All Four You

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Summary

Returning to present-day after reversing the Apocalypse, the Hargreeves decide to be a team again. Klaus is on board until he realizes that not much has changed with how the team treats him. When he is kidnapped (again) and tortured by a significantly malicious ex from his past, his siblings are forced to realize how much Klaus keeps bottled up before Four’s time runs out.
So much had happened during the course of just a few weeks. The apocalypse, reversing the apocalypse, turning from 30 to 13 and then from 13 to 30 all over again… Just the normal day-to-day for the Hargreeve siblings, eh?

"I don't understand why you guys get your adult bodies back and I'm still stuck in this pre-pubescent prison." Five complained for what felt like the billionth time that day. They had only recently returned to the present time after fixing all the mistakes they made with Vanya and reversing the apocalypse. Since then, the siblings agreed that maybe the world was actually better off when they stuck together, believe it or not.

"But you're just. so. adowable." Klaus cooed, pinching Five's cheek and earning a slap on the head.
"Ow… Feisty lil' thing."

He had to admit, he was grateful that he didn't suffer the same fate of being trapped as a preteen like Five. Puberty was not fun for Klaus and he quite liked living in this current body of his, even if he hadn't treated it as nicely as he probably should have for the past twelve years or so.

"So… what, we just move back into our old rooms like ol' times? Pretend that thirteen-year gap never happened?" Diego asked cynically, grabbing an apple and falling into a kitchen chair while taking a large bite.

"No…" Luther defended. "This time we don't have the stress of Dad… I mean… May he rest in peace, but c'mon. Plus, we are all here by choice this go-around."

"And drum roll-" Klaus cut in, banging his hands against the table dramatically. Five raised his cup of coffee off the trembling surface, not phased. "Benji!" Klaus sang, his hands dramatically reached out to a very live, very tangible, and very real Benjamin Hargreeves who sat across from him eating Frosted Flakes. It wasn't just a 13-year-old version either. It was a real-life, grown Ben that sat in their company.

When they reversed the apocalypse, Klaus had taken some other matters into his own hands- those matters being undoing the death of his brother dearest. He had brought it up to the rest of the family initially, but it didn't get the responses he was hoping for.

"Are you nuts?" Five had shouted, his entire 90-pound body shaking with rage. "You can't just pick and choose what you want to change! The repercussions would blow your pea-sized brain to bits!"

Rude. And even though his other siblings seemed thrilled by the idea at first, they slowly and sadly started to realize that Five was probably right… even Ben. He appreciated Klaus's determination to save him, but had claimed that he 'accepted his fate a long time ago'.

Klaus wasn't having any of it. Doing the "reasonable" or "safe" thing wasn't really his style. Doing whatever the fuck he wanted and worrying about the punishment later… that was more like it. And so, Klaus went about studying the timeline leading up to Ben's death and once he found something useful, he acted on it behind the other's backs.

They were mad at first, sure. Furious more like it. Even Ben had nearly beat the shit out of him at the moment that Klaus revealed what he had done.

"It's not. your. choice! It's not your life, Klaus! You don't get to decide… you don't- Damn it." Ben screamed at his brother in frustration, shoving his chest with each word, making Klaus stumble
backward until he hit the wall and slid to the floor. That's when Ben stopped his shoving and hitting and instead slumped to the floor in front of Klaus. He didn't look mad anymore- just defeated. Not to mention, the rest of their siblings were all there too. They steered clear though, everyone a little taken aback from 13-year-old Ben's outburst.

"I'm sorry. I hated seeing you like that." Klaus whispered- all jokes and tomfoolery were lost from him. Ben put his hands on Klaus's shoulders.

"I know you mean well. I- Thank you... really. I'm just worried that other's will have to pay the price."

"I know, I know. You're all worry warts, but that's why I have to take the risks for you! If something happens, it's on me, okay? Can we just... see what will happen? Please?"

Ben didn't seem so sure.

"Pleeeeeease, Benny?" Klaus poked at his brother's ribs, making him smirk. "What's the worst that could happen?"

"Uh, worldwide destruction? Again!" Five shouted from the other side of the room.

"Shh... Sh." Klaus held his hand up to quiet him.

Now, here he was though, alive and well. The world wasn't destroyed because of it either which was a plus if he's ever seen one. The anger that anyone may have held against Klaus faded away quickly and they were overcome with elation for their brother's return.

And then...

"Vanya, too. All of us... All Seven, finally working in some type of dysfunctional harmony... That's what's different." Allison whispered with her healing vocals from where she smiled and nudged Vanya who still looked exhausted from everything that had happened in the past weeks. She weakly smiled despite this.

"Aw... Guys!" Klaus swooned in a high voice, looking around at his family. "Look at us!" He reached to sling an arm around Diego and Five who sat on either side of him. Diego just let it happen at this point, eating his apple as if he wasn't nearly being strangled by the eccentric man to his right. Five went rigid and Klaus waited to be shoved away, but that little tween frame of his actually soon relaxed into Klaus's grip and an annoyed yet slightly fond smirk crept up on his face.

Klaus may make it seem like he projects everything as a joke and that nothing he says should be taken seriously, but this was one of those moments where there was strong truth behind what he said. He did love that the siblings were all getting along again. You'd never catch him saying it with a straight face, but no matter how he said it, he meant it.

Later that night, Klaus stripped off his tight band tee and leather pants, replacing them with billowing, soft gypsy-like pants and a black tank top. He stretched his arms above his head. Then, instead of dropping them to his sides, they fell over his ears.

"Shut uuuuuuuup! Shut up. Shut up. Shut up. I don't give a damn if your sister fucked your husband and poisoned your fucking Tilapia! What do you want me to do about it, Nancy?" Klaus shouted to seemingly no one, but only he could see the crazed, shimmering apparition at the other end of his room. She had been there for nearly half-an-hour now and it was driving him insane.

The ghost dubbed "Nancy" screamed, making Klaus jump and press his hands to his ears harder.
Then she disappeared as fast as she appeared in the first place. Tentatively, Klaus relaxed and lowered his hands. He sighed and rubbed his eyes tiredly, groaning when his fingers came back smothered in black. He moved to his dresser and used make-up remover to clean his hands and face, finally slipping into bed afterward.

For a long while, Klaus stared at the ceiling while repeatedly tossing a bouncy ball up and down. He needed something- some monotonous action- to distract him from the murmurs in his head. Actually, maybe it was more to distract him from the absence of one particular voice.

He missed Ben. Of course, Ben was more with them now than ever before and Klaus would take him alive over dead any day, but for over a decade, Ben was a part of Klaus. He followed him everywhere, was always there to talk to. Even if they didn't talk, Klaus would always find comfort in his presence.

Now… He felt more alone than ever. He felt like he was eternally missing something. Ben was his anchor. His voice drowned out the others. He helped fight away the demons- the literal ones and the deeper, metaphorical ones.

A knock sent Klaus into a scared spasm. He accidentally chucked the bouncy ball across the room, sending it straight through the glass window with a crash. Klaus winced and sucked in air. Woops.

"Entrez Vous!" Klaus called out, proceeding the visual of the dark form of his door popping open. A silhouette stood in the threshold and Klaus could instantly tell who it was. A smile crept up on his face. Of course, they were on the same wavelength. They shared everything for years and now still, they shared thoughts and emotions.

Number Four shifted over on his bed, making space. He patted the mattress and raised his eyebrows suggestively, kissing the air towards his brother, Ben. Number Six rolled his eyes and crossed his arms, unmoving.

"I will not take one step until you wipe that provocative grin from your face and stop making this weird."

"Oh, take the stick out of your ass and get over here." Klaus complained, letting himself flop down on his back to stare up at the ceiling again. He felt Ben climb in next to him, also facing the ceiling. The two brothers were quiet while bathed in blue moonlight, but that was enough. Just being close to one another again soothed the separation anxiety that they both were experiencing.

"I never thought I'd miss your constant, incessant, self-destructive habits."

"And me your perpetual desire to mother me into oblivion."

Ben chuckled and shook his head.

"It's too empty having a room all to myself."

"Well, you can certainly borrow some of the people in mine." Klaus remarked, gesturing to all of the invisible spirits around his room. Ben turned his eyes to him sadly.

"Is it bad?"

"Mm… You know… bloody, macabre imagery forcing its way into my skull accompanied by waves of anguished shrieks straight from Hell itself!" He cried out with exaggerated horror, making Ben chuckle. "Your run-of-the-mill night terror-y stuff."
"Has anyone ever told you that you're a tad melodramatic?"

"Moi!?" Klaus gasped, clasping a hand to his chest as if it was the craziest thing he's ever heard. "Sir, the audacity!" He screamed dramatically, forcing Ben to jump forward with a hand to Klaus's mouth so that he didn't wake their other siblings.

"I will say, it's nice to be able to shut you up now."

"Mhmmp mm mmm." Klaus made muffled noises underneath Ben's hand.

"What?"

Klaus shot out his tongue and licked Ben's palm slowly, making his brother yank his hand back.

"Ah! Klaus…"

"It means I love you." He proclaimed as Ben wiped Klaus's saliva on his sheets. Klaus laughed at the mix of disgust and amusement on his brother's face, but his childish giddiness soon subsided. Ben caught the shift in mood.

"What?"

"I thought maybe…" Klaus averted his eyes downwards so he didn't have to stare into those dark, expectant and sympathy-saturated ones of Ben's. He stuck out his bottom lip like a guilty child, admitting to breaking a vase or something- ever the actor. "Maybe now that you weren't tied to me forcibly in any way that you'd-"

"Hey, woah. Why would you think that?"

"None of the other kids like to play with me." He said, still in this dramatized, child persona.

"That's not true and I didn't stick around all those years because I had too, Klaus. I mean, yeah, you're the only one who I was able to talk to, but I wouldn't have wanted any of the others. You and me, Man- for the past thirteen years. Nothing will ever break that. The only difference now is that I can have a life at the same time and stop being up your ass 24/7."

"But… but… Ben?"

"Yeah?"

Klaus dropped his voice into a deep, husky, seductive undertone.

"What if I like you up my ass?"

Ben pushed Klaus's too-close-for-comfort face and erupted into laughter, rolling his eyes.

"You're the worst. Don't make me change my mind."

"You couldn't if you tried." Klaus noted confidently, also giggling at this point. He felt like a weight was lifted from his chest- an elephant that he didn't want to address or even acknowledge earlier.

There was a long stretch of quiet space. Ben remained on his back with a hand behind his head as he stared up at the ceiling and Klaus was curled up, facing him, his face half-buried in his pillow as he tried to focus on Ben's presence to get him past the voices and into sleep.

But then…
"Ugh! I can't do this!" Klaus erupted, taking his pillow and erratically throwing it across the room. Ben raised an eyebrow at him. "I need to get out. I have too much energy."

"Klaus, you always have too much energy."

"C'mon. You can't sleep either."

"That's true. So, what?"

"Let's go out, broski! Hit the town! You're once again over the legal drinking age and not to mention actually alive, so let's live!"

"I thought you were trying to stay away from that kind of scene."

"You'll be with me!"

"That never stopped you before."

"Huh, okay, yeah. I see where you're coming from, buuuuuut this is about you! Benny, c'mon! Drinking only. No drugs."

"NO drugs." He affirmed, sternly drilling holes into Klaus's pupils.

"No drugs. Some alcohol. Plenty of strippers. We can get you laid and everything, just like Luther!" Klaus gasped in realization. "I should start a business."

"No, hey. We go out and do some harmless dancing and that's it, alright?"

"Fine, Dad. Whatever tickles your pickle, although, never mind because I guess you don't want your pickle tickled tonight-"

"Klaus, stop saying things."

"Aye, aye, Cap'n." Klaus saluted his brother as he hopped out of bed, undressing to re-dress in more party-worthy clothes. "Hurry. Go get ready. Let's have some fun."
The team finds its new rhythm together, but Klaus is feeling off-beat. He continues to struggle against the temptation of drugs and Ben is the only one who remotely cares to understand.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Klaus walked behind his brother with guiding hands on Ben's shoulders, half-forcing him into a small but bumpin' establishment that leaked neon lights onto the wet, dark street. As soon as he got a good look, Klaus felt Ben push back against his hands, probably not too confident about waltzing into a hard-core strip joint. Klaus kept him on track though, knowing that when it came to letting go and having some substance-sex-based fun- Well, he knew what was best for his brother. He'd tell him that but it was much too loud.

Instead, Numbers Four and Six made their way through the dense crowd of drunk men and naked women alike. Ben jumped at every graze of contact with anyone else who wasn't Klaus. The taller Hargreeves knew that he hadn't ever had any type of sexual contact before. He died too young. There was just so much he still had to experience and Klaus gladly took up the mantle of showing him this glorious, ugly world.

With much hesitation, Ben let Klaus sit him in one of the many crappy, wooden chairs around the joint. Klaus sat on the large round table next to him, surveying the room with a smile.

"Look at it, Ben. A wide, glorious expanse of horny guys and girls with daddy-issues as far as the eye can see."

"Mm." Ben looked around the room in disdain.

It didn't take Klaus long before he found Ben a lap dance. A strapping young chap like himself, the ladies were all over him. It was quite the show for Klaus too- watching his brother nervously look back and forth from Klaus and the woman on his lap while confused about what he was supposed to do with his hands. It wasn't like he wasn't clearly enjoying it though- Klaus had made sure that they both had some alcohol in their system beforehand to help Ben ease into these new experiences.

Hands snaked around Klaus's neck from behind, making their way down his chest and underneath the deep-dipping neckline of his thin shirt.

"Uh... I'm not really-"

Ben raised his eyebrows at Klaus and chuckled from where he and "Sasha" were getting pretty friendly over there. Klaus felt another pair of hands slide over his thighs, scratching him lightly with long nails. The girls behind him started pulling him down onto the table. Klaus shrugged at Ben and let himself fall back until his back was pressed against the cool surface. He wouldn't say no to physical contact, no matter who it came from. He hadn't been into any funny business with anyone since Dave...
Klaus shot up, suddenly trembling all over his body. Ben noticed.

"Uh, excuse me," he muttered to Sasha, standing and rushing to Klaus's side. "Hey-"

Klaus felt Ben's hand on his arm that was now covered in goosebumps. There was something about the way they were touching him... it just brought back memories so vividly of Dave tracing circles on his chest or gently gripping his hip bones...

"Klaus."

"Yes, my love?" He snapped back into his gleefully, jesting self to hide all of the darker things that he didn't want to address. Ben didn't answer. They both knew what he was worried about without words to inquire about it. Klaus rolled his eyes. "I'm fine. Let's go dancing."

Taking Ben by the wrist, Klaus dragged him out of the joint and towards their next stop on the night's journey.

They did go dancing.

Then they ate pizza. Lots of pizza.

More dancing.

And near the end of the night, one of them (Klaus couldn't remember which) had the genius idea of teaching each other how to drive since neither of them technically could. By some miracle, they made it around one single block in twenty whole minutes, unharmed.

The next morning, Klaus woke to the sound of Vanya's voice.

"Klaus, have you seen- Oh. Never mind, guys! He's here!" She shouted into the hallway, probably referring to Ben who had passed out on Klaus's bed last night. Klaus groaned and turned away from his sister standing in the doorway, looking both disapproving and entertained by their current state.

"Inside..." Klaus moaned into his pillow. "Inside voices."

Ben sighed and stretched somewhere next to Klaus. He felt his brother pull himself into a sitting position. Even with his eyes closed, Klaus could sense that he was in some extreme discomfort.

"You're supposed to be discouraging his lifestyle, Ben. Not being sucked into a Klaus tornado." Diego snorted in a way that was more teasing that critical as he passed by the threshold. Klaus pretended to remain asleep so that he didn't have to answer to these loud, nagging, noisy, pretentious, and did he mention LOUD schmucks he called siblings.

Okay, so he got a teeny bit grouchy when he was tired. It wasn't even like he had drunk that much- Ben had made sure of that. He was just exhausted, like the events of the past couple weeks were catching up to him and mixing with a late night of partying.

"We were gonna talk some things through over breakfast. A kind of what-happens-next sort of thing." Vanya informed Ben.

"Ugh... Okay..." Ben grunted, sliding off the bed and going for Klaus's arm. "C'mon, princess."

Klaus was too tired to even come back with a retort. He just pulled his arm back and shoved a pillow over his head. A pair of hands grabbed one bicep and another pair grabbed the other. He was then oh-so-cruelly ripped from the comforts of his bed and literally dragged down to the kitchen.
"aaaaaaaAAHHHHHHHHH!" Klaus started with a tired groan that revved up to a full-blown scream the whole way there. Vanya and Ben had their own casual conversation throughout the entirety of his disruptive shenanigans, ignoring him completely. Klaus kicked out his legs weakly but couldn't muster much more than that. He finally went limp and let them do their bidding, watching the lower half of his body drag behind him. His head fell back theatrically. They still ignored his tantrum.

They arrived at breakfast like that, slinging Klaus's body along until they dumped him below an empty chair, leaving to fill their plates with what smelled like a large array of food. Klaus looked up from his place on the floor to see Luther staring down at him, disapprovingly.

"What're you lookin' at, punk? Wanna fight?" Klaus said, not even able to get through the sentence without ending in a fit of tired giggles. Finally, he was able to regain himself, pushing into a wobbly stance and then plopping down into a chair between Luther and Five. As soon as his butt hit the seat, he let his head fall straight down onto the table, maybe a little bit more forcefully than he meant.

"Klaus, you must be more careful." Grace's voice appeared next to him. A soft hand slipped underneath his forehead and raised it up so that she could slide a soft towel underneath. She let his head fall again, this time on a softer surface.

"Thanks, Mom." He mumbled into the towel, muffling his voice. Another great perk of reversing the apocalypse- Mom.

"That didn't take long." Five muttered from beside him. Klaus turned to look at his big-little brother.

"What?"

"Your sobriety."

"I'll have you know that I'm just tired, Five. A little faith, Jesus."

"Alright, alright. No fighting before we even start the day." Luther warned, putting a big hand on Klaus's back to tell him to let it go. "Allison? I believe you wanted to start?"

"The best cure to a hangover is more alcohol." Klaus told Ben as all seven Hargreeve siblings clinked their shot glasses together. This was a different way of celebrating a successful mission than they had celebrated as kids- Klaus liked this better. They each threw their heads back and downed the dark liquid. Klaus lazily flicked his glass across the table afterward. He stared at it as his siblings erupted into conversation around him.

"Maybe another of those.

He reached out for his glass, ready to go up to the bar again but a hand shot out and gripped his wrist forcefully.

"Watch it." Ben muttered, only pulling Diego's attention towards them. Number 2 looked from Ben's stern expression to Klaus's annoyed one. Klaus was about to remark that Ben was abusing his new touchy-feely ability, but Diego cut in.

"Alright, okay." He manually pulled Ben's hand from around Klaus's wrist. "Just- lay low. Okay, Klaus?"

"I'm fine!"

"Come on. You don't want to jeopardize all your hard work do you?"
"I'm rewarding it."

"Please. For us." Diego begged in a low and commanding voice.

Klaus huffed and threw his hand up with an immense presence of sass.

"Oh for you. Well, that changes everything!"

Despite his sarcastic jabs, it did in fact work. Klaus stayed away from any type of substance, but he made damn sure that he was distracted with other things to fill the empty void it created.

At first, he tried annoying each of his siblings, one by one hoping for any kind of attention, even if it was the negative kind.

"Go away, Klaus."

"No, we aren't getting waffles, Klaus."

"No one's holding you back from going dancing, Klaus."

"If it's boring you can leave, Klaus."

"Give it a rest, Klaus."

Number Four huffed and fell into a barstool. Did his siblings think that he was bothering them for the fun of it? Actually, that's exactly what they thought of him and Klaus knew it. He couldn't really blame them for not knowing that he had a nagging reason for doing something... anything to distract him from the thoughts that kept creeping in.

Dave.

The ghosts.

His intense craving for something to numb himself.

Coming right out with what was on his mind wasn't Klaus's thing. Covering it up with constant quips and incessant jabbering was more like it. If no one could see past those walls he built up so high, could he really blame them?

So yes, maybe he was starving for attention but not in the way Luther always so cynically accused him of.

Klaus sat there for a while, watching his siblings talk and tell stories without him. He could join in, sure, but the tightening in his chest and his rising heartbeat was throwing some obstacles his way. It grew and grew until all he could think of was how badly he needed drugs pumping through his system. Ecstasy, heroin... even some edibles would do. He looked down at his thin, trembling hands.

"No, no. I can do this. Come on, Klaus."

He shot up in his seat, landing on his feet with a happy spring.

"I'm going to go." He said to his family who was gathered around a table laughing. No one so much as moved- not even Ben. "Don't all jump at once, please." He said sarcastically. Still nothing. "Bon voyage. Sayonara. Adiós."

...nothing.
Klaus felt a pang in his chest but quickly buried it with a giddy chuckle. "Cool beans. Catch ya'll later, huh?" He raised his right hand towards them and dropped in discouragingly to his side as he turned and slipped out of the bar.

He didn't know where he was going at first. Of course, his instinct and first thought was the alleyway that he knew he could always find the good shit- an alleyway he had spent a lot of time in for the past few years. He could almost hear Ben's voice though:

"You're better than that, Klaus."

He groaned and spun around on one foot, nearly stumbling into the street. Life was so much more fun when he was high.

Another thought crossed his mind though. It hit as soon as he saw the red neon light a few blocks down. There was... a special kind of place down there that always served as one hell of a distraction. He used to go a lot more a few years ago. When he got especially high, that's where he'd end up... or especially lonely... or both. Klaus needed a last resort. He needed human contact- especially after he experienced that slight freak-out when those strippers started touching him. What was up with that?

Within a few minutes, Klaus was submerged in a mass of half-naked to fully-naked human bodies pulling him every which way. Hands gripped his shoulders, his neck, his hips, his thighs and no one spared any time to be gentle at this particular establishment either. Klaus looked up at the ceiling and let whatever happened, happen as the extra shots he took settled in.

Like he said- he needed human contact... Live human contact. Just something that wasn't... dead.

Well, he was getting plenty of that.

Klaus was shoved up against the wall, pain shooting up his back to his neck. He didn't mind. Some guy started in on his neck, kissing and biting him playfully at first until it got harder and more violent. There would definitely be marks left. Again- he didn't care.

Another guy moved against him, pushing himself against Klaus's pelvis and pinning him further to the wall. Fingertips raked down his bare chest towards his waistband. Klaus closed his eyes and focused on all of the pain mixed with pleasure, proving to him that he was still alive. He took a stuttering breath in and sighed as his wrists were slammed against the wall and held there. He guessed he was fully submitted to it now if he wasn't already 100% in before...

"Klaus!"

Klaus opened his eyes to see the nice, muscular men being pulled off of him. Number four rolled his eyes. Ben. Ben looking extremely uncomfortable and out of place in the middle of a room full of people doing all kinds of freaky shit.

"Let's go. We're going home."

"No."

A guy pulled at Ben's coat from behind, making Number 6 jump. He snapped his gaze backward and shrugged off his jacket, letting the guy take it but shoving him away from his body.

"Klaus, now."

Klaus shook out his limbs and pulled his waistband up from where it was dipping dangerously low. The room spun a bit when he tried to stare forward. He stumbled into Ben's arms.
"Alright. Yep. C'mon." Ben coaxed, guiding his intoxicated brother through the sea of bodies and pulsing music. At some point, Ben reached out and ripped his jacket back from some girl who now had it. He threw it over Klaus's shoulders instead, pushing him into the biting night air. Klaus sucked in untainted oxygen.

"Why'd you do that? Am I not allowed to indulge myself in any way, shape or form now? I mean, what's up with that?"

"I'm not leaving you, high on whatever the hell you've taken, in a room of freaky strangers who want to do who knows what with your body."

"I've only had a few more shots! And just needed to get some kind of fix if I'm staying off the substance."

"Anything that you can refer to as a "fix" can't be good for you. I mean, look at this, Klaus." Ben reached over and gripped his jaw, turning his head to the side to observe his neck. Klaus couldn't see what was there, but he was sure there was a nice painting of bruises, bite marks, and possibly some blood. "You can't call this healthy."

"Don't knock it 'till you try it, Benji."

"No thank you."

They stumbled home, breaking through the front door to a living room full of all of the other five siblings who instantly halted their conversations to look up.

"Christ, Klaus..." Vanya started, allowing the others to also kick in their comments and unwanted opinions.

"You're left alone for barely an hour-"

"Are those nail marks?"

Klaus inspected his body as he staggered into the room. He did have long nail scratches up his abdomen and chest accompanied by rope burns on his wrists and slight bruising on his forearms. He reached a hand up to his neck and felt pain immediately.

Many faces were turned to him both in awe and judgment. Oh, so now they were paying attention to him. Of course. Typical.

"Anyone have a light?" He asked, pulling a cigarette from where it was trapped underneath his waistband. Diego sighed and reached in his back pocket, flicking on a lighter. Klaus leaned over to light the cigarette in his mouth, puffing out a breath of smoke. "Thanks, babe."

Diego chuckled and shook his head. Out of all of them (excluding Ben, of course), Diego was the one person who may not fully understand his lifestyle choices but certainly wouldn't look twice to judge him for them.

Aw. Thanks, Diego.

Klaus plopped down next to him, laying his head on his brother's shoulder and taking a deep inhale and blowing out smoke, watching it rise in front of his face like it was the most amazing thing he's ever seen in his life. Diego reached a hand around and rubbed his back, obviously amused.

"You're a train wreck, you know that?"
"Your favorite train wreck." Klaus corrected him.

Everyone got back to talking about their future mission leads as if Klaus never walked in. That's how it went, didn't it? They all had their serious, put-together little clique and Klaus was the weird one who danced around in the background of their pathetically "important" lives or... whatever. Sure, he just waltzed in looking pretty fucked up from what could basically be considered a BDSM Club, but what did a guy have to do to be taken seriously around here?

"Yep. Nope. Gonna throw up." Klaus muttered, pulling himself out of his seat and bounding upstairs towards the bathroom.

"And, there it is." He heard Five's voice. He didn't have time to shoot back a retort. He just needed to get to a toilet or something to puke up what little was in his stomach. Meanwhile, he still heard the chat commencing without him in the parlor.

"You don't have to constantly baby him now, you know?" Diego's voice drifted up through the echoing hallways. Klaus squeezed his eyes closed and kneeled beside the toilet, wishing he would just throw up already. His stomach churned and his mind spun. Usually, he'd just get high to diminish any negative side effects of being drunk. He was still able to react to what he was hearing though, and words hurt if he did say so himself.

"I know, I just- I'm going to check on him." Ben's voice projected.

"He's fine. It's Klaus. He takes it too far and then pays the price and... repeat. We can't be responsible for him 24/7." Allison said. Klaus felt that one too. Ouch.

"You guys don't know him like I do. He's immature, yes. He's impossible to deal with at times, yes." Okay, Ben. Get to the point, will ya? Klaus thought.

"He's erratic. A bit of a freak." Ben continued, followed by a chorus of hums in agreement. "And an attention whore. Have you ever thought about why he always screams for that attention though?"

Silence.

"Just- Nevermind. I'm not doing this tonight. I'm going to check on him." Ben dismissed. Klaus heard footsteps coming up the stairs, giving him a few seconds to think.

He was between feeling grateful for his favorite brother sticking up for him and feeling defensive for him demeaning him at the same time. He wasn't a child- If he had something deeper going on that he wanted to discuss, he would do it himself... right? Ben made it seem like he was more vulnerable than a fetus.

Finally, Klaus felt it all come up. He gripped the edges of the toilet and threw up into the bowl, groaning as Ben came up behind him.

"Nice." His brother muttered sarcastically, sitting down and contrasting the disdain in his voice by rubbing his brother's back comforting. "Get it out, pal."

Klaus puked again, feeling truly all he had left leaving his body. He coughed and flushed the toilet with a weak hand. They sat there for a while, Klaus breathing heavily and Ben right beside him like always. What did he do to deserve a brother like this guy? What a gem.

"You okay?"
"Yeah, yeah. I'm trying to find a new medium with my newly drug-sobered body-

"Not that." Ben shut him down. Klaus sighed and staggered to his feet, moving to the sink and washing his mouth out with some mouth wash. He didn't address Ben's question.

"Is it the ghosts again? The war? Is it Dave?"

"I get it, Ben. I'm a cluster-fuck of psychological angst. Don't rub it in."

"Dude, talk to me."

"Dude, talk to me." Klaus mocked him in a high tone that obviously didn't nearly emanate Ben's actual voice.

"You know, this is why the other's don't understand you."

"Please. They couldn't even begin to try, even if they wanted to... which... they don't by the way."

"Then let's go down there and talk about it!"

"I'm tired, Ben. I'm so tired." Klaus whined, trying to make his way to the door but tripping over the trash can. Ben grabbed his biceps to keep him from falling.

"Klaus, I try my best, Man. Sometimes, you've got to work with me. You can't keep digging yourself into a hole-"

"I try! I've been trying! I got sober. I brought my full powers to fruition. I put myself out there to care about those assholes again, doing everything I could to contribute to the team and still, it doesn't matter! You don't get it because they've always loved you. Even Dad loved Ben. You were just the lovable one. I'm the expendable. The burden. The crazy, have-to-deal-with-him-cuz-he's-family-I-guess one. How am I supposed to rise to expectations that were already set so fucking low?"

Ben looked stunned. Klaus was stunned by himself too. Woops. He didn't mean for that all to fall out like that. Where did that come from?

"Don't tell me. Go tell them. I've always believed in you, Klaus. I stuck by you for all those years-"

"Because you didn't have a choice! If you didn't have to, would we have been nearly as close? Would you have cared to even think that there was more to me than just 'the junkie' like all the other 'picture-perfect pricks' down there?"

Ben's face fell into a scowl. Klaus sighed.

"Stop it, Klaus. This is your only true friend you're yelling at."

"'M sorry. Sorry. Sorry." He mumbled, wavering forward to wrap his arms around his smaller brother. Ben stiffened in his hold but reached a tentative hand to pat his back.

"Ah, the classic Klaus move. Insult with fervor and then send love to make it all better. You asshole." Ben said, but Klaus could hear in his voice that it was with a smile.

Number Four snorted.

"Alright. Let's get you to bed."

"No, no." Klaus shook his head and started out of the bathroom alone. "I'll go to bed. You go have
"fun." He walked down the hallway to where his bed was calling him. He was still nice and drunk- he should sleep fairly well tonight.

"You sure?"

"Yes. Go, sweet little hummingbird. Fly away."

"-What?"

Klaus ignored him and shut his bedroom door. Ah. Silence.

Chapter End Notes

I'm loving writing Klaus. Thank you so much for all the kind feedback. Let me know your thoughts about the new chapter and anything Umbrella Academy related!
Chapter Summary

After getting ready with Allison for an Academy mission, Klaus joins his siblings as they inspect a suspicious warehouse. Klaus feels like the others let him down when they treat him like he's incapable. When he wanders off alone, he finds himself in some trouble.

Klaus looked at his hands—his awkwardly, thin and spindly adolescent hands that shook uncontrollably. His fingernails were chewed short like he used to do when he was a 13-year-old kid…

"Woah…” A young, pubescent Luther voice muttered. Klaus looked up at the faces of his younger siblings.

"Holy fuck-a-mole." He muttered.

"Now is that any kind of language appropriate for a young chap, Number Four?" Five asked in an exaggerated British accent, patting Klaus on the back. Five's little arm was able to rock Klaus's body much more than it should have… Ah, yes. Klaus remembered this scrawny, barely-teenage frame of his.

Glory. Puberty again.

Five cleared his throat casually and stepped out of the sibling circle to take in their surroundings. He obviously wasn't as phased as everyone else. This was same-old, same-old for him.

It was amusing, he had to admit. He looked around the circle. Little Luther holding little Vanya. Little Allison. Aw, cute lil', menacing Diego. Five as they have always known him. And then…

"W- w- wait..." Diego stuttered, eyes falling on the sixth Hargreeve sibling. Klaus covered his mouth and chuckled gleefully.

"Ben?" Luther was the first to utter his name. So, everyone could see him, not just Klaus. It wasn't in a shimmery, apparition kind of style either- it was a solid, viable kid standing behind Klaus, his hand still gripping his brother's shirt.

All at once, the others swarmed him. Even Five broke out into that adorable, show-stopping smile and waited patiently for his own hug. When the excitement subsided enough to give Ben room to breathe, it left the little guy beaming with a mess of ruffled hair and tousled clothes from all of the embracing and amorous shoving. Kid-Ben finally looked at Klaus who patiently waited for his siblings to have time with their brother after so many years apart.

"Ya look good, Benji. Tangible, even."

Ben stepped towards him and Klaus reached forward with a curious hand, poking at his brother's cheek to make sure he was really there as a live body. He then proceeded to annoyingly poke and slap him until Ben broke into giggles, shoving Klaus's hands away. Klaus chuckled and rushed forward into an embrace he's been waiting on for over a decade. He squeezed his brother tightly
enough to worry about snapping the kid in half.

Ben was able to wiggle his arms out around Klaus in return. They were stuck in that moment for a beat, not caring that everyone else was watching them with disgustingly, admiring smiles. Klaus just focused on the feeling of his best friend, alive after so long and squished between his arms.

"Thanks, Klaus." Ben finally muttered in a quiet voice.

"What--"

"I wouldn't have been able to come if I couldn't physically grab onto you. I told you- I like sober-Klaus."

Klaus finally released his brother to raise a cocky eyebrow at him.

"Yeah, I was pretty awesome, wasn't I?"

"You were okay."

"Alright. I see you all the time, you parasite." Klaus joked, shoving his shoulder into his peanut-sized brother and sending him stumbling back towards the others. Nothing about their current situation was okay. They were small. They were who-knows-when. The present world as they all knew it was obliterated. They didn't know what to do or where to go.

But Ben was alive again, and that was okay... That was more than okay.

"I'm not wearing this. I swore I'd never again." Klaus complained, raising the black mask above his eyes. At least it didn't have the white eye covers- they all decided to tone it down a bit since they were kids. No costumes, just... "modified" outfits Luther called it. Klaus gregariously offered to whip something up for everyone but that was shot down quite fast.

"Yeah, me too. But here we both are." Allison whispered, raising a tentative hand to her throat and wincing in pain.

"Oh, hey. Don't talk if it hurts." Klaus said, dropping the mask on her dressing and putting a worried hand on his sister's shoulder. They stood in her bedroom, getting ready for a mission that Luther found just across state.

"No, no. It's fine. Pogo said I need to ease myself into it."

Klaus looked at her with sympathy. He did feel bad.

"My poor Sissy." He pouted. She gave him an appreciative smile in the mirror. Allison turned her attention back to her make-up so Klaus took time to slip the undershirt of their new-and-improved ensembles on. He looked at the black material in the mirror, disdain all over his facial features. It was so uppity. It covered too much. What- was he going to go interview for Harvard or some shit?

Klaus danced lazily around the room until he found scissors. Returning to the mirror, he took no time to open them towards the hem of the shirt, cutting around his torso so that the shirt came above his waistline just a bit.

"Klaus!" Allison protested, shooting out a hand to grip his wrist.

"Whaaaaaat?" He whined, throwing his head back. "You guys can't stunt my right to freedom of creative expression." Allison shook her head, not being able to help the smile that crept onto her face.
"Luther's gonna kill you. He just had these made."

"This outfit is going to kill me first."

She sighed and released Klaus to do what he pleased. He smiled excitedly and cut off the rest of the hem. He then went for the obnoxiously conservative neckline, carving out a deeper dip.

"See? So much better." He stated as he pulled the accompanying jacket on, leaving it unzipped despite Luther's suggestion to always have them fully closed. Klaus had already removed the white stripe from the sleeves that were too similar to their old uniforms back in the day for his liking. Allison took notice and rolled her eyes. He wasn't wearing the right pants either. The ones they had made were just plain black but that was just so boring. He liked his black jeans better. Dark patterns subtly faded into the background of the jean material…much cooler.

Satisfied, Klaus started moving around his sister's room, taking no mind to get into her personal business. He picked up the notebooks sitting on her bookshelf, flipping through.

"Aw…" He muttered, smiling at all of the 'Dear Diary' entries scrawled out in curly, ten-year-old handwriting. A hand came and slammed the diary closed. Allison shoved it back in her bookcase and gave him a disapproving look. Klaus just moved on to the dresser beside it, raising his eyebrows in interest at her jewelry. He fingered through her rack of necklaces and took a particular liking to her rings, trying them on.

Allison rushed over again, grabbing Klaus's hand and taking them off of his hand one-by-one.

"Can't I borrow them?"

"Not for a mission."

Klaus sighed and let her take back all of her jewelry. She grabbed his arm and pulled him over to her desk chair and forcibly sat him down. He fell back into the chair, a little confused but he didn't fight her. She gripped his jaw and grabbed her eyeliner stick from her make-up bag and tipped his head up. Klaus smiled contently.

"Look up," Allison instructed and he did. She gently applied it along his waterline, her eyebrows pulled together in concentration. He had missed this. He couldn't go to anyone else for stuff like this. Everyone was either chock-full of testosterone or timidly conservative like Vanya.

"Close."

Klaus closed his eyes as she put a hand on his forehead, pushing her fingers through his hairline to move his head where she needed it. He flinched when he felt the cool, wet makeup on his eyelid again.

"Don't squirm."

"Mm…" Klaus whined through closed lips, too afraid to talk and mess her up. Allison carefully finished right above his eyelashes. When she was done, she spun the chair around so they were both looking in the mirror. Klaus clapped his hands excitedly and pulled his legs up to sit crisscross on the chair.

He was about to thank her, but she reached for his mask and tried to sneak it on him before he could pull away. Klaus was too fast though. He shot out a hand and pushed it away.

"No. I was serious about that."
"Klaus…"

She tried to surpass him and slip it over his head but he fought her in a tangle of limbs.

"No! No! No!"

Allison's arms dropped to her sides and she looked at him, annoyed.

Klaus gave her a sour look. She slowly raised the mask towards him but this time he didn't deny her. She slipped the band around his head and pulled the mask down over his eyes. He sighed and looked into the mirror as she did the same. Allison wrapped her arms around his neck and looked at the two of them in their reflection.

"Look. Adorable." She said, leaning her head into his.

"Aw. You make me feel all warm and fuzzy." He exclaimed with exaggerated zeal. They didn't look that bad. The masks were updated to look more modern.

"We used to be, like, best friends." Allison said.

"I remember."

She sighed sadly.

"What happened to those times."

"Well, you and Gigantic Curious George for one thing…"

Her arms fell from Klaus's neck and she gave him a dirty look through the mirror.

"Okay! Sorry, leaving." He said, jumping up and bounding out of the room before she could give him more grief for teasing Luther.

"Ow! Dick."

"Jackass."

"Diego-"

"Okay, you're not-"

"Ow!"

Klaus blew out another puff of smoke out of the cracked passenger seat window. He was so glad he wasn't sitting in the back, wedged in between his brothers like Diego, Five and Ben were at the moment. The circumstances that allowed him to get shotgun in Vanya's car might not have been particularly fair, but as Klaus had pointed out, life wasn't fair.

The gist of it was that Klaus was finally comfortable enough to start weaving his powers into his usual shenanigans. He was the last one out of the house, but that didn't stop him from having an apparition hold his place in the front seat. His siblings were so busy bickering as they filtered into the car that they didn't even realize that the figure was no one they knew, or even alive to say the least.

Ever since they were kids, the first person to the car got shotgun. That was the written-in-stone rule. To break it was… unholy. Perhaps that's why when it disappeared and Klaus stumbled in at the last
possible second, the three guys in the back kicked up a chorus of protests.

"Woah, what- How-"

"Klaus, what the hell! You can't do that!"

"No saving seats, Dude!"

"I'm not sitting back here squished between these two lugs."

Klaus didn't listen but instead, he propped his feet up on the dashboard and sat back comfortably, lighting a cigarette. They had their whole lives to use their powers as an unfair advantage in everyday life. The only thing Klaus had to show for was the nagging voices that kept him up at night. You'll be damned sure that he was going to use his new control to do whatever the hell he wanted to.

Later, near the end of the trip filled with a lot of singing, fighting, and then more singing, things fell silent. Their mission destination was approaching and they all tended to get pretty introspective right beforehand.

Well, that and Five was just flat-out sleeping.

Klaus glanced back at his unconscious brother wedged between Ben and Diego. His head lolled back, his mouth slightly open releasing low, heavy breaths. Klaus flicked open the compartment in front of him and started rifling around.

He finally found something, unlatching his seatbelt and wiggling his way into the back of the car while Vanya continued to keep her eyes on the high way.

"Wait- Klaus-" she started but he shushed her. She huffed and shook her head. "If I get a ticket, you're paying every dime."

Diego and Ben looked up skeptically until Klaus started pushing down on their legs with his hands to keep him supported while climbing back- now they just looked annoyed.

"Shh. Sh! He's sleeping!" Klaus shushed them, fake-angrily. He flopped over into the back seat, one knee digging into Diego's thigh and the other leg still stretched into the front seat. Diego grunted in abrupt pain and shoved at Klaus who just absorbed the contact.

"Klaus, what the-"

"Shhhhh! Inconsiderate. Geez." He said pointing at the still-sleeping Five and shaking his head at Diego with mock-disapppointment. "Tsk, tsk."

Klaus uncapped the dark blue marker in his hand and very carefully raised the tip to Five's face. Ben and Diego watched him, neither of them particularly wanting to stop Klaus.

"Mm... Beautiful." Klaus mumbled to himself as he fashioned quite the Reginald-worthy, curled-tip mustache out of marker. For a finishing touch, he very slowly and carefully moved to Five's eye, tracing a circle around it like a monocle.

"Oh, you're awful," Ben said, but with a smile on his face.

"Asshole." Diego snorted, but Klaus knew he won his approval.

"And as quickly as he appeared, he disappeared!" Klaus whispered dramatically. His exit was not
quick or graceful though. He pushed off his brothers' bodies to get him back in the front seat, a lot of struggling and swearing to ensue from both of them.

They got there eventually- this abandoned warehouse that Pogo has been keeping eyes on for a while. There were weird things going on there. Lightning when there were no storms, screaming, music… stuff like that. It had become quite notorious among the neighboring communities, and when teenagers started breaking in and never coming out, it became something worth looking into for the Academy.

Klaus broke free from the car and stretched in the cool, fresh air. He was getting antsy in there. His constant need for distractions without drugs wasn't fed well when confined in a little Chrysler. He lost count of how many cigarettes he lit.

Luther and Allison were already there waiting. They had left without them, claiming that the rest of team was "taking too long and they'd meet them there". Everyone knew they just wanted to drive together alone.

Klaus doubled forward when he saw Five tiredly emerge from the car. He had almost forgotten about his masterpiece. Five plastered on his usual "better-than-you" scowl which truly just completed the look. Everyone from their car stole glances at him, the corners of their mouths turning up not-so-subtly.

"What?" Five demanded when he caught Diego staring at him.

"No, uh… Nothing."

"Huddle up," Luther called for all of them to gather together. Klaus hopped excitedly toward the sibling grouping, happy with his handiwork. Luther started going through the plan, not noticing initially.

"We don't go in looking like we're seeking any sort of altercation. We have no idea what-" Luther trailed off when his eyes fell on Five's face. He didn't react. He looked like he didn't know how.

"What? ...What!?" Five's eyes went wide in frustration. Luther took a deep breath, obviously trying not to laugh. He kept an unconvincing and extremely wavering straight face.

"Um… I-"

Allison snorted and covered her mouth, not even trying to hide her smile. Five's eyebrows came together to form a steely expression. He ran back to Vanya's car and shoved his face in front of one of the mirrors. His face went slack in the most unamused, disappointed expression Klaus thinks he's ever seen.

Before he could realize what was happening, Klaus saw Five disappear and then reappear directly in front of him, delivering a hard punch with a bony little hand straight to Klaus's gut. He yelled out in pain and fell to one knee, holding his abdomen.

"Ow! What! You don't even know it was me who did it!" Klaus said through uncontrollable giggling.

"Oh please." Five spat accusingly, adding a slap to the back of Klaus's head for good measure. It just made Klaus laugh harder which made Five even angrier.

"Okay, okay. We don't have time for this! Five-"
"Here." Vanya interrupted Luther, handing him a few tissues. Five begrudging took them, touching his tongue to the material and then rubbing it roughly against his face.

"Like I was saying- let's split up and take different entry points. We'll cover as much ground as we can. Yell if you're in trouble or you find something notable. ."

Luther assigned areas to cover.

"Number 2, Southwest corner. Number 3, the second-floor fire escape..."

Needless to say, when he got to Klaus, Number Four was not happy.

"Really, Number One?" Klaus mocked Luther's use of their numbers instead of their names when on missions. "The 'outside'? Is that just another way of calling me the 'look-out' again?"

"Klaus."

"I thought I proved that-"

"I don't have time to argue this."

"Holy… FUCK. What do I need to do to be taken seriously? I get sober."

"Klaus."

"I act as a fully contributional part of this dysfunctional circus of a fam-"

"Klaus!" Luther shouted above him. Ben tried to shush them, looking around with worried eyes. Everyone looked concerned about the noise level. Klaus and Luther paid no attention. "Look at Five's face!" Klaus turned to Five but couldn't keep his composure. The marker was maybe a tinge lighter, but it was still clearly present on his face. He now had smudges all over his temples and on his hands. Five sternly stared at Klaus with crossed arms. Klaus clapped his hands over his mouth to muffle his giggling.

"Okay, that's… Awesome and unrelated."

"Everyone know where they're going? Ok. Good. Let's go." Luther completely disregarded him. Klaus's shoulders fell. He turned to Ben as everyone started walking towards the abandoned building.

"Ben? Some back-up, maybe?"

"Yeah, I-"

"Ben, c'mon. Northwest corner." Diego called after him. Klaus turned puppy eyes to his only hope. Ben always had his back.

"I have to… Next time-"

"Ben!" Klaus threw his arms up, appalled.

"We'll talk about this later!" He said, jogging after Number 2. Klaus clenched his fist and spun himself around in a quick, frustrated 360 degrees. He swiped the mask off his face and tossed it onto Vanya's car.

He knew he fucked around a lot.
He knew he got distracted easily.

He knew that his powers weren't as destructive as Vanya's or Ben's or whatever.

He knew that he still didn't even know the full extent of what he could do.

He knew he did a lot to lose people's trust.

He knew he was unpredictable and reckless.

He knew all of these things, but how dare his brother rub it in like Luther was some kind of… Number One or something. Klaus chuckled at his own inner conversation.

On that note, he also knew that they probably thought he was clinically insane. Maybe he was, but that didn't mean that they had to treat him like the bane of their existence all the time. How was he supposed to prove himself if he wasn't given the chance? Why was he getting sober? For nothing?

Klaus found himself meandering off into the surrounding forest that rimmed the crumbling structure. He followed a tiny toad that tried desperately to get far from his lumbering footsteps. It hopped through tangles of roots and over under fallen trees - it was easy to get lost in his thoughts while watching it. Klaus almost forgot about why he was there in the first place. He hummed "Uno" by Muse as he went.

Thunk.

Klaus felt something hollow underneath his foot. Weird… He stomped a few times.

Thunk. Thunk. Thunk.

Hmm…

Klaus looked up and noticed that in one area of the woods, the trees thinned out more than usual. There was a small amount of evidence of man-made structure there - three-foot-tall concrete pillars that had obviously been crumbled down to nearly nothing. It looked to be a pretty large room at one time, now reduced to a few blocks of cylinder.

Klaus skipped over to what would've been the middle of the room. He glanced over to the warehouse to see if anyone might be looking for him… nope.


"Fuck you guys." He muttered, flipping off the warehouse with both hands. He dropped them uselessly. God, he could use some ecstasy right now.

It was then when Klaus noticed the setting sun cast a gleam somewhere on the ground between the structural pillars. He ran over to find a very modern looking storm-cellar door embedded in the ground. Okay, now that was definitely weird. He couldn't open it either. Klaus gripped the handle and pulled with all his might and still… nothing.

All grudges forgotten, Klaus figured it was notable enough to go tell his asshole siblings. Maybe Luther could tear it open.

"Klaus!" He heard someone call him from the main building. It sounded like Vanya. Was it an emergency "Klaus" or a where-the-fuck-did-you-go "Klaus"… he did not know, but he didn't want to take any chances. If they needed him, he had to get there ASAP.
He ran.

And Klaus got... maybe five steps? Five and a half steps before-

_BAM._

He fell.

The ground collapsed underneath him... he thinks? It all happened so fast. It was there and then it wasn't. Blackness came up towards him and he managed to get half a yelp in before his head connected with a cold hard surface and then...

_Nothing._
Klaus's distress regarding his place within the Academy progresses, leading him to temptation and ultimately, more trouble.

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Klaus felt arms snake around him, pulling at his hip bones until his back was pressed up against a warm, firm chest that was all-too-familiar. He chuckled and kept his head down, concentrated on sprinkling pinches of sugar onto raw balls of dough.

