Until We Die Or Forever Ends (Whichever One Comes First)

by Hum My Name (My_Kind_of_Crazy)

Summary

Patrick’s seconds away from breaking down, from throwing the briefcase out the window and praying he’'ll never see it again. He’s moments away from slamming it shut and tossing it in the ocean. He’s breaths away from calling his mom and asking her to come get him because he’s honestly scared for his life.

All of these thoughts disappear with the simple sound of Pete breathing next to him, letting out a breath that could pass for a laugh. Patrick wants to look over at him, to grab him and ask him to fix this. Pete, though, is already ahead of him.

“Well,” Pete says, tossing an arm over Patrick’s shoulders and drawing him close. It’s a simple act but it puts the younger boy at ease. “They want us to be defenders? Awesome. At least they know we’ll go down swinging.”

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The hiatus was something that was supposed to give them time apart from each other, to calm down and relax from the tension. But a briefcase might be enough to dash all those plans.

YBC!Hiatus AU
Notes

Take one writer and give her writer's block for her current fic. Add inspiration and desperation for a new story. You get this.

Ok. I promise that I'm gonna work on my other fic too. I just had to get this out there because I literally had a nightmare where someone else posted a story just like this.

I have a soundtrack for this fic. The theme song would be "End of Innocence" by Kamelot. It's as foreshadowing as you allow it to be.

Also. I don't have a beta reader so all mistakes are mine. Now, enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes.
Prologue: You Have No Idea What You’re In For (But You’ll Trust Me Anyway)

Pre-Hiatus

They never meant to save the world, Pete swears it. They never meant to protect such a mundane looking briefcase or become the Defenders of the Faith. He’s certain that they never meant to get caught up in everything that happened in between the then and now.

They never meant to save the world. Like the best and the worst things in life, it just sort of happened.

When it's all said and done, when the winces settle down to blinks and the scratches fade into scars, Pete will think that happened like a song. If he were a more pretentious man, more so than he already claims to be, he'd further the simile to say that it happened like listening through a new album for the first time. It eased them in and gripped them tight with lyrics so sharp that you could see them imprinted on his bones. It wasn’t necessarily a bad experience.

But it also happened with that inevitable crash. There's always a crashing of instruments and an explosion of vocals that leave him breathless if the album was played at the right volume at the right time. Pete knows that it’s never really the lyrics that keep someone listening, despite what others will tell him. It’s the adrenaline of something new and the gentle judgement lingering in your mind. It’s the confusion and fear and certainty you feel about the next word before it drops into something so innovatively profound that it almost feels like a sloppy kiss backstage minutes before your band is supposed to go on and play. It’s the promise of something special. It’s always that crash.

Pete’s crash wasn’t a song, though thousands and millions would think it more poetic if it was.

No. His crash was never any of the lyrics that would immortalize him forever. It wasn’t even the way he and his band saved the world from certain destruction, the way he had to face nightmares he’d never want to imagine becoming reality. His crash was something simpler and yet so much more complex. His crash was someone with pretty pink lips and sparkling blue eyes. His crash was the cause for his words, the reason that he was so willing to save the world.

His crash was Patrick Stump.

And Patrick’s crash is this story.

“We’re gonna be on top of the fucking world, you guys! Just you wait!”

Pete’s shout echoes through the night, his following hoot of joy bouncing off the walls of the venue behind the group. Patrick shudders a bit in his too thin jacket in the frosty night air but smiles all the same. Pete’s joy is contagious and he can’t help but agree.

“Did you see those kids tonight, Andy? Trick, Joe, tell me you saw those kids tonight,” Pete says, bounding from person to person with a breathless smile on his face. Patrick rolls his eyes fondly.
“Chill out, man. We were all on the stage with you, of course we saw those kids,” he says, his voice a bit hoarse from another night of singing onstage. He clears his throat a bit, hoping to relieve a bit of the soreness. This tour has been one of their most successful, sure, but he can’t help but feel relieved that it’s finally coming to a close. He’s not sure how long his voice can last and he’s not too intent on finding out.

Pete carries on regardless. “They fucking love us! They knew every word, Patrick! They sang along to every word!”

Patrick smiles as Pete turns to face him, walking backwards between Joe and Andy, smiling brighter than the moon in the sky.

“Your words have that impact on people, Pete. It’s nothing I haven’t said before. People love your lyrics almost as much as they love you,” he says with a smile, aiming for teasing but coming across a bit too genuine. Impossibly, Pete’s smile grows and Patrick finds that he doesn’t care.

Joe turns around, an eyebrow raised. “Dude, you sounded so gay when you said that. Just so you know.”

“Joe, leave them alone,” Andy scolds in a light-hearted voice. He smiles back at Patrick as the group comes to a stop, the bus in the distance. “It was a pretty awesome show.”

“And there’s more to come, that’s for sure,” Pete says, nodding emphatically. “I’m already getting ideas for the next tour! So, imagine, what if we-”

“Pete, this tour just ended. Let’s spend some time recharging and then we could think more shows. My voice is exhausted enough as it is,” Patrick says, clearing his throat once again to prove his point. Pete’s eyes widen and he nods again.

“Oh, yeah, dude, of course! We gotta keep those pipes in their natural golden condition. You’re the real reason they love us, you know,” he says with a wink. It still makes Patrick blush and he ducks his head, thankful for the dark of the night to hide the red shade.

“Whatever, these pipes are gonna rust if they don’t get some water. Or tea. Preferably tea. Hey, Hurley, do you have anymore of that organic tea? That worked a friggin miracle on my voice last night,” Patrick says, proud of how none of his embarrassing crush-like sentiments bled into his tone.

“No,” Andy answers at the same time that Joe says “Yes.” Andy turns on the guitarist with a half-hearted glare, to which Joe only responds with a shrug.

“Patrick’s the singer,” he explains in a lazy tone. “I’m pretty sure he needs it more.”

Andy sighs and Patrick feels a small twinge of guilt. But then Andy shakes his head and flashes a grin at Patrick, a reassurance that rids Patrick of his worry.

“Okay, but that shit is hard to find. You owe me,” Andy says. Patrick can’t tell if he’s teasing or not. He doesn’t really mind.

“Okay, cool, thanks,” he says in rapid succession. A strong gust of wind tears through his coat and he shivers, his smile sliding off his face. The group begins their trek back to the bus, the wind merely picking up strength as they draw closer. “Why don’t we ever just park next to the venue? Like, right by the exit?”

“Aww,” Pete says, bumping his shoulder against Patrick, nearly throwing the singer off balance as he trudges forward against the wind. “Does the wittle Patrick need a bigger coat?”
Patrick debates punching him but doing so would require he take his hands out of his pockets and he’s not willing to lose his fingers to the cold just because Pete was being a dick. Somehow, he figures that having both hands is a requirement for staying in the band.

“Dude, you use that baby voice on me again and I will seriously kill you. In your sleep.” He settles on a threat, casting a weak glare Pete’s way. He likes to imagine that the glare would be colder if he weren’t too busy freezing already. In the distance, he catches sight of the bus and lets out a sigh of relief. His breath fogs before him, a testament to the cold, and he watches it dissipate angrily.

“Joke’s on you, Trickster. I spend my nights with both eyes open,” Pete says with a wide grin. Patrick frowns, stopping short. Joe runs into his back with a shocked yelp, stumbling away from where the shorter man had ceased his walking. Somewhere in his mind, Patrick imagines that he should apologize. Pete’s statement, though, prevents him from doing so. He narrows his eyes once he has the bassist’s attention, studying every detail of Pete’s face.

“Wait, what?” Patrick begins, his voice low and accusing. “Both eyes open? Pete, are you not sleeping again? Because I swear that I told you that you could come to me and if you haven’t, Peter Wentz, I will drag you out of your bunk tonight and-”

“Woah, woah, woah,” Pete says, eyes suddenly wide and hands held up beside his face in surrender. “That is totally not at all what I meant. It’s just...I’ve been fine. It’s not like I can’t sleep? It’s just...Well- I mean. I should do as much writing as I can, right? And I gotta write down the lyrics as soon as I get them or else they’ll disappear. And you know how fast they can disappear.”

“That sounds like bullcrap, Pete,” Patrick says, irritation coloring his tone. In the dim lights of the streetlights, he can’t tell if he’s imagining or seeing the dark smudges underneath Pete’s worried eyes. Even if they were there, Patrick muses, it’s not like he could even tell if they were eyeliner or not. “Goddamnit, I told you- I told you- that when you can’t sleep you should tell me!”

“Oh, what does it matter anyway?” Pete shoots back, frustration of his own filling the air. “The tour’s over and I’m doing just fine! I don’t need you to baby me!”

“Um, guys,” Joe says, wary and afraid. Patrick ignores him, stepping closer to Pete with his mouth set in a firm line.

“It’s not babying you, Pete. It’s caring about you! God, what will it take to teach you the difference?” Patrick knows he must look ridiculous, leaning forward threateningly with his hands still shoved firmly in his pockets. The wind yanks down the hood of his jacket, exposing his old and worn trucker hat. His cheeks spot red with cold and anger but that doesn’t prevent him from taking another step closer.

“Guys?” Again, Joe calls out for their attention. Again, he is ignored.

“Oh, I don’t know the difference? What about you, Patrick? You can care for everyone else but not yourself? Maybe if you didn’t push your voice so much on stage then you wouldn’t be taking all of Andy’s tea! Maybe if you thought less about how to impress everybody and more about how to take care of yourself, then you wouldn’t be wearing just a hoodie in the middle of winter!” Pete shouts, folding his own hoodie clad arms across his chest. It’s not fair, Patrick muses crazily, that Pete can look so good, even riled up in the freezing cold. Sure, the wind is doing a number on his hair but it looks more dramatic than anything, revealing his damning gaze and whiskey eyes. When Pete licks his lips, chapped by the wind, Patrick tries not to be too distracted.

“Are you fucking kid-”
“Hey!”

Pete and Patrick turn sharply at the sound of Andy’s voice. They expect to see his disappointed glare, their shoulders already hunching in shame of their bickering. However, what they find is not Andy’s motherly disapproval nor do they see Joe smirking in the background like the sibling who told. What they’re instead met with are Joe’s and Andy’s fearful eyes focused on something over their shoulder. Their anger quickly fades to fear.

“What is it?” Pete whispers, as if he expects for some sort of monster to be standing behind them. Unconsciously, it seems, his hands reaches out and finds Patrick’s sleeve, tugging as if he wants to yank his hand from his pocket, to hold onto him. Just as instinctively, Patrick relents. He only feels a second of the cold he’d been protecting it from before Pete’s hand is in his, squeezing as they slowly turn around.

Pete lets out a breath at the relief that there’s no monster directly behind them. It’s Patrick who gasps at the sight of someone stalking around inside their bus, the lights on and their figure appearing as an ominous shadow against the windows.

“Did-” The word dies in his mouth, dry from fear and hoarse from singing. He swallows repeatedly, willing his voice to hold up. “Did one of you have someone coming over?”

He doesn’t have to look behind him to know that they’re shaking their heads no. His grip on Pete’s hand tightens and he forces out a nervous laugh. “Well... Well, fuck, who the hell is that then?”

The four seem frozen in place as the silence draws out, watching the intruder sneak around. The person doesn’t appear to be causing any harm, merely pacing back and forth at an irregular pace. Patrick holds his breath, aware of the others doing the same, as if any movement from the band may turn this stranger’s passivity into aggression. Perhaps they can wait them out or perhaps someone else will walk by to deal with it. These sound like the safest course of action to take.

But then the stranger flicks off the lights in the bus, shrouding the area in darkness. Their figure disappears into a shadow and it’s not until the door opens with a clicking noise that the four are spurred into action. As if breaking free from a trance, they all begin to move at once as the door shuts loudly, the sound followed with hurried footsteps rushing into the distance.

“That’s right! Get the hell away from our bus!” Pete shouts, pulling forward in a way that would be threatening were he a foot or so taller. Patrick follows unwillingly, his hand still trapped with Pete’s. Andy and Joe stumble behind, reaching out to try and get the bassist to stop.

“Don’t attract his attention! What if he has a weapon?” Joe hisses, grabbing Pete by the shoulder and spinning him around. Pete drops Patrick’s hand and gives Joe an appraising look.

“If he was going to attack us, he wouldn’t have been so obvious about being in the bus! It’s probably just some freak looking for some dirty clothes to sell online,” he says seriously. Andy raises an eyebrow.

“I don’t think we’re big enough for that to be an option. Now, a fangirl who got dared by some friends or thinks that Pete’s her soulmate, that I can definitely see,” Andy says, rubbing at his chin. “Besides, isn’t it kind of wrong to just assume it’s a guy?”

Patrick rolls his eyes, his stomach still twisting in knots from the experience. The sound of the stranger running off has already faded into the distance and he shakes his head as the other three begin to argue the most likely gender to break into the bus. Hoping that the coast is clear by now, he turns to face said vehicle. He expects that it’s all a joke they can laugh about later. Maybe it was a
crazy fan- he doesn’t really care. Right now, he just wants to get back on the bus and warm up with a big mug of tea and a heavy blanket over his shoulders.

He begins to walk back to the bus, hands working their way back into his pockets. He smirks to himself as the rest of the group’s voices are drowned out by the wind. It’s clear that they haven’t yet noticed that he’s slipped away. Patrick can’t help but laugh a bit at the thought of what they’ll do when they do notice. Maybe he’ll keep the lights off in the bus and pretend he’s just disappeared. Maybe they’ll think that the intruder kidnapped him. It’s cruel but Patrick decides a small joke is the least he could do to get back at Pete for fighting with him.

He’s nearly to the bus, practically buzzing with excitement to get out of the cold, when he senses it. Something akin to an electric shock goes down his spine and his muscles go rigid. The hair at the back of his neck begins to prickle and, slowly, he turns to look.

Someone is watching him.

The person from before, Patrick assumes, watches him from where they stand leaning against the side of the bus. Their arms are folded across their chest and a black handkerchief is tied around the bottom of their face. Though his heart is pounding painfully inside his ribcage, Patrick can’t help but quickly decipher that this person seems to be male. Hysterically, he almost wants to call back and tell the other guys.

But the rest of the band is too far back and Patrick’s paralyzed by the intensity of this man’s gaze—too intense for such a light shade of brown. Though it’s hidden under a beanie, Patrick can see the man’s hair being whipped by the wind that Patrick, for some reason, can no longer feel. He wants to force himself to look closer, to dissect every detail in case he gets attacked and needs to tell someone about the stranger. His eyes search desperately for some sort of defining mark but all he can focus on is the way that the stranger’s eyes crinkle, as if he’s smiling beneath his mask. He doesn’t know why he does it, but Patrick’s hand raises in a nervous wave.

The man before him chuckles and something familiar strikes Patrick in his chest. It travels from his heart and through his veins, pulsating with an itch that he knows this man. His mouth parts a fraction more and his eyes narrows, zeroing in on the stranger’s thin glove clad fingers as he reaches to brush his loose locks out of his face. He pushes himself off of the side of the bus and Patrick knows for certain now that he’s grinning when Patrick flinches.

“It’s alright, Patrick,” the man says. The itch grows stronger at the sound of his voice— it’s unique and not one he can imagine forgetting. The stranger hums a bit and his voice drops to a lower timbre, an attempt to mask his identity. “I’m not gonna hurt you or your band.”

Patrick relays the voice and the words through his mind, searching frantically for a match. He doesn’t bother checking through anybody he personally knows. This voice carries a different familiarity than he’s used to. It’s less of the voice of someone he’s encountered and more of trying to recognize the sound of a song he’s heard once on the radio. It’s as if he should be awestruck to be in this person’s presence and that feeling certainly lingers when the other steps back. Patrick can’t help but follow.

“How do you know my name?” Patrick asks, afraid that his voice won’t travel the distance needed only to discover that it comes across much too loud. His hand slaps over his mouth and he finds himself checking over his shoulder, afraid of drawing attention to this exchange. The other three are still debating heatedly, Pete gesturing wildly in Andy’s face while Joe snickers beside him. They haven’t seemed to notice Patrick’s absence yet. For once, the singer is glad.

The man—dressed all in black from his skintight jeans and leather jacket—seems even closer when Patrick turns back around. He readjusts the cloth over his mouth and nose, drawing it higher until it
rests just beneath his eyes. “I imagine it’s from the same way you know mine.”

Patrick frowns in irritation but the feeling doesn’t last for long under the stranger’s gaze. This man, this intruder and possible danger, doesn’t seem to carry any ill-intent in his eyes. Instead, Patrick finds them warm and inviting, wide-eyed like he wants Patrick to trust him. Despite his mysterious response, the stranger seems only to want the best for him.

Patrick takes another step forward. The stranger steps back.

“Who are you?” Patrick breathes out. His feet carry him towards the man, enraptured by that powerful gaze. Those eyes widen and the stranger stumbles back, afraid as Patrick draws closer than before.

Patrick stops, mere feet away from the man. Time seems to stop with him, trapping the two in their own little world where not even the wind could drown out their words.

Patrick feels the man hesitate more than he sees it. “Now’s not the time to tell you.”

“Have we met?” Patrick asks, his voice a mere whisper. The man begins to shake his head but then stops, tilting it to the side as he looks to Patrick.

“Not yet.”

There are no words for the feelings running through Patrick’s mind, for the confusion and bewilderment that one phrase has filled him with. He means to step away but he only steps closer. The other man raises his hand, slowly, a piece of paper held between his thumb and forefinger. His arm extends towards Patrick, just as cautious as before. Patrick means to flinch or run.

He takes the paper instead. Their fingers meet—warm leather against cold flesh—and Patrick’s given enough sense to capture the man’s wrist with his free hand. He shoves the paper in his pocket, crinkling it like the man’s eyes when he seems to smile.

“I need to know who you are.”

The man is much too close now and Patrick’s heart is trying to tear through his chest.

“It doesn’t matter because, where I’m from, you already know.”

“Just give me a hint,” Patrick begs, his grip on the man’s wrist tightening. The stranger doesn’t react, his eyes thoughtful. “Please, I’m dying to know.”

The man’s eyes glimmer. “C’mon, don’t be dramatic. No one wants to die, Patrick.”

“Wha-”

“Patrick!? Hey! Hey! Get away from Patrick!”

Pete’s voice breaks through the bubble that had been forming around them, as piercing and demanding as always. The sound of footsteps follow, the entirety of the band running to save the singer from something none of them understand. Patrick wants to tell them to leave him be, that he’s alright, that this man before him means no harm. But his voice is suddenly hoarse and the wind returns with a howling vengeance.

Patrick hadn’t even noticed that it had left.

He looks to the stranger, meaning to calm him and say that it will all be okay. The fear, though, in
the man’s eyes stop him. His chest heaves with gasping breaths as the others draw near and he pulls away from Patrick with a harsh tug. There’s a moment, suspended in time, where their eyes are still stuck on each others, where Patrick thinks that he might know this man.

But then the stranger blinks and turns away.

“Wait!” Patrick shouts, reaching out for him as the man begins to run. His fingers, numb from the cold, just barely graze the back of his jacket, lingering for a second on the material. His feet move forward of their own accord and Patrick’s calling out again. “Wait!”

The stranger is quicker than Patrick would expect, his lithe form slipping through the wind shoving against them as if it doesn’t exist. The dark seems to swallow him whole and Patrick can’t help but try to follow. He finds himself chasing after the sound of steps, the echoes of the man’s boots pounding against the pavement in his desperate attempt to disappear.

The street lights flash on the side of Patrick’s vision as he runs past, disorientating him and making him sick. In the back of his mind, he hears Pete call out. He might be telling him to stop and come back. Patrick’s shocked to find he doesn’t exactly care.

The sound of running stops and Patrick slows, his chest heaving with heavy breaths. His throat burns with the pain of dragging in the icy air and he bends forward, hands on his knees, as he attempts to catch his breath. He looks around, eyes darting around the now mostly empty parking lot as he tries to find the man who’d escaped. His eyes try to adjust to the dark, the lights of the venue too far behind him now, and his vision plays tricks. One second he’s sure he sees someone inside of the car to his left, ducking beneath the steering wheel. The next, he thinks he sees a dark figure dash into the alley across the street. He shuts his eyes tightly, blinking deliberately as if it can get his eyes to focus.

The feeling from before returns and Patrick stands up straight, spinning as he looks for the stranger. He feels as if he’s being watched again, observed like a rat in a maze. His heart beats at an erratic pace and his palms begin to sweat. The wind does nothing to help calm his breaths.

Footsteps appear behind him, more destructive and forceful than before. Patrick’s breath catches in his throat. He makes to turn, or maybe he wants to run. It doesn’t matter.

It doesn’t matter because it’s too late. Arms constrict around his waist from behind and the force of the other person brings them both to the ground. Patrick’s too afraid to shout out as they fall. His breath leaves him in a stunned and pained whoosh when he connects with the unforgiving cement beneath him. His glasses slide down his face and his chin bounces off the ground when the attacker pins him down by his shoulders.

Patrick’s anxiety of the situation finally reaches it’s peak, everything from the stranger on the bus to now catching up to him like a round of bullets. He loses himself to the flood of panic coursing through his veins, thankful that at least it causes him to forget about the cold. Above him, the person is speaking in a voice that Patrick can’t hope to understand, his thoughts a wreck as he finds himself being flipped over. His hands come to his chest defensively as the person moves off of him, grabbing at his shoulders again and yanking him up into a sitting position. Patrick immediately falls forward, heads hanging between his knees as he tries to remember how to breathe.

He still doesn’t know who this attacker is and he doesn’t care to know, his thoughts racing through his mind with a painful intensity. God, why did he think he could go after this stranger? And why did the stranger know his name? Who was he? Who is he? Is he the one who attacked Patrick or are there a group of them? Is he going to die here? Was it all a trap? What’s going to-
you? Did I hurt you? Fuck, please tell me you’re okay.”

Patrick’s never been more relieved to hear Pete’s voice. He raises his head slowly, his body still shuddering from everything. He opens his mouth to tell Pete that he’s alright but no words appear. This time, it’s not from the hoarseness of his throat or the greedy way he’s too busy sucking in air. No. It’s from the way that his throat closes up and chokes off his voice as he thinks back to the way the stranger spoke to him, like he knew him. It’s from the way that he’s shaking from chasing after someone who could have killed him. It’s from the way he’s too busy trying not to panic.

Pete seems to understand as he moves closer to Patrick than before, kneeling beside him and placing his hands on his shoulders. Patrick feels the tension release just from the touch and he wonders how he could have ever thought that Pete was an attacker. No one feels like Pete.

“Hey. Hey, Trick, look at me. You’re okay, right?” He moves closer, his face near enough that Patrick can see every detail, can feel his breath on his cheek. His eyes seem to sparkle when Patrick looks into them. “I need you to focus for me, Trickster. Are you okay?”

Pete’s focused on Patrick’s eyes more than he’s focused on Patrick himself, drilling holes through the iris and digging into his soul. Patrick puts a hand on Pete’s knee beside him and waits for Pete to blink first. Pete does, in a rapid series that cause his lashes to fan out across his cheeks, casting shadows even darker than the smudged makeup beneath. It looks like he’s twitching or trying to blink out a message. Patrick knows that, most likely, he’s just reacting to the harshness of the wind.

When Patrick blinks it’s more deliberate, following the code they created the first time Patrick had an anxiety attack backstage before a show.

“Blink once,” Pete said when he had found Patrick too afraid to speak. “Blink once if you’re okay to go on. But...But blink twice if you can’t. Blink twice and we’ll call it all off.”

He holds Pete’s gaze with his own, swallowing the worry and concern with his sight. He shuts his eyes slowly, watching his world slip into a blinding darkness. He squeezes his eyes shut, making the action obvious. He takes deep breaths and reevaluates the situation. He’s fine, he tells himself. Everything’s fine. His hand is wrapped in Pete’s again and he doesn’t know how it got there. He waits until he remembers how to breathe. As the cool air rushes into his lungs, he opens his eyes.

Pete watches, his big brown eyes searching for a second blink. Patrick merely shakes his head and moves to stand.

“One. It’s one, Pete. I’m okay.”

Pete’s response is a heavy sigh as he pulls Patrick to his feet, standing along with him. The worry falls off of him like a coat he no longer needs and he smiles at Patrick like nothing’s wrong.

But, as they walk back to the bus, Pete chattering about everything and nothing, Patrick realizes that he still hasn’t let go of his hand.

“Did you guys find out if that guy did anything to the bus?” Patrick asks as they draw closer, the lights to the bus now on as Andy and Joe search through it. Pete gives a quick shrug.

“I haven’t been on yet and I haven’t asked the other two. When I saw you talking to that guy I...I kinda panicked. I ran off after yo- after him when you did,” Pete says. Neither of them mention his slip up. “Did you actually have a conversation? Do you know who he is?”

Patrick thinks back to the way the man said his name, familiar and strange all at once. His eyes, too, were confusing. He looked at Patrick like he wasn’t the Patrick he knew, like he was a different
version of someone else. It causes a chill to run down his spine when he thinks back to the implications of his statements.

“Have we met?”

“Not yet.”

Patrick doesn’t often allow himself to believe in the impossible but the paper the stranger gave him weighs heavy in his pocket. He hasn’t read it yet and he’s not sure if he’d like to.

“No,” Patrick says, finally. He looks down at the ground as it passes beneath them and swings their interlocked hands between them. “He didn’t say anything.”

“You must have been standing there a long time, then, just watching each other,” Pete says slowly, disbelief evident in the way he stares straight ahead. All Patrick can do is shrug.

He’s saved from further conversation by Andy sticking his head out the door of the bus, the light framing his head like a halo.

“Pete! Patrick! Hurry up! You guys are gonna wanna see this.”

Something in his tone leaves no room for question. Pete and Patrick forget their conversation and jog the rest of the way to the bus, dropping their hands to speed things up.

The light inside is painful against Patrick’s eyes when he steps on, blinding him and causing him to wince after so much time in the dark. Pete pats his shoulder sympathetically as he passes him and Patrick catches a glimpse of a smile as he makes his way to where Joe and Andy wait in the lounge.

Patrick hears Pete’s gasp before he’s able to see again and he stumbles into the room after him. He rubs his eyes as if that will make anything better and waits, hoping someone will fill him in.

“Oh, this has got to be a joke.” Pete’s voice carries a tone of exasperation more often saved for intrusive interviewers or persistent haters. Patrick’s curiosity piques and he lowers his hands to look.

A briefcase rests on the couch, plain and underwhelming. There’s nothing terrifying nor magical about it and Patrick finds himself feeling let down. The man he had met had seemed so dramatic, so mysterious and all-knowing. Patrick moves to grab for it, the stress of the night beginning to wear him down to frustration. A piece of paper folded up beside it catches his eye and he pulls away. The paper isn’t exactly interesting either but it does cause the one in his pocket to gain another pound.

“This is fucking weird, guys,” Joe says in a shaky voice, tossing his phone from hand to hand nervously. “I texted the lot security, yeah? And they said that no one came in here. They even checked the fucking cameras and no one showed up. Only us.”

Patrick feels the temperature in the room drop and the briefcase seems to shift into something new. Before, it had seemed to be an innocent prop in an elaborate prank, something he’d been trying to convince himself of since the stranger had disappeared. Joe’s words, though, molded the case into something sinister. It looks like it knows more than him, like it’s mocking them from it’s place on the couch, surrounded by crumbs and dirty clothes. It’s matter out of place, setting him on edge, and Patrick feels like it’s telling him to run and hide.

Patrick tries to tell himself that it’s just how it looks in the light.

A second passes and then another, the four of them staring down the briefcase and the unassuming paper beside it. Patrick counts five seconds more and then Pete springs into action.

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“Screw it all, I’m opening it.”

No one’s fast enough to stop him and, really, no one tries. Their curiosity slows them down and allows Pete to slip past their half-hearted grasps. He falls to his knees beside the briefcase, long fingers reaching for the clasps. The sound of them clicking open is the loudest thing in the room, causing them all to flinch. The fear and hesitation is short-lived, however, because Pete is already opening the case.

Patrick forgets how to breathe.

“Oh,” Joe says, as astounded as they all feel. His phone drops to the floor but not even that is distracting enough to cause anyone to react. Joe blinks a few times, his hands dropping to his sides. “Oh.”

“Ok. Ok, so it’s not a joke,” Pete says, running his hand through his hair. It terrifies Patrick to think that he might hear a trace of fear in his voice.

Patrick’s eyes grow wide as Pete pulls away, allowing the singer a greater view of the inside of the briefcase. He forces himself to look away, afraid he’ll truly be blinded this time, and instead meets Andy’s equally wide-eyed gaze across the room. A conversation passes between the two, one begging for answers and the other wishing he could give it. Patrick makes his eyes a bit wider, a bit more pleading. Andy looks away.

“There’s a note,” Andy says, snatching up the paper still harmlessly on the couch. It tears a bit in his hand, causing Patrick to flinch. He wonders if the man from before wrote it. He wonders if his will say the same thing.

“Does it say who it’s from?” Pete asks, stumbling to his feet. He’s the only one still looking to the briefcase, his eyes wide and his hands shaking. Patrick places a hand on Pete’s arm, hoping that the effect will be the same as usual, even in these unusual circumstances. The relief he feels when Pete looks over to him and forces a smile almost makes up for the fear.

“No,” Andy says. The other three crowd towards him, like students seeking answers from a teacher. “It just says ‘to the defenders of the faith…. Our fate is in your hands.’”

“What the fuck?” Joe asks, crossing his arms over his chest. “They want us to defend this thing?”

Patrick’s inclined to agree with Joe’s incredulous tone, temptation telling him to look back over at the open case. He fights the desire as much as he can, afraid he won’t be able to look away once he has it back in his sight. He instead focuses on the solemnity of the room, of the silence echoing their fears and doubts. ‘Defenders of the Faith’? What faith? And why them?

Patrick’s seconds away from breaking down, from throwing the briefcase out the window and praying he’ll never see it again. He’s moments away from slamming it shut and tossing it in the ocean. He’s breaths away from calling his mom and asking her to come get him because he’s honestly scared for his life.

All of these thoughts disappear with the simple sound of Pete breathing next to him, letting out a breath that could pass for a laugh. Patrick wants to look over at him, to grab him and ask him to fix this. Pete, though, is already ahead of him.

“Well,” Pete says, tossing an arm over Patrick’s shoulders and drawing him close. It’s a simple act but it puts the younger boy at ease. “They want us to be defenders? Awesome. At least they know we’ll go down swinging.”
Patrick doesn’t see Pete smile, lazy and carefree. It doesn’t matter. He’s already accepting Pete’s words and borrowing his calm. It doesn’t matter that he doesn’t see that smile. Because he’s already wearing one of his own.
Dance Miserable So You Don't Have To Dance Alone (To The Beat Of Your Heart)

Chapter Summary

2011- Hiatus

Chapter Notes

I am so sorry

Chapter Playlist:
- "Open Wounds" by Skillet
- "How To Start A War" by Simon Curtis
- "I Hate U" by Simon Curtis
and, of course,
- "The Phoenix" by Fall Out Boy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Dance Miserable So You Don't Have To Dance Alone (To The Beat Of Your Heart)

2011

Hiatus

The show that night is….Well, Patrick decides, it’s not exactly the best.

He stumbles through the small venue, hoping to find his dressing room before the crowds find him. If it were any other night, he’d be mingling with the crowd, laughing and talking to those who actually cared enough to come for his music. More often than not, he has nothing to complain about, even if a handful of haters hang around the back, sneering and muttering under their breath. Most nights, Patrick can ignore them. Most nights, it’s like they’re not even there.

Tonight is not one of those nights.

To be fair, Patrick’s been letting his guard down. He’s been turning a blind eye to Soul Punk ‘s true record sales. He told himself to be grateful he has fans at all. He’s been smiling a dazzling smile and dancing to a different tune and expecting people to accept it. For a while, he convinced himself that they did.

“Play Fall Out Boy or get off the stage!”
“No one wants to hear your shit!”

“We liked you better fat!”

“Bring back Pete or go away!”

That last one stings most of all.

Patrick finds the door to the dressing room and sighs in relief, throwing himself inside and slamming it shut behind him without caring to turn on the light. He leans his head against the door, panting and trying to forget their words. He tells himself that they’re just jealous. He says that they don’t understand why he can’t bring back Pete. He tries to see things from their point of view.

It makes him sick.

“No wonder your band left you…”

It had been a group of them in the crowd, a collection of boys and girls decked out in Fall Out Boy gear, elbowing their way to the front so they can harass the singer. Patrick had counted at least six of them, all saying the same thing- no one wanted him there. He was useless without his band. He was even more so without Pete.

“They’re wrong,” he tells himself, ignoring the pain in his chest and the tears pricking at his eyes. “They’re just jealous and they’re wrong.”

It’s a mantra he repeats to the dark air around him, pretending that he believes it.

“Who fucking cares if we’re Patrick Stump haters? Pete Wentz himself started the trend, haven’t you heard?”

Patrick’s hand clenches into a fist, blunt nails digging into the leather of his fingerless gloves. They had made him feel more confident at the beginning of the night, smiling with his new band as he slipped them on. Now, though, he just felt like a fool playing dress up. How many people tonight saw those gloves and laughed?

“Hey, Patrick! Impress us! Good fucking luck!”

Patrick pulls away from the door, teeth grinding as he clenches his jaw and works to tear the gloves off of his hand. They stick to his palm and he’s reminded of how disgusting he must have looked, sweating onstage as he danced in a way that makes him flush to recall. He finally frees his right hand from the accessory and glares down at it, as if it’s to blame for everything that went wrong tonight. As if this scrap of leather alone brought those teenagers to his show and helped the crowd part for them. As if it told them what to say and slowed down security so they couldn’t get them out before he heard those cruel words. As if it’s the one making Patrick doubt himself and believe them. He tosses the glove over his shoulder and starts to make work on the other one. He waits for the satisfying sound of it hitting the ground, or maybe the couch.

It doesn’t come.

Patrick freezes, his thumb still hooked under the end of the glove he’d been attempting to take off. His senses jump to a higher alert, causing him to focus less on himself and more on his surroundings. It’s something he and his band former band had learned to do over the years. Though most of it had worn off by now, Patrick knows that a sense of paranoia follows them everywhere. His own breathing softens to barely there breaths, ribbon-like strips of air funneling down his throat soundlessly. His hand slowly moves to the light switch on the side of the door, hovering above it as
the other hand wraps around the doorknob. He imagines that his eyesight sharpens enough to allow him to see vague shapes in the dark.

Now that he knows to listen for it, the sound of someone else’s breathing fills the air, almost as soft as Patrick’s own.

Patrick hates that he knows who it belongs to.

“I’d ask if this was important but, really, what else would it be?” Patrick speaks in a cold voice, flicking on the light as he turns around. “Honestly, with how much you’ve been avoiding me lately, one would think this had better be a matter of life or death.”

Pete’s grin is not what it once was, not bright and blinding with too many teeth. It’s sharp and jagged, crooked like a reflection in a cracked piece of glass. It promises cruel words and acid tones when once it used to spill secrets of care and saccharine words. Only one thing remains the same- it’s a smile meant for Patrick.

“Avoiding. Is that what they’re calling it these days? I thought the words we used were ‘taking a break’. Not like it matters. It’s all the same to me,” Pete says, stepping forward with Patrick’s glove held hostage in his hand. “Seeing other musicians, meeting new bands. Typical break stuff.”

“Just get to the point, Pete,” Patrick says, spitting his name like the poison it is. “Why are you here?”

Pete raises an eyebrow. “Did I need an invitation? Can’t I just come support an old friend in his solo work?”

Patrick ignores the way Pete twists the word ‘friend’ into an insult just as much as he ignores the screaming alarms in his mind that Pete was here Pete could have heard what they said Pete could have seen how it affected me Pete could tell that I still-

“Don’t treat me like I’m stupid,” Patrick snaps, scowling as he does so. “We already established that you’re avoiding me. So. Why. Are. You. Here?”

“That could be a song title,” Pete smirks. “S.W.A.Y.H. Much more catchy than GINASFS if I say so myself.”

Patrick refuses to honor that with a reaction, let alone a response. The smirk slides off of Pete’s face as easy as it slid on.

“Did you really fucking forget, Patrick? It’s my turn to watch it. Hand it over,” Pete says. He extends his hand, his expression as cold as his voice. Patrick shuts his eyes for a moment and breathes out a curse. "Fuck ."

“Fuck, it’s been such a stressful tour, I forgot,” Patrick says, running his hands through his bleached blond hair as he opens his eyes. Pete’s eyes narrow and Patrick tries not to fear his reaction. “I don’t have it with me.”

A moment of silence passes. Patrick doesn’t fool himself into believing he’ll be easily forgiven. He’s never been so lucky before.

Pete’s hand falls and his other opens, dropping the black glove to the floor. His lips twist into a disgusted scowl. Patrick prepares himself for the worst, shutting off all emotion and closing off his access to any memory before the hiatus. Any second, Pete’s going to use both against him.

“You what? You forgot it?” He sounds like a storm that's being held back, like the wind and fury
and lightning are just beneath of the surface of his words. “How the fuck could you have forgotten it?”

“It’s been a stressful week, okay? It’s not like I meant to. It’s just in my hotel room. I’m sorry. Look-” And Patrick hates that he sounds like he’s making up excuses and begging for Pete to understand. Even if that’s exactly what he’s doing.

“It’s not like forgetting your keys or phone, Patrick! This briefcase is actually fucking important to some of us! God, doesn’t anything matter to you? This is exactly what caused our last fight!” There it is. Patrick does his best not to recoil and instead leans forward, a cruel light in his eyes.

“Our last fight? Oh, and what was that one about? Your egotism or clinginess? They all seem to run together after a while,” Patrick says in the most acidic voice he can conjure. He hates how Pete doesn’t react. He hates how Pete’s barking laugh causes him more pain than Patrick can ever hope to cause to Pete.

“Right. Fuck off, Trick. We both know it was about how you fucking tore the band apart,” Pete says. Patrick swallows thickly.

“We’re on a break,” he says, his voice low. He knows he doesn’t sound like he believes what he’s saying. Pete latches onto it on aims it back at him.

“Keep telling yourself that, Trick, and maybe you’ll believe it. Just like you might believe that all those kids are wrong when they say that shit about you.”

Ok. That one hurts. Patrick puts it right up there with the time Pete said he would never let himself love Patrick Stump. Of course, that one had been on an interview. Patrick doesn’t know if that makes it better or worse. He turns away and pulls off his other glove, dropping it to the ground carelessly. His hands shake and he shoves them in his pocket to hide the fact.

“It’s in my hotel room,” Patrick says, keeping his voice flat. There’s no emotion, not even a trace of anger. Pete used to say that he hated that most of all, that it worried him when Patrick would shut Pete out and shut himself in. Patrick wonders if he still feels that way. From the lack of response, he assumes not. “I’ll give you the address. You can come pick it up.”

“Yeah, no,” Pete says in a clipped tone. It’s as if he’s imitating Patrick, mocking him and saying see Trick, I can keep emotion from my voice, too. But he fails and Patrick catches a hint of resent. “You can call me later instead and we’ll set up a time to meet up and switch it off. Like hell I’m gonna step foot in a room you fuck all your new bandmates in.”

Patrick tells himself he’s not going to let that one hurt; he saw it coming the second he laid eyes on Pete tonight. It’s not even true. Still, the fact that Pete seems to think it is causes his heart to fall apart.

“Then give me your number, then,” Patrick snaps, spinning around with fury in his eyes. It’s so much easier to be angry than it is to be heartbroken. “You seemed to have forgotten to inform me when you switched numbers. That or you have me blocked.”

“Don’t imagine you’re so important,” Pete says, hand digging in his pocket. Patrick knows what he’s looking for. Pete’s a writer. He’ll never leave home without a pen. “Give me your hand.”

Patrick wants to protest but the night is getting late and he wants nothing more than to cry himself to sleep after everything that’s happened. The fact that he’s been reminded that the briefcase is alone and unguarded only makes him want to return to the hotel room quicker. A twinge of guilt flickers in his mind, a small spark he knows will fan into a flame later tonight. Pete has the right to be upset
over Patrick forgetting. The band set up the system to switch the briefcase between them the second the hiatus started. Patrick knew when he was supposed to switch it off. But tour and his own life had made him forget. He considers himself lucky that Pete hasn’t called him out on his selfishness yet.

“There,” Pete says, adding the final digit to the back of Patrick’s hand, the black ink staining his hand in an almost illegible font. Pete wrote the numbers large enough that it crossed the back of his hand in a distracting diagonal. Patrick will have to twist his arm in an awkward angle in order to read it. He knows that Pete did it on purpose but he doesn’t have the energy to call him on it. Instead, he sighs.

“You sound pretty tired, Trick. You okay?” Pete asks when Patrick looks back up at him.

Patrick’s eyes flicker in an automatic blink. It’s only Pete’s smirk that causes him to understand what he’s doing and he stops before his eyes can betray him with a second one. He turns his head, disgusted with himself and Pete’s trap.

“I’m doing just fine without you, if that’s what you’re asking,” Patrick says, venom lacing his words. Pete doesn’t seem to care, reaching out and grabbing Patrick’s chin in his hand. He forces Patrick to look up and Pete is so much closer than before, his amused grin and eyes taking up all of Patrick’s vision. Patrick finds he can’t look away.

“You should really start taking care of yourself, Trick,” Pete says, letting the nickname into the air like a curse. “You look awful.”

Patrick’s not surprised by the feeling of Pete’s lips over his, sarcastic and spiteful and tasting of poison. It’s nothing more than teeth and tongue, muscle memory forcing Patrick to comply. He doesn’t jerk in pain at the feeling of Pete’s teeth clamping on his bottom lip and Pete doesn’t stumble when Patrick pushes him away. This is a game and they’ve gone through this part before. Pete needs to learn some new moves, Patrick thinks. His usual checkmates are becoming more predictable.

The way Pete looks at Patrick as they break apart would cause one to believe that he has something more to say, that there are crueler words resting behind his lips. He sighs and smiles, as darkly as before. When no words ride out on the breath, Patrick feels himself break.

A moment passes and Patrick does his best not to wither away under Pete’s cold eyes.

“Do you plan to stay here all night?” Patrick asks. Pete just shrugs.

“Do you want me to?”

“No.” The response is immediate. Patrick’s not even lying.

“Well then. That’s that. Take care of yourself, Patrick.”

Pete brushes by Patrick without another word, the door slamming shut behind him as he leaves, the latch clicking into place. Patrick shuts his eyes and focuses on the swelling pain in his chest. He waits until he knows that enough time has passed for Pete to have left the building. When his tired eyes open once again, they see nothing but the place where Pete had stood.

*Come on, don’t let him get to you. Take a breath….Count to three….*

Patrick runs his hands down his face, his fingers cold against his flaming cheeks, spotted red in anger and pain.

*One*
He makes his way to where Pete had carelessly dropped his glove. He kneels and picks it up, his moves stiff as if his muscles ache as much as his heart.

**Two**

He can’t find the strength to stand when the glove is back in his hands. He’s shaking, shuddering like a leaf clinging onto the tree that is his composure. But the roots are being torn out by the storm that Pete left inside him.

Patrick’s blinking for a different reason now, sets of twos rushing into a continuous amount of *blink blink blink blink* blinking away the tears that he refuses to let fall.

He takes a breath. He counts to calm himself down. He wills himself to lock all his emotions inside his head where no one but him can see.

**Three**

But when he parts his lips to draw in a breath, all those emotions flow from his mind, existing on a soundless sob.

The silent scream echoes off his tears and settles into the walls around him. And Patrick has never felt more alone.

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“**Oh my gosh! Patrick? Patrick Stump?**”

Patrick’s glad that he made Pete leave when he did; he can’t imagine facing any fans or haters with his ex-bandmate/ex-boyfriend at his side. He’s more than glad that he dried his tears before venturing outside the venue. He paints a smile on his face at the sound of the young excited voice and turns around.

“How are you? Did you enjoy the show?”

“You’re awesome.”
“Well, thanks,” Patrick says, blushing proudly under the praise. “That’s really nice.”

“Yeah,” the kid says. He shifts a bit on his feet, looking awkward about his next question. “Hey, if it’s not too weird, do you think I could get a hug? I mean, I get it if you don’t want to, I just— Your music really means a lot to me.”

Patrick’s smile grows genuine at the validation that he’s not wasting his time. Someone out there cares about this music, his music. Screw the haters, this kid wants to thank him for his music and give him a hug.

He almost wishes Pete were here to see this.

Patrick responds nonverbally, smiling widely and opening his arms. The kid returns the smile, wide and excited like he didn’t believe Patrick would actually allow this. He rushes forward and wraps his arms around Patrick’s middle, tightly, and Patrick does the same for him. The kid’s hands move up and down his back as if reassuring himself that this is real and that he’s actually hugging Patrick Stump. Patrick laughs.

“My name is Sam, by the way,” the kid says, pulling slowly away from Patrick. He lets his hands linger a bit on Patrick’s jacket, eyes wide like awakening from a dream. “Thank you so much for this.”

Sam’s hands finally fall, shoving immediately into his pockets as he back away with a goofy smile still decorating his face. Patrick shakes his head, smiling at the kid before him.

“No, Sam. Thank you.”

Patrick’s walking on air, floating on the feeling of being cared for by someone, when he gets to his hotel. He’s still smiling to himself as he walks down the halls; he’s humming a bit when he stops in front of his door.

He crashes back down to earth when he realizes that his key is gone.

Patrick’s hands rush down his body and into each pocket as panic begins to set in his mind. He bites his tongue, double checking his jacket. He had left the room key in his jacket. He knew he did. Evidently not, he finds as his hands come out empty but for a few balls of lint. He sighs, aggravated and just about done with everything. He must have left it in his dressing room or dropped it in his hurry to escape the confines of the venue. He pinches at the bridge of his nose, a headache beginning to prod at his mind. The universe wants him dead, he decides. First the haters at the show and Pete taunting him backstage, now—

Patrick’s eyes narrow and his hand falls to his side.

“It’s not like forgetting your keys or phone, Patrick!”

Pete’s words echo through his mind with a painful clarity. Patrick remembers Pete’s hands on him, forcing him into a hateful kiss. Had his hands run over Patrick’s body? Had it been a distraction so to ruin his night further?

Patrick mentally kicks himself. It seems Pete had upped his checkmate after all.

Patrick raises his hand to knock, certain Pete must be waiting inside with a cruel grin on his face. The
thought causes his fist to lower. He refuses to embarrass himself by knocking on his own hotel door, by having Pete let him in with a sharp smile and sharper words. At the thought, Patrick straightens his back and raises his head. The front desk should have an extra. He’ll just ask for it and beat Pete at his own game. Much better to seem like he lost it than to admit to Pete that he’d let his guard down enough to have it stolen. It’d probably just be another weapon in their arguments. If Patrick can’t protect his room key from Pete, what makes him think he can protect the briefcase from whoever may want it?

Determined, Patrick turns. It’s quick enough that he stumbles to the side and has no choice but to brush his hand against the door to stabilize himself. He curses, hoping that Pete won’t mistake it for a knock. Instead, the door inches open.

Patrick stops, watching as the door gives under his gentle weight, his hand still resting against it. He can see now that the door wasn’t ever closed. Patrick knows for certain now that his key was stolen but he’s not quite so certain that it was Pete. He wouldn’t be so sloppy to forget to close the door all the way.

His senses scream at him that something is wrong, that he should turn and walk away. It’s like that night, so long ago, when he locked eyes with a stranger in a mask. It’s like the next morning when he read the note that was given to him. He’d lost that note a few days later but it doesn’t matter. He can still quote it word for word.

Just like both times, Patrick ignores the unspoken warning. He’s too prideful and curious to do anything other than reach out and shove the door.

It opens with a sickening creak.

The light from the hallway bleeds into the darkened room and Patrick follows with a little trepidation. A part of him still wants to believe that this is Pete. A larger part of him knows it isn’t.

“Oh my gosh! Patrick? Patrick Stump?”

The words don’t hold the same excitement as before. Instead, they’re sarcastic. They’re mocking. They’re said by the boy sitting cross-legged on the bed.

Patrick turns to Sam, hoping that he doesn’t look too hurt. He had thought this boy was a fan. He had convinced himself that this boy cared but, just like with everyone else, it was nothing meant to last. It was nothing real.

Sam fiddles with Patrick’s room key, twisting and turning it in his hands, but Patrick can only look at the cocky grin on his face. Patrick sets his bags down. He takes a careful step forward.

“Sam? Why- What are you doing here?” Patrick asks. The boy chuckles darkly.

“I wouldn’t be too worried about me,” he says, looking at somewhere behind the singer. Patrick only has time to notice the shadow creeping up behind him. He doesn’t have time to turn or flee. It’s not like he’d have anywhere to go.

He expects to be grabbed or hit over the head. He expects even to be stabbed or shot. Instead, something cool presses against the side of his neck.

“I’m so pleased to finally meet you,” a feminine voice whispers in his ear. The weapon pulls away from his neck and then the sound of electricity, popping and buzzing, fills the air. Patrick sucks in a breath. The girl behind him smirks and waits, drawing out the singer’s fear, before shoving it forcefully back against his neck.
He falls to the ground with a helpless shout.

It’s almost as beautiful as his singing.

Chapter End Notes

I love Patrick Stump, I swear

Unbeta’d as usual :) All mistakes are mine
Please comment with your thoughts! I'm so excited for this piece and I wanna make sure other people are excited too! Or, if you're not, let me know what I can do to get you excited!

OR bother me on tumblr at remember-me-for-sinturies
Surrender (Is Just Another Word For) Love

Chapter Summary

One Week Later

Chapter Notes

Note: The actions and portrayals of the characters in no way reflect how the author feels towards the real people*

*Fun Fact: At a hotel last Winter, my sisters and I actually met a jerk named Jimothy who worked for the hotel. He was delivering something for room service and stayed in the room with us children (I was 17. I consider myself a child) until our parents returned. He didn't even let me escape into the hallway to call them. I think about how much I despise that guy sometimes. And this is what happens. This is why he's the exception to this rule.

Chapter Playlist:
- "World On Fire" by Les Friction
- and again, "The Phoenix" by Fall Out Boy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Surrender (Is Just Another Word For) Love

One week. It's been one week.

One week since Pete spat acidic words at Patrick and watched them burn into his skin. One week since he saw Patrick perform by himself, flaunting to the world how much better off he is on his own. One week since Patrick failed to give him the briefcase. One week since Pete wrote his number on the back of Patrick’s hand, since he felt the sick desire to dig the tip into Patrick's perfect skin in a desperate curiosity to see if he could make him bleed. One week since he stormed out of that dressing room and slammed his fist into the wall beside him. One week since he reminded himself that the scars on his knuckles will be the only permanent thing in his life- friends and lovers be damned.

It’s been one week since he heard Patrick’s voice and Pete is telling himself he’s not afraid.

He’s not afraid, he says, because Patrick’s a brat and a dick and he’s probably holed up in hotel room laughing at his sick version of a joke. He’s not afraid because he’s gone months without talking to Patrick- a few days should be nothing new. He’s not afraid because he doesn’t care about Patrick anymore- something else he keeps telling himself.

He’s not afraid because he texted Joe, the only person who’s kept up constant communication with
Patrick even as the blond tore himself further and further from the rest of them. He’s not afraid because, surely, Joe will respond back in a demeaning manner with Patrick’s hotel address and tell him how Patrick’s just gotten too caught up in his tour to keep the days straight. He’s not afraid because if anyone’s spoken to Patrick in the past week, it’s Joe.

It’s almost midnight when he gets the reply. Pete looks up from his laptop and towards the phone charging on the desk at the other end of the hotel room and frowns. He closes his laptop and sets it on the nightstand. He drags himself away from the mess of blankets and pillows around him. He prepares himself to read Joe’s condescending words and perhaps imagines he’ll hate Patrick a little bit more.

He flicks on the phone with a lazy swipe, entering the passcode with a scowl as the concentrated light of the phone’s screen lights up the darkened room. Joe’s text rests beneath his thumb, an accusing array of black and white.

_Haven’t heard from him either, man, _it reads. _Think he’s alright?

Pete tells himself he’s not afraid.

He’s terrified.

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It takes a surprising amount of effort to get the name of Patrick’s current hotel out of Joe. Joe’s certain that Pete has nothing but ill intentions and Pete does his best to ignore any reason why. It’s not until the matter of the briefcase is brought up in an early morning phone call that Joe gives in. Why the phone call had to be so early morning, Pete wishes he knew. If he’s honest, Joe probably did so on purpose.

“Wait,” Joe says, pausing at Pete’s shouted explanation of Patrick and the briefcase. “You guys never switched it off?”

“Obviously not,” Pete snaps. “Damn it, if he had just remembered then-”

Joe cuts him off with a worried gasp. “You don’t think that’s why he hasn’t contacted you, do you? Do you think something happened?”

Something like a rock sinks into Pete’s gut.

“No,” he lies. “I think he’s being Patrick and trying to get back at me for what I said in the dressing room.”

“Fuck, I hope he’s okay. Andy and I can come down to check it out, we’re actually not that far. We can be there today and-” Joe cuts off his concerned rambling and Pete can imagine his eyes narrowing. “Wait, what did you say in the dressing room?”

“Nothing.” Pete sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose to fight off an oncoming headache. These kinds of conversations are not meant until after Pete’s gotten out of bed. “Look, just send me the address of the hotel and I’ll go see him. Most likely, he’s lost track of time by writing some music or some shit. Maybe he found a compilation of Prince interviews, I don’t know.” Pete hates that he knows enough about Patrick to venture a guess as to what he’s doing while ignoring Pete.

“You sure? We still don’t know who we’re protecting the briefcase from. If they show up, we might want the entire band together,” Joe says.
“We don’t even know if it’s related to the briefcase at all. The fact that Patrick has it while giving me the cold shoulder is entirely a coincidence,” Pete snaps, growing tired of Joe’s paranoia. It’s only fueling his own and he fights it off with a cruel smile. “Besides, you can’t have the band together if there’s no band anymore.”

Joe’s prolonged silence is enough to make him feel a wave of guilt flood over his feeling of victory. He’s drawing in a breath to take it back when Joe speaks again.

“If you find Patrick, tell him to call me. At least one of us should admit that we were worried.”

He’s hung up before Pete can respond, the guilt only intensifying. He brushes it off with a shrug as he crawls out of bed and gets ready for the day. He tries not to spend too long deciding what to wear. It’s just Patrick, for God’s sake. It’s not like he’s ever had to impress him before.

Still, as Pete stands in front of the mirror, running his fingers through his hair—still so strangely short without the ‘emo fringe’—he pretends that it’s just to be sure that he can let Patrick know just how well he’s doing without him.

His phone buzzes at the same time that someone knocks on the door. Pete groans, not sure which sound he’s reacting to. Probably both.

Pete grabs his phone, shouting to the person knocking that he’ll be there in a moment. The phone’s screen flashes with the notification of a message from Joe— the hotel address, presumably. Pete wonders briefly if he has time to read it but the door is knocked on once again. Pete groans—there’s the answer— and shoves his phone in his pocket as he heads for the door. It’s only halfway opened when he’s assaulted by long, hugging arms and the scent of Bebe’s lavender perfume.

“Hey, Pete,” she says with a coy smile as she pulls away. Her hands refuse to leave him for long, resting on his shoulder as she steps further into the room. “What are you up to today? I hope you didn’t forget that we were hanging out.”

Pete cringes. Bebe’s too busy looking down at his packed bags to notice.

“You did forget,” she states in a flat tone. Pete sighs and crosses the room in an instant to rub his hands up and down her arms.

“I’m just gonna head out for a little while. I’m gonna go see Patrick. It won’t take long,” he says. Bebe’s dark eyes narrow before widening.

“Patrick? You said you two were through, that you were never going to talk again and that I had nothing—” Bebe’s rushed rambling is cut off by Pete’s soft kiss, his hand moving to the small of her back to pull her close. She leans into him with a contented moan. Pete can feel her smiling beneath his lips.

“You don’t have anything to worry about,” he whispers as he pulls away. “Whatever Patrick and I had….It’s over now. He- We made sure of that.”

Bebe still seems unconvinced, her doe-like eyes watching him with mistrust lying beneath a thin layer of doubt. He’s seen that look too many times. He remembers Patrick’s tear-brimmed gaze as he screamed at Pete that the band was over. He recalls Ashlee’s matching sympathetic smile as she slid divorce papers across the table, just a few months ago. Pete hates how one of them hurts so much more than the other when it has no reason to. Pete pulls out of Bebe’s embrace so he won’t have to wonder what other layers hide beneath her eyes. Her hand latches onto his wrist and when he looks back, she’s smiling softly.
“Be careful, Pete,” she says. Almost as an afterthought, she adds on, “I love you.”

Pete throws on a smile, feeling horrible when he says the same.

“Love you,” he lies, slipping out of the door before he can wonder why the words never seem to sound right.

Though the cab ride there had given Pete time to imagine the worst, he finds himself strangely calm as he pushes open the doors to the hotel. The woman at the front desk smiles kindly at him, pushing a long strand of blonde hair behind her ear.

“Hello, sir. Would you like a room?” She asks, already shuffling papers and finding a pen. Pete shakes his head as he walks over.

“Um, no. Actually, I’m here looking for a frie-” he cuts off, rubbing the back of his neck as he thinks. The woman’s smile fails to falter. “You know what, it doesn’t really matter. Is there a Patrick staying here?”

The woman hums as she looks Pete up and down. It’s disturbing, almost as disturbing as the fact that she hasn’t yet dropped her smile.

“That would be Patrick Stump you’re looking for, correct?” The woman leans back in her chair, seeming satisfied. Pete’s eyebrows come together in a worried crease.

“How did you-”

His question is waved off as the woman chuckles. “I’d recognize you anywhere, Pete. I’m a huge fan.”

“Oh.” Pete blinks a few times, caught off guard by the girl’s devious tone. He clears his throat and looks around, starting to feel out of place. Strangely, though dozens of cars had been parked outside, not a single other person is in the lobby. Occasionally, he’ll catch sight of a staff member walking through the halls but they don’t seem to have a purpose- appearing and fading away like ghosts. He shudders. It feels like something straight out of the Twilight Zone. “So...He is here, then?”

“Well, I mean, technically. But Patrick’s your friend, right? I don’t think he’s in any danger. Not from you anyway.”

She says it so innocently, so unassumingly, that Pete is instantly put on high alert. His muscles tense and the girl is still looking at him with wide blue eyes.

“I hope he’s not in any danger,” Pete says, more than a statement and less than a threat. The girl cocks her head to the side, appearing like a confused dog as she does so.
“Of course not,” she says. “But perhaps you should go check.”

Pete doesn’t need to be told twice.

This is a joke. This is a joke. It’s a f*cked up prank and I’m gonna kick Patrick’s ass for it later when I find him

If I find him

Pete shakes his head for the hundredth time as he stalks down the halls. His sense of unease has only increased in the past few minutes, from the knowing smiles of the staff to the way that none of the floors are labeled correctly. He’d been heading down the first floor, following a sign that claimed to have rooms 110-129 in that direction. He’d ended up at a literal dead end and felt like throwing up.

Now, after a shaky elevator ride and a run in with a maid carrying sheets that reeked of too much bleach, Pete wants nothing more than to go home. He wants to turn around and head back to Bebe, to let Joe and Andy handle this. He owes Patrick nothing. He doesn’t have to be here.

Still, he can’t help but keep moving forward.

The lights in the hall flicker and Pete grimaces. Everything in this hotel has felt terrifying and wrong but that doesn’t mean it isn’t cliche. Pete tries to take comfort in it. He tries to place it as evidence that this is a trick.

He focuses on that idea and looks to the walls. He reads the room numbers, focusing on the gold paint rather than the rotting wood beneath it.

