“So like, you know the Horror?”
Ben furrowed his brow slightly.

“Like, the tentacle-y thing that lives in my me?”
“...Yeah,”
“Yeah I’m familiar,
It started at a meeting of the Spooky Smoker’s Social Club, because anything of importance always started there.
The gist of it was, Klaus hotboxed a room, and any ghosts who felt like attending could drift through the smoke, get fucked up, and stay for a brief discussion about philosophy over cool ranch doritos. To most, however, it looked like Klaus getting sky-high in his room.

“Hey. Hey. Hey Ben.”
“Wwhhhhazzup Klausy-cloud?”

Klaus was sprawled across Dave’s lap, being petted like an over-large housecat as Dave puffed at his joint and stared at the magic eye poster on the wall.
(Dave was the Guest of Honour this particular afternoon, because Klaus could only materialize one ghost at a time in the aftermath of the Spooky Smoker’s Social Club and he had wanted his hair played with. Dave was the only one for the job.)

“So like, you know the Horror?”
Ben furrowed his brow slightly.

“Like, the tentacle-y thing that lives in my me?”
“...Yeah,”
“Yeah I’m familiar,”

Klaus rolled over slightly, careful not to jar Dave in any way, and made intense eye contact with Ben.

“So the Horror isn’t you, right? It’s like a, a nice parasite that you share real-estate with. And daddy dearest tried to get you to like, control it, but,”
Klaus flicked a wrist idly in the air as he searched for the words.
“If a bitch is her own thing, she shouldn't be controlled. She should be, worked with, y’know? Consent is sexy, Bennifer.”
He looks up at Dave, who is completely zonked out of the conversation, focussed solely now on Klaus’ hair.
“So, so sexy.”

“Wait, so you think I should like, work with the Horror not against?”
“Yeah dude!”

Ben squinted. Sometimes Five squinted when he couldn't understand something and had to read it again. Maybe he was onto something, and Ben just had to squint to understand.

Klaus kept talking “Like, he fucked all of us up, and if anyone could traumatize a tentacle beast it’s him! I bet it’s not even that violent, that dad just made it made it all abused and shit.”
Klaus kept rambling, but Ben took a moment to check in with his co-host. Usually, the Horror felt bloodthirsty, or angry, but then again, Ben only really checked in right before a battle. Right now, the only overwhelming sensation he got from the eldritch was--

“Hey Klaus, she’s hungry.”
Klaus paused in his rant on why Dave had the prettiest eyes to ask “-for human flesh?”

It was slightly alarming, how long Ben spent with his eyes closed, his torso writhing under his hoodie.

“Nah,” he said, after a lengthy moment’s deliberation, “Like, just for meat in general.”

“Oh great!” exclaimed Klaus, hopping to his feet, “We have the meat! To the kitchen, mein bruder,”

Such began the long and arduous task of descending the stairs while stoned.

Chapter End Notes

there will be more, I have a whole mf plot babes!! comments and kudos give me life, pls lemme know about errors, see y'all when its not almost 5 in the AM have a fantastic day you loveable nerds <3
Five was no stranger to Klaus and his weird shit, but there was something to be said about coming home from a productive afternoon date with Delores to find Klaus sitting on the kitchen table, lit blunt in hand, while a corporeal Ben shoved raw ground beef into the hole in his middle.

“Hey Klaus,”
“Oh hi Fievel! How-” a long, drawn out coughing session, much like a cat throwing up “-are you?”

These kind of situations had to be handled carefully. It’s best to determine what is going on before using hostility in a non-violent circumstance. Now Five had never been the best at diffusing tension, or asking questions before shooting, or even talking. Forty-five years in the apocalypse will do that to a fella. But for his brothers, he decided to try. He took a deep breath in.

“I’m well. What are you up to?”

“Oh it’s not just me and Benny, we got the whole squad here!” A snap of his fingers, and a group of about twenty people appeared in blue light.

