**The High Way to Hell (From Under the Cork Tree)**

by acareeroutofrobbingbanks

Summary

In California the sun is brighter, the days are longer, and the monsters are stronger. Wait, what?

Enter monster-hunting Fall Out Boy, four boys who are a rock band by night, and mythical heroes around the clock. They came to record a sophomore album, but when they stumble on the more insidious supernatural underbelly of LA, Pete the fairy, Joe the werewolf, Andy the vampire, and Patrick the human have to save the day. Again.

Notes

A special thank you at the beginning to my new beta, AO3 name Swampy! You now have someone to thank for removing the nonstop grammar/spelling errors I've been rocking!

See the end of the work for more notes
Joe was having a fantastic day. Was, until they actually boarded the plane. Was doing fine up until the moment they climbed aboard the large, commercial jet. As soon as they did, he could hear Pete's heart speed up next to him, see his eyes widen, and hear as his breathing grew shallow. As Andy turned, concerned, Joe saw that he heard the change as well. But even without supernatural abilities, Patrick was the only one with the ability to just apparently know that something was wrong with Pete, and he grabbed his arm, stepping slightly in front of him and leading him forward, firmly, and carefully enough to make sure his arm did not shake even the slightest bit. Pete leaned toward him turning his head to face Patrick’s neck and balancing his nose on his shoulder, breathing heavily. The four of them were led, Patrick self consciously at the front, to the first class section of the plane, and were instantly out of place surrounded by bleach white floors and cushy chairs and pale walls, filled already with men in blue suits and women in slightly tighter blue suits.

Patrick sat down at the seat closest to the window, but Pete shook his head, moving next to it and pressing his forehead against the glass. Joe and Andy sat in front of them, stored their bags, and instantly turned to face them. Pete was breathing heavily, eyes focused out the window.

“This is wrong this is wrong this is wrong this is so wrong!” he hissed, hyperventilating. Patrick twisted to the side to prevent the stewardess from noticing, and rubbed his back.

“It’s all right.” he said, keeping his hand on the center of Pete’s spine. Pete shook his head violently.

“This is faulty, human hubris, you think the sky the earth the water the world belongs to you?” he was panting, pained. Joe felt ill just watching Pete shake, but couldn’t think of anything to say to him.

“It’s okay, it’s alright, it’s fine,” Patrick soothed, rubbing small circles into Pete’s back. Joe expected Pete to lash out at him, to tell Patrick to fuck off and leave him alone, but he arched into the touch, leaning his head on Patrick’s shoulder and inhaling deeply.

Possibly it shouldn’t have surprised Joe. It had been hardly any time since Patrick had gotten out of the hospital, in fact, he’d had to fight tooth and nail for permission to go across the country so soon, but even in those few days, Joe could see that the dynamic between the two of them had shifted, somehow. The way Patrick had clung to Andy after their first run in with a wendigo was how Pete and Patrick acted towards each other now, always leaning on the other one. A car misfired one day, and Patrick was coiled like a spring until he met Pete’s eyes. Pete got chewed out by Jeanae over the phone, but grabbing Patrick’s hand was enough to steady his voice.

Joe was truly grateful that they had each other, but it was a weird sort of closeness. Then again, they were all closer after everything that had gone down. Joe drove Andy up to Milwaukee to drop Carmilla off with his mom for the duration of their recording. The three of them all stayed with Patrick from start to finish of visiting hours until he was discharged, going over new song ideas together. Joe could tell that they were all much closer, and all much older.

Joe was, in his opinion, the least affected by all of this. Patrick was obviously the most physically different. He was still a little too pale for Joe’s liking; still jumpy when someone came too near his neck. Pete was just edgier. Even before the plane, the smallest things would set him off. Andy was, unsurprisingly, doing the worst. Joe couldn’t even describe what was wrong, it was simply that though none of Andy’s actions had changed, he didn’t do anything with the fervor he had before.

The problem at hand, however, wasn’t his entire band’s frail mental health, but rather Pete’s inability
to stomach the four hour flight they had ahead.

“What’s wrong?” Patrick murmured, stroking Pete’s hair. It was barely audible, shouldn’t have been audible, but thanks to Joe’s super hearing…

“I don’t know,” Pete said into Patrick’s t-shirt. Joe tried to tune them out while Patrick soothed Pete, turning instead to Andy, who wasn’t much of a conversation partner these days, but was something.

“Excited?” Joe asked after a minute or so of awkward silence. He felt like the estranged dad, asking stupid questions just to be saying something. Andy peered at Joe over the tops of his glasses, a little condescendingly, but eventually broke out into a small smile.

“Hell yeah,” Andy said. He pushed his hair out of his face and leaned back onto the plush, first class chair. “Real recording studio. Real producers. First vampire to take on Los Angeles. What’s not to love?”

Joe grinned back at him. The whole deal was too crazy. Paid for living spaces, getting a real salary for writing music, it was the dream come true. And maybe a few months in the sun and focusing on music would be good for all of them.

A flight attendant in a too tight uniform had to tell Pete and Patrick to separate and buckle up, and Joe wanted to intervene, but figured that Pete looked calm enough to handle a few minutes on his own. Which was good, because when not babysitting the other three members of his band, Joe always liked looking out of windows when the plane took off.

Being in an airplane wasn’t very fun, but Pete eventually calmed down, falling into a half sleep on Patrick’s shoulder while Patrick pulled out his laptop to work on music. Joe was hoping it wasn’t for anything Fall Out Boy, because he wanted them to work on that together, but Patrick’s fingers dragged over the keys too fast for Joe to really see.

Sometimes Joe felt like the only one holding them all together. But maybe some time away from Chicago and all that had happened could change things.

Before they even left the airport in Vegas, Joe could tell that they were in a vastly different place. The sun in Chicago during the winter always looked pale and cold, but from the huge windows that lined the halls he could see waves of heat rising off the ground and shimmering in the air.

Also, the slot machines next to baggage collection were a bit of a giveaway.

The second they were off the plane and trying to find their suitcases, Pete was in a much better mood, wondering aloud if they had time to use some of the shitty airport casinos.

“Since when do you gamble?” Patrick asked. He was back to vaguely pissed off and more than vaguely done with Pete’s shit as soon as the crisis was over.

“When in Rome,” Pete replied happily, picking up Patrick’s hat and ruffling his hair, which made Patrick growl.

Through it all, Joe kept close to Andy’s side. Andy kept quiet, and Joe kept talking to fill the silence.

“I guess you and Pete could probably go into casinos if you wanted to, but come on, when would any of us find the time?” Joe asked. He didn’t really expect an answer. He pointed out every sign and advertisement, noting the ones he had seen in the midwest and the new ones. Andy occasionally gave Joe a grateful smile, letting him know that he wasn’t being annoying, so he talked up a storm; Pete and Patrick lost in their own world.
Stepping outside into the heat was a nasty shock, but Joe could just make out Pete hailing a taxi through his squinted eyes.

“How much to Summerlin?” Pete asked the guy, who seemed to be laughing at him, but Pete rolled his eyes and waved his band into the cab.

“Fifty,” Pete sighed, and said: “This band better be fucking good.”

The band remained silent, because, to Joe’s knowledge, it was exclusively Pete’s idea to go ridiculously far out of their way to go see some kids he heard on livejournal perform. He’d been subjected to the demos like everyone else, and sure, they were good, but far from “spend an extra $600 on plane tickets to go to Vegas first” good.

The drive was weird, if for no other reason than every person they passed by was wearing shorts and tank tops. In November. If nothing else, Joe did not trust the weather in the desert. Too much heat.

Summerlin, Nevada was kind of terrifying, Joe thought. It was one endless, sprawling suburb, and stepping outside of the taxi made his skin crawl from the heat.

“This,” Joe announced, gesturing to the sun bleached, stucco house that the taxi stopped in front of, “This looks awful.”

Pete glanced down at the address in his hand and back up at the house. There were cracks in the foundation and where all the other houses had sprinklers running to feed green lawns, there was nothing but pale brown grass in front of this house. An ancient-looking truck stood in the driveway, and possibly it was just the oppressive temperature or the eerie silence, but the house looked abandoned.

“This is what he said in the email,” Pete said, but he looked concerned.

“I’m not about to get my kidneys jacked for some teenage garage band—” Joe began, but the door swang slowly inwards. No screen door. Joe was shocked it didn’t creak. The lights were all off inside.

“I guess he’s inviting us in?” Pete said, stepping forward. Patrick grabbed his arm and yanked him back.

“Pete,” Patrick said, his voice dead serious as he stared at the door, “Are you signing a ghost band? Have you ever looked obituaries for Ryan Ross?”

A voice from inside the house called, “Come in!” and the four of them jumped. Pete let out a nervous chuckle.

“This is ridiculous,” he said, and pulled out of Patrick’s grasp, walking forward. Joe, as he had done since he was sixteen, followed immediately after him.

It wasn’t as bad inside the house. There was a lamp on, actually, it just looked dark in comparison to the too hot sun. And the living room Joe walked into was clean, if shoddy. Very simple, just a couch and a few chairs that looked like they came from Salvation Army, an end table with the lamp on, a huge television, and a coffee table. And, sitting in the darkest corner of the room, a boy.

“Hello,” the boy said, his voice flat and plain. He offered a small, slightly awkward smile as he stood up and stretched his hand out to Pete. “I’m Ryan. Ryan Ross.”

“Figured,” Pete said. “I’m Pete. Pete Wentz.” He shook Ryan’s hand slowly, Ryan holding on for
far more long than was conventionally polite and running his thumb in small circles over Pete’s hand. Ryan nodded after a second, and turned to Joe. Should Pete introduce himself at some point? It seems weird not to.

“You must be Joe Trohman,” Ryan said, shaking his hand. His fingers were very long and icy cold, and he held Joe’s hand for too long as well, smiling a little. He repeated his actions with Andy and Patrick, and Joe could tell by the looks on their faces that they were all just as creeped out as he was.

“Please,” Ryan said, another shy smile down at them. The kid looked like a young teenager, except for the fact that he was so tall, “Sit,” he gestured down at the long couch, which all four of them sat on rather than spreading out to the chairs. Maybe, Joe thought, they were getting a little codependent, but he ignored the thought. It was normal to get closer after trauma, and they’d all dealt with enough trauma to last a lifetime. Ryan gave them an odd look, and his gaze flickered to one of the armchairs, but quickly went back to them.

“Can I get you all something to drink?” he asked. Someone must have nodded, because Ryan smiled and said, “Be right back.”

As soon as Ryan was out of the room, Patrick said, very quietly, “I’m not entirely sure I want to drink what he gives us.” Pete smacked him on the shoulder, but Joe privately agreed.

“He’s just… shy, probably,” Pete excused. Joe rolled his eyes and Andy continued to be quiet. Ryan was back in under thirty seconds with a tray and a huge smirk on his face.

“Root beer,” he said, handing Patrick a glass.

“Light beer,” he rephrased, handing Pete a bottle.

“Root beer again,” he handed Joe a glass, then turned to Andy.

“And O negative.”

Joe froze, turning to see Andy staring up at Ryan in confusion while Ryan held out a plastic cup with a lid on it. Sure enough, Joe could smell the rusty undertones of blood coming from the cup. Andy stood up, pushing Ryan’s hand to the side.

“Who are you?” he asked.

Ryan’s smile widened, evil-looking as he set the cup down.

“Kinda broke into a blood bank but hey, I just wanted to make you feel more comfortable. And I figured I shouldn’t be distributing alcohol to anyone under twenty-one-” he began, but Andy pinned him to the wall, cutting off his sentence.

“I asked you a question,” Andy said, his face dark, as three more boys ran in through the open front door.

“Dammit, Ryan!” one of them yelled, crossing his arms. He ran forward, putting a hand on Andy’s shoulder and said, “I’m so sorry about him, we told him not to do this, but he insisted it would be funny-”

“What the hell is going on?” Pete asked. The whole band was on their feet now, and the boy who had been talking flushed and stepped back, and the nerdiest one, with an awful black bowl cut and glasses piped up.
“Hi, sorry, I’m Brendon, we’re Panic! at the Disco,” he said, “And Ryan is an asshole, but we love him anyway!” His grin was enormous.

“And why does he know so much?” Andy asked, his arm still on Ryan’s neck. Brendon looked like he wanted to make Andy move, but wisely didn’t attempt anything.

“Ah, well, Ryan, he kind of sees the future. A little.”

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“Kind of sees the future a little’,” Pete repeated in disbelief. Andy wouldn’t turn to look at the kids who had just walked in, he kept his eyes on Ryan, still smirking proudly down at Andy.

“I’m the oracle,” he said, still smiling at Andy. Andy briefly turned to look at Pete, who nodded shortly.

“He’s telling the truth,” Pete said.

“Doesn’t mean you aren’t a threat,” Andy breathed. He didn’t let Ryan go, and Ryan rolled his eyes.

“Oh don’t give me so much credit,” Ryan said. “The entire magical world heard what went down at the Drake. You should cover up better,” he advised, and Andy growled, baring his fangs.

“What makes you think that?” Andy asked, all of his air huffing out in growls.

“Well you’re a vegan,” Ryan said, holding up one long, skinny finger, “And you claim to be a pacifist, though this isn’t very peaceful,” he lifted another finger, “And you probably want to hear more about me,” he concluded, putting up a third finger. Andy growled, but released him. He turned on his heels, walked back to the couch, and sat down next to Joe, the others sitting as well.

“Explain,” Pete demanded.

“I’m Ryan, I’m also the oracle,” Ryan said, and Patrick interrupted.

“The oracle?” he asked. “What does that even mean?”

“Like in Greek mythology, right?” Ryan said. “There’s this oracle at Delphi that tells the hero bitches how they’re gonna win and then die. I am The Oracle, the one and only. I see the future and tell the hero bitches what’s up. You here would be the hero bitches,” he added the last sentence with a smile.

“You lured us out here with a fake band to give us a prophecy?” Pete asked, and Ryan rolled his eyes, while one of the boys behind him yelled “Hey!”

“No, you’re here for the band, and if I prophecize at all while you’re here it’ll probably be about waffles or the Russian government or something,” Ryan said. “Though I have seen a lot of you in the past. You first showed up in my dreams a couple of years ago and I tried to focus on you guys because,” Ryan shrugged, “I mean, monster hunting is better than TV. Say, Patrick, you still have a scar on your chest?”

Patrick immediately crossed his arms self consciously over his chest. Andy hadn’t known the answer to the question, but Patrick made it a bit obvious.

“That’s so cool!” Ryan said, a grin splitting his face.

“Ryan, stop it,” one of the boys warned.
“Do you have scars on your neck too?” Ryan asked. Patrick squirmed in his seat.

“Ryan!” the boy snapped. He gave the band an apologetic look. “Sorry about him.”

“Don’t apologize for me, Spencer,” Ryan said, rolling his eyes. “Pete already knows I’m an asshole. The rest of them might as well learn too.”

“Anyways!” Brendon beamed, nervous. “Do you still want to watch us play?”

It was hard to focus on the task at hand, but Andy tried to think about them in terms of music, not as a threat. The eight of them piled into Spencer’s minivan, driving a few streets down and opening the garage door to a rock band set up. Andy was dubious, all of them looking so young and inexperienced, holding their instruments like they’d never seen them before, and Brendon bouncing up and down behind the microphone so much that his glasses fell off.

But then they started playing, and to Andy’s surprise, they were better than good. They were fantastic. Not polished, certainly, but they were competent enough at their jobs, and the song was incredible. The bassist, Brent, seemed a little awkward, and Spencer fumbled the drums once or twice, but not noticeably. And dorky Brendon had one hell of a voice. It was high and soulful and powerful, and even though the amps they used weren’t very loud, Andy could feel the earth trembling beneath his feet while they played.

“Good?” Brendon asked, looking from the band to Ryan and back, flashing hopeful glances at all of them.

“Great!” Pete almost shouted back at them, then flashed an ‘I told you so!’ grin back at the band. Patrick grumbled a bit, but didn’t argue.

“Why don’t I take you guys out to dinner while we celebrate you four being signed?” Pete asked, and the boys looked at him like he was offering them the sun.

“Oh, you’re paying for all of us?” Joe asked, grinning at Pete, who rolled his eyes, and it was all so easy, so calm, but Andy wanted to go back to the oracle thing. The magic. how much had Ryan seen, how much did he know? Had he seen Andy kill Andrea? Did he only experience things in third person, or did he know how all this felt? And did they have to keep talking about fucking business?

It turned out that there wasn’t an abundance of fancy restaurants in Summerlin, but Pete was not entirely in the mood to get another taxi to Vegas, so they ended up briefly stopping to tell Spencer’s mom the good news, and getting a celebratory label dinner at McDonalds. This did nothing to brighten Andy’s spirits, but Patrick was rather excited to have some for the first time in five years, due to his vegetarianism ending on doctors’ orders to help him build up more blood.

Thankfully, Pete wasn’t one to let questions go unanswered, so once they were seated, he turned his attention back to Ryan.

“You said you saw us a couple of years ago?” he asked. Ryan nodded.

“I see lots of stuff in dreams, people I don’t know and people I do, people that aren’t even speaking English,” he shrugged. “But I saw Andy biting him and like, holy shit, vampires!” Ryan laughed a little self consciously, never raising his voice. “So I tried to tune into you guys. The more I think about something, the more I see it, and if I know people really well, I can just sort of see them whenever I try.”

“Yeah, like the one time you-” Brendon began with a laugh, and Ryan elbowed him in the stomach,
“Cutting his words off. “That was an accident,” Ryan growled, and Brendon giggled.

“So you’ve been watching us?” Pete said. Ryan nodded, looking kind of guilty.

“You guys have adventures all the time, and I was intrigued.” Ryan looked sheepish. “Anyway, sorry about the blood,” he turned to Andy, “I thought it was kind of funny, and I do have blood if you need some.”

“I can find my own, thanks,” Andy said stiffly. Ryan looked away, embarrassed.

“Did you pick me on purpose?” Pete asked, and Ryan shook his head, swallowing too much food too fast.

“Actually it was just a happy accident that you noticed us,” Ryan said, “But I probably would’ve contacted you eventually.”

“Why?” Pete asked. All of Panic! squirmed uncomfortably, Ryan and Brent’s eyes flicking briefly to Brendon.

“You’re the only person I’ve seen that knows as much about magic as me,” Ryan said to Pete, “And we have questions.”

“We?” Joe asked, and Ryan definitely looked at Brendon.

“We should go home for tonight though,” Brent said, and Spencer nodded.

“Why?” Patrick asked, and Spencer cast a judgemental look at him in the pale restaurant light.

“It’s a school night?” Spencer said, like that was the dumbest question in the world.

“Oh my god, I’m so sorry,” Patrick said, looking genuinely horrified, and they shrugged.

“Yeah, all right, we got a hotel to get back to,” Pete said, grinning at the others. Andy rolled his eyes. Pete had a strange pipe dream about casinos for no apparent reason on this trip.

They filed out to the parking lot. It was weird, Andy thought, that it was so hot but the sun was still setting mid-afternoon. The minivan was parked behind the restaurant, but when they got back there there was already a group of men in black suits and sunglasses standing in front of the van that was blocking their own.

“Men in black? Where’s the memory stick thing?” Patrick asked quietly, and Andy chuckled, but stepped forward uneasily.

“Can I help you?” he asked. He saw a flurry of movement down at one of their hips, heard a bang, and felt pain coursing through his body, hot and electric and flowing from his chest. He gasped, falling to the pavement, and heard screaming behind him that didn’t quite register into words. It was definitely his band screaming, but there were other voices intermingled. His fangs were showing above his lips as a natural defense, and he couldn’t summon the energy to lift a hand to cover them.

His vision slowly began clearing as the ringing in his ears started to subside, and he tried to stand, only to fall back down. He turned around then, so at least he could see what was happening, and he saw Pete in front, negotiating with his eyes leaking a faint golden glow.

“Why don’t you put down your weapons so we can talk, alright?” Pete asked, his voice soothing and
velvety as it was when he was using charmspeak. “Just drop the weapons, yeah?”

Andy heard guns clattering to the pavement behind him and sat up a little further.

“So,” Pete continued, the golden glow getting brighter, “I bet you want to tell us what you’re doing,” he said.

Andy was finally able to coax his muscles into working well enough to stand up, and he did so shakily, leaning onto the first person who offered their arm out to him. He half collapsed onto their side, breathing in sharply. Joe, naturally. He held Andy in an iron grip, trying to keep him upright. Andy felt his fingers along his side to where the pain stemmed from, but there was no blood there.

“Taser,” Joe whispered out of the corner of his mouth, and Andy nodded.

“We were sent for the siren,” one of the men said. Their faces had gone blank, and there were taser guns on the ground, the men looking even more like robots now that they were under mind control.

“Sent for the siren,” a second man confirmed, “but our orders are to pick up any unregistered non-human humanoid in Clark County, Nevada.”

Pete cocked his head to the side.

“Who are your orders from?” he asked, and Andy could see the charmspeak slipping as he asked with curiosity and less focus on his intent. One of the men reached a hand behind him and then leapt forward at Pete.

Andy lurched towards them to stop him, but he was too uncoordinated from the attack and he stumbled and fell back into Joe’s arms.

“Get your hands-!” Pete began to scream, panicked light coming from his eyes, but his words turned into a muffled scream as he was knocked to the ground. He was making a noise of pain, but it sounded strangled. Patrick was trying to rip the man off of Pete, but he found himself tasered as well, slumping to the ground with a groan. They were rapidly losing control of the situation and none of the younger boys were doing anything to help. Andy shoved Joe aside.

“Help them!” Andy pleaded, sinking to the ground and barely noticing when he himself got grabbed.

When the man that had tackled Pete dragged him up by his hair with a muttered “Fucking fae bitch,” Andy could see why Pete’s cry had been strained. The man had attached what looked like a horse’s bit around Pete’s head, and the bar that rested in his mouth was made of some sort of rough metal that was cutting the edges of his mouth, or no, burning them.

Iron, Andy realized. It must have been an iron gag. And tears were streaming down Pete’s face, but he stayed silent.

Handcuffs were placed on Andy’s wrists, too strong for him to break out of, and he was roughly thrown into the back of the van. Pete was thrown in a second later, gasping in pain on contact as each movement pulled at the gag and seared the edges of his lips. Next, to Andy’s surprise, was the dorky kid, Brendon.

“Let me go!” Brendon screamed, his eyes huge as he kicked at the two men holding him. “You don’t understand, I’m not who you think I am!”

The earth shuddered underneath them, and one of the men gave Brendon a cold smile.
“You’re proving us right, kid,” he said, and then, to Andy’s dismay, he heard a long, low howl cut short and the unconscious body of a wolf was thrown in the back with them.

“I wouldn’t try to break out, if I was you,” one of the men said into the back. If he craned his neck enough, Andy could just see the slumped figures of the rest of Brendon’s band and Patrick in the parking lot. “Boss doesn’t like his material damaged, but he makes exceptions.”

With that, the man slammed the door shut, and they were covered in darkness.

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Patrick woke up with a headache. This was the first time he had woken up this disoriented since the vampire dungeon, and he was not at all happy to see the faint glow of stars above him. He jumped to his feet, and, immediately woozy, fell back down.

“Fuck!” he hissed aloud, rubbing his head. He looked around, trying to take in his surroundings. He was in a McDonald’s parking lot, it was dark out, and Pete had-

“Pete!” he yelled, standing up and spinning round, but Pete was nowhere to be found. There were three bodies next to him, but none of them were his band.

“Pete!” he screamed. “Andy, Joe! Goddammit!” he yelled, kicking Spencer’s minivan. He must have been causing quite a ruckus, because he heard a voice behind him.

“Wuzzgoing on?” he heard a sleep-heavy voice ask. Patrick spun around, wild-eyed and panicked. Ryan was sitting up, confusion thick on his face.

“Wake up!” Patrick yelled at him. He had no time to babysit Pete’s newest pet project, and he was already flipping his cell phone open, grateful that he hadn’t crushed it in the fall. He punched in Pete’s number, and it rang a few times, but there was no answer.

“Patrick?!” Ryan sounded like he was doing much worse behind him, but Patrick was calling Andy’s phone now, not really expecting an answer. He drummed his fingers on the van, and when it went to voicemail he swore and tried calling Joe.

“Patrick!” Ryan yelled behind him. Patrick spun around and saw Ryan staring at him, pleading and helpless. His eyes were welling up with tears. “They got Brendon.”

“Oh, Jesus,” Patrick groaned. Ryan was going to start crying and Patrick didn’t know what he was supposed to do about that. “Okay, come on, don’t cry, we’re gonna get him back.” He put a hand on Ryan’s shoulder, hoping it was soothing even from an arm’s length away.

“I knew something like this was gonna happen!” Ryan gasped, and he wasn’t crying yet, but he looked suspiciously hysterical. Joe’s voicemail picked up and Patrick tossed his phone aside.

“Okay, calm down!” Patrick said, his voice not soothing but demanding as he pleaded with Ryan. He scratched his head and tried to remember the details. “Did you catch a plate number?” he asked.

“No!” Ryan yelled, looking hysterical still. “Why would we need it?”

“Don’t know,” Patrick admitted. He started pacing the lot while Ryan knelt down and began shaking his friends. He tried to focus, but he couldn’t formulate a plan. Obviously he had to figure out a way to get his friends out, but he didn’t know where they’d been taken or who they’d been taken by. He didn’t know if they were still alive but no, he wasn’t going to go there.
“Brendon’s gone!” he heard one of the others gasp, but Patrick wasn’t paying attention. Pete had a guy for everything, right? Maybe if Patrick called Gabe or Bill back in Chicago they’d know someone Patrick could call that could triangulate a cell phone signal. Patrick wasn’t even sure if that was a thing, but it was definitely worth trying…

“Brendon’s gonna be fine, right Patrick?” Ryan turned to him, and Patrick spun around, confused.

“What?” Patrick asked. “I mean, yeah, totally. He’ll be great.”

“Patrick fights monsters all the time!” Ryan declared, almost proudly. Spencer and Brent’s eyes brightened as well, looking over at Patrick. Patrick stopped his pacing, gripping one arm with his hand self consciously.

“What?” he asked, eyes wide and confused, but Ryan beamed at him.

“I’ve seen you!” he said, smiling like all their problems were solved. “You fight monsters and save people all the time!”

“That seems like a slight exaggeration,” Patrick said, feeling stunningly like a deer in the headlights.

“No way!” Ryan said, nodding eagerly at him.

“Mostly I just provide moral support,” Patrick said. “And I get taken hostage all the time. This is a pretty unique role reversal for me, actually.”

“Ryan told me you killed a zombie,” Spencer said.

“Did I? It was a long day,” Patrick said, dizziness washing over him.

“He said you offered yourself up as bait to get into the vampire lair!” Brent added eagerly.

“Well, I didn’t know it was a vampire lair-’ Patrick began.

“Oh and one time you-!’

“Stop!” Patrick said, holding his hands out in front of him. The boys obediently stopped talking, and Patrick grimaced. “I’m not a comic book hero, I just end up in the wrong place at the wrong time a lot,” he said, trying to explain.

“But you help save the day too,” Ryan insisted. “You’d know what to do, right?”

Patrick sighed, sitting down on the pavement. His chest stung where he’d been tasered, right on his old fucking scar, and he held his face in his hands for a minute. It would be easy, yes, if he just knew where they were. Joe’s gun was still in his luggage, along with Patrick’s knife. All he’d have to do was sneak in (there was always a way to sneak in) and he’d be able to put up enough of a fight with his knife to distract the guards while one of them got the gag off of Pete long enough for Pete to charmspeak them into obedience.

“Yeah, I know what to do,” he said at last, looking up at them. All three of the boys were staring at him expectantly. “But I’d have to know where they are. We can’t do anything from here.”

To Patrick’s surprise, Ryan laughed.

“Is that all?” he asked. Patrick stared at him, and Ryan heaved a deep sigh.

“It’s easier for me to see people when I know them,” Ryan said, giving Patrick a meaningful look.
Patrick continued to stare blankly at him and Ryan rolled his eyes.

“Were you listening to me telling you about being the oracle at all?” Ryan asked.

“You know, living with Pete I’m pretty used to answering all questions honestly to save time, so do you really want to know?” Patrick asked. Ryan glared at him.

“Brendon is one of my best friends,” Ryan said. “I know where they are.”

“Don’t you see the future?” Patrick asked. Ryan shrugged.

“I can see a lot more if I focus,” he said, and shot Spencer a look. Spencer nodded, and Ryan’s eyes rolled back into his head as he toppled over backwards into Spencer’s arms.

“Oh my god, is that normal?” Patrick asked. Ryan lay limp, whites of his eyes showing as he twitched slightly.

“Well… he tries not to do it much because he sees it as an invasion of privacy, but he’s done it before,” Spencer said. He and Brent looked largely unconcerned with their seizing friend.

“Sure,” Patrick said. “Why not?” He picked up his phone again, and just to feel like he was doing something productive, tried calling Pete again. It went straight to voicemail, a soundbite of Pete saying to leave a message after the loud fart noise he made. It made Patrick think of sad drama movies where the grief-stricken left-behind people keep listening to the deceased’s voicemail greeting, and how fucking stupid this would be if Pete died.

Patrick turned his attention back to Ryan, still lying mostly silent in Spencer’s arms, and noticed behind them that a worker from the restaurant was coming out. Patrick coughed to get Spencer and Brent’s attention.

“Yeah, if we don’t want the police to get called, we should move this party into your car,” he said to Spencer, who nodded, carrying Ryan over and laying him down in the backseat, allowing Brent and Patrick to climb in after.

“How long will this take?” Patrick asked after a few minutes. Spencer had turned on the radio. Brent shrugged.

“Well, he’s experiencing everything Brendon is right now, so until Brendon figures it out, I guess,” Brent said. Patrick nodded, silent for a moment as he stared at the dirty gray seats, before he realized something.

“Wait, why did they kidnap Brendon?”

Spencer stopped drumming on the steering wheel and Brent slipped in his seat slightly. The two of them turned to each other, having a silent conversation with their eyes. Brent raised his eyebrows, Spencer shook his head, Brent raised his eyebrows again, and Spencer sighed, then nodded.

“Brendon’s… different,” Brent said, grimacing at the word. Patrick huffed a little.

“My best friend has the power of mind control and I recently came out of vampire captivity. Different is kind of my game. Lay it on me.”

“He’s a, um, siren,” Brent said, and looked up at the ceiling of the car, then back at Patrick. “Kind of.”
“Kind of?” Patrick asked, weary. He was really tired of these kids skirting around the answer at every turn. Spencer winced.

“Well, he was a siren?” Brent said. “But his parents, well, they didn’t want a kid who’s tantrums could drown them, so they moved inland. But it backfired a little.”

“Get to the point!” Patrick snapped.

“He’s a land siren,” Spencer said, stopping Brent before he could try again. “He can drown people, but with the earth. Like quicksand, but if all land was quicksand and it attacked you.”

Patrick gawked. He couldn’t imagine the sweet geeky kid he met drowning someone by accident, much less causing the earth to rise up and swallow a person.

“Does he use that power often?” Patrick asked, vaguely frightened.

“Well,” Brent shrugged, and Spencer gave an embarrassed smile. “I mean, a couple of times on accident, but usually he can fix it. And he’s a siren, so it only happens when he sings!”

“And you made him the singer of a band that’s about to get signed?” Patrick asked. The boys shrugged, but they were disturbed by Ryan sitting up suddenly, gasping for breath.

“Fremont Hotel and Casino!” Ryan yelled. “He saw the name while they were getting pulled out! It’s on the corner of 4th and Fremont street.”

“That’s incredibly specific and lucky,” Patrick said, and Ryan, sweaty and shaky, grinned at him.

“Nobody expects the oracle,” he said with a grin.

“Oh, we are gonna be out so late,” Brent groaned.

“Worry about your high school career when your friend is safe,” Patrick growled at him, and turned to Spencer. “You driving, or me?”

“I don’t think my mom would approve of strange rockstars driving her minivan, actually,” Spencer said, turning on the ignition.

“We need to stop by Ryan’s house first,” Patrick said. “I’ve got some weapons to pick up.”

Ryan was bouncing in the backseat with excitement.

“The knife you stole from the ghost of H. H. Holmes?” he squeaked.

“It sounds much cooler when you say that,” Patrick said.

“Is there a way to make that sound uncool?” Brent asked dubiously. Patrick shrugged. He explained the plan to them as they drove. Ryan, they decided, was going to take a knife from his house and cut off Pete’s gag. Spencer was in charge of the gun, a decision that Patrick felt good about making when Spencer nodded seriously and didn’t panic or get excited, because a swing in either direction would have made Patrick uneasy. Brent would stand guard, something he shot Patrick a grateful look for. It was, all in all, a pretty rock solid plan, Patrick thought. Simple and sweet. Ryan’s dad was sleeping, so Patrick didn’t have to answer the questions of a worried adult, and Spencer was able to call his mom and say he was staying the night at Ryan’s house. They were on the road again in a few minutes.

However, as their destination approached, the three boys’ nervousness grew exponentially and
Patrick couldn’t help casting them worried looks. These were kids. Technically all adults, but they were kids that he was sending into life threatening danger. And sure, he gave himself the most dangerous role, but still, any one of them could get killed. Was this how Pete felt all the time? He didn’t act like it.

“How was everyone else when you were in Brendon’s head?” Patrick asked once they had turned onto Fremont street. Ryan looked pained when he replied.

“Joe was um, awake again,” Ryan said, “but tied up pretty tight. Andy seemed fine aside from the cuffs. And Pete was, um, breathing.”

Patrick let out a long, low hiss, and his doubt for the plan melted away.

“Let’s kick some ass then, huh?” he said, his mouth a harsh, grim line.

Spencer turned into the hotel parking lot and pulled up next to the same van from earlier. Patrick handed him the gun, which he took in steady hands.

“You know how to fire flintlock?” Patrick asked. Spencer nodded.

“Pretty sure cock and pull hasn’t changed that much,” he said, demonstrating without pulling the trigger. Patrick nodded back.

“Which room?” he asked Ryan.

“Fuck if I know,” Ryan said, and Patrick gave him an exasperated groan.

“Then where are we going?” he asked. Ryan looked affronted, and clearly had no answer.

“Let’s go through the halls,” Spencer suggested. “Maybe we’ll hear them talking. I doubt a place like this is soundproof.”

Patrick paused for a moment to wonder what was up with all the peacekeeping drummers of the world, but gave a half nod, tucked the long knife through one of his belt loops, and led the way into the hotel.

The tired girl at the front desk didn’t question them as they stormed through the door, but continued to flip through a magazine. They stormed down the hall, but then had to go slower to stop and listen in front of every single door. It was an agonizingly slow process, and Patrick wanted to scream at Ryan for not staying in Brendon’s head just a little longer. They went about this for a few minutes when suddenly Ryan fell sideways against the wall.

“Ry?” Spencer asked, urgent but quiet, but Ryan shook his head, standing up again.

“Room 306, follow me,” he said, and ran forward, Patrick racing after him. They sprinted through the halls, stopping suddenly at the end of a short dead end hallway. At the other end was a vending machine, which three of the suit-wearing guys were standing in front of. And Patrick had a great plan that was still going to work. A scream rang out from inside room 306, long and loud, and it seemed to jar them all into action.

“Hey fuckers!” Ryan yelled down the hall, pulling out the butcher knife from his dad’s house. All three men turned around to face them, their faces already bloodied and their faces instantly furious. Patrick was really starting to hate this band.

Still, he was prepared to run forward to fight them when Ryan wrenched open the door to 306 and
shoved Patrick in, yelling “New plan!” at him as the door swung shut.

***

Once when Pete was a kid, his mother had tried to brush his hair out of his face without washing her hands when she had been cooking with hot chilies. His skin had stung for days, but it was mostly just sort of tingly.

This was nothing like that. The gag they had put him in was a rough iron bar shoved between his lips, the straps holding it to his head too tight, and the edges of the bar uneven and digging into his skin, cutting him in places and burning him in others. There were iron cuffs searing his wrist behind his back, and the men in suits had propped him up against the wall knowing that he couldn’t move without extreme pain. So he didn’t.

Frankly, Pete was furious with himself. Getting himself kidnapped was one thing, dropping charmspeak long enough that his friends could get kidnapped was something else entirely. And Brendon, wrists and ankles tied in the corner, he was seventeen. Not even a legal adult, trying to shake his glasses further up his nose by tossing his head back every now and then, trying not to cry, and all because Pete had managed to get him kidnapped.

They weren’t blindfolded, so Pete could easily see the hotel they were dragged into. The men must have made some sort of deal with the management there, because the front desk clerk nodded solemnly at them as they stumbled in, all in handcuffs and Pete gagged. He made a desperate, pleading noise at the clerk in the back of his throat, but the worker turned away from him.

Once inside the room and no longer being jostled, Pete could get a better hold on their surroundings. There were five men in the room, talking and laughing and lighting each other’s cigarettes. Joe had turned back to human, as per Andy’s encouragement. Pete was unbelievably grateful that Andy knew enough to tell him that while Pete couldn’t. Of course, Andy was gagged soon after, so he couldn’t help much now.

Hunters. Of course, Pete’s mother had warned him about them. Hell, he’d lost friends to them, but they always felt like a distant threat. Like human trafficking, something you read about on the news, but that could never happen to you. Most of them, his mother had told him, wouldn’t matter to him. Trophy hunters that had taxidermied werewolf heads above their fireplaces and vampire fangs on necklaces. Leprechaun gold and dragon-scale wallets. Since fairies looked human, he wasn’t in much danger from them.

Unfortunately, there were black sections of black markets. The sadistic hunters were out there, ones that wanted monsters as entertainment at parties. Fairies frozen with their eyes still glowing or held in iron until they did parlor tricks. Sirens forced to sing forever. Vampires made to bite humans to get them high. Slave trade, in essence.

Joe was probably only alive so long as he stayed in human form, but then, Andy hadn’t been killed yet, so maybe these hunters were different from the ones Pete had heard horror stories about as a child.

“So,” one of the hunters leaned against the wall, puffing on his cigarette like a Disney villain, “got a joke for you boys. A fairy, a werewolf, a vampire, and a siren walk into a bar. They all end up dead or enslaved by the end of the night.”

The hunter walked forward and breathed a cloud of smoke into Pete’s face. Pete, in turn, began hacking, each cough agitating the iron bar in his mouth and burning him.
“The end,” he said.

“What do you want with us?” Joe asked. Where Pete was just propped up against the wall, the three others had their handcuffs chained to the radiator.

“You, dog,” the man grinned, “Your head’s gonna be on someone’s wall. Your siren friend,” he kicked Brendon, who let out a pitiful whimpering sound, “goes to the boss. As for the other two, well, we’ll just see how it goes.”

“I’m nothing special,” Brendon insisted, his eyes big and scared. The hunter put out his cigarette on the iron bar just in front of Pete’s teeth, and shrugged.

“Boss’s orders, not mine,” he said. He pushed his lanky black hair out of his eyes, smirking at Brendon.

“Should we check on the others?” the shortest of the men asked. Still taller than Pete - they all had tall frames and broad shoulders.

“No need,” the first man said. The leader, Pete guessed. He tried to ignore the iron’s searing and focus, look closer at their auras to get a better idea of who they were working with. The leader had a slimy green outline around him, not pleasant, but bright enough that he easily kept command over the men he was working with.

“What about the fae?” asked a gruff man in the back. Pete squirmed under his appraising gaze, the hunter’s eyes boring into Pete’s skin like the metal in his mouth. His aura was too dark- it frightened Pete.

“What about the fae?” the leader asked, impatience rolling off his tongue with every word.

“His wrists are smoking,” the man said, and the leader turned to Pete in alarm. Pete whined around the gag, and the leader grabbed a handful of tissues out of the box on the bedside table, and quickly lined the cuffs. It was only one layer, light enough that Pete could still feel it, but he no longer felt like he was going to get charred to the bone. The leader stared into Pete’s eyes, questioning.

“You’re full blooded, aren’t you?” he asked, eyebrows pulled together in concentration. Pete growled at him, and the hunter laughed.

“Well, that’s a rare prize,” he said. “Shame we’ll have the whole Seelie court up our asses if we hurt this one.”

“How do you know he’s Seelie?” the one in the back asked. The leader rolled his eyes.

“Too fuckin’ pretty to be Unseelie,” he said, and walked over to the radiator. He knelt down next to Joe.

“I hate dogs, but I guess you probably won’t piss on my carpet if I keep you,” he said. Pete winced, not wanting to see the looked of pained indignation on Joe’s face. “Still, probably you’ll keep me up all damn night, braying for your friends.”

“I’m a bit of a lone wolf, actually,” Joe spat, and Pete wanted to scream. He settled for ramming his head into the hotel wall as hard as he could, but unfortunately, he didn’t knock himself out.

“Really?” the hunter purred. He leaned forward and snatched Joe’s chin, staring him down. “No pack to worry about? That’ll be nice.”
Joe seemed to have realized he made a mistake, but he still held his chin up in defiance.

“I’m useless if I don’t turn for you,” he declared, and the hunter laughed.

“Full moon’s only a couple weeks away,” he smiled coldly. “I doubt you can kill yourself that fast.”

Joe growled, more terror on his face than anger, but the hunter had already turned to Andy. For the first time, the hunter looked angry. He ripped the gag off of Andy’s mouth and made a hand motion behind him. One of the hunters stuffed his fingers in his ears, and the hunter spoke.

“You know a vamp killed my best friend?” he asked. Andy rolled his eyes.

“I don’t know your name, so obviously not,” Andy said. The hunter shrugged, then whipped a spray bottle out from behind him, spritzing it in Andy’s face. Andy shouted, and Pete saw curls of smoke rising from Andy’s cheeks, but no other signs of damage. The hunter looked confused, then sprayed again at the bridge of Andy’s nose.

“Motherfucker!” Andy gasped, and smoke rose again, but no visible signs of damage showed. The hunter’s eyebrows arched dramatically.

“You’re a hybrid, aren’t you?” he breathed. Andy glared back at him.

“Go fuck yourself,” Andy said, his voice pleasant.

“Half breed, obviously, but what are you mixed with?” the man asked, peering over Andy. “Too small to be wolf, too ugly to be fairy, I doubt you’d let us take you if you were some type of demon, so what are you?”

Andy remained silent, glaring at the man. He rolled his eyes.

“Whatever depraved millionaire bloodslut I sell you to is gonna wanna know what you’re made of, so start talking,” he demanded. Andy remained silent, and the hunter rolled his eyes again.

“You’re friends with the dog, right?” he asked, and pulled a knife out, slashing it down Joe’s arm. Joe screamed, rocking forward, his eyes instantly watering, and Pete turned to the silver blade. Pure silver, it must have been.

“Human!” Andy yelped, panicked. The hunter turned to stare at him, and Andy swallowed. “I’m half human and half vampire!”

The hunter looked him up and down, swallowing hard. “That project burned to the ground.”

“And I burnt it down!” Andy snarled. The hunter nodded.

“We can retire off of that one,” one of the hunters said silently.

“Brandon might want to keep him,” the leader murmured.

“To hell with Brandon!” the one with the dark aura said. “Lie to him and we close up shop!”

“We’ll discuss this outside,” the leader ordered, and the five men filed out of the room. Once the room was empty, Brendon made a choked noise in his throat.

“Patrick will save us, right?” Brendon asked. Pete growled. God, the last thing he wanted was stupid, brave Patrick throwing himself in the middle of this shitstorm.
“I hope not,” Andy sighed, clearly on the same page as Pete.

“But he’s a superhero just like you guys!” Brendon said. Yeah, I’m real fucking super. Pete thought bitterly.

“Whether it’s a good thing or not to get saved, there’s no way to know where we are,” Joe said. “So, other plans?”

“I could get out of the cuffs if I broke my wrist?” Andy suggested, but his heart wasn’t in it.

“You’re strong, though!” Brendon protested. “Can’t you just break the cuffs?”

Andy scoffed. “Maybe with a lot more time on our hands, but they’ll be back in in a minute.”

“Oh,” Brendon paused, blinked, and smiled. “Well, I can get them out of our way, I just can’t break out.”

“You can get them out of the way?” Joe asked. His eyes narrowed. “How?”

“Like they said,” Brendon smiled shyly, “I’m a siren.”

“Yeah, but we’re in the middle of the goddamned desert,” Joe said, jerking his head at the window. “So water won’t do us much good.”

“Not a problem,” Brendon said. “You want me to take them down?”

“Give it a shot,” Joe said. Brendon nodded, and blushed.

“Sorry, I can’t think of anything else,” he apologized, and took in a deep breath.

“Where is your boy tonight,” he began, the words sweet in his mouth and clinging to the air too long, like someone had left the pedal on while playing piano. “I hope he is a gentleman.”

Outside, Pete heard the leader yell, “The siren, fuck!” and footsteps coming their direction, but Brendon’s eyes were closed, deep in focus.

“Maybe he won’t find out what I know,” Brendon sang, and the window shattered suddenly, sand flying into the room and collecting itself into a small twister in the middle of the room. “You were the last good thing.”

“Stop him!” the leader screeched, the door open, but the sand blasted into him.

Brendon kept singing, the sand ripping at the leader until he was bleeding in multiple places, and he caught a second man in the sandstorm, then a third before the singing was cut off abruptly.

“Got you,” the one with the dark aura growled, a dirty hand clamped over Brendon’s mouth. Brendon screamed into the man’s hand, and he laughed. Another hunter tossed him duct tape, which he used to cover Brendon’s mouth with. Brendon made a choked noise, and the hunter punched him in the face for good measure, sending blood trickling out of Brendon’s nose.

“I think we should go change,” the leader said. When Pete looked at him, he was bleeding from dozens of tiny cuts, and the sand had filled his and his two companions suits with holes. “Can you keep charge of the monsters while we’re gone? There’s more clothes in the car.”

“Got it,” the hunter replied, and his silent friend nodded. The other hunters left, and the six of them
remaining sat in silence for a few minutes.

“Heard rumors about you,” the hunter spoke at long last. “Land siren, first of your kind. All fascinating stuff. Hell, boss might even let you keep your silly little band.”

Brendon kept eye contact with the hunter, not making noise, and Pete felt proud of the kid. He stood his own ground well.

“Shame I can’t say the same for you three,” the hunter said after an inordinately long amount of time. He nodded at Joe. “You’ll die fast, if you’re lucky. But as for you two,” he grinned lecherously, “there’s plenty of kinky people with a lot of uses for vampires and fae.”

Pete hoped Andy wouldn’t listen to him. They were going to get out, they had to.

“Personally?” the hunter continued. “I can’t fucking stand fae.”

The hunter pulled a handful of something from his pocket, walking towards Pete and kneeling down next to him.

“I think you all deserve to burn,” he said. He rubbed his hands together and then put them on either side of Pete’s neck, moving his fingers in a massaging motion, but instead of soothing, it burnt.

Iron filings grated under his skin as the hunter laughed at him, and Pete screamed. And the louder he screamed and the wider his mouth opened, the more the iron gag dug into the corners of his mouth, hurting worse, making him scream more. The pain was cyclical, increasing the more he tried to scream to relieve it.

“Does it hurt, fucker?” the hunter asked, and the burning on Pete’s neck increased, black spots showing up in the corners of his vision, when it very suddenly stopped.

Relief washing over him, Pete leaned forward panting for a minute before he even questioned what had caused him to stop. When he looked up, he saw one of the hunters slumped over the bed, blood trickling out of his head, and the one that had been torturing him on the ground, Patrick pinning him there and slamming his fist into the man’s face over and over and over again.

“You fucking-!” Patrick growled, his knees on the hunter’s ribs and left hand on his shoulder while he bashed the man’s nose.

A few hits after it became clear that the hunter was unconscious and his head had been beaten black and blue, Patrick scrambled up, ripping the clasp off the back of Pete’s gag and throwing the iron behind him. He grabbed Pete’s shoulders and stared at him with huge eyes.

“Are you okay?” Patrick asked, his hands rising and holding Pete’s head up gently. Pete flexed his jaw around, and he said the first thing that came to mind.

“That was kinda hot.”

Patrick pulled back slightly, confused. “What?”

“I mean,” Pete blushed, confused, “What I meant- when did you learn to fight?”

Joe cleared his throat loudly, and Patrick jumped up.

“Get us out?” Joe asked, and Patrick nodded.

“Um, keys?” he asked. “Do you guys know where they are?”
“Got ‘em,” Ryan said cheerfully. He and the remaining members of Panic! at the Disco dragged in the three remaining hunter bodies, piling them up on top of the hunter in the center of the room. He jangled an ancient looking ring of keys, and shot a grin at Pete.

“Iron for iron, probably,” Pete suggested weakly, and Ryan undid their locks, running to the bathroom first and removing the duct tape on Brendon’s face with a damp washcloth.

“You know, I always thought being the one getting rescued would be easier,” Andy said. Patrick laughed at him.

“I liked the change of pace,” Patrick said, and after all that had happened that day, Pete couldn’t begrudge Patrick being the hero today. His aura, pure yellow, was shining.

Spencer drove them all back to Ryan’s house. It wasn’t even midnight yet, something that seemed impossible to Pete, but was probably good news for them all. All the boys but Ryan had school early the next morning, and Fall Out Boy had a flight leaving for LA, and they needed to get back to their hotel, try and scrounge up some amount of sleep.

“We’ll call you soon,” Pete promised, shaking Ryan’s hand. He had wondered aloud earlier if anyone would be pissed at the rockstars stumbling into Ryan’s house this late, but Ryan assured them that his dad could sleep through the end of the world.

“I know,” Ryan said, tapping his temple. “Trust me.”

“Know anything cool we’re gonna do in LA?” Joe asked. He was joking, but Ryan flushed slightly.

“I had a weird vision earlier,” he admitted, and Pete turned to him, intrigued. Ryan shrugged, self conscious.

“There’s um, a man,” he said, “and he’s after you guys. Or, he will be, anyway. He looked pretty beat up, wore a suit, he was white and had short dark hair. I didn’t recognize him.”

“Well, you described half my contacts list,” Pete said. Ryan bit his lip.

“Sorry,” he said. “But he had, ah, names for you.”

“Names?” Andy asked quietly. Ryan nodded.

“Patrick, the infallible,” he said. Patrick’s chest puffed out slightly, and Pete stifled a pleased grin looking at him. “Um, Joe was, um, ‘the indomitable’,” Ryan continued. Joe smiled, chin raised at the words. “Andy, the impossible.” Ryan said, and bit his lip as he turned to an eager Pete.

“And I was?” Pete asked after a minute.

“The Calamitous.”

There was a second of silence.

“Are you fucking kidding?” Pete asked. Ryan looked guilty.

“If it helps, he looked pissed off at all of you. And at the names,” Ryan said. He withered under Pete’s stare. “Hey, I just see the future, I don’t write it.”

“Well, thanks,” Patrick said, stepping in front of Pete before Pete could say something else. “We’ll see you soon, yeah?”
Everyone in both bands called their goodbyes, and they piled into yet another taxi.

“Ready to record?” Joe asked, probably to stop Pete from simmering. It worked to a degree, as Pete laughed.

“Yeah, of course. What’s the worst thing that could happen?”
Breed

Chapter Summary

Joe finds himself in a very unique situation of becoming a teenage parent- not in the way he thought he would.

Chapter Notes

I'm so sorry about how short/unsatisfying this chapter is. Hope it tides you over anyway! Warnings for mpreg, vomit, general grossness and references to masturbation.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The moment Joe woke up, he felt clammy all over, and could feel the heavy solidity at the back of his throat that meant that he had to throw up. Immediately.

He launched himself across the apartment, hand clamped loosely over his mouth as he dove to the bathroom door. The second he tore the door open, he skidded to his knees next to the toilet, vomit barely hitting the porcelain rather than the wall next to it. Joe moaned, leaning up against the wall for a second before he had to lean over and retch again.

While his back started to ache from leaning over the toilet for so long, he tried to think about the night before. He couldn’t remember getting drunk, which either meant that he didn’t get drunk or he had way too much to drink. One of the two. His breath didn’t smell like alcohol, though, which was weird. Maybe he had food poisoning, that would suck, and probably put the whole band out of commission.

Then again, he thought to himself, maybe putting the whole band out of commission would be a GOOD thing at this point. Too many days locked in the same apartment and then the same recording studio, with nowhere to go and no girlfriends to escape to? They were getting cabin fever, as well as increasingly stronger desires to kill one another. All of them. Even Andy looked like he was doubting his commitment to pacifism when Pete stumbled into the studio five hours late the day before. The brief too close camaraderie from the vampire incident had either passed, or was pushed into a deeper part of all of their minds for the time being.

Once Joe was feeling well enough to stand up without hurling, he tried to lift himself up and was instantly thrown off balance, falling forward into the counter, bile dripping off of his chin and onto the bathroom counter. He leaned ridiculously far back, ignoring the heavy protest in his spine, when he saw his stomach out of the corner of his eye. He stared down at it.

He blinked three times, hard, eyes otherwise glued to his protruding belly, because it looked almost like…

Joe could see blue veins crawling across the skin of his stomach where the t shirt he had worn to bed no longer fit, all bunched up around his rib cage.
There was no way, he thought, he could have such an awful beer gut, especially not overnight, but at the same time…

Maybe he was seeing things. Maybe he was cursed to see crazy impossible things and maybe-

A harsh kick came from inside of Joe’s stomach, and he screamed until he thought his lungs would burst. He screamed and screamed and screamed and when he felt another harsh kick, saw his stomach move where it came from. He wanted to vomit again, but his stomach had never felt more empty. He gripped the counter weakly, his breathing shallow as he caught his breath before screaming again.

“Jesus Christ,” Pete grumbled, kicking the bathroom door open with a sour, dark eyed expression on his face. “What are you-?”

Joe could see Pete’s expression change as he took in Joe’s stomach, going from annoyed to confused to terrified.

“Um.” Pete said, staring at Joe’s stomach. Joe was embarrassed to realize he was crying, but he was slightly beyond caring when he responded.

“Pete, it kicked!” he whispered, his voice hoarse and horrified. Pete stared at him, his mouth opening and closing a few times.

“I, I don’t-” he began, staring at Joe’s stomach rather than into his eyes.

“Pete,” Joe begged, on the edge of a panic attack.

“Um,” Pete said. His eyes were bulging. “Who’s the father?” he tried with a small laugh.

Joe punched Pete as hard as he could in the face and immediately fell down onto his ass, heavier than it should have been, and he glared at his stomach reproachfully.

“You’re pregnant,” Pete said thickly.

“I HADN’T FUCKING NOTICED!” Joe screamed. He felt something stir within him again and he made a horrified noise in the back of his throat.

“Okay, this could be okay,” Pete said, putting a hand on Joe’s shoulder and trying to soothe him. “Just don’t panic.”

“DON’T PANIC?!” Joe screeched back. “THERE IS SOMETHING HUGE AND ALIVE INSIDE OF ME! YOU TRY NOT PANICKING!”

“Okay, okay, maybe panic a little, but this is okay, man, I promise, it’s gonna be fine!” Pete said hurriedly. Joe whimpered and clutched at his stomach, but nodded, keeping his eyes fixed on Pete. Something about Pete, possibly the fact that he couldn’t lie, possibly the charisma, made him feel much more reassuring than most people. However, the calm didn’t last, as the door was flung open again.

Patrick stepped into the room, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes and stumbling a little.

“What’s going on?” he asked. Joe let out a low moan in response and his fingers twisted tighter around his shirt. Patrick looked down, and his eyes suddenly bulged, all signs of tiredness gone.

“Holy shit,” he breathed.
Joe felt a pointed budge on the side of his stomach, clearly defined wriggling that he could see from the outside. He tried his best not to pass out.

“Are you-?” Patrick whispered. He paused, his eyes boring holes into Joe’s skin.

“Do you know who the father is?” he said with a laugh after a minute. Joe felt something deep inside of him snap and he turned to Patrick, a growl ripping its way through his throat.

“Fuck off!” Joe screamed, his fingers balling up into fists at his sides.

“I’m sorry!” Patrick gasped. He jumped back looking frightened of Joe, but Joe couldn’t bring himself to feel bad. Patrick had no right to treat this like a joke, not while he was this terrified.

“Okay, calm down,” Pete said, lowering his hands. “Let’s think about this rationally-”

“Rational?” Patrick scoffed. “How can we be rational? Where is that thing even growing?”

Joe froze, and turned to Pete with an expression of horror on his face.

“Where is it growing?” Joe asked, eyes wide. Pete bit his lip.

“I don’t know,” he admitted after a moment. Joe let out a moan.

The door flew open again, and Andy stared at them.

“Thought I misheard,” he said, glaring down at Joe’s stomach. Joe sighed, long and low.

“So what now?”

The four of them moved out of the bathroom, which by then was getting very cramped, and into the too small living room. They tried to discuss their options, none of which were particularly appealing. Andy suggested they go to a real doctor, or fly back to have his mother look at Joe, but there was no way Joe could get on an airplane looking the way he did, and any doctor in his right mind would turn Joe into a science experiment, according to Pete. Pete said he could call a guy, but all of his guys to call were back in Chicago, and he was fairly certain none of them had ever dealt with a call like this. Patrick was, in Joe’s opinion, completely unhelpful. He kept asking “But where is it?” seemingly oblivious to how much the question made Joe upset. Joe was personally of the opinion that they should just cut the damn thing out with a kitchen knife and let his werewolf healing take over, but everyone fought against that idea. The traitors. They would say the same if they were nineteen and pregnant.

Andy eventually made the suggestion that they wait it out, which Joe was opposed to, but he couldn’t think of any better option. He ended up sitting on the sofa, trying to find a comfortable position to watch tv in. There was none, it turned out. Every position he got in strained some muscle or another, and though he didn’t care about damaging whatever the hell was inside of him, his body disagreed, warping itself to protect the creature whenever he tried to move. Pete offered to buy him pickles and peanut butter, citing it as what his mom always wanted when she was pregnant. Andy kept bringing him water. Patrick kept staring at him and asking “But what is it?”

As to that, Joe had no answer. He had no clue what it was, nor any idea how to find out. Andy began research online, and Joe asked for some painkillers, because his back was suddenly killing him.

“Werewolf thing?” Andy suggested.
“Yes,” Joe snapped, hoping his sarcasm was as biting as it felt. “All male wolves get pregnant, how could I have forgotten?”

At this, Patrick started giggling. Joe whipped around to glare at him.

“What?” he hissed. Patrick stopped laughing and looked at Joe guiltily.

“You’re gonna be mad.”

“I know I am, tell me anyway.”

“If you’re a pregnant werewolf, do you stop having your ‘time of the month’?”

Joe would never actually attack Patrick, but lunging forward was worth it to see him flinch. Even if it did hurt his stomach.

Joe had to lie back on the couch after that because his feet were too swollen to stand for long periods of time, and his back hurt like all hell. His spine already wasn’t in the best condition, what would this do to it? This extra too many fucking pounds hanging off of his torso, it was disgusting.

Andy was assigned research duty for a while while Joe poked and prodded at his distended skin. Whatever was inside him would wriggle from time to time, but he began to grow used to the sensation. It was almost- well, still too weird to be pleasant, but it felt almost normal until he thought about it and remembered just how not normal it was to have something moving independently in or around some of his major organs. He couldn’t help but think about some of what Patrick had said. Where was this thing? It did feel like it was in his stomach, like he had swallowed something, but that wasn’t possible, was it? Then again, maybe he should hope for that. Better for him to have a stomach full of alien baby than have his other organs mashed out of the way for something new. He’d seen the health class pictures of a pregnant woman. It did not look fun.

“Do you know of any witches that might have cursed you?” Andy asked.

“Still no,” Joe replied, moody.

“Had sex with a man recently?” he asked, not looking away from the computer screen. Joe sputtered, his arms wrapping in some strange, automatic response around his belly.

“No!” he said, affronted. “Why?”

“Well, there’s this Hebrew demon connected to sodomy and since you’re Jewish-”

Joe growled, and Andy nodded, clicking to another screen. Pete offered to rub his back, and Joe snapped at him.

Joe knew that reasonably, he had no reason to be biting his friends’ heads off, but he was angry, very angry, and frustrated and scared and sad for some reason, and everytime he moved he moved to protect his stomach. Fucking maternal instinct.

They sat in relative silence for a while, Andy asking the occasional question and Pete bringing Joe food from time to time, when Patrick pulled off his headphones in horror and stared at Joe.

“What?” Joe hissed.

“Where’s it gonna come out?” Patrick asked, eyes wide in horror. Joe felt his blood freeze in his veins and his heart stop beating.
“I…” Joe trailed off, looking to Pete for help. Pete was obviously trying to not look horrified, and Joe whimpered.

“I mean,” Patrick looked distant, and clearly wasn’t paying attention to Joe’s rapidly increasing heart rate and increasingly panicked expression, “You don’t have a vagina to the best of my knowledge, and I guess the human body has a lot of holes in it but most of them are pretty small. You could sweat it out if it could separate—” Joe was going to throw up “—if it’s in your stomach you might shit it out—” Joe was going to pass out “—or I guess it could be a chest burster.”

Using all of his remaining willpower, Joe held back enough that when he punched Patrick in the face, he didn’t shatter any of his bones. It was difficult to hold back, but he succeeded in not hearing a crack.

“Get him out of here?” Joe pleaded. His arm was shaking, or maybe everything but his arm was shaking, he didn’t know.

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After accidentally inspiring the fear of God (or fear of a bad Alien sequel) in Joe, Patrick was banished from the main room of the apartment.

“You can do research, okay?” Pete said, a pleading look on his face. “Just please, please shut up. I’ll duct tape your mouth if I have to, okay?”

“I was just trying to—” Patrick began, but Pete left. Patrick sighed. He tried to think objectively. Possibly he wouldn’t be thrilled if someone had told him that he had a chest bursting alien inside of him, but he had been trying to help as best he could. It wasn’t as though it was his fault that Joe was constantly on the edge of a panic attack.

But research duty wasn’t too bad. Well, aside from the fact that all he was getting from “male pregnancy” was a lot of really disturbing Harry Potter fanfiction, it wasn’t too bad. He resigned himself to even reading some of it, just to see what the theories were. Sometimes a magic spell, aliens in the star trek stories, but almost all the signs pointed to it being some type of magic gone wrong, which would have made a hell of a lot more sense if Joe practiced magic or if he had any real enemies. It seemed to Patrick that most of the vampires that were their enemies ended up dead. He couldn’t really see hunters trying to get a werewolf pregnant either, so that seemed out of the question.

Patrick started to go back through pages Andy had already searched on, just to see if Andy missed anything. One website was dedicated to sex demons, an interesting read, which had a copious amount of information on Hebrew sex demons for some odd reason. Not in much of a hurry, he paged through the site slowly, stopping on some of the more interesting creatures even if they didn’t seem hopeful: undines, Nosferat, tulpas. He was about to give up and change the method of searching when he found an entry dedicated to something called a larvae, not very informative, but one specific word caught his eye.

“Can I talk?” Patrick asked, the question coming out snippier than he intended it too. Joe nodded, and Patrick glanced guiltily between him and the laptop.

“Can I ask a personal question?” he asked, and Joe nodded again, slower this time. Patrick bit his lip, refreshed the page, and gulped.

“Have you been masturbating a lot recently?” he asked. Joe scoffed.
“Obviously,” he said, sounding more bored than pissed, which was better than Patrick had hoped for. “Not as much as you.”

“Ha ha,” Patrick said drily, and looked back at the page. “Have you been thinking about the same thing every time?”

“You sound like it’s your first day operating a sex line,” Joe interrupted, though he blushed as he said it. “Why don’t you tell me your theory instead of asking stupid questions?”

“Fine,” Patrick snapped in return. “If you have been,” he held his fingers up in air quotes “spilling your seed’ for the same fantasy over and over again, your, ahem, ‘mental sperm’ could be collected to form some monster, usually one that grows outside of the body, but occasionally grows inside when no other organic life like a tree can be found.”

Joe didn’t really reply, but the pained and embarrassed look on his face gave him away. “What grows?” he asked, looking at the ground.

Patrick cleared his throat, looking back at the computer. “Something called a ‘larvae’,” he said, looking back up at Joe. Joe’s face twisted downwards.

“I’m having a bug baby?” he asked, voice quiet.

“Not necessarily-” Patrick began, but Joe’s voice rose in pitch.

“I’m having a bug baby!?” he shrieked.

“I don’t know!” Patrick shouted back. “It’s very hard to look up, because you know, with a name like larvae, the only pictures that come up are-”

“Of bugs!” Joe screamed.

“Calm down!” Pete pleaded, putting a hand on Joe’s arm, but Joe ripped away.

“Cut it out,” he begged. Pete winced.

“We can’t just-” he began, but Joe continued.

“Cut it out, and get me a drink, please,” his voice was so low and intense that Patrick, overcome with a guilty feeling he couldn’t quite explain, ran out, tossing Joe a bottle of the first alcoholic thing he could find in the fridge. Joe chugged the bottle, hugging his knees to his chest.

“I mean, even if it’s not human, it might not look like a maggot?” Patrick said, trying to sound helpful and optimistic.

“Duct tape,” Pete said in a low breath, and Patrick nodded, ducking out of the room.

Patrick tried not to feel a sense of isolation, but it was difficult. He stuck close to the door, trying to do more research on larvae while still kind of listening in on the conversation. Pete calmed Joe down as best he could, not really helping him recover from “Where is the bug baby going to come out!?”

Patrick, meanwhile, attempted fruitlessly to find more information. Larvae were hard to search for. Everything referred to bugs, and when he searched with more specific criteria, he couldn’t find much of anything, aside from some of the sex demons he had seen earlier popping up again. All the while he was distracted by Joe talking to an increasingly tired sounding Pete about what would happen, if it was an Alien style creature or if he would have to get rid of it some other way.
Having gone to sleep so late the night before, Patrick very nearly started to doze off when he heard frantic yelling from the other room for the second time that day. Before he could scramble to his feet, Patrick could hear Pete and Andy’s frantic shouting, but more concerning, he couldn’t hear Joe’s voice at all.

Forgetting his temporary exile, Patrick bolted to where Joe sat, his face turning blue as he clutched at his throat, gagging. Joe turned to face Patrick, meeting his eyes with a panic so visceral it hurt to look at.

Patrick pushed past Andy and Pete with little difficulty and grabbed Joe by the shoulders, staring him down. His automatic reaction would be to tell Joe to breathe, but that clearly wasn’t an option. Instead, he turned Joe gently as far onto his stomach as he could until Joe’s face was pointed at the floor.

“Just try and force it out, don’t fight it,” Patrick advised, rubbing Joe’s back. Then, remembering an old hospital drama his mother watched, grabbed Joe’s hand and said “Squeeze my hand as hard as it hurts.”

Given Joe’s superior werewolf strength, it did not take Patrick long to realize what a mistake this was, but he made no effort to pull away or entertain the idea that his bones might be getting crushed. Joe’s face was scrunched up in pain, all of his muscles tight with strain, and Patrick wasn’t going to bitch about the relatively minute amount of pain he was getting in return while Joe’s skin turned a worse and worse color. He met Patrick’s eyes again, still scared, and Patrick gave him the most soothing look he could.

“It’ll be okay,” he whispered. “Don’t fight it, okay?”

Joe nodded up at him, and the gagging noises stopped altogether as something white protruded from Joe’s mouth. Patrick figured it would be less than beneficial if he started gagging as well, so he squeezed Joe’s hand as well.

“Try not to look at it,” he advised, and Joe nodded, closing his eyes as the white slid further and further out of his mouth, getting thicker as it got further out.

“You’ve got this,” Patrick said, and with one final retching sound, the white, slimy thing fell to the ground with a wet plop. Joe sucked in a heavy, rattling breath, and Patrick spun him up and around as fast as he could so Joe wouldn’t see the thing wriggling on the ground.

As Joe’s color slowly began to go back to normal, bile dripping down his chin, Patrick clapped him on the back. He didn’t even think his hand was broken.

“You did great,” he whispered, and Joe nodded, leaning on Patrick’s shoulder.

“Never having kids,” he muttered.

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“You were supposed to kill that thing,” Pete said.

“Mmm?” Andy asked, looking up at Pete. Pete nudged the huge jar that held the whatever-it-was. Larvae. Andy looked at the all white slug shaped creature as well, the size of a newborn infant.

“You’re not gonna get rid of it?” Pete asked, leaning back on the counter. “The site Patrick found said it was murderous.”
“First of all, most people say vampires are murderous, yet here I am,” Andy said. “Second, I don’t know whose idea it was to assign the killing job to the vegan, but it wasn’t a very bright idea.”

“You’re not going to?” Pete asked.

“It might not be evil,” Andy said. “So, no. I’m going to monitor it. Don’t tell Joe,” he added, trying not to think about the wrath that Joe could incur if he discovered that Andy kept the thing.

“I don’t want my head bitten off either,” Pete chuckled. His laugh sounded flat, though, nearly deflated.

“You all right?” Andy asked.

“I didn’t vomit up a bug baby a couple hours ago,” Pete laughed again. Andy frowned. He’d known Pete long enough to know there was always something he was hiding if he didn’t answer plainly.

“That wasn’t a no,” Andy said, peering at Pete over the tops of his glasses, not quite accusing. But also not breaking eye contact with Pete. Pete’s face darkened slightly, but he shook his head slightly. He opened his mouth to speak when there came a huge squelching noise from next to them.

“Jesus,” Pete laughed, watching in amusement as the creature oozed down the side of the jar.

“I’m gonna name it Jethro,” Andy announced. If Pete wanted to keep it light, Andy could keep it light.

“Good strong name,” Pete agreed, giggling a little. “Maybe you won’t kill it because of your fatherly instincts taking over.”

Andy rolled his eyes.

“I’m sure that’s it,” he said sarcastically.

“This is gonna be complicated to deal with,” Pete warned, and Andy smiled at the creature, squelching and squealing in the jar.

“Man, it would suck having a complicated life,” Andy said, and flashed another grin at Pete. “Wonder what that’s like?”

Chapter End Notes

I am literally dead. Sorry this is basically a drabble, I'm so tired and I've had a terrible month, but I swear we'll be back to usual soon, and all the loose ends from this chapter will get tied up next time! I'm just way too tired to fix things at this point, and I'm really sorry! I swear I'll make it up to you guys somehow- not sure how yet, but it'll be good. Chapter title by Nirvana.
London Calling

Chapter Summary

On Fall Out Boy’s first European tour, and without Pete, the other three are feeling a little lost. It turns out to be extremely bad timing when they run into some strange creatures...

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warning: Mentions of suicide, mentions of off screen suicide attempt, gore, bug torture

Spoilers for Sex and the City (no, really)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was raining when the plane landed. The kind of dark gray, sky consuming rain from movies. The funeral scenes. Or maybe Patrick was just being needlessly morbid. But the airport was nice, even if the institutional chill was crawling under his skin and he had to take his hat off at customs both leaving LAX and entering Heathrow. His hair was greasy from too many days of travel and he felt even less protected than usual in a foreign country. And for a myriad of reasons, he was in a very bad mood.

Possibly he was disgruntled to be the only member of their huge party to not have been on enough planes to know better than to make a bomb joke, even under his breath. Not that they were stopped, thank God, but it was still humiliating to get told off by someone younger than him (thanks Joe). Maybe it was the disgusting quality of airplane food. Maybe it was the small argument he and Anna had gotten in before the plane took off. But most likely, it was the distinct lack of Pete.

Granted, all the Pete drama was resolved. After the worst night of his remembered life, Patrick was finally let in the hospital room, and all the necessary heart to hearts were had. And while suicide attempts were probably never a fun experience, the hospital took care of all of the physical issues almost immediately. Another week or so to stabilize medication, and Pete was cleared for the European leg of the tour by the doctor. Unfortunately for Patrick, Pete’s mom and even their manager had another thing to say about it. Diaz, who’d been with them for a little while, but still wasn’t that familiar to Patrick, was going in his place.

Luckily for Patrick he was going to be sharing a room with Andy anyway, so that didn’t change, but still. Perhaps it was unfair but he felt an extra claim to Pete, and he felt very lost in another country, on tour, without him. And he couldn’t even piss Pete off by calling him at whatever ungodly hour the shows ended, because Europe was ahead of Chicago. Life was unfair.

Patrick’s hands curled around his arms once he stepped outside, shivering in the cold.

“What do you think of London, boys?” Dan asked. Tour-manager-works-for-Island-Dan, Patrick had no idea who he actually was, but Joe and Andy seemed to have no hesitation in following him
so Patrick went along with it.

“It’s, uh, wet,” Patrick said with a small laugh. It was meant to be a joke, but maybe he sounded more down than he thought, because Dan frowned at him. Worried.

“England is generally rainier than the States,” he agreed. “But the nightlife is fantastic!”

“Well, you know us, Dan,” Joe said, a lopsided grin on his face. “We’re party animals.”

Patrick wondered if Dan had been given instructions to try and cheer them up, because rather than finding either of them amusing, he looked distressed. Patrick hoped he hadn’t been told to cheer them up. He’d be exhausting to avoid for an entire tour. And there was no reason to cheer them up. Pete wasn’t dead. Obviously. Thus the tour continuing.

“Do you want to see the sights, or just settle into your hotel?” he asked, his bright eyes not dissuaded. Patrick almost wanted to tell him to show them the sights, just so Dan would feel like he had accomplished something, but to Patrick’s relief, Andy held no such ideas about politeness. Who would feel like he had accomplished something? Dan or Patrick?

“I’d prefer to just settle in,” he said, and Patrick and Joe nodded gratefully. Dan deflated.

“Let’s hail a cab, then,” he said, stepping into the gutter and holding his hand high above his head.

“You know how there are psychic vampires?” Andy said under his breath. Patrick raised his eyebrows.

“There’s gonna be no energy left in London when he’s done with this city,” Andy said with a grin. Patrick chuckled a little, but didn’t reply. The cabbie chattered with them the whole ride to the hotel, but Patrick was tired. He wanted nothing more than to curl up in bed, even if it wasn’t his, drink a very cold soda, and finally take a shower.

Unfortunately, though Patrick thought putting only two people per room would mean that it would be extremely spacious, he realized as soon as they entered that British hotel rooms and American hotel rooms were not particularly comparable. Also, there was only one bed, somewhere between the size of a twin and a double. Andy sighed heavily behind him.

“If I order extra blankets from the front desk, will you still find a way to steal them all?” Andy teased, his voice light. He could probably tell the foul mood Patrick was in, and Patrick rolled his eyes, not in the mood to be cheered.

“I’m gonna take a shower,” Patrick announced only to find, in the adjacent bathroom, that British showers were also way too small: a square that he could squeeze into, but would certainly not be able to turn around in. By that point he was happily surprised to discover that the water ran hot. He got out, sent Pete a bare bones text of “In London and everything’s wet” and Anna a good morning text, hoping she wouldn’t have woken up yet. It was the sort of thoughtful gesture Patrick needed to remember to do more often, it seemed.

Once dry, he decided to lie down. It looked like Andy was already asleep, but Patrick was tired, and it wasn’t as though their manager would let them sleep through something too important. Mildly comforted, he curled up under the covers next to Andy and fell asleep almost instantly.

It felt like only a few seconds had passed when Andy was shaking Patrick awake.

“You awake?” Andy asked, his voice soft and gentle. Patrick grumbled, but sat up, stretching and yawning.
“Show?” he asked.

“Some rich dude paid for a fancy dinner for us; we don’t have a show till tomorrow,” Andy said with a shrug. Patrick felt alarm bells going off in the back of his head.

“Not to be a party pooper,” Patrick began, “but the last time a rich guy offered to buy us dinner, I distinctly remember nearly getting suffocated to death.”

“Well hey,” Andy laughed, “a lot of people think H.H. Holmes and Jack Ripper were the same person, so that’s one less famous murderer to worry about.”

“I’m serious,” Patrick said, running a hand through his hair and wincing. His hair was wet and sticking in every direction, even a hat wouldn’t fully fix it. “Do you think it’s a good idea?”

Andy shrugged, looking out the window at the still-rainy sky like his mind was elsewhere, back home with his kid.

“Dan said he was involved with the label or something,” he said. “I’m sure it’s fine.”

Ah. Record execs, Patrick had begun to realize, were a strange breed, and not one he particularly liked. They had a tendency to butter artists up and then talk down to them, but hey, fancy dinner. No harm in that.

“When?” Patrick asked, already pulling his shirt over his head and rifling through his suitcase for something more appropriate to wear to a restaurant.

“We’re supposed to leave in a couple minutes,” Andy said. Upon seeing Patrick’s glare, he shrugged again. “I didn’t want to wake you.”

“Thanks,” Patrick said sarcastically, getting dressed quickly. Nothing he brought really screamed anything other than casual, but a couple of his band t-shirts were white, so he turned one inside-out and grabbed something of Andy’s to wear over it.

To his shock, the sleek black car they rode in that drove on the wrong side of the road pulled up to a tiny, hole-in-the-wall establishment with a hand-painted sign above the door that read “Kensington Court”. The outside of the shop was painted black, aside from the gold lettering, and Patrick’s eyes would have glossed over it had they not stopped directly in front of it.

The three of them stepped out hesitantly, without the accompaniment of anyone else on the tour. Dan had assured them in the car that it was a private gesture, and it would be impolite to tack on extra guests. Though the description made Patrick nervous, as soon as he stepped out of the car and into the rain, the warm light emanating from the windows of Kensington Court seemed to dance, and the scent and warmth that blew from the crack in the door was nearly intoxicating.

The door blew open and bathed them in the golden light, releasing more of the strong smell. The night air filled with the scent of spices - nutmeg, cinnamon, peppercorn - as well as flowers, more flowers than Patrick could name, and something deep, woody and musky that he couldn’t identify. It was enchanting, and his feet moved forward before he could pause to think about it, though he was pleased to see that Joe and Andy followed immediately after.

“Hello,” a beautiful girl just to Patrick’s left said once they stepped in the door. Her long and slender arm was the one holding the door open, and her pale gray eyes glittered in the restaurant’s lights. “Fall Out Boy?” she asked, her head cocked to one side. She was incredibly beautiful, distractingly so, and it took Patrick a moment to stutter out a yes. She bit her lip, looking concerned.
“The reservation was for four, I believe?” she said, her tone sharp, and Patrick instantly felt as though he had committed some great personal failure.

“Our, um, Pete,” Joe spoke up, “He’s sick, so he couldn’t fly out. We live in…” he trailed off, obviously staring at the girl as Patrick was. She smiled warmly at them again.

“It’s no trouble,” she said, tossing her head back to shake some of the long, almost white hair out of her face. “Perhaps we’ll see him next time you boys are out this way. In the meantime, follow me?”

The hostess began walking through the labyrinth of tables pushed too close together with expert speed so that Patrick nearly had to jog to keep up. She gestured to a table clearly set for four and strode back into the kitchen.

“It’s beautiful in here,” Andy murmured, and Patrick looked up, having not paid attention to the scenery earlier. Indeed, the interior of the restaurant was gorgeous, now that he looked at it. Ivy grew along the edges of every wall, and soft light glowed from in between the boughs. Intricate murals of birds and flowers were painted on every last inch of wall space, and the glass of the table itself seemed to have a mosaic of strange colors within.

“This is…” Joe began, but didn’t seem to have the words to continue. Patrick felt a deep calmness and contentedness washing over him. He felt pleasantly warm and happy and perfectly at ease in this place, and he leaned deep into the back of the wicker chair he was sitting in.

Another extraordinarily beautiful woman came out and poured a dark red wine into each of their glasses. Patrick turned to protest his age, but she was gone before he could say a word.

“I mean,” Joe looked down at the liquid. “We’re obviously not going to get into any trouble for this here,” he reasoned, picking up the wine glass and taking a sip. Patrick shrugged and followed Joe’s lead, drinking some of the wine as well. He almost gagged - though not unpleasant, it was far from what he was expecting. Not the cold, bitter wine he had been served at the weddings of relatives, this was warm and spicy, the equivalent to a more richly seasoned apple cider. It didn’t even taste particularly alcoholic to him.

“Maybe they’ll give me water if I ask for it,” Andy sighed, leaning back in his chair and looking slightly annoyed, though only for a moment. It soon passed, and a lazy smile grew again on his face as Patrick drank from the glass again, deeply. With each swallow, a wave of warmth passed through him, tingling to the tips of his fingers in a strange pleasure.

“We should remember this place,” Joe said, and Patrick nodded, smiling obligingly at his friend.

The waitress returned to their table, holding no paper or pen in her hands.

“Might I recommend the house special?” she asked.

“I'll take anything you recommend,” Joe said, and Patrick nodded his immediate agreement.

“I’m vegan,” Andy said, and she laughed a light, tinkling laugh.

“We can whip up something without animals for you, I think,” she said, casting Andy a wink. “You must be tired of the same old wilting salads everywhere.”

“Very,” Andy agreed. “Could I also get some water?”

The waitress looked taken aback, but she said yes, and sprung off to the kitchen.
“I love it here,” Patrick declared.

“Don’t get attached,” Andy warned, “It’s probably really expensive.”

But Patrick’s mood would not be hampered. He and Joe exchanged increasingly raucous stories of “remember that time in the van?” with Andy jumping in from time to time, while a singer that sounded almost like a bird crooned from out of sight, quiet enough so as to not disrupt them, but loud enough to be heard and add a pleasant background to the atmosphere.

When the food arrived, Patrick noted that the meat was a little rarer than he was used to, but felt an innate sense of trust in the place and savored every drop of juice that trickled down his chin. Andy ate the food on his plate with slightly less fervor than Patrick and Joe did, but still seemed much more at ease when he began eating.

The food was amazing, on pale white plates with matching white utensils, looking as though they were carved out of stone, yet incredibly light. Upon the plates were a myriad of colors, dark greens and browns as with any meal, but also red and blue somethings that Patrick had no name for, but that tasted delicious.

“How are you boys enjoying your meal?” the waitress asked them, stacking up three empty plates.

“Very much, thank you,” Patrick said. His tongue felt thick and heavy inside his mouth, though he hadn’t really had that much to drink. Only half a glass of wine shouldn’t make him drunk, not from his experiences with alcohol, but then again, maybe it was stronger than he thought. He felt almost sleepy, but not quite tired enough to go to bed.

“Would you care for some dessert?” she asked, and Patrick and Joe both nodded eagerly. Dessert… dessert sounded great! He had no idea what they would serve here, but Patrick knew it must be unbelievable.

“And a spot more wine?” she asked, and Patrick nodded again. He was so full, content, overwhelmed with a strange sense of satisfaction. She poured more into all their glasses, frowning when she reached Andy’s.

“You haven’t even touched your drink, sir!” she exclaimed. Andy shrugged, looking down at his plate and away from the attractive waitress.

“Try some,” she urged, and then walked away. Andy’s hand twitched towards the glass, but he didn’t pick it up. He merely looked worried.

Meanwhile, Patrick felt his limbs growing looser and his spirit freer as time went on. He laughed loudly and raucously at nearly everything Joe said, and Joe did the same. Andy looked mildly concerned, but seemed mostly content to sit back and gaze around the restaurant at the detailed paintings, all red lines on the pale, almost white wood walls.

It wasn’t until Patrick, giggling, leaned into Andy’s chest and splashed some of the wine on his lap as he pleaded “Tryyyyy it Andeeeeeee, live a little!” when Andy stood up, knocking his chair back. Patrick fell back into his chair, pouting.

“What’s wrong?” Patrick asked, aware that his voice sounded more whiny than anything else, but too tired to change the tone.

“I think,” Andy sat down, glancing all around the room with an expression of terror on his face, “that we need to leave.”
Though he hadn’t had anything to drink, Andy’s head was spinning. He thought the smell of the wine was strange, but he had been overall enchanted with Kensington Court, just as Patrick and Joe had. But there were signs. The drink that made Joe and Patrick too tipsy too fast. The fact that Joe and Patrick seemed not to be noticing the fact that they were eating the nearly raw heart of something on a plate of sauteed vegetables. The lack of any other patrons in the restaurant. All of this, however, Andy could chalk up to a normal explanation, up until some of the wine spilled onto his legs and Andy thought, briefly, that he had cut himself, because the wine smelled very, very similar to his blood.

Vampire blood.

Joe and Patrick leaned on each other, giggling stupidly and humming along to the now mournful bird song that rang from the back of the restaurant. They were guaranteed to be useless for the rest of the night. Vampire blood was the world’s best sedative, used for calming victims and making them feel pleasant while they were being changed into vampires. It made them tired, happy, and above all else, agreeable to every suggestion.

“Yeah!” Patrick grinned widely at Andy. “Let’s leave!”

“Yeah!” Joe cried, smiling hugely as well. Andy’s eyes darted around the room, everything striking horror into his heart. The beautiful, colorful mosaics in the glass table were, upon closer inspection, chunks of butterfly wings. When he pushed a leaf of ivy aside, he could see that the string lights were composed of lightning bugs that were threaded and still writhing in pain. Even the fork that he ate dinner with was actually made of bone, and it was all Andy could do to stop himself from throwing up.

“Yeah,” Andy was trying to hold it together as he pushed his chair back. “Yeah, why don’t we head back to the hotel?”

“The hotel!” Patrick sang. Andy let out a noise that was half sob, half laugh. Maybe it was vampire blood mixed with everclear, or maybe he was just extremely susceptible. “Joe! We’re going back to the hotel!”

“Keep your voice down!” Andy pleaded, looking around. The restaurant looked empty, but he knew that whoever, whatever worked here had to be close by.

As if summoned, the waitress reappeared, a dangerous look in her cold, gray eyes.

“Leaving so soon?” she purred. “I haven’t even brought out your dessert yet!”

“Dessert!” Joe cried, smiling wide. The waitress turned her icy gaze on to Andy.

“I think you would be much happier if you were drinking,” she said, her voice so soothing, her eyes glowing silver. Andy’s fingers twitched, but he focussed all his self control on staying still.

“I don’t drink,” he said. “or partake in cannibalism.”

“Pity,” she sighed. “Then again, I suppose it will work either way.” She turned back to Patrick and Joe, flipping her hair over her shoulder.

“How would you like to skip dessert?” she asked, her voice syrupy.

“Yeah!” Patrick and Joe cried in unison. Agreeability, Andy thought, was very useful for vampires,
and it was working wonders for these people. Whoever they were.

“Great!” the waitress clapped her hands together. “Would you guys be interested instead in seeing something that no mortal has seen on an average day in hundreds of years!”

“Yeah!” they cried again. Patrick kept leaning his head onto Joe’s shoulder, like his neck wasn’t strong enough to hold it up.

“Well then, follow me,” she said, and Joe and Patrick stood up.

“NO!” Andy cried. “We are NOT going with you, we’re going back to the hotel now!”

“Hotel!” Patrick laughed, “Yeah!”

“No,” the waitress smiled unpleasantly at Andy, “Wouldn’t you rather come with me?” she asked Joe and Patrick again, her eyes glowing silver, and they both nodded dumbly, their eyes glazed over. Andy had seen that before, though, the vacant expression, not the giddiness of compulsion, but the confusion of charmspeak.

“You’re a fairy,” Andy said.

“You’re just now realizing?” she asked under her breath so that Joe and Patrick wouldn’t hear.

“I thought fairies were vegetarian,” Andy said.

“And I thought vampires were immune to our charisma, but I guess we’re all learning a lot today,” the waitress said brightly, and began walking towards the door.

“I don’t have to come with you.” Andy declared from his seat, but the waitress merely laughed at him, turning briefly with an expression of pure mirth, her eyes glittering in the golden light that emanated from all the tortured bugs in the room.

“Of course, you don’t have to come with,” she agreed. “If everything goes according to plan, you shall get this half of your band back in one piece by tomorrow morning, I promise. But they will be very hard to find if you try and follow us,” she said. Andy stood his ground for one moment more as she opened the door, but then he ran after them, skidding outside into the rainy night. It was darker now, and the light that still shone from Kensington Court was now garish to Andy. A glow brought about only by death.

“There’s room in the car for one more,” she said, holding the door open to a magnificently large taxi, almost a carriage. Andy swallowed thickly and clambered in. Patrick was slumped against Joe, his eyes half closed, and Joe was humming a song—what tune, Andy couldn’t tell.

“Where’re we goin’?” Joe slurred, an easy happiness still tinging his voice. Andy felt a surge of sadness rush over him for his friends. It would pass, but after how long, Andy couldn’t say.

“You lucky mortals are going to be given entrance to Seelie Court!” she exclaimed. Andy felt his stomach drop, while she asked “Isn’t that exciting?”

“Wow, Seelie Court,” Patrick sounded so pleased, and Andy would have bet his life that he had no memory of what the phrase even meant. But Andy did.

Seelie Court, one of the two major courts of Faerie. Pete had described them as “Immortal, old money politicians that see human life as nothing more than a soap opera created for their enjoyment. Vicious and clever and ancient but utterly honor bound. Still, can’t trust them as far as you can throw
them.”

“So,” Andy had replied, many months ago when they were discussing this, “Is the Unseelie Court better?” Pete choked in disbelief.

“No,” he shook his head quickly. “Unseelie Court is much, much worse. But that doesn’t make Seelie Court good.”

Perhaps, Andy thought desperately, Pete had been overreacting. He tried desperately to wrack his brain for anything else Pete might have told him about the fae, but he was coming up blank.

“Wow! We’re flying!” Joe gasped, pulling Andy out of his thoughts. He immediately turned to look out the window, and realized quickly that they weren’t actually flying, but they were moving through traffic with speed and grace that should have been impossible in the middle of a city as large as London.

“It’s really a very minor glamour,” the waitress said, quietly, so that only Andy could hear her.

“Minor?” Andy asked as they zipped past the buildings, heedless of red lights or other drivers with everyone moving out of their way. “What, do they think we’re an ambulance?”

“We’re invisible, in a sense,” she said. “No car and every car. All humans really care about is that we blend in with the surroundings.”

Andy nodded, pulling back from the window. The speed at which they were moving was making him nauseous.

It wasn’t long before the car slammed to a halt, and the waitress hustled everyone out. As Andy looked up at the building before him, he let out a low moan.

“You must be joking,” he whispered.

“Have you seen the Tower of London yet?” the waitress asked, sounding smug. “No? Well, your tour may not be as complete, but what you do see will be more -ah- thorough.”

Andy stumbled along after her dumbly, vaguely aware that he too was at least partially caught in the fae’s spell. He was giving in too easily, not thinking clearly. Fuddled by their charisma.

“We usually hold this in Parliament, assuming the building is mostly clear, but it’s too early in the season for a full session of the Court,” she spoke like a tour guide, his heels click clacking on the ancient stones while she led the way in. “Occasionally, we have to meet outside as we used to, but this is a bit more professional. We met in Buckingham Palace once, you know,” she confided, her words still soothing, practically melting into their ears. Everything she said made Andy feel more calm, more relaxed, and he hated her for it. She led them out into the cold night air again, through some sort of courtyard, and into another building, one with a church inside, the pews already lined with dozens of people. Or, not quite people.

Row after row of fae turned to stare at the band as they were marched inside, all of them just a little bit off. Some with pointed ears, some with pointed teeth, some of the oldest looking ones with moss growing around the edges of their hairline, and all of them with too bright eyes that glowed when Andy passed them. All of their movements, even the minute ones were eerily graceful and lithe. The waitress led them to the very front of the church and sat them down in four folding chairs set up just in front of the altar. One of them sat empty. The murmuring in the church grew louder as they noticed the empty chair, and Andy shifted uncomfortably. Too many stares, too much attention, and he had no idea what would happen next. Even Joe and Patrick had ceased their giggling, perhaps
realizing, even through the haze, the severity of the situation.

The waitress, having sat them down, walked up to a podium just to the right of Andy’s chair. She laid her hands on the podium, closed her eyes, and a shudder ran through her. And another shudder ran through her, continuing as her form began to shiver. Andy turned away as she began to glow, and when he turned back, her plain black pants and shirt from the restaurant were gone, replaced by a long and shimmering white evening gown. Andy’s first thought was that it had been made from snow, and then, remembering where he was, decided that was not an unreasonably conclusion to come to.

The woman brushed her hair back behind her ears, and put her hands back on the podium, as though she was drawing all of her strength from it.

“Good evening,” she spoke after a lengthy silence. The whole of the audience, in perfect unison, knelt before her, their heads bowed, and she laughed a loud, piercing laugh. “Merry meet, my friends. As you can see, we are missing our guest of honor, and therefore have some things to discuss.” The crowd retook their seats.

“Pete?” Patrick spoke up, much to Andy’s horror. The woman turned her icy gaze to Patrick.

“Indeed,” she agreed. “This will take much longer without him, I’m afraid.”

“What do you want with Pete?” Joe asked. Andy was, if nothing else, relieved that both he and Patrick sounded more confused than blindly delighted by everything, but at the same time, he’d prefer they not die by insulting the fae.

“Your fairy friend is of a certain age,” the woman said, “He has reached maturity, and it is time for him to decide which of the Courts he will belong to. He has technically been the proper age for a while, but for some reason all of the Courts in America are having… difficulty reaching him,” she admitted, sounding puzzled.

“So what,” Andy spoke up now, “you were going to just kidnap him and say ‘pick our court or die’? I thought the Seelie Court was all about honor and shit.”

“Must we put up with the mortals back-talking the queen?” a man from the front row sighed in a bored drawl.

“Stand down, my friend,” she held out a graceful hand. “The boys have had a trying night. They deserve to know the truth.” She turned to face Andy. “And you’re right, we do value honor above all things. But your friend has been somewhat troublesome in the past, and we thought some leverage,” her eyes flickered to Joe and Patrick, “Might do him good.”

“Oh,” Andy spat, his eyes narrow. “So Pete joins you or we die?”

“On my honor,” the queen said, holding up a pale hand. “We will not lay a hand on any of you in harm. But we may keep you in our custody until your friend has made his decision. After all,” her eyes glinted. “You are bound to us until we choose to let you go.”

“What binds us?” Andy asked, though he couldn’t really see himself standing up and making a break for the exit. The queen laughed again.

“Do you not know the legends of the fae?” she asked. “Once you have eaten fairy food, you cannot return without permission.”

Andy felt his blood run cold. Far from seven pomegranate seeds, all three of them had gorged
themselves on fairy food. And Andy wasn’t quite sure how to correct it.

Joe and Patrick were rapidly look more and more confused and almost pained, like they were developing headaches. Fast acting wine, Andy thought, or perhaps they didn’t drink enough. After all, Joe’s metabolism as a werewolf was powerful, and Patrick was—well, Andy wouldn’t be surprised if Patrick had little difficulty getting over it as well. However, their eyes were still glazed.

“My queen,” a young girl stepped out of her pew and curtsied deeply, “If I may ask—what do you intend to do without Peter here?”

The queen turned and smiled at Andy.

“You have cell phones?” she asked, and Andy swallowed thickly and nodded.

“Call Pete,” she demanded. “And convince him.”

Andy growled, balling up his hands into fists. “No.”

“It’s for his own good,” the Seelie Queen soothed him. “Think of the good of your friend, Andy, please.”

“How is enslavement for his own good?” Andy asked.

“Not enslavement!” the queen scoffed. “Membership. He is still free to do as he wants, so long as it does not conflict with the good of the Court. He will be able to attend the solstices, the equinoxes. He will help us when we call on him, and in return, he will have our protection and our rules. Is that such a bad deal?”

“Pete will never go for it,” Andy said, changing tactics.

“But what if his friends convince him?” she asked, and turned to Joe. “You see it’s for the best, don’t you?” she asked.

“Um,” Joe looked up at her, “Yeah, I think so. Yeah, probably.”

“How is it for the best?” Andy demanded. For the first time, the queen looked angry.

“Wild fae are a danger,” she hissed. “A danger to others, and a danger to themselves without the proper network of support. Surely you’ve seen him be a danger to himself,” she said, giving Andy a knowing look. Andy flinched.

“But…” he trailed off.

“A fairy that young, that volatile, on his own!” she continued. “Who knows the sort of havoc he could be wreaking this very minute!”

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“CARRIE!” Pete wailed, spewing Lucky Charms and milk all over the coffee table. “You can’t do that! He’s your true love!”

Pete slumped against the couch, his heart beating for Sarah Jessica Parker as she sobbed on the floor of her apartment on the TV in his parent’s living room. He hastily tried to brush the cereal off the table as his mom walked in. She leaned against the door frame and let out a long, low sigh, as Pete scrambled to pause Sex and the City.
“You know,” she said, drumming her fingers on the wall and looking amused. “When I said we should watch TV sometime, I had no idea it would escalate to this.”

“But mom!” Pete whined, tears springing to his eyes. “How could she leave Aiden? He was perfect for her!”

“I think all the estrogen in this house is affecting you in a negative way,” his mother teased, still not comprehending the severity of the situation.

“Mom, she called off the wedding!” Pete said, pleading with his mother to empathize, but she just shook her head, walking to the kitchen.

“Sex and the City ended last year!” she yelled at him, and Pete grumbled, slumping further into the couch.

It was four in the afternoon in Chicago, and wintry sunlight was still streaming in through the windows and glaring off the TV screen. Pete was curled up in an old Midtown shirt he had stolen from Patrick and a pair of very old Eeyore pajama bottoms that belonged to his mom. He left his spot on the couch to go to bed, his childhood bed, to do copious amounts of housework, and to go out with his mom whenever she went on any kind of errands.

“The whole point of getting released from the hospital,” Pete had argued with his mother, “Was settling back into my normal life. The doctor said that babying me was going to make adjustment harder!”

“I have no intention of babying you,” his mom had said, and handed him a bucket full of cleaning supplies.

Not-so-secretly, Pete was grateful. His heart had sunk when his psychiatrist had cleared him for international travel (which, in retrospect, was something Pete probably should have mentioned to his psychiatrist, but oh well) because the stress of being on an international flight added to the stress of a tour and the stress of trying to look happy for whatever goons Island Records sent to watch out for him- it sounded exhausting.

Instead of the wild life of touring, he cleaned his parents’ house, dealt with his siblings stopping by for family dinner and giving him concerned looks, and marathoned Sex and the City, with and without his mom.

Pete hauled himself over the couch and leaned on the kitchen counter while his mom was making dinner.

“Is she gonna go crawling back to Mr. Big?” Pete asked, his voice resigned. His mother rolled her eyes.

“Watch and find out,” she suggested, and Pete groaned. It felt vaguely demeaning to be clinging to the girly drama, but it was still easier to deal with than his own.

Pete had just nestled back into his cave of blankets and throw pillows and hit play on the next episode when his phone started ringing. He waited until the caller ID said “Patrick” before he sprang forward, flipping it open.

“Hey there big boy,” he purred in his best fake sexy voice, “You called for a good time?”

“Not...exactly,” Patrick slurred out, his words stretched and confused. Pete sat up straighter, his eyebrows furrowing in concern.
“Are you drunk?” he asked.

“Maybe?” Patrick sounded confused. “I don’t… know. I thought it was wine, but no… I’m not so… Andy said it was something else…” he trailed off. Concern flared in Pete’s chest while alarm bells went off in his head. Patrick sounded way too drunk.

“Is Andy there now?” Pete asked carefully.

“Uh-huh,” Patrick said, and giggled. “He’s here, but he disapproves… thinks I shouldn’t call you, but shhh!” Patrick shushed the phone and giggled again. “I have a plan!”

“Hey, Rick, can I talk to Andy for a minute?” Pete asked. Patrick giggled again.

“Yeah, okay,” he said, and after some rustling, Pete heard Andy speak.

“We need your help,” Andy said in a panicked whisper.

“What’s wrong with Patrick?” Pete asked. Andy groaned.

“He’s been drugged, he and Joe both,” Andy hissed, and Pete breathed in sharply, clenching his fists. “We got tricked and we’re in Seelie Court!”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Pete asked, his voice rising in pitch. His mom shot him a concerned look, and Pete waved her off dismissively. “How?”

“We went to a fairy restaurant, ate fairy food, Joe and Patrick drank compulsion wine and now we’re being held hostage,” Andy said in a rush.

“Hostage for what?” Pete asked.

“You, obviously!” Andy cried, lowering his voice again. “What else would the fae have to do with someone like Joe or I?”

“What, they want me to come offer myself up in exchange for the three of you?” Pete asked, his heart sinking. He looked over his shoulder to make sure his mom hadn’t heard. If she got wind of this, she would try to stop him, but so long as she didn’t hear he could probably sneak out to the airport. The last thing he wanted to do was join the Seelie Court, but-

“Well don’t do it, obviously,” Andy said. “We just need a new plan.”