"It's my duty to complete this mission for your Mom. Don't you dare get in my way, Sonny Boy- it's too important."

"Sugaring cookies?"

"The fate of humanity depends on it."

"She already loves you. I told you, you had nothing to worry about."

Dave pressed a delicate kiss to Klaus's shoulder. It was a small gesture but fuck - everything this guy did sent shivers shooting up and down his body.

The war was over, at least as far as U.S. involvement went- it had been for a couple of weeks. It was strange being back in 1973 without something to constantly keep you busy. War was all Klaus knew of these times but to be sent back to the normal day-to-day was... weird to say the least.

The only thing keeping him grounded most days was Dave- Kind, charming, beautiful Dave who insisted Klaus come home with him to his apartment and to his family who lived nearby. It had first been a terrifying notion for Klaus, even more terrifying than body-littered war. The only atmosphere that his relationship with Dave had seen was that of Vietnam, fighting, and occasional partying. To just go home and live the domestic life... Well, that wasn't really Klaus's cup of tea.

Of course, he wanted nothing less. Wherever Dave went, he'd follow... always. He was just worried he'd muck it up somehow. From a young age, he knew he didn't fit in a normal, happy family lifestyle climate. Klaus was erratic and wild. He could be sleeping on some complete strangers couch one night and then going on a week-long bender in a whole other state the next. How would he ever be able to be contained to a quiet life among the same people over and over again? How would those "average joe-schmoes" react to an enigma such as himself?

As nervous as Klaus was to meet Dave's Mom and sister, Dave was right- he had no need to
be. They were definitely a suburban family if he's ever seen one, but they were eccentric and a little crazy in their own way. She had thrown her arms around Klaus as soon as he entered the house, squeezing the damned life out of him. Dave's sister, Megan wasn't nearly as outward in a lovey-dovey way, but she took no time to get comfortable with teasing both Dave and Klaus constantly- something that Klaus was used to living with while growing up with his siblings. It really helped ease him into everything.

He was shown plenty of photos of little Dave which was definitely the best part. Then his Mom insisted that they made Dave's favorite cookies- She had gotten all the ingredients as soon as she heard they were coming home and that had been weeks ago.

That's where they were left now, Klaus taking a sip of fancy wine and finding that he really just wanted to make Dave's Mom happy by glazing these cookies if Dave would let him for God's sake. They had went out to the store for more eggs and could be back any second.

"You know I could see you doing this."

"What? Baking cookies? I am doing it, love. And I'm doing a damn good job."

"No, not just that. Living in a small house with a white fence and green grass. Making kids snacks for when they get home from school."

"Oh, gross." Klaus stuck out his tongue and shook his head violently. "You want me to wear an apron too? One with the little frills around the edges?"

Dave laughed.

"You know I can't be tamed, kid. Don't you dare try."

"And you know I wouldn't have it any other way."

Dave kissed from his collarbone and up the side of his neck. Klaus had to stop his efforts with the cookies to close his eyes and try to deny the nagging ache in his chest and stomach to pull Dave into his old room down the hall and do all kinds of things to him.

"As much as I enjoy the image, I don't know how your Mom or sister would feel about walking in the room to find us fucking on top of the sugar cookies."

Dave hummed into Klaus's neck, his fingers dancing along the waistband of his underwear.

"I'm just giving you a preview of when we get back to the apartment."

A smile slid onto Klaus's face. What did he do to deserve precious Dave?

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Whatever you want."

"Whatever?" Klaus raised his eyebrows as if he was challenging Dave's offer.

"Yes, you adorable freak." He smirked. Dave knew practically everything about Klaus. He knew his deepest, darkest corners and his most wild, freaky sides.
"Challenge accepted." Klaus turned in Dave's embrace to press a kiss to his lips, Dave pushing Klaus up against the counter. As much as Klaus was surprisingly enjoying playing 1970s housewife, he suddenly needed to get back to that apartment.

Pulling back from his lips, Klaus's eyes fluttered open to see those piercing blue eyes. Something else caught his eye though- a flash of red. He looked down and saw the color spreading over Dave's light gray shirt. Klaus's heart stopped.

"Dave?"

Dave coughed, red seeping onto his lips. One of his knees buckled and Klaus rushed forward and grabbed his boyfriend's arm.

"Dave! No, no, come on..."

It was everywhere now- running down Dave's perfectly carved arm muscles, down over his legs and onto the floor in a puddle of a crimson pool. Klaus fell to his knees in the mess, only focused on holding Dave's lifeless body. He cradled his face, feeling a sob rip through his chest and throat at the sight of his unseeing eyes.

Klaus gasped and shot up into a sitting position, his whole body wracked with sobs. He hugged himself with thin, trembling arms, his eyes wide open but seeing nothing but pitch black darkness. His heart was pounding loud enough for him to hear it thumping in his head and his eyes stung with tears that threatened to spill down his face.

The voices were awful. He couldn't hear himself think. He didn't even have enough headspace to process what he had just seen. They screamed, cried, shrieked, and called his name from all around him. There was so much that Klaus couldn't make out one single word that any of them were saying. Something terrible happened here- truly terrible.

Klaus covered his ears as if it would do anything against this magnitude of noise. He pulled his knees to his chest.

"Stop. Stop. Stop." He whispered, his voice strained and his chest heaving. His emotions built up inside his chest. There was terror, a whole lot of desperation and even some anger there. It swelled within him, his hands balling up tightly in frustration. A blue glow lit his face and he looked down to see it spreading over his hands and wrists. Ah, yes... this looked familiar.

Klaus's head snapped up and suddenly he saw them- he saw them all: a room jam-packed with blue, shimmering, transparent bodies similar to when he had conjured Ben and Ben's power in that theater. He hadn't been able to conjure people quite like it since. This time it was overwhelming, to say the least, and he wasn't sure he wanted to see the sea of tormented ghosts around him. It did light up the place though, and he saw that he was in a fairly confined, cement room with a few adjoining passageways that snaked off into more pitch-black darkness.

Fuck... Fuck. Klaus started freaking out all over again. Images of that God-forsaken, fucking Mausoleum flooded into his consciousness. He was put into the Mausoleum though, by his Father. His dear ol' Daddy always had the power to pull him out. This time though... this time he had gotten himself into this one. He didn't know where he was- some Satanic crypt or tomb or whatever... Either way, Klaus had very slim hopes of finding a way out.

Oh, God. He'd die down here. But not before he'd wither away for weeks on end with nothing but
the cries and screeches of a hundred tortured souls who blamed him for not being able to help. What egotistical, entitled pricks.

To top things off, all Klaus could see when his hands dimmed down was that visual of Dave bleeding out on the mundane kitchen floor. It had felt so real. He actually believed he was there-safe with Dave, both of their eyes set on their futures together. Then...

Ugh, Klaus felt sick.

*It's okay. It's okay, Klaus.* He tried to mimic what Ben would say. Then with his cocky smirk: *You know, you talk in your sleep, Dude.*

Ben would tell him to calm down. Ben would tell him that it was in his head and to focus on his predicament *now,* here in the tangible world of the living. Ah, always the realist, that Ben.

Klaus looked around but saw nothing but darkness. He looked up and saw a gap of light coming through. Dirt crumbled from the hole and rained down on him so Klaus covered his head. That must've been where he fell through.

The light did nothing to light this hellish pit. He didn't want to see the spirits again, but he didn't know how else to catch clues from his surroundings. Closing his eyes and focusing on the swell inside of him, he tried to focus all of his energy into conjuring the souls around him. Klaus gave it a few seconds before he opened his eyes.

*Yes! Yes, okay, Klaus.*

His fingernails were painfully digging into his palms, but he was doing it. He tried not to focus on anyone's face around the room and rather used the swarms of people-shaped lights be a guide to looking for a way out.

Before he could look far, movement caught his eye. It wasn't the blue shimmer of an apparition, no...
It was a dark shadow of a real, *living* person.

*Oh, fuck no.*

The person scurried down a hallway and Klaus scurried to his feet, the blue glow falling from his hands against his will.

"No, no... Damn it! Uh... Hello? Don't kill me, I'm a highly trained weapon of mass destruction.” He called out, almost laughing at himself. Maybe it was just a way to push through the true dread he was feeling inside.

The sound of running footsteps made Klaus's head instinctively snap behind him as if it would do any good—everything was completely dark once again. It sounded like a few people running through the narrow hallways of whatever hellish, underground hamster maze this was. Whispers followed, but it was different than the voices in his head. They were real. Something deep down told him that the whispers were about him.

Alright, that was it. He had to get out of here.

"Guys!" He yelled up at the hole of light in the ceiling. His siblings *had* to hear him, right? "Ben! Luther!"

More footsteps.
"Shit... Allie! Vanya!"

Everything went quiet, but too quiet. It was like the calm before the storm. If his siblings didn't hear him then than they probably never would.

*It's up to you, Klaus-boy.*

Klaus took a deep breath and tried to find some version of calm. He attempted to clear his mind the best he could, letting a strange wave of numbness and tranquility wash over him. His head buzzed and his fingertips tingled. He got this feeling when actively trying to conjure people like when he talked to all of those victims in Hazel and Cha-cha's motel room.

Something he did was working because a little girl appeared in front of him. She would've looked like a normal, solid person if it wasn't for the slight light coming off her, allowing Klaus to see her face.

"Uh, hi." He greeted her as he'd greet any other six-year-old, putting his hands on his knees and bending down to her height. "Do, uh... Do you know how I get out of here?"

She blankly stared at him. He didn't even know if she spoke English.

"Uh... Dondé está la salida? Où est la sortie?"

She kept staring.

"Fuck." Klaus rubbed his face tiredly.

"That's a bad word." She said in a tiny voice that was very matter-of-fact. Klaus dropped his hands, a small smile forming. Now they were getting somewhere.

"Yes. Yes, it is. Don't repeat that, okay?" Klaus said, just glad to have gotten her talking.

"Fuck."

"No! No, what did I say?"

"Fuck."

"Ah, shit."

"Ah, shit."

"No! Just- How do I get out of here? Please? Is there anyone else I can talk to?" Klaus threw his hands up in frustration. He called out around the room. "Literally! Anyone!"

When he turned his attention back, she had jumped across the room and was standing in the threshold of one of the narrow passageways.

"Mm, no... I don't really want to go down there, thanks."

"Don't be a pussy."

Holy shit this girl was somethin'.

"Got me there," Klaus said, carefully stepping forward to follow her. He took a deep breath and pressed down his crippling fear of dark, spirit-polluted places. He blindly followed the fowl little girl
straight to a steel ladder. It was the only thing he could make out in the darkness, but it was all he needed.

"Wow, thank you," Klaus said sweetly. She just stared at him some more. No response. "Okay..."

Klaus felt the cool metal against his hands and started climbing. It didn't take long to come up to a large steel door- the storm-cellar entrance that he found earlier... the one he couldn't open.

Luckily, when Klaus pushed from the inside, it gave way. He shoved harder and the whole thing open, flooding glorious light down onto him. He sighed in relief and pulled himself out of the dumb, hell-pit and collapsed onto his back in the grass, looking up at the dusk-skies.

Thank. Christ.

Klaus found his siblings all gathered by the cars. Five (with Reginald still drawn all over his face) was the first to see him.

"Where the Hell were you?"

"I-"

"We coulda used your help back there, Bro." Diego added, crossing his arms. Everyone looked at him with that same look of accusation.

"You know, you can't just pick and choose when- I- Nevermind, I found something," Klaus said, ready to launch into his experience with the strange underground bunker.

"That's great, but we already wrapped things up here," Luther informed, nodding over to where local cop cars were pulling up to take away five or six rough, tattered and crazed looking scumbags that looked like they took quite a beating from his siblings.

"Just a bunch of sadistic red-necks, torturing animals and painting satanic BS across the walls to scare locals."

"Uh, okay, but-"

"The one took a good chuck out of my arm..." Ben muttered, holding a blood-soaked cloth to his bicep with a grimace.

"Yeah, we better get you something for that ASAP." Vanya said, putting a hand on Ben's good arm and leading him to the car.

"I really think there's something else going on here." Klaus tried to get their attention despite the fact that everyone was starting to load into the cars to leave.

"Why? Sometimes these missions don't turn into anything but scum terrorizing the public, Klaus. You win some, you lose some." Luther demeaned him with his stupid, authoritative scowl. Klaus threw his hand back to gesture towards the hatch.

"I fell into this pit over there in the woods-"

"Jesus, Klaus." Diego smirked.

"Okay, hold on. Something really fucked up happened here. There are hundreds of terrified dead people."
"If we put everything on hold for every dead person you saw, Klaus-"

"No... Guys, this was different. And there were people-"

"Dead people."

"No, alive people."

"You said they were dead."

"No! There were- There were both, just..."

"Get in the car, Klaus." Diego said tiredly, already in the backseat. "You can have the front again if it makes you feel better."

Klaus let his shoulders slump. Talking to all of them was like talking to a thick, brick wall.

"I'm serious."

"Well, that's new." Five muttered, bitterly edging into the backseat between Diego and Ben again. Klaus rolled his eyes and grabbed Luther's tree-trunk of an arm before he could make his way to Allison's car.

"Luther,"

"Look, I know you're not happy with me but you don't need to make these crazy conjectures to-"

"You're. Not. Listening. This isn't about that."

"How'd you come across this, "pit"?"

"It's more than a pit, it's- I heard you guys calling me so I ran and fell through a weak spot and it knocked me out and then I was with Dave and then there were tons of spirits, so fucking many but then there were real people... I mean I didn't see their faces but there were shadows and voices and this door-"

"So you're having us chasing... shadows? And the voices in your head?"

"No-"

"I'm hungry!" Diego interrupted, banging twice on the door of the car to tell them to hurry it up. Klaus could see Ben tuning into what he was saying. His brother's interest was sparked and he glanced at Klaus worriedly, but he was brought back to the pain in his shoulder with a wince as Vanya pressed a new cloth to his skin. Klaus turned back to Luther.

"Klaus... No one called your name."

Klaus blinked.

"No... It- Yeah, you did. It sounded like you needed me, so I-"

"Nope. Get in the car." Five said, getting more irritated than he already always was.

"Klaus..." Luther said in a low voice. He took his shoulder's in his gloved hands. Klaus looked up at his brother who stared at him with a concerned, stern gaze. "Tell me truthfully- Are you on drugs again?"
Klaus's face hardened. He stiffened in Luther's grip and felt rage burn in his chest. With a quick outburst of anger, he shoved Luther away so that he let go.

"Klaus!"

Number Four clenched his jaw and yanked open the front door of the car.

"Fuck you." He spitefully told Luther before dropping into the passenger seat of the car. If they wouldn't listen, then he was done trying. Whatever. Their loss. He tried.

Klaus saw Luther sigh and pinch the bridge of his nose tiredly. He didn't move back to his car at first, processing what just happened. Maybe he was even considering Klaus's claims.

Allison honked the horn from wherever she was parked though, and Number One finally got moving, everyone packed into their cars. Then they left.

"It's the terror of knowing what the world is about! Watching some good friends screaming... 'Let me out!'" Numbers 2 and 5-7 scream-sang to the radio. Klaus propped his legs up on the dashboard again, completely silent ever since he settled heatedly into the car. His arms were crossed in his lap and his head rested against the window, his eyes closed but not sleeping- he just didn't want anyone talking to him.

Vanya had tried to reach out to him at the start of the ride- if anyone understood how he felt, it was probably her. They were all dicks to her after all, but it was because of something that she couldn't control- a lack of powers or what they thought was a lack of powers. They dismissed Klaus solely based on him. His personality. He hated that he let it hurt him, but his chest felt sunken in.

"Did you see how confused that Duck-Dynasty guy looked when they saw Five's face?" Ben asked over Queen's "Under Pressure". The car erupted into laughter, even Five's.

"Hey, it gave Luther the half-a-second he needed to pummel the guy before he could react." Five pointed out. "We might have discovered a new tactic."

Oh, fun. Mission stories. The one that he was pushed out of.

They started singing again- at least it was better than reminiscing without him. Klaus felt Diego's hand shaking his shoulder.

"C'mon, Klaus. You loved this song."

He kept his eyes closed and pretended to sleep.

"Yeah, I'll even forget this little snafu." Five said, undoubtedly gesturing towards his face. Klaus stayed still. The car was silent for a short moment, save for the radio. He couldn't really see it, but Klaus could vividly visualize the faces of his siblings all exchanging glances at one another as if to say "What's his deal?". He didn't mean to make a fuss. They probably assumed he was making a scene, but he really just did not want to interact with anyone. What he really wanted was some kind of numbing agent.

He wasn't enjoying the recap images of that nightmare either. Over and over, Klaus saw it replayed in his mind- Pulling back from Dave to see red... just red. That feeling of catching his dead body in his arms. The way his eyes were void of all vitality. The worst part was that it wasn't just a nightmare- it had happened. Klaus was just reliving it now, more vividly than ever.

He missed Dave. He missed drugs.
"Under Pressure!" They all sung out in unison to Queen and Bowie, breaking the brief pause. Klaus shifted in his seat to angle more towards the window. He opened his eyes briefly to look out at the dark countryside flying by but he accidentally caught eye contact with Ben's reflection in the car mirror. His brother was staring right at him, looking like he knew full-well that Klaus wasn't sleeping at all.

As fast as he could, Number 4 broke his gaze from Number 6 and looked at the sky instead, closing his eyes soon after. He felt Ben's eyes on him for a while longer before his brother joined the rest of the fun once again.

They arrived at home with the same energy, everyone running inside for food and drinks. Klaus took his time to stretch and walk to the house. Vanya was there waiting for him. She locked up her car and then cocked her head with that sympathy-saturated stare of hers.

"Klaus- Talk to me."

"Nah... I'm good."

"We got through that whole two-hour car ride without you cracking one single joke or vandalizing someone's face," Vanya said, her expression falling as if to say 'Come on, I'm not an idiot'. "You know that I know better than anyone here about how ignorant everyone can be. They didn't mean to-" 

"Vanya..." He said, injecting a tired chuckle and covering his eyes. "Really. Don't worry."

"I always worry."

"I know. You're a peach." He commended honestly, putting a hand on her arm in ways of gratitude before pushing past her and into the house. He didn't go for the kitchen where he heard everyone's voices projecting from though- he slinked up to his room to the sound of his siblings getting rowdy, probably all still high off of adrenaline from whatever altercation happened.

"No, absolutely not."

"Diego, you're so full bullshit. You love that movie. Don't deny it."

"It's not the worst."

"Well, I'd imagine- I remember when you were 8 you were calling it the best."

"Alright, fine! We'll watch it! It's kind of amazing! What do you want from me?"

"Princess Bride it is."

Laughter and constant conversation overlap wafted up through the foyer of the house as Klaus rubbed his temples. His head was killing him. He didn't know if it was from the screaming voices earlier or slamming his head onto concrete. Why not both?

Klaus slowly pulled his uniform shirt over his head and tossed it aside, pulling on a deep, slightly see-through V-neck instead. He slipped on his dog tags and an accompanying necklace before grabbing a coat and exiting out into the hallway again- straight into Ben.

"Where are you going?"

Klaus walked right past him and started descending the stairs.
"Don't know yet."

"Let me come," Ben said, chasing after him into the night breeze. Klaus meant to keep walking but he couldn't help some of the resentment seeping through.

"What- So you can have my back? Like today?" He asked, spinning on his heel and throwing up his hand accusingly. Ben froze, dumbfounded. He looked like he was about to say something, but Klaus waved him away. "Nevermind, it's fine. Stay here." He made it to the sidewalk and chose to start walking downtown. Ben still hurried after him.

"Klaus... Klaus! If I had time, I was going to tell you that we should probably figure out the extent of your powers first. There's still so much we don't know yet. You and I could go somewhere and-"

"Like they told you, Ben. You're not tethered to me anymore. You don't have to baby me."

Ben's footsteps stopped behind him.

"So... what? You'll hike it to the city all upset and end up somewhere with a needle sticking out of your arm?"

"Maybe!" Klaus said, mock-excitely, throwing his arms out for dramatic emphasis. "Either way it's not your problem anymore."

"Fine."

Klaus didn't watch Ben walk back to the house, but he knew he finally did. God, being sober sucked. If he was high, he would've just giggled and shrugged Ben off without a care. He felt like the chasm between him and everyone else was getting deeper and wider and as much as he tried not to feel something about it, he did. That's what being conscious did to you. Gross.

Maybe a few stops at the local bars would help. Klaus took a few shots as he passed some hole-in-the-wall joints, enjoying the buzz in his head until it became a thick haze. Soon, he was stumbling down the street- not quite plastered but definitely far from lucid.

Klaus couldn't breathe. It felt like his airways had shrunk and his eyes were stinging. His mouth tasted bitterly of alcohol and he begged himself not to give into the dull pulses of nausea. He shouldn't have been walking around in the pitch black of the night alone in this state, but he didn't feel like he belonged anywhere else.

"You're better than this. Dave knew it too."

"Shut up, Ben." Klaus said to no one.

With Satan as his guide, Number Four found himself in an alleyway- the alleyway that he knew to be notorious for the city's best substances. He didn't particularly want to search for drugs, but he didn't want to walk away from them either... he didn't know what he wanted.

Klaus nervously tapped his fingers on the side of his leg. He was shaking all over. His head was pounding. His heart was too. His chest still felt heavy from his disappointment in his siblings and vice versa. That nagging image of Dead-Dave settled in the back of his mind like a tick he couldn't get rid of.

If there was a time to get numb, this would be it. Why was he sober anyway? His siblings didn't seem to notice or care. They just accused him of being high either way. And Dave... he never showed up. Maybe it was something about the time jump... Anyway, it didn't work whatever the
Klaus imagined the feeling of pushing fluid from the syringe into his vein... or just the sensation of a pill on his tongue... It made him sigh, longingly.

No! No, no, no, no. Walk away. Walk away.

Klaus started to turn and get as far away from the alleyway as he could but not before a familiar voice called out to him.

"Super Klaus!" The voice yelled. Klaus froze. Jamie. His old dealer... one of them, anyway. Ever since he found out about Klaus's past with the Umbrella Academy, he always dubbed him "Super Klaus" despite Klaus insisting that there was nothing 'super' about his upbringing.

"Jamie." He said, turning to see the smaller man jog over. He took no time to give Klaus a big hug. Number 4 slung one arm around his back, unenthusiastically. He was already realizing this was a bad idea.

"What happened, man? I haven't seen you in ages."

"A lot. A lot has happened, Jamie." Klaus sighed.

"Oh..." Jamie seemed to think about this. He wasn't the brightest guy, but he was nice enough. He never failed to get Klaus a killer discount either. "Well, what're you buying? I've got some goooooooood-ass shit that just came in."

"No, no... I'm just, uh... I'm just passing through." Klaus said tiredly in a high voice, trying to keep somewhat polite. He raised a hand back towards where he came from, trying to gesture that he was just leaving.

"Don't be silly, I can't send you away empty-handed."

Oh please, don't make this harder, Jamie. Klaus thought. He was already on the edge and just the tiniest bit of a push would send him tumbling over past the point of no return.

"I'm kind of in a rush, actually-"

"Klaus!" Another voice came from behind him. Oh, shit.

"Boots. Hi..." He said, dismay clear in his voice. They didn't seem to even notice.

"Where've you been?"

"Uh..."

"I'm trying to set Klaus up, here," Jamie explained to Boots.

"What do ya need, Dude? We've got plenty-"

"Nothing, actually. I was just leaving."

"What?" Boots laughed. "Right... Next thing you're gonna tell us is that you're sober."

"Well, yeah... I am."

Boots and Jamie went quiet. They exchanged unreadable looks until they burst out laughing.
"A riot!"

"When cows fly!"

"Pigs..." Klaus muttered to no one, slightly annoyed. "It's pigs."

Boots slapped an arm around his back and started walking Klaus back into the alleyway towards a beat up garage they sold out of.

"So we've got some China White, gum, snow..."

"No." Klaus nearly yelled, stopping dead in his tracks. Boots looked surprised at first, but then his expression fell as if it was never genuine in the first place. He sighed in disappointment and looked down towards the ground, shaking his head.

"Alright, fuck this shit. Let's just do this the hard way, I guess."

All at once, silhouettes emerged from all sides, surrounding Klaus in crouched positions. He froze up and looked around with wide eyes.

**What the-**

Before his brain realized what was happening, his training instincts kicked in and Klaus threw his elbow back into someone's face, knocking what was nearly his attacker to the ground. Then everyone moved in. There were at least five guys there, not counting the one stumbling backward with a bloody nose. He recognized no one. He had zero idea what in the Sam-fucking-hell was going on.

"Sorry, Dude," Jamie said, stepping back and letting the random-ass thugs move in. Arms came barrelling towards his head, so Klaus ducked and kneed the guy in the gut, sending him to one knee. He stopped another guy's fist with his hand, twisting and pinning his arm behind his back while kicking out the back of his knee. While he was doing that though, someone wrapped strong arms around him, rendering his arms and torso useless. Klaus butted his head backward, probably causing another bloody nose. The man dropped him just in time for two other guys to rush in and grab each of his arms, holding him still.

"HEL-" He started to yell, but a third thug punched him in the gut... hard. Klaus wheezed and fell to his knees just to be yanked up to his feet again by his attackers. He groaned and was about to ask who the hell they were and what the fuck they wanted, but another punch knocked the wind straight out of him. Klaus slumped for a second but kept struggling the best he could.

After they kept hitting him though, there wasn't much left he could do. The world was spinning and intense pain was flaring up all over his body. He wanted to scream or yell out or anything but his brain was not communicating with the rest of him.

And still- His cheek, his temple, his stomach, his stomach again... The more they beat him, the less hope he had. Spots formed and Klaus finally accepted them, welcomingly. A sudden wave of numb tranquility washed over him and Klaus let the darkness take over without a worry in the world.
I can't thank everyone enough for the shower of support I've gotten for this story. I LOVE hearing from you guys. I look forward to what's next for Klaus. Let me know what you think!

Also, I'm sorry for another cliffhanger... I will post in two days though!
Sadistic Sadie

Chapter Summary

Klaus comes into unfortunate contact with an old confidant and is forced to recall a rough and formative time from his past. Ben worries about his brother.

Ben stared down at the cream that swirled in his coffee. He didn't even know if he liked his coffee with cream. There was just so much that he was bull-shitting as he went, trying to figure out all these new alive-adult things as he went along. Klaus had helped that one night, although he didn't know if Klaus was exactly the best person to take adult advice from, as much as he loved that guy.

Ben's heart started beating faster anxiously.

Klaus.

His brother had been on his mind ever since he woke up, especially since…

"Ben? What's wrong?" Vanya asked, quieting Five and Diego's debate over bacon versus sausage. Ben looked up at his siblings' suspicious and worried eyes.

"Oh, uh… I don't know. Klaus never came back last night. I'm just getting kinda worried."

"I mean… It's Klaus, he does that."

Ben sighed and dropped his face in the palm of his hand, resting his elbow on the table.

"He probably found his way back to some dark alley. He's been itching for a fix, I can tell."

"Is that all you think of him?" Ben burst out angrily before he even realized what he was doing. It came out though, and he didn't regret it. He angled it first at Five, but then looked at his other siblings too. They looked stunned. It was quiet.

Then…

"No, Jesus. Of course not…"

"That's not- No, that's-"

"No, no, no… It's just that-"

Ben pushed out of his chair, still annoyed.

"Well maybe let him know once and a while, huh? Or at least don't treat him like he's the family screw-up. Dad did enough of that. He's finally trying really hard."

Quiet again. Numbers 2, 5 and 7 exchanged glances.

"Yeah… No, of course-" Vanya started saying with a sad, small voice. Ben sighed and rubbed his eye tiredly.
"Sorry, I- I know he's a handful… More than a handful. I just feel like something's wrong. He was really upset last night."

"Ben…" Diego said in a low voice, leaning forward with forearms on the table. "Are you sure this isn't just a separation anxiety kind of thing? You guys were together for over a decade. It's understandable if it's hard to have separate lives alone now."

"Yeah, I was right there with him for over ten years. So I know him better than anyone and I know when something feels different. Trust me."

Ben stung a little bit with the delivery of his last phrase. "Trust me", just like no one had trusted Klaus the other night. He didn't know why he deserved to be believed now, more than Klaus, but it happened.

Well, okay… He couldn't totally fault his siblings. As he said, Klaus had a track-record of being quite a lot to handle. He was erratic, distracted, and tended to make a mess of things while numbing himself so he didn't have to be the one to deal with the aftermath. Ben meant what he said, though. He was trying harder these days and Six despised that he let him down when he knew full well what Klaus was going through.

"Alright, alright. Five, let's go." Diego said definitely, slapping his hands on the table and standing.

"What- Where? He could be anywhere!"

"We should probably start downtown. This is Klaus we're talking about."

Five sighed and put his coffee down, materializing out of the room to get ready. Vanya stood.

"I want to come."

"You promised Allison you'd train. It's okay. We'll let you know if we need back-up."

Vanya nodded.

"Well, bring him back whatever the case. He belongs here, not roaming the streets doing who-the-hell-knows-what."

"Will do," Diego said. He left the kitchen with a pat to Ben's arm.

"Be ready in five."

Diego drove Five and Ben around the city, stopping ever so often to ask some shady figures on the street about missing Number Four. Ben knew deep down that there was one place that they should've been checking first, but he didn't want to admit it. After nearly an hour though, Ben couldn't stay away for long.

"Left here." He suddenly spoke up from the back seat. Five and Diego gave him a look, and Diego followed suit. "Right… Yep." Ben kept guiding him. "Just park here."

The three of them got out and walked down the shabby alleyway towards a garage that was all-too-familiar to Ben. This was Klaus's favorite spot to score dope for years. Ben hated this place. He'd often leave Klaus to do whatever he insisted on doing and go somewhere else so that he didn't have to watch painfully as his brother threw his life away.

Now he was back and he was terrified that they weren't done with this place like he thought they
"Jamie," Ben said bitterly, seeing the dealer that he hadn't missed what-so-ever. The scumbag narrowed his eyes at the three Hargreeves walking towards him.

"Do I know you?"

Two other guys emerged from the shadows, backing up Jamie. Diego scoffed behind Ben.

"Have you seen Klaus?" Ben ignored his question. Of course, he didn't know Ben. He's never actually seen him before.

"Who's askin'?"

"His brothers." Five said, crossing his arms.

"Listen, fellas. My customers have full and complete confidentiality. Unless you're-"

With one swift movement, Diego grabbed the guy's shirt and shoved him against the brick wall. The two other guys stepped forward, ready for confrontation, but Diego threw two knives with one hand, just barely nipping their cheeks or ears. The stopped dead in their tracks, probably pissing their pants.

"My brother asked you a question."

Jamie looked between the three of them, a nervous smile spreading across his face.

"Oh, heh… Yeah. I forgot. You're the 'super' siblings. It's a pleasure, really-"

Diego slammed him into the wall again.

"Yeah, yeah, okay… Klaus was here. Last night, he came for a… visit."

Diego, Five and Ben all exchanged glances. Ben felt his chest cave in.

No… NO, Klaus. After all your hard work…

Jamie fell to the ground in a heap, breathing heavily and rubbing his chest. Diego walked slowly to Ben, putting a hand on his shoulder.

"I'm sorry. Relapses happen. Maybe we should let him do his thing until he's ready. We can't force him to stay home, he's an adult."

Ben's eyes fell to the ground. It was totally believable that Klaus, after a rough day, returned to numb himself from the world. He hadn't been sober for an insanely long time yet and Diego was right… relapses happened more often than not, especially when you spent most of your life higher than the clouds.

But something just… didn't feel right.

"You're sure?" Ben asked forcefully, stepping towards Jamie.

"He was right here in front of me, clear as day. I get Super-Klaus a good discount, you know. I take good care of him. He's my star cust-"

"Okay. Shut up." Ben silenced him, turning and heading for the car. Maybe Klaus would wander back home. He usually did eventually, especially when he ran out of money. "Let's go."
Five and Diego bowed their heads and followed, no one saying anything. Ben sunk down into the backseat and looked out the window for the rest of the silent car ride back to the house. He couldn't help but feel like this was partially his fault. He shouldn't have let Klaus's words get to him last night. He should've followed him annoyingly, just like Klaus insisted on doing with everyone else.

*Klaus, you dumbass. You better be okay.*

**Gunfire. Blood. People- Men, Woman, Boys, Girls, Soldiers and Civilians alike- all screaming in anguish.**

**Fire. Explosions. Smoke.**

**Dave.**

Then things warped into a whole new atmosphere.

**Pills. Lots of pills. Syringes, white dust, tablets, joints...**

**Blazing lights and pulsing music that pounded Klaus's chest until he couldn't breathe. Hot bodies all packed in a room that was closing in on him...**

**Things distorted again.**

**The Academy halls... His siblings- Luther, Diego, Allison, Five, Vanya... Ben.**

**Ben turning his back on him.**

**The siblings all thriving without him- They run the halls as if they were kids again, blasting Luther's record player.**

**Klaus calls out, but they don't hear or see him. He screams and no one pays attention.**

**Then, he blinks and they're on the floor, sprawled out... unmoving. Klaus tentatively moves forward and sees the entire house painted in blood.**

**Shit!**

Klaus woke with a gasp and a sharp pain in his chest. The fluorescent lights hurt his head even more than it already was in pain so he closed his eyes again. The only problem with that was once he did, the hodgepodge of images from his nightmares came back to him.

What was up with all of these sudden night terrors?

"Ugh..." Klaus groaned, his head throbbing and his entire body aching. He had no concept of location or time for a bit. His first thought was that he was waking up from a crazy night of every drug and substance known on mother Earth, but it didn't feel like he was buzzed... He wouldn't have felt this shitty.

Was it a rough mission? Did he get in a scuffle with someone at a club?

Everything started coming back though. Walking out of the house, dismissing Ben, finding himself in the alley, getting the shit kicked out of him in the alley...
So that left him where?

Klaus opened his eyes to a room that he certainly had never seen before. The walls were a steely gray stone and the floors matched. One entire wall was made up of a mirror, but Klaus doubted it was simply used for reflection. This was the perfect room for a two-way mirror if there ever was one, and that worried him greatly- what was he just dragged into?

Trying to move his body, Klaus immediately felt his wrists constrained behind him. What felt like zip ties dug into his flesh. His lower back hurt from being slumped on the cold, hard ground for who-knows-how-long. He was, however, able to wriggle to be sitting on his knees rather than curled up on his side in an excruciating, twisted position.

His training had taught him to get a good read on all of his surroundings before anything else. Klaus looked around, doing a full 360 scan of his predicament. Once he did, he wished he hadn't, because in the very back of the 10 X 10' room sat a person... A person that sent chills straight down Number 4's spine.

"Oh. My. God."

"Hiya, Klausy."

That name... He never thought he'd ever hear someone call him that again. He hated that nickname. The girl... No... The demon-hell-beast took no time to shoot to her feet, a pipe swinging freely in the air held by her left hand. Klaus knew it to be her dominant one.

"You owe me some money, kid."

*SLAM.* The inch-wide pipe cracked into Klaus's ribs. He grunted and doubled over in pain, his forehead pressing into the cold floor. The skin over his torso burned from the contact and his insides screamed. He didn't think it actually broke or fractured any ribs, but it felt like it was awfully close.

"Hi, Sadie." He wheezed.

"Hi, Love."

She dropped into a crouch before him. She grabbed a handful of his hair and yanked him up straight again so that his face was but inches from hers. Well now, *this* was a throw-back. Suddenly those dark green eyes that Klaus had all but forgotten drilled memories back into his head against his will. She fluttered her long, flirtatious lashes at him, a small, cocky smirk growing on his perfectly pristine and snowy white face.

"I missed you... My baby." She swooned, running a long, red nail up around his neck. He yanked his head back, hating the familiar shivers it sent through him. That scent- something of sweet bourbon and flowers wafted over him and almost made him sick with images from his past.

However, if *this* was what all of this hullabaloo in the alleyway was about then maybe Klaus would be okay after all. He had owed so much money to so many people at so many times that he was surprised he's made it this far in life without being dragged to the bottom of the lake with cinderblocks chained to his ankles.

Of course, none of those people had been Sadie.

Almost to prove the point he made in his thoughts, she stepped back and took another powerful swing, hitting him right in his hip bone.
Klaus screamed but it turned into chuckles, his body slowly slouching forward in pain.

"They don't call you Sadistic Sadie for nothing."

"Mm… No one calls me that anymore, Klausy. I'm at the top of the food chain now. I'm making big bucks these days… Workin' with Marlin."

"Well while we are making confessions, no one calls me Klausy so-"

"Aw…" She hummed in a low voice. She dropped to her knees behind him. Klaus suddenly felt the cool metal pipe against his neck. Before he could react, he was yanked back up with the pipe digging into his throat. His back pressed against Sadie's skimpily-clad chest as she pulled the pipe tighter. Klaus struggled for air, the tiniest bit seeping through and keeping him conscious. "You saved it just for me."

"Uh…"

The pipe dug harder. Klaus coughed and fought for air.

"Just like old times," She used her hold on him to yank them sideways to be looking straight on into the mirror. Klaus only really realized then that they had removed his shirt. He could see the welts that she had made on his skin in a bright red.

Sadie put her face right next to his from behind, looking at both of them in the mirror. Klaus had a flashback to earlier yesterday… it was just yesterday, right? …When he was getting ready for the mission with Allison. The way she put her chin on his shoulder and they looked in the mirror at how much they had grown since the last time they had hung out together.

This situation was similar but completely different.

For one thing, Allison wasn't strangling Klaus for shits and giggles. His and his sister's memories had been positive and his flashbacks with Sadie were… dark to say the least.

Man, he'd kill to be hanging out in Allie's room right now.

"You've really blossomed. Look at us both- still hot as hell." She rambled, speaking in quiet tones against his ear. Klaus tried to calm his body from its mini oxygen-deprived convulsions, looking at the visual of them pressed together with disdain. "How long has it been? Remind me."

"Ten… Wonderful… Years…” Klaus choked out.

Finally, she released the pipe from his neck and he doubled over, gasping for air. He didn't have much time to enjoy the blessed gift of air though- she cracked the weapon against his back.

"…FUCK." He grunted. She ran the tip of the chilled metal up his spine gently. His skin erupted with goosebumps as he flinched away. She seemed amused by this. Klaus knew how much she was enjoying this, especially after 10 years of probably holding a grudge against him for escaping her sick, masochistic and admittedly hypnotic grasp. "You know, hitting me won't make me shit cash. You'll have to let me go to let me figure something out eventually… or kill me… whatever."

"You know I could but I can't." She said, hitting him in the abdomen as soon as he started to straighten. Klaus clenched his teeth together painffully, but wouldn't scream out because he knew she loved it when he did that. He'd give her no more satisfaction.

"Why's that, dearest?" He asked sarcastically through his teeth.
"I have a… partner with even more invested interest in you. I'm just like the messenger or the right-hand-man or the sexy ex-girlfriend who's had a whole lot of time to think of every single way to get revenge on my wittle Mousy Klousy."

Okay. *That* was terrifying. Klaus took a deep breath. Maybe if this person, whoever it was, was in charge, they wouldn't let Sadie have *too* much fun.

"Who is it? What do they want with me? If it's truly a money thing, my Papa's kicked the bucket and I know there's a fuck-ton of an inheritance lying around *somewhere-*" He instinctively started to sit up again to talk, but a slam of the pipe right above his no-no area sent him to the floor again.

"Uh-uh. Down." She instructed, cockily.

Klaus's jaw clenched and growled in frustration. He *hated* this, but what was he going to do? He was zip-tied in some foreign place, trapped in a box with Sadistic Sadie and a lead pipe that was leaving some sizable souvenirs along his flesh.

"And I can't tell you. They're… Secretive. Truthfully, we just met the other day and I don't know much but I *do* know there's interest in the Hargreeves fortune. They knew that you owed Marlin already and proposed we worked together. The pay-off was just too big to turn down."

Out of all the weird-ass shit that the Hargreeves had to deal with, all of this was about *money*?

"The money or the chance to see me again?" Klaus asked, turning his head a bit to raise an eyebrow at her as she circled him like a tiger stalking its prey. She reached the pipe down to graze his cheek and he turned away, annoyed.

"Both."

*Crack.*

The metal stung the bottoms of his bare feet and Klaus couldn't help but groan.

"Besides," She continued. "Who's going to look twice at a druggie who disappeared at the hand of other druggies? The cops have better things to deal with... people like us."

"So, what? What does this… person want *me* to do if I'm here? You don't think I've tried to milk every dollar from that bastard of a fake-father already? Even my precious siblings haven't gotten a dime."

Again, with the hair grab-

"Ow, ow..."

Sadie pulled him where she wanted him, twisting Klaus forcefully until he had to stumble to end up sideways with the mirror. The pipe dropped to the ground with a *clang* and Sadie pulled on the hair at the nape of his neck until Klaus was sitting up on his knees again, their faces adjacent and much too close for Klaus's liking.

"Hmmm..." She breathed out of those deep red, glossy lips. She narrowed his eyes at him and Klaus forced himself to not give in by diverting his eyes like he so badly wanted to. Instead, Number Four narrowed his eyes right back, staring at those achingly familiar pupils that served as dark tunnels leading straight to the deepest pits of Hell. "I don't know, Klausy. I don't know what he's planning. I just know of the fun that *I'm* planning in the meantime."
Klaus would've been struck with inner fear if he hadn't been more interested in the first part of her sentence.

"So, it's a single male?"

"Look at you! Trying to sneak info out of me." She said as if it was the cutest thing she's ever heard. "Enough of that. We have so much catching up to do."

*Oh, dear God... What was that supposed to mean?*

"It can be like old times." Sadie moved forward, wrapping her arms around his neck and pressing her forehead against hers. The monster-of-a-woman's long, dark hair brushed against Klaus's bare shoulders and chest.

Goddamn, there were those shivers again.

"You mean when I was barely 18? Freshly vulnerable. Had just run away from the only home I had ever had."

"You loved our time together. No one was forcing you to do anything. I *made* you who you are."

"Well if that's the case then thanks a fuckin' ton for that. Can you take it back?"

"Don't say that, Klausy." She pouted. Klaus was suddenly *very* aware of a menacing hand traveling up his thigh. "Don't deny it- You *lived* for me, for us."

"You know what, Sadie. I *did* get one good thing out of our time together and it was realizing that I'm fully confident in my complete, unwavering, glorious gayness. I don't know why! You were just *so* charming!" He chuckled sarcastically at the ceiling. He could feel her rolling her eyes.

"You and I both know it's more complicated than that. I love that about you. There's not a simple bone in that adorable body."

To almost prove her point, she pressed her thumb into his hip. Klaus took a sharp breath in and flinched away, but not because it hurt. No, it was much worse than that.

Confession time; Sadie had always been able to cast some spell over Klaus since the first day they met. He didn't know exactly why, but it was purely a Sadie-thing. It was like a poison that seeped through his veins, affecting his ability to think straight or keep his pants on. He was far from ever allowing himself to be her bitch again, but he'd admit that even after all these years, she still had a strange, inexplicable effect on him.

He had to stay resilient.

"Oh, how I loved those puppy-dog eyes." She reminisced, putting a hand on the side of his face. Sadie admired Four's eyes that stared back, never planning on giving in. "You know, I'd be nicer to me. When withdrawal hits, I'm the only one who can help you and trust me, Marlin's got the best smack that you'll ever-"

"I'm clean. Sober." He said with a slight smile. Finally, something he had over her. He may be tied up, tortured and left without hope just like the Hazel/Cha-cha situation, but at least he could say with confidence that this time there would be *no* withdrawal pains.

"Oh, no..." She said with true dismay as if Klaus had just informed her that a family member died. "Klausy, that's no fun."
Klaus was about to go into a sarcastic rant about just how "fun" the awful life of being sober was, but she started tilting her face forwards towards his, closing that too-close-for-comfort gap. He frowned and shrunk backward, but he couldn't go far. She trapped his bottom lip beneath her teeth and tugged just a bit before letting go and breaking into a smile at his discomfort.

He hadn't even noticed until right then that she had cut his hands free from the zip-ties. Klaus moved his arms forward, feeling the painful tension in his shoulders unravel. He sighed with relief, moving his wrists in circles to get some circulation going.

"You're welcome." She hummed, standing and leaving Klaus in the center of the room, still on his knees. "I'll catch ya later, hmm?"

She knocked on the only door in the room and it popped open. With a quick, casual wink to Klaus, Sadie turned and left, leaving him to his thoughts… his many, confused, horrified, anxious thoughts. That and the low hum of voices in his brain, like there was a hoard of dead souls just waiting for Sadie to leave so that they could have Klaus all to themselves. He didn't know which was worse…

Wait… No… He did. Sadie. Definitely Sadie.

He wished Ben were there. He'd talk Klaus down, know what to do. He never had to think about it before, but Klaus knew he wouldn't have lived to be 30 if it weren't for Ben, so how the Hell was he going to hold up alone?

He'd guess he'd find out.

Despite their recent discord, Klaus would do anything to see any of his siblings right now. He didn't hold onto much hope- they never paid mind when he went missing. He returned for Vietnam last time and no one blinked an eye.

It was fine… Whatever, they all had their own stuff going on. It just would've been nice if maybe this one time they could help him out. Klaus's greatest glimmer of hope was Ben- as bad as he left things with Number 6, he knew it was just a blip in their relationship. That was still his best friend and he'd notice- he'd notice, right?

Klaus sighed tried to stand, but he crumpled to the ground again.

Fuck, his body hurt. If the beating in the alleyway wasn't enough, Sadie's pipe did sufficient damage to keep him down on the ground. Klaus pulled himself to the edge of the room, furthest away from the two-way mirror. He wondered who was watching him out there.

_Hope you're enjoying the show._ He thought spitefully.

Surveying the room, Number Four tried to think of a plan- something- anything. It was difficult when the voices started getting louder and louder though. It wasn't long before he saw them- the ghosts. They moved around him accusingly, and with absolutely nothing to distract him, they achieved in winning his central focus.

Covering his ears and bowing his head into his knees, Klaus sighed.

Why did shit always happen to him?
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It had been an eternity since Sadie left Klaus alone with his thoughts and the dead… Well, it felt like that anyway. Klaus had no way of telling how long it had actually been, but with people screaming at you from all sides when you're awake and disturbing nightmares haunting you when you're asleep, time dragged on.

Speaking of those awful night terrors, Klaus had just woken from one about his sisters' getting shot dozens of times in the middle of a Vietnamese fire fight. It was like all of his worst fears were congealing into one masterpiece of horror every time he closed his eyes. Klaus had always been disturbed since childhood but these were especially bad and extremely specific.

In his last dream, he had held Allison and Vanya in his arms as they choked on their own blood with cruelly, painful last words on their lips:

"You just weren't good enough, Klaus."

"If you were like Luther or Diego…"

So, yeah… Anyway…

Number Four had jolted awake to spirits in his head, his ears, and all around the room. He called for Ben desperately, forgetting that his brother wasn't his tag-along anymore. It took a minute for Klaus to finally grip enough reality to remember that he was utterly and completely alone… except for the dozens of dead in the room.

There had been two trays of food pushed into the cell on separate occasions since he'd been there, both times when he had been asleep. Klaus didn't want to comply in whatever way he could refuse though, so he only nibbled off of a piece of baguette when the hunger became unbearable, but otherwise shoved the food away.

So now that left Klaus pressed into the corner, his knees pulled to his chest so that he could ball up as far away from the screaming maniacs as he could. His hands were pressed over his ears and he lightly pounded his forehead into his knees, feeling like he was going slowly insane.

Pop.

The door swung open. Klaus was almost relieved. He didn't care whatever he had to endure next, as long as it wasn't being left alone with himself, his thoughts, and tortured souls.

Sadie waltzed in, her small black tank top hugging her waist and her torn up black jeans dipping just barely low enough to show off a sliver of the green lace of her underwear.
"Aw, not doing too well, are we?" She inquired, watching Klaus lower shaking hands from either side of his face.

"Whatever the hell you plan on doing to me, can you speed it up a little bit? Chop. Chop." Klaus complained, using his arms to wrap around himself to keep warm instead. "And can I at least have my shirt back? Maybe turn the heat on? I've stayed in nicer crack houses than this. Overall 1 out of 5 stars- would not stay again."

"Everybody's a critic." She shook her head moving towards Klaus who pressed himself up against the cold wall to get away from her but he didn't really have anywhere to go. She grabbed him underneath each of his bent knees and pulled him across the ground to the center of the room. Klaus didn't have the strength to resist, so he let himself slide to wherever she pleased.

"Ugh. These are new pants, too-" He muttered, trying to see if she had scuffed up the material on the stone floor.

"Hush."

"Don't tell me to- hey- wait!"

In a flash, Sadie tied his wrists together with a long rope. She threw the opposite end over a beam in the ceiling, pulling it down until Klaus's arms were yanked over his head against his will.

"I can assure you, I didn't see myself being able to overpower you, escape a room that locks from the outside, fight whoever is out there watching me, and navigate out of whatever corner of hell you're keeping me in… This seems a little unnecessary."