110. 111. 112.

Pete’s steps start to slow and he swallows around the fear that’s been trying to crawl up his throat. Patrick’s door looms before him, as intimidating as playing a new song in front of an old crowd. Pete raises his fist, slowly and cautiously, before lowering it again. He narrows his eyes.

This is ridiculous, he tells himself. He has no reason to be afraid. Patrick’s more than capable of taking care of himself and this wouldn’t be the first time he’s put off calling Pete. More reasons fill his mind, reasons to doubt Patrick’s in any trouble. Patrick’s smart, as much as Pete hates to admit it, he wouldn’t be caught off guard so easily.

You caught him off guard in the dressing room. If you had wanted, you could have killed him before he noticed

Why would Patrick even end up in a hotel like this in the first place? It’s obviously screwed up. No one in their right mind would stay here.

Joe told you that a friend got the room for Patrick. Because Patrick’s too trusting and naive and kind and he wouldn’t ever doubt a friend

Pete scoffs and steps back. Patrick? Kind? As if.

Maybe the hotel didn’t look like this when Patrick came in, Pete ponders. Obviously, someone is setting this all up to be like a horror movie. Someone wants to trick him.

Or maybe someone wanted to trick Patrick
Patrick probably set this up to get back at him for…for everything. Joe’s probably in on it, too.

*Then why did he sound so worried? Joe wouldn’t have sounded that worried if he knew that Patrick was safe.*

Really, what’s the worst that could have happened?

*He had the briefcase in this room. Someone could have wanted it. Someone could have taken it and taken him. Maybe they got rid of him so he couldn’t run off as a witness.*

Pete rubs his jaw, an echo of a memory causing it pain.

Patrick wouldn’t run. Patrick’s a fighter.

*He’s also, like, five feet tall.*

Pete groans, loud and long, dragging his hands across his face. Is he really going to do this? Stand outside Patrick’s door and argue with himself? That’s probably exactly what Patrick wants.

Newly determined, Pete raises his hand to knock on the door.

It opens under his fist.

Pete forces himself to roll his eyes even though his heart feels like it’s in his throat. As he shoves the door open fully, the first thing he notices is the silence.

Patrick is never silent. He’s always bustling about, making some sort of noise, be it humming or singing or breathing a bit too loud. Patrick’s very existence is about making sounds. He would never be this quiet by choice.

“Patrick?” Pete calls out, stepping into the room. He paints irritation and exasperation into his voice, just in case Patrick is waiting around the corner to catch the first moment of weakness. “Did bleaching your hair screw with your brain as well because I thought I told you to-”

If Patrick were in the room, he would have cut Pete off by now. But Pete cuts off all the same.

The bed is made without a crease and the closet door is open, revealing the abandoned hangers. No crumbs or papers or bowties litter the floor or desks. No bags rest on the floor and no smudges mar the TV remote. Not only is there no one in the room, there’s no proof that anyone was there in the first place. Pete’s heart rate picks up. Patrick would never go this far for a joke. At least, Pete hopes he wouldn’t.

For the first time, Pete wishes he hadn’t deleted Patrick’s number from his phone. He wishes that he had just gone with Patrick that night to get the briefcase. He wishes he had told him to call him right away. He wishes he knows where Patrick is.

Pete yanks out his phone anyway, trying with all his might to remember Patrick’s number. There was a nine and a two, he knows that much. Was it a zero after the seven, or was it a six? Pete hates that he can’t remember. Furious with the world and with himself, he rips one of the cards out of the pile stacked nicely on the desk. It’s the list of services the hotel offers. Beside each, there is a number.

Pete’s harsh on his phone as he dials the front desk- too hurried to walk down there. There has to be a mistake. This can’t be Patrick’s room. Maybe he checked out this morning. Maybe he was never here to begin with.
“Damn it!” Pete shouts, throwing his phone to the side. It bounces off the bed and onto the green carpet with a soft *thud*. It's followed by a more insistent knocking on the wall beside the door. Pete turns, pretending that hope isn't welling in his chest.

“Patr—”

No. Instead, there’s a tall, lanky man standing before him with an overly polite smile and a gift bag in his hand. The light from the room creates a glare on his glasses, momentarily blinding Pete as he walks cautiously forward.

“Mr. Wentz, I assume? Pleased to meet you, I’m Jimothy,” The man says in a nasally voice. As Pete draws closer, he can see that the man must work here. He’s dressed too formally to be just a casual bystander stumbling onto this scene.

“What do you want?” Pete snaps, sounding angrier than he thought he was. Jimothy- and what kind of name is that?- doesn’t seem to mind, merely correcting his posture and shoving his floppy brown hair out of his beady eyes.

“Merely to deliver a package.” He sounds too smug, the words coming out twisted. Pete doesn’t like it. “This was left at the front desk for you a few days ago.”

“I didn’t even know I was going to be here until this morning. Who sent that? Do they have Patrick?” Pete’s talking too fast, trying to find a way to convey all his thoughts and emotions. He’s unsurprisingly unsuccessful.

Jimothy’s smile fades into something muted. It grows even worse when his voice becomes demanding.

“Just take the package, sir,” he says in a clipped tone. “I can’t tell you anything more than that.”

He holds the bag out once more, a challenge in his eyes. Pete eyes it suspiciously. Is this the part where he’s supposed to run? He’s seen too many action movies to count and more than half of these situations end with something exploding.

That doesn’t stop him from taking it, though, hating himself as he does so.

It’s lighter than he expected, even if his arm does droop a little under the added weight. He hears the man before him hum, content, before walking away.

“Let me know if there’s anything we can do to make your stay more comfortable, Mr. Wentz,” he calls over his shoulder as he leaves. Pete can’t help but feel as if it was sarcastic.

Pete looks down at the bag in his hand, feeling sick at the drama of this. He walks over to the bed and sits, setting the bag in his lap. All this for a package? He glares at it childishly. There’s definitely something in there- he can hear it bouncing up and down when he shakes the bag. At least it doesn’t sound like a bomb.

Pete decides he’s put off opening it for too long. He sighs and gives into the dramatics. With as much interest as he can muster, Pete opens the bag. He looks inside.

And he screams.
Pete doesn’t know how long passes. It could be days. It could be seconds. In reality, it’s only been two minutes.

The bag lies by his feet, seemingly harmless. But Pete knows what’s in it and he’s holding his head in his hands, fighting off another wave of nausea.

He had almost thrown it against the wall when he looked in, maybe even thought about tossing it out the window. But, insanely, he thought that may have been disrespectful to Patrick and set it on the ground instead. Besides, it’s not like he needed anyone else finding the hand.

That’s right, the hand. Pete had looked into the bag, assuming this to all still be someone’s idea of a prank. But no fake blood looks that real and no one’s handwriting looks like Pete. The numbers scrawled across the back of Patrick’s hand—Patrick’s hand Patrick’s hand Patrick’s detached fucking hand—had erased any amount of doubt Pete might have still had.

Now, though, that he knows that all of this is real, he’s even more at a loss over what to do. His ex-boyfriend/best friend/bandmate/everything is missing and his hand is in a bag at Pete’s feet. Pete almost takes out his phone to call Joe but his hands are shaking too much. Fuck, he doesn’t even know if he’d be able to talk of Joe answered. His lungs seem to have suddenly forgotten how to take in air and not even the words in his head are making sense.

The bag may not have held the bomb that Pete expected but he still feels like he’s going to explode. There’s a knock on the door. Pete’s on his feet in an instant.

“Jimothy,” he snarls out the name. “Where’s Patrick?”

Jimothy smiles demeaningly, pushing up his glasses as he smirks. “I’m afraid I’m not allowed to say. Customer confidentiality is a big thing around these parts, you know. Or so I’ve heard.”

“Bullshit,” Pete growls, stalking closer until he has the collar of the man’s suit in his fist. “What’s her face at the desk told me Patrick’s room number so you sure as hell can tell me his location.”

Pete’s not all that surprised that Jimothy isn’t afraid. He is a bit offended, though, at the man’s exasperated sigh.

“If you must know,” he breathes out. “Only one person in this building has that information.”

“Who?” Pete shakes Jimothy as he spits out his demand, red creeping into the edge of his vision when the man breaks out in a wide grin.

“Oh, don’t worry. I’ve been reliably informed that you two have already met long before this,” he says, taking too much joy in his words. Pete briefly entertains the idea of tossing him out the window or something else just as violent but knows that he needs his information.

“Tell me where they are,” Pete growls out each word, his voice dangerously low. Jimothy’s eyes show a flash of fear but it’s gone just as fast. He wraps his hand around Pete’s and yanks himself free.

“The roof.”

Pete’s not willing to risk the elevator again, not now that he knows how messed up this place really is. He runs up the stairs at record speed, taking two at a time, trying his best to dial Joe as he does so.
Straight to voicemail.

“Goddamnit!” Pete screams, shoving his phone back into his pocket. It buzzes with a new message once it’s concealed. He doesn’t care to check.

Once he gets to the top, he shoves open the door to the roof, breathing in greedy gasps for air as the heat of the day attacks him. His lungs ache and his legs feel like they're on fire. Worst of all, he sees no one around.

It’s deja vu. It’s the same thing that happened in the room. It’s the feeling of arriving somewhere a second too late. Or, worse, arriving there a second too early.

Pete walks cautiously to the edge of the roof, peering down at the city below him. This hotel doesn’t have too many stories, just enough for the elevator to be a necessity. But it’s not high enough that he can’t see the people below. And not only can he see them— he can even recognize a few.

A familiar mess of hair stands by a gas station across the street, carelessly lighting up a cigarette as he leans against his car. Pete watches as Joe casually starts to fill up the tank and Pete only briefly wonders why he’s here.

Joe’s head turns to the side, to the parking lot of the hotel, and Pete watches as Joe suddenly seems to witness something awful. He dramatically takes off the sunglasses he had been wearing and backs away, fear evident in every move. Pete follows his gaze but only sees a black van driving away. Pete looks back to Joe, believing he might have interpreted his reaction wrong. But then Pete reacts in a similar way when he sees a girl come up behind the guitarist and shove a cloth over his mouth.

“Joe!” Pete screams out, staggering dangerously closer to the edge. Of course, no one hears him but the same black van as before pulls up behind the girl so she can drag Joe’s now limp body towards it. Someone else that Pete can’t recognize from before is already in the van, thrashing as two girls attempt to tie him up. Pete catches a glimpse of a tattoo on his neck and he suddenly understands what Joe must have seen.

“No...No,” Pete breathes out, fear flooding through his body. He stumbles backward, away from the edge, as if it will keep him out of the sight of those who just kidnapped his friends. He knows it’s cowardly and he should feel ashamed but, when he shuts his eyes to try and clear his mind, all he sees is Patrick’s hand. He doesn’t want to know what else these kidnappers have planned for the rest of them.

Pete turns and starts to run back to the door, forming plans in his mind on how to get away. Maybe if he can lie low for a while then these people will let their guard down. He can find a way to save the band later, even if the guilt at that thought eats at his insides. He tells himself that it’s the smartest plan— survive and find allies. He doesn’t have to rush in, guns blazing. He has to form a plan.

All of these plans and thoughts are dashed when he finds that the door he had just come through is locked. His heart stops and then sinks into his stomach. As his survival instincts start to kick in, he swears he can hear the sound of heels clicking against the ground behind him.

Someone had messaged him before, Pete suddenly remembers. He doesn’t know who. But whoever it is will be by their phone, waiting for a response. Pete just has to let them know that he’s in trouble, that his entire ex-band is in trouble. He just has to get his phone and send a text. Maybe even the word help will get someone to call the police. He fumbles for the phone in his pocket, hands shaking as he hears the sound of the person behind him growing closer. He only has a few seconds, a few precious moments that may save his life.
His phone is just in his hands when he feels someone’s arms wrap around his neck, yanking him down and backward. He lets out a shriek but he doesn’t let go of his phone.

Whoever has grabbed him is now searching for something in their pocket, he can feel it as they remove one hand from around him. He takes the time to unlock his phone and open the most recent message.

It’s still too late.

A needle, a familiar feeling from hospitals and tattoo parlors, shoves into his neck with a sharp pain. He feels something inject into his bloodstream, something fast acting that causes his sight to swim.

He can still see the words on his phone’s screen. And he wishes that he can’t.

The person behind him laughs as Pete tries to see who sent this message, who’s betrayed him now. But his eyes are slipping shut and it seems a hopeless endeavor.

The person holding him lifts his hand and takes his phone. As they raise it above his head and toss it behind them, Pete can finally see the text once more.

**Gotcha**

And it’s from Bebe Rexha.

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Chapter End Notes

Hey, guys! If you’re interested in knowing the update schedule, read this!

So, as I’ve made obvious (or so I feel) I’m extremely excited for this story. Therefore, the updates are going to be very frequent. I’ve mentioned once or twice that they should occur every Tuesday and Thursday. This is mostly true. BUT just to clarify, it should technically be stated as Monday/Tuesday and Thursday. The original plan was to have it be every Monday and Thursday (just because those were the first two days that I posted) but I get very busy over the weekends when visiting my family so trying to finish a chapter over those days, I feel, would be a disservice to everyone involved. I wouldn’t enjoy it as much and the quality would be lower. SO it may get pushed over to be published on Tuesday. Thursdays should stay the same because I literally have nothing to do other than write and work on this thing.

So...if you’re enjoying it so far (and if you are, leave a comment!)...Stay tuned for Thursdays update! Things are getting interesting!
Do You Wanna Feel A Little Beautiful? (Then, Baby, Lie Through Your Teeth)

Chapter Summary

If Young Volcanoes didn't have a bunch of really trippy stuff going on

Chapter Notes

I'm just gonna again remind everyone that I love Patrick Stump. So much.

Chapter Playlist:
- "Believe" by Hollywood Undead
- of course, "Young Volcanoes" by Fall Out Boy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Do You Wanna Feel A Little Beautiful? (Then, Baby, Lie Through Your Teeth)

“No! Stop! What are you doing!? Let me go!!”

Patrick’s cries are just as futile as before, echoing down the halls that these sinister girls- the Vixens, or so they introduced themselves- seem set on bringing him through. They ignore his questions and laugh at his demands, walking quicker so his feet drag beneath him. He thrashes weakly in their grasp, aggravating the wounds they’d inflicted. The messy stitches that litter his body pull uncomfortably at his actions and Patrick hopes that enough time has passed for this to be safe to do. Patrick doesn’t know how long he’d been strapped to that table after they’d finished, leaving him shuddering in anticipation of their return. They’d only visited him once or twice, silent as ghosts, to force water and food down his throat. It seems as if they don’t want him to die. Not yet anyway.

He’d spent most of that time alone shaking and screaming in pain. Memories of knives and weapons played through his mind cruelly, causing him to whine each time he shifted in a useless attempt to get comfortable. When he slept, he only saw the torture over again. Scalpels sliding across his skin, rope tied tight around his middle, a knife wielded high above his wrist…

There had only been one good thing about being left alone- and it wasn’t that they couldn’t hurt him anymore. No, they’d hurt him enough that he’s sure he’ll feel it forever. Instead, being alone gave him one advantage, or so had felt. It gave him the chance to try and build up energy, to prepare himself to run when given the chance.

Now, as a spot of light makes itself known in the distance, Patrick feels that this is that chance. He twists away from the girls holding onto him, slamming into the wall of the narrow hall in the process. He gasps sharply at the pain that the impact shoots through his body but keeps moving nonetheless. He has to escape, to find the briefcase, to warn the others, to do anything other than sit and take the abuse they’ve been giving him. Patrick shoves past the Vixens, ignoring their shocked expressions as
he stumbles forward towards the light. His legs still shake beneath him, unused to weight after days of lying on a table.

“Get back here, Patrick!”

Patrick’s feet keep moving of their own accord, his face pale and sweaty from the exertion of running on such low energy and high adrenaline. He blinks in the dim lights of the hall, desperately attempting to see but black spots appear in his vision and he feels faint.

“Patrick!”

He hates the way they say his name like he’s a dog being called back to his owner. Like he’s less than human. It sickens him. Though, it’s not as bad as the way they whispered and mocked it as they carved into his skin.

“You’re so good, Patrick, screaming for us like a good boy.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. Did that hurt, Patrick? Are you crying, Patrick?”

“Help! Someone! Help me!” His cries come from deep within his chest, rapid moans that become frenzied screams as they depart from between his dried and cracking lips. He tries to call out again but it only comes out as a scream.

“No one’s coming for you, Patrick!”

The sound of the girls chasing after him draws closer with each gasping breath he takes, tearing apart his throat as he forces himself to run faster. The light seems to become brighter, blinding, and begins to take the shape of a door. A hysterical laugh bubbles its way out of Patrick’s throat. He just might make it.

Just a little further….Damn it! Just a little further!

His chest heaves painfully with burning breaths, the door growing larger as he grows closer. The Vixens behind him continue to scream his name. He doesn’t care.

Patrick bursts through the door,shouldering it open with a grunt of pain. Thankfully, the girls hadn’t messed up his arms too bad. They’d mostly been focused on his torso and stomach, cutting into him like a science experiment. And, of course, there had been the whole thing with his-

Patrick’s stomach lurches. He tells himself not to think about it.

He skids to a stop as he enters the room, his eyebrows furrowing together as his eyes search desperately for a way out. He wants to scream in frustration.

The room before him is bare, all cement floors and rotten wood walls. The room is so large he can barely see the other side. His head’s already pounding and he’s certain that some of his stitches have ripped, if the blood slowly soaking through his shirt is anything to go by. He leans forward, the pain causing him to clench his teeth so forcefully he’s expecting them to shatter. When he looks back up, it’s with a dark determination. He may not be able to make it to the other side of the room but he sure as hell can make it to the table in the middle.

With snow white candles as long as his forearm and elegant dark brown wood, the table is the most out of place thing in this otherwise desolate area. Patrick drags himself towards it, hoping that he’ll find something to get him out of this mess. Maybe there’ll be a knife he can use to try and defend himself; maybe he’ll even find the briefcase itself. Patrick allows the thought to fuel him with the
focus he needs to make it to one of the chairs without collapsing. He leans against the back of the
closest chair, shutting his eyes for a second as he catches his breath. Then, with an overwhelming
amount of effort, he opens them again and looks down at the table.

“Oh my god,” Patrick breathes out, eyes suddenly wide and afraid. Bile rises to the back of his throat
but he finds he can’t look away. Memories arise in his mind, unbidden, and they’re suddenly all that
he can see.

The knife cuts deep into his gut and Patrick cries out, back arching off of the table as he screams in
unbearable pain. A feeling like fire follows the path that the blade takes as the girl cuts a line
through him, blood gushing out over her hands.

Patrick thrashes on the table, knowing that it only runs the risk of causing him more harm but he’s
too overtaken with pain to care. The girl holding his shoulders down gives the other a new knife,
longer and more jagged. Patrick’s torturer grins maliciously and takes it. She makes eye contact
with the singer as she places it against the skin. Patrick’s breathing heavily, begging her with his
eyes. She laughs, still watching him, before cutting in.

Another scream fills the air, fading into childlike whimpers and violent gasps. Patrick’s senses
betray him, magnifying and exaggerating everything that happens. The light above him grows into
the Sun, his own breathing deafens him, and the scent of blood causes him to gag. But, most of all,
he convinces himself that he is dying. The straps tying him down beneath these girls seems to grow
tighter, restricting his air and crushing his lungs. He’s not sure if he’s even breathing.

A girl above him laughs again and Patrick braces himself for more pain as he feels her pull away.
Cold liquid—rubbing alcohol, just like before—splashes onto his shredded skin, mixing with his blood
and running down his sides as he pleads for them to stop, to let him go, to kill him, to put out the fire
coursing through his body. Someone runs their nails down his chest and the room seems to shake
with the force of his scream.

Someone suddenly slaps him, causing his face to jerk to the side. Pain blossoms on his cheek as he
shuts his eyes. He doesn’t want to look at his captors and see their pleasure. Fingers run through his
hair, matted down with sweat, and tangle in his blond locks.

“Please,” Patrick begs. He’s shaking, shuddering. He can barely talk. “Please, why are you doing
this?”

The room seems to freeze as his words linger in the air. Patrick knows that they won’t answer— they
never have before. He keeps silent, wondering if they’ll punish his question with more pain.

As the time drags on, Patrick feels himself relax against his will. It’s the longest they’ve gone without
tormenting him. If not for the hand still holding onto his hair, he’d believe that he’s been left alone.
Slowly, he opens his eyes.

The Vixens stand above him, the fires of hell reflected in their eyes as they gaze down into the cool
blue of his. He swallows, jerking sporadically as if his body’s attempting to get away. The girl with
the knife smiles.

“Why are we doing this, Patrick? We don’t expect you to understand but we’ll tell you anyway.” She
moves away from him and the ice cold of the blade against his skin is enough to bring tears to
Patrick’s eyes. He bites his lip to keep it from trembling.

“Our cult is rising, Patrick. And we need to prepare a feast.”
Patrick doesn’t have time to question her words. He’s too busy screaming.

“No no no no, oh my god, no.” Patrick’s not aware that he’s muttering to himself as he backs away from the table. He just wants to get away- No, he needs to get away because there’s no way that he’s actually looking at something as horrific as this.

“Like what you see, sweetie? We told you we had to prepare a feast.”

Still paralyzed by shock and newfound terror, Patrick’s feeble as he attempts to escape the girls’ grabbing hands and binding ropes. In no time, they’ve wrangled him into the chair he had just been leaning against. They make quick work of wrapping the rope around his middle, not caring as he whimpers in pain when it brushes across his wounds. If anything, it only causes them to tie it tighter. One girl remains behind him, shoving the chair into the table. Patrick has no choice but to look at the display before him.

They had claimed it was a feast but Patrick can’t imagine anyone truly consuming anything here. Plates scatter across the table’s surface, a pure white shade against all the dark. Sure, some of them hold bread or apples. The rest, though, have organs.

Patrick’s vision grows blurry as he remembers the haze of torment his torture had been. He had thought that they were treating him like a dissection, looking at his insides and prodding at him for fun. Now, though, he knows that wasn’t all they did. The Vixens were never just scientists playing with a new subject. They were butchers carving out meat.

Patrick suddenly feels empty and hollow, though he knows that logically not all of these organs can belong to him. There were others before him, others who were tortured until their throat practically bled. It only makes him feel worse and he wants to heave as he tries to guess which of these bloody plates hold a piece of him.

One of the Vixens grabs his left elbow with just enough force to grasp his attention. Hesitantly, Patrick looks over at her.

“We were told you were brave but we never thought you’d try to run away.” She hums to herself, lips in a small smile as her fingers trail down his arm. Patrick’s heart rate picks up and the girl’s smile falls when she gets to his wrist, wrapping her fingers around it easily. “Don’t try it again.”

She emphasizes her words with a sharp squeeze into the tender flesh of his wrist, digging her nails in until blood spots beneath them. Patrick gasps for breath, a silent scream escaping his lips, and looks down at her hand as she pulls away. He quickly shuts his eyes against what he sees but now he’s been reminded of it and he’s not going to forget anytime soon.

He pulls his arm close to his chest, cradling the stump where his hand used to be. He laughs wryly, tears prickling at his eyes because the only thing he can think of is how literal his name is now. What a fucking joke.

He can’t stop thinking about the moment before the torture began and before he knew why he was here. It’s still a blur in his mind, a mess of screaming and Vixens emerging from the shadows to taunt him. He can’t remember how it felt being tied to the chair or what the girls said. He remembers, though, the exact second that they pulled his hand to his side and raised their knife high above it. He can still remember the way it had looked so theatrical with the light glinting off the knife straight into Patrick’s eyes. He can still remember their laughter.

He can still remember his scream as the knife was brought down.
Patrick jolts violently in his seat, eyes flying open as the scene replays in his mind. He told himself he wasn’t going to think about it. His mind’s a fucking traitor.

The girls leave him, ruffling his hair demeaningly as they go, and Patrick is left alone. Moments pass, the stench of rotting organs thick in the air. He chokes on his breath, pressing his tongue flat against the roof of his mouth and refusing to breathe through his nose in an attempt to make things better. It doesn’t work.

Just as he’s beginning to go crazy from the silence, he hears the sound of a door opening in the distance. His muscles tense, shooting pain through his body, and his breathing becomes frantic. Who else is coming? Is it the Vixens again? Is it someone worse? Patrick still doesn’t know why they’ve strapped him to this table. What if it’s just the set up for another torture scene? His eyes fall on the guts displayed like trophies on the table and he feels like throwing up.

He opens his mouth, a beg for mercy falling from his lips. He hates how easily these two girls have lowered his defenses, how easily they’ve reduced him to a shaking child just from a few well-placed cuts. His wrist throbs violently as if to remind him that that’s not all they did. He pointedly ignores it.

“No more,” he whimpers, his voice cracking at the thought of more pain. He feels so cowardly but more than that he feels fear. And fear, he’s learning, is one of the most powerful things to feel. “Please, no mo-”

“Patrick!”

Patrick’s heart doesn’t sink. It doesn’t even drop. It just seems to stop altogether.

Everything stops as Patrick’s head jerks to the side where strangers are bringing in more people to tie to chairs at this table. His breathing, once quick and afraid, catches in his throat as if to keep itself safe as Joe is dragged in, legs trembling beneath him as if he’s just woken up. Patrick’s muscles, shaking in terror, stop and tense when Andy follows, thrashing in the hold of two larger men. Neither of them seems to be hurt, merely disoriented, and blindfolds cover their eyes.

And, when Patrick sees Pete being brought in behind them, screaming his name….Well, Patrick’s mind slams to a full halt. Because he can’t comprehend this scene.

Patrick’s frozen as the three are forced into seats around the table, oblivious to the gore before them. He wants to call out to them, to let them know that he’s there and to be sure that they’re okay. But as he opens his mouth to speak, one of the male captors that had been holding Andy looks at him and smiles cruelly, placing a finger over his lips in a silent command for him to keep silent.

“Don’t worry about speaking,” he says in a sadistic voice, looking Patrick directly in the eyes. The other three around the table jolt at the sound of the man’s voice, clearly confused at his words. He carries on without explanation. “I have a better idea on how to let your friends know you’re here.”

Patrick doesn’t know what he plans to say when he opens his mouth, if he’s going to correct him about which ones are his friends or if he’s going to voice his confusion. But then the man is growing closer and Patrick’s throat closes in fear. This close, the man looms over him, heavily muscled and grinning with as much malicious glee as the Vixens when they held their knives. Patrick takes a breath and tries to restore his courage enough to ask what the man plans to do.

His question is answered when the man leans down, places a large hand over Patrick’s still sore stomach, and shoves. The room fills with the sound of the chair shoving across the floor but, more than that, it’s filled with Patrick’s pained whimpers and cries. Tears spring to his eyes once again and overflow when the man refuses to let up, digging the heel of his hand into one of Patrick’s deepest
gashes, testing the strength of the hastily done stitches the Vixens had attempted. Patrick leans forward and caves his stomach in in an attempt to escape. The man merely follows, his cutting smile mere inches from Patrick’s face. Behind him, Patrick can see his former bandmates looking up at the sound of his cries, heads twisting in an attempt to find him. He doesn’t care; he just wants the pain gone.

“Please,” he begs, his voice a hoarse whisper. He looks into the man’s eyes- brown like Pete’s and Patrick hates himself for making that comparison- and knows that he must look like a mess, sweat and tears streaming down his face. The man presses harder and Patrick’s next plea is a shout. “Please, I’ll do anything, just stop!”

Pete’s head jerks up. “Patrick!?”

Patrick can’t answer, not even when the man pulls his hand away and pats his shoulder as he leaves. He waits until he hears the door shut, feeling no safer when it does.

Everyone else is still looking towards him, though their covered eyes make it hard for Patrick to be sure.

Joe speaks first, voice hesitant as if he’s not sure if he’ll get a response. “Patrick? Are you-”

“I’m fine,” Patrick snaps, proud of how he’s able to keep the tears out of his voice. He finds that focusing on anything but Pete makes it easier, the words from all their fights ringing through his mind whenever he catches sight of the dark-haired man. “I mean- I’m here. Fuck, what happened to you guys? How did you get caught?”

“Pete had called to let me know that you seemed to be missing. Being good friends, Andy and I got worried and decided to come check it out.” There’s something strange in Joe’s tone, something Patrick can’t place. It’s sharp and almost metallic, like a blade. It’s more than an edge, though. It’s like he’s aiming the sharpness at someone in the room but Patrick isn’t quite sure who. “I was getting gas at the stop by your hotel and they got me from behind. Right before that, I saw a girl get Andy into one of their cars. They used some kind of drug to knock me out, though. I just woke up a while ago blindfolded with Andy and Pete.”

“Which begs the question,” Andy begins, moving his head in a strange sort of shake as if he’s looking for someone. “How did they get you, Pete?”

Pete takes a long while to answer, statue-like on his side of the table. It disturbs Patrick, as if Pete’s watching him and planning an attack. Patrick knows it’s ridiculous- Pete’s blindfolded and can’t even see him. Still, something about how his head is turned directly towards him puts Patrick on edge. Eventually, though, Pete snaps out of wherever his mind had been and licks his lips before answering. Patrick looks away.

“It, um, it doesn’t matter. Long story short, he told me that the person behind this was on the roof so I went up there. In retrospect, it was a pretty obvious trap so I’m sure you can imagine the rest.”
“Did you find out who was behind it?” Joe asks excitedly, leaning forward. His head ends up directly above a plate of organs. Patrick wrinkles his nose.

“Uh, no.” It’s a blatant lie and Patrick almost calls Pete on it, the accusing words already crawling up his throat. But then he makes the mistake of looking at Pete, really looking at him, and decides that he can’t. His shoulders are hunched, defeated, and he’s shaking almost as much as Patrick. He keeps biting at his lips until they’re red and raw and Patrick’s words almost reform to ask Pete to stop, to point out that he’s hurting himself. He swallows the words down and looks back down at the wood of the table.

No one speaks and Patrick’s alone with his thoughts. He plays through the scenes that the others have given him, explanations of their capture. He can see it clearly in his mind and he tries to be thankful that they weren’t hurt. But something else tugs at his mind instead. A question.

How did this person know where to find them? What was the chance that they’d all go to the hotel on the same day? Of course, Patrick was caught because he was stupid and reckless with the briefcase, not to mention his naive trust of a so-called fan. But what about the others? What could have led them to the hotel so easily and-

No.

Patrick’s stomach twists into painful knots, guilt crawling through his veins and under his skin.

Only one thing was consistent in all their stories.

They had all been looking for him.

Patrick wants to slam his head against the table. He wants the world to swallow him whole. He wants to scream that he’s sorry until his lungs give out because he didn’t only just get himself and the briefcase caught. No. Far worse, he got those he cares about most caught as well.

His tears have already dried but it’s enough to make him want to cry again.

“Hey,” Joe says, tearing Patrick away from his thoughts. “Hey, Patrick. What about you? How did they catch you?”

I was stupid, Patrick wants to say. I was a goddamn idiot and if we die it’s all my fault.

Instead, he clears the emotion from his throat and refuses to look up when he speaks.

“It wasn’t anything exciting,” he says in as monotonous a voice he can muster. It almost works but his voice is still shaking. “They just- They were waiting in my hotel room after my last show.”

“What!?” Joe’s exclamation is unexpected and Patrick jumps at the sound of it, heart racing for no apparent reason. He looks to the others to see if they had the same reaction but, if anything, they seem as shocked as Joe. “Your last show was a fucking week ago, Patrick! I didn’t- I didn’t think they had you for that long! A few days, sure, but a week? What have they been doing to you? Are you okay?”

It’s too much concern too soon and Patrick doesn’t know how to respond. He sighs, long and loud, to buy some time. As the others look to him, varying degrees of worry on their faces, Patrick ends up looking down. He looks at his left arm. He looks at where his hand used to be.

He could tell them, he thinks. It’s the answer to Joe’s question, isn’t it? They’ve been torturing him for the past week. They cut into him and cut off his hand and he’s not sure he’ll ever be okay again.
But Patrick’s never been the kind of person to lay all his problems out in front of everyone else. He’s never been the guy to scream and cry in front of others or to put that kind of pressure on them. Besides, he’s the reason they’re all in this mess. The last thing he deserves is their sympathy.

And...maybe he’s being selfish and vain. Alright, not maybe. He knows he is. But he doesn’t want the other guys to know how fucked up he is. He knows that beneath the horror and pity his story would get, they’d still start to look at him like a freak. They wouldn’t treat him like Patrick anymore. He’d just be another guy they were in a band with once.

And, fuck, Patrick thinks. The band. His wrist starts to throb, reminding him he’ll never be able to play guitar again. He spent the past year or so hoping that he’d get that call from one of the guys, telling him to get his ass to practice, that they had a new album to write.

That call never came and, now, it never will.

Patrick swallows hard, his throat feeling swollen, and plasters on a smile though he knows the others can’t see.

“Yeah, Joe. They just had me locked up. I’m fine.”

It’s not a convincing lie at all, not with the way his voice trembles as if he’s going to cry. Still, Joe and Andy sigh in relief. It’s Pete who’s mouth sets in an unconvinced frown.

“No, you can’t be. They sent me-”

“Hello, boys. Hate to cut your reunion short but we have a job to do.”

Even though it causes his body to react in utter terror- like a fucking Pavlovian dog, reacting to nothing but a memory- Patrick can’t help but be relieved at the sound of one of the Vixen’s voices as they walk back into the room. Pete’s frowning deeper now that he’s been cut off but he doesn’t try to continue his sentence. Patrick assumes it’s better that way. Anytime Pete’s spoken to him since the band broke up, he’s been nothing but cruel. Patrick’s not certain he’s able to handle any more cruelty today, especially from Pete.

The Vixens say no more, carrying trays as they walk over to the boys. The memory and still present pain of torture causes Patrick to be more willing than he knows he should be, following their instructions to inhale their drugs and drink their alcohol. It courses through his body, relaxing his muscles and making him sleepy. He knows that they’re only doing this to keep them all docile but, as his mind begins to forget how to hold onto a thought for long, he almost feels he should thank them. Though, he does feel guilty when he sees Andy thrashing in an attempt to avoid it. When one of the girls slaps him to make him behave, Patrick’s guilt only intensifies and he has to look away. He doesn’t know how he’ll ever be able to apologize to anyone here. Maybe they’ll just hate him enough that an apology won’t be necessary. Heaven knows that Patrick’s already starting to hate himself.

The feeling doesn’t last long, though. It’s replaced quickly by the drugs and alcohol in his system, a team of sedation that fills his head with cotton until he can barely think. He sees the others begin to droop over but a bag is placed over his head, enveloping him in dark. He knows he should be afraid but the feeling itself never comes.

“Hey, Rosa. I think they’re all out.” One of the Vixen’s voices carries through the air, the sound muffled by the bag around Patrick’s head and the wave of sleep trying to wash over him. He fights against it uselessly, trying to learn more.
“And it looks like we still have some time to kill. What do you say, Sara? Want to have some fun with the band?” Rosa responds. Sara laughs as Patrick’s chair is pulled out and his bindings are undone.

He knows that now would be the perfect time to try and get the upper hand. The two think that he’s asleep and they just untied him. He could grab something, anything, off the table and use it as a weapon. He likes to think that he’d be desperate enough to be successful.

Logically, he knows that it’s a good time to escape. Physically, though, he’s too tired to act on it. He only manages to twitch his right hand, folding it into a loose fist.

But then his eyes are slipping shut and he’s drawn into the safe comfort of sleep…..

Chapter End Notes

If you want to see determination then, man, you should have seen me fighting to leave this meeting I was in for a club in order to get back and post this on time. It was written and done on my computer but I was an idiot that didn't post it when I had the chance. So I was coming up with every good excuse I could to leave early. I said every Thursday and gosh dang it I meant it. Speaking of which IT'S STILL THURSDAY FOR ANOTHER THIRTY MINUTES. Hopefully this posts in time for me to not be a liar, haha
I Don’t Know Where We’re Going (But I Think We Have Room To Forget Where We’ve Been)

Chapter Summary

Patrick awakens to the sound of his own breathing.....
.....Pete awakens to the sound of screams

Chapter Notes

I totally have the best reason for uploading this right at midnight.
Pete tweeted me back on twitter a while ago and I lost track of time while I was freaking out.
Please forgive me.

Chapter Playlist:
- "Superstar" by The Dead Famous
- "Alone Together" by Fall Out Boy (obviously)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I Don’t Know Where We’re Going (But I Think We Have Room To Forget Where We’ve Been)

Patrick awakens to the sound of his own breathing, heavy and amplified in the small space of the bag over his head. Memories dissolve into his mind like sugar in water. Blood and bruises and blindfolded friends. Each small crystal holds a lifetime of pain. A lifetime that he’ll never admit to.

“They just had me locked up. I’m fine.”

Patrick slows his breaths and shuts his eyes, focusing on finding out where he is. He knows that the Vixens must have moved him. This room isn’t as cold as the last and the restraints are something stronger than rope. It wraps around his waist and upper body. In the safety he assumes the silence means, he tries kicking his feet only to find that they’ve strapped his ankles together as well. He frowns and his mind starts filling with the desire to escape. Just as he’s trying to squirm his arms out of the leather straps tied around him, he hears a door slam open.

“-in here, as you can see. Andy’s in the audio-visual room and we left Joe with the kids.”

Patrick tries to make himself seem limp in hopes that the Vixens won’t notice that he’s awake. Maybe he can find a detail to use against them. Maybe he can find out who’s behind this.

The voices fall silent, though, even as he hears footsteps drawing closer. He tenses against his will and his breath comes quicker than before.
“We can deal with the singer.” One of the Vixens, Rosa, Patrick remembers her being called, places a hand on his shoulder. Patrick does his best not to flinch. “Unless, of course, you want to.”

Someone laughs, a third voice Patrick fails to recognize. It rings through his mind, cruel and breathy. It’s almost familiar to him, like the voice of someone he’s only met once or twice before. His mind aches as it strains to remember who this is, as it attempts to guess who’s working against them. Is it one of his friends? One of Joe’s or Andy’s? Maybe it’s one of Pete’s new girls he keeps around, heaven knows that he has plenty of those and-

Patrick’s blood freezes.

“Oh, I’m sure he’s in perfect hands with you two.”

He recognizes that voice.

“Besides, I’d much rather deal with my loving boyfriend down the hall.”

Bebe.

Patrick remembers clear as day, now, why that laugh grates against his nerves. He remembers why red hot anger is now flowing through his veins.

Patrick remembers seeing her on his laptop screen, hanging off of Pete’s arm and giggling as the two announced that they were together. He remembers the pang of jealousy, so sudden and thick that he slammed his laptop shut so hard that the screen should have cracked. He remembers wishing he had Pete’s number so he could scream drunken obscenities at him. He remembers the sense of betrayal. He remembers crying himself to sleep that night because, apparently, Pete hadn’t been lying when he’d said he’d moved on.

Now, though, Patrick feels no sadness or jealousy. He doesn’t even feel an ounce betrayal. Instead, a twisted form of satisfaction takes root in his thoughts. His lips itch to turn into a smug smirk. His throat burns with the desire to find Pete and ask him how it feels to be used and left by someone who’s supposed to love you. He wants to see if they’ll shatter in the same way.

Patrick isn’t left in these thoughts for long as the girls in the room begin another conversation, still ignorant to his eavesdropping. Patrick strains to hear more, desperate to know what’s to become of them.

Rosa’s hand still hasn’t left his shoulder and her nails dig into his skin a bit as she speaks. He represses a wince, biting the inside of his lip as he listens.

“You seem fond of that one,” Rosa says with a sarcastic laugh. “Why not choose him for this experiment instead?”

Heels clack against the floor towards Patrick and he’s only glad that they can’t hear how his heartbeat speeds up. Thick perfume invades his lungs with lavender that can’t completely cover the scent of the chemicals that make it up. Nor does it distract from the metallic taste of blood that splashes over Patrick’s tongue when teeth clench together in fear as he senses the girl growing closer.

“Because,” Bebe says, letting the word linger and fester in the air, worse pollution than her perfume could ever be. “Because Patrick’s always been his favorite. And this will hurt him more than any physical torture ever will.”

Though he’s struggling to stay still, Patrick can’t help but wince when Bebe’s hand lands on his shoulder, removing Rosa’s grip from him and caressing as she moves towards his neck. She leans in
close; he can feel her breath brushing against the bag. He can imagine he’s choking on her perfume.

Her nails scrape tenderly against his skin, raising goosebumps as they move in a pattern Patrick can’t quite seem to figure out. Her hand moves in a figure eight on the back of his neck. The inside of a ring snags on his shirt. Bebe herself doesn’t seem to know what she’s doing until her fingers grasp the edge of the bag and yank it off Patrick’s head.

Patrick’s eyes fly open in fear and he gasps as if the bag were essential to his breathing. His breaths come in heavy pants at Bebe’s close proximity, smudged eyeliner and hazel eyes inches from his face. Her breath is warm where it brushes against his cheek, an instance of comfort before fading into ice.

Bebe’s eyes darken as she narrows them, looking upon Patrick in clear disdain. When she speaks, it’s nothing but hate.

“I don’t know see what makes you so special. Why could he love you and not me?”

Patrick doesn’t have an answer- he barely even understands the question. Why could who love him and not her? He knows that she had been talking about Pete before, claiming that Patrick was his ‘favorite’. If he weren’t so afraid, he might have found the courage to laugh. He’s not Pete’s favorite anything- unless she means favorite person to hurt.

And, speaking of hurt, when she claimed that ‘this’ was going to hurt ‘him’, who was she speaking of? And what’s ‘this’? His mind begins to ache with all the questions clouding it. He tries pulling away from Bebe, suddenly aware that she’s closer than before and still speaking.

“Well? It wasn’t a rhetorical question, idiot. Tell me how you made Pete love you.”

She’s speaking low so that the Vixens won’t hear her from where they stand by a strange machine behind him. Patrick’s eyes widen at the sight of it but then Bebe’s grabbing his chin and forcing him to look at her.

“If you answer me now, I can help you escape. No one else will get hurt, I swear it.”

For once, Patrick catches the desperation in her voice and the pleading in her eyes. She truly believes in what she’s saying. Worse, she truly believes that Patrick knows. He lets out a shaky breath, almost laughing at the implications of her question.

“I’m sorry,” he whispers, his eyes never leaving hers. “But Pete never loved me. And, if you’re lucky, he’ll never claim to love you.”

Bebe’s eyes fill with questions and confusion. Helplessness dances in that hazel abyss. It lasts only a second before she pulls away with a disgusted scowl. She raises her hand as if to hit him but then drops it to the side.

“Liar,” she spits out, the word cutting through Patrick like a physical blow. Her eyes become weapons, digging into him as she straightens her back and steps away from him. “I gave you a chance to free yourself and your band. Everything that happens next is your own fault. I hope you realize that.”

Oh, Patrick thinks bitterly. Trust me. I already did.

Patrick has no time to question the girl’s previous statements before she’s facing the Vixens, the two watching her as if awaiting permission to move. Bebe drags her hand across her face, wiping away sweat and tears that Patrick knows weren’t there before. Her hands fold into fists at her side and her
expression is absolutely murderous. Patrick can’t help but feel a second of sympathy for this girl. He knows that he reacted no better when he realized that Pete could never truly love him.

“I want you to listen carefully to these next instructions and to do exactly as they say,” Bebe demands with a level of authority that Patrick hadn’t expected. She continues, raising her head high and sparing only the smallest glance to Patrick. Her tone is nothing but ice when she speaks. “Do not hold back in this experiment. I want him to hurt. I want him to scream. If I hear so much as a moment of silence from this room, then you will be taking his place. Is that understood?”

“Yes,” the Vixens say in unison, oblivious to Patrick’s growing terror. They turn back to the machine, prepping it for whatever torture they have planned next. Patrick begs Bebe with his eyes, fear lodging in his throat and preventing any words to escape.

Bebe only smiles.

“I’ll tell Pete that you say hello. I’m sure it will comfort him to know that you’re in such good hands.”

Patrick opens his mouth to ask her where Pete is, to ask her what she meant, to ask her what this machine does. He doesn’t get the chance because she’s already walking away and one of the Vixens is moving to stand before him.

“Hold still,” Sara says, grabbing onto him and giving him no choice but to obey. She begins to stick electrodes onto his temple, the wires tangling in her sharpened nails. Patrick tries to move his head, to thrash in an attempt to get her to give up. He knows it’s futile but if he can stall the inevitable pain for just a second then he likes to imagine he’ll feel some form of victory.

The victorious feeling doesn’t even have the chance to appear as a sudden jolt of electricity shoots from the electrodes and into his skin. He lets out a cry of shock and pain, muscles going rigid from the unexpected electrocution.

Sara pulls away, shaking her right hand violently.

“Shit, Rosa!” Sara shouts, turning on the darker haired girl. “Not yet! Have some patience!”

Rosa merely shrugs, one hand on the machine and the other on her hip.

“Do you want Bebe coming back here? You know how determined she is. I don’t believe that threat was a bluff,” she says, strangely monotonous. Sara sighs heavily, brushing her long blonde ponytail over her shoulder before turning back to face Patrick. She makes quick work of finishing what she started, sticking the electrodes to his head in record time, glaring at Rosa over his shoulder. When she’s finally finished, she pulls away and sneers down at Patrick.

“What? No questions?” Sara mocks as Rosa seems to be fiddling with the settings of the large machine. Patrick glances around, fear making him jittery and more prone to distraction that he usually is.

Candles flicker in the corner of the room, which Patrick realizes is actually a chapel. Pews create two lines before him and he knows he’s situated where the altar should be. It’s small, he knows, too small to be a true church. He can’t help but bark out a laugh.

“A chapel in a hospital, really? What, is this supposed to be ironic? Because that was written by Pete, not me.” He struggles a bit in his bindings, his tone dry as he continues to look for a distraction. Anything to take his mind off of the horrid sound the machine is starting to make behind him. “And what is this supposed to be, anyway? Some sort of sick sacrifice? Sorry, I don’t feel like being your
innocent lamb.”

Sara reaches down and grasps the arms of the chair, quick enough that Patrick flinches and begins to regret his words. Sara scowls at him, clearly angered, before schooling her expression into an ugly smirk.

“Funny you say that because, in a few moments, it won’t really matter what you feel like being. That machine you’ve been looking at? Yeah, it’s going to erase everything that makes you Patrick and leave us with nothing but a monster. You’ll be nothing but a one-handed freak willing to do whatever you’re told,” she hisses at him, obviously taking pleasure at how Patrick’s face pales in horror at her words. She grins at him widely, reminiscent of a character Pete once played in a music video so many years ago, and pulls away.

Patrick opens his mouth to spit out a sassy remark, something to make her think that she hadn’t really succeeded in scaring him. He’s just about to comment on how useless a one-handed servant would be when another surge of electricity shoots through his mind. He bites down on his tongue, refusing to cry out again. Sara huffs out a laugh.

“I’d save your breath, Patrick. It may not last long if this process is as painful as they say,” she says. Patrick sucks in air greedily, his lungs beginning to feel as if they’re constricting. Sara looks past him towards Rosa, nodding at her to begin. Behind him, he hears Rosa switching a few dials.

“Now, Patrick. I’m going to count to three,” Rosa says, her voice muffled as if her back’s to him. Patrick hears another dial click into place.

“One.”

Patrick tries to stop his shaking, resting his head back and shutting his eyes. He survived them cutting him up like a piece of meat. Surely, he can survive this.

“Two.”

Breathe, Patrick reminds himself. He takes deep breaths. He pretends not to notice how shaky they are.

What is it he would do when trying to calm down? His mind scrambles to remember.

Oh. Right.

Stop.

Breathe.

Count to-

“Three.”

<><><><><>>

Pete awakens to the sound of screams.

His first thought is that he’s having those nightmares again, the kind that toss the sound of suffering around his brain like a plaything. They’ve become much more common ever since he and the band broke up. He shifts a bit as he begins to wake up completely. His arms stay frustratingly in their position of being wrapped around him, as if he were trying to keep warm. His eyebrows furrow
together and he tries once again to move. When he finds himself still unable to do so, his arms feeling like they’re wrapped up and trapped in his bedsheets, he opens his eyes.

His mind drops the idea of the nightmares being the cause for the sickening sound of screams. Instead, his thought now is that his nightmares have become real.

He looks around, the tall chair beneath him wobbling precariously as he moves. He pays no attention to this, though, much too frightened by the mannequins around him.

Pete’s never really understood people who have irrational fears of mannequins and dummies. He’s always brushed it off with a laugh and a joke, often referencing horror movies like “Chucky” only to receive an eye roll at his attempt at humor. He’s never seen these inanimate objects to be things to be feared. Now, though, he suddenly understands.

Dozens of mannequins surround him, too many for his liking. No two of them look the same, different colors and shapes and poses invading his vision as his gaze darts around the room frantically. Some of them are missing limbs or even their head. It adds to the disturbing aura they already give off by being there. Not even the red rope hung between them and him can make Pete feel any safer. He looks down at the red carpet beneath his feet, stretching out to make an X, and at the cameras hanging off of the mannequins’ necks. He knows what this is supposed to be.

Bright light flashes from the dark doorway of the room and Pete hears the clicking of a camera. He blinks, momentarily blinded, and another flash goes off. Pete scowls.

He knows who’s cruel enough to do this.

“Bebe,” he calls out, the name burning his tongue as he spits it out. “Don’t fucking hide. I know it’s you.”

Light laughter answers his call, followed quickly by the familiar sounds of her footsteps strolling calmly towards him.

Both sounds are drowned out by that of another scream. Pete jerks in his seat, nearly falling off. The scream sounds familiar and the thought causes panic to rush through his veins. Why does he recognize that voice? Another rings out, echoing down the halls and into this room. It’s more pained than the first, causing Pete’s chest to ache in sympathy. Whoever is screaming is being tortured, he knows that for a fact. He can tell that they’re thrashing about and begging for the pain to stop. He can tell that they’re sobbing. He just can’t tell who it is.

Maybe it’s better that way.

Bebe slams the door behind her, cutting the screaming off short. Though he knows that it’s only because the door is muffling the noise, Pete can’t help but feel a bit of relief that he no longer has to listen to this person cry out in pain. Free of the distraction, he looks up into Bebe’s cruel eyes instead. She smirks.

“Sorry about that. I told them to make sure he screams.” She walks forward casually as if Pete isn’t restrained in a straight jacket before her. She raises her camera again and takes another picture as she speaks. “Though, to be fair, I thought his voice would have given out by now. What with all that torture they did before this.”

Pete’s head is spinning from the light of the camera, blinding him as Bebe continues closer, and he can’t make sense of her words. Who’s screaming? Who was tortured?

In an attempt to escape the flashes from Bebe’s camera, Pete turns his head. His eyes land on the
This mannequin is missing a hand.

Pete can’t help but vividly remember the weight of the bag that supposedly held Patrick’s hand. He thinks back to his horror and fear and of how realistic it all seemed. He had thought it was a sign that someone was hurting Patrick and was going to hurt him next. But then he can’t help but remember how Patrick had claimed that he was fine.

If it were years ago, Pete would have been able to tell if Patrick were lying. He would have been able to sense it in his voice or choice of words. He’d be able to call the tremor in his voice an obvious sign. He’d be able to point out that Patrick either had too much emotion or none at all. And then he’d have Patrick breaking down and telling him the truth in a matter of seconds.

But, these days, it’s impossible for Pete to tell if Patrick means what he’s saying. They’ve been too distant for too long and Pete’s afraid that he just doesn’t know Patrick the way he used to. Earlier, when they had been blindfolded and seated together, Pete had tried to listen to Patrick’s voice to see if he was lying. If all else failed, Pete could always tell if Patrick was lying by the tremor in his voice.

He’d found that it did him no good. Patrick’s voice was always tremoring when he spoke to Pete recently. And Pete’s not entirely sure if it’s because he’s always lying.

Bebe moves to his side, right in front of his face, and takes another picture. Pete shuts his eyes to the bright light a second too late.

“Where’s- Where are the others? Are they okay? What are you doing to them?” Pete demands, squinting his eyes as Bebe grows relentless, stealing pictures like a member of the paparazzi. The camera’s shutter sound almost masks her laugh.

“Oh, baby. I think you’d better worry about yourself for now. You saw what we did to your singer. Just imagine what we’re going to do to you,” Bebe spits out, a hint of venom in her voice. Pete shakes his head frantically.

No! He doesn’t want to believe that what he saw is true! He refuses to believe that they tortured Patrick in the way they seemed desperate for him to believe. Maybe just this once Patrick was telling the truth when he said he was fine. Maybe just this once life hasn’t screwed any of them over completely.

When Pete thinks back to that fearful tremor in Patrick’s tone, though, he finds his own thoughts hard to believe.

“What do you mean?” Pete asks, trying to distract Bebe from her desire to blind him with the camera flash. She only moves in closer until the camera is inches from his face.

“What do you think, Pete?” She punctuates her angered exclamation with a flash from the camera. Pete cringes. “You broke my heart. You made me believe that you loved me. I’m not going to let you get off that easy.”

Pete’s eyebrows scrunch together as he takes in her words. That’s….That’s what this is about? She betrayed him because he couldn’t find it in him to love her? He thought that they had both known it was temporary. She was there to listen to him rant angrily about his failed relationships with Patrick and Ashlee. He thought that she’d have understood how unlucky in love he is.

He wants to scream at her. He wants to laugh. He wants to take that camera from her hands and smash it on the ground, all while shouting about how fucking stupid this is.
Instead, he takes a deep breath and emotionally prepares himself for the plan his mind is concocting. Bebe doesn’t know it but she just gave Pete a hint on how to escape. And, as bad as he’ll feel exploiting it, he knows it has to be done.

He closes his eyes briefly as the camera flashes one last time. When he opens them again, he searches for Bebe’s eyes.

“What makes you think I didn’t love you?” He keeps his voice soft, keeps his eyes on hers. He waits, holding his breath to see how Bebe reacts.

She backs away, eyes wide and lips parted. She’s exactly how Pete expected her to be.

Her eyes harden, though, in an instant. Her perfectly red lips purse and the camera drops to the ground. Pete considers it a win.

“Don’t play games with me. I know when someone loves me and when they’re just using me to get over someone else,” she snaps, her tone as sharp as her nails. Pete doesn’t have to feign confusion.

“What? Ashlee? I guess we got together pretty quickly after the divorce but, come on, you and I both know that was nothing serious. And, besides, you’re way-”

“Oh. Oh .

Pete’s words jumble together in his mouth, mixing up letters and falling out as gibberish. He doesn’t know why Bebe’s remark is causing so much heat to rise to his face. He doesn’t know why he’s hesitating to deny it.

“It’s just because he used to be such a big part of your life for such a long time. He used to be your best friend. He used to be your boyfriend.

Now, come on! If you want to escape, you have to hate him! You have to slander him! It’s nothing you haven’t been doing for the past few years!

Bebe smirks at him, even if its edges are tainted with hope. Pete knows that she thinks she’s got him. He also knows that she wants him to prove her wrong.

The words come too easily, tasting freedom before Pete has the chance to know what they are.

“Are you serious? What makes you think I still love Patrick?”

Bebe’s eyebrows furrow together and her arms come up to cross over her chest. She says nothing so Pete continues.

“What makes you think that I ever loved Patrick? Sure, we were close for awhile but every band member goes through their stage gay phase. It’s not my fault if media decided to make it into something it wasn’t.”

It’s too easy, much too easy, and Pete hates himself for each syllable he utters. Bebe, though, lifts an eyebrow in amused disbelief.

“You say all that and yet you still came after him. The only reason we were able to catch you was because we knew you’d come after Patrick. You’d be free if it weren’t for that,” she says in a challenging tone. Pete latches onto her words, leaning forward in desperation for her to believe what
he has to say.

“Exactly! Don’t you think I’ve realized that by now? I wouldn’t be here if Patrick hadn’t gotten caught. None of us would be!”

Pete’s stomach twists in knots but more words fill his head. Things to make Bebe believe him, insults against the man he once called the love of his life. He wants to stop, to take it back, even though he knows he’s said worse to Patrick’s face before. Hell, the last night that they really saw each other, Pete knows that he was horrible. He knows that he picked each word carefully, selected each one with the exact expectation that it would break the man before him.

But Patrick isn’t here right now. Patrick’s tied up in another room, maybe being taunted like this. Patrick’s probably already blaming himself for all of this if he’s anything like he used to be. Patrick’s probably already been tortured and, again, memories flood into Pete’s mind at the thought.

He can’t help but recall just how small Patrick’s voice had been when he’d tried to say that he was fine.

But Pete can’t focus on these thoughts right now, can’t question why this is any different from anything he’s ever said to Patrick’s face. If anything, he doesn’t believe what he’s saying now and he tells himself that it will all be worth it once he escapes with everyone else.

Maybe he can even apologize to Patrick once he knows that they’re all safe.

So, instead of wondering why he feels so guilty about what he’s saying, Pete draws on his anger. He draws out the pain and betrayal of the band breaking up. He forces himself to remember how it felt to see Patrick slam the door on him, to hear Patrick scream that he hated him and never wanted to see him again. He thinks back to every time that he and Patrick have fought. He forces himself to pretend that he hates Patrick as much as he says he does.

“Between you and me, this all could have been avoided if Patrick had just protected the fucking briefcase a bit better. It’s a goddamn briefcase, how hard can it be to keep an eye on it? I’m not surprised, though. The only way Patrick would have remembered it would have been if we’d attached the damn thing to him with a pair of handcuffs. And touring while it was in his possession? How stupid can you be? What kind of person knows that they have something so important and still makes themselves such a public target? No wonder he was caught first!” Pete knows that he may be going a bit too far, knows that Patrick would hate him even more if he heard a thing he’s said. But Pete glances up at Bebe and her smile encourages him to continue. “You know, I almost wish he was the only one. The only one that was caught, that is. I don’t deserve to be here. Joe and Andy definitely don’t either. But Patrick was the one who broke up the band. He’s the one who said we needed to take a fucking break. So, whatever. I just wish you guys had been satisfied with him. Though, I guess I can understand if you weren’t.”

Pete stops, grinning wryly at the girl in front of him. Bebe looks breathless, hands at her side and cheeks red. She looks as if each insult to Patrick had been a compliment to her. It makes Pete hate her a little bit more.

“You...You really believe all that?” Even her tone is stuck in an awed version of disbelief. Pete’s never wanted to scream no more in his life. But he settles on licking his lips and chuckling.

“Why do you think I chose you instead?”

The words have barely left his lips before Bebe’s on him, practically crawling into his lap to kiss him. She drapes her arms over his shoulders, leaning into him so that the chair wobbles precariously.
Pete matches her intensity, forcing his tongue between her lips and tasting nothing but lipstick.

“Let me touch you,” he growls out, impatient to escape. Bebe giggles and pulls back to look at him, smiling as she brushes her thumb over his mouth. She stares at him with hazel eyes full of wonder until Pete starts shifting around uncomfortably. Bebe’s mouth opens and Pete can’t tell if she’s going to speak or breathe. Instead, she giggles again, her breath hot against his face. She leans down to kiss him, chaste, and then she’s pulling away.

Then she’s undoing his binds. Then she’s pulling the jacket off of him.

Cool air hits Pete’s arms as the jacket comes undone and he almost feels bad when he looks at Bebe’s smiling face. She reaches out to him and Pete shuts his eyes. He thinks of how scared everyone had sounded when detailing how they were caught. He thinks about the screams he’d heard. He thinks about Patrick’s hand.

When Bebe’s hands come to touch his arms, he opens his eyes and pulls away.

Bebe’s not expecting the hands that wrap too tightly around her wrists nor is she expecting the way that they suddenly pull and toss her to the ground. Pete looks down at her, an apology in his eyes, but then looks at the door. He’s trying to estimate how far he can get before an alarm is pulled when Bebe grabs his ankle, yanking him down with her.