“Patrick said he had a plan!” Pete said.

“Then why’d he give the phone to me?” Andy asked.

“I asked him to?”

Andy groaned. “Compulsion wine, Pete. He’d say yes to anything right now.”

“I thought he was just drunk! Give the phone back to him!”

Rustling on the other end. A bang, a swear, a giggle, and then Patrick’s voice.

“Hiii,” he sang into the phone. “Pete. Petepetepete. I miss you, you know that? Like, I really reeeally miss you.” Garden tools getting shoved in Pete’s chest would probably have felt less painful than hearing Patrick talking like this.
“I miss you too,” Pete said. Before Patrick could go on, Pete barrelled forward. “You said you had a plan?”

“Yeah!” Patrick said, sounding giddily excited. “You’re my plan! You know about fairies and you can get us out of this with your brain.” He sounded so confident, and Pete only wished he had that confidence in himself.

“Was that it?”

“Well…” Patrick paused. “I brought something with me,” he spoke each word carefully and heavily, trying to convey something to Pete that he couldn’t say aloud.

“Your knife?” Pete asked.

“Yes! But I can’t talk about it,” Patrick said.

Pete let out a hollow laugh. “You can’t fight off all of Seelie Court sober. I’d hate to see you try it now.”

“Yes!” Patrick crowed at someone who wasn’t Pete, and the phone was passed off.

“Hi, Pete!” Joe yelled excitedly.

“Hey,” Pete sounded weary, worn out after a few minutes of conversation with his friends. “Joe, can you hand the phone to Andy?”

“Yes!” Joe agreed happily, and Pete rubbed small circles into his temples as he heard the phone being passed again. Sex and the City had autostarted and was now running in the background.

“Any luck?” Andy asked.

“None. Patrick’s high, he doesn’t have a plan,” Pete felt increasingly hopeless as the conversation wore on, so he gritted his teeth and lowered his voice, “Listen, I can be on a plane to London in an hour-”

“Don’t even think about it,” Andy growled.

“Why not?” Pete pleaded. “I’m not gonna get you three killed over a stupid grudge!”

“First of all,” Andy growled, voice low, “It’s not a stupid grudge. These people are evil, Pete, I can tell. Second, we’re not going to be killed.”

“What makes you say that?” Pete asked.

“They promised not to,” Andy said nonchalantly.

“They what?” Pete asked, leaning forward as though it would bring him closer to his band.

“They promised-”

“No, I heard you the first time,” Pete interrupted. “Who said it, and what were their exact words?”

“The Queen promised it,” Andy said, and paused briefly. “The Queen of Seelie Court, that is, not the Queen of England. I mean, you probably got that, but whatever. Um, she said ‘On my honor we will not lay a hand on any of you in harm’,” Andy rattled back. Pete cheered, jumping up off the couch and nearly knocking over his bowl of cereal.
“What?” Andy demanded.

“Fairies are tricky, but the Seelie Court is honor bound,” Pete said. He ran a hand through his already messy hair and shot his mom a smile as she peered in on him. “All you have to do is provoke them enough that one of them tries to attack you, and as soon as one of you gets hit, you’re free to go!”

“Great, in theory,” Andy said. “But two of us will say yes to anything, and what if we provoke them so much that they kill one of us first?”

Pete deflated, but only slightly.

“You need something that’ll scare them, but preferably close range,” Pete said, and started pacing. He kept a blanket wrapped around his shoulders like a cape, and it billowed out behind him with every step.

“Ah yes,” Andy said sarcastically, “Thank goodness I keep an assortment of short range cold iron weapons up my ass, how could I have forgotten?”

“Patrick said he brought his knife, but I don’t know what it’s made of,” Pete mused.

“Wait, Patrick brought a hunting knife to dinner?” Andy asked.

“That’s what he told me!” Pete said.

“Great,” Andy said sarcastically, “We’ve got one knife between us and a scary fairy court with a hundred ancient mythical creatures that could easily cook us for one of their next meals!”

“Well, you have to be… clever about it,” Pete suggested, cringing at the words. “You didn’t make any promises to them, right?” he asked.

“Nothing aside from eating fairy food,” Andy said.

“Great,” Pete said. “Okay, let’s be logical,” he pulled out his PC and began searching frantically, phone nestled in between his head and shoulders. “Well, obviously don’t try to attack the queen,” Pete said, “unless you want to get shot in the neck.”

“Not particularly,” Andy said.

“Pick someone unimportant and don’t attack to kill, and, actually,” Pete looked up from the computer with the pages on fae loading. “Maybe you shouldn’t do the attacking. You’re a vampire, that makes you too much of a threat.”


“I mean, yeah,” he said. “They won’t try to kill him right off the bat, and they would murder you without a second thought.”

“He’s high as a goddamn kite, Pete, he can’t tell the blade from the handle!” Andy cried.

“He’s got the best chance of surviving,” Pete said.

“Chance!” Andy growled. “And what if he doesn’t?”

“The fae are rash, not suicidal,” Pete said, his voice darkening. “And they wouldn’t be doing this if they weren’t afraid of me. If one of you gets seriously hurt, I’ll give them more of a reason to be scared.”
Andy lowered his voice, “Why are they scared of you?”

“That’s a long story,” Pete excused. “Can you give the phone to Patrick?” It sounded for a moment like Andy was going to protest, but he exhaled deeply.

“Okay,” Andy said, and passed the phone off. Pete stopped pacing and instead sat on the edge of the couch.

“Pete!” Patrick cried, sounding euphoric.

“Hey,” Pete said, taking a deep breath. “Patrick, I’m gonna try something, okay?”

“What are you gonna try?” Patrick asked, his voice sounding like he was grinning. Pete winced, feeling guilty about his plan.

“I would ask for your permission, but you’d say yes no matter what you thought,” Pete said, and then willed the charmspeak to kick in with all his might: “SNAP OUT OF IT.”


“Okay, Rick, that’s great!” Pete said, “I’ve got a plan.”

“You aren’t gonna give in, are you?” Patrick asked, sounding scared. “You can’t do that, they don’t-” he hiccupped “-don’t deserve you!”

“No, nothing like that,” Pete soothed, “But I need you to do something really brave and really stupid, okay?”

“My two specialties,” Patrick chuckled.

“You said you have your knife?” Pete asked.

“Mm-hm.”

“Well,” Pete double checked the website, “It’s probably made of steel, most knives are, and steel is made of iron and carbon, so-”

“You want me to try and...?”

“Don’t attack the queen!” Pete yelled, “Just, I don’t know, go at one of them with the knife, don’t actually hurt them, just make sure they hurt you.”

“You want me to get hurt?”

“Patrick, do you trust me?”

There was silence on the other end for a moment, and then, “Of course I do.”

“They’re not going to hurt you badly,” he hoped, “They just have to hurt you so that they’ve broken their promise, then they have to let you go. It’s an honor thing.”

There was silence for a moment and then a stunned “Oh, okay! Sorry, I was nodding.” Pete smiled down at his feet.

“Hand the phone to Andy,” he said with a small chuckle.
“Pete-” Andy began, but stopped as Pete heard dozens of gasps, what sounded like a war cry from Patrick, and an indignant yelp, followed by flesh hitting flesh and a pained gasp from Patrick. A woman yelled “Stop!” and Pete could hear the charm speak, much more powerful than his own, all the way through the phone line. He felt his heart slowing in relief. The first part of his plan, at least, had worked.

“Hand me to the Queen,” Pete told Andy, and Andy silently did.

“Dirty trick,” he heard a harsh female voice whisper.

“I… couldn’t say the same of you,” Pete said. “For once. But you broke your word, and…” he trailed off, and she growled.

“He isn’t hurt!” she snapped.

“But was a hand laid on him in harm?” Pete asked. “Your majesty, you’d be angrier with yourself if you cut corners than you are at me now.”

“Doubtful,” she sounded like she had a mouthful of hair.

“Your oath is broken, now let them go,” Pete said, his voice low and demanding.

“And if I don’t?” she asked. Pete’s heart skipped a beat.

“You broke an oath, and you’re honor bound-!” Pete began.

“Rules are changing, Wentz,” she said. “The old ways are giving way to the new, and not just for the humans. But I suppose you’re right, we did break a promise, therefore there’s no need to keep it anymore.”

“What do you mean?” Pete asked, feeling his ribs tighten around his lungs, not giving him the space he needed to breathe.

“Hurry on out, Pete,” she said, her voice dripping sweet venom, “I’m not in the mood to kill, but torture, that could be fun.”

Pete opened his mouth to scream at her, but the dial tone blared in his ears.

Joe knew, as soon as the wine kicked in, that it wasn’t normal. The problem was that knowing a drug is affecting you and being influenced by the drug were not mutually exclusive. So by the time Patrick was on the floor with a bruise blossoming on his cheek and the queen had crushed the cell phone in her hand, Joe knew something was very, very wrong, but if someone asked him to jump off of the top of Big Ben, Joe would have to obey.

Andy gulped next to him and whispered “Now what?” to himself, and Joe felt fear course through his body. The queen cast a wintry smile at them.

“Someone should subdue them,” she suggested, a silver glint in her eyes. With no direct command at Joe, he was able to duck down grabbing his chair and swinging it at the first few fairies that ran up to them.

“I’m gonna kill Pete,” Andy growled, following suit as he bashed an oncoming fairy in the head.

Patrick slashed one of the women with his knife, and she screamed, stumbling backwards, smoke
pouring out of the wound. All the fairies stepped back briefly, and Patrick jumped up in front of Joe and Andy on unsteady legs, brandishing the knife in front of him. He swayed, and Joe considered grabbing his shoulder to steady him, but figured that might make them seem less intimidating to the fae.

“Stand back!” Patrick demanded, his voice trembling slightly. Joe couldn’t count all of them, but their appearances were rapidly fading out of the facade of beautiful people and into something horrible and visceral, teeth elongating and skin gnarling like old bark.

“Silly boy,” the queen’s tongue had forked, and ice crystals were growing along her hairline. They all looked elemental, Joe thought, some of them growing scales, others with hair turning to seaweed.

“You can’t possibly fight us all off all on your own. We won’t kill you,” she cocked her head, “We’ll just send Pete some encouragement.”

“I’m not on my own,” Patrick said, sticking his chin up. The queen laughed harshly.

“Our blood is poison,” she sneered. “What will your friends do?”

Patrick shot Joe a questioning look, and Joe shrugged. He had no idea what he would do, but if they could get a clear path to the exit, they’d be home free. But then-

“Um, werewolves don’t drink blood?” Joe said. She paused.

“Werewolves?” she repeated, and Joe’s eyes gleamed suddenly.

“Back me up, ‘trick,” he said, and shifted mid stride, jumping straight at her, dragging his claw down her chest. The queen stumbled and fell to the ground, and Joe growled before pouncing into the crowd. He swatted away all the fairies he could reach, mindful not to bite at any of them. Just behind him, he could hear the screams of fairies as Patrick sliced shallowly at them, and the smacking sounds of a bad martial arts movie as Andy kicked and hit the stragglers aside.

Joe bounded out the door, down the hall, followed in close pursuit by a Patrick who was running at what must have a completely insane speed, if he was keeping up, and Andy, fighting off their close pursuers, from the sound of it.

The second his paws hit the sidewalk, Joe shifted again, having to concentrate extra hard against the alcohol slowing his brain. Human again, he swayed and fell against the wall, sliding down it and looking up at Andy and Patrick.

“Did anyone-?” he started, and Andy tossed his clothes back at him.

“You’re a-” Joe collapsed in a fit of laughter, “-you’re such a fucking thoughtful guy, Andy. We were running from- no, wait, for! Running for our lives! And you grabbed my clothes!” he giggled and leaned against Andy’s legs as he wriggled back into his clothes.

“We should keep running,” Andy suggested, and Joe nodded, pulling his shirt on. “Back to the hotel?”

As if on instinct, both Joe and Patrick yelled “YEAH!” at Andy, and Joe winced. He did want to go home, but the endless yeses were grating. And he had no idea how to stop. A growl rippled from behind them, and Andy grabbed Joe’s elbow, steering him down the sidewalk.

“Slow down!” Joe whined, stumbling after Andy. He could tell Patrick was having trouble running too, now that the adrenaline was wearing off. “There are witnesses out here!”
“Glamours,” Andy shot back. “Nobody on the street will see a damn thing wrong.”

That made Joe speed up, walking faster and straighter and right behind Andy, hoping that the three of them looked casual. He could no longer hear the unearthly sounds from behind him, but he wasn’t sure just how trustworthy his senses were under this much of an influence.

“What’ll stop them at the hotel?” Patrick asked, and Joe looked over in time to see Andy clench his teeth.

“Security is there,” Joe said to Patrick. He couldn’t imagine security staving off a horde of pissed off immortal beings, but maybe Patrick was too drunk to see the faulty logic.

“What’ll stop them ever?” Joe asked under his breath, and Andy shrugged.

“Some fairy bullshit will kick in eventually, I’m sure of it,” he muttered, sounding more weary than anything else. Joe deliberated this for a moment.

“Fairies are weird,” he said after a fashion, and wished desperately that he could articulate something, anything more.

A few blocks further down, they all searched their pockets only to discover that none of them had brought any money with them. They had spent months and months on the road, carried their wallets with them everywhere so as never to get them stolen in a seedy venue, and yet, Joe hadn’t brought his wallet too one stupid dinner.

“You think the manage-y dude was working with them?” Patrick asked, which nearly stopped Joe in his tracks.

“Maybe, yeah,” Joe said, running a hand through his hair and loosing his footing and concentration.

“Wait, um, yeah, he said he knew the restaurant!”

“We’ll lock the doors tonight and deal with it in the morning,” Andy sighed, trudging forward without any falter in pace.

“Where’s the hotel?” Patrick asked, and Andy clenched his fist, screwing up his eyes.

“I don’t know, actually,” he said. “We’ll find it eventually.”

“Pete!” Patrick cried.

“What about him?” Andy sounded like a worn out, underpaid babysitter. Joe felt bad for him, but was too muzzy to fight back, and the rain sparkling under the streetlights was beautifully distracting. Fucking fairy wine.

“I miss him!” Patrick announced, then paused, “And we should tell him we lived and… shit.”

“Great idea!” Andy said, made to call Pete, then looked over at Patrick with his wide, puppyish eyes, and sighed. “Do you want to call him?”

Patrick nodded enthusiastically, and Joe listened in on the conversation, as Andy seemed uninterested in talking.

“Hi Pete!” Patrick said, and Joe could hear static garbled yelling from the other side.

“No, no, I’m fine,” Patrick said. “I mean, my face hurts, but I guess that’ll go away, right?”
“Yeah, no, we got out, it’s all good. Fairies don’t like werewolves or super-strength or drunk rockstars with knives,” pride colored his voice.

“Can I talk?” Joe asked, shocked by the whine in his own tone. Patrick nodded sagely and Patrick passed Andy’s phone off.

“Hi!” Joe said. He had nothing to say, but it was strange not to hear Pete’s encouraging voice behind them all the time.

“Hi?” Pete repeated, his volume crackling in the speaker. “Hi?! Are you okay?”

“Duh,” Joe staggered a bit. “I’m fantastic!”

“Are you sure I shouldn’t come out?”

“Do not come out here!” Joe demanded. “Bad idea. these fairies aren’t like you, they’re intimidating.”

“Thanks,” Pete said sourly. His tone then softened, the worry seeping through, “You’re really all right?”

“We’re fantastic!” Joe promised. “Have fun with your wild parties or whatever you’re doing back home.”


“Who?” Joe asked.

“Never mind,” Pete said, and hung up.

“He’s happy,” Patrick said, smiling a little.

“Let’s just stop in a pub and ask for directions already,” Andy sighed, weary.

Much to Joe’s dismay, the bartender informed them that the hotel (which Andy thankfully remembered the name of) was a few miles away, and the February rain was cold as ice. He forced himself to not start whining, no matter how emotionally raw he suddenly felt, but instead trudged through the slushy roads in silence, Andy leading the way.

Hours later, when they returned to the hotel, Joe felt entirely sober. And ready to sleep for the rest of his life. He yearned to go to bed, but before he could stumble into his room, Andy pulled him and Patrick aside.

“Listen,” Andy said, “I don’t know if there’s anything wrong with our touring manager or not, but I think we should keep an eye on him, okay?”

“M’kay,” Joe nodded, his eyes falling shut.

“I’m serious,” Andy said.

“I have no doubts,” Joe nodded again. “But can we discuss in the morning?”

“Yeah, go to bed,” Andy told him.
It wasn’t till he was almost asleep that Joe wondered why fairies, some of them thousands of years old, would be afraid of a werewolf.

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys! I hope this is a much better chapter than the last, haha, and thanks for bearing with me while I settle into college and junk! I got to see Panic! again last night, which as you can imagine was totally amazing! If you didn't see the announcement on tumblr, I will have another chapter up by the end of September, as well as another drabble. As always, you are more than welcome to make any fanart, podfics, edits, what ever you want for the story, just let me know via a message on here or on thehighwaytohell.tumblr.com, where you can also send questions, concerns, anon-hate, and drabble requests or your own fanfiction. I love you guys so much, and I have the coolest readers in the world! Thank you for all your comments, and as always, thank you for reading!

Chapter title by The Clash.
Somebody Told Me

Chapter Summary

Fall Out Boy wants a break and a chance to hang out with Panic! at the Disco, but sometimes hero complexes land them into more trouble than they can get out of.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“You know what would be a great addition to the album?” Pete asked, leaning over Patrick’s shoulder.

“You can fuck right the fuck off with your ‘great addition to the album’,’” Joe said. “The album is done, Pete.”

“Art is never done,” Pete argued.

“This particular art is done,” Joe said.

“What if we put Brendon in 7 Minutes in Heaven?” Pete asked.

“That would sound...good,” Joe admitted grudgingly. “Backing vocals?”

“Maybe a feature,” Pete said.

Pete had been talking to Panic! online back and forth for months, whining about the recording process and then whining about being stuck at his mom’s house, and giving them magical self-defense tips, like stocking up on Holy Water while one of them still went to Catholic school.

“pete i can’t just steal holy water” Spencer would type in the AIM box.

“shit sorry do the nuns still beat you kids?” Pete would write back.

“Why do I get the feeling you’ve already made up your mind?” Patrick asked wearily, not looking up from his laptop. He was staring intently at the screen and clicking with a feverish seriousness, but Pete could see he was just playing minesweeper.

“Because I have,” Pete said. “Called the label and…” he paused, smirking a little “convinced” them that Brendon should be on the record.”

Andy glanced up at Pete with disapproval on his face.

“You think you should use that on the label?” he asked, and Pete rolled his eyes.

“Since when do you care about the pocket change of corporations? It’ll be good, trust me.”

Andy nodded, but didn’t reply, and Pete sighed. All of them were a little wary, a little bit too pressed in on him after the tour. They were stuck in the apartment out in LA for a little while longer, and the ever present concern was making Pete claustrophobic. It was obvious to himself that he was doing well, far far away from the precipice of the cliff he’d been walking on the edge of for
months, but he had to keep reminding himself that other people couldn’t see emotions like he could. Most people, apparently, didn’t know something was wrong until it got better.

The claustrophobia wasn’t only affecting Pete. Andy was antsy, flying back and forth from LA to Milwaukee more times than he had the money for to check on Carmilla. He always brought back piles of baby photos of her in the swings, throwing tantrums, wearing too-big Wolverine claws that Andy dressed her up in. Patrick joked that it was lucky she showed up in pictures, and Andy rolled his eyes dramatically. Patrick spent, the last time Pete checked, an average of ten hours on the phone with Anna a day, and while Joe was doing better, they were sick of each other.

What could help more than a holiday?

“We’re flying out to Vegas tomorrow,” Pete announced.

“No we’re not,” Joe said, but his heart wasn’t in it. Pete figured at this point Joe just argued out of reflex.

“You have something better to do?” Pete challenged. Joe grumbled, but didn’t form any words of protest. Patrick and Andy made no moves to resist, which they might have otherwise, but Pete was on an upswing. A very big upswing.

“To clarify,” Patrick said, “The four of us are going to Vegas to bring one kid out to LA and then the five of us are going back to Vegas?”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Pete scoffed. “We’re bringing all the whole band back with us.”

“Fantastic,” Joe said dryly, “I’ll pack the fruit snacks for the kids.”

“Don’t be mean, Joe, they aren’t kids,” Patrick teased, “Ryan’s legal.”

“They’re a little young,” Pete sighed. “Look, you guys wanna get out of the apartment, or not?”

The apartment went silent, and Pete knew that he had won.

“Great,” he said bracingly. “We head out to Vegas tomorrow.”

“Living with you is giving me whiplash,” Patrick said quietly, but he smiled at Pete fondly nonetheless, and Pete felt full of self-satisfaction at Patrick’s fondness. At least someone could be counted on to appreciate his character quirks.

Sure enough, the next day the four of them piled on a plane. Patrick declared it was too early, even though the plane didn’t take off until after eleven in the morning. Upon their arrival at McCarran International Airport, Pete grinned at the others and asked them if they wanted to “scare the shit out of Brendon”, to which they all responded enthusiastically.

They rented a car and drove to Palo Verde high school, parking in front of what looked like the main entrance, and Pete sat on the hood of the car, basking in the sunlight. The desert sun beat down on him, too hot to be pleasant, but his skin tingled like it was happy to be alive. It was a great day, the kind of day where every sensation felt amazing.

He didn’t get to bask in the sunlight long before he heard the shrill ring of a high school bell, an unwelcome throwback to a terrible time, but Pete sat up a little more, keeping his eyes trained on the door. Soon enough he spotted the skinny kid with glasses and an awful haircut, wearing a dress shirt and slacks to school. Pete felt his heart twist in sympathy. There was no way kids were
nice to him. And maybe Pete Wentz didn’t qualify as the kind of celebrity greeting that would bump up Brendon’s celebrity status in the last few months of school, but he was still a cool adult with an expensive rental car. So he wolf whistled as loud and powerfully as he could, and yelled: “Hey Brendon!”

Brendon nearly jumped out of his skin as he and the rest of his school turned to stare at Pete, lounging lazily on the hood of the car, sunglasses hanging down to the tip of his nose. Pete made a popping noise in the back of his throat and grinned wide, his eyes dancing at the shocked look on Brendon’s face.

“Need a ride?” he called.

It was the kind of moment high school Pete would have killed for, but he didn’t begrudge the kid of it for a second. Brendon’s face lit up the second the shock wore off, and he tore through the crowd. Well known celebrity or no, Pete exuded an aura of power and charm that made the whole crowd jealous of anyone that was the object of his attention. He hopped back in the driver’s seat as Brendon slid into the back.

“I didn’t bring my stuff,” Brendon panted, shoving his glasses higher up the bridge of his nose. “I uh, kinda thought that you guys would be picking me up at my place, actually.” He paused, and after a full second of no reaction, blustered straight into “I mean it’s fine, there’s nothing wrong but like. I don’t have a change of clothes or a toothbrush and I mean I guess that’s not the end of the world because it’s just the one night but-”

“Dude,” Pete resisted the urge to roll his eyes. The kid’s enthusiasm was kind of cute. “Relax, okay? Our plane doesn’t even leave till tomorrow because Island is cheap. Figured you wouldn’t mind getting picked up,” Pete turned and pulled his sunglasses down to stare at Brendon directly while they were stopped at the light. “Gimme directions?”

“Sure!” Brendon said, but his face dropped as soon as he spoke. “Um, I think you turn right here?”

Brendon directed Pete to his place, but he wasn’t good at it. He would point at a street they were supposed to turn onto seconds before the turn, causing Pete to miss a few streets. Brendon kept blushing and apologizing, saying he wasn’t used to going by car, or recognizing street signs before landmarks.

They eventually pulled into the dirty, sun-bleached apartment complex, devoid of cars and all signs of life save for an overflowing dumpster. The building seemed to be sagging, caving in on itself as waves of heat quivered off of it.

Brendon clambered out of the car, backpack slung over one shoulder and still half open. He speed walked toward the door, flinging it open and leaning against it, looking back at the band with an antsy expression.

“We in a hurry?” Pete asked.

“Course not,” Brendon said with a small smile. Lying. Pete kept the frown off of his face, and walked a little faster.

The inside of the building was so dark that it was as though Pete had gone blind when he went inside. Once his eyes adjusted, he saw Brendon sitting on the edge of a murphy bed, swinging his legs back and forth. The apartment was a little messy, but mostly it struck Pete how tiny the place was. He wasn’t entirely sure if there would be enough floor space for all of them if they were lying
“Mi casa es su casa,” Brendon joked.

“Nice place,” Patrick lied. Always so polite.

“Thanks,” Brendon said, “Got it myself.”

Pete, who had long given up on the manners that were so instilled in Patrick, threw open the door to the yellowish, lead lined fridge that looked like it dropped right out of the 1950’s. Inside, though it was hard to see without a light, there was an expired carton of milk, a bottle of mustard, and dozens of cartons that reeked of expired Chinese takeout.

“Ever heard of vegetables?” Pete asked, smirking over at Brendon. Brendon blushed and ducked his head down. Jesus, the kid was easier to get to than Patrick.

“Vegetables are a gateway food,” Brendon said, “Leads to fruit and good hydration, can’t go down that kind of path.”

“Good man,” Joe laughed.

Brendon’s face lit up with a grin.

“So, you wanna hang out here for the night, or chill with us back at the hotel?” Pete asked. Before Brendon could reply, Andy let out a loud squeak and jumped back as a dark shadow darted across the floor.

“Was that a rat?” Patrick asked, eyebrows shooting up.

“Yeah?” Brendon seemed unconcerned. “Didn’t you guys live in Chicago?”

The rodent squeak that followed might have been Andy again, or Pete’s overactive imagination, but it sealed his decision.

“Wanna hang in a hotel on the strip?” Pete asked, and Brendon smiled and nodded, looking bewildered by his own good luck.

“Excellent,” Pete said. “Start packing, you’re coming to your first Fall Out Boy slumber party.”

“Very manly,” Patrick assured him dryly.

“Because we’re such manly dudes,” Joe teased.

Brendon nodded, looking slightly overwhelmed, and dumped out his school bag on the bed. He ran around the room, picking up articles of clothing and sniffing them before throwing them in the bag, eventually, grabbing a toothbrush and toothpaste from the bathroom and zipping the bag up halfway. It took thirty seconds flat.

“Ready when you are,” he said, and Andy led the way out the door.

The hotel they were booked at wasn’t particularly glamorous, but given that Pete’s last hotel experience in Vegas was getting tied to a radiator and gagged with iron, he thought that this was a nice improvement. Pete could get used to the record company taking care of things.

Pete quickly excused himself to take a shower, and by the time he got out, Patrick and
Brendon were deep in conversation, focused only on each other’s faces and aura’s glowing.

“How old were you when you wrote that?” Patrick asked, slamming the laptop shut. Brendon shrugged, trying and failing to look humble.

“Fourteen,” he said.

“It’s fucking fantastic,” Patrick declared, and Brendon’s aura glowed in a way Pete could definitely recognize. He smiled a little, and wondered if it was crueler to let the kid flounder, or tell him that Patrick was as straight as an arrow. Eventually he figured that he should tell him, but only when they were far away from a certain two band mates with super-hearing.

Brendon seemed determined to stay up and talking to them all night long, and when his eyelids began to droop at barely nine o’clock, Pete offered him a Red Bull.

“That’s an energy drink, yeah?” Brendon asked, staring at the silver can with trepidation. Pete snorted.

“No, it’s crack cocaine,” Patrick said, rolling his eyes, but still smiling warmly. Brendon’s face didn’t soften.

“Caffeine,” he said, taking in a deep breath.

“You don’t have to drink it,” Pete laughed, trying to ease his nervousness. Jesus, but he’d never seen someone experience every single emotion as strong as Brendon did.

“I’ve just never, um,” Brendon took the can carefully, as though it were a grenade. “I mean, I’ve never had a Red Bull before, that’s all.”

“Well now you’ve gotta try,” Joe said, “This’ll be hilarious.”

Brendon did not disappoint. Without caffeine, he was already too springy. With the addition of an energy drink, he was the Energizer Bunny.

Pete had built up a tolerance to nearly every substance known to man, so it didn’t take him long to be sleepy enough to crash, but Patrick insisted Pete take the couch.

“Brendon goes to high school, he’s earned a real bed,” Patrick declared.

“You don’t go to high school,” Pete pointed out.

“I live with you,” Patrick said, but he spoke so fondly Pete couldn’t even be angry. “Besides, Brendon doesn’t mind sharing a bed with me, right?” he asked. The pink that screamed ‘crush’ rolled off of Brendon in waves, but he shook his head eagerly.

“Whatever, fuckfaces,” Pete said, dragging the heavy duvet off of the bed and curling up on the couch. But for all his grumbling, Pete couldn’t help but feel all the happy in the room seeping into him. It was a good night.

The next morning, they picked up the rest of the band at Ryan’s house. Spencer looked slightly jealous at Brendon, but Brent seemed uncaring, and Ryan seemed as content as ever. Maybe it was easier to not be jealous when you could see the future of your relationships, Pete thought, and that thought was immediately followed by the thought that maybe he would be better suited to have Ryan’s powers instead.
“You look hungover,” Ryan told Brendon, and the color rose in Brendon’s cheeks.

“It was just Red Bull,” Brendon said, and Ryan cast a glance at Pete, somewhere between amused and accusing.

“Thanks, Pete,” he said sarcastically, “The last thing we needed was to introduce him to caffeine.” Brendon punched Ryan in the shoulder, and Ryan leaned into the touch, shoving him back.

Watching Brendon was fascinating for Pete. As soon as he was next to Ryan, he mellowed drastically, the sharpness in him dimmed. Being next to Patrick seemed to have the opposite effect. Pete had never met someone like him, and it was enticing to watch.

Once they got to the airport, Pete pulled Brendon off the edge of the lot, motioning for the others to go ahead.

“Brendon,” he started.

“Pete,” Brendon said in a mock serious voice, still bubbling with good vibes.

“Do you, like, get enough to eat, and stuff?” Pete asked. Brendon dimmed slightly.

“I mean, yeah,” he shrugged, self-conscious. “Free lunch at school, Ryan usually brings over takeout, and I can afford pop tarts and junk on top of rent, usually.”

“Why do you…” Pete paused, unsure how to phrase the question so that it wouldn’t be offensive. Brendon took a deep breath, looking up at the sky before looking back at Pete.

“My parents weren’t exactly… thrilled about the whole ‘pursuing rock music as a career’ thing. They didn’t exactly kick me out, but,” he swallowed hard, “I didn’t want to wait around long enough to hear that I wasn’t welcome.

“They know where I live. My sister drops by sometimes. I’m not gonna starve, and it’s not as though I’m in danger of freezing to death,” he laughed, but didn’t sound amused.

“Must suck,” Pete said, “Your parents hating the music thing that much.” Brendon let out another harsh laugh.

“Hey, not as bad as Ryan’s dad,” Brendon said. “I mean, we got to perform at a church thing with my family once. But half our advertising work goes into making sure George doesn’t see it.”

Pete shot a worried glance at where the others had walked off.

“He’s not—”

“No!” Brendon’s eyes widened, shaking his head. “God, no, his dad’s usually,” he paused, “I mean, he loves Ryan a lot. Just thinks the music is stupid. But nobody’s parents want to hear that their kids are trying to make a living in a rock band, right?”

Pete figured now would be a bad time to bring up the family of anyone in his band, so he nodded tightly.

“By the way,” Pete said, trying to change to a lighter conversation topic, “Figured I should warn you, Patrick’s got a girlfriend.”
“Warn me?” Brendon looked puzzled.

“He’s straight as they come,” Pete said, trying to sound sympathetic, but Brendon flared up.

“I don’t care,” he said, defensive. Somewhere in the back of Pete’s head, he knew he shouldn’t push it. But-

“Come on, I’ve seen that look before,” he teased, but Brendon was thoroughly unamused.

“I’m not gay!” he said, and his voice cracked suddenly, and the ground beneath Pete started sucking down, a rumbling sound filling the air.

“BRENDON!” he yelped, his arms flailing. Brendon gasped, and the sand around Pete settled, with Pete knee deep in the earth.

“Get me out!” Pete squeaked, trying to keep his balance.

“Sorry, sorry!” Brendon wailed. “Um, okay, hold on-”

“Get me out!” Pete repeated, and mid note, Brendon’s voice cracked again, and the ground sucked Pete deeper, till he was buried halfway up his thighs.

“Brendon!” Pete’s voice jumped a few octaves, his heart pounding in his chest.

“I’m sorry!” Brendon moaned.

“Shit,” Patrick said from high above Pete’s head. The rumbling must have drawn the others back. “Pete, what did you do?”

“Me?!” Pete was stung by the indignity.

“I’m sorry!” Brendon repeated.

“I’m sorry about him,” Patrick said, rolling his eyes.

“You’re- what?” Brendon asked, panic clear on his face as he wrung his hands together.

“Got it,” Andy said, and grabbed Pete around the chest, yanking up hard. Pete felt like his legs were getting pulled out of their sockets, but Andy stood him upright after a second, Pete swaying a little.

“Come on, we’ve got a plane to catch,” Andy said. Brendon looked painfully confused.

“You’re not mad?” he asked, and Patrick laughed.

“You kidding me? We’ve gotta keep you around,” he said, and Pete pouted.

***

Having Panic! around mellowed everyone out for some reason, Joe could never quite put his finger on it. Maybe it was just that other people being around made them more civil, or maybe it was the strange little brother complex that the other band gave off. Either way, he was privately grateful for Pete’s executive decision to bring them out. And as much as Joe never wanted to be stuck in a studio with Patrick again, being able to focus on anything but lead versus rhythm guitar was almost pleasant.
“No, no, we want him to start- well then help me out, Rick!” Pete yelled across the room, annoyed. While they squabbled over the song and Andy bought groceries, Joe was on unofficial babysitting duty.

“No, we want him to start- then help me out, Rick!” Pete yelled across the room, annoyed. While they squabbled over the song and Andy bought groceries, Joe was on unofficial babysitting duty.

“Excited to get sick of each other?” Joe asked.

“I think if I was going to get sick of Ryan, it would have happened long ago,” Spencer said. Ryan glared.

“Likewise,” Brent said, grinning. Ryan rolled his eyes at the ceiling.

“Ah, don’t be sad,” Brendon said, nudging Ryan’s leg with his knee. “I like your emo poetry. What was it that you wrote about the desert a few nights back-?”

“Quote my livejournal again, I fucking dare you!” Ryan snapped.

“I see you don’t have to look forward to it,” Joe said with a laugh.

“Got it!” Patrick shouted. “Brendon, you ready?”

“Yes?” Brendon said, looking terrified.

“The mic’s not gonna bite,” Patrick assured Brendon. “We slayed it a few months ago.” Brendon nodded, smiled gratefully at him, and walked into the soundproofed section.

“Why are we here?” Brent asked once Brendon was gone. Joe shrugged.

“Wasting label money is fun? Getting out of school is fun? Pete needs admirers now that we’re used to him? Could be anything,” he said.

“Pete still got the label wrapped around his finger with charmspeak?” Ryan asked. Joe paused and digested the question for a second.

“Still?” he repeated, and Ryan cocked his head.

“Yeah, still,” Ryan said, looking confused, “You know, needless perks, getting signed in the first place-”

“What?” Joe leaned in closer. Ryan’s nervous smile melted into a grimace.

“Did he not mention that?” he asked.

“What happened?” Joe asked.

“I mean,” Ryan tried to backpedal while Joe’s eyes bore holes into his skin. “I mean, Island was obviously already interested in you guys, he just sort of, ah, expedited the process?” Ryan amended.

Joe stood up, very calmly, and walked over and into the room where Pete sat in front of the soundboard.

“Pete,” he said, his voice low.

“Hmm?” Pete didn’t look away from Patrick trying to help Brendon fix his headphones in the studio. Joe bent over leaning down right next to Pete’s ear:
“Why did we get signed?”

Pete tensed up suddenly, guilt spreading plainly across his face.

“Don’t tell the others,” he breathed after a second, and Joe swore loudly.

“Are you fucking kidding me?” he yelled. His chest felt tight.

“Look, we probably would have gotten it anyway!” Pete was pleading Joe to understand, but his voice couldn’t cut through the sense of betrayal spreading through Joe. “I just- guaranteed it, that’s all.”

“That’s. Cheating.” Joe said.

“It was just encouragement!” Pete pled.

“It’s a fucking lie!” Joe yelled. “It’s a lack of integrity, it’s- it’s wrong!”

“You know we deserved it,” Pete said, eyes dark.

“No, I don’t,” Joe said. “How do I know anything if the truth is warped?”

“It was just speeding up the inevitable,” Pete insisted.

“It’s still wrong!” Joe yelled. His throat was tight, like he was about to cry. Patrick and Brendon were staring at them through one window, the rest of Panic! looking on from the other side. Anger still rippling through him, Joe shook his head and stormed out of the room, out of the building, blood rushing in his ears too loud for him to hear if anyone called after him.

What he needed, desperately, was to calm down. Angry heat rushed through him, signaling to his muscles that he was ready to transform whenever, and the last thing he needed was to wolf out in the middle of L.A. The anger was hard to contain, though.

Perhaps it was audacious to believe that a shitty pop punk band would get signed to a major label, a major label mostly known for hip-hop, but he always thought it was somehow meant to be. Some weird sort of destiny or karma or some such bullshit telling Joe that he was on the right path. Not his friend’s mind control.

He kicked at litter on the street. Stupid, stupid.

Joe wondered, vacantly, if Patrick had heard any of the argument. He was guaranteed to chew Pete out worse than Joe would have, and that might be fun to come back to.

And maybe, just maybe, it wasn’t as bad as Joe thought. Maybe there really was a reasonable explanation and it could all get smoothed over. After a while walking in no particular direction, an hour, maybe half an hour, Joe began to cool off, to start to want to go back and talk rationally. Besides, it was getting cold out, for some fucking reason. He still couldn’t wrap his head around the fact that yes, sometimes even California gets cold at night.

Nearly ready to turn around and head back for the studio, he suddenly heard a shriek from a few streets away. Joe froze. It was most definitely a cry for help, but he couldn’t tell who it belonged to, age, gender, or any other signifiers. He patted his pocket to call for help, but he had left his phone at the studio. Shit.

He stood there deliberating for a minute, trying to figure out whether or not to go, when he
heard from the same place a very distinctive voice scream “Help me!”

Joe would know that voice anywhere. And of course, fucking Pete would try and chase him down to apologize and end up getting his ass kidnapped.

“Pete!” he yelled, jogging toward where he thought the voice came from.

“Help me!” Pete yelled again. Joe glanced around his shoulder, even as he ran. He hadn’t noticed the dim streetlights or the grungy buildings before, too lost in his thoughts, but now he could tell that he wasn’t on the best side of town, and it was way too quiet.

Joe ran down the street in full silence for a minute before yelling “Where are you?”

“No, no!” Pete sounded frustrated, distant, and almost as though he were behind Joe. Had he run that far?

“Pete?” Joe called, stopping and turning around.

“Help!” Pete didn’t sound scared, though, not like the scream did. He sounded frustrated, and annoyed. Joe stood very still, silent for a minute.

“Where are you?” he called after a pause.

Silence rang through the dark streets. A moment passed, and from behind Joe, he heard a quiet laughter begin to brew.

“Where are you?” his own voice bounced back at him, and Joe froze.

“What are you?” Joe asked, his voice lower, almost a growl.

“What are you? What are you? What are you?” his own voice asked back, echoing from multiple different directions. Joe bared his teeth, a snarl pulling at his lips.

“You don’t want to fight me,” he warned, a dark laugh behind his words. Suddenly, all the streets around him began to ring with cackling.

“Want to fight you,” his voice yelled back, and the cackling increased. Joe swallowed down his panic as heat rose in his chest, and he shifted form easily, his snarl much more impressive as a wolf. His fur rose on end as he stood in the middle of the street, on the well-lit patch of pavement he could find.

“Want to fight you,” he heard his voice come from right next to him, and he spun around, only to be met by another canine face, smaller and sharper than his own, with jagged teeth and spotted, sandy fur.

“Want to fight you,” it repeated, its mouth moving in synchronization with the words. Joe whimpered at the sight, his tail sinking as he stepped backwards into another animal. He jumped away, but could see dozens of near identicals to the creature slinking out of alleys and open windows.

Joe whined loudly, tail between his legs as he tried to count the animals. Math wasn’t his strong suit as a human, and it was nearly nonexistent as a wolf, but he could tell that the number was far more than he could take on his own.

One of the canines placed its muzzle directly in front of Joe’s, growling.
“Want to fight you,” it said, and Joe took off running, bounding over clumps of the creatures in adrenaline fueled leaps that should have been impossible. The hysterical cackling was right behind him, but he had to ignore it, had to keep running, because he was faster than these creatures, he had to be.

He made it only a block or two away before the cackling caught up to him, and he felt the ragged teeth sink into his shoulder. He howled in pain, falling to the ground, and dug his paws into the dirt as he was getting dragged away. In desperation, and in the hopes of being able to grab more, Joe shifted again, ignoring the rip in muscles as he shifted back to human.

“What do you want?” he hissed, trying and failing to grab onto the curb, to stop his captors from whatever they were doing.

“You,” one of them said in Joe’s voice.

“Patrick,” another in Pete’s voice.

“Pete and Andy,” Patrick’s voice came from one of them, each of the words disjointed, clearly harvested from unrelated sentences. His arms going limp, Joe laughed a dark and brittle laugh.

“Of course you do,” he hissed, letting the fight leave his body. “Who the hell isn’t looking for us?”

He craned his neck to see where the creatures were carrying him, and saw a door open to a room so dark that even Joe’s enhanced vision couldn’t make out the inside. He gulped, and before he could prepare himself, they hauled him over the threshold.

To his pleasant surprise, the lights flipped on once he was inside to reveal what looked like a plain, unfurnished living room. Once he was leaned against the wall, the hyena like creatures bounded out the door again, letting it swing shut behind them. Joe heard the lock click, and his head fell back against the wall.

The entire room was covered in yellow wallpaper with a cage-like design on it. Aside from some squares of the paper being brighter where furniture must have been once and a bare lightbulb on the ceiling, Joe could see no indication of anything else in the room. Once the sound of paws on pavement had faded out of earshot, he hauled himself back up on his feet. He wasn’t shocked that the door was locked, when he tried it.

Acutely aware of the throbbing in his shoulder where the blood seeped out, he pushed himself back against the far wall and ran at the door, attempting to kick it down with no result other than a pained toe.

Joe stared up at the door for a moment, trying to see a way out of the situation. Coming up with none, and overwhelmed by the fear and helplessness, he succumbed to the emotion welling up inside of him, and slumped down the wall, dropping his head into his hands and giving up.

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“I leave for one hour,” Andy accused, rubbing his temples.

“Look, I’ve said I’m sorry!” Pete yelled, flung across a chair in the studio with little regard for how chairs were meant to be sat in.

“I thought they already knew,” Ryan mumbled, staring at the floor. Pete turned to snap at
him, but Patrick grabbed his arm first, distaste seeping from his expression.

“Because we should have already known,” Patrick said firmly, staring Pete down. The intensity of the way the two of them stared at one another was too much for Andy, and he had to look away, like the way they talked without speaking was sunlight or something.

“I mean, it’s not always immoral to use your powers in your work, right?” Brendon asked. Andy bristled.

“It’s one hell of an unfair advantage,” he said, though he didn’t really want to have this fight.

“Because I can’t really turn mine off,” Brendon added with a nervous laugh. Andy tensed in remorse.

“No, not like that, it’s different-” Andy began, but Brendon puffed his chest out.

“How is it different?” Brendon asked. “Different from how Ryan found you guys in the first plays? Or different from how you can play drums way faster and longer and harder than any human?”

“It’s different because I don’t hypnotize every person I meet,” Pete said, his stare blank and bored, a kid reciting lines in detention. It was without meaning or passion.

“But, well, you do,” Brendon said. He hesitated, glancing nervously at Patrick before he spoke, but he looked determined. “Maybe not to that degree, but you would’ve charmed the record execs regardless. He’s naturally charming.”

“Ooo, I’m charming?” Pete still wasn’t meeting anyone’s eyes, but the ghost of a smile played across his lips.

“I- obviously!” Brendon sounded frustrated.

“So wait,” Patrick’s brows furrowed in confusion. “Did you- you know-“ Patrick waved his hand around to mime some kind of magic “-the dude on purpose?”

“Not exactly,” Pete said, his shoulders sagging. “It’s complicated, but no, I wasn’t actively planning on mind controlling our way into the label.”

“Well, that’s different,” Patrick said, sounding much more easily pacified than Andy would have expected of him.

“And after that waste of a few hundred in studio time,” Brendon laughed tightly, antsy to get back to recording. Yeesh. It was no wonder he clung to Patrick like velcro. But actually-

“How long were you all arguing before I got here?” Andy asked.

“It started just after you left,” Spencer said, his voice soft from the back. Andy would never have predicted a trend of soft-spoken drummers, and yet here they were.

Patrick and Brendon immediately went back into the studio, Pete bending back over the sound boards, pissed off but now vindicated. Andy’s instinct was to worry about Joe, wonder where he had gone, but he was an adult, and Andy tried to envelop himself in rereading the same comic book he’d been stuck with for nearly a week now. Spencer kept shooting Andy hopeful looks like he wanted to start a conversation, and Andy kept pretending not to see him. He had no idea what he
was even supposed to say with the kid, or why any of them had to be there, really. He would be just as well off back home at Fuck City, with Carmilla.

The comic did nothing to keep his thoughts from straying to his daughter, and that was too painful a subject for him to think about, so, dropping it, he scanned the room looking for something, anything to do. His eyes fell suddenly onto someone's cell phone, sitting out on the table.

“Is this Joe’s phone?” Andy asked, holding it up. Pete craned his neck backwards and nodded, not paying attention.

“Should we be concerned?” Andy asked, heaving a sigh of annoyance.

“Doubtful, he’s a fairly deadly creature,” Pete said, but his tone sounded uneasy underneath the bravado. Andy stared at the phone in his hand with pursed lips.

“I can check on him if you want!” Ryan said brightly, sitting up straighter.

“Show-off,” Spencer said under his breath. Ryan stamped on Spencer’s foot, not breaking eye contact with Andy. Andy was hesitant, but-

“Why the hell not?” he said with a shrug.

Ryan grinned and wriggled deeper into the couch, leaning back and getting comfortable. He inhaled deeply and closed his eyes, his entire body going still.

“He does this all the time,” Brent complained.

“It’s pretty cool,” Pete said.

“Mostly to spy on you guys,” Brent added vindictively. Pete’s expression soured minutely, but he fixed it before Brent could notice, but Andy had to stifle a grin.

Ryan began to twitch after a moment, his eyes rocketing back and forth behind his eyelids, and his face screwed up into an expression of pain. He grabbed his shoulder and began shaking, whimpering slightly.

Seeing Ryan, Spencer pushed the others out of the way, kneeling down in front of Ryan as his pained noises got louder.

“Ryan!” Spencer didn’t yell, but his voice was intense, and he grabbed his friend’s shoulders, shaking him. “Ryan!”

Ryan gasped as he sat up straight, his eyes flying open, one hand still on his shoulder. He turned to face Andy with fear in his eyes.

“We’ve gotta go find Joe,” he said. Andy nodded and stood up, Pete right on his heels as he banged on the studio door.

Though soundproof, Patrick could still see him, and he opened the door with a confused look.

“Joe’s in trouble, let’s go,” Pete said before Andy could talk, and with that, they were on their way.

“What did you see?” Spencer asked Ryan once they were piled in a van. “Where are we going?”
“He was already inside somewhere,” Ryan said, his voice full of apologies. “So I don’t know. But his shoulder’s hurt,” he said, rolling his shoulder and popping it with a wince.

Andy wanted to ask him how his sight worked, how this was even remotely possible, but they had bigger issues to deal with.

“So where should we start looking?” he asked, keeping his voice level. Ryan, he trusted, would tell them if it were an emergency.

“Um, you know which way he might’ve started walking?” Ryan asked.

“Can’t you see anything else?” Pete snapped, and Ryan flinched.

“No, um, it doesn’t work like that,” he said, rubbing the back of his neck. “I can- I mean, I can um, focus on people if I know them well, and it’s hard because I haven’t known you guys that long, but also I’m, uh, I can still only see the future and only the definite future. You know, things that are definitely going to happen and nothing can change them. So for him I can only see about a minute ahead of where he is.”

“What did you see?” Brendon asked. He looked about as confused as Andy felt, but then again, the only one who looked like this was normal was Spencer.

“It was an empty room, nothing in it but a door and me- um, Joe,” he corrected, like he was self-conscious about the way he saw things. “He was just sitting down, and I mean, I can’t see in people’s heads,” Ryan said, almost disdainful, “So I don’t know why he was there, how he got there, or where ‘there’ was, I just know his shoulder hurt, and the room had yellow wallpaper.”

“We need more than that!” Pete growled, stepping out of the car. He slammed his hands on the hood in frustration. Andy climbed out of the car as well. He looked over at Pete.

“You okay?” he asked.

“No!” Pete cried. “I fucked up, okay?”

“It’s not your fault-” Andy began, but Pete glared at him with such intensity that Andy took a step back.

“Sorry, sorry,” he said, holding his hands up. “But he’s going to be okay, alright?”

“You don’t know that!” Pete yelled. “You can’t-”

He was cut off mid-sentence by a distant but still distinct cry of “Pete!” It was scared and loud and Joe.

Andy looked at Pete to confirm that he had heard it, and Pete nodded, the urgency plain on his face.

“We won’t be able to hear over the car-” Andy began, but Pete had taken off running in the direction of the yell.

“Pete!” Joe yelled again, and Andy made a beckoning motion at Patrick and the other band before chasing after Pete.

“Pete! Where are you?” Joe yelled, and though Andy easily overtook Pete with his speed, Pete was still running very fast. Andy heard Joe’s voice coming from further right than he initially
thought, and he rounded a few corners, noting that he didn’t hear the van behind them.

In fact, Andy didn’t hear anything behind him— not even the sound of Pete running. He spun around and saw only empty streets behind him. Fucking vampire speed.

“Help me!” Pete cried from somewhere behind Andy. He spun around again, but couldn’t see anything.

“Oh!” Joe yelled again, and it suddenly struck Andy that he had said Pete’s name in the exact same way every single time.

“Who’s there?” Andy asked, automatically dropping down into a crouched, attack ready position. He looked around on the ground for some sort of weapon and saw a glass bottle, which he promptly picked up and broke against the wall behind him. He held out the jagged edges as he tried to catch his breath.

“We want to fight you,” Andy heard, and his heart stuttered in fear, hearing his own voice in the first word and Joe’s in all the others.

“Show yourself,” Andy demanded, forcing himself to sound calmer than he felt. A hyena-like creature stepped out from behind a trashcan.

“Andy,” it said in Patrick’s voice, its jaw moving in time with the words, and Andy swallowed hard.

“Where is Joe?” he asked, and he swore the creature smiled. Then, it pounced, jumping onto Andy so suddenly that he had no time to think, and dropped the broken bottle, falling to the street while he tried to wrestle the creature off, screaming his head off the entire time.

It wasn’t particularly strong, but by the time Andy had thrown it off, a whole crowd of them had appeared. He forced himself to stand strong, not to shake, and one of them mocked his horrified screams back at him.

“Okay,” he said, “Okay, can we talk about this? I don’t want to fight.”

“We don’t talk,” one of them said, a perfect copy of Andy’s voice, “We fight.”

“Great,” Andy said, and was suddenly struck by inspiration. “I’ll come without a fight, take me where you’re going,” he said. One of the canines at the front cocked its head, but turned after a moment and began walking. Andy followed obediently, knowing without a doubt that they could take him down if he stepped a toe out of line.

While keeping pace with the creatures as they walked a few blocks one way, a few blocks a street over, Andy kept looking at the street signs, trying to memorize them as he walked forward. Eventually, the hyena-things led him down a short set of stairs, pushing a door open with a click. Andy nodded, walked inside, and the creatures let the door swing shut as soon as he was in.

“Dude!” Joe stood up, his expression forlorn and his shoulder badly torn and bleeding. Andy wrinkled his nose up - he needed to drink soon. Joe grabbed his shoulders and looked at him in horror.

“They got you too? Oh man, this is bad, this is really bad, there’s no way the others can fight without us,” he said, beginning to pace the room while running his hands through his hair.

“Shut up a minute, okay?” Andy ordered, and closed his eyes, digging through his memory.
“Neilson Way,” he said aloud. “Take stairs down to get into the room we’re in. It’s about a
mile from the studio, half a mile from the apartment. Neilson Way, take stairs down to enter the
room. From the studio it’s a sharp left, and then-”

“What the fuck are you doing?” Joe asked, staring at Andy.

“Ryan could see where you were, but he could only see and hear what you could see and
hear,” Andy said. “Once they notice I’m missing, he can find us if he can hear directions. The rest I
can explain to you once we get out, yeah?” Andy said, and Joe nodded.

The two of them took turns reciting what they could remember about the exterior of the
building, over and over and over again until Andy’s throat felt dry.

“You sure this’ll work?” Joe croaked.

“Got a better plan?” Andy asked.

“Neilson Way,” Joe sighed, continuing on. “I took a left on-”

Without warning, the door swung open and Ryan popped his head in, face lighting up in a
grin when he saw them.

“Andy, you’re brilliant,” he announced. They heard a scream from outside, and Ryan
flinched. “Also we should go. Hyena-things aren’t happy.”

Andy bolted for the door, holding it open so Joe could run out ahead of him. It was heavy
as hell, and he shuddered to think of how long a person could be stuck in that room without escape.

Outside, the darkened street had been flooded with the lights from the car that Brent sat
behind the wheel of, and everyone else was putting up a decent fight. The pack hadn’t been nearly as
large as Andy had thought, under twenty of the creatures jumping and snarling, but the seemed to
shy from the light, and after seeing Joe and Andy leave the room, some began to run away. Others
were still trying to attack Andy’s friends, but were having little success. The most disturbing part was
the continued yelling using their voices, and using the voices of Brendon, Ryan, and Spencer
whenever they spoke, which kept causing people to look the wrong direction at the wrong time.
Andy could smell blood in the air, but he walked forward and tried to appear calm.

“Pete, glad to see you’re well!” Andy called in a mock jovial voice.

“Serves you right for outrunning me,” Pete said without looking at Andy, sweat on his brow
and a smirk on his face as he kicked aside one of the creatures. “We taking the patented running
away method?”

“Yeah, we’re still outnumbered,” Joe said. One of the creatures snarled viciously to
emphasize his point. “We should go.”

Andy and Joe stayed out an extra second, as was the custom, to make sure that everyone got into the
van first, and Andy stood his ground just a split second longer, baring his fangs and growling as
menacingly as he could at the creatures. They faltered slightly, giving him enough time to jump into
the open door just after Joe did.

“The hell were those?” Brendon asked. He had a scratch on his forehead that was dripping blood
into his eyes and his heart was racing, but he looked relatively uninjured. At the question, Andy
looked to Pete out of habit.
“I… I don’t know,” Pete said.

“Well, first time for everything, I suppose,” Joe said, leaning back.

“Let’s just get back home,” Patrick suggested. “We can go discuss all this just as well in a locked apartment, yeah?”

Andy looked over at Patrick, who was bleeding from three long claw marks down his forearm. Andy’s mouth watered, but he nodded in agreement, thinking of anything else.

Once they got back to the apartment, Andy quickly realized he and Brent were the only ones that had escaped completely unscathed, so they went about helping to bandage up the others. Andy couldn’t help the fond grin when he heard the boys from Panic! talking - bragging about every blow they landed and “Holy shit, that was so cool!”

“Were we ever like that?” he asked Pete, and Pete shook his head, laughing a little.

“No, we weren’t. Well, I still kind of am,” he said, “But you’re too mellow, and Joe and Patrick were born jaded.”

“I punched one of them in the snout and it just-!” Brendon smacked his hands together. “Out like a light! Did you see that?!?” he yelled.

“Pretty impressive for a first fight,” Joe said. “Maybe you’ll even get a battle scar.”

“Sick!” Brendon said, grinning wide. Pete was smiling dopily.

“Happy?” Andy asked.

“Emotions are great,” Pete said, “You can get drunk off of other people’s happiness.”

“Non-substance abuse aside,” Andy said, giving Pete a look, “What were those things?” Pete frowned.

“Like I said, I don’t know,” he said.

“They only wanted the four of us,” Joe said, sitting down by Pete and Andy. Patrick walked over to join them while the boys in Panic! at the Disco kept gesticulating and retelling stories. “I heard them mention each of us, but none of them.”

“Well, it’s not as though we don’t have enemies,” Pete said, “But I don’t ever recall pissing off hyenas.”

“Which implies that they work for someone else,” Andy said.

“For a first time like this, is it socially appropriate to pop champagne?” Ryan asked aloud, and Pete rolled his eyes again.

“You’re under age!” he yelled. And, back to the band: “Let’s talk about it after we get them home, yeah?”

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In a weird way, Patrick felt cheated that everyone in Panic! at the Disco were so weirdly happy about their supernatural experiences. He felt like an old man, like back in HIS day your first supernatural experience was getting your blood drained by your band’s drummer and then getting
snowed in with a murderous wendigo and getting strung up and literally scarred for life. But then again, the way Brendon asked Patrick if he thought he did alright was, yeah, admittedly really endearing.

Brendon did sound good on the record, though, as Ryan pointed out, no one was going to hear the difference between his and Patrick’s voices, which both of them took as a compliment. Brendon was a siren, though, how could Patrick take it badly?

And while having the band there was fun, Patrick was immensely relieved to be on the plane to Vegas to drop them off again. Being a figure to be looked up to, or even just someone a couple years older was exhausting. Too much pressure to not swear was working the opposite way, and Patrick had said “fuck” over three hundred times in the past two days.

The plane ride went without incident. They even made it out of McCarran without incident. The past 48 hours had gone without incident, and Patrick almost got to the happy place where he could imagine he didn’t live in the comedy central version of a horror novel, when they were halfway across the parking lot to the car where they were going to wait with the guys until Spencer’s mom showed up when trouble struck again.

Ryan froze up without warning, a shudder running through his whole body that made him fall against Spencer’s side, gasping.

“Joestandinfrontofus!” Ryan choked out, trying to catch his breath.

“What’s wrong?” Joe asked.

“Stand in front of us and act like you’re in charge and hurry!” Ryan yelled, “He’ll understand pack dynamics better so for fuck’s sake just pretend to be an alpha, okay? We haven’t got the time!”

Joe stood in front of the group, his head still turned to face Ryan.

“Who are you talking about?” he asked in a harsh whisper. Ryan took a deep breath and pointed over Joe’s shoulder, where Patrick could just make out the silhouette of a man step out from behind an exceptionally tall car.

He was an odd looking man for many reasons- he was dressed as though he just walked out of a presidential banquet, his eyes were reflecting a red light that Patrick couldn’t find the source of, and he moved languidly as he walked towards them, as though he were made from water. But none of that was what Patrick noticed about him first.

“Holy shit,” he breathed, star struck, “You’re Brandon Flowers!”

Brandon paused, giving Patrick a pleasantly surprised smile.

“You’ve heard of me?” he asked. Patrick nodded eagerly.

“Dude, Hot Fuss was so-!” he began, stopping mid-sentence as Ryan ground his heel into Patrick’s foot, and he let out a hiss of pain.

“Glad to hear you’re a fan,” Brandon said. “But unfortunately, Mr. Stump, you really weren’t supposed to be here tonight. Frankly, I’m shocked you’re still alive.” Patrick opened his mouth to reply, but Ryan gave him a pleading look, and Patrick stayed silent. Brandon turned to face Joe.
“You’re the leader, are you?” he asked.

“If that’s what you wanna call it,” Joe said without missing a beat.

“Spoken like a true man made alpha thirty seconds ago, but you’ll have to do,” Brandon said. He turned away from them and held his hand out in front of him, flicking his wrist with dramatic flair as he sighed.

“I have to admit, the four of you: Fall Out Boy, you’ve been a bit of a thorn in my side,” he said. “I send my best hunters after what is rightfully mine, and twice they come back empty handed.” He spun back around to face them, no longer smiling, but with an expression of intense hatred on his face. “So tonight I’m going to ask you nicely to return what is rightfully mine.”

Patrick could feel the air around them growing thick and warm, almost as though it were charged with electricity. He could feel the hair on his arms stand on end, though he didn’t know why.

“I don’t think we have anything of yours?” Joe said, sounding plainly confused. Patrick couldn’t blame him.

“I have no doubt you think you have nothing of mine,” Brandon said, “A simple mistake to make, if one goes blundering around playing a game before they know the rules.”

“So… what do you think we have?” Joe asked.

“You have a siren,” Brandon said, a smile pulling at the corners of his mouth, but not a happy smile.

Joe instantly stood up straighter, crossing his arms over his chest.

“I think you’re somewhat confused as to the concept of ownership,” Joe hissed, “But welcome to the 21st century; people don’t own people.”

“Ah, there’s where you’re wrong,” Brandon said. “I made a certain deal a few years back that leaves me entitled to every magical creature in Las Vegas. By a right more powerful than any human law, I own the siren, and by extension, his band,” Brandon said. He shrugged, lifting his hands up above his shoulders, then producing a piece of paper from one of the lapels of his suit. “Got the deed and everything. I mean, I suppose you’re right in that I can’t own pure humans, but still, I’d hate to split them down the middle.”

“Are you out of your fucking mind?” Joe asked, incredulous but unafraid.

“Oh, absolutely not,” Brandon said. “I first assumed that my hunters could simply capture the siren, but then I got wind of some barriers around him. I meant for my leucrottas to keep you four out of my hair while I explained this to my new talent,” his piercing gaze fixed on Brendon, who shrank back while Ryan stepped in front of him, growling, “But apparently putting you out of commission is more easily said than done.”

“You bet your ass it is,” Joe said, pushing his chest forward.

“Even still, it was not a total loss,” Brandon said. “Perhaps we can come to an agreement over this.”

“Like hell we will,” Joe said, “Fuck off and we won’t make you wish you were never born.”
Brandon seemed to find this unbearably funny, and he bent forward, hands on his knees with laughter.

“Oh, that’s sweet,” he chuckled, “Please, hear me out.”

Joe remained silent for a moment that Brandon must have found satisfying, because he continued.

“It isn’t as though I’ll be keeping the boys as slaves or anything,” he said, “They’ll serve me if I need them to, but I don’t have need for sirens often, and I’ve never found much use for oracles,” he said the last word with distaste, and Patrick bristled slightly for Ryan’s sake. “In exchange for your cooperation, I would make a powerful ally.”

Joe stared at Brandon in disbelief, a look that was mirrored by the rest of the band.

“Why even ask us?” Joe asked. “We sure as hell don’t own these guys.”

“Really?” Brandon asked. “Then who owns the label they signed the contract to?”

“That’s not an ownership agreement!” Pete yelled.

“The webs of music and magic are closely interlocked,” Brandon said with a flourish of his hand. “Something you should know, but clearly don’t. After all, these days music requires an assortment of skills.”

“Well you can forget about it,” Joe spoke loud and clear and commanding. It was very impressive, Patrick thought, and he cheered Joe on silently from behind.

“I’ll give you one last chance,” Brandon said. It was already night out, but it seemed as though the streetlights dimmed, and the air grew warmer again, uncomfortably warm. “Say that you relinquish the band to me, and we can all leave the better for it.”

Joe stood very still for a moment that turned to a full minute of silence before taking a step closer to Brandon and taking in a deep breath, bringing his head right next to Brandon’s ear.

“Go fuck yourself,” he said. Brandon looked as though he expected this answer.

“In that case, things may be more difficult,” he said. “I am sorry about that. This may need to get physical in that case, and who’s to say that no one that isn’t my rightful property won’t get hurt as collateral damage.”

“I’m to say,” Joe growled. Brandon and he were still standing so, so very close.

“It’d be a shame if something happened to your human,” Brandon purred, stepping past Joe and staring directly into Patrick’s eyes. Patrick stared back at him, holding his ground even as his knees shook. “You know how fragile humans are.”

“I think you should leave now,” Joe said in a low voice.

“And of course, how flammable vampires are,” he continued, turning to Andy.

“Yeah, we get it, you think you’re gonna scare me by threatening my band, but you don’t look so scary to me,” Joe said.

“Really? Well, perhaps this will change your mind,” Brandon said, and where Patrick had been staring at Brandon Flowers a moment ago, he suddenly had to turn away from a pillar of
blindingly bright fire. Patrick jumped back, shielding his eyes, and he heard Andy cry out, but didn’t sound like he was being badly burnt.

When the light behind his eyelids dimmed, Patrick chanced opening his eyes again to see all of them scattered around in a large circle, where at the center stood an immense Doberman, a Doberman that was made of low burning flames.

The dog growled low and menacing, and turned around in a circle, growling at each and every one of them. Way too big for any dog, taller than Patrick, and still emanating heat.

“Run,” he chuckled, and Patrick scrambled to his feet, taking off in the direction he saw Pete running, half out of instinct and half hoping Pete had a plan. He could hear paws scratching the cement just behind them, and had barely made any distance when he was knocked to the ground by something burning hot, his shirt searing to his back where the paws landed.

The pain of the burns was intense and disorienting, coupled with the sound of Brandon Flowers laughing above him and Pete yelling his name from an increasingly close distance. *Idiot!* Patrick thought. *Run away!*

The burning ceased eventually, to Patrick’s shock, but he heard a twin thud of Pete being shoved down to the ground beside him. Patrick wanted to pull himself up, but every muscle in his body seemed to have given up all at once. He heard running approach them, followed each time by the sound of paws, and someone else was knocked down next to him. He hauled himself up, his head spinning, to see them being herded. Only allowed to try to run away for sport, and he had been the slowest and the easiest prey.

It took mere minutes for all of them to be caught and cornered again, and the Doberman towered over them, too hot to be comfortable next to.

“I’ve made quite a few good deals in my years,” Brandon said. “And I thought it would be only fair to give you an idea of what you’re up against.”

His voice, while in this form, was rougher and drier, Patrick noticed absently. Most of his attention was still focused on the burning throb in his back, but he tried to fixate on Brandon as best he could. It was mesmerizing, the way the fire burned out from a dog shaped source.

“We run on music rules,” he said. “You have one year and one day from the release of the siren’s first album to beg my mercy,” he said, before bounding off into the night.

“Shit,” Joe breathed.

“I thought hellhounds were a myth,” Pete said weakly.

“I thought all of you were myths,” Patrick said, “These days, I just sort of expect the worst.”

The eight of them stared off at where Brandon had run off. A car horn honked.

“I think my mom’s here,” Spencer said.

“We’ll call you later,” Pete said with a wave, not moving an inch while the boys in Panic stood up and walked away.

“So,” Andy said. “Now what?”
Hey, it's still September somewhere. Thank you guys so much, as always, for reading, and for commenting! Writing this was a lot of fun, and I hope the Killer hints I dropped were picked up, haha. I feel like I have more to say, but?? i can't think of anything, so yeah, I hope all of you are having good days, and I hope I'll think this chapter is as good tomorrow morning as I think it is late tonight.

Chapter title by (shocker) The Killers.
La Vie en Rose

Chapter Summary

Someone gives the boys in Fall Out Boy an offer for what they want most in the world, but won't tell them the price. A ghost story, in the spirit of Halloween.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Of everyone in his band, Joe probably liked parties the most. This roughly translated into hating parties the least, given his group of friends, but Joe really did like parties, in general. Free alcohol, lots of people in a good mood, easy socialization. He didn’t really discriminate between different types of parties- the weird uppity atmosphere at rich parties was nearly as entertaining for him as the dirty, grungy parties he went to back in Chicago. It made sense, therefore, that he was the only one even remotely excited for the album drop party the label was throwing them.

“It’s gonna be small!” he argued to Patrick, who said it was still too big.

“It’ll be expensive,” he said to Pete, who said it was still too boring.

“You could probably invite Matt?” he suggested to Andy, who rolled his eyes, and sighed deeply.

Even Joe had to admit, it didn’t sound like that much fun. Island execs, some of their close friends, and from the sound of it, a few dozen Hollywood socialites. Joe couldn’t wrap his head around why the label would think that they would find that appealing, but it was hard to appeal to four people as vastly different as they were.

Still, free drinks, free food, and a couple hours of being mindlessly praised didn’t sound like hell on earth to Joe, and so he, at least, was in relatively good spirits by the time he walked into the rented room in a tux that costed more than a month’s rent at the old apartment.

Joe looked around, trying to look vaguely impressed by the dull hum of people that mostly ignored him. It seemed sort of out of place- he was in the band, for crying out loud.

“Sort of dull for a party, don’t you think?” a woman asked him. Joe turned around, and was stunned at the sight of her. The woman chewed absentely on a cherry stem, duller than her blood red lips. Her dark hair shone in the lights, and she seemed soft and blurry around the edges, unfocused, like the star of a very old movie. In fact, that was it exactly, she looked like she was the star of a silent film, only very bored.

“Kind of,” Joe agreed, taking too long to answer from getting the wind knocked out of him at the sight of her. Not as beautiful, he thought, as Marie, but definitely a close second. Their hair had a very similar curl to it.

“I mean, it’s expensive, but what a waste,” she said, and flashed Joe a dazzling smile. “I imagine a band of your talent could find more entertainment on a street corner.” She smiled winningly for a moment, and then a dark blush spread over her cheeks.
“Possibly I could have worded that better,” she said, and Joe laughed.

“Not wrong either way,” he said, chuckling under his breath. “What are you doing here?”

“My agent thinks I would do well to make more connections,” she said, rolling her eyes.

“Are you a singer?” Joe asked.

“No, no,” she laughed. “I’m an, ah, aspiring actress. But I’m sort of shy.”

“You don’t seem so shy right now,” Joe said, hoping he sounded more encouraging than flirtatious.

“I’m trying really hard,” she said earnestly. Joe smiled encouragingly at her again.

“You’re doing great,” he assured her, and stuck his hand out. “I’m Joe. I play guitar and stuff.”

“Beth,” she said, shaking his hand delicately. “I’d love to meet the rest of your band, congratulate you all on the record.”

“Sure, I’ll go find them,” Joe said, zipping out into the crowd.

Joe found Pete first, looking miserable in a way that looked, to those that didn’t know him well, like he was having a great time. But Joe knew him well enough to see the obvious signs of fraying around the edges, the sharp twist at the end of each sentence, the frantic scanning the room whenever he thought no one was looking.

“Excuse me,” Joe said, ducking in between a few men wearing suits, feeling stiff and uncomfortable. “Could I borrow my friend for a moment?”

“Oh, so soon?” one of the men said, in a loud, bawdy voice that made Joe think of rich, fat villains from Victorian novels.

“Yup,” Joe nodded, and dragged Pete out of the circle by his elbow.

“You’re a lifesaver,” Pete said darkly.

“I’m better than that; I found a pretty girl for you to talk to,” Joe said proudly.

“Really?” Pete’s eyebrows shot up, and Joe breathed an internal sigh of relief. He could never tell whether discussing anything relationship-y with Pete was a good idea. He and Jeanie had split up around the start of the European tour. Some days he would loudly pronounce girls on TV to be the most beautiful thing he’d ever seen, other days he would cringe at the mention of Anna or Marie, because it reminded him that other people were happy and in love. It was a game of dice, but he seemed interested today.

“Very pretty. Old Hollywood looking, dark hair, perfect for you,” Joe said. “She wants to meet the whole band, though, know where Andy and Patrick are?”

“Hiding,” Pete said, and, to Joe’s surprise, he was right. They both looked up guiltily when Joe and Pete found them, talking quietly and ignoring all the goings on in a stairwell. Pete rolled his eyes, muttering under his breath about it being “hardly Chinese water torture” but Joe thought it was funny.

“Someone wants to meet you guys,” Joe said, and led them back to where Beth was
standing, sipping champagne out of a tall flute and looking unbelievably attractive, as though she were in the background of a movie. Effortlessly glamorous.

“Joe!” she brightened and smiled dazzlingly as he walked back up to her. “And this must be the rest of the band.”

“Patrick, Andy, and.”

“Pete,” Pete stuck his hand out, interrupting Joe with a winning smile and a twinkle in his eyes, positively oozing charm. Patrick rolled his eyes, letting out a heavy huff of breath. Pete took Beth’s hand and kissed her fingertips, and Beth, smiled, glancing down.

“So the rumors are true,” she said, still smiling at the floor.

“Rumors?” Pete asked, still grinning his winning grin.

“Nothing, nothing, you’re just very…” she paused, biting her lip as she thought over her word choice, “Personable.” Joe snorted.

“At any rate,” she jerked her hand back suddenly, as though she had just realized that she had held it out for a moment too long. “I wanted to congratulate the four of you on the album.”

“You liked it?” Pete asked.

“Oh, I adored it!” she said, and it sounded sincere to Joe, but he couldn’t help but notice a flicker of hurt cross Pete’s face at the words. It was a shame that she was lying, but Joe couldn’t fathom why she would lie in the first place. They weren’t really important enough to schmooze up to.

“And I think that you boys have a lot of promise,” she said. “In fact, I have a bit of a business proposition for you.”

“A business proposition?” Pete asked, sounding less enamored than he had a minute ago. She shot him a dazzling smile in return, and Joe laughed internally. A charm off, it looked like.

“Of sorts,” she said. “But this is hardly the place. Did you want to keep enjoying your party, or would you care to come - ah - ‘blow this popsicle stand’ with me?” she asked, throwing finger quotes up around the phrase. Even Patrick, trying his hardest to be polite, couldn’t help but laugh aloud.

“Sure,” Pete said between laughs. “What did you have in mind?”

“I wanted to show you the town,” she said, already walking towards the entrance, the band following behind her.

“We’ve been living here for months,” Joe pointed out.

“And you haven’t seen anything yet, I’ll bet,” she said.

Joe didn’t really want to get himself and his friends in yet another supernatural trap, but he didn’t get any bad feelings from this girl. Pete, it seemed, was also at ease with her personality, which calmed Joe significantly. Though there was definitely something off about Beth, Joe felt a swelling sense of (possibly alcohol induced) confidence that they could handle whatever it was if he was right. And who knew, perhaps she was entirely benign.
Beth led them out behind the building, to a car park where she hopped into a bright red muscle car that looked more like it belonged in a 70’s movie than a dirty garage. She leapt over the door of the car, ignoring the handle, and drove the key into the ignition.

Joe yanked lightly on Patrick’s and Andy’s collars when they got close, just holding them back for the extra second it took Pete to climb in shotgun. Joe wasn’t always the best friend, but he was a pretty decent wingman when he needed to be.

“Ever seen the Strip at night?” Beth asked, her eyes gleaming with something close to reverence.

“I’d love to,” Pete said while he shook his head, and she gunned the car out of the garage.

A very obscure thing Joe hadn’t even realized he had missed until that moment was riding in a convertible.

Beth was, as it turned out, an excellent tour guide of Hollywood, far better than the men who sat on buses and narrated the city to tourists. Most of her narration was grim, but it was grimly intriguing, if nothing else.

“That’s the hotel where John Belushi died,” she would say, pointing with a flippant finger, her hand inches from Pete’s nose.

“Tower Records, you boys should know that one,” she smirked, “But it used to be a strip club called ‘Classic Cat’, much more interesting crowd back then, let me tell you.”

“That restaurant was founded by Elton John, but it’s going to go out of business any day now, trust me.”

“Just around that corner is the house where F. Scott Fitzgerald died!”

“And our destination of the night,” she said finally, pulling up in front of a large white building, “Sunset tower. Famous for, well, everything, practically. Former home of Clark Gable, Marilyn Monroe, Michael Caine, Truman Capote, and Frank Sinatra. Used to keep the best call girls in the country, and,” she leaned over the seat, lowering her voice minutely, “Still does, if you ask the right people.”

“Good to know,” Joe said with an awkward smile. He looked up at the imposing building, but thinking it odd that it was relatively small compared to city buildings he was used to.

“Famous for agents too, but then again, everywhere in this city is, so who’s shocked?” she laughed, getting out of the car and waiting for the band to follow suit.

“Can we just… leave the car out here?” Patrick asked.

“A valet will take care of it,” she said flippantly, walking up to the entrance.

“You’re pretty well off for an aspiring actress, huh?” Joe said, and she laughed, blushing slightly.

“I suppose I am,” she said.

“Aspiring actress?” Pete asked, and she blushed deeper.

“I’m also something of a talent agent, seeing as I have got a - ah - complicated contract at
Beth breezed past every form of overly eager bellhop and blazed their path to an elevator and up to a dimly lit restaurant proclaiming itself to be the “Tower Bar”, someplace that looked like air was expensive to breathe. Soft but jazzy piano played from the corner.

“That,” Beth said, pointing at the pianist, “is Page Cavanaugh. Been playing here for as long as this has been a restaurant. Used to play for Frank Sinatra and Nat King Cole.”

Joe took a moment to study his friends’ faces to make sure he wasn’t the only one feeling vastly overwhelmed. It was clear that he wasn’t, and Patrick’s mouth was hanging slightly open while his eyes remained fixed on the baby grand piano.

“Let’s get drinks,” she suggested, clapping her hands together, and Joe felt his throat stick like someone had stuck cotton in it. Twenty years old and the only person in the band that still couldn’t get in to all of the venues they played if he hadn’t been in the band.

“I can’t,” he said, somewhat sourly. Beth smiled at him.

“This isn’t really the sort of place where you get carded,” she said, and sat down at a lavish table without waiting for instruction.

The four of them ordered drinks, Andy just declining with a smile and going back to frowning when the waiter left, and she continued to discuss the history of the hotel, a subject which seemed to never tire. It was famous for death and scandal and celebrity association, and while Pete and Joe drank up all the stories, Patrick seemed to resurface whenever she mentioned a famous musician’s name, and Andy continued to look out the window, bored.

“You had a business proposition?” Andy asked eventually, not tearing his eyes away from the dark window.

Beth stopped midsentence, and Joe wanted to complain that Andy was being rude, but she nodded, seemingly unaffected.

“Of course,” she said. “See, I’m assuming you boys realize that Hollywood isn’t too kind to newcomers. You need connections to get what you want.” She leaned in close over the table, her lids hanging low over her eyes as she lowered her voice to barely a breath. “Now, I know your album is good, you know your album is good, but what if I told you I could make sure it wins a Grammy?”

Silence hung heavy over the five of them for a moment. Her words were… tempting, to say the least. Joe could picture it easily, a Grammy in his house, accepting the award on stage, the vision came to him readily. No more of Marie’s friends taunting her that she was with a failure. No more “get a real job”. His imagination of the acceptance was shockingly visceral, but he snapped out of it when he heard Andy speak.

“Thanks but no thanks,” he said coldly. Joe’s head snapped over to face him, and Andy shrugged. “Look, I appreciate the sentiment, but if we win we get a piece of metal, if we don’t it’s no real loss, and I’m not in the mood to bribe my way into a meaningless award.” He shrugged when he saw the others staring at him. “But that’s just me.”

“Yeah,” Pete grimaced, leaning back in his chair as well. His eyes flickered over to Joe guiltily. “I’d rather not cheat my way into success.”

Their arguments were all completely sound, but Joe still couldn’t get the image out of his head. Crowd cheering. Tight tux. Crying mother. This was the exact same thing he’d given Pete shit
about just the other day, he knew, but still, these award shows were rigged anyway. Before he could gather his thoughts, Patrick spoke.

“You could do that?” he asked, and the intensity of his words startled Joe enough to draw his eyes. Patrick was biting down on his lip, and his eyes looked strangely dark. Beth zeroed in on him.

“I could absolutely do that,” she said, and Joe felt the unbearable desire melt off of him, replaced with worry for Patrick. “I must warn you, though. There is a price.”

“Name it,” Patrick said, unflinching.

“I can’t,” she said. “Not here. It’s a bit of a complicated process.”

“Yeah, that’s our cue to leave,” Pete said in distaste, standing up. “Whatever the cost is, it’s not worth it.”

“I’m talking to Patrick now,” Beth said, not looking up at Pete, and Joe’s frown deepened as well. The look Patrick and Beth were sharing was beyond intense, it was something else altogether.

“I can’t agree to something without knowing what my side of the bargain is,” Patrick said after a long pause, tearing his gaze away.

“What if I promise you can back out once I tell you the cost?” Beth asked. Patrick looked skeptical. “I just need your consent before we move to the next, ah, stage,” she continued.

Patrick looked skeptical enough that Joe was sure he was going to turn it down, but then—

“You swear I can back out after you tell me the price?”

“I promise that you don’t have to do anything if the cost is disagreeable to you,” Beth said. Patrick looked up at Pete.

“Is it true?” he asked.

“Well, yes, but—” Pete began, and Patrick shook Beth’s hand immediately.

“Deal.”

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“Is no one else creeped out?” Andy asked back at the apartment.

“She wasn’t lying,” Pete said helplessly. “I can’t really see the problem, even if it does feel creepy.”

“Look, it doesn’t matter if it’s creepy, the deal was just between me and her, so you guys have nothing to worry about,” Patrick said, trying to be reassuring.

“No, Patrick, that’s exactly what concerns me!” Andy yelled, frustrated. Patrick’s shoulders sank, and he looked apologetically at Andy.

“What’s done is done?” he tried, changing tactics, and Andy groaned.

“I can still back out,” he reminded Andy. “No harm done.”
“Back me up!” Andy yelled at Joe, and Joe laughed while shaking his head. Andy growled in frustration. Could no one else possibly fathom the danger?

“Look, it’s honestly not that big of a deal,” Patrick said, toothbrush hanging out of the side of his mouth. “If it’s too much, I won’t do it. Problem solved. What we should really be worrying about is how much we’re going to tour for this album.”

And like that, the conversation was over. Andy pestered Pete about it a little, but he simply shrugged and said that Beth definitely wasn’t lying. Even with that promise, something still seemed off to Andy.

Over the next few days, they started prepping to go home, finally. Andy missed his mom and his daughter and Fuck City, where Carmilla was going to be living with him until Warped Tour kicked off. His mother was slightly apprehensive about her granddaughter being raised in a commune called ‘Fuck City’, but Andy assured her that it would be fine. After all, she was bound to hear the word at school eventually, and they’d use the name around her as little as possible until she was a teenager. The guys, to Andy’s surprise, were totally jazzed to be involved in raising a kid, even allowing her to be the exception to their gender policy.

Andy was excited too. He hated LA, the heat, the commerciality. The debilitating lack of support for the Green Bay Packers. So for the next few days devoid of Beth, he felt everything was going his way.

All the luck changed when they were out getting lunch with Dan, their tour manager. Andy was still distrustful of him after the fae restaurant they were dropped in in London, but when they mentioned it to Pete, Pete said he seemed fairly normal.

“What would you say to playing Warped again this summer?” he asked.

“Sure,” Pete said, not really paying that much attention, but looking out the window. He suddenly perked up, his eyes lighting up.

“Actually, Dan, we have to run,” Pete said, standing suddenly.

“We do?” Patrick asked, and Andy planned on echoing him before following Pete’s gaze out the window. Oh. Andy’s mood soured as he saw Beth standing outside the restaurant, bouncing on the balls of her feet and wriggling her fingers in a delicate wave. Joy.

The tour manager stuttered at them as they stood up and walked out, but Andy couldn’t bring himself to be too concerned about where Dan thought they might be going.

Outside, it was hot, but not worse than Andy expected. He missed home, sick of the dry wind that kept blasting at him.

“Hey guys!” Beth said, sliding heart shaped sunglasses on. “Busy?”

“Not anymore,” Pete said. Beth blushed, and Andy didn’t begrudge Pete for it. The girl seemed creepy to him, but if it helped him get out of a rut, well, that was good, at any rate.

“So,” Patrick had one hand on the back of his neck, looking almost shy. “What do we have to do?”

“Oh, let’s not dive straight into business,” Beth said flippantly. “Want to get some lunch first?”
“We were sort of in the middle of doing that when you came, actually,” Andy said in a low voice.

“Oh, sorry!” she laughed. “We could get take out if you prefer, eat in the park. It’s nice out today, and I packed some food, but I figure you boys will want it later, since we’ve got a long walk ahead of us.”

“We do?” Pete asked in trepidation.

“Well, technically, only Patrick has to come with me,” she said, shrugging delicately. “But I assumed the rest of you would want to come along.”

“You assumed correctly,” Pete said. His voice was still somewhat cold, which was a relief to Andy.

“Come on, I know a great Chinese place,” she said, and began walking rather quickly down the street. At least there were some vegan options there, which satisfied one of Andy’s dietary needs. Yet another reason he needed to go back home, he never established the connections in LA that he had back home, and though he could usually find a kid “up for something new” at a nightclub, it was eating away at his morals.

Andy wasn’t really that interested in lunch, eaten at a picnic table at some scenic playground (the parks weren’t really parks to him, there were no real trees) while Beth and Pete flirted. Patrick, usually annoyed when the band was being treated as a whole extra tricycle to someone’s date, looked… well, not peaceful, but lost in thought.

“All right,” Beth said, once everyone had finished eating - though Andy noticed Patrick had barely picked at his food before pushing it away. “How do you boys feel about mountain climbing?” she asked.

“Seriously?” Pete asked.

“There’s a bit of a ceremony, tradition and whatnot, and it takes place at the top of Mt. Lee. Better known,” she continued, a glint of amusement in her eyes, “As home of the Hollywood sign.”

“Excellent!” Patrick said, “When do we start?”

“Right now,” Beth said, and began walking back to her car. “We’ve got a bit of a drive out to where the trail starts, and then we’ll be on foot for a while. There’s a lot of security around the sign, so we have to take a bit of a back road.”

“I thought nobody was allowed near the sign,” Andy said. “I mean, if they were, nobody could take pictures of the friggin thing, it would always be surrounded by tourists.”

“It’s a smidgen illegal,” Beth said, “Does that trouble you?”

“Course not, it sounds fun!” Patrick said brightly.

“You’re game for breaking the law? Since when?” Joe laughed, and Patrick scowled.

“I’m not that much of a wet blanket,” he said. Even Andy had to laugh.

Andy was immediately grateful that Beth had made them stop for lunch, given the long drive to what looked like the middle of the desert, save for the gigantic mountain and the scrubby path that lead to the top of it. They seemed to have a long journey ahead.
“It’s a pretty easy hike,” Beth said, seeing the trepidation on everyone’s faces. “There’s a big equestrian path we can follow for nearly three hours, well-traveled, totally safe, and that takes us to the base of Mt. Hollywood’s summit, where it gets a bit steeper, but we should be alright.

“No biggie,” Patrick agreed, completely assuaged by her assurances. Andy was a hundred percent positive that she was working some sort of weird charm on him, but he couldn’t prove anything, so he didn’t say anything.

Beth was wearing a knee length dress and had intricately curled and pinned back hair, she was even wearing kitten heels, but the prospect of hiking seemed to brighten her up considerably. Though unconcerned for herself, she had only gone a few steps before she turned around, frowning at Pete.

“Do you want to put your, um, sweater in the car?” she asked, gesturing to his bright yellow Clandestine hoodie. Pete glanced down at his chest, pulling the fabric out a little, and laughing.

“No, I’m alright,” he said.

“It’s going to get pretty hot on the climb,” Beth warned him.

“Part of my style,” Pete said, raising his eyebrows at her in what looked like a ridiculous replacement for a wink. Andy felt embarrassed for him, but Beth didn’t laugh at him. Instead, she looked almost sad.

“Il faut souffrir pour être belle,” she said, her tone almost wistful.

“Um,” Pete cocked his head. “One must suffer to be beautiful?” he guessed.

“Spot on, Mr. Wentz,” she agreed. “It’s an old French phrase, taken very much to heart in this city.”

“Then I’m in the right place,” Pete said.

“If we could stop flirting for a few seconds,” Andy said loudly, “Let’s get this over with.”

Beth smiled guiltily at him and began leading the way. She was right, the first part of the path wasn’t crowded, but it certainly wasn’t empty. Some girls in neon green shorts biked past them, a family of five on horseback. The path seemed to wind with no real direction, and it was sunny and serene, the sounds of the city long behind them.

Of course, it was slightly less serene for Andy, who felt increasingly ill in the direct sunlight. He had doused himself in sunscreen ahead of time, and he didn’t burn to death like an ordinary vampire, but he still had adverse reactions to full sunlight like this, and after an hour or so of hiking, he felt like a fifth wheel and he had a killer headache.

Pete and Beth were still flirting, talking about silent movies or brands of eyeliner or something, Andy couldn’t really trouble himself to pay that much attention. Joe and Patrick, meanwhile, kept alternating between debating about music and discussing Grammy acceptance speeches. Andy tried to interject on occasion, but eventually he just tried to let the conversations turn into a background buzz, letting him drift off in his own thoughts.

Andy could see waves of heat shimmer off the ground in front of him, hear the shutter of a tourist’s camera go off over and over and over again, almost but not quite in time with the throbbing in his head. Though the sun was getting lower, the shrubs still barely cast shadows. All he had to do was focus on putting one foot in front of the other-
“Andy!” Joe yelled, snapping his fingers in front of Andy’s face.

“What?” Andy asked, shaking his head dizzily.

“You okay?” Joe asked.

“Headache,” Andy said, wiping sweat off of his forehead.

“Would it help if I told you we’re about to go in the Bat Cave?” Joe asked. Andy blinked like Joe was speaking gibberish. Was he having a stroke?

“Like, the Bat Cave,” Joe said, looking more worried when Andy didn’t understand. “Adam West? The old live action tv show?”

“What?” Andy asked. He felt like a circuit that someone had poured water on. Joe sighed and grabbed Andy’s shoulders, wheeling him around and pointing to a perfectly arched entrance to a cave, and oh, yes, Andy did recognize the entrance for the Batmobile from the old live action Batman tv show.

“Cool,” he said weakly.

“Wanna see the inside?” Beth asked eagerly, and though it was fuzzy, Andy could still hear Patrick’s enthusiastic affirmative answer.

Andy stumbled behind Joe, following the sound of his breath much more easily than staring at the path. The moment the shadow of the cave (really more of a tunnel, given that it had an exit on the other side) Andy’s breathing evened out, his head cleared, and his vision straightened. He stood up a little straighter and breathed in deeper.

“Feeling better?” Joe asked with a knowing smile, his hand rubbing small circles into Andy’s arm.

“Much,” Andy agreed. “How long can we stay here?”

“I’ve got it,” Joe promised, and walked over to where Beth was giving Pete and Patrick more of a tour guide spiel. He said something quietly, muttering about sun poisoning and an obscure skin condition. Enough of a blatant lie that Pete shot Andy an apologetic look that Andy waved off with a flick of his wrist. Nobody blamed Pete for rebounding, and Andy felt much less angry at the world and everyone in it in the shade of the cave.

“We’ve come a long way,” Beth agreed, though she gave Andy a strangely penetrative look, “We may as well rest until the sun starts setting.”

Andy smiled, leaning his head back against the rough stone wall, nearly drifting off. He was only half conscious when he heard Beth gasp and then curse harshly, waking him up instantly.

“Damn it!” she groaned, and yanked something long and writhing off of her ankle, throwing it out of the tunnel, still cursing.

“Pete!” she gasped. “What are you doing?”

“Gotta suck the venom out, right?” he said, looking up at her, suddenly unsure.
“No, no, I’m fine!” she insisted, holding her hands up in front of her face. “It, ah, barely got me, don’t think any venom got in.”

“That was a rattlesnake,” Joe said. “We should call 911.”

“Really, I’m fine,” she insisted. “Hardly a scratch.”

“It looked like a pretty bad bite to me!” Pete said, his eyes flashing. Amidst all the commotion, Andy stood up. Possibly lying down in a cave where rattlesnakes liked to hide was a poor idea, even if he was harder than humans were.

“The sun’s going down anyway,” Beth said, gesturing outside of the cave. “We should get going so we have a bit of daylight left, or it’ll be hard to find the trail up the summit.”

“Fine,” Patrick said, glancing at Andy to confirm, and Andy nodded. They probably did need to leave, what with all the weird desert creatures, mythical and non that came out at night.

Beth led them back out of the Bat Cave and around bends in the mountain. No longer was the path filled with tourists, instead it was barren, and in the darkness Andy could see for miles around the area, from the winking lights of L.A. to where the desert stretched out for miles. In the night, it looked beautiful to him, especially from the high vantage point.

As the sun began to sink to a bloody red stripe on the horizon, Beth turned sharply to the left off the path to a tiny, scrubby trail that led up a mountain at a much more drastic degree. It required a bit of focus to not lose his footing, so Andy was shocked to see how well Patrick was doing.

The five of them had climbed upward in near silence for a few minutes when suddenly a dark mass sprung from one of the bushes on the left side of the trail, knocking Patrick over with a high pitched shriek.

Andy reacted before he had the chance to think, skidding off the edge of the path and running towards them. He could smell the other creature, a vampire, and hoped to any higher power that he could force him off, when he heard a delighted voice gasp.

“Patrick? Is that you?”

***

The speed at which vampires travelled never ceased to frustrate Pete. Because it would make a nice change of pace to be the hero, just for once, but no, even being one of the best soccer players in the state wasn’t a match for the otherworldly powers of the undead. It was emasculating, dammit.

Also, the imminent death of his best friend was a pretty terrifying prospect as well.

But though logic told Pete he couldn’t outrun a vampire, he still tried, and was incredibly pleased to see that Patrick was not dead by the time he had skidded and slipped all the way around the steep slope towards him.

The vampire had pulled Patrick to his feet, a wide grin on his face.

“Come on,” he said, his voice striking a familiar chord Pete couldn’t quite place. “You remember me, right, brah?”
“Oh, Christ,” Patrick groaned, “You.” He brushed dust off of his jeans as Pete closed the rest of the distance between them, draping a protective arm over his shoulders.

“You do remember me!” he grinned, his fangs gleaming in the moonlight. “And Pete! You remember me too, from the hotel?”

Pete took in the sight of the guy for the first time. Flowered button up shirt. Board shorts. Tan skin. And yes, Pete did recognize him.

“The surfer dude?” Pete said. “Or, surfer vamp?”

“You remember me!” he turned back to Patrick. “Patrick, really, it’s been too long.”

“Oh, it could be forever and it wouldn’t have been long enough,” Patrick said with a strained smile.

“Aw, was I that bad?” the guy asked.

“You broke down my door, forcibly fed off of me, then left the door broken open effectively leaving me as a drinking fountain for any vampire that felt like using me, so forgive me if I’m not super fond of you,” Patrick said acidly.

“Stephen!” Beth stormed over to them, her heels sliding in the loose dirt. “What the hell are you doing here?!”

“Elizabeth?” he said, cocking his head. “I work here, what are you-? Oh! No!” he leaned in his delighted grin spreading wider on his face. “You’re here with them?”

“Stephen,” Beth’s voice was strained, though she had a tight smile on her face. “I am in the middle of something. Could we discuss this later?”

“Oh!” Stephen looked between Beth and the four of them. Pete tried to puff out his chest when the vampire’s gaze rested a little longer on Patrick than the others.

“Rotten luck, kid,” Stephen laughed, “Get away from vampires only to end up—”

“Were you going to contribute anything to this conversation, or just make our lives difficult?” Beth asked.

“On the contrary,” Stephen smiled at her, kindly but much colder than before. “Are you going to the usual place?”

“Yes, why?” Beth asked.

“Security’s been beefed up,” he said, “You might need an insider’s help.”

“I highly doubt I need your help,” Beth said.

“But they might,” he said.

“You know him?” Pete asked Beth. She scowled.

“Unwilling business partners, you could call us,” she sighed.

“You aren’t human, are you?” Pete asked, though he already knew the answer, and could feel betrayal welling up like a rock in his throat. Before she could answer, Stephen began cackling.
“Oh boy, you guys are really not that bright!” he laughed. “How’d you take out that whole operation in Chicago, minds like yours?”

“If you’re just going to insult them-!” Beth started haughtily, but Stephen held his hands up in surrender.

“I’m sorry,” he chuckled. “I’ll be good, I promise.”

“Then I guess we’ll just have to deal with you,” Beth said, her nose wrinkling up in distaste.

Stephen and Beth began walking away, and were almost around a bend that would have put them out of sight before Beth turned around, apparently finally realizing that no one in Fall Out Boy had moved yet.

“Boys?” she asked, and Pete crossed his arms for good measure.

“Yeah, we’re gonna need a pretty good explanation as for why we’re supposed to follow you when you’re working with him,” Joe said, his eyebrows furrowed in distaste.

“It’s sort of… complicated,” she said, twisting her hair between her fingers. Her eyes darted between the four of them, but none of them budged.

“This is some magical bullshit transaction, nothing to do with business,” Joe guessed, and Beth rolled her eyes.

“Obviously,” she said, huffing out a little breath of air.

“Yeah, well if your friend is involved, maybe we should leave,” Pete said, and began to turn around.

“Wait!” Beth shouted. Her eyebrows furrowed together, and she looked like she might cry. “Look, I- can we talk about this?”

“Look, I’m not her coworker,” Stephen said, a reassuring smile plastered on his face. “We’re just business associates. I’m a guard of the Hollywood sign.”

“You?” Pete asked.

“I’m pretty old, kid,” Stephen said. “When this thing was first built, night-vision security cameras weren’t what they are today. And the government’s always known about vampires-”

“Always?” Patrick asked, a hint of hysteria in the back of his voice, but Stephen continued as though he hadn’t been interrupted.

“Yeah, so when I came on out to Los Angeles,” he strung out the name of the city with a fake Spanish accent, “They were looking for a guard more competent than humans were.” He flashed Patrick an almost apologetic grin. “I guard the sign every night, and if anyone tries anything funny, I get fed.”

“That’s disgusting,” Andy said.

“Blood banks weren’t so popular when I was first made, and then the whole AIDS thing got bad,” Stephen said with a shrug. “You make do. And since Betsy here has to take you kids up to the sign, you have to go through me. Plus, they’ve got some new high tech security that only I can slip past.”
“I don’t like it,” Pete declared, and Andy just snarled at the vampire.

“Patrick?” Beth said, and Patrick bit his lip. He looked nervously at Stephen, closed his eyes.

“Okay,” he said reluctantly.

“Excellent,” Beth said, “Let’s get a move on. There’s only so much time left to get up there.”

“We have a time limit?” Patrick asked. Beth took them back onto the thin trail, and Pete was falling all over himself trying to keep up. It was pitch black and the ground was uneven, so he had to mostly go by what he could hear, and it involved a lot of him ending up on hands and knees.

“Well, not really, but Stephen can’t exactly be out after the sun rises, and apparently we need him to get back out as well,” she sounded nearly as annoyed as Pete felt, except not at all.

Pete didn’t like being around this guy, smiling like an old friend when Pete could see Patrick shiver whenever he got too close. He was a bad reminder of the past, a piece of their history that Pete would have been more than thrilled to leave behind forever and ever. And instead of even getting the satisfaction of punching him in the nose, he was cracking jokes that no one laughed at.

“Oh, by the way, is it true you killed your wife?” he asked Andy, still cheery and bright. Andy’s shoulders tensed, and Pete heard the quiet hitch in his throat.

“We weren’t married,” he whispered.

“Damn!” the vampire laughed. “Cold blooded! Why’d you go and kill her?”

“It was her or the world,” Andy said dully.

“Tough shit,” Stephen said, almost but not quite sullenly. He still looked bright and cheerful. “Is it true, the rumours about the four of you all around town? You’re some kind of magical vigilantes?”

“So it would seem,” Joe said. “Not entirely by choice.”

“Pretty cool,” Stephen said, in a voice Pete would have thought sincere if he weren’t a fairy and able to hear the lie in it. “Got costumes? Code names?”

“Shut up, Stephen,” Beth said sharply. “I’m letting you stay here, but that doesn’t mean—”

“You’re letting me?” Stephen laughed. “Oh, honey, I’m doing you a favor.”

“I think I’m doing you one,” Beth said under her breath, and gave Stephen a meaningful look.

The hill was getting steeper, and Pete’s breath shorter as he had to use his hands to help him climb full time now, but he got up closer to Patrick so as to whisper in his ear.

“I seriously think you should back out now,” Pete said.

“Look, I’m sure that whatever the payment is it isn’t gonna be pleasant,” Patrick admitted in a similar low tone, “But look, we either get a Grammy or I get to walk away, no harm no foul.”