Klaus was kind of amazed at his innate ability to keep up his annoying drabble amongst all circumstances. His stomach was going to start eating him from the inside out if he didn't submit to his need for food soon, his whole body felt uselessly weak, his mind was tired from the constant psychological torture… Still, he guessed it was all he could comfortably hang onto- his tendency to incessantly talk and talk and talk.

"Also, can I request a bathroom be put in? The bucket they throw in here every so often isn't exactly up to my standards, see-"

"Hey."

"Mm?"

"Shut it."

"I haven't talked to anyone in weeks. What do you expect?"

"Klausy, it's barely been two days."

Klaus threw his head back and groaned.

"What! You're lying, right? Is this part of your sick mind games?"

Sadie didn't answer.

"Can I get some music? Some headphones? Some-"

"For God's sake, Klaus. The whole reason I left you for so long was to break you down. Now if I gave you something to drown out the ghosties, that'd kinda defeat the purpose- don't ya think?"
Klaus stared at her. Part of him was proud of himself to hitting sufficient levels of annoying to get her to crack a bit, and the other was a little horrified that she was smart enough to use his powers against him. He wasn't surprised that she knew- She knew almost everything about him, and he, her. It just wasn't her style…

"I have very specific instructions. Believe me, I'd love to visit you more often."

With that, she took his ankles and pulled his knees down away from his chest and towards the floor enough to be able to get down herself and straddle his lap. There was that scent again- A smell that used to intoxicate him all by itself back in the day… the shit-ton of drugs helped too though.

"Whatever happened to 'Do whatever the fuck we want whenever the fuck we wanna do it'?” He asked, looking up at her face that was just inches above his. It had been her mantra back then, so he guessed it became his too. Sadie reached up to Klaus's hands that were still held high above his head with the rope, tugging and making sure it was secure.

"I'm still the same gal, baby. I just grew up. To get to the top, you've gotta jump through some hoops."

Klaus frowned.

"I don't even know you anymore!" He gasped, theatrically looking away like he was disgusted.

"Then I'll jog your memory."

A small click came from her direction and Klaus snapped his attention back in front to see a pocket knife in her hand, the blade flipped up and gleaming in the fluorescent lamps. Klaus sucked in a stuttering breath.

"No, no… That's okay."

"It'll be fun."

"Yeah, see, but the thing is that… I don't do this kind of thing for fun anymore."

"I don't even know you anymore!" She mocked him in the same tone of voice he had just used. Klaus tried to keep his cool. He did well with physical pain, mostly because of Sadie as a matter of fact. After days of his mind being terrorized though, he wasn't quite in the mood.

"Is this part of your 'instructions'?” Klaus asked, his eyes never leaving the menacing blade that Sadie twirled lazily in her hand. Her other hand snaked through his hair near the nape of his neck.

"Nah…"

The cool metal was suddenly pressed against his abdomen. Klaus froze, not even daring to breath against the thin blade.

"Remember what I taught you," she said with a low voice in his ear. Klaus nervously and instinctively pulled against the rope that dug into his wrists, not having this anymore. It wasn't even about the pain that he knew was coming- it was what pain meant to him and Sadie in the past and the fact that all of that was coming back to him. The worst part was that he worried that he wouldn't 100% hate it like he wanted to.

Did that make him fucked up and a freak? Yeah, but he already knew that. *Everyone* knew that- he wasn't hiding anything.
It was just another drug to Klaus, that agonizing ache… something to hide his inner pain. When his body hurt, it distracted from every other kind of hurt. When he had been with Sadie, it was his most intense addiction, even more so than the drugs. He managed to get away from that despite his remaining kink for rough play. Still, the memories with Sadie made him feel like he was transported back to those times when he felt helpless against his constant need for some kind of physical torment to keep him alive.

"Breathe in…" She whispered, breathing heat onto the cold skin of his neck. Klaus did as he was told, squeezing his eyes closed and anticipating the sting. "Breathe out."

Klaus did, groaning as his skin erupted into a painful fire. He didn't even pay attention to her hand on the back of his neck, pulling his head down onto her shoulder. He let her, pressing his forehead into the nook of her neck. Heat spread along his abdomen and he felt wetness drip slowly down his skin. He didn't need to look to know there was a lot of red coating his shivering muscles.

"There you go," She whispered, pushing her fingers through his hair. "I do admit. As much as I miss this, it's also a matter of makin' you all pretty for the camera."

Klaus frowned, his muscles tensing in preparation to sit up and ask what screwed up things she was talking about, but she heard his voice and felt the blade again.

"Breathe in… Out…" Klaus took a stuttering exhale, his whole body shuddering at the slice of the knife over his ribs. He clenched his teeth together tightly, not caring if he was buried in Sadie's shoulder still- that shit hurt.

And while it did numb his mind for a little bit, and while the run of blood did distract him from his recent, punishing thoughts, it was not nearly enough to block off the dark images and self-depreciating ideas that have been plaguing his mind as of late. The twisted part of him relished in the sensation of his hot blood warming his ice-cold skin, but then he remembered that it was Sadie that was on top of him and he got apprehensive all over again.

"What do you mean, camera?" He demanded answers even in the face of the nagging burn in his torso. He had to manage his breathing carefully so that the expansion of his lungs wouldn't irritate the lacerations further. "We did a lot of fucked up things in good ol' 2009, but I'm sure I'd remember if we filmed any of it. Not really my thing."

"It's not for me, Klausy."

She stepped off of him, leaving him bleeding and relieved to have some breathing room. He finally was able to get a good look at his chest and stomach grimacing at the way his cuts opened and closed with each breath.

"Oooo…" He observed, watching the blood glaze his pale skin with color.

Breathe in, cuts open, blood gushes out. Breathe out, cuts close, blood flow halts.

Fascinating.


"Up here, kiddo. It's for your siblings." Sadie interrupted his dazed-out fun with his diced flesh.

Klaus's heart nearly stopped- not from loss of blood that he so easily got distracted in watching, but from the horror that came from having to involve his siblings in all of this. He was already embarrassed that they dubbed him incapable of handling serious situations and now here he was,
kidnapped by a crazy ex—all of this "supposedly" based on drug money charges. Nothing screams the burden of a "useless junkie" louder than that.

Plus, the immature and stubborn side of him thought that if they hadn't bothered to come for him up until this point, he didn't want them to know. They didn't deserve to know. He knew for a fact that they were all sitting comfortably at home right now, passing off Klaus's disappearance as a weak druggie relapse.

Again, could he blame them? Not really. He blamed himself more than anything.

"Hi, Hargreeves!" Sadie gave a small wave to a blinking light that shone from behind the mirror. Klaus guessed there was some kind of camera system set up in whatever fucked up observation room sat on the other side. "Thought you may be interested to know that Klausy and I have been hanging out a bit."

"Nope."
"Marty's?"
"Nope."
"The Lolly House?"
"Nope."
"Keno Lounge?"

"Nope, Luther, we stopped everywhere. Everyone we talked to hadn't seen Klaus in weeks." Diego said, his voice tinged with irritation at his brother's incessant poking and prodding. If Diego said that they checked everywhere for Klaus, then he meant they checked everywhere. He was starting to get worried about the kid and Luther wasn't helping his already-tense state.

"Okay… Well is there anywhere new—"

"Unfortunately, I know the darkest corners of this town from following Klaus around for all these years… He's nowhere. I'm telling you, something's up." Ben said, arms crossed as he leaned against the dresser in the living room where all of the siblings were gathered.

"Well he couldn't have just disappeared out of thin air…" Vanya challenged, her forehead creased with concern. She felt horrible for not reaching out to Klaus further. She recognized that look on his face—one so similar to her own since the time she was small.

"Sure, he can. He's Klaus." Five cut in, pouring himself a neat bourbon.

"What- you're passing this as a couple 'wild-Klaus" nights and calling it a day?" Ben accused, turning Five's nonchalant face into a frown. He raised his glass defensively.

"I didn't say that! I'm as concerned as the next guy but what are we going to do about it?" And Five meant it too—he did care. He was worried about his brother. It was Klaus though, and even if it wasn't anything drug or sex related, it could've literally been anything. How were they to know where to start?

The room went silent. What did they do about it? Ever since they had woken up that morning and realized that two nights later, Klaus still hadn't returned, no one fought Ben when he suggested that
they searched the town. Everyone had plans to split up that day and take care of some Academy business-

Diego was going to set up some stolen police scanners in the surveillance room for future use. Allison and Vanya were handling the press that had been nagging them all for information on the Academy's "renewal". Luther and Five were meeting some merchants for new equipment.

And Ben was always planning on going looking for Klaus. Now that his brother had been missing for quite a while though, the team dropped what they were doing. Even if it was a drug relapse, no one wanted to go back to a 6-person team due to an overdose.

Number 6 imagined Klaus lying still on the wet ground of some dark alleyway, his eyes rolled back into his head and a needle stuck into his skin… He shuddered. He'd never been apart from his brother for this long- not since Ben had died, anyway. He couldn't even imagine the awful feeling that'd stab him in the gut from knowing that Klaus was dead and that he could've followed him- he could've fixed it.

"We're gonna find him." Ben finally answered, more confident than he felt.

"So, if you're so confident that it isn't just Klaus on a bender, what do you think happened?" Five asked, turning his eyes back to his drink that he took a swing of.

Maybe Five meant it as a serious inquiry. Maybe he didn't mean to say it with such accusation. Maybe Ben shouldn't have let that little psycho in the tiny shorts get to him, but that's exactly what happened- it got to him.

"You all just love to shove Klaus further behind his pills and needles, huh? Is it easier for you that way? We can't all pretend to be oblivious to the fact that he's barely slept since he started hearing the dead. We can't pretend that the drugs were all for shits and giggles, not just to maintain some ounce of sanity. You don't bother to look past his worst parts even though he takes such great strides to see past yours. Just because he doesn't broadcast every little inconvenience like you all seem so keen to shove in each other's faces, doesn't mean he doesn't do things to show he cares."

"Woah. Ben wasn't sure where that regurgitated out of… Whoops. Well, he was far past opening the floodgates now. All eyes were turned on him, not sure what else to do. Ben realized that he was shaking a bit. He was sure it was all just an emotional mess of anger, worry for Klaus, and a lot of pent up thoughts that he could never say when he was forced to sit on the sidelines as a ghost.

Luther looked like he was about to say something but Ben cut in.

"He died for you Luther. I mean he dies like every other week for the fun of being recussitated again which is a whole other fucked up thing that I won't even go into, but this time it was trying to help you and your own destructive night of raving and whatever else you got yourself into. While you were off with that Furry-fetish chick and he was tackling the angry boyfriend."

"Wait-

"Vanya, he was the only one who kept suggesting that they should all talk to you like a human being rather than making assumptions or locking you away. Again- No one listened to him. Five- don't forget that whole Hazel, Cha-Cha thing. He held out for ten hours without even mentioning your name. And for all of you- he was in that hotel room for nearly two days and not a single person noticed. He traveled back to the Vietnam War for God's sake and no one batted an eye. Just add shell-shocked to the list."
Everyone looked astounded and perplexed by this except for Five who had a mostly unreadable expression- Ben could see discomfort underneath that tired gaze though, as if he was seeing a glimpse of the true age of Number Five.

"He never complains because he accepted himself as less a long time ago- the family screw up, the outcast, the freak without a real voice. You all kept letting him think it. Do you have any idea of what it's like to have a power like Klaus's? We can walk away from ours whenever we'd like. Klaus didn't ask to be haunted by every damned spirit on God's green Earth. I know that's no excuse to give up on himself in the way he did, but do you even care how hard it is for him to stay sober? At first, I thought he was doing it for Dave, but he lost hope for that a long time ago. Now I see that he's been doing it for us. It's certainly not for himself. You let Dad seep into your mindset and your actions again. He's dead. There's no one here to tell you how to think or how to treat each other so there's no one to fucking blame but yourselves."

And scene.

Silence.

Luther stared at Ben with shocked eyes. Allison stared forward with a dazed, disturbed gaze as if her mind was far off in another place. Vanya looked from Ben to Luther to Allison and then down at the ground. Diego pursed his lips and sat back into the couch. Five slowly nodded and set his drink down, processing everything Ben just threw out into the room without warning.

Honestly, he didn't know how his siblings were going to take that.

"Look, I'm not saying to feed into all of Klaus's bullshit, because we all knows he's got plenty of that. But shoving him aside because it's easier than accepting that he's very not okay and hasn't been for a while isn't the answer either. We should be working together, if we learned anything from the White Violin incident."

"Yeah… No, you're right." Vanya spoke up first, nodding at Ben with an apologetic stare.

"Yeah…"

"Sorry…"

"Okay, yeah…"

"Who's Dave?"

Followed a chorus of voices. Ben felt a tiny part of him relax. That may not have solved their ultimate problem of the missing Number Four, but at least he finally felt like he had a team on his side that was on the same page.

"Attention Hargreeves…" Pogo's voice projected throughout the house. "There's something in the surveillance room that you may want to see." Ben didn't like the hint of anguish hidden in his vocal inflection. Something was not right. Something was worse than 'not right'.

"Hi Hargreeves!"

They watched in horror as the low-quality image flashed up on screen, a beaten but unmistakable form in the middle…

Klaus.
His arms were held high above his head, but that didn't stop him from slouching over from apparent exhaustion. His hair was matted down over his forehead in dark, dampened curls that contrasted dramatically with his paler-than-usual face. Even from the screen, Ben could make out the dark circles under his eyes and the dried blood the ran from his temple down to the top of his cheek bone.

His body was a gruesome painting of black and blues, broken up with two oozing slits through the flesh of his abdomen, small drops of blood still trickling down over his abs to the waist of his tattered black jeans that Ben recognized from that damned mission that he felt started this all.

"Thought you may be interested to know that Klausy and I have been hanging out a bit."

Wait… Klausy?

Klausy…

No…

"Want to say hi to your sibbies?" The woman's voice echoed into their surveillance hub. It chilled them all to hear it- a message just for them.

Klaus didn't move on the monitor. He had his head turned stubbornly away, not even moving when the woman knelted behind him and gently circled his neck with one hand.

"Why are you bein' shy? What- are you mad at them?"

Ouch.

Well, Klaus didn't actually say it and that probably wasn't the main reason he was willing to cooperate, but it still stung. It hurt them all more than they'd like to admit that the whole room was full of people who felt just a bit responsible for this tape's very existence at that exact moment.

"Or… Are you afraid they'll let you down again?"

Who was this chick and why was she claiming to know so much about them? Would Klaus tell her that? Did Klaus tell her that? Was this someone he thought he could trust? What did she want with him?

"Emotional pain isn't nearly as fun as physical, is it, Mousy?"

With that, the siblings caught a gleam on the screen. A knife was held to Klaus's torso and seamlessly dragged through, a new cascade of scarlet flow making its way down his stomach. Klaus tensed but that was the only sign of pain he truly showed. It was widely known that he was good with that kind of stuff, but it also was apparent that it could have also been from Klaus's clear lack of energy and strength… He was worn. He was indifferent… He was giving up.

"You've got a couple days, friends." Sadie spoke to them again, cocking her head at the camera. "This boy's got a half-billion price on his head, got it? Not a penny less. However you get the cash, I don't care, but we know Daddy wasn't exactly scraping by for funds so this shouldn't be too hard. We'll contact you soon about an exchange. You're all invited, of course."

"Who in the fuck-"

"Mousy…" Ben muttered under his breath, the gears turning as he tried to fall back through his memories to fish out a name. He knew this woman. He knew her younger and with red hair, but he knew her… And he hated her.
"What?" Diego demanded? Ben could hear the seething anger in his brother's voice- something he did to hide the fear and worry.

"Mousy Klausy." Ben said, still thinking.

"Ben, what-

"Do you know this bitch?"

"Why-"

"Who-"

"Shh!" Ben shushed. He needed a second, just a second and then-

Bingo.

"Sadistic Sadie." Ben breathed. The whole room stared him down. He realized he sounded ridiculous right now, spouting out things like Mousy Klausy and Sadistic Sadie- it sounded like he was pulling outrageous names from a comic book. "Klaus met her shortly after leaving the house when he was 18. She always had him in this weird trance since day one- She could get him to do anything."

"Anything as in-"

"Following her around like a lost puppy. Sex… Lots of sex. Freaky, weird shit too. That's where he started all of that… Well that and… Drugs. The harder drugs. The addict drugs. It was her. It was Sadie."

Quiet again. Ben let it sink in. To be honest, Klaus was probably going to get into that stuff sooner or later but she didn't help. Maybe he wouldn't have gotten as addicted. Maybe he wouldn't be so self-deprecating. Maybe-

"I'm going to kill this fucking-

"Diego." Luther interrupted, finally jumping into diplomatic action. "So… What happened? Did Klaus do something to piss her off?"

"Well, he eventually grew a brain and a pair- enough to leave her. I would never stick around when she was there and she was always there. I hated seeing him like that. Eventually I told Klaus that if he didn't get himself away from her toxicity, I'd leave… forever. He picked me and yada-yada, whatever. Point is, he left, which in their minds back then was worse than driving a real knife straight through the other's back. But-

"Don't worry everyone. I'm making sure he's taken care of in the meantime. How dare you all let him suffer through reality like this- It breaks my heart. I'm gonna help you, Klausy."

Everyone turned back to the monitor at the sound of Sadie's fake-pitiful voice. At first it was assumed that by "suffering through reality" she had meant letting Klaus endure whatever tortures they were concocting. When she pulled something out of her back jeans pocket though, the realization hit the room that it was worse, much worse.

By reality she meant sobriety, and by "helping" him, she meant drugging him.
Sadie held a syringe in her hand.

"Oh God…" Vanya whispered in a small voice, mirroring everyone's inner agony that they couldn't quite convey with words or outward expression as they watched frozen in horror. Klaus flipped out. Ben could only assume that he had still been managing his sober state until that point- otherwise he wouldn't have reacted so defensively against the idea of being drugged again.

He worked so hard and Sadie was going to send him crashing down again.

Ben hated her. Ben wanted to kill her. He's never truly wanted to kill anyone in his life- he's always just had to in order to protect his siblings or the public.

Now though… Now all he could envision was unleashing whatever eldritch creature he could conjure from his body on her and only her.

Ben wanted to leave, but he couldn't. He wanted to turn his back on the sight of Sadie taking off her belt to wrap around Klaus's struggling arm. His feet were cemented in place though.

He couldn't watch anymore. He couldn't stand there in a room of people who previously didn't believe in Klaus and only now realized the existence of a problem when it was finally laid right in front of their eyes. He had to get out. He had to think. He had to not think. Ben didn't know what he needed, except for his brother…

He needed his brother.

*Klaus, where the hell are you?*

He refused to let his eyes travel anywhere near that unrelenting, blinking red light. Part of it was just him refusing to do any more of what Sadie willed him to do. Part of it was his pride and his still-hidden disappointment in his siblings. He knew they weren't there, but they'd soon be watching this and he could bring himself to look into their eyes for a multitude of reasons, most of which he blamed himself for.

Sadie talked to them like she was calling old friends for a quick, harmless life update. Klaus loathed every word that came out of her mouth, thinking about his siblings' reactions when they'd inevitably hear her.

On that subject- how did she seem to know so much about his current feeble relationship with them? He was sure he didn't say anything, so how was she throwing around allegations about them disappointing him?

However she knew, it vexed him more than he'd like to admit. Those were fresh metaphorical wounds she was digging into- coincidentally while she was slicing him some new, quite literal wounds. Klaus's mind was so far off at this point though that he barely flinched as the blade ran through his skin again.

"How dare you all let him suffer through reality like this- It breaks my heart. I'm gonna help you, Klausy." She was saying, bringing Klaus back to present actuality. He wanted to come back with some witty retort, but he felt out of it. Out of juice. *The* Klaus Hargreeves had nothing to say.

That is, until the sparkle of a needle shone in front of his face.

"No, no- Sadie, please…" His body thrashed, trying to inch away or free himself from the rope that was still draining the blood flow from his hands and making them numb. He didn't want this. He
couldn't have this. Anything else—literally, anything.

Because Klaus knew that if he experienced the sweet delicacy of any drug in any way, shape or form, that'd be it—his sobriety would be obliterated before him and his life would spiral past the point of salvation. He didn't know if he even would have a life past this, but if he did, it was about to disintegrate right before his very eyes.

"Shh… I'm going to make everything better." Sadie reached up to his wrists and untied one hand so that his arm fell to his side, tingling as feeling came back. Even though it was rendered mostly useless with lack of sensation, Klaus used that arm to the best of his ability to push Sadie away.

"No, no, no… Sadie, you can cut me more. You can beat me. You can do whatever the hell you want, okay? Not this."

"Stop your fussing. You know you'll feel better afterwards." She ignored his pathetic attempts at weakly shoving her as she resumed taking off her belt nonchalantly. Klaus could just barely smell the acidic tinge to the air, the vile of heroine staring at him menacingly from Sadie's perfectly manicured hand.

Fuck, how he wanted it… and at the same time, he didn't want it just as intensely. His inner battle raged inside his head.

As the nerves came back to life in his right arm, Klaus hurriedly reached his hand up to his other constrained one, trying to fumble with the knotted rope. Sadie just smacked his hand away and gently took his free arm in her hand, managing to wrap her belt around it and pulling it tight with a few tugs. Klaus didn't stop struggling.

"No, no, no…" He breathed frantically, his throat closing in panic and his eyes stinging with tears. For something that's ruled his life for so long, he was surprisingly terrified of it.

"Klaus." She said in a low voice, putting her face right in front of his so that he was forced to look into her eyes with his own horrified ones. "I'm trying to help you. Let me. You don't want to hear the ghosties anymore, right?"

Klaus stilled, looking into the face of a woman who honest-to-God thought she was helping Klaus out like some kind of angel from heaven sent to do the Devil's work. He did want to give in. For a second, he considered just letting her do her thing. He wouldn't care in a couple of seconds anyway. But…

"Not like this." He started freaking out again, pulling away from her as best he could. She sighed, disappointedly as he continued with his chorus of pleading "no's". Sadie pulled a cloth from where it was tied on her belt loop and twisted it in one smooth motion. She gagged Klaus so that all he could do was scream in muffled tones through the cloth in panicked protest.

Sadie held his arm straight and Klaus moaned in panic, his breathing pattern all over the place. She ignored him and held the syringe in her mouth while she used her hand to tap the crook of his arm, bringing a vein to the surface.

"You're gonna be okay." She told him. "Relax. I don't want to have to stick you over and over again because of your squirming."

Klaus disregarded that, tugging his arm away with no success. He sobbed and complained through the gag, his chest heaving and his body shaking.

Sadie took the needle to his skin. He felt it prodding the surface, ready to plunge in and interrupt his
clean-ish bloodstream.

A familiar pinching pain erupted on his arm and Klaus squeezed his eyes shut. He heard the subtle depression sound of the syringe emptying and then he knew that was it- he was fucked.

Instantly, it washed over him… or… maybe everything washed out of him- every anxiety, every panic, every pain, every worry. It dissipated within seconds and soon euphoria erupted within Number Four, starting at his slowing heart and spreading out from his head to his toes. Klaus welcomed the feeling like an old friend, the familiarity pleasurable enough on its own.

His eyes rolled back as well as his head. Klaus's whole body relaxed muscle by muscle like a wave of relaxation overcoming every single one of his physical features. His body went slack, his mind went slack, his world went slack…

Remind me again why I didn't want this?

"Better?" Sadie's voice spoke close to his ear, sounding smooth and melodic. Klaus could only groan and nod. He felt the belt slip from his arm as Sadie bent down and kissed the inside of his elbow.

Every single tiny sensation felt so damn good, he didn't care where it was coming from or the situation he was in. Klaus was happy- at least in the moment, this was his version of truly content.

"I told you." She whispered against the skin of his neck. Klaus shivered as he finally found the strength to raise his head and his eyelids to see her smiling at him.

He was stuck in a weird position- he wasn't incapable of realizing that he still didn't want to be here with her in this damn prison. He wasn't exactly in any position to channel any hate at her either though. Everything was okay, but not okay… but mostly okay.

"Mmm hmm mmhm hm mhm?"

"Oh." She chuckled, taking delicate hands to remove his gag. Klaus appreciatively moved his tongue around in his mouth. He giggled. It felt like a weird, foreign animal dancing in his mouth.

"You know what I think, Sadie?" He asked lazily in slurred tones. She brushed hair from his face and ran her thumb below his eye.

"What's that?"

"I think you're frustrated. I don't think you can stand it." Klaus didn't know where this was coming from, but he meant every word of it. He knew what he was talking about and it made perfect sense to his subconscious mind, but she didn't seem to be on the same page.

"What- Yeah, I'm 'frustrated'. You owe a lot of people a lot of money. It's my job to-"

"No, no, no, no, no, no…" Klaus slurred, narrowing his eyes at her. His body felt so gloriously heavy. The only reason he was still sitting up was because his captive wrist held him up.

"You're sooooo upset because you still love me."

Sadie's face dropped. It was instantly replaced with a steely scowl.

"Love is ridiculous, Klaus. You know I don't believe in it."

"Oh, you say you don't, but you did love me. I knew it then, I know it now. And you can't handle the fact that I may have fallen under your curse more than once, but all that I've ever felt for you was obsessive infatuation and nothing more. I know what love is now, Sadie. I've seen it. I've felt it... but
not for you."

_Oooh… Should I like, write poems or something? That's deep, Klaus._ He had his own inner conversation with himself simultaneously.

Sadie didn't have anything to say. She looked pissed, though. She stared at him for an eternity, but Klaus had already forgotten what he had just said. He looked around the room. It wasn't so bad in here… It was… gray. Gray could be pretty, he guessed.

"Can I get my hand outta here? It feels like it's detached from my body. Tingly. Everything's… tingly."

Sadie giggled again.

Sadie abruptly stood up, startling Klaus and making his eyes widen. She angrily turned, her hair brushing against her back as she banged on the door that popped open afterward. Klaus watched her go with a frown.

Was it something he said?

Number Four noticed something blinking in the mirror- Oh yeah. His siblings were going to be watching this. Klaus snickered.

_Awkward._

He used his one free hand to salute to the camera behind the wall before the blinking light stopped.

"Bye, guys." He said in a small voice, even though he knew the recording had stopped. Where were his siblings? Where was Ben? Why weren't they here in this lil' room with him? Why wasn't he at home?

_Because you were kidnapped, dumbfuck._

Oh yeah… Well, that's okay.

Klaus buried his face in the crook of his arm that was still unfortunately raised above his head. He swung and rocked back and forth, feeling his head spin.

This was great.

This was _fantastic._

Chapter End Notes

_I promise- There will be a lot happening in terms of some form of resolve regarding Klaus's captivity in the next chapter, HOWEVER, there will be more chapters after that as well. As always, your feedback makes me insanely happy! Thank you to everyone who has been so supportive- I truly appreciate it._

_ALSO- If you haven't been listening to the full Umbrella Academy soundtrack yet (including all of the featured songs from separate artists as well as the songs composed by Jeff Russo) you definitely should. It's probably the best overall TV-Series soundtracks that I've listened to and it helped inspire a great deal of this fic._
Klaus finds out the nature of his kidnapping and his kidnapper, suffering a loss in the process. The siblings finally find out where he's being held and suit up to do whatever it takes to get their lost brother back.

BEFORE YOU READ: Please forgive me- While a lot does happen in this update, I thought I'd be able to write up until we know exactly what happens to Klaus and the potential end of his captivity, but 4,000 words turned into 8,000 words way too fast and I'd rather not cheat everyone out of the full descriptive scenes just because I really wanted to get to the point during this chapter. I promise that the next chapter will start with what everyone's been waiting for, and I will be writing further chapters of much-needed family healing after that!

Thank you all for your amazing feedback and support!

Klaus trudged home after weeks of captivity. His whole body ached, he was weak and barely holding himself up, and to make matter worse, the sweet image of dope spreading through his veins prodded at his mind constantly. Smoking, snorting, injecting… He didn't care how he got it but he needed it… bad.

The only thing he wanted more than heroin was his home though. And so, Klaus found himself outside the Academy walls, taking a tired breath and stumbling towards the door. He wondered what his siblings would say. Have they been worried? Have they been looking? Did they notice?

Klaus was about to turn the doorknob, but his fingertips hovered over the cool metal. He heard an energetic buzz of voices, different than the dead ones in his head. These ones were very much alive and seemed much happier than the ones that screamed and cried at him all day and night.

Cupping his hands against the door's window, Klaus peered into the warmly lit room inside where his family was gathered. They were all dressed in their new Academy uniforms, everyone taking off their masks and tossing them aside, carefree, like they were just returning from a successful mission.

Five "jumped" around the room, handing out drinks from the bar. Diego fell onto the couch and kicked his feet up on the coffee table, smiling at Mom when she gave him a damp cloth for the cut under his eye. Allison who had her full voice back was laughing hysterically at
something Luther said. The big guy himself was even smiling, acting out some grandiose story with vivacious hand gestures.

And Ben… Ben swayed along with Luther's record player, a content grin on his face.

'I think we're alone now… There doesn't seem to be anyone around…'

He tapped his foot along rhythmically while tipping his glass back and taking a sip of whatever Five was serving. Vanya sat next to him, whispering something in his ear. Both of them cracked up, Ben nearly choking on his drink.

The room radiated happiness. The stark contrast between the orange glow of the room and the dark blue, midnight tones outside where Klaus stood was quite poetic he'd admit, but it didn't quite do him any favors. He craved to be in there. He craved to be able to tell mission stories, even as much as he pretended to hate them. He tried to hate missions. He tried to hate the Academy. The truth was, he was never good enough to be like the others and he hated himself for it- he couldn't blame Dad anymore. He couldn't blame them.

It was strange- some part of him was happy… truly happy. It was the kind of joy that sat sickly in your stomach that hurt just as much as it satisfied. Klaus hadn't seen his family this happy in forever and God knew that they deserved it after everything they've been through. It was an unacknowledged desire Number Four has had for a long time now- to be able to look at his family as a normal(ish), flourishing team like they should've been all along. And now, they had that…

…it was just without him.

Maybe it had been Klaus that held them back all this time with his deep dips into drug addiction, stealing, rebellion towards everything the Academy stood for, and his clear lack of the 'superstar' prowess that everyone else seemed to possess. He saw that now, undeniably, his absence was the catalyst for the Hargreeves to thrive.

And it was more than a fair trade- Klaus for both Ben and Vanya, their new-but-old additions that would serve the team much better than he could ever offer.

Klaus always did wonder why Ben died rather than him- it should've been him, it would've done much less damage to the family to lose Klaus over Ben- Ben who always knew what to do, who was invariably loyal, who was more capable in every realm… Everyone knew it too, even if they'd never speak it out loud to spare Klaus's feelings. He knew everyone thought it. He knew it.

That was okay. He thought it too.

Things finally felt as they should be though. The perfect "Six". Six was a much more pleasing number than Seven anyway. That didn't ease the ache in his chest though. It was a pain that perpetually screamed 'you mean nothing' at Klaus, over and over again. It had always been there buried inside of him, but it was finally time to let it rise to the surface and overcome him in a climactic realization- He was done here. They had already accepted their lives without Klaus and that life was good. It was full. It was right.
Number Four took one last look at everyone inside, trying to save the smiles of each of his siblings in his head. Their exuberance was the only thing that gave Klaus enough strength and peace of mind to turn his back to that front door that sported the sleek umbrella logo that had kept control of his life for so long. Not anymore.

Klaus crossed his arms over his chest tightly against the biting breeze and started off into the darkness, going who the hell knows where.

Klaus took a stuttering breath inwards as his eyes shot open. His chest heaved as much as it physically could against the pain. He'd never been in such discomfort; He was bruised from head to toe. His cuts were no longer fresh and bleeding but they were even more unpleasant than when he first received them. His mouth and throat were dry. He was ridiculously feeble from exhaustion and hunger. His eyelids were heavy with fatigue. His whole body felt like it was weighted down by cinderblocks, both literally and mentally…

See, the thing about heroin is that it's a glorious high, but once you come down from that high, it's as equally damning. His post-high depression had settled in and settled in hard. He had no motivation to move himself an inch from where he lay collapsed on his side on the floor, even though the cold cement was flaring up intense soreness in his shoulder that was twisted beneath his weight.

"KLAUS. KLAUS. HELP. HELP. KLAUS. OH GOD. HELP. KLAUS. GET UP, KLAUS. HELP US, KLAUS. HOW COULD YOU? HOW COULD YOU? COLD. IT HURTS. HELP. KLAUS.

"Stop. Stop. Stop. Stop." He muttered, not even able to raise his hands over his ears to block out the screams that now seemed closer and more urgent than ever.

He felt like shit to wrap things up- utter shit. And that was dope's whole shtick- it put you right back into a position where you no longer wanted it to feel right again, you needed it… And Klaus needed it bad.

He was giving up. This was Klaus Hargreeves giving up.

It took a little bit for Klaus to remember that it hadn't in fact been weeks like in his… dream? Nightmare? Whatever you classified it as, in reality, it's only been about a day since Klaus had seen Sadie. He only knew this by the number of times food was thrown into the room.

Speaking of Sadie who he hoped (but also strangely worried) wouldn't return after what he had said- There she was, walking through the door but not in her normal, confident and demanding manner. She walked delicately to Klaus's side and dropped to her knees, putting a hand on his forehead.

"Klaus, c'mon. Sit up." It wasn't a cold demand like previously. Was there worry there? What was her deal?

Whatever. He didn't have the will to argue. With her help, he pushed himself up with a shivering arm that felt like it would snap with the pressure of enough weight.

Sadie put a hand on his forehead again. What was this- some kind of new torment tactic? Some type of manipulation technique? Was this-

"You're warm. Klaus, you have to eat. Drink water at least. I'll go get-"
Sadie frowned at him. Where was her playfulness? Her evilness? Her malicious grin that promised all sorts of physical and emotional abuse?

"Fine. Suit yourself."

She went for her belt and Klaus almost laughed in happy relief. He hated himself for it, but he'd admit that when Sadie walked in, that's all he was hoping for.

She wrapped her belt around his bicep and tugged it tight. She reached into her back pocket and came back with a syringe, already filled and ready to go. Klaus followed the needle's tip with his eyes.

Suddenly, he was overcome with resistance. He wasn't thinking about anything in particular. He just knew he felt a sudden sick shame rip through him and out of nowhere, dope was the last thing he wanted to be around.

"Wait-" He said, inching back. Sadie did. She waited with the syringe just centimeters from his skin. Her eyes turned to him questioningly. It was as if she was waiting for his go-ahead but knew full well she'd get it eventually. Sadie raised an eyebrow at him, but not condescendingly. It was almost as if to say 'you and I both know you want this'.

And he did again. He wanted it, all other thoughts and emotions whisked away as quickly as they came.

Klaus sighed softly and nodded at Sadie. They both turned their gazes back to where Sadie gripped his arm. She pressed the point against the crook of his elbow and stuck him, Klaus pulling in a small hiss of air against the pinch. He watched in fascination as she emptied the liquid into his vein, that intense sensation of euphoria saving him from his inner desolation.

Four sighed and let his body relax, his head lolling forward heavily until Sadie threw the belt to the side and put her hand on either side of his face.

"Stay still."

Klaus's eyes were closed but he felt the cool touch of a damp cloth against his chest. He jumped and tried to writhe away from the contact, but for all the effort he was putting in, he really wasn't moving much at all. Sadie pulled him forward so that his head was resting in her shoulder again and Klaus let himself go limp against her as she cleaned the blood from his skin.

"Klaus," She whispered into his ear as she went. He shivered. He had been lying against the frigid stone floor for days without a shirt- his body had been consistently cold for a long while now, but he never noticed it anymore until she breathed hot air on him like that.

"Mm…" He mumbled into the skin of the base of her neck. Strange how she wasn't calling him 'Klausy'... Very strange… Oh well.

"You can't let them break you, okay?"

Wait… Who's 'them'? Why did Sadie care? Wasn't she trying to break him?

"The nightmares, enhancing your fears- That's all them and you can't let it get to you." She whispered in a calm tone as if she was just telling him what she had for breakfast. Klaus frowned deeply, raising his head off her shoulder with all the strength he had left. He looked into her eyes and
saw true concern there—something he rarely has ever seen in Sadie.

"What?"

"Just listen to me, okay? You might not see me for a little while."

"Why?"

"Because… You know me. Always gettin’ into trouble. Doesn't matter. What matters is that you can't let him win."

"Who?"

"Shush and listen, remember?" She whispered harshly, showing some of that familiar anger and command. She calmed down at once though, going back to her soft, hushed tones. "It's not about the money, Klaus. I mean… that's part of it I guess, but it's so much more than that."

"What? Sadie, Sadie… You're being weird…" A soft hand covered his mouth and ceased his inquiries. Klaus blinked slowly and tried to focus.

"It's about you. It's about you and your siblings, okay? It's always been about you all. If they all get here for the 'exchange' then that's it. He's already won."

"Mmm!" He moaned a complaint into her hand, trying to tell her that he had something to say. She removed it.

"What about us? Sadie, we're all jacked up on powers and whatever, remember? I doubt some guy can get us to-"

"It's not just him. There are others."

"Even so-"

"No! Klaus! Ugh, there's just too much to say and I don't have much time. Look, I'm going to do everything I can to help you but then the rest is up to you, alright? You've got to find a window—when they throw food in or something, I don't know. But when you find that window you take it and you go, got it?"

"What's wrong? What did you do?" He asked, knowing full well that this was not how Sadie acted unless something had spun wildly out of her control. She was scared, he could tell. She was terrified.

Sadie just sighed and brushed her thumb along Klaus's cheekbone. They stared into each other's eyes and at that moment, Klaus remembered the other part of Sadie that he had forced himself to forget—

It was all of her sensitives under that diamond-tough surface that she had built around herself. It was the side of her that stayed up all night telling young-Klaus about her past of constant abuse and her final breaking point when she had run away to live on the streets when she was only 13. It was the Sadie who would also deny sleep for a full night to listen to Klaus rant about his family while she ran those nails down his spine and kissed his jawline…

"We were never too great at the 'emotionally damaging each other' thing, were we? Or I guess I should say we were too good."

Klaus didn't know what to say.

"I'm sorry, Klausy." She whispered. Her hand brushed over his hip and her thumb pressed gently
into one of his darker bruises. Klaus squeezed his eyes shut and moaned at the soreness. He was aware of the feather-light touch of her lips to his forehead, pressing a mild kiss to his skin in a way that he could only take as a 'goodbye' kiss.

Something wasn't right.

"Wait," He called after Sadie as she stood, turning for the door. She turned back hesitantly, looking like it was already painful for her to leave anyway. "We can go together. Sadie, you and I… You've gotta know a way. Then we can- we can-"

Klaus didn't know what he was saying, but he knew that the first part made sense at least. If she was looking for an out and he was obviously on that same page, then why not just tell this mystery man to 'fuck off' altogether and skedaddle outta there?

Sadie smiled sadly and dropped to her knees one more time, reaching into her back pocket again. Again, Klaus hated that his mind instantly lit up at the thought of more drugs, but it was much more than that.

Sadie's hand came back with a familiar chain, dog tags attached. She lifted the necklace above Klaus's head and laid the dog tags against his bare chest. He looked down at them and was filled with a sort of relief that he didn't realize he had been missing without them. Sadie looked from the tags, turning them in her fingers and then looking back up to Klaus.

"Little soldier-Klaus. I can see it." She said honestly. Klaus turned scared eyes to hers.

She was a menace. She was evil more often than not. She was manipulative, unhealthy, controlling… But he cared about her. He always cared about her, and her, him. He had a stabbing feeling that if she walked out of this room right now, something terrible would happen.

"Don't." He whispered. She swallowed thickly, her eyes brimming with tears.

"You're gonna be okay, kid."

That hurt too. She used to say that to him quite a lot all those years back.

….And now, it was the last thing "Sadistic Sadie" said to Klaus ever again.

Klaus sat on what Sadie said for a couple of hours as his high took its course and eventually started winding down. As it did, the ghosts became more abundant and his thoughts did too.

Why the sudden change of heart? What was she talking about when she said he couldn't let 'them' win? Why were they coming after him and his siblings? What did they think- that they could take on a highly trained team of a weaponized family?

And then there was what she said about Klaus needing to find his window to get out. She made it seem pretty dire that he does it as soon as possible, but he had no idea where he was or who was out there or how closely he was being monitored.

Klaus moaned through his forearms that covered his face as he laid on his back on the floor. The frigidity of the stone was the least of his worries right now. He wished he could just give up, but he felt like part of him was fighting for Sadie now too (whatever was happening with her). Even if she didn't deserve it, he was trained to help people whenever he had even the slightest bit of capability… Klaus dejected those principles more when he grew up, but there was also his history with Sadie that admittedly made him care more than he probably should.
Klaus removed his arms from his eyes and nearly screamed—A face was right above his, staring down at him with dark, curious eyes. He pushed himself up and scurried backward the best he could in his still slightly drugged and fragile state. Then, he took a better look…

"Wait… I know you." He said to the little girl who clearly wasn't alive and as solid as a normal person would be. And he did know her. It was not too long ago when he had met her in…

"The Pit," Klaus said, shaking his finger at her. "I talked to you in that—Wait—What are you doing here? Did you follow me?"

The little girl scowled at him and shook her head. Klaus frowned in confusion, but slowly, it started to settle in his brain.


That's where he was. Klaus was back in that dark bunker that he had fallen into nearly a week ago when he was on that mission with the rest of the Academy. He had to be. But how? Trying to imagine how all of this connected was physically making his head hurt. Was that how they targeted him? From when he fell into their weird, underground death trap?

"Can you help me get out again? Remember? Like last time?" Klaus asked in the sweetest voice he could muster. It was hard on his throat that hadn't seen much water in the past few days.

The girl stared at him.

"Please?"

Nada.

"Pretty please?" He clapped his hands together in a prayer gesture and shook them, begging. The girl barely moved, but finally responded.

"Okay."

"Wow! Thank you! Thank you so much. We just need a plan so let's think about this."

And they did… Well, Klaus did while the girl stared at him. It was a pretty simple plan for Klaus anyway—he had to heavily rely on the girl for most of it. Klaus's main part was based on his mere hope that he could conjure up his powers strong enough to allow the girl touch with the living world too and that was something that was iffy to bargain on, especially with heroin still pulsing through his veins.

"Worth a shot though, right?" He asked the girl.

Nothing. Klaus sighed.

"Okay."

He didn't have much time to feel insanely confident in this so-called plan of his because the catalyst to it all came sooner than expected; the tossing-in of the food tray. Klaus never saw the person who methodically set down the tray of food and pushed it through the cracked door just enough to close it once again. He did consistently hear four bleeps and then one deep tone before the door popped open and he could only guess that meant that there was some keypad keeping him locked in there.

While talking to the girl and going over the plan for the third time, he heard footsteps
"Shh, shh!" He said, waving his hands at the girl even though she hadn't uttered a single word in at least half-an-hour. "Okay, you're on. Your big moment, okay? Get out there, get the code, tell me when you're ready and I'll make sure you can punch it in with those adorable teeny-tiny hands, okay? But not before you make sure the coast is clear."

She stared.

Klaus's heart rate picked up as the anxiety set in. If she didn't do this, he wasn't sure what else he'd resort to. None of the other spirits around him wanted anything to do with Klaus unless it was to screech at him in an unintelligible manner. He certainly didn't feel strong enough to take on whoever was supplying the food either. It was a miracle that he was even thinking this straight.

Luckily, the girl dissolved and he was left alone. He prayed to every single God he knew about that she was outside the door right now, waiting for the food-person to punch in the code.

_Bleep. Bleep. Bleep. Bleep…_

_Boop…_

_Pop._

The door opened.

Food was shoved in, the same as always: Kraft Mac and Cheese, an apple and a piece of baguette.

The door closed.

Klaus waited as the footsteps faded. He closed his eyes and tried to focus on the single sense of hearing. Then…

"Okay, uh, girl… Coast clear? You ready?"

The door swung open so quickly that it banged against the opposite wall and scared the living daylights out of Klaus.

"Christ on a cracker! What in the- I didn't do it!" He yelled, holding his arms out in front of him but lowering when he realized that the only person who stood in the threshold was that little girl, the same stony expression on her features.

"What- How'd you do that?"

"I didn't let the door close all the way."

Klaus thought about that.

"Oh…"

He was surprised, no… _astounded_ that his powers were strong enough to allow her to even touch the door without him having to think twice about it. He was still a little buzzed and felt weaker than a limp noodle. Klaus wasn't about to question it though. Go him.

"So, what's it look like out there? Is there anyone else?"

She shook her head no.

"Alright, okay. Here we go."
Klaus pushed himself to his feet, his right knee buckling at first, but he found a stable-enough stance.

It struck him that he hadn't been outside this damn room in days.

Freedom.

The hallways were exactly as he imagined they'd be when he fell in this damn maze the very first time when all the lights were off- narrow and a cold gray, not unlike his prison. There were many intersections but thank the lawd that the girl took the lead. Klaus owed this kid big time.

The room that Klaus had fallen into in the first place appeared up ahead. He could tell by the connecting hallway that leads to the ladder and the hatch in the roof that would be his gate to the outside world.

Klaus stumbled down the hall and imagined it- Fresh air, sunshine, wind in the trees, other humans, waffles…

He envisioned himself standing outside the Academy. Funny how the one place he always set his mind on hating so much was now the place he craved to see the most. He wondered what his siblings would say. They had to have seen Sadie's video by now, right?

"Shit," Number Four muttered. He heard someone opening the hatch. He took a sharp turn into the left branching hallway and pressed himself against the wall. He almost pulled the girl with him, but he remembered that only he could see her.

Footsteps came down the ladder and Klaus inched his way further back into the narrow passageway, taking another left and obscuring himself even further. Maybe he should find a room to hide in just in case the mystery person walked back here.

Klaus saw a door and didn't think twice- he slowly turned the knob, wincing at the tiny squeak it made and shuffled inside.

The room was pitch black but where it lacked in sight it made up for in sound. It was excruciatingly loud in there, but Klaus knew the difference between real-life loud and dead loud and this was the ladder. There had to be at least fifty voices in there, screaming in the most agonizing ways that Klaus had ever heard… and he's heard some intense shit.

Needless to say, he was terrified. He had to stick through it though, he knew that. He heard footsteps and while they were far off, they seemed to be coming closer.

Whyyyyyyyyy…

Klaus internally complained. He edged back further into the darkness, terrified of what might be in there with him.

As it turns out, he was quite right to be.

Midway through backing up away from the door, his heel hit something… Something that was solid but not grounded. It gave away with a small shove from his foot and was clothed. There was something about the weight of it or maybe the shape or something but Klaus just knew… he knew that it was a human being, or what was left of one.

He took a sharp breath in and had to drop to a crouch to keep from tripping over backward. He could sense the presence of the body right behind him, too freaked out to really reach out and make sure. He didn't need to know. He didn't want to know.
But then, a scent surrounded him. It was subtle, but sickeningly unmistakable.

Flowers. Flowers with a hint of bourbon.

_No, no, no, no, no, no…_

Klaus dropped down to one knee, his previous fear replaced with a whole new one. He reached forward, his hands shaking violently. His mind went blank and the only thing he could think to do was search for something to prove him wrong. Klaus desperately wanted to be wrong.

He felt it though- her hair, her nails, her face… and the stickiness on her temple that ran down her cheek and to her neck where it fell to a puddle on the floor. His trembling fingertips felt it all.

Klaus reared back and staggered to his feet, an unintentional scream building in his throat. He didn't even get a split second to vocalize before the door behind him swung open and the room was flooded with light revealing exactly what he was terrified to be true…

Sadie. Dead. Very dead.

Behind her was another room that Klaus could see through the windowed wall- a furnace room, but not the kind that heated houses and buildings... the kind that burned bodies.

Klaus did get that scream out, just in time for his biceps to be yanked back behind him with enough force to drop him to his knees. He was fucked. He was going to end up right alongside Sadie with a bullet hole through his head and ready to be incinerated.

_Ugh…_ The sight made him sick. His heart dropped but he didn't have much time to mourn before his attention was demanded by a voice that somehow topped each and every shock he had just experienced in the past hour.

"Ah, Number Four. Unfortunate that you've seen this. Should've stayed in your room." Said a deep, familiar, matter-of-fact voice… a _British_ voice.

Klaus swore he thought he was going to turn around and come face to face with his father. He didn't, thank God. However, this man was of similar age with a balding head and a thick mustache. His scowl was certainly like his father's. His cold, unfeeling eyes that judged every other single living morsel other than himself- those were nearly the same too.

"Wh- Why is she- She's-"

"Yes. It is indeed sad when certain employees don't work out the way you'd like them too. Maybe you'll be comforted to know that it was her fondness for you that was her downfall. Or… perhaps that'll make it worse."

Klaus's breath caught in his throat. His eyes couldn't travel away from Sadie's body that had been thrown in the middle of the floor like a lifeless doll.