“Liar! You awful fucking liar!” Bebe shrieks, scrambling to get on top of Pete when he’s down. Pete rolls over to his back, shoving at her to get off, but Bebe grabs him by the shoulders and shoves him down again. His head makes harsh contact with the ground and his vision grows shaky.

Bebe’s still screaming curses at him as she stands and Pete expects her to run for backup. Instead, she scowls down at him and reaches for some sort of weapon hanging off of her belt. Pete tries again to pull her back down but Bebe’s too quick, darting away from his hands with too much grace for someone in such high heels.

The world is still focused through a fuzzy filter when Pete feels Bebe’s foot make contact with his ribs, over and over again. He gasps in time with her outraged cries, pain blossoming in his chest as he blindly reaches out to grasp at whatever he can. When something cold and sharp cuts into his palm, Pete closes his fist and pulls without thinking. There’s some resistance and then a shriek. Bebe falls to the ground beside him, flailing for the weapon Pete had taken. Pete looks down at what’s in his hand and grimaces when it cuts further into his palm, blood staining the hook he now has. Pete’s quick to shift his grip on it, grabbing tightly onto the wooden end at the bottom instead. Ignoring her protests and nails across his hand, Pete grabs onto Bebe’s shoulder and shoves her to the ground, rolling on top of her to make her stay put. He doesn’t think as she continues to hit and scream at him. He just does.

The hook comes down with painful accuracy, landing directly in the middle of Bebe’s chest. She screams, a piercing sound, but Pete pays it no mind. He only thinks about the pain that she’s already caused, the way that she’s in a cult that no doubt wants them dead. He thinks about how she betrayed him. He thinks about how much she wants him to hate Patrick.

The hook comes down, again and again, blood spraying into Pete’s face with each blow. Bebe’s struggles slowly become weaker, until she’s just holding onto Pete’s wrist. Pete buries the hook into her chest again but doesn’t pull it out as he realizes what he’s done.

Bebe gasps for breath beneath him, her eyes betrayed and unfocused as she gazes up at him. Pete wants to stand and run away, to forget about what he’s done. But he can’t move away from Bebe’s dying body, the scent of worn-off perfume beginning to fade away from between them.
“At least I know you won’t forget me. I’ll haunt your fucking nightmares,” she gasps out, her voice barely audible. Pete feels sick but he still can’t look away.

“Where are the others?” Pete demands. His voice is shaky. It’s not as strong as he’d like. “Tell me where they are!”

Bebe can’t respond, Pete finds. Her breathing’s already stopped.

PETE’S COVERED IN BLOOD AS HE RUNS, THE STENCH FOLLOWING HIM LIKE THE GHOST BEBE BELIEVED SHE WOULD BE. HE’S GASPING FOR BREATH, THE WALLS A BLUR AS HE RUSHES PAST THEM. HE CAN’T SEEM TO GET ENOUGH AIR INTO HIS BODY TO FUNCTION. HIS LUNGS DON’T FEEL LIKE THEY’RE ON FIRE- THEY FEEL LIKE THEY’VE ALREADY GIVEN OUT.

Pete stops when he hears voices down the hall, girls discussing who’s taking the briefcase to Courtney- whoever Courtney is. Pete freezes, his heart feeling like it’s going to beat out of his chest, and searches for a place to hide. He can’t run back where he came from; he’s not sure he’s fast enough. His eyes land on the doors beside him, symbols marking each one. Exclamation marks and skeletons and sheep- he’s not sure what any of them mean. Everything is moving too fast- his mind’s not slowing down enough to let him think. The sounds of the girls grow closer and he panics, grabbing a random door handle- one with nothing but a flame to mark it- and throws himself inside the room.

There’s another door on the other side and he can hear people talking behind it. Pete freezes, afraid that they’ll come through this door and find him. But the other people seem to be more concerned with speaking to each other than moving out of that room. Pete tries to listen in for a while but finds the door to be a greater barrier than he expected. He only catches snippets of conversation like “merely passed out” and “he’s not dead yet”. Pete’s terrified to imagine who they could be speaking of and pulls away.

He drops his gaze to the piles of things beside him, wondering if this is someone else’s torture room. He catches a glimpse of something familiar on the ground and kneels to pick it up, curiosity getting the best of him. He struggles to see the details in the dim lighting but it feels like some sort of CD case. He squints, thinking that maybe Bebe did succeed in blinding him when small pieces of the picture pop out at him, like puzzle pieces asking to be solved in his brain.

A blue F there, someone’s shoe here...He blinks and tries to put the picture together.

Take This To Your Grave’s cover stares back at him.

Pete gasps and drops it shock, turning to look at everything else in disbelief. His hands fly over the piles, knocking things over and creating a mess but he doesn’t care. Dozens of his band’s merchandise and music find their way into his hands, from Folie A Deux’s vinyl to a beaten up CD of Evening Out With Your Girlfriend. Pete stands, confusion clear on his face. What’s all of this doing here? What does the cult have planned? What does any of this have to do with it?

A door slams in the other room and Pete drops a copy of Fall Out Toy Works. Pete takes a moment to thank whatever higher power there is that allowed it to be silent before moving towards the door. Cautiously, he presses his ear against it. He wants to be able to leave this room, to find the others and leave, but he can’t do that if he doesn’t know if it’s safe. He knows that some girls went down the hallway behind him. Now, he just has to take a chance with this room. Gripping the hook determinedly in his hand, Pete grabs onto the door handle. He opens it slowly, forcing his breaths to calm down. The door squeaks a little as it opens, whining as he pushes it further. No one points it
out. In fact, in the other room, no one speaks at all.

Pete’s still terrified as he finally steps in, seeming to have entered a chapel through a side door. It’s better lit than the closet he had been in but candles are the only source of light, casting a creepy orange tint across the room. Pete imagines that this would be a good place to hideout while he plans. Those girls speaking before didn’t sound like they planned on coming back anytime soon. Pete allows himself to relax, breathing deeply as he walks further inside.

He jumps when he hears a similar breath from someone else in the chapel.

Pete’s grip on the hook tightens. He doesn’t know who else is in here but he does know that he’s ready to fight them if they plan on keeping him from保护ing everyone else.

Just like he said all those years ago, he’ll go down swinging.

There’s another soft breath, one that causes Pete to feel on edge. He takes a breath of his own, tightens his free hand into a fist, and turns around.

And.

And…

And, oh.

Oh no.

He should have known Patrick was lying…..

Patrick’s slumped over, unconscious with his face scrunched up as if he’s still in pain. Blood stains the front of his shirt- the same white button down he’d been wearing the night Pete had spat such awful words at him. Wires from a machine connect to his head, buzzing slightly with the dangerous tone of electricity. Pete tries to focus on that, tries to let the worst of this be the diabolical machine attached to his best friend. But his eyes are a traitor and they travel down to look at his hand.

More appropriately, he decides, they travel down to look at his wrist.

Pete should have known that Patrick was lying but he wanted to be naive. He wanted to be oblivious. He wanted to believe that nothing this bad could touch this band. He wanted to believe that nothing this bad could ever touch Patrick.

Pete wants to fall to his knees, he can already feel them giving out. He wants to scream and cry because the world’s so damn unfair. He wants to go back and find a way to make Bebe’s death last just a little bit longer.

But he doesn’t let any of this show. Even with Patrick passed out before him, Pete can’t let any of this emotion show.

Pete rushes to Patrick’s side, grimacing at the chair he’s strapped to. He grabs onto Patrick’s shoulder, shaking him lightly in an attempt to wake him up.

“Patrick. Patrick. I’m gonna get us out of here but you have to wake up,” he whispers urgently. His shaking grows a bit more forceful when he receives no response. “Patrick!”

Patrick finally moves and Pete sighs in relief. The feeling, though, is short-lived because Patrick starts thrashing as soon as he notices Pete kneeling before him.
“Patrick? Patrick, no, look, it’s me!”

Maybe that’s part of the problem, the cynical side of Pete’s mind says. Pete ignores it, all his attention on getting Patrick to calm down.

“Patrick! It’s alright!”

Patrick can’t seem to understand him- he barely even seems capable of recognizing him. His motions grow more and more intense, violent enough that Pete worries for his wounds. The way that Patrick’s moving can’t be good for any of the wounds that have been inflicted on him. Pete tries to beg for him to stop but Patrick, of course, doesn’t listen.

He’s always been so damn stubborn.

Pete pulls away and looks back at the machine. Maybe if he can shut it off then he can get Patrick to calm down. Maybe he just has to get those damn things off of Patrick’s head. Pete reaches for one of them, biting his lip and hoping that he won't cause further damage. Patrick makes it difficult, tossing his head from side to side as he jerks frantically in his chair. Pete manages to brush his fingers across one of the small electrodes and a small shock courses through his hand, painful enough that he pulls away with a gasp. He means to look down at Patrick sympathetically, to try and convey how sorry he is that all of this is happening. When he does look into Patrick’s face, though, Pete’s expression is one of horror.

Patrick’s eyes look almost as golden as his hair.

Pete doesn’t have time to blink or try and rationalize it as a trick of the light because Patrick’s shutting his eyes and thrashing his head. Worse, hands are grabbing at Pete’s shoulders and pulling him away.

“No! Patrick! Let me go! Patrick!” Pete starts screaming demands for him to be let go, Patrick’s name interspersed between each cry. Patrick pays him no mind, continuing to spasm in his seat as if he has no control over his body. Pete feels himself being pulled further away and he fights back twice as hard. He has to get to Patrick. He has to save him. He once promised a young hopeful kid that he’d stick with him until the day they died. He’s not ready for that day to be so soon.

“Patrick!” Pete screams, the name ripping through him like a cry for help. Patrick looks towards him and Pete feels a spark of hope.

It’s doused before it has a chance to grow. Pete feels something like a pin prick stab into the side of his neck, quicker and more unexpected than when Bebe attacked him on the roof. His hands come up to grab at the injury and he hates how he immediately starts to feel drowsy. More than that, he hates how he was stupid enough to drop the hook.

Too weak to fight them as the sedation he was given starts to kick in, Pete sags against the girl behind him as the other moves forward to grab the hook off the floor. A look of surprise and recognition crosses her face, followed quickly by cruel satisfaction. She waves the hook in front of Pete’s face, gaining his hazy attention.

“You got this from Bebe, I see. Not that I’m surprised. She always seemed a little weak,” the girl says, backing away towards Patrick. Pete tries weakly to get out of the hold of the girl behind him but his arms feel so heavy and he just wants to sleep. The blonde girl before him smiles and lines the end of the hook up to Patrick’s wrist. Pete’s breath catches in his throat and he can't even beg her not to do this. The girl’s smile takes on a sadistic edge. “I guess we’ll just have to create someone strong enough to take her place.”
When she shoves the hook into the end of Patrick’s arm, Pete realizes with a sick stomach that, oh.

That’s who made those screams before.

Chapter End Notes

In everything of this story so far, I'm most proud of my chapter titles. Everything else makes me cry from frustration for a few hours while I edit it before throwing a fit and posting it. I don't know why I had the need to say that. I think I'm just trying to be relatable.

Anyway, actually important thing to say here. I KNOW THAT I HAVE ANOTHER FANFIC but I have very little inspiration for it rn. Now, my promise as a fanfic author is that I always finish every story I start. Just. I can't...promise that it will be very soon. SO if you're reading that other one, I genuinely apologize but I do promise that there will be an update. At least before the end of the year (oh god that's not very reassuring) Just trust me, okay?
They'll Burn Everything You Love (So Treat Your Love Like Ashes)

Chapter Summary

Go back.
Rewind.
Let's see that last bit from Patrick's point of view.

Chapter Notes

Hey, look, I'm not uploading at midnight! Talk about character development!
This chapter was so fun to write (even if it took forever because I felt the need to actually research some things) so I hope you guys enjoy it!

*Fun fact, the word 'literally' completely changes the meaning of one of the sentences in here and I had a debate with myself whether to keep it or not. I did because angst.

Chapter Playlist:
- "Kick Me" by Sleeping With Sirens
- "So Cold" by Ben Cocks ft Nikisha Reyes-Pile
- "My Songs Know What You Did In The Dark (Light 'Em Up)" by Fall Out Boy (obvs)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

They'll Burn Everything You Love (So Treat Your Love Like Ashes)

This isn’t pain.
It can’t be.

Patrick thrashes in the chair they’ve strapped him to. He destroys his voice with roaring screams. He pulls at the bindings around his arms until he’s certain that the bruises reach down to his bones. He cries hot tears that race down his face. But none of this is pain.

It’s agony.

Electricity pulses through his body and mind. It erases each thought the second it begins to exist. He can focus on nothing other than the way his body feels as if it’s going to tear apart at any second. The electrical impulses travel under his skin like bugs. He wants to rip all his flesh apart to make it stop. He wants to cool his overheated skin with the feeling of his own blood. When he screams, he sounds like an animal.

He falls forward, limp. The Vixens have left. He can’t hear them anymore but they’ve left the
machine on so it doesn’t matter, does it? He shifts around in his seat, wanting nothing more than to just pass out from the pain like before and sleep until this torment’s over.

He shuts his eyes. He doesn’t know if he sleeps or not but suddenly someone’s hand is at his shoulder and Patrick can’t help but begin to thrash again. He’s not sure why he’s behaving so violently. He just wants to be sure that whoever’s here can’t hurt him. Patrick hears someone call out his name- he’s sure that he recognizes that voice. He wants to feel relieved. He wants to believe he’s safe, even when he feels fingers fumbling with the wires attached to his head. He can’t stop tossing about in his seat. But he can open his eyes.

And everything is bathed in a yellow light.

Patrick can feel himself begin to panic, his eyes darting around for the source of this change of lighting. Deep down, with the electrodes on his head sending information to his brain, he knows that no one changed the lights. They only changed him.

He feels his eyes slam shut. He can’t tell how many breaths he’s taking- they come and go too fast. Instead, he measures time by counting how often Pete calls out his name.

Pete?

Pete!

Patrick’s eyes fly open and everything is still the hazy yellow shade that Patrick already hates. He jerks his head to the side, searching for the man screaming his name. The action tugs at the wires in a way they hadn’t before. More shocks tear through his body but he tries his best not to care. He has to find Pete! He has to know if he, at least, escaped.

But the Vixens block his view, Sara moving closer to him with a cruel grin on her face. Patrick wants to feel afraid, wants to feel terrified that he can’t see Pete. But Pete screams his name again and all he begins to feel is the rage the Vixens promised him.

\textit{Why isn’t he helping you? Why isn’t he saving you? Pete’s already escaped but he’s doing nothing to stop these girls from hurting you! Why is he here then? Has he come to laugh at your pain like he’s always done before?}

Patrick’s certain that the thoughts aren’t his but they feel so real and they begin to make so much sense. His gaze, distorted and blurred by that awful yellow color, finally lands on Pete. The dark haired man doesn’t look as afraid as he sounds, leaning against Rosa behind him. He weakly calls out Patrick’s name. Patrick opens his mouth to shout at Pete for betraying him.

But then someone is shoving something into the stump where his hand had been. Then it feels like his left arm’s been set on fire.

And all he can do is scream.

\texttt{>>>><<<< <<<}

Patrick doesn’t remember passing out. But he does remember waking up.

\texttt{“-ke up! C’mon, buddy. We gotta know that you’re okay.”}

It’s Andy’s voice, soft and encouraging with more than a hint of concern. It calms Patrick, even if he’s terrified to open his eyes. Slowly, he cracks them open, letting dim light filter in. He catches sight of the wall before him- dark and shrouded in shadows. It’s not yellow and Patrick lets his eyes
flutter open entirely. He’s greeted with Andy’s wide eyes, watching him in worry. Patrick tries shifting away only to find himself backed into a corner. His eyebrows come together in confusion.

“Where are we?” His voice is hoarse and it pains him to speak. He can barely piece together anything that the Vixens did to him after turning on that machine but he knows for a fact that it made him scream. It feels like he’s been choking on acid. Andy backs away from him, subtle relief causing his shoulders to slump down.

“In some kind of van, sort of like the one they put me and Joe into,” Andy answers, rolling his eyes as he speaks. “I don’t remember it being so small.”

Patrick looks around, considering Andy’s words. Stacks of empty cardboard boxes litter the area, making it difficult to see much of anything. Still, Patrick can now see the shape of the van and recognize the lights above them as the same kind used in cars. There are no windows, though, and he can barely tell where the doors are supposed to be. If he were claustrophobic, Patrick imagines he’d be suffocating.

“Why aren’t we moving?” He asks, the silence growing to a deafening sound. Andy casts him a sympathetic glance and shrugs.

“You were out for the entire drive. It didn’t last long but Joe did start panicking when both you and Pete seemed incapable of waking up,” he answers. Patrick suddenly jolts forward, eyes widening.

“Oh my god! Joe! Pete! Where are they?” Patrick demands, watching Andy desperately. Andy raises his hands as if in surrender and Patrick notices that his wrists are tied together. He can feel that his are as well.

“Calm down! They’re closer to the front. Joe moved Pete up there because the ride wasn’t the smoothest from back here and he kept hitting his head against the wall. You’re set up by the boxes, though, so you were fine.” Andy’s barely done speaking when Patrick launches himself forward, knocking boxes over in the process.

“Watch it! He’s still unconscious up here!” Joe calls out, aggravation clear in his tone. Patrick ignores it, stumbling as he half-crawls to the others, Andy following him and muttering his irritation. When Patrick falls onto the ground before him, Joe smiles. “Oh, hey Patrick.”

Patrick forces a grin in return and shoves himself up into a more dignified sitting position. His smile falls as he takes in the sight of his companions.

On the surface, they seem fine. No one has any obvious wounds and they’ve clearly not been tortured as he had been. They’re even smiling at each other. But Patrick can’t help but see the dark bags under their red-rimmed eyes or the slight tremor in their breaths. He can’t help but watch Pete, twitching every so often in his sleep as if he’s fighting off his nightmares.

Patrick looks down into his lap, not bothering to ignore the wave of guilt that washes over him yet again. With this one glance, he’s reminded that this is all his fault and, just like before, he wants nothing more than to be the only one here. If any of his friends get hurt he knows he won’t forgive himself. Almost as much as he believes that they already won’t ever forgive him for trapping them here.

Patrick’s all too aware of the silence, permeating the air around them. He wants to shut his eyes and go back to sleep because nothing’s better yet.

“Hey, um, Patrick? Are you okay?” Andy’s voice is too cautious, too hesitant, and too afraid of the
answer. So Patrick gives the generic one, injecting his voice with false confidence.

“I already told you guys, I’m fine.”

A sharp intake of breath, a second of silence. Patrick has no choice but to look up to see that nobody’s really looking at him.

Joe and Andy are too focused on the hook sticking out from his wrist.

Patrick hadn’t even noticed it was there until now, his mouth filling with bile as he remembers the burning pain he’d felt before passing out. So that’s what the Vixens had done. It wasn’t enough that they had to cut off his hand. It seems they had to attack and mock his dignity as well.

He can still feel the others watching him and Patrick doesn’t trust himself to speak. He barely trusts himself to move. He’s afraid that if he moves he’ll shatter. He just might break into a thousand pieces that no one could ever put back together.

Maybe it’d be better that way.

Time goes on and no one moves. No one speaks. Patrick feels like they’re having a standoff- who’ll admit their horror first? Patrick gives in and glances up at Joe and Andy only to see that their horror isn’t hidden. It’s written on their faces.

Patrick curls in on himself, as if he can hide the hook from their view. The action causes his injuries to scream in protest and he whimpers, settling on cradling the hook to his chest. The point, sharper than it looks, digs into his skin and cuts into his shirt. He doesn’t care.

The others refuse to look away but Joe reaches out as if to help. Patrick flinches away, sure that they’re all thinking the same thing. He’s convinced that no one could want to help him. They only want to point and laugh.

“Yeah, I’m a freak now. I get it. I know.” Patrick’s voice is small but the shame in his words show in the way his eyes drop back down to the floor. It shows in the way that he tugs his knees up to his chest like a child- lost and alone. Patrick blinks repeatedly, promising to himself that he won’t cry. This is all his fault, right? He has no right to be ashamed of the consequences of his actions. His bottom lip begins to tremble.

“Patrick, no-” Joe begins. But then Pete slowly lifts his head and opens his eyes.

“Where are we?” He asks, raising a fist to rub the sleep out of his eyes. Like a child. Innocent and content. Patrick doesn’t miss the irony. He just chooses to ignore it.

“In the back of a van. The Vixens brought us here while we, well, while you and I were out,” Patrick answers, jumping at the chance to direct the attention anywhere else.

Pete doesn’t respond. And Patrick’s terrified to imagine why.

He feels Pete staring down at his hook, can feel the intensity of his gaze like so many of his gazes in the past. Patrick knows that he shouldn’t look, that it will only cause him more pain.

He can’t resist for long.

Pete wears an unreadable expression, wide awake now as he stares at the weapon attached to Patrick’s wrist. With a suspicious wet gleam in his eyes and a downward pull at his lips, he almost looks sad.
Patrick knows better than to hope that Pete could ever feel sad for him. If anything, he’s as horrified as the others. He’s merely looking at Patrick the way that anyone else would look at a newly made monster. Or so Patrick imagines.

Patrick promised himself he wouldn’t cry over this, that he wouldn’t seem so weak and vain, but tears are pricking at his eyes with a painful vengeance and begging to be set free. He thought he could handle the way the others would look at him. He expected this. But seeing it play out is so much worse than what he ever imagined.

Patrick feels as if his throat is swelling as a knot forms within it. Right after the act had occurred, he had thought of anything other than the loss of his hand. He’d rather think about the other ways they tortured him—the cruel words and burning knives. He’d rather wallow in the guilt of dragging everyone into this hell. He’d rather assume that he’d be dead before facing this moment.

Now, though, all Patrick can think of is what they’ve done to him and what this means. He’ll never play guitar again—never really play any instrument at all. Besides, would anyone even support the music of a freak playing with one hand? Even if he escapes and returns to music, he’ll have to spend years regaining the skill he once had. He’ll have to spend even longer regaining the confidence he’d just gained.

Because, he knows it’s selfish and he knows it’s vain, but that’s what hurts most of all. For years, he’d hated how he looked. From the countless jokes about his weight to the stupid hats that became part of his style, he was never confident enough to be himself. When the band broke up and he shed his weight and old style, he felt free for once. He felt like someone people could admire. He felt like he could admire himself.

Leave it to fate to screw him over the second he starts to feel comfortable with his own body. Leave it to fate to literally take a piece of him away.

The other three around him are speaking but Patrick can’t pay attention to the words. He thinks that he hears Pete shouting for them all to be set free, he isn’t quite sure. To be frank, he doesn’t quite care.

So Patrick lets them converse and shout and yell if they want. He lets them forget about him and his disgusting hook.

*It’s better that way*

That line seems to be Patrick’s new favorite excuse. So, he repeats it in his mind over and over as he leans his head against the wall, shuts his eyes, and begs himself not to cry.

Petes bangs his fists against the side of the car again, despite Andy’s suggestion that he not.

“Let us out! I know you can hear me! Let us out!” Pete shouts, bruising his knuckles and threatening to break his fingers. No one responds and he moves to throw his shoulder against the wall as well but Andy pulls on his arm, stopping him.

“They’re obviously not gonna let us go just because you’re yelling at them. So just save your energy until there’s a real chance to escape,” he says. Pete huffs at being scolded but settles down all the same.

His fingers itch to curl into fists and fight. His teeth grind together as he struggle against the desire to scream. After so many incidents of being forced to sleep, his mind retaliates by being more than wide
awake. Every piece of him is on edge and every sense is heightened. It’s as if killing Bebe had
awoken some darker piece of his mind, some portion that enjoyed the act and wants more. His mind
plays out scenarios of vengeance against the Vixens and all of them are gruesome.

Perhaps this is what Bebe meant when she said she’d haunt him.

He strains against the ropes around his wrists, cutting into his skin from being tied too tight. He’s the
only one of the group who’s attempted to pull himself free from the bindings. He’s also the only one
with a leather strap wrapped around one of his ankles, the end of it bolted to the wall behind him.
Pete had smiled wryly when he’d first noticed it. Apparently the Vixens were more concerned about
his previous escape from Bebe than they’d let on.

Once his wrists feel properly cut up from the thick rope around them and he comes to the conclusion
that continuing will only hurt worse, he moves to start yanking at the leather around his leg.

He stops when he smells smoke. He gasps when he hears a familiar sound.

“Do...Do you guys hear that?” Joe asks, looking around for reassurance. Pete nods along with Andy,
sparing a fleeting glance at Patrick’s unmoving form in the corner, eyes shut as if he’s fallen back
asleep. Pete wants to be concerned about him but the sound of crackling fire in the distance takes up
more of his attention.

He doesn’t know why but when he shuts his eyes to focus on the sound, the image of that room full
of their music fills his mind. He opens his eyes slowly even as his mind races to theories about why
there’s a fire so close to them and what they could be burning.

Pete’s always been the guy to go with his gut and his gut’s telling him that there’s only one thing
those girls would want to do with all their CDs and vinyls and merch.

“They’re burning it,” he whispers, more to himself than anyone else. Still, Joe looks at him with an
anxious gaze, searching for an answer.

“What?” Joe asks as the crackling grows louder, as the fire grows bigger. Pete shakes his head and
sucks in a breath. The space in here suddenly feels too small for the amount of energy he has. His
hands shake from the force of it coursing through his veins, begging for release. He doesn’t want to
have to explain himself. Though he knows it makes no sense, he feels as if it’s only wasting his time
and breath. He needs to hit something, to feel blood on his knuckles. He doesn’t have the patience to
sit and talk and theorize about what CDs they’re burning. It doesn’t matter. He rocks back and forth
where he sits, tapping his fingers on the ground as if it will be enough to release the desire to just
explode.

“Our music,” he answers anyway, the words running together in his rush to get them out. Maybe if
he speaks then his mind will empty enough for him to store all this useless energy there. “When I
escaped from Bebe, I found a room filled with all our stuff. Cds and vinyls and shit like that. I think
they’re burning it. They’re burning our music.”

He sounds horrified and everyone else shares the same feeling on their face.

Well. Everyone but Patrick.

The singer laughs bitterly, opening his eyes and unfolding from his curled up position. It’s a harsh
sound, his laughter sinking under Pete’s skin like the drugs the Vixens keep filling him with.

It amplifies his need to fight. Pete bites his tongue and tries not to yell at Patrick. It’s not what they
need right now, no matter how much Pete is beginning to shake with pent up frustration at this entire
situation.

“Is that all?” Patrick spits out, a sour smirk distorting his expression. “People have been wanting to
do that for years. I’m surprised it took them this long.”

Pete’s tongue pulls free from between his teeth.

And to think he felt desperate enough to scream Patrick’s name the last time he saw him. He had thought that he was afraid for Patrick and that he was scared to see the younger man in pain. Perhaps it was all just pathetic pity.

“Oh, look who’s awake. Took you long enough.” It feels good to snap and see Patrick flinch in
shock at his tone. It feels even better to paint on a smirk of his own. “You feeling any better?”

“Well? You want to do this now? Real mature, Pete,” Patrick shoots back, moving so his back is to
the wall and he’s facing Pete entirely. He sounds exhausted and looks even worse, dark bags
hanging beneath his eyes and his frail figure appearing smaller than usual with his slumping
shoulders and shaky breaths.

Pete doesn’t know why he cares.

Joe and Andy eye them warily and Pete knows that they’re worried about the possibility of a fight.

“I’m not the one throwing out useless remarks about our situation. Some of us actually want to
escape,” Pete says. The words are directed at everyone but his eyes never leave Patrick. Patrick, who
knows that it’s meant for him. Patrick, who ignores Joe telling the two to knock it off. Patrick, whose
eyes blaze with fury at Pete’s words.

“And you think I don’t?” He shouts and Pete can’t help but snicker at how unintimidating his
scratched up voice sounds. “You’re a fucking ass, you know that? You can see what they did to me,
do you really think I’d want to stay a second longer?”

“I don’t know.” Pete’s words slide off his tongue the way they did when he was with Bebe. But this
time it isn’t to protect himself or anyone else. It’s to release some of that irritation and anger residing
just beneath the layers of his skin, hiding inside each cell and waiting to be set free. “Maybe you’re
into that kind of thing. I’m not here to judge.”

Pete may be attempting to keep his voice and appearance nonchalant but Patrick has no such ideas in
his mind. He looks absolutely murderous. If he weren’t so weak and pained, Pete imagines that he
would have lunged at him by now. As it is, he jolts forward with a frenzied gaze. Only Andy’s hand
landing gently on his shoulder keeps him in place. The fire in Patrick’s eyes goes out just enough for
a hint of disbelief to show but his lips still curl into a hateful sneer.

“No but I care about the briefcase that you couldn’t keep safe,” Pete says it likes it’s obvious. He
ignores the way Joe narrows his eyes at him.

“That’s not what you sounded concerned about when-”
“Oh, so it’s my fault?” Patrick cuts off Joe with a challenging tone. His angered retort would fit in perfectly with this argument if not for the way his voice shakes as he speaks, as if he himself doesn’t truly believe what he’s saying. Or as if he’s afraid that Pete will confirm his questions. “Are you trying to blame me for this mess?”

It’d be so easy to say yes, to smirk around the word and watch it tear into Patrick’s skin like the hook in Bebe’s chest. It’s already forming in his mouth; he can already taste it on his tongue. The scene plays out in his mind. Just that one word could cause everything to self-destruct, from Patrick’s self-esteem to Pete’s fantasies that they could ever be friends again. Patrick would hate him forever if Pete blamed him for this, if he told him that it’s all his fault. He would scream until his voice was gone forever. He might even cry. And he’d hate himself more than he’d ever hated Pete.

Pete knows where the line is in these fights. He just doesn’t know when he’s crossing it.

“Yeah—” And everything's in slow motion, from the way that Andy shakes his head in disapproval to how Joe’s mouth falls open in shock. Pete’s stuck on the way that Patrick blinks, once then twice, as if he’s fighting off tears. Even Pete’s breathing feels slowed down for once as he exhales the second part of his statement, throwing sarcasm onto the meaning of his words. “—right. You’re not important enough to have caused all this, are you kidding me? I’m not saying that so don’t flatter yourself. I’m just saying that you fucked up.”

Pete likes to think that Patrick hesitates to speak because he’s realizing what Pete did— that he sacrificed the perfect weapon in order to keep them both alive. He likes to think that Patrick, and everyone else who heard, can see the good that he did in that statement. But he knows that Patrick is most likely only seeing the bad. Pete knows by the way that Patrick’s cheeks become a vivid red. He knows by the memory of Patrick’s crumbling expression in the breaths between Pete’s first two words.

Patrick recovers quickly, shrugging Andy’s hand off his shoulder and leaning forward. Pete wonders whether he’ll go for the kill. Heaven knows he has enough experience to throw some of it back in Pete’s face.

And, as Patrick licks his cracking lips and contemplates his next words, Pete realizes how much he’s missed this. He’s missed the feeling of boiling blood rushing through his veins in hot fury, pulsing through him as a reminder that he’s alive. Every part of this fight is addictive, from the euphoric feeling of piecing together the perfect jab to the way his eyes focus on Patrick and nothing else. A bead of sweat rolls down his face like a tear and he savors the feeling.

Is it wrong if this is his favorite way to feel alive?

Patrick starts to speak and Pete leans in closer, not wanting to miss a word.

“So if I’m such a fuck up—” And Pete wants to point out that that’s not what he said, that Patrick’s twisting his words, that he’s not playing fair, “—why did you even ever date me, you dick?”

Pete’s disappointed and sighs to show it. Patrick didn’t go for the kill. He barely even went with an insult at all. It’s his insecurity showing through again, the way it always does when a fight starts to go on for too long. He’ll twist his self-deprecation to make it seem like the other person’s fault, like he’s proving a point when all he wants is reassurance. Pete’s not going to give it to him so easily.

“Now you’re just being overdramatic,” Pete shoots back. Andy gives him a warning look, an unspoken command to just end the fight here. Pete could do that but he doesn’t want to. Each breath he takes is more toxic than the last because it fuels the angry fire inside him, a fire that’s been put out for so long. Sure, at that Soul Punk concert, Pete had been able to insult and snap at Patrick all he
wanted. But, then, he had been restraining himself. He’d been holding back even as Patrick looked at him like a monster. And if Patrick wanted a monster, Pete was more than happy to oblige. “That relationship wasn’t good for anyone.”

“It was near damn perfect for you!” Patrick screams. Joe moves towards him, whispering about how he’s going to lose his voice if he keeps fighting and how Pete’s not worth it. The perfect friend. Still, Patrick disregards Joe’s facts and continues spitting harsh words into the air. “I did everything for you! Every fucking thing you asked from the very start! ‘Join the band, Patrick, I don’t care if you have enough anxiety to give yourself a heart attack.’ You never cared about me but that never stopped me from trying my best to make the ‘emo god’ happy! I made all your stupid words into hit songs. I sang every damn thing you wrote. I kept our relationship secret even though I wanted nothing more than to tell everyone how lucky I thought I was. Hell, I even let you fucking screw around with every damn girl you met just because you were too scared to let anyone find out that those rumors of you being gay were the fucking truth!”

Patrick’s face is red and his breaths come and go so fast that it can hardly qualify as breathing. If Pete were a better man, he’d understand why Patrick’s behaving this way. He’d consider the past week or so of torture and how much more pent up emotion Patrick must have in comparison to him. He’d think about Patrick’s pain and be kind enough to stop. He’d remember how it felt to find Patrick’s hand in that bag. He’d remember his fear when his eyes glew golden.

But Pete’s not a better man and his eyes are seeing red.

“You made those choices by yourself! No one made you do anything! No one forced you or held a gun to your head! If you hated it so much then why did you put up with it?” He shouts back.

Patrick’s shaking now, livid.

“I put up with it because I fucking loved you!”

Loved

And there’s the kill.

Loved not love. He loved Pete. He doesn’t love Pete. Oh, what a difference one letter can make.

Pete feels himself becoming selfish and unreasonably angry at Patrick’s choice of tense. He once screamed that he hates Patrick. Why should Patrick claiming that he used to love him be any different than that?

Patrick’s still speaking and Pete feels too attacked to interrupt.

“I put up with so much shit because I thought I loved you! It wasn’t just the crap I mentioned earlier, either! You don’t even notice half the things I did for you. Why do you think my hair is fucking blond now? Why do you think I lost all that weight? Did it ever cross your mind that I wasn’t doing it for me? That I was doing it because of you? Maybe I was trying to look like all those attractive people you seem to like so much better? Maybe, for once, I wanted to look like all your favorite people to fuck?”

Pete’s not a good enough man to hear the pain behind the words. He’s just selfish enough to focus on the pain he feels.

He doesn’t think about what he wants to say; he doesn’t plan an insult. He just opens his mouth and hopes that whatever comes out is fatal.

If Patrick can go for the kill, why can’t he?
“Ha! You think I didn’t notice that you were literally starving for my attention? Let me tell you something, Tricky. Your new look was working until you got that fucking hook on your hand. But, hey, what a catch, right?”

Patrick doesn’t respond, his walls shattering to show the broken pain underneath the stunned silence. Pete’s not sure if he expected any other reaction or not.

“That’s enough!” Andy snaps. He glares at Pete, a perfect example of the phrase ‘if looks could kill’. “We aren’t ever going to be able to escape if you two are too busy fighting each other.”

It’s a smart remark that shuts down the argument a moment too late. There’s no way to forget what Pete said and there’s no way for him to take it back, even if he wants to.

Does he want to?

He looks back to Patrick and, with the anger fading from Pete’s eyes, he can finally see the hurt in Patrick’s. He takes in the blond’s fragile figure, knees coming up to his chest once again. Patrick’s still shaking but it seems to be more in pain than anything. Pete shuts his eyes and tries to recall what Patrick said that made him snap. All he can remember is his scream.

Yes, of course, Pete wants to take it back. He’s just never taken the time to learn how to do that.

There’s no time to learn, however, because Pete takes a deep breath and immediately begins to choke.

“Pete? You okay?” Joe sounds reluctantly concerned and Pete wants to laugh. Of course, everyone’s taking Patrick’s side. Hell, even Pete’s on Patrick’s side. He wants to say so but he’s too busy choking on air.

Wait.

No.

He’s choking on smoke.

Pete’s head jerks up when he realizes that the sound and smell of fire is so much closer. His head twists to the side, staring at the front of the van in horror. Though there’s a divider between the front seats and the back, Pete can still tell that they’re all in danger. He can still see the bright orange glow of flames licking at the thin barrier between them.

“They set the car on fire,” Pete shouts, turning back to face the others. “We have to get out!”

It’s as if every second of the fight’s been forgotten as everyone springs into action. Andy moves first, turning to look at the back of the van with a contemplative gaze. A second passes before he falls in front of Patrick and holds his hands out.

“Use the hook to cut us loose. I think I can get the back open if my hands are free,” he says quickly, shoving his hands even closer. Patrick looks down at the hook with empty eyes and Pete’s afraid that he won’t do it. But then Patrick’s on his knees as well, making quick work of cutting through the restraints. He fumbles, unused to the new addition to his body, but Andy’s free in no time, shaking the ropes off onto the ground and untying Patrick’s with frantic hands.

“Help the others,” he demands, the voice of a leader. “I’ll work on the door.”

Patrick obeys without a word, moving to Joe and beginning to work on his ropes. If Pete weren’t so
afraid for their lives, he’d make a remark about how Patrick’s saving him for last. It doesn’t matter, though, because as soon as Pete’s thinking it, Patrick’s shoving Joe towards Andy.

“Go see if Andy needs help. Pete and I will be there in a second,” he says urgently. Joe nods and does as Patrick says. Pete watches, fascinated, as Joe and Andy begin shoving at the door together. And then Patrick’s before him.

“Give me your hands,” he demands, not looking Pete in the eye. Pete doesn’t mind, merely sticking out his wrists. He doesn’t watch as Patrick works, trusting him even if he flinches each time the metal brushes against his wrist. Instead, he watches Joe and Andy. He hollers victoriously with them as the doors fly open and they leap outside. Pete’s just beginning to feel the true heat of the fire when the ropes around his wrists fall off. Patrick grabs hold of one of his hands and begins to tug. “Come on, there’s not much time.”

Pete starts to follow. And then he remembers.

“Wait, Patrick, I can’t.” If it were any other moment, Pete would hate himself for sounding so hopeless. As it is, neither of them comment on it. Patrick finally looks up at Pete and something akin to worry crosses his features before he fixes a mask of anger over it. “They have my ankle tied up to the wall. I can’t leave.”

Pete doesn’t even try to fight the oncoming panic. He lets it overtake him with a wave of dread, like submerging himself in the ocean. His breaths become rapid and shallow. He feels himself sweat, both from the heat and anticipation of its pain. He feels his hands begin to tremble from where they’re pressed against his chest, feeling his heartbeat speed up beneath his palms. He feels the smoke fill his lungs.

He feels someone tugging at the leather strap around his leg.

Pete’s eyes fall from where they had been fixated on the flames in the front to Patrick kneeling at his side, cutting into the leather again and again. He’d been so silent that Pete had assumed he’d left. It was nothing less than what Pete deserved for saying such awful things to him. Pete wouldn’t have blamed him if Patrick left him here to burn.

But Patrick’s a better man than he and he’s still here. He’s still trying to help Pete escape.

Pete’s in shock as he watches Patrick work, sweat dripping off of the smaller man the way it does whenever he’s onstage. The fire’s reaching a dangerous point, the flames reaching for them with fingerlike flames. Pete pleads with the universe that Patrick will get them out. His mind races to find out the most likely ending for this scenario. Patrick’s already almost halfway through. With this pace, they should be able to get out before the fire does any true damage to them.

And then Patrick coughs.

Pete gasps. He tastes the smoke heavy and hot on his tongue and in his lungs. And Patrick coughs again.

Pete’s chest constricts with fear and this time it’s not for himself.

“Patrick.” The way he says it could almost make it a question. He clears his throat and tries to make it a demand. “Patrick, you need to leave.”

“You need to stop telling me what to do,” Patrick snaps back, anger remaining in his tone. It’s overridden, though, by the heavy panting that follows each word. It’s only been a few moments but he already sounds like he’s wheezing. “I don’t need to put up with it, right?”
Patrick’s breaths are hastier than Pete’s ever were. It’s as if his lungs can’t hold as much oxygen as they should. When he pauses his work to grasp at his chest and grimace painfully as another coughing fit overtakes him, Pete’s more than terrified. He tries kicking his leg, shaking the strap to gain Patrick’s attention.

“I don’t fucking care about what you want or don’t want to put up with. The smoke’s gonna set off your asthma and that’s going to kill you.” He says each word slowly as if explaining it to Patrick. Really, he’s just trying to keep the emotion out of his voice. “I know you, Patrick, and I know the warning signs of your asthma attacks. You need to leave before you have one.”

Patrick’s barely breathing when he looks up at Pete, one hand now wrapped around his restraint and holding it still. His eyes seem unfocused and he’s already looking paler than before. Still, he smiles wryly.

“Too late,” he gasps out, nearly inaudible over the sound of the fire. It doesn’t matter, though, because he brings his hook through the leather strap one last time and Pete feels his leg become free. The second he realizes that he can leave, Pete wraps himself around Patrick and forces them towards the back of the van. He tosses them both out of the open door, catching a glimpse of the growing fire as they fall. Pete doesn’t have time to reflect on it as they stand because Patrick’s not getting any better in the cool night air as he had hoped. If anything, he’s getting worse. Pete grabs Patrick and has him lean on him as he runs, eyes searching desperately for Joe and Andy. He finds them a safe distance away, standing near the edge of what looks to be a forest. Patrick wheezes beside him as he moves closer and almost feels limp, his body becoming dead weight. Pete begins to move faster.

Joe and Andy meet them halfway, far enough from the fire that none of them will get burned but close enough that Pete won’t have to waste his energy running. He lets go of Patrick, who’s breathing heavily but breathing all the same, and looks back at the van in the distance as it goes up in flames. Pete grins, relief flooding him like a drug. When he looks back to the others, it’s to laugh and exclaim what lucky bastards they all are. He doesn’t expect to hear Patrick’s wheezing suddenly stop. He doesn’t expect to see Patrick collapse to the ground.

When he calls Patrick’s name, he doesn’t expect to hear Patrick respond. And, for once, he turns out to be right.

Chapter End Notes

So a HUGE thanks to everyone who comments. It means SO MUCH. Like, you guys say that it makes you happy when I update? Well, it makes me happy when I see you guys commenting. So keep it up! (pls... haha)

ALSO I try to reply to every comment I get but, as a college student w/ a job, it’s very difficult to find the time to give each comment a unique response (though I genuinely wish I could, I hate to leave anyone out). Typically, I’ll respond to the first few comments I receive and continue to do so until I start working on the next chapter. So, please! Don’t think I’m ignoring you if I don’t reply! I’m just super busy and super awkward (meaning that if too much time passes then I imagine it’ll just be weird to
randomly pop in with a message). So, just know, that if you comment, I do see it and I do love you. <3 *hugs*

Anyway, thank you for reading! I'll see you here again on either Monday or Tuesday! Bye!
There're Chemicals Keeping Us Together (Pretend It's A Romance)

Chapter Summary

You aren't ready for this

Chapter Notes

Honestly. You aren't ready for this.

Note: I do not have asthma. I do not even really know anybody with asthma (ok, lbr, I'm not close enough to any of my friends to know). Please forgive me if this is incorrectly dramatic or dramatically incorrect. Google research can only get you so far. Thank you.

Chapter Playlist:
- "The Only One" by James Blunt
- "Sun On Sunday" by James Blunt
- "Always Hate Me" by James Blunt (are you sensing a theme?)
- "The Mighty Fall" by Fall Out Boy (is that one even a surprise?)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There're Chemicals Keeping Us Together (Pretend It's A Romance)

If he had the breath and the pretentiousness, Patrick would compare his asthma to love.

Really. He would.

It’s a thought he’s had many times before, lying next to Pete in darkened hotel rooms. He’s wondered about that strange feeling in his chest, wondered if it’s a safe thing to feel. He’s thought about asthma and love as Pete shoved him against walls and beds, kissing him breathless, kissing him until his lungs ached. The thought crosses his mind every time he looks at the other man and finds himself breathless. Breathing, he’s found, is mentioned a lot when someone’s heart is bursting with love.

It’s never mentioned nearly enough when someone’s heart is breaking from the exact same thing.

Because having your heart broken is like having the air sucked out of your lungs until you’re gasping for something you can’t have. It’s like trying to breathe when the person you love has their hands wrapped around your throat, tight enough to make you cry but not tight enough to make you forget about the love you shared. Air, tainted and poisoned, snakes down your throat whenever they draw you close, hands still playing the part of a vise around your neck. They smile and laugh, unaware of how each motion of theirs causes you to suffocate more on the emotions you refuse to show. The worst part is that you don’t know who to blame. Sure, they control your breaths but didn’t you give them that power in the first place?
Stupid person, didn’t you feel the warning signs in your chest whenever they smiled? Didn’t you feel your oxygen dwindling away each time they took your breath, lips pressed so close together until you couldn’t tell whose breath was whose? Don’t you know how that feeling in your lungs is just the beginning? Don’t you know how much worse it can get if you don’t take the time to breathe for yourself? Can’t you recognize that your lungs have shrunken down by your neglect?

They call it a heart break but it feels so much more like an attack.

“Patrick!” Pete screams, falling to his knees before him. Patrick can’t pay attention to the words that follow or the crazed look in the other man’s eyes. He can’t focus on the fire in the background or the way Andy’s calmly trying to speak to him. Patrick can only focus on the wind whipping against his cheeks, teasing him with the air he can’t breathe. He can only focus on how, yet again, this is all his fault.

Because, unlike falling in love, he recognized the signs of his asthma. From the moment that bitter laugh left his lips, Patrick had felt the alarms going off in his mind and body. He’d felt the air around him gain a thin, dry feeling. With each hoarse scream at Pete, he’d felt the muscles in his chest struggling to keep up with his actions. That familiar anxious feeling tugged at the back of his mind, begging him to ignore Pete and breathe. But, stupid him, he just brushed it aside. Though he began to shake more than usual and though his breaths became struggles to pull in, he’d told himself that it wasn’t getting worse.

Of course it wasn’t. Patrick could control his breathing, to an extent. For a hysterical second, after Pete had said those cruel words that ended the screaming match, he’d told himself that asthma is really nothing like love at all. He’d been fine. Even when the fire had started and smoke began to infiltrate the air, Patrick controlled his panic and his body. His lungs weren’t going to betray him today.

And then Pete had been trapped. And Patrick’s lungs had seemed to permanently deflate.

And, stupid him, it got worse.

“Patrick!” Pete can’t seem to say anything other than Patrick’s name, can’t seem to do anything but shout it as loud as he can. Patrick tries to glare at him, to let him know how foolish it is to make such noise when there are people who want them dead, but he can’t. The pain in his lungs has extended to his heart and it feels as if someone’s gripping it, keeping it from beating. His lungs won’t inflate and his heart won’t beat- Patrick’s certain that he’s going to die.

“Pete.” The name leaves his lips unbidden, riding on the last of his breath. He focuses on Pete’s face, Patrick’s eyes suddenly brimming with timid tears. “Pete…”

Pete’s eyes are wide, terrified, as Patrick slouches against him. His arms wrap around Patrick immediately, muscle memory working against a few years of hate. His hold is too warm, too tight, but Patrick can’t move without sending painful signals to his chest.

Logically, Patrick knows that this isn’t the worst attack he’s ever had. Once, after a particularly brutal audience during Fall Out Boy’s last tour, he’d felt as if his lungs had somehow shifted into concrete walls. Another time, during a fight with Pete that was edging on the physical, it was as if he had no lungs at all. Sure, this hurts like hell and his vision is blurring but it’s not the worst.

It is, however, the first time it’s been so bad and he hasn’t had his inhaler. And he doesn’t know how much worse it can get without it.

“Stupid, stupid, stupid,” Pete’s muttering as Patrick continues to force breaths into his uncooperating...
lungs. Pete pulls away, holding Patrick at arm’s length, and fixes an angered glare on him. “I fucking told you to leave, I fucking told you this would happen. Why wouldn’t you just leave me in there? You should have just left me in there!”

Patrick has no response and it’s not like he could speak even if he did. Instead, his lips part helplessly and his eyes begin to slip shut. Dark spots play tricks on his vision, making Pete look more concerned than he must be.

“Shit, shit, no.” Pete’s hands suddenly leave him and Patrick begins to sway uneasily. “He’s falling asleep, guys. I don’t know what to do.”

Patrick has no time to think of the break in Pete’s voice- as if emotion is trying to burst through the words- because then Pete is gone. Someone else comes into Patrick’s vision. Someone else grabs Patrick by the shoulders. Patrick blinks and tries to focus on the figure before him.

“Hey, yeah, that’s right, look at me,” Joe says, his eyes wide but his fear better concealed. He grabs onto Patrick’s hand and drags it up to his chest. “Remember that time on the bus when this happened? It was so much worse than this and we got through it. I helped you out then and I’m gonna do my best to help you now. Feel my breathing? Can you copy that?”

Patrick knows exactly what time Joe is talking about and he wants to cry out from frustration. Then, he’d merely lost his inhaler somewhere in the small confines of the bus. He’d woken up feeling as if all energy and oxygen had been drained from his body and had stumbled around the bus, waking Joe by accident. It’s true that Joe had been able to keep him calm and breathing until his inhaler was found. He’d done it just like this, having Patrick mimic his breaths until the singer had enough to remember where that inhaler was. They’d found the inhaler and Patrick had been fine, albeit a bit jarred.

This was nothing like then but Patrick has no choice but to go along with it.

Joe’s breathing is a nice constant under Patrick’s palm where it’s pressed flat against Joe’s chest. Joe’s breaths don’t shake or tremble; they’re long and deep and even. Patrick attempts to match the tempo and thinks of it as the beat to a song. Maybe if he can just focus on the never ending music stuck inside his head then he’ll be able to calm down long enough to...to what? There’s no time to find a doctor and there’s no way his breathing can come back when it’s so far gone. This is just prolonging the inevitable.

Patrick’s thoughts terrify him as he pulls away from Joe, weakly shaking his head. He mouths words that the others don’t seem to understand. Words like can’t and doesn’t matter.

Pete starts shouting again but Patrick can’t be bothered to recognize the words. Joe pulls away to yell back at him.

As he slouches forward without Joe to stabilize him, Patrick can’t help but notice how cool the grass is under his hand. It’s soft under his touch, tickling his palm and caressing his fingers. There’s some dampness to it and he wonders if it’s been raining. He tries to lift his head to look at the night sky but he’s too lightheaded and the action makes him sick. He’s not even trying to draw in breaths anymore. He’s too enraptured by the grass beneath him. So inviting, tendrils of it wrapping around his fingers as if asking him to lay his head down. As if asking him to sleep.

Patrick starts drifting lower- or maybe the grass is just growing towards him, he can’t tell. Pete’s voice has faded into soothing background noise and he’s numb to the hands grabbing at his shoulders. He just wants to sleep. Maybe if he closes his eyes it won’t matter if he can breathe or not…
Patrick’s inches from the ground, feeling as if he’s moving in slow motion when he sees it. Something blue and plastic soars through the air, catching his eye and distracting him, before landing. He frowns at how it dents the grass, shamelessly bending and breaking the green plantlife, before looking at the object at fault.

*Is that….*

He’s scrambling for it before he can really recognize it- as if his body understands its necessity before his mind does. He’s still confused until the plastic is between his lips and he’s pushing medicated air down his throat. He knows he should be patient, wait a few minutes for the first hit to set in, but he can’t. He greedily takes another, relief flooding him with each molecule of air.

It’s like the world is being put back into focus as he shakily regains his breaths, breathing deeply and savoring the feeling. The cage around his heart and lungs unlocks, taking the pain of moving with it. He pulls the inhaler from his mouth, a small smile gracing his features. His lungs still ache and he’s still shaking uncontrollably but he no longer feels as if the world is being ripped from him. He can hear the others whispering from where they stand behind him. He looks up at them, hoping to see the same happiness he feels. Instead, he’s greeted with the sight of them staring at something to his side, at the direction of where the inhaler came from. Varying levels of apprehension cross each of their faces but none of them seem to move. Slowly, Patrick follows their gaze.

His smile fades away as quickly as his breath had moments ago.

“Hey, Patrick! Nice to see you again!”

Sam smiles brightly, though his tone is more than sarcastic. He stands in the middle of a line of other kids, each one looking upon the band with hate. It should be laughable, really, the terror that these grown men feel at the sight of a few children holding homemade weapons. Still, Patrick can sense panic threatening to undo everything the inhaler had just done.

“Who are you? What are you guys doing?” Pete asks warily. Sam’s eyes never leave Patrick’s.

“We’re gonna play a game, okay? It’s gonna be like tag but you guys get a headstart.” Sam’s eyes finally slide to gaze at each of the musician’s faces, a sly smile on his lips. “I’m going to count and you guys are going to run. When I get to ten, we’re gonna come kill you.”

It’s strange hearing a child speak so calmly about the idea of murder. It’s even stranger to see the impatient glee on the other children’s faces at Sam’s words.

“What?” Joe exclaims. Sam’s eyes gloss over him to fall back onto Patrick.

“Are you ready?” Sam asks. Without waiting for an answer, he smiles. “One.”

He says the first number, slowly and fairly, and the three still standing begin to back away. Patrick shoves his inhaler into his pocket and tries to push himself up onto his feet.

He fails.

“Two,” Sam says as he watches Patrick struggle. Patrick bites his lip and attempts to stand again.

It’s no use and the others are beginning to take notice. The adrenaline from before, the adrenaline that the others no doubt still feel, has worn off. Days of torture and minutes without breathing are catching up to him and his legs feel as if they’ll shatter the second he puts weight on them. He takes a deep breath and his chest painfully protests the action, reminding him of the scars that just might rip apart if he moves an inch in the wrong direction. He lets out a small whimper as he falls to the
ground yet again.

“Patrick, come on,” Pete says, his voice soft. Patrick can only hear the demand and he knows how frustrating he must be to watch, how pathetic. He can’t run with them. He can’t even stand.

“Three.”

“I can’t,” Patrick whispers, fear closing around his throat. He looks back at Pete with frightened eyes. “Pete, I can’t.”

Pete takes a step towards Patrick. Sam shouts out “Four!” and Pete flinches away.

Sam starts counting quicker, all pretense of fair play deserted. He rushes into “five”, a sadistic gleam in his eyes.

“Just start running. I’ll catch up,” Patrick forces himself to say. Of course, no one believes him.

“Six. Seven.”

“Here, Patrick. I’ll carry you. Or we’ll just help you run. You can lean on me,” Andy offers, extending a hand to Patrick. Patrick presses his lips together into a thin line and shakes his head.

It’d be easy to believe that Andy’s plan is a good one. He’s strong and Patrick’s lost enough weight to be light enough to hold. But how far could he carry him? How far could they even go with Patrick’s dead weight leaning against all of them? Eventually, they’d drop him or someone would stumble. The children would find them and they’d all be dead so soon after escaping.

Patrick won’t be the reason that they’re caught again.

“Eight,” Sam spits out, the look in his eyes growing more violent with each number he says.

Patrick could try to stand again but what’s the point? It’s like trying to breathe without his inhaler, pretending that Joe’s breaths could help him at all. It’s only prolonging the inevitable.

With a harsh look in his eyes, Patrick grits his teeth and glares at his former bandmates.

“Just go!” Patrick screams, desperate for them to understand. He looks them each in the eye, begging and pleading for them to listen. “Please.”

They’re more reluctant than he would like them to be but eventually Joe nods and nudges Andy. Andy, in turn, looks to Pete and they have a conversation with no words. Patrick sighs in relief when Andy and Joe begin to run in separate directions, casting worried glances over their shoulders as they go. It’s Pete who stays the longest.

“Pete, please,” Patrick says, shutting his eyes to Pete’s wounded expression. “I’ll be okay.”

“We’ll come back for you,” Pete promises. Patrick doesn’t have to open his eyes to hear Pete’s hesitation. He hears it plainly in his stuttered steps, fading away into the forest behind them.

Only when the sound becomes nothing does Patrick open his eyes and let out a sob.

“Nine. Ten. Gee, that was boring,” Sam finishes. “Go get ‘em, guys.”

The children around them sprint forward and Patrick flinches, certain that he’s the most obvious target for them to attack first. Instead, the kids run past him, leaving him in shock.
When he looks forward, he sees that they also left him with Sam.

Sam looks like he should have something hateful to say, with the way his smile falls and the hardened look in his eyes. Patrick’s hand tears into the grass beneath him and he digs his hook into the ground. Faintly, he wonders whether he’ll have time to attack Sam with it should he reveal a weapon.

In fact, it appears as if he already has one, Patrick notices as the boy walks closer. His hands rest suspiciously behind his back and Patrick’s mind traitorously starts pulling up images of more knives and wires.

Patrick doesn’t bother telling himself not to be afraid. He knew what was going to happen when he sent everyone else away. He knew the most likely outcome. But that doesn’t mean he’s ready to face it.

“Sam,” Patrick begins, not sure how he’s going to finish. “Sam, please don’t.”

Sam doesn’t respond; he barely even reacts. He’s closer to Patrick now, looking at him with disdain. Patrick’s breaths come quick and he almost laughs at how useless it was to rid himself of the asthma attack when he was going to be killed so soon anyway. At least, he imagines, he got his band away. At least they had a bit of a head start- delayed as it was.

Sam stops suddenly, a few feet in front of Patrick. He fidgets with whatever’s behind his back and Patrick wonders if this death will be swift, if maybe the boy is toying with a gun. When Sam starts to reveal what he has hidden, Patrick wants to close his eyes but he imagines he’ll seem braver if he keeps them open.

Patrick swallows and watches as Sam grins. The younger boy laughs lightly and then hurries to show Patrick what he’s been holding this entire time.

“A radio?” Patrick asks, exhausted from this emotional journey he’s been on. So maybe he’s not going to die, maybe he’s not even going to be tortured. His mind is still trying to catch up when Sam laughs again and presses play.

“This might just be a waste of time....”

Patrick only has time to grimace at the familiar tune and cringe at the voice. He looks up to Sam, wondering if this is a joke.

But then Sam turns up the volume and, with a feeling like an electric jolt through his body, Patrick collapses to the ground.

When he opens his eyes again, everything is yellow.

PETE’S SPRINT HAD STARTED SLOW, UNCERTAIN AND UNWILLING. HE’D BEEN TOO CONCENTRATED ON THE PAIN IN PATRICK’S EYES AS HE TOLD THEM TO LEAVE HIM, THE PANIC IN HIS VOICE AS THE BOY COUNTED HIGHER AND HIGHER. HE’D BEEN BUSY FIGHTING THE URGES TO RUN BECAUSE ALL HE WANTED WAS TO BE AS GOOD AS PATRICK AND HELP HIM OUT OF THIS SITUATION.

Because hadn’t Patrick just done that for him? Isn’t Pete himself the reason for Patrick’s current condition? If Patrick had just been a bit more selfish, a bit more like Pete, he could have gotten out without so much as a gasp. He could be running with the others. And, even if he was caught or killed, at least Pete wouldn’t have to witness it.
So maybe that’s why he did give in and run away. Maybe that’s why he refused to stay by Patrick’s side even as he begged himself to save him. Because Pete knows the chances of survival when you’re carrying another person. And he knows who would have been the first one killed if he had taken Patrick with him.

So, yeah, Pete is selfish. Because he will do anything he can to avoid watching Patrick die.