“Yeah, maybe Beth would let us walk away,” Pete said, “But him?”
Patrick frowned, and slipped a bit on the steep hillside, grabbing Pete’s shoulder to steady himself and nearly knocking Pete over as well.

“Sorry,” he said, “Look, we’ll figure that out when we get there, yeah? We outnumber them, don’t we?”

“Maybe,” Pete said, but didn’t say that he thought whether or not they truly outnumbered them depended on what Beth was.

“I’m not gonna do anything stupid,” Patrick promised, staring into Pete’s eyes as he did, and he slid a little down the path again, this time falling so far past Pete he had to grab on to a scraggly bush.

“Jesus,” Pete ran over to him and helped him up.

“Shit,” Patrick complained, and held his palm up in front of his face. “I’m bleeding.”

“Hey, can you wrap that up?” Stephen complained from far ahead. “I’m hungry and you aren’t helping.”

Patrick flinched before shoving his hand deep into his jeans pocket.

“Let’s get this over with, yeah?” he said, and Pete nodded solemnly.

Aside from Stephen, the party made the trek mostly in silence, save for Andy making an offhand comment that they were like a low budget version of Lord of the Rings, nothing but walking shots.

Finally, Pete could see enormous white letters in the distance. They looked much grimier up close, but they were finally there. Almost as tall as the letters, however, was a chain link fence with barbed wire lining its top.

“Here is where you may need some assistance,” Stephen said, bounding gracefully forward to the fence. He grabbed hold of a chunk of it and ripped backwards, pulling some of the fence forcibly aside in a gap large enough for Pete to walk through without bending over.

“Show off,” Beth said, and Stephen smiled at her.

“Making things easier for you,” he said.

Beth walked through first, motioning for Patrick to follow after her. Pete noticed that it was getting chilly, even through his thick hoodie, so he wondered how Patrick and Joe were doing in just thin t-shirts.

Pete was starting to wonder where they were actually going, if the ceremony just took place in front of the ‘H’ or something, when Beth ripped back a patch of very realistic looking fake grass aside from an almost vertical section of the hill behind one of the ‘L’s, revealing a very large cave entrance.

“Well, that’s…” Joe trailed off.

“Cool as hell,” Patrick said with a nervous laugh.

“Ladies first,” Stephen said, gesturing in the cave, and Beth walked in first, but before she did, Pete caught a look at her face, and she looked like she was walking towards her own execution.
The inside of the cave seemed to light up as soon as Pete entered, the walls themselves emitting a faint luminescence, though the cave itself was completely barren.

“Beth?” Stephen asked.

“Yeah, okay,” she said, looking like she was about to cry. She pushed Patrick forward and stuck a hand out behind her. A milky, almost translucent wall was thrown up between the rest of the band, plus Stephen, and Patrick, and Pete felt his heart stutter.

“I’m sorry,” Beth said to him, “The ceremony can only be completed by two individuals.” She turned to face Patrick.

“What’s the cost?” Patrick asked.

“Simple exchange,” she said coolly. “A guaranteed Grammy in exchange for your life.”

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Patrick blinked up at her. He wanted to ask her to repeat herself, but he had heard perfectly fine. One guaranteed Grammy for his life.

“Can I think about this for a second?” he asked, and turned to face the blank far end of the cave.

He should say no, obviously, was his first thought. What was the point in winning any awards if he was dead? But then, on the other hand…

Didn’t artists only ever get truly appreciated after they died anyway? Maybe his death was exactly what the band needed to get a boost up.

This didn’t make sense, he knew none of this made sense, but he was suddenly overcome with the urge to say yes, to take this shot, because it might be the only one he would ever get.

“If you want to, we must simply seal the contract in blood, and it will be so,” Beth said quietly behind him.

If he wasn’t willing to die for music, what was he willing to die for?

It was as though two quiet voices in his head were screaming at each other, getting progressively louder. One telling him how insane this all was, how he needed to get out of here now, and the other saying that people died all the time, and at least if this was how he went, he would be remembered.

“I don’t know,” he said quietly.

Patrick turned around suddenly, to say yes, no, to tell her to fuck off, no, definitely to say yes, when he caught sight of his band through the barrier that separated them.

Just as he was about to say no, there was a clattering of metal on stone. Beth had crumpled down on the ground, a knife lying down next to her, with her face in her hands.

“I won’t do it!” she yelled, and the barrier between Patrick and his band dissolved. Patrick knelt down next to her, worry in his eyes, while the band ran forward, a commotion of yelling he couldn’t hear while he focused on her alone.

“Why’d you have to be so damn nice!” she wailed.
“I’m sorry?” Patrick said, his eyes wide.

“I don’t care what you want, I won’t do it,” she told him, and Patrick figured it would be a bad time to tell her he was going to say no anyway. He reached out and put a hand on her shoulder, rubbing small circles into it.

“Hey, come on, it’s alright,” he soothed, and she let out a shaking cry.

“I don’t want to hurt anyone, and if I let this happen you’re going to die an awful death,” she half wailed, looking up at Patrick with sparkling eyes. Patrick opened his mouth to say something, but Pete spoke first.

“Who the hell are you?” Pete asked, his voice cold and hurt. Joe pulled Patrick up and into a bone crushing hug, pushing the air out of his lungs. He pushed away as best he could, but Joe was still clinging tight to him, muttering “Fucking idiot” under his breath.

“I’m- my full name is Elizabeth Short,” she sighed. It was clearly meant to mean something to Patrick, but he didn’t have any idea. He glanced around, but the rest of his band looked just as confused as he felt. She looked up at them, and her sorrow was replaced with frustration.

“Better known as the Black Dahlia,” she said with a wince. “Generally I look more familiar like this,” she said, and her mouth split open in a horrendous Chelsea Grin, blood seeping from her stomach. The Black Dahlia Patrick definitely knew, and he couldn’t suddenly see it, the gruesome crime scene compared to the beautiful girl.

“We got it, yeah!” Pete squeaked, and she reverted to her usual movie star good looks.

“The man who did this to me called it ‘the curse of the West,’” she said. “The earliest he could trace it back was to a man who said he would do anything to get to America, and his corpse definitely made it over,” she said, a dark, humorless smile on her face.

“And you?” Pete asked.

“I wanted to be famous,” she said, “I met a man who promised me that my face would be on the cover of nearly every magazine in America,” she paused, looking sadly at Patrick who childishly looked away, suddenly terrified. “The price of death seems a small one when you’re under the curse’s spell, doesn’t it? The worst part is how you die, exactly how you fear you’ll go. I didn’t exactly look gorgeous on the cover of every newspaper in America,” she smiled sadly again

“You’re just letting me go?” Patrick asked.

“Usually it takes under a decade to pass the curse on, but,” Beth looked miserable and stared at the ground, “I can’t do this to someone else. I just can’t.”

“I mean, thanks,” Patrick said, “I like not being dead, personally.”

“Really?” she looked surprised. “You should still be furious at me for taking away the opportunity.”

“No, I mean, I really like being alive,” Patrick said. Everything seemed to be moving too fast, he was out of breath and the glowing walls of the cave gave everything a strange, blue-ish lighting that made it all seem more dreamlike. He was distantly aware of the fact that, while Joe had technically let go of him, he was still standing protectively close to him. Andy hovered near their side, and Pete hung the furthest back. Patrick hated the devastated look on his friend’s face, heartbroken again, this time by a girl that had been dead for over fifty years.
“Just as well,” Beth said, “The death is always painful, and for you it would’ve been death by vampire, the way you reacted.”

“It may still be,” Stephen said, his voice coming from just outside the cave. “Or had you forgotten about me?”

Suddenly, a lot of things clicked for Patrick. The way he feared he would go. The reason Beth said that she was doing Stephen a favor. He hadn’t hung around to help them back, but so Patrick could be dinner for him.

“You let us up here,” Beth said.

“And if you don’t complete the ceremony, you’re trespassing,” Stephen said with a grin, “And you know what I do to trespassers.”

Joe and Andy moved in front of Patrick, and Patrick couldn’t help the twinge of embarrassment. Generally he was pretty decent at holding his own, but then again, vampires were a different story.

“All five of us, really?” Beth asked, a fierce challenge in her voice. Stephen laughed.

“When you aren’t working for the curse you’re slightly less powerful than the human,” he said, his face full of derision. Patrick wasn’t sure whether to feel proud or offended, but instead worked on pulling his knife out of the side pocket of his backpack, just for good measure.

“Do you want to try running away first?” Stephen asked with a grin. “That could be amusing.

“I don’t think so,” Joe said, “Pretty sure we can take you.”

“The confidence of werewolves never ceases to amuse me,” Stephen said, and made a come hither motion with his hand.

Joe shifted into a wolf as he ran, and though Patrick wanted to run forward with him, he hung back, raising up his knife in a defensive position. Andy sprang forward as well, and Stephen’s confidence was useless when matched against the two of them.

Most of the fight moved too fast for Patrick to follow, but he got a small chance to stick out his foot and trip Stephen, making things even worse for him.

“Sorry, ‘brah’,” Patrick said, though he doubted Stephen could hear it over his own screams of outrage.

It seemed to be going well for a moment, but Stephen got in a good swing, knocking Joe to the side, slamming him into one of the glowing stone walls and eliciting a whimper from the wolf.

Stephen was definitely a lot better in one on one combat, and as a full vampire, he was significantly stronger and faster than Andy. He batted him aside after a minute too, and then turned, to Patrick’s surprise, towards Pete.

“Now, you smell fascinating,” Stephen said, licking his lips. “Maybe I’ll give you a shot before I get to the main course.” Patrick had to hide a smile.

“Oh buddy, you really don’t wanna do that,” Pete said, but he was biting back a smile as well.
“I’ll take the risk, brah,” he said with a smile. He stepped forward and grabbed Pete by his hair, sinking his teeth into Pete’s neck.

“Bad idea!” Pete said, cringing at the pain. After a second, Stephen jumped back as though he had been burned, covering his mouth.

“I don’t understand,” he said, and something black spilled out of his mouth.

“I’m not human either,” Pete said, “I can’t lie at all, and I told you you didn’t want to do that.”

“Fae,” Stephen hissed, before turning to dust.

Joe turned human again, cracking his neck and groaning.

“Son of a bitch,” he said, rubbing his head. “That guy can pack a punch.”

“We should run,” Beth said. “If any of the camera’s caught that, human security will be after us.”

The five of them booked it back down the mountain, Patrick falling more than running most of the time, but it seemed to accomplish the job of escaping. He didn’t hear anything pursuing them from behind, but Beth assured them that they definitely had to go fast to escape whatever might be following, human or not.

“That was pretty bad ass,” Joe said to Pete, who laughed at him.

“I got bit, didn’t really do much,” he said.

“If it works it works,” Joe said. Patrick had to agree. It was a power he would have loved to have.

Once they got back on the regular trail, away from the summit to the sign, Beth slowed down and let them all catch their breath.

“Patrick, I’m really sorry about all of this,” Beth said.

“Don’t worry about it,” Patrick said, shaking his head. “I can’t blame you for wanting to get rid of a curse like that.”

“Yeah, but I should’ve at least found an asshole to pass it off to,” she said, her shoulders slumped. “I was just desperate, I guess.”

“Still,” Patrick said.

“I’ve gotten close a few times,” she said, “Never that close, though.”

“Seriously,” Patrick grabbed her arm, “Don’t worry about it. I’m still alive, yeah?”

“Yeah,” she said, wistful. “At least you are.”

“I’m guessing a second date is kind of out of the question?” Pete asked, and she let out a little laugh.

“I think I’m a little too old for you, to be perfectly honest,” she said.
“First time he’s ever gone for an older woman,” Joe said under his breath, and Patrick snorted.

Beth led them the rest of the way down the path, the sun still not even threatening to rise when they reached where her bright red car was parked.

“Shall I drop you boys back off at wherever you’re staying?” she asked, and Pete nodded. When she dropped them off, she stared at Pete a long time, and he back at her.

“You’re a good person. All of you are;” she said. “So I hope your luck gets better soon.”

“Waste of perfectly good hope, that is,” Pete said with a grin.

“And maybe I’ll see you again?” she asked, this time just directed at Pete.

“Next time I’m in town,” he said. “In the meantime, I’ll send some assholes your way.”

“Maybe the curse will just stop with me,” she said with a small smile. “After all, I can’t let anyone upstage me, can I?”

“One last question,” Pete said, and she turned to him.

“You didn’t like the album,” he accused.

“That’s not a question,” she said.

“You lied and said you did, but why didn’t you like it?” Pete asked, and she shrugged.

“I’m just old fashioned, I guess, but never really got into the whole ‘rock and roll’ thing,” she said. “1940’s, remember? If you want my advice,” she put both hands on the steering wheel and winked at Pete, “Add more horns.”

She sped away, tires screeching, and Patrick sighed.

“Could you just once not flirt with girls that are trying to kill me?” he asked.

“It’s not my fault that all the hot ones want you dead,” Pete laughed.

“What about Lauren? She seems nice and normal, whenever she comes over,” Andy suggested.

“Normal, how overrated,” Pete chuckled. Patrick let out a loud yawn, looking over at the horizon where the sun had finally started rising.

“Right, well, I’m going to bed,” he said, heading inside. He was almost asleep when Joe sat on the edge of the bed.

“Oh Christ, what do you want?” Patrick asked, sleepy and grumpy. Joe was fiddling with the blanket on his bed, and seemed to think over whatever he was planning on saying very thoroughly.

“Were you going to do it?” he asked.

“No,” Patrick said firmly. “I mean, I was, but then I wasn’t in the end, if that makes sense.”

Joe nodded thoughtfully.
“It’s fucked up, whatever that curse is,” he said. “For a second there I wanted you to. Hell, I wanted to take your place.”

“Yeah, I mean, I’d sacrifice you for a Grammy,” he laughed, and Joe sighed.

“Alright, well, I’m heading to bed,” he said, and Patrick laughed again.

“Kidding,” he said. “I wanted to for a minute there too. I think she knew bringing all of us would stop it. I couldn’t when I saw you guys.”

“Good,” Joe said. “No dying.”

“Got it,” Patrick said, saluting him. “Now go to bed.”

Joe smiled at him, but obligingly left. Still, Patrick couldn’t sleep. Not just from the light streaming through the window, from everything he had left to worry about.

Most pressing to him was that if Stephen had still been out there, how many vampires had survived the hotel, specifically, how many vampires that fed off of him had lived, and still wanted to suck his blood? And then, always in the back of his mind- The Killers.

At least the misadventure had given him a temporary reprieve from worrying about them, the threat was still very much real. He didn’t know what being owned by Brandon Flowers would be like, but he highly doubted that belonging to anyone could really be pleasant. And Brendon was so young.

After trying to fall asleep for nearly an hour, Patrick stood up and went into the kitchen, getting a glass of water and pulling out his phone. He noticed, with a twinge of guilt, that he had ignored the past three texts from Anna, having been in the middle of a curse that made him pretty single minded.

Figuring it was nearly ten in the morning in Illinois, he called her, hoping to make the situation better, and only exacerbating it when he explained why he had been unable to reply.

“Under a curse?” she yelled, and he winced.

“Not voluntary!” he pleaded.

A lecture followed about “Should I just assume you’re in mortal peril if you don’t reply to me then?” which made him feel even worse. And it wasn’t as though she was wrong. Had Anna been the one out fighting monsters, and Patrick staying home, he would have despised it. But he didn’t know how to make it better.

Patrick ended up finally being able to fall asleep, frustrated with the sheer amount of problems and lack of solutions he had, but before he drifted off, he got at least one piece of good news.

Sure, after the incident on top of Mt. Lee they weren’t guaranteed a Grammy. But in the amount of time they hadn’t been paying attention to technology, the album had been doing well.

Really well.

Maybe he didn’t have to die for his art to get noticed.
I don't know why, but I'm a little disappointed with how this chapter turned out? I don’t know, tell me what you think of it. But get excited, because next month I'm bringing back MCR and entering the Summer of Like, for all you petekey fans. Thanks for reading! <3
His second summer at Warped Tour, Mikey has a lot going on. He's been waiting all year to see the monster-hunting cute boy, Pete Wentz, once again, but fighting the forces of evil is more trouble than it looked like. While Mikey and Pete's romance blooms, he has to struggle to keep secrets from his band. And when bloody sigils start showing up in graveyards, he and Fall Out Boy begin to realize that an over-protective older brother is the least of their worries.

Chapter Notes

There is a sex scene in here so if that squicks you then you can skip the section that starts with "It was a relief, Mikey thought" and start reading after the next set of asterisks, you won't miss too much plot.

“So,” Ray plopped down next to Mikey, “What do you think happens if you mix pop rocks and soda and then drink the soda after they dissolve?”

Mikey flipped a page in his book, not looking up, and said: “I think the rumors about pop rocks and soda being dangerous will still be just as fake.”

“Well you’re no fun. Isn’t it worth experimenting?” Ray asked, and Mikey looked up at him.

“Look, I appreciate what you’re trying to do, but I’m fine,” he said.

Honestly? Mikey didn’t think that there would be gossip within a band. There were five of them, for crying out loud, plus Brian, their techs, and the bus driver, but the techs were new, the driver was new, and so that made a grand total of six people to gossip. And yet, everyone seemed concerned about Mikey and Gerard because they had an argument, and more specifically, because no one had any idea what the argument was about.

Well, argument might have been putting it mildly.

Still, the screaming match hadn’t lasted long, luckily. Gerard had seen or heard someone nearby and cut it off, because it was still a secret, and the secrecy of the whole affair was what interested the rest of the band.

All Mikey had said was that maybe, possibly, it wouldn’t be the worst idea ever to consider trying to use their powers to get a better handle on them. Gerard hadn’t taken it well.

But contrary to what the rest of his band thought, Mikey wasn’t moping. He was actually still excited for Warped, even if it meant a lot of lying to Gerard, because Warped Tour meant-
He had been drawing back from his band a little while they got prepped in the hopes that maybe his standoffish behavior could be described as him just skulking, at least until they got used to it. A fairly active voice in Mikey’s head reminded him that he had no reason to believe that he was going to be spending the whole summer with another band, but a tiny voice in his heart was telling him otherwise. His hopes were sky high by then, after a year of marinating in thoughts of everyone looking to him like the hero, or being the center of attention, working with a team to save the day, of Pete kissing him…

“Mikey?”

“What?” Mikey asked. Ray sighed, and Mikey felt a little guilty for zoning out, but wasn’t as bothered as he should have been.

“You’ve been really quiet,” Ray said. “I mean, quieter than usual. And if you want to talk about what happened with you and Gerard-”

Anger suddenly flared in Mikey’s chest. Always about Gerard, too stubborn to ever even consider another point of view.

“Sure, I’d love to talk, but I think you’ll have to ask his permission first,” Mikey said, rolling his eyes. Ray’s face pinched up, confusion clear on it.

“I guess I’ll leave you alone, then,” he said, a note of defeat in his voice.

“I mean, actually, aren’t we about to leave?” Mikey asked.

“Shit, you’re right,” Ray said, and Mikey did his best to walk next to him as they made their way to where all the bands were congregating. Mikey’s heart was in his throat as they got closer to the center of the venue, hoping to see a glimpse of the familiar too big, too white grin.

Warped’s lottery was sort of annoying, as Mikey felt it would be fine to play a show at 11:00 AM every day, if only they could do it every day. As it was, they had to wake up at eight in the morning, every morning, to find out when and where they would be playing that day. Not that Mikey was as actively opposed to mornings as most of the fringe haired boys in the sweaty, pulsing, and entirely dressed in black crowd, but he liked some sort of schedule to work with.

Mikey tried to scan the crowd for Fall Out Boy, but he couldn’t see them. There were too many men the same age wearing band t-shirts, too many haircuts identical to Pete’s, too many people in general, but at least they were all alive. Maybe he couldn’t see them because they were all too short, he realized, and started trying to look for curly hair instead. Joe had been kind of tall, he thought, but it had been a while.

“Looking for something?” Ray asked, and Mikey jumped.

“Nah, just bored,” he lied smoothly, shaking his hair out of his eyes. The two of them gradually pushed closer to the giant sign in the middle of the sunny field that had the band names, times, and stages listed upon it as others elbowed their way out of the crowd. They had just made it to the board when Mikey felt a hand grab his elbow and spin him around.

“Wow, My Chemical Romance isn’t playing until seven tonight,” Pete said. His thinly veiled excitement sent an electric jolt through Mikey’s spine, warm and familiar yet buzzing with something new and enticing. “Guess that means you’ve got some free time?” he raised one eyebrow.
“Who are you?” Ray asked, his voice friendly as well as concerned.

“Pete Wentz, nice to meet you,” Pete said, extracted Ray’s hand from the crowd and shaking it quickly but firmly. “Mind if I borrow your bassist for the day?”

“Bye!” Mikey called before Ray even got the chance to answer, and Pete yanked him out of the crowd without pausing or caring that everyone was complaining as he pushed past them.

Pete led Mikey to a merch tent without tables yet set up, where the rest of the band waited, all of them looking mildly amused at them.

“So,” Pete hadn’t dropped Mikey’s hand when he grinned a hundred-watt grin at him, “Wanna come and save the world?”

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Andy was 99.9% sure Pete pulled the name “Mansfield Reformatory” straight out of his ass just so he could hang out with Mikey. They didn’t have Chris as an informant anymore, not after a certain bassist went home to visit his mom in Chicago and slept with Chris’s girlfriend instead. The Killers hadn’t spoken to them in months. In general, things had been pretty quiet for almost an entire month. Andy could get used to that kind of silence, but naturally, Pete had to stir up trouble.

“You could just ask him to hang out,” Andy had suggested in a mild voice as Pete was feverishly reading up on the Mansfield Reformatory, with at least a dozen tabs open on his laptop.

“Andy, do you realize over two hundred people died here?” Pete asked. “No way is it not haunted.”

“Have you considered that maybe you shouldn’t be bringing the necromancer to the most haunted place you can find?” Andy asked, but Pete talked around the question as usual.

“And we have a purpose,” Pete said, “We have to protect people, we’re sworn to it.”

“We aren’t sworn to anything!”

“And the people of Mansfield, Ohio could be in trouble.”

“The prison’s been closed since 1990, and no deaths have happened since.”

“We’re checking it out.”

“True romance,” Joe had said to Andy, once out of Pete’s earshot, “Is taking your date to a closed prison famous for its architecture, use in films, and high cruelty and death toll.”

Oh, the band was not oblivious to Pete’s crush. It seemed to make Patrick a little uncomfortable, but Andy chalked that up to a sheltered childhood. It would probably be good for Pete to admit it to himself, Andy thought, but he wasn’t going to push it.

The five of them made their way back to the car, Pete chattering excitedly to Mikey, who occasionally interjected with a snide comment that Pete would laugh at each time. It was a little annoying, Andy thought, that every time Pete was flirting with someone on an expedition like this, Joe and Patrick would pull off on their own, leaving Andy as a fifth wheel.

“So,” Pete said, sliding into the driver’s side, “Ever heard of the Mansfield Reformatory?”

“From the Shawshank Redemption?” Mikey asked.
“Um-”

“Yeah!” Patrick yelled, “They filmed all the panning shots and the warden’s office there.”

“Cool,” Mikey said, “Is it close?”

“It looks like it’s about an hour and half away from here,” Pete admitted, glancing down at the MapQuest directions in his lap. “And we’re on at six, have to set up ahead of time, so we can’t leave later than four, and you should be back in plenty of time to go on.”

“I’m game,” Mikey said. “Do you have a game plan this time?”

Patrick snorted loudly in the back.

“Game plan? We don’t even know if anything’s wrong with the place,” he said.

“Again, over 200 violent deaths!” Pete said, and Andy saw Mikey visibly stiffen. Pete must have as well, because he turned to Mikey, concerned.

“Is that okay?” he asked, and Mikey smiled nervously.

“I guess we’ll find out,” he said.

“If nothing else, I thought it might be a good place for you to be able to practice, you know? Get a better handle on things,” Pete sounded embarrassed as he spoke, but he began driving, and probably missed the small smile on Mikey’s face.

“Thanks,” Mikey said, “That’s...thoughtful of you. I have been practicing a bit though. Just in secret, when I can get the time. I’m not really good yet, but I’m not so, you know, helpless.”

“Hey, you weren’t helpless, you saved our asses,” Joe said, “And again, thanks for that.”

“You guys have definitely saved more people than I have,” Mikey said, and Andy shrugged.

“We have a lot of happy accidents,” he said offhandedly.

The group pulled up to the empty prison only an hour later, thanks to Pete’s slightly less than legal driving. Andy knew that given the place’s grisly history, he should be frightened, but when he looked out of the window, he was awestruck.

A great stone building loomed up in front of them as Pete drove in closer, all the uniform lawns making their drive look more like a shot in a movie, zooming closer. The prison looked like a castle, all great stone facades and wings stretching out on either side, extending into the emerald grass around it. It was the sort of place you expected a medieval king to live in, and trying to reconcile the architecture was next to impossible for Andy, gaping at the place. When the sunlight hit the stone just right, it looked more like something out of a fairy tale than a ghost story.

“It’s... pretty,” Joe said, a note of disbelief coloring his voice as he echoed Andy’s thoughts.

“Really pretty,” Mikey said, though he sounded kind of bored. He always sounded sort of bored to Andy, but he supposed that was just the way he talked.

The car crunched up the gravel, and at the end of the long, circle drive, there was a sign posted that listed the public tour times for the prison.
“The only Sunday tour is at two,” Mikey noted, and Pete flashed a winning grin at him, pushing his sunglasses up on top of his head.

“The only time for public tours is at two,” he said, “We’re gonna be a private group today, I think.”

“You don’t see that as slight abuse of your powers?” Joe asked, and Pete laughed, pulling the car around to a makeshift parking lot made of stakes and strings in the ground. He stepped out, kicking his door shut, and if nothing else, Andy had to admit that he hadn’t seen Pete this lively in a while.

Pete led the five of them up to the front entrance, pulling the heavy door open like he owned the place, and striding in confidently.

“This seems mildly illegal,” Mikey said, voice full of trepidation.

“Only a little,” Pete said, “And I can talk us out of anything.”

“I got arrested the last time I hung out with you guys,” Mikey reminded him, and Pete shrugged.

“If you can believe it, which was the only time we ever got arrested.”

“Of course,” Mikey muttered. “Just my luck.”

Inside the prison was even more gorgeous than outside. Black and white tiled floors, polished to perfection, and all white archways and pillars. It still looked like a fairy tale castle in the entrance, and nothing like the gory penitentiary Andy was imagining. It was also completely devoid of people.

The group of them stood still, admiring the building for a moment, when they heard a clacking on the floor getting gradually louder.

“Excuse me! Excuse me!” a woman yelled, her heels clacking on the floor with every step as she ran towards them. “You cannot be in here!”

The woman, all dressed in a tightly fitted suit and matching black heels with her hair pulled back into a bun so tight it stretched out the skin of her face underneath a pair of cat eye glasses, skidded to a halt in front of them.

“You cannot be in here!” she repeated. She was out of breath, and her cheeks were a rather pretty shade of pink. She was kind of cute, Andy thought, in a librarian way.

“But since we are here,” Pete said, stepping to the front of the group and letting his voice melt into liquid, “Do you think you could give us a tour? Since you’re so good at your job?”

The woman’s eyes began almost instantly to get blurry, but she shook her head.

“I’m...afraid...not,” she spoke haltingly, “We...have...we have a public tour at two.”

“But you really want to give us a private tour, don’t you?” Pete suggested, the golden light pouring from his eyes highlighting the angles of her face.

“I- I could give you a private tour,” she agreed, blinking stupidly up at him.

“Fantastic!” Pete said, stepping back and letting the glow fade from his eyes. “Always
wanted a guided tour of this place.”

“This way please,” she said, still frowning, as she led them down the hall on the opposite side of the entryway that she had entered from. “Um, sorry, my name is Gina, I’ll be your tour guide today,” she said, and began all the introductions of a very well-rehearsed speech. She click-clacked her way through the entryway, and through heavy doors into much poorer lit, musty smelling hallways that looked like they were made from cement, rather than the marble of the entryway.

From one cell block to another, from a cell block to where the warden lived, Andy felt a surge of anger in his chest. The prison was shut down now, but what was the difference between it and any other place of incarceration? The prisoners were treated like shit, and the workers like kings, and people wondered why there was so much abuse, why the system was so flawed. As ancient as the building looked, it wasn’t difficult for Andy to believe that it had only closed in 1990. Not that much had really changed in fifteen years, not in the way prison worked.

Gina was a very efficient tour guide, even if she was under a spell. She knew every story by heart, the guard that had died here during a prison break, and the warden’s wife had died there in an accident with a gun left in her jewelry box. She seemed to think it was completely normal for a group this small to follow her, and to not pay very much attention to what she was saying. Pete kept looking at Mikey hopefully, but Mikey kept shrugging. He didn’t even look uncomfortable, until she led them into the most monstrous looking room Andy had ever seen.

Rusted, human sized cages stood stacked, six cells high and God only knew how many cells across for nearly as far as Andy’s superior eyes could see, rusted into a violent orange-brown. He could still faintly smell the stale scent of so much spilled blood on coming from the cells, and a small amount of fresher blood.

“The East cell block,” Gina recited proudly, “Could hold up to 2,000 prisoners at a time, and-”

“Can we move on please?” Mikey asked suddenly. Andy turned to him and saw that his face was ash gray, and he was clinging tightly to Pete’s upper arm for stability. Gina stuttered over her words for a moment before nodding, and leading them out of the room.

“What is it?” Pete hissed, somewhat eagerly. “Too much death?”

“No,” Mikey shook his head, “Not that much death. I went on a history field trip to Gettysburg once, now that was too much death. There’s something wrong in there.”

“Prisoner cruelty?” Andy guessed.

“I really don’t think the power to raise the dead includes the ability to sense that, actually,” Mikey said, shaking his head. “No, something in there is just- really wrong.”

“Well that’s specific,” Patrick sighed.

“Should we get out of here?” Joe asked.

“No, no,” Mikey shook his head. “I’ve never felt anything like that before, I have to know what happened.”

“Jesus, Pete’s rubbing off on you,” Joe groaned. “You mind?” he asked Gina, who shook her head.

“Be my guest,” she said with a smile. Andy smiled back at her. Poor girl, he’d have to make
sure Pete charm-spoke her boss too. She didn’t deserve to get in trouble over them.

They walked back into the East cell block, and Mikey inhaled deeply. He still looked sick, but he stuck his chin up and started walking down one of the impossibly thin halls between the cells, illuminated only by very thin rays of sunlight filtering through dozens of sets of bars.

“Where are we going?” Joe asked, after Mikey turned down another twisting hallway surrounded by iron bars.

“Closer,” Mikey murmured, and his speed increased slightly. Joe gave Andy an exasperated look, and Andy shrugged, increasing his speed in correspondence with Mikey’s. Going with the flow seemed the only way to keep up with anything these days.

Eventually, Mikey skidded to a halt, and frowned. He paced up and down the hall a few feet, pursed his lips, and looked up.

“Something up?” Pete asked.

“Literally,” Mikey said, “I think it’s coming from above us. Do you think there are stairs nearby?”

“Just back around that corner, I think,” Andy said.

“You think? Jesus, I’d hate to get lost in here,” Patrick said, shivering a little. Andy had to agree with him. Despite the large windows, the place still reminded him of death and darkness. And frankly, it looked kind of like Azkaban from the last Harry Potter movie, but he figured it would be sort of silly to say that out loud.

Mikey’s sixth sense was weird to work with. He would lead them up one rickety staircase, get off, shake his head, and go up another until they reached the fifth floor, where he nodded firmly, and walked four cells down and stopped.

Andy’s hand flew to cover his mouth as he smelled blood. Pete was the last to jump off the tiny, rusty staircase, and he did so with a hiss, as the tangy scent of his blood filled the air. Sweeter than normal, like Patrick’s, but with a bite to it that Andy was growing to recognize as fae. Smelled appetizing as hell, but poison, he reminded himself.

“Cover that up!” he demanded. “Jesus, you’ve had a tetanus shot recently, right?”

“Sorry,” Pete said miserably, but Mikey pushed past the rest of them before he could do anything, pulling a square of pale blue fabric out of his pocket and tying it tightly around Pete’s hand, and holding his hand gently for a second longer.

“Sorry, went a little too fast,” Mikey said, staring Pete down with the sort of intensity that made Andy feel like it would be polite to avert his eyes.

“It’s fine!” Pete said, blinking rapidly. “Um, at least you came prepared.”

“Glasses cleaner,” Mikey shrugged. “Anyway, this is it,” he said, dropping to his knees. The smell of Pete’s blood was still at the forefront of Andy’s brain, but underneath it he was faintly aware of the blood he had smelled early, stale, but only by a day or so.

Mikey pushed his glasses further up on the bridge of his nose, and brushed his hand over the walkway with a frown.
“What is it?” Pete asked.

“I don’t know,” Mikey said, sounding frustrated. “The closest thing I can compare it to is how it feels when someone else brings back the dead, but it’s not quite that. This is… I don’t know, wrong-er? Kind of like when that idiot back in Indiana summoned zombies last summer, but that’s not it.”

“Think someone else is summoning?” Joe suggested.

“Probably,” Mikey said, sounding disgusted as he stood up. “Do people living in the Midwest have nothing better to do than poke spirits with a stick?”

“Speaking as a band from the Midwest…” Patrick muttered.

They climbed back down, walking back over to Gina. Andy was under the impression that they were going to leave, but Pete spoke up again.

“Did you see anyone in here yesterday?” he asked her.

“We have quite a few tour groups on Saturdays, probably a hundred or so people came through the East cell block,” she said helpfully.

“Great,” Pete said, deflating a bit. “Anyone stick out to you?”

“Oh, yes,” Gina said, frowning slightly. “One girl tried to stay behind here, long after the tour group moved on. We only caught her just before we were closing, and rather than go back to her car, she tried to hang around the cemetery.”

“How did she hide in here? It’s all just bars,” Mikey said.

“Oh, she was some five floors up, and we never let our tour groups up there, so we never thought to check.”

Pete gave the rest of his band a knowing look, as though they hadn’t all heard exactly what she said.

“Could you show us the cemetery?” Joe asked her in a weary voice, and Gina nodded.

“Right this way, gentlemen,” she said, leading them out of the cell block.

Just behind the prison stood a very small cemetery, with bone white tombstones that had on them numbers rather than names. It was a quiet, sunny day, and the graveyard didn’t seem ominous to Andy, but he turned to see that Mikey was bone white, his eyes wide behind his glasses.

“Yeah, something was definitely here,” Mikey said.

“How informative,” Patrick chuckled, but dropped the smile when he saw Pete glaring.

“I’m sorry, I don’t know,” Mikey said, frustrated. Andy peered over his shoulder, and coughed.

“Someone’s been digging,” he said, pointing to a patch of ground towards the middle of the small graveyard where the grass had been stripped, and fresh soil had been packed down.

Gina gasped and pulled a walkie-talkie from her belt, whispering something urgent sounding into it, probably calling in to maintenance, Andy assumed. And Mikey, well, his frown
“Looks like we’ve got a mystery on our hands,” Joe said.

Unfortunately, maintenance at the enormous prison was more competent than Andy would have expected, and they were soon kicked out so that the workers could investigate. Pete wanted to hang around, but Patrick reminded him that attempting to charm speak a huge amount of people was very unlikely to work, and anyway, the tour would come back to Ohio eventually.

Nobody was quite satisfied, but they were definitely kicked out, and all headed back to the car. Andy couldn’t help noticing that Mikey looked almost disappointed, which struck him as somewhat odd, given how upset he was at every turn last time.

“Sorry we didn’t get arrested again?” Andy asked mildly, and Mikey jumped, then shook his head.

“No, not that. I just kind of wanted to...practice,” he admitted. “I never get to on tour, and I’ve gotten a lot better.” When his cheeks got just the slightest pink tinge to them, Andy understood. He wanted to show off. Which, well, Andy wasn’t one to judge for weird things to be proud of. He was proud of spending the better part of the past four years living with Patrick and only sucking his blood once. Everybody had to have something to show off.

Not until they were almost back in Columbus did they stop for a very late lunch. Mikey and Joe ended up engrossed in conversation about some horror movie from the eighties long enough for Andy to catch the pensive look on Pete’s face.

“You okay?” Andy asked him, voice as low as he thought he could go with Pete still able to hear him.

“Just creeped out,” Pete said. “I mean, nothing good comes from messing with the dead. Especially those who died violently.”

“Maybe it was just some dumb kid pulling a fake Satanist stunt,” Andy said, and paused. “That would explain the blood.”

“Blood?” Pete asked, but they were interrupted by the waitress, and then by Mikey, who began grilling Pete on his own personal horror movie experience, and declared everyone at the table to be sorely lacking in any basic knowledge, and insisted on an “educational weekend”. Andy didn’t really have the heart to tell him he didn’t like horror movies that much.

The group of them drove back to the venue while Mikey got increasingly sullen, his muscles all locking up and not pushing his bangs as far out of his eyes, up until they got out in the backlot, all parked buses and vans baking in the sun in patches of grass.

“Before you guys go on, can I show you something?” Mikey asked, eyes only on Pete. Pete nodded, and Mikey smiled shyly.

“I’ve been, ah, practicing a bit since we last met,” he said, knelt down on the ground, and closed his eyes. His fingers dug into the earth, and his scrunched up face twitched in concentration. He muttered something in Latin under his breath, and a shudder ran through his body. He let out a gasp, and a skeletal hand burst out of the dirt, latched its bony fingers on the ground, and began pulling.

“Did someone die here?” Patrick asked.
“No!” Mikey looked away from the arm, now out up to its elbow. “Someone died in the forest, way over there,” he pointed, and grinned. The skeleton freed itself and stood at attention. “I told you, I’ve been practicing.

Pete grabbed Mikey’s face in his hands and kissed him, causing Mikey to let out a squeak of surprise.

“Romantic,” Joe muttered. Andy was still more focused on the skeleton, bits of flesh and scraps of cloth still clinging to it in places, and entirely covered in dirt. He figured this distraction was a reasonable excuse for not hearing someone come upon them. He did, however, notice when he heard a strange and distressed voice.

“Mikey?”

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Having mooned over Pete for the better part of a year, Mikey could honestly say that he wasn’t at all disappointed in finally kissing him. He wasn’t sure what he was expecting; maybe that it wouldn’t be as good as kissing a girl, or that it would be followed by someone shrieking “faggot!” but Pete’s lips were really soft, and his skin was shockingly warm. So he was really lost in the moment when he heard Frank yell his name.

Mikey broke away from Pete instantly, looking from Pete to the skeleton to Frank. He instinctively wiped at his lips.

“This, ah, isn’t what it looks like,” he said in a quiet voice. Frank was standing stock still, for one of the first times since Mikey had met him, and his eyes were enormous and terrified.

“Really? Hah!” he laughed, “Good to know, but I- I honestly have no idea what you even think this looks like,” he chuckled. He sounded near hysteria.

“Okay,” Mikey said, “Um, don’t panic.”

“Assuming that ship has sailed.”

“Take deep breaths?” Mikey suggested. “It’s entirely under my control, so it’s not going to hurt you.”

“Oh!” Frank squeaked. “Naturally. It’s under your control. Why is it under your control?”

“Okay, Jesus,” Mikey winced. Everyone in Fall Out Boy was staring at him, clearly not going to be any help at all, and the skeleton stood motionless, waiting for orders. “Um, so. My brother and I are necromancers,” he said. “And you can’t tell Gerard I showed you this, okay? He’d kill me.”

“I feel like that would be less of a problem for you than for most of us,” Frank whispered, blinking rapidly.

“Promise you won’t tell him!” Mikey demanded, and Frank held his hands up.

“I promise?” he said, still sounding terrified.

“Good,” Mikey took a deep breath. “Um, yeah, necromancer. I raise the dead, you know, sometimes, and control zombies, speak to ghosts, nothing that you wouldn’t expect of a kid like me.”
“And you’re kissing the guy you went to jail with,” Frank noted, nodding at Pete.

“Yes, and I’m kissing the guy I went to jail with,” Mikey agreed. “He’s an excellent kisser and his name is Pete. Pete, this is—”

“Frank, right?” Pete said, stretching his hand out and offering Frank a wide smile. To his credit, Frank kept his feet sturdily planted on the ground and shook Pete’s hand, offering him a tiny smile in return. Mikey felt relief wash through him, because he was pretty sure that Pete’s charm could warm anyone up.

“That’s Joe, Andy, and Patrick,” Mikey said, gesturing to each of them in turn.

“Why do they all know that you’re a necromancer?” Frank asked, and Mikey could hear the offense in his words.

“Oh, well, um,” Mikey bit his lip and looked down at the brownish grass beneath his feet, already trampled and brown from the sun and too many bands in too small of a space, “We sort of, ah, fought off a zombie invasion last summer, and they, uh, fight monsters.” He kicked at the dirt, feeling the sun beating down on his head, making his hair searing hot.

“Really?” Frank asked.

“Really,” Pete said, and Patrick pulled out a long, dangerous looking knife in demonstration.

“And they’re magic too,” Mikey added eagerly, the explanations tumbling out of his mouth quickly, “Like, Joe is a—”

“Hey!” Joe shouted, interrupting him. “Look, I’m sure your friend is great and all, but we aren’t really your secrets to share,” he said coldly. Mikey flushed and ducked his head in apology.

“Whatever,” Frank said. A rattling noise came from behind Mikey, and he jumped around, seeing the skeleton he had created slumping slightly. Oh. That would explain the tugging sensation still in his gut. His guts twisted, and Mikey wanted to release the creature right then, but he knew that it was probably a bad idea to just drop a skeleton next to Fall Out Boy’s tour bus. Instead, he nodded at the skeleton, and it began shambling back into the woods. He could push it through the ground again, but he was too tired to show off anymore.

“Gerard was looking for you,” Frank said faintly after the skeleton was out of sight. That caught Mikey’s attention.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah, we should head back,” Frank glanced briefly at Pete, “If you’re not busy.”

Mikey wished he could fight the color he felt rising in his cheeks, and he shook his head. He turned and waved back at the band, only to have Pete grab his hand and press a piece of paper in it.

“Text me,” Pete said, his eyes glittering. Mikey nodded, and followed Frank out through the labyrinth of buses.

Though Mikey had been terrified that Gerard had felt the disturbance caused by him raising something so long dead, but he just wanted to know if Mikey had borrowed his copy of Watchmen. It figured. The conversation was stilted and awkward, but Gerard was clearly trying to be nice,
bridge the gap between them. Normally Mikey would want to fight back, tell him to stop talking around the subject and confront him already, but he still had the cool piece of paper crumpled up in his hand, and he gripped it like an anchor.

As soon as Mikey could escape without hurting his brother’s feelings, he ducked into his bunk and texted Pete. Pete used no capital letters, way too many acronyms, and half the time just responded with smiley faces. On anyone else, Mikey would have found it irreparably annoying, but on Pete it was, well, kind of endearing.

Aside from performances, the texted back and forth all day, half theories about what was going down at Mansfield, and half Pete’s strange attempt at flirting: “wut’s ur fav color? who wud win in a fight krueger or myers?” It wasn’t until after sunset that Pete asked him to come back over.

Mikey glanced out at the lounge. “Can’t, bus is leaving.” he wrote.

“sleep over ;)” Pete wrote back. Mikey sighed, and looked out at the lounge again. Gerard was meticulously working out a sketch for a D&D character. Bob was already asleep. Ray was buried in a book. Frank looked like he was engrossed with Jamia as well, based on the way he smiled fondly at his phone every time it lit up.

“Frank?” Mikey kept his voice low. Frank looked up, blinking at the darkness of the room. “Can you cover for me?”

“Cover for you doing what?” Frank asked.

“I’m sneaking out,” Mikey said with a laugh.

“Use protection,” Frank said with a smirk, turning back to his phone.

Unsurprising to Mikey, all he had to do was move fluidly and quietly to get out of the bus without attracting attention, and he sprinted through the buses to get to Fall Out Boy’s bus, banging on the door.

“Jesus,” Pete beamed when he opened the door, “That was fast. Thought you weren’t coming.”

“I’ll be back before they wake up,” Mikey said, his voice half promise and half warning. Pete nodded in understanding, leading him onto the bus.

“Guess I’d better make my time with you count then, Cinderella,” he said, while Mikey took in the bus. It looked a little less lived in than his band’s, still messy, but less personalized. The usual tour bus staples of dirty socks and video games were scattered on the floor, but none of it really seemed to fit together.

The lounge also featured the other three members of the band swearing loudly at a television while playing what looked like a pretty intense game of Mario Kart.

“Miss me?” Pete asked, voice low and startlingly close to Mikey’s ear, making him jump. Pete laughed, low and husky, “Come on, grand tour’s just starting. Lemme show you the bunks.”

Mikey was beginning to feel something remarkably similar to stage-fright twisting his stomach into knots when he realized that, for the most part, Pete really did mean a sleep over. He ordered pizza at the last second, making their bus the very last one to leave. He suggested a game of Monopoly, and Patrick threatened to break his nose, which seemed a little excessive to Mikey, but Pete seemed unfazed. Before they fell asleep in a bunk way too small for two people, Pete began
kissing him, which Mikey had no objections to. He was almost disappointed when the two of them fell asleep before he could even get his shirt off.

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Before the summer of 2005, Pete would have sworn that one bunk was way too small for two people to share, but then again, he hadn’t slept with Mikey before then.

Of course, as Joe noted with pleasant surprise over breakfast, a week had gone by and Pete still hadn’t had sex with him, but sleeping next to him and making out was pleasant enough, and he was a little ashamed to admit, even and especially to himself, that the idea of gay sex was more than a little terrifying.

It wasn’t as though Pete had never thought about it before. He’d briefly considered the idea of being gay with some horror in middle school. He’d briefly considered the idea again in high school, that time with less revulsion and a little more interest, but still, all the guys he knew in high school smelled permanently like sweat and Irish Spring deodorant. And after high school, even if he’d been open to the idea, no one he knew really piqued his interest. Everyone was either too conservative, too straight, too unattractive, or too young. So prior to Mikey, the concept of two guys was purely hypothetical, a text book entry rather than a possibility.

Pete was doing his best to download some gay porn and study up on a whole new facet of his sexuality overnight, but he had a lot going on. Not the least of which was the frantic stream of blog posts coming from Southern Texas, all on the same subject.

“Hey,” Mikey’s voice was starting to feel more and more familiar to Pete, way too fast, he knew it was way too fast to already want to curl up in his voice, but Pete was never good at stopping himself once someone sent him into freefall. Girl or boy, apparently.

“What are you doing right now?” Pete asked.

“Listening to my band cuss out Bryan Singer for being born and growing up to make movies, why?” Mikey asked.

“You guys already play?”

“Yep.”

“Excellent, how soon can you get over? We got a monster.”

“On my way,” Mikey said, and hung up.

A minute later, the loud metallic clang of Mikey pounding on the door rang out, and Patrick sighed, rolling his eyes and huffing in disapproval as Pete sprinted across the bus to throw the door open.

Mikey stood on the step, with Frank standing directly behind him.

“Hi Frank,” Pete said, raising one eyebrow. “Um, come on in.”

Once Pete had everyone gathered, he sucked in a deep breath, feeling nervous, sparking energy bouncing around inside him as it always did when he found a new lead.

“Okay, so hear me out,” he said, trying to reign in his excitement. “Chupacabras.”
It didn’t have the dramatic effect he had intended on anyone but Frank and Mikey, but both of them gasped, and Frank’s eyes widened.

“Sure, why the hell not?” Patrick said with a shrug. He sounded almost bored, and was looking at the ceiling of the bus rather than at Pete. Joe made a noise of agreement, and Andy looked skeptical.

“Is Warped Tour taking an unexpected detour to Puerto Rico?” Andy asked, and Pete sighed in frustration.

“A very large amount of chupacabra sightings have been reported in Southern Texas over the past month or so,” Pete said, eternally patient.

“Chupacabras aren’t real,” Andy said.

“Well that’s kind of rich,” Patrick said under his breath, but Andy didn’t laugh.

“Seriously, Pete, you’re desperate to find something, but cryptids are the product of mass hysteria,” Andy said. Patrick pouted a little.

“Does that mean Bigfoot isn’t real either?” Patrick asked with false sadness in his voice.

“Look, if it’s not a chupacabra it’s a vampire,” Pete said, “Because there are obituaries. People have turned up dead, drained of blood.”

“Then it’s a vampire!” Andy said. “Why would you think otherwise?”

“Reported sightings of a reptilian creature all over!” Pete said.

“Are you okay?” Joe asked, effectively cutting both of them off as he looked at Frank, who was decidedly pale looking.

“Yeah!” Frank squeaked, looking even more terrified that Joe had spoken to him. “Of course!” Lying. Pete’s stomach twisted guiltily.

“Can I ask why you’re here? You don’t have to be,” Pete said quietly, soothingly. Frank straightened up a bit.

“Well, Mikey will kill me if I tell anyone else, and anyone else will kill me if Mikey gets hurt fighting cryptids. So I might as well help,” Frank said, shoulders back. Staring Pete down. Pete was starting to get the idea that everyone in that band was a little protective of Mikey, but he couldn’t say he minded. Power in numbers, definitely.

“You want some kind of weapon?” Joe asked, and Pete could hear the respect in his voice.

“Hell yes,” Frank said, eyes lighting up.

“Do I get a weapon?” Mikey asked, mildly offended.

“If you want,” Pete said, shrugging. “We just assumed you were using your supernatural talents.”

“I could still use a weapon,” Mikey said.

“We can’t just take them vampire hunting!” Andy protested.
“Why not?” Pete asked.

“Vampires are the most dangerous mythical creature we know of, and they don’t know the first thing about fighting,” Andy said.

“Neither did we,” Joe pointed out. He turned back to Frank and leaned back in his chair, sizing him up. “You look like a hand-to-hand weapon kind of guy. Something powerful, probably. Hand axe?”

“Fuck yeah!” Frank said. He was surrounded in a nervous aura, but Pete figured unless it got worse it would probably be better to treat Frank like normal than to baby him.

They had a small weapons stash, mostly stuff Joe had found at thrift shops around Chicago, but it lay almost entirely unused because they never had the chance to pick their battles, so the best they could usually hope for was that Patrick had his knife on him. There was a pretty badass katana that Andy used from time to time, though.

Frank looked a little disappointed when Joe handed him a small axe, the kind used for splitting logs in some old pioneer story.

“I was imagining more of a battle axe,” he admitted. “Like, Lord of the Rings, you know?”

“Yeah, I don’t know if that would fit in my suitcase, but I’ll keep it in mind for next time,” Joe said, sarcastic but good natured.

“It’s a good thing we’re in Texas,” Pete said, eyeing the axe that definitely wasn’t going to be hidden like a gun or a knife. “There are very few states where we could get away with this shit.

Frank grinned, tossed the axe up in the air, and, to Pete’s surprise, caught the handle with ease. His aura smoothed out slightly, and he tightened his grip on the wooden handle of the axe.

Mikey looked around at the weapons for a while, finally picking up a somewhat grungy Swiss-Army knife, possibly one that had been used by the actual Swiss army before the WWI, by the look of it. But Mikey seemed to like it, and he slipped it into his pocket, and the six of them headed out.

Pete was used to borrowing the car of one of the Warped workers, maybe with a little extra persuasion that was a little supernatural, but it wasn’t hurting anyone. Of course, it was a compact car, and only designed for five people, so he let Patrick drive, and Mikey sat on Pete’s lap.

Pete liked this seating arrangement a lot better as Patrick drove out to a nearby town. It had a scant two reported sightings, but two separate sightings was nothing to sneeze at. And it was a fairly long drive, which gave Pete plenty of time to lean in close to Mikey. He smelled kind of like dirty laundry and really ancient, dusty board games, but very clean underneath that scent. That with his dreamy eyes, his adam’s apple bobbing all the time, Pete was enticed sitting underneath him. Letting his hands rest on Mikey’s lap, trying to act natural when Mikey pulled Pete’s right hand towards the apex of his thighs...

Jesus, maybe Pete needed to hurry up with the whole sex thing.

Eventually they pulled into the center of a dry town, arid and dusty and looking like an Old West ghost town. It was difficult to imagine anything living here, underneath all the dust and decay, but there had to be at least two people, Pete reasoned.

“You sure about this?” Andy asked in a low voice, and Pete nodded.
“Got a hunch,” he said. He then pulled out a piece of paper he had written an address on. "I think her house is a little further north, let's check it out."

The whole town was eerily silent, a few cars rumbling along, the lone chime of a bell on the door of a Walgreens, but it felt very subdued otherwise. Pete had managed to get a girl's address off of livejournal, one that claimed to have seen the chupacabra, and his first plan was to talk to her.

The group of them pulled up in front of a squat, clapboard house with a scant few pink flowers growing in boxes in the front of the house. The sky was a too bright shade of blue, and was the only bright thing in the entire neighborhood. The thin, dry air dragged in Pete's throat like sand.

"It feels like death here," Joe complained, wiping a light sheen of sweat off of his forehead. Mikey cracked a smile.

"This isn't what death feels like: trust me."

Pete strode up to the door first, rapping on the thin material that felt like plastic. He waited a minute, knocked again, and a girl opened the door.

“Pete?” she asked. Her clothes looked about as dirty and plastic as the house, but she had a pretty face and, to Pete’s surprise, no Southern accent.

“In the flesh,” Pete said with a dazzling grin.

The girl, having told them her name was “Kristy-with-a-K”, led the whole group in, not seeming to mind that there were six grown men in her living room. She then got them lemonade in an act of Southern hospitality, and explained her story.

Kristy had been out at the local graveyard, visiting her sister’s grave with flowers, when she thought she heard something behind one of the larger headstones. It sounded like someone speaking in a different language, almost English, but more guttural, older. She had gone to investigate it when she heard a growling in the old oak tree behind her, and turned to face what she knew was a chupacabra.

“What did it look like?” Andy asked, his voice carefully measured so as not to sound like he didn’t believe her.

“Well,” she paused, “It was only about three feet tall or so,” she held her hand up to her waist, “it stood up on two legs, had big black eyes, and fangs, and spines running all down its back. It also had a really long tail, and it was all black.”

“And then what did you do?” Pete prompted her, trying not to glare at Andy. The girl wasn’t lying, so it either existed, or she was a very vivid hallucination.

“Well, it was scary,” she said. “And I wanted to run, but I didn’t wanna startle it, so I started backing up slowly, but I tripped over a headstone,” she grimaced. “Then I had to start running. It was chasing me, but I got away.”

“Are you alright?” Joe asked gently. Kristy nodded, giving him a grateful look.

“I’m fine,” she said. “Just a little shaken up. You believe me?”

“I know you’re telling the truth,” Pete said, and gave Andy a meaningful look. “Tell me, Kristy, could you give us directions to the cemetery?”
Fifteen minutes later, they were in the middle of a graveyard that looked about as desolate as the rest of the town, but at least it made sense in this sort of place. Mikey looked uncomfortable, but his face was nothing compared to Andy’s.

“What’s wrong?” Pete asked him.

“There’s blood here,” Andy said, frowning.

“I don’t think that’s how embalming works,” Patrick said.

“It’s not,” Andy said, frustrated. He stormed into the graveyard, running deftly around the headstones till he reached an enormous granite slab in the middle, nearly six feet tall, and pointed at the grass. “You can still see it,” he said, just loud enough for Pete to hear as the rest of them ran after him.

Pete could see it, once he got close enough. “It” was a rusty red circle painted into the grass, with different squiggles inside of it.

“That’s blood?” Frank asked, his voice rising slightly in pitch.

“Only a few days old,” Andy confirmed. “It’s the same as we saw at the prison, but a little clearer here.”

“It looks like sigil,” Pete said, “But I have no idea what for.”

“I mean, maybe this is a stretch, but I’m guessing that sigils painted with blood in cemeteries usually aren’t a good sign,” Mikey guessed.

“But unfortunately, it doesn’t give us much info to go off of,” Pete said, frustration bubbling up inside of him. “And what the hell does this have to do with the- oh!” he gasped. It was starting to make sense to him, and he looked over at the oak tree Kristy had mentioned in her story. Sure enough, there was what looked like the edge of an industrial sized ranch behind it, all but confirming his suspicion. “I know why the chupacabra came! They feed off of animals, goats mostly, but there’s a ranch right there, and when it smelled fresh blood, it came here,” Pete explained.

“Well, it doesn’t sound like it’s hurting people,” Andy said. “So I guess we don’t have to worry about it.”

“No,” Pete felt almost disappointed. “Unless we can figure out what the sigil is about, we might as well head back.”

But since they were them, and nothing could be that simple, they only took a few steps before Patrick tripped over something and hit the ground with a string of pretty impressive cursing.

“Jesus Christ!” Andy yelled in annoyance, covering his mouth and taking a few steps away while Patrick pulled himself into a sitting position. Pete felt queasy when he looked at Patrick’s arm.

It looked like when Patrick tripped, he had managed to scrape all the skin off of a two inch wide, foot long strip of his upper arm, and it was bleeding pretty profusely. Patrick was still swearing, not looking as the wound.

“Damn,” Joe whistled, “That’s pretty gross looking.”

“Thanks for the help,” Patrick grumbled, standing up. He tried to cover the cut up with his hand, but it didn’t do much good. “At least it didn’t get near a vein, I guess,” he sighed. “Can we
“Stop at Walgreens on the way out?”

“What did you even trip over?” Pete asked, his voice sounding annoyed rather than as worried as he felt.

“Must have been a tree root, right-” Patrick turned to point, and stopped talking at the same time Pete saw what cut him off. There was a lone skeletal hand sticking up out of the dirty, finger bones slightly curled over.

“Oh,” Patrick said in a small voice.

“Mikey?” Pete asked, and Mikey shook his head.

“Not me,” he said, shaking his head emphatically, “I would know. And anyway, it’s, ah, de-animated,” he said, frowning at the word.

“Great,” Joe said, “Well I think now’s a great time to leave.”

“Guys?” Frank’s voice was small, but the worry in it made Pete’s head snap to him instantly. “Didn’t you say that chupacabras were attracted by the smell of blood?”

Pete shot one worried look at Patrick, before sighing. “Yeah, I did. God dammit.”

They started for the car, not running yet, but walking rather quickly. Patrick still had his hand clamped over his upper arm, but it wasn’t doing much more than staining his fingers red and possibly getting graveyard dirt in the wound.

They made it all the way to the parking lot before they heard growling behind them. Pete turned abruptly to see not one of the creatures Kristy had described, but two of them, saliva dripping from long fangs and black fur standing on end.

“Maybe they won’t attack us,” Patrick suggested meekly.

“Or maybe your blood smells just as good to them as it does to vampires,” Joe suggested. As if to confirm what he had said, one of the chupacabras leapt forward, and before anyone else could react, Frank swung at it with the axe he had. It hit home, but with the blunt end, and flying out of Frank’s hands, knocked the chupacabra to the side and left Frank weaponless, and the other one snarled.

“Nice shot,” Andy said, and Frank beamed for a second before the second chupacabra launched itself forward and sank its fangs into Frank’s leg. Frank cried out, trying to kick it away, but it clung tight, and he howled in pain.

“Hold still!” Joe ordered, pulling his gun out. Before he had it loaded, however, the ground erupted in front of them, and a fairly fresh zombie dragged itself out of the ground. Frank whimpered, but the zombie stumbled forward and grabbed the chupacabra and pulled it off, holding the struggling creature in its rotten arms. Frank stumbled backwards, and Pete smiled proudly at Mikey, who was concentrating hard on the zombie.

“We should go now,” Mikey said, his hands trembling in concentration, “It’s really strong.”

Nodding, Pete and the others continued running to the car, at a flat sprint this time, just in case more of them were coming. Once they were all piled in the car again, Andy holding his breath, Mikey let the zombie collapse, and Patrick stepped on the gas, tires squealing as they left the tiny town behind.
The second the pulled back into the festival where Warped was closing down, Andy
jumped out of the car, inhaling deeply. It had gotten easier once Frank and Patrick got bandaged up,
but Pete still felt badly. Maybe he could pull some strings and find him some real blood as opposed
to formula, because as well as it worked, it wasn’t nearly as satisfying.

“Listen,” Pete said, turning to Frank with a grimace, “I’m really sorry you got hurt today,
and obviously you don’t ever have to come back…” He trailed off when he saw Frank shaking his
head and smiling, his aura glowing.

“Are you kidding?” he asked, “That was incredible! When do we go next?”

***

It was a relief, Mikey thought, that his brother was the most unobservant person on the
planet. Mikey and Frank spent the week after the chupacabra incident sneaking out every night to go
hunting with Fall Out Boy. Most of the time, they would just steal away to the nearest big city to see
if anything needed their attention. One night it was a rogue vampire that almost killed a high school
kid before they got there, one night it was another chupacabra, lower in Texas, which had gotten
itself trapped in the sewers and was feeding off of sewer workers. Most nights, it was nothing at all,
but it was always exhilarating to be with them, boisterous and vibrant.

Of course, unobservant as Gerard was, Ray was regularly giving Mikey concerned looks,
and he and Bob often had their heads bent conspiratorially, but the truth was far weirder than
anything they could come up with, Mikey was sure.

Mikey was on cloud nine as the summer blew by, and the best part of it by far was Pete.

One night, they were making out like always, when Pete pulled back yet again. Mikey
groaned loudly in the back of his throat.

“What?” Pete laughed. The bus was empty, so there was no fear of disturbing anyone else.

“Nothing,” Mikey said, and Pete gave him a look. Ah, the lie thing. There was no getting
used to it. “Just,” Mikey paused, pulling Pete back down on top of him by the back of his neck,
“mmm, want you,” he said, biting at the thorns encircling Pete’s neck.

Pete groaned audibly, blunt nails digging into Mikey’s ribs.

“I want you too,” he said. His chest heaved. “I just have no idea what I’m doing,” he said,
frustrated. “Not with a dude.”

Mikey laughed. “Is that the problem?”

“Is it funny?” Pete asked. He was blushing, but he looked upset.

“Hey, c’mon,” Mikey yanked him down so they were chest to chest, his lips brushing Pete’s
ear. “It’s not a big deal,” he promised, and he grinded on Pete’s thigh. “I can talk you through it,” he
paused, letting his hand trail down to just above Pete’s dick. “If you want.”

Pete nodded, suddenly breathless, and Mikey felt triumph roaring in his chest.

“It might be easier for you to top first?” he suggested, and Pete nodded, rapid and eager.
Granted, talking someone through how to finger him was possibly one of the least sexy things Mikey
had ever done in his life, but the reward was absolutely worth it.
Pete fucked him rhythmically, his teeth digging into his lip the entire time, his eyelids always fluttering but never quite closed, whispering Mikey’s name over and over again. Mikey was more active, less romantically inclined, sucking on Pete’s neck and biting the bruises wherever they bloomed, and trying his best to be encouraging, telling Pete he was so hot, so gorgeous, in between whimpers and gasps whenever Pete got the angle just right.

“Close,” Pete whispered, seeming to be incapable of complete sentences. Mikey groaned, pulling one of Pete’s hands off of his shoulder and moving it onto Mikey’s dick. Pete was very receptive to criticism, and got straight to work. Mikey caught his eyes for a moment, and idly wondered if his pupils were as blown out as Pete’s were before Pete’s hand slipped over him just right, and he came, screaming as he did for the first time in years.

Mikey’s eyes fell shut and his bones melted into liquid, not even noticing Pete finish and collapse on top of him for a minute or so. Pete giggled, his head bent into the crook of Mikey’s neck.

“Hi,” he said, pulling back with a more typical, confident smile of his, finally making Mikey feel flushed again.

“Hi,” he said, looking down.

“You’re so quiet most of the time, I didn’t expect that,” Pete said, and Mikey squeezed his eyes shut in embarrassment.

“Yeah, well,” he began, but trailed off. He yanked his glasses off as an afterthought, hoping to God Pete wouldn’t notice that they had fogged up slightly.

Lying there was really quite peaceful, until they heard Patrick screaming outside.

Both of them ran outside wearing whatever they could get their hands on first, which was a pair of boxers for Pete, and a pair of Pete’s too-curvy jeans for Mikey, and they stumbled out into the twilight to see Patrick backed up against the bus, and a small group of zombies surrounding him and groaning.

“Mikey?” he asked, looking up at him.

“Go away!” Mikey yelled, stretching out his hands and feeling power flow through him. The zombies shambled away, and Patrick slumped against the bus, breathing heavily before looking up accusingly at Mikey.

“Though you could only control the ones you made,” he said, glaring at him. Mikey really, desperately hoped that he wasn’t as red as his face felt hot.

“They were mine,” he said, “I’m so sorry, I just- I’m usually in control, it’s just sometimes if I feel a really strong surge of emotion…” he shrugged, and Patrick rolled his eyes, walking away.

Mikey closed his eyes, feeling Pete shake with laughter before he heard him.

“Shut up,” he said, not opening his eyes.

“A ‘strong surge of emotion’, that what the kids are calling it these days?” Pete asked.

“It hasn’t happened in a long time!” Mikey yelled, his cheeks burning with embarrassment.

“What, am I just that good?” he teased.
“Actually, yes,” Mikey said stiffly. Pete beamed.

“Come on,” Pete pulled him into a kiss, his eyes smoldering, “Let’s go raise the dead.”

***

There was a rule on the bus. A very important rule, one that Joe himself came up with: no sex on the bus when there were other people around.

Nobody followed the rule, not even Joe. They were in long distance relationships, though, and in general, they didn’t hold it against each other. The problem was that Mikey was on tour with them, and Joe really, really didn’t want to hear this. He was also, apparently, the only light sleeper in the band. Lucky bastards.

The upsides to being on Warped were pretty great, though. Frank turned out to be an excellent fighter with an axe, which was a weird lucky guess of Joe’s, and Mikey’s power, when in control, made them all but unstoppable. They were fighting more and better, and, aside from their fear of someone else in their band finding out, everything was going pretty smoothly.

That part Joe couldn’t imagine. It was hard to keep secrets from the people you live with, as he knew from experience with the whole werewolf thing, but that really only affected him once a month in the past. This was an entire double life.

Frank and Mikey didn’t seem to mind, though. In fact, much to Joe’s shock, one day Frank came knocking on the door of Fall Out Boy’s bus with an idea for a place to stake out.

“The next tour date’s in San Francisco, right?” he said, grinning ear to ear and bouncing. It took a long time for Frank to start opening up to them, but once he did, he was a really lively and smiley person for someone who looked so grim at first glance.

“I think so, why?” Joe asked.

“Colma, California is just twenty minutes south of us,” Frank said, grinning widely. “Where the dead outnumber the living by over a thousand to one. It’s a necropolis, and it might be our best bet in the country to find our graveyard sigil painter.”

Mikey didn’t really stiffen at the subject of the dead anymore, but his face did pinch slightly at the idea.

“A necropolis?” he said dubiously. He was lounging on the couch, draped over Pete’s lap, and half holding his hand, as though it were an afterthought. Pete squeezed his hand.

“Is it okay?” Pete asked. “It is a really good idea, you know.”

“Yeah, it should be fine,” Mikey said, biting his lip. “Just catch me if I faint or something.”

The next night they piled into a car, still not entirely legally, but neither Pete nor Mikey seemed to mind the seating arrangements. Colma, or “the city of souls” as all the signs leading in professed, wasn’t hard to find. Despite having a very small living population, it was a fairly popular tourist destination, so it seemed. They figured it would be best to go right after dark, which turned out to be a slight problem, since Fall Out Boy played one of the last shows of the day. It was pitch black by the time they made it to Colma, and whatever tourists might have visited the graves during the day had disappeared by night time.

“What now?” Patrick asked when they were inside city limits.
“There are sixteen cemeteries in town,” Frank said with a shrug. “Just find one and hope for the best?”

“Our kind of plan,” Pete said in a proud voice, and Patrick pulled into the first entrance he could find. It was eerie, looking around and seeing nothing but hills dotted with headstones as far as the eye could see. Joe was, frankly, getting really sick of cemeteries.

The second Mikey stepped out of the car, he swayed as though hit by a strong breeze, and grabbed the hood of the car for support.

“Whoa,” he said, staring at the ground.

“You okay?” Frank asked, and Mikey nodded, pushing himself back up.

“Just dizzy, I can handle it,” he said. Joe’s eyes flickered to Pete, who didn’t look too concerned, so hopefully he was telling the truth.

For once, though, the cemetery seemed to just be a cemetery. They wandered around for a bit, because it was a pretty big plot of land, but Andy said nothing seemed out of the ordinary.

“Next cemetery?” Frank asked.

“We can’t look at all sixteen,” Mikey said, “We have to get back to the bus pretty soon. They’ll be packing up now.”

“We’ll do our best to make it fast then,” Patrick said, and maybe Joe imagined it, but he thought that Patrick sounded a little bit sour.

They breezed through two more cemeteries, and at the fourth, Andy paused once he got out of the car, a concerned look on his face.

“Blood?” Joe asked, and Andy shook his head.

“No, listen, someone’s talking,” he said. Joe knew Andy was just speaking to him, and he paused, trying to hear past the breathing of their group. It would be easier in a different form, but they weren’t that close to Frank yet, so he just listened. He could hear the rushing of cars on the freeway, some crickets chirping, and then, very faintly, the sound of someone speaking.

Whoever it was had a harsh sounding voice, but it was too far away to make out the words he was saying. Joe frowned.

“I can hear it, but I don’t know what it is,” he said at last.

“It’s English, but not modern English,” Andy said. “Old English, I think, but I can’t understand most of it. We need to get closer.”

It wasn’t the safest course of action, but, Joe reasoned, there were six of them, all weapon wielding if you counted supernatural powers, so it felt safe enough. They walked deeper into the graveyard, where trees grew thick, their limbs heavy with Spanish moss that left Joe’s visibility impaired, as though they were walking through a forest draped in curtains to form a maze. The night was a velvety black, and the louder the voices grew, the softer the sounds of crickets and cicadas were.
They eventually came to a small break in the trees, where a tall mausoleum stood, a faint, flickering glow emanating from within, and the voice much stronger now. Joe pulled himself behind the trunk of a tree, everyone else following his lead.

It was hard to distinguish the words, but one modern word that came up repeatedly was “murmur”, repeated at what sounded like the beginning and end of sentences in an almost reverent tone.

“What’s this about?” Pete whispered to Joe. Joe shrugged.

“Satanism? Who knows,” he said in a quiet voice as well, way too quiet to be heard from that distance, but a girl’s voice from inside the mausoleum suddenly hissed “Someone’s out there!”

“What?” the male voice snapped, louder but not shouting. “Does it matter? People come to cemeteries all the time.”

“They’re watching us,” the girl whispered.

“Hmm,” the man said, then chuckled. “I have an idea. Why don’t you come in?” he called, and Joe stiffened.

“Does he mean us?” Pete asked, and Joe nodded tersely.

“Really, come in!” he called again, and Joe met Andy’s eyes. Andy shrugged, and Joe shrugged back, but took a step out into the light and walked forward, hearing with relief that the others were following him.

Joe entered the mausoleum first, seeing the man and woman standing next to each other. They looked enough alike to be twins, if the man hadn’t been a quite a few years older. They still both looked quite young, with smooth skin and thick, dark brown hair.

The next thing Joe noticed was the floor, with a large circle painted in bright red on the concrete, and an X inside of it, and a four symbols in the spaces of the X. The man was bandaging up his arm, so it must have been fairly recent.

“So,” the guy smiled a friendly smile, “mind telling me why you guys are spying on us?”

“We’ve seen a few of those,” Joe said, gesturing at the circle on the ground. “We wanted to know what it was about.”

“And what luck that you found us,” the guy said with a smirk. “It’s the seal of Murmur, if you must know.”

“Murmur?” Joe asked.

“Great Duke of Hell,” the man said, his voice patient. “His charges include philosophy, vultures, and lost souls, and we,” he gestured to the girl and back, “are here to summon him.”

“And you invited us in to share the good news?” Joe asked.

“I mean, now that you mention it, I’ve been thinking that we’re going about this all wrong,” the man said, “We’ve been using our own blood, but none of us have died. And since Murmur is a demon of the dead, it only makes sense to give him a sacrifice, since a sacrifice just walked into our summoning anyway.”
“I think you’re a bit outnumbered,” Joe noted in a monotone.

“Not quite,” the man said. “My sister is a bit stronger than you might think,” he said, and the girl ran forward, grabbing Pete by the shirt and keeping her fangs poised by his throat. A vampire, Joe realized, would definitely be able to hear them from such a distance.

“We’re not exactly what we look like either,” Mikey said, and just behind the girl, a corpse burst from its coffin, and wrapped its arm around her yanking her back and making her let go of Pete.

“You picked a bad sacrifice,” Joe noted, feeling confident. Before he could say something else or knock the man out, the girl ripped away from the corpse’s hold, lunging forward again at all of them, the man running forward as well, when something slammed into her from behind them, knocking her back just slightly, someone Joe only faintly recognized.

Andy ripped a piece of wood from the coffin and held it poised just above her heart. She whimpered and held still.

“You- how could you-?!?” the man stuttered, and Joe pushed him up into the wall, growling.

“You’re going to get out of here,” Joe said. “Stop trying to summon this thing, and if we ever catch wind of either of you trying to hurt someone again, we won’t be so merciful.”

They both nodded, and Joe turned around to see two extra men standing in the entryway of the mausoleum, and Frank moaned when he saw them.

“Hey guys?” Mikey gave a little wave. “Um, guys, meet Bob and Ray,” he gestured, “and that’s Pete, Patrick, Joe, and Andy.”

“That was a zombie,” Ray said faintly.

“And a vampire,” Mikey sounded apologetic. “Thanks for tackling her, by the way,” he said to Bob.

“I tackled a vampire?” Bob sounded baffled by the prospect.

“And it helped a lot,” Mikey said.

“Did you do that zombie thing?” Bob asked. Ray still looked mostly speechless.

“Yes, yeah, I’m a necromancer, sometimes I raise the dead, Gerard is one too but he thinks we shouldn’t use our powers and that’s what we’ve been arguing about so please don’t mention this to him,” Mikey spat out in a rush.

“Maybe we ought to take this outside,” Joe suggested, gesturing to the two still pressed against the back wall of the mausoleum. The eight of them began walking back to where Patrick had parked, and Mikey set about explaining what had been happening in more detail.

Joe hung back towards his band, where he overheard Pete and Patrick talking.

“Everything alright?” Pete asked, swinging Patrick’s hand back and forth out of habit. Patrick carefully extracted his fingers from Pete’s grasp, shrugging a little, but still looking dejected.

“Yeah, nothing big,” he said. “You know me, not a big vampire fan. And Anna and I have been fighting, but nothing big.”
“Need some guy time?” Pete asked.

“You’re not too busy?” Patrick asked. His tone was meant to be teasing, but underneath it Joe could hear a bit of spite that shocked him.

“Never too busy for you,” Pete said, elbowing Patrick in the side. “We’ll dedicate night after tomorrow to watching Ghostbusters.”

Patrick smiled a much more genuine smile, and Joe yawned theatrically.

“Our driver’s gonna be pissed,” he said, and Pete laughed.

“Yeah, well, we’re always late,” he said. “And hey, now you don’t have to worry about making your band worry, huh Mikey?” he said, and Mikey shot him a pained look.

“What bugs me is that those can’t be the same people making all the other sigils,” Andy said, and Joe turned to him in confusion.

“It can’t be?” he asked, and Andy shook his head.

“For one, his blood smelled different than the other stuff. And for another, she’s a vampire, and it’s summertime. Gina said they went outside during the day, so that couldn’t have been her.”

“So how many people do you think are a part of this?” Frank asked.

“I don’t know,” Andy said. “It’s not like we can check every cemetery in the world, but we should keep an eye out for it.”

“Absolutely,” Pete agreed.

Back out at the parking lot, with the comforting sound of the interstate roaring in the distance, Joe felt much more safe, and had almost forgot about the others until Bob turned on him.

“So you all just- fight monsters?” he asked.

“I mean, we’re also in a band,” Joe said.

“You’re not gonna tell Gerard, right?” Mikey asked.

“Fuck no,” Bob said, “he’d kill me.” Everyone turned to Ray, who looked worried.

“I guess not,” he said. “This just seems like a really bad idea to me.”

“Don’t worry,” Mikey said, “Nothing that bad’s happened yet.”

“I mean, the chupacabra bite had me limping for a few days, but that’s the worst,” Frank agreed.

“Chupacabra bite,” Ray turned his head up and stared at the sky. “Okay. Okay. Fine. At least let me come and help out.”

“I could probably help you guys fight too,” Bob added.

“We’re gonna need a second car,” Patrick said, the corner of his lips twisting up.

Frank offered to ride back with Ray and Bob, and they looked at Mikey for a second, but
Mikey insisted that it was fine, getting back in Fall Out Boy’s car. Joe thought he saw the flicker of something almost like betrayal on Ray’s face, but it was gone before he could look too closely.

Joe drove them back, with Patrick claiming to be tired and sitting in the back with Pete and Mikey. The ride back was quiet and very nearly put Joe to sleep as well, but they made it back to where Warped had been set up, and to where a very angry manager was waiting for his car back.

They stumbled back to the bus, Patrick whining about the waking up in the morning that Warped Tour forced him into.

Joe fell promptly asleep, but the next day, all but one member of My Chemical Romance came onto their bus to strategize.

“Is Gerard just not going to notice that you’re all missing?” Joe asked. All of them laughed at him.

“He’s on a drawing kick,” Bob explained, seeming the most sympathetic to not understanding why they were laughing. “The only thing we have to worry about right now is that if the bus catches fire, he might not notice in time to get off.”

“Of course,” Joe said, deciding to act like that was a perfectly normal excuse.

That day, the eight of them went down to a nearby cemetery around noon, since they were both playing later that night. This cemetery looked downright tame compared to the others, and according to Andy, didn’t even have old blood spilled in it.

Bob and Ray seemed eager to get in on the action, but Andy suggested they take a break for the night. After all, he reminded them, they shouldn’t antagonize the bus drivers too much, or go looking for trouble when there was none.

Nobody in My Chemical Romance seemed very inclined to listen, however, and that night they went into the nearest city, where Bob and Ray got the chance to help them corner a pack of werewolves and warn them against trying to turn a girl.

Allies, Joe decided, were exhausting to work with, but it made them a lot more formidable.

***

“Hey, Mikey?” Gerard said, and Mikey nearly jumped out of his skin. He’d been on his way to go spend the rest of the night after the werewolf incident with Pete, and just had to come back to pick up some clean clothes and a toothbrush when Gerard caught him, looking at him with more clarity than Mikey had seen all tour.

“Yeah?” Mikey said, nervous tension rushing through him. There was no way he knew what was happening, Mikey knew, no way Gerard would stay that calm if he suspected the truth.

“Sorry, you on your way out?” Gerard asked.

“Yeah, I’m, uh, staying on a friend’s bus,” Mikey said. He wasn’t lying, he tried to remind himself. Technically.

“Oh, a friend?” Gerard asked, his eyes glinting as he gave Mikey a knowing smile. “What’s her name?”

“His,” Mikey corrected. To Gerard’s credit, he didn’t miss a beat, just gave Mikey an almost
impressed smile before saying: “You can do that on a bunk?”

“Do you want me to explain how it works?” Mikey said, and Gerard reflexively covered his ears.

“Gross, no,” he said, shaking his head. “Wait, can I meet him?”

“Now?” Mikey asked, and Gerard shrugged.

“Whenever,” he said, “You could bring him over tomorrow, watch a movie.”

“He’s never seen Night of the Living Dead all the way through,” Mikey admitted, and Gerard looked aghast.

“Bring him over,” he said, before turning back to his sketchpad. Mikey walked over to Pete’s bus, guilt gnawing away at his stomach.

The second Pete had Mikey pulled into his bunk, Mikey blurted out “So Gerard wants to meet you.”

Pete’s lips froze, then pulled back.

“He does?” Pete asked.

“Yeah,” Mikey said with forced cheeriness, “Meet you, watch a horror movie, typical stuff.”

Pete seemed to grasp the gravity of the situation pretty quickly, and to Mikey’s relief, nodded with a small smile.

“It’ll be nice to meet him,” Pete said. “When are we doing it?”

“Tomorrow night, thanks Pete,” Mikey said. Pete stiffened for a moment, but relaxed again.

“Where were we?” he asked, catching Mikey’s mouth on his.

The next night, Mikey introduced Pete and Gerard, still calling Pete his friend. Truth be told, he wasn’t sure what to call Pete. He wasn’t quite his boyfriend, but he was obviously more than a friend.

Pete and Gerard seemed to like each other, but in a distant way, having very little direct interaction throughout the night, but remaining pleasant and cordial the entire time in a way that Mikey was grateful to see didn’t feel forced. Pete fell asleep three quarters of the way through the movie, but Gerard didn’t look mortally offended.

Mikey didn’t have the heart to wake Pete, peaceful as he looked, but the rocking of the bus must have woken him up, because Pete woke up an hour or so later, blinking and bewildered.

“Where are we?” he asked groggily.

“My bus,” Mikey said, playing with Pete’s hair.

“We’re moving,” Pete said, and Mikey nodded.

“You fell asleep,” he said, quietly, soothingly. But Pete shot up and gave Mikey a horrified look.
“Wait, no, I should be on my bus,” he said.

“Sorry, I didn’t want to wake you,” Mikey said. “You’ll be back in the morning, is that okay?”

“I just… had plans tonight,” Pete said, but he laid back down on Mikey’s lap, and soon Mikey fell asleep on top of him.

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Warped Tour was, in Patrick’s opinion, one of the worst fucking things he had ever endured in his life. It didn’t even count as an album tour which meant even more time away from Anna being unable to patch up all the holes that distance put in their relationship. It was hot all the time, there were too many sweaty people everywhere. He had to wake up at nine or earlier every single morning. They kept running into issues with blood. And he could have handled all of that if he had been able to whine to Pete.

But Pete hadn’t been around. At all. He spent every free second he had with Mikey, teaching him how to fight, talking to him about the B grade horror he had never given a shit about pre-Mikey. Fucking at all hours of the night. Patrick couldn’t see auras the way Pete could, but he imagined that his own was probably getting duller and duller as the summer wore into him.

Patrick probably shouldn’t have been shocked that Pete had ditched on a night of Ghostbusters to spend the night with Mikey, but he was, and it still stung. He couldn’t even really laugh at it, because there was something inherently depressing about laughing at a comedy alone.

Pete came back really early the next morning, though, asking if they could make it up that night, and Patrick definitely should have seen that saying yes again would be a bad idea, something that became obvious when Mikey showed up at Pete’s side.

“Hey. Mikey.” Patrick’s voice sounded horribly awkward and stilted, even to himself, so he tried to force a smile. He was really starting to hate Mikey’s stupid face, the way it was flat but still managed to be scrunched looking. A rat’s face, his mom would have called it.

At the last second, Patrick pulled out Young Frankenstein in lieu of Ghostbusters. Just in case. If Mikey didn’t like Ghostbusters, Patrick wasn’t sure his will was strong enough to listen to that bastard insulting it.

Throughout the entire movie, which they’d all apparently seen before, Mikey kept talking, about the director, it’s strange amount of faithfulness to the original novel, how the special effects were done. It was all relatively interesting information, but he talked his way through all the best dialogue, until three quarters of the way through the movie, Patrick just started saying “Shh!” without looking over at him.

Trying to talk after the movie was an unmitigated disaster.

“What’s your girlfriend like?” Mikey asked.

“Fine?” Patrick said, the question seeming strangely stupid to him. “Female? She has short hair, she’s going to college, pretty great, I think. I wouldn’t date her otherwise.”

“Is it ever scary fighting all these monsters while being the only human?” he tried again. It wasn’t Mikey’s fault that he had touched a nerve, but he had.

“Nah, the kidnap and torture gets pretty boring pretty fast,” he said sarcastically, taking a
drink. He just wanted this conversation to be over so he could go back to moping. Being alone was better than trying to hang out with Pete like this.

“Mikey’s got a weird obsession with X-Men too,” Pete said, giving Patrick a warning look that made him want to light himself on fire. So Pete was pissed with him?

“Hugh Jackman makes a pretty badass Wolverine, yeah?” Mikey sounded weary.

“Totally,” Patrick said with the best fake enthusiasm he could muster.

“You ever read the comic books?” Mikey asked.

Why did everything he said sound like nails on the chalkboard for Patrick? “A few,” he said shortly.

Eventually, Mikey said it was getting late and that he should be getting back onto his bus, and the second he left their bus, Pete turned on Patrick.

“What the fuck was that about?” Pete demanded. Patrick stared at the ceiling. He was exhausted, craving liquor, and he really did not want to hear Pete’s voice.

“What the fuck was what about?” he asked tonelessly.

“Why were you being a fucking asshole?” Pete asked.

“I’m always an asshole,” Patrick rolled his eyes. “Do I read the comics? Jesus Christ.”

“He was trying to be nice,” Pete hissed. “What the hell were you doing?”

“I was also trying to be nice!” Patrick yelled, slamming his head into the wall behind the booth he was sitting at the table in the lounge.

“You’re not lying,” Pete said, sounding disgusted, “That’s even worse.”

“How is it worse?!” Patrick roared. “I was trying! What more do you want from me!”

“I want you to act like he didn’t murder your family! He’s a good guy!” Pete yelled.

Patrick wanted to scream that he was having a bad night. Bad summer. But he was too angry to be reasonable.

“Should I suck his dick like you do?” he demanded, and Pete recoiled, looking angrier.

“Is that the problem? Is that a problem for you?” Pete asked.

“No!” Patrick screamed. He didn’t want to fight, he wanted to cry, but he wasn’t going to start here. “I don’t care if you’re fucking girls or boys or martians, but I’m having a hell of a summer and I wanted to hang out with you, not your know-it-all, walking movie reference, damsel in distress of a second head!”

“He’s a decent person, apparently unlike you,” Pete said.

“Apparently unlike both of us,” Patrick said, “So tell me, what should I do to make sure I don’t hurt the fragile princess’s feelings next time?”

“Fuck off!” Pete yelled, his face red with rage. And the sheer amount of hatred in his voice,
directed at Patrick for once, made the rest of Patrick’s rage shrivel up and die. “FUCK OFF!” Pete yelled again, looking almost like he was going to start crying.

So Patrick stood up, walked into the back room, grabbed a heavy box out from under his bed and walked off the bus, his shoulders hanging in a dejected slump. He trudged over to where he knew My Chemical Romance’s bus was and kicked at the door, since he didn’t have a free hand.

Mikey opened the door, and Patrick only felt worse when he saw a flicker of hurt cross over Mikey’s face. Patrick sighed and shoved the large cardboard box into Mikey’s arms, making him stagger at the sudden weight.

“X-Men comics,” Patrick said, nodding to the box with a hollow voice. “I figured I could let you borrow them, since you like X-Men.”

He didn’t have it in him for an apology more formal than that, so he turned around while Mikey was still stuttering his thanks, and walked back onto his bus. Pete tried to ask where he had gone, what was in the box, was he okay, but Patrick ignored him and went straight to his bunk, lying down and safety pinning the curtains to the sheets so that no one could pull them back.

The next afternoon, after they had played yet another morning show, he holed up in his bunk while he heard everyone in My Chemical Romance gathering in the lounge, chattering about the cemetery they were visiting that day that was just outside of the venue, the city they were visiting that night to patrol for vampires, all the cool new issues of X-Men they were reading.

Andy came into the back to ask Patrick if he was coming, and Patrick, grateful that Andy had asked rather than Pete, said that he felt sick and they could go on without him. Soon after, the noise on the bus disappeared, leaving him in darkness and silence.

It was probably pretty stupid of Patrick to be upset that Pete hadn’t tried to ask him one more time if everything was all right.

Eventually tired of moping around, Patrick dragged himself out of the bus, wandering around Warped tour to watch some of the performances or buy overpriced food or something. Nothing really killed the festival mood, he thought, like being a part of it.

Patrick had been wandering around aimlessly for half an hour or so, ending up at the very outskirts of the festival, he accidentally ran face first into another man.

“Oh!” the guy yelled, stumbling backwards with a hand on his head. He had sort of greasy looking black hair, and really weird eye makeup, and oh. This was the infamous Gerard Way.

“Sorry, wasn’t watching where I was going,” Patrick said. Gerard was shorter than he’d expected.

“It’s fine, my bad too,” Gerard said good naturedly. He then frowned. “This is gonna sound weird, but have you seen the rest of my band?”

“Ha!” Patrick laughed, rolling his eyes. “They’re with the rest of my band, like fucking always.”

“What, international ditch your lead singer day?” Gerard laughed, but still looked a little upset. “I haven’t seen them around a lot recently.”

“Don’t worry,” Patrick sighed. “They’re off having adventures, making out with each other, whatever.”
“You sound upset,” Gerard said.

“Just an off-week. Or year,” Patrick added as an afterthought. He was about to excuse himself when he heard Pete scream, faint and piercing, crying out Mikey’s name from a distance.

“Pete!” Patrick gasped.

“Mikey? Did he say Mikey?” Gerard asked, but Patrick was already sprinting towards where he heard it.

Past a line of tall, scraggly trees, the two bands came slowly into Patrick’s vision, along with a group of people, all wearing black ski masks and all trying to get to Mikey. They were obviously outnumbered, and two of them grabbed Pete, starting to drag him away, when Pete screamed Mikey’s name again, hoarse and desperate.

“Please!” Pete yelled, and Mikey froze, closing his eyes and pulling his hands into fists. Not a second later, as Patrick skidded into the clearing, zombies began crawling out of the ground, five, ten, over a dozen pulling themselves out and grabbing the people in masks and pulling them further back into the forest.

“How far away can you get them?” Pete asked Mikey breathlessly. Mikey was trembling with exertion, and he shook his head.

“Not far enough, we should get back to the rest of the tour,” he said, face scrunched up in pain. As they began to turn towards Patrick, everyone stilled, and Frank inhaled sharply. Patrick turned around and saw that Gerard was standing behind him, mouth hanging open in disbelief. Mikey looked at him, then shook his head.

“We’ll talk in a second, we need to get out of here!” he said, and began walking forward, brushing past Gerard, and everyone else followed suit.

A few yards from the nearest bus, Mikey must have released the zombies, because he collapsed on the ground, breathing heavily. He looked up at Gerard, and pulled himself slowly to his feet.

“I would tell you I can explain this, but it’s a really long story and you don’t look like you want to hear it,” Mikey said miserably.

“They know? They all know?” Gerard asked in quiet disbelief.

Mikey nodded. “I’ve been helping them, Fall Out Boy, that is, fight monsters for a while! Last summer was the first time,” he admitted. “But I’m getting better at it, really, I can control it, and I’ve helped a lot!”

“You all do this?” Gerard asked the rest of his band quietly. Patrick took a step back. For someone of his stature, Gerard was very intimidating.

“We fight monsters! Save the world!” Mikey said, giving Gerard a hopeful smile. This seemed to crack his calm mask.

“Do you want to know why we can’t do this? Why we can’t ever use our power?” Gerard shrieked. His eyes were blazing, and Mikey was trembling. Patrick’s fingers twitched, and he looked away from the scene as he tried to convince himself that interrupting them would make it worse.

“I know why,” Mikey whispered.
“No! You don’t!” Gerard was shaking too, out of rage rather than fear. “You know it’s dangerous, but you have no idea! To reanimate a corpse we drag what remains of their soul back into their bodies until we release them, did you know that?”

“I didn’t know,” Mikey whispered.

“It’s evil! It’s disgusting! It’s wrong!” Gerard yelled. “We’re hurting them, and they’re hurting us! Or did you think you would seem cool by not mentioning how much it’s draining you, how much strain it puts on you?”

“It- it doesn’t hurt as much anymore, if you just practice-!” Mikey began, only to be stopped again.

“We don’t PRACTICE!” Gerard screamed. “IT’S NOT A TOY. IT’S NOT A SUPERPOWER. IT SHOULD ONLY BE USED IN LIFE OR DEATH SCENARIOS.”

“It IS life or death!” Mikey said, “Maybe not for me, but for someone! I’m trying to help people!”

“No you’re not,” Gerard stepped closer, and Patrick inhaled sharply when he looked down. The grass under Gerard’s feet was dying, turning brown and shriveling up in a circle expanding slowly from where he stood. Patrick tried to elbow Bob, point to the ground, but Bob pushed his arm down gently. There was another, much smaller circle of dying grass spreading from Mikey’s feet as well.

“You’re doing this for yourself,” Gerard’s voice had grown quiet, still pulsing with power, nothing like charmspeak, much darker, much richer, like wine. “You’re doing this because you want to be a superhero, because you want glory. But superheroes don’t kill everything they touch!” his voice cracked at the end of the sentence. The patch of dead grass around Gerard had now spread out so far that it surrounded Mikey, the two irregular circles were getting wider and were creeping ever closer to Pete, but Patrick was terrified to say something in the middle of Gerard’s tirade.

“It doesn’t have to be like that,” Mikey said, his voice barely audible. “I’ve saved people.”

“And how many souls did you torture to do it?” Gerard asked. “How many drinks did it take to recover?”

“It’s not like that!” Mikey protested, slightly louder.

“This isn’t up for debate!” Gerard said.

“You can’t just blindly obey forever!” Mikey was yelling now. “It’s a different time, we’re different people!”

Patrick’s eyes were trained on the expanding circles of shadow, so close to touching Pete’s feet. At the last second, Pete took a step back at the sound of Mikey yelling, pushing him a little further away. Patrick breathed a quick sigh of relief, short lived.

A gurgling noise came from the other side of the loose circle of people surrounding the Way brothers, and Patrick’s head snapped to the side to see Ray as he fell to his knees, clutching at his throat.

Mikey instantly stepped back from Gerard, eyes wide, and the shadow that surrounded him snapped back inwards, some of the grass springing back to life. Gerard froze, eyes trained on Ray as he gagged, his skin turning gray. Gerard was still as a statue, but the shadow around him seemed to
get darker, the soil under his feet drying up and cracking. Everyone else seemed to get the message and step back, but Mikey grabbed Gerard’s shoulders.

“Gee!” he whispered, “Come on, look at me!”

Gerard turned to Mikey, and Mikey nodded at him.

“Pull it back in,” he said, still quiet, “You have to pull it back, okay?”

Gerard’s hands were shaking badly, but he closed his eyes and clenched his fists. The circle began to pull back, leaving Ray behind and dragging inward, leaving bright green grass where death had been moments ago. Ray coughed, color rising in his cheeks again, and Frank pulled him up into a standing position, rubbing circles in his back.

Mikey ran over to Ray, looking into his eyes one at a time, and set about inspecting him like a patient in a doctor’s office. And then Pete opened his mouth.

“See! You can control it with practice!” Pete said, clearly trying to be encouraging. Oh Jesus, Patrick wanted to be anywhere but there. He wanted Pete to just keep his fucking mouth shut for once. Wasn’t he supposed to be good at sensing other people’s emotions?

“Pete, right?” Gerard asked. Acid was dripping out of his voice, but there was also a level of careful control to it, and Patrick couldn’t see anything dying nearby this time.

“Yeah, that’s me,” Pete said. He pushed his shoulders back and puffed his chest up as Gerard stepped way too close to him.

“You and my brother are, what, fucking?” Gerard asked.

“I don’t see how your brother’s sex life is any of your business,” Pete said, much more cool than Patrick knew he felt.

“Fine, whatever,” Gerard said, “But whatever you are to him, maybe you should stop filling his head full of idiotic theories on something you know jack shit about.”

“My idiotic theories are working pretty well for him,” Pete said. His voice was level, but Patrick could see anger flaring up behind his eyes.

“If he had never met you, none of this would have ever happened,” Gerard growled. “And you’re going to stay the hell away from him.”

“Mikey’s not twelve, he can decide for himself who he wants to spend time with,” Pete said, leaning up on the balls of his feet to look Gerard in the eye.

“Not when it involves necromancy,” Gerard said, fists still clenched, his teeth still tightly gritted. “You can get your own friends killed with your stupid misconceptions of heroism, but you leave mine out of it!”

With that, Gerard turned on his heels and stormed in the opposite direction. He muttered something to Mikey and Ray, and they followed him, Mikey throwing Pete one apologetic glance, and Frank and Bob followed after them. There were two coal black footprints on the ground, just in front of Pete.

The four of them that remained were dead silent. The air felt like it had dropped twenty degrees in the time that elapsed after the other band walked away. After far too long, Patrick
attempted to crack open the silence.

“So, that was awful,” he said with a false bravado. Pete turned to face him, and he looked angry and betrayed.

“Did you bring Gerard here?” he asked. Patrick felt like he had been kicked in the ribs by Pete’s words.

“I- well, yes, but-” he began.

“Knowing full well what would happen?” Pete asked. His words felt sharp, like they were scratching at Patrick’s skin painfully.

“No!” Patrick said, “I mean, I knew what would happen if he knew, but I didn’t- I wasn’t trying to sabotage you!” he said. He thought Pete’s innate ability to know the truth would be on his side, but Pete only seemed to get angrier.

“Then what? To ruin Mikey’s life? Because of your weird hatred of him?”

“No!” Patrick pleaded. His eyes stung, and his chest felt like it had collapsed on himself.

“We were just talking, and he asked where Mikey was, and I said probably with you, and then I heard you scream and took off running without realizing he was following me!”

“I don’t believe you,” Pete said coldly.

“How can you not?!” Patrick yelled, “You’re a walking lie detector!”

“The truth can be bent,” Pete spat, and he walked away without giving Patrick a chance to respond. Patrick stood there, dumbstruck and embarrassed for reasons he couldn’t explain.

“He’s upset,” Andy said after a second, “He’ll come around.”

“Sure,” Patrick said, “Thanks.” His voice fell flat and toneless. With nothing else left to do, he went back to the bus after Pete. Pete’s bunk’s curtains were drawn, and, trying to put as much distance between them as possible, Patrick curled up on the couch in the lounge, plugged in his headphones, and turned the music up as loud as he could stand.

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The stiff silence had not lasted long. Once they were back on their own bus, away from the prying eyes of everyone else on Warped Tour, Gerard had exploded again.

Mikey’s throat was hoarse from yelling, and he could see the rest of their band was afraid. Fear seemed to him to be a pretty strange emotion, but Mikey guessed he could understand it. He and Gerard had never behaved like normal siblings, they didn’t fight, they didn’t have a typical love-hate family relationship, and they had only ever bickered before this. It was confusing for Mikey too.

“You are not going to do something like this again! And you are not going to go see Pete again.” Gerard yelled, saying Pete’s name venomously. Mikey scoffed.

“Are you grounding me?” he asked, still far louder than he was used to talking.

“Call it what you want, you’re not seeing him again!” Gerard said.

“You’re being a fucking psycho, and you have absolutely no say in who I spend my time with!” Mikey said.
“I have say in it when you’re jeopardizing other people’s lives!” Gerard yelled.

“You’re the reason they were with me!” Mikey yelled, waving his arm over at the rest of the band, who all turned away abruptly, Ray taking a step back. Gerard’s face scrunched up in confusion.

“Yeah, they’re not afraid of what I can do!” Mikey said, a feeling slightly darker than triumph rising in his chest. “They were afraid of you! Afraid of this!” Some sick part of him, usually deep down, was rising to the surface, getting pleasure at the pain on Gerard’s face.

“I’m trying to keep people safe,” Gerard growled.

“I’m not trying to keep people safe, I’m doing it!” Mikey declared. “I’ve done it! I got tired of being scared of myself, when will that happen to you?”

“This isn’t who we are,” Gerard snarled. He stepped closer, jabbing his finger into Mikey’s chest. “Maybe it’s who you are, but I’m not like this. Evil.”

“Power isn’t evil, what you do with it is,” Mikey said, his voice levelling somewhat.

“You sound like a comic book villain,” Gerard said derisively.

“Everything’s a fucking comic book in your eyes,” Mikey sneered. “I’m not talking about this anymore if you aren’t going to listen.”

“You’re not going to see Fall Out Boy anymore,” Gerard said. His eyes had gone hard.

“Try and stop me!” Mikey challenged him.

“See him one more time and I’ll kick you out of this fucking band!”

The worst thing about tour buses, Mikey decided, was that there were no doors to slam. Angrily shutting a curtain didn’t really adequately demonstrate his feelings.

And then, once he was locked away in his bunk, with angry tears streaming from his eyes, he just felt stupid. Like a little kid made to stand in the corner. But it was the only place he had that he didn’t have to share with anyone else, so he lay there, ignoring everyone that tried talking to him and holding the curtain firmly shut, only feeling more and more infantile.