"She heard a little too much, you see. Interesting… She had no problem with the physical torment but once I mention our true intentions with you, she goes rogue. Shame."

Still, Klaus had nothing to say. He was speechless. Who was the fucking sicko?

"Mason." The man said almost as if hearing Klaus's thoughts. Number Four was pulled out of the room away from Sadie for the last time. His eyes still glued themselves to the dark red against her
drained skin. "Mason Hargreeves."

Klaus froze in the hallway. Now *that* caught his attention.

That was the last straw. This was all *too* much. First realizing that he was back in that damn bunker, then Sadie, and now what? A relative? A secret relative?

"Yes, your father liked to pretend I didn't exist ever since he stole my life from me, so I understand how this all can come as a shock."

"A shock?" Klaus mocked in an exaggerated British accent. His voice was about three octaves higher than usual, strained from pure astonishment. "This is much more than a 'shock', this is the fucking bomb shell of all bomb shells- Are you- Are you…"

"Reginald's 'esteemed' younger brother."

"No… No. Sorry. Fuck no. One British asshat was enough, thank you. So, thanks for the family reunion, *Uncle Mason*, but I think I'm gonna head home now…" Klaus said casually despite the fact that he was freaking out inside. He started walking away down the hall back towards the hatch. "Don't want to… overstay my welcome or anything but this has been fun. We should do it again- Actually, no. We should never do this again but-"

Mason interrupted Klaus's nervous rambling by grabbing his arms and yanking them behind him. Number Four wasn't about to fight. Just the mere pull on his arms almost sent him tumbling backward as it was. It wasn't long before Klaus found himself zip-tied again, then being led down the hall with a firm grasp on his bicep.

Klaus's mind just kept replaying Mason's voice… "Number Four," he called him. It was like he had channeled Dad's relentless, condescending soul through him. Klaus guessed that that's what happened when you were actually related to someone. He was grateful that he didn't have to inherit things from his siblings like Luther's seemingly permanent frown or Five's constant high-pitch, matter-of-fact voice.

"*Uncle*. Bah! We're no more related than you and that cheap trick you insist on calling 'Father'. I never understood that about Reginald. He was always soft."

"Hah! *Soft*?" Klaus chuckled in disbelief. If this guy was calling Dad soft that he did not want to see what Mason thought of as hard.

"Since you seem so inclined, let's go for a walk, shall we?"

Mason helped Klaus all the way up the ladder and into that fresh air he's been craving. He didn't get a chance to enjoy it though. Not with what the lunatic was telling him as they walked through the familiar wooded area towards an equally familiar warehouse.

"It was always our dream, you know. As soon as all 43 of you kids were born, we knew we had to take our chance. But one thing leads to another- jealousy, disagreements and what-have-you… Before I knew it, I was being pushed out."

"Boo-hoo." Klaus muttered as he was shoved shirtless towards the abandoned building.

"Back then Reginald had used some… questionable methods in his business ventures. To keep matters short-"

"Thank God." Klaus mumbled bitterly.
"- I was thrown under the bus. I did jail time for his crimes while he herded up 7 children and pursued what was supposed to be ours, taking all of the money with him."

Klaus wasn't really listening all of the sudden. They were approaching the warehouse and something miraculous was happening. In the blink of an eye, it was transformed from a crumbling dump to a sleek, modernized facility. He blinked a few more times to make sure he wasn't hallucinating.

"Yes, it's quite nice." Mason admired when he noticed Klaus's face. "Thank you, Nine." He called out to seemingly no one.

Nine?

NINE?

"When I got out-" Mason continued his story as he shoved Klaus through giant steel doors with a few punches to a keypad. The innards of the newly restored building were just as grim and pristinely polished as the outside. The room opened up into a giant expanse of training matts, weapons, and more importantly, people. Humans fighting each other, all of them about the same age as Klaus. There was a total of-

"Six. I was able to gather six of my own children in the meantime. I kept under the radar, of course, my brother still intent on keeping me out of the equation. Since then, they've been training quite like yourselves but without all the ridiculous emotional "family" drama. I have made them into exactly what you all were always meant to be-"

"Psycho killers?" Klaus asked in astonishment as he watched them spar with each other. He and his siblings were good. They've always been good, but these guys… They were great. They were scary great.

"Venus!" Mason calls out, halting all movement. "All of you- come meet our guest."

They lined up perfectly before Klaus and his good ol' long lost Uncle, faces unreadable. They looked like robots more than people.

"Number 8 can voice anyone's inflection and make you hear whatever it is you want to hear."

Klaus was suddenly brought back to the moment before he fell through the weak spot in the forest- It was when he was running to help Vanya and the rest of his siblings.

"No one called you, Klaus." Luther had said.

"Number 9- She can manipulate the visual world before your very eyes, such as when seven snooping siblings come around an 'old, abandoned warehouse'."

An Asian woman gave him a small, cocky smile and within an instant, the atmosphere around him was changed to exactly what his first impressions of the place was- a dusty, deteriorating dump. In another instant, it was changed back.

"Number 10 can channel an impressive amount of destructive electricity through contact with any sort of metal conductor. Number 11 has quite the affinity for physical pain through direct eye-"

"AHH!" Klaus screamed and dropped to his knees at first look into the thin, pale man's dark eyes. Before he even knew what was happening, it felt like his insides were on fire, being stabbed and then torn from his body all at the same time. He couldn't even describe the sort of pain that erupted within him but it made his mind go white and everything else faded away. He couldn't even tell you
his name if he tried.

"That's enough, 11. Thank you." Klaus heard before collapsing to the floor, curling up and choking on his own breath as he sucked in air.

What the fuck?

Given no time to gather himself, he was pulled roughly to his feet once again. That was another difference between his father and Mason- this Hargreeves was much more built and strong in the physical sense than Reggie ever was.

"12 can breathe underwater… Oddly specific. Not always useful. Still. And then 13… Well… you two have been spending some time together without you even realizing it. She knows a good amount about you, Number 4."

A woman with platinum blonde hair that reached just below her jawline in a perfectly straight fashion. Her eyes were stunningly bright in a bluish-gray color. She looked at Klaus devoid of emotion, but he didn't recognize her in the slightest.

"Number 13 can dig up your worst fears and project them into your unconscious- A psychological persecution master if you will."

"The nightmares…"

"Precisely. And you've been the ideal subject. You're- Well-"

"Majorly fucked up?" Klaus asked with a tired laugh of disbelief.

"If you insist on putting it that way, yes."

"Is that why you took me instead of another one of my siblings?"

"Truthfully, you were easiest to manipulate… To get alone, to whisk you off. That was clear from the first moment you came tumbling into my bunker. Thirteen got an instant read on you but it didn't take special powers to see that you were the easier target."

"Ouch." He meant to seem more of an asshole who was resisting these freaks in every way possible, but Klaus was so tired and this was all just so much. His voice came out more broken than he wanted it to.

"As you were." Mason instructed and they all did just that, no hesitation. He had these guys trained like dogs. Gross. Suddenly his father didn't seem so bad and that was saying something.

"So, what do you want? It seems like you've got a good lil' posse here. Why are you messing with us, Uncle Mason?"

"I'm not- Don't-" Mason shook his head, waving away Klaus's name use. "I've been watching you since you were just learning how to walk, Number Four. All of you, waiting for the day where Reginald would no longer be around to keep you in his stubbornly rigid grasp."

"Creepy… And I hate to burst your bubble but there's no way that my siblings would ever join this team of ever-obedient robots that you've got going here. If you think for a second that we all escaped Daddy Reggie to be made into slaves by his equally-if-not-more psychotic brother, then-"

"I have a skill of breaking wills- consider it… my 'power'."
"Okay, Dr. Seuss. So, is that what you've been doing to me? Breaking my 'will'?
Klaus asked, throwing up air quotes. Even doing that hurt and drained him of more energy that he didn't have. Not to mention, his high was wearing off and he was feeling shitier by the second.

"You have been a guinea pig of sorts. Admittedly though, you're mainly bait. It's the other ones I want."

"Ouch. Again."

"Don't be offended, Number Four. It's not personal. You know it. They know it. I don't want to lose you- any of you. However, if the meeting goes sour and I'm forced to make an act of sacrifice then it's better to risk-"

"The damaged goods?" Klaus chuckled and rolled his eyes. "You're a real charmer, you know that?"
Mason didn't answer. The evil old-timer suddenly seemed enthralled by the training in front of him.

"Don't pull your punches, Number 10!" Mason yelled, leaving Klaus to take a minute and think about what the asshole had just told him. A word came across Klaus's mind that he remembered using earlier. The Expendable. His role as the futile freak of the family was truly catching up to him now. Mason had seen it within him instantly and now he was here, being used as the instrument in his family's impending downfall into slavery or-

"And if they don't bend to your will, Oh Great One?"

"Then they are considered a threat. As you saw with Miss Sadie… We deal with threats accordingly."

Almost on cue, Number 10 swung a metal baton at Number 9 and produced a burst of electricity that nearly rocked the whole room. She screamed and fell to the floor, clutching her stomach.

"Great. Klaus was leading his family right to their deaths."

"I didn't want her to die. I don't want you to die either but frankly, if the situation demands it-"

"I'm affordable. I get it, Uncle Mason. Don't rub it in."

"Stop this ridi- I'm not your uncle. I think that's been quite enough. Let's get you back to your favorite room, hmm?"

"I'm not getting out of this alive, am I?" Klaus whispered in realization, his eyes glazing over as he analyzed everything Mason was saying and his general attitude towards Klaus. He had already tormented him to the point of uselessness and if he was "mainly bait" and he just wanted "the other ones" than why the hell would he ever keep around Klaus as a burden... and Klaus was always a burden.

"Don't worry, Number Four. At the very least I need you tomorrow when I send a little video message to your siblings. They insist on knowing that you're alive and well before our so-called 'exchange'. Funny how you all pretend to care for one another. Hah! Rogue subjects..." He continued to mutter himself, but Klaus tuned him out and thought about having to pose for a video that would ultimately lead to the demise of his family. He thought his situation was bad before...

As Mason turned Klaus around and started pushing him out, he caught a glimpse of movement in the back corner of the room. Four craned his neck around to see one of the numbers, he couldn't remember which was which at the moment, herd in a few terrified looking people who certainly weren't there for fun. They were tattered and crying and tied with hands behind their backs much like
"Wait-" Klaus pushed back against Mason's guiding hand, worried that his suspicions were correct. Number 'whatever' pulled one of the girls in the center of the room and Number Eleven (Klaus would always remember him) stepped forward. He took one look at the girl and she instantly collapsed in a fit of screaming and sobbing. "Woah, woah, woah-"

"Leave it, Number Four. They are just insignificant civilians. You can't expect Venus to be able to practice without practice dummies."

"You're sick. Absolutely nuts." Klaus said, still pushing back but not knowing what the hell he'd even plan on doing. He watched the girl with pain in his heart- he knew how she felt and it hurt him just to watch.

It was with a heavy chest and an awful feeling of helplessness that Klaus returned to that damn cell where Mason threw him in and locked the door, leaving him to stew in the information he was just overloaded with. Klaus was slipping deeper and deeper into post-high depression and this newfound knowledge that his family was going to come to save him only to die wasn't helping.

Nevertheless, Klaus never noticed the blinking red light from before when Sadie recorded him... It had been going on and off for the past few hours without signs of stopping.

Honest, it may not have mattered even if he did notice because Klaus was officially done.

He was done.

And so, began the worst few hours of Klaus's whole lifetime of horrors.

Luther stared at the ceiling. He knew he should be getting sleep after a full 24 hour stretch without a wink, but the only thing he could think of was Klaus in that damn room with his hand held high above his head while some demon-lady drained the blood from him one slice after another.

Luther was Number One. He was supposed to keep his siblings safe. There were multiple occasions where he had felt like a failure in that respect- Five leaving, Ben dying, Allison's throat, Vanya in general… This time was going to get Klaus killed though and Luther has never considered life without the little, lovable menace. Even when they had all be split apart, Luther could go to bed knowing that they were out there, living their lives at the very least.

Sighing, he swung his legs over the edge of his bed and pulled on a robe before heading downstairs to where he knew Five had been tirelessly set up with an array of books and scripts.

"How's it going?" Luther asked in a tired, raspy voice once he descended the staircase. Diego was there too, thumbing one of his knives with his eyes glazed over in deep thought. Luther doubted anyone was getting much sleep.

Almost a day ago, they received a video transmission to their servers- This one was different from the first video that "Sadistic Sadie" had sent them… this one was live. They didn't know why whoever kidnapped Klaus would allow them 24/7 live footage of their brother, but it also came with a code sent by the same address… A code that Five has been tirelessly trying to crack ever since.

"I've got numbers here and there. Whoever sent this was using three different methods of encryption layered in a specific pattern that-"

"Yeah, you lost me." Luther shut him down before Five could ramble on uselessly. Five didn't take
time to even make a remark about Luther's "thick skull" like he usually would. Instead, he just leaned into his work, furiously scrawling something or other.

"Has anything new happened?" Luther asked, not sure he wanted to know the answer.

"Not since he was thrown back into the cell. He's been mumbling and whimpering to himself ever since." Diego said. His voice may have sounded hard on the outside, but after knowing Diego, Luther could tell there was a deep pain in there.

"No more calls either?"

A day before the live feed was sent, they had gotten a phone call from a computerized voice to negotiate the terms of the money exchange for their brother. The Academy only had one condition— they needed to stop hurting Klaus and they needed proof that he was okay before they proceeded. They all thought that the live video footage was their "proof" at first, but something was off... Like someone was trying to help them find their brother. Maybe it was Klaus, maybe it wasn't. They were trying everything they could to use the constant stream of footage to their advantage though.

After the live feed had started, they had someone watching at all times in case there was some kind of clue that would lead them to their brother. They all got excited when they watched Klaus somehow escape on his own, talking to someone that they couldn't see. It was excruciating not knowing how to help him but hoping with every ounce of their power that he got away safely.

He wasn't so lucky and neither were they. Klaus was soon thrown back into his prison but something was happening to him—he looked weaker by the second and trembled more and more. His was mumbling unintelligible things to himself, but they could at least tell that they were frantic and pained words. Sometimes he'd even scream in his sleep and wake in a fit of terror. Whatever the cause or causes, it was hard to watch.

Allison was taking her shift monitoring him now.

"Has Ben come home yet?"

"He's up there with Allison."

Ben had been in a frenzy more than anyone. They didn't know where he went when he ran out to look for Klaus—they had no leads as of now so it seemed like they were just guessing and checking but Ben did anyway, hoping that anything could help them find Number Four.

"I failed him." Luther couldn't help but voice to the quiet, tense room. Diego looked to him and Five stilled his writing for a second before resuming by flipping through pages of his books.

"We all failed, Man."

"I'm Number One. He's supposed to be able to count on me and I—"

"Luther, you need to stop with this Number One BS. We're all his brothers. We're all supposed to be there for him. We all let him down. Guilt's not helping anyone right now." Diego argued. Luther sighed and rubbed his eyes. He knew that his brother was right, but it didn't help the shame from seeping in.

"I just- How didn't I see how bad it got? His- His not-being-okay or whatever."

"Are any of us ever okay?" Five muttered.
"This is different though, I- I guess I could always tell he was deeply troubled. I feel like we all could but maybe it was just easier for us to pass it off as 'Klaus being Klaus' so we could move on at the end of the day... but he couldn't. I should've- I don't know… Tried to- tried to empathize or-

"Hey, we'll all have a big, disgustingly adorable family talk when we get him back but first we have to focus on getting him back." Five said, slamming his hand on his books and looking up. "Please let me do that."

The room went silent again, save for Five's rustling around with books, papers, and pens. Luther racked his brain for something he could do. In the day, he and Diego took to the streets for information, but that was getting them nowhere. No one had seen anything in this whole damned city.

Fatigue started to settle over and his mind started to muddle thoughts into a mesh of unconsciousness. Luther's eyes felt heavy and the world started drifting into darkness and faint images of his brother huddled on the cold ground, tremors overtaking his body.

SLAM.

Luther jolted awake, his eyes wide and his arms outstretched ready for conflict. The only thing he saw was Five though. He was jumping to his feet and slamming his book closed, grabbing a paper in hand and sprinting out of the room and up the stairs.

"Five!" Diego yelled after him, looking as confused as Luther felt. Diego and Luther exchanged glances and then hurried after him.

They found Five in the surveillance room where Allison and Ben were huddled around the monitor showing Klaus in the same position as when Luther had left the room last. Five wasn't interested in that though. He ran to one of the database computers and started furiously punching in numbers.

"What's going on?" Allison asked, her voice just above a whisper as her vocal cords were still healing day by day.

"I thought maybe- But no- No, now- Now- I think- I know-" Five muttered to himself in haste, his face lit by the screen of the monitor where he typed in a combination of digits that meant nothing to the rest of them. With a dramatic last click of the enter button, a map showed up and zoomed in on one specific area that Luther couldn't help but recall some familiarity from.

"Coordinates." Five said. "Someone sent us coordinates."

"To Klaus? Why would they do that?"

"Could it have been Klaus?"

"But how?"

"I know just as much as you!" Five shouted in frustration, gesturing towards the blinking coordinate on the screen.

"Well, that's new." Diego said, rolling his eyes.

"Look at him! We don't have time for questions. I say we jump there and take whatever we find by storm. What else do we have to go on?"

"Wait- Does that look familiar to anyone else?" Luther asked, stepping closer to the area on the
digital map. Five frowned at him and then moved towards the keyboard, zooming out on the map so they could see the fuller picture and pin down it's relation to the state as a whole and…

"Holy shit…" Ben muttered, standing from his chair and tilting his head at the screen.

"Is- Is that-"

"The warehouse. The same one that-

The same one that Klaus insisted they check out more. Luther couldn't finish. His chest caved and he felt sick. He didn't know what that place was or why it was popping up in their lives again after they had long forgotten it already, but Klaus had practically begged them to stay. He tried so hard to tell them that he had found something worth looking into and now he was paying the price for everyone else's ignorance, including Luther's.

"Get suited up. We're leaving immediately. Five? Can you jump all of us?"

"Yeah, yeah." He said, already backing out of the room to go get ready.

"I'll stay and watch Klaus and keep you guys updated," Allison whispered, holding her throat gently. Luther was glad she said so. He didn't think she was ready to go back into such a potentially trying situation in her current state without full use of her powers. They had no idea what they were dealing with.

"Good idea. Now's a great time to try out the new comm system that Pogo put together."

Allison nodded, moving across the room to open the case of communication devices that Pogo had just rigged up for them to use on missions. Luther left with the others to get ready to get back Number Four… their Number Four, and he'd pulverize any single soul who got in their way.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for a large amount of explaining in this chapter, but I had to get everything out there and solve some unanswered questions. I will be mainly focusing on sibling fluff and all that fun stuff in the next few chapters!
Klaus, You Prick

Chapter Summary

Klaus is forced into a new low amongst multiple unfavorable factors and his siblings race to find him before it's too late.

Chapter Notes

Happy Second Season renewal, everyone! I'm super excited and know that anything they do with the kid-versions of the characters will be great, but I really hope it's still centered around the adult actors because of how much I appreciate Robert Sheehan and the others.

Also- You guys spoil me with these reviews. Everyone has been so nice and supportive. People have been saying that they refresh the page and keep returning to the website in hopes for a new update- that's how I feel regarding your reviews! It's fantastic to be surrounded by others with a passion for the same show we all love. Even the previous chapter that I was so worried was too plot-heavy; you guys were so into it and that was so exhilarating to hear! Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

"Alright-" Luther said, peering around a particularly large tree at the old abandoned warehouse. "If we split up into- Hey! Diego!" He whisper-yelled as Diego completely disregarded everything he was saying and charged for the warehouse, breaking in by throwing his body through a window, knives blazing. The rest of the siblings were forced to follow.

Luckily, no one was in the hallway in which they ended up in, but it wasn't plausible to assume no one had heard the crash. Diego started down the hallway with full confidence though, and if they couldn't stop him, well, then they had to follow so that he had back-up.

With one swift turn of the corner, Diego caught the shadow of a man and attacked, throwing his knife and landing it in the guy's hand. The dude screamed, but Number 2 quickly covered his mouth and shoved him against the wall, hoisting his feet off the ground.

"Where's Klaus?" He demanded, nothing else on his mind. "Where's my brother?"

"Our brother." Five corrected from behind Diego. In this specific case, he wasn't annoyed with his brother's know-it-all interjection. Diego lowered his hand for the lowlife to speak.

"What are you gonna do, hothead?" The guy smirked, a cocky grin across his face. Diego had a sudden feeling that this wasn't an easy subject to crack, so he smiled right back and took out a knife.

"Nah..." Diego said, holding up the knife but then swinging it back behind him. He felt a small hand grasp the weapon excitedly. "Not me."
"Two" dropped the wiry male to the ground and Five *pounced*, taking no hesitations to stab the knife straight through the poor fucker's shoulder.

"WHERE IS HE?" Five practically shrieked, climbing up on the man's splayed out legs and getting right in his face with that adorably fear-striking scowl. Only a second or two went by before the knife was yanked out and plunged into the thigh… twice. *TOO SLOW!*

The other siblings all looked at each other with wide eyes, but they let Five go nuts with clear consciences. Diego's breath was *literally* taken away. He knew the little fireball was psychotic, but *this* was insane and truly quite horrifying to watch. Blood gushed from the newly torn wounds, and in no time, words gushed out right with it.

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**HE SHOCKED ME UNTIL I DIED!**

*I COULDN'T SLEEP. I COULDN'T EAT. SHE GOT IN MY HEAD AND SHE ATE ME FROM THE INSIDE OUT!*

*I WASN'T EVEN FULLY DEAD WHEN THEY SHOVED MY BODY INTO THE INCINERATOR LIKE IT WAS TRASH! GARBAGE!*

*PLEASE! YOU HAVE TO TELL MY DAUGHTER- YOU HAVE TO TELL HER I DIDN'T LEAVE HER! PLEASE! PLEASE!*

*THEY KILLED MY WHOLE FAMILY! WE WERE HIKING! WE WERE JUST HIKING!*  

Now that Klaus knew the origin of the dead's complaints, it was at least a billion times worse. All the victims of this so-called "Venus Club" of sociopathic freaks… It was like they could *feel* that Klaus finally knew their secrets and that somehow gave them full permission to treat him like it was he who committed the crimes.

The blood and gore that defined the ghosts and their anguished screeches weren't even the worst of the situation though, because he could *hear* her. *Her.*

She wasn't in the room with him- it was like she was somewhere down the hall, too hysterical to find her way out. The other voices mixed over hers, but every once and a while, Klaus could catch a clip of her horrified scream and place her voice in the matter of a fraction of a second…

Sadie. Stuck in the very moment right before the trigger was pulled, screaming and sobbing for her life over and over like some sadistic asshole had a videotape and was playing it again and again. It wasn't a videotape though. It was really her. Dead-her, but all the same, reliving the worst moment of her short life on repeat.

It. *Killed.* Him.

If the earsplitting noise and emotional trauma of hearing his ex-girlfriend scream for her already-stolen life weren't enough to wear him down, Klaus had plenty of other things to choose from.

*Withdrawal.*

The physical symptoms were bad, yeah. He shivered all over. His was freezing cold and burning hot all at the same time. Every single muscle ached and screamed for numbness. His head was splitting but also mush as waves of nausea passed through him.

The worst was the dip in his mentality though, like someone had taken all the flickers of hope he had
left and shoved them down into the pit of his stomach where they turned into heavy, dismal weights. The previous day-after-day of his worst fears brought to life every time he shut his eyes weren't much help either… The same old, same old stuff, but now with the rope that tightened around his heart and seemed to constantly remind him:

'You're going to kill your family. You're going to kill your family.'

In his sleep, he watched them brought to their knees, forced into cells like his. They would be slowly and intentionally deteriorated until they gave their lives up to slavery by Mason or slowly died an agonizingly drawn-out death…

And Klaus knew his stubborn-ass siblings. They'd never give in. They'd rather die than be someone's bitch.

If his nightmares weren't about the impending future of the Academy, they'd be about a host of all kinds of other shit- Overdosing for the last time, Ben's gruesome and very real past-death, Dave's gruesome and very real past-death, his family kicking him out of the family, the ghosts finally being able to touch him and ripping him to shreds while his siblings sat by and chatted casually without batting an eye…

Awake wasn't much of an improvement. Besides the dead world infiltrating his personal, live one, there were other voices too- Voices he couldn't seem to banish from his head. These voices said things that mattered though, by people who mattered to him… And Klaus would take the spirits any day over that.

"I don't have time for your games, Klaus."

"I swear to God, Klaus. If you're lying-"

"Who are you kidding, Klaus?"

"Does it matter? It's Klaus."

"What are you still doing here?"

"We're trying to have a serious conversation here."

"You should get out."

"You and I- We're not the same."

"Go away, Klaus."

"Give it a rest, Klaus."

"If we put everything on hold for every dead person you saw…"

"Uh, you wait out front."

"You are unbelievable, Klaus."

"Is there any way to silence that voice in your head that screams out to be the center of attention?"

He tried so hard not to let them get to him, but every single guard he had was broken down to shambles. The words kept replaying and stabbing him in the chest repeatedly. He didn't resent his siblings for it though. How was he supposed to expect anyone to accept or trust him if he didn't even
There was one idea that passed through Klaus's mind that at the very least gave him something to focus his thoughts on…

If he was to die in this cell, then this must be him taking Ben's place.

Klaus remembered when he had changed the timeline to save his brother. He knew there may be a payback, but he didn't care at that moment… In truth, he didn't care at this moment either. If this was the trade… If this was because he chose to bring Ben back then maybe that's the one thing that made this all somehow worth it.

It was a fair trade after all. It was simple, really.

They liked Ben better. He liked Ben better. Not to mention, Ben wouldn't waste his life like Klaus did. He'd use it, and he'd use it well.

Number 6 fit in more too. He was always a better Academy member that Number 4 would ever be.

Klaus wasn't like the other six. He'd never be like them… but if he wasn't fit for the Academy, the only thing that's ever defined his otherwise wasted life, then what the hell was he? A junkie? That's it?

A junkie without drugs though… So… Take that away and then what?


This wasn't to say that Klaus was really, truly thinking things through deeply. They were more like fleeting feelings that waved through him as he curled into himself, sitting on his knees with his forehead pushed into the concrete wall which was the only thing holding what was left of him up. His mind felt more and more separated from his aching body by the second. His chest couldn't stop heaving and the more he tried to calm down, the more he was sent into a frenzy.

All of this combined… it was just… too much. There was so much pressure, both physically inside his chest and mentally weighing on his mind. It left no room to breathe. The lack of clear oxygen flow just clouded his mind further, but his true rationality was thrown out the window a long time ago…

"Guys-" A raspy voice came over the Academy's communication earpieces. Ben tapped the small object in his ear, hoping to clear up the transmission to better hear since Allison's voice still wasn't at full capacity. "Guys, I'd focus on finding Klaus… Please… I think something's really wrong."

His heart tightened.

"What? What's happening?"

"I- I don't know-" She choked out. Ben didn't think he's ever heard a more terrified, pitiful voice… partially because of her vocal cords, but still.

"Trying our best!" Luther called out. The big guy ducked a blow from some dude with "lightning fingers" as Diego put it. And he wasn't the only circus act on the playing field… These… People came out once they heard their comrade screaming and instantly, the Academy knew they weren't dealing with your average joe-schmo. In fact, Ben was pretty positive that they
were like them. After all, normal human beings couldn't pulse electricity or send you to your knees in excruciating pain with simply a stare.

Speaking of which, Vanya screamed and collapsed, only able to break from that gangly creep's gaze when Five jumped himself over and cut off her eye contact. Free of her captive trance, Vanya screamed in anger instead of anguish and sent the asshole flying back into a tree with a simple clench of her hand.

"Ben!"

A voice rose above everything else and Number 6 stopped in his tracks, not daring to even breathe in fear that he might miss the voice again… But there it was.

"Ben!"

"Klaus?" He called out, running back towards the warehouse that they had erupted out of when the fighting started. He got a weird look from Diego as he bounded past him, but Number 2 was busy with the guy who Five ever-so-psychotically stabbed a few times. The mangled man dodged one of Diego's punches and scrambled back towards the edge of the river that flowed alongside the tree line. He sank into the current, head underwater and everything. Ben didn't see him resurface at any point during his whole run towards the building… He vanished. What.

Diego looked just as confused.

Who the heck were these people?

"Ben!"

"Hold on, Dude." Ben called out, breaking through the rotting doors and following Klaus's voice up five flights of stairs.

"Ben!"

His heart was beating in his chest but he paid no mind. All he could hear was Klaus's voice calling out for him and he'd do anything to reach it…

Except Ben finally reached the furthest corner of the building and there was no one… He swore it had sounded like Klaus was right there.

"Klaus? Where are you?"

He walked around timidly. Something was off.

Affirming his beliefs, a sharp kick was delivered to the back of Ben's head. He stumbled forward, having to drop to one knee.

Alright. What the-

Ben turned and his reflexes kicked in just in time for him to catch another flying kick with a firm hand. He grabbed this new mystery girl's ankle and ripped her from her stance, sending her falling to the floor with a hard smack. She twisted from his grasp and jumped right back up again though, going in for another punch. This time, Ben wasn't so quick.

And there started his hand-to-hand combat with some woman who seemed half of Ben's size (and Ben was considerably smaller than his brothers), but still managed to continuously keep knocking
him on his ass. He was either really out of practice from being dead, or these people were trained
damn well.

"Guys!" Allison's voice came over the comms again.

"Alright! I'm going!" Five yelled back. Ben wished he could join his brother to look for Klaus, but
he was a little preoccupied.

"He's not in the warehouse. I looked everywhere." Ben managed to grunt in between struggles with
the tiny menace.

"That pit thing he was talking about- Remember?" Luther's voice broke over the earpieces.

"On it." Five said.

Well, he tried, anyway. The only structure he could see for miles was the damn warehouse which
Ben insisted was a waste of time. Five's powers were shaky ever since he jumped all of his siblings
here, but time was of the essence and a few small jumps around the area wouldn't kill him.

*Flash.*

Five appeared at the opposite side of the warehouse. He looked around desperately. Forest.
Just forest.

*Flash.*

Nope.

*Flash.*

Nothing here either.

*Flash.*

He was getting tired.

*Klaus, where are you?*

Five was about to jump further into the dense greenery, but something caught his eye; it was a gleam
of orange- a reflection of the slowly rising sun that pierced the forest with its outstretching rays. One
of those radiations caught on a metal door in the ground that Five almost didn't catch.

*Bingo.*

He was surprised he made it to 30, honestly. The general consensus was always that someone would
find Klaus dead in an alleyway with a needle stuck in his arm, finally a victim of his own reckless
obsessions. Klaus had accepted that as his way of living for quite some time. He wasn't frightened by
the thought of it. He was never scared of dying.

He was scared of living.

*That* was so much harder than dying….

Just don't tell the spirits that- they may not agree.
So, it wasn't hard for Klaus to just wish they would've killed him a while ago… Who they were exactly… drugs, his captors, whatever… he didn't specify in his mind. All he knew was that his physical existence was the catalyst for what would ultimately be the demise of the Academy and that was one pill that was hard to swallow.

He refused to, in fact.

Klaus never technically wanted to die, per se.

Please. He wasn't that edgy.

Nonexistence though… Now that sounded nice. He craved it when he numbed himself with every substance on the planet. He craved it when his mind couldn't seem to pick a side- the dead or the living. He craved it now most of all, when his siblings' lives hung in the balance and depended on it, or the absence of it.

Klaus couldn't keep doing it, not solely regarding this dark, swirling moment of his, but in the normal day-in and day-out too. He couldn't keep fighting. He gave it a good try, but everything was just… so much. This living thing, he didn't want it. He didn't want it anymore. He didn't ask for it.

"Stop. Stop. Stop. Stop." Klaus heard himself whimper uselessly, but it didn't feel like he himself was even saying it. Stop what exactly, he didn't know. The screaming ghosts, sure, but it wasn't that simple anymore.

Everything. He just wanted everything to stop.

This is what happens when you force your fake "okay-ness" on everyone and dull yourself for over a decade… it all builds up to the unbearable breaking point and boy oh boy was this that point.

"Stop. Stop. Stop. Stop."

KLAUS! HELP US, KLAUS!

THEY BURNED ME! BURNED ME!

HELP! SOMEONE HELP!

PLEASE, NO! NO, NO, NO, NO…

Klaus had been in darkness ever since the heavy withdrawal symptoms settled in, his eyes squeezed close so tightly that he wasn't sure he'd ever see light again. Something, an instinct maybe, proved him wrong though. As if his body told his brain that there was something worth seeing, he peered out through hazy tears to see the strangest thing…

The veins in his wrist- they were grey… devoid of all possible color. The symptom spread along the lines underneath his skin, creating a path down his forearm. It turned his skin colorless with it-colorless and cold as hell. He could feel his greyed hand where it was curled against his chest but with all the strength left in his withering body, he could not move it. His hand just laid there, stiff and not belonging to him.

This… whatever it was… illness, sorcery, phenomenon… kept spreading throughout his entire body, starting in on his legs and his other arm and growing until his limbs stopped trembling with the rest of him, everything unmoving and oh-so cold.

Klaus collapsed fully to the floor. He didn't even feel it. His limbs fell to a heap against the hard
ground, but the only physical sensation he had left was of his chest expanding and contracting with his panicked, labored breaths, the hot tears that stung around his eyes, and the nagging pain that persistently dictated over his still-beating heart.

Klaus didn't know what was happening, but he was past processing or caring. What small part of his brain that still pumped out logic told him that the only explanation was that it must've been him.

How? He didn't know. Klaus's mind didn't have room for this, whatever this was. He only knew the voices and what he kept repeating to himself:

If his siblings saw him on that tape tomorrow they'd come.

If they came, they'd die.

He couldn't save Dave. He couldn't save Sadie.

Maybe… Just maybe he could save them.

Suddenly, a weird wave of tranquility was seeping through Klaus. It was somewhere underneath the deep weight that controlled every part of him, just waiting to take over and Klaus willingly accepted it. That glorious, awful wave of the colorless surge was expanding and banishing everything with it.

And that was a relief.

Klaus had always been able to contact both worlds- the dead and the living. There had always been a strict line between the two though, never any confusion. He was part of one, but not the other, only able to reach out in ways of communication. Now though, everything was changing. The line was blurring. The voices seemed to not just be echoing in his head though, they were everywhere and everything. He couldn't tell what was what or what belonged to which world.

The screams persisted around him, but Klaus finally wasn't listening. His eyes blinked numbly, sending heat down his cheeks. He didn't notice that either. All he saw was the grey in his veins disperse over what was left of his flush chest, moving in and covering more and more until his body was nearly no longer his. It just kept spreading and spreading and spreading…

Thump. Thump. Thump.

He heard the last living part of him screaming for help in his chest. It pounded against his ribs as if it was begging to get out, trying to escape the impending flood of repose that had already succumbed most of Klaus's body.

Thump… Thump… Thump… Thump…

His heart slowly started giving up the bleak battle as it realized there was nowhere else to go. His fight was over. He could sleep now.

Thump… Thump…

Thump…

Thump.

…

Five stumbled into a concrete wall after his last jump, his weakness really starting to weigh in on
him. He found the bunker, sure, great, but that didn't solve the fact that this underground hell-hole was a hamster maze of turn after turn, room after room, cell after cell… Five couldn't run around simply hoping to come across Klaus by luck before getting himself lost or running in circles first… It wasn't sensible. Especially not with Allison screaming (well, the best she could) in his ear.

"Please! Please! Oh my God-"

"Allison, what?" Diego demanded, mirroring all of their frantic frustration. She was going absolutely nuts on the other end of their communication line, but somehow, she couldn't quite tell them what the problem was and that was driving Five more insane than anything.

"I don't know! I don't know! He's- I don't know!"

"I'm trying-" Five called out, noting the uncontrollable waver in his voice. He admittedly knew it wasn't from his personal physical exasperation (although that was proving to be quite a problem), but from the panic that was starting to set in for Klaus… Because what-in-the-name-of-the-holy-Lord could possibly be sending Allison into such concern that she was nearly killing her voice all over again? Five needed to know. He needed to find Klaus.

Five clenched his fists in front of him, closing his eyes and frowning deeply in concentration.

_Come on…_ 

_FLASH._

Eyes open- An empty corridor. Five ran down and looked from side to side at empty rooms.

Hands clenched. Eyes closed. Arms out.

_FLASH._

Five ran down another vacant corridor.

"Klaus!"

No response. Nothing.

_FLASH._

"Klaus?"

Zilch. Five was trembling now, his breathing ragged and labored.

"Please, please, please Five…” Allison sobbed. Five dug his fingernails into the palms of his hands.

_You can do this. Don't be a pussy._

_FLASH._

Five stumbled from fatigue and a wave of nausea, but he kept running, pushing open doors and calling for his brother. He didn't know how many jumps he had left in him before he passed out, but he was willing to test it.

Five clenched his fists and screamed with effort, really feeling the quantum realm rippling through his body, manipulating space around him.
Five staggered forwards and grabbed the wall next to him, breathing heavily and coughing.

"Klaus!" He choked out, followed by another fit of coughs. He pushed through because he knew he had to, pulling himself through the hallway.

Five couldn't keep this up forever.

And now, he knew he wouldn't have to.

"KLAUS."

Five turned a corner to see light flooding from a large window that looked into a small grey cell of identical size to the one from the live feed, but most importantly, there was his brother, unmoving and collapsed at the edge of the room.

"No, no, no…"

Five tried to push his observations away until he knew the situation for sure, but his realistic mind took in all the hints.

His colorless flesh.

His stagnant chest.

His stagnant everything.

Klaus may have been turned away from where Five stood, but he didn't need to see his face to know that…

Shut up, Five. He scolded himself. Number 5 ran to the door and tugged but it wouldn't budge- not with that keypad lock staring him straight in the face. Not a problem.

"Come on…” Five muttered, closing his eyes and balling his hands into fists for one last time. He focused every ounce of himself into one single mindset- one single action- one single desire…

He had to get in there.

FLASH.

Five collapsed, but he at least collapsed inside the cell where he successfully jumped. He hit the ground hard but pain could wait.

"Klaus?" He croaked, his throat dry and every muscle weak with fatigue.

Five pushed himself up on a shaking arm that gave out underneath his weight, sending him to the floor again. His head spun, his stomach churned, his mind threatened to cave into the black spots in his vision, but for heaven's sake, why wouldn't his brother just answer him? Of course, Five had a dark theory… No… A dark knowing, but he refused every fiber of him that told him to be realistic.

Five was able to pull his own weak, unresponsive body forwards towards Klaus just a few inches more, enough to almost reach out and touch him.

"Klaus! You asshole. You can't do this." Five ordered in a weak, raspy voice, followed by pathetic coughs. He grasped the ground and pulled himself a few inches forwards again. The extra physical
exertion this required broke down his insides too, an unwilling sob breaking free from his throat. Five could see his own face contorted into a desperate expression of bereavement in the mirror out of the corner of his eye. Tears threatened to run down his face, but he refused them permission to do so… Tears were meant for what was lost and his brother wasn't lost to him… No, not yet.

"Don't you dare." Five choked out, his fingertips reached out with great effort. He grazed the belt loop of Klaus's tattered jeans. He grunted and stretched forward more, enough to curl his fingers around the fabric of the loop. Five tugged.

Klaus's body gave in too much like it was just a physical object that Five could move however he pleased. In this case, his brother slowly turned to his back, his face up towards the ceiling.

Five felt the corners of his lips curl down as his chest caved in.

"Klaus!" He called uselessly, his thirteen-year-old voice breaking miserably and punctuating the anguish he felt rising up in his throat.

He didn't care how ridiculous grief made a man. He didn't care about the logistics stating the obscene, excessive energy wasted on regarding others. He didn't care that he had prepared himself for this very situation before they left the house. Five had known that there was reasonable cause to believe that Klaus may not come back with them.

That didn't help in the end. That didn't help now. This was his brother he was clutching onto, and he was dead. He was gone. They were too late. They failed.

Five. Failed.

"Five? Five!"

Voices came in muffled somewhere far off in the bunker. His siblings had caught up. Five took staggering breaths in, trying to hold onto reality without passing out. He could at least do one last thing…

"Here!" He screamed with all the power he had left. His hand still gripped Klaus's belt loop like a lifeline. He wasn't sure if he could pull his fingers from around the material if he tried.

Footsteps were abundant in the distance. Five had to turn his head and rest it on the ground, the act of holding it up even being too trying a task. He screamed again, feeling it rip inside of him.

"Guys!" Breathe. Breathe. "Here!"

Five was starting to feel fiercely lightheaded. The pain in his chest dulled into numbness and the black spots turned into black blotches that turned into just plain blackness…

There they were through the window, the camera set against the glass and sending the live feed all the way back to their house. Five was collapsed, stretched out on the floor with one small hand gripping Klaus's jeans… And Klaus?

"Oh my God…." Luther muttered. Vanya didn't even take time to look in. She immediately went for the door and with the slightest wave of her hand, it flew open, hitting the wall. When she did finally see the sight that everyone else observed through the glass, she screamed and covered her mouth.

"Fuck." Diego muttered, running into the room first and dropping by Klaus's side. Then Luther. Then Vanya.
And then Ben who moved into the room as if he was walking through molasses. His face was unreadable, every movement stiff as if he wasn't quite sure how to respond. That was Klaus on the ground, unmoving, but it wasn't Klaus. He was too thin. Klaus had always been skinny, especially since the drugs, but this was unnaturally so. His eyes were sunken in, his eyeliner (or what was left of it) smudged and carried into light streaks down his face. His chest was a plethora of purples, reds, blacks, and blues. His hair was matted down to his forehead with sweat.

Weirdest of all, he was colorless in a way that Ben hadn't ever expected to see in a person.

This couldn't be Klaus.

This wasn't Number Four.

"Come on, pal. Not today." Diego firmly stated, positioning his hands over Klaus's chest and beginning CPR. It seemed almost silly seeing as Klaus looked like he didn't even belong in the living world anymore, but Allison chimed in, her voice forced back to a whisper after much of her crying and screaming.

"It's barely been a minute."

"Since what exactly?"

"Since he collapsed."

"What did they do to him?"

"It- It wasn't-."

The only sound as Allison faded out was the thump, thump, thump of Diego's compressions forced onto Klaus's chest. The room was completely still otherwise.

"It was him."

No. Nope. That was impossible. How would he- How could he- Why would he-

Ben dropped to his knees, finally reached Klaus's side. His brother's face was blank, his eyes open just the tiniest bit so that he could see the glimmer of his iris beneath his lifeless eyelids. Ben hated the way his body moved underneath the repetitive pressure of Diego's hands like there was absolutely no resistance… he was a doll- reduced to an inanimate object that served as a shell of the Number Four they knew.

It was okay when Ben was dead- he could talk to Klaus whenever he wanted to. Klaus dead though… that wasn't okay. This was wrong. It wasn't supposed to be this way. Ben wished with every fiber of his body that he could reverse it back to the way it was meant to be with their places switched back. At least he'd still be able to see Klaus whenever he wanted to.

He couldn't go on without him, he just couldn't.

Ben kept returning to that same thought that's been dictating his mind for the past few days- If I just followed him, dammit.

And then Ben snapped out of it.

"You. Fucking. Stubborn. Asshole." Ben directed into his brother's dead eyes, his hands clenched painfully tight. "I know you can hear me, Klaus." And he did suspect that he did. There was a small
part of him that doubted it, but for someone who had an affinity for drifting into the dead world while living, you'd think he could do the vice versa, right? "C'mon, dude. You're really going to give me my life back just to throw yours away? Dick move."

Ben's words came out angrier than he truly felt, but even then, there was a pained waver clear in his inflection.

"I'm sorry I let you down, okay? Do you hear me? Klaus?"

Everyone looked between Ben and Klaus, except for Five who was still blacked out and Diego who only stopped his compressions to tip Klaus's head back and uselessly blow air into his lungs before starting his compressions again.

"I promise I won't make fun of your stupidly long baths anymore."

"You're such a diva, you know that?" Ben smirked at Klaus from where he read in the corner of whatever guy's house they were staying in that night. Klaus's current boy toy was out getting drugs and movies, so Klaus took a bath while waiting... A three-hour-bath.

"Don't hate me 'cause I'm beautiful." Klaus dramatically flipped his non-existent long hair and wrapped his head in a towel, rifling through the house owner's colognes. "Fancy, fancy..." He muttered, helping himself. "You staying for the show?"

"Absolutely not."

"If you want to get waffles at 4 AM every night, we'll fucking get waffles. And when you bust your head open, I'll even take you to the hospital myself... Once we learn to drive." Ben said with a pathetic half-chuck, half-sob.

"Ben. Please. Besides, you don't exactly have a choice. Wait- Yeah- Why am I even asking?" Klaus prodded Number 6 into going out and finding waffles for the third time that week.

"Everything's closed."

That didn't stop Klaus. He went to the 24-hour supermarket instead, grabbing every box of waffles they had.

"You don't have a toaster." Ben muttered tiredly, wondering what Klaus's life would be like if he put in this amount of determination into things that actually mattered.

Well, that didn't stop Four either. He broke into an office building, found the kitchen, toasted ALL of his waffles and walked with streets with an armful of Eggo's. His downfall that night actually had nothing to do with waffles, but with the shopping cart that they came across and the multi-level parking garage right next to it. Ben realized had realized that if there was an opportunity for recklessness laid out clearly in front of him, Klaus was addicted to stupid little adrenaline fixes just as much as he was to dope.

Long story short, he ended up needing stitches and there were waffles strewn everywhere next to the flipped cart at the bottom of the garage ramp. It ended up being a pretty amusing night for Ben.

"I won't leave the room when you blast the Hollies. I guess they're okay."

Memories were flooding in fast now, making this all the harder. Ben especially loved the ones where Klaus would be dancing around the room, engrossed in his music. He'd be alone except for Ben who he'd be determined to dance with even though he couldn't truly touch him. Klaus would pretend the
best he could though, sometimes getting Ben to give in and join him with a roll of his eyes and a smile. Those moments made Ben feel more alive than he ever had since he died- like he was an actual human again.

"I won't comment on any of your weird-ass fetishes or your… endeavors. You can be as much as a magnificent freak as you want. You know even though I dig at you, I wouldn't have it any other way."

Ben wished he had been dead just so he could've stayed with Klaus through this hell he's been through the past few days. At least dead, he'd be of help. Alive, he was just part of the problem.

And what was worse was the if Klaus somehow *did* do this himself, then he wouldn't come back to them if he didn't want to. He responded to bossiness and persistence though, so Ben kept at it, ignoring the tears that escaped down his face.

"Klaus, you prick. C'mon."

"Get- No- Wait- Hold on!"

He chased the little toad through the winding roots and branches of the forest floor. Klaus couldn't help but feel like there was something awfully familiar about the situation, but he didn't know why. He didn't care to know why. He didn't have a thought in his head except the pure determination to catch up with the damn thing.

It hopped over a log and Klaus followed suit, feeling extremely light on his feet and in his heart as cheesy as it sounded… He just felt like he was floating. It was a wonderful feeling; better than being high.

His eyes locked onto the little, bouncing amphibian until something awful happened: A big, sleek dress shoe. It stretched out over the toad and stepped down as if it was nothing, the guts of the creature spreading out underneath the sole.

Klaus yelped in horror, covering his mouth.

"Hey! What the fu-"

"What did I tell you about cussing, Number Four?"

Klaus froze. Ugh... Really? *This* guy?

"Sorry, *Daaaad.*" He rolled his eyes before glancing up to come face to face with Reginald Hargreeves who looked down on him condescendingly… but what was new?

"What do you think you're doing?" He asked accusingly. Klaus spun around and stumbled over some roots, finding his footing again and surveying the beautiful landscape around him. Something about it made him so happy, so at peace.

"What does it look like, Papa?"

"It looks like you're giving up. I raised you better than this."

"Huh." Klaus thought about it. Come to think of it, he *did* faintly remember dying. "Guess you're right." Four shrugged, hopping over a log and slowly walking around, chuckling as if it were a joke.

"You'd just leave your siblings like that? Does your selfishness know no bounds?"
"They’ll be fiiiiiiine. And-"

Klaus went to turn and deliver some retort to his father's incessant criticism, but in the blink of an eye, he was no longer in the forest. He was in that God-awful room that'd haunt him for the rest of his existence- Dead, alive, it didn't matter. It lodged itself in the back of his brain like a life-draining tick.

"Do they look fine to you?" He demanded and Klaus realized that he was looking in on the 'now' of the living… and he wasn't part of it. Only his body lay there, unresponsive under the constant beating of Diego's hands on his chest. The rest of them were there too, save for Allison.

Luther stood stiffly, his eyes glazed over in such thick tears that you couldn't tell his iris from his pupil. His jaw was clenched so tightly that you could see the muscles bulge. Klaus wasn't so sure that he was even breathing.