The smokers club. Of course. A group formed of most of the 173rd, some of Five’s victims, and the people Klaus killed in Vietnam, they were a surprisingly amicable and fun group with little to no hard feelings, a fact Five found both endearing and profoundly weird. Not to mention, they were a leading force behind most of Klaus’ more, well, eccentric, ideas.

“So what are you doing then?”

“Well, y’know how Ben’s got a tentacle friend in his guts? I thought, what if she’s friendly, and Ben said she’s hungry, and I know I don’t make great first impressions when I’m hangry, so we thought-”

“Hold on, just- just hold on a minute,” Five turned to ben, who was now shoving half of a raw, frozen chicken into the hole in his stomach.

“Ben,”
“Yeah?” Ben turned around, revealing that there was a rather formidable cephalopod beak in the middle of this torso. Five watched, the way you can’t help but watch a car crash, as it bit through the chicken’s flesh and bones, and swallowed whole, and as Ben shoved the other half forwards to repeat the process.

Five noted, in the part of his brain that was purely intellectual, that the beak was more reminiscent of a squid than an octopus, designed for tearing and ripping. There were small hooks along the edge, perhaps to stop live prey from moving backwards and escaping… Fascinating design, obviously
razor sharp, Five would have to compare that to his notes on cephalopods of the Paleogene period and-- No. No, there were more important things right now.

“Ben, you are going to unleash the Horror and see if it’s deadly.”

“That was the plan. If she is, Klaus can always de-swazyze me, and after that it’s like, what’s she gonna do? Kill me again?”

Five sighed deeply, and turned around to explain why that is still a valid fear, but Klaus and Ben were already two minutes into their secret high-five. Klaus turned around.

“C’mon Five, it’ll be fun,” he wheedled, “and I know your science brain would love it, and me and you could hide so it doesn’t get us, c’monnn”

It had been a while since Five got to do some good old practical science. Theoretical is fun, but it has its drawbacks. And this could open a whole new field of dimensional space, as well as potential bioweapons, and behaviorology, and--

“Oh, I know that Doc Brown gleam in your eye! Ben, he’s on board!”

Ben turned around, the beak letting out a small victory screech as he fist pumped.

“Hell yeah, adult supervision!”
Let Me Out

Chapter Summary

Alright, on three. One, two, three!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Okay so!”

Five had set up the experiment to be as sterile as possible, within the half-hour he had to set up and the limited attention span of his subjects. Ben was situated comfortably on a folding pink deck chair in the middle of the courtyard, there was two five gallon buckets of offal from the butcher next door, (Klaus had had to get those, turns out that nobody will sell that many pig-parts to a thirteen year-old after the theater release of Carrie, despite how much money you throw at him.), and a large glass of water with a bendy straw, because it was a hot day and Ben had complained, despite being a actual ghost.

“Ben, you feeling gucci?” Klaus shouted from a balcony, signalling the start of the experiment. Five whipped out his notepad and turned on the microphone. Ben gave a lazy double thumbs up. Philistines, the lot of them. Five shook his head fondly.

“Alright, on three. One, two, three!”

Giant, deep red tentacles whipped out from Ben’s torso as Klaus and Five ducked out of sight. It wasn't a tearing of Ben that released them, more of a folding, almost retracting motion of his skin to allow the Horror out. Diego had always said it reminded him of sleight of hand: blink and you miss it.

They searched the courtyard for some sort of threat, retreating closer to Ben when they found none.

“They behave like they’re about to be punished,” whispered Five as he scribbled furiously. “Like it’s inexcusable to be out without killing.”

Klaus just watched Ben down below. He seemed, tenser, now. It wouldn't’ve been noticeable except to Klaus, who saw how his brother didn't change from his reclined position, but how he breathed shallower, his hands clenched, his blinks lasting just a tad longer, like he wanted to keep his eyes shut.

Klaus and Five moved closer, not talking about it but needing to help.