Eventually, the bus grew silent, and the sound of snoring filled the back room. Mikey still couldn’t sleep, even when the bus finally rolled to a halt somewhere new. The sound of something light pattering on the side of the bus was now almost lulling him to sleep. Maybe it would be raining, he thought. That would be nice.

The tapping noise was very on and off, however, and only lasted a minute before Mikey’s cell phone screen lit up.

“open ur window & sneak out already juliet, im out of rocks”
As always, thanks for reading! I had a lot of fun writing this chapter and I can't wait to give you guys part two at the end of November! Special thanks to maniccrocodilian who read it over for me to make sure I didn't make any horrible errors (which is good because I DID) and to the AMAZING fan art and fan edit made by silence-of-the-graham and somefandomquote, respectively. You can view both of them on the story blog, thehigh-waytohell.tumblr.com.

More petekey/peterick drama to follow- let me know what you think of it in the comments!
Thanks so much for reading! <3
Chapter Title by My Chemical Romance
The Jetset Life Is Gonna Kill You

Chapter Summary

The adventures of My Chemical Romance and Fall Out Boy continue on Warped Tour! Eager to learn how to fight monsters, Ray, Bob, and Frank help keep Mikey's secret so that they can all sneak out to hunt cryptids and search for more answers about the mysterious cult of Murmur. But their research may be more involved than they first think...

Chapter Notes

Hi there. Sorry for the delay. Wrote all night, my brain is fried, but trigger warnings for homophobic slurs, blood, gore, demon possession, and sex. Also, this is a really long chapter, so sorry? Maybe not sorry? This chapter is like 20,000 words so... yeah.

Side note: All the cemeteries mentioned in this chapter are true, and I highly mention searching The Angel of Death Victorious when you reach that part of the story. A picture's worth a thousand words, as they say.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Pete and Mikey picked up right where they left off. The moment Mikey was outside the tour bus, Pete’s hands were roaming all over him, fingertips pressing into his skin and lips pressing into his neck.

“Hi,” Pete giggled into his ear, sounding almost drunk. Mikey let out a short bark of laughter, leaning into Pete’s arms.

“Hey there,” he murmured. He brushed a piece of Pete’s hair behind his ear and smiled at him fondly. Pete was beaming up at Mikey like they hadn’t spoken in years rather than hours.

“I missed you,” Pete said, and began dragging Mikey away from Mikey’s bus, before Mikey tugged him back.


“What, are you grounded?” he asked, and Mikey’s face twisted.

“Apparently,” he said, rolling his eyes.

“You’re an adult,” Pete said, echoing Mikey from the night before. “He can’t control what you do, can he?”

“So what do you suggest?” Mikey asked.

“Break the rules anyway,” Pete said, an impish grin glittering on his face in the faint light of dawn. Mikey glanced at his bus, then back at Pete, feeling his heartbeat pick up in the way that
“I’m gonna need a good excuse,” he warned.

“We’ll think of one later,” Pete promised, and they ran off.

Back on Pete’s bus, Mikey fucked Pete into the flimsy mattress, and Pete was incredibly vocal about his enjoyment. Joe yelled at them to shut up, that it was too damn early for this shit, and Mikey felt another rush of joy surge through him when he realized that he could recognize Joe’s voice without seeing him. That they were past being polite.

When he and Pete got up to get a breakfast of cold pizza, Mikey couldn’t fight off the overwhelming sense of belonging. If only, he thought, he played guitar rather than bass. Involving Frank and the others had made things complicated, but he on his own could run away with Fall Out Boy. Learn how his powers worked without trying to hide from Gerard. He could fight monsters. He wouldn’t have to be everyone’s little brother anymore.

Mikey didn’t mention a word of it to Pete. He was starting to get the sense that if he told Pete he had a vague inclination to go to the moon, he would come back the next day to see a half built rocket ship and a friend-of-a-friend astrophysicist prepping them for flight. Not that Mikey didn’t love that Pete was larger than life, but sometimes it was exhausting.

The sun was high in the sky by the time Mikey and Pete had finished their leisurely breakfast, one of Pete’s hands constantly tracing the contours of Mikey’s arm the entire time. When Mikey looked at the time, he jumped. Nearly time to go get their band’s time. They had to be awake.

“I have to go!” he said, yanking his arm away from Pete’s hand and jumping to his feet. Pete caught sight of the time and swore in response.

“You’ll be okay?” he asked worriedly, and Mikey snorted and rolled his eyes.

“Worst case scenario is I get cussed out,” Mikey said, but still felt nervous, even though he knew what he said was true. He hated fighting with Gerard. He threw the door open to sprint across the field, and ended up tumbling into Bob.

“Hey Mikey!” Frank said cheerfully, and the two of them walked him right back onto Fall Out Boy’s bus.

“You could knock,” Patrick muttered sourly, not looking up at the dirty glare Pete shot at him, but collapsing on the couch instead.

“Gerard’s already up, but we have Ray distracting him,” Frank said to Mikey, then turned to Pete, letting his eyes flicker to the rest of the band, who must have followed Patrick out of the back room. “We want to talk.”

“Okay?” Pete said, looking about as taken aback as Mikey felt.

“We’ll help cover for you and Mikey and you can teach us how to fight monsters,” Frank said, Bob shrugging in affirmation behind him.

“Seriously?” Pete asked. Frank looked disappointed, and though Bob was less easy to read, he seemed a little put out as well. Pete backtracked. “I mean, sorry, it’s not a no, it’s just we’ve never…”

“Never taught other people how to fight before,” Joe finished, leaning up against a wall.
“It’s not like we have much of a technique. And we mostly rely on extra abilities, I’m not sure how well it would work for humans.”

“I’m human!” Patrick snapped. Mikey had been making an effort not to look at him, but he was glaring at the floor with a frightening amount of venom in his eyes.

“Are you the only one?” Bob asked, and Patrick nodded curtly.

“Why the hell not?” Pete said, grinning up at them. “We’d be glad to.”

“Excellent!” Frank said.

“Should we head back?” Mikey asked, somewhat baffled by the conversation. Bob and Frank nodded, and they headed back for their bus, the two of them chattering excitedly about monster fighting. Maybe Mikey wasn’t the only one that felt stifled in their band.

Once they met up with Gerard, they were grilled about their location, but all three of them swore up and down that they were off visiting another band, until eventually Gerard let it go. The tour was going to get more complicated, but at least it wasn’t over. As Ray snuck him a conspiratorial grin, Mikey felt a matching smirk growing on his face. Things were going to get pretty interesting around there.

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Patrick was trying to look on the bright side. He had a list that he went over in his head: The Killers’ deadline was still far off, they were next to the Pacific Ocean where the weather was slightly less sweltering, everyone was relatively healthy, the tour was halfway over, their new album was selling well, and, most importantly, all this free time was ensuring that his relationship with Anna was flourishing. It turned out that in the time he could usually dedicate to hanging out with Pete, or, these days, to moping about him, he could spend much better on the phone with his girlfriend. And it was good talking to her, actually talking. She was super friendly, and sounded really guilty for all the fighting she and Patrick had been doing for so long.

If Patrick was being honest with himself, things really weren’t that bad. He still wasn’t talking to Pete, which was mostly just weird after so many months of being constant fixtures in one another’s solar systems, but he was doing better now.

“Magic bullshit of the day?” Anna asked good naturedly after she and Patrick had said hello.

“Apparently the rest of Mikey’s bandmates want to learn how to fight monsters,” Patrick said, hoping she could hear the eye rolling implied in the sentence.

“Is there a specific method?” she asked, derision thick in her voice. “Are you guys going to have a training montage?”

“God, maybe,” Patrick groaned, and shrugged. “I don’t know; they treat it like a game.”

“You go out searching for trouble too much too,” Anna reminded him.

“Trouble comes searching for us, baby,” he said. “Anyway, I can’t wait for this stupid tour to be over so I can come home for a while.”

“Me either,” she said, and he could practically hear her smile. “I miss you.”
“I miss you too,” he said, wishing there were some way he could press himself even closer
to the phone. The two of them stayed on the phone for hours, only hanging up when Anna had to go
to class. Patrick felt infinitely better afterward, a feeling that disappeared once the bus began filling
up again.

“Alright, we’ve got a few hours before we go on,” Pete announced, tossing a quick look at
Patrick, who automatically looked away. Jesus, it was like trying to hang out with an ex. “But we’re
parked pretty far from the center, so we won’t have to walk too far to get away from the crowd. How
is Gerard not gonna notice this?”

“I’m going to go hang out with him, actually,” Mikey said, pushing his shoulders back. “It’s
me he’s worried about, so it shouldn’t be a problem if the others are gone.”

This caught Patrick’s attention. He looked up to see Pete’s reaction, but instead, Mikey
smiled directly at him. “We’ve got a lot of X-Men comics to read, and he’s pretty excited, so thanks,
Patrick.”

“No problem,” Patrick said, stunned. Mikey beamed at him, and Patrick blinked back in
response.

“See you in a bit?” Pete said to Mikey, and leaned over to kiss him on the cheek, but Mikey
pulled away and ran out the door.

“So,” Joe said, undeterred by the confused and slightly upset look on Pete’s face. “Let’s get
cracking. Patrick, help me grab the weapons?”

“Me?” Patrick pressed his fingers to his chest. “Why? I’m easily the worst fighter out of all
of us, you don’t need me.”

“First of all, Pete is the worst fighter,” Joe said. Patrick tried to think of some sort of proof to
refute this, but neither of them could really hold a candle to Andy or Joe, so it probably didn’t matter,
“And second, like you said yesterday, you’re human. They’re human. Your input will probably be
more valuable, since you can’t wolf out or just mind control whoever you’re fighting.”

Patrick nodded, still somewhat bewildered, but also rather pleased, his chest puffing out. He
picked up Joe’s suitcase full of weapons and walked out with them, brushing past Pete.

It wasn’t like he was trying to avoid Pete, but he sure as hell wasn’t going to be the first to
apologize. He hadn’t done anything wrong.

Also, it baffled Patrick how easily they found a place to practice, in the middle of a
travelling festival. They only had to walk a few minutes to find a completely abandoned parking lot,
where Joe could crack open the suitcase and turn to the three men staring eagerly at them. Patrick felt
something sort of similar to stage fright come over him at their intent glances.

“So,” Joe’s mouth pulled up really high on one side, and he turned to Patrick as if to say
“Now what?”

“You guys have any history of self-defense training?” Patrick asked. The three of them
looked pretty blankly up at Fall Out Boy before Ray coughed and said:

“I think I might’ve taken karate for a couple months when I was really young?”

“That’s fine,” Patrick said, “Neither did I. So, first thing’s first, you should probably work
on endurance running in your free time. I don’t, and I don’t know anyone who does, but you
probably should. Running away is a fairly important part of this business, in my experience, and by all means, put more effort into your survival than I do.”

“Running away is always the best option,” Andy piped up in agreement.

“Not fighting?” Frank asked.

“Run if you can, you just usually can’t,” Joe said sagely.

“Another good idea is to find a weapon with a weight that works for you,” Patrick said. “Like, if you’re stronger and you want more power, maybe get something bigger, but I like working with this,” he pulled his knife out and held it up for them.

“Kukri knife!” Bob said eagerly.

“Is it?” Patrick looked at the knife, stunned. There was a speck of rust near the handle he hadn’t noticed earlier, and wondered if he was damaging something important.

“It’s an Asian utility knife,” Bob said. “Families have them for chopping wood and vegetables and stuff. It also gets used in the military in some country. Where’d you get it?”

“Stole it off the ghost of H.H. Holmes,” Patrick said. All of the guys from My Chemical Romance looked excited, and Patrick grinned, eager to jump into the story, but Joe rolled his eyes and broke in.

“Anyway,” he said pointedly, “You guys wanna try something?” he kicked the suitcase.

“So, what, just grab a weapon and go for it?” Bob asked.

“Yeah, I mean,” Patrick shrugged, looking to his band for help, “Just whatever feels good in your hands, I guess.”

Frank was first to the open suitcase, lifting up the small, woodcutting axe he had used earlier. He hefted it up and down in his hands a few times, testing the weight, and then launched it end over end towards a telephone pole. Patrick expected to hear a clatter, but the axe-head had buried itself firmly in the wood. He heard clapping behind him, and the sound of Joe whistling.

“I’d recommend sticking with that one, then,” Joe said. “Um, can you get it out of there?”

“Oh, um, maybe?” Frank laughed self-consciously and ran over to the pole, where he began yanking on the axe until it finally prized itself loose.

“Any thoughts?” Patrick asked Bob. He liked Bob; he seemed sensible and solid and dependable, and he was as friendly as Patrick thought it was really reasonable to be, given all of the madness surrounding them.

“Maybe a gun,” Bob said, staring at the suitcase dubiously without approaching it. Patrick looked at Joe, unsure if he had any guns other than the one he used, but Joe nodded eagerly.

“You’ll want to get your own eventually,” he said, “But…” he pulled an ancient looking gun out of the bottom of the suitcase. Not as ancient as his, since this gun appeared to be a six shooter, but definitely not something in production currently, with its smooth wooden handle and dark metal barrel.

“.357 magnum, Smith and Wesson,” Joe declared proudly. “Give it a shot.”
“Was that a pun?” Bob asked with a smirk, but aimed and fired, hitting the same telephone pole Frank’s axe had lodged into.

“Good shot,” Andy said, eyebrows raised.

“I have a gun, actually,” Bob admitted, handing the pistol back to Joe. “I’m from Chicago, so you pretty much have to.”

“Hey, so are we!” Patrick said.

“Ha!” Bob laughed, and smiled at Patrick. “Knife to a gun fight?”

“We aren’t really worried about creatures that can be stopped with a bullet,” Patrick said. “Also, you may want to get some silver bullets, if you’re serious about this.”

“Ouch,” Joe laughed, but nodded in agreement.

“Werewolves?”

“Silver is a deterrent for most mythical creatures, to be honest,” Andy said. “It would hurt me way more than lead, I’ll tell you that.”

“Ray?” Pete asked, and Patrick could hear that he sounded weary. Patrick felt something akin to derision at first – Was he that dependent on Mikey? But he felt bad after thinking that. Pete always fell hard. Patrick didn’t know why it surprised him this time.

“I don’t know if weapons are really my thing,” Ray said, his eyes wide and full of panic. “I mean; I don’t have any idea how to use any of this stuff.”

“Hey man, it’s up to you,” Joe said, kicking the suitcase over and spilling weapons all over the pavement. Swords and knives clattered, along with a sparse few guns, a set of nun chucks, and one crossbow. The crossbow seemed to catch Ray’s eye, and he stepped forward, leaning out towards it hesitantly.

“Can’t help you much with that one, pal,” Joe said, toeing the crossbow. “No idea how it works.”

“I think I do,” Ray said, his voice taking a curious edge. He leaned down and picked it up. He fit an arrow into the notch and aimed at the same telephone pole. He pulled the trigger back, and the arrow went wide, flying for far too long and skittering down on the pavement eventually.

“Well, I’m not getting that,” Bob said.

“It went really far,” Patrick said, hoping his voice was encouraging.

“It was a trigger,” Ray said, rolling his eyes.

“It was close to the pole, actually,” Joe sighed, “Which, unless you’ve got a lot of crossbow training, isn’t too bad.”

“You think?” Ray asked.

“Yeah,” Joe said. “So now, you guys can practice with weapons in another city where we’re closer to some trees. How about at the moment we work on something else before we’re arrested for destruction of public property?”
“Again,” Frank said with a grin.

“That was arson, actually,” Andy smiled somewhat fondly.

“I would suggest hand to hand combat, but that sounds like a recipe for disaster,” Joe said. “So, resident human,” he turned back to Patrick, “What keeps you alive?”

“Holy Water?” Patrick shrugged. “I’m also still a pretty big fan of running away. Um, if you ever want to stake a vampire, wood is pretty easy to get a hold of, and the heart is just left of the sternum? That’s your right, by the way,” he added.

“Riveting,” Joe rolled his eyes. But the rest of My Chemical Romance looked entranced.

“Tell us about fighting vampires,” Bob said, his eyes glinting. “It sounds cool.”

“I mean, I was mostly unconscious the one time I staked a vampire,” Patrick said, his mouth twisting. “But it’s not that special. You just, you know,” he held his fist up and made a stabbing motion. “Aim and stab. Also don’t miss.”

“How else can you kill vampires?” Frank asked.

“Fire,” Andy said, “They’re pretty flammable. Also, sunlight, that one’s true.”

“Garlic?” Ray asked.

“No, trust me, I’ve tried drinking straight garlic butter to ward them off, doesn’t work,” Patrick said.

“Mirrors?” Bob asked.

“Myth,” Andy said.

“Invitations?” Frank asked. “Like, to get inside?”

“True,” Pete said. “Do you guys just want supernatural lessons?”

“I mean, that would be cool,” Frank said. “Are werewolves real? Have you ever fought one?”

“Ha!” Joe actually laughed aloud, and Patrick turned his face into his collar to hide his smile. Even Pete looked pretty amused, giggling under his breath. The band they were training looked frustrated, and Andy sighed good naturedly and cracked his knuckles.

“I think we owe you guys the truth,” Andy said. He bared his teeth and ran his tongue across them, emphasizing the slightly oversized canines. “I’m a vampire.”

The new guys had no time to say anything, no time to do anything but look surprised when Joe spoke up.

“Yeah, and I’d say werewolves are pretty real,” he added, shifting into wolf form. Frank shouted in surprise, and Bob inhaled deeply, and Patrick kept biting his lip, trying not to laugh too hard at them.

“And I’m a fairy, no jokes at Mikey’s expense, please,” Pete said, letting his eyes glow a brilliant gold.
The three of them turned, terrified, to Patrick.

“What are you, then?” Bob asked, panic clear in his eyes. Patrick tried not to sound sour when he replied.

“Just human, remember?” he said. He thought then might be an appropriate time to do a cool knife trick, but for him it was mostly just a self-defense tool. He doubted he could even hit the telephone pole if he threw his knife at it.

Patrick expected them to look disappointed, or, best case scenario, relieved, but instead, Bob grinned and let out a laugh.

“And you keep up with them?” he asked, looking impressed.

“We’re multiple parts of one complete superhero,” Patrick said, trying not to blush, “they had the superpowers down, just needed someone to provide the sarcastic quips.”

“Pretty fucking awesome,” Frank said, and Patrick lost the not-blushing battle pretty quickly.

“And you killed a vampire?” Ray said.

“Yeah, well, like I said, mostly unconscious,” Patrick said, waving his hand flippantly. “Pete and I were trying to escape this vampire convention thing, and the hotel was on fire anyway, Pete didn’t hear the vampire behind him and he was mostly carrying me, so I twisted around and got in a lucky hit.”


“Lucky shot,” he said, but he was smiling, secretly pleased.

“Why do you guys hunt monsters?” Ray asked. “I mean, not judging, but Mikey didn’t really elaborate, and how do you get into that sort of profession?”

“Man, the monsters hunt us, we’re just lucky,” Pete said.

The three of them, it seemed to Patrick, were bottomless pits of questions. Who had they fought? How did they defeat them? What did every individual person do? Did they think knives or guns were better against mermaids? And were there really mermaids in lake Michigan?

It was like meeting fans, Patrick thought, but way weirder. Usually fans just wanted to know if Pete would sleep with them. And no part of their lives seemed to bore the guys from the other band. Patrolling the city for Sisky had seemed tedious to Patrick, but to them it was riveting. It was sort of exhausting.

Eventually, they had to pull away, because Fall Out Boy was due to perform within the hour. Andy suggested they stagger their arrival, to which the others replied “Why bother?” before Joe reminded them of the Gerard problem.

They sent the Bob, Ray, and Frank back first, and then Patrick turned to the rest of his band. Still not meeting Pete’s eyes.

“Do you ever think…?” he trailed off, not finishing the question.

“Not if I can avoid it,” Joe quipped. Patrick rolled his eyes.
“I just… Gerard looked pretty scared,” he said, trying to tread lightly around what he was thinking. He wished he hadn’t brought this up around Pete, whose eyes he could feel boring holes into his skin. But they were all waiting, so he had to go on.

“Ever think that maybe he had good reason?” Patrick stumbled over the words as he tried to get them out, and instantly regretted it, trying to backpedal. “It’s just, not that I don’t think he’s being unreasonable, but maybe he knows more about it than Mikey.”

“Or maybe he’s being a dick,” Pete said, pushing past Patrick. Still, at least he kind of spoke to him. Patrick decided to drop it, and followed him back to the main area.

The show was awful, a certain chilliness to the air between him and Pete, nothing that Joe or Andy would come close to breaching. Patrick knew they would say it was strictly between him and Pete and that they wanted no part in it. Neither did Patrick, for that matter, but there was little that he could do. He could only hope that it didn’t affect their playing. The crowd screamed as loud as they usually did, so he could only assume that everything was fine.

As the days ticked by, Patrick did his best not to mope. He spent a great deal more time with Andy as well, binge watching movies and, on occasion, sitting through Andy’s weird sports stuff and complaining.

“We should really train more often too, you know,” Andy said, in the middle of a soccer game on TV that Patrick couldn’t follow at all.

“Hmm?” Patrick asked. His legs were draped over Andy’s lap, and he had been texting Anna.

“I said, ‘we should really train more often too’,” Andy said. “I mean, you know, we just sort of fight monsters all willy-nilly, we could at least train with our weapons.”

Patrick giggled. “‘Willy-nilly’?”

Andy thumped him lightly on the arm. “Not the point, dude. Come on, do you know anything about how to fight with a knife?”

“No,” Patrick admitted. “Do you know how to fight with a katana?”

“No!” Andy said. “That’s my whole fucking point, dude. If the monsters are gonna attack us anyway, why leave it up to fate?”

Patrick hated to admit it, but Andy had a really good point. Still…

“It’s not as though we have teachers,” Patrick said. “You think we should just make it up as we go along?”

“That’s what the internet’s for, buddy,” Andy said, but he was grinning. “Why don’t we start training more seriously with My Chem? Could be good for all of us.”

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Mikey felt guilty. No matter what he did, he felt guilty. Whenever he was with Fall Out Boy, training, he felt guilty that he was betraying Gerard’s trust. Whenever he was hanging out with Gerard he felt guilty that he wasn’t spending time with Pete. And that was far worse, because he was most certainly not under any obligation to Pete. He hoped. Pete hadn’t said the “L” word yet, and Mikey was deathly afraid of the moment he would.
It wasn’t like Mikey didn’t like Pete. Maybe more than that. His heart started racing whenever Pete was around, and when Pete stared at him, eyes smoldering, Mikey felt his internal organs fly somewhere far away. But he also felt the heart racing/stomach butterflies feeling around roller coasters, and he wasn’t exactly going run to King’s Island and propose to the Son of Beast ride. It was all pretty confusing, and even though no one in his or Pete’s band was homophobic, thank God, they did act a little… weird.

Mikey wasn’t even sure that his bandmates knew they were acting weird. But aside from Gerard, none of them referred to Pete as anything but Mikey’s “friend”. They gave Mikey plenty of room to correct them, but he never did. And when he and Pete snuck off to bang during another training session, they didn’t mock them with innuendos. Just let it happen.

Had Mikey been more confrontational, he would have screamed at one of them by now. Yelled, “You know we’re dating, right?” but then he would have to use the “d” word. So maybe he was just as guilty of tiptoeing around the issue as his band. The only person that had tried mentioning it was Pete, who called Mikey his boyfriend just once. Mikey grew pale and silent and pulled back, and Pete hadn’t said it again.

At the second or third training session, because they couldn’t sneak away every day, Ray was stuck on Gerard duty, leaving Mikey, Frank, and Bob to train with Fall Out Boy. Joe kept suggesting that Mikey get a weapon in case his powers were somehow incapacitated, but Mikey wasn’t even sure that could happen, and in any case, after nearly decapitating Patrick with a Roman Gladius (and seeing the look on Pete’s face when he did) he decided that maybe weapons just weren’t for him.

Still, training time didn’t go to waste. Andy was introducing him to the idea of meditating, and it was harder work than even running might have been. Trying to sit completely still, stop his foot from jiggling and just focus all his thoughts inward, calm. He wasn’t that good at it, but the one time he got close to being “Zen”, he managed to conjure up a zombie in seconds, with the nearest graveyard a good half hour away from them.

Mikey meditated, Patrick and Andy fought with blades, Joe and Bob practiced shooting, Frank did- well, Mikey wasn’t quite sure what Frank did, maybe chop wood, who knew, and Pete seemed pretty bored.

“Don’t you have a weapon?” Mikey asked him, and Pete shrugged.

“Nothing really fits me,” he said, leaning back on the grassy knoll they were practicing on. He started shredding the blades of grass between his fingers, and Mikey sighed. The clang of metal wasn’t really good for concentrating anyway.

“How do you fight?” he asked. Pete smiled at him, tapping his temple.

“Mind games, and some pretty damn good looks,” he said.

“Seduce the villains?” Mikey teased.

“You might think you’re joking,” Pete sighed, but he was still smiling.

“Ever seduce the heroes?” Mikey asked, crawling a little closer to Pete, looking up at him through heavily lidded eyes. Pete smiled down at Mikey, biting the bottom of his lip.

“On occasion,” he agreed mildly, breaching the distance between them and pressing his lips into Mikey’s. Mikey groaned into Pete’s mouth, pushing one hand off the grass and grabbing onto
Pete’s hair hard enough to hold himself steady. Pete gasped in pain, but pushed in closer.

As soon as they were kissing like this, the sounds of swords faded away, and the sunlight, and the grass, and he all he was aware of was a desperation for Pete like water. He pulled Pete closer still until Pete fell crashing down on top of him, pressing him into the hillside.

“Hi,” Mikey laughed into Pete’s mouth, because Pete still hadn’t pulled back.

“Hi,” Pete breathed, moving down to kiss Mikey’s jaw. Mikey’s eyes fluttered shut as an electric tingle flowed through his body.

“Wanna get a room?” he asked, still breathless. Pete nodded eagerly, swiftly pulling Mikey to his feet, where Mikey had to lean on Pete to stop himself from swaying unsteadily.

“Slacker,” Bob yelled at Mikey, who rolled his eyes. As he and Pete walked by Bob, he heard Bob mutter: “Wish I had a friend with benefits on tour,” and Mikey paused. He could tell by the way Pete stiffened that it hurt him, and though he felt like he owed a lifetime of debt to Pete for giving him all this adventure, he could pay off a tiny bit of it.

“Boyfriend, actually,” Mikey said. His heart pounded somewhere around his throat, but he got to revel in the confused look on Bob’s face as they walked away.

The two of them made it onto the bus before Pete turned to Mikey, eyes big and hopeful.

“Boyfriend?” he asked, and, too late to say no, Mikey nodded, swallowing hard.

Pete surprised him by dropping to his knees in front of Mikey and wrenching his belt undone. His jeans were around his knees before he had the chance to say anything, and then there was Pete’s mouth.

“Holy shit-!” Mikey gasped.

He should start dating Pete more often.

***

Joe was really starting to love this two band arrangement. Sure, fighting with the guys from Panic! was fun, but he also had a tendency to get kidnapped when they were fighting with them. And training with other people gave them some healthy competition, something Joe was never opposed to. He was a better shot than Bob, but he was also practicing in secret to keep it that way, given how good everyone was getting so fast. Even Patrick was pretty impressive - one day he managed to disarm Andy’s sword with his knife, and when Joe asked about it later, Andy admitted that he didn’t let Patrick have that win. There was just one thing that bothered Joe.

They had been touring all over North America, but ever since Colma, they hadn’t seen a single monster. No vampire nests in big cities, no werewolf packs in the woodsly western states with their towns few and far between. No zombies, save for the ones Mikey was raising. No wendigos up North, and not even any witches, as far as he could tell.

It made Joe nervous. There was no way that all the monsters were just gone, and maybe they just weren’t looking hard enough, but it was still creeping Joe out. Realistically, they had gone much longer without being attacked by monsters before, and in fact, Joe had gone a good twelve years without being attacked by a monster, and then another eight years after that, but these days it was a bit odder.
Not in the mood to look a gift horse in the mouth, Joe just threw himself into training himself and the others. Sometimes he switched out his gun for a sword to spar with Andy and quote the Princess Bride at the top of their lungs. Of course, they both wanted to be Inigo Montoya, so they rewrote the scenes a bit so that it had the appearance of Inigo Montoya fighting with himself.

A few days of training passed, and the tour had led them up to Canada before someone suggested a cemetery visit again.

“What about Mountain View Cemetery?” Ray suggested at training.

“For what?” Joe asked, breathless as he dropped his sword in confusion.

“Aren’t we still looking for the weird cult thing? Blood sigils in the cemeteries?” Ray asked.

In truth, Joe had forgotten.

“Right,” he said, “Mountain View Cemetery. It sounds good to me. Any creepier mausoleums we need to be looking out for?”

“Don’t think so,” Ray said. “Actually, it’s supposed to be one of the most beautiful cemeteries around. It’s quite scenic.”

“Shot in the dark, but I’m guessing it has a decent view of some mountains, right,” Joe said.

“Guys?”

“Sure,” Mikey said brightly. “It’s been awhile since I’ve been to an actual cemetery: I bet I’ll be fantastic if we run into trouble.”

“I think we’re all a bit better prepared than last time,” Andy agreed mildly. “But for those of you with long range weapons, please remember to shoot second and ask questions first. The last thing we need is someone to get trigger happy with a monster only to find out that it’s not a monster.” Joe was happy Andy had said something. He trusted his band to aim to disable so they could talk, but he had next to no practical experience with Ray and Bob.

“Great,” Pete said, “When can we leave?”

As it turned out, they could leave almost immediately. Bob arranged for the guys from A Day to Remember to distract Gerard for a few hours, but the cemetery wasn’t far off, so theoretically, they would be back in under two hours.

“Shouldn’t be hard to find blood,” Bob joked, “We’ve got our own personal bloodhound right here!” he gestured to Andy, who sighed. Joe was just happy that there had been a dog joke that hadn’t been directed at him.

The cemetery was beautiful, Joe had to admit, and he was getting pretty sick of cemeteries. This one was sunny and grassy, with a few sparse trees scattered throughout it. It stretched out in a seemingly endless sea of bright green grass and pleasant seventy-degree weather.

“Hard to imagine any Satanic sacrifices happening here,” Frank pointed out, but Joe shrugged.

“I’m starting to find that very few things are hard to imagine,” he said. A light wind rustled the leaves of a nearby cherry tree, and a bird chirped in the distance. “Smell anything?” he asked Andy, looking over his shoulder. Andy shrugged.

“Blood? Lots of it, there’s a fuck ton of people here today,” he said. “But we’re looking for
something older, so I think we’re gonna have to do it the old fashioned way.”

“Well, no one’s died here,” Mikey said, and Joe turned to give him a dubious look. Mikey flushed.

“Not recently, anyway,” he said, turning his glance to the ground, “And nothing’s actually died here, there’s just a lot of dead. It’s different.”

“Right, so we split up?” Pete asked.

“Well now you’re just inviting a slow, painful, horror-movie death,” Frank said.

“It’s daylight,” Joe said, “let’s just split into two groups.”

Joe made to walk to the left with Andy and Patrick, expecting Pete to follow, but realizing his error within a few steps. He turned around to see Mikey and Pete standing next to each other, sucked in a deep breath.

“Or we could pair off,” he said bracingly. Frank and Bob snorted, Mikey looked embarrassed, but Pete beamed at Joe. Jesus Christ, but he was a ray of sunshine when he was in love.

Joe met Andy’s eyes, and Andy gave him a doubtful look, that seemed to Joe to say that the two of them pairing up would be a bad idea, given that they were by and far the best fighters. Also, Joe was kind of thrilled at how easily he could read Andy these days, but by the time he turned to partner up with someone else, Bob and Patrick were walking off in one direction, Ray and Frank walking in another.

“It is daylight,” Andy said grudgingly. “They can probably keep themselves alive for half an hour.”

“Oh, don’t say that aloud,” Joe sighed, “you’ll jinx it.”

Still, he and Andy set about looking around the cemetery. It was a very pretty place and a few families were out with picnics, some of them looking solemn, but most fairly cheery. They were far enough North that it was pleasant out, not too warm or too cold, and Joe found himself continually getting distracted from what they were supposed to be doing by the nearly overwhelming scents of flowers or humming of insects. One of the many perks to werewolf senses, all of the pleasant sensations were that much more noticeable.

“What do you think we’re missing?” Andy asked as they walked, and Joe shrugged. The situation made him feel uneasy, but he couldn’t quite tie the information together.

“I looked up Murmur,” Joe said eventually. “Mentioned in The Lesser Key of Solomon, this old demon text from the Middle Ages. Didn’t really say that much about him, though. Nothing they didn’t tell us in the mausoleum. He’s a demon of death, supposed to be summoned to teach people philosophy and show them their dead relatives and whatnot.”

“Doesn’t sound like too bad of a guy,” Andy said.

“I think it’s sort of implied that he’s a bad guy,” Joe said mildly. “Sometimes he’s just portrayed as a vulture.”

“Those birds have a bad rep for no reason at all,” Andy said.
“Look, those guys wanted to kill us,” Joe said. He was somewhat disconcerted that he was having this conversation in the first place. Andy looked somewhat bashful when Joe looked over at him.

“Yeah, I know, still,” he said, “Wish we knew what we were fighting.”

“Maybe we’re not fighting anything,” Joe said. “After all, they haven’t successfully summoned anything yet.”

The words had hardly left his mouth when he saw a splash of brownish red in the grass on the other side of a particularly large, white tombstone.

“There!” Joe yelled, and he sprinted over to the other side of the tombstone, slipping a little on the grass as he ran. He stumbled to where he saw the red, and gasped when he could see the whole thing. Though the sigils were usually quite well made, this one was sloppy, the circle uneven and the lines so thin they were barely visible in some places, and thick splashes in others.

More concerning than this was the copious amount of blood all around the sigil, the silvery glint of a razor still on the ground, and the shaky drops of blood in a line away from the grave and back to the parking lot. Lots and lots of blood, enough to look like a dark shadow under the large gravestone, and still bucket-sized splashes running from the stone to the parking lot.

“That’s a lot of blood,” Joe said, and Andy began cursing under his breath. Joe turned to him, hoping for some sort of reassurance, but Andy was sheet white, and he looked petrified.

“Enough to kill someone?” Joe asked, not wanting to hear the answer. Andy nodded slowly.

“If they didn’t go straight to a hospital, more than enough,” he said. He began quickly walking to the parking lot, following with splotches of blood staining the ground, only to see the brownish red patches abruptly cut off at the first parking space. Andy swore loudly.

“So, should we check hospital records?” Joe asked. He was fighting the urge to be sick all over the ground next to the blood.

“Maybe,” Andy said, pursing his lips. “I don’t know. Call the others back down here, see what they think.”

It took a while to relay instructions for how to get to a fairly specific part of the cemetery, but Joe managed to get the rest of the two bands all in the same place.

As soon as they saw the amount of blood, everyone assumed as Joe and Andy had, but Mikey shook his head, stepping closer to the grave and kneeling down.

“No, no one’s died here,” he said.

“No shit,” Joe said, “As noted by the lack of body. We think he drove off and then died.”

“Maybe,” Mikey admitted. “It just seems a little odd. Why bother finishing the ceremony if you’ve cut too deep?”

“Apparently, people really want this Murmur guy raised,” Joe said.

The eight of them scrounged around the area for a while, searching for any other sort of clue they could find, but unable to discover anything but the blood and the razor. Pete picked up the razor
blade and slipped it in his pocket to look at more when they got back to the tour. They were just about to leave when Joe heard an almost inaudible moan come from above them.

Joe slowly turned his head upwards and into the boughs of the tall tree above them. There was a rustling of the leaves, and Joe turned to Andy, mouthing “Did you hear that?” at him, and seeing Andy’s small but deliberate nod.

He had to make a decision pretty quickly, and ultimately, Joe decided there were more than enough of them to take someone down if need be.

“Why don’t you come on down?” he demanded of the tree, and heard a noise of disbelief, the further rustling of the branches, and slowly the figure of a girl came into view, swinging down branch by branch. She looked like she was in middle school, maybe, and her eyes were rimmed in purple. She nearly collapsed on the ground when she dropped from the final branch, and swayed when she stood up.

“What are you doing here?” she demanded, her voice quavering. Joe felt awful looking at her, all dirty blonde hair and tiny voice. She looked unbelievably tired and scared, but still stuck her chin up, trying to hold her own.

“We’re investigating these sigils,” Joe said. He didn’t talk down to her, he could tell she was the kind of kid who would hate that. “Know anything about them?”

“Investigating?” she bristled instantly, “Are you a cop?”

“No, we’re definitely not cops,” Joe chuckled, glancing at Andy briefly. “Just curious. Why are you watching it?”

The girl hiccupped, swayed, and steadied herself. “My friend Kyle and I made it,” she said, “but he was hurt and had to go home, so I stayed to see if it would work.”

“Is this Kyle’s blood?” Joe asked, and she nodded, her eyes big and brimming with tears. “Have you heard from him since left?”

The girl’s lower lip started quivering, her knees shaking. Joe was sure she was going to have a full on meltdown, but she calmed herself again before speaking.

“I- he hasn’t come back yet,” she said, “but I know he’s gonna be okay, because…” she trailed off, looking into the distance beyond Joe. Joe snapped his fingers in front of her face, and she startled back to looking at him.

“Because what?” he asked, a sharp edge of concern to his voice now. This got the girl’s attention, and she recoiled, straightening her back.

“I don’t have to tell you shit!” she yelled, stuttering over the curse like she had never said it before.

“If he died, Murmur would be here, wouldn’t he?” Mikey asked softly from behind Joe. Joe turned to glare at him for scaring the kid, and the girl whimpered, but she nodded.

“Are you Murmurers?” she asked, her voice almost reverent.

“No,” Joe said firmly, “but this is important, okay? Why are you all trying to summon Murmur? And why all at once?”
“Everybody’s got their own reasons,” she said, staring at the ground, kicking up patches of grass and clods of dirt. “Kyle and I weren’t even friends before, but his mom died a few years back, and my sister too, she,” she cut herself off to inhale deeply, “I mean, they say if you summon Murmur he’ll show you any dead person, and they’ll answer any questions you have. I’d never heard of him before, but someone started talking online and they say the more people that believe in something the stronger it is, yeah? So if we all start doing things for Murmur, one of us’ll be able to bring him back.”

“One of the Murmurers?” Pete clarified, and she nodded. Joe put a hand on her shoulder and smiled at her.

“Thank you,” he said, and she looked puzzled.

“If you’re not police, and you’re not Murmurers, why do you want to know?” she asked.

Joe shrugged at her, and the group of them walked away. They were taking two cars everywhere now, always switching up who was riding with who, but for the ride back, he ended up with just the rest of his band.

“So, Murmurers,” Joe said. “They even have a creepy cult name. And they’re all trying to summon a demon.”

“Specifically the demon of philosophy,” Pete said, cracking a smile while he kicked at the driver’s seat. “Cheaper than a college education I guess.”

“Think the other kid lived?” Patrick asked, and Joe grew solemn again.

“I don’t know,” he admitted. “She seemed pretty insistent that he must be, but…”

Silence thickly filled the car.

“To see a dead loved one,” Andy said, “Ask them any questions you want. I mean, you can see the appeal, right?”

Joe briefly turned his attention away from the road to give Andy the same incredulous look he saw on Patrick and Pete’s faces.

“Not at all,” Patrick said, and Pete made a noise of agreement.

“Guess I can’t expect you to get it,” Andy sounded almost angry when he spoke, frustrated and cornered. “But if it would work, no repercussions, I’d do it too.”

“Why?” Joe asked, hoping he came across as gentle rather than prying.

“Andrea. My dad.” Andy was staring out of the car window, and everything was dead silent except for the quiet rumbling of the motor. “Just, you know, see what they think of me now, I guess.” His throat sounded thick, and Joe tried to change the subject.

“So what’s our plan of action?” he asked.

“Monitor it?” Pete suggested. “Doesn’t look like a problem yet, but we should keep checking in. If they’re starting to think they need to kill someone to summon him, we’ve gotta stop it. Plus, the philosophy demon doesn’t sound too scary, but it could be worse if he actually shows up.”

a cheery summer.”

The next day they had off, just dedicated to the gigantic stretch of driving across Canadian countryside, Joe and Frank teamed up to convince the rest of their bands to stop at Lake Okanagan to search for Ogopogo.

“He’s the Nessie of Canada!” Joe had whined, and Patrick wondered when he had been killed and replaced with Pete. Pete who, for the record, would rather stay in and sleep with his boyfriend than go searching for the Canadian lake demon. It was pretty weird.

Unfortunately, it proved slightly difficult to get both buses to stop at the same out of the way location without attracting a lot of unwarranted attention from Gerard. The only time the two buses stopped in the same place was at a diner with three other bands, way too far away from the lake for any of them to come close to seeing the water, much less a sea serpent.

Under the feeble excuse of comparing equipment, and with Gerard in a heated conversation about D&D with Bob, the rest of them snuck off anyway, mostly at Frank’s request. There were no cars to borrow, so they were stuck walking a little way into the woods. It was partially because Frank claimed he could sense they were close, but mostly, Joe thought, the group of them was just growing accustomed to hanging out with each other. The further into the summer they got, the more Joe’s version of an “us” had stretched from himself and his band to himself, his band, and the majority of My Chemical Romance.

They had walked in the patch of woods for fifteen minutes, and really needed to turn around when they came across a few heavy looking rocks and crosses sticking out of the ground.

“Really?” Joe said, staring at the crosses in disbelief. “What are the fucking odds?”

“Look on the bright side,” Mikey said, pushing his glasses a little further up on his nose, “this isn’t a real cemetery.”

“It’s not?” Joe asked warily.

“Nope,” Mikey said, a smirk crossing his face, “And I can even show you Canadian Nessie,” he added with a chuckle. He twisted his wrist in a quick, jerking motion, and a snake skeleton began writhing its way out of the ground.

Frank made a dramatized gagging sound, and Patrick turned away, making a grossed out noise in the back of his throat, and Mikey giggled a little.

“Pet cemetery,” he said. “Just like the book- everything you bury here comes back to life.” A claw poked its way out of the ground, and Joe shuddered.

“Yeah, I’m gonna head back,” Patrick said, and Joe was set on following, when he heard Andy call out into the woods.

“No one will believe you,” Andy yelled, and Joe saw a little kid run in the other direction.

“I don’t believe myself,” Joe sighed, and Mikey hastily reburied the snake as they started walking back. “We’re totally finding Ogopogo next time we’re here, though.”

***

As Mikey shimmied through the barely open window in Fall Out Boy’s lounge, he couldn’t help but be proud of himself for what Pete would probably think was a really romantic gesture.
While the romantic gesture of sneaking in someone’s window felt, to Mikey, more like a stalker move, it seemed like the kind of thing Pete would find sweet.

In all honestly, Mikey was crawling through Fall Out Boy’s window at four in the morning because he had been having a nightmare and needed to see Pete’s face, confirm that he was okay, and he was scared of knocking on their door this late and potentially waking up Patrick. So he was pretty grateful that, when he landed with a soft thud on the floor of the lounge, no one was awake to see it.

He padded softly to the back of the bus, pulling back just the corner of the curtain over Pete’s bunk to verify that it was his first, then pulled it all the way back, wriggling into the small bunk and shoving Pete over gently. Pete’s eyes flickered open, his face puzzled.

“Mikey?” he asked, hoarse with sleep, and Mikey nodded.

“Hey,” he said, pulling in closer. “I missed you.” Pete smiled sleepily at him, running a hand through Mikey’s hair, and pulling him to his chest.

“Missed you too,” Pete chuckled. “How’d you get in here? What time is it? And where the hell are we?”

“Window, four AM, and Alberta, Canada,” Mikey said. Deciding that there wasn’t a moment to waste, he leaned in closer still, missing Pete’s mouth and kissing his nose instead, then working his way down.

“Hi,” Pete giggled, letting his hands travel up underneath Mikey’s shirt. Mikey’s skin tingled with heat where Pete’s hands traced, and he arched his back under the touch, moaned softly.

“Gotta be quiet,” Pete murmured, his voice still thick and syrupy with sleep as he lifted the t-shirt over Mikey’s head. Mikey nodded, his glasses slipping down to the tip of his nose as he did, catching Pete’s mouth on his again and digging his blunt nails into Pete’s shoulders.

“Jesus,” Pete whispered, trying to worm his way out of his clothes within the confines of the bunk. Even with Mikey helping, it took a long time to get both of them undressed without making a sound, and it ended up in a lot of stifled laughter coming from both of them.

“Lie still and relax,” Mikey demanded, kissing Pete’s mouth firmly to prevent him from making any noise while Mikey prepped him. Flying blind, trying to feel his way out without seeing much of Pete at all in the dark, hardly anything but the glint of light against his blown out pupils or the flash of his teeth. Pete was loud about everything, sex being no exception, but with every hiss of pain, Mikey cut him off with a chiding kiss, trying to capture the sound between the two of them.

Pete also demanded attention, writhing underneath Mikey the whole time and needing every bit of Mikey’s focus on him, all the time. When Pete topped, he could divide attention up pretty evenly between the two of them, but when he bottomed, he begged Mikey to keep touching him, keep kissing him, to keep going, in a constant stream of desperate whispers in Mikey’s ear. Not that it bothered Mikey at all- it was probably the hottest thing on the planet having Pete beg for him, but it was also fun to tease him about later.

Even then, minutes after pleading for Mikey to be quiet, he was whining, rocking up and down.

“Please, Mikey, please, fuck,” he whispered, and Mikey let the words wash over him.

“Fuck, yeah, yeah,” he said.
Mikey was careful to focus on dimming his sensation as much as possible when he came, really hoping to not have another zombie incident. Too soon, it was over and he lay down half on the bunk, half sprawled on top of Pete, lazily running his finger in circles on Pete’s chest as he began to fall asleep. He was almost completely gone over to sleep when he heard Joe’s voice, jarring him awake again.

“You know, I’m sure we all appreciate your efforts to stay quiet, but you realize you were shaking the whole bus, right?”

***

Warped Tour was making Andy feel increasingly claustrophobic. There were too many people and there was too much going on and solving a worldwide mystery was, to say the least, exhausting. And as guilty as it made him feel, he was secretly really happy that at least Patrick was doing worse than him.

He did talk to Patrick about it once. It hadn’t gone over that well.

“So, why are you so jealous of Mikey?” Andy asked. No point beating around the bush, he figured, but Patrick’s shoulders hiked up, instantly defensive.


“You’re not jealous?” he asked.

“God no,” Patrick said, rolling his eyes.

“Then what’s your beef with Mikey?” Andy asked.

“Nothing, I just…” Patrick trailed off, looking huffy.

“He’s spending a lot of time with Pete, and you want to hang out with him?” Andy suggested.

“Exactly!” Patrick cried.

“So you would be jealous of the time he’s spending with Pete?” Andy asked. Patrick scowled.

Andy had also decided that, after they cleared all this Murmur crap up, he was never going to a cemetery again. They stopped at a cemetery in nearly every town to check, trained every day, and even if it was exhausting, at least Andy was getting a workout. Getting a workout and learning how to fight with some seriously cool weapons.

He and Joe stopped in a pawn shop in the middle of nowhere Montana after one show, found an M-1 Garand, which was being sold for way less than it was worth. Not that Andy, as a vampire, had much need for a vintage semi-automatic rifle, but it was still absolutely amazing to work with.

It was in Utah where they got to start training with the rifle, and where Andy made his decision to never go to a cemetery ever again. Pretty much immediately after Pete said that they could go to Salt Lake City Cemetery that night before the buses left.

“Jesus fucking Christ, I never want to see a fucking cemetery again,” Andy groaned. Possibly louder than he meant to, given the stares he got.
“It’s… it’s a really big cemetery,” Pete said, “and we agreed to monitor the situation.”

“Yeah, I know,” Andy sighed. “Fine, let’s go hit up the cemetery. Look for sigils. Do nothing new.” He said the last bit under his breath, where only Joe could hear him, and he snorted a bit.

It was dusky when they got to the Salt Lake City Cemetery, the air pleasantly cool in contrast to the arid heat that seemed to permeate the whole region. The sky was a hazy purple, and even though the backdrop of mountains was beautiful and serene, Andy was really sick of the beautiful and serene.

“I don’t think I want to get buried in a cemetery at this point,” he said wearily to Joe.

“I didn’t think you did anyway,” Joe said. He was spinning a pistol on his finger, occasionally scanning the ground for blood. The whole group was walking together, paranoid after dark.

“Anyway,” Joe tapped a headstone with his toe and took a hurried step back when it shifted a little in the ground, “what are the goddamn odds that while we’re ‘monitoring’,” he held up air quotes around the word, “we’re just going to stumble upon someone completing the ceremony?”

“I mean, haven’t you noticed? We used to find these things on occasion, but lately they’ve been in every cemetery. I think it’s spreading,” Andy said, frowning. “Either way, this appears to be the most major cemetery in a reasonably big city, so our odds here are exponentially-”

“Hey!” a girl from a little way away waved cheerily over at them. “You the guys from Centerville? Come on, you’re early!” she called, beckoning them over. Andy turned to Pete automatically, who shrugged and walked forward.

Just over the crest of the small hillock, there was a group of thirty-odd people all sprawled out on the grass, talking quietly and surrounded by candles. Some of them were lying on blankets, others were standing up, but they all seemed in relatively high spirits. They all smelled human to Andy, so he proceeded with caution, but wasn’t too concerned.

“Who all’s here?” Pete asked easily, using his most charming voice, the kind Andy knew was infused with the tiniest bit of charm speak. It wasn’t enough to do anything major to the woman, just to warm her to him with even the tiniest phrases. Sure enough, she smiled at him with a warm smile, like he was an old friend.

“Well, my husband and I are from Bluffdale,” she said, pointing to another white-bread looking guy sitting and talking with a few other men. “I think most people are from the city proper, oh, and this is Alex!” she said brightly, directing them to a very tall man with slicked back hair that was probably attractive twenty years ago.

“Pleasure,” Alex said, grasping Pete’s hand, then scanning over the rest of them. “I thought there were only six of you coming?”

“Well, we’re all interested. I hope it’s no inconvenience,” Pete said, his voice dripping warmth that cracked Alex’s face into a more amicable smile.

“The more the merrier, naturally,” Alex said. He led them closer to the center of the group, still talking. “I was hoping to make it to Indianapolis for the gathering tomorrow, but I’m not sure if I can get the time off work. Still, since I’ve done so much to orchestrate this event, they really want me out there. Think any of you will make it?” he asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Absolutely!” Pete said brightly. Andy gave him an odd look, because Pete couldn’t lie, but were they really going to Indianapolis on that day? Still, Pete paid him no mind. “We already have rides and everything, just don’t know exactly where it will be held.”
“Oh dear, are you having problems with the website as well?” Alex asked, a deep frown on his face. “I’ve heard that complaint a lot. At any rate, it’s at Crown Hill cemetery, I’m sure any one of the locals would be able to point you to it.”

“Alex, the lighter’s busted!” a man complained from behind them, and Alex sighed, told them to make themselves comfortable, and walked away.

“We’re going to Indianapolis tomorrow?” Andy asked Pete, and Pete frowned deeply when he turned to face them.

“Yeah, we are,” he said.

“Pretty big coincidence,” Frank said nervously.

“Unless it’s not a coincidence,” Joe said. They all eyed each other nervously.

“I mean, let’s not be too paranoid,” Patrick said with a smirk, “It could easily be another creepy cult stalking us.”

“Or another band on Warped Tour,” Mikey chuckled, and to Andy’s immense shock, Patrick smiled grudgingly back at him.

Andy was about to suggest that maybe they were dealing with real Satanists this time when Alex called everyone to attention, standing on top of the hillock and clapping his hands together.

“I’m happy to see the big turn out tonight!” he said, smiling coldly out at all of them. Something in his eyes was throwing Andy off. He looked lost, unfocused, like he was on drugs, though he seemed perfectly sound in his mind. “And I’m sure you’re all equally honored to be here. I have faith, as we all must have faith, that tonight will be the night that can change it all. Tonight, before sunrise, we will speak to our loved ones one last time. But we haven’t assembled to make speeches,” he chuckled, “so let’s get on with it, shall we?”

From behind him, Alex produced a deep and ornate black vase, thin at the top and thick at the base, with swirling carvings inlaid with a shiny red substance. He also pulled out a jagged and dangerous looking dirk, shook his sleeve back, and dragged the tip of the knife down his arm, leaving a stripe of red in its wake. Andy suddenly felt woozy.

“You okay?” Joe asked right in his ear, and Andy nodded dizzily. Patrick had been keeping him well supplied with formula, way more often these days due to the frequency of the sigils, but it was still not quite the real thing, and a slight breeze carried the scent over to him easily. Unpleasant, but bearable.

The blood flowing somewhat freely from his arm, Alex held his hand over the opening of the vase, letting his blood trickle in until it slowed a minute or so later, after which he wrapped it up in a piece of cloth he wrapped with him. He then wiped off the blade, stowed it away again, and passed it to one of the onlookers.

Everyone in the crowd began forming a circle, fanning out with a large patch of ground in the middle. The first girl in the crowd pulled out a paring knife and put a deep slice in her wrist as well, holding it over the vase to bleed into as well. Andy realized before she passed it to the next man, with his own knife and bandages, what was going on.

“Now what?” Andy asked Patrick, who just happened to be standing on his immediate left.

“Well, I don’t think we can out fight all of them, but I really don’t wanna give blood up to
“summon a demon,” Patrick said, his teeth on edge.

“Any plans?” Pete asked out of the corner of his mouth.

“Ever charm spoke thirty people at once?” Andy asked, and Pete gave him a horrified look.

The decision was made for them, when, five people down the line, a group of well-dressed men came over the crest of the hill and one of them yelled, “Wait, you weren’t supposed to start without us!”

“Who the hell are you?” Alex demanded breaking the circle to storm up to them, his voice full of wrath.

“I’m Aaron!” he yelled back, running down and looking just as furious. “From Centerville!”

“Shit,” Pete said, as Alex and the woman who had called them over turned to glare at the two bands.

“Then who are-?” the woman began, and Andy took off running, hearing the footsteps behind him that indicated his friends were following suit.

Andy knocked over one of Aaron’s friends as he ran, but they easily made it out of the cemetery, apparently unpursued, as they were alone by the time they reached the parking lot.

The eight of them stood panting, leaning against their cars, with only Andy completely unaffected by the run. He spoke while they all caught their breath.

“Let’s agree to never crash a blood giving cult again, okay?” he asked tiredly, glancing over his shoulder again for good measure. “Because that could’ve gone way worse if we hadn’t had the element of surprise.”

“Agreed,” Bob said, wiping sweat off his forehead.

“It was convenient, at least,” Joe said, straightening his shoulders. “So, what kind of party you guys think is happening in Indianapolis?”

This seemed to be a pretty quick way to break out into an argument. Everyone was torn—did they go into what was almost definitely a trap to figure out what the big event could be, or avoid the obvious trap?

“We’ve got quite a few decent secret weapons, if you hadn’t noticed,” Joe said.

“But if this is a smaller gathering than the one in Indianapolis, we’re definitely outnumbered!” Ray argued back.

They couldn’t come to a consensus, and after a few minutes of arguing, Andy suggested they head back to the tour. The car ride was remarkably quiet, and only then did Andy notice that Mikey had crammed in between Pete and Patrick in the backseat, which Patrick was sure to hate. He smiled to himself. Andy never knew quite what would set Patrick off, but it was always amusing when he got angry about little things.

But to Andy’s surprised, Patrick was pointedly civil. He made small talk about what they thought X-Men: The Last Stand would be like, and some tips on hand to hand combat with muscles that looked somewhat like they were created atrophied and only got worse. Though Mikey didn’t phrase it like that, it was just Andy’s personal opinion.
“Oh man, so I’ve always been kind of picked on, did I tell you what happened to me when I got shoved in a locker in middle school?” Mikey asked, laughing a little but still looking sheepish.

“What?” Patrick asked, offering up a tiny smile.

“Christ, well, I was scared of the dark at the time, and I could hear people laughing and I panicked, and next I knew there was just all this screaming and—” Mikey had to cut himself off for laughing, “—and anyways, the lock was mostly busted, so I beat my way out in a minute or so, and it turns out that a zombie dragged this guy halfway to the woods!”

“Hilarious,” Patrick said in a clearly terrified voice that Pete glared at, but Mikey didn’t seem to pick up on the sarcasm, and he was still chortling for a few seconds after.

“Yeah, well it was just like some Harry Potter bullshit, you know, they blamed it on a gas leak and a teacher trying to drag him away from a fight, claimed we were all seeing things, I guess. I mean, they could hardly pin it on me without all getting called crazy, could they?” Mikey asked, looking proud of himself.

“I suppose not,” Patrick said feebly. Joe, meanwhile, still was laughing.

“What?” Andy asked him.

“Well, come on, that’s pretty badass,” Joe said, and Mikey beamed. Even if Patrick looked tense, Mikey looked peaceful, glowing. He was a little weird, Andy thought, but then again, who was he to judge.

Mikey looked positively mournful when he had to head back to his own bus, not even staying to get in any alone time with Pete. Andy was somewhat preoccupied by an attention seeking Pete for the rest of the night, begging Andy to play video games with him until he was too tired for his eyes to stay open.

Pete seemed troubled, but Andy didn’t want to pry. In spite of how bad things had gotten the past winter, he still believed the best policy was to let Pete come to him. He would always come to someone when he needed it, so in the meantime, Andy tried to be a somewhat decent stand-in best friend. And after way too many rounds of the same damn shooter game to be healthy, Pete finally started talking.

“I had this cousin once, Tammi,” he began hesitantly, “her parents got divorced when she was really young, and she said that her mom fell in love with her dad’s family. Her mom came from this, like, this really shit family, dad always out on business trips, mom always drunk, no siblings. So she met the dad, and he had a huge fucking family, all nice and middle class and sit down Sunday dinners. But Tammi said her mom never really loved her dad, just her dad’s family.”

“Sounds tough,” Andy remarked after Pete had been quiet for a long time.

“What do you think?” Pete asked. Andy knew there was a time and a place for playing dumb.

“We’ve already got one shitty bassist; we don’t need another.” He could have added that there was definitely no love lost between Patrick and Mikey, or that Gerard could easily tear Pete limb from limb, or the fact that Mikey’s eyes lit up whenever Pete walked in the room, but the first two seemed unnecessary additions, and he doubted Pete would believe the last. Sure enough, Pete smiled a little.

“I’m a goddamn fantastic musician,” he said, tilting his chin up.
“Yeah, sure thing,” Andy said, rolling his eyes. “Going to bed, alright?” Pete nodded, standing up, stretching and going with him, the extra proof Andy needed to know he would be alright.

The two bands spent the majority of their free time training the next day, sans Bob, and Joe wondered aloud how Gerard wasn’t finding any of this suspicious. None of them had any really satisfactory explanations, but Andy was still pretty preoccupied with his newfound rifle, and all the fun that came with wielding it. He still preferred swords, but this was a hell of a lot of fun.

Joe mentioned that it might be fun to work with moving targets, and Andy agreed wholeheartedly, but wouldn’t hear of any kind of hunting, or Joe’s even stranger suggestion on practicing on one another, even though “we’re totally fast enough to duck and we heal rapidly, the two of us would be fine!”

Andy was more focused that day on trying to get Pete to pick up a real weapon. Pete fuckered with one of the pretty, ceremonial type knives for a while, but eventually put it down, uncomfortable with it.

“You only get comfortable with it with time,” Joe had said, not looking up from the gun sight he was staring down. Pete still flinched with he heard the gun go off.

“Look, I do pretty well with the powers I already have. You’re not peer pressuring Mikey into this,” he added, and Andy rolled his eyes.

“Mikey can summon zombies to drag his enemies to hell. You’re a glorified Casanova,” Andy said. Pete scowled at him, looked back into the rapidly expanding suitcase of weapons, and sighed.

“Nothing fits,” he said, and Andy shrugged.

“We’ll keep shopping,” Joe said.

In between training, they argued. They were going to the cemetery in Indianapolis, no they weren’t. Only Fall Out Boy was going, but that was too dangerous. Fall Out Boy with Mikey was going, but there was no way in hell anyone in MCR was letting Mikey go alone.

“Not alone,” Pete said, his eyes narrowed, “We haven’t thrown him to the wolves yet.”

“Yet being the operative word,” Joe added, baring his teeth. Ray still didn’t seem to find this joke quite funny yet. He was a worrier, like Andy used to be, before worrying about his band got too damn exhausting and he went back to being the cool, logical one.

Eventually, with great reluctance, they agreed to all go into Crown Hill cemetery together, with the caveat that they could leave instantly if anything went wrong, and that they didn’t throw themselves into the situation immediately.

So, for the first time Andy could remember, they went into danger with a plan. They looked up the best map of the enormous cemetery they could find online, and did their best to memorize the lines that meant very little on the grainy screen. They decided to do their best to spy on whatever was going on, listen to whatever they could, and then, maybe, if the numbers were slim enough, one of them could go into the presumed trap set for them and see what came next.

“I’d be volunteering to enter the trap?” Patrick asked wearily.

“Don’t be stupid, I would,” Andy said.
Andy wasn’t sure who was babysitting Gerard that night, given that all of the rest of My Chemical Romance seemed to be there. They took two cars, and got to the cemetery just at sunset. The heat, for the Midwest, was remarkably dry, and the air felt too thin for them to be so close to home. It felt too quiet, too empty, too much oddly like L.A. It was eerie.

Actually, it felt way too quiet in that cemetery.

“Do you hear anything?” Andy asked Joe, and Joe frowned as he shook his head.

“They might not be here yet,” he said dubiously.

“Or this cemetery might be nearly four hundred acres,” Patrick said, “One of the two.”

“We’d better look quick then, hadn’t we?” Joe said, leading the way forward.

Just like any cemetery, Andy didn’t like this one. It was filled with tiny statues of children, some of them with their faces worn smooth by time that still seemed to be watching Andy. Why, he wondered, were cemeteries always filled with creepy statues? He knew it was crazy, but he felt he was being watched everywhere in the cemetery. Remember the girl in the tree from who knew how many cities ago, Andy kept looking up into the trees, but his eyes, working perfectly in the dark, couldn’t see anything out of the ordinary.

Maybe he was doing this monster fighting thing too much, but not seeing anything strange was starting to make Andy more paranoid than seeing something wrong.

The sun sank beyond the horizon, and the light was turning a glowing pink when Andy finally heard the soft murmur of voices up ahead, behind what looked like a large stone wall. As they approached it, he began to see the flicker of orange light blinking around the top of the wall, firelight licking at the top of a stone house. Mausoleum, Andy recognized, even if it was just blank concrete from the back. They crept up behind the wall that blocked them from the mausoleum entrance, and Joe turned, pressing a finger to his mouth, and leaping up, his fingers catching on the top of the wall. He lifted just the top of his head over the wall, then dropped back down to the ground.

“Not many,” he whispered, barely audible. “Only about ten of them, actually. So much for a big turnout here. They don’t have the sigil painted yet either, they’re just standing there.”

“Waiting for us?” Frank asked, but Joe shook his head.

“They wouldn’t be so damn hard to find if it were a trap,” he said.

With that ominous warning, they waited for a while, all of them trying to listen but Andy knew he was the only one that had a decent shot of hearing anything important. Still, he couldn’t hear much more than murmuring. They were all talking at once, and never about the same thing. He could pick out Murmur’s name a few times, or mundane things such as picking up the kids from daycare, but nothing of importance until the last strains of twilight had faded from the sky and the stars were all shining clearly.

“Do you think it’s time to set up?” a soft, feminine voice asked.

“I imagine so,” a man responded, paused. “Do you really believe it?”

“I don’t know,” she said, “I didn’t believe in any of this a few months ago, but now, I mean, Jesus, we’ve seen vampires, why not this?”

“If this kid can really raise the dead, if there are others like him, what’s the point in
summoning Murmur anyway?"

Lucky, Andy thought, that there was a harsh outcry to this blasphemy, because it covered up the sharp intakes of breath from all of them. Everyone’s eyes trained on Mikey, who was frozen, eyes wide, staring at the blank wall in front of him.

“Heard he doesn’t bring ’em back right,” a gruffer man said, “not like Murmur will.”

“Lots of rumors about the kid, but we’re not a rumor mill,” the first woman rebuked. “Please keep it professional.” But no one seemed particularly eager to listen to her, and soon the words were flying.

“Heard he’s just a teenager!”

“What, acne and everything?”

“Oh yeah, geeky looking thing, glasses, bad haircut, the whole shebang.”

“Got a whole trained bodyguard we’ll have to take out.”

“Like CIA?”

“Yeah, trained fighters!”

“Heard he’s part vampire too.”

“You’re full of shit!”

“I heard he’s a fag,” someone snickered.

Andy turned behind him to hear the rustling of a furious looking Frank being held back by an almost equally murderous looking Ray. Mikey was stony silent, staring blankly at the wall like he couldn’t hear a thing.

Andy held his hands up in pleading, listening while the first woman got the crowd under control.

“Please, please, please, gentlemen, try and be professional. We need to go get the regular meeting in order, and do remember to take a very thorough attendance for your region. We don’t need another Utah, alright?”

The group all muttered their assent, and began walking away from the mausoleum, carrying their candles with them and leaving the bands in the darkness.

“Oh, I fucking swear,” Frank began, intricately detailing just what he would do if he got his hands on any member of the cult, but Andy was focused. Time to regroup later. And always thinking in time with him, Joe took up the lead.

“Alright, so they’re after Mikey,” he said, and then turned to Mikey. “So I think it’s only fair we leave it up to you. Do you want to get a closer look, see if we can learn anything else?”

“Yes,” Mikey responded without hesitation, his eyes flashing. “Absolutely.”

“Excellent, no time to lose,” Joe said, and began following the now distant glow of the candles. Andy took the lead with him, only realizing how strange this must seem when Bob asked how the hell they knew where they were going, and Andy chuckled slightly. They probably couldn’t
see the light up ahead at all, not like he and Joe could with their enhanced vision.

The group of them followed the flickering light, their feet crunching on the slightly dry grass as they walked. Andy hoped it wasn’t noisy to draw too much attention, but then again, they found the mausoleum when the sun was still out, so surely there were no vampires among them.

They eventually stopped at a large stone structure, separated into three arches, and divided by the three arches were dozens of people. Far more than in Salt Lake City. Andy swallowed hard, and Joe jerked his head over to a group of trees that all of them stepped behind. They were too far away to hear them all now, but the cover was sparse, and some streetlights were focused on the area.

“Any plans now?” Bob asked in a harsh whisper.

“Maybe whoever’s in charge will make a speech,” Joe suggested. “They seem to like speech making. It’s like stalking politicians, honestly.”

“Yeah, but we aren’t getting anywhere hoping, and it looks like they’re waiting for us,” Mikey said, frustrated. “So what if we set off the trap by walking into it?”

Andy stared at Mikey, and saw that nearly everyone else was looking at him with contempt, but Joe and Frank both looked like they were considering it.

“Well, we obviously can’t send you in first,” Joe said, and Andy had to clamp his hand over Pete’s mouth to stop Pete from screaming at Joe and getting them all caught.

“I’m the one they’re looking for,” Mikey said, looking like this was obvious. “I go in, I get them to tell me what they want, then you guys and the inevitable undead army take them out before anything bad happens.”

“Not the worst plan I’ve ever heard,” Joe said.

“Really?” Ray hissed. “There have to be nearly seventy people there! It’s a- a suicide mission!”

“Obviously not, as they need him alive for whatever this is,” Joe said, and shrugged. “Still, maybe you’re right.”

“If none of them have seen him before, someone could go in pretending to be Mikey,” Patrick said.

“How does that improve our chances even slightly?” Pete asked, his eyes still a little wild, and his hand clasped protectively over Mikey’s.

“It helps if it’s me,” Andy said, smiling slightly. Mikey frowned at him, but Patrick grinned, and Joe nodded approvingly.

“Think you can pass for him?” Joe asked.

“The description was young, gay, bad haircut, and possibly part vampire,” Andy said, smirking a little. “I fit the description better than him.”

“Hold on, this is ridiculous!” Mikey said, looking panicked. “You can’t go risking your life-”

“I’m the strongest and the fastest here,” Andy said. “I’ve got the best chance of escaping if
“things go south, and nobody can force me to use powers I don’t have.””

“And if they do have a better physical description of me?” Mikey asked.

“I tell them I’m interested in the cult, read up on it online,” Andy said, shrugging again. “Summon some backup zombies and come help me if I give the signal,” he said, and grabbed the gun Joe held out to him.

“What’s the signal?” Bob asked.

“Screaming for you guys to help me, presumably,” Andy said, flashed them a smile, and walked a distance in the opposite direction before walking towards the gathering, where they were already beginning to light candles.

It was a little nerve wracking to walk into the middle of this alone, but truth be told, Andy was a little grateful to not have to worry about anyone else for once. He felt indestructible, and against humans, he nearly was.

Andy made it up to the edge of the ring of people before they noticed him, and the chattering group fell eerily silent within seconds of the first one seeing him. Andy coughed.

“Hey,” he said. All of their eyes were trained on him, and he coughed again. “I heard, um, online, that you were, uh, looking for me.”

“Young enough,” the woman in charge whispered to her friend, too low for a human to catch, but just loud enough for Andy to hear.

“I think I can help you,” Andy said. It was such an unbelievable lie, and he could tell it would never work by the looks on their faces, flickering in the candlelight.

“I don’t think we’ve had the pleasure,” the woman said. Andy felt his heart throb painfully at the sight of her: bright red hair pulled back into a ponytail, piercing eyes, the same focused professionalism. She reminded him so much of Andrea that he had to fight to keep looking at her. Just as bad, he tried to remind himself. Just as self-centered, probably. He swallowed thickly and stretched his hand out, shaking hers.

“Lucinda,” she said. A beat passed before she raised her eyebrows, and Andy coughed again.

“Michael,” he choked out, and he cringed internally. He hadn’t meant to use Mikey’s name, but it was the first thing that came to mind.

“Michael,” she repeated. “Well, we’re all quite pleased to see you, but I don’t think any of us expected you would come so willingly,” she said, striding back and forth in front of him.

“I’ve got ghosts just like anyone else,” he said. The truth behind his words sat heavy in his chest. “But I don’t understand how exactly you think I can succeed where you’ve failed,” he said. Lucinda turned to him, eyes sharp and cutting, and Andy had the sinking feeling that he wasn’t fooling her.

“Before we discuss that, why don’t we see if you can really do what we’ve been told,” she said.

“You want me to raise the dead?” Andy said, raising his voice far louder than they had been speaking, trying to play it off as shock, and praying that Joe had been listening and would transfer
“I mean, you can understand why we need some sort of proof,” Lucinda said, smiling coldly at Andy.

“Right,” Andy said, “It’s not super focused, but…” he closed his eyes and lifted his hand out in the direction of the other guys, made a beckoning finger towards himself, and waited. He started counting seconds, and a full minute had passed, the mutterings getting increasingly worse, before someone gasped, and Andy’s eyes flew open to see a zombie staggering over to them.

“I- I don’t.” Lucinda’s eyes were wide, and Andy grinned.

“That’ll be all, thanks!” he said in his raised voice at the zombie, and it crumpled to the earth, lifeless again.

“How did you-?” Lucinda was still staring at him in awe.

“I was born with it,” Andy said. “What do you need me for? I can’t raise their essence, you know. You can’t talk to them through me.”

“We believe that if you were to summon Murmur, and to offer yourself up as a human vessel for him, he might take to it better than he has to us,” a man said from the back, also staring at Andy in terror.

“What makes you think that?” Andy asked.

“I spoke to him!” a frail woman spoke up from the back of the crowd. “He wants a stronger vessel!”

“Well, that seems all well and good, but I’m not sure I want to be a vessel,” Andy said, rubbing the back of his neck.

“We anticipated that,” a bulky looking man said. He stepped closer to Andy, too closer, towering more than a foot taller than him and significantly wider.

“You think that’s really a good idea?” Andy couldn’t bring himself to even pretend to sound nervous as he glared up at the cult guy. He flexed his muscles and growled.

“Don’t think it’s a bad one,” he said, and he lifted his hand, ready to strike out at him, but Andy was much faster.

Before the man knew what had hit him, Andy had him flat on his back and was sprinting for the trees. He didn’t waste his breath yelling at them to run, he assumed that that was sort of a given, and luckily, he was right. His bands were running before Andy reached them, giving them a hell of a head start on the mob behind them.

Unfortunately, Andy’s plan of running towards his friends made their location somewhat obvious, and he really hadn’t thought this plan through enough to remember that he was a way faster runner than anyone else there with him. He had outdistanced everyone within a few seconds, and a few seconds later the plan fell apart entirely as he heard someone get tackled to the ground.

Andy snapped around, but he heard Patrick spitting and cursing before he made him out. It took no time at all for a few others to get enveloped, and Andy stopped running. He let the fastest of the group take his wrists and drag him over to the others, trying to think of a backup plan.
“Necromancer,” Lucinda hissed, drawing herself up to Andy’s face.

“Eh,” Andy’s face twisted and he shrugged as best he could while trapped in someone’s grip. “Actually, I lied. I’m not a necromancer. I don’t think I’d make a very good vessel for your Murmur guy.”

“I saw you raise the dead!” Lucinda scoffed, pacing on the uneven grass. “I know what you can do.”

“Really, and I’d say I’m sorry about this, but I’m not, I’m not even human,” Andy said, cracking a grin. He pushed the arms of his captor backwards with a horrible, snapping sound that made him fall over in pain, and he grabbed Lucinda, holding her neck just beneath his teeth.

“Vampire, actually,” he said, and held her shaking in his arms as he looked up at the rest of the crowd.

“You can let my friends go now,” he said, raising his voice without lifting his head. The man who had threatened Andy earlier who now had his arms wrapped around Patrick scoffed.

“Kill her, bloodsucker, see if that stops us.”

Andy swallowed. He hadn’t expected them to care so little about the fate of their leader, and he looked to Joe for help. Joe shrugged at him, his face stretched into a similarly helpless grimace.

“So, are you going to come quietly?” the man asked Andy. Andy swallowed.

“I can’t actually raise the dead,” he said. “So, no, not really.”

“I can,” Mikey said, ignoring Pete’s groan.

The Murmurers turned to face Mikey, who straightened up.

“Let me go and I can show you,” he said, chin tilted up. Andy might have imagined it, but he thought he saw Mikey’s eyes flash, all white from corner to corner, very briefly. Lucinda nodded a tiny bit under Andy’s grasp, and the girl holding Mikey let go. Mikey stepped forward, raised his hands out flat in front of him, and his eyes flashed bright white, glowing temporarily behind his glasses before returning to normal.

“Bad idea,” he said, and smiled a cold, cruel smile. Andy could hear the distant sound of way too much groaning, and could see over the shoulders of the Murmurers the enormous crowd of undead shambling towards them.

It didn’t take long for the screaming to start.

Once the zombies reached the crowd, it had dissolved into chaos. Most of the people were running once they saw the undead, but some of the more dedicated stayed to fight, to try and get ahold of Mikey. The Murmurers that remained still outnumbered the two bands, but the undead put them at a huge advantage, giving everyone a chance to draw their weapons.

It really wasn’t much of a fight, Andy thought, mostly people started running when they saw that the zombies weren’t there merely for show. But Lucinda and a few of the men refused to back down, trying to fight through Andy and the others to reach Mikey. It seemed a simple fight until one of the undead bit down on Lucinda’s arm, pulling and ripping until it fell back with a large, stringy chunk of her flesh clamped in its teeth.
Her screams drowned all of them out, frantic, terrified wailing that filled the whole cemetery with noise, but the zombies weren’t done, sinking their teeth into the remaining fighters as well, and Mikey’s eyes kept flashing white.

“Mikey, Mikey, stop!” Pete pleaded, grabbing Mikey’s face in his hands and staring into his eyes. “Please stop,” he begged, and Mikey’s eyes dulled. The zombies collapsed onto the ground. Everyone left of the Murmurers ran for the parking lot, Lucinda still scream-sobbing as she ran.

“Well, I mean, that probably could’ve gone worse,” Joe said wearily, throwing a sweaty arm around Andy’s shoulder. He threw a furtive look at Mikey, who had pressed his face into Pete’s chest. Pete rubbed circles in his back, and Andy turned away. It felt too personal to even look at.

“I think we should get back,” Bob said in a small voice, and no one disagreed.

The drive back was silent, and Andy couldn’t help but notice Mikey was in the MCR car this time.

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Something had gone wrong the other night, Mikey was sure of it. He knew that the zombies had gotten out of his control. He had no idea how he got them back under control, but they were definitely out of control, and that was terrifying. It was unacceptable. But every time he tried to bring it up to Pete, Pete dismissed it as a normal issue with controlling his powers.

Mikey felt edgy all the time, and worse, the tension had spread to him and Pete, making him snappy at the smallest things. Pete was breathing down his neck, he snored too loud, he couldn’t stop to watch a movie for five minutes and instead just kept kissing all the time. Sure, physically Pete’s lips were just as soft as they had been the day before, but they were no longer charged with sparks. Pete didn’t seem to notice as Mikey’s responses grew more and more feeble, then dropped out altogether.

He knew objectively that it was a small issue, that things were going to get better, they had to, but that loss of control he had felt terrified him more than he’d been scared in a long time. And the only person he could really talk to…

Well, he didn’t have enough of a death wish to mention it to Gerard. Not yet, anyway.

Mikey’s somber mood didn’t seem to be affecting any of his other friends. They were all over the moon at the success of their mission and the new information in the case. Pete must have sensed something was wrong, but he didn’t say anything about it if that was the case.

It wasn’t until Pete had Mikey half pinned to the couch, lips brushing through his hair while he murmured compliments that Mikey couldn’t stand it anymore.

“Will you get up?” Mikey asked tonelessly. Pete drew back instantly, eyes brimming with hurt.

“Will you tell me what’s wrong?” he pleaded, and Mikey pulled himself to the other side of the couch, wrapping his arms tight around his chest.

“You need to back up,” Mikey said. He stared straight ahead, letting his fingers curl tightly around his own arms, desperate to find some sort of warmth now that Pete’s feverish body was far from his. Pete made a frustrated growl.

“Back up how? In what aspect? You have to talk to me, I’m not a mind-”
“In every aspect!” Mikey shouted, standing up. He felt cold to the bone, and tried to reign in his emotions. No more zombies, not like that, not ever again. He had to stay in control, right? He couldn’t remember anything Gerard had told him about this, and maybe he’d gone too far for that advice anyway.

“What do you want from me?” Pete asked, forcibly calm. Mikey took in a deep, rattling breath. He still didn’t meet Pete’s eyes.

“I want you to give me some space for a couple of days,” Mikey said, trying to think clearly. “I should spend some time with Gerard. Maybe back up from this monster fighting stuff for a bit. I know you think what happened with the zombies wasn’t a big deal, but trust me, it really, really was.”

“Oh,” Pete let out an elated sigh. “Is that all? You’re just worried about that?”

“No, that’s not all,” Mikey said. It was harsh, but there wasn’t exactly much point in lying to Pete. Pete inhaled sharply, but didn’t argue it.

Hanging out with Gerard was nice. Mikey felt some of his guilt abate, if nothing else. Gerard was quieter than usual, still apologetic, and so was Mikey. Neither of them mentioned the N word. Instead, Gerard was eager to show Mikey some of his newer concept drawings, drawings that Mikey felt like hell for not looking at earlier.

A part of him, a large part, still longed to run away with Fall Out Boy. To not be the kid, the little brother, to be powerful and be a superhero, but God, he would miss all of this too much to even think of it.

For some reason, Frank ended up hanging out with the two of them more than training after a while. Maybe he felt guilty too, Mikey reasoned, given the way he laughed too loud at all of Gerard’s jokes and kept offering to buy more snacks at whatever weird grocery store they had in this part of the country. Maybe they should all feel guilty.

After a bit of this, Frank finally pulled Mikey aside in the morning, before Gerard had woken up.

“Listen, I’ve got this today,” he said, smiling encouragingly at Mikey. “You should go train. I think the guys miss you.” The thought that Pete missed Mikey went unsaid.

“Yeah, but, are you sure?” Mikey asked, half pleading. He was hoping to put this confrontation off as long as possible.

“No, Frank’s right.”

Both Mikey and Frank nearly jumped out of their skins as they saw Gerard standing behind them, nursing a cup of coffee with steam billowing up over his dark ringed eyes.

“You should go see your secret boyfriend,” Gerard said, rolling his eyes and giving Mikey a small smile.

“I- I don’t- I didn’t-!” Mikey sputtered, eyes darting between Gerard and Frank, the latter of which looked just as helpless as him. Gerard chuckled, taking a sip of the too hot coffee.

“None of you were particularly, um, subtle,” he said, rolling his eyes. “But I guess learning self-defense isn’t the worst that could happen. The rest we can talk about later, alright? I think I’ve made you feel guilty enough.”
Gerard’s smile looked genuine, absolutely sincere, and more mystified than he had ever been, Mikey walked out of the bus and over to where Fall Out Boy’s was parked, where Ray and Bob had already started practicing.

“So the weirdest thing just happened,” Mikey said, walking up to Pete as though nothing had ever happened. Pete looked pleasantly surprised, and Mikey gave him a brief peck on the cheek by way of greeting. “Gerard knows,” Ray and Bob’s weapons clattered to the ground, “and he’s cool with it.”

“Really?” Joe said, eyebrows shot all the way into his thick, curly hair.

“Yeah, it was the craziest—” Mikey began, cut off by an earsplitting scream from the direction of his bus. Too familiar.

Mikey was running immediately. The earth could be collapsing in on itself disaster movie style, and if it wasn’t in Mikey’s direct path to the bus, he wouldn’t notice it.

He wrenched the door open, only realizing once he got inside that the windows were broken, and there was broken glass scattered all around the inside of the lounge. Sunlight streamed through in uneven chunks, hitting Gerard in his position sprawled on the ground with an unnatural yellow glow that shone on the blood that was splattered across his face.

Mikey dove down next to him, ignoring the warmth that spread across his knees as he accidentally sliced them open on some of the broken glass on the floor. He said nothing, just stared into Gerard’s eyes with horror. Gerard opened and shut his mouth a few times, closed his eyes, and swallowed.

“Frank,” he said at long last. “They took him.”

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The My Chemical Romance bus was absolute chaos. It had been chaotic the first time Pete had seen it, the strange sort of decor that was generic tour bus meets GameStop basement meets the basement of a Universal monster movie fanatic. This time, the chaos was much worse. All blood and glass and terrified band members. Neon yellow auras hissing and spitting everywhere, it made Pete scared before the news of Frank had even traveled, telephone style, back to him.

Though his band was all for sticking around and finding out what had happened to Frank, who had taken him, how they could help, it was pretty clear to Pete from the look on Gerard’s face as he briefly met Pete’s eyes that the best thing they could do was get out of there and leave the other band alone.

The second they got back on their bus, Pete was in full on research mode. If he buried himself in the task, maybe he wouldn’t have to think of the look of agony on Mikey’s face.

“Can we find this stupid fucking Murmur website they keep talking about?” Pete asked sourly.

“On it,” Joe said, pulling out his computer, and Patrick grabbed his laptop as well.

“He’s going to be alright,” Andy said softly, on hand on Pete’s shoulder that Pete shrugged off. Andy looked pained, but kept talking. “Really. They aren’t going to kill him, I’ll bet. He’s probably bait for Mikey.”

“And Mikey’s going to go after him,” Pete hissed. “That doesn’t make it better.”
“Found it,” Joe called. Pete ran over behind him to look at the laptop over his shoulder, and his heart sank.

“There’s a reward offered to anyone who can kidnap the necromancer’s boyfriend,” Joe winced. “He’s described as short, black hair, tattoos, and keeping close to Mikey.”

“Shit,” Patrick spat, and Pete shook his head.

“They think that that’s Frank?” he asked.

“There’s no picture,” Joe said, and looked up sympathetically at Pete. “I’m really—”

“Don’t say sorry,” Pete pleaded. He went back to his bunk, drawing the curtain shut and curling up in the darkness. He sent Mikey a bare bones text of what they had learned, and didn’t apologize. Mikey would just hate it that much more if he apologized. Would hate him that much more if he apologized.

Pete’s band managed to drag him out on stage in spite of his guilt, and even if he was awful, the screaming crowd didn’t seem to notice. He spent the whole time feeling the burning weight of his cell phone in his pocket, still with no replies on it, and trying not to think about My Chemical Romance cancelling their show that day.

He tried to go to their bus to say something to try and make it better, but no one would answer for him. The silence was worse than a thousand screams that this was all Pete’s fault, he thought.

Pete went back to lying on his bunk and drifting in and out of sleep, never quite awake, but not getting any sleep that made him feel rested. At some point during all of this, the bus started moving, and a few hours after that Patrick ripped Pete’s curtain back, his glasses dangling off the end of his nose and his eyes wide with excitement.

“Get up, we’ve got good news,” Patrick said, dragging Pete out of bed. It took Pete a minute to wrap his blurry mind around what was happening, and then felt a surge of warmth run through him from his hand that Patrick was gripping all the way up to his chest. Patrick sat him down on the couch, and squeezed his fingers reassuringly. Somehow, when nothing else did, this made Pete feel fractionally better.

“We know where they’re going next,” Joe announced, the laptop still half open on the coffee table. “They don’t know our names, but they figured out that we were on Warped Tour, so they took Frank to Cleveland, which is where we’re going right now,” Joe punctuated the last two words by pounding the table twice with his fist.

“It’s still a trap,” Pete said, but he felt more hesitant than actually worried, and the circles Patrick was rubbing on Pete’s hand with his thumb were very soothing.

“Yeah, well,” Joe rolled his eyes, “that’s never stopped us before, why should it now?”

“Told the My Chem guys?” Pete asked.

“Funny story, none of us actually have any of their numbers, would you believe it?” Joe asked. “You can text them, or we can just bombard them as soon as the buses stop. Either way, we perform a rescue mission, we book it out, and we forget about this psycho cult business forever. Some other crime fighting band can deal with it.”

“Hell, we can deal with it once we’re not touring with Mikey,” Patrick said, and gave Pete
an encouraging smile. Pete gave him a look of gratitude.

“What if they’ve got a knife to his throat?” Pete asked.

“Wow, I don’t know,” Joe said sarcastically, “it sure would be convenient if we knew someone that could use their creepy mind powers to make them let go of him long enough for some of Mikey’s zombies to save the day. If only we knew someone with mind control.”

“Oh, right.” Pete felt a little sheepish.

“So try and get some real sleep, is what we’re saying,” Patrick said gently, “We’ve got a big day and an early morning tomorrow.”

Pete tried his hardest to get to sleep, he really did. He drafted a few different texts to Mikey, letting his finger hover over the Send button for a minute or so each time before deleting them. Sleep evaded him, but he hadn’t really been expecting better. The second he felt the bus screech to a stop, he bolted out, searching for a bus that had broken lounge windows. At least it wasn’t going to be hard to find for the next couple of dates.

Rather than knock and risk not getting let in, Pete nodded to the bus driver, who remembered him by now, and let himself in. The rest of the band was sitting up in the lounge, clearly having no better time sleeping than Pete had. Pete cleared his throat, and all of them looked up at him, mostly blank. Pete’s mouth went dry under their gazes, but he held himself together.

“He’s in town, we know the place, and we have a plan,” Pete said, still breathless. Gerard stood up, and Mikey’s eyes brightened.

“Where?” Ray asked.

“Lake View Cemetery,” Pete said, relieved that they were listening to him. None of them looked angry anymore, all focused intently on him. “They’re there right now, and we’ve got a plan to get him out.”

“Easy, I do what they want,” Mikey said, and Pete protested before Gerard could.

“Don’t be stupid, we’ll have a plan that doesn’t involve you getting possessed by a demon from the middle ages,” Pete said.

“Possessed?” Gerard turned to glare at his brother, but Pete was in a hurry.

“It’s still dark out, we should go before the cemetery fills up with visitors,” Pete said.

“We’ll be ready in five minutes,” Gerard said.

“I’ll go wake my band up. Meet you back here,” Pete said, running back to his bus and shaking his friends awake.

None of them were particularly eager to be up before four in the morning, but they all got up and shuffled out to the other bus in the early morning fog, and Pete led the way to the cars they were, in all honesty, about to steal. No time asking, and no point this early either. He tried his best to not be offended that Mikey got in the car the rest of his band was in. Pete would be pissed too, but he had an even more sinking feeling that Mikey blamed himself more than Pete.

“So no splitting up,” Joe demanded, halfway through a largely silent car ride. Pete had been staring out the window at the morning star, and this brought him back down to earth.
“Okay, but what if-”

“No buts,” Joe said, “The last thing we need is for someone else to get taken.”

“Yeah, but it’s a trap,” Pete said. “Clearly they already have a plan for us.”

“They’re not expecting your power, and we’re better prepared this time,” Joe said, his fingers tapping on the handle of his gun to drive his point home. Pete sighed, but stopped arguing. Maybe Joe was right and they wouldn’t need to split up and he wouldn’t have to worry about it.

The pulled up to the chained shut iron cemetery gates at a little after four in the morning, the stars still shining brightly, without threat of sunrise on the horizon. Pete hopped out of the car just as the other band’s car pulled up next to them. He rattled the chains that held the gates shut, frowning when he felt just how heavy they were.

“Think you can break these?” he called to Andy. Andy’s nose crinkled up.

“Doubt it,” he said. “Anyway, I’ve got a better way of getting in,” he said, and then he climbed back into the driver’s side of the car. He pulled up parallel to the gate, dangerously close to scraping the paint of the car on the iron bars, then wiggled out of the passenger side.

Andy jumped up onto the hood of the car, then the roof, and then flung himself over the top of the gates, landing deftly on his feet, and smiled at the rest of them through the bars. Pete scowled.

“That is a terrible plan,” Patrick said. “Do you want me to break my legs?”

“I can catch you if you’re scared,” Andy said, his too sharp teeth gleaming in the darkness.

Patrick rolled his eyes, climbing up onto the top of the car less gracefully than Andy had, slipping a little bit, but managed to climb up onto the top of the gate. He tried to lower himself gently, but ended up falling to the ground with a harsh gasp. He stood up, brushing off his pants and wincing, and by the time he had, Joe was nearly over the gate as well.

Pete was about to make the steep looking climb as well, when he saw someone was already on the hood of the car. His shadow in the night was sharply angled like Mikey’s, but broader, somehow, darker than the night around him. Gerard dropped to his feet on the other side with a surprising amount of ease, nearly as lithe as Andy, and Pete was shocked to see that there was no fear crackling in his aura, nothing but steely gray determination, reflected as well in his eyes. He stared Pete down with an almost menacing look, but turned away.

Pete clambered up on top of the car, nearly losing his grip when he felt the icy iron on his palms. He fought the instinct to yank away from the metal and hauled himself over the bars as quickly as possible, hitting the hard earth with a dull thud.

Mikey and Ray had climbed over as well, and Bob was on top of the car when Joe spoke up.

“Wait, stop!” he demanded, his face pinched with worry.

“What?” Bob asked, his tone harsher than it would have normally been.

“This car thing is all well and good, but how the hell are we gonna get back over to the parking lot once we have Frank?” Joe asked. There was silence.

Bob threw himself over the edge, cracking his neck when he stood on the other side of the
“We’ll deal with that when we’ve got him,” Bob said, and led the way walking deeper into the cemetery.

“What’s your plan, then?” Gerard asked Pete in a level voice, forced calm.

“I’m a fairy, like, fae,” Pete said, hoping they wouldn’t have to stop to explain. “So if I can look whoever’s got Frank in the eyes, I can make them let him go, and then Mikey can do his zombie thing to distract them, and we book it.”

“His ‘zombie thing’?” Gerard repeated, stopping dead in his tracks. “He is not going to do his ‘zombie thing’, or haven’t you learned anything?”

“Oh Jesus Christ, give it a rest, dude!” Pete turned in shock to see that it was Patrick who had spoken. Gerard looked almost equally shocked, though that was nothing compared to the look on Mikey’s face.

“We get it, the creepy death powers are scary and forbidden for some weird, Stephen King reason, but surprisingly, the more Mikey practices, the better he gets. Your friend is in danger. Mikey’s never accidentally hurt anyone with this power, and he’s saved our asses quite a few times. And whatever, maybe there’s more to this than you’re letting on, but unless you want to be the one to do the corpse summoning, give it a rest for tonight at least? Please?” Patrick took in a deep breath before continuing. “And if you’re gonna give anyone shit for it, complain about us,” he waved his hand around to encompass his band, “we talked Mikey into it in the first place.”

Gerard was quiet for a moment, then nodded and said “later,” and kept walking. Pete couldn’t be sure, but he thought he heard Mikey whisper a quiet ‘thank you’ to Patrick as well.

“So where are we going, anyway?” Gerard asked, too loud, after they had walked in silence for a few minutes.

“No idea,” Joe said, his voice pointedly quieter. “We usually just walk until we find something out of the ordinary. In this case, they should be looking for us too.”

“Could we just wait for them?” Gerard asked.

“Not if we want the upper-hand,” Joe said. They reached the top of a small hill, and he peered down. Pete trusted Andy and Joe to be the best lookouts in the world, but he felt like something was off.

“It’s too quiet,” he said to Andy in a whisper, and Andy grimaced.

“I know,” he said. “If they’re here, they must be waiting for us. Plus, it’s still night, and we know this guy doesn’t just have human followers.”

“You think…?” Pete trailed off, and Andy nodded curtly.

Well, vampires would definitely throw a wrench in their plans, but Pete tried not to think about it. Joe was a sure shot with silver bullets, that could hold them, right?

Pete didn’t realize until too late that they were right by the tree line of a small wooded area, and what that could mean. Before he could say that maybe they ought to get out of there, someone small and pale leapt out of one of the trees and latched itself on Andy.
“Run!” Andy yelled, fighting to rip the thing off his chest. Pete caught a glimpse of its face, looking like a young girl with big, white fangs that kept trying to rip at Andy’s skin.

Joe shot the girl in the head, and she moaned, dissolving into dust in the traditional vampire way. They stood, heaving for a moment, before Joe’s head perked up, turning terrified to Pete.

“They’re here,” he said, and then hesitated. “Too many.”

Pete felt suddenly very small and defenseless without a weapon, and turned to Mikey and Gerard, because they didn’t have weapons either.

It got confusing pretty quickly after that. The Murmurers hiding in the forest were attacking them all at once, and it was the best Pete could do to punch one or two of them in the face if they got too close. He tried to keep next to Andy, who was actively throwing them off without killing them.

Everything was happening too fast, and it was too dark for Pete to see, but eventually he started to make out the voices.

“Grab him! The one with glasses- no, no, the tall one!”

Pete hissed, met someone’s eyes he didn’t recognize and yelled “STOP!” at them, and they froze. He spun wildly looking for someone else to stop, anyone, but they were receding, and before he could make sense of it, the Murmurers were gone, and they had Mikey with them.

Gerard swore at the top of his lungs, causing some of the birds in a nearby tree to fly away, but Pete turned to the Murmurer that was still frozen from his words. Pete glared into his eyes, fury burning in his chest.

“Where are they going? TELL THE TRUTH,” he demanded. Pete saw the gold reflected in the other man’s voice before he spoke.

“They’re going to complete the invocation at The Angel of Death Victorious,” the man said, the words sliding out of him in a monotone.

“Where is that?” Pete asked.

“The other side of the cemetery.”

“Can you take us there?”

“I don’t know how to get there on my own, but I remember the general direction.”

Pete grabbed the man by his collar and stared into his eyes, seeing the almost flame-like reflection of his own eyes in the other man’s.

“Take us there,” Pete said, and the man nodded, stumbling into the wooded area, dizzy.

Pete started walking, and paused to turn around when he didn’t hear footsteps following him.

“That was…” Ray didn’t finish the sentence. Pete straightened his shoulders.

“Come on, I don’t wanna lose him,” Pete said, half jogging after the man through the sticks and underbrush.

The forest was too dark for Pete to see properly, so he had to rely on his sense of hearing to
stumble after the man, who was traipsing through the woods like he had grown up there.

Only a few minutes passed before Pete could see flickering firelight up ahead, and Andy grabbed the man leading them, cupping a hand over his mouth as they walked the rest of the way down the path. They ended up on the right edge of a clearing, just on the side of a group of people, less even than there were in Utah, all staring up at the most horrific statue Pete had ever seen.

An enormous green angel sitting on a throne, holding what looked like a staff out in front of it, it wasn’t so terrifying in and of itself, but in contrast to the pale green of the rest of it, its eyes were black, and black tears crawled down its face, making it jump from mildly creepy to downright alarming. And sitting in its lip, chest between its arms and tied to the thing, was a gagged and extremely pissed off Frank.

Lucinda, from Indianapolis, stood up next to Frank, with a ragged and dangerous looking knife against his throat. Mikey stood in front of the statue, unrestrained but shaking. Pete heard Gerard let out a tiny moan of relief when he saw them both, but the crowd was clamoring so loudly that he doubted it would cause any problems.

“We need a little bit of everyone’s blood here, save for the vessel,” he heard Lucinda say over the din, and then heard Gerard’s sharp hiss as she drew the knife away from his neck and down Frank’s arm. Frank winced, and glared at her, but there wasn’t much he could do as his blood dripped into the heavy black vase. Another woman took the vase from her, and Lucinda brought the knife back up to Frank’s throat.

“What are you waiting for?” Ray pleaded in Pete’s ear. Pete shook his head. Nothing would work when they were this close, but he had to try something.

Pete took a leaping step into the clearing and stared straight at Lucinda.

“Get away from him!” he demanded, but the command wasn’t there, dammit, he tried again, blinking hard and concentrating. “Get away from-” he began, but he was tackled to the ground, a dirty, bloody hand clamped over his mouth.

Pete bit at the hand, and whoever held him made a pained noise, but didn’t let go. Pete turned to the side, and saw the rest of them getting captured as well. His heart sank, and he looked up to the statue again, were Mikey and Frank were staring at them in horror, and in Frank’s case, a little disdain. Clearly they didn’t have a backup plan.

“Anyway,” the woman said, rolling her eyes, and she began pouring the blood out of the vase in the shape of the sigil, muttering Latin phrases under her breath as she did, carefully creating the sigil to use every last drop of blood, and then she stepped back.

“Step into the sigil,” she ordered Mikey. Mikey looked over at Pete, up at Frank, and stepped into the middle of the sigil.

Mikey stood there in the soft glow of the fire, and after a minute, turned to the woman as if to say “What now?”

“Say his name, and say that you offer yourself as his vessel,” she said. Mikey grimaced, looked skyward, and spoke.

“Murmur, I offer myself as your vessel,” he said. For a moment, it seemed nothing had happened, but then all the candles and flames in the clearing were extinguished, all at once. Pete inhaled sharply, and as his eyes started to adjust, he saw that Mikey had fallen to the ground and was
thrashing, and Frank, who could see him better, was fighting against his restraints and making loud noises of protest against the gag.

Just as quickly as the lights had been extinguished, they all flew back on, along with a circle of fire that now wreathed the clearing, turning everything a gaudy orange. Mikey turned to face the crowd, his eyes burning like the fire and his mouth twisted up into a cruel smile.

“My followers,” Mikey’s mouth opened, following the words like a crudely made puppet, but the voice wasn’t his, it was dark and gravely. “Five hundred years I’ve laid dormant, and yet now I am summoned back. To what do I owe the pleasure?”

All of the Murmurers were shaking, awed, and, if Pete was right, a little bit scared. Lucinda stepped forward, clearing her throat, and spoke up.

“My lord,” she said, genuflecting awkwardly in front of Mikey, but giving the sigil a wide berth. Andy tugged on Pete’s sleeve and gestured up to Frank, no longer guarded. Pete nodded, and while everyone focused on Murmur, they began sneaking around the crowd and up to the horrific angel statue.

“We only recently discovered your might again, after all these years…” Lucinda was sucking up, and all of them made it up to Frank. Patrick pulled his knife out and cut the gag off Frank first, then began sawing at the ropes while Frank stretched his jaw out, careful to remain silent and not attract any more attention.

“...and so, we all were hoping that you might, well, might let us speak to our deceased loved ones,” Lucinda finished. Murmur laughed cruelly through Mikey’s mouth.