Now, Pete’s running like he means it, not caring of what direction his feet take him. Two children chase behind him, shouting out incomprehensible words and swinging their weapons around as if they’re toys. Given their size, Pete should be able to overpower them easily. But he doesn’t feel like hitting a kid, not if he can avoid it. He hurries up the hill they’ve been chasing him on and, once he’s certain he doesn’t hear them behind him, he ducks into a cluster of trees.

As he hoped they would, the kids rush past, still making an unnecessary ruckus. Pete watches them from the cover of the trees and shudders at the sight of their weapons; a chain and a modified bike handlebar with spikes. Pete genuinely hopes that he never ends up on the receiving end of it.

Pete slouches against the tree trunk behind him and lets out a long breath. Now that he’s no longer running, his mind can’t help but focus on Patrick. With his pale skin and white shirt a stark contrast to the night behind him, Patrick had been the perfect image of a lamb awaiting slaughter. Pete had wanted to scream as he watched Patrick give up trying to stand, opting to kneel on the ground as the malicious boy before him drew closer. Pete should have done something then. He should have protected Patrick better.

He wonders if it’s too late to circle back and find him but he already knows it’s been too long. If the boy was going to kill him, it’s too late.

Pete feels physically sick, clutching at his stomach and taking even breaths as he hopes with every fiber of his being that Patrick’s okay. If something happens to him, Pete can’t imagine how he’ll ever forgive himself.

Slowly, Pete lowers to the ground, the exertion of the run taking its toll. Though he knows it’s an awful idea, he shuts his eyes and leans his head back against the tree.

He refuses to think that it may be too late for Patrick. Patrick’s stronger than he seems and he would never go down without a fight...would he? Pete tries to comfort himself with the thought that at least Patrick has that hook. He may have a fighting chance.

*You mean that hook that you used to insult him? That hook that you know he hates having attached to him? Why would he save himself with something you made him hate?*

Pete’s head falls into his hands as he remembers the fight and the cruel words he spoke. He didn’t mean it, he swears it.

But that doesn’t really matter, does it? Patrick clearly believed him.

It always disgusts Pete at how easy it is for him to piece together the perfect insult. He likes to say he’s good with words, that he can have anybody wrapped around his finger just by speaking. Oh, don’t you dare let Pete Wentz know what hurts you. He’ll tear you apart with that one minute detail until you’re nothing more than another poor soul sacrificed in the name of his ego. It comes so easily and so naturally to him, this cruel wit. He could be quoted for decades if he wanted to be.

Why, then, is it so hard for him to say what he truly feels?

Pete makes a bargain with the universe, screaming in his mind that if Patrick survives then he’ll
apologize. He’ll make things right. He’ll say everything that those cutting words cover up. He’ll never let evil pass through these lips again.

And now that he’s started thinking about Patrick, Pete can’t stop. He can’t stop asking himself why he cares so much about the man who made him feel as if he’d never love again. Why should he feel so much pain at the thought of Patrick’s death? Sure, there should be some ache but why does he feel as if someone’s reached into his chest and replaced his heart with glass shards, tearing into his insides every time there’s a cursed beat? Days ago, Pete was sure he hated Patrick. If you had asked him how he’d feel if he had disappeared, he’d shrug and claim that it’s not his problem. But seeing the boy has revived old feelings and brought them to the surface. No amount of fighting can put out those flames.

But…. But maybe one phrase can.

Because Patrick had said that he loved Pete. He’d spat it out without a second thought. Pete may be fighting off the sickening feeling of a grade-school crush but Patrick obviously was only interested in fighting off Pete.

Which is why, when Pete imagines what will happen if he sees Patrick again, he can only see himself apologizing. He can only make sure that Patrick knows he’s sorry for everything he’s ever said and done to him. Seeing Patrick in so much physical pain only causes Pete to wonder if he’s any better than the cult that did it to him. Don’t they say that emotional pain is worse?

Three words dance around in the back of Pete’s throat, teasing him and choking him with their weight. These words are the ones he swore to never speak again, to never even think with Patrick in mind. For both of their sakes.

Besides, it’s not like Patrick could ever say those words back to him. Not unless they were in past tense.

A sharp pain explodes in Pete’s right shoulder and his eyes fly open at the sensation. The kids from before have returned and they attack Pete with fury in their eyes. Pete tries to fight them off but he’s been caught off guard and he’s sitting on the ground with nowhere to run. The children are relentless and he throws his arms up to protect his face. The chain connects to his shoulder repeatedly, causing him to cry out. Pete notices that the other kid had lost his bike handlebars and is using his small fists instead. Though the kid is surprisingly strong, Pete feels as if luck may be on his side for once.

It doesn’t last long as he hears the unarmed kid declare to the other that he’s going to go find a bigger weapon- whatever that may be. The kid with the chain merely nods and begins striking Pete twice as hard, as if to make up for his companions absence. Pete feels his arms grow weak from being held up for so long and he knows he has to do something before the kids can get to his face.

In the distance, Pete can hear Andy and Joe shouting out as if they, too, have been caught. Pete shuts his eyes for a moment and chokes back a sob. What’s the point of fighting back if everyone else is already caught or dead? Pete’s already established that he’s a selfish man; he doesn’t want to live without the best friends he’s found. Slowly, his arms begin to lower.

“We’ve been down, we’ve been out, we’ve been hanging ‘round…”

Pete’s eyebrows furrow together at the sound of a song being played in the distance, like some misplaced background music. The lyrics certainly sound familiar and it takes him a while to place it. Just long enough for him to see the other kid running up with his handlebars again, just long enough for the kid with the chain to face his friend with a smile on his face.
Just long enough for Pete to recognize Patrick’s voice.

“Tip our glass to no direction, yeah. Start the van...”

So maybe it’s a recording from forever ago and maybe Patrick doesn’t even like the album but that song is one of theirs and that’s Patrick’s voice singing the words. That’s Patrick’s voice dragging Pete back to the days where he swore he’d do anything for the boy in the argyle sweater, to the days where they were too stupid to admit they wanted to be anything more than friends.

That’s Patrick’s voice straight from the days of when he still loved Pete.

Pete knows it’s cliche and uncalled for but that sound gives him hope. That sound reminds him of why he needs to fight. He needs to find Patrick and he needs to save him. He needs to restore the band back to the point where they were best friends...no....where they were a family. For too long, he’s been pushing them away and isolating himself from what they used to be. Pete may blame Patrick for breaking up the band but Pete knows that he’s the reason it stayed that way. Pete listens to the sound of Patrick’s voice singing and he knows that he can’t die without telling Patrick those three words that seem to haunt him- whether Patrick wants to hear it or not. When the kids turn back to face him, Pete’s already standing up. The one with the chain raises his weapon, a grimace on his face. Pete responds to the expression with a classic smirk of his own.

It’s not much of a fight and Pete feels bad fighting off kids half his size but he grabs onto the chain and tugs, yanking the kid off his feet. The kid stays down when Pete raises the chain, threatening pain if he stands. The boy with the handlebars is a bit more difficult, racing forward and getting in a few well placed slashes as he expertly avoids Pete’s attacks. It’s not until Pete tosses the chain to the side and gets the kid against the tree that he knows he’s won. He presses his forearm, bruised and bleeding, against the boy's throat- barely any pressure but he knows that the child is terrified. With his free hand, he wrests the weapon away from the kid and backs away, holding it up as a warning.

“Don’t follow me,” Pete says, eyeing the two suspiciously. Their killer demeanors instantly fade away, leaving nothing but scared kids who nod enthusiastically to what he says. Pete watches a while longer, just to be sure. Once he’s certain that he won’t be chased, Pete drops the weapon and begins to run.

“Patrick!” He screams without caring who hears him. “Patrick!”

Trees rush past Pete, becoming a blur on the sides of his vision. He doesn’t know where he is or why the music is suddenly gone but he doesn’t care. He’ll keep running and he’ll keep searching. Even if it takes all night. Even if it takes all year. Even if it takes a lifetime, Pete doesn’t care. He knows he has a reason to keep going.

“Patrick!”

Pete’s going to save Patrick. Or he’ll die trying.

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“I bet you’re wondering why I didn’t just kill you.”

It’s an interesting way to start a speech but Patrick can’t point that out. He can only shuffle along behind Sam, his legs still trembling beneath him. After the yellow haze had taken over, Patrick had found himself under the boy’s control and unable to stay put on the ground. The second that Sam had demanded Patrick to stand and follow him, Patrick had no choice but to obey. It was a painfully humiliating process as he shoved himself onto his feet, swaying back and forth and falling multiple
times. After a few run-throughs, Patrick had finally stood, feeling unbalanced on his own feet, and followed.

Now, it seems, Sam wants to give his villainous monolog. And Patrick has no choice but to listen.

“I definitely thought about it. I mean, Courtney and her group had killed most of my friends and brainwashed the rest into becoming killers. I don’t even recognize them anymore. So, I thought that killing the Defenders would be a good way to show the cult up, to beat them at their own game. I mean, those girls couldn’t kill you properly. Imagine how embarrassing it would be if a group of kids turned out to be better murderers than you!” Sam laughs bitterly, turning around to face Patrick. He fiddles with the volume of the radio, turning it up. If he could, Patrick would have cringed. He feels tortured enough by the total possession this mind control has over him, does it really have to be triggered by ‘Evening Out With Your Girlfriend’?

Sam continues his speech with a shrug. “But then I saw what they did to you, I realized what I could do if I could get you under my control. I’d have my own weapon. I could use you to get rid of Courtney once and for all.”

Sam stops and Patrick moves awkwardly to try and see what he’s looking at. Sam nods at him to move forward and Patrick does, zombie-like movements causing his limbs to shift without his permission. He staggers forward to stand by Sam and blinks, trying to make sense of the yellow mess before him.

“This is where they burnt all your stuff,” Sam explains, seeing Patrick struggling with the distortion the haze has given his sight. He fishes in his pocket and, just as he did the first time they met, he passes Patrick a piece of paper. Patrick holds it up before his face, squinting to read it. Again, Sam aids him with an impatient tone. “It’s your autograph. You do remember signing that right?” Patrick gives a jerky nod. “Good. Now burn it.”

Patrick doesn’t even process Sam’s words; he just does as he’s told. The second Sam’s sentence has left his lips, Patrick’s already tossing the paper into the fire before him. It eats away at his signature, taking with it the memory Patrick had of a kind fan who stammered as he asked for a hug. Patrick wants to fall to his knees, wants to give up in every way possible. Instead, he can only stand by Sam and pretend to enjoy what he’s seeing.

“Smile. You’re going to be doing the world a favor by being my weapon,” Sam says. Patrick looks at the boy and gives him a crooked smile, his lips twitching strangely as he fights the command. Sam doesn’t seem to care. “No. You’re more than my weapon. You’re my own personal monster.”

The twisted smile is still on Patrick’s face even as the words burn into his skin like the fire around that ticket. Sam turns and starts to walk away. Of course, Patrick follows.

“We’ll start with the Vixens and work our way up to Courtney. She should be easy to kill, I don’t think I’ve ever heard of her carrying her own weapons. I still don’t know if I’ll let you take the fall for the murder or if I’ll have you kill yourself after. Either way—”

Patrick stumbles backward as a figure emerges from the shadows of the trees they had been nearing. Someone tackles Sam to the ground, the radio flying from his grasp as the attack pins him down. They’re taller than the kid, a ski mask covering their face and gloves over their hands. Patrick watches, useless, unable to move unless given a command to do so.

The stranger reveals a gun and stands, pointing it at the kid. “Don’t move.”

A jolt goes through Patrick like a memory resurfacing. He looks at the masked man with the hope
that he’ll discover who it is, twisting his head to the side like a perplexed animal. Nobody pays him attention. No one but Sam.

“Patrick! Kill hi-”

**Boom**

The sound of the gunshot echoes through the air but Patrick can’t react to it. He’s already heard Sam’s last command- *kill*. Patrick’s eyes fixate on the only other living being around and he growls. That command had been screamed at him, had been demanded so harshly that Patrick’s almost convinced that the idea was his own.

Patrick rushes forward, raising his hook and slashing it through the air just as the stranger jumps back. He shouts out wordlessly, trying over and over to catch the man with his hook. The yellow mist before his eyes hazes over until just the masked man can be seen and Patrick feels a rage and bloodlust he’s never felt before. He wants to know what sound the man will make as he dies, he wants to know how warm his blood will be. Patrick lunges for him, crying out as the man ducks under his hook and rushes for the radio, lying forgotten on the ground.

Patrick’s fueled with the desire to kill this stranger and he’s quick, standing above the man with his hook poised to kill. He’s seconds away from his first murder and he’s never been more excited.

“Patrick, stop,” the man demands, confidently and unafraid. It makes Patrick want to kill him more. Why isn’t he afraid? Doesn’t he realize what Patrick is, what he can do? Patrick bares his teeth and raises his hook higher. He wants this strike to *hurt*.

*“The battle’s only halfwa-”*

The man shuts off the music. And Patrick feels as if something yanks free from his soul.

The man before him hurries to stand, rushing forward to catch Patrick as the singer begins to sink to the ground. Patrick’s legs are tired again and his entire body is aching. His eyes hurt most of all, black spots and blurred images taking the place of the yellow haze as it fades away. He forces himself to stand with the support of the stranger before him, feeling foolish as he does so.

“Th-Thank you,” Patrick stutters out, his throat still sore. The man chuckles and rubs Patrick’s arms. Patrick whimpers thankfully at the warmth the action gives him and the man laughs once again. Once he’s certain that Patrick can stand on his own, he takes off his jacket and offers it to him. Though he’d usually prefer to politely decline, Patrick takes it gratefully and hurries to put it on. It’s oversized on him and it feels thicker than it looks. It also, Patrick notices, feels very familiar and it irritates him that he can’t remember why. He looks up at the person before him with narrowed eyes.

“Why are you here?”

The person laughs and Patrick rolls his eyes, aggravating the headache he’s had since he first heard the notes of that music.

“Don’t give me that look, Patrick. You know I’m on your side. The mask was just a necessary precaution.”

Patrick’s eyes widen and his jaw drops open. He *knew* he recognized that voice.

“*Gee?”* He asks incredulously.

The man before him whips off his mask, revealing a cocky grin and a mess of red hair.
“Who else?” Gerard smiles. “Now let’s go find your friends.”

Chapter End Notes

Aahh!!! That ending was such a surprise to me too when I was outlining this a few months ago. I was like....ok but what if this guy showed up. And...he did. I hope you guys enjoyed it as much as I did.

And yeah, that chapter playlist at the beginning. Talk about redundant! But my dad is, like, in love with James Blunt and so we have a lot of his CDs around the house and a lot of his songs work perfectly with angsty Peterick, ok? (speaking of which, "The Only One" is perfect for any angsty hiatus Peterick, ok? Like, the lyrics and anger of it and i just had a lot of emotions when I was daydreaming about ships when listening to that song. Like, if I could songfic, I would songfic angsty Peterick with that song (subtle asking for a fic based off that song, haha, i'm a loser))

Anyway! This one was equally fun and difficult to write! I hope you enjoyed! Please leave a comment on your way out!
I Know I'm Bad News (But I Saved The Best For You)

Chapter Summary

Joe Trohman needs to be protected at all costs

Chapter Notes

Full Disclosure: This chapter is, like, half of what it was supposed to be. There’s another scene I wanted to add but then the chapter would have been twice as long and probably wouldn’t have been posted on time. I had so much to do today, you have no idea. From my astronomy class "night observing" (in freezing weather) to a club meeting at a cafe miles off of campus, I had so little time to add what I wanted. And, honestly, I don’t write things half-hearted. I could have taken it to the cafe or classes with me but I like to dedicate my full attention to my writings. Otherwise, I feel like I’m just doing the plot and characters a disservice. Thanks for understanding!

Chapter Playlist:
- "Save Me" by Globus
- "Just One Yesterday" by Fall Out Boy :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I Know I'm Bad News (But I Saved The Best For You)

“What are you doing here, anyway? How did you know we were in trouble?”

Patrick and Gerard had been walking the forest for a while, both comfortably silent as Patrick discovered how to properly use his legs again. Now that his voice is feeling better, though, he uses it to question the man beside him. Gerard falters in his hurried steps but continues on as if nothing had happened.

“You don’t wanna know,” he says, brushing aside Patrick’s question as he speeds up. His head turns from side to side, swiveling as he searches for the other three. Patrick stumbles as he rushes to catch up with, panting a bit once he’s by his side again.

“Actually, I do. Hence the question,” he says. The corner of Gerard’s mouth almost lifts into a grin but it falls just as quick. Gerard pauses, licking his lips as he searches for an answer. Patrick, too, stops and looks to Gerard with a worried frown. “Gee?”

Gerard is silent for a long moment, staring off into the darkness beside him. He’s stuck in his own thoughts, as he often is, but this time is different. His eyes are more than distant- they’re lost.

Patrick reaches out and places a comforting hand on the other singer’s arm as if it will bring him back to the discussion. Gerard stiffens under the touch, pulling away as if in fear. He turns to stare at
Patrick, eyes wide and unreadable. Patrick shrinks away, pained at the thought that Gerard may see him as a monster as well. Instinctively, he tries to hide the hook behind him, Pete’s words still ringing through his mind. Patrick fears they’ll never leave.

Gerard’s quick, though, and his eyes dart down to the movement Patrick’s arm makes. He makes a strange sound in the back of his throat and his hand shoots out to snake around Patrick’s wrist, centimeters before where the hook begins. Patrick tries to pull away but it’s only half-hearted.

A long silence passes between the two, Gerard looking down at the hook and Patrick looking up at Gerard. Patrick doesn’t know what his own expression may be but he notes that Gerard is the first to appear unappalled at the new addition to Patrick’s body.

“Did…The cult did this, didn’t they?” Gerard asks softly, his eyes shifting to meet Patrick’s. Patrick can only nod and Gerard’s frown deepens. “I’m sorry.”

Gerard’s grip loosens and Patrick pulls his arm away, forcing it down by his side where it’s less noticeable. Gerard is still watching him with sad brown eyes, the shade so familiar and strange to the singer.

“How do you know about the cult?” Patrick asks, flinching at how accusatory his voice sounds. He softens his tone, trying again. “I mean, I didn’t know about them until about a week ago. And that was after they kidnapped me.”

Gerard laughs dryly, folding his arms across his chest. “Then I guess we made our discoveries in the same way.” Without waiting for a response, he turns and starts to walk again. Patrick processes his words as he rushes to keep up.

“Are you saying what I-”

“Yeah, probably,” Gerard snaps. Patrick flinches at the harsh tone and Gerard takes notice, instantly sighing and calming his voice. “Sorry, I’m just…on edge, I suppose. It’s been a rough few months.”

Patrick finds himself nodding until Gerard finishes his words.

“Wait, months?” Patrick asks, stricken. Gerard merely sighs again and looks up, as if he can see the night sky through the trees above them.

“This is the part where I tell you what happened, right? Honestly, I kind of wanted to avoid that.” He pauses, his steps slowing. Patrick knows better than to interrupt, despite how impatient he feels. His silence is rewarded in mere minutes when Gerard begins to speak again.

“It was a few months ago,” he starts, his storyteller voice drifting into place. “And it wasn’t just me that they took. Our entire band got the same texts- just a hotel address and a room number. It was freaky as hell but…also kind of exciting. We thought that it was the beginning of our superhero adventures, like the first few panels in a comic book.” He stops to shake his head. “It was foolish.

“It happened so fast that I barely know what happened at all. These girls appeared from nowhere, like shadows, and were grabbing us with weapons and needles. Mikey was screaming. I remember that much….When I woke up, we were all tied to the wall in a small windowless room. It wasn’t meant to have so many people in it but this group didn’t care. They….They did things to us that I’d rather like to forget,” Gerard says, his gaze dropping to the ground now as his voice grows with emotion. Patrick wants to tell him that he can stop, that he gets the picture and doesn’t need to know the rest. His words, though, can’t seem to form properly in his mouth. “I’m certain that you, more than anyone, can understand what I mean when I say that it was hell. They kept us there for weeks,
demanding that we tell them of a briefcase we knew nothing about. They called us the ‘Defenders of the Faith’ and laughed when we said they were wrong. They were told the Defenders would be a band of brothers with devotion unequalled by any other. Apparently, we fit the bill.”

Gerard stops speaking once again, his eyes searching until they find Patrick's. There’s no shared silence between the two, only Gerard’s dark gaze on the smaller man. Patrick’s nervous breaths fill the air.

“And then that kid showed up with your picture. It was a month ago; I barely recognized you,” Gerard smiles weakly, not at all putting Patrick’s nerves at ease. His smile falls as more memories spill from his lips. “He pointed out the briefcase in your hand and told the girls that they got the wrong band, that they failed. He was smug about it, too, saying that he could catch you guys better and with less mess. The cult didn’t believe him at first so he kept showing up with more proof, having his friends follow you guys around until it couldn’t be denied anymore. Those girls were so mad. I was certain they were going to kill us. Instead, just a few weeks ago, they set us free, said that the kid was right all along. We waited until we were well enough to travel and thought about leaving, about going somewhere far from here. But I knew I had to come back for you guys. I couldn’t leave you to suffer what we’d been through.”

Gerard’s voice begins to fade away near the end, dropping to a pained whisper. Guilt marks his words, a tone Patrick’s personally familiar with.

“I’m sorry I was too late,” Gerard says suddenly, looking towards Patrick with an ashamed face. Patrick’s quick to shake his head, despite a fleeting headache it gives him.

“It’s not your fault, Gee. You came back to help. It’s more than most people would do,” Patrick says. Pete’s words appear in Patrick’s mind, different ones from before.

“We’ll come back for you…”

Patrick doesn’t know if he’s hurt that Pete never did return or if he’s worried by the same fact. He decides to be neither. He told the others to run; he has no right to be angry that they obeyed. And as for the worry? Well, it’s not as if Pete was worried about Patrick when he broke his heart.

“I guess,” Gerard says, taking Patrick away from his thoughts. He begins to shuffle forward, slower than before. “Come on, the rest of your band has to be out here somewhere.”

“I’m not sure if we’re much of a band anymore,” Patrick says without thinking. Gerard looks at him, eyebrows wrinkling together. Patrick can tell that he wants to question what statement means but Patrick’s too emotionally drained to get into the details of it. Instead, he tries to distract Gerard with a question. “Speaking of bands, though, where’s yours? Did they come with you?”

Gerard visibly tenses up and his jaw twitches as if he’s chewing on the inside of his cheek. When he speaks, there’s no emotion in either his words or his eyes. Patrick doesn’t blame him. He knows he feels the same way.

“They couldn’t come,” he says. “I was the only one well enough to do so. I was lucky.”

“Oh,” Patrick says, glancing over Gerard’s form in a new light. He’s certainly thinner than before, his cheeks hollowed and limbs lanky. Dark shadows coat the skin beneath his eyes and the darker thread of stitches reach out from under his short sleeves, crisscrossing his arms and hands. Patrick drops his gaze to the ground, his own scars aching in sympathy. “You didn’t have to leave them for us.”
Gerard sighs, his hands dropping to his sides. It’s a sad sound and a hopeless action, as if there’s something about his words that Patrick himself doesn’t understand. The sound of the two walking through the forest takes the place of the conversation, leaves and twigs crinkling beneath their feet. For once, Patrick pretends to enjoy the silence and absorbs it into his mind, refusing to allow himself to think.

It feels as if it should be morning already—though only a few minutes have passed—when someone lurches through the dark to stand before them. The two singers stop short, Gerard’s hand inching towards his gun.

“Pl-please tell me I’m not seeing things. You are Patrick, right?”

Patrick laughs out his relief, a sudden sound, as his eyes piece together the image of Joe before him. Joe, hunched forward and holding a thin stick as a weapon, relaxes instantly and laughs in return, the noise carrying throughout the night like a calming song. Patrick relishes the sound. He steps forward, meaning to ask Joe how he escaped the children, but finds himself wrapped in Joe’s arms instead.

“Fuck, Patrick, I can’t believe you made it,” Joe mutters, his arms tightening around Patrick’s torso in a way that should pain his scars but only causes him to pull the other closer. “I’m sorry for leaving you. I should have stayed but I was so damn scared. And when I came back to look for you and you were gone…I was certain that kid had gotten you. I don’t know how I could have ever forgiven myself if something happened.”

Patrick’s vaguely aware of the breaks in Joe’s voice as he speaks, fighting back tears as he apologizes needlessly. Patrick does his best to rub Joe’s back comfortingly, holding his hook a safe distance away from him.

“Hey, it’s alright. I told you guys to run, you have nothing to be sorry for,” Patrick says emphatically, squeezing Joe just a bit tighter before pulling away. Joe rubs away some loose tears that had escaped and Patrick pretends not to notice as he steps back to stand by Gerard again.

“Besides, I had someone else watching my back, too.”

Joe seems to take notice of the redhead for the first time, his face contorting in astonishment as Gerard places his hands on his hips and grins cockily. Joe splutters, eyes darting from Gerard to Patrick and then to Gerard again. Finally, after seconds of attempting to speak, Joe raises his hand and points at Gerard in disbelief.

“You- You’re- Why-?”

“I think he means to say, what the hell are you doing here?”

Andy emerges from the trees behind them, brushing the dirt off his clothes and wincing as his hands pass over apparent scratches on his arms. His suspicious gaze, though, eradicates any doubt that he’s too concerned about his wounds.

Gerard and Patrick turn, Patrick smiling when he sees that another friend of his is mostly unharmed. He steps forward, maybe meaning to hug or question him, but Andy brushes past him, his gaze fixed on Gerard. Patrick shakes off the hurt and quickly jumps to Gerard’s defense.

“No, Andy, it’s fine! He saved me from Sam and, well, trust me. He has good reason to know about the cult and everything,” he says, waving his arms frantically as Andy continues to stalk forward. Andy stops, eyes falling on Patrick. Almost immediately, he smiles and Patrick feels a rush of warmth flood over him.
“I trust you, Patrick. But that doesn’t mean that I’m not confused,” he explains, raising an eyebrow at Gerard who merely sighs.

“Fair enough. But it’s getting late and you guys need to rest. There’s a small clearing nearby. I don’t have much but there’s food and it’ll be a safe place to sleep. Come on, I’ll catch you up on the way there,” he says, shoving his hands in his pockets. He starts walking straight ahead, not bothering to see if anyone will follow. Andy shares a look with Patrick, doubting and asking for his judgment. Patrick nods without hesitation, pulling the jacket closer to his body. Andy’s eyes follow the action, eyebrows raising. He looks back to Gerard, swapping stories with Joe further ahead, and then back to the coat that Patrick’s clinging to. His eyes soften and he laughs.

“Ok, then. I trust you. Let’s go.”

The clearing that Gerard had found is more like an ominous circle of trees. Well, that's Patrick's opinion, at least.

They come upon it just as Gerard finishes recounting his tale to the other two, with less detail and more questions. They prod at places they shouldn’t, asking if they were severely tortured or if the others were able and willing to help them get the briefcase back. Gerard responds with the bare minimum, often choosing to shrug instead of speak. Eventually, the two get the hint and Gerard puts on a smile as he introduces them to the empty spot in the woods.

Patrick looks around, severely underwhelmed. He’d been fantasizing about rebel camps, with weapons and tents and a raging fire amidst it all. He’d been so caught up in the movie-like dramatics of the past few days that he’d forgotten that real life isn’t supposed to be like that. Still, he takes note of the tattered blankets and canned food littering the ground, a calm smile sliding across his face. It may not be the heroic headquarters he’d hoped for but it’s a place to sleep and recover. He doesn’t have to try to be grateful. He looks to Gerard passing out cans of beans to the others and his smile widens. He’d never been so thankful to see someone in his life.

Gerard walks over to Patrick, holding a similar can out to him. Patrick shakes his head— the thought of the organs on the table still prevalent in his mind—and looks over at the blankets instead. Even small and scratchy, they look promising.

“Mm, I’m not really hungry right now. But sleeping sounds awesome,” he says, nearly yawning at the thought alone. He looks back up at Gerard. “Here, you can have your jacket back. Thanks for letting me use it.”

Patrick begins to take off the jacket, not waiting for an answer. Gerard’s hand falls to his shoulder, pulling it back on and preventing Patrick from removing it further.

“You should keep it. It gets really cold at night and those blankets were snatched from a crappy hotel we crashed at a while ago. They suck,” he admits, laughing sheepishly. “Besides, I gotta be able to show off these battle scars, right?”

Patrick can’t help but laugh as Gerard holds out his arms, the stitches creating a spiderweb pattern across them. He reaches out, unthinking, and runs a finger across a particularly messy one, the stitches raising up into the air as a testament to the lack of care the cult had held while performing them.

“They are a bit cooler than tattoos,” he says, walking his fingers across them. “Pete should be…. Pete. Patrick's smile falls and he feels his heart drop into his gut. ”No.
“What?” Gerard asks, his hands falling to his side once again.

“Pete should be here,” Patrick says, stumbling back as he gasps. His eyes widen in fear and he starts spinning, searching desperately for the bassist. His breath becomes violent and unforgiving, worry climbing up his body to paralyze him and squeeze at his throat. “No, no, no, oh my god, how could I forget? Pete was with us. He ran off and I don’t know where he is. He should be here with us, he should have heard us, we should have at least run into him once while walking around the forest! Pete? Pete!”

Joe and Andy rush over at the sound of Patrick’s yell, their cans of food falling to the ground, forgotten. Patrick looks to them with begging eyes. “Please tell me that you know where Pete is.”

The hesitation that follows is all Patrick needs to choke out a strangled cry, to turn his helpless gaze back to Gerard.

“We have to go look for him. Or...You guys stay here, I’ll go look for him. I need to look for him,” Patrick decides, taking deep breaths and telling himself that he’s overreacting. It was Pete against two kids. There’s no way he could have gotten hurt….Is there?

Still, Patrick’s mind taunts him with memories of the malice in the children’s eyes and the danger of the weapons they held. He thinks back to how Joe was limping as he staggered up to them and of how Andy was bleeding when he found them. Pete was the last to run, giving him, at best, two seconds to get away. Those kids were fast and they were brutal. What if a group of them teamed up against Pete and that’s why the other two got away? What if….oh god….what if the Vixens returned and he had been taken again? Patrick can’t imagine that they’d risk losing Pete a third time. What if they torture him? What if they kill him?

Patrick’s not even aware that he’s stopped walking, his legs frozen in place as his mind drags him to the darkest scenarios possible. When someone grabs him by the shoulder, he jumps and turns, hook wielded before him like a knife.

Gerard pulls his hand away, holding it up to show that he means no harm. Patrick stares at him, hook still raised. The memory of Sam’s last command drifts through his memory and he tastes a bit of that bloodlust from before, the need to cut through anyone that gets in his way. It’d be so easy to just swing his hook in the right direction, to tear apart those who think they can tell him what to do. He just wants to go find Pete, why don’t they understand? They must want him to fail. They must with nothing but the worst for him. He hears no music but, as Joe and Andy look upon him with fear, he imagines that the edges of his vision are tainted yellow.

“Patrick,” Gerard says. Patrick’s eyes snap to him. “I’m going to step forward. I just want to talk to you.”

Patrick gives a jerky nod and Gerard returns it, cautiously stepping closer.

Why is he so afraid, Patrick wonders? Gerard saved his life, does he really believe that Patrick would repay that with an injury? Of course, he wants nothing more than to give into the rage swimming through his veins but isn’t that natural after everything he’s been through? Hell, he was tied up and tortured! Surely he has the right to feel a bit of anger!

Gerard takes another step. Patrick doesn’t know why or how but suddenly the hook is moving through the air. Patrick follows it with his whole body, the action coming too naturally to him. For just a second, he sees Gerard’s eyes widen in fear but then everything’s a blur and Patrick can’t piece it together.
Joe and Andy shout in the distance but Patrick pays them no mind. Now, it's just him and Gerard. Him and the one who tried to stop him from finding Pete.

Seconds pass and all Patrick is aware of is his own heavy breathing.

“I have to find him,” he gasps out finally, staring into Gerard’s eyes as he speaks. When did Gerard get so close? Why are his eyes mere inches from Patrick’s own? And why can Patrick feel his pulse rapidly accelerating beneath his hand? He brushes aside these concerns. Perhaps it’s just another side effect of the trauma he’s gone through. “I have to. I have to know that he’s okay. I have to tell him-”

“Tell him what, Patrick?” Gerard asks. Though fear is evident in his eyes, it’s nowhere to be heard in his voice. Patrick falls silent, unable to answer. Another moment passes and then he feels someone’s hand wrapped around his wrist, above the hook. “You’re tired, Patrick. You don’t know what you’re doing. I’ll find Pete for you, I promise. But you have to let me go.”

“What?” Patrick asks, furrowing his eyebrows together. “What do you mean?”

Gerard doesn’t answer. He doesn’t need to. Patrick’s already realizing what he’s done.

“Oh my god, I’m so sorry!” Patrick cries out, rushing backward. Gerard pulls away from the tree he’d been pinned to with Patrick’s hand wrapped loosely around his neck and his hook aimed directly for his heart. He rubs his throat, clearing it as Patrick stumbles further away. “I- I didn’t know- I didn’t mean to!”

“I’m okay,” Gerard assures him, though he still won’t look Patrick in the eye. “I know it’s not your fault.”

Patrick isn’t listening, too busy yanking at his hair, eyes wild as he stares at Gerard.

“I don’t know why I did that,” he confesses, voice broken. “I wasn’t in control.”

Patrick knows how useless that excuse sounds, knows what he would think if he heard someone else say it. What does he mean he’s not in control? He held that hook over Gerard’s heart, he placed his hand around his neck. No one told him to do it and no music was playing. Hell, the Vixens aren’t even here! Patrick tries not to think about what could have happened if he hadn’t snapped out of it in time or if he had given into the anger fueling his actions.

He tries not to see the way that Joe and Andy must be looking at him now. He’d felt so much pain when Sam had called him a monster but now Patrick knows that he was right.

Patrick shuts his eyes, cheeks flaming from shame and his breath hitching from the need to cry. He refuses to give into the tears. He doesn’t deserve to feel this sort of betrayal by his own actions.

“You three get some sleep. I’ll be back with Pete, I promise,” Gerard’s saying in the distance. Andy argues, claiming that they’ll be more effective if he goes as well. Patrick still wants that to be him, still wants to feel as if he’s doing something to help his band. He should be shouting that he cares more about Pete, that no one else could understand the importance of finding him. But, more than ever, he feels reminded that nothing good can come from what he does. The best-laid plans merely fall apart at the most delicate touch from him.

Trying to protect the band led to the breakup. Trying to prove that he was reliable and competent led to the briefcase being taken which in turn led to the entire band being kidnapped.

Trying to prove that he could save Pete led to him nearly killing Gerard.
His legs give out and Patrick feels himself crumbling to the ground. No one rushes to catch him and he doesn’t expect them to. His knees and the harsh forest floor collide together, sending tremors throughout his being. Even though this pain is temporary- the most temporary he’s had yet- he can’t seem to get those tremors to stop.

His eyes open and he watches Gerard fade into the darkness, Andy by his side. Gerard’s gun catches Patrick’s eye as the man pulls it from its holster, checking the bullets left. What if Patrick had been a bit more sloppy while shoving him up against that tree? What if Gerard had panicked the way he should have? Would he have used that gun on Patrick? Patrick wouldn’t blame him if he did.

Patrick’s murmuring under his breath, the same words repeated over and over. “I’m sorry I’m sorry I’m so sorry.” He can’t stop. He doesn’t believe he deserves to.

“Hey. Hey, Patrick.” And that’s Joe, walking over to Patrick without a hint of fear in his eyes. It confuses Patrick as much as it hurts him. When did he start to expect for his friends to fear him? “You’re okay, alright? No one blames you.”

Patrick’s words die in his mouth. Clearly, apologizing isn’t enough. Slowly, he lifts his head to gaze up at Joe, still standing even as Patrick kneels before him. “You should.”

A spark of concern lights up Joe’s expression, if only for a second. He lowers himself down to Patrick’s level, forcing the blond to look him in the eye.

“No, I shouldn’t,” he says, emphasizing the word. “You’ve gotten the worst of this and you’ve been under a lot of stress. Even before the cult interfered and all this shit happened, I know that touring and fighting with Pete has been eating at you. You’re just cracking from the stress and it’s amazing that you hadn’t already. You just need to rest and recover.”

Joe sounds so adamant, so persuasive, that Patrick almost allows himself to believe that he means it.

Gerard’s pulse under his fingertips, beating faster in the fear of death. Patrick’s hook pressed against the other man’s chest, the point digging in and threatening to carve out his heart.

He almost believes him.

But almost is never enough.

“I attacked Gerard. I could have killed him. There’s no coming back from that, I know it. You guys will always see me as the cult’s freak,” he says weakly, dropping his gaze down to his hook. Joe is silent, biting his lip, and that’s all the answer Patrick needs before he’s pushing himself to his feet and shoving Joe away from him.

Joe’s eyes widen at the brusque action but he recovers quickly, speaking Patrick’s name and reaching out to him. His lips move smoothly as he speaks words Patrick doesn’t want to hear, reassurances that it wasn’t his fault and it won’t happen again. Patrick remains still, feeling lost before one of his closest friends, before gaining the strength to stumble away. He wants nothing more than to believe Joe, to collapse into his warm hug and to feel safe. But how can he feel safe when the only danger is himself?

Patrick’s eyes grow more vacant and Joe’s voice grows more distant. Patrick has just enough energy to bite his lip to keep it from trembling. He doesn’t want to be here with Joe. All Joe does is say lies like Patrick’s a good person and deserving of forgiveness. Gerard wouldn’t lie to him, though he’d certainly sugarcoat the facts. Andy would do the same.

And, Pete? Pete’s never been anything less than brutally honest.
Patrick already knows what Pete would say, what he would have done had he been here. Patrick has no doubt that Pete would have been the first to tear Patrick away from Gerard. He'd be screaming at him, all harsh words but no distortions of the truth. He'd shout at him and point out the danger that he is. Of course, the others would try to stand up for Patrick, guilt pulling at their guts but Pete’s mind is never changed, only calmed.

He would have been the last to calm down but he'd also be the first to see the evil implanted in Patrick’s mind.

Joe seems so much farther now and Patrick realizes that, as his mind wandered, his feet had started backing away. Joe calls his name; Patrick stops.

Pete wouldn't call his name or ask him to come back. He'd demand that he leave.

Maybe Patrick should just save everyone the trouble and disappear while he can.

Patrick takes step after step back, more instantaneous each time his foot hits the ground. Joe follows with a worried voice but Patrick doesn't care. He moves away quicker- but feels like it isn't quick enough- until he's turned around and the wind is whipping at his face. He walks until his strides become sprints, carrying him away from Joe’s pretense that Patrick will ever be alright.

He runs until tears are streaming down his face and he feels far enough to scream.

Joe calls after him but Patrick ignores the sound, wanting nothing more than to get lost in the woods around them. Joe doesn’t know about the machine they hooked him up to. He doesn’t know what they did.

Does Pete know, Patrick wonders? He saw the machine and he’s one of the smartest people Patrick knows. Does he know the creature that Patrick is now?

What if that’s why he never returned to him- though he promised he would? What if that’s why he hadn’t found him as easily as Gerard and all the rest did? Perhaps he figured it out the second he saw Patrick strapped down in that chair. Perhaps that’s why he was so much crueler in the back of that van, why he went so much further than he usually did.

Maybe he left before Patrick could turn on any of them. Maybe he left Patrick there to die.

Patrick stops running, choking on air as he leans against a tree for support. Everything hurts, from the inside out, and tears burn tracks down his face as he sobs. He can’t stand this feeling anymore; he doesn’t know how to live with himself. He doesn’t know why anyone would want him to.

Everything floods over in his mind, reaching the breaking point until he’s on his knees gasping for breath and sobbing openly. He doesn’t care who finds him. He doesn’t care who hears.

“I'm sorry,” he gasps out once again, the words spilling forth in desperation for someone to grant him pardon. He doesn’t mean to be a burden. He never wanted to be a freak. More tears race down his face. “I'm so sorry.”

Pete’s words play in his mind. They’re exactly as they always are- a song always stuck in his head, warping his view of the world and himself. He just wants things to go back to the way they were, back to when Pete wouldn’t hate him for the smallest mistakes and he wouldn’t sneer at him like he’s just another clingy ex. He wants to go back to the days where Pete wouldn’t treat him like a waste of time, back to when he’d try to convince him of the opposite.

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I don’t care about any of the shit that those jealous reporters want to say about you , Pete would tell
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him. Because you’re beautiful and that’s never gonna change.

But Pete doesn’t say that anymore. He hasn’t said it in a long time.

*Your new look was working until you got that fucking hook on your hand. But, hey, what a catch, right?*

Patrick knows those words are just the first layer of the truth. This hook is more than an imperfection on his body; it’s a symbol of the freak he is now.

And Pete Wentz could never allow himself to love a freak.

Patrick feels sick as the thought crosses his mind unbidden, nearly dry heaving from how hard he’s now crying. He doesn’t know why the thought appeared, why it matters so much that he’s so unlovable to the one person he should hate the most. Pete used him and threw him away like he was nothing. He broke his heart and had no problem letting the world know about it. Pete’s the only person to ever make Patrick feel so worthless. Pete’s the only one to say that he hates Patrick. Pete’s the only one to perfectly personify an asthma attack. Pete’s the only one to break Patrick’s heart.

But, for some unjustifiable reason, Pete’s the only one that Patrick wants to see right now.

Patrick wraps his hand around the hook, whimpering when it cuts into his palm, and begins to pull. Maybe he can reverse all this. Maybe he can make things right. He doesn’t always have to be a monster, does he? He can change all that before it starts. He can make sure that he doesn’t ever try to hurt one of his friends again.

And, Patrick thinks as he yanks on the hook, maybe it will prove to himself that he’s worthy of being loved.

Patrick doesn’t remember the exact moment that the Vixens shoved this hook into his wrist but he can hazard a guess. He remembers screaming until even his lungs ached and he recalls pain like fire spreading through his arm. He imagines that must have been the moment this horrendous fixture was forced onto him. It certainly feels an awful lot like the pain he’s feeling now.

Patrick’s lip is bleeding and he whines as he tries to detach the thing from his arm. It barely gives, only moving a millimeter- if it’s even really moving at all. Patrick doesn’t know why he can’t just pull it out. He can’t be that weak already, can he?

A hand wraps around his wrists, pulling them apart. Patrick emits a weak sounding cry as the hook slashes across his hand but looks up anyway. Maybe the Vixens found him. He doesn’t know if that’d be good or not.

Instead, he’s looking into Andy’s disappointed eyes. Patrick pulls away from him, confusion prohibiting him from speaking.

“You could do more damage to yourself if you pull it out,” Andy says calmly, not mentioning the tear stains down Patrick’s face or the way his breath is coming too quick. He reaches out his hand to help him up but Patrick ignores it, standing on his own.

“I don’t care,” he spits out, proud of how his anger masks his sorrow. Andy, though, doesn’t seem to buy it.

“Joe!” Andy shouts, looking somewhere over Patrick’s shoulder. “He’s over here!”

Patrick hears someone running towards him and he stiffens, worried that Joe will either attempt to
hug or hit him. Joe, though, merely runs to stand next to Andy, watching Patrick with worried eyes.

“I ran into Andy while chasing after you,” he explains. “I’m glad he was able to find you.”

Patrick folds his arms across his chest and stares at the ground. He knows that he’s pouting but this is the last place he wants to be. The conversation that’s bound to follow, as well, is the last conversation he wants to have.

“I’m gonna go meet back up with Gerard,” Andy says, turning to face Joe. “Take Patrick back to the clearing and keep a better eye on him this time.”

“I don’t need your help! I’m not a child,” Patrick explodes suddenly, turning the misery in his eyes into fury. He almost expects the two before him to back away since the last time he grew this upset was when he attacked Gerard. Andy, however, has no such fears.

“No, you’re not a child,” he snaps back, causing Patrick to step away. “And no one’s treating you like one. But we are treating you like our friend because, goddamnit, you are our friend and we won’t let you get like this. Not again.”

Patrick opens his mouth to rebuke what Andy’s saying, to scoff and say he has no idea what he’s talking about. But, as Andy’s eyes tell him, that’s a lie he can’t say.

Patrick knows exactly what Andy means when he says that. The time before the hiatus was one of the hardest for Patrick. It was a downward spiral that no one could seem to pull him from. Everywhere he turned there was another scathing review, another comment on his weight. Folie was his baby but no one loved it. Patrick was gaining weight and, it seemed, no one loved him, either. Though this was before he and Pete had their falling out, Patrick had convinced himself that the bassist was with him out of pity. Or, if he wasn’t, then he’d open his eyes soon enough and see how much better he could do. Hating Patrick Stump felt like the new trend and, for once, it was a fad he could easily follow.

It was Andy who finally noticed. He didn’t have the gentlest approach, shutting Patrick’s laptop as the singer read deeper into the hateful youtube comments. He’d forced a much-needed discussion, poking and prodding until Patrick gave in and admitted to the depression he’d been feeling. It was Andy who took it upon himself to help Patrick out of it, who understood the most when Patrick said he needed a break. It was Andy who reassured him that the break was the best idea- especially with how things had become with Pete.

Andy was right back then. Patrick’s emotionally tired enough to believe that he could be right this time, too.

Andy stalks off and Joe gingerly reaches out to grab Patrick’s hand, frowning when he feels the blood sticking to it. He bites down on his tongue, ripping a piece of his shirt off to tie it around the wound. Patrick lets him, only shuffling his feet the smallest bit when Joe leads him back to the clearing.

Patrick’s numb, searching for the right emotion to feel as Joe pulls apart two blankets and sets them on the ground. Again, he grabs Patrick by the tips of his fingers and tugs, a pleading look in his eyes. Patrick’s expressionless but does as Joe suggests, sitting on top of the blankets with him.

He expects Joe to bring up why he ran off, to ask him if it had to do with attacking Gerard. He expects Joe to ask why he was crying or to question where his thoughts led him. Patrick’s not ready to answer any of those questions. He’s barely discovered the answers himself.
Instead, once they've settled and the silence is edging on awkward, Joe nods towards Patrick’s hand.

“That cut- it wasn’t there before,” he says. Patrick folds his hand into a loose fist, looking away. “Did you try to pull the hook out?”

Patrick's gaze snaps back over to Joe, shocked at how easily he could assume what had happened. Surprise covers his features but he finds that he still can’t speak.

It doesn’t matter. Joe reads his curiosity easily enough.

“I can’t stop thinking about what you said earlier, about being a freak.” Patrick flinches at the words but Joe carries on regardless, staring into Patrick’s eyes. “Andy’s right. You’re our friend and I know how you get. You’re not a freak, okay? And you never will be. No one blames you for anything. Not for the way you acted towards Gerard and definitely not for the hook. I don’t know what you’re thinking but I can venture a guess. And I wish I knew how to make it stop.”

Patrick can’t focus on anything past Joe telling him that he’s not to blame. He wraps his arms around himself, looking at Joe with watery eyes.

“But it’s all my fault,” he says, admitting to the thought that’s been circling his mind since they all confessed to how they’d been captured, how they were all looking for Patrick, and how he was basically the trap. “I couldn’t protect the briefcase well enough and I couldn’t stop myself from being caught. Those were the mistakes that led us here.”

Joe’s quick to reassure him, placing his hands on Patrick’s shoulders and waiting for him to look up. “Listen, that’s not your fault. It could have happened to anyone.”

Patrick’s cried too much these past days but a few tears remain to escape from his eyes.

“Then why did it happen to me?”

It’s a selfish question but it sounds so sad, barely a whisper as Patrick tries not to let his voice break. That doesn’t stop Joe from seeing his tears or hearing the deeper meaning. It doesn’t stop Joe from pulling him in for a comforting hug.

“Oh, Patrick,” is all he says, rubbing Patrick’s back as Patrick cries into his shoulder. He offers soothing words and shushing sounds, the way one would assure a child that their nightmare isn’t real. Patrick pays no attention to them, too captivated by the sensation of someone’s genuine care. Sure, he received a hug when Joe had found him in the woods but it was nothing like this. Patrick realizes just how starved of affection he’s been this past year and he melts into Joe’s arms, searching for just a touch of kindness. Joe, the best friend he could have asked for, gladly gives it.

Moments pass until Patrick is growing limp in Joe’s arms, his eyelids drawing down as he falls into the belief that this is a safe place. Joe takes notice, helping Patrick to lay down and pull a blanket over his shoulders.

“You should get some sleep. You’re tired and emotionally drained. Trust me, everything will look better in the morning.”

Patrick doesn’t respond, sleep already drawing him close. As Joe lays down beside him, Patrick cuddles closer, seeking the warmth and friendship he had been feeling just moments before. He feels Joe’s arms wrap around him, pulling him into his chest. It’s reminiscent of years past, pressed close together in a van with barely enough room for the four young boys trying to find their place in the world. Then, it had been an annoyance to lay so close to someone else. Now, Patrick enjoys it and shuts his eyes.
Maybe he’ll trust Joe, just this once. Though past experience tells him otherwise, maybe he’ll believe that all just might be better in the morning.

Chapter End Notes

We all love Joe Trohman. God bless him.

You know, I felt like I had something to say down here but, while spell checking and plot checking, I kinda lost it...So...I guess...just pretend that I was awesome down here and wrote a cool author's note updating you on my totally mundane life?

Haha, anyway, I love all of you and I hope all of you are having a fantastic day. I know that, whenever I see your beautiful comments and feedback, my day is made so much better. And I always check them right before going to work. And work sucks. So thanks for helping me through that.

See you Monday/Tuesday!!!
Chapter Summary

Two idiots can't finish a simple confession, goddamnit

Chapter Notes

It's late. I'm tired. As I finish typing and begin uploading, it's 11:30pm. I already know it's gonna be posted, like, an hour into Wednesday. Please forgive me.

Chapter Playlist:
- "Where The Lonely Ones Roam" by Digital Daggers
- "Half-Truism" by The Offspring
- "Just One Yesterday" by FALL OUT BOY (i gotta do something interesting whenever i mention fall out boy because it's such a given)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I'm The (Worst Kind Of) Way

“I don’t think he would have wanted you to see that.”

Pete pulls away from the tree he’d been pressed against, bark digging into his palms as he stabilizes himself. His legs quake beneath him. He’s uncertain of how long he’d been running in his search for Patrick but it had been long enough for him to feel like death's slowly draining the life from his legs. His breath, too, burns as it yanks out from his lungs, creating a formless fog in the night air.

“G-Gerard?” Pete pants out, voice barely audible. Disbelief coats his words even as the other man draws nearer. Pete knows that there’s no reason to doubt that this is Gerard- no one else wears arrogance quite so well in their tone, even if it does sound forced. He narrows his eyes in the dark of the forest. “What are you doing here?”

“Looking for you,” Gerard answers, coming forward until he’s too close for Pete’s liking. Pete can see scars littering the other man’s arms, can sense the sadness carried in his blood like an incurable disease. He turns back around, facing the place where Patrick had just been.

Patrick, so small and curled in on himself as sobs tore through him like another form of torture. Patrick, begging for forgiveness and apologizing with every breath as if he knew Pete were watching, guiltily hiding behind a tree as the younger man fell apart before his eyes. Patrick, who said that he loved Pete, who implied that he couldn’t love him anymore. Patrick, who Pete had to look away from to question the knot forming in his throat and the strangled feeling around his heart. Patrick.

Just.
“He’s worried about you, you know,” Gerard says softly, pulling Pete from his thoughts. Pete turns his eyes to the taller man, refusing to believe his words.

“It seems like it should be the other way around,” he says. The words slip out without thought but, to no one’s surprise, it makes them no less true. “What happened to him? I’ve never seen him like that. It was-” Pete cuts off, feeling as if any adjective he chooses will reveal too much.

“Was what? Scary? Wrong? Heartbreaking? All of the above?” Gerard runs a hand through his hair as he sighs. “I don’t know. He… I think he’s just reacting to everything that’s happened. The cult messed him up real bad.”

“But Patrick’s strong. He can overcome it, right?” Pete doesn’t know why he sounds so defensive or why he needs to know that Patrick will be alright. Gerard, though, doesn’t question it. He merely frowns at the ground, taking time with his thoughts. When he looks up to Pete, it’s with despairing eyes.

“For everyone’s sake, I hope so.”

Aside from Gerard sharing his story, the walk through the trees is a silent one. Pete breaks it every so often, sharing whatever random thought pops into his head. Gerard’s always been an easy person to talk to, better than half the therapists Pete’s ever had. He doesn’t judge; he just listens and waits to share his wisdom. It’s calming. Pete’s in the middle of debating whether he should ask Gerard about how big of a difference there is between loved and love when they come across Andy.

“Pete!” The drummer declares, wrapping Pete in a tight embrace. Pete grimaces as the action provokes the bruises scattered across his arms but returns the hug nonetheless. Gerard stands to the side, a strange expression on his face that fades when Pete raises an eyebrow at him. Pete pulls away from Andy, meaning to ask Gerard if he’s alright but the singer turns away. Pete only catches a flash of an emotion and he hesitates to call it one of regret.

“Where were you?” Andy asks, unaware of the unspoken exchange. Pete blinks, looking back to Andy, and forces a smile.

“Looking for…Looking for you guys.” It’s only mostly a lie. After all, he didn’t specify that he was looking for Patrick more than he was looking for the rest. Andy catches his reluctance but doesn’t comment.

“Alright, well, Gerard has a safe place set up just a bit in that direction,” Andy says, nodding to the right. “Joe and Patrick are already there. You guys wanna head back?”

“It’s the best plan, right now,” Gerard cuts in, walking back over to the two. “Your group can rest and I’ll have the first watch.”

Pete takes sudden notice of the gun in Gerard’s free hand and his mouth goes dry. “Watch?”

“Yeah,” Gerard says as if it’s obvious. “There’s a cult out to kill us- Well, out to kill you. I don’t think you want to risk sleeping out in the open while there’s a chance they’re still searching.”

“Fair point,” Pete says, beginning to walk in the direction Andy had said the others were. “How long until we get there?”
“It’s not far,” Gerard replies, he and Andy hurrying to walk by Pete’s side. “I’ll show you where it is.”

Without another word, Gerard moves to walk before them, his shoulders tense and gun drawn. Something about it sets Pete on edge but he knows he’s not one to judge. Everyone deals with absurd cults in different ways and, Pete thinks, at least Gerard’s on their side.

“Hey, Pete, wait up a sec, okay?” Andy says, his voice softer than usual as he grabs at Pete’s shoulder. Pete slows and glances over at Andy.

“Is something wrong?” Pete asks, incapable of keeping the subtle panic out of his words. Andy shakes his head dubiously, eyes seeking for an answer he's not yet asked.

“Nothing too bad just…I know that you and Patrick aren’t on the best of terms right now but, when we get back, I think it’d be best if you try to keep from fighting. He’s…He’s not in a good place right now.”

Memories of Patrick’s sobs arise in Pete’s mind. Images of him alone and on his knees, tears streaming down his face, take over his sight. He shakes them away, shuddering at the taunting thoughts.

“Okay,” he says, expecting it to be the end of the conversation. Andy, though, refuses to look away. “What?”

“I mean it, Pete. After everything he’s been through, his mental state is sure to be fragile. One wrong word could send him into a breakdown,” Andy answers, a scolding tone in his words. Pete can’t help but feel offended.

“Christ, Andy, you think I don’t know that?” Pete blurts out, glaring at the other man from the side of his vision. “What, you think I want for Patrick to have an emotional collapse? That I’m petty enough to risk his mental health? I know I can be a dick at times but do I really seem that cruel to you?”

Andy’s response is soft, slow, and full of trepidation. “You seemed that cruel when you two were fighting in the back of that van.”

Pete’s on edge, hands tightening into fists and his nails digging into his palms. “That was a fight. Everyone says things they don’t mean when they’re fighting. Besides, it’s not like I was the only one throwing out insults.”

“But you went too far,” Andy says and Pete wants to hit him. So now he’s taking Patrick’s side? Sure, Pete can admit that what he said was awful. Hell, he’d been wallowing in guilt just a few moments ago. But he’s too stubborn to accept blame from anyone else and Andy’s words just sound like an accusation.

“But you went too far,” Andy says and Pete wants to hit him. So now he’s taking Patrick’s side? Sure, Pete can admit that what he said was awful. Hell, he’d been wallowing in guilt just a few moments ago. But he’s too stubborn to accept blame from anyone else and Andy’s words just sound like an accusation.

“You know what part, Pete. I know you haven’t forgotten already,” Andy chides, gazing upon Pete in disappointment. “And, I assure you, Patrick hasn’t either. What you said, Pete…I don’t- Patrick- You know how he is. And I’m scared of what he’ll do if he believes you more than he already
“What do you mean?” Pete scowls, confusion wrinkling his features. He thinks back to the breakdown he’d seen Patrick have and how Andy was the one to find him, calming him and trying to explain that he was only going to ‘cause more damage’. Pete hadn’t been able to see what Andy had meant when he’d said that and he hadn’t thought about it until now. “Did he do something?”

“He…” Andy trails off, sounding uncharacteristically uncertain as he ducks beneath a low hanging branch. Pete waits, breath caught in his throat to be sure he hears. Andy, though, merely sighs. “It’s not my place to share. If he wants to tell you, he can. I don’t want to talk about him behind his back, though.”

Pete bites his tongue, fighting down the urge to question Andy further and to demand an explanation. Patrick was his best friend, wasn’t he? Doesn’t Pete deserve to know if he’s feeling upset? Doesn’t Pete have the greatest claim to Patrick’s emotions? Didn’t Pete say he’d be Patrick’s greatest protector? How can he keep that promise if no one will help him do so? When did the world become so backward?

Perhaps, Pete imagines, it became this way when the only thing Pete needed to shield Patrick from was Pete himself.

“Here,” Gerard says suddenly, gesturing to the clearing before them. Pete squints in the darkness, trying to see if Patrick and Joe are close. All he sees are distorted shadows and lumps, exhaustion messing with his sight. “There are blankets and food over there. I think that Joe and Patrick are both asleep, they’re lucky they didn’t get caught. But be careful of waking them. I’ll take first shift like I said. You two should get some rest, as well.”

Pete’s astounded as Gerard shifts in the role of a leader, shooting out commands as easily as he could shoot the gun in his hand. He leaves no room for arguments, though Pete wants to say that he’s unlikely to sleep anyway so it’d be fair for him to watch as well. Instead, he follows Andy through the dark to pick up a blanket, coarse and stiff in his hand. Andy wraps his blanket around his shoulders and walks back to Gerard, discussing shift schedules in hushed voices. Pete hears Andy claiming that he’ll take the second shift in a few hours and only the beginning of Gerard’s agreement before he’s tuning out. He glances down at the ground below him, eyes pacing across the grass as he walks cautiously to the other end of the clearing.

A flash of blond hair catches his eye and Pete feels his heart swell. Pete bends down as the image expands, details coming into focus to show off Patrick’s shadow-framed face and a worried frown. Pete’s eyes adjust as he scans down the other man’s body, taking in the hand curled against his chest and the arm with the hook splayed miserably away from him. Is this what Andy meant, Pete wonders? Was Patrick merely trying to distance himself from the hook? It’s not as drastic as Pete had come to imagine but it causes his heart to sting either way.

As Pete moves to sit beside the sleeping man, a comfortable smile slides onto his face. He doesn’t know how it got there and, right now, he doesn’t really care.
Patrick’s okay.

After so much torture and fire and fighting and running and heart-wrenching sobs he thought no one could hear, Patrick’s still okay. He’s still sleeping securely with the moon and stars keeping watch of him. He’s still reacting to Pete’s touch as if nothing has changed. He’s still okay and, if Pete’s lucky, he’s still Patrick.