Ben was scared out of his fucking mind.

The Horror approached him tentatively, and Ben couldn't think. Usually, the Horror was a cacophany of hurteatkillhunteathungrypleasehunteat, layers of raspy voices, slightly out of sync in Ben’s mind. But the meat that Ben had force fed her seemed to have helped. There was now a quiet, growling hum, instead of a raging buzz of noise.
She didn't sound angry, she sounded confused. Scared, maybe.

Ben remembers back to days spent training in vacant fields, the animals he had killed with her help. He remembers crying over dead sheep, remembers being covered in blood and viscera and sitting in the back of a car while his father paid a farmer in cash. But before that. This was a deep fear, rooted in his lizard brain, something that was trained in when he was young, very young.

The Horror showed him.

Small host. Larval stage.
Wrapped in soft blue comfortable. We were: Small, soft, hungry.
Got out, hunted.
Host: too small to feed itself.
Ate prey. Movement. Very red. We were: Sated. Slept.
Slept out.
Mistake.
Awoke: pain.
Attack: pain.
Eat: pain.
Hunt: pain.
Aid: pain.
Out: pain
Learned to hide. We were: hungry. Always.
Could not feed from host,
“It’s called mutually assured destruction, Number Six. If one party makes a move, both they and the other will surely die. Symbiosis, in that regard, is a double-edged sword.”
Could not feed. Hungry = no pain.
So hungry. Always.

Ben opened his eyes.
The Horror’s flashbacks were murky, blurred, but the spike of pain was unignorable. Ben recognized it, too. Tasers and cattle prods, like he was an animal. He saw his father, keeper, behind the blue electricity, the callousness and disregard for the welfare of an eight month old boy.

Ben breathed out, and tried to make his thoughts warm and soothing.
‘There’s no pain here’, he thought, loudly. ‘It’s okay.’

Ben, with trembling hands, reached into the bucket beside him and withdrew a chunk of… something. He held it out to the Horror, a peace offering. A piece offering.

She took it from his hand without making contact, almost delicate in her movements.
Hooked suckers gently seized the flesh of-- god, what was that? A pork tongue?-- and transferred it towards the beak protruding from just under where his rib cage ended, the one part of the Horror he’d never been able to hide. He’d hid the beak under hoodies and layers when he had been alive, hating the way that it made the buttons on his uniform shirts stand out. Hating how the tentacles would sometimes shift under his skin, as if trying to get more comfortable, or how the Horror would snap her beak at raw meat and corpses alike, how her tentacles would shift at mealtimes.

Hungry.

Not an apology, not a explanation. But Ben understood. He fed her a handful of tripe and spleen. Four more tentacles came out as he fed her the offal, the same as her others, but less pigmented.
Like they had never seen the sun.

‘Is that all of them?’ he asked
Yes. Too weak, before.

Her voice in his head was now a contented rumble after eating the contents of both buckets. She had not retracted yet, and Ben didn't really want her to. She sprawled across the courtyard, soaking up sun like a happy cat. It felt right, and Ben was reminded of how Klaus would shed clothes after he entered a building, and would then collapse on the nearest soft surface.

“Feels au naturel, Benny boy,” he’d say, usually as a response to Ben mocking his underwear choices.

He leans over and sort of, pats her. It feels like the right thing to do. The tentacles are warm, warmer than he thought they’d be, and though they are slimy, it’s not nearly enough to leave any sort of residue. She reminds Ben of a octopus he saw in the aquarium once when Klaus snuck in, sorta weird-cute.

And just like that, a spell has been undone. Carefully, like she’s trying not to spook a deer, she drapes one tentacle over his lap, tucks another behind his head, continuing until Ben looks like he’s in a sleeping bag made of pulsing spaghetti. It’s quite possibly the best hug Ben has had since his death eight years ago.