“Thank you, dear girl, for the necromancer. Truly, I couldn’t ask for a better body to inhabit while I am on this plane. But I fear you’ve made a grave mistake in giving me human form. You see, there’s nothing to keep me obeying you right now, which means I intend to have fun,” Mikey’s face contorted into an evil smile again, and he lifted his hands. Shadows stretched out from each of his fingers forward, and covered the crowd in a blanket of blackness.

There was no screaming underneath the opaque shadow, but Pete could feel the pain, see the too bright red auras seeping out from underneath it, feel it viscerally, enough to bring him to his knees from the amount of suffering. Black spots crowded in his vision, blinding him as he felt waves and waves of pain coming off of the crowd.

He must have briefly blacked out, because when he next opened his eyes he saw Patrick staring worriedly at him, hands on his face, and Pete was lying on the ground. Awful, disfigured laughter was ringing out from Mikey’s body, and when Pete looked out again, he saw all of the Murmurers lying on the ground, faces contorted in pain, dead.

“Oh, that was fun!” Murmur cried, and he cracked Mikey’s neck to the side, stretching. He turned to the two bands and knelt down next to Pete. Pete tried to scramble away from the poisonous, powerful aura, and Murmur chuckled.

“You’re his lover, right? I can feel it, you know,” Murmur said. Pete whimpered, leaning in closer to Patrick as he tried to pull away from Murmur, but Murmur grabbed him by the collar with Mikey’s hands, holding him up with more strength than Mikey had.

“I think you’ll make an excellent first sacrifice,” he mused. “I need a full body’s worth of blood to get all my true powers back, and I think the human I’m in is strong enough that it might not kill him. Still, destroying his love will do a number on his soul, don’t you think?”
Pete couldn’t respond, he was too terrified to think, to breathe, to move, and he just barely
registered Murmur picking up a sharp rock from the ground. Pete felt the too blunt edge of the rock
break the surface of the skin on his neck when suddenly Murmur dropped him.

Pete blinked up at Murmur in Mikey’s body, clutching the now burnt looking hand that held
the rock and breathing heavily.

“Sorry, Master, so sorry, I didn’t know,” he moaned, and Pete instinctively stood up,
stretching out his arms as far as he could to try and block Murmur from touching anyone else. He
had no idea what was stopping Murmur from touching him, but he sure as hell wasn’t going to let
anyone else die like that. Pete’s head still throbbed.

“Fine,” Murmur said, standing up and glaring at the group of them, shielded by Pete. “I
already have his body; I can go elsewhere. And when this one gives, out, I’ll get another.” He gave
them a horrifying smile.

Pete was knocked slightly to the side as Gerard ran out from underneath his arm, ornate
cross held high in his hand, and he screamed “The power of Christ compels you!”

Murmur looked uneasy for a moment, then, when nothing happened, laughed.

“You know that won’t work if you don’t believe in it, right?” he said. Then his mood
shifted. He stared at Gerard inquisitively, and inhaled deeply, a smile spreading on his face.

“You, you’re a necromancer as well, aren’t you?” he asked, his eyes glowing with energy.
“Older too, I’ll bet,” he lashed out, grabbing Gerard by his shoulders and licking his lips hungrily.
“More powerful. What I could do in your body…”

Gerard was fumbling with something in his pocket, and then, with Mikey’s face nearly
touching his, he pressed something into Mikey’s forehead.

Pete could hear both Murmur and Mikey screaming out in pain, their two voices coming out
of the same mouth. Gerard must have heard Mikey too, so he yanked his hand back. Seared into
Mikey’s forehead was a symbol— it took Pete a moment, but it couldn’t be. It looked like the symbol
of the Rebel Alliance from Star Wars.

“Han primum iecit!” Gerard screamed, and he pressed the keychain symbol into his
brother’s chest.

“What magic is this?” Murmur spat.

“The power of the Force!” Gerard growled, and as he pressed the keychain down again,
Murmur let out one last wail, and Mikey slumped to the ground. His eyes fluttered open slowly.

“Hey there,” Mikey rasped. His eyes and voice were back to normal, as was his aura, Pete
was delighted to see.

“Hey,” Gerard was tearing up as he stared down at Mikey.

“Did you give me a Star Wars exorcism?” Mikey asked. Gerard nodded, and Mikey smiled,
sat up, and pulled Gerard into a hug.

“Sun’s rising,” Andy said. “Um, should we just leave all these bodies here?”

“You know what, someone else can deal with it,” Joe said. “We didn’t leave fingerprints
anywhere. Let’s just go home.”

***

Things changed between Mikey and Gerard, afterwards. It turned out there was a lot more to necromancy than simply raising zombies, and Gerard knew a lot more about it. Their grandmother told him to never use the power again after accidentally killing a bullying classmate in elementary school, but before then, she had taught him a lot about the power. With a little encouragement, he and Mikey trained together, along with the rest of their bands.

Aside from zombies and “death rays”, as Mikey called them, they could technically see into what Gerard assumed was purgatory when they were in a meditative state, seeing all the dead that had not yet passed on.

The summer was good. Once Gerard was in the loop, everyone got along really well. Sometimes they traded off who was playing for what band, just for fun.

And, to a degree, they still fought monsters. There were a few weird ghosts that Gerard was able to talk down in Virginia, and a vampire problem they worked on in Chicago. They kept checking cemeteries, but the website stopped updating, and eventually, they stopped seeing sigils anywhere.

The only problem was Pete.

Mikey still loved being with him, still loved the sex, the kissing, holding hands when they walked and kissing in front of Gerard to make him screw up his face and call it gross, but Pete consistently leaned a little further in than Mikey, hung on a little bit longer when Mikey tried to drop hands. Mikey knew he should say something, but he refused to acknowledge it until the very last date of the tour.

“So,” Pete’s voice was right in Mikey’s ear, his lips in his hair, seriously distracting him from whatever eighties movie they were supposed to be watching. “I was thinking.”

“Never a good thing when you do that,” Mikey mumbled sleepily. Pete chuckled.

“I was thinking that, after the tour, we should come out, you know?”

Mikey’s blood froze solid in his veins, his whole body turning to ice as Pete kept speaking, not seeing something wrong.

“I mean, we’ve got a tour coming up again this fall, so if we’re gonna be long distance, it’ll save any extra explanations. Plus, it would be really cool for the kids, you know? To see dudes in their favorite bands aren’t always straight too, it could be nice for… them…” he started trailing off, giving Mikey a worried look. “Are you okay?”

“I- Pete,” Mikey was sitting up straight now, trying not to meet Pete’s eyes. “Listen, I- it’s been great, but this isn’t a- I never saw it as a serious thing, you know?” He had to keep going, he wasn’t going to look at Pete, wasn’t going to see the look on his face. “It was just a summer fling kind of deal, just messing around and stuff. Shit, I mean, that’s okay, right?” He finally looked up at Pete, his face a blank mask of forced neutrality.

“I- Pete,” Mikey was sitting up straight now, trying not to meet Pete’s eyes. “Listen, I- it’s been great, but this isn’t a- I never saw it as a serious thing, you know?” He had to keep going, he wasn’t going to look at Pete, wasn’t going to see the look on his face. “It was just a summer fling kind of deal, just messing around and stuff. Shit, I mean, that’s okay, right?” He finally looked up at Pete, his face a blank mask of forced neutrality.

“Yes, of course, I get it,” Pete said, with an unpleasant smile that didn’t reach his eyes. “Obviously you don’t- I mean, no point forcing long distance if you’re not into it, right?”

“Yeah,” Mikey said. He didn’t apologize, but he was sure his face looked apologetic. Pete’s
mask was slipping, and Mikey wanted to be out of there when it fell. “I should head back to my bus, but it was a fun summer,” he said.

“See you around,” Pete agreed robotically, and Mikey ran out the door.

Mikey saw Pete one last time that tour, later in the evening. He was sitting in a lawn chair next to Patrick, his head on Patrick’s shoulder, and Mikey could just make out Patrick saying quiet, soothing things to him.

He’d be okay, Mikey thought. And in the meantime, Mikey had his own band to worry about. None of them, not even Gerard, seemed to be willing to give up monster fighting after they’d had a taste of it. Mikey suspected that things were about to get very, very strange, in My Chemical Romance.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter Title by My Chemical Romance

Hey guys! Thanks as always for reading! About the delay- I really don't have a good explanation for how things got so out of hand. A lot went down over the past month: the end of a decade long friendship, me coming out to my family, my deciding to move in with my girlfriend next year, and also, finals. I still don't think any of this is a reasonable excuse for making you wait an extra month however, and I have nothing to say except that I'm sorry. I don't know if there will be another December chapter or not, but I don't want to make promises I can't keep, so assume this is it till January, and if I end up being a decent author, you get a pleasant surprise, right? Thank you all so much for waiting as long as you have, hopefully you'll stay with me as I continue to fight the current and try to keep my life together, haha.
Thanks for reading!
Chapter Summary

While on tour with Panic! at the Disco, each of the four boys in Fall Out Boy meets a girl, they think they've found someone special. Unfortunately, they've all found the same girl, and she has less than pure intentions for trying to get close to them.

Chapter Notes

Hey guys! Before you read, please note this episode has a heavy sexual content throughout due to the nature of the monster. If you're uncomfortable with sexual content, please comment here or send me a message on tumblr and I'll provide you with a sex free summary- I promise the next chapter won't be like this, and I'll have a drabble up soon also without such an R rating. Thanks!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“FUCKING BITCH!”

“Yikes,” Joe muttered, leaning in a little closer. When he was right up on the keyhole he could almost make out Anna’s pleading, wheedling voice on the phone, but he still couldn’t hear specific words. Patrick, however, he could hear loud and clear.

“Are you eavesdropping?” Pete whispered, walking up to him. Joe nodded, pressing his finger to his lips.

“Is that Patrick?” Pete asked, slightly louder. Joe shushed him again. Pete opened his mouth to yell at Joe for invading Patrick’s privacy, and Joe cut him off.

“He’s breaking up with Anna!”

Pete’s eyes grew wide, and he shoved Joe to the side, with a remark about Joe having super hearing and him needing the spot by the keyhole much more.

Joe was torn between a lot of emotions as he heard Patrick curse and scream at the phone. He felt awful that this was happening to Patrick, amused at the word choice, satisfied that Anna would never darken their door again, and a little concerned as to how Patrick would react when this was all over. And, under all that, he also felt a little guilty for eavesdropping. Still. This was important.

Pete kept making distraught faces at the door and flinching, but Joe couldn’t help but chuckle from time to time. The harsh words sounded somewhat funny coming from Patrick’s mouth. It wasn’t as though he never swore, but he never swore like this, never at Anna, never with the intention of causing as much harm as possible.

Interestingly, this was the second violent breakup that Joe had overheard in a week, though
he wasn’t sure if the first one really counted. After all, no one thought that Lauren was anything more than Pete’s friend with benefits in L.A. Including Pete.

And yet, the day before the tour began, the whole band had woken up to screaming, and walked out to a scene straight out of a bad movie. The girl with wildly tangled hair and makeup streaking from her eyes down to her jaw, wearing Pete’s too big clothes. She looked like all of Pete’s girlfriends did: too skinny, dark hair, huge eyes. A slightly older Jeanae.

Pete mostly looked embarrassed, and Joe tried not to listen to this one, but it was hard not to hear her screaming. It sounded like a really bad case of miscommunication to Joe, but Pete did a hell of a job making things worse by trying to explain to the sobbing girl that he never actually had feelings for her, and didn’t she know this was just a casual sex thing? Sure, it lasted a few months, but even still. The sound of glass breaking was definitely enough to keep Joe far from the argument.

Maybe it was something in the air, all the breakups. Either way, Joe had taken to calling Marie a lot more and repeatedly telling her just how much he loved her.

“FINE!” Patrick roared, and there was one beat of silence before Joe realized that he had hung up.

Go, go, go! he mouthed at Pete, dashing for a chair himself. He had only time to throw himself into a cushy armchair and open up a copy of Rolling Stone, upside down, when the door to the back of the bus swung open.

Patrick’s whole frame quivered with residual anger as he stood there. His eyes were wild, and his face was pink and splotchy. He caught sight of Pete and Joe, made an indistinguishable noise in the back of his throat, and threw the separator door shut again. Pete winced when the whole bus shivered as the door cracked, and Joe grimaced.

“That didn’t sound like they made up,” Pete whispered, and Joe shook his head tersely.

Patrick and Anna had been dating for, well, nearly forever, in Joe’s mind. Not technically for as long as Joe had known him, but for as long as they were spending substantial amounts of time together rather than just dicking around. More importantly, Patrick was a very constant creature. He never handled change well. Losing Anna, it would make him, well, Joe didn’t really want to think about it.

So, he decided, the best thing to do at a time like this was to not think about it. Leaving Pete to deal with the inevitable emotional mopping up, Joe wandered off of the bus in hopes of finding someone from Panic! to hang out with.

Touring with Panic! at the Disco was a hell of a lot of fun, Joe had to admit, even if he didn’t have the same level of camaraderie with anyone in this band that they had with My Chemical Romance. They were more like younger brothers than best friends, though he was sure anyone from that band would’ve hated that description.

As if on cue, Joe had hardly gotten thirty feet from his bus when he ran straight into Ryan Ross, who was massaging his temples and staring at the ground as though it had done him a personal wrong.

“Ouch-! Oh, hey Joe,” Ryan gave him a distracted smile, “Say, you haven’t seen Brendon, have you?”

“Can’t say I have,” Joe said.
“Right, well, I’ll be willing to train with you in a moment,” Ryan said, “But I need to find Brendon really quick. He went to find Patrick to attempt to sleep with— ahem, write with him, but I just saw…” Ryan paused, biting his lips and glancing nervously at Joe for confirmation. Joe nodded tightly, and Ryan continued, “Well, I figured Patrick might actually want to be alone for a minute. But I’ll catch right up with you,” he promised.

Ryan dashed off, and Joe sighed, hoping to find a sunny patch of grass to relax in for a minute. He liked Ryan, really, he did, but Ryan had an annoying tendency to be the world’s worst kind of insufferable know-it-all, what with his near omniscience and his overzealous reading habits. Truth be told, Joe had no idea how anyone in Ryan’s band could stand it, but he kept reminding himself that it was only the one tour, and tried not to be overly judgmental.

“Hey there,” Ryan said. He looked haggard, but he smiled at Joe eagerly. Almost expectantly.

“Hey,” Joe said bracingly.

“Can you teach me how to shoot?” Ryan asked. Joe sighed.

“Yeah, why the hell not?” he said, then paused. His guns were in the back of the bus, and he really didn’t want to risk running into Patrick…

“I got the guns when I was grabbing Brendon,” Ryan said proudly, holding out Joe’s favorite pistol and his backup. He scowled slightly, because he hadn’t exactly given Ryan permission, but he took hold of one of the guns, and set off away from the crowded area where the concert was being set up.

If nothing else could be said for him, Ryan was a fast learner, something that Joe deeply appreciated. Ryan followed his instructions to a tee, and in no time he was hitting bushes at a respectable distance without even a sight on the vintage gun.

“You’re pretty good at this,” Joe admitted, albeit begrudgingly.

“Maybe it’s just in my blood,” Ryan said, smiling grimly at a reference that Joe couldn’t understand. “Do we move on to moving targets now?”

“Hell no,” Joe said. “Neither of us has a hunting license, and Andy would murder my ass if I even thought about killing for sport. Though,” Joe paused to think for a second, “he might actually think it kinder to eat animals I’ve killed myself than get a burger at McDonald’s…”

“So how do you prepare to hit monsters? That move?” Ryan demanded, sounding judgmental.

“Honestly, I haven’t shot that many monsters,” Joe said. “Bullets, even silver ones, don’t do much good on the really scary ones.”

“Yeah, I saw the vampire thing,” Ryan recalled with a shudder. Though the early fall day was still sunny and warm, Joe felt like shuddering too. He never wanted to be surrounded by that many vampires again, and he doubted that if he lived a hundred years he would ever fully get over everything that happened at the Drake. It had nearly been a year since that had happened, and they were all different from it.

“Well,” Ryan raised his voice, as though he could tell Joe hadn’t been listening for a moment. “It’s just that- I’m worried about the Killers,” he admitted.
Joe felt a sudden surge of something paternal rush over him, a need to protect this way too skinny, way too young looking kid. He was the oldest in the band, and still just about as old as when Patrick even learned the supernatural existed.

“We’re not going to let them take you,” Joe said darkly, and, to his dismay, Ryan rolled his eyes.

“Yeah, that’s very sweet of you guys and all,” he said, in the same bored, monotonous tone he used in interviews, “but it would be nice to be able to defend ourselves as well. We can’t be your opening band for the rest of our lives, you know?”

He had a point.

“But the Killers aren’t going to do anything until the anniversary of Fever,” Joe pointed out. Ryan’s face pinched up, and his front teeth dug into his lip the way they always did when he was thinking.

“I’ll be really surprised if it’s that simple,” Ryan said ominously, and turned up to the trees again, where he carefully shot down one lone red leaf in a sea of green.

As much as Joe hated to think about it, it did seem naïve to think that nothing else was going to happen to them for a year. But it was easy to shirk the thought of dealing with the Killers off, in the meantime. Easy to deal with other, more imminent problems.

The first of the more relevant problems for Joe to deal with was the problem of Pete and Patrick. When Joe returned to his bus, the two of them seemed to be sharing a bottle of something very strong smelling, but Joe really didn’t want to say anything about it. Rather than trying to engage in conversation over it, he plucked up the bottle when Patrick’s words started coming out slurred and he put it up in a cupboard too tall for either of them to reach while still looking dignified.

Another problem was babysitting. Joe had told Andy, repeatedly, that it probably wasn’t a good idea to bring an infant on tour, but Andy didn’t want his kid to be raised exclusively by his mother. So now, the entirety of the Nintendo Fusion tour was raising Carmilla. Thus far, it was going, well, better than Joe would have thought, but significantly worse than what Andy had hoped for.

To no one’s surprise, Patrick was a whiz at raising kids. He managed to cradle Carmilla at the perfect angle to support her soft head, and had mastered a perfect combination of gentle rocking and quiet singing that could put her to sleep in under a minute. Since Patrick was up all night anyway, he ended up holding Carmilla through most nights, with one hand on her and one on the touchpad of his laptop, fiddling with music.

To Joe’s personal surprise, Pete was also really great with babies. No matter his personal mood, he could make Carmilla giggle wildly, putting an end to a few pretty awful temper tantrums.

Joe was kind of terrified of the squalling baby at first, but he was gradually warming up to her. He held her when one of the others in the band was busy, and always held her high, because she liked playing with his hair. She also really liked eating his hair, but hey, she was quiet, and Andy never tried to make Joe change a diaper, so he lived with it. The kid had only thrown up on him once or twice, which was more than Pete could say, so how much could Joe really hold against her?

The only real issue that they had come into with having Carmilla on tour with them was the brief window of time in which the band was on stage. Andy had assumed that Panic! would be capable enough to take care of a baby for just two hours. He ended up being sorely mistaken.
“I don’t know what you expected,” Pete said to Andy, trying to hold back laughter at the sight of Brendon crying harder than Carmilla, face dripping in piss. “They need their own babysitters.”

“We were managing!” Spencer had protested weakly. He looked like a very concerned ghost from all the baby powder on his face.

Andy didn’t have many options for when they were on stage. Joe had suggested just putting her in a crib with high bars for the two-hour stretch of time, but Andy wouldn’t hear of it.

Still, Joe reasoned, for as much as was happening, what with his heartbroken friends and the baby and the evil rock band hell bent on enslaving the Panic! kids, at least there wasn’t some apocalyptic monster chasing them this tour.

Then again, maybe even thinking about it was a jinx.

Joe checked on Pete and Patrick again just before they were about to go on. Patrick’s face had turned from puffy and grief stricken to blank and dark. Pete was still surveying him nervously, but Joe figured that the best way to deal with him was to treat him like normal. Both of them, actually. Pete still shrank away from zombie movies with glassy eyes.

“We go on in a few; you guys ready?” Joe asked.

“Yep,” Patrick said, taking a deep draft of something dark brown. Joe wrinkled up his nose, mildly worried, but he was absolutely not about to start mothering these guys.

“Great,” Joe said bracingly, “You guys seen Andy and the mini-Hurley?”

“I’m here,” Andy said, skidding into the room. “I couldn’t find Spencer, and Ryan tried to tell me he could handle Carm, but—” Andy made a face like he had just swallowed a chunk of rotten milk, “Well, anyway, I left her with Motion City Soundtrack tonight.”

“Do you think that’s a really good idea?” Patrick asked sharply. Joe felt dubious too, and Andy ran his hand worriedly through his hair.

“I know, I know,” Andy moaned, “But, I mean. Didn’t Justin have a plant back at his old apartment?”

“It- it was a cactus,” Pete said.

“Let’s just get on stage,” Andy pleaded. “And pray to all the gods you can remember the names of that Spencer finds them if something goes wrong.”

Patrick sang surprisingly well, given the circumstances. He didn’t sound drunk, anyway, and that was the most Joe could hope for on that particular night. They weren’t fantastic, but they were still good. Not much of a follow up after Panic!, actually. Half the crowds seemed to only be there for Panic!, recently. Pete assured them it was because of Brendon being a siren, but Joe thought he was wrong. He was pretty sure the kids were just that good. He probably also shouldn’t keep thinking of them as kids. Ryan was technically only two years younger than him. Technically.

Aside from Patrick’s heart still beating a little too fast, it was perfectly average for one of their shows until Joe stepped outside to smoke.

Leaning against the wall, with a cigarette hanging loosely out of her mouth, was one of the most beautiful women Joe had ever seen in his life. She didn’t look like any of the scenester
teenagers that usually came to their shows. She had beautiful, jet black hair, and an unrealistic figure. Jessica Rabbit meets Beyonce. Looking underdressed in jeans and too small tank top, Joe couldn’t help but stare at her. This girl was too beautiful to be real.

Before he could even consider saying something to her, she looked over at him, and lit up at the sight of him like he was a long lost friend. Her eyes were so dark of a brown they looked nearly black, and they danced in the street lights as Joe approached her.

“Got a light?” she asked, her voice low and velvety.

“Um, uh huh,” Joe said, feeling suddenly very slow and very stupid. He coughed and pulled out his lighter, flicking it on and holding it out to her. She leaned forward, her lips holding the cigarette in place as she held the end of it in the flame. She pulled it away from her mouth in a fluid motion as she exhaled deeply, a strangely large amount of smoke pouring out of her mouth.

“Thanks,” she said, smiling gratefully at Joe. “Security confiscated mine, but I figured you might have yours still. Nice show, by the way,” she added. Her eyelashes were so thick and long that Joe wondered idly if they could get tangled.

“Pretty mediocre for us,” he said with a shrug, lighting his own cigarette. “You’re a fan?”

“To tell you the truth, I came here to see that new band, Panic! at the Disco,” she said, smiling bashfully, “But I think I like you better.”

She leaned in so close that Joe could feel the microscopic heat emanating from the end of the cigarette. His heart stuttered, and he tried to catch his breath and unravel his tongue.

“Um, haha, well, I guess we’ve been practicing longer,” he said, rubbing the back of his neck. His face felt hot like it hadn’t since his first date with Marie.

“Oh yeah, you’re more, ah, professional,” she agreed. Her knee bumped into Joe’s thigh, and Joe jerked back.

“Thanks,” he squeaked. She put out her cigarette then shivered, rubbing her hands together.

“It’s cold out,” she complained, and stuck her hands in Joe’s front pockets. “Mind if I warm up a bit?”

“Actually,” Joe pulled her hands out of his jeans, “Yes, kind of. I have a girlfriend.”

“Oh,” she turned away, instantly icy, and tossed her hair over her shoulders. “Sorry, then.” She didn’t sound sorry, though. She sounded frozen solid, bitchy cheerleader all of a sudden. “I should probably get going. I guess you need some sleep.”

“Oh, I’m probably not the only one,” Joe said cheerfully, jamming his hands deep into his pockets so as not to flip her the bird.

“Can you tell me which way the Panic! at the Disco bus is?” she asked, businesslike. “I want to meet them.”

“No, I can’t, it’s a security issue,” Joe said, just as cold. Her face was sour.

“Nice to meet you,” she said, before strutting away.

“Bitch,” Joe muttered when she was out of earshot. He put out his cigarette as well, and
went back to the bus. It was time to face the music - the music, in this case, being nonstop Ghostbusters, if he knew Patrick when he was upset.

Sure enough, the bus was filled with Ray Parker Junior’s voice, and Patrick appeared to be about two-thirds of the way through a pizza with way too many toppings on it. Joe thought about it for a minute, took a deep breath, and sat down next to Patrick on the couch.

“So, do you want to talk about it, or do you want me to keep pretending everything’s fine?” Joe asked bracingly.

Patrick considered for a moment. His eyes were hazy and unfocused, and Joe let himself, just for a moment, feel just how concerned he was. He chewed thoughtfully on a huge mouthful of pizza and swallowed before speaking.

“Just keep pretending,” Patrick said. He held up the huge, grease stained box. “Want a slice?”

“Yes,” Joe said, letting the tiny screen become the center of his focus. “So, do you ever get sick of this movie?”

“Haven’t in the past twenty-one years. Seems unlikely that I will now,” Patrick still chuckled, if a bit feebly, at every joke on screen.

Joe fell asleep before the movie was over.

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Andy knew that a rock tour was no place for an infant. Especially an infant as, well, special as Carmilla. Though he hadn’t mentioned it to his band, it was his mom that convinced him to bring her. He thought that she would have a much more stable life with his mother when he was on tour, a better chance at normalcy away from his magic bullshit and his rockstar bullshit. But his mother reminded him of the sun.

“In between the death of your father and the start of school, and every summer until you were eight, you couldn’t play in the sun once,” she reminded Andy. “I love you so much, and I did my best raising you, but I’m not in the best place to raise a child with my condition,” she said. “I don’t want my granddaughter to forget what day looks like too. Besides, she wants her father.”

Andy had forgotten that people who weren’t around Pete all the time lied more often than he did. Carmilla most certainly did not want her father. Not most of the time, anyway. Andy wouldn’t be surprised if her first word was “Patrick” at this point. Things were still somehow awkward between him and the baby. How could he make things awkward between himself and a baby?

The kid, at least, seemed to like him, if not love him, possibly because he was the only one that could give her bottles of blood without worrying about her fangs getting the better of her. One time Patrick tried to feed her, and she instantly bit him instead. Andy tried to reason that maybe she liked Patrick best because she just remembered how good he tasted. Either way, after that, Andy made sure that she was well fed before Patrick held her for too long. Not because Carmilla could do any real damage, but because Patrick looked kind of like he was going to cry when she bit him.

Andy was trying his best. He read to her every night and encouraged her to try and move more, but she was a pretty lazy kid. She liked falling asleep in people’s arms and very little else. Especially Patrick’s. Given his situation, Andy wasn’t all surprised when, as he was finally getting
ready for bed, Patrick asked if he could hold Carmilla for the night, and Andy obliged with ease.

After all of the demonic issues they had dealt with during the last tour, the next night’s wendigo run in felt pretty mild for Andy. Both Fall Out Boy’s and Panic! at the Disco’s bus had stopped at the same gas station at nearly three in the morning, but as it turned out, no one was asleep yet but Brent, so they all got out. Andy thought that the sight of seven teenage and twenty-something boys would scare the piss out of a worker that late, but the man sitting behind the counter simply smiled pleasantly at them all when they walked in.

Brendon whizzed up and down the aisles like he’d been injected with adrenaline. Though actually, as Pete had explained to Andy, Brendon was the epitome of an extrovert. People energized him far more than caffeine ever could, and especially people he was friends with. He was, in short, practically the only person alive who could not only survive a tour, but enjoy one. He buzzed in and out of conversations, always returning to Ryan’s side, usually with some other strange junk food in tow. (“Boiled peanuts! Do you think that’s too different from like, what are normal nuts? Roasted? Raw? Dude, do we eat raw nuts? That sounds dirty.”)

Andy was really just in the station for the company. He had long since given up on finding anything to eat in gas stations other than bananas nearly black from abuse. He was trying to keep an eye on Patrick, and keep him engaged enough in conversation to not wander over to the cheap fridge full of beer. Getting anyone in his band to give up on drinking was a lost cause, but as long as Andy kept asking questions about Patrick’s opinions on music, Patrick kept answering with some level of interest.

Andy let his gaze wander while not trying overly hard to pay attention to some anecdote about James Brown and the subsequent death of funk when he noticed the cashier. A very wizened old man, he looked like he had few teeth behind his caved in cheeks and very little hair underneath his baseball cap. His t-shirt hung off his shoulders like a tent, and it took a moment for Andy to realize that the red shirt had patches of brown on it.

“I mean, all genres fade in and out, so I guess it shouldn’t be surprising, but you wouldn’t think that some genre as insubstantial as hair metal could-”

“Hey, Patrick?” Andy’s voice was easily calm, clipped and precise, it didn’t betray his emotion, but Patrick had fought alongside him enough to look up instantly with a dark expression. “Don’t be inconspicuous, but does that clerk’s shirt look like it has blood on it?”

Andy focused intently on a rack of candy bars for a moment, then heard Patrick’s sharp intake of breath.

“Just once couldn’t we have a normal day?” Patrick asked angrily, his voice soft as he turned away. “Are you sure it’s blood?”

“Not sure, no,” Andy admitted. “But he’s awfully skinny.”

“Doesn’t he smell different?” Patrick asked. Andy’s mouth twisted.

“Maybe to regular vampires,” he shrugged. “I thought Joe was human for months, remember? I’m getting better, but wendigos are mostly human.”

“You should make us a chart,” Patrick grumbled. “‘Degrees of Humanity According to Blood Scent’, that could be useful.”

“Keep an eye on him,” Andy said, and he moved a few aisles over to where Pete and Joe
were talking to Spencer.

“Front counter looks like a wendigo,” Andy said, voice low. Joe looked up and swore softly. Pete looked up and swore loudly.

“He might hear you!” Andy chided. Pete, to Andy’s surprise, rolled his eyes.

“There’s seven of us. We could all be human and still win this one.”

“Well we can’t just attack him! He might be human!” Andy said.

“What, can’t you smell if he is?” Pete asked.

“Honestly!” Andy growled, annoyed.

“Did you say ‘wendigo’?” Spencer half squeaked. Andy felt like a hardened veteran next to these kids.

“We could distract him and you could look for dead bodies in the back, or we could just pretend to leave one person behind as bait,” Joe said.

“I’ve got a better idea,” Pete said, and then Andy watched in shock as Pete walked up to the counter.

“Excuse me? Sir?” Pete said, and the man at the counter gave him an uncomfortable smile, too wide and too devoid of teeth. Still, Pete oozed pleasantness as he spoke.

“Are you a wendigo?” he asked.

Instantly, the man’s grin faded.

“Ah, hunters,” he rasped. “I’ve been expecting this day for a long time, I must admit. But I may have a good last meal!” He lunged over the counter, Pete only managing to duck out of his way with an inch or two to spare. The man growled, turning on Pete again, now sprawled out on the floor, only to get hit in the head by a can of green beans.

Disoriented, the man swayed, and Andy tackled him to the ground. He had a small knife tucked into his pocket, but once he pulled it out and had it poised over the wendigo’s chest, he saw the fear in the man’s eyes. Fear Andy hadn’t seen this close since the last time he was about to kill someone, nearly a year ago.

The room blurred around Andy, and his arms must have gone slack, for when he could see clearly again, the wendigo had him pinned to the wall, his own knife held up to his throat.

“Just one bite!” he moaned, and his breath reeked of blood when it hit Andy’s face. He leaned forward, his scant few teeth trying to find purchase on Andy’s shoulder, when he was abruptly ripped off.

Instantly sitting up, Andy saw Joe wrestling the wendigo to the ground a few feet away. The creature was weak, and it moaned pitifully when Joe dug his hands into his back. Joe gave Andy a questioning look, and Andy nodded quickly.

Joe reached for his gun slowly, hesitantly, and gave the wendigo time to turn around, sinking its teeth into Joe’s shoulder.

“FUCK!” Joe yelped, and shot the wendigo point blank in the head. Gore splattered on the
side of the counter, and Andy, still woozy, felt like he might actually pass out.

“You okay?” Joe asked Andy.

“You’re the one bleeding,” Andy managed, his voice still weak.

“Tempted?” Joe asked, smirking.

“Jesus, this’ll be a bitch to clean up,” Patrick sighed. “Burial and free junk food, or are we calling in an anonymous tip to the police?”

“Oh, anonymous tip,” Pete said, glancing out the window of the store, “The bus drivers will definitely notice if we bury a body.”

“Actually,” Andy had almost forgotten about the kids from Panic! before Brendon spoke. “Actually, um, I can bury him really, really quickly.” He looked paper-white, but his voice was steady.

“Um, thanks Brendon, but that might be more conspicuous,” Pete said.

“You could sandblast the store to remove fingerprints?” Andy joked. Brendon’s brow furrowed behind glasses still too big for his face.

“Would that work?” he asked.

“There are no security cameras here,” Joe sighed. “Let’s just beat it, alright?” Andy nodded slightly, leaning over towards Joe slightly. He already felt ridiculous for freezing up with the monster, but Joe wouldn’t make a big deal out of it.

Unlike Joe, however, Pete pulled Andy aside before they got in their bus.

“You okay?” he asked. Auras, Andy decided, were bullshit.

“I’m fine,” Andy said, and he was sure his face instantly expressed how much he regretted saying that.


“Don’t worry about it,” Andy said. This conversation felt all backwards. Even when Andy was just a sophomore and Pete was the cool older kid hanging out with him, it was always Andy applying emotional bandages to Pete. But to his relief, Pete dropped it.

The next day, Brendon, Ryan, and Spencer could talk of nothing but the fight with the wendigo.

“Not much of a fight,” Joe said, rolling his eyes. “I cheated with a gun.”

“Yeah, but he bit you!” Spencer said. “It was terrifying!” He still looked terrified just thinking about it.

“Wendigos aren’t catching,” Joe said with a shrug. “Plus it’s already healed.”

“Why?” Spencer asked.

“He’s a werewolf; he heals at top speed,” Ryan said, sounding almost bored. Joe nodded in agreement.
“Must be cool,” Spencer said, “Being a werewolf, that is.”

“It has its moments,” Joe said. Andy could tell that he liked the attention, at least a little bit. Spencer and Brendon were fawning over him, and Andy was happy to be avoided.

But on the thirtieth or so retelling of the same story, Andy decided that he needed a break. The venue where they were parked didn’t seem like the best neighborhood, but the idea that any human could hurt Andy was laughable, so he went for a run.

Even in broad daylight, most people were at work, returned from their lunch breaks, and in any case, wouldn’t notice anything as small as Andy running a little too fast. It calmed him down better than any meditation could. The whole city whizzed by like he was in a car, gray and brown and brick and steel, tall buildings in the middle and long, low buildings the further away he went from the center in every direction. All cities were the same when you toured enough.

Nothing could stop him, running at top speed and feeling blissfully peaceful, up until a car ran into him.

Andy crumpled onto the street, automatically curling in on himself in self-defense. He didn’t feel pain, but he could see blood on the asphalt next to him.

“Holy shit, are you okay?” a pretty, feminine voice asked. Andy blinked a few times before unfurling and looking up.

Standing above him, head haloed in the light of the sun, was a stunningly beautiful woman, with light brown skin and long, dark hair. One long, thin hand was extended out to him. Andy nodded and grabbed her strangely strong hand, gasping as she yanked him to his feet.

“Are you hurt?” she asked. Andy blinked again and tried to assess himself. He had a scrape on his arm where it had skidded on the road that was dripping blood, but he felt fine otherwise.

“No, I don’t think so,” he said. His glasses had survived too, and he pushed them further up his nose.

“I’m really sorry,” the girl said, placing her hand on Andy’s forehead. She was frowning at him, but even frowning, her face looked angelically perfect.

“Don’t worry about it,” Andy said. He rubbed his head, but he didn’t feel too dizzy. Really, she couldn’t have been going faster than he was for the amount of damage he got.

“Can I give you a ride back home?” she asked.

“I don’t live here,” Andy laughed. “But sure, you can drive me back to where I’m staying. You know the way to the, um,” he wracked his brains, and realized he couldn’t remember where they were playing that night. “Um, okay, shit, it’s a concert venue.”

“Oh, you’re on that tour?” she asked. “Yeah, I’m going to the show tonight, I can totally take you there.”

“Thanks,” Andy said, giving her hand a grateful squeeze. He looked at her car for the first time, shocked to see a bulky truck and she laughed at his reaction.

“Hand me down,” she explained as they climbed in. “Interesting story, actually…” and just like that, she kicked off into a very long story, one that lasted most of the rest of the way to the venue. Andy was thankful she was filling the silence, and even more thankful that she seemed quite
nice. She rested her right hand on his occasionally, turning to him to make exaggerated faces with the
story when they stopped at stop lights.

She was bubbly, and kind, and didn’t need a lot of prodding to talk about, well, anything. For the first time in a long time, Andy felt interested in a girl. Even better, she seemed relatively normal. That would be a welcome change of pace for Andy.

“So,” the girl said, somehow stretching the two letter word into a good three syllables, “Is there any chance I could see you after the show tonight?”

Andy’s tongue suddenly felt very dry and at least three sizes too big for his mouth, and his thoughts raced. He was a single dad, and it felt sort of inappropriate to be dating, and he wasn’t looking for anything serious, and someone would need to watch Carmilla…but then again, the girl had pretty eyes.

“I’d like that,” he finally managed to force out. She smiled a sly smile, keeping her teeth entirely hidden, and for the second time stretched out a slender hand to Andy.

“I’m Lily,” she said, and tossed her hair over her shoulder. She smelled incredible, but not overpowering, and Andy had to focus hard on keeping his knees locked so as not to fall over toward her.

“Uh- A- Andy,” he said, and she smiled again.

“I’ll just pop around back here again when the show’s over,” Lily said, and drove off. Andy felt a little unsteady, like the ground was moving beneath him, but he collected himself and ran into the venue where he could already hear sound check starting.

“Yo, man, you okay?” Joe asked. Andy was still grinning as he nodded, the feedback from Pete’s amp too loud to talk over.

“You’re bleeding!” Joe yelled over the noise, and Andy started, looking back at his arm. It seemed a little worse now, and he winced when he touched it.

“Car hit me!” he yelled back, and Joe’s eyes bugged. Andy shrugged. “Which way is the bathroom?!?”

Joe pointed to the left, shaking his head paternally, and Andy went into the bathroom, mopping up his arm as best he could. It wasn’t too bad, but he pressed a napkin to his arm when he came back out. A part of him wanted to brag about a possible date, but even excluding the recent heartbreak of half of his band, a much larger part of him really, really, really never wanted to tell anyone. Because if he did tell someone, he’d have to explain that he was this excited because it was his first date after Andrea, which would involve admitting that he hadn’t been with anyone since Andrea. Not exactly something he was looking forward to.

So he kept silent, playing with a little extra vigor and showing off in whatever mild ways he could. Realistically, there was no way some girl in the crowd could see the extra effort he put into drumming with his whole body and working up a crazy sweat, but he couldn’t help but dream. Each song dragged on and on, and Andy felt like the concert had been twice as long as normal when he finally managed to get outside.

Lily was leaning on the bus by the time Andy got outside, which gave him a small pang of disappointment. She had to have left early at best. Still, he consoled himself, she must have been eager to see him.
“Cool show,” she said, her tone dark and husky. “I didn’t know you were the drummer. It must get hot up there,” she said, leaning in close. Even desperate as he was, Andy could tell that the girl was laying it on a little thick, but maybe she just really wanted to hook up with someone. She didn’t give any signs of being a fan, and there was no way she was younger than twenty-one, so he decided that now wasn’t the time to worry about it.

“Yeah, I mean, that’s why I go shirtless most of the time,” he laughed. She bit her lower lip and let her eyes flicker down to his chest, and oh yeah, Andy was really excited.

“Well, it must be fun,” she said. “Being in a band, that is. When did you get into drumming? You play anything else?”

“No, just drums,” Andy said. “I don’t know, music’s just always been really important to me.” He could feel himself pulling back. Now wasn’t the time for a personal conversation. To his relief, Lily seemed to get it.

“I’ve always just been so curious about rock bands; do you think you could show me what the inside of your bus?” she asked quickly.

“Sure,” Andy agreed, grateful. He pulled the sticking door open and led Lily onto the bus. He didn’t think it was much of a sight, but she seemed fascinated by the design, organized (hypothetically) to fit the comforts of home into a moving vehicle.

As soon as they reached the bunks, it became fairly obvious that Lily wasn’t in the mood to go through too many of the pleasantries that came with hooking up, and immediately smashed her mouth against his. And once they started kissing, Andy felt amazing for a brief moment. He loved that she was warm and soft and smelled sort of like cinnamon and cloves and sort like something he couldn’t identify. He loved the way her lips felt on his and he loved her silky hair in his hands. But the moment she pulled her hands away from his face, going to start lifting her shirt up over her head, something in Andy’s stomach lurches, disgust or fear or something else, and he pulled back, ramming his back into the corner of a bunk so hard his eyes watered.

“Hey, don’t worry, you’ll get plenty of time to look,” Lily laughed, her shirt off and unperturbed as she pulled Andy in by the waist once more. They were kissing again for a moment, and then he pushed her down.

“I can’t, I’m sorry,” Andy said, sounding miserable. He looked down at Lily, who had fallen to the ground, one of her bra straps slipping off her shoulder. Her lips were pursed, and she didn’t look so breathtakingly beautiful when she was pissed off. Or, maybe she did, and Andy just couldn’t see her properly anymore.

“You can’t?” she asked dubiously, something pleading in her voice.

“I’m really sorry,” Andy said again, and he slumped into a sitting position on the floor of the bus himself.

“Do you need…?” her eyes flicked down to his shorts, and Andy laughed a small, frustrated laugh.

“No, it’s not like- I don’t think I can do this,” Andy said. Lily stood up, straightening her bra straps and grabbing her shirt off the ground. She tossed her hair over her shoulder and sat on the bed across from Andy.

“Want to talk about it?” she asked. Andy could feel himself shutting in, closing off from the
world around him, and he really didn’t want to have this conversation with a stranger. Then again, it wasn’t someone who already knew his sob story.

“I killed my fiancé last year!” Andy blurted out.

“What?” Lily gasped, her eyes huge as she clutched her shirt up to her chest. Andy backpedaled nervously.

“I mean, it was an accident,” he said.

“Oh wow,” Lily said, nodding and still looking kind of terrified.

“I’m not crazy or anything, it wasn’t- forget it,” Andy sighed, slamming his eyes shut.

“Maybe you should go.”

“Yeah, maybe,” she said, pulling on her shirt and standing up. “Next time you’re in town?” she said. Andy was shocked. How desperate could she be to still want to see Andy after he confessed to murder?

“Sure,” Andy said. He lay back in the bunk and closed his eyes, and waited for nearly a minute before he finally heard her walking away and out the door of the bus.

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Pete waited a few minutes after he saw Andy walk onto the bus with someone else to crash Panic!’s bus. He wasn’t in much of a going out mood, so he figured he’d leave Joe and Patrick to explore the local bar scene while he stayed in. There wasn’t a very good sock on the door policy for going on tour, but Pete figured when he saw Andy preoccupied that he’d just hang out with Ryan for a while. Ryan could be kind of douchey about classic literature, but then again, so could Pete, and it was nice to actually be able to talk about nineteenth century authors without realizing halfway into a speech that the person he was talking to had put headphones in.

Plus, he really liked the other bus. It was weirdly clean for a tour bus, and someone, probably Ryan, had put lots of sturdy green plants up around the windows. He had a strange feeling that if he opened the fridge, there would be fruits and vegetables sitting next to a huge stock of Red Bull. That particular day, it smelled vaguely of lavender incense.

“Anyone home?” Pete called out.

“Shh!” Spencer poked his head out from the back room, glaring sternly at Pete. “She’s sleeping!” he stage-whispered, and Pete could just see a tuft of red curls peeking out from the crook of Spencer’s arm.

“Is Ryan here?” Pete whispered back. Spencer sighed, backing out of sight, and a moment later Ryan was out in the lounge.

“’s up? Ryan asked, his eyes hazy like he’d been asleep. Pete shrugged. He meant to say that he was bored, or maybe suggest going on a walk, but his tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth, and a completely different question tumbled out.

“How much of my future have you seen?” he asked. Ryan’s brow furrowed.

“You really want me to answer that?” he asked.

“Yeah, I think so,” Pete said. Ryan shrugged and sat down on the booth, nodding at the seat
across the table for Pete to sit down as well.

“Truth be told, I haven’t seen too much,” Ryan said. “I can only see what’s definite, so I usually can’t see that far ahead. But you’re a little different from the others. I know more about your future, but not really enough to tell you.”

“What does that mean?” Pete asked.

“I can see the definite, but sometimes I, um, prophesize. Not often, you see, but sometimes. ‘Course, if no one’s there to hear it, it doesn’t do much but make me pass out for a few minutes. But often Spencer’s there to hear it, and he tries to write them down as best he can remember. Some of them are really dumb, because, um, they’re just about waffles or something. But there’s one I’ve said a couple of times that I think is about you. I can’t really remember it off the top of my head, something about destruction and becoming the greatest enemy the gods have ever faced, but I think we left the notebook at home.”

“Are you joking?” Pete asked after a long pause. Ryan shrugged, cracked his knuckles and covered one of Pete’s hands with his own.

“No, but I wouldn’t worry about it. Prophecies are uncertain, visions are guaranteed. And that’s what concerns me. I can’t see any of us after next summer. The future’s too unclear. Which is good, in that we have a chance against the Killers, but bad because, well,” Ryan trailed off. Bad because they might lose.

“How long had you been watching us?” Pete asked.

“Years,” Ryan admitted. “It was like a TV show, or a fairy tale, or something. You fought monsters and you saved people and it was all too fantastic for me to believe. That there were other people like us, and they were super heroes.”

“We’re terrible super heroes,” Pete said, grinning a little in spite of himself.

“No, you aren’t,” Ryan said. “You guys are amazing!”

“Thanks,” Pete said. The kid was such an ego boost, though not quite as hero-worshipping as Brendon. Speaking of-

“So isn’t Brendon usually attached to you at the hip?”

“Yeah, I dunno, he said he was gonna meet some girl later tonight,” Ryan snorted. “Which is true, if you ‘meeting’ means following and ‘girl’ means Patrick.”

“Sweet,” Pete chuckled. They moved on to other subjects, but all that night Pete couldn’t help thinking about his future. What was going to be so calamitous? What was all the destruction about?

If nothing else, Ryan’s predictions made a nice change of pace from constantly thinking about other issues. Other issues that he could focus on later. Like angry, threatening texts from Lauren, and about a dozen unanswered “What’s up?” texts from Mikey. And how he was spending less time with Patrick because he could feel the misery rolling off of his best friend in waves, but he wouldn’t talk about it. And Andy being the world’s most ever presently concerned parent. Despite the fact they were all in danger of being enslaved, the kids from Panic! seemed much more relaxed.

Pete went to bed almost calm, for once, managing to fall asleep thinking about whatever Chuck Palahniuk book Ryan was talking about. It was an almost peaceful sleep, and even more
amazingly, he was able to go to sleep without staring at the ceiling for hours. Naturally, he woke up at four in the morning, but a few hours were better than nothing. He wandered out of the back of the bus and thought he could hear Brendon laughing. He looked out of one of the windows to see if he was just outside, but no one was there. They were at a rest area, and the only thing Pete could see was a semi-truck next to them. But, no, there was a girl walking back into the glow of the rest area’s lights. Pete looked over. The bus driver was sound asleep, and Pete could always call her if she drove away without him, so he walked out into the brisk night air.

Once he felt the breeze outside, Pete knew he killed his chances of falling back asleep easily, but he walked across the middle of the parking lot and into the brightly lit building. They must not have been on a very heavily travelled road, because rather than having an attendant sitting in the middle of the table full of maps, there didn’t even seem to be a place for a worker to sit. Then again, it wasn’t as though Pete was about to steal five hundred maps of Tennessee.

He had started looking at the local attractions that the place advertised (a water adventure park, a few dozen campsites, and a lot of maps with big stars over Memphis and Nashville) when he heard a beautiful, rich voice coming from behind him.

“I think it’s a little late to look for hotels.”

Pete turned around to see what was doubtlessly the most gorgeous girl he had ever looked at smiling at him. He felt abruptly self-conscious of his threadbare sweatpants and un-straightened hair while he looked at her. Even at four in the morning, she looked like she had just finished a Victoria’s Secret photoshoot and slipped into a slightly less revealing outfit.

“Already got a place to sleep,” he said, jerking his thumb over his shoulder towards the tour bus and smirking slightly at her. “Nice homey bunk. You need a place to stay?”

A brilliant smile slid across her face, lighting up for him.

“I’d love one,” she said. “But I’m really not that tired yet.”

She was extremely forward, so that was fantastic for Pete. And gorgeous to boot. This was exactly what he needed to take his mind off of things. Everything.

“My friends are asleep in there, though,” Pete warned. The girl paused and thought about this, then leaned in close to Pete, her lips just brushing his ear.

“In that case, we could go out to my car for a minute,” she said. “Listen to a CD or something. If you’re not too tired either.”

“Wide awake,” Pete said, his mouth extraordinarily dry.

The girl smiled and grabbed his hand, tugging him outside and around the back of the building, to where a truck was parked in the grass, just out of sight of the parking lot.

“You allowed to park here?” Pete asked, feeling nervousness seeping into his stomach.

“Rules are made for breaking,” she said, jumping into the driver’s side. She turned the truck on, and the cab filled with All Along the Watchtower on low volume. It was still dark inside, and Pete nearly jumped out of his skin when he felt pressure on his thigh, looking down to see her hand.

“I can switch to something else, if you like,” she said, leaning in far too close. Pete felt overwhelmingly like he needed to lean back, but he swallowed the irrational fear and smiled at her.
“No, this is great,” he said, and she leaned in closer. He could smell mint and something smoky on her breath as she dragged herself onto his lap, wrapped her arms around his neck, and pressed her lips to his.

It felt good, sure, vaguely pleasant, but not the fiery sparks Pete had expected. Not even a smoldering burn. It just felt sort of mildly pleasant. He could tell she was feeling the same thing from her aura, like it was nice, but nothing particularly life altering. The difference between the overly-sexy, Hollywood ambiance of the dark, smoky cab with the faint strains of Jimi Hendrix and how they were actually feeling was almost laughable.

“Did you want to keep this?” she asked, tugging on the old shirt Pete was wearing. He didn’t even know what the hell he had put on. He shook his head rapidly, and she ripped it over his head, kissing up and down Pete’s chest with a fervency that didn’t match her real mood at all. Oh well. Maybe she was a fan, but Pete had just really lost his touch.

When her lips had traced all the way down to his waistband, Pete took a moment to pull her shirt over her head. She yanked his sweatpants halfway down and crawled further up his body. Pete was jammed at an awkward angle, with his neck bend uncomfortably against the side of the car, but he was still trying to go with it.

She sat back on her ankles, her knees positioned on either side of Pete’s hips, and undid her bra, letting it drop to the floor of the car. She leaned back, bit her lip, and looked more like a porn star than a real person, and Pete still couldn’t get into this.

“How do you want me?” she asked in a sultry voice.

“Um.” Pete was trying to find a way to say what he was thinking, but nothing was coming to mind. She smiled, undoing her jeans as well.

“Why don’t you just lie back and get comfortable?” she suggested. She pressed a kiss on Pete’s jaw, and then, as if to emphasize Pete’s lack of participation, grabbed one of his wrists and pushed his hand up onto her chest impatiently. She let her free hand trail down to palm his crotch. She made an almost disappointed face, shook her head, and then pulled his hair, causing Pete to let out a small gasp. But he still wasn’t feeling anything for this girl, and he couldn’t reason why.

“Um, listen,” Pete began, but she caught his mouth on a kiss, moaning an incredibly fake moan into his mouth and grinding down on his leg. He took the hand on her chest and moved it up to her shoulder, pushing her up.

“Listen!” he demanded, and she finally paused, looking deeply annoyed. “I can’t do this.”

“Seriously?” she asked, looking dubious. That one look sent Pete over the edge, and without warning, he felt his breath hitch and his eyes blurred with tears.

Pete scrambled into a sitting position, his breathing coming out ragged as he started crying, of all things to do right now, he was crying.

“Are you okay?” she asked, one hand wrapped over her chest and panic heavy in her voice.

“I- I’m sorry!” Pete said. He didn’t know where this sudden wave of panic and sadness had come from, but he pulled his knees up to his chest, letting the tears flow freely.

“Okay, Jesus, do you want to talk about it?” she asked, sounding annoyed at the very thought, but begrudging help was better than nothing.
“I don’t what’s wrong with me,” Pete said. He stared out of the dashboard at the dark forest beyond, still barely able to see for how blurry his vision was.

“There’s nothing wrong with you,” the girl sighed, and though Pete wasn’t looking at her, it sounded like she was putting her clothes back on.

“I think I might be gay!” he said, his lungs feeling way too small. Pete also noted that either the truck was shaking rather violently or he was. All of a sudden all his fears were bubbling up and overcoming him.

“Why do you think that? You were interested in me, weren’t you?” she asked.

“I thought I was!” Pete moaned. “But I don’t know! I dated a guy this summer and he- I mean, it was amazing, but I thought it was a fluke or something! A one-time thing! And that was when I did think about it, which I didn’t do often. I tried not to think about it because it’s weird and crazy and I’ve liked girls my whole life but now that he’s gone I just can’t anymore! And I don’t know what’s wrong with me or if I can ever date girls again but god only knows I can never really date a guy because the whole damn planet would lose it and I don’t want to be gay! But I came back home and tried to sleep with some girl again and I couldn’t do it then! And if I can’t be with someone like- someone like you!” Pete gestured at her in frustration, “-then who the hell can I be with?”

“You don’t sound gay,” the girl said.

“Right!” Pete scoffed, still upset, but the irrational tears slowing down.

“No, really,” she said. “You sound like a heartbroken idiot. You haven’t been with a girl since then, sure, but have you been with another guy either?”

This made Pete pause, and he looked up at her hopefully.

“No, I haven’t been with anyone in a while,” he said. She had gotten dressed by then, and she threw her hands up in the air in exasperation.

“Then congratulations! You’re just heartbroken!” she said, rolling her eyes. “Go get back to your friends.”

“I am really sorry about this,” Pete said, grabbing her hand. She yanked it away from him and looked out the driver’s side window.

“Please go,” she said, sounding close to tears.

“Wait, um, did you want to talk about anything? I mean, you must have known you’re way out of my league, so why did you even-?”

“I’m having a lot of trouble at work, and I just wanted to wind down, okay?” she said, not looking at Pete. “And anyway, I don’t want to talk to you about it. Please just go.”

“Yeah, okay,” Pete said. He felt awfully guilty as he climbed out of the car and walked back out to the parking lot. The bus was still miraculously there, and Pete got back on. Though still guilty, he felt dramatically better after crying himself out and talking about it.

Pete laid down, and, suddenly exhausted, hoped that things were going better for the girl’s job, better for her in general. Just before he drifted off, he finally texted Mikey, even though it was four thirty in the morning and his last text had been sent days ago: “not much. U?”
Touring was weird, and Brendon couldn’t actually decide if he liked it or not. On the one hand, he loved the crowds, and he loved his band, and he loved the other bands, but he had no time to process any of it. It seemed that someone always wanted to talk to him, and girls wearing too much makeup kept seeking him out and leaning in too close with an over exaggerated “Oh? You’re in that band?” even though they found him working the merch table for his band, after he had said on stage that that was where he would be. It seemed like every show there were more of them, more people begging him to sign CD’s and screaming sexual comments when he was on stage. It was strange and Brendon was fairly sure that no one in the band had done anything with anyone yet.

Brent seemed uncomfortable with sleeping with strangers in general, so he was out. Spencer and Hayley had been dating since they were freshmen in high school, and Brendon doubted a tiny thing like fame would change that. Ryan probably would have helped Brendon figure all of this out, but just as the tour started he met a girl named Jac online, and he was staying loyal.

It wasn’t as though he hadn’t been interested in the girls, but Brendon was so overwhelmed. He hadn’t exactly been a hit with girls in high school, and the second he graduated he was busy working on band stuff until they hit the road. Plus, Andy had given their whole band a big speech on why groupie culture was wrong, and later, Pete gave their band a speech on how easily they could get statutory rape charges if they messed up. Both speeches were mildly traumatizing, and Brendon didn’t want to get arrested or do the wrong thing, but how was he supposed to know who was or wasn’t a groupie or who was actually eighteen?

On top of all that, up until the past week it was very difficult for Brendon to focus on all the girls at every show when Patrick was constantly hanging around. Patrick who kept spending time with Brendon, looking over his melodies and complimenting them, always smelling kind of like sweat and kind of like kid’s shampoo, with his shaggy hair hanging in his eyes and his full body laugh. Brendon couldn’t focus on anything when he was in the room with Patrick.

Luckily, everyone seemed oblivious to it. Pete had, of course, suggested that Brendon might have a crush on Patrick once, but Brendon was hoping he had forgotten it. He had tried to forget it himself, because it was Pete that had put the seed of a crush in Brendon’s head. He hadn’t even considered, had never let himself ever consider something like that, but the more he thought about it, the more things added up. Brendon wanted to spend as much time as possible with Patrick, kept thinking how handsome he looked without feeling jealous, and he desperately wanted to fall asleep next to him and smell his stupid kids-shampoo smelling hair all night. Which, in retrospect, was a pretty obvious crush, but Brendon had felt that way about boys before, and always just assumed it was the natural next level in a friendship.

Brendon had since decided that he was an idiot. The time away from home was really helping out with expanding his worldview.

Brendon was left with a desperate desire to get closer to Patrick, and his pining in silence plan was going without a hitch when one day he was on his way to go hang out with Patrick when he heard Patrick screaming obscenities on the phone. When Brendon ran on the bus and asked if Patrick was okay, Patrick had screamed, wild eyed, for Brendon to get out right now, and Brendon hadn’t had much of a chance to speak to him since. Which left him with abundant time to be aware of all the girls screaming for Brendon to do things that still made him blush.

Still, even without Brendon having to ask embarrassing questions, he knew that the girl he met was not a groupie, and definitely not under eighteen. She introduced herself as Lily, and she looked like she belonged on the cover of a magazine. It was not like she belonged on Alternative
Press or Kerrang, but Vogue. She looked a lot older than Brendon - not old, but older. She wore the kind of outfit you could wear on a red carpet without looking out of place.

Brendon was excited when she started talking to him, but all they did was talk. For hours. Or, Brendon talked for hours, about everything. He talked about how homesick he was and how scared he was of messing up and about all his siblings and years of hand-me-down clothes only to end up getting the hand-me-down singer position. Through all of it, Lily listened like her life was on the line. Brendon hadn’t had someone listen to him that caring and understanding since Ryan had before he decided to devote his whole life to writing poetry to his girlfriend over Livejournal.

Before Brendon could even start asking Lily about her life or thinking about this taking a non-platonic direction, Fall Out Boy’s tour manager had yelled at him to get back on the bus so they could leave, and Lily just said she’d see Brendon later. Brendon had assumed that they couldn’t possibly run into each other again, but sure enough, after the next show in a city hundreds of miles away, Lily was leaning on his bus and smiling at him like he was her favorite person in the whole world.

Lily was there each night after the show, and one night, when Brendon missed her, she caught up to him at a rest area in the middle of nowhere at three in the morning.

“We could save a lot of time if you would give me a phone number. You could save a lot of money,” Brendon laughed, rubbing the back of his neck nervously.

“Ah, but where would my sense of mystery go?” she said, smiling sadly at him. She looked achingly tired, and Brendon wished suddenly and violently that he had some way to help her.

“You could probably sleep on the bus for a bit, if you’re tired,” he said. She looked suddenly stricken, shaking her head and stepping back.

“I couldn’t possibly,” she said. “I should get going, actually. I’ll see you later, Brendon.”

Brendon had called out after her, but she ran away like she couldn’t hear him. He had eventually gone back to bed, heartsick and worried that something was wrong with the girl that was rapidly becoming one of his best friends.

Yet, without fail, Lily was waiting just outside the backdoor of the next venue, jumping up and throwing her arms around Brendon’s neck.

“I missed you!” she exclaimed, clinging tight to Brendon until he got ahold of his senses long enough to remind himself to keep breathing, just a supermodel girl, no big deal, and rub her back.

“I missed you too!” he said, feeling drunk just being with her. When he pulled back and got a better look at her, he frowned. She still looked beautiful, but slightly sick. She looked a little like Ryan had finals week, his first semester of college, when he was studying for six tests and his dad had gotten pneumonia at the same time.

“Are you feeling alright?” he asked.

“I’m just really, really hungry,” Lily said, her voice sounding pained.

“We’ve got poptarts on the bus!” Brendon said brightly, gesturing to the bus for emphasis before realizing that the way his arms swung was painfully stupid.

“That would be lovely,” Lily said with a grateful smile. Brendon led her inside, and had just
opened the cupboard when Lily spun him round and mashed her lips into his. Brendon let out a small squeak, falling backwards, but Lily caught him with ease.

“Careful there, soldier,” Lily whispered, steering Brendon down to someplace he could sit. He had no idea where, but it made it a lot easier for Lily to keep undressing him.

“I don’t, um, oh-!” Brendon gasped, and Lily covered his mouth with her hand.

“Shh, please don’t talk,” she said, kissing the top of his head as she moved down to his pants.

Brendon, for his part, decided to roll with it. He tried to get his fingers underneath her shirt, but his hands fumbled, and he thought he heard her let out a small sigh before taking her shirt off.

“Lily-!” he gasped, and she covered his mouth again. That was sort of annoying and he was about to say something when he felt her push him backwards and felt his head run into something extremely hard.

Dizzy and confused, the whole room swayed around Brendon, and Lily looked downright mournful as she stared down at him.

“I’m really sorry about this,” Lily said, and she flipped him over and duct-taped his hands together.

“I- wait- what are you doing?!” Brendon yelled, shock and betrayal running thick in his voice.

“Listen, Brendon, I really am sorry about this,” Lily said. Brendon, belatedly, started kicking, and she sighed, taping his legs together too. “But it’s my job, and I don’t really have a choice. Don’t fight this, okay?”

Brendon’s breathing was getting shorter and the room was getting hard to see.

“What are you going to do with me?” he asked, trying to keep the panic out of his voice and failing miserably.

“Please don’t panic!” Lily begged. Brendon began to whimper what started as a normal whimper, but was rapidly turning into something almost musical. Bits of rock started slamming against the sides of the bus and got faster as his voice got louder.

“Kid, don’t do that!” Lily yelled, clearly panicked herself as she launched forward and covered Brendon’s mouth in tape. Brendon still whined through the tape, but he couldn’t speak, and the earth slowed and stilled outside. Lily leaned back, panting for a moment, catching her breath.

“Oh, don’t give me that look,” she said when she caught Brendon’s eyes, but her voice was still pleading. “I did what I had to do. And you’ll be fine, okay? I’m taking you to Brandon so he can have a word with you away from your friends, but he’s not going to hurt you. And you’re lucky I was able to stop myself there. Like I said, I’m starving,” she muttered, turning her gaze to the ground.

“Oh, sorry, I’m a succubus,” she explained. “And I’ve been trying to get to one of the goddamn monks you open for, but no takers. Brandon’s going to be pissed. I told him I could take out at least one of them.”

Brendon wanted to scream, but as it was, he glared daggers at Lily until she flinched.
“I said I was sorry,” she said. “I feel bad, and I really like you, but I can’t disobey him. Soon you’ll be the same.”

Brendon started wriggling with the intent to hop over to her and hopefully bruise her at least a little when he knocked her over, but a sharp rapping came from the door.

“Brendon?” Brendon’s heart leapt, that was Patrick’s voice, Patrick could get him out of this. “Brendon, are you in there?”

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“Brendon?” Patrick asked again. He was sure he had seen rocks and dirt flying around the bus like a centralized tornado a minute ago, but now everything seemed quiet and peaceful. In Patrick’s book, that usually wasn’t a good thing. He had resolved himself to just knock the door down when it blew back to reveal a girl. A gorgeous girl, in jeans and a bra for some reason.

“Oh, sorry,” Patrick said blankly. He took a step back, unsure of the protocol for this. “I guess I should, um, go,” he said, but before he could stutter out an excuse, the girl yanked him in the bus.

“Do you want to have sex?” she asked. Patrick thought about it for half a second before responding.

“Oh, fuck yeah, why not?” he said. He was still slightly drunk, just buzzed enough to not question the situation and just let it happen while he got her undressed in between desperate, sporadic kisses.

She started moaning almost immediately, even though Patrick had barely touched her. She kept pulling him closer and holding his hands on her.

Patrick, though still confused and dazed, was more than happy to oblige her. A small part of the back of his head was screaming that this didn’t make any sense, but the larger part of his brain felt hot and heavy with liquor, so he stumbled closer to her.

“Who are you?” Patrick asked, and she shook her head and kissed the side of his neck.

“Doesn’t matter, just don’t stop,” she pleaded. Patrick shrugged again. She dragged him down to the floor, and started tugging at his clothes. When Patrick pushed her away after she got his belt off, she whined.

“Come on, please, please, I need you,” she groaned. She grabbed his head tight and whispered in his ear, and had Patrick been sober, he wouldn’t have been able to handle it. As it was, he flipped her onto her back and fumbled inside his wallet until he found a small foil package.

“Oh fuck yes, fuck me,” she groaned. The back of Patrick’s head was still screaming that he was either dreaming or in very deep danger, that girls that weren’t in porn did not act like this, but he ignored the reason in his brain and undid his jeans.

“You sure about this?” Patrick asked, and she nodded eagerly.

“God, yes, please!” she looked up at Patrick, and frowned at the condom in his hands. “Do you have to use that.”

Patrick’s mind briefly flickered to the one baby they were already babysitting, and nodded firmly. “Yeah, I definitely have to.”

“Okay, just hurry up!” she demanded.
In his hazy state of mind, Patrick was losing track of things. If he closed his eyes, her skin felt like someone else’s, and if he ignored the feeling of the floor he could pretend he was anywhere. He could feel her everywhere, touching his skin, just like always, and for the first time in a long time he felt happy and complete. His mouth popped open slightly in an ecstatic expression.

“Anna,” he whispered, and he felt an uncomfortable twitch underneath him, because that wasn’t her name. The temporary bliss crashed down all around him, and he immediately rolled away, buttoned his jeans and grabbed his shirt. He felt suddenly and powerfully sober, and he was shaking slightly.

“Come back!” the girl pleaded, chest still heaving on the ground.

“No, I- I’m really sorry about that,” Patrick said. She crawled over to him on hands and knees and grabbed fistfuls of his shirt in her hands, staring at him pleadingly.

“I don’t care!” she said. “Please, call me whatever you want! Cover up my face, tell me what she should say, I’ll do anything!”

“I don’t think- no!” Patrick said, standing up and brushing off his jeans. “Look, I’m really sorry about this, but I can’t. It’s not fair to you or me or An- or anyone.”

“I am begging you to fuck me!” she screamed shrilly. Patrick stumbled backwards into a table. Maybe the emotional train wreck hadn’t been as sobering as he thought, since he still couldn’t walk straight.

“I’m sorry, no,” he said. “Drop it.”

“Well Christ, that’s annoying,” she said. She was still undressed. She grabbed a sturdy looking brown pot with a small jade plant growing in it and hit Patrick hard on the side of the head.

Shocked and in pain, Patrick slumped to the side, dizzy but still conscious. He felt distantly glad that he was fully clothed, because if he couldn’t stand up before someone came in, it could be way worse. Just as he was thinking this, the girl opened a closet door, and Brendon, tied up with his mouth taped shut, tumbled out. He looked up at Patrick in terror.

“Brendon?” Patrick was kicking himself for drinking so much, his reaction time was too slow, he was too confused. Brendon struggled on the ground, and Patrick tried to sit up, but saw stars.

“Rock stars are easy,’ he said, ‘they’ll throw themselves at your feet,’ he said, well Brandon can go fuck himself if he thinks I’m ever taking a Fall Out Boy job again,” the girl grumbled as she got dressed. She pulled a rather large mesh bag out of her purse once her clothes were on again and shoved Brendon into it, still just wearing shorts and duct-tape.

“Truth be told,” she sighed, after slinging the bag over her shoulder like Brendon was weightless and turning to face Patrick, “I don’t actually think Brandon wanted me to kill you. Or the first boy either. He’s so obsessed with making his pack bigger, he’d never turn down a werewolf or a potential one like you.” She paused. “Plus, I really like your music. I can probably leave Brendon in my car when I hit up a truck stop on the way back to Vegas.”

“What are you talking about?” Patrick asked. He was trying to stand up, the edges of his vision still so fuzzy. The girl just smiled at him, and walked out of the bus.

The minute she was off the bus, Patrick jumped up. His head was throbbing like mad, but he wasn’t nearly as incapacitated as she thought. He ran off the bus and saw the direction she was
walking, so all he had to do was find someone, anyone, who could help him get Brendon back.

Patrick felt like he was running in circles, he couldn’t find his band anywhere in the darkened parking lot where all their busses were, and he was running out of time. If the girl got Brendon into a car.

“RYAN!” he screamed as soon as he saw him. Ryan looked over, bug eyed when he saw the state Patrick was in. Patrick grabbed Ryan’s arm and started dragging him back to where he saw the girl leaving.

“Brendon’s in trouble and there’s no time!” he said, while they were both running, and that seemed to do the trick. He went from dragging Ryan to having Ryan break out of his grip, sprinting forward than Patrick had any idea Ryan could run. Patrick chased after him, but watched at a distance as Ryan tackled her to the ground.

Patrick caught up to them a moment later, tearing open the bag and trying to gently pull the duct-tape off of Brendon’s mouth. It was only half off when Brendon started singing, not a real song, but one high, sustained note, and the ground beneath the girl’s feet started dragging her under.

“What are you doing?!” she screamed, and Brendon finally stopped, breathing hard when she was waist deep in the parking lot.

“What just happened?” Patrick asked. The world was swaying, liquid, and he tried to sit down to steady himself while Ryan helped Brendon climb the rest of the way out of the bag.

“Lily, apparently, is a succubus that was assigned to take me back to Brandon Flowers,” Brendon said. He was leaning heavily on Ryan, who had a tight grip around Brendon’s waist.

“I thought Brandon wasn’t supposed to do anything for a year,” Ryan breathed.

“That’s not good,” Patrick noted.

“Get out of here,” Brendon said coldly to Lily. He hummed a short tune under his breath and the ground spat her back out. “Go home.”

Lily nodded and ran away.

“You should gather up the rest of your band,” Ryan said to Patrick. “We need to talk.”

Patrick was wearing a thick hoodie and nursing a bottle of water while the two bands sat around an outdoor picnic table, the only thing big enough to seat all of them. Andy rocked Carmilla back and forth while Brendon explained who Lily was and what she wanted.

“So it’s not so much that we have a year of mercy, but that we have a year to beg for mercy,” Joe said. “Fantastic. And you know, I think a girl kind of like that tried to sleep with me too.”

“Yeah, the girl I met sounds the same, and had the same name,” Andy agreed.

“She tried to kill all four of us, apparently,” Patrick said dully. Of course he was the last choice. “We just got really lucky.”

“Look, we have to figure out how to take down Brandon without killing him,” Ryan said. “And soon. I don’t know what he wanted with Brendon, but it can’t be good.”
“Why without killing him?” Patrick asked. He didn’t mean for the question to sound so
callous, but he was so tired, and he really wanted to go back to wallowing.

“He’s got an entire city behind him,” Ryan said. “If you guys die, I mean, obviously we’ll
be sad and it’ll be awful for your families and stuff, but we’ll be enslaved and no one in their right
minds will go to avenge you.”

“Somehow I have a feeling that quite a few of the bands we work with aren’t in their right
minds, but go on,” Joe said. Patrick almost laughed picturing the terror on Brandon Flowers’ face if
he ever saw Gerard and Mikey at full power.

“Right, well if you kill him, you’ll have all the magical creature in Las Vegas up against
you, and given the deal he made, possibly most of the denizens of hell. That’s not a fight we can
win,” Ryan said miserably.

“We’ll figure it out,” Pete said in a reassuring voice. “You guys should get some sleep - and
don’t worry about this for now, okay? We’re working on it.”

Reluctantly, the guys from Panic! got back on their own bus, Ryan’s arm still slung
protectively around Brendon’s shoulders. Pete inhaled deeply, his expression darkening, and he
turned to face Joe.

“I have an idea,” he said.

“Oh god, I hate it when you have ideas,” Andy groaned.

“I’ve been doing research on werewolves and hell hounds and general pack dynamics and I
have an idea, but you’re not going to like it,” Pete said, his eyes still focused on Joe.

“I’m not interested in any packs,” Joe said flatly.

“Hear me out,” Pete pleaded, “the bigger a pack is the more powerful the leader is, right?”

“Shut up,” Joe said, closing his eyes.

“So since you’re a wolf, if you had a pack-”

“Shut up!” Joe said louder. “It’s not happening, and we can find a different way.” Patrick
watched as Joe stormed off. Carmilla woke up and started crying, and Andy sighed, walking away
as he rocked her.

“What was that about?” Patrick asked Pete, only mildly interested.

“I have an idea that might work, but Joe doesn’t like it and he won’t listen to me, even
now,” Pete groaned. “And I need him to agree to it first, but…” He trailed off, and looked into the
distance.

“Right,” Patrick said. Of course, a real explanation would be too much to ask for. “I’m just
gonna go to bed then,” he added, his voice deliberately sour. Pete looked up at him in worry and
grabbed his wrist.

“Hey, man, are you okay?” Pete asked. And Patrick had every intention of saying yes, he
was fine, not to worry about it, but instead he exploded.

“No, of course I’m not okay!” he yelled. “My mom called a week ago to say my dog had
died, and then my girlfriend cheated on and then broke up with me, I can hardly get out of bed without getting drunk, and the cherry on top is that the only person who will sleep with me is a starving sex demon!”

Pete looked like he was going to say something, but Patrick was having none of it.

“I’m tired all the time and nothing feels good and I’m not good for anything around here, and this is the worst fucking week of my life, including the week we were locked in a vampire dungeon!”

“Patrick.” Pete began.

“What?” Patrick growled. Pete looked all scared and open but Patrick was angry at the universe, and it was just Pete’s bad luck that he happened to live in it.

“Um. If you and Anna are done for good, can we say what we really thought about her?” Pete asked timidly.

“Sure?” Patrick said, his anger thrown off. He hadn’t been expecting that.

“Okay, so, Anna’s a fucking bitch with an anger problem serious B.O., this coming from someone that lives with you,” Pete said. “And I’ve hated her ever since she went batshit during the mermaid thing, but I didn’t say anything because I’m a good friend, but the point is you deserve way better. I can’t actually think of anyone good enough for you, but you deserve better than her, I know that.”

Patrick was momentarily stunned into silence. A small voice in the back of his head reminded him that Pete couldn’t lie.

“Thanks,” he said thickly. “I don’t really think I’m going to get much better, though.”

“I know you will,” Pete said.

“Thanks,” Patrick said again. It didn’t fix anything, not yet, but he hoped that since he could feel Pete’s eyes on him as he walked away, he could see in his aura that it helped.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks as always for reading! This episode felt a little bit filler, but things are going to really heat up next episode. I feel like I had a lot more to say but time limits- i may add to this later. Thanks so much for reading, please comment and tell me what you thought of it!

Chapter Title: Let's Get Fucked Up and Die by Motion City Soundtrack
This City

Chapter Summary

Upon returning home after a long tour, Fall Out Boy discovers someone new roaming their streets, someone who shouldn't be there. Their new friend combined with a very strange encounter with an acid spitting worm culminates in a strange holiday season for the four monster fighters.

Chapter Notes

tw sex mention, animal abuse??

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Coming home to Chicago didn’t feel like it usually did.

Pete was starting to get used to the constant touring, the always waking up somewhere new and living out of a few dusty backpacks that he scrounged up from his high school days. But a few minutes into the plane’s descent into O’Hare airport, he realized that he wasn’t sure if coming back to Chicago was really coming home anymore. The idea that he didn’t see the city as home anymore put a lump in his throat.

Pete was getting better at the whole flying in airplanes thing, though. He was still absolutely petrified if he thought about it too much, but as long as he had something within the plane to focus on, he did just fine. Keeping himself occupied usually meant bugging the other guys in his band, but the guys from Panic! at the Disco had decided to come and stay with them for a week or so before Christmas and after the end of the Nintendo Fusion Tour, and Pete was pretty happy to discuss poetry with Ryan. It wasn’t like anyone else was going to listen to him.

In fact, things were still good when they got out of the airport. The tour hadn’t played a venue in Chicago proper, and once they found an enormous minivan of a taxi and started driving towards the city, the kids from Panic! were staring out at the skyline with wide, childlike eyes, as though they’d never seen a city before.

Then again, Pete didn’t really have the right to judge them, given that Patrick still looked at Chicago the same way.

They had only been driving for a few minutes, however, when Pete began to feel incredibly sick. He felt somehow hollowed out, sucker punched, and flash-frozen all at once, and he leaned over and gripped someone’s shoulder for support as he started heaving.

“Shit, dude, are you alright?” Joe asked, his voice coming from somewhere very far away, like Pete was listening to him from the bottom of a well.

“Something’s wrong,” Pete moaned. His skin was cold and clammy and he could hear his heartbeat. “The city, something’s wrong with it.”
“Um, just give me a minute, I’ll see what I can find out,” someone said, still distantly. Pete really wanted to throw up, but figured that the cab driver wouldn’t appreciate it, so he swallowed thickly and kept taking shallow breaths.

“Pete’s right, something is really wrong here,” Ryan sounded panicked, and Pete forced himself back into sitting upright and turned to look at him.

“What’s wrong?” he asked thickly. Ryan’s face was drawn and focused, but his eyes were blurry.

“Chicago is there,” Ryan pointed out the window, “But it’s not… um, it isn’t?” he said. Pete met Ryan’s eyes and nodded slowly. He was sure everyone else in the car thought they sounded mental, but Ryan’s explanation made sense, that had to be it. The hollow feeling in his gut, the fuzziness of the area.

“City’s gone,” Pete agreed in a hoarse voice.

“Not trying to doubt you guys or anything, but the city is right there,” Brendon said, pointing out of the window to the gray skyline, just visible in front of the gathering storm clouds.

“It’s there, but it’s not,” Pete said, painfully aware of everyone’s eyes on him while he was still sweating bullets. “Okay, um, Jesus, you know how everyone has an aura? It’s not just people that have auras. Plants and shit have spirits too, and anything that can hold emotional attachment. Some laptops have auras if they’re really fucking important. So towns and cities have spirits too. And Chicago is still there physically, but the spirit of the city is gone.”

“Is that… a bad thing?” Brent asked slowly.

“Yes!” Pete said vehemently, then paused. “I mean, I think so. I don’t know if anything like this has ever happened before. But I feel sick, so it’s probably a bad thing.”

“It’s a very precise science, aura reading,” Joe said, voice dripping with obvious sarcasm. Pete wanted to throw a biting retort at him, but his stomach twisted painfully, and he curled in on himself tighter.

“The city essentially has no aura,” Pete said when he got his breath back. “The problem is that things without auras are dead.”

“Yeah, but cities can’t die,” Joe said. “Look, there are still buildings, there’s a homeless guy pissing on a building right there. Chicago looks like normal.”

“For now,” Pete said.

“What did you see?” Spencer pressed Ryan in a voice so quiet Pete almost missed it.

“Nothing,” Ryan said, shrugging and glancing around the inside of the cab self-consciously. “I mean, literally, nothing. Everything we do in the future, in this city anyway, looks like we’re standing on a soundstage, just totally empty. And everyone looks… fainter.”

“People’s essences are tied to their homes,” Pete said helpfully.

“So what’ll happen to the people living in Chicago if it’s gone for good?” Brendon asked, his eyes big and worried.

“Well, they’ll probably feel a strong- a strong urge to move,” Pete stumbled over the words,
trying not to think about what they meant for him, “And if they stay here, a part of them will be dead so long as they call it home.”

Everyone was staring at Pete fearfully, and he held his hands up.

“I'm just theorizing, guys,” he said.

“Frightening theory,” Andy noted. “Should we call you out sick for the show tonight?”

“No, I’ll be fine,” Pete said.

When the taxi pulled up behind the Aragon Ballroom and they collected their bags to take into the venue, since they were running behind, Pete threw up violently on the ground as soon as they stepped out of the car.

“Oh, wow, are you sure you can play?” Brendon asked nervously, sounding again very far above Pete.

“Mmm,” Pete made an affirmative noise as best he could through gritted teeth. Truth be told, he wasn’t sure, but he wasn’t going to admit that. He wanted to fall to the asphalt and curl up immediately, but it was starting to snow, and he dragged himself inside the building.

As soon as they were inside, Pete felt suddenly fine. His skin didn’t feel clammy anymore, and his chest felt like it could actually expand and contract again. He cracked his knuckles and grabbed his bass, running his fingers up and down the fret until the jitters in his stomach were manageable. Back in the corner of the green room, he could see the guys from Panic! huddled close together, heads bent while they talked in harsh whispers. They all looked intense, with the exception of Brent, who was texting.

The show was amazing, and all of them were on fire. The whole venue was buzzing with wild energy, and the place was so beautiful on top of that. It was an old ballroom, and the high ceilings were still painted to look like a starry night sky.

Pete whirled and jumped around stage, light and happy, and found himself wishing, during Saturday, that the show could have been longer. Everything went without a hitch, but the second he got outside in the cool night air after the show, he threw up again.

“Jesus, maybe we should go back to my place? Or a hotel if it’s closer, fuck,” Patrick fretted. Pete shook his head, standing up as straight as he could and trying to look like he was fine. He spat bile onto the ground and rolled his shoulders back.

“I’m gonna be fine,” Pete said. “Really. Come on, do you guys still wanna see the city?”

Pete was able to convince Panic! to go along with him with relative ease, and once they were in, the rest of his band came along, probably just to humor Pete, but Pete was fine with that. Pete insisted that they would cover the clean, tourist-y side of Chicago that night, and they could do the real city the next day. Patrick kept giving Pete nervous looks, and Joe muttered something about there being no point in seeing the city if it was gone, but Pete was too busy trying to look fine to care what they were thinking.

They passed by the Art Institute that night on their way to Millennium Park, and Patrick pointed out the lions that had come to life a few years ago. Brendon laughed aloud at the story of the gargoyles and lions coming to life after a show.

“Come on, talking lion statues?” Brendon said, his eyes wide. The bigger lion statue,
Defiance, turned and roared at Brendon when the car driving by them had driven out of sight, and Brendon blanched and looked as though he was going to pass out.

Once they made it to Millennium Park, Pete’s muscles began to relax again, and the air started tasting the way it was supposed to again. They weren’t inside, so Pete was more than a little confused as to why the park was making him feel better, when he heard someone call out.

“Hey!” a voice called from behind an enormous construction tent. “Come and take a look at this!”

To Pete’s relief, no one moved. He felt a little guilty for thinking any of them would be ridiculous enough to answer a strange voice in the middle of the night, but he couldn’t say he was sure.

“Hey!” the voice called again, and just the head of a man popped out of the side of the beige tent, covered in caution tape. He was smiling brightly, his teeth practically glowing against his dark brown skin, and wildly curly hair hanging down to his shoulders mostly covered his eyes. He blew some of the locks out of his face, still grinning widely. “ Seriously, you guys have got to check this out! You know what’s under here?”

Pete kept his eyes on the guy, possibly crazy, possibly dangerous, but someone must have shaken their head, because the man jumped all the way out from the tent. He was dressed fairly normally, in relatively clean jeans and a red flannel shirt.

“This is a new sculpture!” he said eagerly. “The designer’s calling it Cloud Gate because it’s just going to be one enormous mirror, and you’ll be able to see the whole city and all the clouds in it. It’s shaped kind of like a bean, and they’re almost done polishing it, so you guys should come in here and look at it because it is so beautiful!”

“I don’t think we’re supposed to go in there just yet,” Patrick said politely, nodding at the caution tape. The guy rolled his eyes, stepping closer to them. Pete made to take a step back, but he finally noticed the man’s aura, way too bright for a human, and it didn’t even look properly alive the way human auras should. It seemed brown at first look, but the closer Pete got, the more he realized it was multicolored and constantly shifting. It hurt his eyes to focus on, so he tried to tune out his aura.

“Yeah, but I wanted to see it,” the man said with a shrug. “They shouldn’t hide beautiful things, they’re made for looking at, right?”

“We actually need to be somewhere,” Joe said. “So sorry, but have fun with-”

“WAIT!” the man yelled, taking a few huge steps until he was right in Joe’s face, though significantly taller than him. The man looked down at Joe until they were nose to nose, and he bit his lip nervously.

“You’re Joe, right? The musician? And the wanderer? Sometimes you aren’t human?” All while he was speaking, the man was blinking at Joe owlishly, studying his hair and his face, and eventually grabbing a lock of Joe’s hair. At this, Joe’s hand snapped up and grabbed the man’s wrist, firmly pulling it away from his hair.

“Don’t do that,” Joe said. “Who are you?”

“Oh, buddy, I really wish I knew,” he said with a laugh. “But you’re in Fall Out Boy, right? You’re one of the vigilantes? I remember hearing about all you’ve done, and I need your help. I
know I’m not human, but you won’t kill me, right?”

“We’re not going to kill you!” Joe said, looking horrified at the very thought. “Why do you need our help? And how do you know who we are?”

“I need your help because I’m not right,” the man said, his arms flying in gesticulation as he spoke. “I need to go back to where I belong and I know you guys well enough to trust you.” With that, he turned to Andy.

“Ashley! It is Andy, right? Seeing is weird, sorry. You’re always homesick, I’m sorry,” he said sincerely. He looked over at Ryan, Brendon, Spencer, and Brent, and he frowned.

“I’m sorry, I don’t know any of you,” he said mournfully.

“Don’t worry, we don’t take any offense at that,” Ryan said in a flat voice. The man shrugged, and half skipped over to Pete. He looked like he was bubbling over with energy.

“Pete! Oh, Pete, I’ve known you for your whole life!” he cried, grasping both of Pete’s hands. “It feels like we grew up together sometimes. We’re growing apart, though,” he said, frowning at Pete.

“Sorry?” Pete said, utterly baffled. The man turned at last to Patrick, and his face lit up. His whole aura lit up, and for a second Pete thought he might be blinded by it.

“Patrick,” he breathed, like nothing in the world could ever make him happier than seeing Patrick’s face. Patrick, for his part, looked just as confused as Pete felt.

“Patrick, Patrick Stump,” the man said reverently. He stepped up toe to toe with Patrick, and then took a step back so he could better look at his face. “You love me.”

“Love you? I don’t even kn-!” Patrick was cut off mid-sentence by the man grabbing Patrick by his shoulders and kissing him hard. Pete felt frozen in shock for a moment, but when he saw Patrick pushing at the man’s chest with his hands, he moved to punch the guy’s lights out, whoever he was. The man, however, seemed to take the hint from Patrick, and let go, still smiling.

“Who the fuck are you?” Patrick asked, and Pete could practically see the cartoon steam pouring out of his ears.

“Again, does anyone know who they really are? I mean, god, I could become anyone and I’ve only-”

“Your name, jackass,” Patrick demanded.

“Oh!” He brightened. “I’m Chicago!”

The world felt suddenly very, very quiet, and Pete started counting his breaths. He got to five breaths, in and out, before Patrick spoke again.

“What?” he asked in a blank voice.

“Chicago,” he said brightly. “It’s my name.”

Patrick turned to Pete with a pleading, desperate expression on his face.

“Pete?” he asked.
“Um, yeah,” Pete laughed nervously. “I think we know where the city went.”

“You’re the city of Chicago,” Patrick asked, raising his voice a little.

“You just made out with the entire city of Chicago,” Joe said in an awed voice. Patrick looked panicked, and turned to glare at Joe.

“No I didn’t!” Patrick yelled, and he turned back to Chicago.

“I’m confused,” Chicago said. He brushed some of his unruly hair out of his eyes. His eyes were huge and wonder filled, and he looked like he wanted to keep smiling but thought it might be impolite.

“So am I, so we can take turns,” Patrick said diplomatically. He was still a little flushed, but was standing with his shoulders back. Pete gazed coldly on Chicago, feeling oddly protective of Patrick. “First of all, why are you a person and not, you know, a city?”

“I have no idea, I just woke up on a park bench with arms and legs and all the rest, and now I’m a person!” Chicago said cheerfully. He shook his limbs to emphasize their existence, and giggled a little. “How cool is this? I have skin and eyes and ears and I can feel and see and hear and it’s all amazing and beautiful! Everything is so beautiful, and I mean, I’m just gonna say it, I’m happy to be alive,” Chicago bubbled, still beaming. He made to step closer to Patrick and Patrick stuck his hands out, pushing back on Chicago’s chest and prevented him from kissing him again, and Chicago pouted.

“You don’t want me to touch you?” Chicago asked Patrick.

“I don’t want you to kiss me,” Patrick clarified. “You can’t do that without people’s permission, and in any case, what makes you think I love you?” he asked, a little bit scornfully. Chicago looked, for the first time, hurt. He blinked in confusion as he tried to stitch words together.

“But… I kissed you because you love me,” Chicago said.

“Well, that’s just,” Patrick paused, looked to Pete for help. Pete shrugged, and Patrick groaned, turning back to Chicago. “Look, assuming I do love you-”

“You do,” Chicago said.

“Yeah, okay, whatever, but there’s lots of different kinds of love and most of them have nothing to do with making out,” Patrick said earnestly. “You get that, right?”

“Oh. Right,” Chicago said, but brightened again anyway. “I can stop kissing you. Can you guys help me?” He was bouncing up and down more like a puppy had been turned into a person than a city, Pete thought.

Pete turned to the guys a hopeless expression on his face, and then turned back to Chicago.

“I don’t know how,” Pete said. Chicago deflated a little, but he still let his eyes drift across the group of them hopefully.

“But you can figure it out, right? That’s what you do when you have a problem, you figure it out! That’s why I found you tonight, twice.”

“Twice?” Pete asked, but as soon as the word left his lips, he understood. The concert, that had to be why he stopped feeling sick.
“I went to see you perform tonight,” Chicago confirmed. “I thought I could meet you there, but it turns out you guys are really, really popular.”

Ryan let out a loud laugh before stifling his mouth with his hand.

“How long have you been,” Joe gestured to Chicago with flapping hands, “You know, existing?”

“I just woke up today!” Chicago said. He started bouncing on the balls of his feet, realizing that the band was interested in hearing his story. “I felt this huge jolt through me, and then I opened my eyes and sat up in some back alley, which was weird because it was the first time I had eyes. Or a body. Anyway, I remembered Fall Out Boy saving the city all the time, and I asked around until I heard that you were playing a show tonight, and I went there, and then I couldn’t talk, so I headed out to the park because I overheard you telling the other people that you wanted to show them around.”

“Well, you found us,” Pete said. “But do you remember anything about how you got- um, personified?”

“Nice one,” Joe snorted.

“Nothing,” Chicago sighed. He rubbed his arms up and down nervously. “I mean, seeing and hearing and feeling is cool and all, but I feel weird not being where I’m supposed to be.”

“Oh Christ,” Patrick exhaled heavily. Pete held up one finger in front of Chicago.

“Could you give us a moment?” he asked, and Chicago nodded, sitting down on a bench and folding his hands in his lap. Pete turned to face the two bands.

“Well, we have to keep him, don’t we?” he said.

“We do?” Brent asked.

“We can’t just let Chicago roam the streets of Chicago freely,” Andy said. Joe laughed, and Pete glared at him.

“I mean it; he could get himself hurt. I don’t want to know what happens if Chicago gets killed,” Pete said, slightly nervously. He looked over his shoulder to check on Chicago, but Chicago had walked closer to them.

“Where do you plan on keeping Chicago?” Patrick asked. Pete gave Patrick his most winning, hopeful smile.

“At the home of my wonderful and amazing best friend who happens to live in Chicago and own his own place?”

“Dammit, Pete!” Patrick glanced over his shoulder at Chicago and then looked back. “Look, I know you think he’s Chicago-”

“I know he’s Chicago.”
“But what if he’s dangerous? I live alone, or I was planning to and frankly kind of really looking forward to after sharing an apartment with you and Joe and if we’re being honest, Jeanae and Andy and Marie for the past few years,” Patrick said. “I was kind of excited for the solitude. Finally. Pete shrugged, giving Patrick a sympathetic look.

“Look, just over Christmas? I’m gonna be with my mom, but if you absolutely hate him then we can figure something else out, but I don’t want to move him out of the city he’s supposed to, you know, be. Anyway, come on, you love Chicago! Usually you’re referring to the Sears Tower and the Bears and the shitty diner on Clarke Street, but still!”

Pete knew from Patrick’s eyes that he was going to say yes even before his face betrayed the answer.

“Fine!” Patrick said, and they turned back around.

Looking at Chicago again, Pete couldn’t help but melt at his puppy dog eyes. Chicago smiled at the bands and waved a little, shyly. Once beckoned, Chicago ran back over, and Pete heard a loud rumbling sound coming from him. It must have been really obvious to more sensitive ears than Pete’s, because Joe looked actively shocked.

“You hungry?” Joe asked, and Chicago cocked his head.

“I’m not sure,” he said. “I’ve never had a stomach before.” He paused for a minute after saying this. “The stomach is the hunger bit, right?”

“Yeah, the stomach is the hunger bit,” Andy agreed.

“I might be hungry,” Chicago mused. He put a hand on his stomach and pondered it for a minute. “Feels kind of hollow?”

“You’re hungry!” Brendon said, seeming thrilled to have solved the mystery. “Hungry for anything in particular?”

“I’ve never had food before,” Chicago said, blinking at Brendon in something halfway between fear and disbelief. To Pete’s surprise, Patrick smiled a wry smile.

“Well, obviously we’ve got to get you pizza,” Patrick said. “You-style pizza, it’s the only kind that matters.”

“Disgusting,” Ryan said.

“You’re uninvited back to the Midwest forever,” Patrick told Ryan, then turned back to Chicago. “Come on, I know a good twenty-four-hour place near here.”

“I prefer eating my pizza to drinking it,” Ryan said wryly.

“No one asked you,” Patrick said.

“I’m excited to see what the hype is about,” Chicago said, beaming shyly at Patrick. It freaked Pete out to look at Chicago, who was displaying all the physical signs of a crush, but had no noticeable change in his aura. It was eerie.

Patrick dragged the nine of them to a dingy, hole-in-the-wall pizza place way too far away, where all the wallpaper peeled and all the waitresses scowled while they popped bubble gum. Brendon was the only one from Panic! at the Disco looking even remotely enthusiastic, but Chicago
was vibrating when he ordered an entire pizza for himself. Distantly, Pete wondered who was going to pay for him.

“So what are your names?” he asked, and unsurprisingly, Brendon spoke up first.

“I’m Brendon!” he said, waving a little despite the fact that they were walking a mere few feet from one another. “Brendon Urie. I’m a singer, like Patrick.”

“Oh, are you the hot one then?” Chicago asked, and Brent made a sound that sounded somewhere in between laughing and choking.

“Excuse me?” Brendon asked.

“Girls in the city usually think that the singers are the hot ones, and I think I know your name. So you’re the hot one?”

“He’s the front man,” Ryan said sourly. “I’m Ryan. I play guitar and write the lyrics and I’m a college dropout.”

“Like Pete?” Chicago confirmed.

“Well, Ryan can play guitar, so that’s different,” Joe snorted. To Pete’s surprise, Chicago frowned.

“Pete’s a better musician than you give him credit for,” he said. “I know everyone in the city, and he practices whenever he can.”

“I spend a lot of time staring at walls and losing my mind too,” Pete said in a joking voice. But Chicago just gave him a kind, perceptive look.

“Yeah. You practice when you can,” he said, and a sudden warmth rushed through Pete, halfway between embarrassment and pride.

When their food finally came, even Brendon’s vigor seemed to dim a little. Ryan, Spencer, and Brent seemed to think better of ordering Chicago style pizza, and Brendon looked almost afraid of the deep dish in front of him. Andy looked a little miffed to not be eating, but apparently the salad bar closed at nine, even if the pizza was twenty-four hours.

“This is the best food I’ve ever had in my life!” Chicago moaned around a way too big mouthful of pizza.

“It’s the only food you’ve ever had in your life,” Andy said.

“But it’s-!” Chicago let out a nearly orgasmic moan. The waitress eventually brought out a huge pitcher of Mountain Dew, after Chicago chugged his third glass in a matter of a few minutes. Chicago was also avidly avoiding his fork and knife, attempting to eat the pizza with his hands like any regular pizza, and subsequently spilling sauce all over the table, himself, and Spencer, who had the misfortune of sitting next to him. Brendon, in contrast, had attempted to dig into the slice five different times and paused each time, as though he couldn’t figure it out.

“This is so good!” Chicago exclaimed, and turned to Patrick with starry eyes. “People are wrong about you, you’re just as smart as you are kind.”

Patrick opened his mouth with a warning expression on his face, but before he could say anything the oversized booth they were sitting in began vibrating. The pictures on the wall trembled,
their frames tapping against the walls, and someone from the kitchen swore as Pete heard pots and pans clattering to the floor.

“Um. Does the ground usually just, ah, move?” Chicago asked worriedly.

“Must’ve been an earthquake,” Spencer said, drinking his soda unconcerned. Pete noticed that his own band was much more worried.

“Yeah, maybe, it’s just that Chicago hasn’t had an earthquake since before I was born,” Patrick said.

“So it doesn’t usually happen?” Chicago clarified.

“Well, it does where we’re from, but not here,” Brendon said. “And honestly, that felt more like an aftershock than an earthquake to me.”

“I thought I would remember if that happened often. I mean, I never had physical sensations before, but still,” Chicago said.

“I mean, Illinois has earthquakes sometimes,” Joe said. “Maybe the city’s adjusting to not having a city? Wait, that doesn’t make sense, hold on…”

“It’s probably nothing. You want some dessert?” Pete asked Chicago, and he shook his head.

“Pizza and soda forever!” he declared.

“A city after my own heart,” Pete said. He turned to Patrick and gave him another pleading, wheedling smile.

“So, Patrick,” he began, and Patrick raised his eyes skyward.

“Will it even slow you down if I say the answer is already no?” Patrick asked.

“Not at all,” Pete said, “It’s getting kinda late, do you think we could crash at your place tonight?”

“When you say ‘we’, who all is ‘we’?” Patrick asked around a thick bite of pizza.

“Patrick,” Pete gave him a pleading look.

“Don’t you glow-y eye me!” Patrick said.

“I don’t use charmspeak on friends!” Pete insisted. “Please?”

“I have no blankets or pillows,” Patrick said.

“We’ll make do,” Pete said brightly.

A new song came on the radio, “It’s Not Unusual,” and Chicago instantly started tapping his toes and humming along. By the end of the song, he was smiling and half singing along. It was really quite endearing.

“This is the best song I’ve ever heard,” Chicago said, and Pete laughed. Chicago would grow on Patrick; he was sure of it. How could someone not like the guy?
“We should get back, it’s like, two in the morning,” Patrick said, stretching and yawning a little. “Also, I’ve got two beds, and I get at least one of them.”

“Can we share?” Pete asked, batting his eyelashes theatrically. Patrick rolled his eyes.

“Someday, I’m going to tell you no,” he sighed. Pete pulled him into a sloppy, one armed hug, and walked up to the front counter with the bill. Paying was the least he could do.

Patrick’s apartment was, according to Patrick, not very far from the restaurant, but after a dozen or so blocks, Chicago was starting to shiver pretty badly. Pete was going to suggest something to help, but before he could, Patrick sighed and shrugged off his coat, draping it over Chicago’s shoulders with a look of resignation. Chicago gave Patrick another adoring look, before frowning in concern.

“Aren’t you going to be cold?” Chicago asked, and Patrick rolled his eyes.

“We’re almost there, but you looked kind of miserable.”