Five was literally passed out splayed across the ground, his little bony hand clutching onto Klaus's body's waist.

Vanya pressed herself against the far wall, watching in horror as she sobbed quietly to herself through hands that covered her mouth.

"You. Fucking. Stubborn. Asshole." Ben's voice rose above the silence. His eyes were glazed too, but his face was hard and steely- more than Klaus had ever seen. His brother was usually so calm, no matter how much Klaus pushed his buttons. "I know you can hear me, Klaus."

Of course, he knew. Ben always knew.

"They cannot go on the same without you, Number Four."

"Careful…" Klaus shook his finger at Reginald. "I'm almost sensing compassion, old man."

"It's simple logic." Reginald stated, as if it were obvious. "It cannot simply go One, Two, Three, Five… That's absurd."

Klaus laughed. "That's a beautiful sentiment, Daddy Dearest. Thanks for that."

Reggie's face softened and he looked like he was about to add something, but Klaus cut in again, starting to regain his thoughts and memories of the situation.

"May I remind you that this is your business that brought us to this point? Even in death, you're preying on our lives. Nice psycho-brother, by the way. Real great family."

"I'm not my brother."

"And thank fiddlesticks for that because I thought you were bad."

"Mason had evil ideals. He wanted to manipulate you all for his own selfish deeds and I couldn't allow it to proceed. I did what I had to, including hiding his existence from you all. It was all to protect you. Besides… He never saw the big picture… The worldly picture."

"Wow. You're right. You're just… ever the saint, aren't you?"

"Don't turn this into something about me, Number Four. You're avoiding your issues like always."

"I'm finally addressing my 'issues', Daddio."
"Klaus, do you really want to be stuck in the same realm as me for the rest of your existence?"

"Well, now that's the most compelling point you've- you-" Klaus frowned, tilting his head curiously. "Did you just call me Klaus?"

"It's not your time."

"Well, I say it is."

"Well, I forbid it."

"Well screw you then, I-"

"If you want to get waffles at 4 AM every night, we'll get fucking waffles..." Ben was saying, distracting Klaus from his trivial bickering with his father. Number Four swallowed thickly.

...They'd be okay, right?

"A train wreck if I've ever seen one." Reginald scoffed, watching the family crammed into the room, falling apart at the seams. Klaus felt his heart go heavy.

Ugh... His time wasn't over yet, was it? Fine...

"My favorite train wreck." Klaus said with the tiniest of smiles, remembering a similar conversation with Diego earlier that week. Was he really going to go back to that? He remembered the pain- all sorts of it. Not just today or this past week, but life in general. It was so unappealing...

But as Ben brought up some of their times together over the past decade, he was reminded that it wasn't all horrible, even without the drugs. Not to mention, he didn't know how he'd go on without Ben being around in some way or another. All of his siblings were important to him, but none of them were attached at the hip like he and good ol' Number 6.

"Klaus, you prick." Ben was uttering, more waterworks following.

Ahhhh... Fuck me. Klaus thought as he made his decision.

"Well..." Klaus said to his father, turning to him with a resigned sigh. He was at least going to take advantage of their little shindig before he went back to being a 'real boy'. "Before I go, I should probably ask you about-"

But suddenly...

**Darkness.**

Diego couldn't stop. He didn't know anything else but this monotonous motion of up-and-down on Klaus's already-fragile chest. He felt his brother's ribs cave underneath the pressure of Diego's weight every single time, but as he learned when he was still training with the Academy- broken ribs are better than a dead body.

His mind went blank after a while and autopilot took over.


Tilt his head... Breathe...

He had no idea how much time went by, but Diego was starting to feel like he was trying to resuscitate a cause as inanimate as Five's mannequin.

Still, Diego didn't stop, and no one stopped Diego.

He was surprised he heard it honestly- it wasn't a loud, dramatic gasp like in the movies or even the usual in real life- it was a small stuttering breath that just barely retracted underneath the surface of Klaus's chest. Diego immediately stopped and hovered.

"Klaus?"

The whole room atmosphere changed and it felt like all conscious bodies leaned in, observing everything they could take in, desperate for a clue of hope.

When Diego first entered the room, he wouldn't believe Klaus was gone… And now, similarly, he couldn't believe he was back.

There he was though, blinking his eyes ever so slightly until they closed and he stilled again, this time with accompanying rises in his chest- it was subtle, but it was there. The grey was fading back into color and the siblings watched as their prayers came true.

"Klaus… Klaus…” Ben got into Diego's space, leaning over the not-so-dead body and timidly touching his shoulder. No one breathed, waiting for some response.

"Who you callin’ prick, dickmuffin.” A small voice commanded the full attention of the room. The atmosphere relaxed big time, like a giant collective sigh. Ben broke into a smile and laughed through a short, sob of relief. Even though Klaus didn't offer any other signs of consciousness, everyone seemed to be fairly comfortable in his hold on world of the living at the very least. As long as the kid was breathing, they could too.

"We need to get out of here.” Luther spoke up first, already thinking of the next steps. "Can someone remove the Five attached to his pants?"

Diego pulled his smaller brother's rigid fingers from around Klaus's belt loop, bending down to scoop his little frame into his arms. He heard Five groan in protest but ignored him, holding his limp body against his chest. Luther did the same with Klaus, managing to awkwardly maneuver until he stood confidently with Number Four in his arms. Klaus gave even less protest than Five- he was completely slack in Luther's grasp, his head falling against One's chest. The only thing that eased Diego's mind was his brother's chest that still rose and fell, just barely.

All six of them got the hell out of that damn cell, taking to the winding hallways.

"Anyone remember how we came in?” Luther called back from the lead.

"Yeah, that would've been smart, wouldn't it have been?" Diego said, kicking himself for not taking time to memorize the pattern of turns they took to get there.

This was one of the few moments Klaus came to, his eyes sliding open just enough to see shapes in a blurry fashion as they flew by, his body feeling useless in his brother's giant arms. The one shape that he did recognize was a familiar small person- a little girl. She stood in the upcoming right corridor, looking at Klaus with that stony face.

"Right." Klaus used all remaining energy to utter.
"What?" Luther asked from above him. If Klaus could roll his eyes, he would.

*I know you heard me, Lu-ther.* He mocked in his head, not even able to bring himself to say so out loud. His brother did, in fact, hear him, turning right and running straight through the apparition of the girl.

"Left. Right. Right." Klaus kept directing, straining his eyes to keep opening in order to follow the girl's directions until finally, the ladder came into view. Klaus opened his eyes one last time to see the apparition of the little mystery girl over Luther's shoulder. With a deep breath and an adrenaline burst of strength, Klaus raised his hand tiredly and waved goodbye.

And then... nothing. Again.

He did briefly remember feeling himself rattling around in the back of some sort of van that he didn't recognize. He was completely without any memory of how he got there or what the hell was happening. Klaus was able to open his eyes enough to see Ben holding his head though, arm protectively laid over Klaus's still-bare chest. His legs were over Luther's lap who also sat on the floor of the van, squished between Ben and Vanya who held a sleeping Five. Diego was driving up front.

He didn't know what was going on, what had happened, where he was going, where his shirt was, or why everything hurt, but he at least knew he was among his siblings. With that in mind, he found peace enough to let his eyes close once more and succumb to much-needed sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Fair warning: This was Klaus at his worst, but there's still a lot he'll be dealing with in future chapters. No sunshine and rainbows quite yet, but more fluff for sure.
Chapter Summary

Klaus is back home, but can everything really go back to the way things were?

Chapter Notes

I live in the city, and as I've been walking around, I've been seeing a LOT of umbrellas spraypainted along posts, public mailboxes, walls, the ground, etc... Don't know for sure it's for UA, but that's SO cool if it is.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Five rolled over and buried himself further in his blankets. His tiny body felt so heavy that even *that* motion took great effort. His eyes stung when he opened them, pained from exhaustion. His bed had never felt so comfortable. Not even after returning from all those years away from home.

*But wait…*

Five shot up, all lethargy forgotten. A small gasp ripped through his chest as his mind connected the dots, bringing up his recent memories.

*Klaus. Dead. They were too late.*

No wonder the house was so uncharacteristically silent- they must've all been mourning. His chest tightened and his throat swelled. He couldn't believe that this could happen… That he could *let* this happen.

Five considered balling back up under the covers and sleeping for eternity while letting his failures eat at him from the inside. That wasn't him though. He couldn't sit still. He had to keep going, do something, stay busy…

At the very least he had to know what happened.

Five slipped out of bed, lacking the motivation to change out of the black Academy Mission uniform that he was still wearing. It seemed like such a trivial thing to waste time on. Did his outfit really matter? His brother was dead. He couldn't bring himself to do mundane, day-to-day activities as if nothing ever happened.

Stewing in existential crisis, Five slowly made his way down the hallway, checking his siblings rooms as he went.

Allison's: Empty.

Luther's: Empty.

Vanya's: Empty.
As Five came up to Klaus's door, he stopped before passing. He imagined all of the decorations and thingamabobs that Four had strewn across the room as if part of his wild spirit was still there— in the walls, in his posters, his lights, his tapestries, his rugs, his plentiful teapots… Even down to his hookah pipe. It all would scream Klaus… scream for a person who no longer existed.

Five swallowed the lump in his throat and stepped forward, forcing his eyes to glance inside sadly…

…What.

WHAT?

Five reeled back, turning away from Klaus's room and pushing his back against the hallway wall. He closed his eyes and tipped his head back, feeling all the knots that were tightened around his insides as they unraveled.

Thank Christ.

He didn't know how. He had no answer. Five had nothing.

And for the first time in his life, that was okay.

Regaining his newly calmed self, Five pushed through the door to the sight of his four siblings: Vanya, Allison, Ben, and a living, breathing Klaus. Every single one of them was fast asleep which was exactly what Five planned to do as soon as humanly possible.

He approached Klaus's bedside where his brother laid under the covers, patched up and with much more color than the last time Five saw him. The sheets over his torso slowly rose and fell, but just barely. Five reached past Allison who was asleep in a chair next to the bed. He poked Klaus's face with a curious finger.

Number Four gave the quietest moan of protest, but that was enough to satisfy Five and confirm his brother's well-being. He took note of the empty space on the bed behind Klaus, between him and the wall. One perk of returning to his 13-year-old body: he could maneuver himself pretty much anywhere he wanted.

Five climbed up on the bed, crawling over Klaus's limbs until he found his space to collapse into wonderful, glorious sleep once more.

Where was the cold ground? The hard stone? The screaming voices that surrounded him at every angle? The musty smell that he thought he'd get used to eventually, but never did?

Klaus was definitely in a bed. What's more, he was in his bed. He could tell just from the familiar feeling of the fabric of his sheets.

Mason… Dying… His siblings… The van…

Oh yeah.

He blinked his eyes before fully opening. He was still exhausted, but he had to know for sure.

Yep- his room. And his siblings… Allison and Ben at least. Ben was slumped in a chair right next to his bed. Number Six's head rested on Klaus's mattress though, pushed up against his pillow and close enough to Klaus's face that he could smell the shampoo that he's loved since he was a kid.

"It makes my hair extra floofy." He'd say.
Allison was wide awake, eyes overflowing as soon as they connected gazes. She smiled and a strained exhale broke from her lips, tears escaping down her cheek. She looked heartbroken. Klaus wanted to fix that, but he had no energy. At the very least, he took her hand in his and held it to his chest, running his thumb over the skin of the back of her hand. She smiled more.

"Diego and Luther are at the library digging up records." She whispered. He tell that she didn't whisper to preserve their siblings' slumber, rather, her vocals sounded damaged again, like she had backtracked in her healing. He hoped it wasn't because of him.

Records for what, he did not know. He didn't care at the moment either.

Klaus kept his hold on his sister's hand but took some time to look around. Vanya was asleep on the end of his bed, her back propped up on the wall and her head hung low on her chest. Klaus tried to fully turn on his back, but he felt something behind him. He craned his neck to see Five's forehead pushed into his shoulder blade, his scrawny, little body curled towards Klaus as small but heavy breaths escaped his slightly parted lips.

He guessed everyone was exhausted.

Speaking of which, he drifted off again right after that, periodically waking up for half-a-minute, noting his siblings' presence, then slipping under all over again.

When he finally did feel like he was conscious enough to start thinking straight, Klaus stretched out his arms but quickly pulled them back in, cursing at the severe pain in his chest. He could tell it was slightly dulled by painkillers, but it still fought to make itself known. Klaus peeked underneath his covers to see his bare chest and abdomen wrapped up in gauze.

*Thanks, Mom.*

The weirdest part was that besides in the physical sense, he didn't feel anything. His mind felt numb. His heart felt numb. He wasn't quite sure what to think of everything that had just happened. He didn't know what he felt when he looked at his siblings. He didn't know how he felt about himself.

He *did* know that he had a sudden urge to get up though. Maybe that would get some thoughts and feelings flowing.

Klaus edged out of bed, careful not to wake any of his siblings that were all still pretty heavily subdued. He picked up the first shirt he saw and carefully and painfully pulled it over his head. Certain things started swirling around his mind:

Sadie. Mason. The Venus Six. Being beaten in that alley and whisked away. Being beaten in the grey room. All of the nightmares that plagued him for days.

Drugs.

Dying.

Drugs again… And again… and again… That one really stuck on his mind. The worst of his withdrawal was over, but that didn't stop the clawing craving feeling in the pit of his stomach. After all of that… after his awful, spiraling moment of lethal darkness, who the hell *wouldn't* go for a fix? In fact, this may be the one situation where Klaus was *justified* in getting higher than the Empire State building.

Was this who he was again? Was he ever *not* this person? Was he just pretending only to find out that he couldn't stop acting the part of something he'd never be?
So many questions and confused, muddied ideas ran amuck in his head, but still, he didn't feel anything. There were just the facts, the questions, and his options. He didn't know what he wanted. He didn't know what he needed. He didn't know what he'd say to the people all passed out around his room, waiting for him to wake up and give them some explanation as to why they found him collapsed on the ground, devoid of all life.

He didn't know if he had answers to give them.

Klaus sighed and instinctively reached up to grip the dog tags in his hand, relaxing a bit when he felt the cool metal under his skin. At least he was still sure of his feelings about Dave. That was his only constant and he held onto that feeling of warmth for as long as he could before he clenched his jaw and made a difficult decision.

Ten minutes later, Klaus was walking through the double doors leading into his father's office where he heard the voices of the great Numbers 1 and 2. He had stopped in the kitchen first to eat some cereal and pop some pain meds (a responsible amount), already feeling a little bit stronger. He held a paper closed tightly in his hand, not quite ready to face his brothers but knowing he had to bite the bullet and do what he came here to do- it was much too important not to.

"-absolutely nothing on it. I mean, we always knew there had to be more, but-" Luther's deep voice faded as Klaus quietly rapped on the door frame, entering to his brother's attentive gazes. Diego raised his eyebrows at him from where he was crouched by Dad's file cabinet.

"Hey, bro. How you feeling?" He asked cautiously, Luther cutting in right after.

"Yeah, how're you doing, Klaus?"

"I, uh- How did you get past them? The others?"

Diego and Luther looked at him for a bit, then exchanged glances with each other. The room was so tense and that was something Klaus was not accustomed to. He hardly let situations like this get to him… stress, tension, awkwardness… Klaus was the one who lifted all of that from a room the second he eccentrically waltzed in. He never caused it.

"Uh, the others? The ones like us?"

"With powers?"

They both asked, standing and walking slowly towards Klaus as if they were scared that if they didn't approach with enough caution, he'd fade into nothing all over again.

"Those are the ones."

"Well, uh- We were fighting… all of us, and then-"

"And then we were on a busy city street full of people." Diego cut Luther off, getting to the point much quicker. "Almost like a "Five" jump but I could tell it wasn't real. When it faded back to the forest, they were gone. We didn't spend time looking. We went straight for you."

_Ah. That girl._ Klaus thought. The illusionist. Why did they flee though? He guessed that it's what Diego and Luther were looking into now.

"Mm. Weird. Well, this is all I know." He said, stepping forward and putting the paper on the desk for them both to see. Scrawled out was truly _everything_ Klaus knew from Mason's name, all the powers, everything Dad had said about him, everything Mason had planned for them…
"Mason Hargreeves?" Luther questioned, looking up at Klaus under suspicious eyebrows. Klaus couldn't help but think that if he had brought this up under any other situation, Luther would accuse him of making up wild stories and conjectures. He brushed the idea from his mind though. Not important. He was over it.

"Uncle. Just don't call him that."

"God, there's another one? Is he just as charming as Dad?" Diego smirked a bit in disbelief, turning to Klaus and waiting for him to make a jest back.

"He's worse. Much worse. It's all there." Klaus said numbly, taking a step back, ready to leave his brothers to it. Diego's face dropped to concern when Klaus wouldn't engage in his usual high-spirited fun.

"Hey, well- Why don't you stay? Help us out? God knows we need it."

"Yeah," Luther added. "We were thinking of ordering in Chinese food and gathering the family-"

"I thought you said Pizza?"

"Then I changed my mind. I said that-"

"Dude, you know I can't eat shrimp."

"Then don't order shrimp."

"They mix and fry everything with the same shit though! Remember when I got that reaction from China House and-"

Luther and Diego launched into a whole debate over dinner and Klaus slowly backed away. It was so strange- silly squabbles like this always used to seem so salient in the moment, but now it all seemed so ridiculous to Klaus. His brothers were in a heated argument over Chinese versus Pizza and all he could think about was Sadie's blood gushing onto the floor or watching the grey travel through his veins and welcoming it with ease.

For that reason and a host of others, Klaus slipped out into the hallway and picked up the bag he had left by the staircase, packed with essentials- toothbrush, underwear, eyeliner, and whatever drugs he could easily grab from a few of his hiding spots around the house.

"Master Klaus-" A familiar voice called across the foyer as Klaus headed for the door.

"Pogo." He greeted back, not bothering to turn around.

"May I inquire where-"

"Out." He muttered, pushing the heavy gates open and walking out into the thick air. Rain must be coming. Oh, how long it's been since he's felt rain… At least he feels like it's been ages.

Klaus lazily staggered down the steps and headed for the street, not feeling in any rush. He didn't feel anything still and it should've been worrying, but it was better than dipping down into a deep depression like he felt he could do at any moment.

"Klaus! Hey!" A voice shouted from behind him. Klaus closed his eyes, coming to a halt.

Ugh. This was so close to being easy.
"Yeah?" He asked casually, turning to see Diego and Luther in the doorway. The rest of his siblings ran up around them, faces looking confused and distraught at the sight of Klaus leaving.

"Where are you going?"

"I don't know," Klaus admitted honestly.

Luther frowned, holding out a hand in frustration.

"I mean… You can't just… leave."

"Sure, I can. Why not?" Klaus asked truthfully in a tired and airy tone.

"I- just- Why? You just got back!"

Klaus sighed. How did he explain something that he couldn't even explain to himself?

"I just need some space."

"Some space?" Diego asked, taking a few steps down the stairs and tilting his head at Klaus as if he had just personally offended him.

"Klaus, I know we've disappointed you recently, but-" Vanya started to kick in, her eyes big and hurt like a doe. He felt bad, but… Did he? Did he feel bad, or was it just an instinctual response based on what he knew he should be feeling?

"No, no…" Klaus said, dropping his shoulders in discouragement. "It's not you guys. Really. I just- I can't be here."

"What do you mean? This is your home." Vanya persisted. Klaus didn't know what to say to that. Maybe that's what was confusing him so much- Was this his home? Was this really where he wanted to be? Was this who he was? He knew he loved his siblings. Of course, he did. Something just felt… off.

"Klaus, don't be an idiot." Five chirped in, tiredly rubbing his eyes as if this was all a great inconvenience to him. Aw, Five was always so poetic in how he showed his love. Klaus didn't quite know what else to say, but:

"Sorry."

He turned again, ready to start walking. A small puff of air, and suddenly Five was in front of him, arms crossed. Klaus just put his hand on his brother's head and physically pushed him out of his way. Another puff and Five was in his way again.

"Seriously. We can't let you leave." Luther said, coming down the steps but not getting to close. Again with the walking on eggshells around him… Klaus hated that.

"You can't let me?" Klaus challenged, gaining more vocal variation than he ever had ever since waking up. He spun around to cast an accusing gaze at Number One. Luther opened his mouth and held out his arms hopelessly, looking for the right words.

"I- Klaus… You-"

Klaus raised his eyebrows at him, waiting for Luther to just spit it out and move on with it.

"You killed yourself with your powers,"
Klaus groaned and threw his head back rolling his eyes. Oh. 

"You can't possibly think that I'm okay with you just roaming around in who-knows-what state. Do you even know the full extent of what you can do?"

"I- I wasn't processing what was happening! I was beside myself with whatever BS they were pumping through my head. I hadn't eaten or slept or-"

"Klaus. You're walking around with something inside you that could… no… has killed you. Killed you."

"I'll be okay." He laughed and shrugged it off, taking a few slowly steps backward.

"You know that for sure?"

"Yeah."

"How?"

"Because I could feel- I- I-"

I let it happen. Klaus couldn't say that though. They'd tie him down or send him to some institution. His siblings all looked at him in horror, anticipating what words were about to finish his sentence. He's already said too much.

"It caught me by surprise, but trust me, it won't happen again. Now if you'll excuse me."

"That's the problem, Klaus! To be alone after what just happened? I don't trust you!"

"You never do."

Oops. He didn't mean for it to slip out. He didn't even really mean it, or maybe he did. This bickering- he wasn't for it. This is exactly what Klaus needed a respite from.

Luther looked hurt. Klaus couldn't help but realize his lack of sympathy. He didn't care. He felt like that probably made him a bad person, but he couldn't feel anything but apathy.

"Look, I'm an adult, Luther. You can't lock me up here."

"I'm just worried about your safety."

"I'm not going to kill myself, okay? Is that what you want to hear?" Klaus burst out. He noticed the tears gathering in Vanya's eyes but he quickly diverted his gaze. Luther went quiet, not knowing how to respond.

"When would you be coming back?" Diego took over. Klaus let his hand fall to his side. He didn't know the answer to that.

"Will you be coming back?" Five asked with a suspicious little scowl on his face.

He didn't know the answer to that either.

"Let's talk. Come inside." Vanya offered reason. Klaus's mind was made up though. Why wouldn't they realize that?

Allison pushed around Vanya and bounded down the steps, running towards Klaus with a terrified
expression and tears in her eyes. She gripped his forearms desperately, trying to convey herself without being able to talk.

Klaus swallowed thickly. He did feel a pang of guilt within him. It was the first thing he's truly felt since he got back.

He didn't like it.

Allison looked like she was trying to say something but instead wrapped her arms around his still-too-thin torso. Klaus wrapped his arms around her, rubbing her back. She squeezed him so tightly that he was starting to think that this was her plan- just keeping him physically captive.

While he was hugging Allison, he looked over her shoulder.

He finally realized the one person who wasn't saying anything. Ben. He just stared at Klaus with the most disappointed, broken stare he's ever seen on anyone. He locked eyes with Number 6, and it was like they had a conversation of a billion words right there without actually saying anything... And that hurt the most.

Klaus needed to get out of there quickly. He didn't want to think about it. He didn't want to feel this guilt. He just. needed. out. It was getting more painful by the second.

Klaus's shoulders tensed and he pulled away from Allison, but not before giving her a sad, forced smile and kissing her on the cheek. He wasn't sure when he'd see her again, but Klaus wanted to at least have the peace of mind to be able to say that he said goodbye.

Klaus pushed past Five again, that being a good enough goodbye for that one. This was starting to stress him out and he didn't like it. Being numb was a little scary, but it was better feeling whatever this was that his siblings were pulling out of him.

He actually got in ten whole steps before that voice he's been dreading called out.

"Klaus!"

He didn't need to turn to know Ben was running after him.

Don't. Don't make this difficult, Ben.

Klaus didn't know what possessed him to do it, no pun intended, but with an impulsive clench of his fist, the street erupted in a blue stream of light and suddenly, the pavement was crowded with people- not live people, but dead people. Klaus heard some of them and then others minded their own business, but they all bustled around like they were in the congested center of Times Square rather than simply outside the usually-deserted street of the Academy.

Klaus watched Ben get shoved back by the overflow of souls taking over the street and soon, he couldn't even see his brother amongst the crowd. They didn't pay any attention to Klaus- they all looked like they were just living their best death, walking the day-to-day.

 Weird. Very weird. He's never done this before.

It worked though. In the confusion, he was able to slip away from his house and all his astounded siblings. Klaus slinked off into the darkening city as thunder rumbled overhead.

Drugs.
Sex.

More drugs.

More Sex.

Dancing.

Drugs while dancing. Drugs while dancing \textit{while} having sex (don't ask).

That was Klaus's life for the past three days… and he remembered almost \textit{none} of it.

It was \textit{amazing}.

That's what he told himself as he filled his next syringe with the boiling liquid from some random guy's spoon. He held his arm out and tapped the inside where there were already track marks from the past couple days. Then, without hesitation, Klaus stuck himself and slowly and leisurely forced the drug into his veins.

Number Four was met with instant gratification. Any inkling of the bad thoughts coming through his mind dissolved into nothing but a sigh of relief. His muscles felt like pudding… banana pudding because that was the best pudding. His heart felt like a bird in his chest. He imagined his ribs like a cage...

… a \textit{rib} cage! \textit{Woahhhhhh}…

Klaus chuckled to himself and let his head fall back, his eyes rolling with it.

He would admit that there \textit{were} some struggles that came from living like this every day and night. For starters, money was getting increasingly hard to come by. He was also taking so much of whatever he could get his hands on that he was blacking out at least once a day, waking up to somewhere he didn't recognize with people he recognized even less.

The \textit{worst} part was that he couldn't live his life in peace. It felt like every hour there was someone coming up to him.

"You're Klaus, right? Yeah, your brothers/sisters are here. They're lookin' for you."

Klaus's eyes would go wide and he'd take his high-as-fuck ass scrambling out the back exit, getting far away as he could before he was dragged back to the Academy. He just wasn't ready. He still didn't know what to think or what he wanted.

Of course, he wasn't giving himself much room to actually think things through when his mind was off in la-la land like this.

Klaus ended up passing out at some point that night. He didn't know where or with who or what he was doing before, but he \textit{did} know that when he woke up again, it was already the \textit{next} night… and he was in severe need of a good numbing.

Pushing himself up and looking around, Klaus had \textit{no clue} where the hell he was. It was some club, that was for sure. There were plastic cups littered around the hall (because it was definitely a hallway) and music pulsed through the walls. Klaus coughed weakly, wrapping his arms around his torso that was still sore from the hell of earlier that week. Dang, had that only been earlier this week? It seemed like a lifetime ago.
Before Klaus could even think of getting up to go meet someone with some… *any* type of drug, a guy around his age burst through a door on the other end of the hallway, slamming into the wall. He quickly regained himself and started trying to slam open the fire escape door. A few others followed.

"Come on! Come on!"

"What's going on?" Klaus asked tiredly, noting their desperation. One guy glanced at him briefly before returning his eyes to the exit.

"Cops. They're taking people in. Something with the dope that's been going around here… I don't know, it's all linked to some crime… bad shit, man."

"Fuckballs." Klaus muttered under his breath, jumping to his feet. He couldn't get arrested.

_Not again._ Not to mention, he'd have to call his siblings to come to get him out and he wasn't ready for that. He could already imagine the judgment on Luther's face.

They got the fire escape door open, but Klaus heard cops outside on the ground. They were running straight for the catch. Instead, Number Four ran down the opposite way, turning a corner and shutting himself in a small utility closet that he almost missed. In an instant, he was bathed in darkness.

Klaus pushed himself against a wall, knocking over a broom with a loud *clack*. His hands flew over his mouth and he tensed, waiting until he felt confident that he was alright to relax.

He didn't fully relax though- he _needed_ a fix. It had to have been at least a full day since his last, due to all those hours lost in darkness.

Footsteps sounded outside, down the hall. A police radio clicked on.

"48-23." The voice said, before clicking out. Klaus pushed his fingers through his hair and let his head fall onto his knees. He wouldn't even breathe. He couldn't be taken in. He wouldn't.

The police snooped around for _at least_ an hour. Klaus would've tried to make a break for it and try his luck, but he was starting to feel dope sick as hell, and if he needed to run, there was no way that was happening.

God, the amount of withdrawal he's been through in the past month was ridiculous. He should just pick one already… Well, he kinda did. That's why he was here, wasn't it?

Without drugs, Klaus did everything else in his power to distract himself from the thoughts and memories that poured in… Everything he experienced in the past week was constantly lying there underneath the surface, begging to break through. Klaus was afraid he'd crack up again if he let it.

"You're a real hot mess, you know that?" A voice came out of absolutely nowhere- and it was right beside him. Klaus jumped to the high heavens and a scream escaped his lungs. Well, if they didn't find him before then they sure would now.

The only reason Klaus wasn't shoving open the door and get the hell out of there was because there was something about that voice that Klaus recognized- In fact, his heart realized it before his brain did. He almost screamed again just from pure joy. Tears jumped to his eyes and suddenly everything else was forgotten as Klaus turned to the somewhat-solid, somewhat-shimmering figure beside him.

"You- you- you- you-"

"Me- me- me- me." Dave laughed, nodding in amusement as Klaus looked him up and down in
disbelief. He had a million questions like why now? Why in this broom closet? Where's he been? What's he been up to? Could he stay a while? Could he stay forever?

Klaus just dove forward and wrapped his arms around Dave instead though, thanking Christ that he contained the power to actually touch him. He could feel every muscle, every fiber, every hair on his arm and the scars on his shoulder…

"Where in the fuck have you been?" He asked, but not at all mad- quite the contrary. His voice was so high and excited that he suddenly worried about the cops again. He'd like to see them try taking him from Dave.

"Klaus, I love you… But shut it and listen for a sec, okay?" He said, somehow sternly and lovingly at the same time. Klaus pulled back but kept as close to Dave as he could be with still being able to look into those gorgeous eyes.

Dave. Dave was here. Dave. Dave. Dave. Dave. He couldn't get enough just being able to look at him. If he could stay like this- hiding in a tiny closet with Dave's ghost- for the rest of his life, that'd be fine. That'd be ideal, actually.

He wasn't expecting what came next though.

"Your family is worried sick, Klaus."

"Ugh! You've got to be kidding. I see you for the first time since you DIED IN MY ARMS and you want to chat about my siblings? Major turn off, David." Klaus groaned, even using his full name. Dave gave him a look and opened his mouth to respond, but Klaus broke into a happy smile. "Fine, fine. You wore me down. Nothing could ever diminish your beautiful, sexy godliness."

Dave chuckled and rolled his head back to rest against the wall, looking at the ceiling.

"Oh, I've missed you."

Klaus smirked, but it faded fast. A lump rose in his throat, but he managed to force out a few words.

"Yeah, I missed you too."

"What are you doing to yourself though? You know you're so much better than this." Yikes. This conversation. Dave never had to see Klaus in this type of environment- of course, he's told Dave about it, but he let go of his addiction with the whole war and falling-in-love-thing going on… stuff like that kept a guy busy.

"You always did think so unrealistically highly of me." Klaus sighed, mindlessly toying with his dog tags. Dave took his hand in his and man, did he miss that feeling. Even dead, it enveloped him in warmth.

"And you always thought so ridiculously low of yourself."

Klaus scoffed. There was silence, but not the tense kind. It was comfortable. It was nice. It was perfect.

But then…

"C'mon. This is what you wanted, right? For them to notice? To get their attention? They noticed, Klaus. They've been chasing you around the city for days, for Christ's sake. You have something
great, babe. You're throwing it away, just like your poor, beautiful body." Dave finished his lecture with a poke to Klaus's ribs. He couldn't help but smile a little in return, turning to meet Dave's eyes again.

"You're so cute."

"Klaus! I'm serious!" Dave reprimanded, reaching forward and brushing a strand of hair from Klaus's face. He sighed. He guessed he wasn't getting out of this.

"I tried the whole 'family' thing, Dave! It's not for me, I guess. We clash way too much. We hurt each other constantly. The drama is too much for even me. I'm just a liability. I can't be like them, or be whatever the fuck they think they want me to be."

"Oh, you lovely idiot," Dave said with all the love in the world. "Did you think families only came with sunshine and rainbows? That's part of the deal. You can't run away from things as soon as they get tough."

"Sure, I can. That's my thing."

"Well… I don't know… Stop it." Dave rationed. Klaus looked away and then down at the dark outline of his knees that were pulled to his chest.

"You all sound the same. You… Ben…"

"Then when will you listen? You can't keep living like this or you won't be living at all, but oh, wait… I forgot. That's what you want, isn't it?"

Wooosaaaahhh. That turned real accusing real fast. Klaus was silent for a beat. What was he supposed to say to that?

"Ghost-Dave is a big meanie, I hope you know. I never said I wanted that-"

"You didn't have to. I watched you that night. How do you think it felt to-"

"Wait, hold on… You watched me? How many other times have you been hanging around? Didn't think to drop by and maybe say 'Hi. Hey. How ya doin'?"

Dave looked down. There was guilt there. Good. Klaus was fired up now.

"This whole time I was trying to contact you thinking it was me and you turned out to be there the whole time… I…"

"Okay, yeah. It was my fault. But babe... You'd never move on if-"

Klaus shot up so fast that more brooms went flying to the ground. He burst out of the closet without any regard for the possibility of being caught by the potential cops. He stormed down the hall and shoved open the door of the fire escape, climbing onto the rusty stairs that lead down from the second floor to the first. He just needed air and some room to think and air in that tiny closet suddenly got too heavy to bear.

Before long, he felt strong arms wrap around his shivering shoulders, pulling him back into a familiar, firm chest.

Dammit. He couldn't stay mad at this guy for more than ten seconds. The worst part was that Dave knew it too. He knew just how to wiggle his way back into Klaus's arms.
That manipulative bitch. Klaus loved him so much.

"So, if you don't want to die… What do you want?"

Klaus sighed and leaned back into Dave's warm hold on him. He hadn't felt this secure since… Well, since the last time he was in Dave's arms.

It was a good question though.

What did Klaus want?

Six hours. It took Klaus six hours to walk all the way back to the Academy. He spent the waking hours of the morning alone with Dave in that abandoned club once he was positive that the cops were officially gone. Ultimately, Dave promised to come back, but he wouldn't tell Klaus when. Something stupid about wanting Klaus to be able to live his life or whatever…

He did see where he was coming from. If Dave was around, he'd be perfectly happy with never talking to another living soul ever again and maybe that wasn't exactly healthy. Klaus had never been the poster boy for "healthy" though.

It hurt to let him go. It hurt bad. It was a great start to the day though. A phenomenal start.

And then, Klaus went out hunting for food and drugs (sorry, Dave). One revelation at a time. He had already decided that he was going to go home. He couldn't make two big lifestyle choices at the same time.

Plus, it was like his "last hoorah" because once given time to think things over, he didn't want this anymore. Dave was right… he was always right. Klaus could do better than this life of constant numbing and passing out and then doing it all over again. It was like he refused to choose between living and dying so he was trapped in a terrible limbo of constant unconsciousness… not good. Especially not with Dave watching.

Klaus was hoping his siblings would help him out with the whole sober thing now that the Apocalypse wasn't an understandable distraction.

Anyway, luckily, he was high for most of the walk. He could've tried to hitch a ride, but he wanted time to think and process as much as the drugs would let him. Even when it started to rain, he persisted on. The cold feeling of the drops against his skin helped him get some of that feeling back-the feelings he lost.

Klaus had always been a passionate, extreme person. When he was sad, he was devastated. When he was happy, he was exhilarated. When he was horny… Well, his sex life was pretty out in the open and everyone knew that if he wanted something, he made sure he got it.

The point he was trying to dig around for in his head was that the numbness he felt earlier after returning from the grey room was more terrifying than he initially wanted to admit. He assumed it was his way of building walls to keep out the horrible experiences that ultimately even led to his death.

For as many times as he said he wasn't ready to address it though, he was. He had just been fighting it so hard that his stubborn side refused him permission to accept that.

The Academy finally made itself known in the distance. The last time Klaus had seen it, there were swarms of dead people preventing his siblings from dragging his dumbass back inside… Just another
thing he had to figure out. He had no idea what kind of powers were surging through him at any
given moment, but he was excited and terrified to find out.

*Everything* could be summarized in that way. His return home, his decision to officially quit drugs
for *himself* rather than everyone else, his powers, living some more life with Ben…

Excited, pained, confused… Dave did say that family would do that to you.

Klaus pushed open the gate and stepped onto the walkway, instantly hearing a commotion inside.

"Five, wait!"

"Who is it?"

"We can't-"

"Five!"

"Don't go without us!"

*FLASH.*

Klaus stopped tiredly, half-way to the door. Five stood on the steps defensively, squinting out
through the dusky lighting. His expression and stance immediately went from guarded to relieved
when he saw his brother standing, exhausted from the long walk and trying conditions. Not to
mention he was dope sick all over again. Plus, his emotions were surfacing at peak breaking point,
especially upon seeing his brother stand there before him.

Three days ago, Klaus felt nothing but dull insensitivity when he looked at each of his siblings. Now,
just simply seeing Five's slight, cocky smile grow broke Klaus down in ways he wasn't expecting.

Before he could get a word out, even though he didn't quite know what to say anyway, Five jumped
over the whole progression of steps and ran to Klaus, not stopping until his body rammed into his
brother's. Five was a tiny lil' thing, but Klaus had been on his feet all day and the impact nearly sent
him stumbling backward. He held his stance though, tiredly wrapping an arm around his smallest
brother's shoulders as wiry arms wrapped around his torso.

"Hey, squirt." Klaus tiredly teased. Usually, he might even ruffle Five's hair to patronize him further
into irritation, but he was too exhausted. Five didn't even mind the name calling though. For once, he
didn't have something snarky to shoot back. He just stood there, welcoming Klaus home as the doors
opened and the rest of the gang filed out.

Allison ran out first, pushing past both Luther and Diego to throw herself around Klaus, squeezing
him just as tightly as she had before he left. Five barely got out of the way in time.

"Is that *the* Allison Hargreeves?" Klaus picked on her for her fame again, smiling at the light punch
on the arm he received.

Diego wasn't far behind, breaking into a big, uncharacteristic smile.

"You're a pain in the ass to chase around the city, you know."

He didn't let Klaus answer before hooking an arm around Four's neck from the side while Allison
still stayed latched on.

Luther brought up the other side, wrapping his massive arms around *everyone* and Vanya wiggled
her way in between Luther and Allison enough wrap her dainty arm around Klaus's back, giggling at all the pushing and shoving.

Every time one of his siblings made contact, he came closer to collapsing- his legs could only do so much more. Five literally hopping onto his back from behind was the final straw though, sending all six of them to the ground a mass of limbs and bodies. People finally relinquished their grips on Klaus, but he still got "love shoves" and hair ruffles from all directions.

Everyone was all smiles. It was definitely a disgustingly cheesy Hallmark scene if he's ever seen one.

Klaus kind of felt like crying. He kind of felt like laughing. He definitely felt like smiling uncontrollably, even if it was the exhausted one he wore right now- overworked or not, it was 100% genuine.

After he let his five siblings have their time shoving him around and bursting into comments about his amazing skill of avoiding their countless pursuits, Klaus looked up between Luther and Allison where a dark figure stood next to the doorway, his arms crossed but his face in a small, approving smile.

Wow, déjà vu. This was just like when they discovered Ben was brought back to life in their kid bodies, except Number 4 and 6's places were reversed.

In any case, Klaus shakily pushed himself to his feet and made his way towards his best friend that he missed just so fucking much all the fucking time. Going from seeing Ben every day to not seeing him for a week was a rude awakening, and he planned to never let it happen again.

Klaus opened his mouth to say something, but Ben pushed himself off of where he leaned against the wall, enveloping Klaus in a firm hug. Klaus sighed and felt his body let go of all kind of tension that he didn't even realize he was still carrying.

Something about that very moment with Ben was the final breaking point- Everything Klaus had been trying so desperately to push down rushed right back up and his chest heaved against his brother's. Tears sprung to his eyes and he tried his best to regulate his breathing and not totally fall apart in front of all his sibling right here outside the house the second he returned home.

It was hard when Ben rested his chin on Klaus's shoulder though, pulling his brother in closer. Klaus took a deep breath.

He was fine.

They were fine.

Everything would be fine.

"You okay?" Ben finally muttered into his shoulder. Klaus nodded, finally pulling back to see his brother's ever-concerned expression.

"I won't be in a bit," Klaus said, wrapping his arms around himself as the shivering took over, warm bodies no longer there to act as a blanket against his sickly, withdrawal symptoms. He didn't need to elaborate- everyone knew what Klaus had been doing when on his three-day bender and everyone knew the repercussions afterward.

"Well," Luther started, looking around at the siblings for confirmation, and then stating plainly, "We'll help."
Also, if you've noticed, AO3 is asking for donations! I'm a broke college kid so I understand how hard it is to spare money, but I know that my life would be significantly duller without this great website. If you can spare just a few bucks, help me support the fandom culture!
Getting Clean

Chapter Summary

Klaus has trouble getting clean.

Chapter Notes

The chapters are going to be shorter once again. That way I can stay on top of life but also keep updating every other day. Thanks for sticking with me!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Ben yawned and walked out of the kitchen, his arms full of all kinds of stuff. Apples, Poptarts, Goldfish, Cookies… He didn't know what he wanted, but he could tell Klaus hadn't eaten in who-knows-how-long. He himself was hungry too, and tired while he was at it. When Klaus had left four days ago, Ben hadn't been taking care of himself all too well. How could he when the last time Klaus went missing, he died?

Died.

"Whatever you make is fine, Mom." Ben heard Luther saying. "Or, um- Mac and Cheese would be good. He likes that still, I think."

Mom smiled and passed Ben on the way to the kitchen to whip up dinner.

"Don't spoil dinner, Ben. I'm making Mac and Cheese."

"I'm just bringing Klaus a snack."

"Alright…" She said waringly but still smiling sweetly at him. It was so weird talking to Mom again. It had been a while since Ben had come back from the land of the dead, and still there were things that he couldn't get used to.

Ben stumbled to pick up a packet of dropped Goldfish as he ascended the stairs. When he got to the hallway though, everything went tumbling from his arms. Diego who was walking out of his room, frowned at Ben.

"What-"

"Why's is Klaus's door closed?"

Diego looked back between Ben and Klaus's bedroom door that was in fact closed. He didn't seem to get what the big deal was.

"Uh… 'Cause he's getting ready to take a ba- Hey! What's-"

Ben rushed past Diego and went for Klaus's door, banging on it three times.
"You can't leave him alone during a withdrawal. Especially not in his room. Klaus!"

Diego finally broke into an expression of disappointed understanding.

"Shit…"

"Klaus! Open up!" Ben shouted again, followed by more rapping on the door. He didn't like that he wasn't getting a response until…

"In a minute!" Klaus's voice called back. It was muffled, but Ben sensed an urgency in there- not good.

"No, Klaus. Now." Diego joined in. At this point, they attracted Allison's attention. She edged out of her room.

"What's going on?"

"Klaus! Seriously!" Ben grew more frantic. He believed in his brother… really. But he'd bet hella money on the notion that Klaus was probably digging into his hidden stashes of drugs right this very second.

"Fuck it." Diego muttered. Ben barely staggered back in time for Number 2 to launched his shoulder into Klaus's door, swinging it wide open until it violently hit the wall inside. Klaus was hunched over a small table, barely moving. Ben took no time to rush to his side and put a hand on his back.

"Klaus." He stated sternly, hiding his true worry until he knew exactly what was going on. He pulled back on his brother's shoulder. Instantly, he was met with a very giggly Klaus who fumbled until he collapsed on his back, eyes slowly closing and hands resting comfortably on his chest…

…shit.

"What'd you take?" Ben demanded. Klaus just giggled and curled on his side. Number 6 tried to scan the room for clues as to what Klaus just shoved into his system. The entire place was ripped up- teapots flipped over, pillows torn open, drawers scattered…

"Damnit, Klaus." Diego muttered, kneeling to take each of Klaus's biceps in his hands and hoisting him into a limp sitting position. Klaus just chuckled more, his head slumping forward onto his chest.

"This is gonna be harder than we thought." Allison sighed besides Ben, crossing her arms over her chest. Ben ran his hand through his hair in frustration, dropping to a knee in front of Klaus. He put a firm hand underneath his brother's chin, yanking his gaze up. Klaus's eyes slid half-open and then closed again.

"What did you take?" Ben asked again, stiffly. Klaus hummed happily, his smile spreading wider.

"Some Xaaaannnnn."  

"Xanax?" Diego repeated at Ben with a questioning glare as if Ben was the expert on this stuff… Well, okay. At this point he was.

"How much, Klaus?" Ben pulled his brother's head up again, but it just lolled backwards. Diego caught it and held Klaus upright.

"Dude. Do you think he's going to overdose?"

"Not unless he was a complete idiot. KLAUS!"
"What?" Klaus scrunched up his face at the loud aggressiveness of Ben's nagging.

"Answer my questions, or we're taking you to the hospital."

"No, no, no... I- Heh-heh- Found a dollar in my pocket."

"You snorted it?"

"Had some stashes. Stashes... Mustaches, hehehe..."

Ben looked below the table and saw a rolled-up dollar bill. He closed his eyes and tried to keep some form of calm. He should be used to this by now. Something about Klaus diving right back into the thick of it after returning home in such a grandiose way made this all so much worse though.

"Where are the other stashes?" Ben asked, channeling his happy place. He knew this wasn't easy for Klaus, but it wasn't easy for them either. Especially when Klaus was zero help and insisted on giggling down at the floor while swaying from side to side.

"Klaus-"

"I heard you coming and got scared." He whispered into his chest. Diego and Ben exchanged glances. "I- I- I panicked. I- I- I had to hurry. Just one last time, Ben. I had to. One last time."

"Okay... So-"

"I took it. I took it all." There was a beat of silence and then Klaus burst out in laughter. Ben looked up at the ceiling before closing his eyes and shaking his head. Diego looked from Ben to Klaus, completely out of his element. "All of it. All of it." Klaus slurred, falling from Diego's grasp and straight into Ben's chest. Number 6 grunted from the impact and returned his eyes down to the top of Klaus's head that acted as a heavy weight against his sternum.

"He couldn't have done it after his bath?" Diego sighed, pushing himself up to a standing position. He was right- Klaus needed one badly. If not for any other reason, for the rain streaked mud that somehow found its way around his body on his apparent 6-hour walk back to the Academy.

"Klaus!" Mom had said with worry upon seeing her fourth child walk through the door, worse for wear. "Those can be infected! You better wash up." She scolded, looking at the cuts still evident in the skin of his torso underneath his deep dipping v-neck.

"Wait..." Klaus muttered into Ben's shirt. "Just wait 'til later..."

"Nuh-uh. You smell like a fuck-ton of rain, mud, weed and alcohol." Diego complained. No one could argue that. "So, Ben? Have fun, my dude." Diego gave him an affirmative nod and started out the door.

"Woah no, no... I've had to babysit high-Klaus for over a decade. It's your guys' turn." Diego's head fell back in frustration as he jolted to a halt in the doorway. Allison gave a resigned sigh and immediately stepped forward to help get Klaus to the bathroom.

"Me? Why me? I'll get Van-"

"Diego. Shut up and get over here." Allison shut him down quickly, already wrapping one of Klaus's limp arms around her shoulders. "Vanya and I can't cart him around by ourselves anyway."

Diego gave a resigned sigh and went to Klaus's other side, hoisting him roughly to his feet and
sending Klaus into another fit of giggles.

"I'm glad you're enjoying this."

They got their extremely high brother into the bathroom. Luckily, he had enough power to stand on his feet at that point- he swayed like crazy, but still. Klaus toyed with taking off his shirt as Numbers 2 and 3 started the bath.

Klaus groaned in frustration.

Diego looked back to see Number 4 trapped in his own shirt, his arms a jumbled mess over his head and the fabric stretched around at odd angles. Klaus's thin, beat-up chest heaved up and down quickly in exasperation.

"Klaus…" Diego muttered in a sigh under his breath. He helped pull Klaus free, ruffling his hair into a mess over his head. Klaus closed his eyes and smiled tiredly.

"Thaaaanks, bro." He said with so much appreciative sincerity, Diego tossed his shirt to the side and Klaus started taking off his pants too. But where Diego jumped in was when Klaus went for the waistband of his rainbow colored, speedo-underwear next.

"Woah, woah, woah… You can keep those on, big guy."

"Wha-" Klaus's face dropped to pure confusion, looking at Diego under furrowed eyebrows. "In the bath?" He asked as if it was the most ridiculous thing he's ever heard… then another fit of giggles.

"When your siblings are giving you one, yeah." Diego affirmed. "Now get your scrawny ass over here."

Klaus shook his head and started to turn away.

"Nah… I don't really feel like a- hey! Diego!"

Diego had shot up and grabbed his brother by the arm, practically dragging him to the bath that they already had filled with steaming water. Allison sat on the tub's side, a small, amused smirk crawling up her face.