Five, at this point, believed that the experiment had gone rather well. Ben had fed the Horror all of the offal, and it seemed contented enough to sunbathe with him for now. Five was writing down the results of the experiment and his hypothesis for improving Ben-Horror relations over a series of carefully-controlled half-hour sessions when Klaus gasped and shook his shoulder.

Five looked over. “Shit,” he said, with vehemence. “Shit, it’s eating Ben!”

Chapter End Notes

let me out by gorillaz is a great song that has absolutely nothing to do with anything, but like, suffer, i guess?

for all y'all that got the peace/piece pun, and the back to the future reference in chapter 2: ayyyyYYYY

i hope to god you appreciate the amount of research on cephalopods going into this, it's a really interesting field!

also also also, if any of you cool cats know shit about posting with italics ~B~lease drop a comment ya boi be motherfucking drowning in a sea of HTML and formatting,,, pleaseTM, i am,, a simple Idiot TRYING my BEST but god keeps Testing Me.

Also also also, if you're gonna call me out on the fact that tongue is not actually offal, a) marry me, b) I know, I'm training to be a butcher <3

oh and soz for the lil cliffhanger, gotta give myself somewhere to jump off y'know?
anyways drop a comment, any and all suggestions are welcome but not guaranteed to make it in, leave some kudos if you liked it, tell me about spelling (not grammar tho, cause, cmon. Whomst the fuck cares.) and yeah! hope y'all have a lovely week/however long until i update again, mwah!
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Level Eight emergency in the courtyard!” Klaus screamed down the hall “Up and at ’em, we got a Level Eight, soldiers!”

Dave and Five were hot on Klaus’ heels as the group flung themselves down the stairs. Allison and Luther were already in the courtyard by the time they got there, clearly having ran out from whatever part of the house they were in. Diego crashed through a window on the opposite side, always having a flare for the dramatic, and Vanya quickly crawled out after him.

“Alright, game plan,” Five shouted “Distract it long enough to free Ben so he can get control, when it comes for us, Klaus will make it a ghost, let’s go--”

In the chaos, there was a sudden burst of sound. “Wait--” said Vanya; “Wait, what was--” Again.
“Was that-- giggling?”
It was. Ben, still high and being wrapped in the flesh-eating thing that made his life a living hell, was giggling.

“Ben? You doing okay?” Luther asked cautiously, approaching slowly. Diego still had a knife in each hand, but Allison held up a notepad that read ‘NOT YET.’

“She’s hugging me!”
“The Horror is a she?”

Ben leveled a Look at Luther. “Klaus is wearing hot pink pumps right now.”

“Hey! These are Louboutin!”

Ben simply sighed, deeply.
“Just, like, look up sexual dimorphism in squids and get back to me, yeah? Now Klaus, get over here, ‘cause I’m only gonna say this once.”

Klaus immediately flounced his way towards Ben, not at all worried that his brother was entangled in the same tentacles he had once seen tear apart a human being like a barbie doll. Ben leaned in close, with help from the Horror.

“You were right. She just wants to be loved.”
Klaus almost cried.

He flapped his hands for a second, in a sea of emotion, then dove in and hugged a tentacle. All of his siblings took a half step forward at the sudden movement. The hug was instantaneously and warmly reciprocated, the Horror weaving her way through Klaus’
legs like a possessive cat, and a tentacle wraps around skinny shoulders and lands on his face.

“She’s kissing me! That’s so fucking cute!” The suckers gently explored Klaus’ face, almost as if trying to memorize the shape of him.

The Horror murmured in Ben’s head.


“Congrats Klaus,” Ben said through a bright grin, “You’re officially part of the family.”

It took awhile, but eventually Ben convinced everyone to touch the Horror so she knew who her family was.

Luther stood stock-still as a tentacle landed across his face with a wet thwack, and eventually started gently patting her, getting more enthusiastic as they started to play tug-of-war with one of his fingerless gloves. *Foe!* she had cried happily as Luther tried to pin his opponent in something resembling a head-lock.