Because Pete made a bargain with the universe. He swore that if this golden boy with the golden voice made it out alright then Pete would fix everything he broke. He’d put Patrick back together with reverent hands and finally face those emotions he’s stored away for far too long. Words build up in his chest, pressing against his ribcage like a bird wanting to be set free. Words and feelings swim through his body and mind, words and feelings meant only for Patrick.

Because, Pete realizes with no amount of surprise, he never stopped loving Patrick. How could he? Loving Patrick is more than an action; it’s a trait he was born with. And, as the saying goes, seasons change but people don’t.

Pete can’t imagine a time when he didn’t want Patrick by his side or a time when Patrick couldn’t make everything better just by placing his hand over Pete’s. Pete wants to think of something monumental to say to Patrick when he wakes him up and confesses, something that might make Patrick hate him a little less. He wants to bring up the moment he first fell in love- isn’t that what they always do in the movies? He wants to be as cliche as his heart will let him but he wants to mean every word. How can he talk about when he first fell in love if that moment doesn’t seem to exist?

Simple.

He didn’t begin loving Patrick and he didn’t fall into it. He just. Loved.

Perhaps this is what a soulmate is. There are no fireworks or special effects. Because Pete feels as if he was born loving Patrick, even if he didn’t meet him until almost two decades later. He feels as if he was born to love Patrick. More than music and writing, this is his one true purpose in life.

If that’s the case, he thinks, then he’s been failing pretty badly these past few years.

This is his moment to change that.

Pete’s arm extends out again, more meaningful this time. It’s like meeting a celebrity crush, with sweaty palms and butterflies in his stomach. He’s almost afraid that his words will stick in his throat but that doesn’t matter. He knows that, when Patrick’s brilliant blue eyes are on him, he’ll know exactly what to say.

I’m sorry, I’m so sorry. Please forgive me, I never meant to hurt you. I never want to hurt you. I was just stupid and, more than that, I was afraid. Please, please, say you understand. You don’t have to say it back but at least say that you believe me.

I love you, Patrick Stump. I always have and I always will.

So, what do you say? Give it one more shot? Because we’re not dead yet, babe, and forever hasn’t ended.

Pete shuts his eyes tight, his hand suspending in the air above Patrick’s shoulder. He knows he’s going to do it. He already has the monolog running through his head- his skill with words infallible as always. He tries to visualize Patrick’s face. Will he cry or will he scream? Will he forgive Pete or will his hate only intensify? Will he even believe him or let Pete explain himself? Pete believes that he has to. He and Patrick are soulmates, right? Who could fix Patrick better than Pete could? Who
could even hope to comfort him when the world grows too dark and he’s aiming a gun at his own head?

Pete opens his eyes, determination and insecurity warring against each other inside him. If he’s going to do this, he has to do it quick. He’s a stubborn bastard but determination can only fight for so long.

Patrick rolls onto his other side, groaning as he does so. Pete smiles at the action. His hand lowers to rest on Patrick’s shoulder. He wants to shake him awake and he prepares to do so.

But then Pete blinks. And his eyes adjust.

Was Patrick wearing that jacket before? Pete doesn’t remember it. And, since when was Joe there? Why are he and Patrick so close?

Pete yanks his hand away and widens his eyes, details jumping out at him like snakes. That’s not Patrick’s jacket so where did he get it? Pete remembers Gerard’s arms, bare and exposed. His eyes trail down to Patrick’s hand, where the too long sleeves reach his knuckles. Why would Patrick be wearing Gerard’s jacket? That makes no sense, Pete thinks. It makes no sense at all.

And why would he be sleeping so close to Joe, arms wrapped around each other like lovers on a stormy night? Joe’s one of Patrick’s closest friends, sure, but isn’t this a bit much? What the hell is going on?

Pete’s breath comes quick and he stumbles to his feet, gasping loudly for air.

No.

No, it can’t be.

He wasn’t too late, was he?

Scenarios play through Pete’s mind, each worse than the last. Gerard said that he saved Patrick and Pete suddenly hates that he didn’t go back. He should have been Patrick’s hero. He should have been the one to kill that kid and help Patrick to his feet, to hold him close if he was cold, and to promise that everything’s going to be alright. Pete can’t help but imagine Patrick and Gerard smiling at each in victory as Gerard puts his gun away with one hand and pulls Patrick close with the other. How did Gerard react when he saw the hook? Selfishly, Pete almost hopes that it was with disgust so that he can be sure that Patrick would never fall for him again. But Patrick fell for Gerard once before when he and Pete were fighting, the taller man becoming the perfect gentleman in Pete’s place. Is history repeating itself? Last time, Pete had the chance to make things right and Patrick had come back to him. Who’s to say that he’ll get such a chance this time? Their fight then had been so trivial, nothing but jealous accusations. This one was so much more dangerous….

And what of Joe? Once the hiatus began, he seemed to replace Pete quite easily in the best friend department. He had run to Patrick’s defense, bruising Pete’s ego and jaw in the process. Joe had no problem showing whose side he was on, taking any chance he could to remind Pete just how bad he had been for Patrick. He still remembers the call he received after Patrick had called for the hiatus. He still remembers Joe’s angry screams of why is my best friend crying.


When did all that change?

Pete knows he could have done better and he knows that he’ll spend the rest of his life begging for Patrick’s forgiveness. He thinks back to every time Patrick would be performing near him and how
Pete went out of his way to be sure he didn’t have to go. Patrick hadn’t been lying that evening in the dressing room when he claimed that Pete was avoiding him. How badly had that hurt? Did it really take away Pete’s rights to ever try to consider him a friend again?

Pete remembers those pictures that circulated the web, of Joe showing up to one of Patrick’s concerts unannounced, standing in the audience with a proud smile on his face. He remembers Patrick’s smile in the picture he took with Joe after, an arm slung around Joe’s shoulders. Patrick’s smile had been muted, the way it had been since the hiatus began, but there was something beneath it. Something that radiated a happiness so bright that it seemed to want to burst from his lips. Pete had scoffed at the picture, calling the two a couple of fools. Now that he thinks back to it, he realizes he was just jealous.

It’s been years since he was the reason Patrick was smiling like that.

Pete backs away, his hand dropping to his side.

He could be calm about this. He could reason that Gerard and Joe and anyone else would be better for Patrick. He could consider himself honorable and step down. He could swear to never lay a hand on Patrick again. He could pretend that that’s the right thing to do.

He could let this make him more determined to win Patrick back. He could decide that only he knows what’s best for Patrick and he could insist that they’re meant to be. He could wake Patrick up right now and confess his love until his face turns blue. He could convince himself that Patrick loves him in return. He could pretend that this is easier to fix than he thinks.

But.

I loved you

Those aren’t simple words to cast from his mind. And Pete’s never been good at calm or sudden resolve.

Fire sparks in his gut, not unlike the first time he saw the pictures of Joe with Patrick after a Soul Punk show. It grows, flames licking at his insides and boiling his blood. It should hurt; it should make him scream. All it really causes, however, is the intense desire to spit on the two curled up below him.

Perhaps it’s childish to jump to such rash conclusions, to mentally insist to himself that he’s been wronged. But he can’t shake the feeling that something’s been taken from him. He can’t fight down the jealousy burning him from the inside out.

He almost feels like he’s losing his mind, with the way his vision swims and distorts the scene before him until he can see nothing but Joe’s arm on Patrick’s waist and Patrick’s arms in Gerard’s jacket. He wants to break this image, to watch it shatter like a jigsaw puzzle being torn apart. He wants nothing more than to take the fire from his guts and set it alight on Gerard’s stupid jacket. He wants Patrick to feel the same way he does.

But it’s been a long day and an even longer night. Despite how much Pete wants to fight— with tooth and nail and bloody words— he knows that there are greater issues to deal with. He knows that come morning he’ll have all the chances he wants to tear into Patrick. For now, he should at least build up some energy for the screaming match ahead.

Pete walks away, the blanket trailing the ground behind him. He hears Patrick sniffle in his sleep but he doesn’t dare turn to face him. He doesn’t know what he’ll do if he does.
Pete finds a tree not too far away and rests with his back against it. It’s too familiar to the position he had been in when those kids attacked, too exposed as he prayed for Patrick to be alright. He’d said he would apologize if Patrick was fine but, now, Pete’s not quite sure what he has to apologize for.

Pete shuts his eyes and, this time, he merely prays that he’ll be allowed to sleep.

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The sky is a pale blue when Patrick first wakes up. The air is cool and crisp, grass tickling his cheek as he shifts about. His side is sore from lying on it for too long and Joe’s arm around him is uncomfortably tight. Patrick taps the other man’s wrist lightly, hoping to cause him to shift away. Joe only pulls him closer.

Patrick sighs heavily, raising his head a few inches to gaze about. He doesn’t expect anyone else to be awake- except, perhaps, Gerard- and he wonders if he should take the next shift watching over everyone.

Andy lies a few feet away, tangled in a blanket with his hands folded over his chest. His breaths, nice and even, match the beat of Joe’s behind him. Patrick takes an inspired breath of his own but chokes on it when he hears movement further behind him. He flips over, heart racing, only to see Gerard pacing back and forth at the edge of the clearing. Patrick shuts his eyes, calming his mind and easing his pulse. He’s been too on edge recently; it has to stop.

When Patrick opens his eyes again, he watches Gerard in fascination. The man stalks back and forth with the prowess of a wildcat, his flaming hair framing his face like a mane. A hand rests on his gun and his shoulders hunch forward, guarding him against any threat that may appear. Though he’s incredibly thin and has the kindest heart Patrick’s ever encountered, Patrick can’t help but feel safer with him around. Though, it does mix with a feeling of guilt. How long had Gerard been up? When did he even return from looking for-

Pete!

Patrick’s head fills with a frenzy of exclamation marks, the vibrations traveling up and down his body. Gerard and Andy had gone searching for Pete! If they’re back that means they found him, right? Patrick jolts upright, only wincing slightly at Joe’s muffled groan as his arm falls to the ground with a soft thud.

Patrick’s head is on a swivel as he searches for a glimpse of Pete, fear clogging up his veins as he imagines what it would mean if Pete isn’t here. It would mean that Pete truly left them or that he got caught. Patrick doesn’t know which scenarios worse. He just knows that he’ll have to live with the pain and regret of their neverending argument.

Patrick’s close to hyperventilating as these thoughts threaten to choke him. Last night, he’d said something to Gerard, something Patrick hadn’t even realized the meaning of.

_I have to tell him-

Patrick still doesn’t know the rest of that sentence but he’s certain that it has to do with how desperately he needed to see Pete last night. He’s certain that it has to do with the way he feels he’ll die if Pete isn’t here.

He’s positive it has to do with the way he immediately calms upon spotting Pete’s figure leaning against a tree a few feet away.

“Pete,” Patrick breathes out, relief taking the place of the panic he’d been feeling. He doesn’t know
how but Pete seems to hear him, lifting his head and sparing Patrick a cold glance. In the dim light of morning, Patrick sees Pete’s eyes dart from him to Joe and back again. His mouth is set in a twisted line that Patrick can’t decode but it doesn’t stop him from standing and moving towards him.

“I’m glad you’re okay,” Pete says in a clipped tone when Patrick sits beside him, legs crossed like Peter Pan. Patrick wants to feel joy at Pete’s words, wants to pretend that they mean that Pete cares. But he knows that Pete has never cared and, besides, it’s not like Pete himself even seems to believe what he’s saying. He averts his eyes away from Patrick and flinches when Patrick tries to move closer. What should be happiness twists into hurt and Patrick swallows nervously.

“Thanks,” Patrick says weakly, looking across Pete’s body to see if there’s any reason for his cold behavior.

_When isn’t Pete acting this way towards you? What, just because you realize that you might not hate him you expect him to feel the same? What kind of self-centered bullshit-_  

Patrick shakes off his thoughts, focusing instead on the bruises and scratches coloring in Pete’s tattoos. “Are you okay?”

He expects an answer, a snapped ‘no’ or ‘why do you care’. All he receives is a shrug. Patrick bites down on his lip, careful not to break the skin, and tries again to move towards Pete. Once again, Pete shies away as if Patrick’s contaminated with some disease.

_Or as if you are the disease. Don’t forget about what you did to Gerard last night. What if Andy or Gee told him?_  

Patrick flinches at his memories of the night before. No matter how many times Joe told him it wasn’t his fault, Patrick can’t forget the way it had felt to slam Gerard against the tree and threaten his life. He can’t forget the thoughts he had had leading up to the action.

He can’t forget the complete silence or the lack of music. He can’t forget the clear color of his sight. Patrick draws in on himself, wondering if trying to speak to Pete was a mistake. He begins to stand, meaning to find an isolated spot in the clearing to wallow in self-loathing. The second he begins to shift his weight, though, Pete’s hand darts out to wrap around his wrist. Patrick looks up into wide whiskey eyes.

“Don’t. I’m sorry, I just-” Pete’s hand loosens, releasing Patrick from his grasp, but his eyes remain just as intense. His voice is almost sad when he speaks. “I just have a lot on my mind.”

Patrick can’t respond, the memory of Pete’s hand on him burning into his skin. When was the last time Pete had touched him with such urgent desperation? When was the last time he apologized without glass shards in his mouth, tainting and staining the words?

When was the last time he looked at Patrick as if he truly meant it when he said he wanted him to stay?

Patrick’s cheeks flush red and he settles back down, a warmth resting over him like the blanket lying forgotten by Joe. He dares not hope that Pete’s been thinking the same things that he has even if the thought causes butterflies in his stomach to flutter. Distracted by his feelings, he offers the other man a shy smile.

“I understand,” he says. “I’ve…I’ve been thinking a lot more about us. Things that I didn’t think I’d let myself think again.”

It’s more blatant than Patrick thought he would be. He’d come over here with the plan of speaking to
Pete, to be sure he’s alright, and then going back to sleep. He certainly didn’t mean to… to imply such things as….

But then Patrick’s thinking of the past week. Why shouldn’t he be allowed to be so obvious? At least three times, he should have died. The torture, the asthma attack, Sam… What if Patrick died without telling Pete that- Well, without telling him whatever it is that’s been consuming his thoughts?

He knows that he needs to tell Pete and he knows that it will be rejected. But that doesn’t matter. Any second could be their last and Patrick won’t forgive himself if he doesn’t say this.

If only he had the words.

“I’m not angry, you know,” Patrick says, surprising even himself. “What you said earlier about the… about my hook….I’m not mad about it anymore. I forgive you.”

Pete still doesn’t speak but Patrick catches a change in his eyes. Something that Patrick had said made it through. Emboldened by the thought, Patrick continues.

He licks his lips, his hand brushing against Pete’s until the older man looks over. When they have eye contact, Patrick grants him a nervous laugh.

“Do…Do you remember when we first started dating? We rushed into things and I know that’s mostly my fault. I was just so afraid that once I got something I wanted that I would be more likely to lose it. I thought that I had to prepare for the worst, to tell you everything in case I wouldn’t get the chance later,” Patrick says, his words trembling as they leave his mouth. Pete’s eyes remain on him, narrowed in confusion. “I know that it was stupid to confess my love to you on our first date but, then, it had felt like we had already been dating for years. It felt obvious. You were never my best friend- You always felt more than that. And I don’t regret telling you that I loved you, even if it was too soon.”

Patrick’s tremoring, matching the terrified tone of his words. Does Pete remember what he’s saying? Does he know where Patrick’s trying to lead him?

Patrick’s words stick in his throat as he tries to imagine how to proceed. He could be grandiose and continue the monolog, outlining every moment that they’ve been together. He could be cliche and quote their lyrics, maybe even mention the songs he’d written about Pete during the break. But Patrick’s no good at words, not unless Pete’s the one writing them.

Patrick’s voice is nothing but a ghost, searching the air for someone to haunt. “Do you remember what you said? About how long we’d be together?”

His words take on a pleading tone, begging for a response. He’s hoping for Pete to hear what he’s saying; he’s desperate for Pete to remember what Patrick means.

Because, now that he’s brought it up, Patrick can’t stop thinking about it.

*Patrick confessed his love to Pete on their first “official” date, sharing a milkshake at some late night diner a few blocks from the venue they’d played at an hour earlier. It was stuttering and awkward, a bright red blush hidden beneath the shadow of a trucker hat Pete had bought him on the way here.*

*Pete didn’t say the words back; merely smiled cleverly and took a long sip of the blueberry shake between them.*

*It had bothered Patrick for days, embarrassing him as he realized he had jumped the gun. He*
avoided Pete, shame rising in him every time they crossed paths. Despite this, Pete wasn’t treating Patrick any different. And maybe that was the worst part.

Why didn’t Pete call him out on saying those words too fast? Why wasn’t he scared off or intimidated by Patrick’s impulsiveness?

And

And if he felt the same way, why hadn’t he said them back?

Insecurity had bubbled up inside of Patrick, a volcano resting just beneath the surface of his skin. Was Pete stringing him along? Was this pity? Was this just a sick joke?

Pete crawled into Patrick’s bunk late at night, hot tan skin pressed against the soft fabric of Patrick’s faded white shirt. He held onto Patrick, whispering how beautiful he was and how talented he was. But not once did he say he loved him.

“Why didn’t you say it?” Patrick asked one night, months after their first- and, at the time, only-date. “Why couldn’t you say it back?”

Pete hadn’t hesitated to respond. To this day, Patrick’s certain that he had prepared the lines in advance, just waiting for Patrick to ask.

“Because I thought it was obvious. I love you, Patrick. I love everything about you. I love how easy it is to make you blush and I love how you wear your heart on your sleeve. I love the sound of your voice, and not just your singing. I love your laugh, I love your smile, I even love the symphony of your breaths. I love every part of you that I can see and every part that you try to hide and every part that I have yet to find out. I’ve always loved you. And you know what? I’ll continue to do so until the day we die.”

“That’s not very long,” Patrick said, too awestruck by Pete’s speech to say anything clever. Pete had laughed and brushed a thumb across Patrick’s cheek.

“C’mon, Trick. Don’t you know we’re gonna live forever?”

Patrick blinked. He didn’t understand.

“But fine,” Pete had said. “I’ll love you until we die or forever ends.”

He buried his face in Patrick’s neck, breathing the next words against his skin. “Whichever one comes first…..”

“What about it?”

Pete’s tone is harsh, a jarring contrast to the memory playing in Patrick’s mind. The singer flinches and wonders if he’s made the right decision. He’s said these words too soon once before; he doesn’t know what will happen if he makes that mistake again.

So, this time, he’ll give Pete the pieces to put together. He’ll play Pete’s game of tension and wits. The chips will fall where they may.

“We’re not dead yet, Pete,” he starts. He licks his lips, swallowing down the fear that Pete won’t play along. “And fore-”

“Don’t you think it’s strange that Gerard’s here?”
Patrick feels his world and hope teeter on the edge of destruction, Pete’s flippant brush-off of his confession striking him in the heart. “What?”

“I’m just saying,” Pete says, folding his arms over his chest and glaring at the jacket Patrick’s wearing, “that it’s weird. Why do you trust him so much?”

Patrick’s immediately defensive but he takes deep breaths. Maybe if he gets past this diversion then Pete will let him finish.

“Gerard’s our friend, Pete,” he says slowly, as if speaking to a child. “And he saved my life. If he was going to hurt us, he would have done so by now. There’s no reason not to trust him.”

“Still,” Pete huffs and Patrick feels himself growing angry. “Why is he the only one here? Where are the others? Do you really think he would leave Mikey alone?”

Oh.

Mikey.

Patrick’s world more than crumbles- it burns to nothing but ash.

Patrick knows that Pete and Mikey were a thing once- it’s who he had been with while Patrick was with Gerard. He has nothing against Mikey Way. He has nothing against Pete being friends with Mikey Way. Hell, Patrick’s friends with Mikey Way.

But he has everything against Pete using Mikey as a reason for Patrick to end his confession.

Rage builds up inside the smaller man until he’s brimming with it. It hits him with the force of a chandelier that’s been cut from the ceiling- it was just a matter of time until everything came crashing down.

Pete had told him that Mikey was a summer fling, not meant to go past ‘05. He had told him that if Patrick was over Gerard then he was over Mikey. He had told him that he was more beautiful than Mikey when Patrick grew insecure looking at pictures of the thinner boy.

Besides, Patrick lost the weight that was so obvious when he stood next to him. Why would Pete hurt Patrick by bringing him up? Hasn’t he changed enough to fit his standards?

“....that fucking hook on your hand....”

Patrick sees red and he almost wishes it were yellow if only for the blame to be on someone else.

“Gerard says that he’s fine,” he spits out, harsh words that cause Pete to finally look him in the eye. “I’m pretty sure he has both his hands, too. I hope you’re very happy together.”

He wants to sink his hook into Pete’s skin, to show him how much it hurts to have it attached. He wants to scream at him to just fucking listen because Patrick was seconds away from saying he loves him.

He wants to forget he ever tried to do so.

“What?” Pete asks, confusion lacing words that Patrick doesn’t want to hear. “That’s not what I meant. I was just asking because it’s suspicious and it’s not like you have room to talk. You’re wearing Gerard’s jacket, for fuck’s sake. And even if I did mean that do you really think that I would-”
“Whatever,” Patrick snaps, raising his hand to silence Pete. He stands on shaky legs, ignoring the way he wants to start a fight with the man seated below him. “I’m going back to sleep. You should, too, if you want to look all pretty for Mikey tomorrow.”

He doesn’t stay to listen to whatever else Pete has to say, staggering back towards Joe. He bends down, yanking the blanket off the ground and moving a safe distance away. He doesn’t want to be by anybody. He doesn’t want his lonely and catastrophic life to affect anybody else.

As he lies down in an open area of the clearing, aware of Pete’s eyes on him, he can’t help but hate the dying feeling in his chest. He had expected a rejection, hadn’t he? Well, yes. He just hadn’t expected it to be so…harsh.

Of all the people Pete had ever dated, Mikey was the one that made Patrick the most jealous, the most insecure. Mikey was perfect in everything he did and he was even more perfect for Pete. He was beautiful to look at and a wonderful musician. He was as big a nerd as Pete and had a smile to die for. Patrick had mentioned all of this to Pete once they had gotten back together but Pete had brushed it aside. He had said that Patrick was so much better. Patrick never really believed him, though. Who could love him if they could have the world?

Patrick has no more tears to cry but he still feels the need to scream. The more he thinks about it, the more embarrassed he becomes. Did he really expect for this to play out like a romance movie where he could blushingly admit his feelings and fall into Pete’s arms once again? Did he really expect that Pete could ever love him back?

Patrick shuts his eyes and bites his lip, chewing on it painfully.

His life isn’t a romance.

It’s a fucking tragedy and it’s about time that he follow the script.

Pete doesn’t sleep for the rest of the night- or early morning- keeping his eyes open as the sky shifts from baby blue to a deep azure, as if it’s filling with tears.

He plays Patrick’s words through his head for the thousandth time, trying to figure out what went wrong. He’d been paying attention to Patrick only halfway for the first part, simultaneously soothed and confused by his sudden gentleness. He hadn’t thought too much of the words, tuning those out the second Patrick had forgiven him. That was all he needed to hear, right?

But then Patrick had continued and Pete had caught snippets of phrases as his mind wandered.

*Dating*

*My fault*

*I loved you*

*You were never my best friend*

*Too soon*

They were like the lyrics of a song that they would never write.

Part of him had wanted to believe that Patrick was trying to be kind, to extend a hand in friendship.
The darker and more vindictive part of Pete’s brain laughed at that idea. Why did he need to be kind to Pete or make him a friend? Didn’t he have Joe and Gerard for that?

Jealousy, Pete’s found, is an ugly thing.

Pete tells himself that he was in the right, that Patrick wasn’t saying anything too important anyway. He was on the edge of an emotional breakdown and reminiscing on better times. Pete’s had his fair share of those moments.

But

But that would be easier to believe if Patrick hadn’t begun to say that phrase. If he hadn’t recited the lines they created together.

“We’re not dead yet, Pete. And fore-”

Pete had cut him off. But he’s pretty sure he knows where that sentence was going.

To be fair, Pete hadn’t been paying attention. He hadn’t even realized that Patrick had said that until everyone was awake and Patrick was being guarded by Joe and Gerard, one on each side. Andy helps collect blankets and empty cans, creating a pile in the center of the clearing for some odd reason. Pete supposes he could stand and help but he’s too caught up in his thoughts.

For the better part of his ruminations, he had assumed that Patrick had been being bratty as he stalked off and spat harshly about Mikey. Isn’t that what he always assumes whenever something between them goes wrong? That it's Patrick’s fault?

Pete’s beginning to realize with no small amount of guilt that, this time, he’s the only one to blame. Patrick had, Pete hopes, been basically confessing his love to him. And Pete had shut him down by mentioning the one person who made Patrick the most self-conscious. Pete kinda hates himself for it.

He doesn’t understand why but Patrick has always seemed intimidated by Mikey. He once asked Pete why he would choose Patrick if he could so easily have someone so pretty and smart and perfect- someone like Mikey. Pete’s only answer was to ask Patrick a question in return- why wouldn’t he choose him?

Looking upon Patrick now, Pete feels that he would answer in the exact same way. From across the field, he watches as Patrick smiles with Gerard and tries to have him take his jacket back. His laughter, more hesitant than it has ever been, carries across the area like Pete has earbuds plugged into Patrick’s voice. He seems so calm and at peace but Pete can still vividly picture the hurt that had been in his eyes when Pete had so callously spoken about his hook.

He had hoped that the hurt Patrick had displayed would be fleeting but those hopes are dashed when he sees Patrick covering the hook with his hand as if he can hide it. Despite his laughter and smiles, Patrick still hurts.

Pete stands, swaying as feeling returns to his legs. He has to make things right. Jealousy sinks its teeth into his heart when he sees Gerard ruffling up Patrick’s hair but, Pete knows, it wasn’t Gerard that Patrick was trying to confess to this morning. That has to count for something.

He wonders if Patrick will believe him, though, if he were to say everything he’s feeling. If he’ll believe him when he says that none of this is his fault and that the torture and hook will never make him any less perfect in Pete’s eyes. He wonders if Patrick will agree when Pete finishes what Patrick started, smiling as he says that forever hasn’t ended.
He had thought that his need to apologize and makes things right had ended the second he had seen Patrick curled up next to Joe. Now, though, it only feels as if it had intensified.

If he had just woken Patrick up then and been the first to confess, they wouldn’t be in this mess. That could be him making Patrick laugh, not Joe. That should be him carefully removing Patrick’s hand from his hook, not Gerard.

Pete can’t let another chance slip through his fingers just because he’s petty and jealous. He needs to apologize to Patrick for ignoring his confession and, more than that, he needs Patrick to know that Pete feels the same.

Once Pete makes it to Patrick’s side, though, Gerard’s already interrupting.

“Alright, guys,” he shouts, gesturing for Andy to join them. “The others are at an abandoned hospital not too far away. I’ll take you and, once we get there, you should be safe.”

As the group follows Gerard, Pete means to confront Patrick. He really does. But something keeps coming up, like the fear that he’s misunderstanding what Patrick meant. When he finally works up the courage to walk by Patrick’s side, ten minutes have passed and they’re out of the forest. They stumble along the side of a road and Pete hopes that no cars drive by. With everything they’ve been through, he wouldn’t blame people for calling the police.

“It’s great that Gerard found us.” Pete starts up a conversation with Patrick, hoping to ease him into the deeper details and to gauge if he’s still angry. With how light-hearted he had seemed earlier, Pete expects that he’s not.

“Yeah,” Patrick snaps, eyes instantly darkening as he looks over to Pete. “I’m sure you’re real excited to see Mikey.”

Ok. So he’s still mad. But he’s also responding and Pete can work with that.

“Look,” Pete says after a moment has passed. Patrick flinches at the sudden sound and Pete tries not to be too hurt by it. “I know you said you forgive me but I still feel like I need to apologize. What I said about…What I said in the van was fucked up and you don’t deserve that. I- I don’t know how much it means to you but I didn’t really mean it. I could never mean something so cruel.”

Patrick’s gaze turns away and he sighs, a horrible sign.

“You don’t need to apologize,” he says dejectedly. “It’s true. I-I’m a monster now. A real freak. Nothing any of us say can change that, no matter how much we want to believe otherwise.”

Pete catches Patrick staring down at the hook, twisting it so the light glints off the metal in different ways. He doesn’t seem sad or repulsed when he sees it anymore, just resigned.

It breaks Pete’s heart.

“You can’t think like that, Trick!” Pete quickly disputes, the nickname falling out of his lips in full sincerity. “You’re more than the hook. You’re Patrick Stump and you’re one of the most beautiful people I’ve ever had the luck of meeting. Nothing can change who you are, Trick. And what you are is perfect.”

It’s as good a speech as any and Pete expects to see a blush on Patrick’s cheeks. When he looks over, however, all he sees is a deep frown.

“But that’s not all,” Patrick says in a quiet voice. “The hook…You don’t know what else they did to
me….”

He trails off as if there should be more and Pete’s tempted to ask him about it, to question what could be worse than the hook. But then Patrick’s suddenly angry again, a flare of rage lighting up his eyes.

“Anyway, I got the message loud and clear earlier. You don’t need to keep hanging on me. I want to be left alone.”

Patrick rushes ahead, jogging to stand by Gerard. Pete quickens his own steps, meaning to follow, but a hand on his arm stops him.

“I told you to leave him alone,” Andy says when Pete turns back to face him. The drummer moves to Pete’s side, fixing Pete with a motherly glare. “Give him some time. He’s not in a good place right now.”

“Yeah, you said so last night,” Pete snaps, folding his arms across his chest childishly. He watches Patrick with a longing gaze, angry at Andy for putting an end to his attempt to confess his love. He immediately starts making more plans, deciding that his third chance will just have to occur at the hospital. Maybe if he can prove to Patrick that he’s over Mikey then Patrick will be more inclined to listen. “But he doesn’t seem any worse than when we were in the van together. I don’t see what you’re talking about.”

Andy chews on his lip for a long moment, clearly debating over whether he should speak or not. When he sighs, Pete smirks.

“I didn’t want to tell you because it’s intrusive and not something you really needed to know,” Andy says, immediately catching Pete’s attention. “But, last night, I found Patrick sobbing in the woods. He- He was trying to pull out his hook.”

“ What? ” Pete shouts, slapping a hand over his mouth when Patrick looks back with frightened eyes. Andy rolls his eyes but nods when Pete looks over to him.

Horror fills Pete’s mind.

Did...Patrick didn’t do that because of what Pete said, did he? Pete had seen how agonizing it was to have the hook shoved in and he could only imagine that yanking it out would be just as bad, if not worse. Why would Patrick be willing to put himself through that much pain? Did Pete’s words really affect him that much?

Pete suddenly feels sick, guilt physically impacting him. He falls silent, unable to speak.

He doesn’t deserve to love Patrick and, for the first time, he hopes that Patrick had been doing anything other than confessing his love to him that morning.

They arrive at the hospital shortly after that, Gerard pointing it out with a discouraging sigh. No one in the group takes notice, simply smiling and high-fiving each other in relief. Even Patrick looks back at Pete with a fond expression and sighs happily. It’s enough to make the guilt in Pete’s gut grow.

The closer they draw to the building, though, the more wrong it seems to be. It’s more than abandoned- it’s deserted. No noises travel from the inside out and no one rushes outside to meet them. Gerard’s bandmates couldn’t be that wounded, could they?

Patrick, too, seems to sense these things and turns to Gerard with a faltering smile. “Where’s everyone else?”
Gerard looks at Patrick with sad eyes and Pete feels his stomach drop.

“I’m sorry,” Gerard says, confirming every fear Pete had had leading up to this moment. “But I haven’t been entirely honest.”

Andy and Joe slowly back away from Gerard, their eyes on the gun attached to his hip. Patrick’s the only one who stays close, eyebrows furrowing together. Pete wants nothing more than to grab him and tell him to run but he’s frozen in fear and betrayal. There’s no way this can end well for anyone.

“I...I don’t understand,” Patrick admits, the smile sliding from his face. Gerard shoves his hands into his pockets, looking at anywhere that isn’t Patrick’s eyes.

“I didn’t lie about all of it. My band was captured and we were tortured for weeks. But, when they let us go, it wasn’t all of us. Mikey and Ray made it out okay and, last I heard, they’re in another hospital a few states away. But I received the least of the torture so they kept me. They chose me to do this.” Gerard’s hands leave his pocket, a phone held tightly in one of them. Pete doesn’t understand its importance but Patrick clearly does, terror filling his eyes as he gasps.

“What do you mean?” Patrick asks, warily backing away. Gerard has tears in his eyes when he finally looks to Patrick.

“The same thing they chose you for, Patrick. To be a weapon. To be a traitor.”

Patrick stiffens at the accusations and Pete’s insides grow cold. Everyone seems to be looking at Patrick now, disbelief crossing their features as they distance themselves. Pete hears Patrick begging for Gerard to stop, to put the phone away, but he can only focus on the fact that Gerard called Patrick a traitor. He hates that he has to think about that sentence. He hates that Gerard is trying to make them believe that Patrick would ever turn on them.

And, as Pete prepares to run, he hates that he’s even considering the possibility.

But it all makes sense! Why else would Patrick have suddenly become so kind? Why else would he try to tell Pete he loves him? Why else would he try to tear out that hook if not because he knew what it would be used for later?

“Patrick, what does he mean?” Pete’s not aware that’s spoken until Patrick looks at him, eyes wide and fearful. He doesn’t answer and it only causes Pete’s dread to multiply.

Patrick seems horrified as he turns back to face Gerard, bending as if his knees are going to give out. He gasps out another plea but Gerard shakes his head.

“I’m sorry, Patrick,” he says, tears flowing freely down his face now. “But they have Frankie.”

Gerard presses a button on his phone and soft piano music begins to play, too soft and delicate for the storm brewing in Pete’s mind. Patrick screams, grasping at his head and tugging at his hair, stumbling forward in obvious pain. Pete doesn’t understand what’s going on but he wants to believe that Patrick’s not in control. If Patrick is a traitor then it’s not his fault. And, if that’s so, Pete will do anything to prevent it.

Patrick tries to cover his ears but Pete rushes forward and grasps his arms, terrified that Patrick will cut himself with the hook. Patrick cries out in despair, wordless and heartbreaking. Pete physically aches at the sound.

“Patrick, Patrick, Patrick,” he says like a mantra. He doesn’t know how to fix this- he doesn’t even know what’s wrong. Patrick meets his eyes and, in the distance, Gerard turns the music up. Pete
watches as Andy and Joe move to take the phone from him but Gerard pulls out his gun, threatening them without a word. Patrick’s screams grow louder by the second.

Patrick yanks away but his eyes are still on Pete. Pete wants nothing more than to cradle him to his chest, to tell him that it will be okay. But he knows that no one will believe him.

“One or two?” Pete asks, habit forcing the words out of his throat. Patrick shakes his head. “Patrick! One or two?”

He doesn’t know why he’s asking. Maybe it’s for hope that it’s not as bad as it seems. Maybe it’s just for a bit of normalcy.

Patrick looks at him and blinks quickly, tears streaming down his face. A final time, Gerard turns up the volume and Patrick screams louder than before, eyes slamming shut.

It’s not a blink until Patrick opens them, Pete thinks. It’s not two until he sees his eyes again.

Time seems to stop until it’s only him and Patrick, Pete begging that everything will be okay and Patrick fighting off something Pete can’t see.

*You don’t know what else they did to me…*

Patrick blinks a second time. And when he opens his eyes, they burn gold.

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Chapter End Notes

Did you know that there was a fire drill when I was typing this chapter out? And I had to wait outside for maybe half an hour as the entire dorm building evacuated? It sucked and it was cold.

Also, fun fact, this chapter is ~3000 words more than the average. That's gotta make up for a bit of the tardiness, right?

I sound really unenthused right now but that's only because I'm at that point of tired where my hand-eye coordination sucks and my fingers won't type the freaking keys I need in order to sound literate and I spend like five minutes on a sentence just to go back and correct all of it. SO I'm just gonna skip to the end:

THANK YOU FOR READING!!! IT MEANS SO MUCH YOU HAVE NO IDEA!!! PLEASE CONTINUE TO DO SO AND, HEY, COMMENT IF YOU FEEL SO INCLINED. THANKS AGAIN! HAVE A GREAT DAY!
My Old Friends Become (E R R O R)

Chapter Summary

Mistakes have been made....

Chapter Notes

Yo! This is kinda late (by a half hour or so) but blame my sister. It's her birthday tomorrow so she came up to stay the night with me :)

Chapter Playlist:
- "Let It Burn" by Red
- "Animal I Have Become" by Three Days Grace
- "The Kill" by Thirty Seconds To Mars
- "Where Did The Party Go" by Fall Out Boy :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

My Old Friends Become (E R R O R)

It doesn’t happen all at once the way it did before. It doesn’t slam into him with the intensity of a fist colliding with a wall. It doesn’t wash over and drown him like a wave.

It’s worse than that.

When his vision goes yellow and his muscles relax, Patrick feels like water beginning to boil. It starts soft, warming up to a greater danger. Heat rushes throughout his body and meets in his mind. It presses against his skull and consumes his every thought.

_I hate them I hate this I hate him I hate everything_

He has every excuse to allow his rage to take control. The need to be the perfect polite Patrick they expect is gone.

The feeling turns into fury as a more rational part of his brain fights back. He remembers how Sam commanded him and how he had no choice but to be his puppet. He knows that this isn’t freedom and he turns his hateful gaze on Gerard.

He opens his mouth; he tries to speak. Patrick wants to shout that he should have killed Gerard when he had the chance. He wants to repeat those actions from before, to see if Gerard’s blood is as red as his hair.

_I trusted you_, he wants to say, _I told them that I trusted you and you made me look like a fool._

But Patrick can’t say these things because Gerard’s the one holding the music. He’s the one pointing
at Pete and Andy and Joe. He’s the one now saying, “Patrick. I command you to kill them.”

Patrick’s head snaps to the side, following where Gerard is pointing.

He locks eyes with Pete. And the last of his reason fades away.

The mess in his mind expands to his entire being and the sensation from last night returns. The air around him feels electric and every breath he takes is buzzing with static. He doesn’t want to fight this feeling down. Why should he? For the first time, he knows he has the power to protect himself. No longer does he need to cower behind those who will eventually hurt him. Now, he has the power to hurt back.

Everyone here is looking at him like a monster, like someone to be feared.

Good.

Patrick’s breathing becomes heavy as Gerard repeats his command, his voice sounding muffled to Patrick’s ears. Patrick nods jerkily, raising his hook as the taste of blood fills his mouth.

Pete begins to back away and his eyes flit down to gaze at the weapon that Patrick is wielding. Patrick follows his eyes and twists his head to the side as he looks upon his own hook.

The light glints off of his hook in a fascinating way, distorting the yellow light his eyes receive. It’s a twisted form of beauty, like the double suicide of star-crossed lovers. It’s terrible, it’s evil….. It’s wonderful.

Patrick knows that they think of him as a monster now and he knows that it’s how he appears. But this hook- now he can see its appeal. Maybe this is what he is meant to be. Maybe this is the only way for him to be beautiful.

Patrick hears Pete calling out his name and the sound of his voice makes him sick. Who is Pete to mimic such concern? Oh, so now he wants to pretend to care for Patrick? Now he wants to make things right?

“That fucking hook on your hand”

“You’re not important enough”

“Doesn’t anything matter to you?”

Patrick won’t ever forget what Pete’s said to him. He’ll never forget the pain he’s felt at Pete’s words. And now Pete wants to act as if none of it matters?

“I mean, does anyone really believe I’d ever let myself fall in love with someone like Patrick?”

Yeah, right.

Patrick walks towards Pete, control in his every action. His mind screams at him to not draw things out, to just rush forward and sink his hook into his chest. He wants to throw himself against Pete and press down on his throat until his breathing stops forever.

But, for as much as he claimed that Pete was the drama queen, Patrick was the sucker for dramatics.

Andy and Joe stumble away as Patrick stalks forward, his breaths the only sound he hears. He half expects Pete to pull back when he gets close but, for some reason, Pete only steps closer.
Their breaths intermingle between them and Pete widens his eyes. He’s close, so close. He leans forward, a fatal mistake.

He’s close enough to kiss; he’s close enough to kill.

“Patrick, this isn’t you. It’s not your fault,” he says. As if Patrick even cares about that now.

He places a hand on Pete’s shoulder and the entire trio flinches. Patrick glares at each of them in turn. Do they want a monster? Fine.

He raises his hook high in the air but Pete’s eyes never leave Patrick’s.

A moment passes. And then Patrick smirks. “It’s not my fault. It’s yours.”

And the hook comes falling down.

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It happens all at once but Pete only sees it in pieces.

Patrick coming closer, that golden light illuminating his eyes. Andy suggesting that they run. Joe trying to calm Patrick down. Gerard slipping away in the background.

Pete sees all of them but he only has eyes for one.

“Patrick,” he says, swallowing as his mouth suddenly goes dry. “This isn’t you. It’s not your fault.”

He doesn’t know why he says this only that he feels that he’d want to hear those words if he were in Patrick’s place.

Because that wasn’t Patrick gazing at his hook with a strange fondness and it isn’t Patrick standing before him now. This…This creature taking control of his best friend’s mind warps Patrick’s smile into something sharp. It replaces his eyes with those of a predator, reminiscent of a snake staring down the mouse it’s about to kill. It causes his grip to be so much tighter, so much crueler, when it lands on Pete’s shoulder. This isn’t Patrick. It can’t be.

“It’s not my fault. It’s yours.”

But, fuck, Pete can’t deny that that’s Patrick’s voice.

The hook flies down, aimed for Pete’s throat. Pete doesn’t remember how to run. He doesn’t remember how to cry. All he knows is the pure hatred in Patrick’s eyes.

“RUN!”

Andy yanks at Pete’s arm with a vicious scream and pulls him out of the way. Pete only has time to see Patrick’s hook fall through the air, throwing him off balance. Joe runs behind him, pushing him along.

There’s nowhere to go but into the hospital and Pete despises how much it feels like a trap. A part of his mind wants to go back to Patrick. It tries convincing him that Patrick can be saved. But, right now, his body doesn’t agree as he continues to run for his life.

Andy and Joe run alongside him as they race down the halls. The building’s large and definitely abandoned- Gerard hadn’t been lying about that. The lights are useless, flickering like a sporadic pulse, and the corridors are better described as a maze. Déjà vu tears through Pete’s mind and, for a
moment, he almost feels Bebe’s blood still dripping down his arms. He can almost hear Patrick’s screams.

“Split up?” Andy suggests. Farther back, Pete hears the sound of the front door being slammed open. He can hear Patrick’s footsteps chasing after them.

Joe seems about to agree with Andy and panic shoots into Pete’s bones. As cowardly as he feels, he’s terrified to be left alone.

“No,” he demands, voice harsh. Andy looks to him, panting. He opens his mouth, an objection on the way. Pete merely shakes his head again. “I said no.”

Andy’s mouth shuts into a thin line and he begins to run quicker.

“Fine,” he says after they’ve turned another corner. “Follow me.”

Joe and Pete share a look of confusion but follow Andy anyway. He darts down the hall, circling back the way they came. There’s no sign of Patrick anywhere, not even a speck of dust out of place. Pete folds his hands into fists from frustration.

Eventually, Andy throws open a door and rushes down the steep staircase inside. Pete and Joe don’t hesitate to follow.

The basement is even darker than the other floors, the lights dim and ineffective. Pete stops running, blinking as his vision disappears. He can still hear Andy in front of him, pacing around and sliding his hands across the walls. The sound of a door forcing open causes Pete to jump and a sudden light floods out of the storage closet Andy had broken into.

The three are silent as they pile inside, slamming the door shut behind them. It feels like the wrong place to be in, everything a clean white color that only promises good things. Pete slides to the ground against the wall, all too aware of how the dried blood on his clothing leaves a trail on the way down. Joe sits beside him, eyes downcast as they finally receive the chance to catch their breath.

Andy’s the only one moving, dragging carts of medical supplies in front of the door. It’s a bit much, Pete thinks. Do they really need that much protection from Patrick? He doesn’t know whether to cry or laugh.

The sound of Patrick screaming, floors above them, decides for him.

Pete shivers at the sound, goosebumps appearing on his arms. Patrick storms about, wrecking and tearing his beautiful voice as he shrieks and screams in anger and pain. Pete feels as if this room is just the eye of the storm. Sure, it’s safe. But he can still witness the damage just outside it and, once he leaves, the storm will consume him whole.

Patrick screams again. It’s nothing like what Pete had heard when he had found Patrick strapped to that chair with wires connected to his head. Then, Patrick had merely been hurt on a physical level. He’d sounded like anyone would if they’d had a hook shoved into their wrist. This one’s different. This scream comes from somewhere in Patrick’s soul, scooping up and throwing out every emotion he’s ever felt. Pain, betrayal, loss, heartbreak, **hate**

Pete can’t stop thinking about the venom in Patrick’s eyes as he had gazed upon Pete. He can’t stop thinking about the acid in his words or how genuinely he seemed to mean them. He can’t stop thinking about the fact that Patrick tried to kill him.

He’s especially stuck on that last part.
Patrick tried to kill him.

“What the fuck did they do to our Patrick?” Joe’s voice is small; his words are lost. Pete knows that, like him, he’s totally freaking out. For a moment, Pete wishes that he could be like Andy, currently raiding the carts for any useful supplies. In a crisis, Andy can’t help but take charge. He becomes overly logical, emotions slipping away and making room for reason. It’s a useful trait. Pete and Joe, however, just panic.

Pete thinks about Joe’s question, wishing he had an answer. His first thought should be of the machine he had seen Patrick connected to. His first thought should be to defend them.

Instead, he thinks of Gerard’s words.

“The same thing they chose you for, Patrick. To be a weapon. To be a traitor.”

Traitor.

“Maybe he was never our Patrick.” Pete’s voice carries no emotion and he’s not entirely sure of what he’s saying. He just needs to fill the silence. He just needs to expel some of the thoughts darkening his mind. “Maybe he was a traitor like Gerard said.”

Pete knows he deserves the hard punch in the shoulder but that doesn’t mean that he expects it. He backs away from Joe with a high-pitched cry, hurt as he looks at the younger man. “What the fuck?”

“Oh, fuck you!” Joe snaps, eyes blazing. “Patrick would never do that. You saw him try to fight it!”

Directly above them, they hear glass shatter. It’s quickly followed by Patrick calling out their names. Pete winces.

“Yeah, really seems like he’s trying.” Pete expects Joe to hit him again or to at least continue fighting. Instead, he merely shuts his eyes and shakes his head.

“Patrick would- He would never,” he mutters, so softly Pete’s certain it wasn’t meant for him to hear. He looks away.

Andy walks over with his arms full of bandages and bottles of hydrogen peroxide. He drops it at their feet, offering a small hopeful smile.

“It’s not much but we can at least try to mend our physical wounds,” he says, bending down to sit in front of them. “The bandages look clean, at least. I don’t know how long the peroxide’s been here, though. I know it’s good for at least three years and, even if it did expire, it just becomes ineffective. It wouldn’t be harmful so it seems worth a shot.”

He’s too calm, too normal. Pete doesn’t understand but he picks up a bottle anyway. “Thanks.”

Hydrogen Peroxide. That stuff fucking stings. Being stupidly reckless all the time made sure Pete was aware of that. He looks down at his wounds and then back to the container. How much would it hurt to pour it over his entire body, to let it soak into his cuts and burn away the bacteria beginning to grow there? If it could seep into his oversaturated heart and heal those wounds, if it could eat away at the flaws rooted in his soul, would that hurt worse? Would that hurt more than having his hand cut off? Would it hurt more than having his heart cut out by a hook? Pete tosses the bottle to the side and decides to bandage himself up without it.

Joe stands with Andy’s help, complaining about the gash on the side of his leg. With the adrenaline wearing off, he limps as he walks across the room, grimacing as he does so. Andy keeps a light grip
on his arm, offering to loosen the bandage if it’s too tight. Joe waves off his offer, claiming he just needs to walk it off. Grudgingly, Andy complies.

Pete glances around the room again, sighing when he sees what a mess it’s become in the few moments that they’ve been here. Andy’s rummaging had left a mess of objects by the carts and Joe only knocks more things over as he stumbles for balance. Pete looks at his shoes, shuffling his feet to see the dirt that comes loose. When even that becomes boring- and when he finds himself thinking of Patrick again- he looks up.

His eyes land on the phone in the corner.

“Hey,” he says, more energy in his voice than before. “There’s a phone! If we hook it up right then I’m sure we can call for help.”

Both Joe and Andy frown.

“I don’t know if I feel comfortable dragging more people into this,” Andy says, folding his arms across his chest. Pete stands, rolling his eyes.

“Well, obviously,” he responds. “We don’t need to call any of our friends. I was thinking more along the lines of the police.”

“Absolutely not.” Joe’s response is immediate. “If the police show up, who’s to say they’ll even believe us? ‘We got caught by a cult that brainwashed our friend’. Speaking of which, they’d probably take Patrick away first chance they got if he’s still acting like this when they arrive.”

“But,” Pete says, walking over towards Joe. “Would that necessarily be a bad thing?”

Joe’s eyes narrow. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, would it really be so bad if it meant that we got help and were safe?” Pete runs his hands through his hair, a shaky sigh leaving his lips. “We don’t know how permanent this...this thing with Patrick is. What if doesn’t wear off? Do you really want to be trapped down here until he runs out of energy or, worse, if he finds us? Look, I’m not saying we throw him to the wolves, I’m just saying that maybe it’s already too late.”

It makes sense in Pete’s mind, even if his own words make him nauseous. He begins to look to Andy for backup but stops when he notices Joe storming forward.

“Do you even realize how heartless you sound right now?” Joe shouts, hands on his hips. He leans forward with a scowl, the pain in his leg momentarily forgotten. “Look, you may be willing to give up on Patrick but I sure as hell won’t. You’re fucked up, you know that, right? I thought that Patrick was supposed to be your best friend! Your- Fuck, you once called him your fucking soulmate! Did you ever mean any of that? Did you ever really fucking care?”

Pete’s blood heats up like a match being struck. What right does Joe have to say any of this? What right has he to accuse Pete of never caring? Because Pete cares. He probably cares a little too much.

“Shut up, Trohman,” Pete spits, getting in his face. “You don’t know shit about my feelings for Patrick.”

“Really?” Joe retorts, raising an eyebrow condescendingly. “And do you know anything about them?”

“Of course!” Pete roars, eyes wild and hands in fists. Everything from the past few days builds up in
his chest, bubbling to the top with a furious intent. He just can’t take it anymore. “I know because I fucking love him!”

Silence falls, except for the sound of Patrick above them. Pete’s breathing is heavy and he steps back as he registers what he said. There’s no regret, though, only certainty.

Those words, he realizes, are the truest things he’s said since the hiatus began.

“I love him,” Pete says, voice quieter but no less intense. “I love Patrick and I would give anything for him to be okay. If I could take his place, I would. If I could go back and stop all this from happening, I’d do it in a heartbeat. I’d move fucking continents for that kid so don’t you ever tell me I don’t care about him. I care about him more than I’ve cared about anything and it kills me that there’s nothing I can do. Fuck, it kills me knowing that the man I love is in pain and all I can do is sit here and wait.”

Pete expects another silence, perhaps even some encouragement or reassurance that it’s okay to be in love with Patrick after everything he’s done to mess up their relationship. Instead, he gets Joe folding his arms across his chest.

“You love him?” Joe asks. “Then prove it.”

If this were a movie or a fairy tale, then Pete would know what to do. He’d know to look Joe in the eye and see more than the anger- he’d see the desperation for Pete to mean exactly what he says. He’d know to look to Andy just in time to see him shrug in a way that is more than just neutral. He’d know to run upstairs to Patrick. He’d know that he’s the only one who can save him.

But this is life and all Pete does is blink and back away.

“I-I don’t-” He begins, though he knows exactly what Joe means. Joe scoffs.

“That’s what I thought,” he spits. A moment passes and Joe’s gaze flicks from Andy and Pete, both standing passively as Patrick rages above them. Finally, Joe lifts his chin and throws his shoulders back. “If no one else will help Patrick then I will.”

No one expects Joe to run out of the room so fast, tossing the carts to the side and throwing the door open. Andy lurches after him, calling his name.

“Joseph Trohman, get back here!” He shouts, standing in the doorway and glowering in the direction Joe had disappeared to. He makes to run after him but, first, he looks to Pete.

There’s meaning in those eyes and Pete just feels so lost.

“I’m going to go fix this,” Andy says. “And you’re going to call the police.”

Pete swallows and makes his way to the phone.

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Patrick’s vision is the sick yellow shade of sulfur. Everything else is nothing but the inner works of violence. Anger and misery dig their dirty claws into Patrick’s mind, ripping it apart until there’s nothing worth saving. He screams out his frustration, slamming his fist painfully into the wall. He can barely think.

His outbursts have no words- they’re only meant to express his pain to anyone who will listen. He wants someone to draw close, a warm body pressed against his. He needs to feel their bones
shattering beneath him. He needs to feel their breath drain away.

The feeling to kill, destroy, demolish, to wreck the entire building around him is suffocating. It’s more than a desire; it’s a physical need. It itches at his skin and pulls at his hair, poking holes in his lungs and filling his mouth with blood. Energy and electricity take the place of his pulse, burning through him with each dreaded beat of his heart. He just knows that one drop of another’s blood will heal this ill. He knows it like he knows that everyone has neglected him.

Because he saw them run in here, screaming and fleeing from the animal he’s become. He heard their voices chattering away as doors slammed open and shut. He felt their terror; he tasted their fear.

So where the hell are they!?

_They’ve abandoned me_, he thinks to himself traitorously, _I haven’t done anything yet and they’ve abandoned me_.

He stomps his feet harder as he searches through the halls, his mouth twisting down in a distorted pout. Loneliness joins the terrible mixture of emotions filling up his head and he opens his mouth to let loose another cry. More than anything, he feels like a toddler throwing a fit. He feels like the kid locked in his room while all his friends play outside. It’s wrong. It’s unfair. It’s time to make things right. And, if making things right means that his friends will have to bruise and bleed then

So be it.

“Patrick.”

Patrick turns at the sound of his name, like a dog whose leash had been tugged. His entire body snaps around; his eyes narrow in on the source of the voice.

And he recognizes the curly-haired man at the end of the corridor.

Joe holds his hands up in surrender as Patrick stalks curiously forward. With each step, that curiosity becomes morbid satisfaction at the fact that he finally has a willing victim to kill.

“Patrick, stop,” Joe says and Patrick falters in his steps. There’s fear in Joe’s voice but not enough. Patrick’s steps slow. “This isn’t you, I know it. So please, please, calm down. Come back.”

Patrick hates that Joe’s implying that he could never be like this. He could never be this strong, this confident, this powerful, this unafraid. Everyone wants him to become docile Patrick again. Everyone wants him weak and soft and so easily hurt. Everybody wants him to be broken and he figures that it’s his turn to break somebody else for a change.

“I-I’m not afraid, Patrick,” Joe lies. “I know that you think we are but...but I’m not. I trust in you.”

Even though he knows it’s a lie, the fact that it’s so easy to brush away the idea that he could truly be a threat stings. It more than stings. It settles into his soul and burns away at any pity he could possibly feel, replacing his heart with a burning coal. How dare they treat him like a child? How dare they try to placate him like a dog?

In an instant, Joe is pressed against the wall, Patrick’s forearm pressed against his throat. He places pressure on Joe’s neck, sneering as he leans forward.

“You shouldn’t ever trust someone like me,” he hisses, restricting Joe’s air intake as he forces him closer to the wall. Joe’s eyes widen in terror and Patrick feels a surge of power. “Are you scared now?”
“Of you? Never.”

Patrick growls and pulls back only to push forward with a greater strength. He feels insulted by Joe’s words, certain that he’s mocking the thought of Patrick ever having any sort of malice or dominance in his being. Joe gasps for air and Patrick begins to smile. Everything stops, though, when Joe speaks.

“Patrick. Patrick, I have to tell you,” he gasps, voice barely audible as he pulls on Patrick’s arm. “He said he loves you, Patrick. Patrick, Pete says he loves you.”

It clearly doesn’t have the desired effect.

“Liar!” Patrick screeches, tossing Joe to the floor. Before Joe can stand, Patrick’s on him, pinning him down and reaching for the cord in the corner. Joe’s eyes widen and he continues to repeat his claim, each time with more surety. Patrick lifts him by the front of his shirt and slams him back down onto the ground, Joe’s head bouncing painfully off the linoleum floor. His eyes cross and he groans as Patrick does it one more time. “Pete could never love someone like me!”

“No, no, you’re wrong.” Joe assures him, speaking in a quick and panicked voice as Patrick’s hand moves to his throat. The cord from before tangles around Patrick’s hook, an inviting idea entering his mind as he looks from it to Joe. “I promise, I would never lie about something like this. Pete loves you, Patrick. I swear it on my life.”

Patrick pauses at the insistence of Joe’s tone. It’s more than a man making desperate claims for his life and it’s less than Patrick’s wildest dreams. Could it be that this is real? Is Joe telling the truth? The thought that these words are honest causes the yellow filter over his eyes to flicker in doubt.

“He-He can’t,” Patrick urges, insecurity lining his words as he backs away from Joe. “He...He wouldn’t and-”

“But he does.” Joe smiles. “Stop doubting yourself, Patrick. Anyone could fall head over heels for you and, it seems, Pete has. He loves you. He still loves you.”

Patrick smiles, a strange feeling after so much rage. The yellow lighting is still there but he fantasizes that maybe it will go away. Maybe life can be a romance, a fairy tale. Maybe all he needs is true love’s kiss and happily ever after will follow. Maybe this can all end here with no one else getting hurt.

“Joe? Joe? Where are y- Patrick?”

Pete’s voice fills the corridor, louder than the angry thoughts trying to reclaim Patrick’s mind. Something’s off about his tone but all Patrick can think of is if there’s a happy ending waiting just around the corner. He turns to look at Pete, his smile widening.

And then he sees Pete’s face.

It starts out terrified, eyes wide and mouth agape. His chest heaves with heavy breaths, his hands loose fists at his side. Patrick can work with panic. He can help reverse that.

But then those eyes narrow and fill with repulsion; his lips curl up into a deformed grimace. He takes a deep breath and tightens his fists. He looks upon Patrick with absolute hate.

“Get off of him,” he demands, eyes burning with a hostile fire. His voice rises to a yell when Patrick fails to respond. “I told you to let him go! I won’t let you hurt anyone else, you monster!”
“Pete, stop!” Joe shouts but it’s too late.

Hot tears burn at Patrick’s eyes and he chokes on his own delusions. Of course, Joe was only lying. Joe was just trying to save his skin and he did it in the cruelest way. He gave him hope and hope is a terrible thing. It eats into your body and makes a home in your heart. It’s a kind companion for its temporary stay. But when it leaves it rips free without care to the pain you feel. It leaves you empty and cold and bleeding every time you try to move. Just the thought of it makes Patrick feel as if his lungs have been cut open. And he wants someone else to feel the same.

“You lied to me!” He roars, turning back to Joe and tearing the cord free from his hook. Joe pushes and tries to fight him off but Patrick’s grown so much stronger from the pain of another heartbreak. How dare he let himself hope again? How dare he ever believe that Pete could care? How dare he think he deserves to be anything less than this creature of destruction?

The cord finds its way around Joe’s throat and Patrick tightens it with childlike delight. Joe flails and fights beneath him but Patrick barely feels a thing. It’s so easy to keep the other man in place, so easy to press his knees against his shoulders and feel the life slip away with each second.

