Heartlines

by Trash

Summary

It's 1999, and Mike is sick of being told the band would be better without him.

Notes

Un-beta'd. Any mistakes are my own damn fault.

Just keep following the heartlines on your hand, 'cause I am

After a day of meetings Mike comes home to his apartment and looks around. He wonders if this is what his mom and dad had in mind for him when they hammered home the importance of good grades and hard work. Did they picture him living in a bedsit with, ironically, no bed? Did they see him having to run the tap for ten minutes before he uses it to get rid of the sludge in the pipes? Mike doubts it.

He moves about, feeling detached. The plate of leftovers he put down this morning is licked clean, meaning the stray cat that keeps appearing on his fire escape crawled through the missing window pane whilst he was out. He had hoped maybe today it would choose to stay, to curl up on his mattress. He had hoped to have someone to talk to.

The only thing in the refrigerator is the beer Brad bought as a house-warming gift and Mike's stomach grumbles unhappily at the idea. He closes the door and stands in the kitchenette, staring at nothing.
His suit, the same one he wore for his uncle's funeral, is itchy. Or maybe it's just his skin. He wants to unzip his body and climb out of it. Instead he walks to the bathroom and shrugs off his jacket, unbuttoning his shirt, and hangs both over the back of the door. Shirtless he can see it, why they don't want him. He has no tattoos, he has absolutely nothing about him that screams 'potential rockstar'. His personality is nothing but a mosaic made up of fragments of people he has known. All he has is his desire to make music. And his scars.

Thousands of them. A map of his life etched into the skin of his chest and stomach and legs. Not his arms, though. He did that once and Brad questioned him continuously until he lied about being high and hallucinating. It's not a complete lie - in a time when he could afford weed he would smoke until he was relaxed enough to not have an internal dilemma about his self-harm.

Now, though, there's only one person in the band on drugs. And he's the one everyone wants. Rightly so, Mike thinks as he pulls his razor blade from where he taped it to the bottom of his bathroom cabinet. (He doesn't have to hide them now, but old habits did hard). Chester is incredible. Even when he walked into the audition room in what appeared to be his dad's clothes, they all knew he had something about him. When he opened his mouth it was obvious why he was here, why he was so confident that this was his time.

Who knew that their newest member would become the reason the oldest member was ousted?

He holds the blade in his hand until it warms to his body temperature. Twenty two and still dealing with his issues the way he did when he was fifteen. No more, he thinks, this is the last time. The last anything.

He positions the blade between his finger and thumb and holds it to his wrist just as there is a knock on the door. He sighs, dumping the blade in the sink and pulling on his shirt, buttoning it quickly as he makes his way across the apartment. The knock comes again. "Give me a fucking second," he yells as he takes off the chain.

"Keep your panties on," Chester says when the door opens. He looks Mike up and down. "You missed a button."

Mike looks down and blushes, refastening the last few buttons and clearing his throat. "You wanna come in?"

Chester nods and shuffles past. "So. After you graciously stomped out of the meeting-"

"I didn't stomp out."

"- we all called bullshit on this kicking you out of the band thing. Brad almost gave himself internal bleeding yelling about it to us. And anyway, even if he didn't, this is your band. And, like, there's no band without you."

Mike blinks, watches Chester's back as he makes his way into the kitchen. He opens the refrigerator and helps himself to a beer, opening it with his keys. He swigs it from the bottle and turns back to Mike, catches him staring and raises both eyebrows. "What?"

"You wanna know something funny?"

"Sure."

Mike barks out a short laugh. "If you had been like, five minutes later - maybe more, I dunno - I'd be dead."
Chester frowns, pushes his glasses up his nose. "What the fuck?"

"Yeah," Mike says, laughing hard now. He wipes at tears and giggles. "I was going to kill myself." He snorts and doubles over laughing until his laughter transforms into coughed, angry sobs. He straightens up and stares at Chester, holding out his hands. "Because I don't need y'all telling me why I'm not good enough, I tell myself that plenty."

Chester stares for a full minute before hurrying forward and gathering Mike in a crushing hug. "Don't you fucking say that," he scolds. "We were always on your side," he says, "I was always on your side."

Mike wants to explain, wants to say more, wants to explain the way his life is that feeling, that heart-beat-skipping moment when you miss a step on the stairs or misjudge a curb. He wants to find a way of putting into words how what the record company said wasn't entirely unexpected. Instead he cries a wet patch into the shoulder of Chester's T-shirt.

Chester presses his lips to the top of Mike's head and whispers. "It'll all be okay," and, "everything will be alright."

Mike wants to believe him but it's hard. Chester has his issues too - demons in the form of meth and coke and speed, all chasing him from Arizona. Does he tell himself the same whispered lies in the dark?

He lets himself be led to the mattress on the floor, lies down voluntarily. Chester crosses his arms across his stomach and grabs his T-shirt, pulling it over his head. His skin is pale, and Mike wants to reach out and touch him just to check. Memories hit him like a train - a mosaic of images, Brad pressing him down and pulling off his own shirt the same way, the way neither of them had known what they were doing but Mike knew he wanted to feel the flutter of Brad's heartbeat below his white skin pulled tight...

"No," he says, just as Chester gets onto the mattress beside him. "No I don't..."

Chester frowns at him. "It's okay," he says, lying down on his back. He shifts until his arm is underneath Mike's shoulders and pulls him closer. And then nothing. Mike wonders how he could have misjudged the situation so entirely.

"When I was a kid I would lie like this with a girl called Sam. Not that you're a girl...just, you know. Anyway. We would lie like this and look for the stars. Only you can't see them for all the streetlights. You can see them in the desert, but my dad said it wasn't safe there. As if he had any idea of where I would or wouldn't be safe." Chester sighs, just a little.

And Mike hears his voice though he doesn't believe it. "It'll be okay," he says, "everything will be okay."

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