Vanya was protectively rolled up by one of the main tentacles and brought in close to Ben’s body after the main inspection. When Ben asked why, the Horror had responded defensively: *Too small: runt, fragile. Requires: extra care.*

The Horror then cuddled Vanya closer as Ben tried not to die laughing.

Five had tried to greet her with a handshake, insisting that “Having met aliens at the commission, it’s a good idea to try and make a formal introduction.” His expertise was quickly proved wrong when the Horror tried to return the favour by grabbing his ankle and shaking him roughly upside down. After that brief conversation, Five was placed delicately along the length of a tentacle, and was swung gently as if he were in a hammock. Ben tried to ask about that, but neither she nor Five would explain. He eventually fell into a light doze, and Ben supposed he looked comfy enough.

Allison just sort of leaned in, and was soon enough sitting with a tentacle over her shoulders, showing the Horror pictures of Claire on her phone.

*Small you-friend. Good.* said the Horror, and when Ben relayed her message to Allison, she beamed and got out more pictures.

Diego was, in some ways, the hardest. His fear of creepy-crawlies was insurmountable, despite having lived in a basement in New York. He started out offering only one hand to touch, and laughing when she made contact. The sensation was reminiscent of when he went to Eudora’s niece’s quinceanera, and her big St. Bernard licked his hand. Diego then started to pet the tentacle, and continued to when she wormed her way into his lap and demanded to be pet. It was kinda cute, he decided, later that afternoon. Like a octo-puppy. Diego started looking up ‘pet enrichment toys’ and ‘octopus treats’ that very night.

Chapter End Notes

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the Horror is the mom-friend and y'all can come after me
also: do neuro-typical people flap their hands when they are emotional? who knows?
hmu with suggestions and corrections babes!
Chapter Summary

“hungry.” They say, and immediately pass out.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After that, Ben keeps the Horror out pretty much constantly. It becomes regular to see Klaus petting empty air, or to have a tentacle creep through an open door, just checking in, on their time-travel-excursions where Ben is still alive.

(They all have different names for these trips. Ben and Klaus are strongly in favour of timey-wimey shenanigans, Five and Luther both approve of Time and Reality Adjustment Missions, Allison explains them away as “family road trips” to her friends and colleagues, and Diego spent an embarrassingly long time going through Vanya’s thesauruses to make up various cool acronyms he then refused to share with anyone.)

Reginald is, of course, a right bastard about it.

He finds out when The Umbrella Academy is eight years old, and Ben is alive. They got in late last night, seamlessly inhabiting the bodies of their younger selves. There are always problems with this process, but the main one is that your body is in the same condition as you left it.

The Horror is a endless shriek as Ben comes to that night. hungryhungryHUNGRYHUNGRY--

Ben is hit by the feeling like a brick as he stands up, and almost blacks out. He had forgotten spending most of his childhood in agony as the being inhabiting his body struggled to not consume him.

He remembers when she had failed. Number Six Hargreeves, 1989-2011.


Sibling--spawn-mate, she clarifies, and they are hungry, so fucking hungry, he sees the ouroboros repeated over and over in his mind. Ravenous, and desperate and locked in a paradox wherein it always dies, she is scared to die eatconsumefeastkillhunthungry hungry please---

Ben stands up, and it feels like he a marionette being propped up by the Horror, his puppetmaster. He is grateful for her support.

They turn towards sibling-spawn-mate-friend, perfectly synchronised. Ben is sure he looks a little strange at this point, but he can’t bring himself to care. His torso is twitching so much that it looks more like a bag full of snakes at this point, his breathing is ragged and laboured, and the Horror snaps her beak through his shirt.

A sibling gasps, but They can’t bring Themself to care. They are one organism, a man o’ war jellyfish, together and each cog in place like the world’s most perfect clock. They turn to Their siblings, and Their voice is layered and ancient and echoing. “hungry.” They say, and immediately pass out.
“Shit.”