When they finally got to the apartment, Pete could see that it was definitely nice, but also had the distinct air of not having been lived in. It was furnished, technically, but not even remotely decorated, and the sheets were just sitting on top of the beds, not even made yet. Patrick reminded Pete that he hadn’t had much of a chance to do any living there yet, but Pete figured he didn’t actually mind the good natured ribbing. It also seemed more like a placeholder home, just to work as a place that wasn’t his mom’s house and had water that ran hot. Pete ought to get a similar living situation worked out, but then again, maybe living alone wasn’t the best idea for him, and that was why his mom didn’t bug him about moving out officially.

Patrick kicked open a closet that had a few pillows and threadbare quilts in it, along with a collection of matching blue towels that still had tags on them, and told everyone crowded inside the living room to figure things out for themselves, and let Pete tail after him into the master bedroom.

“You actually going to bed?” Patrick asked Pete, and Pete grinned.

“Isn’t that my line?” Pete asked him, and Patrick sighed.

“Do you see a guitar in here? I’m going to bed,” he said, and he flopped down without even bothering to change. His voice muffled by the pillow, he said, “Turn out the light when you lie down, and grab a second blanket so you don’t steal mine.”

Pete chuckled a little, and stopped in front of the window. It was a little far away from the center of the city, but Pete felt, on a deep level, more connected to the city than he did on Lake Shore Drive. It was weird, being next to so much concentrated energy, and almost too much, after he spent a fair amount of time with Chicago. Almost nuclear, a kind of sickly heat, but still better than being far away from him. Pete shuddered to think what any other fae in the city must be feeling.

But though he couldn’t see much of the city from his vantage point, Pete saw a strange flash of red in the distance. He blinked and stepped closer to the frosty window, pressing up against it so he couldn’t see his reflection so clearly.

He saw the flash off red again, this time more clearly. It looked like a thin red tube curled out of the ground, darted across the street, and down into the ground again. Pete blinked, wondering if he was just seeing things, when he felt the ground shaking beneath him again. Pete glanced back at Patrick to see if he felt it, but Patrick was snoring.

Overcome with tiredness, Pete decided that if it wasn’t going to kill them tonight, he could
deal with it in the morning, and he fell asleep before he could turn out the light.

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Rockstars, Andy had decided, were the worst kind of people. They never woke up before noon, they still needed to drink their body weight in caffeine to survive the day, they couldn’t hold down girlfriends, all they ever did was argue about famous musicians...

All of these problems applied to Andy too, but he didn’t like it. He also thought it was ridiculous that everyone was insisting on taking Chicago to a Starbucks, of all places, for coffee and breakfast at two in the afternoon.

“Starbucks? Of all the places to eat in this city?” Andy asked mildly, one eyebrow raised.

“I’ve heard a lot about it,” Chicago said brightly, then frowned. “Or, well, not heard, but just sort of knew, but not in the same way you think, because sensations are really different now-”

“Yeah, we got it,” Patrick said. “Keep my coat, it’s sunny out and I can grab a hoodie.”

Andy couldn’t deny the one good thing about the chain coffee store - there was one of them really close to Patrick’s apartment. They only had to walk a few blocks over, and the store was completely desolate, save for one shaggy looking guy behind the counter who lit up when they walked in.

“Hey there, guys,” he said in an amused voice, eyebrows raised.

“Jon!” Brent said, grinning at him, and oh yeah, Andy vaguely recognized him as one of the techs for Panic! at the Disco, though Andy hadn’t talked to him much.

“What are you doing here, man?” Brendon asked, pulling Jon into an extremely awkward hug over the counter.

“Oh- um, hey there, I live here,” Jon said. “What are you all doing here?”

“Private tour,” Pete said dryly. “We’re all just crashing at Patrick’s for a couple of nights.”

“Full house,” Jon said with a nod. “And, sorry, what’s your name?” he asked, turning to Chicago.

“I’m Chicago!” he said eagerly, stretching out his hand to shake Jon’s in a manner that would have been pompous if it had been anyone but him.

“Cool name, man,” Jon said, shaking his hand with equal enthusiasm. “What can I get you guys today?”

“Hey, do we get it for free since you know us?” Brendon asked equally, and Jon’s face became incredulous.

“You’re all internationally successful rockstars, and I work two jobs. What do you think?” Jon asked, and Brendon wilted.

“I’ll leave a big tip,” he said, and Jon nodded. He made the drinks while he was taking their orders, and when he got to Ryan he smirked.

“So I’m guessing either black or some ridiculously complicated and girly order?” he asked him, and Ryan scowled, but the scowl almost immediately became a smile.
“Mocha frap; go fuck yourself,” Ryan said, and Jon gave him a derisive look and pumped extra syrup into his drink.

Jon also remembered Andy was a vegan, and Andy felt a little guilty that he barely remembered the guy existed. When he sat down, Chicago was already talking to Joe, his face pinched up.

“Should I not tell Jon that I’m a city?” he asked, and Joe shook his head.

“I don’t think so. Jon knew The Academy Is… pretty well, but I’m not sure if they told him about freaky magic stuff.”

“Am I freaky?” Chicago asked, and Joe nodded.

“Way freaky. It’s a good thing, though. Freaky can be cool.”

Chicago apparently had nothing else to say on the subject, as he tasted the drink and declared it the best thing he had ever had in his life, and pronounced Jon to be the best barista in the world. Andy was about to beg Pete to let him run down to the nearest 7-Eleven to get something chocolate for Chicago to taste when another earthquake hit, this one harder than the last, strong enough to knock nearly all of their drinks over and cause Andy to grip the table to keep his balance.

“I thought these weren’t common!” Chicago said. Andy was about to explain to him that they definitely were not common when the ground shook again, continuously, until something long and red and thick as a manhole cover slithered out of a drain and onto the street.

It looked like an oversized, phosphorescent worm, and once it was entirely out on the street, it reared back as though it were a snake about to strike. Instead of its whole head coming forward, something wet and glistening shot from it, landing on the door with a hissing, sizzling sound. Once the door was hit, it instantly began dissolving, and Andy felt the blood drain from his face.

“What is that?” Jon asked in a very small voice.

“Dangerous, presumably,” Ryan said, at the same time as Joe yelled “Is there a back exit to this place?”

Jon nodded, running towards the back, but the worm reared back again and spat forward, the liquid hitting the doorknob before Jon could and melting it.

“New plan?” Jon asked as he turned around.

Andy rolled his eyes and kicked the leg off of one of the tables, then threw it at the worm like a javelin.

The sharp wood glanced off the side of the worm without appearing to do any real damage, but the worm let out a high pitched screeching sound and turned to Andy, rearing back to spit venom again.

Andy vaulted off of a surviving table and jumped on top of the creature’s head before it could spit. The thing’s skin was glossy and hard like a thick plastic, and though there were some ridges that Andy could probably get a weapon under, he didn’t have any weapons on him. As it was, Andy could almost wrap his arms all the way around the worm, and he tried to do so to strangle it or steer it away from his friends, or something.

Though having his arms around the thing’s neck didn’t seem to do that much good, after a
minute, Andy felt the skin on his arm scalding. He let out a cry and let go, falling to the floor and landing painfully on his head. When he looked up, he saw Jon spraying steamed milk at the worm from a small nozzle behind the counter.

The worm recoiled and shrieked its high pitched shriek in pain, and Andy looked at Jon, impressed, as Jon switched to another nozzle when the first one stopped spraying at full pressure, all the time with a frighteningly calm expression on his face.

“Brilliant,” Joe yelled at Jon, and thinking in a similar vein, Patrick smashed the glass over a fire extinguisher and held down the handle for that, blowing white froth all over the cafe before hitting the worm, but eventually finding his mark.

Chicago, still standing next to Joe, pulled out a handgun and shot at the worm multiple times. It seemed that the force of the cold, hot, and bullets combined was too much for it, and still making that horrible, high pitched noise, it began slithering backwards, and it went back down the manhole, unpursued.

“When did you get a gun?” Pete yelled at Chicago in the silence after the worm left. Chicago laughed a little at that.

“Pete,” he said in a voice that made it clear the answer should have been obvious, “I’m Chicago.”

“Why do I get the feeling that’s not just a kick ass name?” Jon asked. His face was a very pale white, and Andy felt guilty that he didn’t know more about this.

“Because magic is real, he’s a city, and we just almost got assassinated by a monster worm,” Pete said, and gave Jon an apologetic smile. “Sorry about all this.”

“Well I’m getting fired,” Jon said, looking remarkably calm. “I’m gonna go call my manager.”

While Andy helped Jon and the others clean up the store as best they could, Joe and Ryan were bent over Jon’s laptop, doing research.

“The world’s largest earthworm is only a meter long,” Joe announced.

“Yeah, funny, I didn’t think that was an earthworm,” Jon said.

“Try ‘Mongolian Death Worm’,” Ryan suggested suddenly. Joe gave Ryan a confused look, but typed it in, and immediately looked shocked.

“This is it, yeah!” Joe said. “How did you-?”

“I make it a point to be as aware of mythological creatures as possible,” Ryan said.

“You being one of them?” Jon asked. He was holding a piece of warped glass up to the light, and Andy could see the curve of where it had melted. He shuddered to look at it, because if the venom could melt glass like that, what could it do if it touched a person?

“I’m human,” Ryan said, “And so are Spencer, Brent, and Patrick.”

“Comforting,” Jon said, and he grabbed a push broom to sweep up the smaller pieces of glass.
“No, hey, listen, this isn’t right,” Joe said with a frown as he bent further over the computer screen. “It says that the Mongolian Death Worm only gets to be about two to five feet long, and that was what, twenty feet?”

“I’d say,” Andy agreed. He picked the table leg off the ground and pushed it up under the table he had broken it off of, propping it up again. “Good as new?”

“I’ll make sure the manager doesn’t sit at that one,” Jon said, his face pulled back into a grimace.

“Would it help if we said we definitely need you for our next tour?” Brendon asked. Jon nodded, while Joe looked up.

“It can’t be the right thing,” he said. “I mean, everything else fits, glowing red, acid spit, no discernible facial features, but it’s way too big.”

“I have a theory,” Ryan said, pursing his lips. “It’s a bit of a stretch, though.” Andy turned to face him, along with everyone else in the cramped cafe, and Ryan’s face contorted again as he thought.

“Okay, so, um, we uh, obviously don’t live anywhere near where that worm is supposed to come from, but it’s still a desert creature, right? Well, who lives in the desert and is also out to get us? With enough power to possibly take a perfectly normal cryptid and turn it into a monstrosity like that? The kind of power you’d find in, say, hell?”

“You think it was Brandon?” Pete said, his eyes narrowed. Ryan shrugged, somehow fluidly, while still looking self-conscious.

“It doesn’t look very native to Chicago. And I couldn’t find anything about an earthquake on the news, so it must be following us.”

“Brandon?” Jon asked.

“Brandon Flowers,” Brendon said. “He kind of sort of wants to, you know, enslave me. No big deal.”

“And this coupled with the succubus would imply that he’s not opposed to the idea of killing us before he gets you guys,” Joe said dully.

“It’s just a theory,” Ryan warned. “The only clue we have is that it lives in the desert. I mean, do you know anyone else that wants you dead?”

“Most vampires,” Patrick said. “The ghost of America’s first serial killer, a vengeful Pennsylvania native spirit, a council of faeries living in England, and a demon called Murmur, but I mean, none of them seem particularly able or likely to send a death worm after us.”

“The lead singer of the Killers wants to enslave you? Why?” Jon asked. “And more importantly, why does everyone want to kill you? Your music’s not that bad!” Jon said, turning to Patrick.

“Thanks,” Andy said.

“Again, just a theory,” Ryan said, a little louder. “Let’s not be too hasty about this.”

“Ryan’s right,” Joe said. “We need to find this thing again and follow it, see where it goes
and gets its orders from or where its base is or something.”

“Sewers? Again?” Patrick whined, and Andy privately agreed, wrinkling up his nose at the thought.

“I know the sewers pretty well,” Chicago said, and everyone turned to look at him.

“You do?” Patrick asked. Chicago looked nervous, but Andy nodded at him encouragingly, and he spoke again.

“Well, yeah, I mean, I know this place quite literally like the back of my hand,” Chicago said. “I know where everything is, if you just ask me. All the streets and sewers and shops. Wherever within city limits humans have been, I know it.”

“And that’s the city of Chicago?” Jon asked in a whisper, clearly meant for just Spencer to hear.

“Yeah, he’s new,” Spencer whispered back.

“Not how I would have pictured Chicago as a person,” Jon said.

“Then all we have to do is get the worm to come after us again,” Joe said. “And I doubt that’ll take long.”

“Well, while you guys try to attract the death worm,” Jon said, his words heavy with implication, “My manager is on his way, so…”

“We’re gone,” Patrick said with a nod, and everyone stood up, saying their goodbyes quickly. Chicago pulled Jon into a close hug, lifting Jon up a little, and they went back outside, walking away from the shop somewhat briskly. Andy hoped they could put a decent amount of space between themselves and the Starbucks, and really, really hoped that they hadn’t lost the kid’s job.

Andy got the idea that they should get away from populated areas as best they could, but as Joe pointed out, there weren’t very many places in Chicago that weren’t heavily populated. Chicago himself had some decent suggestions, but none were very close or safe. Eventually, they decided to start making their way back towards Millennium Park, in the hopes that the park would be a little more derelict in the bitter cold out.

As they walked, Chicago talked more about being a city, which Andy found endlessly fascinating. He seemed to have insight into the minds of every single person who called the city home, and though he had always had some sort of mind of his own, it was deeply swayed by his inhabitants. His spiritual influence was tied to the geographic location of Chicago, but didn’t really exist until a couple hundred years ago.

“Of course, I know historically speaking the land has been here much longer than I have,” he had said, “And it’s been a historical spot of trade for way longer than the time I’ve existed. Loads of people used this spot as a city of a different kind before it got claimed by Europeans and called Chicago, but I exist only for that city. Maybe someone else was here before me, but there’s no way for me to know. It’s not like I can really communicate with other cities.”

It was fascinating to hear about, even if it was a little freaky how much he knew about the four of them. Andy was a little nervous when Chicago mentioned that he only saw the city as home for a few months, but no one seemed to really notice the importance of the time period of February to November, except Pete, giving him a worried look, like always.
“So, now that you’re a guy-” Brendon began, but Chicago recoiled, looking vaguely annoyed.

“I don’t think I’m a guy,” he said, and Brendon frowned.

“I mean… you look like a guy,” Brendon said, looking Chicago up and down. “Do you have a, um-”

“I am currently in the body of a male human, as best as I can tell,” Chicago said, “But I’m not male or human. I’m a city.”

“Cool,” Andy said, and though Brendon looked confused, he dropped the subject.

They sat talking until Andy started to feel a little bit chilly, and if he was feeling kind of cold, it was a pretty safe assumption that everyone else was absolutely freezing. He was close to suggesting they just head into a nearby building so no one killed themselves out of pride when the ground began shaking again, and Andy toppled over and looked over at Joe in apprehension. Joe pulled out his gun and tensed up, and Andy jumped to his feet as well, clenching his fists in preparation.

When the glowing red worm burst from the fountain near the front of the park, it already looked slowed, almost injured, but it immediately began slithering towards the group of them sitting together, and Andy jumped forward, trying to get a grip around the thing’s neck as he had before, but found that he slid right off and fell to the ground.

The worm let out its keening noise again and turned to Andy. It reared back, and as Andy tried to scramble away, he found himself suddenly and violently aware of a pain in his leg from landing wrong, and he couldn’t stumble away quickly enough. The worm spat, and though Andy mostly managed to roll out of the landing zone, some of it burnt through his jeans and hit his legs with a fiery pain. With a whine, Andy crawled to the edge of the fountain it had crawled from, and plunged his whole leg into the icy water to relieve the pain.

Looking up, he saw that the worm had turned its attention to the rest of the band, which had mostly scattered. It seemed to be chasing after Joe, spitting over and over at him as Joe kept dodging and jumping from side to side. While focused on Joe, Patrick jumped forward and plunged his knife into one of the dividing lines between the worm’s segments. It let out another pained screech and turned on Patrick, spitting acid at him, which Patrick, thankfully, had enough presence of mind to jump out of the way of.

The worm looked almost confused by the amount of people yelling and aiming attacks at it, and it turned from side to side before zeroing in on Pete and slithering towards him. Chicago jumped in front of Pete at the last moment and shot at the black, segmented jaw of the worm, and when the bullet hit its target, the worm let out another awful screech, and drew back, turning from the band and towards the street.

“We have to follow it!” Pete gasped, trying to catch his breath even as he ran forward and yanked Andy to his feet. Andy let out a pained cry, but let Pete pull him up and stamped down hard on his bad leg. Shockwaves of pain ran down it, but it felt nearly normal again, and he began running after the worm, faster than the rest of either of the bands or the city.

The worm seemed to break through the manhole barrier in the middle of the street with no issue, and Andy jumped down after it with no hesitation. The sewer was dark, too dark for any human to see properly, but Andy’s vision was clearer in the dark, and it was effortless to follow the glow of red in the dark tunnels.
He raced after the worm as fast as he could, painfully aware of how loud the splashing beneath his feet was, and how quiet the rest of the tunnels were. He knew that the others, if they were following, had been left long behind, and when he got wherever this thing was going, he’d have to face it alone. But the worm couldn’t turn around, not there, and Andy felt reasonably safe tailing behind it.

The chase became almost another peaceful run after a while. It was darker and slimier than most jogs Andy went on, but he was still falling into a rhythm, following the creature with his head lost to a wave of endorphins released by the exercise. Once sure that he wasn’t going to lose the creature, he tried to run more on the sides of the sewer, out of the water. He doubted Joe would be able to follow the scent of one vampire in all of Chicago, but running through the water certainly wasn’t doing him any favors if he could. It also had the convenient perk of making Andy’s footsteps much quieter, and he if the worm really was going to run into its master, Andy would prefer not to make his presence known.

Luckily for Andy, the worm began slowing before it stopped, giving Andy more time to focus on making his footsteps even quieter. He half jogged the last few blocks until the worm slowed to a stop. He pressed his back against the wall before the worm turned a corner into a shockingly well-lit part of the sewer system, and craned his neck to hear better.

“Unsuccessful?” A horribly familiar voice purred, and Andy’s spine felt flash frozen to the wall. “How… unfortunate,” the man whispered. Andy carefully turned around the corner, just enough so that he could see Brandon Flowers standing in front of the worm, his face cold and emotionless.

“Poor thing,” he said quietly, and his eyes blazed a fiery red before his whole body was engulfed in flames, turning into the oversized dog made of fire, the terrifying hell hound Andy had seen before. The hound pounced on the worm, and one loud, piercing screech filled the tunnels, so awful that Andy clamped his hands over his ears.

When Andy could bear to look up again, he saw what remained of the worm dead on the ground, smoke still rising up in black curls from the burnt off end of its neck. Brandon was standing next to the worm in human form, a small smile on his face that didn’t reach his eyes.

“Run along now, Andy,” he said quietly, and Andy felt fear course through him like ice water had been dumped on his head. “Your time, it seems, isn’t yet up.”

Andy didn’t need telling twice. He ran in the opposite direction for a few minutes, until the tunnel he was in was completely devoid of the light from the worm’s corpse, and he climbed back up out of the nearest manhole cover and onto the street.

Andy pulled out his cell phone once he was back in the cold, winter sunlight, and dialed Pete’s number with shaking fingers. He spoke in a very calm voice, despite how terrified he still felt.

“Can you guys meet me back at the park in ten minutes? I think I have news.”

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“And you’re definitely sure it was Flowers?” Pete asked, for what felt like the thousandth time. They had barely had time to recount the story the day before, rushing to yet another concert, and now that things had calmed down, they were trying to figure out what to do.

“You wanna take me to a sketch artist?” Andy asked in an annoyed voice. Patrick was sitting in the back of the crowded group, cross legged on the ground, like most of them had to be. It
wasn’t exactly an apartment designed for nine, after all. He was drinking tap water, because he hadn’t had a chance to go grocery shopping yet. It was the day after they had dealt with the worm, and Pete had an idea, but apparently needed to be very, very sure of what had happened. He had tossed and turned all night the second night, and Patrick was ready to sleep alone, finally.

“Are you sure about everything you saw?” Joe asked, and Patrick winced. He didn’t really want to hear Andy tell the story again. It was probably hypocritical, Patrick knew, to be so horrified by the murder of the worm when he had, in the same day, stabbed the creature in the side, but he hadn’t really wanted it to die, just to go away. Patrick also decided that, had he been given the option, he’d rather be stabbed than have his head burnt off. He didn’t stand on moral high ground, where the worm was concerned, but a small part of him felt sort of bad for not getting murdered, because it got the creature killed.

Andy, as it turned out, was very sure, and nearly as uninterested in retelling the story as Patrick was in hearing it again.

“Do we have any sort of plan from here?” he asked. Pete sucked in a deep breath, cast a look at Joe, and then turned back to the center of the awkward, almost circle they were sitting in.

“I’ve got an idea, but it isn’t a good one,” Pete said. “Obviously, it would be a borderline suicidal idea for us to go to Vegas right now, but Tim - Rise Against - he’s out of town right now, and if I could get him to drop by Vegas real quick, just cause some kind of trouble for them, maybe a little retaliation might make them back off.”

“Yeah, you’re right, that’s a horrible idea,” Brent said. “You want to provoke the crazy hell hounds?”

“Why would that help?” Spencer asked, looking similarly doubtful. Pete looked like he was floundering, so Patrick spoke up.

“It shows that we aren’t just sitting here and taking this,” Patrick said, standing up suddenly. “Look, you know how in middle and elementary school if a kid gets bullied and tells the teacher that someone’s being a dick to them, the teacher tells them not to react because the bully wants a reaction, but if the kid just keeps taking it just keeps getting worse? Well, this is the same thing. If we just keep letting this shit happen, what’s to ever stop Brandon, really? He needs to know that it’s not going to be that easy. And we also need someone who can walk inside the boundaries of Las Vegas.”

It was a tiny speech, but it seemed to have most everyone convinced, though not entirely Patrick. Even if everything he said was true, he didn’t like the idea of involving anyone else in their trouble. He wasn’t sure Pete did either, but Patrick didn’t have any immediate plans.

“But he’s here, so why go to Vegas?” Chicago asked.

“He’ll probably be heading home now that this didn’t work. Probably. We’re just guessing,” Pete said, the words tumbling out of his mouth as if by force, while he looked annoyed with himself.

“So, do you think you should call him? What are you going to ask him to do?” Andy asked. Pete gave him a grim smile.

“Tim’s got a bit of a… talent for fire,” Pete said, and Brendon looked up eagerly.

“Oh, is he a djinn? Some kind of fire demon? A magic user?” he asked, and Pete looked taken aback.
“No, he just has a talent for fire,” Pete said, bemused. “He once burnt down a KKK chapter in Southern Illinois while we were on tour. He’s kind of a pyromaniac. And very human. What if he burns down Brandon’s label?”

“Aren’t you and the Killers signed to the same label?” Ryan asked. Pete’s face fell.

“Bad idea, okay,” Pete said. “But come on, they’re supervillains, they have to have some kind of lair, right?”

“What is this, a bad Batman movie?” Spencer asked.

“No, they do have a lair,” Ryan said, and Patrick turned to him in surprise.

“How do you know that?” Patrick asked.

“I’ve been keeping my eye on him for a while. My, er, third eye, I guess,” Ryan shrugged. “And they have a place. Not Brandon’s house, either, like, a kind of headquarters where they do all their planning, talk to the other creatures they’re going to send after you guys.”

“If you can see all that, you could give us a warning before we get fucked to death,” Patrick said sourly. Ryan laughed a little bit.

“I’m not omniscient,” he said. “And he’s hard to see. I can only get flashes, but I know there is a place, and it is in Vegas.”

“Great,” Pete said. “So then I’ll call the dudes, see what they can do, and on that note, I gotta get home. My mom’s expecting me back for Christmas, and doesn’t your flight leave in a few hours?” he asked in the direction of the Panic! guys.

“Yeah, we should head out,” Spencer said. They were looking somewhat expectantly up at Pete, and Patrick had to bite back a laugh. It seemed like they were expecting someone to take them to the airport, and though it was kind of amusing to see what would happen when they tried to get back on their own.

“I can go with you,” Joe said. “I’m heading out to Marie’s for Christmas.”

“Ooooh,” Patrick teased, but Joe just smirked.

“Yeah, I’m going to go have fantastic sex for a few weeks, and nobody else in this room is: so embarrassing, right?” Patrick’s mood dampened in response, but even so, it was nice to be alone. Almost alone, anyway, he realized as he practically felt Chicago’s excited smile reflecting off of his back.

Pete pulled Chicago aside after Joe herded out the younger guys, and tried to have a hushed conversation that Patrick heard clearly.

“You okay with staying with Patrick for a while? I mean, I know he’s a little standoffish, but~”

“Don’t worry about me, Pete, he loves me,” Chicago said brightly, and Patrick had to fight to keep from snorting. On the opposite side of the room, Andy stood next to Patrick.

“Need me to stay with the two of you?” he asked, and Patrick rolled his eyes.

“I think I can handle it,” Patrick said, though his voice betrayed some of his hesitation.
Andy raised his eyebrows and surreptitiously jerked his head over at Chicago, who had turned on the kitchen faucet and jumped backwards in shock. Patrick winced.

“Milwaukee is just a two-hour drive away. And even though Wilmette is closer, I bet I can be here faster,” Andy said, patting Patrick on his shoulder.

“Thanks,” Patrick sighed. “I might have to ship him to you for Christmas Day, unless he learns how to act and respond to a different name really quickly. My mom might be a little suspicious.”

“Got you covered,” Andy said, and he raised his voice as he turned to Pete. “Wanna split a cab?”

When the two of them left, silence rang out in the apartment for a blissful few seconds before Chicago was right in Patrick’s face.

“So, what now?” he asked, his teeth too white and too bright against his skin.

“Now we see if I actually got cable hooked up properly,” Patrick said, pulling the remote down from the top of his tv and turning it on hopefully. It didn’t disappoint, and went straight to a bloody, machine gun filled action movie.

“Great,” Patrick said, and handed the remote to Chicago. “Um, knock yourself out. I’m gonna work on some music and stuff.”

“Can I help?” Chicago asked.

“Maybe later,” Patrick said evasively, trying to hide his horror at the thought of working through his production with someone else, especially on the work he was doing alone.

“I don’t get it,” Chicago said, and though he was definitely still a foot taller than Patrick, he seemed even taller and more in command of the space around him than usual. “You absolutely adored me until a couple of days ago, so what changed? I’m still the same city.”

“You kissed me without my permission. That’s kind of douchey, and not really a social norm if you don’t belong to a fraternity. Also, I don’t love you, I mean, not like this. I like the city, but like, the skyscrapers and museums and music scene bit, not the ‘spirit of the city’, whatever that means.”

“It’s the same thing,” Chicago said, and Patrick fought the urge to roll his eyes.

“I don’t even know you,” he said, and Chicago’s eyes burned with a strange intensity.

“But I know you,” he said.

“Then you know I like being alone,” Patrick said bracingly.

“I know you tell yourself you do,” Chicago said. But to Patrick’s relief, he sat down on the couch and spread himself across it, somehow splaying his arms and legs so far out that there wasn’t a full foot of space for Patrick to sit down even if he wanted to. He picked up the remote and began flipping through channels, looking deeply intrigued by the television, though not as much as he seemed to be by anything else he had seen. He looked at everything like it was the most interesting thing on the planet.

“Um, I also have some books in the boxes over here,” Patrick said as he tapped a cardboard
box with his foot, feeling something almost like guilt welling up in his stomach. “Almost all nonfiction, but I also have a lot of comics, and I think I have a poetry collection Pete gave me as a joke.”

“It wasn’t a joke, he just didn’t remember to buy you a real present and some of the poems made him think of you,” Chicago said, not looking at Patrick.

“Okay, the whole seeing into our heads thing? Also really creepy,” Patrick said. Chicago gave him a cheeky grin.

“Then I guess I won’t bring up anything you thought from the ages of twelve to sixteen, because wow, one track mind,” Chicago bit his lip, and Patrick let out a strange, sort of choking noise.

“You know, you’re not nearly as naive as you’re playing yourself up to be,” he said, and Chicago giggled.

“I never claimed to be naive. It’s just weird having a body. Imagine if the only interaction you ever had with the world was watching TV in a pitch black room with no other sensations for hundreds of years. You’d know what was happening if you ever joined them, but you’d just be working with what you could imagine worked.”

“Right,” Patrick said, not fully understanding the analogy. “Well, anyways, if you need me,” he jerked his thumb over to the bedroom door, and Chicago nodded.

Patrick sat down at his desk and got to work with a sigh of relief. He should probably be going over some of the stuff his friends had given him, but it had been a long few days, and he wanted to just relax with some of his own work. Nothing he really wanted to show the other guys in his band, even, just some music he was working on independently. Pet projects songs that were probably going nowhere, but calmed him down to tinker with.

It felt like he had only worked for a few minutes, but it was probably hours later when Patrick finally felt satisfied with one of the songs. He’d been working on it for months, but he was starting to like the way it was taking shape. He hit pause and reveled in the silence of high quality headphones for a moment.

There was a tap on his shoulder, and Patrick spun around in reflex, his headphones dragging the laptop with him and sending it crashing to the ground and ripping the headphones off of his ears, taking a good deal of hair with them. Patrick pressed himself up against the wall, breathing heavily, and staring at Chicago, who had his hands facing palms out to Patrick, laughing an uneasy chuckle.

“Hey there!” he said. “Um, you busy?”

“Yes!” Patrick said, clutching his heart. “Why?”

Chicago rubbed the back of his neck nervously. “Oh. I was, um, bored.”

In spite of his annoyance, Patrick let out a little laugh. He grabbed his laptop and set it back on the desk, happy to see that it seemed to have sustained no damage.

“You’re just like Pete,” he muttered, and Chicago brightened, if he could even possibly get any brighter.

“Thank you!” he said, and Patrick rolled his eyes. “See, you do love me!”
“How do you figure?” Patrick asked, scooting his chair to the side and patting the edge of his bed for Chicago to sit down on.

“You love Pete,” Chicago said simply. “And you think I’m like him.”

Patrick decided it wasn’t worth the energy to argue. In any case, he couldn’t think of any argument he could offer, using Chicago’s logic. Instead, he pulled Garage Band back up on his computer, and checked to see that nothing had accidentally gotten deleted. Behind him, Chicago gasped.

“Oh, are you working on music? Can I hear it?”

“Yes I’m working on music, and no you can’t hear it,” Patrick said defensively. “It’s- it’s not ready yet.”

“Oh, please?” Chicago asked. Patrick looked from him, to the computer, and back again. He didn’t want to, but then again, there was something in the way that Chicago was looking at him that almost compelled Patrick to let him. It felt too personal, but then again, Chicago was already way too personally acquainted with Patrick.

Patrick didn’t say a word, but rather hesitantly handed the headphones over to Chicago, giving him an almost fearful look. Chicago gave him an encouraging smile, seeming to understand the gravity of the situation, and fit them carefully over his ears, making a face at the new sensation.

Patrick turned to the computer and checked the volume. He wasn’t sure how loud was too loud, but he figured that whatever volume he was listening to it at was too much. He turned it down a few notches before hitting play, and winced when he could still hear the music from his position at the desk. He waited as long as he could stand before turning around, but when he did, his chest expanded instantly in relief. Chicago had his eyes closed and a wide, lazy grin on his face. He was nodding his head in time with the music, and after a minute, sort of humming softly as well.

Not one to push his luck, Patrick immediately slammed the laptop shut at the end of the song, and Chicago’s eyes flew open, staring at Patrick with open admiration.

“That was amazing!” he crowed. “That was my new favorite song! I love it! I love it so much! It’s the best song I’ve ever heard!”

Patrick was sure his face flushed, but he tried not to let the compliment get to him.

“You said the same thing about the song we heard last night,” he said.

“Yeah, but this is way better! Is that your voice?” Chicago asked. Patrick nodded, and Chicago beamed. “Pete’s definitely right about you.”

“Shut up,” Patrick said, but he was smiling too. “Do you want some food? You must be hungry.”

“I’m starving,” Chicago agreed. “Can we get pizza?”

“We can’t have pizza for every meal,” Patrick said. “But ordering in sounds good. Want to try Chinese food?”

Unsurprisingly, Chicago wanted to try everything. Patrick ordered a few of his favorite dishes, hoping that Chicago would like at least one of them, and then sat down next to him on the couch. While they were waiting, a brilliant thought occurred to him.
“You know, you could be my one good shot at fucking with Pete,” he mused. Chicago looked interested, so Patrick continued, “I mean, he thinks you’ve never tried anything, so if I were to say, hypothetically, teach you how to play video games and guitar and stuff, you could ruin his day by showing him how good you are at it all.”

“Ruin his day in a good way?” Chicago asked, getting the hang of Patrick’s speech patterns really quickly.

“Well, in a good way for me,” Patrick said. “Ever played Mario Kart?”

After the first night, it wasn’t weird between them. Chicago, predictably, loved Chinese food, and loved all the old records of Patrick’s artists that he played for him. He loved video games, but he wasn’t amazing at them, unfortunately for Patrick’s plans. Patrick attempted to teach him a few instruments, but as fascinated as Chicago was by the sounds they could produce, he wasn’t overly interested in learning them well enough to do anything fancy.

Chicago was shockingly easy to hang out with. It was strange having to explain basic things to him, and Patrick was a little pissed off that Pete had left him with the responsibility and the bills for having to take Chicago clothes shopping, as nothing of Patrick’s fit him even remotely. Still, Patrick could start to see how Chicago was actually Chicago the more that they talked. When Patrick did request brief periods of alone time, Chicago mostly watched the news. Patrick mentioned offhand that he thought Chicago would be more interested in blockbusters and superhero movies with bright colors and fast plotlines, but Chicago was deeply invested in politics. He also had a shocking propensity for knowing how to translate politician speak into what they actually meant, as well as noting who was a crook and who was actually running for the good of the people. Alternatively, he was very good at lying when they played card games.

“I am Chicago, after all,” he’d say, and rattle off the names of a few dozen crooked politicians. Patrick asked him to stop after recognizing a few names he had voted for that hadn’t been convicted of anything yet.

Chicago had a good head for numbers and figures, and he could do complicated math without ever being told how. Patrick looked at him a bit wistfully when Chicago pointed out a mathematical inconsistency in a show they were watching together, and Chicago just rolled his eyes (Patrick was worried that Chicago was going to pick up a bad eye rolling habit from him).

“You’re way more talented than me where it matters to you. Just, you know, maybe hire someone to help with your taxes,” Chicago had suggested.

Much to Patrick’s surprise, Pete usually came over in the late afternoons that week, often bringing food and always looking pleasantly surprised when he walked in to see Patrick and Chicago still bonding.

“Not too standoffish?” Patrick asked waspishly when he caught Pete staring at the two of them in disbelief.

“No, and not as dickish as I expected either,” Pete said with a grin.

Everything was going better than Patrick had expected, if still very strange, with a few notable exceptions.

“I feel weird,” Chicago had said one morning. It was before noon, so Patrick wasn’t really thinking clearly when he sat up, still curled up on himself and clenching the covers to his bed.
“What kind of weird?” Patrick asked. They’d been through this routine before with hungry, thirsty, needing to piss, needing to shit, and needing to sleep, and Patrick thought they’d run out of basic human urges.

“Kind of like hungry? But lower than the stomach,” Chicago had said, looking bemused and not paying any mind to Patrick still being in his pajamas. It took Patrick a moment to process, and then he felt blood rush to his face, and he winced.

“Oh! Um, are you, uh, hard?” Patrick asked. He really hoped he wouldn’t have to elaborate, and Chicago pondered that for a moment, before slowly nodding.

“Yes!” Chicago said. “Yeah, I can do that!”

“Awesome!” Patrick yelled. “This isn’t the kind of thing we talk about, okay?”

“You got me a Christmas present?” Chicago asked, still pleasantly surprised by everything he saw. “That’s so-! I mean-! I’ve never gotten a present before!”

“Don’t mention it,” Patrick said with a shrug.

“Should I have gotten you something?” Chicago asked, and Patrick laughed.

“You have no money, and that whole buying someone a present with the money they give you is only cute when you’re a kid.”

Suddenly, Chicago pulled Patrick into a tight hug, knocking the packages to the ground.

“I’ll miss you,” Chicago said in Patrick’s ear, and Patrick laughed a little uncomfortably.

“You’ll only be gone a couple of days,” he said. “I just don’t know how I could explain the existence of a city as a person to my family. I’ll see you soon, though.”

“Really soon, right?” Chicago said, and Patrick nodded.
“Really soon,” he promised, and was shocked, as the train pulled away, to find that he already missed the city’s presence.

Christmas with his family was mostly awkward, filled with questions about Anna and the band and where he was going to live and the odd “Are you ever going to get a real job, though?” It was still nice being back with his family, but the more time he spent with the band, the worse being with his family got. He’d never really kept secrets from them, and now his entire life was a secret. None of the other guys had brought up him being able to tell their secrets, and what was he supposed to say? “Hello mom, grandma, everyone I’m related to, I know you think I’m living a dangerous, drug riddled life as a rockstar and it’s bad enough that the baby of the family lives in an apartment complex called “Cokewood,” but I also fight monsters and could easily be killed by any of the hundreds of vampires with a vendetta against me.” It would sound insane.

Though he missed his mom as soon as he was gone, it was a bit of a relief to meet up with Chicago again, and Chicago agreed wholeheartedly.

“I didn’t like being out of town,” he said as soon as he saw Patrick. Patrick frowned, noting the almost gray undertone to Chicago’s skin and the deep hollows under his eyes. He looked really ill, and when Patrick asked about it, Chicago just shook his head and leaned into Patrick’s side.

“I don’t think it’s good for me to leave,” he said. “I mean, it was fun. And I like Milwaukee. But I didn’t feel well being away.”

“Good to know that for the future, then,” Patrick said, his face creased with worry. “Let’s get you back to the apartment, all right?”

Chicago nodded, and Patrick kept shooting him worried glances as they made their way back to the apartment, which Patrick was starting to think of as their apartment in his head. He hadn’t really had much of a chance to get used to it without Chicago there too.

When he kicked in the door, Patrick had every intention of zoning out in front of the TV and showing Chicago High Fidelity, but when he went to grab the door, it was already unlocked.

Patrick burst in, not thinking about the potential danger, and someone instantly grabbed his hand and pulled him into the kitchen. He did his best, even as he was getting pulled, to block the door frame and make sure that he stood between whoever it was and Chicago.

“Patrick!” she gasped, and he blinked, his eyes adjusting to the semi-darkness as he stared at her. He barely recognized her, as she looked haggard and emaciated, her once glossy hair now tangled and dirty, and her skin almost sagging off of the frame of her face.

“Lily?” he asked, and she nodded.

“Listen to me, you have to run!” she said, and her eyes flickered over to Chicago. “Both of you, I don’t care where, but this place isn’t safe for you, and he’s on his way right now to-”

“Brandon?” Patrick asked, and she nodded.

“Please go, he’s really furious and he already has the others!”

“In my band?” Patrick asked, fury rising hot in his chest. She nodded, but looked devastated as she did.

“Come on, I risked my life here, please don’t do something stupid!” she begged.
“Chicago, go hide in the guest bedroom. I'll come and get you as soon as it's safe, okay?” Patrick said, and Chicago looked like he was going to argue, but he nodded, and ran to the back.

“What are you doing?” Lily asked, and Patrick steeled himself.

“This doesn’t really seem like something I can run away from,” he said.

“Quite right,” came a velvety voice from the doorway. Patrick sucked in a deep breath, and turned to face Brandon.

“Care to come for a ride with us? Your band’s waiting just outside,” Brandon said. Patrick gave Lily a reassuring nod, and followed after Brandon.

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Joe wasn’t entirely sure what to expect when he got a text from Pete telling him that he had to get back to Chicago, that it was an emergency, but he knew he couldn’t ignore it. On his way to the airport, he called Pete dozens of times and sent a frightening amount of texts, but didn’t get anything in reply. He was trying not to think of everything that could go wrong, trying to focus on the slim chance that this was something really stupid and trivial and that immediately after sending the text, his phone had died. Maybe it was sent in code and meant for someone else. But the plane ride was too long and kept him too still to keep his mind from racing, and when he finally got back to O’Hare, he was a nervous wreck.

When he landed, Joe wasn’t sure where he should go to - Pete’s mom’s house, Patrick’s place, the old apartment, but his unspoken question was answered for him in the form of a man in sunglasses waiting just past the gate with a sign that said “Trohman” on it. Joe stared at him for a long time, wondering if it was meant for another Trohman, but the man nodded slowly and pointedly at Joe, and Joe walked over to him.

“Do I know you?” Joe asked, and the man dropped the sign and grabbed Joe’s right hand in a vice like grip, clenching it so tightly Joe felt like his bones might break.

“Ronnie Vannucci,” he said in a hiss, “I’m glad to see your flight was timely.”

“Friend of Pete’s?” Joe asked, feeling waves of heat rushing through him. His body was vibrating, but the man didn’t seem to notice.

“I’m acquainted with him, but we aren’t exactly friends,” Ronnie said. “Brandon would like to see you.”

“Then let’s not keep him waiting,” Joe said, and he wrenched his hand out of Ronnie’s grip, but followed quickly behind him.

Waiting just outside the airport was a jet black limo, and upon stepping inside, Joe saw Pete sitting in the center of one of the rows of seats, his head bent down and his eyes shut. Joe slid in next to him, and as low as possible, asked “Are you hurt?”

Pete gave him a tiny head shake, but didn’t speak, and Joe wondered briefly what was wrong, before hearing a sort of snuffling noise. He turned in the direction it came from, and saw Tim McIlrath, bloody and bruised and huddled in the far corner of the limousine. Sitting across from them were Brandon and two other men, including Ronnie, Brandon with a cold facsimile of a smile on his face.

“Nice to see you,” Brandon said to Joe, and waggled Pete’s phone in the air. “How are you
“Well, a bit more captive than I prefer, but I’m in good health,” Joe said. “And yourself?”

“Angry,” Brandon growled, but his face smoothed almost as quickly as it had turned malevolent. “But I want to save the discussion for when we can speak all together, band to band. So please, make yourself comfortable.”

Joe wanted to quip back with some sort of biting retort, but he couldn’t think of anything. The limo cruised through the streets of Chicago in dead silence. They stopped in front of a small, inner city park, where another man Joe didn’t recognize got out of a car and got in the limo with Andy. They then pulled up to Patrick’s apartment complex, and Brandon got out, saying he would be back momentarily, and they sat in dead silence.

When Brandon returned and threw Patrick into the last remaining seat opposite the Killers, he turned and told the driver to start circling the city, and turned to the band with what looked like actual flames in his eyes. Joe pressed his back against the seat, but said nothing as he stared at the flickering of the red flames in Brandon’s irises flare up and die back down.

“Tell me,” Brandon said after a moment, “What exactly did you think would happen when you sent someone to burn down the base of a creature made of fire?”

“We were kind of hoping you would actually stop trying to kill us until the anniversary of Panic’s album like you promised,” Joe said. He usually expected Pete to talk in these situations, but looked unlikely to speak again.

“And did you, at any time, consider that since I have any number of creatures at my disposal who could destroy you instantly?” he asked.

“Okay, what’s your shtick here, you sound like a principal from a bad eighties movie about to give us all detention,” Joe said. “Can you skip to the point? Why bother with all the theatrics when you could just, I don’t know, send us an email or something?”

“The point,” Brandon spat, bits of spittle landing on Joe’s face and feeling like a spray of boiling grease, “Is that you have no means of proving I have done anything to attempt to harm you yet, and had your little friend here been less difficult with me, I would have the proof needed to raise an army of hell itself against you. Tell me, Mr. Trohman, do you think this is a game?”

“Do you think you’re a video game boss villain?” Joe asked. Brandon snarled, his eyes lighting up red again.

“On September 28th, 2006, I am going to kill all four of you,” Brandon said, his voice a forced calm, like deep and cracking ice. “Mercy is no longer one of your options. You may fight back, but you will lose. And I truly hope that you believe these boys’ one pathetic year of freedom was worth all of your lives.”

“What if we kill you?” Joe asked. “I mean, there’s got to be some kind of self-defense clause in this agreement that we never agreed to.”

“You’re perfectly welcome to try,” one of the men Joe didn’t know the names of laughed. “It won’t do you any good.”

“I have the power of Hell behind me,” Brandon said. “Suffice to say you stand no chance. Even if you did, you would have made an enemy of Hell. The short remainder of your lives would be filled with suffering. Your deaths are imminent, and it would be more graceful to accept them...
“You obviously don’t believe that,” Joe said, “Or why would you go to all this trouble to kill us?”

“Suggestions whispered in the ears of the right creatures are not commands for your death,” Brandon said. “And I simply want to speed up the process. You’re welcome to end this feud now, if you wish.”

“You’re giving us permission to die?” Patrick burst out scornfully. “Are you joking?” Brandon turned to him slowly.

“I had so hoped I wouldn’t have to kill you,” Brandon sighed. “You would make an excellent addition.”

“Fuck off and die,” Patrick said, and Joe snorted.

“Play your childish games. Try and fight destiny. But know that when the time comes, your demise will be long and agonizing, and Brendon will be mine,” Brandon snapped, and he banged on the divider. The limo pulled over, and Brandon pushed the door open.

“Take your friend,” he said, gesturing to Tim, and Joe picked him up gingerly as they all hastily climbed out onto the sidewalk. The moment Patrick was out the door, the limo sped away, and Joe threw up his middle finger after it.

“Fuckers!” he yelled, and turned back to the rest of his band.

Pete had pulled Tim aside and they were talking quietly, so Joe pulled his best fake smile on Patrick and Andy.

“Good holiday?” he asked wearily, and both of them nodded.

“How’s Carm?” he asked Andy.

“Great, she’s good,” Andy said, with a matching false grin. “She loves the snow right now, more than any of her gifts, I think.”

Joe was about to say something else, something meaningless just to keep them talking, when he noticed a cab pulling away, and Pete walking back over towards them, alone.

“Joe,” he said, and his eyes were pleading. He looked older, too much older, with the tired, desperate look that Joe hated seeing on Pete.

“Yeah, I know,” Joe said. He closed his eyes, wishing he could avoid this moment further. “Yeah, I know. Are you out of backup plans?”


“Can we go back to your place?” Joe asked Patrick. “We need to talk.”

At Patrick’s apartment, the entire city of Chicago made them all tea, while giving Patrick occasional worried looks that Patrick returned with soothing smiles. Joe took a long, deep breath, and started talking.

“Wolves are typically pack creatures, right? I’ve never been even remotely interested in being a part of a pack, but there are rumors in the magical community. I can’t attest to them because I
really don’t deal with other werewolves much, but Pete swears it’s true, that wolves in bigger packs are stronger, specifically the alphas are much stronger. And, ugh, this all sounds like such awful, teen movie bullshit, but yeah, packs have alphas. The bigger the pack, the stronger the alpha, and the alpha, like, leader wolf thing can command his pack, and if he can dominate another alpha, can command him too.

“The second part to Pete’s theory is that hellhounds, from what he’s seen, operate like werewolves. Bigger the pack stronger the alpha blah blah blah. His idea is that if I were to become an alpha, somehow, and I were strong enough, I could force Brandon to drop this without violence.

“I said no the first few times he brought it up because first off, I’m really against that whole lack of free will thing, I’ve had bad experiences with packs in the past, and I also would have no fucking clue what I’m doing, but between that and death, I have a much preferred option.”

Patrick cleared his throat suddenly, and Joe looked up from the carpet to stare at him.

“Sorry,” Patrick said, “But where would this even go? Do we know other werewolves?” Joe snorted.

“Yeah, and this is where Pete’s idea gets really crazy. He thinks that, hypothetically, it should work on any creature so long as I ‘consider him part of my pack’, whatever the hell that means.”

“You want us to be your wolf pack?” Andy asked. “That makes no biological sense.”

Joe shrugged in exasperation. “Well hey, if you have a better idea, I’m all fucking ears.”

“If anyone could be in a pack, why don’t people form packs to get stronger and shit?” Patrick asked. Joe turned helplessly to Pete.

“Most magicians who have studied pack dynamics say that only wolves can be alphas,” Pete said in a still too quiet voice. “Also, most of the studies I’ve read about were mostly like, Jane Goodall but for werewolves. Full wolf pack and one human or something. This would be the first of its kind.”

“Is it possible?” Andy asked. Joe deferred to Pete again, who shrugged. He looked absolutely drained with exhaustion.

“I’m willing to try anything,” he said.

“And I guess I am too, now,” Joe sighed. He didn’t like it. He had no idea how it could possibly work. But he couldn’t do nothing, not while they still had a chance.

“Sure, why the hell not?” Andy said. “Give the vampires that know me something more to gossip about.”

“Anything that helps,” Patrick said, and he gave Joe a reassuring smile. Joe felt a sudden pang of emotion, and he turned to Pete, who half smiled for the first time since Joe had seen him that day.

“Duh,” he said. “Come on, we’d be a band and a pack. How badass is that?”

“Okay,” Joe took in a deep breath, and turned to Pete. “Do you have any idea how the hell we do this?”
“We’ll work on that later,” Pete said. “I- uh- haven’t read that far yet.”

“In the meantime,” Chicago, whom Joe had almost forgotten, swept down into the middle of their circle. “Patrick told me to ask you guys to play Mario Kart?”

Patrick laughed, and Joe grinned up at Chicago, feeling strangely lighter than he had a moment ago.

“Yeah, you’re on,” he said. “How often do you get to say you beat the entire city of Chicago?”

“Also,” Chicago looked nervous, but he ploughed on, “You’re still going to put me back, right?”

“As soon as we can,” Patrick promised him solemnly. “But today, we’re taking a break from all our responsibilities. Is that cool?”

“Definitely,” Chicago agreed.

Joe leaned back, a deep peace washing over him. He was sure, somehow, that things were going to work themselves out.

Chapter End Notes

i might add more notes later. i'm so tired. i put this off too late. i'm hoping it's still february somewhere but i don't know anymore. it was a bit of a strange chapter but i hope you guys liked it! thanks for reading <3
Another Night

Chapter Summary

As Joe tries to become a pack leader using whatever sketchy instructions the band can get their hands on, they still have battles to fight on other fronts. They don't know how to put Chicago back yet, they have to hide their secrets from friends accompanying them on tour, and a strange monster they happen upon makes them relive their worst nightmares.

Chapter Notes

Warnings for blood and graphic violence, as usual

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Again,” Pete sighed, hitting a button on his stopwatch again. Joe’s eye twitched and he cracked his knuckles menacingly. He leaned closer to Patrick, sweat dripping off of his forehead, and he growled low in the back of his throat.

“Kneel,” he demanded, power sparking in his voice and filling the room with a rush of prickling, dry heat. Patrick tensed up, but felt nothing. He gave Joe a sympathetic smile.

“Nothing,” he said, and Joe screamed.

“I quit!” he yelled for, by Patrick’s estimate, the third time that day. “I quit! I can’t do this!”

“Come on, dude,” Patrick said, trying to be encouraging. “I can definitely feel something; it’s just not affecting me.”

“I don’t get it,” Pete said when Joe turned to glare at him. He rifled through the pages of an old book with a technicolor, shiny jacket that he had been consulting throughout the training process. “You’re definitely doing something, but it’s clearly not working right. We can all feel it, so maybe try focusing more?”

“If I focus any harder, my head will explode!” Joe growled. Patrick felt guilty. Joe looked like he had run a mile, and all Patrick had done was stand there for the past hour.

“Try a different command?” Patrick suggested. He adjusted his glasses, and looked longingly at the sprawled out cushions on the floor. He definitely shouldn’t ask to sit down, but still.

“‘Kneel’ is the shortest one I can think of, and it directly establishes dominance,” Joe snapped. “That or ‘bow’, because I need to-”

“Establish dominance, command, and leadership all at once,” Andy, Patrick, and Chicago recited in unison. Joe glared, and Pete looked hurt, glancing protectively at the book that the definition they had heard over and over again had come from.
“You could do ‘sit’ or ‘jump’ or ‘scream’,” Patrick said with a shrug. “Really, any one-word command would work pretty well, wouldn’t it?”

“Sit! Jump! Scream!” Joe infused the last word with furious power, and a blast of heat pushed Patrick nearly over, but he still felt nothing internally.

“Maybe you should take a break?” Chicago suggested meekly, and he handed Joe a glass of ice water. Joe drained the glass in seconds before wiping sweat off of his forehead.

“No, I can do this!” he growled. He stared at Patrick, his eyes as blue and hard as ice, and they flickered red as he spoke again.

“Kneel,” he demanded, his voice a strange and frigid calm. The whole room burst with heat, and Pete gasped, dropping his book in surprise. Patrick felt the heat again wash over him like a desert wind, and he tensed up, waiting to fall down to his knees on the cushions below, but all he felt was a slight tingling in the back of his head.

Joe screamed in frustration, kicking aside the practice pillows on the ground and sinking down on the wall.

“Hey, wait, I think I felt something,” Patrick protested, putting a hand on Joe’s shoulder, but Joe scoffed and shrugged him off.

“No, he’s not lying,” Pete said, and he still looked astonished. “I saw that. Felt it. You sent, like, a goddamn tractor beam of energy at Patrick. It was amazing.”

Joe lifted his head tentatively. He gave Pete and Patrick a skeptical look.

“But it’s not really mind control,” Pete mused. “The nuances between the different types of verbal control are fascinating-”

“Don’t be a nerd while I’m feeling murderous,” Joe demanded. He turned to Patrick, still glaring, and Patrick winced.

“What did you feel?” Joe asked.

“Kind of a tingling in the back of my head,” Patrick said. “Like a spark, or something. I don’t know, it was weird.”
“Feel like you were gonna kneel?” Joe asked hopefully.

“Not quite,” Patrick said apologetically. “But it’s better than nothing, yeah?”

“Yeah,” Joe wiped his brow and cracked his neck. “So Pete, is there a step two to this plan that we could work on simultaneously?”

“Andy and I are still working on finding some friendly wolf packs to talk to, see if we can get some tips,” Pete said. “There’s a good pack of kids in Baltimore, but they’re, um, a little young. Probably too inexperienced to give us much good advice. Rumor in the magic community is that they formed on accident, just dumb high school fights and junk.”

“Are they in a shitty pop-punk band too?” Joe asked wearily.

“Yes, actually,” Pete said. “Pretty good, but that’s not the point. And, well, we’re going to be in New York at the same time as another pack, but…”

“But?” Joe prodded.

“They’re Metallica,” Andy coughed, looking extremely awkward. Joe’s eyes bugged, and Patrick was taken aback as well.

“Jesus, are you even allowed to be a musician if you’re not a mythical creature?” Patrick asked. “Anyway, they’d be horrible to ask, they all hate each other, so they must not be a very good pack.”

“They do not all hate each other!” Joe jumped to the band’s defense immediately. “They just- well, it’s just James and Lars that hate each other.”

“That’s where it gets really crazy,” Pete said with a grim laugh. “They’re both alphas.”

Joe and Andy gaped at Pete, and Patrick shrugged at Chicago, giving him a sympathetic grin. Patrick didn’t understand why they were supposed to be surprised by anything. After all the monster bullshit began, nothing shocked him. If Pete took a detour to Hogwarts when they were in Scotland, Patrick still wouldn’t be surprised. Chicago, on the other hand, had hundreds of years of existence behind him, and could tell stories of myths that Pete declared were now extinct. Patrick assumed things were weirder for Joe and Andy since they were acclimated to a certain level of magic already, and they kept getting thrown past their comfort zone.

“That is possible,” Chicago said lightly. Patrick had dropped down into an armchair, and Chicago, who still had no sense of personal boundaries, draped himself across Patrick’s lap. He was skinny enough that Patrick didn’t protest, and instead readjusted himself so the bulk of Chicago’s weight rested in a more comfortable position. “I’ve experienced a few packs with multiple leaders. They’re not common, but there are perks.”

“Such as?” Joe asked, one eyebrow raised.

“Well, it’s kind of like how the government in this country makes it so every part of them has veto power on another part. One deranged leader can command the whole pack into oblivion if he isn’t thinking straight, but that’s impossible with two. They balance each other out, and keep each other in check. Decisions are much more logical, and they share power. Still, it usually ends with one of them murdering the other,” Chicago said, his mouth twisting into a regretful expression. Andy looked devastated.

“I don’t want them to kill each other! I love Metallica!” he said.
“They’ve lived this long?” Pete said, patting Andy on the shoulder. “Look, the point is I don’t think they’re the best people to ask about this whole situation.”

“I thought the music industry was supposed to be full of werewolves,” Joe said sourly. “You don’t know any?”

“As it turns out, Chicago has been a very vampire heavy city the past few years,” Pete said, his voice heavy with inflection. “I’m working off of whispers and rumors here, give me a break.”

The conversation seemed to be going nowhere, and Joe looked nearly as frustrated with this as he did trying to add Patrick to his pack. Patrick, for his part, was more than grateful to take a break. He also kind of wanted to kick everyone out of his apartment so he could get some sleep before the tour, starting tomorrow. Patrick’s stomach twisted. He didn’t want to go on another tour, much less another European tour. Pete would be there this time, at least, but he missed home. Hell, he even missed having a tour bus when they were in Europe, having to carry everything for months in an oversized, too heavy backpack. And another problem with their upcoming tour…

“So Pete,” Patrick said, sitting up so quickly as the thought hit him that Chicago lurched in his lap, his bones digging into Patrick’s legs, “What are we telling Dirty and Diaz and, you know, everyone, about Chicago?”

As soon as Patrick asked the question, Pete’s face twisted into a grimace.

“Um, everyone but me is going to tell them that Chicago is my cousin from Wyoming,” Pete said, side eyeing Chicago. “His father ran out on him when before he was born, and his mother died in a tragic hunting accident. He’s lived a rough life with the help of his friends from a young age, and he recently tracked down my family, and I wanted to show him a taste of luxury.”

“For someone who can’t lie, you’re an excellent liar,” Joe said. “But you might want to alter the plot of Bambi slightly.” Pete shrugged.

“I thought Bambi would be easy to remember,” he said. “And it’s easier than explaining the truth to them.”

“He doesn’t have a passport,” Patrick said, and Pete flashed him a too-white grin.

“Already taken care of, mom,” he said. “Got all the forgeries back at my place.

“And I can come back if it doesn’t work?” Chicago asked yet again.

“Of course you can, my apartment’s always open to you,” Patrick said, and squeezed his hand reassuringly. They’d been planning for a while, still searching for ways to put Chicago back into normal city form, but they thought it might be safest to bring him with them on tour, and Chicago was largely unopposed to the idea, wanting to stay with the group of them.

“Are you ever going to tell Dirty?” Andy asked quietly, and Patrick turned away from the scene. He’d heard this argument enough times to tell it backwards by now, and knew without looking that Pete was going to grit his teeth before speaking.

“Maybe someday,” he said tightly.

“He’s one of your best friends. One of all of our best friends,” Andy amended, and Pete rolled his eyes.

“Look, I like the fact that he thinks I’m a jackass just for the sake of being a jackass and not
because I physically have to. I like that he doesn’t get kidnapped by whatever demon of the day we’re dealing with. He’s human and I like that he can live a safe and human life!” Pete huffed. Patrick’s face pinched up.

“I think I’m offended,” he said, and Pete rolled his eyes again.

“What? Were we supposed to tell you Andy had an extreme iron deficiency and a messy psychiatric history and just hope you stuck with the band anyway?”

“Does this mean I have to be human around everyone but you four?” Chicago asked. He had leaned horizontally across the entire chair and the tips of his hair were trailing on the floor. Patrick could only imagine how long his hair would be if he ever straightened it.

“Yes,” Pete said. “Just remember, you’re Bambi.”

“Why do you call him Dirty?” Chicago asked. “Is that his real name?”

“No, but it’ll make sense when you meet him,” Patrick laughed. “You’ll like him. You like everyone.”

“I like you best,” Chicago said in his embarrassingly honest way, and Patrick felt his face burn. Chicago was definitely closest with him, but when he put it that way it made Patrick feel like his skin was the wrong shape for his body.

Eventually the rest of the band went home, Joe having been relatively silent for most of the rest of the visit. Chicago looked nervous after they left, staring out of the windows and fidgeting with his clothes.

“Are you alright?” Patrick asked him, and Chicago puzzled over that for a minute.

“There’s just so much to worry about,” he said at last. “I always thought being human would be simpler, but you have so much to worry about and so little control over anything! How do you stand it?”

“Um,” Patrick sat down next to the city, one of his legs leaning up against Chicago’s, “I don’t know. It’s like swimming in the ocean I guess. You just have to roll with it and hope things will work out okay.” Chicago turned to him with wide eyes, deep set and brown and ancient looking.

“That’s terrifying,” he said, and Patrick laughed.

“Yeah, I guess,” he agreed, and rubbed his thumb over Chicago’s hand. “What are you worried about?”

“You,” he said, his eyes fixed on Patrick. “I don’t want you to die.”

“I’m not going to die,” Patrick assured him. “Joe’s gonna figure this out, and we’re not going to die.” To his surprise, Patrick believed what he was saying. He felt like he should be more terrified, but maybe there was just too much time to think about this for it to stay scary.

“What if I don’t get put back?” Chicago asked, his voice a lot softer, but still piercing Patrick with his eyes. “I understand that you have to focus on this whole hellhound business first, but I’m worried.”

“We’re gonna figure it out,” Patrick promised, wishing he knew what else he could say.
“Pete knows people. I just wish we knew how this had happened, or if it had happened before…”

“Oh, it’s definitely happened before,” Chicago said, looking surprised. “Why, does that help?”

Patrick was dumbstruck.

“Yes, yes, of course it helps! You might have mentioned!”

“I didn’t know it was relevant,” Chicago said with a shrug. Patrick waited a minute, but Chicago kept sitting still, and didn’t elaborate.

“Well?” Patrick asked. Chicago cocked his head and Patrick reminded himself for the thousandth time to be patient with him. “What city was it? When was it?”

“I can’t remember,” Chicago said his eyebrows pushed together. “I’m sorry.”

Patrick wanted to scream, but thankfully, didn’t.

“It’s fine,” he said, and patted Chicago’s shoulder awkwardly. “Just lemme know if you figure it out, man.” Chicago smiled gratefully up at him, and assured him that he would.

It felt almost uncomfortable going to bed, Patrick thought. Chicago was so close and clingy throughout the days; it was weird walking into separate bedrooms at night. And then it was even more weird because it was weird. And sleeping in separate bedrooms really shouldn’t be weird. But Patrick didn’t mind Chicago’s clingy, puppyish qualities anymore. He was willing to talk about anything and everything for hours, and up for doing whatever Patrick wanted, so long as they were hanging out with each other. He wasn’t getting as much work done as he wanted, but he also wasn’t constantly ruminating over Anna. Chicago never gave him the time to.

The next day, they met up in O’Hare Airport, grumpy and frazzled. Pete handed Chicago a passport in full view of airport security, but nobody noticed anything off. Oddly, Pete seemed to be in a better mood than usual.

“Sleep well?” Patrick asked, and Pete shook his head, giving him a small smile.

“European airlines are statistically way safer than domestic,” he said. Patrick dropped it, and focused more on Chicago, who looked sort of like he was going to throw up. He kept jiggling his leg whenever they sat down, and by the time they got on the plane, he looked ashen gray.

“Are you okay?” Pete asked Chicago before Patrick had a chance to, and Chicago shook his head nervously.

“What if I can’t leave? What if something fucks up when I leave?” he asked in a hoarse, terrified whisper.

“You’re gonna be fine,” Patrick promised. “If you can’t do it, you can go straight back, okay?”

“Okay,” Chicago whispered, and closed his eyes. Patrick rubbed his arm supportively, while still looking around furtively to make sure Dirty didn’t see anything off about the situation. As it turned out, Joe had him engaged in conversation, and Patrick let out a sigh of relief. There was nothing directly incriminating about being anxious on a plane ride, but he couldn’t be too careful.

Their plane left ridiculously early in the morning, and didn’t arrive in Belfast until three in
the morning, local time. Someday, Patrick vowed to himself, he’d learn how to not get ridiculously cranky after a transatlantic flight. But that day he was irritable and sullen, and the only ray of sunshine that slightly improved his mood was that Chicago was, shockingly, in a great mood.

“Oh my god, you guys, this is so cool!” he prattled on and on as they walked out to the cab. “I mean, we’re in a whole other country and everything feels so much older here, you know?”

“Exactly!” Pete said, excitedly turning to Chicago. “You can literally feel how different the streets are here!”

“I mean, not to kill the poetry buzz or whatever, but I’m pretty sure they repave the roads outside the airport all the time,” Dirty snorted, and Pete composed himself.

“It’s the principle of the thing, dickhead,” he said primly, and punched Dirty hard in the arm. It was weird, Patrick thought, since they were all kind of effeminate guys, how much of a dude Pete became around Dirty. Chicago didn’t seem to notice though, and gravitated next to Patrick.

“Are you excited to be here?” he asked softly.

“Mostly I’m tired,” Patrick said, rubbing his eyes for emphasis. “Are you?”

“Yeah!” Chicago said brightly. “I feel fine! I don’t know why, but I’m really happy about it!” His huge smile was contagious, and Patrick gave him a small smile in return.

“I’m glad you like it,” he said, falling into step with him.

“You ever been out of the country, man?” Dirty asked Chicago politely.

“Never!” Chicago said. “It’s beautiful!”

“Yeah, wait until you see the country outside of the airport,” Dirty laughed as they got into the cab, boxy inside and designed with seats facing each other. They were all squeezed together, with Dan in the cab as well, wearing a dress shirt and pants and looking unbelievably uncomfortable. Tightly fit as they were, Patrick was squashed by Pete and Chicago, and what seemed like seconds after they got in, Pete was shaking him awake, in front of a fancy looking hotel.

Patrick and Chicago were up in their room, Patrick in pajamas and about to crawl into bed when Joe walked in, a look of determination on his face.

“Dude!” Patrick groaned. “It’s like, four in the morning!”

“It’s not even midnight in Illinois, man up,” Joe said, and grabbed Patrick’s shoulders, moving him to stand a few feet directly in front of Joe. Patrick wanted to protest, but the look in Joe’s eyes was somewhat desperate.

“Three tries, and then we go to bed,” Patrick said, in a voice he hoped sounded harsher than it probably did. Chicago helpfully set a few pillows down in front of Patrick. Joe cracked his neck and shook out his arms, then stared Patrick down with a hard, powerful stare.

“Kneel,” he spoke in a low voice, and Patrick again felt a faint tingle of something, but shook his head.

“Kneel!” Joe tried again, a little louder. Patrick clenched his jaw to prevent himself from yawning.
“Kneel.”

The energy in the room was palpable, but Patrick winced, and shook his head.

“Bedtime,” Patrick said, and Joe let out a string of profanities as he left the room.

Chicago wanted to see absolutely everything there was to see in Ireland, and was deeply disappointed to learn that the band had too much of a schedule to do more than the bare minimum of sightseeing. Even so, he liked just looking out at the streets and talking to other people in a sense of wonderment.

Meanwhile, it was getting harder for Joe to try and get the band alone without Dirty, who was sticking to them like glue more so than on regular tours. By the time they made it to London, Patrick had only been pulled aside for four miniature sessions of Joe trying to induct him into his pack, and they hadn’t made any more palpable progress, though the last time a tech had walked in on them.

Patrick was sure they must have been a sight to behold, Joe sweating and breathing heavy, screaming “kneel!” while Patrick glared up at him, defiant. The pillows and the sweat probably made it look somewhat suggestive, and the tech stuttered as she apologized and ran out, Joe swearing louder when he couldn’t explain himself.

The lack of progress was making Joe edgy, and in turn, making everyone else edgy. He was getting snippier about everything, and no one could make him feel better. Honestly, if simply giving in would be a feasible lie to keep up, Patrick would have pretended that the alpha command had worked weeks before then.

The band had a few more days in London than they necessarily wanted. Patrick was still wary after the faerie incident from the last time they had been there. They still went out to look at cool stuff during the day, but only in large groups, with Pete. Chicago begged to ride the London Eye, and Pete dragged Andy on with them, not trusting him alone so close to where unfriendly fae were.

“It’ll be fine,” Chicago said to Andy as the ferris wheel started movie. Patrick felt deeply sorry for him, stuck in an all glass container and scared of heights. “Come on, just keep looking at me and ignore the ground, we’ll be off before you know it.”

It was impossible, Patrick thought, not to love Chicago.

Things were going relatively fine until the band decided to leave Chicago and Dirty to bond and go on a walk late one night. Pete hadn’t seen much of the city, and they needed a bit of time away to talk strategy. Pete also mentioned that he’d heard of a pack of wolves in the area, bullying, high school monitor-like wolves, but even so. Plus, Chicago was a very inventive liar, and he was having a lot of fun talking to Dirty about the fake version of Wyoming he had invented.

“Can you contact the high school werewolves? Or something?” Joe pleaded to Pete. “I mean, I’m desperate. I have no clue what we’re doing and I’d like some kind of hint.”

“Maybe,” Pete agreed glumly. “I mean, the book didn’t say how long it took, but I’m guessing—”

“Fuck off with your fucking book,” Joe said. He was constantly snapping. “It hasn’t done us much good thus far, has it?”

“Where are you at?” Pete asked, and rather than answer Joe spun on his heels.
“Kneel!” he yelled at Patrick, and Patrick didn’t even prep for it, just felt it rush by him as usual. Joe turned back to Pete.

“See?” he said. “I just don’t know what’s going wrong!” he groaned in frustration. Patrick opened his mouth to say something encouraging, when he saw a dark figure emerge from a side street in front of them.

“What’s this?” he asked, his accent thick and smooth. “A wannabe alpha trying to make a pack?”

More people were stepping out from the shadows like a bad movie, and Patrick had to stifle a laugh at the ridiculousness of the situation.

“How clever of you to notice,” Joe deadpanned. “Do you just wait in allies to confront people? That’s kind of clichéd, don’t you think?”

“No, not waitin’ ’ere, just good hearing,” the man in the front said. The street was too poorly lit to see him well, and Patrick thought wistfully of the long knife, still under his bed in Chicago. It looked like there were only four of them, but even so. “Here to stop you from breaking the law.”

“Please, take way too long to explain for dramatic effect, it doesn’t get old,” Joe said, his hands clenching. From what little light was flickering on his face, Patrick could see something brewing behind his eyes, an itch to fight and prove himself.

“No alpha speak in someone else’s territory,” the man said.

“Glad we’ve cut to the chase,” Joe said, “Anyway, I’m not from here, and I won’t do it again, so if we could pass on by?”

“I’m afraid it’s not that simple,” the man in the front said. “We’ll take you to the boss, and he can decide what happens to you.”

“That’s not happening,” Joe growled, his muscles tensing. The men they were up against stepped closer, into the light, and to Patrick’s surprise, two of them were girls, their hair pulled up into ponytails. All of them wore identical, all black outfits, and looked well-muscled and menacing.

“You don’t want to fight with us.” the man in the front laughed, but he looked worried behind the statement. His fiery red hair caught the light, and Patrick’s mind was drawn back to the flames of the hellhounds at once.

“Oh, buddy,” Joe chuckled, pushing his sleeves up, “That is where you’re dead wrong.”

Joe shifted in mid-air as he jumped forward, and the pack across from them shifted just as quickly, in perfect unison, their clothes seeming to melt away rather than falling off awkwardly onto the ground like Joe’s had.

Joe leapt onto the leader, incapacitating him in a matter of seconds while Andy knocked two of them back, instinctively standing in front of Patrick. The last one lunged at Pete, and Joe knocked it out of the air as well.

The two wolves Andy had knocked aside were barely stirring, but the Joe-wolf’s eyes widened, and he shifted back as he stared into Patrick’s eyes.

As soon as he could speak, Joe was yelling.
“Get down!” he screamed at Andy, and Andy ducked, barely lower than the wolf that jumped over him, the leader back on his feet again. Still human, Joe slammed his fist into the wolf’s nose, knocking it to the ground with a howl. Joe’s chest was heaving, and Patrick didn’t realize what had happened until he saw the way Andy and Joe were looking at each other. Andy was still on the ground, looking up at Joe like he’d never seen him before.

“Holy shit.”

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Andy’s mind was still reeling an hour later, sitting in a pub and staring down at the table while the rest of his band ate and drank in celebration. It wasn’t that Andy didn’t feel like celebrating, it was just that his head felt so different that he had no idea how Joe could have adjusted so quickly.

As soon as the command to get down had left Joe’s mouth (and Andy still felt embarrassed that he hadn’t seen the damn wolf coming at him, iron jaw milliseconds from clamping down on his neck) he didn’t make a conscious choice to listen to his friend, but rather his body responded to the command before Andy could even think about it. And once he dove to the ground, it was like he had grown an extra, metaphysical limb. He wasn’t constantly aware of the extra presence in his head, but if he reached out to think about it he could feel Joe’s excitement and pride resonating in Andy’s brain, but still very foreign to him. It was weird, and Andy wasn’t sure whether or not he liked it.

“...and BAM!” Joe slammed his fist down on the table eagerly, retelling the story that they had all been there to see for the third time. “He hits the ground, just like that! I mean, I know that was me! And now I can, like, feel you, dude!” he said, looking at Andy in wonder.

“Works both ways,” Andy said, his throat dry. His head felt weirdly heavier than it did before, but it wasn’t entirely unpleasant. Joe gave him an encouraging look, as though trying to validate in Andy’s head that this was a really good thing.

“It was SO cool, right?” he asked.

“It was really weird,” Andy clarified.

“But so cool!” Patrick laughed. “I mean, you hit the deck like that!”

“I knew you could do it,” Pete said, slinging his arm around Joe’s shoulder. “Never doubted you for a minute.” As Pete spoke, a shadow flickered over Joe’s face. Andy couldn’t automatically feel it, but if he reached back mentally, to prod the bit of Joe’s mind linked to his, he could feel the confusion there.

“I thought you said Andy would be harder,” Joe reminded Pete, “Because of the compulsion.”

Pete shrugged, taking a huge bite of his burger and looking largely unconcerned.

“Maybe you were more powerful than usual because you were worried for him and all full of adrenaline,” Pete suggested.

“Probably,” Joe said. “Even more impressive then. He has compulsion!”

“And he’s probably the first vampire to ever be in a wolf pack,” Pete said, raising his glass to Andy, who rolled his eyes in response. “How does it feel to be a part of history, Andy?”
Andy took a long pause before he spoke.

“ Weird,” he finally said. “But kind of cool. I know what Joe’s feeling, and I bet we could do some really badass fighting in sync if we needed to.”

“And therein lies the entire purpose of packs,” Patrick laughed. It was hard for Andy not to be caught in their uproariously good mood, but he was still introspective. The more attention he paid to the link to Joe in the back of his head, the more he could tell about him. That he was proud and happy, but the core emotion under it was relief. The sudden alleviation of the worry that something was wrong with him. Of course, Andy had to pay close attention to feel it, but it was so mind-boggling that he could feel the thoughts of someone else that he kept coming back to it.

“There’s also supposed to be all kinds of cool side powers,” Pete said, waving his hands in the air like he was trying to sell them on the idea of forming a pack, rather than already being a third of the way there. “Like, Joe can give us commands just in his thoughts when he’s in fighting mode.”

“Is it just one way?” Patrick asked.

“No idea!” Pete said brightly. “But it’s cool as hell, right?”

It was really cool sounding. It felt like nothing could bring Andy down, and everything was a celebration. None of them wanted to go to bed, and when they finally crashed as the sun rose, Andy could feel the enormous accomplishment swelling in his chest, coming from both himself and Joe.

As the tour progressed, however, things became complicated again. Both eager to try out any cool new perks of being almost-a-pack and simply because Pete heard rumors, they went hunting down fights to try and help people, and as such, spent a lot of nights out, sometimes bringing Chicago and sometimes not, but always having to come up with an excuse for Dirty. No one else really cared, but he was more perceptive than any of their techs.

By the time they reached Germany, and had decided to track one of the particularly anti-human vampires from the Drake Hotel, Dirty confronted them.

Andy hadn’t really meant to walk in on the conversation, but it was hard not to overhear from his vantage point, and there was no way for him to leave without alerting them to his presence.

“Do you want me to go back home?” Dirty asked. Andy couldn’t see, but he sounded more resigned than anything.

“No! Why would I?” Pete asked, but Andy could hear the subtle strains of guilt coloring his voice.

“I don’t know, I just keep getting this crazy feeling you don’t want me around. Couldn’t have anything to do with the all but locking me in a hotel room every night while you sneak out to do… something,” he finished lamely.

“What do you think we’re doing?” Pete laughed, mean and derisive enough that Andy would have backed off, but apparently Dirty was impervious.

“I don’t know!” Dirty said, agitated. “It can’t be drugs because Andy’s with you, and it can’t be prostitutes because Patrick’s with you, though while we’re on the subject of prostitutes, I feel like I should also mention that we are going to be in Amsterdam tomorrow, and as of yet all you’ve mentioned for plans are watching Pay-Per-View artsy movies in the hotel room, seriously, what the fuck? But the point is that you’re doing something, and if you want me to stay out of it, I
You’re not angry?” Pete definitely sounded guilty now. Dirty sighed, and Andy sneaked a peek to see him looking half defeated, his head cradled in his hand.

“I don’t know,” Dirty sighed. “Kinda pissed. I just wish I knew what was happening.”

“I’m sorry,” Pete said. There was silence for a long time, and then the sound of Dirty leaving the room and slamming the door.

Andy slunk out from his hiding spot, wordlessly, and kicked his suitcase open, grabbing the cheap, souvenir sword out of the bottom and strapping the hilt around his waist. Pete looked up at Andy like he was expecting to be rebuked, but Andy just gave him a sympathetic look. It didn’t really matter what he thought, especially while he looked so miserable.

The second Andy walked into the adjacent room, Joe caught him by the arm.

“You’re worried?” Joe asked, his brows furrowed. Andy widened his eyes, shaking his head.

“That’s so weird,” he said with a startled laugh.

“What are you worried about?” Joe asked.

“Pete,” Andy said simply, and Joe gave him a knowing look. “Dirty’s kind of pissed.”

“Well, we can’t exactly take him vampire hunting,” Joe scoffed.

“Why, because he’s human?” Patrick asked in an amused voice, not looking up from his laptop in the corner of the room. Andy hadn’t even noticed him until he spoke. Chicago was tangled in his legs, humming quietly. “Shh,” Patrick added, nudging Chicago in the head with his knee.

“You hardly qualify as human,” Joe said to Patrick. “You and your weird super-stubbornness.”

“Yeah, that’s what you want as a kid. Superman’s short twin brother who didn’t inherit the super strength or super speed, just the super stubborn,” Patrick shook his head and sighed. “So vampire hunting?” Andy nodded down at his sword.

“You remember to bring any stakes?” Joe asked.

“Stake. Singular,” Patrick said. “I didn’t think we’d be purposefully hunting down a vampire when we left.”

“I’ve got a gun,” Chicago said, beaming up at Joe and Andy.

“Wait,” Andy said, shaking his head, “How did you get a gun past security?”

“The gun comes with me,” Chicago said, as though that explained everything. Andy decided to drop it.

Pete walked in then, his face tight, but he cracked his neck and grinned at them.

“Let’s go see what kind of damage a pack can do,” he said, and they took off.

Pete’s information turned out to be very vague, though, and mostly amounted to them
wandering around the city, talking amongst themselves. Pete suggested that they quiet down a bit, but he didn’t seem too concerned. It was still bitter cold in Germany, and Andy could tell it was really unpleasant for Pete, Patrick, and Chicago, but he felt fine. The city was bright, with the iconic cathedral in the center of it lit up brightly, and Andy felt remarkably safe and peaceful.

“You’re in a good mood,” Joe noted.

“It’s beautiful here,” Andy said. “I mean, I didn’t think I’d get the chance to tour Europe every couple of years when I was younger, so this is nice.”

“It feels nice,” Joe said. Andy wasn’t sure he was talking about the city, but he agreed either way. It was really cool, feeling his own happiness and the layer of Joe’s underneath his. Weird, but amazing.

They never did find any sort of vampire, but they started trying a weird training exercise in which they tied a blindfold around Andy and had him walking blind, following only Joe’s instructions for how to move. It started as a reasonable trust exercise, and eventually descended into “make Andy do parkour blindfolded”, but it was fun nonetheless.

Walking blind was unpleasant, but his body always reacted before he could when Joe told him to “jump” or “duck” or switch directions. Once they got used to simple commands, Joe asked if he was cool with taking things a little further.

No longer so scared of walking with no idea where he was going, Andy felt pretty confident before he heard the heavy alpha command from behind.

“Flip,” Joe demanded, and Andy, who had never been able to do a flip before, launched forward and upwards at the same time, and spun in on himself in midair, his head plunging sickeningly below his legs before he landed on his feet again.

“Holy shit,” Andy said, breathing heavy. He ripped off the blindfold and turned around to see Joe’s delighted expression mirroring his.

“Wonder what else you can do?” he mused, and Andy gulped. They were in a slightly darker part of the city, and the streets were all so small, and all so stone, that if something went wrong, he could crack his skull open. But then again, he must have already trusted Joe with his life to do this, so he nodded.

“Let’s do it,” he agreed, and put the blindfold back on.

Frankly, Andy didn’t even know that he could do a double front-flip over a trashcan and scale a streetlight, but he took off the blindfold at the top and was understandably shocked.

It took a few hours, but eventually Patrick put his foot down and said that they absolutely had to head back to the hotel: “Before I get hypothermia again, assholes.” Andy really wanted to stay out because this was so much fun, and they were figuring out how Joe could give the commands in his head, but his friends did look sort of cold and miserable.

It took them a long time to get back to the hotel, and when they did, even Andy was exhausted. The day had been long, and they would be going to another country tomorrow, and it took all of his will power to stay up long enough to get dressed for bed, and when he got back into the hotel room, he saw Joe frustrated and trying to shoo an ice butterfly out of the window.

“Buddy, I know it’s cold, but you’ll die if you stay in here,” Joe pleaded. The butterfly landed on Joe’s finger, resolute, and when Joe flung his hand out of the window, the butterfly
zoomed back in, landing on the lamp.

“I don’t think he can hear you,” Andy said, and Joe turned to glare at him. The butterfly fluttered around a bit more and landed on the wall.

“We could leave the window open?” Joe suggested.

“Dude, it’s February,” Andy said, shaking his head. “If he’s still here in the morning, we’ll let him out then, okay?”

“Yeah, okay,” Joe sighed, and flipped the light off. Andy climbed into bed and fell asleep instantly.

“Just drop the stake and come on,” he heard himself pleading. “We can work on what you want to work on without them!”

“You’re just saying that,” Andrea said, and Andy felt sick. He had been here before, and he knew what was happening. “You’ll never listen.”

He wanted to stop, didn’t want to do this. He could feel the smooth wood of the stake under his hand but all he had to do was hold it still. He hadn’t seen Andrea in so long, and all he wanted to do was have a little more time with her. Her eyes were so big, and her hair had been pulled up in an elegant knot for the speech they were going to make later. It was silky, and he wanted nothing more than to reach up and run his fingers through it.

Andrea seemed to sense something was different too, and she took a step closer, like she could hear his thoughts, tilting her head up and letting Andy stare directly into her eyes. She was so much more beautiful than he remembered. The scent of smoke was rising, and her eyes were burning. His heart screamed, and he tried to reach out, but instead his fingers curled tighter around the stake.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered, and moving too fast for her to stop him, he plunged the stake through her heart, just above where she was cradling Carmilla in one hand.

Andrea’s eyes widened, her mouth a perfect circle, and her eyebrows turned in.

“I love…” she gurgled out, her breath sounding wet. Bloody. There was far too much blood, suddenly, gushing from her chest and her mouth and pouring out from her eyes.

“I love you,” she gargled, stumbling forward. Carmilla had disappeared, and she fell into his arms, drenching him in hot blood as she fell. Andy reached out robotically to catch her, but as soon as she landed on him, everything changed.

The person he was holding was much heavier than Andrea, and the smell of smoke was gone. The heavy brocade of the hotel was gone too, replaced with the grayish dawn sky and pale white of snow falling everywhere.

The scent of blood was no longer one of disgusting gore, but tantalizing, and still hidden beneath skin. The best thing he had ever smelled in his life, like spiced wine and home cooking and water after a long day, if water could have a scent.

He felt suddenly starving, unable to see or hear or think, so thirsty that waiting another second would kill him. He sank his teeth into Patrick’s neck like it was butter. Under his iron strong grip, Patrick moaned, not a helpless moan, but a fearful one, stuttered from cold or fear or a combination.
“St-stop-” Patrick yelled, and Andy remembered this too.

“Don’t!” Patrick gasped, trying to squirm away, only causing Andy’s fangs to rip into him more. Andy felt confusion at the struggle, trying to hold Patrick close to him, not let him go. The rip caused by his victim’s movement made a splash of blood fall down onto the snow, bright red across the white, the only color in the whole world.

And fuck, Andy could taste him. He tasted better than he smelled, better than anything, better than water in the desert, and he was sucking and lapping at the blood feverishly. But this was wrong, and Andy knew it was wrong, and he wanted so desperately to pull away. Once again, he was stuck in a body he couldn’t control, and all he could do was wait this out, drinking desperately from Patrick while Patrick writhed under his hand, his strength comparable to a mouse next to Andy’s iron grip.

This was wrong, though. He tried to pull away and still couldn’t, but someone should have come and stopped him by now. He should have stopped himself by now. Blood was all over the snow, red pooling out at their feet. Patrick was getting weaker.

“Please,” Patrick begged, barely struggling and no match for Andy’s steely grip. “Please, Andy, let me go w-we can t-talk-” he stuttered as he pleaded, shivering from the blood loss and the cold. “Stop!” he screamed in one final effort to get away, but instead of letting go like he was supposed to, Andy felt himself tearing deeper into Patrick’s throat. Patrick let out a horrific, broken scream, turning half gargle in the middle as a huge chunk of his flesh tore away, and Andy kept drinking deeply, greedily.

He didn’t stop when Patrick went limp, or turned as sickly gray as the dirty snow on the street. He didn’t stop until Patrick felt half his normal weight, and then watched as he fell to the ground, pale and lifeless, blue eyes still staring up at the sky.

Andy finally forced his jaw to unlock, and a scream burst from his mouth.

“Andy!” a familiar voice was yelling, hands on his shoulders, and Andy jolted suddenly awake, his head spinning, drenched in sweat. He couldn’t think straight for a minute, and not until he turned on the lamp did he really take in the sight of Pete and Joe, looking at him, terrified.

“Are you okay?” Joe asked, looking nearly as scared as Andy felt, and Andy shook his head. He felt sweaty and sticky and he was embarrassed to realize that he was trembling all over.

“Just- just a bad dream,” he said, chest heaving. Pete gave him a sympathetic smile.

“Do you want some-?” Pete floundered for a second. “Um, water? Or something? Or I think we have some tomato juice in the mini fridge, if you want me to ask Patrick to-”

“NO!” Andy yelled, his heart kicking up speed again, and he shook his head. Pete looked kind of scared, and Andy bit his lip, too hard. “Sorry, Pete, um, I’m gonna be okay. You should try and get some sleep.”

“Okay,” Pete said. He didn’t look convinced, but he got up to leave anyway, thankfully. “I’m just over there, if you need me.”

Joe sat back on the bed next to his.

“Wanna talk about it?” he asked dubiously, already knowing the answer.

“Not really,” Andy said wearily. Joe nodded, and laid down. Andy didn’t fall back to sleep.
Reaching the end of the European tour, Joe was doing fantastic. After weeks of trying to make any kind of progress with Patrick, he had become fairly convinced that something was really, truly wrong with him. Maybe he’d been a lone wolf for too long, or maybe he was changed too late in life, or too early, but something had to have been wrong with him.

His moods definitely weren’t helped by Pete’s constant assertions that “according to the book, it should be working!”

So not only was it a relief to have Andy, it was also ridiculously cool now that he had it. Unfortunately, he and Patrick were still on square one.

“Kneel?” Joe sighed, but his heart wasn’t in it, and Patrick gave him a withering look.

“I mean, not to be an asshole, but I don’t think you’re even trying anymore,” Patrick said, slightly dejected. They were standing in the green room in their venue in the Netherlands, and in the adjacent room, they could hear the distant sound of Pete teaching Chicago the trade secrets to coming up with weird ideas that end up with Dirty getting seriously injured. Dirty sounded kind of delighted about the whole thing.

“I’m tired,” Joe pleaded. “I was up all night last night and we’ll have plenty of time to practice back home!”

“We live in different states,” Patrick remind him. Joe felt guilty, and the look on Patrick’s face made him feel worse. Like now he was wondering what was wrong with him.

“Look, we’ll figure it out,” Joe said encouragingly. “I mean, come on, maybe you have to be in danger for it to work.”

“Jesus fuck!” Dirty yelled, streaking through the room with Pete and Chicago in hot pursuit.

“And to think,” Patrick said dryly, “I swore I would never be Pete’s roommate again.”

Joe snorted, and turned his attention back to Patrick. He tried to summon all up all his energy, all the desperation he had to keep Andy safe, and focused as hard as he could.

“Kneel!” he demanded, and Patrick winced, but didn’t kneel. He gave Joe a puzzled look, and Joe gave him an equally puzzled look.

“I think I almost did it?” Patrick said, confused. “I didn’t, but I think I was going to? If that makes sense?”

“Call it progress and switch to video games?” Joe suggested, and Patrick nodded.

They were, for the record, in Amsterdam, but it didn’t really matter as much to Joe as he thought it would have. He had enough connections for weed at home, and he also had Marie, so didn’t particularly want anything there. Apparently Pete and Dirty had since made plans to go out on the town, but no one else was particularly interested. For rock stars, Joe mused, they were pretty tame.

“So, like, once you get the band, I’m assuming we still need a bigger pack, right?” Patrick said. Joe shrugged.

“I guess. Probably Panic!, the little twerps owe us. Maybe The Academy Is and whatever
Gabe’s doing now, if they’re interested. Fuck, I don’t know. We’re going up against the prince of hell. Of homeless people in the streets are game, they can join the pack too.”

Patrick laughed, nodding. Chicago ran back in and sprawled across the two of their laps on the couch, curled up and laughing so hard that Joe could feel him vibrating on top of them.

“Having fun?” Patrick asked him, looking somewhere between annoyed and amused.

“Yeah!” Chicago giggled. He then jumped up, eyes wide, and ran out of the room, chased by Dirty and Pete holding water guns. Joe turned to make another joke to Patrick, who was just looking at the doorway sort of fondly, and shrugged it off.

They played an amazing show, Joe jumping and spinning all over the place, still elated about everything. He could feel Andy laughing at him when his guitar and Pete’s bass nearly clipped each other, but it just made him happier because he could feel the amusement without even looking at him. He couldn’t get over how excited he was.

The high seemed to go down at the end of the show, when Dirty and Pete disappeared almost immediately, and Patrick and Chicago were off to their room to do whatever weird sleepover things they did, and Andy said he was going to turn in early. Joe didn’t blame him; given the nightmare he’d had the previous night. He doubted if Andy had gotten any decent sleep after that, but it left Joe feeling kind of keyed up.

Joe tried to hang out with Patrick and Chicago, but he felt like too much of a third wheel, probably because Chicago was closer to Patrick than anyone.

Eventually, Joe gave up and laid down. He thought he saw another white butterfly flitting around the window, but he was nearly asleep, and decided he must have been imagining it as he drifted off, much faster than he thought he would have.

Joe was stumbling through the forest, trying to keep up with her. He was much smaller, and he hadn’t had a chance to put shoes on before he left. He kept looking down to check for roots and sticks, and also wondering if his feet were turning blue. The woods were getting denser and colder, and he could hardly see anything by the thin light of the moon shining through the gaps in the tree branches.

He opened his mouth to ask where they were going, and couldn’t he just head back home to get a coat or some shoes. He really, really wanted shoes. The dirt beneath his feet was cold and rough and he kept accidentally running over rocks trying to keep up with her. But before he could speak, she spun around, her eyes wild.

“Here’s far enough,” she said, and it was enough to jolt Joe into his normal state of mind, and oh god, he hadn’t seen her in so long, and this couldn’t be happening, there had to be a way to stop it.

“F-f-far enough for what?” Joe stuttered, his teeth chattering in the cold. She smiled at him, a smile of anticipation, and then her head snapped backwards, and her features started shifting, changing grotesquely.

Her limbs were bending all wrong and she was growing fur from all over her skin. Joe couldn’t speak or move, he was paralyzed with fear as her body bent and changed into the shape of a wolf.

The wolf snarled, and Joe’s legs could move again. He was flying down the path they had
walked up, but he knew he wasn’t fast enough. He had been here before.

He knew what was happening like a sickening weight in his stomach before he felt it. There were teeth clamping down on his shoulder, pulling and tearing and he was screaming in perfect sync with his dream self. It hurt, more than anything he’d ever felt before, and the brief relief he felt when she pulled away was crushed by what felt like an even worse pain when she bit down again, this time crushing his stomach with her jaws.

Joe was screaming and sobbing and his hands were twitching, and she kept pulling away and biting him somewhere else, more forcefully, like she was enjoying it. Eventually he felt his body give up and curl in on itself, wracked with sobs.

She finally stopped, and Joe shifted into a wolf as well. Bigger than he had been at first, and in a different place, with warm sun beating down on his back. He turned to face Marie, a feral snarl ripping through him, and he jumped forward, mirroring what had just happened to him.

Marie screamed as his teeth tore through her muscles like they were nothing. Marshmallow fluff. She cried and he felt blood filling his mouth, spilling out onto the ground. She stared up at him in horror, and Joe felt horror flying through him too. What had he done? He wouldn’t, he would never-!

“NO!” he yelled, and he fell out of bed, the blankets tangled around him and pinning him in place. He ripped them off, sending down and cotton flying in all directions in his fervor, and then leaned against the wall, his head in his hands, trying to catch his breath. He felt like he had just run a marathon, and he grabbed at his shoulder where the bite had been, shocked to see his hand coming away dry.

He leaned his head back against the wall, taking deep breaths, when he heard a voice screaming from the adjacent room. Collecting himself as best he could, he ran into the next room, skidding in to see Patrick thrashing against the bedsheets, and Chicago trying to shake him awake.

Patrick didn’t scream any words, but he kept yelling, loud enough that Joe was shocked they hadn’t gotten a noise complaint. He tried roughly shaking Patrick’s shoulder on the opposite side of Chicago, and Patrick just pulled away from him, moaning.

Joe was going to run and get some water to throw on him, old superstitions about not waking people from nightmares be damned, when Patrick started awake, pulling himself into a sitting position in a fast, jerky motion.

“Wha-?” he looked so confused, and he was trying to catch his breath. Chicago took one of his hands and stared into his eyes instantly.

“Hey, it’s okay, just a bad dream, yeah?” he said, and Patrick nodded weakly.

“Dream. Yeah,” he said, and turned up to look at Joe. “Jesus, are you okay, dude?”

“Yeah,” Joe said, his lips pursed. “Nightmares too, actually.”

“Two for coincidence, three for correlation,” Andy said, frowning deeply. Joe hadn’t heard him come in, and was still jumpy enough from the nightmare that he jumped a foot in the air as he turned to see who it was, clutching his chest when he realized it was just Andy.

“Sorry,” Andy said softly. “I didn’t mean to scare you.”

“I’m fine,” Joe snapped, defensive. Chicago looked around between all of them, and stood
up, turning on the overhead light. The lamps were already on, but it made the whole room a lot brighter, and embarrassingly, Joe’s breathing did get a little easier.

“ Weird that we didn’t wake Pete up with all of this,” Patrick laughed, glancing over at the other side of the room, where Pete was snoring like a chainsaw. Joe forced a little laugh as well, sitting on the edge of Patrick’s bed. As he sat down, a tiny, ice white butterfly floated off of the end of the bedspread, like a tiny puff of air, and flew over to land on Pete’s headboard.

It took Joe just a second too long to realize what was wrong. He jumped to his feet as Pete’s face twisted, and he turned restlessly.

“ Not a coincidence,” he agreed, his voice still fuzzy with sleep. “ A monster.”

“What?” Patrick asked, and Joe ran over to Pete’s side, shaking him roughly, hoping he could wake him up before the thing got to him as well, but Pete’s breathing started to get labored.

“Shit!” Joe yelled, and tried to slam his hand down on the butterfly, but it flew just out of his grasp, like it was mocking him, and landed on Pete’s nose.

“You think a butterfly is giving us nightmares?” Patrick asked.

“No, I don’t think so, I know so,” Joe said all of the fear he’d felt from the dream boiling away and being replaced with anger. He tried to snatch it again, and again it floated just out of his grasp.

“Motherfucker!” he yelled. Pete showed no signs of still at the yelling, and instead, his face contorted in what looked like pain, and he rolled onto his side, mumbling something.

“Wait, we can’t just kill a butterfly! We have no proof it did anything!” Andy protested. Joe growled at him.

“Then you capture it,” he said, and turned back to Pete, who had started to shake. He opened his mouth and started mumbling, too fast and slurry for Joe to hear most of it, but what he could make out were names he didn’t recognize, pleading.

By the time Pete let out a loud whimper, all of them were on their feet around him, trying to formulate a plan. The must all have had really terrible dreams, Joe thought, that they were taking a nightmare this seriously.

Patrick was alternating between pleading Pete to wake up and trying to whisper soothing things in his ear while Joe was still trying to shake him awake, when suddenly Pete’s eyes flew open, and the whole room was doused in a blaze of golden light.

“BACK!” he screamed, and all of them were pushed back by force slammed into the ground, and Pete was back to thrashing on the bed again.

“Shit,” Joe said, staring at Pete in horror, “That could complicate things.”

“Fuck,” Patrick agreed.

Pete thrashed, occasionally screaming, and sometimes when he screamed, his eyes flew open again, dazzling them all with the golden floodlights behind his eyes. After a minute or so of this, his eyes stayed open, but didn’t stay golden. His eyes moved like he was seeing, but he didn’t seem to register any of them.
“Pete, come one, you have to wake up,” Patrick said, taking the first hesitant steps back across the room towards him. “This isn’t real? It’s just a dream, and you have to wake up.”

Pete’s eyes flashed gold again as he screamed. He didn’t say anything in words, but Patrick was thrown back again, smashing headfirst into a lamp. He gritted his teeth against the pain as he stood up, but looked more than a little woozy when his hand came away bloody.

Pete looked like he was just getting worse, writhing on the bed so much that Joe wondered if the floor was shaking.

Joe was dangerously close to saying that things couldn’t get worse when there was a knock on the door.

“Hey, is everything okay in there?” Dirty asked.

Patrick shot Joe a panicked look, and then mouthed get away! He pulled his shirt over his head, tousled up his hair, and opened the door just a crack.

“Hey,” Patrick made his voice lower and rougher, “I’m, ah, in the middle of something right now.” Joe was kind of impressed by how well Patrick was doing. Just the right amount of embarrassed. But he didn’t have much of a chance to focus on him, as he had to hold down one of Pete’s arms so he didn’t knock everything off of the bedside table.


“Yeah, so, if you don’t mind,” Patrick said in his best trying-not-to-be-rude voice, and just as Dirty was about to leave, Pete screamed again.

“Is that Pete?” Dirty asked, his voice rising in pitch.

“No?” Patrick said, but the panic gave it away, and Dirty kicked in the door. Joe was still trying to hold Pete down so he didn’t hurt himself, but it was clear that he was struggling against it.

“What the fuck?” Dirty demanded, turning to Joe.

“Extreme sleep paralysis, it looks like,” Andy said, then paused, frowning, “Well, you know, minus the paralysis part.”

“He looks like he’s seizing!” Dirty accused. “If he won’t wake up we should take him to a hospital!”

“No!” Joe, Andy, Patrick, and Chicago all yelled in unison. Dirty stared at them in disbelief.

“What the fuck is wrong with you? Is this band some kind of, I don’t know, fucking cult?” he asked, getting increasingly frantic.

“No! It’s just really complicated!” Patrick said. Pete screamed, and twisted against Joe’s grip, wailing when he couldn’t get free.

“I’m calling a hospital,” Dirty announced.

“You can’t do that!” Joe snarled, getting in Dirty’s face. Dirty looked terrified, and Joe was going to try and come up with a reasonable explanation when Pete screamed again, and his eyes glowed gold, filling the room with more light than the morning sun would bring. Everyone went silent, except for the sound of Pete whining for a moment.
“What was that?” Dirty asked in a quiet voice.