"What are you laughing at, smiley?" Diego accused, just making her chuckle further.

"Diego-"

"Shut it, Klaus."

Number Four eased into the water, his face twisted in complaint.

"Too hot? Too cold?" Diego questioned.

"Um-"

"Too bad."

Diego helped guide Klaus to sit down carefully.

"Why'd you ask…" Klaus whispered to himself under his breath, genuinely perplexed. His siblings rolled up their sleeves and brought out shampoo and soaps. Klaus drew circles on his arm with his
fingertip, watching his arm hair move. "...it's actually quite nice." He kept mumbling to himself without a care in the world.

Diego hated seeing Klaus high. He hated that his brother couldn't go twenty minutes without some kind of fix. He couldn't help thinking, however, that this was still better than seeing him in the ultra-depressed, self-destructive state he was in while trapped in that damn bunker. High-Klaus was a vexation to no end, but at least he was some version of happy, even if it wasn't real.

Diego shook his head at himself. It was still a product of Klaus's pain. He may be temporarily okay, but he hoped to God that in the next few days, they could get him to a better place without the need for narcotics.

Diego took a big scoop of water with the pitcher Allison had run up with from the kitchen. He didn't hesitate to run a waterfall over Klaus's head, soaking his hair and matting it down to his forehead. Klaus sputtered in surprise, coughing a bit with his eyes squeezed tightly shut. He didn't complain though. Diego did it again.

"Pffft..." Klaus spit out water, shaking his head quickly back and forth like a dog trying to dry its fur, soaking its owners- Except Klaus wasn't a dog, and he soaked his two siblings instead.

"Ah! Klaus! Jesus..." Allison protested, grabbing a towel and patting down her expensive and now very wet looking shirt. Klaus turned giant puppy dog eyes up to both of them, realizing what he did.

"Oh no." He plainly said before he seemed to forget the whole thing completely. "You know fruit fly swarms are just giant-ass orgies?"

"Fascinating." Diego said flatly, dumping another bucket of water over Klaus, this time just to shut him up. Before he could shake out his hair and drench Two and Three again, Diego slapped a handful of shampoo on his wet mop of hair and roughly scrubbed. Klaus closed his eyes and let Diego somewhat-aggressively move his head around as suds spread all over the place.

"How's it going?" Ben asked as he walked through the open threshold of the bathroom, pulling himself to sit up on the sink with a book in hand.

"Ugh... Harder, Diego." Klaus moaned, making Two roll his eyes. He dunked the pitcher and dowsed a snickering Klaus in water.

"Your attempts to make me uncomfortable aren't gonna work today, bro. I've gotten way more physically close to you in the past week than I've ever needed for a whole lifetime."

Diego unintentionally brought back the unfortunately vivid memory of him giving Klaus CPR. Sometimes he still felt the constant up and down motions in his arms or the cold resistance of Klaus's chest on the palms of his hands. Blowing air into the shell of a body wasn't all too fun either.

"Klaus?" Allison spoke up as she was rubbing dirt off of his back with a wash cloth. Her motions slowed and she craned her neck to see Klaus's face. Diego and Ben's attention was drawn now too, seeing what all the fuss was about.

Klaus was frozen, his eyes wider than usual. He was so still that he didn't even seem to be breathing. In fact, he wasn't, and that was the problem.

Ben sighed and went back to his book, not phased.

"Breathe, Klaus." Ben suggested plainly. Diego and Allison were the only ones who looked worried. Ben made it seem like this was a normal occurrence though. Klaus shook his head, not able
to talk.

"What- What's happening?"

"He just forgets how. Klaus. Like your drinking a milkshake through a straw, remember?"

Klaus whimpered through tight lips, choking out words.

"What kind?"

"For Christ's sake, dude. I don't know, strawberry." Diego cut in, getting more anxious as more time went by without Klaus taking in air. His brother squeezed his eyes shut in disgust and shook his head violently.

"You've gotta be kidding me." Allison muttered.

"Chocolate Peanut butter." Ben said in a bored, knowing tone from where he was still engrossed in his book. Suddenly Klaus took a dramatic suck of air inwards, breaking his self-induced spell. Diego smirked and shook his head in disbelief. This guy was inconceivable.

"How often did you have to deal with this exactly?" He questioned Ben. His brother just shook his head as if to suggest that it was impossible to even keep track.

"Allison!" Klaus called out excitedly as soon he regained his ability to breathe. He whipped his head backwards to look at her upside down.

"What?"

"Your beautiful voice. It's back."

"Almost." She chuckled, wiping some of his wet curls from his face.

"Dinner's almost ready!" Mom called from somewhere downstairs. There was a chorus of "okay's" from around the house.

"Alright, come on. Enough messing around." Diego said, handing Klaus a new washcloth. The still-drugged out sibling took it and laid it on his raised knee, petting it like a cat. "No- I- For your face. Dear God." He took the washcloth back and wiped any dirt from Klaus's face. Klaus kept trying to take the cloth.

"Klaus, stop- Stop-" Diego finally got frustrated enough to just take the washcloth and throw it behind him altogether. He didn't sign up for this. "Still. Stay still."

Klaus begrudgingly did what he was told and Diego took the opportunity to use his hands to roughly wipe the remaining eyeliner from around Klaus's eyes. Klaus made a small whine of protest but held as still as he could while Diego did the other eye. Four strained to keep his head up against Diego's forceful movements.

"Diego, you missed some shampoo." Allison said, looking at the back of Klaus's head. Diego took his brother and faced him downwards to see the nape of his neck. He took his hand away for a second to grab the pitcher and Klaus casually raised his head straight again.

"No." Diego pushed him back down and poured the pitcher over the back of Four's head and neck. Klaus's hair swirled over his skin that soon erupted in goosebumps. He shivered.

"I'm cold."
"Almost done."

"And tired."

"I bet."

"Dave and I stayed up a long, long, long, long…"

"Wait-" Ben cut in, dropping his book to his lap and leaning forward. It was the most engaged Diego had seen him since he plopped in the room for… moral support, he guessed. "You saw Dave?"

Klaus's head remained down this time, his forehead pressed into his knees. No one could see his expression and he didn't answer.

"Who's Dave?" Allison asked, getting the last of the dirt off of Klaus's arms and looking to her brothers for answers. Diego had none. A friend? A dealer?

"Who's Dave, Klaus?" Diego asked, tapping his brother's head. He remained still. Two looked back at Six in confusion. Ben just shook his head as if to tell Diego to drop it for the better. Something about this "Dave" must've really upset Klaus…

"I'm sorry that I took the drugs." Klaus finally whispered down at the water. Diego looked at Allison and swallowed thickly. He wasn't sure what to say. He felt sympathetic towards his brother and was trying harder to understand him after the shit-storm of this week, but he also couldn't tell him it was okay and condone it.

"Hey." Allison's voice soothed. She reached forward and slipped her hand underneath Klaus's forehead, pulling him back up. He was devoid of all emotion, staring forward at something none of them could see.

Allison ran her hand back towards his hairline, smoothing his wet locks up and slicking his hair back as her hand reached the crown of his head. She tilted him back enough to lean forward and kiss his warm, matted hair that smelled like shampoo- the same shampoo they used since they were kids. It always brought so many memories back for her.

Klaus took a deep, sad breath upon Allison's sweet moment of comforting contact and soon he was back to his regular, xaned-out self.

"You guys- We have the same birthday." He mumbled with a lazy smile. He closed his eyes and continued to laugh about it. Diego left him to it.

"I don't think we're going to be able to wiggle him in those little skinny pants he wears." Diego said, looking back to Ben for confirmation.

"We'll just get him some of Luther's clothes."

"Oh yeah, that'll-

"Guys!" Ben jumped off the sink and pointed at the tub. Diego turned back to see Klaus had slid himself underwater. It didn't look like he was passed out or anything- he was just hanging out under there, swaying his arms back and forth.

Still, Allison scooped under the water and pulled him up. Klaus splashed above the surface in a fit of coughs, his chest heaving violently. Diego shook his head. Being this high, Klaus was worse than an infant. He turned his back for literally five seconds.
"He doesn't realize you can't breathe underwater."

"How has he survived this long?" Allison asked, patting Klaus on the back as he spat out more water.

"Well, he usually doesn't get this high to his credit." Ben admitted. Diego couldn't imagine having to watch Klaus do anything remotely close to this to himself for all those years- he could barely stand fifteen minutes.

"Alright. We're done with this. Come on."

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will be all about fighting through withdrawal amongst his siblings and then having a big, much-needed family talk about what has happened.
Klaus fights through withdrawal with his siblings' help.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Klaus got through dinner… That's really the best he can describe it. He hardly remembered much except his family sitting around the table, watching him try to eat Mac and Cheese with limbs that felt like jelly. Needless to say, they tried to stay stern about his whole Xanax situation, but the image of him missing his mouth over and over again must've been too amusing to hide their smiles.

They all laid around the family room now. He was starting to come to his senses which came with its own pros and cons…

Pro: He could stop having to rely on his siblings to do everything for him and actually remember his name once and a while.

Con: Withdrawal was coming in fast. Klaus was starting to shiver. His head was beginning to throb with a splitting headache and he felt like his body was hit with a truck. Some girl that only he could hear was moaning sorrowfully in the corner of the house, and as much as he tried to tell himself he could ignore it, she was driving him crazy.

He wanted to be sober. He wanted to stop relying on drugs to live. He just didn't want to go through the initial process to get there. His siblings seemed intent to help this time.

"Scoot over." Five instructed. Klaus groaned at the achiness in his limbs as he hooded and bundled himself with his giant blanket. He slid closer to Ben on the couch so Five could sit on his other side. Allison sat on the floor, leaning up against Klaus's blanketed legs.

"How are you doing?" Vanya asked from behind the couch, leaning over Klaus and peeling back the edge of the blanket pulled over his head. He glanced up with tired eyes, no explanation needed. "That bad?"

"I think something… something small just to help ease me into the process may-""

"No!"

"Nuh-uh."

"Nope."

"Not a chance."

"No."

"Absolutely not."
Klaus huffed and let his head fall back onto the cushion behind him, crossing his arms around himself and pulling his blanket tighter. They had him locked down good, all six siblings taking places around the room and settling in for a movie on Dad's old projector against the white sheet Luther hung on the wall.

The movie was hard to concentrate on though. It wasn't that Klaus had too much on his mind- that part was at least a plus. He didn't have room to think about his recent dark thoughts with all the side effects dictating his every breath. An hour in, he had to move or do something.

"Klaus?" Ben's voice mumbled quietly. Number Four turned to look at his brother's dimly illuminated face, the light changing over his features as the scenes played out on the wall. "You doin' okay?" He asked through furrowed brows. Klaus was noticeably trembling now, his hand anxiously tapping on his thigh.

"I'm just gonna go to the bathroom," He said, carefully sliding out from underneath Allison's weight on his legs and standing. He wasn't expecting the whole room to jump to their feet in defense with him.

"Woah. No, no, no," Diego said, putting a firm hand on Klaus's chest to prevent him from going further. Number Two looked at him with suspicion. The whole room gave him similar gazes, everyone standing like they were ready to pounce at a moment's notice.

Klaus tried to reassure him, putting his hands on either side of Diego's face and speaking deliberately.

"I just need to pee."

Diego smacked his hands away and narrowed his eyes.

"Not before we search it."

"Wh- Diego. Like I'd hide things in the downstairs bathroom. Really."

Fast forward sixty seconds, Diego and Five were pulling all kinds of shit out of weird places in the bathroom. The rest of the siblings stood in the doorway, watching in awe as Diego kneeled and reached under the sink, feeling as far as his arm would search the underneath cabinet. He came back with a little bag of weed that Klaus didn't remember taping to the underside of the piping.

"Seriously, bro?"

"Okay, weed doesn't count. Also, I'm pretty sure that's been there since we were 16."

Diego proved this by blowing the dust off the little baggie. That concluded their search. Overall, they'd found the weed and two small bags of pills. One of which Klaus didn't remember even stashing there and the other... Well, so what? He wasn't planning on taking any of it.

That's what he told them anyway.

"Alright. You're clear." Five announced, stepping out of the bathroom with Diego. Klaus bowed to them mockingly as he shuffled past his brothers and entered the restroom.

"Merci beaucoup."

Ben watched Klaus bow sarcastically to his siblings, finally moving into the bathroom. Diego went
to brush by Ben, but he spoke up first; Six suddenly remembered one of Klaus's favorite hiding places over the past ten years...

"You guys checked underneath the toilet tank's lid, right?"

Diego blinked.

"Shit."

"Damn. Klaus!" Ben yelled. Luther, who was closer to the door, luckily picked up that something was wrong immediately and went for the doorknob. It was locked.

"Klaus!" Luther touched the knob again, but this time it flew off as a product of his super-strength. He shoved the door open with his shoulder and bounded in the room. Due to his large stature and the bathrooms narrow architecture, no one could really see what was happening. It became pretty clear when Luther backed up literally carrying a thrashing-Klaus.

"No! No!" He struggled violently against Number One. Luther kept his brother's bony body captive in his huge arms, barely affected by his attempts to elbow or kick himself free. Ben sighed and watched Klaus push at Luther's shoulders, his face twisted in determination. Six's eyes then moved to the bathroom where the tank lid was, in fact, slid off, tape hanging from the underside. A baggie full of who knows what was crushed on the floor.

"Calm- Klaus! Calm down." Luther demanded, squeezing his flailing brother tighter. Klaus wheezed a choked whimper, his movements ceasing.

"Can't breathe…"

"You done?"

"Mhm…"

"I swear, all the doors in this damn house are going to be destroyed by the end of tonight," Diego muttered, rolling his shoulder as he probably remembered breaking through Klaus's bedroom earlier.

Luther released Number Four down to his feet who stumbled into a weak stance, his arms crossing over his chest in frustration.

"It's not- I wasn't-"

"Shut up, Klaus."

Five moved into the bathroom and picked up the baggie, stuffing it in his Academy jacket pocket.

"There. Go ahead." Luther said, gesturing towards the bathroom again. Klaus scowled at him, his arms dropping to his sides in defeat.

"I don't need to go suddenly…” He muttered, slinking back to the couch and burrito-ing himself in a blanket again. Klaus collapsed dramatically, stretching out over the width of the cushions.

The six remaining siblings exchanged glances. No one moved or knew what to say. What was there to say?

Ben was the first to give in and move back to the couch. They just kept on going. That was all. They were in the worst of it. If they could just get Klaus through this part, it'd get easier, right?
Ben took the sad burrito by the shoulders and sat him upright so that there was enough room to sit next to Klaus. He did, letting Klaus's shoulders go and watching his brother slump right back down onto his shoulder. The burrito sighed.

"You'll be fine," Ben told him, looking down over the ruffled mess of Klaus's hair on his shoulder. "Quit your whining."

"Quit your whining." Klaus mocked in a ridiculous voice. He got so rude when he craved a fix. Ben was used to it. He knew his brother was only ornery because he felt like absolute shit.

Once everyone sat back down, it didn't take long for the family to start dropping like flies as slumber drifted into the room. Five curled up on the limited space he was given at the other end of the couch, Allison and Vanya spread out a blanket on the floor, and Luther and Diego each slumped in their own separate chairs.

The only ones who didn't get a wink were Ben and his sickly counterpart. They didn't say anything, but each one was clearly aware of the other's completely attentive presence. Ben realized that they hadn't had a real moment alone since they got Klaus back from that hellhole. It was so odd to think about after spending nearly every single day with Number Four. He had felt so admittedly lost this past week, but now that he and Klaus finally did have the chance for a one-on-one, he couldn't think of what to say for the life of him…

It seemed like Klaus was in the same boat. Then…

"Hey, remem-"

"You're an asshole. You know that?" Ben interrupted abruptly. Klaus remained still. It came out of nowhere… but then again, maybe it didn't. Ben had been upset about it for a while, but it was buried by other emotions- Worry about his brother running off again, determination to find him, loneliness without him…

There was anger in there though. There was a hurt anger that festered in Ben's stomach ever since he watched Klaus's lifeless body jolt along time to Diego's steadfast compressions.

Klaus let him go on.

"Why on Earth would you think it was in your and everybody else's best interest to just give up like that?" He asked, trying to keep his voice low in order to preserve their one-on-one rather waking a whole room of opinions.

And as for Klaus… still nothing. Ben kept going.

"How do you think I'd- Did you think that I'd just be able to… move on? Did you think of that?"

"Benji…"

"Don't Benji me. Do you know how long that image of you will be burned into my mind?"

"Uh-"

"Forever."

"Well, great. Now we're even. You have an image of my morbid death and I have one of yours!" Klaus offered the macabre statement, light-heartedly.
"You didn't see me die."

"I saw the end. What more did I need?"

"Klaus, this isn't about me!"

He felt his brother's ribs rise and fall with a big breath of air.

"Sorry." He whispered. "I wasn't thinking right, really."

"But you were thinking something. That's what terrifies me is that it's-" Ben had to break off his sentence when his voice caught in his throat.

_Oh, stop._ He told himself, taking a deep inhale to reset.

"How did you do it?"

"Ben- I really don't know. I swear."

Silence… at least a minute's worth. He believed Klaus. Despite all of Four's bullshit, when it came to truly serious matters, Ben always believed Klaus.

"Just don't do it again."

"I won't!" Klaus said immediately, lifting his head off Ben's shoulder to look at him in the eyes with his own widened ones. "I won't."

Ben stared at him with a straight face, trying to contemplate if he was going to let Klaus off that easy. Maybe not _overall_ but at least for tonight. After all, he could tell they were both exhausted.

"Don't leave me, dumbass."

"Aw, Benny." Klaus purred, plopping his head back down on his shoulder. "You're forever my parasite, remember?"

"Mn. Cute." Ben muttered, disillusioned. Klaus chuckled and hummed happily but it soon turned into a groan.

"Doesn't fix the fact that I still feel like shit."

Ben let his head fall back on the couch cushion, his eyelids feeling heavier by the second.

"Then get some sleep."

Klaus managed a few minutes here and there, but something always forced him back into consciousness. A voice from beyond the grave, his flipping stomach, a nightmare…

_Nothing_ like the ones that were inflicted on him in that damn room, but still, not pleasant. He was comforted in waking up to the familiar setting of his living room, especially surrounded by all six of his brothers and sisters. There was an unscratchable itch within him though, and there was only one thing that could fix it.

Unfortunately, that one thing was drugs and he wasn't doing that anymore.

But like… Weed was fine. Weed was nothing.
Klaus carefully eased himself off of Ben's shoulder, taking care not to bump Five either. He unraveled the blanket from around his body and tried to take a step onto the carpet. Vanya and Allison were laid out perfectly to create a nearly-impossible blockage over the ground. Plus, he'd have to pass Diego if he went that way, and he was pretty sure Two constantly slept with one eye open.

Instead, Four turned towards the couch and very carefully climbed over the back, taking his precious time not to depress the wrong area of a cushion and alert the "guards". He almost did it too. He was almost successful.

A hand clamped around his raised ankle as he went to make the last stretching step over the couch. He froze, his eyes wide.

In one swift moment, Klaus was yanked backward. He yelped as his chest hit the couch frame, his hands unable to catch his fall. His body was dragged back over the cushions and manually flipped over to his back with a force so strong that it could only have been one person…

"Ow! Luther!"

"Where are you going?"

Klaus glanced on either side of him. His siblings stirred, but miraculously, no one woke. No one except Diego who just noted that Luther had it handled and then proceeded to roll over and fall back asleep.

"If you must know, I have an appointment with Mary Jane."

"What? Who's."

"Weed, Luther. That means Mari-ju-ana."

"What? No! Klaus, what do you not understand about getting sober?"

"The sober part. And weed is- it's nothing, it's just-"

"Doing weed is a gateway."

"Smoking weed is no such thing. That's a myth. A fiction."

Luther rolled his eyes.

"No." He simply denied him, pulling the chair he had claimed earlier closer to the couch to watch over Four who was annoyed by the whole situation. He wasn't going to resist Luther though. He already tried that.

Instead, the two of them just looked at each other.

"Well, you obviously want to say something so just… spit it out." Klaus urged. Luther cleared his throat and frowned down at the ground.

"I uh- I can't help to feel like I failed you, Klaus." He admittedly guiltily.

Wow. He wasn't expecting that.

"Luther…" Klaus started to oppose, but he cut in again.
"No, no. Really. I- I'm supposed to be here for you all and, you know… Know what's going on. Keep you guys safe. Keep the team a… team. I'm Number One and."

"You need to stop with this 'I'm Number One' self-expectation thing. You were given a number and it happened to be a '1'. That doesn't make you our Dad."

Luther looked offended for a moment, but Klaus hurried to add on.

"Lovingly! Lovingly said… as in, you need to stop beating yourself up all the time."

"Yeah, but I'm the older brother which is."

"Woah. Dude. We're all the same." Klaus chuckled.

"Well, but there's the unsaid scale."

"The what?"

"Yeah, you know… Like the order of our age if we had different ones."

"That's not a thing." Klaus shook his head and sat back on the couch, dismissing his brother. And he said that Klaus spouted out crazy shit.

"Yeah, it is! It goes me, then Allison, Diego, Five, You, Ben, Vanya."

"Wait… No! No one follows that!"

"Ask anyone."

"What the hell is it based on?"

"I don't know… Everything."

"I'm behind Five?"

"Well, technically I guess we all are now."

"Well, how do I climb up the ladder?"

"You don't. It's set."

"Okay, that's bullshit."

"Klaus, you seriously never realized this?"

"No! Because it's- it's ludicrous. Actually, wait… I'm ten months older than you. All of you! Except the old geezer." He said gesturing towards the 13-year-old, 58-year-old.

"What?"

"Never mind. Too much to explain. Just know that I am older. For real. Not based on your stupid… scale."

Luther looked at him, perplexed as all Hell. He opened his mouth a couple of times, closing it without being able to find words. Finally, he spoke.

"That's the thing. I don't know. Apparently, there's a lot none of us know, Klaus. You don't have to
keep it all bottled up. In fact, you probably shouldn't regarding recent-

"Yeah, yeah. I get it." Klaus waved him away. He yawned and stretched out, finally feeling true, sweet fatigue set in. "Just not tonight, big guy."

Luther nodded and yawned himself, settling back into the chair and closing his eyes.

"I promise I'll listen this time." He mumbled tiredly. Klaus could still hear the saturated guilt in there though.

"Luther, it's-"

"No," Luther's eyes flew open again. He sat forward and looked at Number Four insistently. "Klaus, if I believed you back at the warehouse the first time, none of this would've happened."

"You don't know that."

"Will you just accept my apology?" He asked, now annoyed more than anything. Klaus snorted in amusement. Even when Luther tried to be all nice, he ended just being uptight and angry.

"Okay, okay. I accept your aggressive apology, alright?"

Luther relaxed and nodded, closing his eyes once more and sinking into the chair.

Klaus sighed and looked at his brothers on either side of him. There was just enough room for him to lie on his side between them if he curled up enough. After all, he didn't really feel like smoking anymore anyway.

Instead, he scooped up his blanket and wrapped himself, pulling his knees in and easing into the cushions so that the top of his head was against Ben's hip and the blanket over his shins brushed against Five's back that was turned towards Klaus. He was surprisingly comfortable there, wedged between his brothers. Maybe it was Five's heavy breathing that somehow calmed him. Maybe it was the comforting silhouettes of his sisters that he saw every time he opened his eyes. Maybe it was the feeling of Ben always nearby like "old times".

Whatever it was, Klaus suddenly felt better than he had in ages. He hated clichés like, 'And that night, he had the best sleep of his life' or 'For the first time in a long time, he slept like a rock'…

He couldn't help that it was true though.

Because the next thing Klaus knew, he was breathing in the scent of coffee with vanilla creamer. His eyes blinked open to find Vanya hovering over him, holding the cup right near his face probably in attempts to wake him.

"There he is." She smirked, watching Klaus rub his eyes groggily and look around the empty room. Everyone else had gone and natural light was seeping through the curtains and lighting the living room that was still littered with blankets and pillows. Klaus yawned and let the blanket slide from his shoulders.

"'Morning. What time is it?" He asked with a raspy morning voice, taking the coffee from Vanya appreciatively.

"Definitely not morning. Going on 3 o'clock."

"What?"
"Yeah, we kept having to send someone in to make sure you were still breathing." Vanya sat down on the couch next to him, sipping her own tea. Klaus couldn't believe he had slept that long. He used to when he was a kid, but then the ghosts started getting bad and he hadn't overslept a day since. "How're you feeling?"

Klaus thought about that. How was he feeling?

"Starving."

"Yeah, we figured. Allison suggested we go to Gigi's."

Klaus raised his eyebrows. "Oh? What's the ocasión?"

Gigi's wasn't anything special… Well, it was to them but the establishment itself was just a rundown breakfast diner a few blocks away. They only got to go out to eat on special occasions though. To be specific, their birthday and maybe Easter if they were lucky. It was enough for the owner and waitresses to get to know them there as the "hoard of super kids" though.

"Nothing, really. We just figured now that we're grown up, we don't need one." She shrugged. Klaus sensed something else in her voice though. She looked away from him, pretending to study something outside the window.

"Vanya?"

"Mmm?"

"What?"

She turned her eyes to him and let her shoulders sag.

"Nothing, it's just… We figured it'd be a good place for all of us to… talk, you know?"

"Oh. That."

"Yes. That, Klaus." She raised her eyebrows at him as if to say there was no way out of it. He knew that, but he still dreaded this giant family conversation everyone insisted on. He didn't like opening up about serious things. Serious things were dumb. They were boring. They were- "Important. It's important." She finished. He looked into his sister's eyes and groaned.

"Yeah, yeah."

"Get dressed. We leave in fifteen."

Vanya gave him a sweet smile squeezed his arm reassuringly before walking out. He heard the hum of voices somewhere deeper in the house, along with the click of heels walking by the living room.

"Klaus, do you want something to eat?" She asked, clasping her hands together when she came into view. Klaus sighed and stood, stretching. He gave her a small sweet smile back.

"No thanks, Mom. I've got a date with six boneheads."
Okay, NEXT chapter they'll talk everything out. Also, don't do drugs.
As they walked in, two waitresses were walking out, their aprons in hand and their hair askew from an apparent day of hard work.

"Uh-oh…" Vanya mumbled. They pushed through the front door anyway, flooded with familiar sounds, smells, and visuals that struck all of them, even Klaus, speechless. It was like they had transported back to their childhood all over again… They had, after all, done that just a couple weeks ago. They'd know how it felt.

"We're closed! Come back tomorrow morning!" A voice called from somewhere back in the kitchen. The siblings looked at each other knowingly and smiled: The howl of Ms. Gigi. It was unmistakable.

"Shit. Probably should've guessed from a breakfast place." Diego muttered. Luther held up his hand to tell them all to wait. He took a step towards the kitchen.

"Would you be willing to make a special exception?" He called back. There were some clanging noises before the clacking of heels cut through the air. A small, haughty old woman with graying hair appeared with a face twisted in disdain.

"And who do you think you are to be askin' me to-" She stopped dead in her tracks. Klaus wiggled his fingers at her.

"Hello." He chirped in a high, small voice. She took in the sight of the siblings that she hadn't seen in thirteen years. It was a miracle she recognized them, really.

"Well, screw me sideways and call me Betty." She huffed, blowing a strand hair from her face. Suddenly her features broke out into tearful smiles. "Where have you all been?"

No one could hold back their returning grins- not even Five. She bustled forward and stretched out her arms for giant hugs that they hadn't felt since their 17th birthdays.

"Betty." Klaus greeted jokingly, wrapping his arms around the ridiculously gleeful woman.

"Oh! Ha! Exactly the same, Klaus."

"I wish, G."

"You wish? Look at me! You've all aged beautifully. Look at you." She swooned, putting her hand on the side of Allison's face, making Number Three beam. Then she moved onto Ben…

"I-" That's all she could get out before her face went stone-still, warped in an expression of pure confusion, anguish, and joy all at once. Ben gave her a small, shy smile.
"Hi, Ms. G."

"Oh!" She threw her arms around him and squeezed until Ben's face twisted in pain, but nothing could keep down that humble smirk of his. "I don't even care how! I don't care!" She sobbed, rubbings Ben's back and then getting slammed with possibly an even bigger surprise.

*Oh yeah…*

Klaus had forgotten. She hadn't seen Ben in about fifteen years after he died and then even *further*, she hadn't seen Five in…

"SEVENTEEN YEARS!" She sobbed, even more, when she finally released Ben and moved to sweet little, certifiable Five. The woman literally picked the kid off his feet and hugged him so hard that it looked like he may snap in half. "I haven't seen my little Smarty Pants in seventeen years and you haven't changed a bit!"

This was truly the only person in the world that Five would've let do this. Klaus rose an eyebrow at the way his brother just chuckled and patted her on the back.

"Don't ask." He wheezed before she set him down. He straightened his jacket and tie, clearing his throat and regaining his pristine composure.

"Oh, I don't need to! I don't need to! The seven of you all together again! Your father would've loved to see this, bless his soul. He still came here every year on your birthday, you know."

The siblings all exchanged glances except Luther who had to have already had knowledge of this fact. Still… It surprised the rest of them.

There was a moment of stillness where they froze in time, all of them preserving this happy moment of reunion. And then, a shrill interruption.

"KENNY!" Gigi shrieked into the back, hobbling back around the counter. Ah… the charming familiarity of her deafening screeches was music to their ears. "FIRE UP THE GRILL!"

Luther pushed a table against one of the booth tables, the same as they always used to do. There would always be a big struggle as to who would get a booth seat…

Today was no different.

All at once, seemingly everyone but Number One dove in, shoving and elbowing their way to the cushioned seats. To everyone's complaint, Klaus *always* got a booth seat. He was just willing to get dirty for what he wanted. Case in point, he smirked as he elbowed Diego in the ribs, sliding in right where Number Two was about to claim his prized seat.

"Ah! Every time." Diego grunted, begrudgingly taking one of the metal chairs next to the booth instead.

Five just "jumped" into the seat diagonal to Klaus without batting an eye. That happened every time too. Ben sat in the booth next to Five, across from Klaus. Allison was on Four's other side, in the booth by the window.

Luther rolled his eyes at their childish tendencies, taking his place at the head of the table in the metal chair between Diego and Vanya. Generally, that's where Dad would sit, but no one objected.

"Just the same, the lot of you. I image a fine group of adults such as yourself enjoy coffee." Gigi
said, appearing with a tray of seven steaming cups. Everyone thanked her, eagerly taking up her offer. "So, is everyone's taste the same too or do I need to bring out menus?"

Luther looked around at everyone. No one seemed to have any objections.

"I think just the usual, Miss G."

"Alright, so we've got peanut butter banana pancakes, the sunrise omelet, maple pecan oatmeal, full farmer's breakfast, classic eggs and bacon, waffles, and an omelet with fruit salad. Yes?"

Luther nodded.

"Thank you. We appreciate it."

She smiled and walked off, looking back a few times almost as if to make sure they didn't disappear from right before her eyes. She seemed to have taken the comfortable atmosphere with her. Suddenly the mood dropped and everyone buried their gazes in their cups of dark, swirling liquid.

Klaus watched the steam coming off his.

Ah, to smoke. He should've at least brought a pack of cigarettes. What was he thinking?

"So, um… Before we tackle how we should approach this "Venus Club" thing, I think we should probably address some other… stuff." Luther awkwardly handled the silence. Klaus knew he was talking about him, but he didn't dare look up at the other faces that turned to him. His fingers nervously tapped on the porcelain side of his mug.

Diego nudged him with his elbow. Klaus was forced to look up at all the expectant eyes directed towards him. He hated that look on their faces—pity, cautiousness, confusion—Bleh. Gross. He turned to Ben though, and his gaze was different. It was unamused.

*Come on, dumbass. Can't hide forever.* It said to him. Klaus much preferred Ben's stern sarcasm. It helped him relax amidst its familiarity. He sighed and sat back in the booth, slapping his hands uselessly on the table.

"I don't really know what you want me to say."

"Okay. Why don't we start with everything you've been keeping from us just this past month?" Luther suggested authoritatively.

"Or the drug thing." Five broke in.

"And who's Dave?" Allison asked.

"What about this "Sadistic" Sadie bitch? Do we need to worry about her coming back for you?" Diego asked.

*Yikes.*

"Sadie's not a problem." Klaus addressed to the only thing he could answer definitively.

"Okay, Klaus… This is Sadie. How can you be sure?" Ben bartered.

"Because she's dead." Klaus abruptly cut in. "For trying to help me."

Silence.
Complete and utter silence, except for the sound of the grill in the kitchen. The air got reaaaaallll heavy. Klaus took a sip of his coffee. It burned, but he appreciated the sensory distraction.

"She won't be a problem." He reaffirmed, setting the cup on the table. The siblings all looked at each other, avoiding Klaus now. Not Ben though. Ben stared straight into his soul. His eyes were truly chock-full of a sympathy that Klaus was grateful for. He gave his brother a small sad smile before looking down and drumming his fingers on the table.

"She must've been how we received the live feed and coordinates." Five realized. Everyone nodded. Klaus always did wonder how his siblings ended up finding him. It made sense now. He didn't particularly need that information- knowing that Sadie risked everything for him didn't make any of this easier.

He was alive because of her though, and for that, he'd always be thankful.

"Alright, so moving on…” Luther pushed. Klaus groaned and rolled his eyes. This was painfully drawn out and awkward and he couldn't stand it. "Klaus, this is important."

"What? What do you want from me?" He demanded, growing increasingly jittery and agitated.

"Okay, fine. You want me to be frank?"

"Please, Frank. By all means."

Allison snorted beside him, shaking her head. Luther looked like he was gearing himself up. Everyone was hanging onto every single second, waiting to see how far this whole thing was going to be taken.

"Alright…” Luther challenged, looking ready to lay it all out there. And boy, was he in fact ready. "I want to know that I don't have to worry about you killing yourself every time I don't have eyes on you."

"Christ." Klaus muttered, erupting from his seat and standing on the booth cushion. He couldn't do this.

The table's uptight aura broke with his sudden movement, some people telling Klaus to sit down and some berating Luther for being so brash. Klaus ignored it all and climbed over the back of the seat, jumping to the floor.

"Where are you going?"

"The bathroom- Or do you not feel comfortable unless you 'have eyes on me'? You're more than welcome to watch, buddy."

"I don't think I'm being unreasonable. Right- I- Come on… Someone back me up!" Luther grappled at his other siblings. Five leaned forward with his hands clasped sensibly.

"He's got a point, Klaus. You can't deny the facts."

What a realist.

"I'm not even sure what the facts are!" He argued in frustration, throwing his arms up dramatically as his voice rose to the high octave used for tense dialogue.

"What is that supposed to mean?" Diego prodded.
"I didn't know I could do that. I couldn't do it now if I tried! It just- happened…"

"But how?"

"I don't know!"

"You don't know?"

"I just… I fucking willed it, okay? Something inside of me was subconsciously willing it to happen and then it did and I didn't mean for it to actually go through and-" Klaus was breathing hard now, forgetting to inhale oxygen through his rushed, frantic words. These were thoughts he didn't even realize he had locked up within him, but as Klaus said it, he knew it was true.

It was him. He had wished so hard to not exist that it happened.

The other part was true too, though. He couldn't do it again if he tried. It took hella emotional energy and the exploration of some very dark corners in his mind.

The biggest fact- he didn't want it anymore. He wanted to exist. He wanted to find these people set out to terrorize his family. He wanted to be a part of the Academy again. He wanted to introduce Ben to more life experiences. He wanted to explore sobriety, as much of a drag as it seemed to be…

Klaus just didn't know how to exactly convey this to his staring group of siblings. He wasn't good at that kind of thing, especially when they were all drilling him with those judgmental eyes of theirs. Even Ben looked at a loss for words. He realized that no one was going to be able to respond to that.

"I know it sounds bad. My mind was fucked though. I mean… seriously fucked, guys! There were so many factors in play: They tortured me, put things in my head, killed Sadie, dangled your lives in front of my face... I just… It won't happen again."

"And you're sure of that?" Vanya spoke up, her face etched with concern and disturbance. Klaus sighed and nodded, annoyed and uncomfortable with the whole conversation.

"Yes… I wanted it, okay? Is that what you came to hear? I wanted it, but I don't want it anymore."

More processing silences. He tried to be sympathetic. They were only trying to take care of him. If any of his siblings told him what he just told them, Klaus would feel sick to his stomach. That didn't help the fact that this was hard for him too, and even harder to try to convince a doting group of family that he truly wasn't a ticking time bomb.

"I just- Can we talk about how you even got to that point?" Diego asked, confused and like Vanya, understandably disturbed.

"What do you mean?"

"What do you mean, what does he mean? What's going on with you, Klaus? How could you even have the power to- to feel like that was the thing to do?" Luther stuttered out awkwardly. He knew what his brother was saying, but where did he start? Klaus did the only thing he could think of- he looked to Ben.

Six's face was nearly unreadable though. He looked just as hurt as Luther did underneath those furrowed brows and dark eyes- just as curious as to what on Earth Klaus had in terms of an explanation.
Upon looking at his brother's face though, Ben's own features softened. He gave Klaus a reassuring nod.

"Well, the voices didn't make it easy…"

"The voices?" Allison asked, worriedly. Klaus waved his hand dismissively, rolling his eyes and shifting back and forth uncomfortably. Great. Now he's making himself sound insane on top of it all.

"The dead, you know. Whatever. They never make it easy."

Blank stares. They didn't understand. Of course, they didn't.

"Yeah, we know you don't like that." Diego tried to reason. Klaus spun around in frustration, clenching his fists in the air.

"But you don't! You don't know! None of you ever cared to try to understand how much it just sucks to have my powers. You all can turn yours off! Mine is a constant clusterfuck of all the god damned horror films shoved together, day after day, night after night. Do you have any idea of what it's like for a child to go through that?"

Nothin'.

"Monsters screaming at you constantly, like it's somehow your fault that they've died gruesome-ass deaths? Not to mention, being locked in a mausoleum for hours on end while "Daddy" told you all I was constantly sick. And then I know you'd all hear me screaming at night in my room. But I also know that it's easier to be grateful that it wasn't you in my situation- that you didn't get stuck with the spirits and the demons and the nightmares."

Well, yep. There it all was. And here it came again.

"Why do you think I resorted to drugs in the first place? For funsies? For shits and giggles?"

"Well… Yeah…" Five muttered honestly.

"Okay, fine. That was part of it." Klaus admitted. "But mostly it was the only thing I ever found that let me fucking breathe for a minute without dozens of ghosts crowding my space! There are four in this room right now- I- Yeah, yeah. Shut up!" Klaus got distracted, yelling at some invisible being in the corner. The siblings looked at each other with wide eyes. He doubted anyone was expecting him to let off this much steam.

"You all just loved to make me into the bad guy though! Oh, that Klaus! He's just high again. No surprise there, just your run-of-the-mill family screw up!"

"Hey, hold on-"

"And I know I can be a bit handful when I'm high-"

"Just when you're high?" Five muttered. Allison shushed him.

"-but that wasn't some excuse to discredit anything and everything I did or said! 'Contribute more, Klaus! Now you're lying. Shut up, Klaus.' I don't know where this innate urge to tag everything I say as a lie comes from, but- Like- Ben! Why would I lie about being able to talk to Ben? That's literally my thing. Same with Dad! Was it that hard to believe?"

"Klaus-"
"No! Do you know how much shit I got this family out of just in the past month! No. Of course, you don't. Because the only thing people wanna focus on is that maybe I drop acid sometimes or maybe I say certain things at inappropriate moments."

"Klaus! Just slow down, for a sec. Okay?"

"I need to smoke." Klaus resigned, covering his face in his hands and spinning on his heel. There had to be some store around here that sold cigarettes…

"Woah! No!"

"Cigarettes, Luther." Klaus clarified. He started towards the door but a firm pair of hands clamped onto his shoulders and dragged him back.

"No, no, no… Sit down." Diego said from behind him, dragging Klaus back to the booth. He groaned and plopped down into the cushion bitterly, letting his face fall into his hands with his elbows on the table.

Again, with the staring. He didn't meet anyone's gaze.

"And here we go." Gigi came out of the back, a huge tray of food in hand. No one paid attention. The whole room was still sitting on everything Klaus just rained down on everyone. The only thing that broke the trance was the sound of the first plate being set down in front of Five.

"Oh, uh. Thanks, Miss G."

"Thanks, Gigi."

"Thank you!"

"Thanks, Miss Gigi."

"Looks amazing."

She handed out everyone’s meals and they had to plaster on unconvincing smiles. Klaus saw her suspicious expression- she knew something was up but didn't ask. He silently thanked the heavens. Steam rose up from his waffles, but he suddenly wasn't hungry…

He wasn't about to be given an opportunity to eat anyway. As soon as Gigi turned and left, Luther leaned forward.

"Everything you said- from the ghosts to the not believing you about… many things- totally fair. And I know I'm a huge culprit of all of that so I'm sorry. Truly, Klaus." Number Four sighed a subtle breath of relief. Part of him was worried that he'd get backlash for his recent onslaught. He didn't expect everyone to roll over and beg at his feet, but a little recognition for once felt good… Really good, actually. "I didn't think twice about what you were thinking or feeling admittedly because I just- With the way you waltz around in La-La Land, I couldn't imagine there being a whole other side which, in hindsight, was stupid and ignorant of me. And we can all apologize a thousand times over if that's what you need from us, but for right now, I just- I need you to- you know- Or maybe I need to know…"

Luther fought hard to search for words. Klaus hung onto every beat, not sure how he should be reacting right now.
"I- Well…" Luther rolled his eyes and sighed. "What I'm trying to say is that despite all that, you knew we still loved you though, right? Yeah, you annoy the shit out of us but that never meant we just stopped caring. I- You knew, right?"

Klaus blinked and anxiously tapped the rim of his mug with his fingernail. He was starting to suspect that Luther truthfully meant something a little different:

_if you knew we still cared despite all of that, why were you still so willing to leave us? Was all of this enough for you to think that we wouldn't care if you died?_

Everything was coming back to that and Klaus knew it. His siblings were desperately trying to understand how he could possibly think that ending it all would be in everyone's best interest.

"Yeah, no. I got that. I mean… Sometimes there were moments where it was harder to believe than others-"

"Okay, like what?"

"Like- Like the Hazel and Cha-Cha thing!"

"What about Hazel and Cha-Cha?"

"EXACTLY!"

Klaus was getting fired up again to his surprise. He told himself that he had gotten over the whole kidnapping incident, the first one anyway, but maybe there was an inkling of frustration still there.

"Alright, alright…" Diego put a hand on his rising shoulder to keep Klaus calm and in his seat. He hesitantly let Number Two take over so that he didn't go off into another tangent. "After the shooting at the house, Klaus was taken. None of us, including myself, even noticed for over a day. He was tortured for information on dear Five here," Diego gestured to a slightly guilty looking Five. ", forced to go through withdrawal, took a magic suitcase and-"

"What?" Allison looked at him with wide eyes.

"I know you guys were busy, but c'mon. Just one "Where's Klaus" would've been splendid before I got the shit kicked out of me, thank you very much."

Guilt. So much guilt around the table. Was this really what he was looking for? Not really. It didn't make him feel better. At least it was out there though.

"I mean, I fought in the fucking Vietnam war for God's sake. Almost a year. Granted, it was like an hour here, but still- Shit… so many bodies…" Klaus closed his eyes and shook his head frantically, trying to rid of the images. He had so many dark visuals clouding his mind at any given point that he was surprised he could still function as a human being.

"Okay, hold on. Now you've lost me." Vanya cut in.

"It's not that hard." Five announced with a cocky scowl. He took a bite of his pancakes. "Klaus used the suitcase that serves as a concentrated, contained point of molecular."

"Stopppp-"

"There's no need for that."

"We get it. You're smarter, Five."
A chorus of protests interrupted the mini genius. He shot everyone an annoyed look before shrugged and continuing to dig into his meal.

"Whatever. Suit yourself."

"So, we didn't know… I'm sorry. We should've noticed, I'll admit that." Diego offered calmly. "But on the other hand, why would you not tell us? The only reason I got it out of you was because I basically forced it."

"Would you have believed me?"

"I did!"

" Barely! And I'm still pretty sure that you had your doubts."

Diego had nothing to say to that. Klaus continued.

"What's the point of telling you guys shit if you just dismiss it as another one of my crazy 'stories' or 'lies for attention', hmm?"

"Klaus, something that crazy. I mean… I feel like we would've had to believe you." Vanya tried to reason, reaching her hand across the table to squeeze Klaus's. He pulled away.

"I'd bet a hundred grams of Perry's cocaine that you wouldn't have. The only person who ever unconditionally believed in me was Dave for whatever reason… Perry had the best coke, by the way. In case you were wondering."

"Alright, back up. Who's this Dave?" Five asked cynically through a mouthful of pancake. Klaus sighed.

This. He loved talking about Dave, but it often brought up emotions within him that he didn't quite enjoy being brought up.

"We fought together in Shau Valley. That's the only reason I stayed, really. I followed him. I was stupid. But what can I say about Dave? For starters, he saw something in me… Who knows what or why. I didn't complain though. He made me feel like I was something more than I was…" Klaus realized he had everyone's undivided attention, even Five. Maybe it was the way he could talk about Dave. It was like he sunk right back into 1968. He could see his eyes, his stupidly beautiful grin, his perfect hair… "We were together for ten months until he died in my arms on the battlefield. So, yeah." He said, his throat closing up against his will. He felt heat on his cheek and quickly wiped away an escaped tear. He wondered if he'd ever get over lovely Dave. Maybe he didn't want to.

"Wait..." Klaus looked up to realize that his siblings were all exchanging suspicious glances, their engaged trances broken. Luther's brow was creased with intense curiosity. He leaned in. "Klaus… Are you gay?"

Ha! Is he gay?

"Nice sleuthing, Sherlock. Is it- Am I not being gay enough? I mean, if I made it any more obvious, I'd need to hold a flashing sign above my head that screams 'I like dick'. C'mon, people."

Ben couldn't muffle his chuckle from across the table. He shook his head at Klaus's comment.

Truthfully though, Klaus was pretty surprised at how taken aback all of his siblings looked. He guessed it had been over a decade since they had spent serious time together, but even when he was
younger, he was shocked that it took him so long to realize it.

"I'm sorry about Dave," Allison whispered from beside him. He felt her hand take his right one that he tapped against his knee under the table. He tensed at first, still a little defensive from his vulnerable state of revealing everything at once. Klaus relaxed into her grip though, allowing the feeling of her thumb running over the back of his hand lift some of the heaviness in his chest back up.

"Must've been one hell of a guy to put up with your weird-ass shit." Diego added.

"Yeah... Probably wouldn't have worked out anyway. We were so different."

"Aw. Really?" Vanya asked, sadly.

"Nah," Klaus changed his tone. "We would've been together forever." He corrected, sighing in disappointment over what was lost. Diego smirked and hooked an arm around his neck, jostling him around playfully. Klaus couldn't help breaking into a reluctant smile.

"Alright, so let's... Let's think about this." Diego said, letting go of some of his grip but keeping his arm relaxed around Number Four's shoulders. "We all fucked up. Nothing new. I think I speak for everyone when I say that we feel like shit and are very, truly sorry." There were solemn nods around the table. Klaus fidgeted uncomfortably. He appreciated it, but all this serious attention on him was still making him slightly uneasy. Diego continued. "This family is the most dysfunctional circus act I've ever seen."

"Act? We're the whole damn circus."

"Shush. But Klaus, if you want us to take you seriously, you've gotta take yourself seriously, Bro. How are we supposed to have faith in you when you don't put any in yourself?"

Klaus pursed his lips. Ouch. Ouch, but true.

"Okay, fine. Fair."

"So, in return for us being less shitty, I'll make you a deal."

"What happened to your unconditional, undying love?" Klaus accused playfully. Diego ignored his comments.

"One- you take better care of yourself and maintain some self-respect. The getting sober thing is huge. We're all insanely proud of you, even if we don't always say it. Just... keep with it, okay? We'll help you, but we can only do so much."

"Right. Say no to drugs, kids. Got it."

"Alright. Two- You've gotta be in, man. I mean fully in. There are times where we have to literally drag you to contribute to Academy stuff."

"Well, that's just asking me to change my core beliefs and attitudes and I believe in staying true to yourself- laziness included." Klaus countered as if he were giving an inspirational lecture.

Luther rolled his eyes at the end of the table.

"Okay, but you can't deny that sometimes you've acted as though the Academy was the worst thing that's ever happened to you and that you want nothing to do with it."
"So has everyone!"

"You know what I mean."

"Fine, fine. Okay. Is there a number three in there?"

"Three…” Diego concluded his list of proposals. He paused for dramatic effect. Everyone leaned in ever so slightly. "You have to do my laundry for three months."

Scoffs all around.

"Get off me." Klaus rolled his eyes and slapped Diego's arm away as his brother smiled playfully at him. The table erupted into separate conversations, signifying the end of the longest, hardest conversation Klaus had ever had to endure.