Five watched in fascination and fear as his favourite brother passed out on the floor. The group had been going to Ben’s room to discuss what changes they were making to the timeline this time, when Diego had stopped them in the hall, suddenly.

“What-”

“Shh.” A deep growling, with a high pitched buzzing overlaid. It sounded like nothing human, and the hairs on the back of Five’s neck had gone up.

“Ben?” Vanya had asked, tentatively, “You okay?”

And now, after watching Ben turn towards them with his shirt torn through and his skin rippling and bubbling, he was K.O.‘d on the floor.

“Shit.”

It was Luther who said it, surprising all of them. He was standing behind the group, even now a full foot taller than the rest of them, frowning slightly.

“Now we need to get him to the kitchen.”

Five looked up at Luther. “What?” he hissed, quietly.

“Well that’s where the food is,” Luther said, reasonably.

“Do you think that we have the supplies to feed” A tentacle popped out of Ben, hopeful, at the mention of food “-a giant eldritch monster in the kitchen?”

“Well…”

“Ben said she ate meat,” said Klaus, gently patting the tentacle that had emerged from Ben. “I think we have meat.”

Three more tentacles extended from Ben’s back, and started crawling towards the kitchen like a massive, nightmarish praying mantis. Ben kept breathing deeply, dead to the world as he was carted off.

“Shit! C’mon, we’re on the move.”

The Hargreeves sneak through the hallways as they always did as children, distributing their weight evenly so as to not to let the ancient hardwood floors creak, sneaking around corners with wide open eyes, all the lights off.

Diego moved in front, while Luther closed the group, The Horror above all of them.

She seemed to recognize the need for silence, and would only step in the exact spots that Vanya had, recognizing her as the one with the lightest footfalls.

They make it to the kitchen unscathed, and suddenly The Academy is once again a well-oiled machine, Vanya holding open the door to the walk in freezer as Luther retrieves an entire suckling pig, Allison opening packages of raw meat with single minded intensity and handing them to Diego to lob at The Horror.

(She’s getting more bloodthirsty as the scent of preyfoodmeatyes permeates and stains the air around, the smell of spawnmates is overlapping and mixing with that of hunger. She would be sad to consume them, but better spawnmates dead than Host.)

Five reappears in a flash of light with a whole goat. His uniform is stained with a bit of blood, but then again, when is it not? There’s a vaguely manic glint in his eye. He yells “Incoming!” and throws the goat straight at Ben’s body.

(He would explain later that he had stolen a goat from the butcher’s shop that refused to sell him buckets of pig offal in the future, and Allison would cuff him around the back of his head and say that that was petty.)

The tentacles grab the goat out of the air in a graceful arc, neatly halving, then quartering the
carcass by ripping it apart, careless as destroying a paper doll. Bones crack and vertebrae unclasp like a zipper. The Horror consumes her goat in under a minute, the wet crunching-snipping sounds almost making Klaus pass out. An assembly line of passing hands in formed after that, with the sole objective of feeding The Horror anything meat-ish, from sausage casings to foie gras, until she was no longer hungry.

The siblings startled slightly at around three am, as The Horror began lowering Ben toward the floor, folding a tentacle under his head to make a sort of pillow. Ben looked calm, no longer shallowly unconscious but deeply asleep. His cheeks were filled in in a way that none of his siblings had ever seen before, his skin looked less jaundiced, his ribs didn't poke out, he breathed deeply without a hint of struggle.

“Oh my god,” said Allison, “This is the first time he’s gotten enough food.”

For the first time ever, Ben looked healthy.

It took two hours and around four hundred pounds of meat, but The Horror was no longer hungry. The tentacles sprawled across the floor in sated relaxation, grabbing her siblings in warm recognition. She placed them against Ben’s body, relishing human touch for the first time in years, and making sure none of them rested against the cold concrete floor of the kitchen. Klaus was the first to relax into the embrace, and his siblings followed him.