“What was what?” Chicago asked in a joking voice. Faced with glares, he muttered an apology.

“Is he possessed?” Dirty asked nervously.

“Probably not,” Joe said. “I mean, maybe. We’re not sure how this monster works. But the glow-y eye thing? That’s all him.”

“Oh,” Dirty said, his voice a little high as he looked back and forth between Joe and Pete. “Has he always done that?”

“To the best of our knowledge, yeah,” Patrick said wearily, “He’s, um, well, he’s a fae. Like a fairy, you know?”

“Right,” Dirty said, still wide eyed. Pete screamed in pain, his eyes flashing gold again, and Dirty was at the bedside with them in a second. “What do we do?”

“I don’t know,” Joe said. “I woke up when my eyes opened.”

“Same here,” Patrick said, and Andy nodded when Joe looked at him.

“Also, his charmspeak makes him really dangerous,” Joe added miserably. “If he says something wrong, we could get hurt, or the room could, I don’t know, blow up or something.”

“That’s it!” Andy yelled, jumping up. “Charmspeak! Joe, do the alpha thing!”

“He’s fae!” Joe yelled back in dismay. “There’s no way that would work!”

“Try it!” Chicago demanded. “This is lasting way longer than anyone else’s. It could be dangerous.”

Joe gulped, feeling everyone’s eyes on him. It wasn’t going to work, he knew it, but he caught sight of Pete’s eyes, not gold, but normal, and he scrunched his face up, focusing all the energy he had in his body before speaking.

“**Pete, WAKE UP!**” Joe demanded, his voice ringing through the room. A beat passed of Pete still struggling against Andy’s grip. Joe’s heart sank. It hadn’t worked, and he was still fighting, and how long could this possibly go on?

“Let go of me, please,” Pete said, and Joe looked back at him. Pete was sitting up, very pale and very shakily, but very much awake. More than anything, he looked shell shocked.

There was a loud bang as Andy slammed a glass down over the white butterfly, trapping it within.

“Hey, Dirty,” Pete said, giving him a weak smile. “Man, you would not believe the dream I just had.”

“So if you’re a fae, what the hell are these guys?” Dirty asked him, and Pete took a brief moment to glare up at the others.

“It’s kind of a long story, all this magic stuff,” Pete warned him. Dirty nodded.

“I’m all ears.”
Pete was, frankly, in no mood to be explaining himself to Dirty that night, but he had to admit that the explanation was long overdue. For the most part, Dirty just looked relieved.

“I’m just glad to know I’m not crazy,” he explained, visibly relieved. “Thought to be fair, I might still be crazy. I’m just gonna go with it.”

Presumably, he was at least a little high. He didn’t look all that phased to see Joe turning into a wolf in front of him, so he couldn’t have been fully sober.

Pete was immensely grateful that Dirty was accepting everything at face value, though. He was in absolutely no state of mind to go in depth explaining anything. He was so shaky, so fragile after waking up, that he felt like he could fall back into the nightmare at any time. Every noise made him jump, and every shadow made his heart beat faster.

Luckily for him, for once, no one wanted to go back to sleep, and they all stayed up, leaving the TV on in the background and playing cards, all the lights on. Pete was fairly certain that he never wanted to sleep again, but barring that, he would settle for not sleeping until he was back in his mom’s house and the sun was up.

Once Dirty was (relatively) up to speed, Pete went straight to inspecting the butterfly. It looked like a pretty normal butterfly to him. It was all white, and looked kind of sweet, or it would have if it weren’t buzzing around in the glass like an angry wasp.

“I hope it’s really fucking late in Vegas,” Pete said after staring at the butterfly fly in frantic circles for a minute, and he called Ryan.

To his disappointment, Ryan picked up fairly quickly, telling Pete that it was around dinner time where he was, but Pete described the situation and the butterfly to him.

“Been in Germany recently?” Ryan asked.

“We’re doing a Europe tour, what do you think?” Pete asked.

“Probably an alp,” Ryan said.

“Like the mountain?” Pete asked wearily.

“Like an elf that causes nightmares and can shapeshift into a butterfly. All it does is cause nightmares, it’s not really dangerous.”

“Easy for you to say,” Pete muttered before he hung up.

It wasn’t like a normal nightmare, not at all. It felt like he was there, living everything, but so wrong, so twisted. He could feel all the pain directly, but couldn’t do anything about it. Like reliving his worst memories while possessed.

And in some ways, waking up was worse. He’d never wanted to hurt anyone with his charmspeak, much less everyone. His whole band was banged up, and Patrick was bleeding, and even though they said it was no big deal, Pete was horrified with himself. Disgusted, really, though he knew logically there was nothing he could have done.

As the sun started rising, and they had to go back to the airport, they all stared at the butterfly in the glass.
“It’s just,” Andy fidgeted with the strap on his backpack. They were all checked out, and now only had one last thing to take care of. “I don’t want to kill a butterfly.”

“It’s a nightmare monster,” Pete said, but he didn’t move to kill it.

“Yeah, but,” Joe looked sort of pained, “I mean, it’s a really cute nightmare monster.”

Pete sighed, he looked at Patrick, who shook his head quickly.

“I’m not killing it, man,” he said, holding his hands up. “It feels wrong.”

With a groan, Pete leaned in very close to the glass and tapped it until the butterfly stilled and faced him.

“We won’t be this nice if we hear you’re causing any more nightmares, okay?” he said sternly. The butterfly couldn’t respond, but Pete threw open the window and released it, letting it fly away into the chilly winter air.

“Thank fuck most monsters aren’t that cute,” Joe said, and grabbed his bag. “Let’s go.”

The flight back home felt much longer than the flight there, even though they gained time flying West. When they were all back in Chicago it was early afternoon and Pete felt half frozen, half burnt, and all stripped nerves from lack of sleep when they landed. No one looked particularly healthy, but they were all still standing. To Pete’s surprise, they didn’t get different cabs, but rather all took the same one, gesturing for Pete to get in with them.

“Where are we going?” Pete asked, and Joe smirked at him.

“Back to Patrick’s place. I have a theory I want to test,” he said.

At Patrick’s apartment, everyone looked eager, and Pete wasn’t sure what he was missing until the door swung shut and Joe said “Jump.”

Pete’s feet kicked off the ground without his agreement, resulting in him sprawling spectacularly on the ground when he fell. He looked up at Joe in disbelief.

“Well that’s new,” he said, eyes wide.

“That’s how we woke you up,” Joe said smugly. “And I have one other thing I want to test.”

Joe turned to face Patrick, and Patrick steeled himself, but they both smiled, knowing what was coming next.

“Kneel,” Joe said, not screaming anymore, but speaking in a calm, level voice. Patrick didn’t fall, like they had expected, but sank slowly to his knees in a position of obvious fealty. A beat passed, and then they were all screaming.

“You fucking did it!” Pete screamed, thumping Joe on the back too hard for a human, but Joe just laughed deeply.

“Fuck yeah I did,” he said, and Pete could feel the pride radiating off of him. And from inside of him. That was really weird, but Pete thought he could get used to it. It felt friendly, and familiar.
“What next?” Andy asked, and Joe beamed at him.

“What next?” Andy asked, and Joe beamed at him. “Next we ask everyone we’ve ever been friends with if they want to join a wolf pack,” he said, altering his smile just a bit so that it looked menacing.

“Next we ask everyone we’ve ever been friends with if they want to join a wolf pack,” he said, altering his smile just a bit so that it looked menacing. “Not that this isn’t all awesome,” Patrick said, “But it’s been a long night, and I really want to go to sleep.”

“Not that this isn’t all awesome,” Patrick said, “But it’s been a long night, and I really want to go to sleep.” Somehow, everything seemed like the best joke ever told to Joe, and he laughed the whole way out. Pete felt a sleepy sense of contentment as he left, not broken until they were waiting for another taxi by the curb.

“Shit, forgot my coat,” Pete said, “Don’t go without me, okay?” he demanded, and ran back up the stairs.

The second he opened the door, Pete realized that something was wrong. The door was soft, and just one room away, Patrick and Chicago hadn’t heard it open.

“I figured out why I got so sick in Milwaukee and not in Europe,” Chicago said. His voice was too low, and if Pete craned his neck just so, he could see that he was leaning in way too close to Patrick.

“It wasn’t the land I missed,” Chicago continued, nearly pressed up against Patrick, their faces almost touching. It was unnatural, not normal for people to speak that close together.

“I missed you,” he said, and Patrick nodded, only slightly, so as not to bump into Chicago.

Pete tried to ignore them, tip-toeing across the living room to grab his jacket.

“I missed you,” he said, and Patrick nodded, only slightly, so as not to bump into Chicago. Pete tried to ignore them, tip-toeing across the living room to grab his jacket.

“I think you were right about me when we first met,” Patrick said. Pete had the coat draped over his arm and he was not going to let himself look over at the next room.

“I think you were right about me when we first met,” Patrick said. Pete had the coat draped over his arm and he was not going to let himself look over at the next room.

“You love me?” Chicago confirmed.

“And I think it goes both ways,” Patrick murmured. Pete wanted to be anywhere else, but by the time he reached the door, he realized that they had definitely stopped talking.

As soon as he pushed the door very, very softly shut, he bolted back downstairs, his heart in his throat.

“You okay, man?” Joe asked, looking concerned. Pete forced a rusty smile up at him.

“You okay, man?” Joe asked, looking concerned. Pete forced a rusty smile up at him.

“Just really tired.”

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys! I don't know how you feel, but I feel like I’ve been kind of AWOL for the past month. I might try the two week schedule again just to keep in touch with all of you, haha.
In all seriousness, college and taxes and family have all been hella stressful, but I am trying to get my everything together, and writing this always improves my day, so I hope you guys like it too.

Thank you so, so much for reading.

Chapter Title by Real McCoy
New Way Home

Chapter Summary

While in Vegas and expanding their pack, Fall Out Boy discovers a lead on how to solve their Chicago problem. While following that lead, they end up getting sought out to solve a monster problem on the other side of the country. Love comes in many forms, each as hard to comprehend as the next.

Chapter Notes

Warning ahead for snakes, blindness

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Joe was really starting to hate Las Vegas. Every single time he was sent back to this god-forsaken city, something tried to kill him, and though more attempts on his life had been made in Chicago, he was kind of fond of Chicago, unlike this too-hot, sandy, hell hole.

And, to absolutely no one’s shock, Chicago loved Las Vegas. Yeah, it had been months, but it was still weird. Weirder than the fact that they were travelling with Chicago, putting a way too literal spin on the whole “bring home with you” cliché, was how clingy Chicago was acting to Patrick. Sure, Patrick had a lot of hometown pride, but it still felt kind of strange. Patrick was known for pushing Pete off of him when anyone else draped over him like a clingy girlfriend, but he seemed willing to indulge almost anything Chicago wanted.

“Can we check out casinos while we’re in Vegas?” Chicago asked. Chirpy. It could be seven at night and it would still be too early to deal with someone as chirpy as Chicago.

“Check your ID, I don’t know if I actually made you old enough to get into casinos,” Pete said, not even looking up as his fingers flew across the keyboard of his SideKick. Chicago scowled.

“I’m over two hundred!”

“You look about twenty, you’re just gonna have to work with it.”

“I wonder why that is,” Chicago mused. “You think it’s ten years for every hundred?”

“If that’s the case, I never want to meet Rome,” Andy said, shivering a little for effect. Joe snorted behind the wheel of their rental car.

“Turn here,” Pete said, still not looking up. Joe spun the car around, making a hairpin turn and mashing his lips together into a hard line.

“Thanks for the warning,” he grumbled.

“No prob,” Pete said. From what Joe could see of him in the rearview mirror, he looked more bored and edgy than usual, but he’d been acting a little off since they got back from Europe. Of
course, now Joe could feel how off he felt, which was really weird. It was hard to define, but if he mentally reached out to Pete, he could feel that Pete was uncomfortable. Sort of twisted, like he had a mental stomach ache that Joe couldn’t quite define. Whatever it was irking at Joe’s brain too, but he didn’t want to mention it to Pete, who already felt inordinately guilty for being in a pack with Joe.

“My head isn’t really the best place to be a lot of the time,” Pete had said to him in private, his face twisted up in apology. It would have sounded kind of corny and emo coming from someone else, but Joe could feel the sincerity and guilt coming from Pete, and rushed to reassure him.

“Dude, you’re one of my best friends. I wouldn’t want anyone else!”

He had meant it. At the time. But Pete really hadn’t been kidding. One corner of Joe’s brain was on a stomach churning roller coaster, sometimes fluctuating so badly it would wake him up in the middle of the night. Joe was starting to get the feeling that, cool as having a pack was, he was getting way too close to his friends.

For example, sometimes when he felt a surge of panic waking him up at three in the morning and he had to stay wrapped up in a blanket watching South Park reruns to calm his heart down, he could feel strange leaps of ecstasy coming from Patrick. Or, after Europe had rubbed them all raw, jolt up in the middle of the night after having dreams of murdering Andrea. He thought he was having a heart attack when Pete was going through security at the airport, couldn’t eat for days after a negative article came out about them that he hadn’t even read, saw red running down the drain when he was making steak and almost threw up.

And then there was the dream about Mikey, which he was actively trying to bleach from his mind. Jesus.

Still, he didn’t think it was entirely tactful to bring up emotions he had felt that his bandmates weren’t sharing aloud with him. Pete usually made a point to not comment on Joe’s aura when it must have been negative, so Joe figured it was common courtesy. Still weird. And all of this was only serving to make him more apprehensive at the thought of adding more people to this pack. Maybe that was why he was so opposed to being in Vegas.

“Dude, you missed his house,” Pete said. Joe growled, slamming on the brakes and switching into reverse.

“How can you tell? All these houses look the same,” Joe grumbled.

“You don’t have to do this,” Pete said suddenly, sounding guilty again. Joe sighed.

“Make the pack bigger or die, right?” Joe sighed, stopping in front of a stucco house only slightly more familiar than all the surrounding ones that were nearly identical.

“Right,” Pete sighed, sliding on sunglasses before climbing out of the car. Joe followed him up to the door, and was only slightly taken aback when a middle-aged man with familiarly large amber eyes and a protruding stomach answered the door.

“Wentz, right?” he grunted.

“That’s me,” Pete said, nodding. The man looked Pete up and down and exhaled sharply.

“They’re out in the garage,” he said, retreating back into the cool darkness of the house. Pete shrugged and followed him in, walking through the house like he owned the place through a door that, apparently, led to the garage. How many times had Pete even been here?


“You’re early!” Ryan said, jumping up. Brendon was sprawled across an ancient looking couch, and Spencer was still sitting behind a dusty drum kit. It looked like the most stereotypical garage band set up Joe had ever seen in his life, except all the secondhand instruments in the garage looked like they hadn’t been touched in months, probably replaced with shiny new tour instruments. For some reason, it struck Joe as unbearably sad.

“Shouldn’t you know when we’re coming?” Patrick laughed, tapping the side of his head. Ryan rolled his eyes.

“I’m an oracle, not omniscient,” he said. “How’d you get in?”

“Your dad let us in the front,” Pete said.

“Super,” Ryan said, looking kind of embarrassed. “So, how do we do this thingy?”

“Wait, hold on a sec,” Joe said, holding his hands up. “Where’s Brent?”

“You didn’t tell him?” Ryan asked Pete, and Pete shrugged, still looking distant.

“Brent… isn’t really our bassist anymore,” Spencer said, forming each word carefully like the subject was touchy.

“Why?” Joe asked.

“Well,” Ryan said, holding out fingers as he listed, “He can’t actually play bass to save his life, he doesn’t like the idea of being famous, he doesn’t like the idea of magic existing, and he’s a massive bag of dicks.”

“Very professionally put,” Joe said, his voice thick with sarcasm.

“Mostly just the music bit,” Spencer said, grimacing. “Though he’s also really not down for that whole ‘Brandon Flowers’ eternal slave’ thing.”

“Seems fair,” Andy said diplomatically. “I mean, that sucks, but you guys have to do what you have to do. Have a replacement in mind?”

“Hey,” a way too mellow voice came from Joe’s feet, and he jumped back a foot as Jon rolled out from beneath the musty couch.

“What the fuck?!” Joe said. Jon shrugged.

“I’m hiding from the sun,” Jon said by means of explanation.

“You’re inside?” Patrick said. Jon glanced up with a long suffering look.

“There’s no escaping the sun in Nevada,” he moaned, covering his face with his hands. “Am I contractually obligated to be here?!”

“Technically, you haven’t signed a contract yet, and we closed the garage door for you, so stop being a baby,” Ryan said. Joe wondered, distantly, if he would ever stop being weirded out by this band. He doubted it, somehow.

“So, Jon,” Joe said bracingly, flashing his teeth at Jon in an approximation of a smile, “How would you like to join a wolf pack?”

“Ryan gave me the spiel,” Jon said, sitting up on the floor and leaning his back against the
couch. “I mean; I guess I’m in. Why not try it, right?”

“Right,” Joe said, shaking his head a little.

“Isn’t it kind of a personal thing, though?” Ryan asked, sitting on the arm of the couch, somehow managing to look languid and painfully awkward at the same time. All arms and legs, too lanky. “I mean, packs are usually small because it makes you like this,” he twisted his fingers together. “You sure you should be adding people all willy-nilly?”

Brendon giggled at the phrase, and Joe tried to laugh, though he knew Ryan had a point.

“Right now we just have to worry about power,” he said, feeling uncomfortable. “We can, you know, sever the connection after we win with most people, since packs really shouldn’t be made with acquaintances.”

“What happens if you lose this whole standoff thingy?” Jon asked.

“We die, those three get enslaved, the usual,” Patrick laughed. Jon raised his eyebrows, wrapping his arms around his knees.

“Shame they’re such dicks. The Killers make some really good music,” he said.

“Point being, losing’s not really an option,” Pete said.

“Well, I’m always up for helping people not die,” Jon said brightly, and turned to Joe. “So, you wanna do this?”

“Yeah, sure,” Joe said, trying not to look outwardly panicked. Here he was, trying to induct this guy, practically a stranger, and he swallowed hard before motioning for Jon to stand up.

“Kneel,” Joe said, his voice slipping into something lower, more archaic with hardly any effort now. Jon snapped to the ground, his knees cracking harshly on the garage floor. He looked up at Joe, his brown eyes no longer easy, instead were wide, clear, and frightened.

“Holy shit,” he said. Joe could feel a sudden surge of excitement and horror and adrenaline spike through a corner of his brain, but it wasn’t the thrill ride it had been with Andy. Jon was in shock, but Joe was mostly bored. Unfortunately, he couldn’t really hide the boredom from Jon through the bond. A slight buzz of hurt rushed through Jon, and Joe put a hand on his shoulder, trying to be comforting.

“You kind of get used to the feeling,” Joe said apologetically. Jon nodded quickly, and Joe cracked his neck, looking over to Brendon.

“You’re up, kid,” he said. His voice was a little gruffer than usual, adding nice effect, and making Brendon’s eyes go huge.

“Is it gonna hurt?” he squeaked.

Joe laughed, only a little. He also felt kind of bad for the kid, but it didn’t last long.

If he thought it would be difficult to convert a siren, after everyone in his band, all of Panic! at the Disco was easy. It took a grand total of ten minutes to get all of them inducted into his pack, and strangely, but to Joe’s immense relief, their voices felt quieter. His head was officially way too crowded, but they all seemed to take up fractionally less space than when it was just his band.
“Jeez, was that it?” Ryan asked after, rubbing his forehead curiously. “Sorry you guys wasted the airfare.”

“I wouldn’t worry about,” Pete said, a glimmer of his usual mischievous grin appearing on his face. “It was a, um, band expense. Or, that’s what Island is getting billed for, anyway.”

Joe could reverberations of amusement coming from everyone in the room, with a little extra jubilation from Patrick.

“But, I mean, while we’re here,” Pete said, leaning into Ryan. “Did you find out more about the… thing we’ve been talking about?”

“Oh! Right!” Ryan said, standing up straighter. “Yeah, I figured it out, but…” he bit back a laugh, “You’re going to freak out.”

“Why?” Pete asked. Ryan turned to face the rest of Fall Out Boy, glancing over at Chicago.

“The last time I could find a city getting - ah - personified, it was Seattle.” He paused for a long moment. “In 1992.”

Joe could feel it click in everyone’s heads when they understood what Ryan meant, but couldn’t tell what it was they were understanding, in an annoying turn. It took Andy making a startled noise for Joe to understand, and then it hit him like a brick to the face. Seattle as in home to Nirvana, hugely successful in 1992. Made slightly more complicated by the fact that one member was dead, Dave Grohl was in another wildly successful band, and he had no idea where the third member was.

“Ah!” he said. “Nirvana were monster hunters too?”

“Really?” Brendon squeaked, his eyes huge. Out of curiosity, Joe reached out to feel Brendon’s mind with his own. It was full of frenetic energy, and Joe pulled back almost instantly. Jesus, he wondered how the kid slept.

“So the guys from Nirvana are like us?” Andy asked.

“Well, were,” Ryan said apologetically. There was a collective wince throughout the room, and Ryan continued, “See, I had dreams about them when I was really little, but up until recently I thought they were just dreams. It wasn’t until recently that I really put it together that my dreams have never just been dreams. Anyway, when I was five, six, seven, I kept dreaming about these three guys, and occasionally a girl with them.” Ryan grinned ruefully. “My dad thought I was just dreaming about superheroes, because they always saved the day. It wasn’t until all of this stuff with Chicago that I started really wondering why the girl’s name was Seattle, and you know, the more you think about your dreams, the more you can remember about them.”

“Dave Grohl still fighting bad guys?” Joe asked.

“No, actually,” Ryan said, apology leaking through the bond. “Around 94 I stopped dreaming about them altogether, and I haven’t seen anything from him or Krist since I was a little kid. I finally pieced all this together and did the research to back it up yesterday, but no matter how hard I focus on either of them, I can’t see anything but mundane stuff.”

“You think they stopped doing magic stuff after Nirvana?” Pete asked. Ryan looked up at him with ancient looking eyes.

“Didn’t you?” he asked. Joe felt increasingly uncomfortable with the turn the
conversation was taking, and changed the subject as quickly as he could.

“Great, so we just have to track down Dave Grohl and ask him how to put a city back into a city. No big deal, right?” he said bracingly.

“No big deal,” Andy repeated in a disbelieving whisper. “Right. And do we have any ideas as to how to find him?”

“Foo Fighters are staying downtown at the Bellagio right now,” Ryan said in a voice half-cocky and half bored. “They just performed at the VH1 Rock Honors and are hanging around and enjoying scenic Las Vegas for a while,” he grinned over to Pete, hair hanging in his eyes. “Am I good or what?”

“How did I live without you?” Pete asked in a dreamy sigh, and he kissed Ryan wetly on top of his head, ignoring as Ryan wrinkled up his nose and shoved him away. “Ready to meet the Foo Fighters?”

“Sure,” Andy said, looking rather pale.

“Wait, wait, wait, should we really barge into this guy’s hotel room just to drag up the past?” Patrick asked. “I mean, come on, don’t you think the poor guy gets enough of this shit? He probably doesn’t even want to think about Nirvana anymore.”

“Unfortunately for him, he’s our only lead,” Pete said, a little harshly, to Joe’s surprise. “And we have to put Chicago back before something goes really wrong with the city.”

“Thanks,” Chicago said gratefully, and he looked up at Patrick pleadingly. “It’s not like we’re going to be hounding him, we’re just asking for help putting me back.”

“Still, it’s rude,” Patrick said.

“Just to make sure I’m on the same page,” Jon said. “The five of you are planning on breaking into Dave Grohl’s hotel room at the Bellagio to ask him how he turned Seattle back into a city over a decade ago?”

“Yeah, that’s a pretty good summary,” Joe said. “You guys wanna come with?”

“Nah, I learned my lesson about stalking celebrities,” Ryan said. “You get successful and then put on a hit list. I’ll pass.”

“Technically we’re not on a hit list,” Spencer said quietly, “We’re only going to be enslaved.”

“We’re working on that too!” Pete said.

Joe rolled his eyes, said goodbye to the other band, and led the way back out to the too bright sun, he got behind the wheel of the car again, marveling at how different his head felt. More crowded, but everyone else had faded to a buzz. They were still easily distinguishable, but quieter, somehow. And he was still worried about Pete.

The city flew by in a blur, and no one seemed to notice Joe squinting in concentration. Ryan’s head was fascinating, full of the same kind of energy as Brendon’s, but much more focused. Rhythmic, but organically, somehow. His thoughts and emotions moved like waves beating against the shoreline. Where Brendon felt every emotion at its strongest, if only for a second, even Ryan’s thoughts were layered and convoluted and controlled. Spencer’s thoughts moved similarly to Ryan’s,
but stronger and at a much slower pace. Jon - well, Joe couldn’t say for sure, but he thought Jon might be a little bit high. His head was muted, muffled, and it felt like a calmer version of when Pete or Patrick got drunk. Of course, they were all less defined than his band had been a half hour ago, but it was still intriguing.

“Turn left up ahead,” Joe heard Ryan’s voice out of nowhere, and in a panic, he immediately slammed on the brakes. An earsplitting honk came from behind them, and he soon heard everyone’s voices rising up in annoyed exclamations.

“What the fuck?”

“Dude!”

“We’re in the middle of the road!”

“Ryan?!” Joe yelled.

“Oh, Jesus, sorry, I thought you were used to this, pull over?” Ryan said. Joe looked around, but no one else seemed to notice.

“Ryan?” Patrick asked.

“Is he in danger or something?” Pete asked worriedly. Joe shook his head mutely and pulled over to the shoulder, his chest still heaving.

“Okay, so this is my bad, I thought you knew about this. We can talk in our heads now that you have the pack bond. Come on, try saying something.”

“How?!” Joe half shrieked.

“What’s going on?” Andy asked. “Are you having a stroke?”

“Shut up!” Joe yelled. He closed his eyes, still hyperventilating, and tried reaching out to Ryan’s mind. Ryan? He thought, and immediately felt stupid.

“I hope I didn’t scare you too much. None of you are dead, I can feel that much. Okay, so if you’re extremely focused, you can talk through a pack bond. I’m guessing you’re not feeling really focused right now. Anyway, I just combined it with my oracle sight and figured I’d give you directions!”

“Pete,” Joe growled, his head pressed on the top of the steering wheel. “I need you to call Ryan and tell him to never fucking do that again.”

“What did Ryan do?” Patrick asked, but Pete was already pulling out his phone. Good. About time someone listened to Joe around here.

“What did you do?” Pete asked, and Joe could hear Ryan’s harried reply coming from Pete’s phone. He was taking deep breaths and he shook his head with finality to try and get some clarity back.

“Oh my god,” Pete sounded exasperated. “Why would you think that was a good idea while he was driving?”

“You get directions from him,” Joe demanded, and pulled back onto the highway. He thought about it for a moment, then got into the turn lane and turned left.
Miraculously, they made it to the hotel without getting lost, or having Ryan talking in Joe’s head again. Joe really hoped this wasn’t going to be a trend. He could live without other people’s voices in his head. Ever.

Of course, the hotel was just as grand as they would have imagined. Of course, everything in Vegas looked better at night, but the Bellagio was intimidatingly beautiful enough that it was still outlandishly gorgeous, even in the sun that made the rest of the strip looked washed out and garish.

Joe pulled up to the front, handing his keys to a valet that looked at him doubtfully. Joe resisted the urge to fidget with his clothes, feeling self-conscious. It wasn’t like he was planning on breaking into a luxury resort when he woke up that morning. But plenty of rock stars probably checked in wearing t-shirts and jeans, and sure, Joe was a little grimy looking, but they weren’t too unusual, were they?

“Thanks so much,” Pete said to the valet, shaking his hand. As he did, Joe could feel Pete’s energy leaving him through the bond, and the man smiled at them pleasantly.

“Was that necessary?” Joe asked, and Pete shrugged.

“Don’t want anyone getting suspicious,” he said. Even without manipulating auras or whatever he was doing, Pete looked like he would fit in just fine here. Having upgraded from girl jeans to designer girl jeans, wearing a hoodie emblazoned with the logo of some major fashion designer, and topped off with sunglasses and bored expression, Pete had transformed into the perfect celebrity in under a year. Joe just usually didn’t notice.

The five of them got into the elevator and rode up in tense silence. Joe felt really cool for reasons he couldn’t quite explain, but he could still tell that the overwhelming emotion coming from his friends was nervousness.

Pete led them up to the door, pulling off his sunglasses and raising up his fist to knock, then pausing.

“I mean, he could be busy,” Pete began, and Joe stepped forward, banging on the door louder than necessary.

There was a very short pause, and then the door swung inwards. Joe, at the front of their group, was face to face with a slightly taller man, still with his signature beard, his hair shorter than Joe had remembered. Joe usually prided himself on not getting star struck, but it was hard not to.

“Hi,” he said, trying to choose his words carefully and prevent himself from saying something stupid. Dave Grohl stared at him for a moment, and Joe swallowed thickly.

“Come on in,” he said, kicking the door all the way open and letting the band and Chicago walk into the hotel room.

“Nice place you got here,” Joe said jokingly, and Dave laughed in a way that felt politer than amused, but Joe decided he would take it.

“Say, you guys are that band, right?” he asked, and Joe froze up.

“You’ve heard of us?” he asked. The man nodded, lounging back in an armchair and drinking deeply from a water bottle before replying.

“Sorry, massive headache,” he said. “But yeah, I know you guys. You’ve got that Sugar song, and you’re the one with the hair,” he said, nodding to Pete. “Not to be pushy, but is there any
particular reason you’ve all just happened to find yourselves in my hotel room?”

Seeing and feeling how star struck the rest of his band was, Joe took to opportunity to jump to their rescue.

“Yes, actually, we’re really sorry to bother you here, uh, sir,” Joe said. He snorted a bit at Joe’s use of the term ‘sir’, but didn’t look upset about it. “But we have a bit of a, uh, less than natural problem we’re working with. I’d even call it a supernatural problem,” he joked, giving him an appeasing smile, but as soon as he finished talking, Dave’s easygoing grin had turned into a frown that was almost a snarl, his whole face hard and brittle. Joe felt abruptly terrified. “Did I say something?”

“I’m not gonna yell at you, because you seem like decent enough guys,” Dave said, “But I am going to tell you to get the hell out of my room, and if you know what’s good for yourselves, you’ll stay away from all this magic bullshit. For good.” With that, he stood up and walked back over to the door, throwing it open. Joe felt himself floundering.

“Wait, but, I mean, you haven’t even heard what we’re here about!” Joe pleaded. Dave snorted derisively.

“Oh, but I’ve heard it all, kid,” he said, and raised his voice in a high pitched mimic; “‘Please, Mr. Grohl, sir, there’s a dragon!’ ‘But no one else knows how to defeat this monster!’ ‘But if we don’t figure this out the record company will drop our contract!’ I don’t wanna hear it! I don’t want to get involved! I’m done! I’m not going to sit around and watch more of you poor bastards die because you signed a contract with the wrong kind of monster!” he hissed.

“What are you talking about?!” Joe asked.

“You and every other poor bastard signed a contract you weren’t ready for, got in over your head with monsters to get famous?” he asked. “Well it’s not my fucking problem.”

“I- contract?” Joe asked, shaking his head. “I don’t- we do this on our own!”

Dave was stopped short, his eyebrows pulling together in confusion.

“Really?”

“Really!”

“Well, I feel even less sorry for you poor bastards,” he said, and gestured to the door again. “Now will you please go and deal with your problem as far away from me as possible?”

“But you’re the only one that can help me!”

Chicago’s voice rang out loud and desperate and more pained than Joe had ever heard him. He turned to see Chicago standing up, looking like he might start crying as he stared Dave down. Dave looked at him for a long time before cocking his head in confusion.

“Are you in the band?” he asked, and Chicago shook his head.

“My name is Chicago!” he said, and Dave’s eyes widened.

“Oh!” he gasped. He trained his eyes on Chicago like he was seeing him for the first time, looking at him in detail, and took in a deep breath. He kicked the door shut and sat back down.
“Chicago, huh?” he said. He took another long sip of water and inhaled deeply. “Well, shit.”

“You see our problem?” Joe pleaded, immensely grateful that Chicago had solved the problem for him.

“Yeah, I see,” Dave said. “Funny, I always sort of pictured Chicago with more of an Al Capone kind of look.”

“I have a lot of South side in my,” Chicago deadpanned. “Can you help?”

“Sure, sure,” Dave said. “Don’t panic, man, how long’ve you been like this?”

“Since December,” Chicago said, and Dave began choking on water.

“December?! Okay, December, that’s not too bad. Fuck,” Dave sighed, shaking his head. “Good thing you found me. How did you find me?” he turned back to the band, and Joe shrugged.

“We’re friends with the Oracle,” he said. “Apparently he used to dream about you guys and a pretty girl named Seattle?”

“Seattle,” Dave said in a distant, dreamy voice, “God, I remember Seattle.” He closed his eyes, his face looking peaceful for once as he sank deeper into the cushions, a small smile spreading across his face. “Yeah, she was beautiful. Of course, she couldn’t stay with us, but she was amazing. Really loved grunge music, too, but I guess that makes sense.”

“What was she like?” Patrick asked gently.

“Pretty girl, blonde hair and flannels and stormy eyes,” Dave said. “She fit in perfect at shows, which was a relief. She had a voice that sounded like a chain smoker, but it was kinda sexy, at the time.” He shrugged, still looking very distant. “Christ, that was a long time ago.”

“How did you put Seattle back into Seattle?” Pete asked urgently, and Dave snapped back to attention.

“Well, you all can’t do shit,” Dave said with a chuckle. “That’s all up to the city.” He turned to Chicago, who looked confused. “We went scouring the country for answers, never did find another case like hers, but we did find a brilliant witch. She tried inventing a few spells, but then figured that the best magic was visualization and talked to Seattle alone. Seattle came out looking heartbroken, and she led us down to the Space Needle, stood at the base, and said goodbye,” Dave’s tone was no longer cheerful, he was speaking like the words physically hurt. “And then she was gone.”

“Of course, we were confused, so we talked to the witch, and she said that all she told Seattle was to go to the heart of the city and- and give up what made her human,” he said, stuttering over the words.

“What does that mean?” Patrick asked.

“I can’t say for sure,” Dave sighed, “But I think it meant us. Love is what makes us human and all that bullshit, right? We always figured that it meant that she had to give up her human attachments. She had to give us up and go back to being a city.”

The room was painfully silent, with no sound but the heavy buzz of the air conditioner running in the background. Patrick shivered slightly, and Joe turned to Chicago, who looked very
deep in thought, but otherwise completely impassive. Joe couldn’t entirely discern the emotion coming from Pete, but it didn’t feel pleasant.

“Well, anyway,” Dave stretched, “Was that all?”

“I’m a big fan of your work!” Andy spat out before he could stop himself. Dave grinned at him.

“Thanks!” he said brightly. “I’m sorry for snapping at all of you earlier.”

“Yeah, about that,” Pete was frowning, “What was all that about contracts?”

Dave looked deeply uncomfortable as he answered.

“I imagine it’s less common these days than it used to be,” he said. “I mean, I really haven’t had an incident in years, but back in the nineties… alright, well, Jesus, to start with, you guys know that the music industry attracts a lot of monsters and monster fighters, right?”

“We’d started to pick up on it,” Joe said.

“Yeah, well, all that didn’t start till the sixties, and it didn’t really start till the seventies, but by the nineties, enough people had heard about it that record execs figured that absolutely anything - including saving people’s lives - can be monetized.” Dave shook his head, looking disgusted. “Pop and rock groups got churned out like factories for a bit there, and all the contracts had musical stuff as well as a clause that meant they could ship out their bands all over the world to act as magical mercenaries. It was disgusting, but after everything that went down a few years back, well, that doesn’t really happen anymore. Most record companies have backed off, I think, realizing how badly that went. I don’t know, honestly. I made it absolutely clue with the Foo Fighters that there was no magic business involved in it. I haven’t even touched a damn stake in over a decade now. But kids still used to come and ask for help. And I used to help them. But…” he trailed off.

“But?” Patrick asked.

“But everybody’s mortal. And these kids weren’t equipped to handle what they had to.” Dave looked pained, and Joe felt sick to his stomach.

“And to think,” Dave forced a smile, clearly trying to lighten the mood. “I put so much work into trying to get these damn idiots to stop forcing kids into the business, and you all just do it on instinct. Wonder how that happens.”

“Extremely bad luck?” Patrick suggested.

“Well, that, and we’re damn good at it,” Pete said, looking proud of himself. Dave snorted again.

“Course you are. Look, you don’t have to listen to me, but I have to say it anyway: don’t do this. Humans don’t last long in this business, and you seem like decent people. Quit with the magic bullshit.”

“Well, thanks for the advice,” Joe said, feeling more than a little uncomfortable getting lectured by Dave Grohl. “But I think we’re stuck in it for a while longer anyway, plus three of us are very not human and are gonna be magic for the rest of our lives whether we like it or not, so…” he trailed off with a shrug.

“What, you got more magic problems than just your city?” Dave asked.
“Ah, we upset a gang of hellhounds and we’re going to be murdered in a few months if we can’t find an alternative solution,” Joe said, heaving a deep sigh. Dave scowled.

“The Killers?” he asked.

“Ah, you’ve heard of them,” Joe said with a fake smile. “Yeah, great guys, right?”

“Sucks,” Dave sympathized. “But not to be rude, I really do need you guys to leave. I’ve got to get packing…” he trailed off with a shrug.

“Right, we’re gone,” Joe said, standing up and stretching his hand out to shake Dave’s. It felt weirdly formal, but Joe decided that it could technically have gone worse. Dave shook his hand then ran over to the desk, scribbled something down on the hotel paper, and handed it to Joe.

“It’s my number,” he said. “Call me if you need any more help with, you know,” he gave Chicago a smile, and Chicago returned it weekly.

“Thanks!” Andy half gasped, and they left the room, the bond in all of them still buzzing with excitement.

“Goddamn, but that’s cool,” Pete laughed. Joe felt lighter than air walking down the halls and back to the elevator, and he turned and punched Chicago lightly in the arm.

“And we got it, man!” he cheered, and Chicago nodded, looking nervous. Joe wondered about it, but figured he would deal with it later, too caught up in celebrating to really care.

They were waiting for the valet to bring the rental car back around in the baking desert sun, feeling pretty damn successful when, right on cue, someone came to interrupt them.

A scrawny looking teenage boy ran up to them, his eyes bloodshot and purple, and his skin so pale it looked nearly translucent. He skidded next to them breathing heavily and opening his mouth again and again like he was going to start talking but didn’t have the breath to.

“Are you okay?” Joe asked him. The boy shook his head but held up one finger as he tried to catch his breath. He finally spoke up in a scratchy voice.

“Are you Fall Out Boy?” he asked, his voice so raspy that it hurt Joe’s throat to listen to him talking.

“Yes?” Pete said, his expression halfway between horrified and concerned and his hand half outstretched, as though to try and comfort the boy. The boy sucked in another few deep breaths, and tears welled up in his eyes.

“Can you help me?”

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“Who said you could come back?” Ryan asked by means of greeting. Pete rolled his eyes before replying.

“Oh, I’m sure unlimited access to your garage is in your contract somewhere.”

It very well might have been. Pete and Ryan had a pretty rock solid contract. One of the few perks of all the pre-law credits that weren’t going anywhere.

“Who’s the kid?” Brendon asked, pointing to Shawn, who was still terrified looking.
Possibly more so.

“Don’t call people kids when you’re still a kid, kid,” Jon said.

“This is Shawn,” Pete said, trying not to sound too much like he was just giving the kid a
time out. “Shawn, want to tell our friends why you followed us all the way to Las Vegas.”

Shawn stared at the ground, tugging at his shirt for a second, before rushing out the sentence
in one quiet, quick breath of air.

“I summoned a basilisk.”

“What was that?” Ryan asked, his eyes huge.

“I summoned a basilisk!” Shawn yelled, looking kind of like he was going to start crying
again.

“He summoned a basilisk!” Pete repeated in a slightly higher pitched voice. “And Shawn,
do you want to tell them why you summoned a basilisk?”

“Because I wanted revenge and I couldn’t get my hands on a gun,” Shawn said, wringing
his hands. “Look, I said I was sorry!”

“Actually, you said you were sorry it didn’t work,” Andy said.

“I’m not gonna do it again!” Shawn said.

“Because apparently the basilisk is already killing people in your hometown!” Patrick half
screamed. He looked more frazzled than Pete had seen him in ages, and he still looked so peaceful.
Pete felt his stomach twisting. He had let things with Chicago go way too far, too far to come back
from, and he could tell from Patrick’s aura that he wasn’t even thinking about what they’d heard
earlier in the day… but they had a bigger issue at the moment.

“Wait, hold on, because you couldn’t get a gun?” Brendon asked, clearly terrified. “Who
did you want to shoot?”

“You don’t understand!” Shawn screamed, stamping his foot down. Pete winced, wishing
he knew how to tell Brendon to back down without directly speaking to him. Shawn’s aura had a
tendency to spike dangerously, and as furious as he was, he really didn’t want to set the kid off.

“You don’t know what it’s like,” Shawn said, his voice lower. “What I have to deal with. I
wasn’t even thinking about it as a murder. I didn’t want him to die, I just wanted it to stop.”


“It sounds… really childish… when you put it like that,” he said, closing his eyes. To Pete’s
surprise, Brendon stepped forward and hugged Shawn tightly.

“I get it,” Brendon said, and he rubbed small circles into Shawn’s back. “I get it,” he
repeated softly. “People suck. And I admire your ingenuity.”

Pete was never so bold as to think he had seen it all. He knew how much crazy shit there
was in the universe, and his odds of ever seeing a star go supernova were slim, so he could never
technically see it all, but he still didn’t expect to see Brendon calm down the crying teenage that
tried to go on a killing spree with a home-grown basilisk. Eventually, Pete coughed.
“How did you summon the basilisk?” he asked. Shawn pulled away, but continued to stand close to Brendon.

“Technically, I didn’t summon a basilisk, I hatched one,” he said. “If you take a chicken egg and hatch it underneath a snake or some other reptile, it forms a basilisk. Or, that’s what the Wiki page said,” he winced. “I was kind of expecting something bigger, actually. You know, like *Harry Potter*? But it hatched like a normal snake.” He shrugged.

“Anyway, I tried to bond with it without looking at it, but it’s hard, you know? And I mean, if you look them in the eyes you die, but I figured if it trusted me it could be different. But the problem with never looking at your magical otherworldly snake is that it’s really hard to tell with it disappears. I went over to handle it the other day and there was nothing left of the terrarium but broken glass.” Shawn winced, and looked down at his shoes again, taking a step closer to Brendon so they were almost touching. “And then- then people just started turning up dead! No explanation!” He looked up at Pete with big, pleading eyes. “I didn’t want people to die!”

“I believe you,” Pete said. “But people have died. How did you hear about us?”

“Scoured the supernatural forums till I found a rumor that you guys fought monsters and I was desperate enough to try anything,” he said.

“Fair enough,” Patrick said, looking disbelieving. “So you want us to find a small snake in your hometown without looking at it, and then kill it?”

“You guys deal with monsters all the time, right?” Shawn pleaded. “You can do it, right?”

Pete turned to the rest of his band. They all looked about as lost and unsure as he felt. Pete hadn’t exactly signed up to be a mail order superhero, and he had no idea as to how they could possibly fix a problem of this magnitude, but on the other hand, they couldn’t just let people keep dying while they knew something about it. Then again, Pete also had no idea how to fight something he couldn’t see.

“Can you give us a minute?” Joe asked, seeming to think along similar lines, and he pulled the rest of the band just outside of the garage.

“We can’t kill the basilisk!” Andy said immediately. Pete turned to Andy, but he looked steadfast.

“Dude, it’s killing people,” Joe said.

“By making eye contact!” Andy cried. “It’s not doing it on purpose! It’s not it’s fault! This is completely immoral!”

“Not to mention we literally can’t kill it,” Patrick said. “How are we gonna scour an entire town for something we can’t look at?”

“I think we should help him,” Joe said. Upon seeing his friends’ stares, he looked exasperated. “Come on! This guy’s hysterical, the basilisk is on a killing spree, and what’s a few days camping out in some podunk town for a good deed?”

“We have to get Chicago back!” Pete said, and Joe gave Pete a strange, questioning look that made Pete squirm.

“He’s been human for months, what’s a few more days?” Joe asked. Pete cringed, and pointedly ignored making eye contact with Patrick. If Patrick wasn’t going to think about it, neither
was he.

“I still don’t see how we’ll be able to kill it!” Patrick insisted.

“I still don’t see why it deserves to die!” Andy snapped back.

“Look, we don’t have to commit to anything, but let’s just go scope it out? Please!” Joe pleaded. Pete sighed.

“Yeah, sure, I’m in,” he said. Patrick shrugged, and Andy looked nearly murderous, but slowly nodded as well.

“Only to scope it out,” Andy demanded. “I am not killing this thing!”

“Let’s just get there first,” Joe said in a worn out voice. They turned back to see Shawn actually kind of smiling as he talked to Brendon, and Pete could see the small ripples of jealousy crossing Ryan’s aura. He tried not to laugh, figuring that would be mean, and walked back in and clapped a hand on Shawn’s back.

“Where do you live, kid?” Pete asked, and Shawn looked up at him, delighted.

“Pennsylvania!” he said. His face was glowing with hope, and Pete couldn’t help feeling for him. “You’re really going to help me?”

“We’re gonna try,” Pete said, biting his lip. “Say, you don’t live near Pittsburgh, do you?”

“No,” Shawn said, wrinkling up his nose. “Why?”

“Rather not run into an old friend there,” Pete said, and Joe hastily turned a laugh into a cough. “Let’s get to the airport.”

Shawn was a surprisingly decent person, as Pete discovered the more he talked to him. He tried to pay for all of their tickets to Pennsylvania, but Pete instantly refused to let him. And, though the kid knew absolutely nothing about music, he was a huge English nerd, which made it easy for Pete to talk to him. And Pete made a point to talk to him while they waited for their flight, and while the plane was in the air, and when they were driving back to his house. More to the point, Pete wasn’t talking to Patrick. Plus, they had other issues to deal with.

“You think the basilisk broke the terrarium?” Pete asked, and Shawn nodded.

“Well, actually, I think he outgrew it,” Shawn said, looking nervous as he did. “I mean, he was born the size of a regular snake, but he was growing pretty fast. I was actually going to buy him a bigger tank, but then I came home and the glass was broken.”

“Do you have any idea what size it should be?” Joe asked. Shawn shook his head.

“Wikipedia said the original myth was about cobra size, but it felt like he was bigger than a cobra when I last handled him,” Shawn said. “It’s kind of hard to tell, though, without looking.”

“Kind of impressive that you kept handling him, though,” Pete said, and Shawn shrugged, looking unimpressed.

“I like snakes,” he said by means of explanation. “It’s really not a big deal.”

“What do you like aside from snakes?” Pete asked.
“Poetry?” Shawn said, and gave him a sad smile. “I guess it’s not really shocking that I’m not that popular.”

“What kind of poetry?” Pete asked. Shawn looked a little nervous before speaking, but eventually spoke up.

“I mean, I like the transcendentalists?” he said the response like he was expecting to get in trouble for liking poetry, and Pete had the brief urge to just like the basilisk run amok, but he shook it off.

Pete and Shawn kept up conversation until they got back to Shawn’s house, where he waved to the band as he got out.

“Um, my parents are home, so do you think you guys could just get a hotel?” Shawn asked. “Mom and dad are, well, they’re already going to be pissed if they actually noticed I left. Tomorrow’s a Sunday, so just call me when you do something, okay?”

“Sure,” Pete said, because there didn’t seem to be an alternative, and he waved goodbye as Andy sped down to the pathetically small downtown section of the town.

The only hotel they could find in the area was a tiny, grungy looking Days Inn. Andy shrugged, pulling into the parking lot, and Pete tried not to cringe. It was going to be cheap, if nothing else, so that was good news, he decided. He leaned back in his seat while Andy went inside to ask about available rooms, staring out at the dusky sky. They had flown away from the setting sun, and it felt too dark, having come from Nevada. Pete felt strangely chilly, even though it was hot outside. Andy soon came back with news that there were rooms open, one for him and Joe and one for Pete, Patrick, and Chicago. That jarred Pete out of his quiet reverie. He opened his mouth to speak, but couldn’t come up with a reasonable excuse as to why he shouldn’t room with the two of them. Evidently, Patrick and Chicago were stuck in the same predicament, as neither of them looked particularly pleased with the rooming arrangement.

“Yo, Chicago, pool’s still open, you wanna go swimming?” Joe asked as they walked inside.

“Absolutely!” Chicago yelled. “Pete, Patrick, wanna come?”

“Absolutely not,” Patrick said, shaking his head firmly. “Wanna stay back with me?” he asked Pete, and his tone was casual, but Pete sensed it wasn’t the kind of question he would really get to say no to, so he nodded mutely.

“See you,” Joe said, oblivious, and he and Chicago took off.

Patrick led the way into his and Pete’s room mutely. Pete distantly thought that this Days Inn couldn’t be less like the Bellagio if it tried, what with all the ancient, mildewed carpets, everything in various shades of brown. The room was ugly and dark, and the air conditioner rattled and wheezed ominously in the corner. Patrick sat down on one of the two beds and looked up at Pete, his eyes too pervasive.

“You’re mad at me,” Patrick said, and Pete took a deep breath.

“I’m frustrated,” he admitted. He felt too keyed up to even sit down, and instead he crossed his arms. Patrick thought about that for a moment.

“I don’t understand,” he said slowly. “You’ve been acting weird for months, and then the other day you call Ryan and you stop even speaking to me and I have no idea what could possibly
“Patrick he has to go back!” Pete yelled, too loud. Patrick looked up, startled. Pete swallowed back panic and put his head in his hands, rubbing circles in his temples, muffling his words as he spoke. “I know about you and Chicago.” Ugh. Who talked like this? Like he was in some bad soap opera playing the role of the jealous ex-boyfriend.

Meanwhile, Patrick had frozen up on the bed, looking petrified. Eventually, he sucked in a deep breath and spoke.

“And how do you know about that?”

“Initially, I overheard you and him talking,” Pete said. “But then- Jesus, I can see auras. You light up like the fucking fourth of July whenever he walks in the room.”

Patrick flushed, and Pete winced.

“I want to be happy for you because I think it’s great that you found someone that kind who loves you that much, and great that you’re getting over Anna, but I don’t think you’ve even thought about the fact that he has to go back,” Pete said. Patrick was still tense, but it was clear from the expression on his face that Pete was right.

“I don’t have to think about it right now,” Patrick said, unable or unwilling to meet Pete’s eyes. Pete wanted to scream in frustration.

“He’s a city!” Pete cried, his voice strangled. “You can’t be with a city! You can’t be with a city that we’re supposed to be returning to city form!”

“Why not?” Patrick snapped, getting defensive. “He loves me, I love him, we can deal with the rest later!” he said, standing up to be face to face with Pete.

“Yeah, it would be great if that were all that mattered, but when we get back to home in a couple of days, it’s going to be like he’s dead!” Pete yelled, barely even feeling guilty when he saw Patrick recoil like he’d been slapped.

“Thanks for your concern,” Patrick snapped, “But how about you let me take care of myself, alright?”

“Right, cause you’re so great at handling heartbreak,” Pete said.

“Well, much like every other sentient being in the universe, I’m better at it than you,” Patrick hissed back.

“And how the hell is he supposed to let go of what makes him human if he’s clinging onto you?” Pete demanded. “You know what’s really fucking human? Falling in love! How is he supposed to let go of you and go back where he belongs if you’re clinging to him like a parasite?”

“It’s entirely up to him and he can do whatever he wants,” Patrick said. “But if he doesn’t want to go back I’m not going to make him.”

“How can you be so selfish?!” Pete yelled. Patrick’s eyes were fiery with determination, and Pete was starting to become frightened. “Millions of people live there and you would just let it rot?”

“Don’t I deserve to be selfish for once?” Patrick yelled back.
“Not like this, no!” Pete screamed. “Jesus, if you want to get fucked that badly-” he never got to finish his sentence, as it was abruptly cut off with a fist to his jaw. Pete wheeled around to fight back when there was frantic knocking at their door.

“Guys, you’d better hurry!” Joe yelled, and Pete stormed over to the door, throwing it open before he could think. Joe was shivering in the hallway, his clothes damp like he’d thrown them on too fast, and his eyes were wide.

“I think you’d better come outside,” he said, and Pete followed him instantly. He could hear Patrick’s footsteps behind him, and he decided to take that as a good sign.

They ran out back to the pool where Chicago was still shaking water droplets out of his hair and Andy had his eyes trained with intense focus on the treeline about fifty feet behind the back of the hotel. Andy looked so intense that it was almost comical, if it weren’t for the frightened look in his eyes.

“What is it?” Pete asked.

“Shh,” Andy chided, cocking his head slightly. Then, very abruptly, he slammed his eyes shut.

“Close your eyes and get back inside!” Andy yelled, and Pete nodded. He tried to follow Andy’s orders, but immediately realized that would be easier said than done, and decided to opt for just turning away from whatever Andy was looking at. They ran just inside the hotel, and Pete glanced out the window before realizing what a terrible idea that was, and looking back down.

“It’s in the trees?” Pete guessed.

“Well, I can see something moving in there and it sounds like a snake slithering, so I’d say that’s a decent guess, yeah,” Andy said. Pete gulped.

“You have really fucking incredible ears,” he noted. “You can hear a snake moving from that distance?”

“Well,” Andy glanced around nervously, still standing close to the window but with his back to it. “I mean, it sounded bigger than the average snake, actually. Not like, Mongolian Death Worm big, but bigger than snakes in Ohio are supposed to get.”

“Oh, fucking great,” Patrick said. “More giant snakes.”

“Are you sure that’s what you heard?” Joe asked.

“Well would you like to look?” Andy snapped back.

“Easy,” Chicago said, and then, very carefully, he looked over his shoulder, and almost instantly turned back around.

“Did you see anything?” Andy asked.

“Something,” Chicago confirmed. “It looked like a shadow on the grass. Maybe twelve feet long?”

“Shit,” Joe swore. “Okay, we need a plan.”

“Maybe it’ll go away on its own?” Andy said. “It’s not like it’s hunting us down or
“Well, now you’ve just jinxed it,” Pete said, and Andy punched him in the arm.

“I bet I could get a good shot at it without looking into its eyes,” Joe said.

“Don’t kill it!” Andy demanded. “Why do you have to try and kill it!”

“Because it’s killing people!” Joe yelled back.

“Excuse me,” Pete looked up to see a woman dressed in a formal looking gray suit and a tight bun glaring at them. “Can you please keep your voices down? The guests are sleeping.”

“Right, sorry,” Pete said. “We didn’t mean to wake anyone up.”

The woman, whose name tag identified her as the manager, rolled her eyes, and walked past them to the door leading out to the pool area.

“Wait, don’t go out there!” Joe gasped, but she had already stepped outside into the night. Chicago instantly ran after her, eliciting a strangled cry from Patrick, who followed him. Pete swore as he ran after them, only to hear the manager scream in terror.

“What is that?!” she yelled, and by the time Pete was outside and in view of them again, she crashed to the ground, knocking down pool furniture as she fell down, completely lifeless.

Chicago made to step forward and grab her, but Patrick grabbed his hand and pulled him back inside by force, Pete running in with them.

As soon as they were inside, Patrick slammed the door shut, leaning against it and breathing heavily.

“What were you thinking?” he demanded of Chicago, but as Pete stared at them, he could see that Patrick was glowing with relief. His aura was huge, a bright, glowing yellow as he gazed on Chicago. It was obvious that he was shining with relief and care and love, so bright that it hurt Pete’s eyes.

And no, Pete couldn’t blame him for wanting to keep this. But the brighter he glowed, the worse the end was going to be.

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Andy, the only member of his entire band with any sense whatsoever, was the one who inevitably had to pull the group of them away from the hall right next to the exit to the pool. They made for Pete and Patrick’s room, trying to ignore as they heard the sound of a maid screaming from down the hall when she discovered the body outside. Luckily, the basilisk must have been gone by then, because an hour later, he heard the same girl delivering the story to police officers in a trembling voice. He told the rest of his band the good news, but rather than seeming relieved, they all seemed to still be extremely tense. Andy wanted to ask what he was missing, but figured that, if it didn’t involve him, he’d rather not know.

Instead, he went back to his and Joe’s room, trying to puzzle over the basilisk issue. He knew that, with Joe’s marksmanship combined with his incredibly hearing, it would be beyond simple to take out the basilisk while it was still relatively young and was not yet full on *Harry Potter* sized with scales too thick to penetrate. And Andy could tell that the others felt strange about his sudden and intense need to protect the creature. But for reasons Andy didn’t know how to explain, it
felt too cruel to kill the newborn creature simply for existing. It wasn’t actively trying to do wrong, misguided or not. It was just looking wherever it heard noise. Maybe it didn’t even want to be a killer. It certainly hadn’t asked to be born.

Andy tried to compromise with himself. If he got wind of the basilisk killing again, he’d give the others full reign to take care of it however they saw fit. But in the meantime, he was going to try and figure something else out. There had to be a human way to capture enormous snakes, right? Maybe he could find something out on his own, capture the snake, and somehow take it into the middle of the wilderness and set it free.

He sighed even as he thought about it. He was probably the worst vegan anarchist of all time. He should be happy that humans had a predator to deal with, but he still couldn’t get the woman’s screams out of his head. To clear his head, he pulled out his phone.

“Hey, dude,” Matt said, “You still in Vegas?”

“Pennsylvania,” Andy sighed. “You would not believe the day I’ve been having, but it involves Dave Grohl, high school bullies, and a basilisk.”

Matt was quiet for a beat, then said “Did they walk into a bar? Is this the start to a really weird joke?”

“No,” Andy laughed. “I’ll tell you about it when I get back. I was just,” he paused, cringing at how ridiculous and pathetically suburban he was about to sound, “Just wondering if you could put Carm on?” Yeah, absolutely ridiculous. It wasn’t like his kid could even fucking talk, but still, dumb as it was, hearing her would calm him down. To his credit, Matt didn’t laugh.

“Sure, man,” he said, and he set the phone down on some hard surface with a light clicking sound. As soon as he heard the familiar sound of Carmilla cooing, Andy let a tiny smile spread across his face.

“Hey, sweetie,” he said in a soft voice.

“Dada!” she yelled back, sounding excited. Andy giggled a tiny bit, nodding to himself, alone in the room and deeply grateful that Joe hadn’t come back yet.

“I miss you, Carm,” he sighed. “I hate leaving you at home for the European leg, but I mean, you like Matt, right? You sure as hell like him better than flights that last all night.”

She replied with nonsense baby talk, only serving to make Andy smile more.

“Yeah, we’d fucking better be back tomorrow. You’d better believe I’m holding this over the other guys’ heads when they have kids. No matter how many Patrick has.”

“Dada,” she repeated, sounding more pleading this time, but Andy may have just been imagining it.

“Soon, I swear.” His chest ached, but it was still almost pleasant with the knowledge he’d be back soon. “Matt?” he called a little louder.

“You’re very involved,” Matt said within seconds. “I hear that’s rare in rock star dads.”

“Thanks,” Andy said, rolling his eyes. “I’ll see you in a day or two, is that okay? Sorry for lumping babysitting on you all the time.”
“Hey, if you wanna keep paying for the sweet house and buying expensive cars, I’ll play
stay-at-home-mom all you want,” Matt said.

“Still, thanks,” Andy said. “Later?”

“Later.”

Andy sighed, turning on the TV. He felt wired, but the shitty hotel TV was fuzzy and only
got about ten channels, so it didn’t help much. He meant to go downstairs, break into the business
center to look up snake trapping, but, apparently more tired than he felt, fell asleep pretty quickly.

As per usual, he woke up first, still wearing shoes but with the blanked half folded over him
in a very mediocre attempt at mothering from Joe, he presumed. It was only just light out, and the
scratch in his throat indicated that he was starting to get thirsty, but he wasn’t going to hunt anything
down unless they were there for a couple of days. Yet another inconvenience of the extended tour,
he had scheduled it pretty down to the wire to get back home to a fridge full of blood before he even
started to worry about getting thirsty.

Unexpectedly, after he’d only been awake and bored for a few minutes, his phone started
going off, and he ran into the hall to answer it.

“Hello?” he asked, his voice still scratchy from sleep.

“Andy! Glad you’re up,” he heard Dan say, and Andy resisted the urge to stifle a groan. He
could only think of one good reason for him to call this early in the morning.

“Hey, Dan,” Andy said, running one hand through his hair.

“Listen, I know you just got back home, but do you think you could be back in Chicago by
tonight? There’s an excellent last minute opportunity for a concert and I think it would be amazing if
you guys could do it!”

“Um, actually, none of us can do it,” Andy said with a nervous laugh. “We’re in
Pennsylvania. Sorry.”

There was a long pause before Dan spoke again. “What are you doing in Pennsylvania?”

“We’re, ah,” Andy winced. “Visiting an old friend?” Being friends with Pete was making
him terrible at lying.

“Where in Pennsylvania?” Dan asked, sounding almost businesslike.

“Um, a tiny town outside of Scranton,” Andy said. “Pete’s idea, kind of a long story, sorry
about the concert.” There was an even longer pause on the other side, so long Andy nearly hoped he
had hung up, before he spoke again.

“Don’t do anything stupid, I’m on my way there,” Dan declared.

“Wait, no, don’t come out here-!” Andy began, but their manager had hung up.

“Unbelievable!” Andy groaned, storming back into the room and turning on the news.

Naturally, the news was absolutely hopeless. In movies, Andy mused, all the information
required to solve the murder was aired right on the news, but in real life, homicides weren’t even
reported, so unless he could get his hands on a police scanner sometime soon…
“Waste of time,” Andy muttered, gently tossing the remote forward, and accidentally launching it through the screen. He winced. That would be awkward to explain to the front desk. He only ever had a bad sense of how much strength he was using when he was keyed up like this. Still, on the bright side, the hotel probably had way bigger problems to worry about.

After patiently waiting for nearly an hour, he finally shook Joe awake.

“What?” Joe groaned.

“Come on, I wanna go home tonight, let’s go snake hunting,” Andy said. “Oh, and also our tour manager is following us out here?”

“What the hell?” Joe asked. He sat up, and his hair had been entirely flattened on one side from the way he slept, and Andy couldn’t hold back laughter. Joe scowled at him, rubbing his eyes.

“Why?” he asked, and Andy shrugged.

“He wanted me to head out to Chicago so we could do some last minute promotional show, I told him nobody was in Chicago, and he freaked out when I said Pennsylvania, said he’d be right out and not to do anything stupid.”

“ Weird,” Joe said. “Think we should actually not do anything stupid?”

“I think we have a snake infestation to take care of,” Andy said, and heaved a deep sigh. “And I think you should just kill it.”

“Why the change of heart?” Joe asked, and Andy sat down, feeling heart-heavy.

“Because it’s just gonna get bigger and kill more people and it can’t control that. Because it’s kinder than what humans would do to it if they found it instead. And because,” the most selfish and most honest answer stuck in his throat. “Because I really want to go home.”

Joe put a hand on his shoulder, giving him a sympathetic smile.

“It’s gonna be super humane and quick, I promise,” he said, and Andy scrunched up his face.

“Ugh, I don’t want to think about it.” He glared around the room. “So, what do you want to do in the half day we have between now and when Patrick finally fucking wakes up?”

Joe laughed loudly. “I don’t know, what do people do in Pennsylvania? Eat chocolate? Get lost in the Blair Witch woods? Set their creepy coalmining towns on fire and design a video game around it?”

“Dude, is the Blair Witch woods really in Pennsylvania?” Andy asked.

“The Blair Witch is absolutely not real and if I find out she is I am personally giving up on the supernatural forever, do not start with that shit and do not let Pete hear you! In fact, don’t even think about the Blair Witch around Pete! I am not going stir crazy from the fucking stick people,” Joe said, surprisingly fiercely, and Andy giggled.

“You’re a werewolf that was scared of the Blair Witch movie?”

“Yeah, yeah, sure, horror movies don’t freak you out just cause you’re a vampire? Yeah right,” Joe snorted, and Andy shrugged.
“I mean, when I was a kid, sure,” he said, and Joe rolled his eyes.

“Jesus, you’re the fucking guy that takes girls to horror movies he’s prescreened just to get her scared and in your arms, aren’t you?” Joe demanded, and Andy laughed. It was easy enough for the two of them to just hand out, ordering awful movies on the hotel’s pay-per-view until the other three wandered in sometime around noon.

“Is this that fucking boogie man movie?” Pete asked as soon as he walked in, not knocking.

“We were in the mood for horror,” Joe said.

“You’re not sick of living it?” Patrick asked.

“Living something doesn’t make it less entertaining,” Joe argued. “Case in point, Spinal Tap.”

“Anyway, the boogie man isn’t real,” Pete said.

“You’re gonna jinx yourself, talking like that,” Joe said. “So we gotta go kill this snake before our manager shows up.”

“Dan’s coming?” Pete asked.

“Are you okay with killing it?” Chicago asked Andy, stunned, and Andy felt his stomach squirm guiltily.

“As long as it’s humane,” he said, staring down at the ground.

“Dan?” Pete repeated.

“Yeah, no fucking clue,” Joe said. “Any ideas how to hunt down a snake?”

The room was filled with silence for a moment.

“We could go out back and see if it left tracks?” Andy said.

“I feel like part of the appeal of a snake is that it doesn’t leave tracks,” Patrick said.

“I think it’s worth a shot,” Chicago said encouragingly. Patrick smiled and grabbed Chicago’s hand, squeezing it tightly, which was… weird, but what did Andy know?

The five of them walked out back, and Andy looked at the ground for a long time. He occasionally looked up at Joe, who was also staring at the grass, but Andy had to admit, this seemed pretty hopeless. Some of the grass looked crushed, but it wasn’t in any discernible pattern. On top of that, there was no scent he could follow, and if there were, what would it even smell like?

“Alright, so, if it’s not trying to kill people, where would a snake be?” Pete asked aloud.

“Well, maybe…” Joe frowned, staring at the ground like he could see something Andy couldn’t. Andy looked at him and raised one eyebrow.

“Snakes are cold blooded, right?” Patrick spoke up. “So it would want to be somewhere warm, yeah? But snakes are also skittish, so if it’s not trying to kill people, somewhere warm without a lot of people.”

“It’s probably warmer outside than it is inside, since it’s so late in the spring,” Chicago said.
“That’s good for us.”

“Yeah, but it’s a Saturday, and families go to parks with their kids and shit, and it’s fucking Pennsylvania, and everything is trees,” Pete said sourly.

“Joe?” Andy asked quietly.

“We passed a sign for a middle school on our way out of Shawn’s neighborhood,” he said slowly. “And most middle schools probably have baseball diamonds and stuff, right?”

“Brilliant,” Patrick said, “Sounds like a good place to start. Close to Shawn, warm, nobody there since it’s Sunday. Let’s check it out.”

The middle school was, predictably, shrouded by trees, but as they drove up the long driveway, there was a large brick building, and next to it, a few dilapidated sports fields. Most of the fields were filled with trampled, brownish grass, and just in between two of them was a small, light brown square for of brown for baseball, with something large curled up in the middle of it.

“Don’t look over there,” Andy said, pointing as he looked away, and the others turned too.

“Now what?” Patrick asked.

“Now I guess we get closer,” Joe said, kicking open the door and walking backwards in what looked like a hopeful direction. He glanced over his shoulder then kept walking backwards slowly.

Andy followed after him, feeling a little ridiculous as he tried to walk slowly to not trip over anything. They were probably being overly cautious, but Andy really didn’t mind it too much.

Andy had just backed into the fence that separated the parking lot from the baseball field when he heard a low hiss coming from behind him, and the very soft sound of slithering on the dust, barely loud enough for him to hear.

“Joe, it’s moving,” he said. “Can you hear it?”

“No,” Joe spat, his voice nearly a whisper. “The ground is too soft.”

Andy bit down on his lip hard, trying to think fast.

“Okay, well it’s probably going to get a little closer to us, and you’ll probably hear it then, right?” Andy asked.

“Right,” Joe said, but he sounded unsure. “Um, is it getting closer?”

“It’s not getting further away, but it doesn’t sound like it’s getting closer,” Andy said. “Might just be that it’s uncoiling.”

“Hey, Andy?” Joe’s voice had taken a slightly higher tone than usual. “Do you know how basilisks kill other than looking their victim in the eyes?”

“They might be venomous?” Andy said, with a sinking feeling in his gut. “I’m not sure how fast they are, though.”

“Mmm,” Joe said, sounding nervous. Andy turned to see him holding his gun in a vice like grip.
Just then, Andy heard something moving towards them way too fast, and his heart took off. He reacted instinctively, jumping sideways and knocking Joe over just as something iridescent whizzed over their heads.

Andy looked up in time to see the globule of what he could only assume was pure venom hit a tree just past where the car was parked, and reacting like acid, burning a hole in the trunk as it crackled.

Andy yanked Joe to his feet and they ran forward, the others already moving for cover, and the both of them fell to the ground once the school was in between them and the snake.

“What the hell was that?” Joe asked.

“Venom? Acid venom?” Andy felt a little hysterical. “Couldn’t have made it a little less deadly, you know? Kills you with one look, spits acid venom, fangs the size of my forearm—”

“Really?” Chicago asked.

“I’m just guessing!” Andy snapped back, barely noticing as Chicago curled away from him.

“I think trying to kill this thing was a bad idea. We should call in professionals,” Pete said.

“Are there even professionals for this?” Patrick demanded. “I mean, Jesus, you can’t have a guy for mythical snakes, can you?”

“No,” Pete admitted, “But we do know a kid that really likes snakes.” He pulled out his phone and punched in the numbers quickly. “Hey, Shawn? Yeah, get your ass down to the middle school, we found your snake.” He hung up almost instantly, and Andy frowned at him.

“No goodbye?” he asked.

“He didn’t pick up!” Pete snapped, raising his voice over the quiet hush they’d all been operating at. Andy froze. He was too far away to hear the snake slithering, but they were all still close enough to hear the chain link fence clatter to the ground as something large and powerful broke past it.

“The car?” Chicago half screamed.

“No time,” Joe said, and he slammed his elbow through the window, jumping in as soon as it was broken. Andy threw the others after as fast as he could, boosting them over the tiny ledge, and then just as he saw the tip of the snake’s tongue probing past the edge of the wall, he jumped through after, tucking and rolling when he hit the floor.

Andy barely stopped to shake the broken glass out of his hair before they took off out of the classroom and running down the hall, past art projects and brightly painted lockers and smiley face poster plastered to the wall.

“Where to?” he asked.

“Chemistry classroom?” Pete suggested. “We could make something explosive to throw at it?”

“Yeah, great plan if any of us knew chemistry or the kept real chemicals in a middle school,” Joe snapped.
“You know, I’m all for fighting back, but until we have a plan, maybe just any room with a door that locks?” Patrick suggested.

They heard a sound of crashing glass too close behind them, and Joe nodded, leading them up the stairs and into the nearest classroom on the second floor and locking the door, then piling up a few desks in front of it for good measure.

“Now what?” Pete asked as soon as they caught their breath.

Everyone was quiet in response.

“If we had some bait, if we knew what would work as bait, we could get it below the window where I would have a clear shot at it,” Joe said, frustrated. “But while it’s inside, while it’s behind us in these halls—”

“We’re fucked,” Andy finished. Maybe it was karma, he thought dully, for trying to kill something that he thought was innocent.

They sat in the relative darkness of the classroom, all the lights remaining of, when the sound of a crashing window within the room made Andy jump out of his seat, his hands automatically curling into fists.

But there was no slithering sound to accompany it. After a moment, Andy gathered the courage to look up, and he saw what looked like a heavily built grappling hook on the linoleum floor, slowly being dragged backwards until it hooked against the wall, the black cord it was attached to pulling taut.

Andy ran to the window, staring down and ignoring the cries of protests from the rest of his band.

There, one story down but quickly scaling the wall, was Dan Suh, their tour manager, looking determined and calculative. Within seconds he had launched himself into the classroom, dusting himself off and looking annoyed.

“Hello, boys,” he said. “Didn’t I tell you not to do anything stupid?”

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Patrick was staring at their manager, feeling like he was caught in the sort of strange, nonsensical dream, the likes of which would make him turn into a Star Wars character in the middle of an important moment. He tried to think of something he could say to or ask of his manager that would somehow make sense of the moment, but it ended up being Pete who spoke first.

“That was really cool, man,” Pete said. Dan gave him a disbelieving look, and Pete nodded eagerly.

“Seriously,” he said, “That was some Mission Impossible bullshit. You’re like, the Korean version of Tom Cruise.”

“Yeah, that’ll catch on,” Dan rolled his eyes. “I told you not to do anything stupid! Chasing down basilisks when you know fuck all about preternatural herpetology qualifies as stupid!”

“Preta- what?” Patrick asked.

“Nevermind!” Dan groaned. “We have to get you guys out of here! I’m not strictly speaking supposed to interfere, but I heard there was a basilisk issue in this part of the country and of course
you manage to get yourselves into it—"

“How did you hear there was a basilisk problem?” Pete asked. “What do you mean you’re not supposed to interfere?”

“Look, can I explain it later,” Dan said, “We need to get you all out of here and then we can call someone who can properly deal with this and move the creature into a facility where it can be properly studied.”

“You’re going to capture it just to turn it into a science experiment?” Andy asked, sounding affronted.

“Weren’t you just going to shoot it?” Dan asked. Patrick looked down at the ground, feeling guilty. He’d barely been paying attention to all of this basilisk bullshit the past couple of days, and had instead just been following his band around on autopilot. Trying not to think about Chicago going back. Trying not to think of Pete calling him selfish. He was discovering that trying not to think of something sometimes took more effort than trying to think of something.

“Will you please just come down?” Dan pleaded, gesturing towards the window, and Patrick abruptly stood up.

“No,” he said, glaring at him. “No snake is getting past that door, and I have a few questions for you. First of all, how do you know about all this magic stuff?”

Dan sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose between his fingers, but to Patrick’s relief, his band all gave Dan a similar look, standing by his side.

“Monster fighting used to be a lot more pervasive in the music industry. Record companies hired people who were specifically trained to deal with magical situations. The bands and performers were always the ones trained to handle the dirty work, but if you worked for the label you did… cleanup,” he said evasively. “Of course, a while back we stopped pushing all the fights onto the bands, figured they were doing more harm than good, plus it’s, you know, not a very lucrative business, saving the world. But I’m still trained, and I still keep up with the magical community, even if they tell me to stay out of it,” he shrugged. “I can’t help being curious.”

Patrick stood very still for a moment, trying to take all of that in. It sounded really similar to what they had heard yesterday, from Dave Grohl, but it was still hard to imagine nineties music as a huge magical underworld.

“What the hell were you doing with us in London?” Joe demanded. “You sent us into that fae restaurant knowing full well what was going to happen!”

“I didn’t realize it was a fae restaurant until after you’d already gone in!” he said, holding his hands up. “I’m only human. I’m just as susceptible to charm speak as any other human, even if I’m trained to be more aware. They’re very old, and very powerful, and I didn’t realize the problem until it was too late.”

“And you’re out here today because?”

“Because I’ve gotten fond of you guys!” he groaned, sounding defeated. “I don’t want you to die, and you don’t seem to have any grasp as to how dangerous basilisks are, so I was trying-!”

There was a loud bang coming from the door, and the entire frame shuddered. There was a spitting noise, and a wet plop as something hit the door, and Dan had gone very pale when Patrick turned back around to see him again.
“We have to get out of here!” Dan groaned, and Patrick ran for the window. He took a brief second to stare at the rope in apprehension before grabbing it tight and leaping over the edge of the window, half rappelling down, half simply falling, and ending up falling flat on his ass with some really terrible rope burn on his palms.

The rest of his band followed quickly, and they ran around to the front of the building to get to the car. The school was too quiet behind him, though from the way Andy looked Patrick guessed it was only quiet to him.

They had nearly reached the car when another, old car came screeching down the drive to the school, a rusted, ancient looking station wagon. Before it even came to a complete stop, Shawn flung himself out of the driver’s side and ran up to meet Patrick and the others.

“Hey, Pete, sorry, I just got your message!” he panted, stopping all of them in your tracks. “Listen, I was wrong, okay? You can’t hurt him; I’ll figure out something to do on my own-”

“Get out of the way,” Dan growled, trying to move past him, but Shawn looked up past him at the school building.

“He’s still alive?” Shawn breathed.

“Shawn, do not go in there, he spits venom!” Pete yelled.

“Like a spitting cobra, yeah,” Shawn said. “I know. I know, I shouldn’t have gone to you guys, I panicked. I can take care of this.”

“Take care of this?” Patrick asked, but Shawn ran past them, moving for the building way too fast. Andy started to move forward to grab him, but suddenly stopped himself, holding back as he watched Shawn run into the derelict building.

“Are you just going to let him-?”

“I just have a hunch,” Andy said, pleading.

Patrick stared up at the school. It looked ominous even in the midday sun, and despite the terror he could fear in himself and through the bond in everyone in his band, no one ran in after him.

“What could he do?” Patrick asked Pete quietly, and Pete thought for a minute quietly.

“I have no idea,” Pete said. “But it sort of feels like he needs a minute alone with it?”

Honestly, Patrick had really had it with his band and gut feelings, but he didn’t fight it. It felt like they were stuck waiting for far too long, waiting for something to happen while Dan paced in circles, muttering that they should get out of there while they still could, but no one paid him much attention. Chicago had been oddly quiet, but Patrick would talk to him later.

After much, much too long, Shawn climbed shakily out of the window, his legs unsteady as he stumbled mostly forward, but staggering a little from side to side.

“Dude!” Pete gasped, running forward, and holding his arms out to steady the teenager, jumping back suddenly when he got a closer look. Even from a distance, if Patrick paid attention, he could see that there was something seriously wrong with Shawn’s face. It looked like his eyes were closed at first, but upon further inspection, they were covered with a white, foamy substance. Like venom.
“It’s okay, it’s okay,” Shawn said, his voice calmer and more together than Patrick could remember hearing it. “Pete, right? It’s okay.”

“Did it spit at you?” Pete asked.

“Yeah, but he didn’t mean to hurt me,” Shawn said, and Patrick’s breath caught suddenly in his chest as he saw a shadow moving behind the empty window, lurking just behind the opening. “Come on, come on out,” Shawn cooed as he turned around, rubbing his fingers together to make a quiet rubbing noise.

Patrick slammed his eyes shut before he heard Shawn laughing.

“You can look, guys, I covered up his eyes.”

Against his better judgement, Patrick slowly opened his eyes, and saw that there really were two patches of black cloth fastened over the eyes of a snake. The basilisk was a pale brown, much smaller and smoother than Patrick had been imagining, quite long but still not much thicker than a telephone pole. Most surprisingly, its head was hooded, like an oversized cobra. It let out a low hiss, still menacing, but almost as though it wasn’t intended to be, as if Patrick could tell the intentions of snakes.

Shawn stretched out his hand, running it down the snake’s head and smiling to himself.

“He doesn’t want to hurt me,” Shawn said in a loving voice. “He’s just lonely. If I can’t see, he’s not putting me in any danger. It works out perfect! He can’t hurt me, but he wants to help me, and we’ll go move someplace else, someplace far away. I’ll make sure he doesn’t kill people, he’ll make sure I’m taken care of, I just. I don’t think you need to worry about either of us anymore.”

“Are- sorry- are you running away with a snake?” Pete asked, blinking rapidly. Shawn smiled widely as he nodded.

“There isn’t anybody for me here, and I mean, he remembered that I used to take care of him. I just wanted a friend, and sure, I didn’t expect this, but,” Shawn shrugged. “I can teach him not to kill, and I can make this work. Start over someplace… warmer.”

“That’s not-!” Dan began, and Andy interrupted.

“I think it’s a great idea,” Andy said. “I mean, I assume he can hunt for himself, so if you’re sure you’ll be okay?”

“I’ll be fine,” Shawn said. “I think we both need each other at the moment. He’ll be my seeing-eye snake,” he said with a laugh.

Shawn then ran forward and threw his arms around each of them in turn, hugging them tightly. When he hugged Patrick, he could smell the sickly sweet venom, feel the heat radiating from his eyes, and he almost gagged.

“Thank you all,” he said. “Especially you, Andy. I overheard you and you were right. He didn’t deserve to die. Nobody did, actually,” he laughed again, sounding elated. “Don’t follow us, okay?”

Patrick stared off into the distance as the two of them took off, his brain not properly computing.

“That… was… without a doubt… the weirdest shit I have ever seen or heard of in my life,
and that’s counting the time mermaids vivisected my girlfriend,” Pete said.

“Hey, now, you know what they say,” Joe said, his face contorted into a strange expression, “Nothing quite like the bond between a boy and his… mythical snake beast.”

“Yeah, I wanna go home,” Patrick said, giving Chicago a tiny smile that Chicago returned even more halfheartedly.

“Finally,” Dan said as they piled into the car. Pete got a strangely amused look on his face as they climbed in, turning to face Dan.

“So, Korean Tom Cruise,” he said, making Dan roll his eyes. “Since you’re helping us out with magic and stuff now… what can you tell us about the Killers?”

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so, I have so much I want to say and no idea how to say it. No matter how much I tweak this chapter I CANNOT get satisfied with it, but it's already over a week late, so here it is anyway? Idk, it felt more like I had a few drabble ideas that I just stitched together into one franken-chapter of a filler, so sorry that after all this wait it was still a little disappointing. That said, a finally took care of a lot of plot important stuff, and more important, there are ONLY TWO EPISODES LEFT IN THE SEASON. AH!!!! So the actual May chapter will come in a few weeks, and then the finale in June, and we're onto season three???? It feels so fast, but I'm really excited!

Anyway, the last month has... honestly kind of blown, but my personal life really isn't the issue here. No matter how crazy life gets, this fic kind of anchors me, and having such incredible, dedicated fans and readers definitely keeps me going on some of my worst days, so thanks so much as always for reviewing, leaving kudos, telling me your headcannons, and keeping me in line about actually publishing this. It means the world to me, and hopefully things'll get a little simpler for me later in the summer.

As always, thanks so much for reading!

Chapter Title by the Foo Fighters (I couldn't resist)
Chapter Summary

When Ryan discovers a lead as to where The Killers might keep their base, some of them want to pursue it, and others would rather wait and prepare. But Brandon Flowers doesn't like it when people encroach on his turf.

Chapter Notes

Hey! Sorry I'm late (again) and would any of you believe me if I say this is the last time? I wouldn't believe me. Anyway, warning ahead for blood, violence, excessive use of bold and italics, teen angst, and an almost sex scene in the very beginning.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Oh my God-!”

“Jesus, you’re beautiful.”

This wasn’t where Patrick thought he would be a year ago. A year ago, he would have predicted for himself a life very different to the one he was already living, a life with moderate success for his band, never really moving outside of hipster circles, maybe giving him a push in the direction of being a studio musician one day. He would have predicted getting a real place for himself and Anna, maybe another dog for the two of them. As for magic, he would have predicted that, if anything, the monster fighting would have died down. Even if, after imagining thousands of scenarios, he could picture a single one where his best friend was a sex symbol that sulked at him from every tabloid cover in the supermarket and where he was planning a fight to the death with Brandon Flowers and where he had broken up with Anna, he could never fathom being with someone like Chicago.

“Patrick, fuck- yeah-!”

Not that Patrick had any complaints about being with Chicago.

With agonizingly slow movement, Patrick dragged his tongue down Chicago’s chest, keeping his eyes trained on Chicago’s face the entire time, watching him contort as he groaned. Chicago wasn’t like anyone Patrick had ever been with before. Just making out with him was incredibly gratifying because Chicago had absolutely no reservations.

Patrick had been deeply uncertain of how they were going to work out sex when their relationship began. At first, he had been unwilling to approach the subject, letting Chicago take the lead in everything. The first few days they had just kissed, tugging at each other’s shirt collars and kissing only the other’s face like awkward teenagers, Patrick yanking his hands back whenever he stopped thinking long enough to approach Chicago’s hips.

 Mostly, Chicago seemed content with this. He had so many other things he wanted to do,
that sometimes he fell asleep after only smashing his lips into Patrick’s once, completely exhausted. They had hardly any time alone when Fall Out Boy went on the Black Clouds and Underdogs tour, so stolen kisses and hands held under tables were all they could manage. But just like he had when he still was a teenager and doing more was out of the question, Patrick was starting to get desperate for more.

After moving back into the apartment at the end of the tour and after the debacle in Pennsylvania, they had taken Chicago to the top of the Sears tower, assuming it was the heart of the city, and to Patrick’s relief, it hadn’t worked. Neither had the sculptures in Millennium Park, or Lake Shore Drive, or the front windows of Marshall Fields. After a few days, the rest of his band went home to rest up, and Patrick and Chicago had a sudden abundance of alone time.

In the time since they had been left alone, Patrick and Chicago had an unspoken but pretty firmly implemented policy of not wearing shirts inside the apartment, for ease of touching the other, but Patrick was far from prepared to go further than that.

Patrick paused when he made it to the edge of Chicago’s jeans, riding low on his hipbones, and he abruptly sat up, pecking Chicago on the cheek and moving back. Chicago tried to kiss him again, and when Patrick didn’t respond at once, finally pulled back, both of their lips tacky and wet, and stared at Patrick without saying the question out loud.

“What?” Patrick asked.

“Not to make you uncomfortable or anything,” Chicago said, “but I’m starting to notice from TV and books and stuff that it’s considered a kind of horrific oddity if a man makes it to thirty and has never had sex, and I am two-hundred. So I was wondering why we’re still, you know, dressed all the time.”

“I don’t know if you’ve noticed,” Patrick said, crossing his arms self-consciously, “But this is incredibly undressed for me. I mean, I don’t do this with everyone-”

“Do you want to have sex with me?” Chicago asked, his eyes huge and clear. His extreme transparency was sometimes eerie to Patrick, uncomfortable, and he wasn’t sure how to respond immediately, taking a minute to think in silence.

“I don’t know,” he said at length. “I mean, yes, obviously I want to, but I have some reservations.”

Rather than responding, Chicago raised one eyebrow, and Patrick sighed.

“Okay, well, for one thing, as you mentioned, you’re way too old for me,” Patrick half laughed. “Or way too young for me. I’m not quite sure which.”

“I look like I’m about the right age,” Chicago said, “I feel like it.”

“Okay, well, also, you’re a man,” Patrick said.

“I’m a city.”

“A city that looks a lot like a man! And has a dick! And that’s not- I mean I’m not- look, I’m not gay,” Patrick said, shaking his head like he was trying to shake water out of his hair. “I don’t know what I am. I mean, I like girls. I’m sexually attracted to women, and I thought that was all, but apparently I’m attracted to women and cities that look like men? Which makes me wonder if maybe I’m attracted to men and if I am then I have no idea what I’m supposed to do with that information and I’ve never looked at guys before and that’s all really confusing and if we have sex I’ll have no
idea what to do because I’ve never been with a guy so it’ll probably suck and more than that if we do this then that makes it real.” Patrick said everything in one huge breath, and then looked up at Chicago in dismay.

“I want this to be real,” Chicago said softly. It was nothing close to what Patrick had meant, but somehow the words struck him. “And you don’t have to label yourself right now, or ever, if you don’t want to. You can just be attracted to certain people.”

“That makes me sound like a douchey college girl,” Patrick said with a hollow laugh. His arguments felt weaker and weaker. “I don’t just sleep around. That’s never been me. Everyone told me after things happened with Anna that I should rebound with someone, anyone, but I can’t do that. I can’t sleep with just anyone.”

“I’m not just anyone.”

“That makes it scarier.”

“Look,” Chicago said, gripping Patrick’s arm tight enough to be strong and reassuring, but not painfully. “I’m not going to make you do anything. I just figured, you know, if you want to, you should know that I’m up for it. I mean, when will I get the chance to have sex again?” he laughed. Patrick felt like someone had injected ice directly into his blood even as Chicago laughed. Because that, more than anything, was the real reason Patrick wasn’t and would never be ready. He hadn’t had to think about it before they had met Dave Grohl, but now he realized, very violently, that he wasn’t going to get to keep Chicago.

Then maybe, a miniscule voice in his head whispered, you should enjoy him while he’s here.

Patrick stared at Chicago for a long time, drinking in the soft, gently rising planes of his chest, the soft, curly hair that fell nearly to his shoulders, still tangled from where Patrick’s fists had pulled on it. He looked at Chicago’s soft lips, probably still tender and sore from all the kissing.

Patrick pushed Chicago roughly back down, and picked up where he had left off.

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“You want to what now?” Gabe asked, staring at Joe in disbelief.

“Dominate you,” Joe said.

“Kinky,” Gabe said, “but you’re not really my type.”

Joe rolled his eyes.

“I told you,” he said, “It’s a wolf pack thing. I give a command, you obey it, I’m giving full access to draw from your spirit to defeat Brandon Flowers and stop him from killing us and enslaving Panic! At The Disco. You were sent an email about this.”

“I definitely didn’t get an email,” the tall guy with the fluffy looking hair behind Gabe said. Joe threw Pete a desperate look, one that he hoped conveyed his internal feelings, namely: who are these weird strangers and why do I have to add them to our pack?

“I sent it to the email you gave me, Ryland!” Pete cried, sounding frustrated. “Jesus, Gabe explained magic to all of you, right?”
The five of them nodded, and Joe resisted the urge to sit down and groan out loud. He wanted to go home and sleep for at least a year, but first, he wanted to cut each and every single intruder out of his head. They were driving him crazy and keeping him up and no silence ever felt silent anymore.

“He mentioned it,” the girl said, glancing between Joe, Pete, and Gabe in disbelief. “But I mean, he also mentioned a giant cobra, so we assumed the vampires were also a peyote kind of thing.”

“Oh fucking Christ,” Joe groaned. He shifted to a werewolf and back again, fast enough that he barely felt the pain. His shirt slipped off during the shift, and he quickly threw it back on, but luckily no one in Cobra Starship seemed to have noticed the less than elegant transformation, as they were all too busy screaming their heads off.

“Can we please just get this over with?” Joe half whimpered, already exhausted.

“I’m not sure how I feel about sharing my spirit with you,” Gabe said hesitantly.

“Oh for fuck’s sake, I’m Jewish too, asshole!” Joe yelled. “Come on, we help you with your magic problems, right?”

“No!” Gabe said. “I don’t get into magic problems like you guys seem to. I just help you with yours. Remember the vampires?”

“Oh, don’t act like you didn’t have fun,” Joe snapped.

“That isn’t the point,” Gabe said, “The point is—”

“Oh shut up!” Joe cried, and, to his horror, though Gabe kept opening and closing his mouth, no more sound came from it. Panicked, Joe held up his hands.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean- you can talk again,” Joe said weakly, and Gabe gulped down air, but stared at Joe without saying a word. Everyone was staring at Joe, and he felt his face burning as he searched his mind for the connection to Gabe. He could feel it, distantly, but there were so many people in his pack. He could feel his band, and Panic!, everyone from The Academy Is, Marie, his parents, Korean Tom Cruise (the nickname, to his dismay, had stuck), Dirty, most of Fuck City, every single musician Pete had ever introduced him to, and a few fans that had approached the band after shows with displays of their own supernatural abilities. It was nearly impossible to distinguish between people anymore, after the long tour.

“I feel weird,” Gabe said, looking slightly green and not meeting Joe’s eyes.

“I’m sorry, I can take it back, probably!” Joe said, distraught.

“No, no, it’s cool, I just wasn’t expecting… I mean, I feel so connected to everything all of a sudden,” Gabe said, staring at his own hands. Joe shrugged.

“It’s like I’ve been, I don’t know, plugged into something,” Gabe said, looking up at Joe with wide eyes.

“It’s just temporary,” Joe said firmly. “As soon as we fix this, I’m gonna figure out how to sever the connection.”

“What does it feel like for you?” Gabe asked.
“Weird,” Joe said, and it wasn’t a lie. It didn’t come close to what it really felt like, like being furious and unable to hit something, like Bruce Banner in the split second before he turned into the Hulk, but all the time. There weren’t textbooks about being a werewolf, but Joe was positive that packs were absolutely not supposed to be this big.

“Do you want us, to you know, join up?” one of the guys standing behind Gabe asked in a small, tentative voice. Joe had been introduced to them, but he couldn’t for the life of him remember their names. His head was buzzing too loudly. He was tempted to tell him no, to say he had more than enough, but he knew he couldn’t. Brandon was too powerful, too much of a threat to take chances with.

“Yeah,” Joe said, and stared the man down. “Kneel.”

Joe finished with all five of them in under a minute, and gave them a weak “see you later” before throwing himself back inside the passenger seat of the car, gesturing for Pete to take the wheel.

Pete sat down next to him a few minutes later, gripping the wheel and exhaling deeply. The car was Joe’s, a recent purchase and a small luxury that he allowed himself. It still smelled like new leather, and it reached the kind of speeds that couldn’t be legally reached on any roads Joe could find in the continental US. He loved it, and the fact that he wasn’t driving it was probably part of the reason Pete looked so concerned.

“Are you okay?” Pete asked at length.

“Tired,” Joe said, and Pete snorted.

“Well that’s a lie,” he said, and Joe rolled his eyes.

“I don’t like this,” he said, and Pete gave him an odd look.

“It’s too much!” Joe said. “I wasn’t even trying when I told Gabe to shut up! What if I’m in a bad mood and tell some homeless guy to get out of my way and bam! He’s in the pack too? We don’t even know if this is going to work!”

“We almost totally know it’s going to work,” Pete said in a voice that was almost reassuring. “From everything I’ve managed to read on pack dynamics—”

“And what have you managed to read?” Joe asked scornfully. “Harry Potter fanfiction? I mean, god, it’s so unfair! How come on Buffy and Supernatural and Charmed there’s always some helpful ancient tome with the answer to their problem, pre-solved by some monks in the 15th century or something? Why don’t we get ancient tomes? Did you get that book from a fucking New Age shop?” Joe asked, pointing accusingly to a glossy, paperback book with a bright full moon on the cover.

“There’s nothing wrong with new age magic!” Pete said defensively. “And hey, sometimes there are ancient texts! Murmur was in the Lesser Key of Solomon!”

“You found that through a Google search! We have no idea what we’re doing! We’re betting all of our lives on a hunch!” Joe felt his voice rising in spite of himself. “Is it too late to apologize and just let Panic! fend for themselves?”

Pete was silent for a moment, his fingers drumming nervously on the wheel while he thought.
“I mean, technically, you’re the alpha, so you really shouldn’t be asking me for permission—hey!”

Joe had thought he had punched Pete only lightly on the arm, but apparently it was harder than he had thought. He thought about apologizing, but quickly thought better of it.

“It just feels,” he continued, his voice a forced calm, “like we’re flying blind here. I mean, come on, I don’t know anything about being a werewolf. Not really. I don’t know anything about making a pack. But I’m way too strong all of a sudden, and I don’t like it. It feels…”

“Like you’re going to explode?” Pete asked.

“Yeah,” Joe said.

“Still fae,” Pete said, giving Joe a small, sad smile. He twisted the key in the ignition, and pulled away, the car’s wheels crunching gravel loudly. “Look, I know this can’t be particularly fun or easy, but as soon as we take care of Brandon, you can sever the connection.” Pete paused, biting his lip, and focusing on the road ahead of him, pointedly ignoring Joe’s gaze. “Also… If you want to find out more about wolves, do you think you could ask…?” he paused again, still not looking at Joe. “Do you think you could ask the wolf that turned you?”

Joe rather prided himself on the fact that his lips did not immediately turn up in a sneer, and that he didn’t outwardly snarl.

“No offense, Pete,” Joe said, keeping his voice completely level and devoid of emotion threatening to bubble over in the form of an angry howl, “But I’d prefer the worst case scenario of fighting the Killers to talking to her again.”

“Just a suggestion,” Pete said meekly, cowering under the sudden emotion in the car. Joe resisted the urge to roll his eyes.

It wasn’t, strictly speaking, a bad idea, though. Pete, thankfully, went silent as they drove forward, but as Joe stared at the cold window his forehead was pressed against, watching as the countryside and telephone poles raced by, he started thinking about it. It wasn’t as though it would be hard to get her number again. It wasn’t as though she had any sort of power over him anymore. He was so strong, stronger than she could ever dream of, and even though he didn’t want to talk to her, wanted to avoid her for the rest of his life, if she could somehow help…

No, he decided, clenching his fists even as he thought, no, he could handle this alone. After all, it was unlikely she had ever delved this deeply into magic either.

“Who next?” Joe asked wearily after a couple of miles had raced by.

“Actually, I was thinking we could maybe go to my house,” Pete said, looking almost sheepish. “I talked to my mom about this, and my family is willing to, you know, be part of this.”

“Really?” Joe said, raising his eyebrows. “All of them?”

“Well, not like, my extended family or anything,” Pete said, “but my mom and dad and Andrew and Hilary, yeah,” he shrugged. “You cool with that?”

“Sure,” Joe sighed. “Why not?”

Joe kept moving through the day in a haze, feeling his veins buzzing with something that felt almost like adrenaline. It no longer took any effort to add new people to the pack, which still
concerned Joe. What if he made a demand of someone he was ordering fast food from and added a random McDonald’s worker to the inside of his head?

After adding the Wentz’s to the pack, Dale insisted that both of them stay for dinner, and while Joe was sitting pensive in the living room, snickering at old photos of Pete, he heard Ryan’s voice ringing out in his head again.

_Are you busy?_

Joe wasn’t entirely sure how to reply, but he settled for thinking as loudly as he could.

_Why do you never just call me?_

_Hey, you’re doing it!_

_Fuck off, Ryan._

_No, listen, this is important. I just had a vision, and I think you’ll want to hear about it. I know where Brandon is._

_Yeah, the whole world does. He’s in a rock band._

_No, I know where his lair is. We could catch him off guard! Or, if he’s out of town, we could figure out more about him!_

_Aren’t we waiting till time runs out for this confrontation?_

_Why not do it on our terms?_

“Fuck off,” Joe growled aloud. Pete turned to him, giving him a concerned look, and Joe shook his head.

“What’s up?” Pete asked nervously when they left his house, too many hours later.


“Lair, I guess,” Pete said, sounding distracted. “Where is it? This is huge!”

“Does it really matter?” Joe asked. “I mean, we have until September, and I don’t see why we should go there early.”

“We could find out something about their weaknesses if we go scope it out!” Pete said eagerly. Joe rolled his eyes, plopping into the driver’s seat and shooting off into the dusky night.

“You sound just like Ryan,” he sighed. “What do you expect to find out?”

“We won’t know until we get there?” Pete suggested.

“Can I go home?” Joe sighed. Pete scrunched up his face in apology.

“I kind of told Patrick we would stop by his place.”

“Are you two talking again?” Joe asked, trying to focus on something else as he switched lanes in defeat.
“We were never not talking,” Pete said defensively.

“Sorry, are you guys not screaming at each other anymore?”

“I’m not mad at him!” Pete said.

“You act like it,” Joe said. He wasn’t being antagonistic, but was mildly curious. Ever since he’d first added Patrick to the pack, he’d felt the two of them pushing apart. Magnets that refused to be next to one another, which was the opposite of the way they had always acted. Maybe he was just more concerned than usual because it was a pack thing.

“I’m just worried about him,” Pete said.

“Why?” Joe asked.

Pete kicked his feet up onto the dashboard, slamming his head back against the headrest, exhaling slowly.

“I just think,” he said slowly, “That he’s getting too attached to Chicago. I think he’s going to do badly when Chicago has to go back.”

“Oh, you’re jealous,” Joe said immediately, and then the car swerved slightly, his eyes widening when he realized what he’d said out loud. He cursed all the stupid pack business, how tired he was, and how gone all his filters were.

“Jealous?” Pete sputtered. “Why would you think I’m jealous!”

“You know, because Patrick’s spending all his time with Chicago?” Joe said. “I wouldn’t worry about it, he’s still your best friend.”

“Right!” Pete squeaked. “I mean, I’m not- you really think I’m jealous?”

“Duh,” Joe said, almost bored as they drew closer to the brightly lit skyline of Chicago. “I mean, I get it, you and Patrick have your weirdly close best friend thing, but you’ve got plenty of other friends. Plus, you act kind of distant around the two of them. You’re both really possessive about your friendship, but I mean, you’re always kind of possessive in relationships,” Joe laughed, and gave Pete a gentle smile. “Don’t worry, you’re still his favorite.”