"Hey, we made a deal." Diego continued, finally cutting into his untouched eggs.

"Being taken seriously at the price of self-respect and laundry somehow feels like I've drawn the short straw."

"Take it or leave it, bro."

"Eat your dumb eggs." Klaus dismissed, finally cutting off a piece of his waffle. It suddenly was looking real good and his hunger was returning. He went to jab the glorious piece of heaven, but Diego did first with his own fork, popping it in his mouth. Klaus hissed at him, cutting himself another piece. "You're a pain in the ass."

"Says the pain in the ass."

"Diego. Don't flatter me, so. You know it makes me blush."

It was strange- they all returned to a lively breakfast as if nothing ever happened. It didn't feel like nothing happened. No one was trying to bury or ignore everything that was just thrown into the air for consumption… It was just… Time to move on.

And that felt good.

That was years of shit that weighed on Klaus's chest. He had buried it down so deep in drugs, jokes, and impulsive adrenaline-seeking endeavors that it had just become part of him that he accepted. Now it was gone. It was the weirdest, most freeing feeling he had felt in a long time. Klaus couldn't remember a time where he could honestly say he felt like everything was going to be alright, but…

Everything was going to be alright.

He messed around with his siblings that afternoon at Gigi's. He annoyed them to no end per usual. To his delight, he was still able to maintain that essential part of his persona even after all the heaviness that he just unloaded. It was like everything was back to normal but better. Much better.

Klaus felt a kick to his shin under the table. He grunted and snapped his attention up to find the culprit, his eyes landing on dear Benjamin. Six smiled at him, no one else paying attention to their interaction. Klaus tried hard not to smile back- it was so cheesy, these moments they had where they conversed just through eye-contact. What could he say, though? He was a sucker for cheese.

Ben's eyes told him that he was proud of Number Four- he knew that without a second glance. Klaus looked away before his smile broke too big. He shyly looked down at his plate as he rolled his eyes.
"Shut up, Ben." He muttered, making Six smile… he didn't say a word. He didn't have to.

Chapter End Notes

So, I'm thinking there will be two more chapters of this story! No worries though- I have a plethora of other Klaus stories planned! Stay tuned. Thank you as always!
Klaus adjusts to sobriety but in a very Klaus-like way. Dave makes an appearance.

Klaus slammed into the wall hard. Pain flared up in his shoulder, but he had to keep moving. His life depended on it.

"Ouchie," He whimpered, shoving himself back into a sprint. He dodged around chairs, his arms flailing and shoving things out of his path. The footsteps behind him rapidly grew closer. He even felt the fingertip of his assailant brush the back of his shirt.

"KLAUS!"

"Don't hurt me!"

Diego crashed over a chair, the legs snapping off and ricocheting in all directions.

"Guys, quit it!" Luther yelled from somewhere else in the house. The boys ignored him.

"Don't be such a dick!"

"Leave me and Blankie-Poo alone!"

Klaus gripped the cloth in his hand tightly, giggling through panicked but amused breaths. He shot out of the kitchen with Diego close on his heels.

To keep matters short, Klaus wandered into Diego's room that morning, looking for a ride to pick up some more cigarettes. Somehow the conversation turned to Klaus recalling a certain blanket Diego was attached to as a kid... Blankie-Poo. Little-Diego had actually named it Blankie-Poo. And he had held onto it at least through his teen years.

"You still have it?"

"Pfft. My 'blankie'? Klaus. I'm an adult."

"Mm, yeah. Yeah. No, you're right." Klaus played along but while searching his brother's room as his back was turned.

"I mean, I already clung to that thing for way to long as it is. I chucked that ratty-ass rag-"

"Ah-hah!" Klaus cheered, pulling out EXACTLY what he knew he'd find from the deepest corner of Diego's closet. "Blankie-Poo, I missed you, darling!"

"Hey!"

And the rest was history.
This is what happened when Klaus didn't have drugs- he got bored. It had been three days since the diner talk and things had been infinitely better in multiple respects, but the sobriety was a constant uphill battle. Not just for Klaus either. His boredom and twitchiness meant that all of his extra energy and attention was projected onto his surroundings and his surroundings just happened to be his family.

Klaus was driving them insane.

Still though. They preferred this over the drugs so it was tolerated to a certain degree.

"He'll calm down once he gets used to the absence of his constant stimulants." Five had said one day when they all sat down for dinner as Klaus slid around the parlor in his socks like he was ice skating.

Presently though, Numbers Two and Four tore through the living room next, their paths heading straight for the couch that Ben sprawled out on, reading per usual. Klaus didn't have time to dodge around the obstacle, so instead he gripped the frame and propelled himself over the furniture and over his brother. Ben lowered his book from Klaus's destructive passage, unamused. He raised it again to resume reading, but what he didn't plan for was Diego to mimic Number Four, kicking the novel out of Ben's grip as he shot over the couch and resumed his mad scramble after the delinquent.

"C'mon…" Ben grumbled, annoyed but not surprised by this behavior.

Klaus nearly tripped on his way towards the foyer but stumbled back into his frenzied strides. He almost smacked right into Five, but the smaller brother spatial-jumped across the room just in time to avoid the incoming freight train that was Number Four.

"Watch it!"

Klaus scurried up the staircase, even bending down to use his hands for extra drive. He can across the big shoe of what could only be Luther, diving behind his brother and clambering onto his back like a spider monkey.

"Luther!" Klaus wailed, begging for his protection.

"Klaus- Get- You two! Quit it!"

Luther turned around, trying to pull Klaus off his back while holding his right arm out to keep Diego from ripping Number Four limb from limb.

"I swear to God…" Diego muttered through clenched teeth.

"Wait- Is that Blankie-Poo?" Luther's voice changed inflection upon realizing the cloth that Klaus had bunched up against his giant shoulder. "I thought Dad made you got rid of it when you were-"

"Shut up!" Diego shouted, breaking past the tree-trunk of an arm and yanking Klaus's flailing ankle in one swift movement. Klaus shot down and hit the top step- luckily not as hard as he would have if Luther wouldn't have grabbed hold of his bicep and tried to save him from some of the fall.

"Diego-" Number One tried to berate, but Klaus twisted out of both of his brothers' grasps and booked it down the upstairs hallway, running straight into Allison who had come out to see what the commotion was about. Klaus's chest barreled into hers, nearly decking her to the ground. He gripped her arms to steady her.

"Sorry!" He quickly chirped, pecking a kiss on her on the forehead before taking off again, not allowing his sister to even react.
Blankie-Poo in hand, Klaus went to make a turn but misjudged the distance. He skidded into the wall opposite of the ornate balconies. His shoulder screamed in pain again as his limbs crumpled against the hard surface. Instinctively, Klaus shoved himself off the wall as hard as he could to get a running start once more…

He pushed off a little too hard.

Klaus realized it was going to happen, but it was too late to stop it- his body momentum was out of his control. His shove off the wall had him tripping over his own feet and straight into the balcony that snapped under the weight of his falling body.

And suddenly, everything came tumbling down to the first floor… especially a shrieking Klaus. Fortunately for him, it wasn't head first. Unfortunately for him, his hand was crushed under all of his weight. Klaus groaned against the hard, living room floor, rolling over onto his side and cradling his afflicted arm to his chest.

"Shit!"

"Klaus!"

"Damnit..."

"Ooooooohh..."

A chorus of footsteps flooded in around him from all sides, everyone coming to see the damage regarding the balcony and their brother. Number Four hissed in a pained breath, refusing to look up at anyone. The only thing he could think of was the sharpness in his hand.

"Klaus, you okay?" Ben prompted, putting an unsure hand on his brother's shoulder.

"See what happens?" A know-it-all voice muttered from somewhere in the room.

"Owwwwwww..." He groaned, not too amused by Five's cocky comment.

"Oh, Klaus. You've really done it, haven't you?" Mom's sweet voice appeared beside him. "Let me see..."

After this whole debacle with the famed "Blankie-Poo", the siblings had reached their peaking point.

"Jesus. I hate to be that person, but I'm going to be that person. Can we just give him back his drugs already?" Diego had said, knowing full well that it wasn't an option but conveying the gravity of all of their irritation.

It wasn't their proudest moment, but everyone did agree to give him sleeping pills that night in order to get one full sleep without hearing Klaus practice archery on the hallway paintings or bringing in stray cats to play with. Not to mention, his hand was broken from his fall and he wouldn't stop moaning and whining from the pain. They couldn't give him anything stronger than ibuprofen though- not a good idea.

"You need, like... A hobby or something." Ben said, engaged in watching Klaus trying to change his shirt with one hand before bed. To say the least, he was struggling.

"I tried but everything gets boring so quick. Boring, Ben. Life can be sooooo boring."
"Boring is better than subduing dark miseries underneath every numbing agent on the planet."

Klaus stopped mid-action, his arms caught above his head in attempt to wiggle himself through the fabric of his band tee. He stared at Ben through the neck hole that he couldn't quite seem to make it to.

"And I thought breaking my hand hurt. Ouch, Ben."

"Am I wrong?" Six asked, knowing that he wasn't. He stood as he spoke, walking over to Klaus, not able to take it anymore. He pinched the hem of the shirt tangled around his brother and tugged it down so that the shirt slid on. Klaus took a relieved breath. "And how about helping with the hunt for the other numbers?"

"What else can I do? We're already training every day. We're following every single, teeny-tiny lead. Five's been tirelessly digging up info on Uncle Mason and coming up with nothing..."

Ben sighed. Klaus did have a point there.

"Amazing that even Pogo didn't know about it."

"I know. Pogo seems to know everything… Hear everything, see everything-"

"That is quite an overstatement, Master Klaus." A voice came from somewhere down the hall. Ben and Klaus looked at each other in surprise. Klaus broke the moment by thrusting out his hands towards the open door as if to say, 'See what I mean?'.

Ben chuckled, reaching down under his chair where he set the bottle of sleeping pills. He popped the cap and handed Klaus two.

"Thanks, Nurse Ben." He mocked, tossing the pills in his mouth and swallowing with ease. "You know, it's kind of silly to have to administer these each night. Feel free to-"

"I'm not leaving them with you."

"But, Ben. Two barely does anything. It's so loud at night." Klaus complained, bitterly taking a swig from his glass of water.

"That's what the back of the bottle says, so that's what we're goin' with. You don't want me to leave them here. Trust me."

"Oh, I don't?" Klaus pressed, challenging him on why he would ever think he knew what Klaus truly wanted.

"No. Because the second you abuse any type of drug in any sort of way, I'm throwing your ass in rehab. Understand?"

"Ooh..." Klaus was taken aback, putting a hand over his heart. "Ben, I love it when you take charge like that." He swooned, making Six roll his eyes.

"Shut up. Get sleep. I'm going to find something for you to do tomorrow." Ben turned off Klaus's light and left to his brother's final comment for the night.

"Ugh."

~X~
Luther lumbered down the upstairs hallway. The house was unusually quiet, but it was understandable after what had just happened.

All signs pointed towards the "Venus Six" being back to their old site- the warehouse. The Academy immediately suited up, afraid they'd miss their chance if they didn't act now. What they were planning on doing when they got there, they didn't quite know. Half of the team wanted to reason with the rest of the Numbers, thinking that somehow, they'd be able to relate to them enough to convince them to break away from Mason and join them instead.

The other half of the team wanted to go in, guns blazing.

Either way, they knew they had to somehow expose Mason for what he was doing. It was basically slavery. How did they expose people who had been hiding for their whole lives though?

"Provoke 'em." Diego had offered. "That girl, the illusionist. We've gotta get her guard down or the only thing we're gonna be able to search is a seemingly empty, dump of a warehouse."

So, they tried that. Needless to say, it didn't go quite as planned. Maybe the Academy as a whole was a little cocky after years of fighting people not nearly matched for their abilities. Maybe their difference in opinion on how to handle the situation created an overall breakage of harmony within the group.

Whatever the reason, the moment they arrived, shit hit the fan. The illusions were in a constant state of change around them, making it nearly impossible to operate effectively in their true environment. Everyone was hearing things that only they could hear, distracted by the one who could throw voices around.

From there it was easy for the pain-freak and electricity monster to come in and deliver a world of hurt. Luther barely managed to round everyone up so that they could fall back safely. No one got out without some sort of injury or impairment.

"That's what we get for rushing into things. I told you-"

"Shut up, Five." Everyone grumbled as they walked back through the door of the Academy.

Luther knew they had to approach this smartly- unlike anything they had ever prepared for before.

But right now, everyone needed some time apart. They were united now as a family more than ever before, sure, but as a crime-fighting team? Well… It had been a while.

Passing by each one of his siblings' doors, Luther glanced in to check up on whoever was visible.

Allison- reading a magazine. She looked up and gave him a small, sad smile. He returned it.

Klaus… Wait… What?

Luther expected to find Klaus doing something strange, especially since he had been so jittery as of late in his newly sober habits. He was not expecting Klaus not to be alone though- and it wasn't with Ben, either.

There was some guy lying on top of Klaus's bed cover, his back against the wall and his legs bent at the knee, spread just enough for Klaus to lie between them, his back against this random dude's chest. Number Four's eyes were closed and his head slumped to one side. The guy holding him in his arms had one hand messng gently with the curls over Klaus's forehead. They looked… comfy.
Luther didn't mean to hover, but he did just long enough for the man to look up and notice him. Luther wasn't sure what to say.

"Uh…"

The guy looked just as shocked as he was. He let an arm fall over Klaus's chest. He tried shaking him awake.

"I- I think your brother sees me."

Well… Luther thought to himself. Duh…

~X~

"I- I think your brother sees me."

"No…” Klaus denied. That couldn't be possible. Dave was a ghost. Other people couldn't see his ghosts unless it was a situation like the Ben-thing in the theater before the Apocalypse.

"Babe. Seriously, he's staring at me all weird. Um. Hi." Dave called out. Klaus's eyes tiredly slid open to watch Dave's hand give a small wave to Luther who was in fact in the doorway, staring in with a confused gaze.

"Sorry- I- I didn't realize you had company over." Luther's voice rumbled awkwardly. "I'll- I'll just-" He started to stumble into a turn to leave, but Klaus sat up.

"Wait! Luther- Can you see him?"

"Yeah, of course, I can- Why- Wait… Is he… Is he a-"

"Sexy ghost? Yeah." Klaus hurried along, his interest suddenly very sparked. "Does he look like a normal person?"

"Yeah…"

Klaus laughed in disbelief. He snapped his gaze back at Dave who looked just as perplexed as Luther.

"How'd I do that?"

Dave simply shrugged. Klaus laughed again and clasped his hands together, giddily.

"Wow. I'm awesome."

At this point, faces were starting to curiously peek in from around the doorframe. Allison was first, emerging from the side and trying to see Dave for herself. Then Diego poked his head around Luther, and Five crouched down to see behind him.

"Well… I- Nice to meet you." Luther hesitantly greeted. Dave gave another small wave, going to get up, but Klaus pushed him back down.

"Okay, well show's over, sibbies. Dave's gonna visit for a little bit so you can all go do whatever it is you do in your-"

"Wait! We have questi-"
"Nope." Klaus cut off Diego, standing and going to close the door. "Another time. And before you ask, no, I don't know if ghost sex is a thing but you better believe I'm gonna find out-"

"Klaus!" Dave berated from behind him. Klaus ignored his lovely Moon Pie and waved goodbye to his siblings before shutting the door on their curiously astounded faces.

As quickly as he could, Klaus returned to his spot, wrapped in Dave and comfortably falling asleep for the first time since that night they had the sleepover in the living room. He nestled himself down so that his back was against Dave's chest again. His… boyfriend? No, he wouldn't say that as much as he wanted to. They both agreed that the dead thing complicated things a little too much.

Anyway… His… Whatever-Dave-was resumed playing with his hair, occasionally kissing the top of his head.

"Why can't we always do this? Forever?" Klaus asked quietly after a while, truly in paradise without even having to leave his room.

"That's no way to live, Klaus." He answered sadly. Dave bent down to press his lips to Klaus's forehead, just resting them against him. Klaus couldn't help but smile at the warm contact. He was getting good at this ghost-touching thing.

"Great way to die."

"You know I'd love to." Dave agreed.

"But…" Klaus sighed, knowing that it was the next word coming.

"But…" Dave muttered against his skin. "I'd never hold you back like that."

"What if I want to be held back?"

"You don't always get what you want."

"Let me guess… But I try sometime, then I just might find I get what I need?" He quoted bitterly.

Klaus felt Dave smile. He didn't answer. Klaus moaned quietly and sadly. He knew Dave was making the mature, and overall best decision deep down, but way deep down. Most of Klaus just desperately wanted him to stay forever.

"I never seem to get what I want." Klaus complained.

"Life's not fair, kid." Dave mused, sliding a hand down Klaus's arm until it reached the brace on his hand. He stopped short, seeming to just remember his injury. "And you don't really make it easy on yourself. How'd this happen again?"

"I… Was beating up a group of thugs that were hassling my sister."

Dave laughed. Klaus purposefully told him a different lie each time he asked. Obviously, Dave knew that it was probably due to some stupid happening, but Klaus enjoyed being able to make him chuckle from his antics.

"I love you, dumbass."

The words sent a tingling heat through Klaus's chest. Why was he so cruelly robbed of this? Why was this too much to ask for? Why couldn't he have this one wonderful thing- this thing that was purely his in his life?
Klaus turned his head up, his eyes locking with his glorious Gumdrop's.

"I love you." He whispered back. Dave's irises literally sparkled in response. They captured that moment, freezing in time where they were and wishing it would turn into an eternity… just like that- just like they were now.

"And I'm proud of you." Dave continued, running his fingertips ever-so-lightly down Four's neck.

Klaus shrugged and smiled, cockily.

"I know." He plainly chirped. Dave smiled wider and bent down lower- low enough to press his lips against Klaus's. The familiar contact made Klaus's heart clench up- it was both a sad and happy tightness- a melancholy pain.

At the same time, it helped him realize a little more of Dave's point of view. If this was how he was going to feel every time they kissed- like there was a pit in his stomach over all that he could've had… maybe that wasn't the best way to carry on.

But maybe Klaus didn't care.

It wasn't solely his decision though.

Luckily, Klaus was distracted from these nagging thoughts when the kiss grew past just a sweet little peck. He could taste Dave too- the amount of detail was truly amazing compared to his whole life of not being able to even touch the dead.

Dave put tentative fingers on his jaw, bringing Klaus in closer. Four took that moment to turn around off of Dave's chest, facing him and putting a hand on the wall behind his beautiful ghostie. Dave's hands traveled under Klaus's shirt and up his back. Klaus couldn't help but grin into his lips, humming happily as he was pulled down against Dave.

Oh yeah. If ghost sex wasn't a thing before, he was sure as hell going to make it a thing.

~X~

"Klaus…" A voice beckoned him from his slumber.

Who on Earth had the audacity… He and Dave had been up all night talking, cuddling, and… other stuff. Anyway, he didn't get any sleep which was totally fine with, but when noon hit, Klaus couldn't function without a nap. He had collapsed on the couch, asleep for who knows how long. And now, this insolent person…

"Klaus!"

"Whaaaaaat?" Klaus whined, turning over on the couch and burying his head in the pillow… Except there wasn't a pillow. There wasn't anything. The only thing his limbs met with was air, but how was that possible? Was he dreaming?

Klaus's eyes fluttered open to something he wasn't quite expecting- The living room… Twenty feet below him. He was floating. Klaus was floating.

And screaming. Klaus was screaming.

Within a swift half-second, whatever invisible force that was holding him up dissipated. Luckily, Klaus instinctively shot up his hand to grab the support beam attached to the ceiling… Not so
luckily, it was his bad hand. Klaus yelped and shot up his other hand to help support his weight. *Fuck,* that hurt.

He looked down at the faces staring up at him from below. Everyone looked just as shocked as he felt.

"How did you get up there?" Allison asked from the ground. Klaus gave a short, exasperated laugh.

"You tell me!"

"Stay there!" Luther called. Klaus rolled his eyes.

"Was plannin' on it!"

Number One moved hastily around the couch and stopped directly under where Klaus dangled. The pain in his broken hand was enough to make him feel sick to his stomach, but he refused to let go and risk breaking the other one too.

"Alright. Let go, Klaus."

"No! You let go!"

"What- That doesn't even… It'll be fine. I got you." Luther argued, waving him down. Klaus kicked his feet as if that would do anything, but didn't move his hands an inch. He *just* tumbled off the balcony yesterday. He wasn't about to do that again. Maybe if he inched his way towards the same balcony…

But as soon as Klaus tried to move his hand along the beam, pain shot through him like a bullet. He whimpered.

"Klaus, you have nowhere else to go." Ben reasoned. Stupid Ben. Always right.

"Ehh… Okay…” Klaus admitted, hesitantly. He looked down at Luther holding his arms out at the ready. Klaus decided to at least draw this out as long as he could before having to let go. "But I want you all to know that-"

With a yelp, Klaus's good hand slipped and with the bad hand being the only thing left holding him up, the rest was history. Faster than he could process, he dropped straight down and soon was met with Luther's giant arms, catching him in the niche of time. Klaus sucked in a surprised breath, taking a second to realize what happened before turning to Luther's face.

"*My hero!*" He declared dramatically, putting his arms around Luther's neck and leaning in as if he was going to kiss him.

Luther dropped Klaus instinctively.

"Ugh… Luther…” Klaus complained from the floor, curling on his side in pain.

"Oh. Shoot. Sorry." Luther mumbled, helping him to his feet.

*Ah… Sweet ground.*

"What the *hell* was that?" Diego demanded, looking up at the ceiling for possible answers to explain the phenomenon. Klaus took the apple out of Diego's hand and bit into it, in need of sustenance.

"I dunno." Klaus said plainly as he chewed, giving an irritated-Diego back his fruit. Yeah, it was
weird. Weirder things happened though. He needed some Cheez-its.

"Wait! Klaus!" Allison called after him as he pushed past the crew towards the kitchen. He let his head fall back in annoyance, turning on his heel to face that flabbergasted family of his.

"Yes?"

"Dude, was that… Was that you?" Ben asked, stepping forward with a small smile creeping up on his face. Dare Klaus say, his brother almost looked impressed.

"What, like my powers?" Klaus thought about it. They were fully coming in now after his sobriety took effect. This was the longest he's been sober for over a decade. He guessed it made sense. Klaus shrugged. "Yeah… I mean. Maybe. It seems kinda random though. I can talk to ghosts and… float?"

"Well… Do it again!" Five urged, like it was that easy.

"I can't! I have no idea how."

"Try." Luther joined in. All faces watched him expectantly. Klaus sighed and closed his eyes.

"Fine. If it'll make everyone happy."

He focused on… Well, he didn't really know what he had to focus on. He tried to do everything he's heard of in movies- Clear his mind, think about the action, channel "inner energy"… Almost a minute went by before…

"See?" Klaus said, opening his eyes and kind of hoping that there still would be a floor underneath his feet- there was. "Nothing."

Everyone looked stumped. He was too. He was just more hungry than anything though. Klaus turned again.

"Anyone want a snack?"

~X~

"…I'm a- I'm a trained assassin, buster." Five muttered to the figure in his room, holding his M40 sniper rifle tiredly before him. Only there was no figure, and there was no rifle. When Five blinked his eyes and forced himself awake, he realized they were only figments of his dreams.

Groaning, Five pushed himself out of his bed until his stocking feet hit the floor. He needed water.

Moving stiffly as if he was still limited by his 58-year-old body, the boy padded towards the stairs, feeling for the railing.

That's when he heard it- footsteps downstairs. It was incredibly soft and subtle, but that's what worried Five. It was like they were trying to be quiet. He wasn't one to take such clues lightly. Five probably still had all kinds of enemies out there, and this wouldn't be the first time that people bust into his house looking for him.

Five backtracked as quickly and quietly as he could, dipping into Diego's room and going for the exact spot where he knew an aluminum bat to be. Having two constantly paranoid people in the house came with its perks.

The footsteps made their way to the foyer, towards the door. Five knew his best chances were to just… go for it.
"Ahhhh!" Five screamed animalistically, spatial-jumping into the air right above the dark silhouette and landing on their back. It all happened so fast that it took the second to get the bat pulled against the potential-intruder's throat before Five gained enough insight from the feel of the person's body to know who it was.

"Little- Monster- What the fuck!" Klaus choked, stumbling to one knee and gasping for air once Five let him go. The pajama-clad assassin landed to his feet rather gracefully, letting the bat fall to his side.

"Where are you going?" He demanded with crossed arms, watching Klaus rub his neck and tentatively stand. Five took a step forward and Klaus flinched.

"None of your beeswax."

"It is if you're going to get a fix."

"Christ." Klaus muttered, rolling his eyes and throwing his head back.

"What do you expect?"

"Some faith, maybe."

"You're sneaking out of the house in the middle of the night!"

"Well, would it make you feel better if I said I'm not going to get drugs?"

Silence.

"No."

"Trust me!"

"No!"

The two brothers stared at each other for a moment. Five could see, even in the dark, that Klaus's eyes were weighing his options. He wouldn't dare-

But he would. Klaus dove for the front door, but Five was ready for that. He dove after him, latching onto Klaus's ankle and pulling the much-taller man down.

"Shit!" Klaus whisper-yelled when he was forced to use his broken hand to break his fall. Five didn't mind. He would not let his brother out of this house if it was the last thing he'd-

"Adiós." Klaus said in a suddenly devious little smirk. Five frowned and was about to deliver a snarky retort about how he wasn't going anywhere when a movement was caught out of the corner of his eye. Something came flying towards his head and Five was forced to let go of Klaus's ankle to shield his face.

As it turned out, it was only a pillow from the couch, but he didn't know that. The important and unfortunate thing was that in a quick bolt, Klaus was gone and out the door. Five scrambled to his feet and spatial-jumped outside, but he was nowhere to be seen.

DAMNIT.

"Five?" A voice came from the doorway. Oh, now Luther decided to come and help. Five didn't
answer. He still stared into the darkness, hoping to find some kind of movement so that he could jump there and catch Klaus before it was too late. "What's going on?"

"Get your shoes on." Five instructed. He finally turned back to the house to see that they had woken all of his siblings up… Almost all of them. They stared out into the night with groggy but worried eyes. "All of you. We have to go look for Klaus."

A chorus of grumbles and disappointed moans. Five sighed in chagrín for both Klaus and himself for letting his brother get away.

Then fix it, idiot. Five told himself as he bounded back into the house to grab shoes. No time for clothes. Pajamas would have to do.

"Where's Ben?" He asked as they all headed out, climbing into two cars.

"Sleeping."

"Wouldn't he be the most help in this particular situation?" Five asked cynically, trying to keep his voice from being too biting. He climbed into the driver's seat as Diego climbed into the passenger side.

"He's had to deal with Klaus for however many years. We got this. You and I should know all the places for the last time we went looking." Diego waved off.

Fine. Whatever. Five didn't have time to argue. He started the engine and waited for Vanya to climb in the back. Luther and Allison took their own vehicle and the search around the city commenced.

Chapter End Notes

Well, I finally broke my every-other-day streak. I promise I have a very good reason that I won't get into but sorry it took a little while!

Also- did you guys see the posts about how Klaus knocked down the wall between him and Vanya's room to create one big room? I can't believe I didn't notice it before, but his room DOES get twice as big and has the exposed brick that Vanya's room had. What an extravagant dude. And what great details from the show's production designers.
Hello

Chapter Summary

The siblings find Klaus. Later, Number Four is hit with a heartbreaking surprise.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Yo," Diego called out the car window at the vehicle that they pulled next to. The driver's window rolled down, revealing a concerned Luther… but when was Luther ever not concerned?

"Any luck?"

Diego slapped the dashboard, discouraged. He shook his head.

"Nada."

"Yeah, us either."

"Relapses happen." Vanya finally offered quietly, but disappointed was still clear in her voice.

"Yeah, but this is, what- The seventh time?" Allison asked from the curb where Luther had their Dad's old car parked.

More silence.

Five started the car again. All eyes turned.

"Where are we going?" Diego asked, hoping the irritatingly-genius psycho had another sudden, bright idea.

"It's a stretch. Follow me." He called out to Luther. Number One sighed in resignation, closing his window and turning his own car on once again. They headed out, only Five knowing their destination. It wasn't until they started crossing over towards the Southside edge of the city when Vanya spoke up.

"Wh- Why-"

But she didn't get to finish. In the darkness of the street absent of light posts, a strange occurrence revealed itself in the distance. They drove closer to the source until Five deemed it close enough, parking and allowing everyone to pop open their doors and join in a huddle on the sidewalk. The air was slightly biting, but no one seemed to notice with the distraction ahead of them.

"What. The. Hell." Diego breathed. The siblings were dumbfounded.
Klaus trotted through the giant gates, shaking out his ankle that still had phantom feelings of Five's bony hand wrapped around it. He knew that Diego or Five would've caught him at some point- he swore, they never fully fell asleep.

"I thought you were just going back for your jacket."

"I was!" Klaus said, pulling his black, feather-rimmed sweater around his body tightly.

"What took you so long?"

"Frickin' Five."

Ben "ahh'd" in acknowledgment. He threw Klaus a KitKat bar from the gas station, making Four smile.

"Thank youuuuu."

"Mhm," Ben said, chewing his own Snickers bar. Six looked around at the atmosphere surrounding them.

The graveyard was nearly pitch black save for the cloud-shrouded moonlight that created soft outlines of gravestones and statues. As Klaus looked around more, enjoying his KitKat, his eyes adjusted. Mist hung heavily over the landscape- so creepily typical.

"Did you tell him?" Ben asked, crumpling up his wrapper and shoving it in his pocket.

"What?"

"Five. Did you tell him that we've been coming here?"

"Oh. No. He thought I was going to meet my dealer."

Ben narrowed his eyes.

"And he just let you go?"

Klaus shook his head.

"No, I escaped. I hit him in the head with a floaty-pillow." Klaus broke out in giggles.

"Klaus! He's probably rallying up the house."

"Nah."

"Why wouldn't you just tell him?"

"Because if he doesn't trust me then he doesn't deserve to know." Klaus mumbled, bitterly. Ben shook his head and smiled slightly.

"You're a stubborn bitch."

Klaus scrunched and threw his wrapper at Ben's head. Six flinched but caught it, stuffing it in his pocket.

"Alright, C'mon. Let's start. I'm already tired."

"You don't have to be here."
"You asked me to be! I want to, I want to. Let's just get a move on."

It was true- Klaus did ask Ben to aid him in his nightly trips to the cemetery in the Southside of town. It was after that day he levitated and nearly killed himself.

"Benny?" Klaus called out, gently pushing his brother's door open. Ben was lying on his bed, looking through photos.

"Come in, I guess." Ben said, but in his voice, Klaus could tell he didn't mind at all. Klaus leaned over his brother's shoulder, definitely invading his personal space bubble. Ben was used to it.

"Aw..." Klaus muttered, watching Ben sift through polaroids of when they were younger. Everyone at Griddy's Donuts, having a movie night (Jaws, if he remembered the moment correctly), swimming at the lake beach... These were all small moments taken from an entire childhood of training, learning, and fighting though. Still, they made Klaus smile.

"Yeah. Found them under my bed. Anyway, what's up?" Ben asked, gathering the photos and placing them back in an old tattered shoe box.

"Iiiiinnn wanna go somewhere tonight. Can you come with me?"

Ben sighed.

"Klaus. Seriously. We're not hitting the clubs while you're still fragile around."

"No! No... And I'm not 'fragile'."

Klaus reluctantly explained how he wanted to actually start tackling his powers rather than them tackling him. If the levitation earlier wasn't enough, the fact that he was able to mesh the line between life and death enough to kill himself probably should've been enough for him to want to take the incentive and learn how to control these things. Maybe there was other stuff that he didn't even know he could do.

He wanted Ben to come along because, well, him and Ben doing everything together was kind of just an assumption, but also, he was admittedly afraid of whatever was brewing inside of him. He wasn't sure if he had the capability to seriously hurt himself, or worse, someone else.

Plus, he knew he'd be strongest in the cemetery and he didn't quite like that place ever since his "sessions" with Dad.

Ben readily agreed to come with him.

That's where they were left now- preparing to put Klaus to the test and poke at the previous limits they had reached in the past two nights. Klaus rolled his shoulder back and tilted his head back and forth. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

"Focus." Ben's voice came from where he sat on the steps leading up to the "famed" mausoleum.

"No shit."

"Klaus." He reprimanded. Four whined.

"Fiiiiine!"

His fingernails dug into the skin of his palm. He had found that it helped to be able to focus on one single sensation and the stinging in his hand often worked. For now, his right hand was immune to
his tactic due to the hand brace he still had to wear.

Klaus tried to banish everything from his mind, except the voices of the ghosts that all melded together in a giant buzz throughout the cemetery. It was strange reversing roles- accepting only the voices of the dead rather than doing everything he could in his power to avoid them.

Something surged within him- he couldn't quite describe it, but it was at least similar to being so intensely excited about something that pressure rises in your chest towards your throat and you feel inclined to scream or shriek or squeal. The only thing is that he wouldn't describe it as a happy feeling per se, although it wasn't bad either. It was just some kind of invisible strength, clawing to get out.

And it did.

"Nice!" Ben cheered, causing Klaus to open his eyes and survey the graveyard. There were shimmering blue bodies of the dead that walked around, all of them emitting a strong energy that even his brother claimed to be able to feel. It was like a hum or a buzz that thickened the atmosphere and touched everything around it. It was the dark strength of the dead reaching out to the living world through Klaus, and it allowed him to do things- all sorts of things they were starting to realize.

He could reveal ghosts and communicate. That one was already obvious.

He could use that invisible energy to lift things and guide them where he pleased with his mind. Not quite as violently and dramatically as Vanya, but something similar, he presumed.

Also unlike Vanya, he couldn't seem to levitate other people. However, he could levitate himself if he wanted to. Ever since having a couple falls in the past couple days though, Klaus refused to explore that too much despite Ben begging him simply for the spectacle.

And now, a fairly new development, Klaus could harness telepathy. It wasn't like he could have casual conversations with people in his head, but he could communicate wills, emotions, and intentions without saying a single word. It started with ghosts, especially the more willing ones. He could almost control them… maybe not control but guide them to do things- simple things, for now, like pick up a rock, open a door, cross the yard.

Then Klaus tried with Ben. It was hard and taxing as hell, but it was just barely effective.

"You… want tacos?" Ben cocked his head curiously the first time Klaus had attempted to channel some type of communication through his brother.

"Yeah! Did you hear me, like… say it?"

"No, I- I don't know. One second I didn't know it, and the next, I did. It's just a… a sense."

"Trippy."

"Yeah."

Again- all of this was extremely exhausting. Klaus even had to lean on Ben the whole walk home the second night. He didn't mind though. This was too cool. A little scary, but overall awesome. Plus, it kept him busy and helped him sleep like a baby through the nights and that was something he never could confidently count on consistently.

"Alright," Ben brought Klaus's thoughts back to the present moment. "Try to use it. The energy thing."
"Yes, sir," Klaus smirked, amused by Ben's bossiness. What was new though?

Klaus closed his eyes and focused on feeling his surroundings. It was like his consciousness could reach out through the hoards of ghosts, using their energy to connect with the physical structures and objects of the world around him. He envisioned wrapping the force around tangible items, lifting them up and maneuvering them to his will.

I wonder if Dave's coming back tonight. He came back last night again. He's gotta come back tonight, right?

"Klaus! Stop getting distracted."

"I'm not!" Klaus denied, snapping his attention back to focus.

"I can feel you thinking about Dave, Man."

Klaus's eyes flew open.

"That's so weir- Hey!" He interrupted himself, looking around at the hovering sticks and leaves around his ankles. As soon as he noticed though, he felt the energy slip from his grasp and the foliage fell. "Damn." He muttered, kicking the stick off his shoe.

"You have the attention span of a goldfish."

Klaus huffed and frowned at Ben, concentrating really hard with all the frustrated currents running through him. Ben scoffed.

"Did it work?" Klaus asked, hoping his message got across to Ben through his telepathy.

"That's not very nice." Ben said, telling Klaus that he was in fact successful. Four clapped his hands together happily.

"I want to try again!"

"Okay, just-"

"Shush, sh. Focusing, here." Klaus waved Ben away, knowing he was just going to Mother him on being careful and not overdoing it. He could sense Ben raising his eyebrows as if to say 'Fine. You're funeral', but he still ignored him. Klaus knew Six was afraid of the whole… death-by-powers debacle from a week ago, but that was completely different. Number Four would know right away if he was experiencing that kind of negative energy again. He couldn't forget that feeling.

Anyway, Klaus took a few moments to concentrate all over again. The world slipped away and time wasn't a factor anymore. His head felt like it was floating. It was like the unconsciousness of a high, but he was more aware than he ever was... sober, even.

Hands trembling, muscles tensed, eyes squeezed shut, hair blowing gently across his forehead… He felt every single being, every spirit, every bit of life and death around him… The animated, the inanimate…

"Klaus," Ben's voice beckoned him from his trance. Klaus carefully slid his eyes open to reveal quite the phenomenon. There was so much light. So much glow. The whole world seemed to be illuminated in the vibrant blue color, even if it was truly just the graveyard. There were so many figures all around them, surrounded by objects that hovered over the ground, vibrating with such fervor that Klaus could feel it in his core.
He couldn't stop though. He didn't want to. The world around him was completely bent to his will—finally, the splitting of the living and nonliving that he had to experience every day, coming to fruition. The more he searched for power, the more he found in the graveyard. There was so much death that it just kept coming seamlessly.

Woah.

He was breathing hard, but not realizing it. His hands were glowing. Wind was whipping his clothes and hair around-

"Klaus!" Ben yelled again, just as giant cracks and booms broke through the air. Klaus saw the ground move before him, all throughout the cemetery. It was breaking apart in one swift quake, like everyone under the earth was fighting to get out... or maybe it was Klaus fighting to get in.

That's when he stopped though. It scared him—the monumental destruction he had unexpectedly caused. He didn't want to be a Vanya.

Not to mention, any bit of "gusto" he had gone in with was now entirely dissipated. Klaus stood wavering on his feet just barely, completely drained. He couldn't even find it within himself to collapse. He was suspended there, trapped in the weight of what he just managed to do.

Ben looked from the broken graveyard to his half-conscious brother. Six looked like he was ready to run forward and grab Klaus until-

"What. The. Hell." Ben and Klaus looked to the right over the low, crumbling brick wall of the yard. Everyone stood watching them: Diego, Five, Vanya, Luther, Allison... Their eyes were all as wide as the moon.

Oh great. They're gonna lock me up in a little room in the basement. This was Klaus's last thought before gravity took effect and the ground rushed up at him. His stomach flipped and his head spun around like a deadly carousel.

"Oh. Shit." Ben muttered, running to his side and grabbing Klaus's biceps to hold him on his knees at least rather than hitting the ground on his side. Klaus's head rolled to the side, hung over his chest. He was just so sleepy.

"Oooh no." He mumbled softly, falling into Ben, slumping against his shoulder and chest. Footsteps congregated at the entrance of the graveyard, filing in timidly. They were scared of him. They were scared and were gonna do what they did to Vanya, to him.

"Klaus, you okay?" Luther pressed first, towering over Numbers Four and Six. Ben put a stabilizing hand on Klaus's back, doing the talking that he couldn't do at the moment.

"It just takes a lot out of him. He's basically pulling his connection with the dead up and letting it share the living parts. That's what we're thinking anyway."

"And what is... "it", exactly?" Five asked, still in his pajamas.

"Telekinesis. Telepathy. Uh... I don't know... Making things glow all cool-like?" Ben tried to explain, more attentive towards Klaus and shaking him awake before he fell into a potentially dangerous unconscious state.

"How much have you two been doing this?" Diego questioned.

"This is the third time. He's not supposed to push himself that hard though." Ben said with a salt-
infused tone directed straight at Klaus. He wanted to shoot back a retort, but he decided to just lay limp some more instead.

"I thought you said Ben was sleeping!" Five accused Diego.

"There was a lump! In his bed, there was a Ben-sized-"

"Guys!" Allison scolded, turning everyone's attention back to what was more important. "Why wouldn't you guys just tell us?" She asked Ben.

"He, uh- I-"

"I didn't want you to Vanya me." Klaus mumbled, pushing himself off of Ben with an ounce of restored energy. He opened his eyes to look up at his confused family. Specifically, he gazed at Vanya with an 'I'm sorry- No offense' stare. She shrugged, understanding.

"Oh… Klaus…" Allison said, her voice sad.

"I also didn't want to present something that I don't even know how to use yet."

"Well, uh… Let's get you to bed, huh?" Luther wasn't quite sure how to react to what they had just seen. Klaus wasn't sure either. He was proud though. He knew that. Never had he ever felt so in tune with the strange, inexplicable force within him. It was like he spent his whole life just itching to let himself connect with his full capability.

Now that he overdid it and his walls broke down though, his world was loud again. The screams were ripping through his soul, the full effect of the crowded graveyard starting to weigh in on him negatively. Klaus groaned and moved his hands over his ears, curling in on himself. He felt like puking… and screaming, and sleeping, and crawling in bed next to Dave, never to leave again…

One step at a time though.

"Bed sounds good."

"Hey." Allison greeted shortly, falling onto the couch beside Five. He glanced up from his array of papers, giving her a curt nod.

"Hey."

"Any updates?" She placed a coffee cup down on the table for him. Five's eyes lit up. If only he had that bright, appreciative expression for literally anything else other than the caffeinated beverage.

"Ooh. Thanks. And kind of… Turns out that notably, 9 of the 43 known cases of rare births like ours resulted in the children going missing. All a little while after Dad would've adopted us."

"Missing… Like-"

"Like literally stolen from their homes in the middle of the night."

"Okay… Well, if it was Mason, why is the 'The Venus Six'?"

Five took a sip of his coffee and tapped the table anxiously.

"I'm thinking, with how rigorous his training was… 3 didn't exactly make the cut. Realistically, there may have even been more of them that just went unrecorded."
"Wow…"

"Yeah."

There was a quiet beat, save for the rustle of papers and the occasional sip of coffee. Allison mulled over the new information before remembering what she originally came to ask.

"Hey, have you seen Klaus? We just realized- No one's seen him all day."

Five froze. Obviously, he knew something.

"Um…” Five hesitated. "Yeah… He's been holed up in his room. Ben's up there with him."

Allison waited for more but there was nothing. Five went back to his work. He had said it in such a somber tone…

"Okaayyy… Is he alright?"

Five cleared his throat and sighed. He gave Allison a small, sad smile.

"Boy troubles. Might need you up there."

Allison frowned. She had no idea what Five meant, but she was about to find out.

Walking up the stairs, she prepared herself for the worst. If Ben was in there already, it couldn't be too bad, right? And boy troubles? Was the love of your life being a ghost not "boy troubles" enough?

"Klaus?" She called softly, pushing open his squeaky, slightly cracked door. She instantly saw Ben sitting on the side of his bed, turned away from her. He was hovering over a curled-up lump underneath the covers- Klaus. He was facing the wall, most of him shrouded by Number Six who had a hand on his back. He was obviously very upset about something. The room was dark and devoid of the string lights Klaus always had turned on. It seemed so… dead in there.

Ben turned at the sound of Allison walking in. He gave her a lifeless upturn of the corner of his lips. Six rubbed Klaus's back through the blankets, trying to wake some reaction within him.

"Hey, look. Allison." He told him. The lump didn't move though. If Allison didn't know any better, she would've thought Ben had just stuffed inanimate pillows under there.

Number Three moved besides Ben, hoping to get a better glance at the state of Klaus but her brother was buried in his pillow, balled up with the sheets pulled high above his shoulder. He was still turned away enough for her to be unable to see his face. She looked at Ben instead.

Number Six mouthed words at her.

'Dave left.'

Oh… Oh… Oh no…

Allison sighed and put a hand on Klaus's side, feeling a deep hurt for her poor, heartbroken brother. She knew how he felt to a degree.

"Hey, uh… I'll stay here if you want to get some work done." Allison offered, giving Ben an eye that said, 'Let me take over'. Ben nodded, catching her hint.
"That okay, Dude?" Ben asked, tapping gently on Klaus's head. The sad Number Four nodded into his pillow, allowing Ben to get up and hesitantly leave. Allison immediately sat in Ben's place, inching onto the bed until she was pressed against Klaus's back.

She reached a hand over to run fingers through his hair lightly. He didn't react. He always reacted when she did that. He always had some comment about how the heavens shined down when she played with his hair or scratched his arm with her manicured nails.

"I'm sorry." She whispered, running the pad of her thumb across his temple. Klaus didn't reply at first. She didn't expect him to.

"It's okay." He finally whispered in the most heartbreakingly small voice. Allison frowned, knowing better.

"No, it's not."

Klaus gave a little sigh, the blanket rising and falling with his tiny breath.

"No, it's not." He repeated, agreeing. He was so quiet, she could barely hear him over the background garble of the rest of the siblings milling around the house. This was so unlike him- like someone had possessed Klaus's body and made him into a barely-present, pained human. Of course, recently, Klaus hadn't been himself in many situations, but this was different.

It was love heartbreak. Allison would recognize it anywhere.

"I know it's hard now, but it'll get better… Day by day."

"I don't want it to get better." He whispered. She could tell it was difficult for him to even manage that through the tightness in his throat. "I don't want to just forget about him."

"C'mon, Klaus. Are you really going to ever forget him?"

He shook his head, no. Allison sighed, searching for the right words.

"You don't have to stop loving him, or vice versa. I'm sure he just wanted you to-

"Move on?" Klaus said, a little louder and more bitterly. She obviously struck some chord there. "He said that- that he was selfish for allowing himself so much time with me because now it was harder."

"Why now?" Allison inquired, feeling like it was the appropriate time to fit in some of her begging questions. Klaus sniffled and shifted a little bit, pulling the blanket tighter around him.

"He said I didn't need him. That I was doing so well. That he would just hold me back from finally living my life… or some stupid shit." Klaus added, hotly. Allison wouldn't tell him it quite yet, but she didn't disagree. Klaus was finally figuring his life out- actually living. She wasn't sure how well that'd progress if all he wanted to do was sit alone with the dead.

"I thought you knew it'd happen eventually, right?"

"I guess I didn't want to believe it."

The room went silent again. Allison had dealt with divorce, sure, but she never talked about Patrick in the same way Klaus talked about Dave. Part of her thought of losing Luther though… Forever, dead and not coming back.

God, she felt awful for Klaus.
"It was taking a lot out of me." Klaus admitted in a disappointed tone. Allison returned her hand to his hair, messing with his curls.

"What?"

"Keeping him around… Touching him… Making him present. I don't know if it was because he died over 50 years ago, but it was…" Klaus took in a stuttering breath, trying to steady his breathing. "It was hard."

Allison knew it was insanely difficult for him to admit that. She just nodded.

"I hate to say it but… It was for the best. Even if it doesn't seem like it now."

Klaus didn't say anything. She knew that he knew she was right.

"It hurts, being taken away from someone who's your everything. I know. Trust me."

Klaus tensed, hesitating to say something.

"You're not talking about Patrick, are you?" He asked, knowingly.

"God, no. Claire. There's just this pit in my stomach when I think of her. Like someone ripped a part out of me."

Klaus nodded, still facing away.

"Are you gonna visit soon? Or- or bring her here!" He said, the first signs of excitement present in his tone.

"I want to figure out this Venus thing first. The last thing I want is to put her in danger. So… I want to. God knows I want to. I just… know this is for the best right now." She tried to bring the topic back around to how it relates to Klaus's situation. "Klaus… I'm sure it took a lot from Dave too… Sticking around this world when he could've been… You know, moving on."

Klaus swallowed thickly, burying his head further into his pillow.

"I know."

Silence. Allison didn't know what else to say. He was just hurting right now and nothing could change that.

"Wanna watch something?" She asked, glancing over at the small TV on his shelf. Allison always thought Klaus's room set-up was pretty amusing. Where he got all this stuff, she didn't know, but she did know that a lot of it was swiped from around the house, various alleyways, and who-knows-where-else. Mom always used to call him her "little pack-rat".

Not to mention, the second Vanya moved out, Klaus somehow got his hands on a sledgehammer and destroyed the wall between their rooms to Dad's horror.

"What? She's not using it!" He had said. Always so theatrical. Just like Klaus to wiggle his way into wherever he pleased.

"No," Klaus breathed presently, answering her earlier question.

"It'll take your mind off things. C'mon. Drake and Josh should be on."
"How do you know?" He perked up a bit, his interest peaked. Allison gave a little smile and walked to the TV, turning it on and flipping through channels. She knew he had always loved that show in their teen years.

"I have a young daughter. I can tell you the entire schedules of every kid's TV channel."

She found it rather quickly.

"Aha." She chirped, moving back to the bed where Klaus had finally turned onto his back to watch her efforts with the TV. She could tell he had been crying. In fact, his eyes were still glazed over, reflecting the sunset light that streamed in from the singular crack between his mostly-closed curtains.