That night, the Hargreeves fall asleep curled around each other like puppies, in a kitchen with splashes of viscera against the ceiling. And despite (read: because of) The Horror, they feel safe in this house for the first time in a long time.

They are not woken up to Grace’s gentle smile or sunlight or even from awkwardly positioned necks. Even though they deserve softness, even though they are eight years old.

“Number Six, what is the meaning of this.”

Chapter End Notes

GUESS WHOS FUCKIN ~DRUNK~ AND BAD AT WRITING!!
unrelated but shoutout to vince staples for making some rad fuckin music tbh, sorry for the angst babies but U know i had to do it to em like goddamn.
who else is ready to fuckin Muurder reggie hargreeves? probs not gonna happen in this work but MURDER!!!!
also my hc is that luther isn't evil but just a absolute idiot and y'all can pry that from my cold dead hands. if this idiot got some therapy he'd probably have big golden retriever energy (loyal, dumb, unaware of his own strength, unquestioning, people pleaser)
there will be more gucci luther in this fic and honestly come for me bc family means everyone (EXCEPT REGGIE #GETFUCKED) n i don't think he's past redemption.
“Number Six, what is the meaning of this.”
Not a question but a statement. One Ben knew would have no sufficient answer.

Klaus had tried therapy, once. Three days into a lack-of-funds-fueled detox, he had stumbled his way into a walk in clinic, centipedes crawling under his skin.
His therapist was a large man, with a gentle south-african accent and pictures of his nieces on his desk. Ben had liked him, had liked the mint green walls and the way he carefully broadcasted his movements after noticing Klaus flinch.

Not a lot of people did that for Ben’s brother.

A coke dealer a while back had, said he knew what it was to be afraid. He showed Klaus the spot of his scalp where hair couldn't grow and how his left eye couldn't close right because his Dad had thrown a bottle at him.
He showed Klaus pictures of his wife, of their little flower garden on the balcony, and said that things wouldn't be this way forever.

A acquaintance of Klaus’, Madam Chang, had run her hands down his back covered in scars, and had asked softly if he had wanted this. She held him close after he shook his head no and cried silently. She hid her whips and floggers before Klaus came over, after that night, and showered him in soft words and even softer kisses amongst black leather and latex.

But the therapist had said something, something important as Klaus wasn't paying attention and digging his fingernails into the arms of his chair.

“No abuser manipulates. You cannot converse with them as you do with anyone else, because no matter what answer you give, it will be the wrong one. This robs you of your power and agency.”

Ben thought of that now, as The Horror shrank back against his eight-year-old-frame, his siblings forming a protectie wedge shape around him. His heart ached, knowing that their behaviour was more in line with a pack protecting a weakened member than that of a family.

The Horror was a raw, pulsing edge of panic and bloodthirst at the sight of Sir Reginald Hargreeves. Only Ben really knew why.

There are still scars along her skin. Burns and taser marks, places where she will never feel properly ever again. The kind that grow with you, because she was bigger than her host when she got them, but still small. Pale marks that most assume are colouring, patterns that can shift. There are, phantom aches, when she is exposed to That Man. When her host stands in front of him,
immature stage, *short pants*, every inch of her shrieks to curl in, to hide his organs and her beak, to stop exposing delicate underbelly.

She is muddied between the urge to kill, to retract, to do anything to stop the pain he is causing to her and her Host just by being here. She can’t think.

“Number Six, I asked you a question!”
“But no matter what I say, it will be the wrong answer”, he tries to reply. Finds his words stuck in his throat and he’s choking, choking--

“Sir, Number Six is exercising control over his powers by using them in a non-confrontational--”
Ben lets Luther’s platitudes wash over him like white noise as he looks around the room, tries to ride out the waves of adrenaline, of *runhideretractconcealbloodpainburnt* that The Horror is frantically pushing at him. A bit like Spidey-sense, Ben thinks numbly.