More people come rushing at him, Pete and Andy tearing at his arms and tugging at his shirt. He can hear them begging him to stop, commanding that he pull away. He ignores them, too focused on the light fading from Joe’s eyes. He screams at him, calling him a liar and condemning him for ever giving Patrick that spark of hope. He tells Joe that he’s burning from the inside out and, to makes things fair, he hopes Joe burns in hell.

Joe’s hand raises weakly, brushing against Patrick’s wrist. It’s not an attempt to escape, not anymore. As he locks eyes with Patrick and forces a smile with pale lips, Patrick knows that it’s a sign of forgiveness. Joe’s hand falls at the same time that Patrick blinks and lets go of the cord. The second that he opens his eyes, a feeling like electrocution shoots through him.

Patrick screams, full color coming back to his sight, and his moment of weakness allows Pete and Andy to tear him away from Joe’s body. He hits the ground with a painful sound, groaning as his wounds protest with pain. He breathes like he’s been underwater for years. As the sensation of electricity pulsing through his veins begins to fade, he feels as if his heart restarts.

It stops just as fast when he hears the others desperately calling out Joe’s name.

“No,” Patrick breathes out, a feeling worse than horror taking root in his mind. He wants to scream. He wants to cry. He wants to wake up from this nightmare for once or, if not that, then to go to sleep and never wake up at all. “No.”

He shakes as he pushes himself to a sitting position, vision blurred with tears as he watches Andy and Pete attempt to shake Joe awake. They slide down Patrick’s cheeks, as silent as Joe’s nonexistent breaths. He knows that Joe won’t wake up or respond to their calls. He knows because he felt the very second that his life faded away.

There’s a hole in his chest as the scene replays through his mind and he can’t tell if it’s his heart or lungs that are missing. Pain extends from his chest and pulses in time with the flashes of memories that invade his mind.

Joe pinned against the wall and telling him that Pete still loves him.

Joe pressed against the ground with a hand around his throat.

Joe saying he’ll never be afraid of Patrick and claiming that this isn’t even Patrick at all.
Joe smiling at him even as Patrick did the unthinkable.

When Patrick’s vision clears and he’s rubbing away more tears before they fall, he catches sight of Andy and Pete. He sees how they’re looking at him.

Anguish. Dread. Shock. Hate. Nothing more than what Patrick deserves but definitely less than what he himself is feeling.

No apologies can fix this. No amount of time will change what’s been done. This war with the cult may someday end but, Patrick knows, no matter what, he’ll always be their monster.

Joe Trohman is gone and so is Patrick Stump

Chapter End Notes

DON'T HATE ME AT LEAST LET ME EXPLAIN PLEASE

First things first, I want you to know that I was stupidly close to changing my original plans because almost everybody was begging me to let Joe survive. Like, every comment mentioned him and I sat at my computer staring at my outline thinking "oh god what have i done"

Because you wanna know what mistake was made? When I wrote in Joe and Patrick being so damn close. The first time anyone ever commented about Joe on this fanfic, I literally shouted "oh no" because I just knew it was only gonna get worse

Ok but srsly I genuinely hope that this wasn't a dealbreaker for you. I honestly did try and think if there was any way to alter the plot to keep him alive because I felt so bad for you all but...there was no way to do it. Don't worry though! Like the actual YBC, he will show up again. I swear :)

Please comment and, please, keep reading? Have a nice day!
You Can Wear The Chains (But You're No Monster)

Chapter Summary

Responses only have three options: True, False, or None

Chapter Notes

Happy Soul Punk Day! Celebrate with some hiatus angst!

This was originally outlined to be only two scenes. But then my astronomy lab got cancelled and it gave me time to basically double the amount I already had and to flesh out the details I wanted to explore. Hope you guys enjoy!

Chapter Playlist:
- "Your Man" by Five For Fighting
- "Heaven Knows" by Five For Fighting
- "Comatose" by Skillet
- "Death Valley" by Fall Out Boy :

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You Can Wear The Chains (But You're No Monster)

For perhaps the first time in his life, Pete has run out of words to say. He doesn’t like the feeling. It gives him too much time and energy to focus on his memories. And those are the last things he wants to see right now.

But he knows better than most that you can never forget the past. Trying to do so only carves it deeper into your brain. So, instead of fighting them off, he tortures himself with the past few hours.

He doesn’t want to start by thinking about Patrick hovering over Joe, turning to him with what had to be a twisted smile. Though, of course, for a moment Pete had believed it could have been real. Even his memories paint it as the bright grin Patrick always used to wear whenever they saw each other. He immediately reasoned that it had be a trick. His eyes were still golden after all.

He doesn’t want to think about how he ripped that creature- and he refuses to call it Patrick because Patrick would never do this, this isn’t him- away from Joe’s body. He refuses to remember how he was the one to check Joe’s pulse. He was the one to unravel the cord from around his neck. He was the one who had to watch Andy’s expression shatter. He was the one to see Patrick’s tears- the one to hate and despise each drop as it slid down his blotched red cheeks. No. He refuses to think about any of this.
His mind skips forward a few scenes, glitching like a scratched CD as it rushes along to the safer parts. After Patrick’s eyes dulled back to blue and before they could decide what to do with him, the police had arrived outside. They’d run in with guns drawn, searching for the possessed being Pete had screeched about on the phone. He’d thought they’d get there sooner, that they’d prevent anyone from getting hurt. When a few of the officers had found them and escorted them outside in stunned silence- except for Patrick, who was crying and saying that he didn’t mean to- Pete had thought they’d all be questioned. He’d expected to be set up as witnesses that could condemn the cult that cursed them.

He didn’t once imagine that he’d see Patrick holding his arms out for their handcuffs, shamefaced as the cops gawked at his hook. Pete had watched, dumbfounded but numb, as Patrick bit his lip and let the police treat him like a criminal. Pete had watched as they’d forced him into the back of a squad car, restrained like a common crook. Patrick had stopped sobbing at that point but his face was no less tragic as Pete glanced at him before the door was shut. Eyes empty and mouth set in a tight line, Patrick looked like he was the one awaiting death. Pete could tell by the shake of his shoulders that he felt he deserved it.

Pete hated the part of himself that hated Patrick for feeling that way.

Now, he and Andy sit in the witness interview room, waiting to see if they’ll be joining Patrick behind bars or not.

The thought of Patrick in a cell makes Pete’s stomach turn.

Andy’s silent beside him, staring at his hands and taking even breaths. On the ride here, he’d asked Pete what their story’s going to be. Pete hadn’t had an answer. He still doesn’t.

If he were more forgiving, he’d think of a witty lie to get them all out in a matter of minutes. If he could forget the hate in Patrick’s eyes, he’d be able to save them all with just a few easy words.

But he’s not even sure if Patrick still exists.

Pete lets his head fall into his hands, taking shaky breaths. This is all his fault. If he had just confessed to Patrick sooner, maybe the singer wouldn’t have felt such a strong need to trust Gerard. If Pete had told Patrick that he loved him then maybe that rage would have never taken over. If he were braver and smarter and better then maybe he and Patrick could have defeated this together. Maybe forever would never end.

Maybe it wouldn’t feel as if the piece connecting them has died.

Tears sting in the corner of Pete’s eyes, too reluctant to fall. He presses his palms into them, wiping the wetness away. He refuses to cry. He refuses to feel so weak.

Still. His thoughts remind him that he lost his chance to ever confess his love to Patrick. He feels the tears threaten to return.

The door slams open and Pete jerks up, panic fading once he recognizes the police officer who had led them to this room.

The fear reignites when he hears Patrick screaming from down the hallway.

“What’s going on out there?” Pete demands, staring at the door. What if the cult’s back and they’re taking Patrick? What if the cops are hurting him? What if that...that thing is back in control?

Pete doesn’t know which scenario’s worse.
“I wouldn’t worry too much. That hook he has is considered a weapon, as well as evidence, so I imagine that they’re removing it,” the officer says, taking the seat in front of them. Pete relaxes but Andy leans forward, scowling.

“What? Shouldn’t you have a doctor or some other professional take it out? Do you know how much damage you can cause by pulling it out forcefully? How much pain?” Andy snaps before looking to Pete. “Pete, tell them to get a professional.”

Pete shrugs. “I don’t really think there are professionals for this kind of thing.”

Andy scoffs and looks away. Pete doesn’t blame him.

Another silence fills the room as the officer before them shuffles through some papers, taking notes and testing the ink of his pen. Pete pays little attention. Andy seethes beside him, tapping his fingers on the table with an eyebrow raised. Pete doesn’t understand how he can be harboring so much emotion. Pete just feels drained. Before, this had all just seemed to be a vivid nightmare like the ones he used to wake up screaming from on the bus. Now, it feels like punishment for daring to exist, for imagining that he could ever be happy. As with most punishments, Pete finds it easier to comply and wait for it to blow over before anyone can get caught in the crossfire. Well. Before anyone else can get caught in it, that is.

“Alright,” the policeman starts, forcing his papers into a neat pile. “I suppose I should just ask the obvious question. Was that or was that not Patrick Stump that we just arrested?”

Pete has no words to give, staring at his hands and wishing that he’d been the one caught by Patrick’s monstrous rage. But then the police officer clears his throat and Pete realizes that everyone else is looking to him.

He feels no desire to lie. In fact, he feels absolutely nothing at all. So he does the easiest thing and grants the most honest answer he can give.

“Was that Patrick Stump? I don’t know.”

The policeman frowns and waits for more. Pete doesn’t care. He drops his head to the desk, cushioning his fall with his arms. He doesn’t fool himself with the hope that he can fall asleep. But maybe he can fool everyone else.

Andy takes control of the questions after that, giving answers that are 95% truth. He sounds sincere and genuine even though 5% of his answers make it seem like none of this is Patrick’s or Pete’s fault. If he cared enough, Pete would have cut in by now to correct him. As it is, he can’t find it in him to care at all.

How can Andy sit here so calmly and answer questions with barely a tremor in his voice? How can he not blame Pete for failing to save Patrick or for getting to Joe too late? How can he not blame Patrick for giving in to the monster and for being the one to kill Joe? That blood is on Patrick’s hands, how can Andy not hate him?

How come Pete doesn’t hate him?

Pete delves into his thoughts, each memory slicing him open like jagged blades as he falls into his mind. Sure, pure anger and utter disgust were there when they discovered Joe was dead. Pete had wanted to lunge across the hall to Patrick, to shake and beat the demon out of him. He’d thought that he’d hated Patrick. He still thinks he has every right to.

He just doesn’t know if he’s physically capable of maintaining that kind of hatred. Especially against
Of course, this isn’t to say that he’s forgiven Patrick. Far from it. He still wants Patrick to pay for what he’s done. Pete used to have beliefs that the band could be brought back together once he and Patrick had resolved all their conflicts. In one action, Patrick had shattered every hope of that ever occurring. He had stepped into Pete’s dreams like a creature from a nightmare, burning down every vision of the future. Pete doesn’t know how he can ever look at Patrick again. He doesn’t know if he wants to.

“What about you, Mr. Wentz?”

Pete looks up, eyes tired, and glances at the cop with an eyebrow raised. Andy’s gone rigid beside him, arms folded across his chest. Pete sits up straight and meets the cop’s eyes.

“Sorry, what?” Pete asks, void of emotion. The policeman sighs but repeats his question.

“Your friend here seems to think that Mr. Stump is innocent. We need to know your thoughts on the situation before proceeding in the investigation,” the policeman says, eyes boring into Pete’s. “Now, know that there will be an investigation nonetheless but your answer will help us know whether to view Mr. Stump as an accomplice or a victim to these crimes. So answer honestly. Is Patrick Stump guilty?”

Is Patrick....

Pete doesn’t want to think about the implications of either answer. He looks at the wall and pretends to think when, really, he’s just letting his mind wander.

Is Patrick guilty?

He doesn’t know.

Pete does know that one time when he was younger, he had jumped off the roof of his house to see if he could fly. He’d prepared himself perfectly, grabbing an umbrella and bundling himself up in jackets to cushion the fall- should he fall, that is. He’d been so enamored with the idea of flight, so caught up in the idea of being Peter Pan, that he was certain that he wasn’t even Pete Wentz anymore. He was just a kid who wanted to disappear inside the stars.

No one had known about this because he knew that telling anybody of his plans would just get him in trouble. It would have been kept a secret had his neighbor not walked down the sidewalk right as he jumped.

Much to his surprise, he plummeted to the ground, crushing his mother’s small flower garden beneath him.

His neighbor- a kind elderly woman named Mary- had rushed over, fawning over him and checking his wounds. Pete had been fine and Mary had promised not to tell on him so long as he swore not to misbehave again. Even when Pete’s mother had asked Mary if she had any idea what had happened to her peonies and marigolds, Mary had refused to admit that Pete was guilty.

The next time Pete jumped off the roof, he broke his arm.

Pete doesn’t know why this story has a sudden resurgence in his mind, causing his already aching arm to throb in memory of the action, but he does know that there must be a reason.

He connects dots quickly, in the space between two breaths, and considers his answer. Of course he
doesn’t want to place the blame on Patrick. He wants nothing more than to protect the younger man, to hold him close and lie that everything will be okay. If nothing else, he wants to be his friend and a good friend wouldn’t send him off to jail.

But Pete can’t help but remember how Mary thought she was doing a good thing. Sure, she kept Pete from the wrath of his mother but it also condemned him to greater pain in the future. Had his mother just discovered the truth and made it so he could never try to fly again, then maybe he would have never broken his arm.

If Pete assures the police of Patrick’s guilt, then maybe Patrick will be saved the pain of hurting himself or anyone else. Maybe it will prevent the cult from getting their hands on him again.

Sure, Pete can save Patrick easily by confessing that he’s as much a victim as the rest. But what good will that do? It’ll save him from the shame and guilt of jail but, in the long run, will it have been worth it? Patrick may hate him if finds out that Pete condemned him but, unlike so many others, that’s a risk that Pete’s willing to make.

He licks his lips and prepares his words. If he’s going to condemn Patrick to being treated like a criminal, the least he could do is condemn him kindly. When he finally decides on what to say, Pete looks up.

And he catches sight of a familiar figure on the other side of the window.

Pete’s breath stills in his throat as Patrick shuffles down the hallway, eyes focused on the floor. Two police officers stand on either side of him, each holding onto him as if he’s actually a threat. Pete wants to look away, wants to just spit out that yes, he did it, he killed Joe, now keep him safe behind bars, please, keep him safe but he can’t.

He can’t.

Patrick looks so young and small in the shackles they’ve placed around his wrists. He’s out of place in the harsh lights above him and the cold faces around him. One police officer tugs on his arm, urging him to move faster. Patrick stumbles but tries to keep up. A hot flare of protectiveness ignites deep in Pete’s gut.

Even as he disappears around a corner, the image of Patrick—hurting and defeated—imprints on Pete’s brain. He can’t blink without seeing it.

But he killed Joe! He’s a monster now! He’s not Patrick! He did you wrong, he did everyone wrong! He-

“Sir,” the cop before them says, voice stern. “I asked you a question. Is Patrick guilty?”

The only thing Patrick’s ever done wrong is fall in love with me

Pete meets the officer’s eyes, ice on ice, and frowns.

“No.”

Time begins to move quicker once Pete’s answer fills the room. The policeman holds his gaze, eyes narrowed with disbelief. Pete raises an eyebrow, daring him to voice his doubts. As expected, he doesn’t.

“Alright then,” he says instead, resignation in every word. “You boys are free to go. We’ll call you back if there are any more questions. Stephanie’s arranged for you to get a rental car seeing as you
have no other way to get back to your homes. Just meet her at the front desk to fill out the required paperwork.”

It’s too anticlimactic in Pete’s mind. He wants this man to question his loyalty to Patrick. He needs another fire to start in front of him since he failed so badly from pulling Patrick free from the last one.

Still, he stands when Andy taps on his shoulder. He still leaves that room feeling relieved.

Everything’s put on autopilot as they move through the building, the looks from the cops they pass making Pete feel on edge. They watch him as if he’s not to be trusted or as if he, too, belongs in a cell. It’s nothing compared to how they’d been looking at Patrick.

As soon as Pete thinks his name, he comes to a stop. The hallway before them branches into two, offering a turn to the left and a continuation forward. The path ahead is the way out; he remembers from when they came in. It’s the sign describing the turn to the left that causes his pause.

It’s the way to the holding cells.

It’s the way to Patrick.

Pete swallows, staring at the sign. No one’s around. No one could stop him.

No one but Andy.

Pete turns his gaze on the other man. Andy watches him, an unreadable expression on his face. Pete chews on his lip and looks away.

Andy had been calm during the questioning, going so far as to claim that Patrick wasn’t a threat. But Pete has no way of telling if that’s how he really feels. What if he wants to exact justice on Patrick himself? What if it was all a ploy and he knows that, no matter what they do, Patrick will never be freed? Pete’s heart drops at the thought.

“Sorry,” Pete says, forcing himself to move forward. “I just…We should go-”

“Pete,” Andy says, grabbing his arm and cutting him off. Pete looks back, prepared to be scolded or mocked for hoping that he could see Patrick again. Instead, he’s met with warm eyes and Andy’s kind smile. “You should go talk to him.”

“Really?” Pete asks suddenly before withdrawing that excitement again. “I mean…We don’t really have the time and we need to go talk to that Stephanie…”

Andy waves him off with a dismissive hand. “I’ll go fill it out for us. You just go fix things with Patrick, okay? I know how much he means to you.”

The words are so calm, so sure, and they land on Pete like a burst of icy winter air.

“I thought you told me to give him space,” he says. Andy shrugs and looks away.

“Life’s too short to waste time pretending not to care. Joe’s one of my best friends and….I mean, I was never awful to him but….I know I’m not good at sharing my feelings. I just hope he knew that he was one of my closest friends,” Andy says, looking at anywhere that isn’t Pete. His words sound pained, forced out of him by the traumatic experience they all shared. His eyes, though still soft and kind, have a glassy sheen and Pete realizes that Andy’s fighting down the need to cry.

There are a thousand things that Pete can say but none of them could compete with the way the two
of them feel. Words rest in the back of throat, aching to be formed into a condolence or heartfelt apology. Pete swallows them down. Words mean nothing right now. He knows this. So, instead, he lets his hand rest on Andy’s shoulder until he looks Pete in the eye.

“He knew,” Pete says, his voice a hoarse whisper. “You care about everyone and we know. Trust me.”

Andy wipes at his eyes. “I’ll be outside. Take all the time you need.”

The two separate without another word, Andy rushing ahead and Pete running to the left. He knows he’s not allowed to do this. He knows that, any second, a police officer could grab his arm and stop him. Though every part of his body aches from the past few days, he forces himself to run faster.

He finally gets to the cells, shoving open the door preventing him from entering. Dozens of cells fill his vision, each empty, and his heart nearly stops. How is he to find Patrick if there’s a maze for him to search through? He considers turning around but refuses to allow himself to do so. When he finally drags his gaze to the end of the room, he sees a cell larger than the rest. He sees a figure huddled on the hard bench inside. He sees Patrick.

Pete sprints the rest of the way, shouting Patrick’s name as he goes. Hope fills his chest.

This time, there won’t be any flowery language or dramatics. He just needs to spit out those three words. He just needs Patrick to hear them.

“Patrick!” Pete shouts as he skids to a stop in front of the cell. “Patrick, listen, I lo-

Pete stops, the words fading into nothing as he realizes that Patrick’s asleep.

Pete lowers to his knees, tugging at his hair in frustration. Of course Patrick’s asleep. Why wouldn’t he be?

Sure, Pete could wake Patrick up. If he called his name loud enough, maybe he’d have time to confess before anyone else walked in and dragged him away.

The more hateful part of Pete’s mind tells him that he shouldn’t do that. This is fate’s way of saying that confessing to Patrick is a bad idea. The first time he tried to tell him, he’d chickened out. The second time, Andy had pulled him away.

This time, Pete’s certain that nothing goes according to plan because he doesn’t deserve it.

Pete rests his head against the bars, letting out a long sigh. He wants to reach out to Patrick, to wipe at the tear stains across his cheeks. He wants to hold onto him because the police had taken Gerard’s jacket and thrown him into this ice-cold cell with nothing more than a tattered shirt and skinny jeans. Pete wants to shut his eyes but, more than that, he wants to memorize this peaceful look on Patrick’s face.

When was the last time Patrick seemed so calm? He doesn’t deserve to be woken from this rest.

“All right,” Pete whispers, moving himself to a more comfortable sitting position. “It’s alright, I’ll let you sleep.”

Seconds pass and Pete listens to the sound of Patrick’s breathing. He counts twenty of them before he speaks again.

“I don’t hate you, you know,” Pete says, looking earnestly at Patrick’s sleeping form as if he can
hear him. “I could never hate you. That thing with Joe… It wasn’t you. No one blames you. And I
know how you think. And I want you to know that I don’t hate you.”

Pete takes a deep breath and continues, a small smile playing at his lips as he looks to the ground.
“Quite the opposite actually. I… I know what you were trying to say, Patrick. And I’m sorry for not
listening to you. I don’t deserve it but I want to say the same thing back to you.”

Pete raises his eyes and smiles when he sees Patrick shifting in his sleep. “I love you, Patrick. I am so
deeply in love with you and I wouldn’t change that for the world. Nothing makes me happier than
you and- you know what?- nothing can make me sadder, either. Because I know I don’t deserve
somebody as golden as you. I never did and I never will. And...And the fact that you want to spend
your lifetime and forever on someone like me… I just don’t understand it, Patrick. And I know it
might be selfish but… I’m glad that you do. I’ve never felt this way about anybody else. Nobody else
could promise me a forever but you did and...I want to do the same for you, Patrick. You deserve so
much more than me but, I promise, if you give me one more chance, I’ll make it worth your fucking
while. I love you so much and, as long as you know that, I’ll never need anyone or anything else.
Just….”

Pete takes a breath and shuts his eyes, blocking off the escape route for the tears forming in his eyes.

“Just promise me you’ll be okay, Patrick. Okay? Andy and I are gonna go but I promise that I’ll get
you out. I’m gonna get you the hell out of here and I’m gonna make sure that nothing like this ever
happens again. But I need you to be okay! If... If anything were to happen to you....If you get
cought or hurt or…..or worse….I don’t know what I’d do. I’d probably go mad.”

“So just...stay safe, okay? Please. Stay safe.”

Patrick doesn’t respond when Pete opens his eyes. It’s okay because Pete’s already standing, a fond
smile on his face. A policewoman’s already poking her head in and demanding that he leave.

Patrick whimpered Pete’s name in his sleep but Pete’s already walking away.

“I didn’t mean to!”

Patrick’s sobbing cries yank free from him like screams. Everything is hazy. He doesn’t know where
he is.

The only thing he can see is Joe’s lifeless body spread out before him. Patrick screams again,
shoving himself to his feet. He has to get away. He has to leave before any of the others can find
him. If they see what he did, they’ll hate him. They’ll kill him. They’ll never forgive him. They’ll tell
him what a monster and freak he is. Patrick doesn’t know if he can take that.

Patrick turns and tears through the darkness, arms thrown out before him as he feels his way
around. Nothing blocks his path and his breaths come racing from his lungs.

He’s trapped in this never ending night.

It feels like forever when Patrick finally falls to his knees, tripping over his own feet. The hard
ground beneath him shifts into grass and he gasps in breaths as the setting changes. The sound of
the forest surrounds him and he almost hears Gerard’s voice again, telling him that it’s safe and
he’s trustworthy. Patrick jumps back up to his feet, waving his hook around wildly.

“I hate you!” Patrick screams. “You traitor! I hate you!”
“It’s alright….”

Patrick turns suddenly, arms falling to his side.

That wasn’t Gerard’s voice.

Pete walks up to him, smiling and unwounded. Patrick chokes back a sob and backs away.

“No, Pete,” he says. “I don’t want to hurt you.”

“It’s alright,” Pete says again, walking closer to Patrick. “It’s alright.”

Patrick’s shuddering as Pete comes closer. Pete stops suddenly, too close for Patrick’s liking, and runs his hands down Patrick’s arms. Instinctively, Patrick leans into his chest and Pete holds him in a warm embrace. Tears run down Patrick’s cheeks.

“I don’t hate you, you know,” Pete says, lips brushing against the top of Patrick’s head. “I could never hate you. That thing with Joe… It wasn’t you. No one blames you....”

Patrick shakes his head even as he presses closer to Pete. “Stop lying. You should hate me. I know you hate me.”

“Quite the opposite actually. I… I know what you were trying to say, Patrick. And I’m sorry for not listening to you. I don’t deserve it but I want to say the same thing back to you.”

Patrick stiffens suddenly and tries to yank away.

This is a trick. It has to be a trick. Pete would never say what Patrick thinks he’s going to say. He could never feel that way about Patrick. Not after everything Pete’s already said to prove otherwise. Not after everything Patrick’s done….

“I love you, Patrick. I am so deeply in love with you and I wouldn’t change that for the world. Nothing makes me happier than you and- you know what?- nothing can make me sadder, either. Because I know I don’t deserve somebody as golden as you.” Pete says all this with a smile that should melt Patrick’s heart.

Patrick covers his ears instead. The hook cuts into his cheek but he feels nothing.

“You’re lying!” Patrick shouts. “I’m a monster! I’m a freak! You could never love a freak like me….I don’t deserve it!”

Pete’s still speaking and Patrick has no choice but to drown out his words with screams. Pete steps towards him and Patrick stumbles back.

“Stay safe,” Pete says.

Patrick turns and runs.

Someone grabs Patrick and he turns around, eyes wild and heart racing. “Get away from me!”

His hook flies out in self-defense. Patrick screams, eyesight going yellow as he attacks whoever it is that had found him.

“Leave! Me! Alone!” Patrick shouts, tackling this person to the ground. His voice gradually becomes nothing more than a wordless growl. His motions become more methodical.
Yes. This feels right. Blood splatters on his face and he grins. He pauses in his actions to wipe the blood away. He blinks some drops off of his eyelashes. When his eyes open again, everything is back in color.

Everything comes in flashes.

Blood.

Hook.

Pete.

His own screams.

“Pete!” Patrick screams, pulling away. “No, no, no, Pete, wake up!”

Pete’s body remains on the ground, eyes open and accusing as they stare at Patrick. Blood coats his beautiful face and his chest is nothing more than a gory wound. Pieces of his flesh stick to Patrick’s hook.

“No, no, Pete, please.” Patrick whimpers. “I told you not to love me, I told you I was a monster. Why didn’t you listen? Pete!”

Patrick can do nothing more than scream.

“PETE!”

The cell door slams open and Patrick jerks awake to see a policeman standing over him.

“Glad to see you’re awake, Mr. Stump. These ladies are here to transfer you to a more local station. They deal with murder cases better than we do,” he says, helping Patrick to his feet. Patrick nods, rubbing at his eyes as he stands.

“Do Pete and Andy know? I need—” Patrick cuts off when he sees the women standing behind the officer.

Sara and Rosa.

The vixens.

Patrick starts pulling away from the officer immediately, crying out his protests.

“Wait, no, I can’t go with them!” Patrick shouts, wincing when the man unknowingly tightens his grip over a cut. “They’re the reason I’m like this! They’re the real reason Joe is dead!”

“Don’t be silly,” Sara says in a sickeningly sweet voice. “We have the forms for a transfer all filled out. The cops checked the validity and everything.”

Patrick shakes his head desperately, attempting to go limp as they drag him down the hallway. “It’s a fake, it has to be! Check the papers again, they’re forged!”

His cries go ignored and his heart beats quicker as they near the exit. He can’t go with these women, not again. Memories and flashbacks come at him like bullets. Scars and knives, taunts and the pain of having his hand cut off. His breath becomes so restricted he’s certain he’s going to die here in this
hallway. “You have to believe me, please!”

No one even looks his way and Patrick thrashes in the officer’s grip as the exit enters his line of sight. Outside the glass doors, a large black van waits. Patrick wants to scream.

“I can take the prisoner from here, officer,” Sara says, digging her nails into Patrick’s arm as she grabs him. “Please help my partner gather the evidence you took from him.”

Patrick freezes.

The hook.

They’re going to reattach the hook.

“No!” He shouts, to no avail. Sara shoves him through the front doors.

Her grip loosens for a moment and Patrick imagines that he can make a run for it. He tries to yank away, certain he must be strong enough to break free.

“Pete!” Patrick screams without thinking. Didn’t Pete once promise to protect him? Where is he now? “Pete, help!”

Sara laughs and pulls him back, her grip bruising.

“Stupid fool,” she says. Rosa exits the building, holding the hook in a clear plastic bag. “Do you really believe anyone will come for you?”

Patrick has no time to respond before he’s being shoved towards the opened doors of the van. He tries to scream, one last time. He takes a breath and means to shout Pete’s name.

Rosa presses a dirty rag over his mouth and nose. The last thing Patrick remembers is the foul sensation of chemicals in his lungs.

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It’s been thirty minutes of driving in complete silence when Pete realizes that he has no idea where Andy is taking them.

He voices this concern and Andy’s guilty “um” does nothing to reassure him.

“Andy,” Pete says, slowly. “Where are we going?”

He doesn’t mean to sound so suspicious- like he suspects Andy to suddenly betray him. Still, he wraps his hand around the door handle, prepared to toss himself out.

He lets go immediately. This is ridiculous. Andy would never betray him.

“So, well. Remember Stephanie?” Andy asks, side-eyeing Pete. Pete returns the gaze.

“The blonde who runs the front desk? Yeah, you had to fill out the paperwork for this car with her, right?” Pete asks. Andy nods. “Well, what about her?”

Andy doesn’t answer, just tosses a small strip of paper into Pete’s lap. Pete picks it up, reading the words aloud.

“I wear the crown but am no princess,” Pete says, eyes suddenly widening. “Holy crap, Andy! Did
she give this to–"

“Yes,” Andy says, fingers beginning to drum on the side of the steering wheel. “And there’s an address on the back. We had nowhere else to go so I figured, why not?”

“Why not? *Why not?*” Pete shouts incredulously. “Dude, how about the fact that this wouldn’t be the first crazy girl out to kill us? How does she even know about that phrase? No one but the band should know it!”

Pete’s brought back to the day after finding the briefcase. They’d thought they’d be like superheroes, then, fighting crime and saving the world by keeping this case safe. It was Joe who suggested they have a code phrase for whenever they needed to discuss the briefcase in private or if there was an emergency. Of course, it was an incredibly useless idea because a secret phrase would sound way more suspicious than just ‘hey, about the case…’

Still. It was a cool concept at the time and even Patrick was on board. He picked out the code from the scrap of lyrics he’d rejected from Pete prior in the week. The phrase was never used but they never forgot it.

Andy’s lips purse before he speaks. “Well, do you have any other suggestions? Lie low? Try to hide? Sorry but I don’t think we really have the time for that right now.”

Pete covers his face with his hands, breathing deeply. “Oh my god. Oh my god. We are walking into an *ambush*. Shit like this always ends up in an ambush.”

Andy’s hushed for a moment and Pete really hopes he’s turning around. Instead, he feels the car stop.

“You can wait in the car. I’ll come get you if it’s safe.”

Pete’s hands fall from his face and he looks over to see Andy unbuckling his seatbelt and opening his door. An average two-story house waits in the distance, the lights shut off. It shouldn’t be terrifying but there are no other buildings nearby and it feels like they’re in the middle of nowhere. The setting sun and fading light don’t help.

Pete scrambles to get out of the car and catch up with Andy. As scared as he is, he refuses to let Andy go in alone.

When they get to the front of the house, Andy rings the doorbell. Pete flinches at the chiming sound that follows, almost expecting for a bomb to be triggered by the action. Instead, the door opens.

“You’re here,” Stephanie says, sounding relieved. Pete tries to smile but drops it as soon as he realizes how dark it is. She couldn’t see the smile even if it was real. “Come in, quick. We have a lot to discuss.”

Andy and Pete share a look, shrug, and follow.

Stephanie continues to speak as they venture further into the darkened house. Pete’s only paying a bit of attention to her but her tone sounds nothing more than a fangirl gushing about her favorite band. Pete allows himself to relax.

“Oh, sorry, I keep the lights off to keep the house from being seen from a distance. But I’m sure we can turn a few on if you guys are here.” Stephanie reaches out and flicks on a light switch. Pete blinks as his eyes adjust.
There’s no sudden reveal of a weapon or enemy, much to Pete’s relief. Stephanie just stands before them in her black suit from the office and her blonde hair hanging over her shoulders. She smiles at each of them and Pete almost smiles back.

But then his gaze lands on the armband wrapped around her upper arm.

Pete stumbles backward and suddenly wishes that he had a weapon with which to threaten this woman.

“Andy, that’s the symbol of the cult. I recognize it from the boxes inside the van,” he gasps out, eyes never leaving the crossed out music mark. Andy begins to back away, hands curling into fists.

Stephanie rolls her eyes and tears off the band, tossing it to the ground and stepping over it to get closer to the men watching her with unease.

“I’m not with them, if that’s what you’re worried about. I was on an undercover mission. Like Sam, that boy with the kid gang. We were working together but...well, I’m sure you can see how far he went in his attempt to show his own power. I’m sorry for that,” she explains. “Now, do you want to know how to defeat *Silence The Noise* or not?”

Pete gapes, mouth opening and shutting. Finally, he manages to spit out one of the dozens of questions inside his head.

“*Silence the Noise*?” Pete asks. Stephanie nods seriously.

“Yes. Follow me. I have more information in the garage. I take public transport to and from work so there’s plenty of space for everything in there,” she says, pulling her hair up into a ponytail as she begins to walk away.

Pete wants nothing more than to just leave but Andy starts to follow her. Pete groans and trails after them.

“*Silence the Noise* is a cult run by Courtney Love- crazy, I know. Their aim is to destroy all forms of music under the belief that it’s the last bond holding society together. Without that unity, everything will descend into mayhem,” Stephanie explains with a shudder as she unlocks the door to the garage. A gust of cold air rushes inside like a threat but fails to prevent anyone from entering.

As the lights flicker on, Pete and Andy gape at what they see.

Photos litter the entire wall, some taken personally and others cut out of magazines or newspapers. Wanted posters of the Vixens, pictures of the cult destroying instruments, polaroids of Courtney, banners with the no music symbol….Pete’s mind starts to reel with the amount of information being forced in.

“Why would anyone do that?” Pete asks, turning back to face Stephanie. The woman’s lips form a thoughtful line as she walks forward, gazing sadly at a picture of Courtney.

“We are every old, broken toy born again, and again,” she mutters. “We turn the diamonds back into coal.”

Seconds pass and Pete grows restless, looking to Andy for answers. Andy shrugs and Stephanie turns back around.

“The original founders of the cult….They used to be musicians and celebrities. They were adored and loved and….They were gods. But you know better than anyone that fans and crowds change.
Those who loved you at the start could be the same people hating you in the end,” Stephanie says, wrapping her arms around herself and pacing. “But these people. They couldn’t stand having their status taken away to the point where no one now knows their names. They formed this cult to take back what they feel is theirs. And they plan on doing that by forcing the world lower just so they can be higher. If they can’t make themselves gods, they’ll make the rest of the us into dust.”

Pete thinks back to the briefcase and gasps. This is worse than he ever imagined, lying awake at night and pondering the worst scenarios if he just threw that burden out the window. He’d imagined corrupt politicians and businessmen. He’d imagined dictators. He’d imagined a war like none other.

He’d never imagined the end of the world.

“And you expect us to stop them?” Pete shouts, turning on Stephanie. Her eyes widen.

“Well, yes. I mean, you are the Defenders,” she says, eyebrows furrowing in irritation. “Didn’t you know that?”

Pete runs his hands down his face. “I sure as hell didn’t. What about you, Andy? Did you know that?”

Andy shakes his head and Stephanie sighs. Pete looks up to see her pinching at the bridge of her nose, easing away a stress induced headache.

“There’s a…There’s been a rumor- for a while now, mind you- about a band that is destined to destroy the cult and to bring peace back to the world. There’s been a lot of speculation about which band that is but-”

“You think that’s us?” Andy cuts in, voice concerned. “Why would that be us? We’re not even a band anymore!”

Pete cringes at the reminder but nods in agreement.

“Don’t you see?” Stephanie urges, stepping closer. “The band is supposed to share a bond. They’re supposed to overcome trials of emotional and physical pain to prove their worth. They’re supposed to have sacrificed more than any band before them! Don’t you think you fit those traits?”

She sounds so earnest that Pete doesn’t have the heart to disagree. Stephanie sees his disbelief in his eyes, anyway, and sighs.

“You guys should go to bed,” she says, marching towards the door. “I’ll explain the rest tomorrow.”

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The room Patrick wakes up in is small and dark and cold. The ceiling seems to reach forever, until he gets dizzy trying to stare up to find a light, but the rest of it is cramped. The walls seem to close in with every second that passes and Patrick grows restless from pacing the five or six feet that the width of the room feels to be. His eyes refuse to adjust to the pitch black and he stumbles more than once, landing painfully on hard cement. Though he’s shuddering and in pain, the worst part is that he can feel the weight of the hook back on his wrist.

Patrick falls to the ground again as his pacing grows quicker, tripping over something that sounds like chains when his feet brush over it.

Patrick screams and pushes himself up to his feet.

“Let me out!” He roars, running up to the wall and banging his fist and hook against it. “You can’t hold me in here! Let me go!”

Though he doesn’t know how much time passes, his screams and cries seem to continue for hours. He collapses to the ground, exhausted and sore. He raises his fist one last time, weakly slamming it against the wall.

“Please,” he whimpers. “Let me go…”

No one responds.

Chapter End Notes

Yo!

So, can I just say that I was genuinely afraid of people rioting or boycotting this fic because of Joe's death last chapter? That worry in the note in the bottom was real and you have no idea how happy it made me to see that you guys still plan on reading! I never planned on getting this much feedback on the story but WOW I've gotten attached to you guys! Your comments make my day and your personalities in them make me smile :) So thanks for doing that, it really does mean a lot!!

Also, really random sidenote, but those two songs by five for fighting in the playlist may seem really happy and this chapter didn't really live up to the definition of happy but lemme just say that those songs make me an emotional wreck. This is probably something dignified people don't say but I went through a huge hetalia phase a few years ago and there were a few really emotional fics that destroyed me and some people made music videos for those fics using those songs and i. was. dead.

*for the unlikely hetalia fan in the crowd, those were "Auf Wiedersehen, Sweetheart" and "We'll Meet Again". They basically shot me in the chest.

Anyway, I hope you enjoyed this! Leave any feedback that you'd like! See you on Thursday!
You're The Lonelier Version Of Us (And I'm Just Where It Went Wrong)

Chapter Summary

The longest (and probably most important) flashback yet

Chapter Notes

Oh, this one was emotional to write...I hope you don't mind the flashback, I got a bit carried away :)

Chapter Playlist:
- "Make A Move" by Icon For Hire
- "Monster" by Meg and Dia
- "Nightmares" by Chameleon Circuit (ok, yes, it's based on doctor who but it works okay)
- "Rat A Tat" by Fall Out Boy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You’re The Lonelier Version Of Us (And I’m Just Where It Went Wrong)

It’s been a week and Pete feels like they’re tempting the phrase “too late”.

It’s been a week of meaningless lectures and lessons, in his opinion. Stephanie had used every waking moment to teach them about Silence the Noise, sharing backstories and details and symbolism Pete didn't know existed. He had found it interesting at first, nodding and wondering if he should be taking notes. He was certain that Stephanie had been a godsend, a convenient character written to fill in the plot holes and answer all lingering questions while simultaneously telling them how to win the battle in one epic showdown.

That had lasted all of fifteen minutes. He’d raised his hand and asked if they should get Patrick out of the jail before continuing. Stephanie had gone tense.

“Let’s focus on getting the briefcase first,” she’d said, her eyes shifty as they averted Pete’s gaze. “You last saw Patrick in the jail, right? He should be fine there.”

There was something strange in the way she spoke, Pete had noticed. It sounded fake and forced, like an ill-practiced lie. But then she had been passing out weapons and Pete forgot all about it.

He still feels like she’s leaving out details, though. Whenever Andy asks her if there’s any new information- the way he asks every morning- Stephanie just shakes her head and changes the subject. On the rare occasion that there is information to share- like a new member joining the cult or another music store that’s been burned to the ground- she speaks in an emotionless voice. She states the facts succinctly, like she’s reading it off a paper or giving a report.
Pete’s noticed that she also always seems to have more she wants to say. She’ll finish speaking and then take a breath, parting her lips in preparation of more words. Then she’ll look at Pete, shake her head, and excuse herself from the room. She almost sounds guilty whenever she does so.

Pete sits at the table, chewing on the piece of toast Stephanie had offered him, and shakes free himself from these thoughts. They’re far from healthy, he knows. Paranoia has always been a problem for him and mistrusting their new ally isn’t the best idea.

Andy wanders into the kitchen, yawning and stretching. Stephanie smiles at him and passes over another plate of toast. He takes it with a muttered thanks.

“So,” Andy begins once he’s been properly seated across from Pete. “Is there any new information?”

Pete perks up, eyes darting over to gauge Stephanie’s reaction.

Paranoia’s only a problem when it has no basis. And Pete is set on trying to find some.

The girl freezes and bites on her tongue, the tip of it sticking out from between her lips as she shuffles through some papers set on the counter.

“Nothing we haven’t seen before,” she says. “Another music producer went missing last night, though. That makes five. And a few record labels have been complaining about getting threatening letters. And-”

She trails off. Just like she always does. Pete’s eyes narrow.

Stephanie sighs and shakes her head, dropping the papers back onto the counter. Her eyes lift, for just a second, and find Pete’s. She looks away just as fast and sighs again.

Pete’s paranoia calls it good enough.

“That’s all,” she says finally. “That’s all the new information I have for today. Now, if you excuse me, I’m going to go see if I can contact those labels before the police can. We need to know what kind of threats they’re sending out.”

And, just like that, Stephanie sweeps out of the room without another word.

Pete folds his arms.

“Andy,” he hisses when he hears Stephanie’s footsteps hurrying upstairs. “Andy!”

Andy looks up from his plate with tired eyes. “Huh?”

Pete rolls his eyes but carries on anyway. “I think Stephanie’s hiding something from us.”

“What?” Andy blinks, growing more alert. “Why would you think that?”

There’s something strangely defensive in his tone and Pete almost feels like he shouldn’t press the issue. His concern, though, outweighs his fear of Andy. Besides, the drummer’s probably just irritable from lack of sleep. They’d stayed up pretty late practicing with the weapons Stephanie had given them. Though, to be fair, the weapons were pretty badass.

“I don’t know for sure…But didn’t you notice how she started to say something and then cut herself off? It’s not the first time it’s happened, either,” Pete says, leaning across the table intently. Andy hums thoughtfully, his lips pressing into a line.
“Yeah, I guess I can see how that would seem suspicious,” he says. “And she did leave the room in a hurry after that.”

Pete nods vigorously. “Exactly! Don’t you think we should question her about it? See what she’s hiding?”

“More like see if there’s anything she’s hiding.” Andy’s response is quick and his gaze is almost a glare. “And I don’t think we should team up against her to find out. I can ask later. It’d be too overwhelming if we both did.”

Pete narrows his eyes as if it could help him see what’s going on with Andy’s tone. He sounded defensive before but, now, he almost sounds protective…

Pete doesn’t like the implications.

“Whatever,” he says, standing and balling up his napkin. “I’m gonna go practice in the garage. Knock before coming in. I don’t wanna accidentally stab you.”

Andy makes a noise of affirmation. Pete watches him for a few seconds more and then turns to leave.

Once Stephanie had proclaimed them knowledgeable enough on the details of Courtney and the cult, she’d granted them homemade weapons as some sign of their worthiness. Pete received a machete attached to the neck of a bass. Andy was handed a crossbow and arrows modeled after a drum and drumsticks. As cheesy as they are, Pete can’t help but love them.

After much debate, Stephanie allowed the garage to be used as a makeshift training arena, seeing as it was too dangerous for either of the men to be spotted outside. The garage is dark and small but, with recently purchased sand bags and dummies, it works.

Pete grabs his weapon from its place on the wall, grinning at the weight of it in his hands. There’s not much he can do to practice- a machete is pretty straightforward- but he at least wants to feel comfortable holding it.

His eyes slide over to the other weapons lying in the corner of the room. Stephanie hadn’t mentioned them but that doesn’t matter.

One of them’s an ax with a guitar neck fashioned as the handle.

The other is a microphone connected to an old-fashioned mace.

Everyone understands who those were for.

Pete shuts his eyes, grip tightening around the handle of his bass-machete. He’s going to make the cult pay, he’s decided. He’s going to make them hurt and suffer and starve for mercy. He’s going to make them regret ever imagining that they could get away with hurting anybody in his band.

Pete’s eyes open and he turns his back to the wall.

He trains with his weapon until his hands bleed.

Patrick’s not sure how much time has passed. The darkness of the room makes it feel like an eternal night. He’s only been able to sleep a handful of times and, even then, his rest doesn’t last long. He’s too afraid of what the next nightmare will be and, more than that, he’s too afraid of what will happen
to him if he lets his guard down.

He’s a prisoner to this cult and they do everything they can to remind him of it. When the Vixens come and collect him- as they do every so often- they refuse to speak or even look at him. Patrick had screamed and tried to fight the first time they dragged him outside of that room, certain that they were going to resume their torturing. However, they’d only tossed him inside a small bathroom with a change of clothes. The same thing happened a while later, only that time they hosed him down with freezing water. They’ve returned only four times since then, forcing him to rely on them to gain access to clean clothes or water. Though, they haven’t given him anything to eat since he’s arrived and the weakness is starting to show.

He likes to think that they show up once a day, that he can mark the time by that, but the intervals between each encounter don’t feel even. Or is he only imagining that they don’t feel even? It’s not as if he can tell the difference between ten minutes or ten hours in this room. He’s certain that he’s losing his mind.

Patrick imagines that he hears footsteps thundering down the halls but doesn’t move from where he sits, resting weakly with his back against the wall. The last time he’d imagined that someone was coming for him, he’d forced himself to stand and seem strong. He’d thought he’d seen a flash of light but, when he rushed towards it, was greeted with the mocking shadows on the wall. He blames it on his lack of food and sleep.

These footsteps, though, don’t stop and Patrick tries leaning forward to hear better. The door slams open and he jerks back in shock, banging his head on the hard wall behind him.

The lights flash on and a searing pain shoots through Patrick’s skull at the sudden brightness. Every time the girls had led him outside, they’d given him sunglasses to block out the lights. He’d thought it was a strange kindness. Now, though, he could see how it was just preparation for when they finally wanted to hurt him again.

Patrick blinks and, when his vision is nearly focused, he sees Rosa setting up a radio in the corner.

“No,” Patrick rasps, voice hoarse from disuse. Sara walks towards him and he tries futilely to back away. “No!”

Neither Vixen speaks to him and Patrick thrashes weakly as Sara chains his arms to the wall behind him, attaching the end of the chain to a loop high above his head so arms are held up uncomfortably. Patrick winces at the pain of some scars being stretched but remains silent.

No one says anything and Rosa turns on the radio.

A new pop song Patrick hasn’t heard before starts playing and he tosses his head to the side as the familiar feeling of their brainwashing starts settling in. He grits his teeth and tries to shout in protest. His vision begins to fade into that yellow shade, dimming a bit of the lights. He can see the room better now, see the barren emptiness of the prison he’s been locked in. He can Sara and Rosa smiling at each, proud of the fact that they still have him under their control. He sees everything and he sees it all in yellow.

But when he shuts his eyes, he sees Joe’s dead body. And that’s in full color.

“No,” Patrick says, blinking. “No, I won’t be your monster!”

The yellow haze starts to fade. The grey of the wall before him makes a brief appearance until Rosa turns the volume of the music up and the cloud of yellow returns with a vengeance, fixing itself in
Patrick’s vision with an electric shock.

Patrick’s body goes rigid and he bites back a scream, his teeth clamping down so hard on his lip that it begins to bleed. The taste of his own blood fills his mouth. It makes him sick.

“Patrick,” Sara says. “You are under our control now. Swear your loyalty to us.”

Her tone is self-assured without a hint of doubt that he’ll follow through.

But Patrick forces himself not to speak, forces this control to stay with his vision. He knows what will happen if he gives in, knows how they’ll use him to kill more innocent people. As much as it hurts, he keeps the memory of Joe in his mind. As long as he can remember Joe, he can’t give in.

“Did you hear me?” Sara says, voice growing shrill. “I said to swear your loyalty!”

Patrick’s breathing heavily and the movement of any muscle takes too much energy. Still, he drags his eyes up to Sara’s and smirks. “You can’t force me to do anything.”

Sara’s eyes light up in fury and she turns, muttering with Rosa in soft voices he can’t hear over the music. He wishes they would shut it off already. Each note cuts into him like a thousand knives. Each heartfelt lyrics breaks his bones.

His wish is answered when Sara leaves, kicking the radio on her way out. The sound of the song stutters and then stops. Only the painful sensation of the yellow haze ripping free from his mind prevents Patrick from sighing in relief. He grunts in pain and shuts his eyes, waiting for the pain to subside. When he opens his eyes, Rosa is kneeling before him with a grimace on her face.

“I don’t get it,” she hisses. “Nobody’s coming for you. Surely you must have realized that by now. If they wanted to save you, they would have tried already. But we haven’t seen anything from your so-called friends. You’re a monster and they know it. You know it! So- I have to ask- who are you fighting for?”

Patrick grins at the frustration in her tone. He licks at the cut on his lip, pulling blood into his mouth. Everything she’s saying is true; he thought as much the second he lost his voice screaming for someone who never came. But he also knows that, small as it is, his refusal to be loyal to them was a victory and he’s going to savor it for as long as he can.

Rosa scowls, grabbing his jaw and forcing him to look at her. “Answer me, you little freak!”

What was the question? Oh, right.

Who are you fighting for?

Patrick says the first thing that comes to his mind.

“The tide’s out, the ship’s run aground. We drown traitors in shallow water,” he spits. Confusion fills Rosa’s eyes as she pulls away. When she finally recognizes the lyrics, she stands with a sneer.

“Then I suppose your friends will be drowning you.” She’s prevented from speaking further as Sara walks into the doorway.

“Rosa,” she says, though her glare is focused on Patrick. “It’s ready.”

Petra stares up at the dark ceiling of the bedroom and curses his insomnia for the thousandth time that
night. He’s sore, he’s exhausted, and he doesn’t want to deal with the frustrating questions circling his head for one more minute. Despite all this, he still can’t fall asleep and it’s starting to piss him off.

He rolls over, groaning as pressure falls onto a few bruises. Stephanie helped them get proper first aid before sending them to bed on that first night. Pete’s grateful but there’s only so much that a home bandage kit can do for wounds inflicted by someone who wants you dead.

Pete wonders how Patrick’s wounds are doing.

The clock beside him clicks as the numbers shift to three am, the noise mocking to Pete’s ears. He exhales forcefully and tosses his blankets to the side. He’d thought it was cool when he’d piled them all on but, now, the room is much too hot.

Pete takes even breaths, shutting his eyes again and swearing that he’ll get some sleep if it’s the last thing he does. He doesn’t know when they plan on storming the cult’s headquarters so he wants to gather as much energy as he can. If there’s anything this experience has taught him, it’s that he never knows when his last night of safe sleep will be.

The thoughts in Pete’s head begin to fade away, making room for the wisp-like beginnings of a dream. He knows he’s not asleep yet because he knows that this isn’t real. He knows he’s still in Stephanie’s home, miles away from Patrick. Still, it’s easier to believe that the glimpse of blue eyes he sees in his mind are more than an illusion.

“-only telling you...”

Stephanie’s voice drifts into the room and all traces of Pete’s sleep-like state vanish. His eyes slide open at the intrusive sound but curiosity is what truly causes him to be alert. With all hope of sleep gone, Pete decides that spying on the conversation down the hallway is his next best option for how to spend the night. Silently, he slips out of the bed, pulls some sweats on, and hurries out of the room. He enters the hallway just in time to see Andy following Stephanie into her bedroom. Pete raises an eyebrow. He holds his breath and sneaks down the hallway to the direction of where they were. He pauses only once to pray that he’s going to hear anything other than what the scene appears to be.

By the time he makes it the outside of the bedroom, the two seem to be already deep in conversation.

“No, don’t worry. I revised the plan so that it doesn’t need to include him. We can get you in and out with the briefcase before the cult even realizes that you’re there. And we can send you in whenever you feel ready,” Stephanie’s saying, her words urgent. Pete’s eyebrows furrow together. They’re changing the plan? Why wouldn’t they tell him about this? He leans in closer, ear nearly pressed against the shut door as Andy responds.

“I still don’t understand,” Andy says. Pete can just picture his tired confusion and the way he’s probably scratching his head right now. “Why are we excluding Pete?”

Pete doesn’t have time to understand his words before Stephanie’s responding.

“He can’t be trusted to fulfill the mission correctly.”

Red hot anger burns through Pete’s veins at that one statement. He can’t be trusted. He’s heard that more times in his life than he could count. He’s heard it from people on the street judging him based off of tabloid articles or pictures taken out of context. He’s heard it from so-called friends after one too many late nights of his pretentious ramblings. He’s heard it from family members whenever he got too manic, buzzing with an energy he still doesn’t know how to control. He’s heard it from
doctors and therapists, hesitant to let him out of their sight lest he try and destroy something other than himself next time.

_He can’t be trusted_

Pete wants to punch a wall through this door. He wants that machete back in his hands. He wants to give her a reason not to trust him.

At least Andy sounds upset, if a bit more restrained. “Look. Pete is my friend and I don’t care what kind of information you have, he’s the most loyal and trustworthy guy I know and I won’t stand here and let you insu—”

“No, no!” Stephanie argues, cutting him off. “It’s not like that, you don’t understand.”

“Then make me understand,” Andy says, voicing Pete’s thoughts exactly. “Because, right now, all I’m hearing is a bunch of bullshit about one of my best friends.”

Pete mentally makes a note to never make fun of Andy’s straight-edge veganism again. And to maybe tell him that he’s one of his best friends, too.

“It’s…It’s complicated,” Stephanie says, stammering. “It’s not that he’s going to betray us. Not on purpose. But he’ll lose his focus and we can’t risk that and, you don’t understand, if he finds out—”

“Finds out what?” Andy snaps. Pete can hear Stephanie’s small gasp at the sudden impatience in his tone.

After a few deep breaths, Pete hears Stephanie sigh.

“The cult took Patrick,” she says. “And I don’t think Pete can focus if he knows that.”

Pete can barely focus on anything past _The cult took Patrick_

It feels as if the wind had been knocked out of him by those four words alone. Those words sink their teeth into his skin like leeches, sucking everything out of him until he’s bone dry. Until he’s on his knees in the hallway gasping for breath.

No. No. This can’t be right. She can’t be telling the truth. Pete had left Patrick with the police; he’d thought that was the safest place! He should have checked on him more often. He should have called everyday and demanded to speak with Patrick. Hell, if he had just been there this morning instead of wasting his time swinging a toy sword around, he could have saved him. Pete’s mind is reeling and he feels sick, clawing at the ground and begging for the images to stop.

Because he can’t stop seeing Patrick’s hook or the golden color of his eyes. The cult has him? Now? What are they doing to him? Is he okay? _Is he even alive?_

Pete forces himself to stand, rationalizing the situation even as Andy and Stephanie begin to argue in hushed voices behind this door. No, he can’t be dead. She said that they took him so he has to be alive, right? If they took him today… If they even took him yesterday then there has to be a chance!

“That Pete deserves to know this more than anyone!” Andy shouts suddenly, causing Pete to flinch at the sound. “He’ll work even better if he knows what’s at risk! We can shift some things in the plan so that everyone gets out okay. Look, I’ll go after the briefcase and we can create a plan to save Patrick, too. I don’t care if they’re brainwashing or torturing him, I won’t leave him with them!”

Stephanie is silent and Pete can’t picture her expression. He folds his hand around the doorknob,
prepared to burst in and join Andy’s side.

And then Andy is speaking again, in response to something Pete couldn’t see.

“This…This isn’t something you just found out today, is it?” Andy asks. Already, Pete’s vision is growing fuzzy. He doesn’t want to hear the answer. “How long have you known?”

Stephanie’s response is immediate. Pete wishes that it wasn’t.

“They took him on the first day, moments after you two had already left. I…I didn’t want to tell you. I didn’t want you to feel guilty or as if it’s your fault,” she says, her words hushed but not hushed enough.

Pete’s not aware that he’s opening the door until he sees the shocked expressions of the two before him. He’s not aware of how emotional he is until he feels his own hands shaking.

“They took him on the same day we were there?” His voice is shaking, too. He looks at Stephanie, eyes wide and betrayed. “He’s been with them that long?”

Stephanie’s lips are a tense line, refusing to divulge any more information. But she won’t look away from Pete’s eyes and, for some reason, it only fuels his reckless thoughts.

“If we had stayed just a bit longer, we could have saved him. I should have stayed with him; I should have never left. They’ve had him for a fucking week. The last time they had him that long, they cut off his fucking hand. If anything happens to him, I’ll never forgive myself. I’ll...I’ll, fuck, I’ll go insane, I won’t be able to live, I’ll-”

“Pete,” Andy says, too calm. “It’s not your fault.”

Pete takes a breath. He doesn’t understand how Andy can never show emotion. He doesn’t understand how Andy doesn’t see the danger here. He doesn’t understand how Andy can be so calm and, frankly, he doesn’t want to.

“You’re right,” Pete hisses out, lips curling in an ugly sneer as he looks over at Stephanie. “It’s hers.”

“Pete.” Andy’s tone is so condescending, so reminiscent of those same doctors and therapists and family members and everyone who’s ever wanted him to just stop and calm down.

“No,” Pete snaps, storming forward. “Because if we hadn’t been wasting our time looking for her, we would still be by the station trying to plan out our next move. We would have seen them take Patrick, I know it. Fuck, even if we did end up coming here, she still should have told us. She’s known from the beginning and hadn’t said a damn thing! We could have saved him! We could have gotten him out! This is all her fault! She’s just as bad as them!”

Stephanie looks near tears. Pete doesn’t think she has any right to look that way at all.

“I’m so sorry,” she whimpers. “I couldn’t risk you two getting caught as well.”

Pete bares his teeth; he nearly growls.

“If anything happens to Patrick, I’ll kill you,” he spits. He only takes one threatening step forward and then Andy’s in his way, holding his arms out defensively.

“Pete, stop.”

Pete freezes, confused. Shouldn’t Andy be just as angry? Doesn’t he understand that she’s basically
letting them kill Patrick? Doesn’t he understand that she’s a traitor?

Pete takes a step back, reevaluates the situation.

And then he sees it.

Andy has his arms spread, keeping Stephanie safe behind him. His muscles are tense as if expecting a fight. Stephanie stays behind him, eyes timid, and rests a hand on Andy’s shoulder as if he’s protecting her.

No. Not “as if”. Pete knows that he is.

Pete backs away, barking out a bitter laugh. “Really?”

No one moves and he feels like crying.

“Fine, I get it,” he says, his voice as wet as his eyes. “But, just know, every second you two spend sneaking around is another second that Patrick’s being tortured.”

Andy calls his name as Pete turns away.

Pete slams the door on the sound.

“Aah!”

Patrick cries out as another burst of electricity shoots through his being, leaving trails like fire in his veins. The Vixens stand in the corner of the room, indifferent to his pain. They haven’t spoken since they’ve strapped him into this chair again.

He hates the feeling of electrodes sticking to his skin, hates the straps of this chair wrapping around his frail torso. He hates that all of this feels familiar.

The wall before him displays images meant to trigger some emotional response; the music in the background serves the same purpose. Patrick supposes he should be proud for how much time has passed with barely any response. But he can’t help but feel as if he’s just prolonging his own torture.