"I'm gonna turn some lights on, okay?"

Klaus nodded, his eyes still on Drake and Josh. Allison plugged in the string lights around his room, allowing for a warm glow to cast over their surroundings. There… That was a bit better.

"Scoot over, bean." She tapped his leg through the blankets at the end of his bed and Klaus did as he was told, the smallest of smiles hinting in his features from her use of the old nickname. She had always commented on how tall Klaus was compared to her growing up, dubbing him "string bean" and soon just "bean". He'd call her "small fry".

As Number Four moved towards the edge of the bed, she could climb in behind him, between Klaus and the wall. She was too warm to get under the covers with him, so she just laid on her side on top. Allison wrapped an arm around her brother tightly, resting the side of her head on his shoulder to look over him at the TV.

"Hug me, brotha!" Josh was yelling on the TV. Allison chuckled at the nostalgic feeling the show brought her. This had always been her and Klaus's thing- after combat training on Sundays to sit down watch their favorite Nickelodeon show. She had always had a small suspicion that it was partially because Klaus had a little crush on Drake Bell. Now she was almost sure that was part of it.

She didn't know how many episodes they went through that evening- Thank God today was a Drake and Josh throwback marathon. Klaus's breathing returned to a steady rhythm. She monitored it by feeling his chest gently rise and fall underneath her embracing arm. His eyes never left the screen, zoned out and exhausted but at least sidetracked from his heartbreak over Dave.

At some point, Diego knocked on the door with a somber look on his face. She guessed Ben had told the rest of the siblings. Number Two held out a milkshake in front of him, raising his eyebrows at Klaus.

"Chocolate Peanut butter, right?" He asked. Klaus hesitated but nodded, reaching out to take the offer. Diego handed Allison one as well.

"Mm. Wow. Mint Chocolate chip. I'm impressed." Allison realized happily.

Diego shrugged.

"Luther told me. Look- I've gotta go somewhere with Five, but when I get back, I'll take you and Ben driving if you feel up for it." Diego offered, giving Klaus's shoulder a soft, playful punch. Allison knew Klaus had been bothering Diego to teach him how to drive for a while now.

Four took a sip of his milkshake.

"I don't know…"
"C'mon. It'll be a total disaster. It'll be fun."

Klaus snorted. "I do love disasters."

"Yeeaah… See? Let's shoot for 7, alright?"

"Okay. Thanks for this." Klaus said, taking another sip. Diego winked at both of them before leaving, calling out for Five. Allison snaked her arm back around Klaus's torso, resting her hand that was holding her shake on his chest. She gave him a little squeeze before returning her attention to the TV.

He'd be okay.

Chapter End Notes

Good news and bad news!

Good news: There will be one more chapter!

Bad news: There will only be one more chapter.

I thought this would be my last, but as always, it got to be too long.

On another note: Can't believe it's taken me this long to figure out that Klaus says "schnell" when demanding security at the doctor's office because it means "fast" in German and Grace really made sure the kids kept a lot of their culture with them. And when he thanks Five in German too... These tiny details are the best.
Goodbye

Chapter Summary

Something must be done about the Venus Six, but will it mean the demise of an Academy member? The last chapter of this particular installment to wrap everything up.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Mashed potatoes are a weird food. They're like… mushy… mush. Moosh-Mush. Isn't it like space food? Does Luther like mashed potatoes more after going to space, or less?

Speaking of, maybe he should be paying attention to Luther like the rest of his siblings. They were gathered around the dinner table, listening to Number One's rundown of the worsening Venus situation.

Klaus still wasn't himself though. He knew that. Ever since Dave left, the life had been sucked out of him. He wasn't trying to be brooding- That was more of a Number One or Number Two thing… He couldn't help that pit in his stomach though.

"We're like tigers circling each other, waiting for the first to strike," Diego commented, spinning his knife in a pinwheel fashion on the dinner table. Allison shot a hand forward with a stab of her fork, stopping the motion and giving Diego a disapproving look.

Diego's analogy wasn't too far off. If the Academy wasn't staking out by the warehouse or digging up info on Mason, then the Venus Six were lurking outside the house or trailing anyone who so far as stepped off the grounds. It was getting so bad that they had to employ the "buddy system". It was too dangerous for anyone to go out alone. They didn't want another Klaus situation.

"If we don't hit them with something soon, they'll hit us first. They already tried." Five pointed out.

This evening, it was particularly poignant; Earlier that morning, Five had gone out at the break of dawn to meet with a potential "informant". The little genius had found someone that used to work under Mason right before he was sent to prison back in the day. In Five's stubborn ways, he thought he could go out and meet this individual by himself and not tell any of his siblings.

Turns out, this "individual" was still working for Mason. He was ready for Five. Before he knew it, Five had a tiny needle shoved into his neck. It was the strangest contraption- like a black button that latched into his skin and stuck into his vein.

Whatever the little parasite was, it did something to Five. It took away his power to spatial-jump and without that, he was just a small, angry 13-year-old boy with unusually sharp instincts and maneuvers, but still... It wasn't enough. The informant managed chucked him into the back of a van and took off.

Luckily, Diego had followed him, suspicious of Five per usual. After what was described as a "harrowing car chase", Diego retrieved Five and booked it back to the house. Unfortunately, that wasn't before Five ripped the device from his neck in frustration, spewing blood everywhere and
nearly dying just from blood loss.

Now here he sat next to Klaus, a bandage over his punctured skin and a scowl on his face. They hadn't been able to figure out what the hell this Mason employee had stuck him with, but Pogo was analyzing it the best he could. It was terrifying though, that they had that kind of technology to stunt their powers in such an effective way.

"Well, we need a plan. We can't just go in like last time. We've tried that." Luther pointed out, then carrying on into a long list of possible approaches and outcomes. Klaus zoned out, drawing lines in his potatoes with his fork.

He hadn't been getting much sleep lately. Every time he closed his eyes, he'd just be hit with Dave's smile or his eyes or the way he raised his eyebrow at Klaus when he did something questionable.

He missed him. He missed him so much.

"We just have to be wary of their powers more than anything." Luther was saying as Klaus swirled the mushy white food onto his utensil. He took his finger to the edge of the fork and flicked potato back onto his plate.

Ooh... That was fun. Let's do that again.

Klaus took more mashed potato and went to flick it onto his plate, but he overcompensated just a bit.

The mashed potato glob went flying across the length of the table, straight by Luther's ear, missing it by inches. With a splat, the decorative column behind Number One was slammed with a forkful of food.

The room went silent. Every pair of eyes were snapped to the mush that slowly slid down the column. It seemed like an eternity went by until it finally made it to the floor. The eyes then turned to Klaus.

Whoopsie.

"Sorry," Four said in a small voice, returning to playing with his food but containing himself to his plate this time. He was aware of everyone's gazes still on him, but Klaus didn't have anything else to say. Maybe if he wasn't in such a funk, he'd have some humorous remark, but against every fiber of his character, Klaus really didn't feel like talking.

"Uh... So out of 43 kids, subtract 7 for us, subtract 19 for the parents that didn't want to give up their babies and had their records privatized for some hope of a normal life, subtract 9 that went suddenly missing from their homes which we can assume was Mason, and that leaves 8 completely unaccounted for." Five spoke up, forcing things back on track and ignoring Klaus's interruption. Number Four was grateful for that.

Usually, he'd chuckle at the visual of Luther and Diego trying to follow along with Five's math, but he wasn't even feeling that.

"So, if the 9 who went missing were in fact Mason... What happened to the other 3? And what if he got ahold of any of the unaccounted 8? Why is it the Venus Six?" Vanya tried to reason, bringing up the questions everyone had. Five knit his eyebrows together and was about to say something, but Klaus couldn't help but blurt out his own experience with this one.

"They're dead."
The siblings gave him suspiciously curious frowns.

"Why do you say that?"

"In that bunker where they were keeping me- There was an incinerator-type of room… A real fucked kind of set up, but… yeah. It was where they disposed of anyone who got in their way. Their "practice dummies", employees who resisted…" His mind flashed to Sadie. He swallowed thickly but moved on. "So, I don't doubt that they wouldn't waste a second to kill any of Mason's little "slaves" that resisted either." He managed to get out of the words, but they were so tired and lacked any enthusiasm. Of course, it wasn't quite the brightest topic, but even then, Klaus was unusually lethargic.

"You sure?" Luther asked, not accusingly but simply in need of some kind of extra affirmation.

"I heard a lot of things that week. There were at least a hundred spirits in that cellar alone, but there were some things I didn't really understand at first. They kept saying 'I was one of them' and I assumed it was just another ghost ploy to guilt me into helping them somehow… I don't know, whatever. But now I understand that they didn't mean 'one of the dead', they meant-"

"That they had powers too…” Ben realized. He leaned forward across the table to lock eyes with Klaus in the same way he did when he needed to get his point across loud and clearly. "Klaus, do you know how many?"

"No. Have no idea. They were just fleeting comments that I hardly paid attention to. In fact, I tried to block them out if anything."

Conversation was erupting from all around the table with this new realization. It allowed Klaus to sink back into the background and bury his attention in his untouched plate of food. He rolled around some peas underneath his fork tongs.

"-if we got them to come here-"

"-set up a ploy to-"

"-wait 'til tomorrow and-"

"-if we strike tonight-"

All kinds of ideas flew around. Arguments ensued, plans were birthed and trashed then birthed again…

"Hey," Five's voice demanded Klaus's attention among everything else. He was aware of the boy staring at him from his left. "We could really use your input, kid."

Klaus rose an eyebrow at his brother. It was funny being called kid by a little shrimp such as himself. Regularly energetic-Klaus would've even told him that to his face.

Right now though, Four was just surprised by the sympathy so clear in the bite-sized assassin's voice. He seemed… genuine- Genuinely worried about Klaus. Genuinely seeking his insight. How nice it was to have that change. It actually shocked Klaus into considering taking Five up on his offer.

He looked up at the dinner table that was thrown into turmoil. Allison was in a heated conversation with Vanya and Ben, Diego was arguing Luther like normal, and Five continued to cock his head at Klaus expectantly. Klaus did have something to say, in fact. He was just anxious to jump in and he couldn't quite place why. He felt shy. He never felt shy.
Klaus gripped his dog tags.

"Go on. Get a move on." Five coaxed affirmatively. Klaus sighed. He promised that if he'd be a part of this family, he'd fully be a part of this family.

"I think we should go back," Klaus spoke up. The buzz of voice died out. They looked at him. "...to the warehouse. I think we should go back. Hit them at home."

Luther opened his mouth, unsure of what to say. He looked around the table for backup but no one wanted to comment as if they'd break Klaus. Ugh. He hated the pity train.

"Klaus, we tried that, remember? It didn't exactly…. Go well."

"Yeah, I know. That was before I knew about all this other hullabaloo though. This stuff I can do. With all those dead, angry souls… especially the ones of the other potential Numbers… It'd be like an unlimited source of power and resources."

The table seemed to think about this, but still, no one jumped on board readily right away. Klaus was expecting that. His siblings promised they'd listen to him more but that didn't mean they had to actually consider anything he said.

"Klaus," Luther reluctantly tried again. "I know you've been practicing… That's great, but do you really think you're ready to take something on at such a big—"

"Yes." Klaus interrupted, unwavering. Luther closed his mouth and drilled into him with an unreadable gaze. Everyone else around the room exchanged glances. Klaus didn't move a muscle from where he locked eyes with Number One. He got ready for everyone's denial of his input.

You tried. Oh well.

"Okay." Luther stated plainly…

I'm sorry- WHAT?

The room looked at Luther. No one argued.

"Yeah. Okay. We'll go with Klaus's plan. Suit up and we'll put together some type of strategy before we head out. Everyone got it?"

Murmurs of agreement sprouted up at all sides. Klaus was too stunned to add a reply to the garble. He felt Five's hand squeeze his shoulder (Possibly proudly? Klaus couldn't tell) before he spatial-jumped up to his room.

Number Four didn't have time to remain in shock at his siblings' sudden belief in him. Well, it wasn't sudden per se. They did have a long-ass talk about this at Gigi's, but he didn't expect it to actually come to fruition to this degree.

Don't get him wrong, it felt nice. There was pressure on him now though. He had to deliver the performance he promised. Klaus wasn't used to expectations, unless they were low ones. He operated in the sense that he couldn't disappoint anyone if he was already at peak disappointment-less pressure that way. This was new though. He didn't know if he really liked the feeling.

He guessed this was what it felt like to be a responsible, functioning member of a team. Huh. Weird.

Up in his room, pulling on his black mission shirt, Klaus found that his movements were snail-slow
compared to usual. That was normal for the past couple days since Dave left. It was gradually getting easier day by day, but like he told Allison, he didn't really want it to get easier. He didn't want to move on.

Klaus considered going to Ben's room to get ready in there like he usually did as a kid. Or maybe, he'd go bug Allison again. He couldn't bring himself to be his normal chipper character though, and he didn't want them to pity him. They'd be great the past few days, don't get him wrong, but no one knew quite how to deal with somber-Klaus.

"Can you help me?" A voice came out of absolutely nowhere, making Klaus jump. He whipped around to see Five standing in the middle of his room while looking down at his jacket, unpassed by Klaus's jumpy reaction.

"Christ," Klaus whispered under his breath, slowing his wildly beating heart and moving towards Five who was toying with a jammed zipper. "Sure, bud."

Klaus kneeled at Five's level, slapping his brother's fumbling hands away and gripping the zipper tightly, trying to pull it past the cloth that was jammed in the mouth of the zipper-head. He scrunched up his face with effort until the zipper broke free from its obstacle, zooming upwards to close Five's jacket. Satisfied, Klaus slapped a hand on Five's shoulder before getting up and returning to his dresser where he searched for his jacket.

"Thanks." Five plainly said from behind. It went quiet for a beat and Klaus assumed his brother jumped away, back to his own room. Five wasn't one for small talk.

But then, he cleared his throat from behind Klaus again, making his remaining presence known. Klaus couldn't help but smirk. Obviously, the kid had something to say but was waiting for Klaus to urge it out of him.

"...Yes?" Klaus played along, amused. He moved to his closet, not giving Five a second glance. His jacket had to be around here somewhere.

"I'm sorry." Five said, his tone truly heavy with condolences. "About Dave."

It was a simple enough sentence, but it sent all kinds of feelings ripping through Klaus's chest- most of which were a deep pang of loss but also a sense of gratitude at the fact that the hardest-shelled member of his family was coming to offer sympathy. Klaus gave him a small, sad smile.

"I'll live." He admitted, turning back to rifle through his closet. "Funny enough that's the reason we won't work. Hah." He chuckled at the end, a product of his dark humor. There was an obvious pain in there.

"I think I know what you're going through... at least to some degree."

"Ah, yes. The dear Ms. Dolores. You know, come to think of it, I haven't seen her around lately."

Five cleared his throat again, but this time it was in discomfort rather than an attempt for attention.

"Yeah, I- I figured I'd never be able to move on. From her, from the future, from the Apocalypse... I wouldn't be able to move on, so I let go."

Klaus froze, his arm deep in his closet. His breath caught for a second. He could tell it was difficult for Five to say out loud even now. Honestly, it was difficult for Klaus to hear too. Maybe Five did know what he was going through.
"I fully realize that I probably looked crazy to all of you, but-"

"Hey." Klaus stopped him, jumping into brotherly mode at the drop of a hat. It was like an instinct when he could tell a sibling was hurting. It was kind of nice to focus on someone else's burden, as much as he'd never wish it on Five. "She made you happy. That made us happy, dude." Klaus said in all sincerity. Five smiled. He candidly, sweetly but sadly smiled. Aw. What a truly rare phenomenon.

Klaus moved back to his dresser. Where was this damn thing?

"The powers- what you're doing." Five continued the conversation even as Klaus frustratingly tore through everything he owned. "It's really cool."

Wow. What a shocking night this was.

"And the sobriety thing." Five paused in a search for words. "I'm sorry if I haven't been handling it in a way that is as supportive as- I just- Maybe I was trying so hard to deny that I kinda knew how it felt. The thing you said about me being addicted to the apocalypse… I know it's not the same, but it was a type of obsession for my whole life and I didn't want to accept that so I was extra hard on you about your own obsessions and that wasn't fair."

Klaus had no idea how to respond to that. Five literally just puked a slew of information and feelings at him all at once. Klaus just blinked. His brother sighed and walked around the room slowly, looking at some of Klaus's wall hangings and decorations as a distraction from the hard topics he was hitting.

"You were right. I don't know how to live day-to-day now. Living in a home. Living with other humans. Live with you guys more specifically- the very people who I dreamed of returning to for so long. It's just… strange. I don't know how to switch my life around so fast and I'm guessing it's similar without your…" Five waved his hand in the air, looking for the right term. "…vices. We are alike in more respects than I gave credit for and it's- it's certainly not a bad thing… Ya know?"

Five finally looked to Klaus, awaiting some approval. Klaus wanted to give it of course, but this was just a lot to take in and all so unexpected.

"I… Thanks, Five."

"Klaus…” Here it comes. "I know it probably doesn't seem like it at times, but I feel like I need to- At least, once, after everything that's happened in the past couple of… you know… I need to express that I- that I- You know, you're my brother and I'm- I'll always-"

Klaus smiled away from Five, his chest warming. This guy. At least he was trying.

"Five." Klaus cut in, saving his brother from his intense struggle. "You nearly jumped yourself to death just to find me." He pointed out in a low voice. "…I know."

Five stared into Klaus's eyes as if to say, 'thank you for saving me there', but also with a deeper appreciation that Klaus rarely saw in him. He gave Klaus a sheepish, half-smirk.

"I love you too, Pip-Squeak." Klaus finished, walking past Five towards his door and giving him a vigorous hair-ruffle on the way. Five nearly fell over, not expecting the sudden contact. He scoffed
and tried to shove Klaus away, still all-smiles.

"Asshole." Five smirked, smoothing out his hair. "I'll see you downstairs."

With a flash, he was gone.

As soon as they touched down via spatial-jump, everything erupted into the expected chaos. Allison was the first to scream out, rambling on about something regarding Claire.

"They have her! They have her! Can't you hear it?"

"No, Allison!" Luther ran after Number Three who had bolted towards the warehouse. No one could hear anything but the creak of the shifting trees in the wind. "It's not real, okay? She's in your head. Remember? All in your head."

But as soon as Luther caught Allison around the waist and prevented potential disaster, everything started warping.

He didn't know how the atmosphere shifted for everyone else, but for Klaus, the pines became palm trees. Soil turned to sand. Buildings formed but in ruins. The skies filled with smoke, gunfire, and beating helicopters.

It shook him to his core.

"Guys!" Klaus called out for his siblings, panic rising in his chest. It's not real. It's not real.

He heard shouting, and the worst part was, he recognized the voices. They were the guys he fought with side by side in Vietnam. The guys that all died. Everyone died. Everyone but him.

Shadows flashed over Klaus like a strobe. He looked overhead at the giant chopper sailing over his head. Gunfire followed. He stumbled backward until his back hit the trunk of a tree. His knees gave out and he slid down to the ground.

"Shit, shit, shit…" He covered his ears and ducked down, trying to fight off the pseudo images before him.

"Klaus!" A chillingly familiar voice called. It sounded anguished- in need of his help. "Klaus!"

…Dave.

But he wasn't real, right? The illusionist and the ventriloquist were just working together to fuck with his mind… right? The thing that bothered Klaus the most was that it very well was possible that Dave's ghost was around. Even though he supposedly "moved on" to whatever ghosts "move on" to, the smallest of likelihoods still worried Number Four.

"Klaus!"

That one wasn't Dave, however. Before Klaus knew it, Ben's face was right in front of his. His brother gripped Klaus's shoulders tightly, shaking him gently.

"Hey! Hey, look at me."

Thank God. Ben to the rescue as always. Unfortunately, he was drowned out as another helicopter flew right overhead, making Klaus flinch back. His eyes squeezed shut and suddenly Ben faded away. He was back in the heat of the war.
"HEY!" Ben forced his way back into Klaus's attention. He opened his eyes to see Number Six against the background of Vietnam. It was strange to see his modern brother in such an atmosphere, even if it wasn't real. "Eyes on me." Ben continued to press. Klaus did his best to follow through. "Where are you?"

He couldn't find the words. Soldiers ran by, directly behind Ben who crouched low in front of him, still gripping his shoulders.

"The mausoleum?"

Klaus shook his head, no.

"Shau Valley?"

He nodded.

"Alright. C'mon. Stand up."

Klaus did as he was told, grabbing Ben's offered hand and shakily standing. He knew this wasn't real deep down, but it was a whole different feeling when the place this bitch transported him to was somewhere he so vividly remembered.

"Your power, Klaus. You-"

"It won't help unless I get to the bunker." Klaus interrupted, still looking around at the very realistic war zone around him instead of directly addressing his brother.

"No. I mean it'll ground you. Help you feel out the true atmosphere. Not this bullshit one."

Klaus thought about that. The energy that he pulled from the dead world did base itself around his current and tangible environment. When he got that buzz, it was like he could sense every single molecule around him, even with eyes closed. He could use that. Ben might be onto something.

Closing his eyes and balling up his hands, Klaus focused. He let the sounds of Vietnam fade away and cleared his mind of everything- His war friends, the fighting, the death, Dave… Everything.

He envisioned his invisible force rising from the nether world and wrapping around the physical, living one. He started to feel that floating feeling and his body tingled with little sensors that gave off indicators of every tiny-to-monumental morsel around him.

When his eyes opened again, there was the strangest mix before his eyes; The fake-Vietnam world mixed with the real one in a mesh of pines, palms, sand, soil, forest, and beach. It wasn't perfect, but it was better than before. The best part was that he saw it. He saw the hatch to the bunker across the way. He just needed to get there.

"Okay." Klaus took a deep breath, slapping a hand on Ben's arm. "This way."

The two of them ran towards the gleaming metal door in the middle of the woods. Klaus had to make sure he kept focusing on emitting that invisible force around him- he didn't want to seep back into the illusion. A thought came to mind as they ran.

"What do you see?" He asked, glancing at Ben. His brother gave him a quick look before turning away.

"Midtown Station."
Oh… That's where Ben died. Ouch... His heart.

"Backup! We need backup!" Luther's voice called over the low garble of Vietnam sounds. Klaus and Ben both stopped in their tracks, glancing back to where Klaus could see his siblings struggling. They were mixed in with the Shau Valley backdrop, but that didn't change the fact that they were very clearly fighting off a couple of the numbers that made themselves known.

Diego was attempting to shower the Electrical Freak with knives, but as Mason had told Klaus, the kid conducts his powers through metal which, well, knives were metal. Sparks would combust the weapons into to nothing before Diego even got them in the air.

Allison was sobbing, covering her ears and backing away from the fighting. Klaus could only imagine what kind of things the ventriloquist was making out of Claire's voice to mess with her emotions.

Vanya looked confused- like she didn't know which way was up or down. She'd jerk her head to the side as if she saw something and send a sonic wave that way, but alas- nothing was there but a poor tree or two that'd topple under the immense pressure of her power. Occasionally she'd cover her ears and scream. For someone whose powers relied on sound, Klaus was sure that Vanya was being extremely thrown off by the ventriloquist's ability to throw fake voices and sound effects into your head.

Luther was currently throwing Number Whatever… The one who could breathe underwater… across the forest and into a tree. As soon as he did though, three of the girls attacked from all sides. They held him in place long enough for the pain dude to step out of the shadows and do his thing. Luther screamed in a way Klaus had never heard him scream before.

Five was jumping around, trying to help where he could, but it was clear that the illusions were messing with him. He'd run towards Luther, intent to jump towards him, but would end up way across the way more towards Allison.

To say the least, everything was falling apart.

"I need to help them. You got this." Ben said, patting Klaus's chest. Wait… No… Alone? The plan they came up with was that Ben and Klaus take on the bunker stuff together. Ben was like his powers coach. Ben was like his life coach, honestly. He couldn't do it without him.

"Wait-

"You got it, Klaus!" He yelled, already taking off towards the hot mess of their five other siblings.

"BEN!"

But Ben was already too far gone.

"Okay, okay, okay..." Klaus turned towards the bunker door, painfully noting the nostalgic voice that was seeping back into his mind.

"Klaus!" Dave's voice yelled off into the forest. "Klaaaaus!"

"Stop." Klaus scolded the air. He closed the gap between him and the cellar door. He tried the handle.

Oh yeah… It locked from the outside typically. He remembered that from the first time he had found the damned place.
Klaus closed his eyes and went through the motions.

Clear the mind. Ball his fists. Relax the muscles. Feel his environment. Let the voices in. Channel the dead.

Focus.

Klaus opened his eyes. The door banged open so forcefully that it made him jump.

Alright… Here we go…

He climbed down the ladder and hopped down to the cement floor. The air was 20 degrees colder in here- the walls blocking out every and all sound. The illusions and pseudo-noises faded and Klaus was left in stark, harsh reality.

He hated how it made him freeze up. He hated how just the simple, cold atmosphere made him feel. He hated that smell. He hated the fluorescent lights. He hated everything about this place- the memories it brought back, most of all.

His siblings needed him though. This had been his plan. He pushed them to come here. He couldn't let them down- not after the long talks they've had about trusting Klaus and giving him credit. Not after everything that's happened.

Klaus was about to push forward towards the incinerator room when an apparition appeared in the threshold of the hallway. He instantly smiled.

This made him feel better.

"Well, shoot. If I didn't know any better, I'd say you're happy to see me!" Klaus greeted, wiggling his finger at the familiar little girl in ways of hello. She hit him with the unwavering, stoic glare. Not a muscle in that dainty little ghost body moved. She didn't answer. The fact that she appeared there before him was enough though.

She cared about him- He knew it.

"Okay…" He chuckled, walking towards and eventually through her to go down the hallway. Seeing his old confidant was just the burst of energy he needed.

He'd find the spirits of the dead Numbers. He'd ask for their help.

He could make this happen. He could do this.

____________________________________________________

Ben didn't like it. He didn't ask for this power. He didn't ask to be a destructive, deadly freak of nature, half-human, half-beast… thing. But life sucks and it's unfair and this is where he was right now- sprouting monsters out of his stomach to kill other people in order to save his family…

…but what was new?

The only person he was targeting was the electric-guy, really. The man had knocked Diego out cold and was taking on Vanya. If Ben hadn't stepped in, his sister would've been dead right now. That was the only thing driving him forward.

With a few more thrashes of the long, slimy necks of the nether beast, the electrician's neck snapped and he went limp. Ben's heart sunk as it always did after killing his victims. It never truly got better.
Six took a deep breath, ready to channel the writhing arms back inside of him for later use, but something else happened unexpectedly… and it happened so fast.

_BANG._

His mind really only processed the sound- not the pain in his chest. Not the impact of the bullet. Not the sight of the flash of the gun before him. Not the horrified screams of his siblings...

Just the bang. Ben only heard the bang.

And suddenly, the ground rushed up. For the first time since he got there, imaginary visions and sounds weren't floating around him. Every "trick" they had up their sleeve dropped out and left him collapsing into the grass in the reality of the forest that he felt like he's become much too familiar with.

Ben sucked in a painful breath of air as his other sensing started settling in, but blood was rising in his throat. All he could do was cough up the red liquid, wetting the ground right in front of his face. He gripped the grass in anguish. His chest was in excruciating agony.

He processed what happened.

He was shot. Ben was shot right in the chest. It was on the opposite side of where his heart sat, but he wasn't quite sure that would matter in the scheme of things. He was bleeding, and he was bleeding a lot. Wet heat soaked his shirt.

A shoe stepped into his vision. It was polished and obviously expensive. It reminded him of…

"Number Six. I apologize for the… harsh introduction."

Ben looked up through a face scrunched in pain. There was no denying it: **Mason.** He resembled Dad all too much. He almost didn't believe it. Even more shocking, or maybe not, the gun in his hand, still slightly smoking at the barrel.

"STOP!" Luther yelled, shoving at the girls that still tried to hold him down and running forward. He was much too far though… Much too far to help Ben, now.

Five sprinted forwards and _flashed_ right next to Mason, taking a hidden knife from his sock and going to stab him with fervor. It seemed that the British behemoth had expected this though. He caught Five's wrist and pressed an aggressive thumb to his neck.

When he drew back his hand, the same "button" that was stuck to Five earlier that day was left embedded into his skin. Five grunted and tried to take a swing at Mason, but the much bigger man held him away at arm's length. With a simple twist of his arm, Five was forced to his knee, his limb held painfully behind him.

"I believe you're familiar with this particular contraption, Number Five. I call it an Inhibitor, see? It took me a while to perfect it, but it _is_ quite effective."

Almost to prove his point, Five tried to ball up his fist and _flash_ out, but nothing happened. He was held down to the ground, rendered useless. He turned a guilty gaze to Ben. They locked eyes.

_We're screwed._ They both seemed to say.

"DON'T even consider it," Mason shouted out, his voice echoing into the landscape. Ben gripped his leaking wound and looked up to see Allison running forward towards them. Her mouth was half-
open as if she was about to say something- about to rumor him, no doubt. Mason held the gun towards Ben's head though, showing that he still had the upper hand. Allison didn't dare to move a muscle. No one did.

And it was because of this that the remaining Venus members… The Venus "Five" now that Ben killed the electrician- were able to step towards the Academy members and reach forward with the tiny black dots at the tip of their fingers. The Academy had no choice but to let their counterparts stick them with the damned "Inhibitors".

Ben closed his eyes and sighed. He couldn't help but feel like this was his fault that his siblings were incapacitated with these Inhibitor things. Without their powers, they could fight hand-to-hand, sure. Not against other highly trained super-beings though.

It was all over. They were done. In order to save Ben's life, they were all going to hand over their own into a life of slavery. If they thought their Dad was bad, just wait…

"Technically I'm Number 11, but once they killed me, Sparky became 11."
"Yeah. Technically I'm 8."
"Well, I've always been 14."
"15, here!"

"OKAY. Okay, okay… Just… I'm gonna have to give you names, alright? I can't keep this all straight." Klaus put a halt to the ghosts' yammering. He wasn't expecting them to be so… casual. He found them pretty easily actually- All four of them. Four Numbers that have been trying to contact him for a while now. Four Numbers that were killed brutally by Mason after acting out against him. Four Numbers that were all too willing to help the Academy take down the Venus Six.

Klaus had to admit; as far as powers went, he felt pretty good with what he had to work with.

One could summon earthquakes.

One could control hordes of creepy crawlies.

One could manipulate nature.

And the other could alter the molecular composition of anything he pleased. Solid. Liquid. Gas. He could seamlessly transfer anything into a different state at any given moment.

He just needed to get them to settle down and focus on a plan. It was like herding an excited group of puppies. He guessed being dead and alone with such a grudge for so long would make the arrival of the awaited opportunity extremely enticing. He just needed to think though. There was only room for one hysterical diva here, and that was him.

"Alright… You're Timmy, Tommy, Teddy, and Tina." Klaus announced, pointing to each as he said it. Tommy narrowed his eyes.

"Isn't that just as confusing?"

"I don't want to be Timmy!"

"Fine! Fine! You're Eugene then! Okay. So. Eugene-" Klaus tried to barter and move on. Everybody's a critic.
They had a loose plan, but it all went to shit when Klaus emerged from the bunker. The first thing he saw sent his whole center off whack. Panic ripped through him at the speed of light.

"Ben!" He couldn't help shouting out at the sight of his brother, broken and bleeding at gunpoint via Uncle-Fucking-Mason. He ran forward without a second thought, not even taking the time to see the state of his other siblings- still as statues, rendered nearly useless with the black button things in their necks, and afraid to proceed.

Klaus still rushed forward. The first thing that almost hindered him was his atmosphere warping before him, but Klaus could see the illusionist. She stood near Luther with a cocky grin on her face.

It wasn't so cocky when Klaus clenched his fist and sent a giant branch flying to her head though. It hit her unexpectedly from behind, sending her to the ground, unconscious.

Points for Klaus.

...Until Mason cocked his gun. Klaus stopped dead in his tracks, holding his hands out in front of him.

"Wait! Wait, okay! Please, just-" He looked into Ben's eyes, his muscles frozen stiff. Klaus was afraid that if he moved an inch, Mason would get trigger happy and kill his brother- his brother that just got his life back not all too long ago. His favorite brother (don't tell the others, but he thought it was pretty obvious).

"I see you've learned some of your own little tricks, Number Four." Mason said, gripping the gun stiffly but turning to look at Klaus.

"Some." Klaus agreed, relishing in the visuals of him using said "tricks" to rip Mason apart limb from limb. "Probably shouldn't have let them take me back, you sick, British fuck."

"I will admit, your insufferable comrades breaking through here and stealing you back against their word was a bit of a shake-up. The "inhibitors" weren't ready yet though. They needed time to reach perfection." Mason dug into his pocket and held up a tiny black dot- the same dots that were punctured into his siblings' skin. "This one's got your name on it, Four. It's up to you. You can preserve your family's lives and the chance to become your best selves under my guidance, or you can choose a life of having to conjure your future family reunions."

Klaus clenched his jaw.

This. Little. Bitch.

Mason must've moved ever so slighty- Klaus's instincts picked up on something at least because a pang of alarm flashed through his chest and suddenly he was afraid that he might pull the trigger. Without a second thought, Number Four shot a hand forward and focused his energy on the gun, forcing it up and away from poor Benji with that invisible force he was starting to like more and more nowadays.

Mason snapped his attention back to the resistant weapon in his hand, forcing it back down against Klaus's energy. This was a problem. Klaus had been able to levitate things pretty easily over the past few days but never had he tried to fight against manual, human strength.
The two men fought for dominance of the gun, Mason with his hand and Klaus with his power. The pistol shook from the strain of opposing forces, but the most important part— it was tilted back just enough to where if it was shot, it'd narrowly miss Ben. If Klaus could maintain this until he figured something else out…

He was aware of all of his siblings' eyes on him, but it wasn't helping the building pressure and the heavy weight on his shoulders. He couldn't focus on them either. Not when all of his willpower had to constantly be zeroed in on holding the gun away from his brother.

Four kept his steely composure the best he could on the outside, but on the inside, he was a frantic mess. Klaus didn't know what to do. He wasn't the decision maker. He wasn't supposed to have the answers, be the hero. That was a Luther thing… A Diego thing… A Five thing…

It wasn't a Klaus thing.

All he knew was that it was becoming increasingly hard to fight against Mason for control and direction of the gun. He could hear his heart beating in his head and feel a shaking intensity brewing inside of him. He just hoped he'd be strong enough to keep this going. Ben's life depended on it.

"You're wasting your time, Uncle Mason. We won't be part of your dumb "Venus" club shit." Klaus called out, trying to at least stall. His eyes kept flickering to his bleeding brother when he got the chance, hoping that the next time he glanced back wouldn't yield unwanted results. If Ben died right there, he'd never forgive himself for not being able to do anything.

"Yes, yes. I know. You all think you have some undeniable right to free will. To a "family life". I know my brother has put ridiculous musings in your head, but you're not a family. You've been trained to pretend you care about one another- it's a farce. A falsehood." Mason grunted, also having trouble fighting against Klaus's invisible resistance. He tried to force the gun down towards Ben's head again in a swift shove, but Klaus wouldn't waver in his efforts.

Every word that left the egomaniac's mouth rose Klaus's blood to a new boiling point. Anyone who held a gun to Ben was already going to push him towards the edge. To threaten his whole family on top of it though… Let's just say that Klaus's thoughts were not the nicest right now. This was apparent by the way the wind picked up around the forest. Maybe Mason didn't notice, but it looked like just about everyone else did. Klaus felt a buildup of power surge within him.

"You're not going to do it this time," Klaus said, shaking his head.

"Do what?"

"Get in my head."

"Oh, please, Number Four. You, of all people, really think you're one of them? That they want to feel obligated to pick up the pieces of the constant wreckage you leave behind? There isn't even a 'them' to begin with! You're kidding yourselves if you ever thought you had any sort of license over your own lives. From the moment you were born, you've been part of something bigger. You're not like other humans. You're not meant for this… individuality."

Klaus felt his nails stinging the palm of his free hand and intense pain under the brace of the broken one. His skin felt wet. He knew he was drawing blood. He felt the ground vibrating ever so slightly. Was that him?

Just keep that gun up. Keep that gun up.

"All of your powers if properly trained together- you'd be an unstoppable force. That's what makes
you all "special" since you seem in such dire need to feel so. Not this absurd, apocryphal "sibling" nonsense. These blasphemous ties to each other hold you back, but I'm here to free you."

Klaus was seething. It was an emotion that was extremely unlike him. He was flamboyant. He was depressed. He was wild. He was probably slightly deranged. He was f*cked up. At any given moment, Klaus was any of these things and more, but hardly ever was he this pissed.

"You mean break us?"

"If that's what it takes."

And that was it. Klaus could feel it. That sentence right there was the catalyst for everything else that followed.

It hit Klaus hard. It hit his siblings hard. Most importantly, it hit the spirits of the four dead Numbers hard. Within him, he could feel anger for five people: Eugene, Tommy, Teddy, Tina, and himself. As it turns out, that was the extra push he needed to let the rest come to fruition.

CRACKS filled the air, followed by a deep crumbling. The ground was breaking- just like in the graveyard earlier. Blue rose up from the floor and emanated from the four, transparent figures that stepped forward with malicious grins on their faces.

They had been waiting for this and Klaus knew it.

The best part?

Mason looked terrified at the sight of his previously discarded "experiments".

"Now, listen to me!" He shouted, obviously panicked but trying to maintain control. The gun was forgotten at this point. Klaus flicked his hand and it went flying against a tree. Number Four wasn't stopping there though. He wasn't sure if he could even if he tried.

Using his power to give strength to the four beings around him, Klaus urged them to unleash everything they had.

And boy, did they.

The ground shook so violently that a few Academy members had to grip onto nearby trees to stay on unsteady feet. Vanya wasn't so lucky, falling to the ground but otherwise okay. The same was said for the Venus Six- Some kept upright, but most went down hard.

Roots started swimming out of the earth, curling over and through the soil like a serpent monster slithering through water. The earthy tendrils wrapped themselves around Mason's ankles, rendering him stuck in place. The same for Venus.

An army of little clicking noises spread through the ambiance. In a dark, disturbing display, a sea of bugs and insects crashed out from the soil and cast a writhing shadow that traveled up over Mason's legs. It seeped up his body as he screamed, trying to wipe off the invading pests to no avail.

And finally, with a chorus of pops and sizzles, Mason's skin transformed before their very eyes. In horror, every single person watched as steam rose from his flesh and a terrible odor suffused the air. It was as if he was… melting. A human being was melting before their very eyes.

It wasn't like a slow wax burn like the wicked witch of the west though- The liquid turned to a steaming evaporation of gas before they knew it. This process took over their uncle's flesh and bones
as he screamed in a way that not even the most crazed animalistic creature could scream.

Solid... Liquid... Gas...

Klaus wasn't expecting Eugene's powers to be so gruesome, but it worked.

Soon enough, there wasn't much left of Mason Hargreeves and the trembling, glowing, wind-blown, scuttling, earth-shattering world turned silent once again- an absence of sound that Klaus felt he may never hear again in the midst of such extraordinary chaos.

Stock-still, too. The world was still...

...Until Klaus collapsed and broke the motionless atmosphere. In a severe wave of vertigo, his consciousness slipped and his body went with it. He wasn't sure if it was in his dreams or nightmares or whatever, but Klaus did hear people calling out for him. He even thought he felt people gripping his shoulders and arms, trying to break him from the darkness. They were just so far away though, and a little sleep would do him some good.

He felt high, but in a different way than drugs made him feel. It was like his mind was detached and floating differently from his body. Don't get him wrong, he could feel the acute pain in his hand just fine, but there was a surreal about everything that was making Klaus feel awful trippy.

But then a thought hit. An awful thought. A thought that he prayed was just a dream… a nightmare.

Ben. Ben who had been bleeding out. Ben who had been losing consciousness and life with every passing moment.

My God, was he dead?

Klaus shot out of… wherever he was, gripping the sheets over his body anxiously.

Room. My room. My house. I'm home.

No one else was there though- He was alone. The only thing on his mind- find Ben.

"Shit…" He muttered, throwing himself into a stumbling stance. His hands shook violently like he was hopped up on gallons of caffeine. His heart jumped from a slow, relaxed beat to hypersonic speed. "Shit, shit, shit…"

Klaus went to bound out of his room but there was a person standing in the doorway. No… Not just a person.

Ben.

Ben! Ben! Ben! Ben! Ben! Ben!

"Benny!" Klaus exclaimed, panic dropping from his chest and being replaced with rising excitement. "You-"

…scared the bejeezus out of me. That's what Klaus was going to say, but another horrifying thought crossed his mind as he took in the sight of his brother.

He was standing, seemingly fine. He was dressed in his normal, black, Ben clothes: The hoodie, the
coat, the jeans, the shoes. His hair was all groomed as Ben liked it. His stance was relaxed but at the same time just a little bit sarcastic… if a stance could be sarcastic.

He looked like normal Ben. He looked healthy. He looked… too healthy for just being shot.

Klaus felt his stomach drop. Oh no… Oh God, no…

"No…" Klaus breathed, wanting himself to be wrong but knowing it made sense. "No, no, no, no…"

He moved forwards towards a frowning Six- a frowning ghost Six.

Klaus felt sick. He felt grief-stricken. He felt angry in himself- disappointed that he wasn't enough to save the person that had saved him oh-so-many times. In that moment, he hated himself. He loathed himself for not being able to save Ben.

"Benny…" Klaus covered his mouth with one hand, reaching forward with the other. He willed himself to allow the power of touch with the dead world. It worked enough for him to touch Ben's coat and then feel the firmness of his brother's shoulder.

He didn't want to touch ghost-Ben though. He wanted to feel real Ben. Alive Ben.

What has he done?

"Klaus…" Ben said, worriedly, putting his hand on his brother's arm and trying to lock eyes. Klaus didn't want to hear it though.

It's not your fault. There was nothing you could do. Ben would say.

"I'm so sorry." Klaus choked out, his voice breaking. He rushed forward and embraced his poor ghostie as if it would somehow make up for a beautiful life lost…

"Klaus!" Ben wheezed between Four's ridiculously tight hold. "What are you-"

"I knew it. You're dead. I knew it." Klaus mumbled miserably into the fabric of Ben's coat.

"Klaus-for-fuck's-sake-I'm-not-dead-but-I-am-still-in-some-serious-pain-and-HOLYSHIT-you're-going-to-make-me-pass-the-fuck-out-" Ben spat out so rapidly that it all might as well have been one word. Number Four immediately let up, still keeping his arms around his (…dead? ...alive? ...to be determined.) brother. He leaned back about a foot away from Ben's face to shoot him a stunned look.

"Say what?"

Ben was taking big, long breaths through this apparent pain he mentioned. Klaus gave him a moment. Number Six came back calmly, gripping each of Klaus's shoulders for emphasis. He drilled his gaze into Klaus's, telling him that what he was about to say next was important.

"I'm not dead. I'm fine, but healing. You've just been knocked out for almost two days." He tried to explain in the simplest way possible. Klaus pondered this. Ben patiently waited, staring at Klaus and standing by until he processed the information. Four looked away, trying to compute everything in his still-woozy head.

"Oh…"

He thought some more. He guessed it was possible. Ben still lingered in Klaus's loosely looped arms. He raised his eyebrows expectantly. Klaus finally turned to look at his brother. Four's eyebrows knit
together.

"...Do we have spaghetti, ya think?"

He released alive-Ben and brushed past him, making his way to the stairs. He heard Benny snort behind him.

"Attention span of a goldfish," Ben muttered, amused. Klaus heard his brother follow him downstairs. Thank God, he wasn't a ghost. He generally preferred his Number Sixes alive.

Klaus could make a whole dramatic scene about the whole thing- Getting Ben back, succeeding in a truly stunning display of his powers, defeating Mason…

He was just plain hungry though.

"Hey, kiddo." Five's voice was the first to greet him when Klaus passed by the dining hall. The rest of the Academy was in there, digging into plastic bags full of take-out food. Everyone turned to look at him, ceasing all movement, but only for a second.

Thank the Lawd. He didn't want to make a big deal out of everything. He just wanted to relax with his living, breathing family.

Yes, Mason, you fucked douchekazoo. My family, asshat.

Then Klaus remembered that his uncle was dead and could possibly haunt him forever and ever.

Just kidding. I didn't mean it. He thought again, just in case. He looked around the room. No Mason.

Phew.

"How're you feeling?" Diego asked, throwing Klaus a carton of rice. He caught it and moved to the table to swipe a fork.

"Like someone chewed up my brain and regurgitated it into my skull. Otherwise, okay." He yawned, falling tiredly into a seat and pulling up another one right next to him. He looked back at Ben and patted the empty chair.

Four may not make a big theatrical production about Ben's survival like he usually would, but you better believe that Klaus was going to glue himself to Ben even more than usual for the next couple of days, fueled by the slightly irrational fear of even coming close losing him again. Klaus said all of that in his look to Six, and Ben seemed to understand. He sat down next to his subtly doting brother, grabbing a carton of chicken.

"We really had to hold Luther back from locking you up, man." Deigo said, shaking his head disapprovingly. Klaus's face dropped. He looked from Luther to Diego.

"Really?"

"Yeah, dude! After that whole spectacle-"

"Oh- Shut it, Diego! He's totally lying." Luther dismissed, rolling his eyes. He leaned forward and looked intently at Klaus.

"I did no such thing. I promise."

Diego smirked at his favorite hobby- bugging Luther. Klaus felt the knots in his chest unravel. He
was terrified that he was going to be looked at as the next Apocalypse inducer.

"It's okay." Four played along. "I'd understand if you were all jealous that I'm suddenly the cool one now."

"Woahhhh!"

"Now, hold on a sec-"

"An exaggeration if I've ever heard one-"

Everyone jumped in, making Klaus smile. Ah, yes. *His* favorite hobby. Bugging *all* of his siblings.

"Listen- It was a *little* badass, 'kay?" Diego humored. By his tone, Klaus knew he was impressed though. "Don't go blowing your head out of proportion there, pal."

"What did happen though? To the other numbers?"

"Ah, yeah. We tried to talk to them, but it was clear that we'd never develop the trust we needed. They're undying Mason-ites." Five informed between bites of food.

"We were able to remove our Inhibitors and tag them instead. They were taken to some high-profile facility… Who knows. Not our problem anymore- it's the government's." Allison added as she walked behind Klaus to reach for napkins. On her way back to her seat, she put a hand on his head and quickly kissed his mess of hair. "Glad you're okay, by the way."

Klaus smiled up at her before returning to his glorious, wonderful, beautiful sustenance.

"So, we going driving tonight?" Deigo asked, raising his eyebrows at Klaus and Ben. "Gotta get you test-ready."

"Test?"

"Yeah. For your license."

"Pfft. License? I don't need a license. I just want to basics, then I'm set."

"Jesus."

And that was it. No more talk of Mason. No more talk of Klaus's slightly terrifying and very awesome powers. No more talk of Ben almost dying.

They moved on. They kept living. They talked about driving out to the beach next weekend, taking Ben and Five to their first amusement park… And when they did mix in some business, they loosely talked about the future of the Academy.

There were other Numbers still unaccounted for. Then there were numbers that were leading seemingly normal lives… until something bad happened. Until there were accidents. Five proposed they at least work to put together a database about their potential friends and foes- just so they weren't blindsided like last time.

They had fun. They made plans. They looked forward.

"*The team at its best. It's just like old times.*"

It wasn't though. It wasn't like old times at all. It was better.
And it was about fucking time.

Chapter End Notes

Thought of the day: Klaus comes back from fighting a war, killing people, seeing people around him killed, and losing the love of his life. Then he runs into Luther who is brooding about his moon expedition- Klaus drops EVERYTHING to try and make his brother feel better and gets what? Accusations and dismissals.

So unfair. You've got some explaining to do, Steve Blackman and Jeremy Slater.

So, I feel like I aged ten years writing this chapter. Not that it wasn't fun, but it was just a lot to fit in. I'm so sad to see this story end, however, I'm not TOO sad because I have a list of about 10 other stories I want to do! I've already started outlining for a few so I promise, if you stick around, they should come out very soon- All Klaus centric.

Thank you SO much to every reader, favoriter, follower, reviewer... You guys make this worth it and fuel my passion to continue the story. It's been a blast and I look forward to giving you some more content!

Just to give you an idea of some stories to possibly look forward to if you're interested (not necessarily in any order):

- Dave and Klaus's 10 months together in Vietnam
- What Klaus was doing BETWEEN the scenes shown in Season 1
- Klaus gets fed up and tries to leave the family for good
- In an unexpected turn of events, Klaus has to watch over Claire
- Klaus lets Vanya out (alternative to the show)
- Dave becomes a consistent ghost-boyfriend
- Ben's past death
- Klaus disappears and is found in a state so bad that Ben forces him into an institution

And there are a few more that are too complicated to simply give a one-sentence preview to at the moment. Can't wait to potentially hear from you all again!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!