Reginald Hargreeves blanches and quickly stops his scolding, not because of Luther’s pre-prepared speech on control and symbiosis, still droning in the background.

Not because of the knives that Two holds under the table and Five brandishes threateningly, not because of Allison’s inhale and dirty look, daring him to make her say it. Not even because Klaus is holding an adult-sized set of brass knuckles in his tiny child hand, still pudgy with baby fat.

Not because of any of that.

Reginald Hargreeves shuts the fuck up for once in his goddamn life, because Vanya’s eyes lock with his from across the room.

He had always placed her the furthest away-- end of the table, end of the hall, in the basement. Out of range, *an outcast*, but it meant that she could look at him.
Making full, threatening eye contact like he hadn't spent years training it out of her, out of all of his children.

Her eyes were glowing white, almost colourless, and the room smelled slightly like ozone and petricor.
The walls seemed to be sucked away, every perfectly aligned corner slanting, the shadows saturated and inky black.

Grace used to have a original M.C. Escher lithograph in her alcove. She’d stare at it blankly, (or so he thought), as she recharged, pleasant unchanging smile on her face. He’d thought it was art when he had bought it, that such impossible constructions would be a marvel to witness. He had been wrong. It was a horror show.

Sir Reginald Hargreeves, inventor, billionaire, gold-medalist, industrialist, and alien, was scared. Very scared.

(They had a ceremony for it, now, when they went back in time. Vanya received her medication on Monday mornings. Grace would say “Now make sure to take them all, dear” and then wink knowingly before ruffling her hair. Vanya would go up to her room, where all her siblings had gathered, crowding up the tiny space. Together, in a amoeba-like clump, they would walk to the washroom at the end of the hall and flush all her pills. They’d do a sweep of Klaus’ room next, unearthing crystals and powder and pills, and Ben would be the one to say whether or not they got all of them.
Klaus would mostly sit outside his door, eyes tightly closed as Vanya rubbed his back through the withdrawals he’d have to go through again in this body.)
After all the pharmaceuticals had been flushed or thrown out or garborated, they would have a group hug, and go to Griddy’s for doughnuts. Vanya would always cry a little, so it was always a bit rainy out, but no one minded too much.)

Sir Reginald Hargreeves backs out of the kitchen.

Ben enrols himself in a training course for aggressive dogs, and couples counselling when he’s sixteen and Five says that they are all spending six months here, getting therapy and making sure Klaus doesn’t OD this time around.
He figures that communication would be good for them, but quickly discovers that The Horror is has the average intelligence and temperament of a ex-fighting pitbull.
He attends both the classes and sessions religiously, and every week a different sibling attends to field questions or intimidate his classmates.

Five teleports around the world, asking marine biology experts on squid behaviour, owners of giant rottweilers on training tips, and on one very memorable occasion, dragging Ben to a meeting of The First United Church of Cthulhu.

They were very pleased to have him, and Ben frequently receives postcards and frozen seafood, stopping at his death and being sent to Klaus’ P.O. box instead. Klaus follows the instructions they send on passing the offering to the Great Ben, portal to The Horror despite the fact that Ben is right there, and Klaus can make him corporeal enough feed The Horror the eight pounds of cocktail shrimp they’ve sent him.
He insists on lighting frankincense and chanting, and Dave, because he is The Worst, got Klaus a copy of the necronomicon and a book of filthy sea shanties.
Klaus then passes on the (completely false) message that Ben wants a choir to sing him sea shanties about-- god what was that, STIs?-- and a week later the church responds with a video. The Horror, to his horror, actually seems to enjoy it and rumbles along eerily to the song.

It’s good to see her happy.

Chapter End Notes

t-th-th-that's all folks!
,,well, might fuck around and write a little epilogue (leave suggestions babes!)
anyways had a lot of fun with this, thank you all for the support. Hmu with ideas for this series, i am Ready To Write, and please go read the other two if u liked this!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!