“Thanks,” Pete said tightly, not looking particularly relieved.

By the time they reached Patrick’s apartment, it was pitch black outside, and Joe was exhausted, as well as kind of hungry again. It took way too long to drive anywhere in Chicago, and Joe decided that if he had to be a mythical creature, he at least deserved wings.

They had to be buzzed up to Patrick’s apartment, and the doorman glared at their scruffy looking appearance when they walked in. It was too grand, Joe thought, and he wondered how Patrick, usually wearing ripped jeans that hadn’t been washed in weeks, who though Pete’s house was too rich to feel comfortable with, could stand living in a building with a lobby that looked like it was exclusively made out of marble.

However, when Patrick kicked the door open, it looked nothing like Joe remembered, finally looking lived in, with something cooking on the stove top and throw blankets on all the couches. Lived in, but not lived in by Patrick, evident by the cleanliness of the whole place. It was Hollywood messy, with a few cans of beer open on the coffee table, but tiny, decorative pillows still in place on the couch.
“Hey guys!” Chicago said, pulling Joe into a too tight hug, as Joe was starting to get used to from the city. “Hungry? I’m making enchiladas.”

“I’m sure Patrick’s mom is thrilled that someone in his apartment knows how to read a cookbook,” Pete said, and Patrick sighed.

“He’s discovered the joys of cooking,” Patrick said in a pained voice, and Joe laughed. It felt homey and warm, and it was next to impossible to feel moody with Chicago bubbling along next to him.

“Actually, can you call Andy?” Pete asked Patrick. “There’s something we need to talk about.”

Patrick nodded, a little cooler than usual, but there were too many people in Joe’s head for him to zero in on Patrick to figure out what was going on there.

“Is now a good time?” Patrick asked Andy dubiously, while Pete mouthed “speaker phone” at him.

“Why?” Andy’s garbled voice came out of Patrick’s phone, sounding wary.

“Pete and Joe are here,” Patrick said, and Andy sighed a long, crackling sigh.

“New plan,” Andy said, “If the band isn’t doing stuff, we’re not doing magic stuff.”

“Ryan found out where the Killers, um, lair is!” Pete said. Patrick gave him an annoyed look. The other line was silent for a long time, before finally:

“So?"

“So we should look into it! Get the upper hand!” Pete said.

“Look, we have a plan, we have almost the entire summer to ourselves before we have to go back to recording, and I have a kid. Can we just let it rest for a little while?”

“I’m with Andy,” Patrick said. “What’s wrong with the plan we have now?”

“What’s wrong with the plan we have now is that we’re giving Brandon way too much time to figure out what we’re doing and counteract it!”

“We don’t have any proof of that,” Joe pointed out.

“You don’t think we should check it out at all?” Pete asked, openly frustrated now.

“I think,” Andy began, his voice slow and reassuring, even through the phone line, “That we should wait on it. We can go look later, but just because we have new information doesn’t mean we should go tearing off to Vegas right now, okay?”

“Sounds fair,” Patrick said, with a steely glint in his eyes like he was daring Pete to contradict him. Joe nodded in agreement, and Pete shrugged, his expression growing cold.

“Fine,” he said, and Joe patted his arm.

“We can check it out later, okay?” he said, while Patrick said his goodbyes and told Andy to give their best to Carmilla.
“Yeah, okay,” Pete said, still looking disappointed. It bugged Joe, but not enough to change his mind.

Eventually, Pete took off, and Joe asked if he could stay at Patrick’s place. It wasn’t until he was almost asleep that he wondered why, if Chicago was still there, the guest room was empty.

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It had taken a year and a half, but Andy could finally stare at the tiny human in front of him on the high chair and not see her as a stranger. Carmilla clapped her tiny hands together, and Andy felt a tiny pang of something in his chest, not the pain that he used to feel, but a feeling similar to fondness. Like extra concentrated fondness.

His mom had taught him how to make juice boxes out of blood, and she still had her nursing job, so procuring a little extra blood wasn’t too much of a difficulty for her, especially not with vampire compulsion. He also tried feeding her baby formula, because he was pretty sure she needed breast milk, but she didn’t seem to like it much. She was, however, very much taken with pureed bananas and carrots, which Andy decided counted as a win. She didn’t look unhealthy, so he didn’t spend a great amount of nights lying awake in worry about her nutrition.

There was an entire hidden room at the Fuck City house filled with Fisher-Price toys that all of his friends had sent in. The baby’s-first-musical-instruments Patrick gave her remained largely untouched, but she loved smearing finger paints on, well, everything. Her favorite activity these days was grabbing tubs of the stuff and swirling it around Andy’s tattoos, giggling whenever some of it got splattered on his clothes or stuck in his hair. To Andy’s deep seated surprise, he didn’t actually mind this playtime so much.

To Andy’s even greater surprise, no one else at Fuck City minded her either. Possibly it was the fact that she cried much less than the average baby, as blood could almost always make her go peacefully silent, but Andy’s friends went above and beyond tolerance. Though Matt was definitely her favorite, and the feeling was mutual, all of them loved the idea of raising a kid together, in some weird kind of way. They all understood her special dietary needs, after a little bit of awkward explanation.

Though she was learning how to talk pretty quickly, Carmilla still had trouble with her “m” and “n” sounds, so when the door opened, she yelled “BAT!”

“Hey kid,” Matt said, ruffling her tiny, bright orange curls. “You getting paint all over the expensive-ass floors?”

“Yes, yes, yes!” Carmilla yelled, clapping her hands together and splattering the kitchen with bright blue paint. Matt made a face, sticking out his tongue and groaning, a tiny blue splotch on the corner of his lips.

“Nice one, Carm,” Andy laughed, kissing her forehead as she giggled. “You should go give Matt a hug!”

“No, no, dammit Andy!” Matt growled as Carmilla threw her sticky, paint covered arms around his legs. He sighed, lifting her up as he gave up, swinging her up over his shoulders.

“You having fun being the stay at home mom for once?” Matt asked. Andy rolled his eyes.

“Lots,” he said primly. “Do you miss it?”

“All the time,” Matt laughed, tickling Carmilla on her perch on his shoulders and sending
her nearly into hysterics with giggles. “I can’t believe you made me like the rugrat.”

“Me either,” Andy admitted. “I also never thought I’d think of spending time with a little kid as peace and quiet, but here we are.”

“Life’s a lot simpler without battling the dark forces all the time?” Matt asked.

“A lot simpler,” Andy agreed. “Even so…”

“Yeah, yeah, you miss being a super hero,” Matt said. “Don’t worry, I’m sure a crisis will come up soon.”

As soon as he finished talking, Andy’s phone lit up blue and started ringing.

“Fuck,” Andy groaned, and opened it in a hurry, dreading the worst. “Hello?”

“Hey, have you heard from Pete?” Joe asked.

“Why?” Andy asked immediately.

“Well, I mean, I haven’t heard from him or anyone in Panic! for a couple of days, and I always worry when none of them are bugging me,” Joe said. “Probably it’s nothing, I was just curious. And, I mean, maybe he’s just sulking because we didn’t side with him a couple days ago.”

“Mmm,” Andy said, his head already spinning. It was probably nothing, he tried to tell himself. He couldn’t lie effectively to himself at all.

“Anyway, lemme know if you hear from him?” Joe asked, his voice the same fake, forced calm that Andy felt in his head.

“Uh huh,” Andy said, feeling a sinking deep in his chest. He hung up and set the phone gently down on the counter before letting out a long, harsh string of swear words.

“What’s wrong?” Matt asked.

“Pete’s missing,” Andy said, kissed Carmilla on the side of the head, and ran into the other room, turning on his computer to try and find the old email where Pete had sent him all of the phone numbers of the kids from Panic!. In the meantime, he called Pete, and after it went to voicemail, called him twice more.

Joe really might not have been that worried yet, but Andy absolutely was, and if there was anything wrong, he needed to get on top of it immediately.

“Hey, um, this is Ryan, leave a message after the beep, I guess.”

“Son of a bitch!” Andy yelled.

“Bish?” Carmilla asked, tugging on Andy’s shorts. Andy was already calling Brendon, but his phone went straight to voicemail without even ringing.

Getting desperate, he called Spencer’s number, and when no one answered again, he sighed and dialed the number left for Brent.

“Hello?” Brent asked, sounding like he had just woken up. Then again, he sort of always had sounded like he had just woken up.
“Hey, Brent, it’s Andy. From Fall Out Boy,” Andy clarified, feeling suddenly overcome by awkwardness.

“Yeah, I know,” Brent said, sounding sour. “Did you want something?”

“Have you heard from Brendon or Ryan or Spencer recently?” Andy asked.

“I’m not sure where you’ve been, but we don’t really talk anymore, no,” Brent said.

“Have you heard from Pete?” Andy asked, abandoning any pretense of being polite.

“Why would I?” Brent asked.

“Brandon Flowers?” Andy asked desperately.

“Actually, yeah,” Brent said begrudgingly, “He said that since I was human and out of the band, I didn’t have anything to worry about anymore.”

“When did you talk to him?” Andy asked.

“He and some girl cornered me in a dark alley last night and demanded to know why I wasn’t with the rest of my band. I told him I wasn’t in the band anymore, and he said that I was no longer in any debt to him, and he took off.”

“That’s all?” Andy croaked.

“Yes.”

Brent hung up, and Andy sighed, long and low. Matt had Carmilla braced against his hip, and he was giving Andy a strange look.

“I think,” Andy said, looking up at Matt, “That Pete’s in trouble, but I can’t prove it.”

“What are you going to do?” Matt asked.

“I’m going to Vegas,” Andy said, nodding slowly as he decided.

“Right now? Do you have any actual proof that Pete is in danger?” Matt asked.

“No,” Andy said, “But I have a feeling he is, and better safe than sorry, right?”

“What are you actually planning to do?” Matt asked, while Andy whirled around the room, throwing shirts haphazardly into an overnight bag. Andy gave Matt a pleading look.

“I don’t know,” Andy admitted. “But it just- it sounds like Brandon has them.”

“Pete?” Matt asked.

“Pete and Ryan and Brendon and Spencer, maybe Jon? I don’t know, but I just- it sounds bad.”

“What sounds bad? Why are you so freaked out?”

“Because!” Andy was panicking, unable to properly vocalize his thoughts. Because he felt responsible for Pete, and for the band full of teenagers. Because he had been the cause of his friends getting hurt before, by not being there, and not doing enough to help them. And just the thought of
any of them being taken again was enough to drive Andy over the edge.

“Because if there’s anything I can do to help them then I have to do it,” Andy said.

“They might not be in any danger,” Matt said, but only halfhearted, like he had already given up.

Andy shoved his toothbrush and toothpaste into the side pocket of the bag, zipped it up, and kissed Carmilla on the top of her head.

“I know,” he said, “And you’re probably right. But I have to know for sure. And I have to try and help.”

Matt nodded tightly, and Andy ran out of the house, and immediately started driving towards the airport.

He drummed his fingers anxiously on the wheel while he called Joe, letting the phone ring as he drove. It took Joe far too long to answer.

“What’s up?”

“I think Brandon has them,” Andy said. He sped up, the gas revving to add emphasis to his words.

“Shit, why?”

“Talked to Brent. Brandon asked him why he wasn’t with the rest of his band, sounded pissed. None of the rest of them are answering.”

Joe swore colorfully on the other line.

“I’m going out to Vegas. Wanna meet me?”

“Yeah,” Joe sounded like he was groaning, “I’m on my way out there. Call Patrick?”

“On it,” Andy said, slamming his phone shut and then back open, trying to open Patrick’s contact information while still keeping his eyes on the road. He swore and slammed his wrists against the sides of the wheel when he dropped the phone on the floor next to his feet, unable to pick it up until he hit another red light.

“Hello?” Patrick asked, probably having just woken up.

“Patrick!” Andy said. “Listen, I can’t get ahold of Pete or anyone in Panic!, and I think Brandon might have them. Joe and I are heading to Vegas, wanna meet us there?”

“Oh, you have got to be kidding me.”

“Don’t I wish,” Andy said. “Call me when you’re out there, I’ll get us a hotel.”

Patrick hung up, which Andy took as confirmation that he was on his way, and he kept driving as quickly as he could.

The workers at the airport seemed shocked that someone wanted to buy a ticket there as opposed to getting one online and ahead of time, but luckily McCarran International Airport in Las Vegas was large enough that there were a lot of flights leaving for there, leaving Andy with only a two hour wait in the airport, running his hands through his hair and trying to think of plans. What
would make the most sense, he thought, would be Brandon operating out of some sort of recording studio, or potentially an office for the label.

Of course, the main problem with that was that The Killers were signed to the same label as Fall Out Boy, and all of Island’s headquarters were in Las Angeles, not Las Vegas. Still, Andy wasn’t willing to look in an entirely different state. If Brandon was to be believed, he only had jurisdiction over Las Vegas, which meant that he would have to put his base there.

Where in Las Vegas, then? Andy knew nothing about Brandon Flowers’ childhood, and why would he? Pete had been right; they did need to know more about their enemy. For all Andy knew, Brandon could have secretly had a Batman background and lived in a manor house where he kept all of his magical servants, his magical slaves, made up of the whole Las Vegas magical population.

The whole time he waited in the airport, the whole plane ride, all the way to the hotel, and the whole time Andy paced in his hotel room, his was antsy and worked up, and by the time Joe, Patrick, and Chicago showed up, he felt crazy and his nerves were fried.

“Any news?” Patrick asked, and Andy shook his head tersely.

“I’ve got an idea, but I need your help,” Joe said, shoving Andy’s things unceremoniously off the edge of the bed and sitting cross legged on it, looking up at Andy with intense concentration. “If Ryan won’t or can’t answer his phone, I can think of another way we can communicate.”

“He can talk to you in his head,” Andy remembered.

“Works two ways,” Joe said, “I’ve just never tried it on my own before.”

“What do you want us to do?” Patrick asked.

“Help me focus,” Joe demanded. He patted the muted, earthy tones of the bedspread next to him, and Patrick and Andy sat on either side of him, with Chicago hesitantly sitting across from him.

“How do we help you focus?” Patrick asked after a moment of quiet.

“Oh, fuck if I know,” Joe laughed. “Send me focusing energy or some other fae bullshit? Um, focus on Ryan so that you can help me find him.”

Andy wasn’t sure what Joe meant by finding Ryan, but he grabbed Joe’s outstretched hand on one side and Chicago’s on the other, and he focused with all his might on Ryan’s face, on the sound of his voice, on every detail he could conjure up about him. A moment or two passed in silence like this on the hotel bed before Joe let out a quiet gasp, his hand closing tighter over Andy’s. Andy kept focusing on Ryan, but after a moment or so of this, Joe ripped away from Andy.

“Son of a bitch!” he yelled, fuming.

“What is it? What’s wrong? Are they hurt?” Patrick asked.

“No!” Joe snarled. “They’re all fine, they just turned off their phones because apparently exploring this place was too important to be interrupted.
“So they’re all fine?” Andy asked wearily.

“Unfortunately,” Joe muttered.

“So where are they?” Patrick asked.

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The real punchline to all of this, Joe thought, was that he had spent all those hours trying to figure out what kind of place Brandon Flowers would have a base at in Las Vegas before being told they were in a casino. Of fucking course they were in a casino. What else would make sense in Las Vegas?

Even once he made that discovery though, it was still kind of intimidating to walk up to the colossal building that was Caesars Palace and try to look like he even remotely knew what he was doing there.

The entirety of Panic! at the Disco, accompanied by Pete, were sitting outside, lurking around the fountains at the entrance. Any time a worker walked up to them, Pete said something with a flash of gold in his eyes that made them walk away. Brendon appeared, from a distance, to be leaning further and further back like he was falling asleep in the fountain, but on closer inspection, Joe saw that he was simply trying to see how far he could lean back before he fell headfirst in the fountain, letting the back of his head get soaked before he would sit up again, laughing.

“Hey!” Joe yelled, storming up to them. “What the fuck?”

“What?” Pete asked, pushing his glasses up on top of his head. “You said you didn’t want to look into this, so-”

“We thought you guys were kidnapped! Or dead!” Joe ranted, sounding even to himself frighteningly like his mother. “What the hell? You couldn’t answer your phones?”

“We forgot?” Brendon shrugged, looking happy and unconcerned.

“What happened was I saw the Killers coming out of a secret hidden entrance and into a casino,” Ryan explained, “It looked ritzy and all, but I couldn’t tell what casino it was just from that vision, and I wasn’t getting any insight, so we,” he gestured to the rest of his band, “Decided to try and at least figure out what casino it was. But then, you know, Pete called yesterday and said he wanted to help. And this place,” Ryan pointed up at the immense hotel and casino, its white pillars towering far above their heads, “Has a whole fucking array of magic security, so we figure this must be the place. Now Pete’s just trying to save up some energy so that he can charmspeak our way into the building itself so we can try and find the secret entrance.”

“The entrance to Brandon Flowers’ lair is hidden somewhere in the most famous casino in Las Vegas,” Patrick said, managing to sound bored and frustrated at the same time. “Well, he certainly has a flair for the theatrical.”

“Hell of a good supervillain,” Jon said, his voice light and easygoing.

“Are you high?” Joe asked Jon, who shrugged.

“It’s been a weird day,” he said, and Andy shook his head in derision.

“And so, naturally, now you won’t leave until you’ve found the hidden entrance,” Joe said, feeling ridiculous for being as afraid as he was.
“Well, I mean, we’ve gotten this far,” Pete said, and everyone behind him nodded in agreement.

“Let’s just get this over with,” Joe said, and he stomped up to the entrance. More than one of the door guys walked up to Joe, looking concerned, but Joe held up one hand in front of him.

“You’re going to let us in,” Joe said, and their eyes glazed over as they moved back to their regular positions. Joe walked right past them, everyone following after him quickly. Even though he never, ever would have admitted it, Joe was kind of thrilled by how easy that was. He felt like a Jedi, and he was trying not to be over the top happy about that.

“I’m a fucking Jedi,” Joe muttered.

“Congratulations,” Andy snickered. Joe tried not to let it get to him.

The moment they stepped inside the lobby, Joe was overwhelmed. Everything was lit up with gold, glowing like the whole casino had been bathed in the light from Pete’s eyes. Women in cocktail dresses and men in expensive suits bustled past, and music emanated from one corner. Joe couldn’t see it, but he assumed it was the sound of a live band. Gold swirled marble pillars surrounded the circular room, holding up the ornate ceiling. A tiny Olympus dragged down to Earth.

“They’re everywhere,” Pete breathed, and Joe spun around to see Pete looking very pale, his eyes wide.

“Who’s everywhere?” Joe asked.

“Creatures,” Pete said, almost in reverence. “I’ve never seen so much magic in one place before.”

“Yeah, well we really don’t want to attract their attention,” Joe said, pushing forward. “So do your aura thingy and make them think we belong here so we don’t get swarmed.”

“There’s so many of them,” Pete repeated, stumbling forward as Joe walked as though his legs were obeying Joe without any agreement from his head. “Wolves and vampires and banshees and sirens, fae and succubi, giants, nixies, leprechauns, demonata—”

“Leprechauns?” Patrick asked. “They’re real?”

“And they love casinos, from the looks of it,” Pete said, nodding in confirmation.

“Yeah, well, try not to get their attention,” Joe said, ducking to the side. He turned the corner into a room that was equally over the top with luxury, but filled with slot machines and gaming tables.

“More of them in here,” Pete said, his footing getting even less even.

“Is he having a stroke?” Joe hissed.

“Magic auras are brighter than human,” Pete said, leaning heavily on Patrick’s arm. “It’s a little overwhelming. Give me a minute, alright?”

“We don’t have a minute if we’re surrounded!” Joe said in a low voice. He nodded to Andy, who moved immediately to the back of their group protectively.

“Maybe we should get out of here,” Patrick said nervously. “I mean, if Brandon already
knows that we’re digging for more information.”

“Why would he know that?” Pete asked sharply.

“Brandon cornered Brent and asked why he wasn’t with the rest of his band, so I assumed—” Patrick began, but was cut off with a hiss of pain as Pete grabbed his arm in a too tight grip.

“Brandon knows we’re here?” he asked.

“Oh, now we can leave,” Joe muttered.

“We could be walking into a trap!” Pete yelped.

“Brandon can’t send me visions,” Ryan said. “It’s probably a coincidence.”

“Doubtful,” Joe said. He was feeling more uneasy with every moment that passed, and though it may have just been an overactive imagination, he thought that some of the strangers walking by were looking at them a little too closely for a little too long. Granted, they weren’t gambling, but Joe felt too open and exposed. “We should get out and think of a more concrete plan now that we know where this is all happening.”

“Wait!” Ryan said, pointing a long, thin finger at a red velvet curtain stretched across a small doorway, bloody and unnatural against the exclusively gold and blue tones of the rest of the casino, the rest of the hotel. It clashed with the heavenly theme, but was small enough in the room’s grandeur that most people’s eyes would glaze right over it. “That’s the place!”

“Obviously,” Joe sighed. He shook his head. “Look, we know the way to it now, that’s good enough. We should get out.”

“A little late for that, Mr. Trohman,” he heard a familiar, velvety voice just behind him. Before he could turn around, he felt something small and round jab into the small of his back.

“I thought I’d take the liberty of arming myself this time,” she said, leaning forward. A wave of sweet smelling dark hair hung over Joe’s shoulder, and Joe wrinkled up his nose.

“Are you that succubus?” he asked.

“My name is Lily,” she growled, jamming the barrel of the gun harder into Joe’s back. “Thanks for remembering, Captain Monogamy.”

“Pleasure,” Joe breathed. He chanced turning his head to see the rest of his friends had drifted further away, still discussing. “What’s to stop my vampire friend from knocking the gun out of your hand before you can blink?”

“I don’t plan on shooting you,” she said, her voice ragged and breathy and painfully sexual. “But I have a secret weapon if you try to stop me from carrying out my orders. Now,” she jabbed him with the gun again, “Walk.”

To Joe’s surprise, she steered him right towards the bands, her heels clicking on the ground as they walked. Joe still couldn’t look at her due to the angle, but based on the way everyone gaped at her, she must have been stunning.

“Lily?” Brendon said.

“The demon?” Ryan scowled, stepping closer to Brendon.
“Succubi aren’t demons, asshole,” Lily said, flipping her hair and assaulting Joe with the scent of floral shampoo again. “And at any rate, I need Brendon, Ryan, and Spencer to come with me. Or I can put a bullet in his spine,” she said, shoving Joe slightly.

Everyone, as far as Joe could see, looked shell shocked. A moment passed, Brendon looking like he was prepping to hand himself over when Jon blurted out:

“Wait, not me?”

“Did I say your name?” Lily asked. “No. I don’t know who you are, but you smell like skunk, and you can stay here.”

“Oh. Cool.”

“What if we don’t come with you?” Spencer asked, puffing out his chest.

“Gun, remember?” Lily said, sounding disgusted. “I promise, on my honor, you won’t be killed or maimed beyond repair. Brandon just wants to speak with you.”

Joe was about to make a quip about how that didn’t sound even remotely believable when Andy sprang forward, knocking Lily to the ground and sending the gun spinning far away across the marble floor. Joe jumped up and scrambled away from Lily. To his displeasure, she gave him an almost mournful smirk.

“I still have a secret weapon,” she reminded him, then she cupped her hands around her mouth.

“LOOK, IT’S PETE WENTZ!” she screamed, pointing at Pete.

“Motherfucker!”

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Frankly, Pete hadn’t expected Lily’s plan to work as well as it had. He knew that he was a celebrity for teenage girls in tiny Midwestern towns, but there were plenty of celebrities in Las Vegas.

“It’s because they work for him,” Joe said offhandedly.

That made much more sense. Regular fans typically didn’t get quite that violent, but Pete wasn’t entirely thinking straight.

Also: “Did you just read my mind?” Pete asked.

“If I’m reading your mind, you’re thinking way too loudly,” Joe grumbled.

Barricaded in the men’s bathroom, Pete kept rotating his right arm and wincing whenever he got his palm almost facing the ceiling. He sat on the counter to keep weight off his legs, and Patrick was dabbing paternally at a cut on his temple with a wet paper towel. Andy leaned against the door to prevent anyone else from entering, while Chicago sat on the counter, kicking his feet back and forth. Joe was leaning against the opposite wall, massaging his temples, and Jon was pacing.

Somewhere, in too many screams and too many hands, Ryan, Spencer, and Brendon had disappeared, and Pete felt hollow. He wanted to wail and anguish that this was entirely his fault, but
that would only really be satisfying if he thought someone would disagree with him.

It was Patrick who ended up convincing an irate Jon that they should stay in the bathroom for a moment, and that getting mobbed again wasn’t going to help anyone.

“Can you walk?” Jon asked Pete.


“Alright, well then, they could be outside, so Pete, you stay here, and we’ll-”

“Absolutely not,” Joe said without looking up. Pete looked over at him, and winced when he did. His aura looked, more than anything, heavy. “We’re not going to get split up in the middle of enemy territory.”

“It’s a casino,” Jon said, his voice surprisingly even. Pete would have been out of his mind in Jon’s position, but Jon always struck Pete as eerily well balanced. “Even the prince of hell firedog lead singer dude can’t kill someone in a crowd this big.”

“Do you see a crowd in here?” Joe asked flatly.

“What do you suggest?” Jon asked patiently.

“That depends,” Joe said. “If they’re working for Flowers and they’re brainwashed, they might just leave after a while, because they’ve already done what they needed to do. If they’re real fans, they’ll be out there for a while, but I think they’re probably a mix, which means the ones remaining after a minute or two will be less, ah, violent. Then we run for it back to the room Ryan had the vision about, get the rest of your band, and get the fuck out of here.”

“I’m guessing that’s easier said than done?” Chicago said.

“Spot on,” Joe sighed. “But the longer we take; the more time they have to get away. Pete, you good to go?”

“Yeah,” Pete said, sliding off the counter and onto his feet with a grunt. Patrick winced next to him as Pete staggered on the landing.

“You okay?” Patrick asked, with a hand on Pete’s arm. Pete nodded mutely, turning away quickly and ignoring the prickles of hurt coming from Patrick.

“Okay,” Joe lined himself up in front of the door, and everyone quickly fell in step behind him. “Andy?”

Andy threw the door open and Joe started walking forward at as quick of a pace as he could make natural. Given their height difference, this meant that Patrick and Andy were still affecting an uncomfortable half-jog behind him, but they were doing quite well. Pete heard a few gasps, but the others closed in around him, effectively blocking him from view as they crossed the casino floor again, bathed in the eerie orange light pouring out from the painted and lit up ceiling above them.

“Where was it?” Joe growled as they weaved in and out of machines and tables lined up with cards. He bumped head on into a man in a business suit who turned around and hissed at him, a slim, forked tongue rolling out from between his teeth. Joe stumbled away as quickly as possible, turning them in the other direction.

“What was that?” Joe hissed.
“Demon spawn, maybe?” Pete guessed, feeling his palms growing slippery with sweat. “I’m not actually sure. Keep away from him, just in case.”

“Talk about the city of sin,” Jon murmured. An unnaturally beautiful woman smirked at them, balancing a tongue of flames in the palm of her hand and extinguishing it with a wink. “How are we supposed to get out, again?”

“Let’s worry about getting in first,” Joe said firmly, brushing past a group of vampires laughing, their fangs out on full display.

“Fucking weird,” Andy murmured. “Like they’re waiting on some kind of signal to turn on us.”

“Like, he says,” Patrick laughed nervously. They were all pressed in tight, with Pete at the center of their group. It was comforting, even though he wasn’t particularly enjoying being jostled from all sides.

From out of the corner of his eye, Pete spotted a flash of red, and he stopped in his tracks. Andy bumped into him, and Pete grabbed the back of Joe’s shirt, yanking him backwards. Joe turned with his lips pulled up into a snarl, ready to shout at Pete, but Pete jerked his head to the red curtain. Joe nodded and turned, steering their whole group towards the red, velvet curtain. Pete’s shoes squeaked in loud protest on the slick floor as they sped up, the splash of crimson growing too close too quickly, and Joe didn’t hesitate when they reached it, just stuck out his hand and ripped the curtain aside.

Almost immediately on the other side the ground began angling downwards, a steep and narrow ramp with a low ceiling, more of a tunnel than a hallway. The overall feeling of the area was painfully claustrophobic, even more so because the cream and gold color palette of the casino was there replaced with dark gray stone. Medieval.

Joe didn’t slow down in the slightest, but instead sped up as they raced down the tunnel. The dark became increasingly overwhelming, until eventually Patrick flipped open his phone. The blue LED screen wasn’t very bright, but it was enough to help dimly light their way, and Jon and Pete quickly followed suit until all of them had their phones out.

“You’d think we’d know well enough to bring a flashlight or something along,” Patrick said quietly, starting to huff from the exertion.

“Vampire eyes,” Andy said, “I’d always be able to find our way out.”

“Shh!” Joe hushed them, and the tunnel took a sharp turn to the side, gradually leveling out to being flat again. Joe stood abruptly still, and motioned for all of them to turn the phones of, and held a finger to his lips. He started walking forward again, slower this time, and a little bit further down, Pete could see a very distant light, probably much brighter to Joe’s eyes than Pete’s.

Eventually they came to a doorway, the room beyond made blurry by what looked like another curtain, this one made of translucent plastic.

“No element of surprise,” Joe said in a low voice, and ripped the plastic aside.

On the other side, there was a round room filled with opulent couches and chairs covered in the same red velvet that the first curtain was made of, and sitting on an armchair directly across from the entrance was Brandon Flowers, his legs crossed, and a knowing smirk on his face.
“It took you longer than I thought it would.” Brandon’s eyes were cold. “Your friends are over there,” he added, nodding to one of the side walls where a glass enclosure was inset in the heavily brocaded wallpaper, just large enough for four people to stand up in. Brendon and Ryan were leaning up against the wall, and Spencer was taking advantage of the extra space to sit down, his arms wrapped around his knees.

The rest of The Killers stood around Brandon, their arms crossed, and an array of other overdressed people lounged around the room, including Lily, sprawled out across a couch.

“Waiting for us?” Joe asked. Pete could feel the power emanating from him, and was alarmed to see how similar in strength and color his aura was to Brandon’s. Like looking in a metaphysical mirror, both of them dark and dominant.

“Well, it’s not a show without spectators,” Brandon said. He stood up, taking a few steps closer to the band, and Pete’s hand shot out instinctively, gripping the nearest arm he could find for reassurance. “Plus,” Brandon shrugged, “I need to make an example now.

“See, you never believed me. All this time, I just needed to get these boys alone to talk to them, and you never believed me. At first, I simply couldn’t break through the protection that this wannabe sorcerer put over all of their houses,” Brandon bared his teeth at Ryan, who simply stuck his chin out in response. “But then, it became a matter of pride. Something of a game to me, I’ll admit. I wanted the pleasure of saying I’d gotten them right out from under the noses of the great and powerful Fall Out Boy,” he sneered in derision. “As if you’re all that impressive. As if your famous exploits were anything more than smoke and mirrors. As if the murder of one stupid girl could make you dangerous. As if keeping her half-breed spawn could make you a hero.”

Andy lurched forward,shouldering Pete out of the way before he could react at all. With a lift of his eyebrows, a wall of fire erupted around Brandon, and a tall, blonde girl grabbed Andy by the wrists, holding him in her arms while he struggled and spat curses at Brandon.

“You’re a freak of nature,” Brandon said mildly to Andy, and turned back to the rest of their group.

“But you are so damned hard to get around,” Brandon said, “Pride, I’ll admit, was my real failure here. But I was willing to admit my defeat. Was willing to wait for a chance to talk to the siren on my own terms, away from your interference. But then you have the audacity to believe that you have the upper hand? To try and interrupt my plans? Pride, as I’ve learned myself, is an unforgivable sin.

“I’m not here to talk today. The time for talking is done.”

Then please shut up, Pete thought desperately.

“I’m here to make a demonstration,” Brandon said, and on all sides the once lounging people closed in on them, grabbing and holding them still like Andy, Pete’s captor immediately covering up his mouth. Pete bit down on his fingers, and the man holding him merely sighed.

“Let us go,” Joe demanded, staring straight at Brandon. Brandon stared his icy stare back.

“No chance in hell,” he said, and nodded at Lily, who put tape over Joe’s mouth.

Brandon strode leisurely over to the glass case, opening the door briefly and yanking Spencer out, shutting the case again before Ryan or Brendon could lunge forward, both of them hitting the side of the case. It looked like they were shouting, but the case must have been
soundproof.

Spencer, for his part, like terrified, but walked where Brandon led him, to the center of the room, his head held high.

“Are you going to kill me?” Spencer asked. His voice didn’t tremble, and he looked powerful, but so, so young. Pete felt a thrill of foreboding as Brandon stepped closer to Spencer, pressing their foreheads together.

“Not at all,” he said, and Pete breathed a tiny sigh of relief. He wasn’t lying, at least.

“No, I’m going to give you a gift,” Brandon said, stepping backwards. Spencer looked around, his head snapping from side to side as he looked for somewhere to run. One of the few burly men that wasn’t holding someone back already grabbed Spencer around the neck, his eyes bulging sickeningly. He lifted Spencer off the ground, and Spencer started to choke, grabbing onto the man’s wrist for support. Ryan was banging on the glass and clearly screaming his head off, but none of them could move.

“A greater gift than you deserve,” the man said with a voice like gravel. He pulled Spencer closer, ripped his t-shirt at the neck so it hung loosely off of him, and sank his teeth down onto Spencer’s shoulder.

A werewolf bite was nothing like a vampire bite, and Pete could see that at once. Spencer crumpled to the floor, screaming and writhing as he clutched at his shoulder, and the bite was ragged and bleeding freely, unlike the elegant and careful bite of a vampire.

“There’s no use for humans around here anyway,” Brandon said with a cold smile.

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Joe wanted to howl. In both the human and non-human way, he wanted to howl in pain, pain of remembrance of himself and in pain for Spencer, so much older than he was and still so young.

Spencer trembled on the ground, and even with as many people as there already were crowded in Joe’s head, he could still feel the spikes of pain from Spencer, all too familiar spikes of pain. Blood was seeping into the carpet, and Joe could remember, more clearly than he ever had before what it felt to have the sparks of what felt like electricity shooting through his veins, lighting him on fire. Spencer’s face was screwed up, tears falling out and glistening on his cheeks.

Joe’s chest ached.

As hard as he pulled against the arms of whoever had grabbed him from behind, he couldn’t actually move anywhere.

To his surprise, he could feel a pain almost twin to Spencer’s in the back of his mind, and he looked up to see Ryan pressed up against the glass of his enclosure, his face screwed up with the same pain as Spencer’s, one fist still banging weakly against the glass.

Andy still ached in the back of Joe’s mind, old wounds ripped open again.

Too many people. Too much pain. Too many different kinds of pain. It was ripping him apart.

“Why are you crying, Spencer?” Brandon asked, toeing him with the tip of his shoe.
Spencer cringed away from the touch, shuddering out a sob as he did. Joe winced with the memory. Eventually, nothing hurts, but first everything does.

“You’re going to become a werewolf. Your band’s protector. Infinitely more useful than a human,” Brandon snorted. “You’ll have powers beyond your wildest dreams. This is the best thing I could give you. Pain is temporary; power is forever.”

Spencer, on the ground, center of attention, bit down on his lip, his chest shaking, and Joe averted his eyes. He didn’t want to watch anymore, didn’t want to be there anymore.

“And I said I was here to make a demonstration, didn’t I?” Brandon looked up, directly at Joe with a cold smile. “One from my band, a demonstration of their future servitude, and one from yours. I suppose the Vegas natives have a bit of an upper hand. As much as they annoy me, they’re still mine. You, on the other hand, well, you’ve meddled enough that you have to die.

“But you, Joe, I want to give you a fighting chance,” Joe hoped no one could see his tiny sigh of relief. “Humans, on the other hand,” Brandon turned to face Patrick with a sneer, “Humans are useless.”

Patrick raised one eyebrow as Brandon walked closer, and once he was right in his face, Patrick spat on him, his face thick with disgust.

“That’s only scary the first dozen or so times,” he said. Brandon’s eyes narrowed.

“Oh, there’s a special kind of hell waiting for you when I finish your pathetic band off for good,” he growled. “But today, I think it’s time we exterminate the breed of half-vampire once and for all!”

Brandon spun to face Andy, turning to his fiery, hell hound form as he turned, but as he bounded across the room, several things happened at once.

Jon, dead silent and completely still for the entire time suddenly ducked down under his captor’s arms, and slammed the butt of a gun into the head of the man holding Joe hard enough that Joe could slip out. Simultaneously, Andy broke his way out of the grip of the woman holding him with a sickening crunch of bone and a wail coming from her.

Andy leapt over the hell hound and kicked one of the wooden legs out from beneath Brandon’s armchair, throwing it across the room and landing it dead center in a vampire’s chest. Joe sprinted across the room, so much larger than it looked as he had no time to make it to the other side, and ripped the door off of the glass case.

“Get us out of here!” Joe demanded, and a damp eyed Brendon nodded.

Brendon immediately sucked in a deep breath and hit an alarmingly high note, his eyes screwed shut in intense focus, holding the note long and loud until the ground below and above them began shaking.

Pieces of plaster ceiling began to rain down on them, and Joe ripped the tape off of his mouth and shoved Ryan, who was closest to him, towards the door they had entered from, as he screamed “GO!”

He pushed Patrick, Pete, and Chicago in the same direction, while Andy kept a good five-foot radius around Joe clear. Even in the moment, a small part of Joe was still grateful that Andy was so, so easy to work with.
Joe looked for Jon, panicking when he couldn’t find him, until he saw him, cradling Spencer up against the wall, trying to avoid the pandemonium of the rest of the room. His grip on Spencer was harsh and protective, and Joe realized in a panic that Spencer was in no state to run.

Joe knelt down next to them, counting the seconds and hoping that Andy could hold on for another second, another, another, while he grabbed Jon roughly by the shoulders.

“Give him to me!” Joe yelled over the shaking of the earth and the panicked screams of all the people working with Brandon. Jon shook his head, terrified, and Joe, out of time, let his voice switch.

“Give him to me!” Joe demanded and, blank faced, Jon pressed Spencer into Joe’s arms.

“Get out of here!” Joe said, and Jon ran. Joe grabbed Brendon’s hand and began tugging him away from the spot he had remained rooted to. Brendon sucked in a deep, rattling breath, and went back to holding the note, stronger now than ever. Cradling Spencer in one arm with his other hand wrapped tightly around Brendon’s wrist, Joe began running for the exit, Andy directly behind him, when the enormous hell hound jumped in front of the door, releasing what could only be described as a roar.

“Give them up,” the hell hound rumbled, the heat emanating from him enough to nearly put Joe on his back. Joe clung protectively to both of the boys from the other band, and lost for words, shook his head.

Brandon, huge and flaming and terrible pulled himself back into a crouch, coiling to spring, and Joe widened his stance in preparation to attempt to throw the demonic creature off, when he let out a horrible, pained howl, turning black and scorched as he fell to the side, revealing Ryan standing behind him. Ryan was pale, a pocket knife in hand, and his face tear streaked, but there was no time to worry about him.

Joe pushed Andy ahead and ran forward, and as soon as they cleared the room screamed: “Now, Brendon!”

Brendon’s voice cracked as it hit a note too high for him, and the stone doorway crumpled in on itself. A cloud of dust flew up from it, but Joe was done taking chances, and he kept running, up and out of the tunnel, ripping through the horrible red velvet curtain, and tearing across the casino floor.

People gasped as they ran past, but no one had their wits about them enough to try and stop them. Before he knew it, they were back outside in the fading sunlight. So much time must have passed, and it barely felt like minutes to Joe.

“Gonna need a lot of taxis,” Patrick said quietly, looking out at the stream of cars dropping people off and getting taken by valets.

“No time,” Joe said, shaking his head, and ran up to a minivan that a valet was about to step into and pushed him aside, then cast a pleading look at Pete.

“You don’t need to worry about this one,” Pete said gently, placing a hand on the man’s chest. He nodded and walked away, and Pete jumped into the front seat instead. Joe climbed in the back, finally letting go of Brendon’s wrist but still holding Spencer close.

“Where to?” Pete asked after they had all piled in and he had peeled away from the casino.

Joe had so many questions. He didn’t know Ryan had done magic, didn’t know how badly Brandon had been hurt or how long they had, but he felt exhausted. Pete drove towards the highway at a dangerous speed while Joe decided to start.

“Protected?” he asked.

“I started meddling with magic my junior year, just in case,” Ryan said. He was sitting right next to Joe in the back of the van, one of his hands loosely supporting Spencer’s head while Spencer groaned quietly, probably not even remotely aware of his surroundings. “I put up defensive barriers around all of our houses in case of, you know, anything.” He shrugged, focused intently on Spencer.

“Flowers?” Joe asked slightly louder.

“Injured, not dead,” Pete said tightly. “And when he recovers, he is going to be really pissed.”

“They should be held off for a while, right?” Brendon asked.

“For a bit,” Pete agreed, not saying aloud what Joe was thinking, that there were an awful lot of creatures in that room with super strength, and a few boulders weren’t going to be more than an inconvenience for them.

“You did amazing,” Chicago said to Brendon, smiling kindly at him, and Brendon managed a weak smile in return.

“So what now?” Andy asked.

“We regroup at Ryan’s,” Joe said, feeling more sure of himself than he had all day. “Get something to eat, get some weapons, do our best to… clean up,” he said, Spencer weighing down his arms more heavily as he struggled over words for how to deal with it. “Then we run for it again. Magical protection can only do so much, but there’s no creature yet that can run faster than a car can drive,” Joe said.

“We can’t run forever,” Patrick said.

“We can sure as hell run until we come up with a better plan!” Joe snapped. “I don’t know if you noticed, but no matter how big my damn pack got it didn’t do shit, so until we come up with a plan B, we run and try to keep everyone alive, alright?”

No one spoke out against him, which almost made Joe feel worse. Patrick leaned closer into Chicago’s chest, and Pete’s knuckles were white on the steering wheel. Jon still looked distant, like he wasn’t in control of himself still.

They all trudged into Ryan’s house, empty before they got there, in spite of the car in the driveway. Joe laid Spencer gently onto Ryan’s bed, where his eyes finally started fluttering open.

“Spence,” Ryan said, rushing forward and shoving Joe out of the room, where he fell into a seat in the living room with ease.

“I’ve got a plan B,” Andy said after a moment, and Joe looked up wearily. Andy handed him a glass of tepid tap water, and he drank gratefully, nodding for Andy to continue after a moment.

“Brandon’s got an issue with pride, right?” Andy said, and Joe nodded. “Then let’s see if
we can convince him to fight the old fashioned way.”

“That’s the whole plan?” Joe asked.

“Well, we’ve got a head start,” And gave Joe a sly smile. “This time, how about we do it on our terms?”

“The odds are pretty far stacked against us,” Joe noted.

“Well, when has that stopped us before?” Patrick asked.

“We’re in your pack, after all,” Pete said. “We fight to the end and all that. Plus, like Andy said, we don’t have to fight fair.”

“Why the hell not,” Joe almost laughed, “Let’s kill The Killers.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for reading, guys!!! Part two should be coming up in the next couple of weeks, and then I'm going to take a brief break (not gonna say the h-word) before season three starts! Can't believe how far we've come in one year, and I am overwhelmed by all of the fanart and edits and posts that you've made, and all the support I've had for this story. I had a lot of fun writing this chapter but my apologies if it seemed a little slow, it had to be mostly exposition to set up for the finale finale, which is next chapter! Apologies also for the lowkey peterick/ryden/joncer, I can't help it.

Chapter title by, obviously, Fall Out Boy.
Get Busy Living or Get Busy Dying part deus

Chapter Summary

In Part Two of the finale, the boys run from the Killers, and then discover a secret weapon that can help them save the day.

Chapter Notes

Warnings for: burns, cuts, fights, swearing, medical attention, nothing worse than usual.

HERE’S WHAT YOU MISSED ON THE HIGH WAY TO HELL: After being chased by Las Vegas based rock band, The Killers, for months, Fall Out Boy gets a clue as to where their base of operations is. Upon checking it out, Spencer is bitten by a werewolf, and Brandon Flowers declares that all gloves are off in their fight, and Fall Out Boy and Panic! go on the run.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Joe had assumed, based on his previous experience with people’s parents, that if Ryan’s dad came home to find his son’s best friend bleeding all over the living room carpet, that he would be upset.

As it turned out, George Ross was not a problem. When he walked into the living room where all of Fall Out Boy, the city of Chicago, and the rest of Ryan’s band were sitting, he looked unsurprised, and when he looked into Ryan’s open bedroom door, merely frowned slightly and grunted, jerking his head towards Spencer when he got Ryan’s attention.

“What happened?” he asked, and Ryan sniffed, blinking rapidly and rubbing his hand across his face to smear all the excess tears off.

“I need to borrow your car,” Ryan said instead of answering. His throat was thick with mucus, and Joe felt embarrassed listening to him speak. For his father’s part, George’s eyes narrowed, not in anger, but in doubtful suspicion.

“What somethin?” he asked.


George nodded, then walked into the kitchen, and came back with a juice glass mostly full of a dark amber liquid. He took a long draught of it, and sighed again.

“Seen the end yet? You comin’ home?”

“I don’t know, dad,” Ryan said, not meeting his father’s eyes. Neither one of them raised their voice, but the house was quiet enough that they didn’t need to.

“Huh,” George said. He glanced around the room, and when Joe met his eyes he could see
that they were full of anger, though he was otherwise impassive. He sighed, and peered into Ryan’s room, shuddering when he saw Spencer splayed out, shirtless and bloody on the table.

“I’ll help you clean him up before you take off. He’s in no state to travel like that.”

“He’ll heal,” Joe interjected. He hesitated, looking at Ryan, but his dad must know he was the oracle by then, especially if he was asking about seeing things. “It’s a magical wound. It’ll heal fast.”

“Then we’d better clean it up quick,” George said gruffly. “Last thing he needs is an infection.”

Joe prepared to protest, that that wasn’t how werewolf bites worked, that they self-cleansed, burnt like they were cauterized because they were touched with venom, but George had already lifted Spencer up and was carrying him towards the small bathroom. Ryan followed them in, and Joe tried to as well, but the tiny room didn’t fit four fully grown men - or, two men and two teenagers, Joe thought bitterly - so he stood in the doorway, blocking them from the rest of the crowded room. Based on what little Joe had seen of George’s cold nature, he was shocked by how tenderly he pushed Spencer’s shirt aside, dapping at the huge, ragged bite marks with a damp washcloth. Spencer’s shoulders jerked in short, staccato movements when they started applying soap, but he was silent, only letting out the occasional slight gasp as his fingers clenched. Joe was internally grateful that he couldn’t see Spencer’s face, and that Ryan was going out of his way to look unaffected by the scene in front of him.

This wasn’t Joe’s fault, and he knew that logically. He didn’t sign Panic!. He didn’t go poking around in the casino. He didn’t bite Spencer. So why did he feel so guilty?

His musings were interrupted by the soft clatter of a bottle of hydrogen peroxide falling to the floor. Directly above the bottle, George’s hands were shaking.

“Dad,” Ryan said sharply. George took an unsteady breath and picked up the bottle, sloshed some onto the washcloth and pressed it into Spencer’s shoulder. It was stained pink and red nearly all the way through.

“I can get it,” Ryan said flatly.

“It’s fine,” George said, dabbing at Spencer’s shoulder as the peroxide made the wound bubble and fizz.

After they wiped the peroxide away, Joe took a tentative glance at Spencer’s shoulder, and was relieved to see that it looked much better than he remembered. Cleaner, if nothing else, and already starting to heal around the edges. There would only be the one scar, Joe noted bitterly.

George taped a thick bandage over the bite and gripped Spencer’s good shoulder with his hand.

“You’ll be alright, son,” he said softly, and Spencer managed a mangled looking smile of gratitude for him. George and Ryan helped him to his feet, and Joe stepped out of the way so that Spencer could stumble into the living room and collapse on the sofa.

Joe really didn’t want to be in the permanently dim living room with everyone else. Everyone was exuding emotion, signs of it ranging from Brendon’s red nose to the dark red semi-circle indentations on Pete’s hands from where his nails dug in too hard. He was uncomfortable around all the displays of emotion, preferring Ryan and his father’s quiet stoicism. But he was
supposed to be a leader. He had to be a leader. Absolutely no one else in that room was going to be.

“We should head out,” Joe said in a firm voice. “Ryan, you have two cars, including your dad’s?”

Ryan nodded mutely, and Joe nodded in return.

“Fantastic. Alright, Andy, you can go dump the stolen car a little way away, make sure it’s not traced back to Ryan’s place. Then you go with Pete, Patrick, and Chicago, and I’ll go with Ryan, Brendon, Jon and Spencer,” Joe said. “You got any water?”

“Uh-huh,” Ryan said, darting out of the room. Andy left out the front door, and Joe pushed his shoulders back. Time to stop resisting, he thought. He could feel the thrum of too many people in his brain, but he could channel it. He was strong enough for that. Suddenly, in embracing the power, he felt heat running through him, reinvigorating him.

“Brendon, your power, does it work on all land the same, or is sand the most powerful?”

“Um, uh, desert territory is probably the strongest, just because the terrain is easier to work with,” Brendon said. His voice sounded awful, and exactly like someone who was trying not to let your know he was crying, but Joe didn’t have the time to worry about his well-being.

“Well, that complicates things, but we can work with it,” he said. “Pete, who in the world would fly out to LA to die for you?”

“Probably Gabe,” Pete said instantly, the ghost of light flickering in his eyes. Joe didn’t need a pack bond to feel the badly concealed guilt wafting off of Pete, but he was on a mission.

“That it?” he asked.


“Nevermind,” Joe shook his head. “We’ll keep this simple. Patrick, how are we for weapons?”

“I- we flew out here,” Patrick said miserably, “I didn’t think I could sneak anything through airport security.”

Joe cursed through his teeth, then heard a man clear his throat from behind him. He turned to see George, looming slightly and still looking frightening in a way that humans usually weren’t to Joe.

“We have some weapons in the garage,” George said. He was staring into Joe’s eyes, too intense. It was a bargain, Joe thought immediately. A trade, in exchange for bringing his kid back alive. Joe nodded curtly as Ryan stumbled back in while hefting a case of water bottles that looked like it weighed roughly as much as he did.

“Good God,” Joe said, though his tone didn’t change much.

“I live in the desert,” Ryan grunted, dropping the case unceremoniously on the ground.

“What’s the plan?”

“Half of you go with Andy, half of you go with me, and we lure The Killers as far out of Vegas as we can while still staying in the desert, then we fight the band and sic Brendon on Brandon,” Joe said. Letting the power keep flowing through him, he felt completely sure of his plan,
even on hearing the disbelieving sputters of everyone else.

“Sic me on him?” Brendon asked in disbelief.

“Yup,” Joe said, “Like a rabid dog.”

“But, I don’t, I can’t!” Brendon sputtered.

“So you can’t control your powers! You and every other comic book character since the
dawn of time!” Joe yelled impatiently. “You think you can get upset and sing till he drowns in
sand?”

“Maybe!” Brendon said, throwing his hands up in the air. “I don’t know! That might work,
or I might lose control and kill everyone!”

“Here’s the plan then: don’t do that,” Joe said. “Is Andy back yet?”

“What about Spencer?” Jon asked.

“What about Spencer?” Joe asked in disbelief. “He comes with us so that The Killers don’t
try and turn him feral! Look, we have to get out of here, so does anyone have any better ideas? No?
Andy!”

Andy jumped as he walked in the door. Joe snatched the keys to one car out of Ryan’s hand
and tossed them to his friend.

“Grab the water and some dudes and let’s get out of here,” he said, and to his relief, Andy
nodded, lifting the water with one hand and walking right back outside.

“Now let’s roll,” Joe said, walking out after him.

The sun had set sometime while they were in the house, and the night air was a clammy
kind of cold, chilling Joe deeply as he let his eyes adjust to the lighting. The sky was a cold, almost
matte black, fading into purple in the direction of the Las Vegas skyline. There were no stars in sight,
but there was no moon either, which boded ill for Joe. Less powerful, technically, though he had
never felt more powerful in his entire life.

Joe pulled in one deep breath to center himself, taking in the artificial scent of heavily
watered lawns and fresh insulation and drywall, and focused his power again. High maintenance, but
it was helping him out.

Ryan held up the second set of keys to him, but Joe shook his head in distaste.

“I’ll stay in the back, try and talk Spencer through it,” he said. Ryan seemed unhappy with
this, pointedly tossing the keys to Jon, and Joe tried not to roll his eyes. It was sweet, he supposed,
technically, the power of their friendship and all, but he couldn’t see it being immensely helpful
when Spencer started burning with fever.

As they started piling in, Brendon pulled back suddenly, looking hesitant.

“I think I should get in the other car,” he said, his voice still sounding awful. “I just… it’s
probably going to get crowded in here, if Spencer’s lying down,” he added, a desperate twinge to his
voice.

“Alright,” Joe said, jerking his head over to the other car. He followed Brendon part of the
way there, knocking on the driver’s side window till Pete rolled it down.

“Just start heading towards LA, and we’ll follow you, okay?” Joe said, and Pete nodded. Joe got back into the other car, sitting up front to leave Ryan and Spencer in the back.

They sped off into the night, leaving the rapidly dimming lights of Summerlin behind them.

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Andy leaned his head up against the cold glass while Pete drove, watching the desert swim past his vision. It was just after midnight, and they’d been driving down route 15 for a few hours, but there was no change in the scenery. Carmilla would like the desert at night, all cool and dark as it was. Nevada, as a state, made no sense at all to Andy.

Chicago and Patrick were curled up together, Chicago’s knees pulled up to his chest and Patrick’s head leaning in the hollow of Chicago’s neck. Chicago had one hand absentely tangled in Patrick’s hair, and Patrick looked like he had fallen asleep. Brendon, on the other side of the backseat, had similarly tried to scrunch himself in the tightest position possible, and was looking out the window, his face still red but his eyes dry. Andy felt a twinge of sadness looking at him, and let out a long, low sigh. He stretched. Pete yawned.

“Wanna trade off?” Andy asked.

“I’m good,” Pete said, shaking his head just slightly. “Besides, they haven’t pulled over yet, and I don’t wanna lose ‘em.”

“Guess not,” Andy said, and yawned again. “I’m kinda hungry, though.”

“Hungry or thirsty?”

“Hungry, asshole. I haven’t eaten since breakfast, and I don’t want to fight to my death on an empty stomach.”

The car swerved just slightly when he said “death”, but Andy thought it was probably impolite to mention it. He grimaced.

“Look, we’re gonna be okay.” Andy said.

Pete turned and gave him a disparaging look before turning his eyes back to the long, empty road ahead of him.

“I can’t say the same. You know why? I can’t lie.”

“Truth is relative,” Andy said immediately. “You don’t think we can do it, but I know that we can. Man on man we can kill Brandon and the rest of his kingdom crumbles with him. Easy.”

“Since when do you think killing people is easy? Or does it just get easier the more you do it?” Pete spat at him. Andy winced.

“It’s easy if it’s a necessity,” he said slowly. Lying. “Physically easy anyway. Self-defense. Us against him. That’s nine on four.”

“Yeah, that sounds good on paper, but Spencer can’t even sit up, Jon has never dealt with any of this bullshit before, and you and Joe are the only ones that know how to fight. Plus, it’s nine against four if it’s only the band coming, and they aren’t bringing the goddamn hordes of hell with
“That’s why we’re trying to move away from where Brandon’s power is strongest,” Andy said patiently, trying to remember how Joe had explained it.

“I don’t want to argue this,” Pete said. “I just want to get it over with.”

On hearing the empty, defeated note in Pete’s voice, Andy growled, protective and angry. He had devoted way too much time of his life to keeping his friends alive to hear Pete ready to give up without a fight. Impulsively, angrily, he grabbed the side of the steering wheel and yanked it hard to the right, sending the car careening across the rumble strip and onto the shoulder of the road, then off into the sand before Pete slammed down on the breaks.

“What the fuck?” Pete yelled, and Andy could hear the sounds of Patrick, Chicago, and Brendon stirring in the back.

Andy yanked the keys out of the ignition and pointed them at Pete, seething.

“You’re not giving up,” he growled, pointing the sharp edge of the key at Pete. He turned around to the back seat. “For that fucking matter, none of you are. I swear to fucking god we have not made it this far to all die because that’s what we expect to happen. We still have a goddamn chance as long as we keep believing we do, is that fucking clear?”

Chicago and Brendon nodded fervently, as did Patrick after a minute. Andy turned his piercing stare to Pete.

“You really believe that, don’t you?” Pete asked.

“I’ve got a kid to go home to. I’d better believe I’m not leaving her an orphan.”

Pete took a deep breath.

“Okay, yeah, we- we have a chance,” he said, looking shocked even as he said it.

“You can’t lie,” Andy said with a smirk. Pete rolled his eyes, but smiled slightly in spite of himself.

“Truth is relative.”

Someone knocked on Pete’s window, and the sharp noise made Andy jump so violently that his head hit the ceiling of the car. Pete rolled the window down calmly, however, to reveal a concerned looking Joe.

“You guys okay? What happened?” he asked.

“Being stupid,” Andy said quickly.

“We should stop in the next town to grab some food and weapons, though,” Pete said.

Joe raised his eyebrows.

“Think anything’s open right now?”

“Probably an all-night diner,” Pete said. “And as for weapons, well, the store doesn’t have to be open to stock them.”
Joe exhaled a miniscule laugh, and shrugged.

“Yeah, okay, we should do it,” he agreed. “You guys lead the way; we’ll catch you at the restaurant.”

Andy had to jump out to push the car back onto the highway, not a difficult task for him, even giving how stuck they were in the sand, and then he jumped back in. A quarter of an hour later, they turned off into Baker, California, a town they had seen billboards for during the past hour or so of driving, advertising the world’s tallest thermometer, and, more importantly, a Denny’s.

The poor, gum chewing waitress was obviously devastated to see a group of nine boys coming in that early in the morning, but she dutifully got all of them coffee and menus, only giving Spencer a briefly concerned look when she saw him leaned against the wall, sweating through his clothes and shaking violently.

Andy poured over the menu and didn’t have to feign interest at their scant vegan options, he was hungry enough to eat whatever they had. Spencer’s hands shook as he tried to hold the menu, and his eyelids fluttered, but he didn’t drop it.

“Looks like your fever’s gonna break soon,” Joe said softly to Spencer, who nodded wearily.

Patrick and Chicago were still sitting too close, practically sharing a seat, and Chicago was whispering something inaudible to Patrick, his lips brushing against Patrick’s ear, and Patrick leaned in closer to him. Jon put a lot of effort into making it seem like he was reading his menu, when he kept glancing nervously over at Spencer, and then back up at the kitchen, biting his lip. Ryan had sat down next to Brendon, and smiled warmly at him, trying to strike up a conversation, trying to cheer Brendon up. Pete, meanwhile, leaned back, his eyes tight and focused, like he was trying to plan something.

Surveying all of them, Andy felt a pull coming from his chest, a gentle tugging from behind his ribcage that told him he could not let anyone sitting there die. It simply wasn’t an option.

“What can I get you guys?” the waitress asked, stifling a yawn. She did her best to keep up with all the orders, and gave Spencer another worried look before she shuffled back to the kitchen to put the orders in.

“Your dad okay?” Spencer croaked at Ryan, and Ryan nodded.

“How’re ya feeling?” Joe asked Spencer, and Spencer blinked and stretched slightly.

“Little warmer,” he said, “I’m actually kind of hungry.”

“That’s good,” Joe said, looking relieved. “You’re almost done.”

“Yeah, pretty soon all I’ll have to worry about is turning into a wolf for the rest of my life, right?” Spencer said, but he was smiling a little.

“Yeah, you know, nothing big,” Joe agreed, his voice dry. Andy then watched a huge smile spread across Joe’s face as he let out a laugh. “I guess this is one fever you can sweat out.”

The entire table groaned, with the exception of Joe and Chicago, the latter giggling a little.

“That’s like their album title!” he giggled.
“Unfortunately,” Patrick said, sitting up a little straighter.

After dinner, they all drove around the town, which was, as it turned out, incredibly small, and the only place they thought had a prayer of selling weapons was the local gas station. The gas station, due to being in Southern California, didn’t even sell any ice scrapers that could be used as blunt force weapons, so they settled for picking up soda in glass bottles, gasoline, and some cigarette lighters, although, as Ryan noted, they were already on fire, so it seemed unlikely that any fire based weapon would do all that much to hurt them.

As they were walking back to the cars, Chicago stopped the group.

“What?” Joe asked.

“I mean, we’re already here. It sounds kind of cool,” Chicago said.

“It’s not that impressive,” Brendon said, but Joe shrugged.

Yeah, why the fuck not?” he said, and on their way out of town, they dropped by the world’s tallest thermometer, and Patrick obligingly took Chicago’s picture in front of it, despite the fact that the whole town was pitch dark, and the picture looked like it had been taken in grainy black and white even with the flash on.

Andy was just climbing back into the car when he saw headlights down the interstate. They were still very away, just insect sized pinpricks of light even to his advanced eyes, but they were fast advancing.

“Fuck, we have to go right now!” Andy yelled, jumping in the driver’s side seat and gunning the car to life. He looked across at the other car, and could tell Joe had seen it too, meaning it was getting closer.

It could be any random car, Andy told himself. It might not have anything to do with them. But he had a terribly sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach as he swerved out of the parking lot, leaving tire tracks all over the sun-bleached ground.

By the time he’d managed to pull back onto the interstate, the car he had seen in the distance was right on top of them, engine snarling. It was, on further inspection, actually a black, sturdy looking SUV, and Andy knew at once it would have no difficulty running Ryan’s suburban compact car right off the road.

Andy revved the engine slightly, trying to edge closer to Joe’s car and give them the impression that they needed to go faster, lose whoever was behind them as soon as possible, but as he sped up, so did the car behind him. He grimaced, briefly glancing at the other passengers, all of whom looked scared except for Brendon, who was concentrating hard and muttering something under his breath. Andy let a miniscule part of himself focus on it, only to hear that he was singing, very soft and low, but singing.

The car rocked suddenly, a harsh wave from back to front, and Andy glanced back through the windshield of the SUV. It was tinted, and he couldn’t fully make out the features of the man behind the wheel, but whoever it was pointedly backed up and sped up to hit them again, knocking the whole car forward.

“Fuck,” Andy muttered, and he spun the wheel hard to the left, switching lanes and very narrowly avoiding clipping the car that the rest of his group was in. He slammed his foot down on
the gas, but even as he sped up again, the SUV swerved in between the two lanes and crashed into both cars at once.

The car was instantly sent spiraling out to the left, kicking up flumes of sand as it spun off the road. Andy swore loudly as he tried to steer into the skid, unsure if that was even the correct procedure when it came to something other than ice. Impulsively, stupidly, he jumped out of the car and ran towards the road, where men and women still dressed like they were going out began to step out of the SUV. Lily, wearing a tight red dress, gave him a disdainful glance as he ran up to the middle of the road.

A group of men in suits and women in dresses amassed in the center of the road, eight in total, and in a perfect, V-shaped formation. Andy bit back the hysterical urge to laugh at the fact that they probably had to practice this. Jesus, the theatricality was killing him.

Everyone else was fairly quick to follow Andy, piling out of the cars and walking towards the center of the road, seeing no other option.

“You know, it’s not really safe to just stand in the road like this,” Joe said at last. He stood loosely in the front and center of their group. Brandon smirked.

“Mr. Trohman,” Joe repeated with a scoff. “You sound like the label when they’re trying to suck up to me. So what’s the deal? You crashed our cars just to talk, or what?”

“Actually, my intentions were—” Brandon began to speak, but was unable to finish as the song Brendon had been singing under his breath crescendoed into something unearthly, shaking the ground all around Andy.

Brandon’s eyes widened in horror as the asphalt street cracked open in front of him, long tendrils of sand snaking up out of the maw of the ground and wrapped themselves around his legs.

“Stop him!” Brandon growled, pointing at Brendon. A member of the band, Andy had no idea what his name was, jumped forward, and Andy batted him aside like a ragdoll, sending him flying out across the barren land. A girl ran forward as well, and Joe snapped her arm and sent her sprawling to the ground.

Brandon himself hissed as he turned, his skin being replaced with fire and his body contorting into its form as a hellhound, enormous and burning, but sand only flowed upwards more freely. The hellhound let out a long, piercing howl, and another girl stepped forward, and as she did, she turned into stone.

The girl, looking more like a statue than a human, continued walking anyway, but now making a horrible sound of grinding stone whenever she moved, and her mouth contorted in anger as she reached out for Brendon’s throat.

Andy was too far away, quick as he ran for Brendon, he couldn’t reach him before the girl with her hands of stone was crushing Brendon’s throat.

Brendon was only stuck in the stranglehold for a fraction of a second as fast as Andy and Joe reached him, and Andy managed to rip the girl away, hard as it was. He threw her hard to the ground, where she transformed back into flesh and blood at the last second so as not to shatter. When Andy turned back to Brendon, the singer was on the ground, his hands cupping his neck as he
gasped for breath, and Brandon was standing up, brushing off his suit.

Andy looked over at the girl, groaning in pain and curled up on the ground where he threw her. Physically, he reminded himself, it was easy.

Andy knelt down, grabbed her head firmly and twisted it hard and sharp, trying not to show any emotion when he heard the snap of her neck.

“You killed her,” Brandon said, stopping in his tracks closing in towards the bands.

“Yeah, well, two-way street,” Andy said. “It seemed fair.”

While Brandon gaped, Andy leapt over the crack in the pavement and past Brandon and the rest of his lackeys, throwing himself behind the wheel of the car and gunning the engine.

Andy drove the car straight forward, letting it bounce wildly across the crack in the ground, and he threw the doors open for everyone else to jump in.

His band and Panic! quickly piled in while Brandon stared with fire in his eyes, unmoving.

“Thanks for the ride, jackass,” Jon yelled out the car door, still hanging open while Andy peeled away from the city of Baker, and into the night yet again.

***

Chest heaving in the back, and once he was well assured that they were in the clear for a while again, Joe began to take stock of his surroundings. He was next to Brendon, who was still gasping for air. Joe was tempted to tell the kid to suck it up when he saw the inky-black bruises that were already forming, and thought better of it.

The entire interior of the SUV was black leather, still smelling new. The windows were tinted. The seats were black. The sideboards were black. The carpets were black. All he could see in the extremely dim light that filtered through were his friends’ comparably pale faces.

They sped down the interstate for around five minutes when Pete spoke up hoarsely.

“Should we do a headcount or something? Make sure everybody made it?”

Joe glanced around the car.

“No worries, everyone’s here,” he said. Pete made a weak noise of affirmation. Spencer looked a little green, on the edge of vomiting, but he was holding himself together remarkably well.

“I’m so sorry about that,” Joe said at last to Brendon. “I can’t believe I missed her.”

“It’s fine,” Brendon said, but his voice sounded more like paper rustling than a real voice. Joe winced.

“We’ll do better next time,” he promised, and Brendon nodded weakly, leaning up against the side of the car.

Since he was already sitting in the back, Joe leaned over the back of the seat and began rummaging through the trunk in the off chance that they were carrying extra weapons. He was in luck: finding a few swords, two guns, and a frankly alarming amount of rope.

“Score,” he muttered, pulling the weapons up to the backseat of the car.
“Do we have a new plan?” Ryan asked.

“Hoo, boy,” Joe sighed, wiping his forehead and taking in a few deep breaths. “I mean; I guess the plan is the same. Get to a strategic location. Go after the lackeys. Brendon sings Brandon to death. We do it more organized this time. The usual.”


This car was going much faster than the others were, Joe could tell by the blurry quality of the scrubby shrubs they passed by. He should probably sleep, since he wasn’t the one driving, but he couldn’t quite convince himself to. He was physically exhausted, but his mind was still racing beyond his control, unwilling to stop working in high gear. He was cycling through plans, backup plans, a way to get the kids from Panic! home if he couldn’t save his own band. Because he would, if it killed him, get them home.

Using all of his newfound power to hone in on Andy’s mind, he almost winced away as he felt it. Andy didn’t like to hurt people, and while Joe didn’t take much joy out of killing, Andy was definitely not dealing with the death of the girl he had killed well. His head felt heavy and riled up with guilt, and Joe wasn’t sure what he could say to make his friend feel better. “You did the right thing” possibly might just make him hate Joe as well as himself.

Joe mentally pulled back, and physically turned to Ryan, who was sitting right next to him on the opposite side as Brendon, trying to lean over Joe and talk to Brendon.

“Does it hurt?” Ryan asked, looking nervous.

“Mm-hmm,” Brendon made a noise, then winced again. Joe didn’t want to even think about what solid rock crushing his neck felt like, and made sure not to intrude on Brendon’s mind.

Ryan looked upset, and he kept eyeing Brendon’s neck. Joe wondered why all the morbid curiosity, when he realized that Ryan might have seen a vision of this before.

“Are we getting any closer?” Joe asked Ryan in his mind. Ryan jumped, one hand flying up to grab his chest as he stared wide eyed at Joe.

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“Whatever you were talking to your dad about. You saw the big battle against the Killers, right? What happened?”

Somehow, Joe could feel the ripples of hesitation coming from Ryan’s mind before he answered.

“I did, yeah. I didn’t see the end, but it… It didn’t look good.”

Joe winced internally, but it was no worse than he had expected.

“Brendon had the bruises? And that’s why you’re scared?”

“Uh-huh.”

Joe let his mind race for a moment, trying to settle on one thing to ask.

“What else?”

“I can show you.”
Startled, Joe was about to exclaim that, no, absolutely not, just telling him would be FINE, but before he could react, Ryan had wrapped his long, too-strong fingers around his wrist, and all of Joe’s senses were shifted, muted and somewhere else entirely.

Joe was standing in the middle of a desert, covered in pale midday sun. Everything felt duller, more like it did when he was human, his sight, hearing, sense, and his smell felt barely there at all, though he could tell that the scent of diesel would be strong if he were really there. His weight shifted from one side to the other, and sand moved slightly under his feet. There was a sharp pain coming from his left arm, and something sticky and warm covered his entire left side. Brendon was gasping on the ground in front of him, his throat black and blue, and his eyes bulging and spilling over with tears. To his horror, he also saw himself, ravaged and bloody, and breathing in ragged and without rhythm. Brandon grabbed Joe (himself? The other him?) by the shirt collar, and sneered.

“Give up,” he growled in a quavering dream voice, and the whole image shivered, and disappeared, leaving Joe back in the dark SUV.

“What the fuck?!” Joe yelled, forgetting that other people might be trying to sleep. Everyone turned to him in alarm, but he waved his hand in the air.

“Fuck, forget it, go back to… whatever,” he said, then turned to Ryan.

“What the fuck?!” he hissed.

“That’s the vision,” Ryan said, shrugging.

“You can just tell me next time,” Joe said. He wrapped his arms around his chest, shivering in spite of the heat. He sat in silence for a moment, then sighed aloud, and reached out to Ryan’s mind again.

“Was your dad okay?” he asked. Ryan stiffened next to him.

“I hope so,” he said, physically closing off as he straightened up and pulled further away from Joe. Sensing his curiosity, he continued with reluctance. “He’s a vet, so he doesn’t really like wounds. And… he doesn’t really like the idea of me purposefully involving myself in something this… physically dangerous. Not for a career.”

Joe didn’t really have a response to that. Instead, he did a mental sweep to make sure everyone was okay, and leaned his head back on the seat, and tried to fall asleep.

When he woke up again, the sky was beginning to pale. Seeing the soft blue color of the sky, he felt overcome with a sudden panic. The vision Ryan had shown him wasn’t far away, not nearly far enough away, and he had no idea how to prepare.

Joe knew, logically, that seeing the vision had changed nothing, but it made him feel different, more afraid. He took a brief moment to be glad, deeply glad, that he wasn’t the oracle. He couldn’t live with the constant knowledge of things that were going to happen without obsessing over them, and he wasn’t sure how Ryan managed it. He’d have to tell Ryan to never do that to him again, assuming they lived through the day.

Speaking of the devil, it looked like Ryan was driving now. They must have traded off sometime in the night. Andy was now sitting in Ryan’s place, his head resting on Joe’s shoulder, and snoring lightly. Joe snorted, but stayed in place, even though he felt the sudden, desperate need to stretch.

“Where are we?” Joe asked in a hoarse whisper. Ryan turned his head slightly.
“Just outside of Ely, Nevada,” he breathed in return. “Andy drove up through Death Valley, and we traded off just North of there.”

Joe nodded. “Bored yet?” he asked.

“I’ve been keeping him company,” Pete mumbled. Joe considered asking if Pete had slept, but he figured he’d better not bother when he knew the answer.

The reason for his waking up appeared to be a sharp turn onto an off ramp, as Ryan pulled into a gas station. One man was outside on a ladder, changing the numbers on the gas price and looking dangerously close to falling asleep and crashing to the ground below.

Joe breathed in the deep, sterile smell of the car as he leaned back, resigned to sitting in the car while Ryan went in so as not to disturb Andy. The sky was turning a paler and paler blue, and Joe sighed, preemptively bracing himself. He could already tell it was going to be a long day.

As he waited, Joe watched the signs of the small, sleepy desert town waking up, as the empty streets began to be populated with occasional cars. The first lights in stores turned on. And it took Joe an embarrassing amount of time to realize that Ryan had been in the gas station for too long.

Ducking out from underneath Andy, Joe wrenched the door open and sprinted towards the gas station, ignoring the haze of confusion swelling in the car behind him.

He tumbled through the doors of the gas station convenience store, all white linoleum and color leaching fluorescent lights, and found the store completely empty. He heard muffled noises going on behind the counter, and he slid across the countertop, kicking open the door behind the counter.

Ryan was tied to a chair in the storeroom, struggling against the ropes and making distressed noises. A pale man with long, shaggy hair stood next to him, and growled when Joe walked in.

“There’s no use, dog. The boss is already on his way.”

“Then I’m sure you’ll feel like your death was worth something,” Joe growled, and pounced at the vampire.

Joe was, he realized, much stronger physically than he used to be. He could throw the vampire around like a ragdoll, and in seconds he had him pinned against the wall, and he dragged the nearly unconscious creature outside, throwing him into the dawn light and slamming the door shut.

He hurried back in and tore the ropes away from Ryan, his face a mask of worry.

“Are you hurt?” he asked. Ryan shook his head.

“No, I just wasn’t expecting it,” Ryan said, stretching his arms up and loosening his muscles up. “Fuck, Joe, he called Brandon-”

“I heard,” Joe said grimly, and he helped Ryan to his feet. “Still, we’ve got a decent head start.”

“It’s not gonna hold forever,” Ryan said quietly. Joe sighed, and gestured to the gas station as they were walking out.

“Take whatever you want, security here is dead,” he said, and snorted at his own joke.

“We’re in serious trouble,” Ryan shot at him. “You saw the vision, right? Do you have any
real plan? I mean, you’re stronger than you used to be, but you’d need a way bigger pack to compete with his power. Thousands of people, maybe!”

“Hey, I still think our best chance is if Brendon fights Brandon and-” Joe began, and he stopped midsentence, his jaw dropping and his eyes widening.

“What?” Ryan asked, snapping his fingers impatiently in front of Joe’s face. “What?”

“Grab some stuff to eat, okay?” Joe demanded, and he ran back out to the car. Most of them were hanging around the outside of the car, looking nervous, but Joe ignored them; there would be time to explain later. Instead, he ran straight to Chicago, and pulled him (a little forcefully) away from Patrick, and dragged him away from the group.

“You want to help us make it out of this, right?” Joe asked, and Chicago nodded, looking frightened. Joe probably looked manic, all wild eyed and tense faced.

“Then I need you to do just one thing for me,” Joe said, and Chicago nodded, his eyes nearly as intense as Joe’s. Joe focused in on him, paying attention to the deep set brown eyes and focusing harder than he ever had before, throwing all of his power and will into his voice.

“Kneel.”

***

Pete felt unsteady behind the wheel. He hadn’t slept in a while, and when he did, it was only a half sleep that ended in him being jolted awake just as he thought he was falling to his death. He felt like the narrator in the beginning of Fight Club, the world blurring and turning into an uncomfortable copy of itself, just slightly off kilter from the way it was meant to be. The endless road and earth in front of him kept skipping, more like he was seeing a sequence of photos of driving down a road than one continuous movement. Waves of heat rose up off the asphalt, and distant mirages of shiny pools of water lay far off in the distance.

“We’re going to be fine,” Joe reminded him. “We have a plan.”

Right. They had a plan. A hell of a gamble, but a plan nonetheless. Pete wasn’t a big fan of the plan, that involved convincing the Killers of their victory before pulling out their potential trump card. Pete didn’t even voice his concerns, because he felt certain that saying them aloud would jinx them.

Because all he could think was that Chicago, while the embodiment of a city, was still just one person. His aura was strange, but it wasn’t the size of a city. It might not be enough.

But it was, apparently, the hope that everyone else needed. Patrick had a sword, Ryan had a gun. Chicago was always armed with a gun. Jon was, by his own word, not much of a fighter, and as such opted out of grabbing a weapon. He wasn’t lying when he said he wasn’t much of a fighter, but Pete couldn’t help but wonder if he would try to run for it when everything went to hell.

“So,” Ryan said, “You guys are gonna replace my cars, right?”

“Hey, if we save your life, you owe us,” Joe said, shoving on the back of Ryan’s head, but still in obvious good humor.

“I, for one, don’t think my life is entirely worth two gently used midsize sedans,” Jon said, and the car broke out in laughter. Pete wasn’t really in any conversation, but he let his head drift through all of them, listening to whatever was going on.
“How do you feel?” Patrick was asking Chicago in a low voice. It was exactly the tone of voice that indicated a conversation that Pete shouldn’t eavesdrop on. He leaned further back in the chair to make it easier for him to hear.


“He can let you go as soon as it’s over.”

“I know.”

“What’s wrong?”

“I like feeling human. I like all of this. I feel close to you...”

Pete tried to focus on the road, but there was nothing to focus on. Fucking deserts, and their long, empty, easy to navigate roads. Where was the construction? Where was the traffic? How long could it possibly take for the goddamn prince of hell to find them in the middle of nowhere?

In the rearview mirror, Pete could see Chicago and Patrick leaning close together, their faces practically touching, and somehow no one but Pete was paying them any attention. One quick step on the brakes wouldn’t hurt any of them, just startle them a bit...

Jealous, Pete thought miserably, just like Joe had said, more right than he knew. He was jealous, and Pete felt almost grateful for the life or death situation he was in, because it gave him an excuse to think about something other than the implications of being jealous here.

Off in the distance, what Pete had initially thought was just another shimmering wave of heat rising off the ground got closer as Pete sped towards it, and he saw that it was actually another car, a red car that was driving over the land rather than the road, and was kicking up immense clouds of dust as it sped towards them. When the car finally careened into the road, it stopped across the two-lane highway with a loud screech of brakes. Pete’s vision finally kicked back into focus, and he swore.

“Get ready,” he demanded in a low voice, just loud enough that everyone could hear it, and the chatter in the car died down immediately.

Pete slowed down as he approached the car, a shiny, ostentatious red muscle car. The driver’s side door hung lazily open, and Brandon Flowers was leaning on the side of it. The black suit and slicked back hair made him look like a Bond villain, and Pete swallowed hard.

“What’s the plan?” he asked Joe, his voice nearly without volume, his mouth was so dry.

“Well,” Joe said, “All we have to do is get Brandon talking, so it shouldn’t be hard. When was the last time you met him without getting a villainous monologue?”

“Right,” Ryan said, and he leaned over to Spencer, who was sitting up on his own but still looking woozy and out of it. “Stay in the car, okay?”

“Gladly,” Spencer said, looking a little green. Pete swallowed hard, still staring out the windshield. He knew the windows were tinted, but it felt like Brandon was staring directly into this eyes. Glaring.

“Everyone get out on three, alright?” Joe asked, his voice clear and commanding, and though they were really in the middle of something, Pete couldn’t help but feel a swell of pride towards Joe.
“One.”

Why did Pete never get a weapon? He really needed a weapon, and he scrambled around the floor beneath the steering wheel, coming back up with a crowbar. Well, it would work for self-defense at least.

“Two.”

His hand was sweaty on the handle, and his heart was beating so fast that his chest hurt. He suddenly realized, with a dizzying jolt, that he could die.

“Three.”

Pete kicked the door open and jumped out, crowbar held out in front of him as though it would ward off the enemies. He stumbled forward, unsteady on his feet and not remotely cut out for fighting, but he ran forward in what was probably the world’s smallest, most pathetic looking battle charge. Mid-sprint, he heard the unmistakable sound of a gunshot right next to his head.

Ryan cried out in pain, and Pete was too frozen from the shot right next to him, oh god, aimed at him?

“Idiot!” a girl snarled, and shoved a man in front of Pete to the ground, grabbing his gun and training it on Pete’s forehead. She leaned in close and breathed down his neck, her words hot in the already sweltering air outside.

“Sorry about him, he seems to have forgotten that you’re off limits. Care to watch?”

Without waiting for an answer, the girl spun him around, and jabbed the tip of the gun against the nape of his neck, hard and warning.

Unable to think of any option but to watch, Pete saw with a pang of horror that Ryan was staggering, half bend over, and with a violently bleeding arm. Chicago was sprawled out on the ground, but looked otherwise uninjured. Patrick, with a sword that looked too big for him, was actually holding his own quite well against a member of the Killers with a katana. Andy and Joe were standing in front of Brendon like sentinels, fending off the attacks of everyone that tried to come after him while he sang.

Sand was slowly lapping up Brandon’s legs, but he didn’t look afraid. He wasn’t trying to shift or fight it, and for some reason, he was smiling. It wasn’t right.

Pete tried to stand up, and the girl behind him yelled, but he spun around and cupped the end of the gun with one hand, his fear beginning to evaporate. The girl holding the gun looked frightened of him, her aura was filled with fear, and for some reason the intensity of her fear was intoxicating, bright and satisfying.

“Why are you on orders not to kill me?” Pete asked. He cocked his head in question, strangely calm while the screams and sounds of battle erupted behind him.

“I- I- I-” the girl stuttered, and Pete laughed.

“Yeah, maybe don’t tell me you can’t kill me before threatening me with a gun, actually,” he said, and pushed the gun down to face the ground, then stepped closer. “Why are you on orders not to kill me?”

“I can’t-”
“Tell me,” Pete demanded, his eyes flashing golden, and her aura clouded over at once.

“Retribution,” she said. “Flowers, he told us he’s afraid of retribution. He’s afraid of you.”

“Is he now?” Pete asked. He stepped closer, his chest practically touching the girl’s. His eyes were narrowed. “Are you afraid of me?”

“Yes.”

Pete grinned.

“You should be,” he said, and snatched the gun out of her hand. He slammed the butt of the gun down on her head and aimed it straight at Brandon, vengeance be damned. He wanted out. He lined the barrel up with Brandon’s head and pulled the trigger.

It was a direct shot. Not bad for someone who’d never aimed a human shaped target, but unfortunately, it sailed through Brandon’s head and hit the car behind him. His aura, it was there, but Brandon wasn’t. Whatever was leaning on the car, getting enveloped in sand and not giving a damn, it wasn’t Brandon.

“This is a trap!” Pete announced, spinning around and searching for Brandon, the real one. He had to be close, he had to be powerful to fake something like this, but they needed to get out.

“Clever,” he heard someone whisper in his ear, and Pete spun around, firing the gun wildly and hitting nothing but the ground a few yards in front of him. Joe screamed, and Pete turned again to see the hellhound on top of him, paws holding him to the ground and burning him.

Pete fired again and missed again as the two of them kept moving, too fast and too strong for anyone else to intervene. Andy tried to jump in and the wolf that turned Spencer knocked him to the ground, keeping him preoccupied.

The hellhound, all roaring flames and black ember skin slashed its claws across Joe’s torso, ripping open his shirt and instantly cauterizing the deep slashes on his chest. Pete tried to get closer to them to fire again, only to find the gun empty. Low on ideas, he threw the gun at the hellhound’s head, which made it growl, but little else.

“Brendon!” Pete screamed, and Brendon jumped, before nodding at Pete and trying to work up a tune, singing a cracked and raw version of Eleanor Rigby. A moment later, a sinkhole opened beneath the car the Killers had come in, but no one was left beside the car.

“Brendon!” Pete groaned, and Brendon cringed.

“I’m sorry, I can’t focus!” Brendon said, starting again, his voice still quavering.

“Stop!” Pete yelled at Brandon, throwing the full force of his charmspeak at him, but Brandon wasn’t making eye contact, and nothing changed. The hellhound was ripping Joe to shreds, and Pete was just watching.

When he couldn’t stand it anymore, Pete jumped forward and threw himself on top of the hellhound. Instantly, the heat had him screaming, burning his skin, but he clung tight while the hellhound tried to buck him off. The flames inside the hound burnt Pete until he couldn’t feel the heat anymore, and only then could the creature finally throw him off.

Pete was sent sliding across the cracked earth, heavily burnt, and finally, his eyes fluttered shut, and his head stayed quiet enough for him to fall asleep.
In the movies, whenever the badass hero got injured fighting, he would just keep fighting, gritting his teeth through the pain, save the day, and eventually forget about his injuries.

Then again, in the movies, werewolves were usually amnesiacs used as metaphors for drug usage, so Joe had learned not to hold too much stock in them.

While he knew he should have leapt instantly to his feet to gain the upperhand after Brandon, for some reason, stopped treating him like a fiery chew-toy, all he could do was clutch the wounds on his chest and shoulders and howl in pain.

Joe was pretty sure that he was supposed to stop feeling pain because of adrenaline, or some other equally bullshit explanation. And yet, he still felt like he got his chest sliced open and like his clothes were on fire, because it was, and they were.

Joe took his sweet time getting to his feet again, and he ran his hands through his hair for good measure to make sure that wasn’t on fire too. When he was finally standing again, he saw Pete unconscious and sprawled unnaturally to the side, and the hellhound gearing up to pounce at him again.

“Fuck, you’re not feeling chatty today, huh?” Joe asked, his voice higher than he had hoped it would have come out, and he raised his arms over his head to ward off the hellhound as it crashed into him, snarls ripping out of the creature as it did.

“Give me the siren,” Brandon spoke in his gravelly, inhuman voice. He dragged his paw across the ground in front of Joe while Joe’s chest heaved, trying to catch his breath.

“Well, see, now we’ve worked too hard to keep him,” Joe said, shrugging, “So you see, that definitely can’t happen now.”

The hellhound growled, and Joe had just enough warning to shift into a wolf and collide with it in midair, whining with the strain against his bones and the fire on his skin.

This fight should be easier now, should be effortless, but Joe felt exactly the same, and it terrified him. Even better matched as a wolf, the fire radiating from the hellhound was making it too hard for Joe to attack, and he was constantly on the defensive, with no one left to help that wasn’t in a fight of their own.

The hellhound pulled back once more and then clamped his jaw down on Joe’s side, and Joe let out a long, pained howl as he heard the sound of ribs snapping. He felt faint as he crashed to the ground, his vision blurry as he transformed back into his human self. His shirt was in bloody tatters, and his ribs, oh fuck, they felt like they were stabbing him.

The world in front of him swam with color and light, delirious and senseless as Joe tried to focus again, tried to shift back, but didn’t have the energy to even stand. Brandon courteously took care of the problem for him by grabbing the collar of his mangled shirt and lifting him up, his lips pulled back over his teeth, making him even more animalistic and dangerous while wearing a suit.

“Give up,” he demanded, his smile cold. “Concede defeat and I’ll make your death painless. I have an army. I have unlimited resources. I have a pack nearly ten thousand strong and soon to be three stronger. And what’s your secret weapon? Spunk? Friendship?” he sneered.

“Ten thousand strong? Really?” Joe asked. His vision of Brandon was blurry, but he managed a weak smile. “Well, I don’t think the power of friendship can compete with that. But the
population of Chicago is roughly two point five million.”

“What?” Brandon asked, sounding suddenly uncertain.

“Chicago,” Joe said, spitting blood out on the ground. “Ugh, gross. Um, yeah. Two point five million.”

“You’re lying,” Brandon breathed.

“Am I?” Joe asked. “Drop me.”

Brandon let go, and Joe straightened up and let loose all the power he hadn’t realized he’d been holding back. He was instantly, painfully overwhelmed, his body nothing but an overworked conductor for a city’s worth of electricity.

“In fact, everyone stop!” Joe yelled, and everyone froze. He took a shuddering step forward, the ground beneath him trembling with his power. Power like this, raw and unstable and limitless, there were no bounds to stop him.

“Kneel,” he said to Brandon, not bothering to raise his voice, though it rang out through the desert, like thunder, like sirens. Brandon crashed to his knees, a desperate noise leaking from out of his mouth.

“You’re going to leave us alone.” he demanded. “You’re going to leave everyone I care about alone, and you’re never going to so much as threaten someone I’ve met before ever again. You’re going to give up your slave labor, and live your life showing fealty to me. Understood?”

“Understood,” Brandon croaked, twitching from pain, cracking under the weight of Joe’s words.

“Good.”

With the last of his strength, Joe grabbed Brandon’s shirt collar, lifted him to eye level, and punched him hard in the nose. Brandon whined in pain, then turned up to Joe.

“Indomitable, aren’t you?” he muttered.

“Damn straight.”

“And all your friends,” Brandon croaked. “Your impossible vampire. Infallible human. The calamitous fae. You have no idea how dangerous you’re all going to become.”

“You’re also going to shut up,” Joe said, rolling his eyes.

“Grab Pete,” Joe said to Andy, unsure how to turn off the alpha voice. He walked back into the car, slammed his door shut, and leaned his head back while the car filled up. Now that he had turned on all this power, he didn’t know how to turn it off, and it was rapidly becoming overwhelming.

“So?” he sighed, already tired of this weird, multi-toned voice. “Hospital?”

Ryan nodded eagerly.

“Hospital.”
In spite of all the injuries, everyone ended up being fine. Of course, with Pete being unconscious, they couldn't charm the hospital workers out of asking a lot of difficult questions, but for some reason, looking at Joe made everyone a little less inclined to press their group to call the police.

Ryan's injury was very superficial, and after he was cleaned up he was good to go. Once Joe’s bones were set he insisted on leaving, as being a werewolf tended to heal most wounds. Chicago was fine, with nothing but a minor head injury, and though Pete was heavily bandaged, he was told (though Patrick couldn’t imagine how) that he wouldn’t even have long term scars from the entire burning experience.

Patrick was trying very hard not to even think about the way Pete had looked, his clothes singed and his hands bloody from the burning while he tossed and turned on the whole drive to the nearest hospital. The hospital, luckily, was an easy find. Joe could smell antiseptics miles away, now.

Actually, once everyone was bandaged up and given pain killers, Joe still looked the worst out of all of them. Once they got back to Ryan’s house, Patrick could look at him properly, and he looked pale. Wrong, somehow, his bones too prominent, and his eyes almost too clear, too dark. Deeper set. He held himself up higher and his face looked stiff, incapable of smiling. Most importantly, his voice no longer sounded like his own.

Heavy and powerful, Joe’s voice now exclusively sounded like his alpha voice, like every word he said was being spoken by thousands of people behind his voice. It felt heavy against Patrick’s ears, hard to listen to.

“So,” Ryan said, his arms wrapped loosely around his knees, one of them in a bright white bandage. “Not like I’m not eternally grateful to you or anything, but were we gonna drop the pack thing?”

Joe looked at Ryan, confused and still distant.

“Do you want to leave?”

Ryan flinched backwards, though Joe didn’t seem to notice he was making everyone else afraid.

“I just…” Ryan licked his lips. “I thought you were uncomfortable with all the power?”

“I don’t know how to stop it,” Joe said in what should have been a whisper, but was still too heavy and powerful.

“Let Chicago go first?” Ryan suggested.

“I can’t.”

“Yes you can,” Chicago stood up suddenly, his eyes wide. He felt guilty, Patrick could tell by the way he looked, and Patrick’s stomach swooped with dread as Chicago pushed his head back to continue.

“I think I need to go back.”

Patrick wasn’t surprised. He didn’t even feel sad. He felt like all of his organs had disappeared and left nothing but empty space behind in his chest.
“Should we go back?”

The flight back to Chicago was quiet, and they brought Panic! with them so that Joe could, theoretically, remove them from the pack as soon as Joe was capable of it. Patrick kept thinking of arguments against it, that they didn’t know anything about pack dynamics still, that it would probably be a simple process to remove someone without consigning them back to nonbeing, but he knew there was no point. Instead, he leaned on Chicago’s shoulder, dead silent. Chicago kept trying to talk to him at first, interest him in some conversation about anything but what was about to happen, but Patrick didn’t respond. Instead, he leaned closer, relishing in the feeling of just how warm and alive Chicago was, and how if he paced his breathing just right, their hearts beat in time with each other’s.

Once they got out of the airport, Chicago directed the driver to take them down Lake Shore Drive, and then had him stop somewhere where they had a beautiful view of the skyline. Patrick could hardly believe that the sun was just then setting, after everything that had happened in a day.

After Patrick got out of the car, which took a couple of tries, Chicago pulled him aside, placing his hands on Patrick’s shoulders and staring nervously into his eyes.

“Are you going to be okay?” he asked.

“Fine,” Patrick said, grateful that he wasn’t talking to Pete. “And you- you’re ready?”

“I think so,” Chicago said, giving him a sad smile. “This is too much? You know? All the time, it’s just so much being human. So intense. I think I’m kind of tired of it.”

“You know the rest of us have to deal with that for our whole lives,” Patrick said, staring at the ground. He couldn’t keep facing Chicago. Too cowardly to still look him in the eye.

“I’m sorry,” he said quietly, and turned to the others.

“Goodbye guys, good luck with that whole Las Vegas thing, hope it involves less slavery in the future,” he said, grabbing everyone from Panic!’s hands and shaking them in turn.

“And Joe, hey, thanks for everything. You’re an amazing leader, okay? Don’t ever forget that.”

Chicago turned to Andy, shaking his head a little.

“I still think I’m cooler than Milwaukee, but you’re an awesome dude,” he said, hugging Andy tightly, and then turned to Pete.

“You’re stronger and better than you know,” he said, then pulled Pete in for a hug and whispered something inaudible to Patrick in his ear that made Joe frown in confusion. At last, he turned to Patrick, while dread pooled in Patrick’s stomach.

“Patrick–” he began, and on hearing his name, all of Patrick’s organs returned to him, his blood pumping faster and his head rushing. He didn’t forget everyone staring at Chicago, but he suddenly didn’t care, because someone else watching him was the least important thing in the world. He threw himself forward into Chicago’s open arms and kissed him desperately.

“Don’t leave,” he pleaded without pulling back, his lips still brushing Chicago’s. “Please don’t leave me.”

“Patrick,” Chicago said, letting his hands rest on Patrick’s back. He stood up straighter, so that Patrick’s head was resting against his chest while Chicago held him.
“You were right,” Patrick said. “You were right, I love you.”

“I know that,” Chicago said. “I love you too, but…”

Patrick pulled away to look him in the eye. He stood straight, stoic, knowing what came next.

“I need to let go,” he said, grasping Patrick’s hand and letting go again. “Goodbye.”

Patrick wasn’t sure what he expected. A bigger production, maybe. Chicago to slowly dissolve away. But he was there one moment, and then he was gone.

“Holy shit,” Joe said, his voice gone back to normal. Patrick’s hands were shaking. There were still seven people standing behind him, and mostly he felt embarrassed. The moisture prickling at the edges of his eyes wasn’t really helping matters.

“I’m gonna go home,” Patrick announced, refusing to look at anyone. He walked forward, right through where Chicago had been standing, so that he wouldn’t have to look at anyone else. He was stupid, ridiculous, a loser, who the hell fell in love with a city?

It was swelteringly hot, but he felt strangely cold, so he decided to walk back. The entire city, he decided, had never looked worse. The trash was baking on the streets like it did every summer, so everything smelled awful. It was dark and dingy, filled with homeless people that Patrick had no change for, and it felt less like home than it ever had.

After walking for over an hour, Patrick finally gave up and hailed a taxi. He loathed the idea of going back to his empty apartment, but it was either that or passing out in the road, he was so tired.

When he finally shouldered the door of his apartment open, he didn’t even notice that the light was on until he heard someone on the couch clear their throat.

Patrick jumped about a foot in the air, and he gripped the wall to keep from falling over once he saw it was Pete.

“Jesus Christ, what are you doing here?” Patrick asked, deep breathing to calm down. “You nearly gave me a goddamn heart attack!”

“Sorry,” Pete gave him a sheepish smile. “I thought you’d be here sooner.” He held up a huge brown paper bag and shrugged. “I brought takeout. I mean, I didn’t know if you’d rather be alone or not, but just in case you wanted someone here and didn’t want to ask for whatever weird manly no-homo reason, all though to be fair you were just with another man, so I feel like we’re kind of past no-oof!”

Patrick clutched at Pete, hugging him so tightly it was probably restricting his airflow. Pete, for his part, held Patrick just as tightly.

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It took Joe the better part of a week to track everyone down and remove them from the pack. The severing emotion he had to focus on in his mind was incredibly simple once Chicago was out of his head. Eventually, Pete hypothesized that he simply couldn’t remove two million people in one fell swoop, which made sense, Joe supposed.

Eventually, the only people left in his pack were the band. Joe had put them off till last, and
he was reluctant to sever them from his head at all, but still, it was kind of intense for a friendship to be connected in the head, he supposed. He still wasn’t exactly looking forward for the day when he met up with everyone in Chicago.

Joe was grateful to see that Patrick looked much better than he felt. Maybe that wasn’t something to feel grateful for, but he was happy that Patrick was still together enough to at least put up a facade of normalcy. He felt like an idiot for not noticing anything earlier, but he had always assumed Patrick had been straight. Beyond straight. Maybe cities didn’t count; Joe didn’t know.

“So,” Joe said, cracking his knuckles. The brilliant sunniness of the park felt uncomfortable, given the situation. “We gonna do this?”

“Actually, no,” Andy said. Joe raised his eyebrows.

“We talked about this, and unless you want to, we’d rather stay,” Pete said, grinning his typical toothy grin at Joe. “I mean, it’s good for us, as long as we keep fighting.”

“No privacy, but it can’t be worse than living in a van together,” Patrick added.

Joe felt a slowly creeping sense of elation running through him.

“I mean, obviously, if you’d rather be done with pack bullshit forever we don’t have to,” Pete added. “But I get the impression that that’s not how you feel.”

“Fucking fae,” Joe muttered, but he was smiling. “Seriously?”

“Yeah, you’re stuck with us for life,” Andy said. Joe rolled his eyes.

“Wasn’t I already?”

Pete’s phone went off, and he pulled it out, eyes widening as he checked it.

“You guys feel up for a wendigo on Clark Street?” he asked.

“Who texted you?”

“Korean Tom Cruise,” Pete said, a sly smile spreading on his face. “I got him to get in contact with some of the old crowd, back when monster fighting was more of a network. We’re heroes for hire, now.”

“Sure, I’m game,” Joe said, rolling up his sleeves. Andy grinned, his fangs flashing, and Patrick tightened his grip on his knife handle in its sheath.

“Let’s go save the world.”

Chapter End Notes

Oh man, I can't thank you guys enough for sticking with me through another season! This whole story has been such a wild ride, and I cannot believe the amazing amount of support and love I've received from everyone who reads this, and it means the world to me. The comments, fanart, and asks keep me going, really. As always, I'm sorry this chapter is late, and since I'm so off schedule, I think that I'm going to take a (very small)
break, and you can expect the beginning of Season Three in August! Thank you guys for everything, and I hoped you liked the season!

End Notes

Wow guys, I don't know what to say! I'm totally floored by all your comments and edits and artwork and general support! I can think of a lot to say just yet except thank you thank you thank you for sticking by this story, and I'm glad you guys all enjoy it! You can check out the official tumblr at thehigh-waytohell.tumblr.com, which has links to the youtube where my rad girlfriend made a trailer? Yes, a fanfiction trailer! How cool is that? It also features amazing edits, artwork, updates on the story, and you can always ask me questions there. Anyway, thanks so so much, I'm excited you guys are still interested!!!!

Chapter One title by Phantom Planet

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