A photo of Joe appears, followed by a quick flash of Patrick’s torture from before. A sharp pain shoots through Patrick’s skull and everything goes yellow for just a second. He shuts his eyes, trembling.

*Control your emotions. Don’t feel anything. Don’t react. You can’t let them know how much it gets to you. Even if you don’t change into that monster, you’re still giving in if you so much as flinch.*

Patrick nods to himself, his motions stiff. He wants to shut his eyes, to stare at the ground, but when he’d tried that, the girls had just threatened to move to physical torture like before, claiming that they’ll take his tongue next time.

It might be a bluff, but Patrick’s not willing to test it.

“I, tonight? I feel like being alone. If you don’t mind, if you don’t mind…”

Patrick’s certain it’s not the emotion they want him to give but his lips turn up in a bitter smile at the opening lines of his own song. He opens his eyes to see more pictures projecting onto the wall, pictures of concerts from the Take This To Your Grave era all the way to Soul Punk. He doesn’t
want to know how they got those images. He doesn’t want to imagine any of his fans being hurt or betraying him.

“Isn’t this the album that everyone hates?” Rosa asks, a small smirk on her face. Sara raises an eyebrow.

“No, I thought that was Folie à Deux,” she says. “But, then, maybe it was just Patrick everyone hated.”

The banter sounds fake, taking some of the stings away from their words. Patrick jerks in the chair, glowering at the Vixens.

“I know you’re just trying to get a reaction. It’s not going to work,” he says.

The girls fall silent and Patrick is cautiously grateful. The tremors in his body, though, grow more violent as if he’s physically unaware of their period of grace.

“A young man is a pulled pin looking for a grenade. A young woman will drive you places you never meant to go…”

“Is this song about Pete?”

Patrick doesn’t know who asked it and he doesn’t care because, as if the question were the true trigger, his eyesight turns yellow.

Patrick shuts his eyes as soon as he notices, afraid of what the girls will do if they see. He takes deep breaths, fighting back the demonic feeling in his mind. When he opens his eyes, he’s able to pretend that it never happened. But, judging from the smirk in the Vixens’ faces, it’s already too late. He shivers, the room temperature seeming to drop as the two girls face each other and whisper conspiratorially.

He expects the way they start walking towards him, malicious glee in their eyes. What he doesn’t expect, however, is the way Rosa walks past him to shut off the music and the images flashing before him. Patrick shudders one last time, reveling in the feeling of freedom from the taunts. Sara stands before him, smiling viciously.

“So, what? Your weakness is Pete Wentz?” Sara asks, hands on her hips. “How pathetic.”

“Shut up, you don’t know anything about it,” Patrick snaps. He hates the way his voice shakes.

Sara just laughs, bending to get in his face. “But you did react when we said his name. We were just joking but…that song is really about him, isn’t it? Everybody wants somebody who doesn’t want them, right? Sounds right. You might love Pete but Pete sure as hell doesn’t love you.”

Patrick’s biting down on his lip, knowing full well that any sarcastic remark will earn him another scar or bruise. He settles on glaring and tightening his hand into a fist. He hopes that remaining silent will discourage the girl. But Sara is only getting started.

“Don’t act so upset, it’s only the truth. Don’t you remember? I mean, does anyone really believe he would let himself fall in love with someone like you?”

Sara’s smile is barbed wire, dangerous and cutting as she leans in closer to Patrick.

“Not that anyone could blame him. Not after that whole fiasco with the pictures,” she says, emphasizing each word as if it should mean something more. Patrick narrows his eyes, shaking his
head and refusing to be drawn into this trap.

“I didn’t post those pictures,” he snaps, anger igniting within him. “It wasn’t me.”

“Quite right,” Sara says, smile widening. “It was me.”

Patrick’s eyes widen; his breath cuts off. Sara pulls back, grinning and curling a lock of blonde hair around her finger.

“Don’t worry, Patrick,” she says, her voice a high-pitched mimicry of someone Patrick once met. “I won’t tell a soul.”

Patrick can’t understand; he doesn’t want to. “You…”

“Do you remember me, now?” Sara asks, raising an eyebrow. “Because I never forgot about you…”

“I won’t tell a soul,” the girl said, blonde and wide-eyed as Patrick proudly showed off the pictures Pete had taken of them on his phone. Pete would hate him if he found out Patrick was doing this, drunkenly telling some strange girl of their secret relationship in the corner of some bar in the back of the venue they just played. But Pete had gotten pissed at Patrick for seemingly no reason—though he had shouted about Patrick flirting too much with one guy at the bar. Patrick didn’t remember any flirting at all and told Pete as much. Pete had stormed off, leaving Patrick confused.

“But why can’t I tell anyone?” The girl asked, twirling her hair around her finger. “I mean, you two are such a cute couple and it’s not like a lot of the fans would really mind.”

“It’s Pete,” Patrick answered, smiling at the picture pulled up now. In it, Pete had just ambushed Patrick with a kiss and it showed in the way that Patrick was wide-eyed and blushing fiercely. Pete held Patrick’s phone out at a distance, snapping a handful of pictures before pulling away. Patrick had been too flustered to do anything about it. It was a fond memory. “He’s not sure he’s ready for the world to know about us yet. I think he’s scared.”

“Are you scared?” The girl asked.

“No,” Patrick answered immediately. “I want the whole world to know I’m in love with Pete Wentz.”

The conversation had drifted into safer territory after that, Patrick leaving his phone on the bar between them and laughing about the anecdotes the girl had to share about her own experiences in love. He hadn’t thought anything about it until the next day.

The next day.

When those pictures hit the internet with the fury of a tidal wave crashing against the sand.

Patrick was happily oblivious about them for a good hour or so as he stayed in his bunk and tried to remember just how he got there. The last thing he remembered was that girl shoving more alcohol into his hand with a barb wire smile.

It was Pete who found out first. It was Pete who disrupted Patrick’s morning by throwing the curtains of his bunk to the side and screaming “What the fuck did you do?”

Pete wouldn’t believe any part of Patrick’s story, certain that the singer had done this in retaliation
to their fight the night before. Patrick wasn’t aware that there was a fight to begin with.

“Just admit it! You’ve been wanting to go public for a long time and this was your way of going behind my back and getting what you wanted!”

“No! Trust me, please, I would never do that to you...to us...”

“Really? You admitted to showing those pictures off to the first pair of tits you saw at the bar. What’s to stop you from posting them?”

“Is it even that big of a deal? What’s the problem with the public knowing that we love-”

“Just shut up. I don’t want to fucking talk to you right now.”

Patrick wanted it to blow over. He thought it would. Those pictures weren’t half as bad Pete’s dick pics and the public had mostly forgotten about those, right?

“Um, Patrick? You remember that interview Pete did yesterday? You...You might want to watch it...” Joe suggested a few days later, patting Patrick on the shoulder and wearing remorseful eyes. Patrick didn’t think about what they meant.

“Yeah, alright. But why?”

“Just... Watch it.”

Patrick had waited until no one else was around, to when they were in the safety of their homes after the last show of the tour. He’d waited just in case it was as bad as Joe had made it sound.

It wasn’t as bad. It was worse.

“About these pictures of you and Patrick Stump... You seem very close.” The interviewer was a woman, blonde and big-eyed like the girl who’d stolen Patrick’s phone.

Pete laughed nervously. It made Patrick hurt. Why would he laugh?

“They’re just pictures. Stupid dares, y’know? I’ve found that a lot of people like to take things out of context and make them into something they’re not. It’s a bit of a problem with celebrity culture, I think.”

“So, the rumors of you two are-”

“They’re just rumors.”

“I see.” The woman didn’t seem surprised and she laughed as she asked the next question, as if it were a preposterous suggestion asked only for entertainment’s sake. “Do you think there’s ever the chance that you two could ever become something more?”

Pete shifted in his seat, eyes nervous. Patrick could feel no sympathy.

“Sorry, but I don’t see that as an option. We’re just good buds, that’s all. And I think we’re both happy with that. Besides, I think there kinda needs to be some mutual attraction involved for that. Everyone’s seen how one-sided the ‘stage gay’ stuff is and, I mean, does anyone really believe I’d ever let myself fall in love with someone like Patrick?”

No one had questioned that answer and Patrick was left wondering if he had been missing something this entire time.
He quit the band the next day, sending out an apologetic email about how he needed time to focus on his own stuff.

Pete came over a week later, demanding to know why Patrick was being so difficult.

It escalated.

“You denied our relationship! You said you could never love me!”

“It was damage control, calm down.”

“Damage control? So now I’m just some damage you need to control?”

It escalated fast.

“This all started because you couldn’t keep those pictures on your phone!”

“Well, at least I don’t have problems keeping things in my pants!”

“Are you really going there? Because, if I remember correctly, you were the one acting like a common slut for that man at the bar!”

“I already told you that there wasn’t any flirting! Besides, like you’re so much better…”

“Maybe I am!”

“You’re such an egomaniac!”

“Is that a problem?”

“Is that why you told that interviewer you couldn’t love someone like me?”

“Maybe I told her that because it was the truth!”

No one was surprised when they broke up, taking the band with them.

Patrick didn’t speak to Pete alone again until…

“I’d ask if this was important but, really, what else would it be? Honestly, with how much you’ve been avoiding me lately, one would think this had better be a matter of life or death.”

...That night in the dressing room

“Avoiding. Is that what they’re calling it these days?”

“Oh? Are you surprised?” Sara asks. “You shouldn’t be. We had to find a way to break up your band to prevent you from becoming the Defenders- or, at least, to stall you. That plan worked so well that we were certain we were wrong about you all being the legendary Defenders. It’s why we moved onto Gerard and his band. Really, we’ve had our eyes on you for a very long time, Patrick.”

The projector behind Patrick flickers back to life, lighting up a grainy image on the wall behind Sara.

“But don’t worry,” Sara says, standing straight and walking out of the way. “We’ve kept our eyes on Pete, too.”

It’s security footage that they’re showing him now, dated just a bit over a week ago. Two figures are
in the middle, in fuzzy black and white. Rosa slowly turns up the volume.

“What makes you think I still love Patrick?”

Patrick freezes, eyes on the video before him. He recognizes that voice and, now, he recognizes those figures.

Bebe pauses on screen, a large camera held precariously in her small hand as she crosses her arms. She looks at Pete, puzzled, as he continues.

“What makes you think I ever loved Patrick?” Pete says, unwittingly sending sharp pains through Patrick’s being as he feels rage building up inside of him. “Sure, we were close for awhile but every band member goes through their stage gay phase. It’s not my fault if media decided to make it into something it wasn’t.”

It’s nothing Pete hasn’t said before; it’s nothing he didn’t say in that fight all those years ago. Still, Patrick can’t help but feel betrayed. He can’t help but feel tears prick at his eyes as he begs for all of this to be staged, to be a lie.

But Pete looks so earnest, not once breaking character as Bebe tests him with accusations of how Patrick was the trap for Pete. Of how Pete only got caught because Patrick did first.

“Exactly!” Pete asserts, breaking Patrick’s heart further. “Don’t you think I’ve realized that by now? I wouldn’t be here if Patrick hadn’t gotten caught. None of us would be!”


Pete continues, ranting about Patrick’s stupidity and foolishness to lose the briefcase. He sounds so honest about it, scoffing in all the right places and saying everything Patrick's been thinking since this whole thing started.

He knew everyone else felt the same. He knew that they would hate him for causing this.

So why does it hurt so much to see these facts confirmed?

With each word Pete says, Patrick can feel himself falling more into rage and hurt and hatred and anger. He fights to keep the bloodlust down, desperately holding onto the strings of his humanity.

But, as Pete smirks at Bebe and as she draws close, he’s starting to forget why it’s so important to remain human in the first place.

“You know, I almost wish he was the only one. The only one that was caught, that is. I don’t deserve to be here. Joe and Andy definitely don’t either. But Patrick was the one who broke up the band. He’s the one who said we needed to take a fucking break. So, whatever. I just wish you guys had been satisfied with him. Though, I guess I can understand if you weren’t.” Pete’s words are cruel and they dig into Patrick’s skin relentlessly. Patrick cries out as a vicious jolt of pain bursts through him, unending as it takes the place of his pulse. He breathes heavily, screaming and jerking in the chair. Pete and Bebe are still talking on the video before him but he can no longer hear the words. He can see, though, the way that Pete looks at Bebe. He can see as Bebe pulls him close.

He can watch in horror as the two collide in a passionate kiss.

The video stops and Patrick can’t think straight. What a fool he must have looked like to Pete this whole time, dragging them into trouble and failing to pull them out. How pathetic he must have seemed, confessing his love to a man who wants him dead.
Patrick convulses under the violent wave of wrath and fury washing over him. He can’t control his body, shaking back and forth so intensely that the chair begins to rock dangerously beneath him.

This isn’t like that time with Gerard or Joe. This isn’t bloodlust or rage consuming him.

It’s pure hatred.

And it’s only directed at himself.

Because he caused this.

Joe’s death, Pete’s anger, Andy’s sadness….it was all him.

He deserves this.

He deserves those words that Pete spoke.

He deserves to be here, tortured and taunted by people who hate him. Because who is he to feel anger against people who hate him if he’s one of those people as well?

“Pete never loved you,” Sara says, moving back in front of him. Patrick falls limp, head hanging and chest heaving with heavy breaths. “He hates you. He blames you for this. And you’re still fighting for him? He is the one you’re fighting for, right?”

Patrick doesn’t respond.

“Answer honestly, Patrick. Do you really believe Pete would ever care for someone like you?” Sara continues.

Patrick’s broken. He’s defeated and dejected when he answers.

“No. No, of course he wouldn’t.” He can barely hear his own voice.

Sara nods at Rosa. signaling her to press play on the radio. The sound of static fills the air and then…

“I’m good to go…”

There’s no jolt of pain. There are no terrible spasms.

“…and I’m going nowhere fast…”

He blinks twice.

And his vision is covered with yellow.
There's gonna be at least one more part of Rat A Tat and then we get to get into Miss Missing You. Oh boy, oh boy, I can't wait :)  

BTW Can I be excited for a second?? This might be really annoying but whatever it made me happy because it was one of my goals for this fic (I had high hopes for it, still kinda do). One! Of! My favorite! Tumblrs! Posted a fic rec list thingy! And this fic was on it! I smiled stupidly for a good five or ten minutes because, c'mon, it was listed with a few of my favorite fics. It totally didn't deserve to be on there. But still. I love that it was <3  

Thank you so much for reading and commenting! You guys are awesome! Please continue to do so!
Pete’s in the garage packing up weapons and supplies when the thought hits. What the hell is he doing?

He tightens his fist around the bass-machete, gritting his teeth. Is he really planning on storming into the cult’s hideout with no plan, waving around a weapon too big for him? Is he really prepared to leave Andy behind, risking his life for someone who killed one of their friends? Does Pete really want to throw himself into a suicide mission for something like this? For Patrick?

For Patrick….Always.

Pete casts aside all thoughts of the briefcase and cult; the world’s worth nothing if Patrick isn’t in it. Besides, Pete knows that they need more than that useless briefcase to take music from the world.

They consider the briefcase their secret weapon- the endgame for a war Pete never signed up to fight. To hell with prophecies and fate. Stephanie keeps blabbering about him being a Defender of the Faith. Apparently, that’s supposed to mean something. He’s supposed to feel some great duty to end Silence the Noise- to defend the faith.

Screw that. His faith has only ever been focused on a stubborn little singer with red-gold hair and
vibrant blue eyes. From the day he first heard him breathe, his faith has been all on Patrick Stump.

He doesn’t know what will become of it if he finds out that Patrick…

If…

It’s been a week, Stephanie said, that they’ve had him. A week ago, Patrick was stolen by a group of people who fed off his pain the last time they had him. A week ago, Patrick was shaken from his sleep in that cell and tossed back into the nightmare their lives have become. A week.

How much can happen in a week?

Pete’s mind taunts him, piecing together pictures and scenes that he never wanted to imagine existing. But now that he knows their possibility, he can’t stop.

He wants to believe that Patrick’s still alive but he can’t keep those screams out of his head- those awful screams from before. What if he’s screaming now? What if he’s crying and sobbing, begging for death because the pain is too much? Oh god, Pete doesn’t want Patrick to beg to die but he knows that everyone has a breaking point.

Patrick seemed to have reached his the second that Pete broke his heart.

And that’s the worst part- that Pete never got to tell Patrick that he still loves him. Patrick could be biting back his name, swallowing down the sobs for someone he loves to come and save him. Patrick could be wishing for Pete to appear all the while scolding himself for hoping for someone who hates him. Because Pete knows what he said and he knows what Patrick thinks. And he knows that Patrick has every reason to believe Pete hates him.

And Pete’s heart beats faster, his palms growing sweaty as he crumbles down to the ground. His grip on the machete comes loose, the weapon crashing to the floor beside him. He can’t focus; he can barely see an inch in front of him, his vision is swimming so. He doesn’t want to follow this train of thought, doesn’t want to imagine any more scenes of Patrick curled into a helpless ball as he begs for the blows and taunts to stop. He doesn’t want to imagine how long Patrick could have lasted under that much pain or how he must have felt alone- so alone.

He doesn’t want to imagine that Patrick died but, more than that, he doesn’t want to imagine that Patrick died with the belief that Pete did nothing to stop it. He doesn’t want to imagine Patrick truly believing that Pete hates him.

Each moment he was ever cruel to Patrick, each time he saw those blue eyes fill with betrayal and pain, paints itself in his mind in the form of his own voice. The words he spoke are bitter and barely alive, Pete shooting them down each time they appear. He never meant them, he swears it. These words don’t have the right to exist, they’re nothing more than ghosts from a time he thought he was the one that was hurt. He wants to kill them and to eradicate them from his memory but they take over his thoughts.

His ghost train of thought haunts him.

“Monster!” Pete slams his hands over his ears as the memory invades his mind. “I won’t let you hurt anyone else, you monster!”

If the last thing Patrick ever heard Pete say is this- this proclamation of the love of his life being nothing more than a simple-minded monster- Pete may never forgive himself. He tells himself that wasn’t really Patrick, that some other creature was taking control.
But he saw the second of hurt in Patrick’s eyes. He saw the way his smile fell.

Guilt and anguish gnaw at Pete’s bones, burying their razor-blade teeth into his flesh and tearing chunks from his heart. He wonders how one man can be allowed to feel so much emotion at once, how it’s possible for him to survive this kind of pain. He tugs his knees up to his chest, his lungs aching from the thousands of screams he’s holding in. Patrick’s cries and his own insults grow louder in his mind with each breath he takes, mocking him and blaming him for every scar either of them receive. He closes his eyes and sees nothing but disjointed images and words. Patrick’s tears, alone in the forest as he screamed for forgiveness he didn’t need. He sees his own sneer, wrapping around words spilling from his lips like poison. He hears Patrick’s soft breaths as he tried to tell Pete that he still loves him and Pete’s throat itches with the desire to scream those words back at him. He throws his head back, slamming it against the wall behind him. Pain bursts on the back of his head but it’s not enough. Nothing will ever be enough if he can never see Patrick again. Still, he repeats the action again and again until the image of tear-filled eyes leaves his mind.

Patrick said he loved me. But I made him feel as if I never felt the same for him.

Though the images and sounds begin to dull into repetitiveness, Pete still can’t escape the overwhelming weight of shame crushing his bones into dust. He lets his head fall forward into his arms, pain blossoming from where he had been brutally banging it against the wall. He begins to shake; he begins to gasp for breath.

With the sensation of a great wall collapsing, Pete lets his guard down and a sob rips free from his throat, echoing off the walls around him like a roar. Shouts and screams that can’t be held back any longer fill the silence of the room. Tears stream down his cheeks for the first time since this disaster began weeks ago. He rubs at his eyes and tries to wipe away his tears. They’re too reminiscent of Patrick, too great a reminder of the pain Patrick, too, has suffered. The thought, though, only makes him cry harder. He doesn’t care how loud his sobs grow or how he hears the door slam open as someone walks in on his breakdown.

“I’m so sorry, Patrick, please, I’m so sorry. Please be okay, please forgive me, I’m so sorry,” Pete chokes out, unable to stop the words from breaking free. “I’m so sorry.”

Someone calls out his name and hands land on his arms, trying to calm him down. The actions, though, are too sturdy to ever be Patrick. The voice is all wrong. Pete shoves them away. If it’s not Patrick, who could it be? Has the cult come to take him, too? Or is it someone else, trying to convince him that he isn’t too blame? It doesn’t matter. Pete screams all the same.

“Patrick,” he cries, throat beginning to ache from the screaming sobs. He slams his hands over his ears, blocking out even his own voice. “Please, I just want Patrick. I need Patrick. I need him. I need him here. I need him now!”

Someone tugs at his wrists gently, prying them away from his head and whispering calm reassurances. Pete shakes his head, eyes screwed shut. He doesn’t understand how no one can see the wicked things he’s done, the pain he’s brought to the one who means the most to him. Patrick’s face and voice enter his mind again, causing his cries to become screams. He gasps for breath.

This is all his fault.

If he had gone with Patrick to the hotel to gather the briefcase...If he hadn’t been such a stubborn idiot and just went with him...Patrick would have had a better chance of never getting caught. He could have protected Patrick. No... He should have protected Patrick.

The tears run faster, hot and burning across the small scabs scattered over his face. He doesn’t notice.
“Pete, please. It’s just me.”

Andy’s voice suddenly registers in Pete’s mind and his eyes snap open. He draws in a breath. 

_Leave me alone! Go away! Nothing matters anymore! We let Patrick die and I hate us for it!_

He means to scream. He means to shout insults that would sever the ties of another friendship.

Instead, he lets out a helpless sob and falls into Andy’s open arms.

“We let him die,” Pete whispers, staining Andy’s shirt with tears.

“Shh,” Andy hushes, hands stroking calm circles across Pete’s back. “It’s going to be okay, I promise. We’re going to be okay. All of us. I promise.”

Pete shakes his head, tears coming faster. “No, no, no, that’s not true. It’s all my fault. I left him. I left him alone, God, why would I ever leave him alone?”

“It’s not your fault, Pete. No one could have known that they’d come for him again,” Andy says. He tries holding Pete tighter, tries healing him with a hug. Pete pulls away, though, rubbing at his eyes painfully.

“Did you know,” he gasps, not meeting Andy’s eyes, “that I promised to protect him? When we first went on tour… He got so homesick, Andy, and he was terrified of almost everything. I found him crying in the back of the van one night because he was so scared. He’d never been so far away from his family for so long, you know? And I promised. I promised that I’d make sure he didn’t have to worry. I promised I’d protect him. And… And I failed. And if he’s dead, I’ll never forgive myself.”

Pete chokes on his sobs, raising a hand and biting on his wrist to keep the cries from growing too overwhelming. Andy says nothing, simply reaching out to pull Pete’s arm down so he doesn’t hurt himself.

“I just want Patrick back,” Pete sobs. “Saving the world means nothing if we couldn’t even save Joe or Patrick. And- And that damn briefcase, Andy, I hate it. It’s not…What we’re fighting to steal back isn’t even-”

Pete’s not sure why he stops speaking, if he cuts himself off or if Andy does.

“Hey,” Andy says, voice soothing. His hand rests on Pete’s shoulder. “We just have one last mission and then we’re done.”

“No,” Pete snarls, standing suddenly and pulling away. “I told you- I don’t give a damn about the world. Why can’t I be selfish for once? I hate that briefcase and I hate that we’re the fucking defenders. I can’t even defend Patrick so why should I try to defend the rest of the world? What did it ever do for me that Patrick couldn’t?”

He’s working himself into a fit, breathing heavily and losing track of his words. Andy drags him back to earth with a stern voice.

“Pete,” he snaps. Pete stops, breathing deeply, and meets Andy’s eyes. “We’re not going after the briefcase. We’re going in for Patrick.”

Pete’s world slams to a halt, his vision breaking into pieces and coming back together in new ways. He suddenly grows too aware of his own pulse, beating furiously in his neck.
“But,” he starts, voice lost. “It’s been a week. He could be dead.”

“You’re right. He could be dead,” Andy says. Pete flinches and makes to storm away. Andy, though, steps closer and blocks his escape route. “But he could also be alive.”

“Do you really think there’s a chance?” Pete asks, staring at his feet. “Is it worth the risk?”

“I think there’s hope,” Andy says, causing Pete to look up at him in shocked awe. “Hope is usually worth the risk.”

“Usually?” Pete repeats. Andy nods.

“Hope, yeah. But Patrick’s in there, too. And if there’s one thing I know, Wentz, it’s that Patrick will always be worth the risk to you.”

Pete still feels like a monster, like he doesn’t deserve the small grin Andy’s granting him. His head throbs with cruel thoughts and his heart still twinges painfully at the thought of Patrick.

Still, he can’t help but smile.

“Okay,” he says in an uncharacteristically small voice. He laughs weakly and looks back down. “God, I’m sorry. I’m such a horrible person. We should be saving the world but instead—”

“We’re saving Patrick,” Andy interrupts. Pete looks up at him and raises an eyebrow. “And, for you, that’s basically the same thing, right? Screw what anyone else says. Patrick’s important to both of us but I know that he’s your entire world. So, c’mon. Let’s save the world.”

And, well, Pete doesn’t really have anything to say to that instead of a breathless “Yeah, okay. Let’s save the world.”


These thoughts circle through his mind relentlessly. It’s as if they’re all that he knows.

The Vixens draw close and Patrick snarls, baring his teeth and pulling against the restraints in an attempt to attack them. He’s animalistic, eyes darting around the room as he tries to see past the blurred haze covering his sight. Yellow. He forgets what’s wrong with that color.

Music fills the air, itching at his skin and tugging at his thoughts. Off. He needs it off. One girl steps towards him again and Patrick thrashes towards her, growling as he does so.

Words. He knows that he should speak words but, right now, he can’t get his throat to form them.

The Vixens watch him with wide-eyes. They’re afraid. Patrick smirks. Good.

“Stay away from me,” he finally spits out, the words like razor blades as they leave his tongue. It causes him to wince. Speaking isn’t good, it seems. One girl raises an eyebrow.

Who are these women? And who is he? He doesn’t know how he got here or why they’re looking at him so strangely. With each second that ticks by, it feels as if more memories are being erased.

He grows more violent at the realization, shouting wordlessly and glaring at the girls before him. A sickening anger like none other fills his mind but something in his gut feels empty. When he ponders on it, he realizes that he feels lost, out of control. He needs something to do; he needs a purpose. He
needs something to distract him from this rage.

“Stay still,” one girl declares. Patrick obeys. Like a dog.

“Good boy,” the second girl coos. It should be demeaning but Patrick can’t deny the warmth that floods through his body at the phrase. Good. He did well.

Slowly, the Vixens free him from the machine and the bonds on the chair. Patrick’s perfectly still, barely even breathing as they work. His only movements are his blinks. Strange, he notices, that they come in groups of two.

One blink. Blink again. Wait. Repeat. He tries to blink only once but, as if the action is hardwired into his body, he can’t help but blink again.

Strange. He wonders what it means.

“Ok. You can stand now.”

Patrick breaks free from his musings as he does as he’s told, muscles aching as he moves to stand. The girls watch, fascinated, as he grows accustomed to this body. He knows it’s his; he just doesn’t remember how long he’s had it.

Patrick scans the room, gritting his teeth to get his eyes to focus. They’re too hyper, though, jumping from detail to detail without really taking anything in. It’s making him sick and he shuts his eyes. He shakes his head. He doesn’t understand what’s wrong with him.

When he opens his eyes again, he has more control. And the first thing he sees is the paused video of the man projected onto the wall before him.

Part of the man’s face is hidden, covered by the girl kissing him, but Patrick can make out some details. Something about him feels familiar, with his dark tattoos and darker hair. His eyes are shut but, somehow, Patrick knows that they are brown.

Something in Patrick’s mind snaps at the sight of this person, this stranger portrayed before him. Anger. Hatred. Rage. Patrick growls and slashes his hook across the image. A horrible noise fills the room at the action but Patrick smiles. For a second, he had been able to forget about the music.

Someone’s hand lands on Patrick’s shoulder as he raises his hook to attack the man again. In an instant, he turns and pins the offender against the wall.

It’s a Vixen, dark-haired with fear in her eyes as he lines his hook up with her throat. Confusion fills Patrick. Friend? Enemy? He doesn’t know.

“Patrick, stop,” the girl beneath him says. Patrick? Who the hell is that? He searches his mind for the name. Surely he isn’t Patrick, right? Shouldn’t he know if he is?

But, as he searches for memories, he realizes that he has none.

His hook presses closer against the girl’s throat now, drawing a dot of blood.

“Who am I?” Speaking still hurts and still burns as words slide over his tongue. When he yells, it’s like spitting sparks. “Why can’t I remember who I am!?”

“Back down. Now,” the girl behind him snaps. Patrick has no choice but to do as she says. The Vixen he’d been holding onto shoves him away, sneering as she passes by to stand next to the other
girl. Patrick finds that he doesn’t care.

“What’s my name?” He asks, wincing around each syllable. “Where are my memories?”

He’s answered only by the song from before repeating itself with a click. Patrick would fill the air with more demands if his mouth didn’t feel as if it were bleeding.

“Rosa,” one girl says finally, not looking at him. “Let’s take him to Courtney. I think he’s ready.”

The other girl nods and they begin to walk, brushing by him without a care. Patrick knows that they expect him to follow and he wonders what would happen if he doesn’t.

The wonder doesn’t last long as he turns to face them, just in time to see one girl beckoning him to go. Any hesitation leaves his mind and, with one last glance at the stranger on the wall, Patrick turns and leaves.

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The first thing Patrick learns about this Courtney is that she likes to laugh and smirk. At everyone.

The room that the Vixens lead him into is smaller than he would have expected, what with the size of the rooms they had just dragged him through. He was certain that the last room they’d been in would never end. The sound of instruments and CDs crashing against the ground rings in his ears. He shakes his head to rid himself of it.

The Vixens have left him in the room but Courtney’s not the only one in there with him. Another man stands beside him, eyes blazing and his hair like fire. He looks upon Patrick with a strange mix of fear and pity. Something hides in the frown he gives him. It almost looks like an apology.

Patrick feels as if he should remember this man but he pushes the thought away. Courtney will tell him what he needs to know, the Vixens had said, so he shouldn’t focus on false memories that may appear until then.

“Why are you wasting my time?” Courtney asks, voice as smug as her smile. “Your brother and friends are all alive, are they not? You should be thanking me and yet here you are, making requests.”

“Because not all my friends are free,” the red-haired man says. His voice carries a strange tone, an accent Patrick’s certain he’s heard before. “I brought Pat- I did as you said. Now let Frank go.”

Courtney’s unperturbed by the man’s pleading sound. Patrick watches, fascinated, as her eyebrows crease together.

“Frank?” She says thoughtfully. “You think we still have him?”

The other man’s face wrinkles in confusion. “The Vixens told me that you were keeping him prisoner and would only let him go if I did as you asked. Are you saying that he’s been free all this time?”

Courtney’s eyes narrow and then widen, filling with glee. “No, Gerard. I’m saying we’ve already killed him.”

Patrick can’t understand the concept of pain or heartbreak. He knows that they exist, that he must have felt them at least once in his life. But emotions are jumbled up in his head, mixing together until the only feeling he has is the disgusting gray color that they become.
He imagines, though, that pain and heartbreak must look an awful lot like what this man- Gerard?- is feeling.

It’s spellbinding to Patrick, like watching a building collapse. It starts with Gerard’s eyes, filling with tears instantly as they widen to an inhuman point. His cheeks pale and his mouth falls open as if his jaw has been unhinged. His hands begin to tremble and all his air leaves him in one violent cry.

“You’re lying,” he screams, tears collecting on his lashes. “You- He’s not- You’re lying!”

“Maybe I’d let you believe that.” Courtney smirks. “But it’s much more fun to assure you that I’m not.”

Gerard is a blur of color as he races across Patrick’s vision- the yellow haze making his hair appear a bit more orange than anything else. He lunges towards Courtney’s desk, teeth bared as he cries out for vengeance.

He’s a threat and Patrick feels as if he’s been programmed to stop him.

There’s no time to think; there’s barely any time to breathe. Patrick sees the fury in Gerard’s eyes, directed at Courtney, and he runs forward to block his way.

“No,” Patrick growls, the word scraping its way up his throat as he stands defensively in front of Courtney’s desk. He locks eyes with the startled man before him and bares his own teeth, the way Gerard had just been. “No.”

Patrick expects this stranger to attack him. He’s much taller and Patrick quickly figures that he’d easily beat him in a fight. Still, Gerard falters and his eyes are nothing more than sad.

“Leave,” Courtney demands before Patrick can wonder too much about why Gerard’s looking at him like that. “I’m giving you the chance to live. Take it.”

So kind, Patrick thinks. Courtney must be so merciful to allow this man to remain alive when Gerard so clearly wants her dead. Surely this is a sign that he should trust her as the Vixens said?

Gerard hesitates, his eyes stuck on Patrick. He doesn’t move and, as time crawls on, Patrick begins to grow restless. He steps towards Gerard, snarling as he does so. The flinch he receives causes him to smile. Finally, Gerard sighs. Patrick expects him to leave, to take Courtney’s offer and go. Instead, he steps forward. He raises a hand as if he intends to rest it on Patrick’s shoulder or stroke his cheek. Patrick panics and grabs his wrist, eyes wild at the unexpected affection. Gerard gasps and Patrick releases his hand.

“You’re… You’re really gone, aren’t you?” Gerard asks him in a sad voice. Patrick lets his head fall to the side, confusion in his eyes. Gerard wraps his arms around himself. “I’m so sorry.”

Patrick’s eyebrows furrow together. “Wha-”

“Leave,” Courtney snaps. This time, Gerard tosses a scathing look her way and goes. Patrick almost feels sad when he does. Courtney, though, interrupts his thoughts.

“Ignore him,” she says. “Let me get a look at you.”

Patrick turns to face the woman. He expects to see her scrutinizing him with narrowed eyes, to be judging every facet of his appearance. Instead, she’s on a laptop with her bottom lip caught between her teeth. He wants to ask her about who he is and why he’s here but the words stick in his throat. He’s not willing to put himself through the agony of speaking just yet.
“Who are you loyal to?” Courtney asks, nonchalant. Patrick steps towards her.

“I don’t know,” he whispers. It’s easier than talking normally.

“Will you be loyal to me?” Courtney questions, finger dancing over the buttons of the laptop. Patrick considers his answer carefully. The correct answer has to be yes- she seems to be a safe person to side with. But something tugs at his mind and he can’t forget that he has forgotten memories.

“I’ll be loyal to you,” he says slowly. “If you tell me who I am.”

Courtney raises an eyebrow but keeps her eyes on the screen before her.

“So you’ll be loyal to me?” She asks. Patrick nods. “Prove it.”

Patrick’s taken aback, unable to comprehend how she wishes for him to respond. “Prove it? How?”

Slowly, Courtney’s eyes raise to look at him. Slowly, music begins to play from her computer.

Patrick goes rigid.

“Turn it off,” he demands. Courtney ignores him and he raises his voice. “Turn it off!”

Courtney hums, fingers hovering over the power button of her laptop. Just as Patrick begins to believe that she’ll show him the same mercy she’d shown Gerard, her hands land on the volume and merely turn it up. When Patrick cringes in pain, she laughs.

“I thought you loved music,” she says. “Do you really want me to turn it off?”

“Yes,” Patrick spits out through gritted teeth. His tugs at his hair and scowls. Bugs. Bugs everywhere. It feels like they’re crawling beneath the deepest layer of his skin, swimming through his veins and burrowing into his bones. Electric jolts shoot down his spine and his legs feel too weak to support him. Even speaking doesn’t hurt as much as this. “Turn it off now."

“Get rid of it yourself,” Courtney says, leaning back and folding her arms over her chest. Patrick looks up, blinking at her, before acting on instinct. His body moves towards the desk against his will. He doesn’t look at Courtney. He just does what his mind tells him to.

*Crush it. Get rid of it. Kill it. Break it. All music must be destroyed.*

With steady movements, he lifts up the small laptop and tosses it onto the floor. When the music fades out, punctuated by the shattering of the screen, he grins. Courtney giggles from behind her desk and he looks to her.

“More,” she demands, holding out a guitar. Patrick runs his fingers over the strings, a strange sound emitting from the device. He grimaces as he takes it. It only feels natural to slam it against the ground.

Courtney laughs louder as she passes him more and more material to break, items that his brain screams are evil and wrong.

*Music! That makes music! Destroy it! Get rid of it! It’s all wrong!*

He screams as he tosses a record to the ground, watching it break into pieces as he slams his foot down on it. The only music in the room is that of his shouts mixing in time with the destruction occurring by his own actions.
“Enough,” Courtney says, at last, grinning at Patrick like a Cheshire cat. “You’ve convinced me.”

Patrick pants heavily, sweat streaming down my face. Annoyance bubbles up in his veins; anger clenches around his throat. Courtney’s laughter is mocking and her smile is even worse. Still, Patrick only has one thing to say.

“Then tell me,” he demands. “Tell me who I am?”

Courtney laughs again and Patrick finds his irritation reaching impossible levels.

“Oh,” she says. “Isn’t it obvious?”

Patrick waits, eyes on the blonde woman moving towards him.

Courtney smiles and runs her hand through his hair.

“You’re our little freak.”

Pete and Andy arrive at the cult’s hideout late in the afternoon, Stephanie’s warning ringing through their heads. Don’t take any needless risks. Save only Patrick or the briefcase- saving both will waste too much time. Don’t start any fights. And, most importantly, understand if Patrick is too far gone to save. Don’t bring home a monster.

Pete’s heart pounds angrily at that last statement. Who is she to call Patrick a monster? Who is she to set conditions on how to bring him back? Pete’s decided to ignore that last rule. He’ll save Patrick, whatever state he’s in.

“You ready?” Andy asks, hand on the door handle. Pete nods.

“Yeah,” he breathes. “Let’s do this.”

The two sneak out of the car and across the parking lot to the warehouse across the street. It doesn’t look like much and Pete’s a bit underwhelmed but Stephanie had assured them that the cult had found ways to make the limited space work. He shares a guarded look with Andy as they press up against the wall of the building, breathing heavily as Pete reaches for the doorknob. They’re on the side of the building and Stephanie promised them that a “friend on the inside” would shut down the alarms in the area so they could sneak in. Still, Pete takes a breath in an attempt to calm his terror.

“You don’t have to do this, man,” Andy says, sensing Pete’s fear. Pete tosses him a glare.

“Yes,” he says. “I do.”

With a demanding shove, he throws open the door.

No alarms go off and Pete allows himself to breathe. Just as he’s about to step inside, Andy grabs his arm.

“Remember the plan?” He asks. Pete hesitates, looking around cautiously.

“Yeah,” he whispers. “I’ll take the basement while you check the main floor. If either of us finds Patrick, take him back to the car immediately then come back and find the other. If he’s not in the lower or main floors, we go to the upper together.”

“And if we don’t find-” Andy cuts off with a sigh and shakes his head before fixing a scolding look
on Pete. “Pete, I need to know if you’re prepared to see…If anything goes wrong or we were too late, I need to be sure you’ll still stay focused. Are you ready for that possibility?”

Pete’s blood runs cold.

Patrick screaming. Patrick bleeding and bruised and crying out his name. Patrick dead on the floor with accusing eyes.

“It can’t be any worse than what’s already in my head,” Pete says. Andy searches his eyes before nodding and heading inside. Pete shakes the thoughts from his mind and follows.

The first hallway is dark and Pete is tempted to look for a light. Andy draws in a breath before him, raising his crossbow as he marches down the hall. Pete’s grip on his bass-machete tightens and he follows soundlessly. After a few minutes of walking, Andy holds out a hand to signal Pete to stop. Pete slows, too afraid to voice his confusion. Andy looks back, seemingly sharing the sentiment, and points to a staircase further ahead, descending down into a deeper darkness. Pete nods, understanding right away.

It’s not until they reach the staircase and Pete turns to go down it that he lets himself feel afraid.

He’s alone.

He’s officially alone.

The staircase seems to go on forever and the temperature drops with each step down. Pete shivers as he nears the end, his anxiety only making it worse. Eventually, he reaches the bottom along with the conclusion that no one else is down here. It’s too dark and silent for any Vixens or cult members to be lurking about-as creepy as they are. Feeling secure in that realization, he fumbles for the pocket flashlight Stephanie had equipped him and Andy with. At the time, Pete had groaned at its weakness but, in the total darkness of the basement, it’s an incredibly handy tool. He begins to stalk through the cold halls and rooms, fear keeping his steps quick.

Moments tick by and Pete begins to worry that he’s wasting his time. What if Andy is in trouble upstairs? What if Patrick’s being tortured right now as he wanders aimlessly down here? Does he even know the way back to the staircase? This setting is too much like a horror movie scene with dimmed lights and cement walls. His breath comes impossible quick at the thought as he waits for a monster to appear from around a corner.

“When I say…”

A familiar voice ghosts through the halls and to Pete’s ears, drowning away his worries. He recognizes that song and, more importantly, he recognizes that voice. He begins to run, flashlight shaking dizzily before him, and comes to a large door. It’s imposing, threatening, and constructed to blend into the wall around it. He struggles to force it open, nearly dropping his flashlight as he searches blindly for the handle.

“Patrick,” he hisses as the voice inside continues with the song. “Patrick, I’m coming!”

When the door finally opens, he’s assaulted with a myriad of lights. He flicks off the flashlight, blinking in the sudden brightness, and pushes forward.

“Saturday…”

As Pete ventures further into the room, he notices that what he thought was Patrick was merely a CD. His heart sinks at the realization and he rubs at his eyes to take in the rest of the room.
He knows instantly that this is where they had been keeping Patrick.

He recognizes the chair and machine from before, the wires and electrodes hanging carelessly onto the floor. The restraints are loose as well, lines across them as if someone had been tugging to get free. He bites his tongue to keep from speaking as he stalks towards the chair. Carefully, he rests his hand against the back.

It’s still warm.

Patrick was just here.

The thought lands on Pete like a brick, shattering every bone on its way through him. Patrick was here! He was here mere moments ago and, again, Pete was too late. He nearly falls to his knees but the radio in the corner clicks and “Saturday” begins to repeat. He feels sick as he wanders towards it.

“I’m good to go…”

Pete had realized that music was Patrick’s trigger, that the cult had been using it to brainwash and torture him. He’d thought it was cruel the first time he’d figured it out. Patrick loved music more than life itself and Silence the Noise was bold enough to take that from him. More than that, they used it to hurt him. When Pete had first realized this, he’d wanted nothing more than to tear this cult to shreds.

But now he knows that they used “Saturday”. They fucking used “Saturday” to hurt Patrick, to make him scream and cry out in pain. They used this song- their song- to turn him against himself. And the worst part is that they’d thought they’d get away with it.

Pete wants to burn this fucking place to the ground.

He drops the machete and it hits the floor with an echoing clank. Pete doesn’t care because all he can focus on is Patrick’s voice sounding the way it should. Young. Happy. Safe.

The emotions in Pete’s mind overflow into his body and he rips the radio from the wall. When he throws it across the room, it hits the cement hard enough to burst into a thousand pieces. It’s not enough.

It will never be enough.

Pete grows wild, tearing apart the room with his bare hands. He kicks the radio as he passes it and flips the chair over with a scream. He stabs his machete into the machine that was used to change Patrick into someone he barely recognized. He throws the flashlight at the projector in the back of the room.

And something in the front starts playing.

At first, it’s static as the video scratches and rewinds, trying to find its place. It doesn’t need to begin, though. The second Pete sees it he knows what it is.

“I wouldn’t be here if Patrick hadn’t gotten caught! None of us would be!”

Pete’s certain he’s going to be sick.

No matter how he tries to stop it, his mind takes the pieces of this room and fits them into a bigger scene. A scene where Patrick’s strapped to that chair, shocked and conditioned to hate his own music. A scene where Patrick’s tortured and taunted as the Vixens play this video out of context.
A scene where Patrick’s in pain and crying and truly believes that Pete hates him.

It’s as if all his fears are coming true, that all Pete’s worries about what he’s said are alive. He’d thought that maybe Patrick could see past the venom of his words as they fought. Maybe he’d forgive him for calling him a monster. But Pete can’t imagine a world where Patrick ever forgives him for this.

He knows what he did; he knows what he said. And it continues to play on the wall before him.

Before he knows it, Pete’s running outside of the room, desperate to escape. He slams the door shut behind him, locking himself together with the darkness. He can still hear his voice, though, mixing with Bebe’s as she crawls onto his lap to kiss him. How much did they make Patrick watch? Did he see them kiss? Pete falls to his knees. Too much anxiety eats at his stomach and guts, crawling up his throat until he’s retching onto the ground beneath him.

This isn’t right. This isn’t fair. He was supposed to find Patrick and bring him home so they could finally be happy together. But…But now the cult…

No. Pete shuts his eyes. He has no one to blame but himself. He could have found a better way to trick Bebe but, at the time, he just went with what was easiest.

When was saying such awful things about Patrick easy?

Footsteps echo from down the hall and he reaches for his weapon, lying forgotten on the ground beside him. He pushes himself to his feet and waits for the person to show themselves.

“Pete!” Andy whisper-yells. Pete sighs in relief, muscles going lax. “Pete!”

“Over here,” Pete responds, not bothering to remain quiet. “I’m- I’m over here.”

Andy hurries towards him, flashlight searching the area before Pete feels it land on his face. He blinks weakly, looking away as Andy comes to stand before him.

“Patrick wasn- Hey, what’s wrong?” Andy asks, eyebrows wrinkling together. Pete shrugs, wrapping his arms around his middle.

“He wasn’t down here but I found where they’ve been keeping him. He- They tortured him again, Andy,” Pete says, his voice cracking. “They hooked him up to that goddamn machine and I think they might have him under their control again.”

“Do you know how they did it?” Andy asks. Pete presses his lips into a thin line before nodding.

“It was just music. They conditioned him to hate music and triggered that hate with…with certain videos, I guess,” Pete says, too ashamed to tell the full truth. Andy nods slowly, seeming to sense that something’s off, but doesn’t press further.

“He wasn’t on the main floor, either. But we should be careful heading back up. There are a ton of cult members scattered everywhere;” Andy warns. “They’re breaking instruments and records so I don’t want to get on their bad side.”

Pete nods even as a chill settles in his bones. Patrick must be with Courtney- the head bitch in charge, or so he likes to call her. He’s terrified to imagine what it must mean if he’s been brought to the leader already.

“Do you have any idea how to get up there without being noticed?” Pete asks. Andy shrugs.
“Well, it’s not the best plan, but-”

“Oh dear, what do we have here?”

Pete and Andy freeze as a light switches on. They turn to face the opening of the hallway to see Rosa and Sara stalking towards them.

Pete and Andy share a look. Andy raises an eyebrow; Pete nods.

And the two take off sprinting past the girls, shoving them to the side as they go. The sound of shouts and gunshots fill the air and Pete’s heart is in his throat as he runs. His eyes try desperately to adjust to the darkness but he ends up running into the wall more than anything. Eventually, Andy grips his wrist and he’s being tugged up the stairs.

“So much for not being noticed,” Pete says, out of breath as they reach the top. Andy laughs in response.

“Come on!” He says. “We just need to get to Patrick and we’re out of here.”

Patrick. Just the sound of his name makes Pete run harder.

“Where were all those members you were talking about?” Pete asks. Andy throws open a door at the end of the hall.

“They were-” Andy cuts off, slamming to a halt and causing Pete to run into him. “Oh, fuck.”

Pete’s heart drops and he looks past Andy to see a legion of cult members holding weapons and standing before them. A staircase across the room ascends to Courtney’s office and Pete’s mind hurts from how fiercely he's trying to find a way to get them from here to there.

“In my defense,” Andy says. “They were totally in a different room last time I checked.”

Pete can’t respond as he and Andy step further into the room. The Vixens are still behind them, catching up. Pete’s debating running through the crowd with his eyes shut. Maybe if he has enough hope, he’ll make it through.

Yeah right.

“I don’t want to die here,” Pete admits, voice soft. Andy casts him a sympathetic look but Pete shakes his head, trying to make him understand. “I don’t want to die before I find Patrick.”

Andy opens his mouth but Pete can only hear the Vixens shouting behind them. Fear locks up his throat and prevents him from breathing. He lowers his weapon and shuts his eyes.

The Vixens are drawing closer and he can feel Andy drop into a defensive stance.

Any moment now, those cult members are going to attack and he won’t stand a chance.

Any last words?

Pete’s breaths are shaky and tears prick at his eyes. “Patrick…”

The battle doesn’t begin the way Pete expects.

It starts with the innocent sound of a door opening. It starts with the piercing sounds of the alarms going off.
“Time to make some noise, bitches!”

Pete opens his eyes to the sound of gunshots and screams. A flashing red light floods the room and the alarms won’t quit. He looks over his shoulder to see the Vixens disappearing down the hall, away from the fight. He looks forward to see who saved them.

Blue jacket. Yellow mask. Bright red hair.

Gerard fucking Way.

Pete smiles breathlessly as he watches Gerard shooting fearlessly into the crowd of cult members, a dotted yellow mask covering his eyes but failing to hide the tear stains down his cheeks. Pete blinks, frozen in his spot, until Gerard looks over at him.

“Go!” Gerard screams. “Patrick’s just up those stairs! You need to go to him!”

Pete doesn’t need to be told twice.

He and Andy begin to run, shoving aside cult members as they go. Andy could easily take a number of them out with his crossbow but he settles on punches. As much as Pete wants to see everyone in this damned cult dead for what they’ve done to Patrick, he finds that he doesn’t care so long as it gets him to the staircase. As long as it gets him to Patrick.

It doesn’t take long to get to the other side of the room. Gerard’s still firing into the crowd, keeping the attention on him. Pete doesn’t know why Gerard’s suddenly back on their side or what made him snap but, as he nods gratefully to him, he feels no need to doubt him the way he did last time. He and Andy hurry up the stairs, the thought of Patrick fuelling Pete’s speed.

They’re halfway up when a cult member grabs Andy, pinning him to the wall. More appear, flocking around them like moths to a flame. Pete shoves as many as he can away, threatening them with his machete.

“Pete, just go!” Andy shouts, successfully knocking one man out with a single punch. He looks at Pete sternly. “Go save Patrick!”

With only a small amount of guilt and reluctance, Pete does as he’s told. When he gets to the top, he’s faced with a door. He tosses it open, unsure of what he’ll see.

“Took you long enough.” A feminine voice fills the room as soon as he steps inside.

Courtney sits behind a desk near the back of the small room, smug and unafraid even as Pete instinctively aims his weapon at her. She raises an eyebrow. Her eyes slip to the side.

Pete follows her gaze.

“Patrick?” Pete gasps out, his voice barely a whisper.

He’d known to expect this. He knew that if he found Patrick alive then this was the most likely result. Still, he’s unprepared to see Patrick this way. He’s unprepared to see Patrick at all.

The singer moves to stand before the desk, protecting Courtney from Pete. His eyes, furious and golden, watch Pete’s every move.

“Get out,” he demands, wincing as if the words hurt him. “Get out before I kill you.”

The words are malicious, tearing into Pete’s skin. He knows that this isn’t really Patrick, that the cult
made him into this violent creature. Still, it hurts to hear such hatred in Patrick’s voice. No matter how much Pete knows he deserves it.

“Patrick, come on,” Pete tries in a wavery voice, lowering his weapon. “Calm down, this isn’t you.”

Patrick doesn’t respond, though his eyes fill with more fury.

“Patrick, please!” Pete says, more pleading than before. “Please! Just let me take you home. I need to take you home, Patrick.”

Courtney laughs, a disturbing sound.

“Don’t you understand?” Courtney asks. “He’s not Patrick anymore. Patrick’s gone and there’s no way my monster is going to follow you out that door.”

Pete watches Patrick carefully, expecting to see him flinch or cringe at Courtney’s comment. Anything to prove that Patrick’s still in there. But Patrick does nothing but narrow his eyes at Pete, disgust in the way he curls his lip. It seems as if, in Patrick’s vision, the only monster in the room is Pete.

Well, Pete thinks. It’s not like he’s wrong.

Patrick doesn’t attack Pete, though it’s clear that he wants to. It’s as if he’s following some stronger order that outweighs his own desires. The thought makes Pete’s heart hurt, even if Patrick’s stronger desire is to kill him.

Pete raises his weapon again and winces when he sees Patrick flinch at the action. He assumes that Patrick’s order is to protect Courtney. It makes the most sense. But, as Pete walks further into the room, something doesn’t add up.

Patrick shifts to the left, body tense and prepared to attack. Pete lets his eyes follow Patrick’s body. Maybe he can find something to end all of this. Maybe he can discover what’s keeping Patrick under this sick mind control.

Pete’s eyes land on the briefcase. And he gets a terrible idea on how to get Patrick to follow him.

Pete lets his muscles relax. His face falls and his shoulders visibly drop. He points the machete towards the ground and looks sadly at Patrick. He’s the image of defeat.

“Patrick. I’m going to leave now. Just...stay safe, okay?” Pete says. Patrick’s head tilts to the side in confusion and Courtney raises an eyebrow. She’s suspicious, as she should be.

But she’s not suspicious enough.

The fastest he’s ever moved in his life, Pete lunges forward and wraps his hand around the handle of the briefcase. Patrick shouts out in protest and Pete pulls away, barely missing Patrick’s hook as it swings down towards his hand. He hugs the briefcase to his chest, grinning wildly, before looking to Patrick.

If he was angry before, Patrick’s furious now. He bares his teeth at Pete and breathes heavily, his face red and hair wild. He’s like a bull about to charge and Pete’s terrified to find that he’s scared of him. He backs away slowly. Patrick takes a menacing step forward.

Pete turns and begins to run.
Patrick chases with a loud yell, interrupted by the sound of Courtney’s raucous laughter. Pete can hear Patrick thundering behind him as he sprints down the stairs and through the halls, eyes searching desperately for Andy or Gerard. He feels guilty for having left them but Patrick’s close behind him and, like the plan says, he just needs to get him to the car. Hopefully, Andy and Gerard are already there.

The exit door is in Pete’s sight and he breathes out a sigh of satisfaction, pushing himself forward. The red alarm light has stopped flashing, replaced with the bright lights of the hall that had been shut off the first time he and Andy came in here. He assumes it’s for the cult to be able to see them better should they try and run off. He doesn’t care, though. He’s close to escaping, so close that he can see the daylight streaming in through the cracks at the top and bottom of the door. He’s just about to reach out and grab the handle when Patrick grabs him by the back of his shirt and slams him against the wall.

The air leaves Pete’s lungs in a pained *whoosh* but he has no time to consider breathing in. Not when Patrick’s so close, eyes glowing a beautiful gold. Not when this is the first time he’s seen him in days.

Not when his hook is raised high in the air and aimed for Pete’s heart.

*Go ahead, take it*, Pete wants to say. *It’s only ever belonged to you*.

Patrick sneers at him and Pete wonders if he said any of that out loud. He reaches his hand up, wanting to touch Patrick one last time, when Patrick is pulled away from. They both shout out in objection, Patrick sounding a bit in pain. Pete regains his breath and pulls himself off the wall in time to see Andy pinning Patrick to the wall on the other side of the hallway. Gerard’s with him, aiming his gun at Patrick’s head to keep him from attacking anyone. Still, Patrick snarls and thrashes against Andy’s hold like a wild animal being caged. He’s barely recognizable.

“Okay, let’s get him to the car,” he manages to say, drawing the others’ attention to him. “Maybe we can wait for this thing to wear off. It wore off last time, right? No one else has to get hurt.”

Courtney’s laugh fills the room and Pete hates how familiar it’s become. He turns, a grimace on his face, to see the woman walking into the room with a gun pointed forward.

“Are you that stupid?” She sneers. “He’s not ever changing back. So give me back my weapon.”

Pete means to make a sarcastic remark, something angry he can’t hold back that’s sure to get him a bullet in the chest. But then a Vixen appears and she’s pulling Andy back, holding a knife to his throat. All of Pete’s words die before he can think them.

“And you,” Courtney says, turning her gaze on Gerard. “I thought I told you to leave.”

“You did,” Gerard says, dropping his gun to the ground. “I just didn’t care.”

“You’re a stupid fool,” Courtney remarks, cocking the gun. Gerard grins.

“And you’re a pathetic bitch,” he shoots back. “And nothing, not even you, can stop the Defenders of the Faith.”

Pete wants to tell Gerard to stop, to shove him out of the way and shout at him to run as fast as he can.

But there’s a look in Gerard’s eyes that Pete doesn’t want to understand.
It’s the look of a man who’s accepted his fate.

“That may be so,” Courtney says with a scowl. “But you won’t be around to see if you’re right. Any last words, killjoy?”

Her tone is mocking but Gerard smiles anyway.

“Yeah,” he says, turning to look at Pete. “Sometimes we gotta die with our masks on. But that doesn’t mean you have to.”

Pete steps forward, drawn in by Gerard’s warm smile. There’s something more in his words, something deeper, and Pete wants to ask him what it is.

“Gee-”

BANG

The sound echoes off the walls around them and everyone but Courtney and Patrick flinches. Gerard crumbles to the ground, that smile still on his face, blood pouring from the bullet wound in his head. Pete feels sick and the world starts to tilt. This can’t be real. This is a dream. Any second he’s gonna wake up. Any second he’s gonna hear Patrick’s voice, drawing him out from another nightmare.

For some reason, he can’t stop looking at Gerard’s body.

Patrick walks over to Courtney, standing beside her proudly. Pete looks up, horrified that his best friend can behave so calmly after someone- and it was Gerard, no less- was just killed before him. Surely this must grant him some kind of reaction?

No. It doesn’t.

Courtney reaches and pets the top of Patrick’s head, stroking languidly through his hair. Patrick leans into her touch like a dog. He doesn’t even seem to notice he’s doing it, anger still prevalent in his eyes.

“Patrick…” Pete mutters. He doesn’t know what else he means to say but it doesn’t matter. Courtney’s cruel laughter cuts him off.

“What did I tell you?” She asks, her fingers still brushing through Patrick’s hair. She looks over at him slyly. “You’re not Patrick, are you? Tell them what you are.”

The fury in Patrick’s eyes dulls slightly, filling with hesitation and shame. Pete latches onto that. Though it hurts him to see those emotions in his eyes, it’s a sign that Patrick’s not entirely lost to anger and hatred.

“I’m…” Patrick stutters. “I’m a…”

He fades out and Courtney’s touch grows cold. She tightens her grip on his hair and yanks his head back, exposing his throat as he cries out in pain.

“I gave you an order,” she hisses with a sneer. “The next time you disobey, I will kill you. Is that understood?”

Pete watches, horrified but unable to do anything, as Patrick whimpers.

“Yes, master,” he says softly. Pete’s heart breaks at the sound. Courtney seems satisfied with this sign of submission and releases him, returning to the action of false affection. She pets the top of
Patrick’s head and Patrick doesn’t do anything to stop her.

“I’m not Patrick,” he says quietly, refusing to look anywhere besides the ground. “I am their weapon. I’m… I’m nothing but a freak.”

What’s worse than Patrick actually saying these things is how genuinely he seems to believe it. If Pete’s heart was broken before, it’s absolutely wrecked now. He doesn’t know how he’ll ever be able to put the pieces back together.

“Good boy,” Courtney says mockingly, letting her hand fall to the side. “Now, hand over the briefcase.”

Pete looks down at the briefcase. He considers handing it over and ending this all now. It’s not like this briefcase is really as important as they’re all making it out to be. Still, he knows it’s the only way to get Patrick to follow him and he’s not throwing away that chance. He looks Courtney in the eye and, instead of responding, he moves the briefcase behind his body, protecting it from her and Patrick. She frowns and raises the gun again.

“I’m not afraid of dying,” Pete laughs. Courtney raises an eyebrow.

“Is that so?” She asks. “Very well.”

Courtney nods somewhere behind Pete. Pete understands the action far too late.

“No!” He shouts, turning in time to see the Vixen drag her knife across Andy’s throat. Pete’s world shatters and he screams. Just like Gerard, Andy falls to the ground. Blood bubbles out from his throat and Pete wants to help him but he doesn’t know how. He doesn’t know how to fix this.

So he does what he does best and lashes out in anger. He aims his machete at Courtney and rushes forward. She pulls back before it hits her chest but the movement causes her hand to get in the way. A jagged cut forms across the back of her wrist, causing her to drop the gun. Patrick reacts instantly, rushing to her side to see if she’s alright. If he weren’t so angered and desperate and emotionally destroyed, Pete may have seen it as another sign that Patrick’s still inside that body somewhere. Instead, all he can see are Gerard and Andy’s bodies lying in a puddle of blood on the floor.

Pete looks back up in time to see Courtney shoving Patrick aside. Patrick stumbles towards Pete, confused, when Courtney looks up with murder in her eyes.

“Kill him,” Courtney orders. “Kill him now!”

The look in Patrick’s eyes changes in an instant, worry becoming murderous rage instead. The golden shade of his eyes seems to glow as he focuses his fury on Pete and begins to stalk forward.

Pete begins to back away, aware of the Vixen moving to stand beside Courtney with an amused smirk. Andy’s blood paints her hands and Pete hates her.

He has no time, though, to focus on hate. Not when Patrick is moving forward with the intent to kill him.

“Patrick, stop,” he begs, stumbling backward. “Please, you don’t have to do this!”

“Yes,” Patrick says, almost sadly. “I do.”

“No!” Pete cries out. “No, you have a choice! You can stop and we can go home and we can forget this ever happened! I love you, Patrick, don’t you understand! I want to be with you forever but I
can’t do that if you kill me! Until we die, right, Patrick? I’m gonna love you until we die so, please, don’t do this.”

Miraculously, Patrick stops. And Pete feels something like hope pick up the broken pieces of his heart.

“Forever…” Patrick says, blinking in groups of two. Pete gasps.

Patrick.

He’s in there. And he’s crying out for help in the only way he can.

“Yeah, yeah! Patrick, I know you remember!” Pete cries out. “I know you’re listening.”

Patrick blinks again and again. One, two. One, two. Help me. Help me.

Courtney begins to notice that everything isn’t going as planned.

“Are you stupid?” She shouts. “I told you to kill him, you good for nothing freak!”

“Don’t listen to her!” Pete shouts. “You don’t have to listen to her!”

“Yes, you do! You swore loyalty to me and you better follow through.”

It becomes a mess, a game of tug-o-war as Pete and Courtney shout their own demands at Patrick. Patrick grimaces in pain as the two continue but Pete can’t find it in himself to feel guilty- not when that pain stems from confliction over whether he’s going to listen to Courtney or not.

“Look at Andy, Patrick! He was your friend! I’m your friend! Please, this doesn’t have to go on any longer!”

“You worthless monster! You really believe he cares about you?”

“Yes,” Pete says emphatically. “I do care about you! I have always cared about and I always will. Do you know how long I’ll care about you, Patrick?”

Patrick blinks and, for a second, Pete swears his eyes are blue.

“Forever…”

“Oh, this is ridiculous,” Courtney says finally, storming forward and turning Patrick to face her. “I didn’t want to have to do this but it seems you’re too useless to behave without it.”

Pete’s afraid, suddenly, that she’s going to hurt Patrick or kill him. He moves forward, ready to yank the singer away. He stops, though, confused as Courtney leans forward.

“Saturday,” she says, locking eyes with Pete. “You’ll do as I command because I know how to control you. And I can control you with Saturday.”

Pete freezes as Patrick yanks away from Courtney, eyes flashing gold again as he turns to Pete. And Pete understands what just happened.

“Shit, was that a fucking trigger word?” He shouts, backing away again as Patrick moves angrily towards him. “Patrick! Patrick! You’re stronger than this, Patrick!”

“Stop calling me Patrick!” Patrick shouts, picking up speed and waving his hook frantically in the
air.

Courtney laughs, victory in the sound.

And Pete has no choice but to run.

Chapter End Notes

Miss Missing You is Thursday. Are you fucking ready.

Thanks again to everyone who leaves a comment! It means a lot!
Trade Baby Blues For (Hot Whiskey Eyes)

Chapter Summary

1 of 2 (I'm sorry)

Chapter Notes

Ok guys, look. It's almost midnight and this chapter is turning into a monster. My roommate's already asleep, I have to be up at 6 for a philosophy exam, and- to top it all of- I love all of you way too much to half-ass the rest of the chapter OR, alternatively, make you wait for the whole thing. So here's my compromise. Miss Missing You is gonna be two parts. Trust me. It's better that way.

Chapter Playlist:
- "Love Was Made To Break" by Andy Black
- "How Do You Love Someone" by Ashley Tisdale (srsly)
- "One In A Million" by Breathe Electric
- "Breaking" by Anberlin
- "Miss Missing You" by Fall Out Boy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Trade Baby Blues For (Hot Whiskey Eyes)

The sun sinks down further behind the rust colored clouds scattered across the setting sky. It should be casting more lovelier colors than it actually is, painting the land in hues of red and gold. But there are no city lights to contrast the darkness setting it; there’s no nature to highlight the beauty. Instead, the sun takes the rainbow shade of earth with it, shading everything in gray.

Pete’s been buried in gray before. It’s not a pretty sight.

The night will be taking over soon and Pete stumbles over a rock. Dust lifts into the air and he gags.

No, Pete tells himself. He can’t give into it the way he did before, no matter how bleak it all seems now. He stops running, catches his breath, and gazes at the horizon. The sun is nearly gone now and the dark of night entwines itself into the sky above him. Black, Pete decides. He’d rather see black because then at least there’s a chance that the light will be something separate, not a lie dancing with the darker shades like it is with gray.

Pete feels like he’s been running forever and he knows that there’s nowhere he can hide. Even now he can hear Patrick in the distance, his footsteps even and heavy as he follows Pete at a consistent pace. Will nothing stop him? Will Pete be running from his best friend forever? Is this his punishment for hiding his emotions for so long?
Pete refuses to accept that but it seems as if there’s no other choice.

Pete wants nothing more than to turn to Patrick and scream for him to come back. He wants to tear the gold from his eyes and rip that anger from his voice. He wants this to be just a story, a fairy tale with a happily ever after. He wants to rescue Patrick from himself.

But Pete knows better than anyone that happy endings aren’t for him.

What, then, is he expected to do? He can’t run forever but his only other option is to fight Patrick or to hand over the case. He’s not inclined to do either. If he doesn’t kill Patrick, Courtney will. Pete has no doubts that, either way, he’d have to live with the guilt of Patrick’s blood on his hands.

So maybe he shouldn’t have to live at all.

Patrick’s footsteps grow louder and Pete knows he’s growing closer. There’s no escape but running and Pete’s tired of leaving his problems behind.

Maybe he should just let Patrick kill him. It’s clear that Patrick won’t come back from what Courtney and her cult did, not after programming a trigger word into his mind. *Saturday*. Why’d it have to be that?

Pete lets his muscles relax for the first time in hours. He doesn’t know how long he’s been running but he knows his legs are shaking from overexertion. His vision occasionally fills with black dots. He can’t remember the last time he was able to breathe without gasping.

“Found you.”

Pete cringes at Patrick’s voice. He can hear the hurt behind the hate, the betrayal fueling the hold the cult has over him. If only Pete could find a way to prove them wrong, to show Patrick that he still loves him. But that’s impossible when Patrick is convinced that Pete never loved him in the first place.

“Yeah,” Pete sighs, “You did.”

He turns to face Patrick, eyes downcast as he prepares to give up. The world will be fine after Patrick kills him, Pete knows that. Courtney’s cult doesn’t have half the power they think they do and, Pete hopes, they’ll never succeed in gaining it. It does hurt to know that he’s leaving Patrick in their hands but it’s not like this is really Patrick, right? No, Pete’s certain that his Patrick died the second Courtney hissed the word *Saturday*.

Pete’s eyes slide across the land around him, filling in the details of where he’ll be killed. This dust beneath his feet will bury him; the stars above will laugh at him. The people in that trailer park will-

Wait.

Trailer park?

Pete’s head turns to the side quick enough to give him whiplash. He stares at the small community in the distance, trailers and cars scattered like crumbs in the desert. He’s been here before, he understands with a jolt. He knows that trailer park.

He knows what’s there.

Against his will, hope fills his mind and replaces any thought of giving up. Years ago, he hid something in that trailer park, something strong enough to change the world. More importantly,
something strong enough to change Patrick.

Pete’s tired and sore and he wants to sleep for the rest of eternity. But Patrick snarls as he walks towards him and Pete knows that there’s nothing he wouldn’t do for the man behind the golden eyes. He just needs Patrick to follow him.

Pete smirks and waves the briefcase before him, causing Patrick to pause in distraction. His eyebrows furrow together and those gold eyes watch the movement of the case in Pete’s hand. Back and forth, back and forth. Pete needs to have all of Patrick’s attention on him. He needs to be sure that Patrick will stop at nothing to get that briefcase from Pete.

“You want it?” Pete asks. Patrick’s nose wrinkles and Pete’s heart aches at how adorable it still looks. Patrick’s eyes find his and he nods, stepping forward once again. Pete swallows, shifting his weight towards the left. “Well, then. Come and get it.”

Patrick takes another step. And Pete runs.

Patrick’s thoughts blur as the man takes off running away from him. Emotions that Courtney told him don’t truly exist- betrayal, hurt, confusion- swarm his thoughts. Who is this man? He has a weapon of his own, why hasn’t he tried to kill Patrick yet? And why doesn’t he hide or call for help? Could it be that he wants to be killed? No…There’s something more….

Dangerous. Courtney told him that these thoughts were dangerous. He shouldn’t question his instincts or hesitate with his orders. His orders were to retrieve the briefcase; his instincts tell him to kill that man.

As soon as he thinks it, all reluctance and wonder flee from his mind, allowing room for his rage to expand and fill the space. Instead of seeing the fear in the man’s eyes as he called out for someone who wasn’t there- Patrick, who is this Patrick?- he sees that taunting grin and mocking action of waving the briefcase before his eyes. How dare he? How dare he?

Patrick scowls and begins to run, his body never tiring from the action. The man before had seemed exhausted and Patrick has to laugh. Courtney told him that they cut off certain pain receptors in his mind. He could chase this stranger for as long as he needs.

His senses, too, are heightened and Patrick freezes as a strange sound fills the air. He turns, falling into a defensive position, and sees two black motorcycles racing down the road in the distance. They’re too far for Patrick to see who they are but he knows that no one would ever willingly come to this barren piece of land. It’s the cult. It’s the Vixens.

Patrick snarls, eyes focusing on the girls as they draw closer. How had they known where he was? He hadn’t seen them when he first ran off after the man with the briefcase. Were they following him? Did they not trust him to finish the job?

Patrick stomps his foot childishly and glares at the motorcycles. He means to wait and demand that they leave, to explain that he wants to kill this man by himself. He stomps his foot again and, this time, he notices the small device that falls out of the bottom. He narrows his eyes, bending to pick it up though he already knows what it is.

A tracker.

So they didn’t trust him, did they? No, they wanted to watch and follow him and be sure he did his part. Maybe they plan on killing him once the briefcase is secure. Patrick can’t have that.
He will prove himself to this cult, to Courtney. He’ll kill this stranger. He’ll retrieve the briefcase. And he’ll do it by himself.

Conviction and determination line up beside his anger. He tosses the tracker far into the other direction, offended by its presence. Though, it did give him one thing.

It convinced him that he must kill this man. And he must do it fast.

Newly resolved, Patrick smirks and runs after the stranger in the distance.

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Pete makes it to the edge of the trailer park and then stops, memories of this place flooding through his mind. He remembers driving by it as his family went on vacation and he recalls bouncing giddily in his seat as the van drove past it on one of their first tours. Then, it was brighter and more vividly colored.

But then he remembers his nightmares of becoming trapped in a place like this, his fears of being forgotten and abandoned like these poor people. He remembers how this place took over his thoughts and controlled his night terrors because even the worst demons still need a setting to roam. He remembers everything but, most importantly, he remembers that night…

That night, where mud and dirt caked under his fingernails. Where people gathered to see what he was doing under the accusing midnight moon. Where he bled and cried and swore that if the band wasn’t together then he couldn’t trust anyone. Where he felt that one day this would all be worth it but prayed to god for that day to never come.

His prayers were answered; that day never appeared.

Night, though, is a different story. The night is falling fast and he knows why he’s here.

Pete shakes these feelings away, walking through the broken down cars as his eyes search the terrain. The sight of this place makes his skin crawl. It's too familiar and so foreign all at once- the same way he is whenever he looks into the mirror.

All is silent but for his feet treading lightly over the dirt beneath him. All is silent until he hears it. Until he hears him.

Patrick isn’t speaking or calling out his name but Pete would recognize that voice anywhere, as distorted and broken as it is. Patrick hums eerily as he zigzags his way through the cars, careless as he drags his hand across windows and doors. He hasn’t seen Pete yet and Pete isn’t looking to get caught. Instinctively, Pete throws himself into the nearest car, cradling the briefcase to his chest. Breath drags out of his lungs and rushes back in as Patrick circles around the area, somehow sensing that Pete must be near. His humming grows louder as he grows closer and, though it’s a terrifying sound, Pete can’t help but relax. Patrick’s voice has always had that effect on him and Pete doesn’t know if it’s good or bad that that hasn’t changed. He ducks down lower in the car he’s in, pressing against the door as Patrick comes closer. The tune of his humming changes and a familiar chord strikes within Pete.

It’s nothing that they’ve written together, he knows that for sure. Is it something from Patrick’s solo record? Pete had listened to it but, at the time, he was too bitter to pay too much attention. If he dies tonight, it will be one of his biggest regrets.

With Patrick’s musical genius and angelic voice, Pete’s certain the album must be perfect. He doesn’t really understand why anybody would hate on Patrick for that but Pete knows he’s hated on him for
The humming begins to fade away and Pete dares to peek out through the cracked window. He watches as Patrick turns, restarting his cycle through these cars. His shoulders are stiff as he passes by each one, peering inside them this time. Pete’s heart rate picks up. He needs to get out of this car. Fast.

His eyes scan over the area, searching for the safest escape. Maybe he can make a run for it before Patrick notices? Or maybe he can hide underneath the car- Patrick doesn’t seem to be checking there. Pete bites the inside of his cheek. He’s debating which direction to run when he sees the little girl in the car across from him.

For a moment, she’s almost doll-like- more so than the toy she holds in her hand. Dark hair brushes past her skinny arms and darker eyes widen when they meet Pete’s. Pete can’t think to signal for her to remain silent but she seems to understand that he’s hiding, from the way those eyes dart from Patrick and back to him. Pete almost convinces himself that she’ll play along, that she’ll keep him safe. But then she’s sneering at the bassist and the doll falls from her arms. She stands and seems to age before his eyes, childlike wonder growing into cynical maturity. Patrick turns at the sound of the doll hitting the ground but the girl pays him no mind. As she raises a hand and points a finger in his direction, her eyes never leave Pete’s.

The humming stops. Patrick turns to face him.

Pete forces the door open and, with great irritation, he’s running again.

Patrick follows at the same pace as before, causing Pete to wonder how he isn’t exhausted yet. He’s been through the most- Pete should have the advantage. Patrick, however, just keeps running after him.

Pete begins to weave through the trailers scattered about the park in a random pattern. Though none of the trailers or decorations have changed, he doesn’t recognize any of the people he sees. It makes his breath catch in his throat.

Did he curse this place that night? Is all this madness- from the man on the leash to the woman sharpening knives- his doing? As Patrick draws closer, hand grazing the back of Pete’s shirt, Pete knows that it must be.

An open trailer lies before him and Pete rushes inside, uncaring of the people he passes by. The woman with the knives laughs maniacally as Patrick follows Pete into the place. Pete makes it to a living room- filled with smoke and a woman with a gas mask- when Patrick suddenly tackles him to the ground.

The hook skims across his cheek and Pete can still hear those knives scraping against each other outside. *Scratch-scratch* as Patrick lowers over him, pinning Pete to the floor. *Scratch-scratch* as Pete gasps at the proximity.

Patrick’s eyes are golden but his pupils take up more space than that color. He blinks- one two- and raises his hook in the air.

So close. Patrick is so close and Pete can barely breathe. He’s suffocating in this room and the smoke has nothing to do with it.

The hook doesn’t fall, not yet. Pete can feel Patrick’s hand sliding down his body to search for the handle of the briefcase. His face is closer than it needs to be and Pete is drowning in his eyes.
The hook lowers, slowly to rest over his throat.

Close.

Patrick is so close.

But then the TV shifts to static, the deafening sound breaking through the tension in the air. Pete feels more than Patrick’s body lying over his. He feels fear.

With sudden strength, Pete shoves Patrick off of him, wincing when the smaller man connects to the ground with a thud. Pete doesn’t hesitate, though, to run out the door. Patrick takes longer to chase after him but Pete hears him shouting all the same. He can only hope that Patrick remembers that he only wants to hurt Pete. He doesn’t know what he’ll do if anyone else gets involved.

Pete’s feet carry him to the center of the trailer park, muscle memory allowing him time to think. He thinks of how cold it is now that Patrick is no longer so close. He thinks of how he can’t hear Patrick behind him anymore.

Pete slows to a halt. He turns around.

Patrick’s gone.

Pete grimaces and groans, kicking at the dirt as he spins in an attempt to find the singer. He’s nowhere to be spotted and Pete’s heart begins to race.

What if Patrick attacked one of the people who live here? From what he’d seen, these people don’t seem as if they’d be very forgiving to a stranger suddenly starting a fight with them. Pete thinks back to the woman with the knives and suddenly feels nauseous.

Humming starts to drift through the air again but Pete knows that this time it isn’t Patrick. No. This voice is too young, too high-pitched to be his. He wanders about, peering into windows of the trailers and following the noise. He doesn’t know exactly how Patrick’s hypnosis works but this humming is similar to music and, Pete hopes, it just might lure him out.

Pete only hopes that he can stop Patrick before he attacks whoever is making the melodic sound.

Pete comes across a smaller trailer than the rest, with open windows and locked doors. He stands a safe distance away as the humming fades out, replaced with the static sound of radio stations trying to play. Through the window, he sees a small young girl fiddling with the radio dials before her. He can’t help but grin.

As he watches the girl, Pete feels a strange twinge of nostalgia that isn’t for himself. He wonders if Patrick was ever like this when he was younger, innocently screwing with whatever machines he could just to hear a few seconds of music. Pete can see it vividly in his mind. Patrick would be seated on the ground, an old radio splayed out before him as other kids played in the streets. Did he try to imitate the sounds he heard, singing along shyly in his room? Did he lean down to press his ear against the speaker, straining to hear the music beneath the white noise when the signal grew to weak? It doesn’t matter to Pete’s imagination. He enjoys the image of that innocent curiosity. He likes to pretend that it existed, once, before Pete threw him into such a twisted world of fame and misfortune.

When Pete’s eyes turn to the sound of someone else’s humming, he sees that same curiosity shining in Patrick’s sun colored eyes.

Pete wishes he could admire that look for just a moment longer, to pretend that that’s his Patrick
walking towards that little girl. But Patrick’s hook is twitching as he raises his arm. His lips are set in a deep frown.

Pete knows what music does to Patrick. And he knows what Patrick will do to that girl.

All thoughts of himself shove to the side and Pete rushes forward to slam Patrick against the side of the trailer. The girl inside screams and he hears her run off. Good, he thinks. She should be safe.

Patrick turns to face Pete, eyes blazing with fury as he recognizes him as his target. His hook raises but Pete grabs his wrist and pins it to the wall beside him.

“Patrick, stop,” he hisses, pressing more weight against him.

Patrick gasps and whimpers, writhing beneath Pete. Pain fills his eyes before he shuts them again, turning his head as he tries to escape. Pete backs away. Pain? It had seemed as if Patrick hadn’t felt pain before so why now?

His worry is short lived as Patrick’s eyes snap open again, violence replacing the pain he had seen. Patrick takes a step forward and Pete moves away in fear. It’s a twisted game of cat and mouse, Patrick pursuing him with calculated steps as if he fears the ground is going to collapse beneath him. Pete wants to run, to flee, but he doesn’t know where that girl is and he doesn’t know what Patrick will do if he leaves.

He tries to think, to slow down his hastening thoughts. If he runs, Patrick might follow but that’s not a promise. If he stays, Patrick might kill him. That one’s certain.

Pete barely has time to decide whether he wants to scream or cry before Patrick pounces at him. His hand grabs Pete by the shoulder and Pete’s knees- tired and weak- give out. The two fall to the ground in a heap. Patrick gazes down at him as the two fall into the same position as before. Pete stares into Patrick’s golden eyes. He wants to pull Patrick closer just as much as he knows he should push him away.

For a second that feels like an eternity, Patrick remains over Pete. He doesn’t move and Pete doesn’t breathe. It’s the longest moment of his life and Pete feels that he may die before it ends.

Patrick breaks first, sitting back and aiming his fist for Pete’s gut. Pete bucks beneath him, tossing Patrick to the ground. He collides with a pained grunt but it sounds more like an instinctive sound than a genuine one. Patrick stands immediately and Pete begins to run, making it to an empty area in the middle of the park.

Here, he thinks. Here.

As he pauses to catch his breath, everything from the past few weeks catches up to him. The kidnapping, the fire, the exhaustion, the betrayals. For a second, he wonders if he died in that fire and if everything else has been his hell- his punishment.

Patrick’s hand grabs him by the shoulder and Pete’s too lost in his thoughts to wonder about his reaction. It’s too natural when he drops the briefcase and turns around.

It’s too familiar when he his fist connects with Patrick’s jaw.

Patrick stumbles back and his hand flies to his cheek in an action that would seem stunned if he weren’t grinning in such a devious way.

“I didn’t mean to do that,” Pete says, arm falling to his side. Patrick shakes his head, regains his
composure. Pete, on the other hand, is a jittery mess.

“But I bet it felt good.” The words fall from Patrick’s lips like acid and he cringes as if they carry the same taste. Every time Pete takes a step back, Patrick takes one forward. Pete’s breath solidifies in his lungs when his back hits the cold metal of a trailer. Patrick pins him there, hand and hook on either side of Pete’s head as he leans in close. “Hurting others...Killing them...It always feels so good.”

Patrick grips tight to the collar of Pete’s shirt, taking him by surprise as he tosses him to the ground. Patrick’s quick, leaning over Pete like an animal with snarls and bared teeth. His hand wraps around Pete’s throat, just enough pressure to prove who’s in control. It’s different from what Pete expected and he’s drowning in his thoughts. Patrick begins to tighten his grip but Pete can’t focus on the air he’s losing. Not when he can see the sheen of sweat on Patrick’s neck or feel his hot breath on his skin. Not when he’s just reliving how soft Patrick’s hands can be or how bright his eyes can seem—even hidden under a layer of rusting gold.

Pete pries his fingers from the machete he’d been gripping so tightly and allows his hands to find Patrick’s chest. His shirt is damp with sweat and blood as Pete shoves weakly, biting his lip and willing himself to find some strength.

Pete’s hand reaches up to Patrick’s shoulder, his fingers pressing down as he holds onto him. His palms are sweaty and his lungs are beginning to ache. He pushes, stronger this time, and heaves the singer off of him. Patrick rolls to the ground, not once showing a sign of weakness or exhaustion. He stands, taking the time to brush off the dust collected on his clothes. He moves to kick at Pete, his body coiling and bending as he prepares the energy. Pete is fast, hurrying to his feet and getting his hands on Patrick before he can attack again.

Pete pushes Patrick back, eyes searching to be sure no one is near enough to get hurt. A few people stand a safe distance away, sick amusement in their eyes. Pete shoves Patrick again as the singer rushes forward and, this time, Patrick falls. Pete kneels down beside him, hands brushing over Patrick’s shoulders and pinning him to the ground. The fabric of his shirt tickles Pete’s palms as Patrick thrashes and tries to get back up. His eyes meet Pete’s, frenzied and wild. He gasps and shrieks in anger as Pete toses a leg over his waist, straddling him to keep him down. Patrick licks at his lips and Pete hates how easily that action draws his attention. Though, this position is too familiar for him not to remember how addictive that mouth used to be. For a hysterical second, Pete wonders if it still is.

“Patrick, please, come back,” Pete pleads, unashamed of how his voice trembles. Patrick lifts his head, pink lips wrapped around a vicious growl. His teeth shine in the darkness around them and Pete has to suppress a shudder. Pete tightens his hold on Patrick’s shoulders, causing the younger man to arch and twitch in an attempt to escape. His knees bend and he bucks his hips. Pete merely presses more weight down onto Patrick’s arms.

“I’ll kill you,” Patrick spits, twisting away from Pete and baring his throat. Pete’s heart beats fast at the sight. Is Patrick so certain that Pete won’t hurt him that he feels safe enough to expose such vulnerability? Or is he just being as reckless as always? Neither option is enough for Pete to breathe easily. Patrick’s words ring in his ears. *I’ll kill you*. Patrick’s muscles quiver beneath Pete’s hands but he can feel the strength in them. He’s so small right now, trapped and trembling under Pete, but they both know that, in a fight, Patrick won’t hold back.

He won’t stop until Pete’s dead.

Patrick pulls a nasty move, smirking as he twists his arm just right and buries the tip of his hook right above Pete’s hip. It’s a shallow wound but it hurts like hell and Pete stands, stumbling back with his
hand pressed to his side. Patrick’s ready to follow, pushing himself to his feet and grinning at Pete with something like mischief in his eyes.

Mischief. If only that was all this is.

Pete has no choice but to defend himself as Patrick comes at him with fist and hook, causing more bruises and future scars. Pete lands a few hits of his own, tossing his fist into Patrick’s gut. He feels guilty about each one.

Pete moves closer to Patrick, reaching out to try and grab his shoulder again. Patrick mimics the action and suddenly the two are too close, Patrick’s eyelashes teasing Pete’s cheek as he shoves the bassist to the ground. Pete’s knees explode with pain as they crash against the dirt. Pete grabs Patrick by the ankle and yanks, causing the other to stumble. Pete stands, burying his fist in Patrick’s gut. Patrick does nothing to show that it causes any pain.

The air fills with the scent of sweat and blood, Pete’s side bleeding and Patrick’s lip busted. Pete manages to get a tight grasp around Patrick, the singer’s back pressed close to Pete’s chest. Patrick’s elbow lands between Pete’s ribcage. Pete groans and lets him go.

Pete pauses to look at the mess that Patrick is now, blood dripping down his chin and eyes manic. His chest is rising and falling with breaths that grow heavier with each inhale. His eyes, those cursed golden eyes, follow Pete’s every move.

And Pete’s move is for the bass-machete on the ground.

“Don’t,” he says in a shaky voice, holding the blade out as an empty threat. “Don’t fight me, anymore, Patrick. I know you’re in there. And I can’t fight you anymore.”

Patrick stiffens as his eyes zero in on the weapon in Pete’s hand. It’s dangerous and it’s worse than the hook that Patrick has. Pete’s tired but adrenaline is beginning to rush through his veins. He doesn’t want to hurt Patrick but he knows how he gets when his mind leaves him in a fight. He knows how easy it is to forget who’s friend or foe. He knows how easy it is to hurt someone you love.

Patrick’s barely moving, eyes locked on Pete’s machete. Pete knows that, before, Patrick had made the mistake of exposing his throat. He’s convinced that must have been an oversight, that Patrick’s in control now- or as in control as he can be with the cult still stuck in his head. He’d never risk his life over something as stupid as a briefcase, lying forgotten a safe distance behind Pete.

Pete realizes too late just how desperately Patrick wants him dead.

It happens too fast. Patrick screams and roars and rushes forward. He’s a flash of blond and gold. Pete reacts on instinct. He means to drop the weapon, he swears. He means to point it in the other direction.

Patrick screams. He runs at Pete.

And Pete can’t get the blade out of the way fast enough.

It’s not a fatal blow but Patrick collapses to the ground fast enough that Pete’s convinced it is. Blood stains the first few inches of Pete’s machete and suddenly it’s all that Pete can see.

Patrick’s curled in on himself before him, hand pressed to the bleeding wound as he tries to stand. Something’s wrong. Pete sees it right away. Patrick can’t seem to function the way he wants, falling to the ground each time he begins to regain his footing. Pete wants to move forward, to help him and
to be sure that he’s alright. But Patrick’s shouting angrily now, meaningless sounds that drive all the
gawkers away. It’s more than rage or confusion.

It’s the sound of an animal that’s been left to die.

“Patrick,” Pete says, bending to be on Patrick’s level. “Patrick.”

Patrick ignores him, frustrated tears springing to his eyes as he falls to the ground yet another time. This
happens again and again until Pete’s left watching the love of his life sit on the ground with heavy breaths. Patrick stares at the dirt and blood on his hand, childlike horror in his eyes. Is he just now realizing that he’s been wounded? Can he still feel no pain?

Patrick’s cries weaken into whispers and mutters, words that Pete can’t understand. He inches closer, eyes on Patrick’s hook.

“Sing…” Patrick breathes out, wincing around the word. “...Sing to you everyday….Take away the pain…”

Pete knows those words and, suddenly, Patrick’s humming from before makes sense. He knows what Patrick’s saying. He knows what song Patrick’s been humming.

He knows because Patrick sent it to him months ago.

It had been a mistake, Patrick swore the next day as Pete demanded answers over the phone. He’d gotten drunk, Patrick had tried to say, and accidentally emailed the file of a song he was working on to Pete. It meant nothing, Patrick stated. Pete could just forget about it.

That song had been stuck in his head for weeks and, now, it seems to be stuck in Patrick’s too.

There were lines in that song, Pete recalls, lines and lyrics that had made his heart beat fast and his stomach twist into knots. Patrick had said that the song meant nothing and Pete wondered if that was all he was to Patrick- nothing. After debating with himself about it, though, he eventually did as Patrick said. He forgot about it.

“Miss...I miss you…”

That doesn’t seem to be an option right now.

Pete moves closer to Patrick. This could be it. This could be the way to change everything back to the way it should be. It’s as if a spark shoots through Pete’s brain at the thought. The cult took music away from Patrick but they couldn’t take the lyrics from him. They couldn’t stop him from remembering what he once loved- even if it’s subconscious.

Pete reaches out to Patrick, a gentle frown on his face. Here it is. Here’s his chance.

Patrick, however, has other plans.

Immediately, Patrick turns and pins Pete to the ground, his hook pressing into his neck. There’s no one around to save Pete this time, no one to pull Patrick off and pretend that they’ll be okay. Patrick digs his hook into Pete’s skin, eyes murderous as he leans down. For once, Pete feels no fear.

“I can still kill you,” Patrick hisses. “I can still make you bleed like you did to me.”

“I didn’t mean to do that,” Pete says softly, reaching slowly and wrapping his hand around Patrick’s wrist. “I’m sorry.”
This is the only thing he can do. Pete refuses to fight Patrick any further,

Besides, he’s always been better with his words.

“You aren’t,” Patrick snaps, golden eyes blazing. “You want me dead.”

“No,” Pete corrects. Gentle, gentle. He needs to keep his voice gentle. “I just want you back. I just want….I need to see my Patrick again.”

Patrick grimaces.

“I don’t know who that is,” he says, twisting his hook and scraping it softly across Pete’s skin. “But if he was one of your friends you should assume that he’s dead.”

Pete shakes his head as best he can with Patrick’s hook at his neck.

“No, no,” he says. “You’re right here. I can see you! You’re right here!”

It’s a bad idea to grow emotional. Pete knows that any sentence can set Patrick off and any word can be his last. But, with Patrick’s voice falling over him like waves, Pete can’t help himself.

“Patrick, please! Stop pretending! I need you like I need fucking air and I can’t breathe when you’re like this. I need you to stop this! I need you to come back and I promise everything will be okay,” Pete pleads, tears stinging at his eyes. He moves to rub them away but Patrick’s quick, pressing weight onto his hook as anger fills his eyes.

“Stop calling me that,” he snaps, leaning down to snarl in Pete’s face. “Patrick isn’t here.”

“Yes!” Pete cries out. “Yes, you are! Please, I love you, Patrick! I don’t care about what you did or what the cult made you do. I love you and I’ll always love you. Until forever ends, Patrick, right? Patrick, Patrick, please!”

“I said to stop!” And Patrick’s growing emotional, too, his eyes wide and cheeks flaming red. “Stop!”

Pete knows he’s struck a nerve and he knows he’s close. He just needs to press a little deeper. He needs to see if Patrick’s still alive somewhere in there.

“Why shouldn’t I?” Pete demands. “You’re Patrick and nothing’s gonna change that. So why shouldn’t I call you by your name? Why shouldn’t I say it as many times as I want? Because I adore saying it, Patrick. It’s the most beautiful name I’ve ever heard. You’re the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen. Patrick. Patrick, Patrick, PatrickPatrickPatrick….”

“I’m not him!” Patrick roars, voice splitting through Pete’s mind. He lifts Pete and slams him back into the ground, body trembling from anger and rage. “I’m not...I’m not him! Stop calling me that because I’m not him! I’m not Patrick, Pete!”

The world stops.

Pete takes two measured breaths, watching as Patrick leans back with terrified eyes. Pete licks his lips. He stares at Patrick and refuses to look away.

“How then,” he says, slow and calm, “do you know my name?”

“I-” And Patrick’s really scared now, running his hand through his hair and blinking rapidly. One-two. One-two. It’s almost impossible to make the pairs out. “I heard someone say it. Your friend, he
said it. He...Stop trying to confuse me!”

“No one said my name, Patrick. I know that. You know that.” Pete sits up as Patrick backs away. He’s still like an animal but he’s no longer feral. No. He’s like something being caged or chased. In a matter of minutes, he’s shifted from predator to prey. “You’re Patrick and nothing will convince me otherwise.”

Patrick’s backed further away but he’s still close enough that Pete can see the terror in his eyes. He’s practically sitting in Pete’s lap now, one leg on either side of Pete as Pete sits up completely. They’re close, so close. Pete wraps his hands around Patrick’s back, keeping him in place. Patrick’s hand finds Pete’s shoulder. He doesn’t seem to notice that he’s holding onto Pete with such a desperate grip.

“You’re Patrick,” Pete breathes, watching Patrick flinch as his breath ghosts across his face. “You love Bowie and Prince and all of Chicago more than you love yourself. You wanted to be a drummer but- and this is the story you tell- everyone in the band forced you to sing. Your father was a folk singer and you’ve always been in love with music. You recently made your own album and are forging your own path, away from the band and...and away from me...”

Pete stops, taking a breath to collect himself. He lets himself fall forward, resting his forehead against Patrick’s. If this were years ago, before the pictures and the break, Patrick would hold onto him and ask him silly questions to distract him from the mess inside his mind. If this was before everything went to hell, Pete would whisper lyrics into Patrick’s ear just to watch him blush. He’d....

Lyrics.

“Is any of it coming back to you?” Pete asks, pulling away. Patrick’s stiff under his touch as if he’s confused by any form of affection. His golden eyes search the distance for something Pete can’t see.

“I...I...It doesn’t matter.”

Patrick’s cold tone returns with a dark scowl. His eyes are now on Pete’s and they’re more golden than ever.

“It doesn’t matter!” Patrick screams, shoving Pete away. “You hurt him! Me...Patrick...It doesn’t matter! You broke his heart and left him! You made him think he was special and loved but then turned your back the second things stopped going the way you like. You took all that love and made him feel worthless and like nothing. I saw what you said to Bebe, you thought that he was the only one who should have been caught....Y-You wouldn’t even care if he died! You promised to love him until he died and....A-And you as good as killed him yourself! I-I hate you! You stopped loving m- him! You hurt him and stopped caring and I don’t see one good reason to be Patrick if that’s the life I get!”

Patrick’s sobbing before he’s finished, tears streaming down his face and breath hitching in the middle of words. Pete tries to rest a hand on Patrick’s cheek only to have his efforts shoved away.

“Open it then,” he says after a prolonged silence. “That’s what you’re here for, right? Go open the briefcase. And then tell me that I ever stopped loving you.”

Patrick seems to know he shouldn’t but then he stands and stumbles over to the briefcase. Pete turns, heart pounding in his chest, and sees Patrick fall to the ground before it. His hand brushes over the top and Pete wonders if he’s remembering the past, if he has any nostalgia over that night they found a briefcase sitting menacingly inside their bus. Pete’s chest aches as he thinks about to their innocence so long ago. All of this pain, all of this suffering... They had no idea...
Patrick’s like a child, struggling clumsily with the latches on the case. Pete wants to go to him, to help him and speed up the process. He knows, though, that this is something he must watch from a distance.

The latch opens with a click. Patrick hesitates and Pete holds his breath.

Patrick opens the briefcase. And a cloud of paper surrounds him.

Pete can’t help but grin at the astonished look on Patrick’s face as he grips onto the papers flying through the air like confetti. Ink and lead stain the pages, hundred and thousands of words that spilled from a tortured mind onto the blank papers of notebooks and hotel notepads.

Patrick’s eyes grow wider with each page he reads. Pete doesn’t need to see what words mark the papers. He already knows.

He knows because he wrote them.

*I loved everything about you that hurts so let me see your moves*

Every day and every night, he wrote them.

*Surrender love*

Every letter.

*Do you wanna feel a little beautiful, baby?*

Every word.

*Do you have room for one more troubled soul?*

Every heartfelt line and phrase.

*The mighty fall in love*

He wrote it all.

*I’d trade all my tomorrows for just one yesterday*

Until his hands were bruised and stained from the pen between his fingers.

*You got me all fucked up on love*

And...

*Don’t take love off the table yet*

The most important part?

*My love is a weapon….My heart is a grenade*

He only wrote for one reason.

*You are what you love not who loves you*

He wrote for one person alone.
Patrick shakes as he reads the words Pete’s written. He’s trembling so hard Pete can’t understand how he can focus at all.

“These…” Patrick says, holding a few papers to his chest and looking over to Pete with tears in his golden eyes. “These were for Patrick?”

Pete nods, forcing himself to stand. “Yes.”

It’s not really the reaction he expects when Patrick tosses the papers to the ground.

“But I’m not him!” He sobs, wrapping his arms around himself. “I’m not Patrick.”

Pete decides he’s had enough of this. He falls to his knees at Patrick’s side, uncaring of if a hook somehow ends up in his gut for his next words.

“Yes, you are. And I’ll keep saying it until you know it’s true,” Pete says firmly. Patrick looks at him as if plans on protesting. Pete doesn’t care. Anything’s better than the murderous rage he’d been faced with before.

“You are Patrick Stump,” Pete says. “You hit me when I call you stupid nicknames but confess that you don’t care when it’s late at night and it’s just us. You cried yourself to sleep the night after our first show because you were sure that you could never be the stage man a rock band needs and I swore that I’d take that pressure away for you. You’re always the little spoon when we cuddle and you say it’s so you can elbow me better but I know that it’s really because you’re scared of having your stomach pressed against my back- which is crap, by the way, you’re fucking flawless no matter what. You sing me to sleep when I have nightmares but won’t tell me when you have bad dreams of your own. You’re a musical genius with the voice of a god and the looks of an angel. You’re perfect and beautiful and everything good in this screwed up world and, yet, somehow you fell for a mess like me.”

Patrick’s eyes are wide, glowing gold in the night. Pete can’t care less. He places his hands on Patrick’s cheeks and, this time, Patrick lets him.

“You are Patrick fucking Stump,” Pete says. “And I will love you even when forever ends.”

When Pete’s lips collide with Patrick’s, it feels as if forever has just begun.

Patrick’s mind is often a cacophony of sound, piecing noises together and testing what sounds right. He plays with pitch and volume, voices and noises collapsing together to make a soundtrack for his life.

The past few days have been hopelessly devoid of this music. He’d almost forgotten what it means to hear something other than insults and commands. He’d accepted that he’d never hear his music again.

What, then, is this melody playing in the back of his head?

Patrick’s frozen under Pete’s lips, unable to blink or breathe as the kiss extends forever. Pete pulls away, fear evident in his eyes.

Patrick still doesn’t know if that name- *Patrick* - suits him or how he knows the man before him is
called Pete. He doesn’t know why the lyrics on these pages him make him cry. He doesn’t know why he misses the feeling of Pete’s lips on his.

His head floods with music, instrumental and loud and missing something important. It aches when he tries to think of what he needs.

Pete’s eyes are sad when Patrick looks up to them. They’re a strange color. Brown, he thinks it’s called? That’s strange. It’s the first thing he’s seen besides yellow.

“Trick?”

It’s a question full of hope and fear and sadness, full of promise if Patrick knows the right answer.

He does.

Patrick surges forward and pulls Pete’s lips back to his.

They crash together like waves on the shore, emotion fuelling their every move. Pete’s lips part and he moans, hands moving to the back of Patrick’s head to force him even closer. Every piece of Patrick burns at Pete’s touch, his heart racing and pounding as if it wishes to escape his ribcage and join Pete instead. Patrick presses forward until they’re chest to chest, Pete’s hands tangling in Patrick’s hair. Patrick sighs, lips falling open as he exhales into Pete’s mouth. Pete steals his breath-the way he always has- and gives it right back until they’re nothing more than each other’s oxygen, each other’s reason to live.

The music in Patrick’s head reaches a crescendo and, suddenly, he knows what he’s been missing. Finally, this song of his, this soundtrack of his life, has what only Pete can give.

It has words.

“Mine, mine, Patrick, you’re mine and that cult’s never gonna touch you again, I swear it, I promise,” Pete pants, pulling away until their lips are just barely brushing. “I never stopped loving you, don’t ever think that. Promise me you won’t ever think that.”

Tears slip down Patrick’s cheeks and he can’t respond but it doesn’t matter because all this time- all this time of suffering and second guessing- he could have had this. He could have had the taste of Pete’s lips between his teeth and the scent of his skin as he presses even closer, trying to mold them into one. Pete’s hands move to hold onto Patrick’s hips with a firm pressure, keeping him calm and keeping him stable. He nips at Patrick’s bottom lip and Patrick whines, eyes wide open in fear that the color will disappear the second he blinks. He needs to see this, to know it’s real. He needs to know that this is more than just a trick. It’s something the cult will never be able to take away.

Pete’s papers scatter in the wind, surrounding them like a snow globe of their own creation. It’s white against the black of the dark night sky. It’s hope in the fear of losing everyone he loves.

And Patrick sobs as he bunches Pete’s shirt up in his hand, the hook digging into the ground beneath him. He sobs because he remembers and he remembers it all. He remembers everything and everyone and he doesn’t understand how Pete can be kissing him after all of that.

“Oh god,” Patrick says, pulling away. “Andy and Gerard and Joe and….I’m so sorry, Pete, I’m so sorry for everything I’ve done.”

“Hey. Hey, no,” Pete says, tugging at Patrick’s chin to steal another kiss. His eyes are shut but his hands wander, taking in every detail of Patrick’s body as he leans in close. He opens his eyes slowly, glancing at Patrick through thick lashes “That wasn’t you. It’s okay, I swear that we’re okay. You’re
gonna be okay, I promise. We’re gonna be okay.”

Patrick can do nothing more than fall into Pete’s arms, sobbing into his chest and letting everything from the past years come out. Pete holds him through it all, rubbing his back and vowing that it will all be fine. He kisses the top of his head and brushes his fingers gently over his sides, careful not to provoke any scars or bruises. He keeps his arms around Patrick, keeps him safe against his chest. And Patrick feels as if this embrace is forcing all his shattered pieces back together.

It’s dark and they’re out of breath, lips swollen and cheeks tear-stained, when Patrick pulls away and gazes into Pete’s eyes. “What now?”

Pete caresses his cheek, the action proving he already has an answer. He takes a breath and prepares to speak. But then he tenses and Patrick finds himself being pulled back into Pete’s arms. He can feel the fear radiating off the bassist like a heater.

“Now, it’s midnight.”

Patrick freezes at the familiar voice, horror locking him in place.

“And that means that it’s just the beginning of Saturday.”

Chapter End Notes

Oh! Did I mention in the A/N at the beginning the part of the compromise you're gonna like?

Since Miss Missing You was supposed to be one chapter, the next update will be before the weekend is through :)

See. I got your back.
**Who Do You Take A Bullet For (If I'm Behind The Trigger)**

Chapter Summary

2/2 of Miss Missing You

Chapter Notes

As promised! I was so upset I couldn't fit this in with the previous chapter that I HAD to just make it an addition to it. It's longer than I expected, haha, but still a bit shorter than the average. Consider it a gift for Halloween. Your fears of what this chapter may contain should be spooky enough :)

Chapter Playlist: Same As Previous Chapter :)

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Who Do You Take A Bullet For (If I'm Behind The Trigger)

“It’s just the beginning of Saturday”

Pete feels Patrick stiffen at the trigger word and holds him even tighter than before. Tremors run through Patrick’s body and it breaks Pete’s heart.

“Do you hear us? We know that you can,” Rosa says. “Come here. Now.”

Patrick tries to pull away, his hand pressing against Pete’s chest. Pete refuses to let him go, running his fingers through Patrick’s hair and telling him to ignore the Vixens.

“All right?” Sara snaps. “You have to listen to us. You have no choice, you little freak.”

Patrick flinches and hot anger courses through Pete’s body.

“He’s not a freak,” he mutters, so soft he can barely himself. Sara lifts an eyebrow.

“What was that?” She asks mockingly. Pete meets her eyes, illuminated by the light held in Rosa’s hand. It scans over the two on the ground, huddled together like animals searching for warmth. Pete can’t find it in him to be embarrassed.

“I said that he isn’t a freak,” he snaps, aware of Patrick’s shaking form against him. Patrick’s fighting a mental battle, Pete knows it. He knows by the heavy breaths passing over his neck and the constant shift of Patrick’s weight- away from Pete and then too close. Pete knows that a part of Patrick wants to go to the girls, to follow the instructions given to him. Pete prays that Patrick will be strong enough to fight it off.

“Is that the lie you’re telling each other now? Please.” Sara smirks at the boys. “He’s a freak. And
“No, he’s not,” Pete nearly growls, uncertain of which part he’s protesting. Patrick’s gone still in his arms but a constant tremble runs through his body. His mind races, wondering how to get out of this mess. There has to be a way….

Sara pulls out a gun and aims it at Pete, the smile falling from her face.

“Yes, he is,” she snaps. “Unless you both want to die here tonight.”

Pete’s blood runs cold; his words die on his tongue. It can’t end like this, not after everything they’ve been through. He’s just gotten Patrick back, just let loose those feelings he’s been hiding for so long. He can’t stop thinking of a way to escape but the seconds pass by with each breath he takes.


When Patrick shoves Pete away with greater force than before, standing with a lost look on his face, Pete feels his heart go with him.

Pete stares up at him from where he lay, splayed out on the ground beneath him. “Trick?”

Patrick takes a deep breath, rubbing a fist over his eyes. There’s a stability in his movements that wasn’t there before.

“I’m not Patrick.”

Sara lowers her gun but Pete feels as if he’s been shot all the same.

“Good boy,” Sara coos as Patrick hobbles over to her, his head bowed. “I knew you wouldn’t be able to resist joining us again.”

Patrick’s head lifts slightly as he stands before Sara and Rosa, the illumination of the night’s violet hue coating them in an eerie light. Pete feels sick.

“What do you want from me?” Patrick asks, voice stilted and forced. He stands with his back to Pete, shoulders tense and nails digging into his palm. Pete wants to stand and grab his hand, to drag him away to a dimension of their own where none of this has happened. Not the breakup or hiatus or briefcase or cult. Pete wants to deliver Patrick to the stars above and tell them to take care of this boy because he shines brighter than them all combined. Patrick’s other-worldly and ethereal. He doesn’t deserve any of this and Pete hates himself because he doesn’t know how to make things right.

“We want to know if you’re loyal to us,” Sara says. The Vixens crowd closer to Patrick, awaiting his response.

“Yes,” he says. His voice is a hoarse whisper, layers of it begging for mercy. It sounds nothing like the Patrick that had been trying to kill Pete a mere while ago. Pete wonders what version of Patrick they’ve released now. “I live only to serve Courtney and her cult.”

When Sara puts her hands on Patrick’s shoulders, Pete flinches.

“Well, you’re not wrong,” she says, one hand trailing down his arm to find his hook. “But that servitude may not last as long as you would like.”

Rosa and Sara move Patrick’s body like a puppet, pulling him around to face Pete once again. With a twisted smile, Sara raises Patrick’s hook and Pete’s breath catches in his throat as he struggles to get
to his feet. Rosa and Sara watch him carefully but Pete’s too focused on Patrick’s hook.

He can’t fight him again.

He can’t.

Pete’s prepared to run or even to take a hook in the chest, anything to keep from giving into these girls’ sadism. Even with the shade of gold covering Patrick’s eyes like a sheet, he refuses to fight him. He licks his chapped lips and waits for the girls to order the inevitable- for Patrick to wish to kill him again.

It doesn’t appear.

Instead, Sara slowly lowers Patrick’s hook to rest across his own throat, her eyes on Pete the entire time. Pete feels as if the wind has been knocked out of him, a deep pain spreading from his gut into his chest. No, no. This can’t be what they want, why is the hook on Patrick’s neck? It shouldn’t be like this, it can’t—

“Listen,” Sara says, turning her cruel gaze onto Patrick now. “I’m going to ask Pete a question. If we discover that he is lying, you are to slit your own throat. Is that understood?”

Patrick’s expressionless, eyes glazed over as he nods. Those eyes- those perfect, precious eyes- lazily wander across the scene before him, sliding over the Vixens as if they’re nothing. Pete takes a sudden breath when those eyes land on him, glowing gold just like before.

It’s no great relief when Patrick shuts them, hiding the shade from the world.

“Please,” Pete chokes out, terror coloring his words. “I’ll tell you anything, I promise. Just- Don’t hurt Patrick. Promise that you won’t hurt him. Please.”

Rosa and Sara glance at each other with identical expressions of morbid amusement. Sara nods and then turns back to Pete.

“Very well. But only if you answer honestly,” she says. Pete nods.

“Of course, of course. Please, anything,” he says. He doesn’t care about how desperate he sounds or how weak his voice is. He can’t tear his eyes away from Patrick, can’t look away from the hook lining his throat. If anything happens to him, Pete will never forgive himself. If Patrick dies tonight, Pete will beg the Vixens to kill him, too.

Rosa folds her arms over her chest and Pete already knows what their question is.

“The real briefcase. What did you do with it?” She asks. Pete wraps his arms around his middle, keeping himself together.

If it were any other situation, he would lie. He’d play dumb and pretend that this is the real briefcase and then accuse the girls of asking a trick question. But Patrick’s breaths are too loud, too close, for him to ever consider that. Pete shuts his eyes and lets out a shaky sigh.

“When the band broke up, I- I switched it out with a fake. I didn’t trust anybody else to keep it safe. Protecting it didn’t mean anything if we didn’t do it together.” Pete knows that he’s wasting time, that the girls don’t want to hear him ramble. But his mind has become cruel, replaying those nights after the breakup. He can still hear Patrick’s words, demanding that Pete leave and never come back. He can still feel the tears racing down his cheeks as soon as he left, can still feel the burn in his muscles after he went and got in any fight he could to get rid of the ache in his chest. He can still
remember the way he cursed Patrick’s name and stole the briefcase from his room. When he’d filled the fake with lyrics about Patrick, old and new, he’d thought it was clever.

*Patrick will never know*, he’d thought, *but at least he’ll care. So long as he cares about this briefcase, it will almost be as if he’s caring for a piece of me, too*

Pete feels tears sting at the back of his eyes and he forces them open, taking a gasping breath.

It’s not real, he reminds himself. That’s all in the past and, once he gives up the briefcase and gets Patrick back, he can spend the rest of his life making up for it.

“Where is it?” Rosa asks, impatient as she taps her foot on the ground. Pete lets his arms fall to his sides.

“Here,” he says with a defeated sigh. “I brought it here. I was trying to lead Patrick to it- I thought it could save him. But… It doesn’t matter. I buried it near the center. There’s a broken swingset. It’s buried beneath that.”

Rosa and Sara scrutinize him for an agonizing second more, causing his breaths to quicken to desperate pants. Finally, Sara turns to Rosa and nods once more. Rosa leaves without a word, pulling a phone from her pocket as she goes. Pete doesn’t give her a second thought, stepping towards Patrick with an outstretched hand.

Sara moves to stand between them.

“Move,” Pete demands, patience wearing thin. He needs Patrick. He needs to take him home and fix him up, to get that hook out of his hand and to hold him until they both feel as if everything is going to be okay. He told Sara where the briefcase is; he doesn’t understand why she’s standing in his way now.

“I just don’t understand,” she says with a crooked smile. “Why do you care so much about him? Do you two really believe you love each other? That you’ll live happily ever after? The world is rarely so kind and life is barely that easy. Don’t you know that?”

Pete glares at her, ice cold and piercing. “I don’t expect you to know a thing about love.”

“Perhaps not,” Sara replies, pursing her lips. “But you shouldn’t expect to know a thing about Patrick, either. He led us here, after all. Didn’t he tell you? Or was the make-out session just that good that he forgot?”

Pete ignores her mocking tone, wondering if she’ll shoot him if he shoves her aside.

“Just let me get Patrick.”

“This is what he used,” Sara continues, producing a small tracking chip from her pocket. “He knew he had it. And he knew what would happen if we found you. Face it, Peter. He was just playing you again. He still wants you dead just as much as before and he led us here to help with it.”

From behind her, Patrick makes a strangled sound.

Sara moves out of the way, eyes widening at the unexpected noise. Pete doesn’t dare to rush forward yet, not with Sara looking upon Patrick with so much threat in her eyes.

Patrick’s eyes are open now, as golden as always. There’s no emotion on his face but he’s tense, arm with the hook shaking from the strain of holding it in place for so long. Sara’s shocked expression
fades and she sneers at him.

“What?” She asks sarcastically. “Does the freak want to say something?”

Patrick’s eyes are on Pete and, though they’re glazed and unfocused, it makes Pete’s stomach twist in impossible ways.

“I...I didn’t,” Patrick struggles to say, wincing slightly. “The tracker...Tore it out... Can’t hurt Pete. Didn’t want to. Still...Still won’t. Won’t let you. Won’t.”

Pete’s heart swells but Sara has the opposite reaction, a menacing expression crossing her features at his words. She shoves him harshly back, causing him to stumble. A look of shocked pain seems to flitter over Patrick’s face for just a moment but it’s gone so fast Pete wonders if it was ever really there.

“Are you kidding me, you little freak?” She snarls. “What, you think you make the decisions now? That your opinion or emotions are actually worth something? That’s not how this works. You’re fucking worthless, got it? Just a weapon for Courtney to use. Like a fucking puppet. Now, hold your tongue before I cut it out.”

Pete’s anger takes hold of his mind, preventing him from thinking in terms of his own safety.

“Don’t fucking talk to him like that!” He shouts, stepping forward threateningly. Sara raises her gun back up instantly, stopping Pete in his tracks.

“Watch it,” she snaps, eyes blazing with fury. “I can still tell him to slit his throat.”

“You wouldn’t,” Pete tests, body flooding with adrenaline as he stares down the barrel of the gun. “You promised you’d let him live if I told you the truth.”

Sara’s eyes narrow and her face wrinkles in a disgusting sneer as the hand holding the gun begins to shake from anger.

“You’re right,” she spits, lips curling in disgust. “Patrick will live and he’ll live forever as our monster and weapon. But, you? Your forever ends here.”

Pete doesn’t feel the fear that Sara so clearly wishes for him to. He smiles, causing her irritation to multiply.

“Do it,” he dares. “If it means that Patrick will live, then fucking do it.”

Sara regains her composure, grinning at him lazily. “Take a good look at your Patrick then. I want you to remember him like this. I want this version of Patrick to be the last thing you see.”

Pete doesn’t care if Patrick has golden eyes when he looks at him. Patrick will always be the last thing Pete wants to see.

But, when Pete looks over at Patrick, he knows right away that something’s wrong. Patrick’s twitching, his muscles spasming dangerously as the hook shakes over his skin. His eyes widen and his breaths come quickly. Pete feels a flare of fear ignite in his chest.

“Trick,” he calls out, causing Sara to turn and see Patrick’s strange behavior. “Trick, are you okay?”

Patrick’s eyes find Pete’s and he stops moving altogether.

Pete swallows nervously. “Are you alright?”
Patrick pauses.

He blinks once.

And when he opens his eyes from that solitary blink….

They’re the brightest blue that Pete has never seen.

Patrick is sick of seeing yellow.

His eyes are open and he sees nothing but yellow. Figures move throughout his vision and voices fade in and out of his mind. Everything else is too vivid: the briskness of the night air biting into his skin like fangs, the dull pain of his hook pressing against the tender flesh of his neck, his lips still warm and begging for Pete’s touch. Everything aches as if he’s been feeling it for years.

The sickly yellow part of his mind tries to take control, to force him to forget everything about who he is and what’s happened tonight. It tears through him with agonizing force, screaming at him that he’s nothing more than a monster and a freak, a weapon for Courtney’s cult.

That may be true, he concedes. But it doesn’t change the fact that Pete kissed him anyway.

Patrick focuses on the memory of Pete, of skin on skin and hands tangling in his hair. He can still feel it like a ghost brushing through him. He doesn’t want to forget. To do so would be a crime, he’s sure.

He tries to think of Pete, to pull his image into his mind. Yellow taints the vision. His thoughts are as yellow as his sight.

“I want this version of Patrick to be the last thing you ever see.”

Patrick hears Sara threatening Pete; he hears Pete accept his fate.

He hears Pete asking if he’s okay and he is sick of seeing yellow.

When Patrick blinks, it’s nothing more than instinct. His vision clears; he sees Pete watching him with worried eyes.

Patrick turns his gaze to see Sara pointing a gun straight at Pete.

And his vision turns red.

Patrick doesn’t think as he attacks the girl, moving to bury his hook in her arm and wrestle her to the ground. He doesn’t think as he reaches and fights for the gun still gripped tightly in her hand. Sara scratches and screams but Patrick won’t be distracted. He focuses on the fact that that gun had been aimed at Pete. He focuses on the sound of Pete screaming his name.

In moments, Sara’s shoved flat against the ground, Patrick’s hand clasping around her throat. Sara starts screaming at him, words he’s too furious to understand. She screams louder, her shrieks piercing but not loud enough to drown out Pete shouting for Patrick.

Nothing will ever drown out Pete again. Not to Patrick.

Sara stops yelling and strikes her hand across Patrick’s face. Patrick recoils from the blow, hissing as his head snaps to the side. He grits his teeth but fights on, reaching for the gun she keeps waving
around dangerously. The end of the gun connects with the side of his head, hard enough that a flash of light overtakes his vision for a second. Sara takes the chance to shove him away from her and to stand. Patrick shoves himself to his feet, feeling his own hatred for the first time in days.

Patrick lashes out, tearing another gash into Sara’s arm as he swings his hook wildly at her. Sara cries out and stumbles back, hand flying to the wound. Crimson blood flows from between her fingers and Patrick feels a sick twist of satisfaction.

She tried to kill Pete.

She tried to take Pete away from him.

That’s not something Patrick could ever forgive.

Patrick looks down at the lowered gun. He calculates the amount of danger.

Pete stands behind him, a look of wonder on his face. And Patrick knows that Pete is worth the risk.

“Run!” He screams, grabbing Pete’s wrist and dragging him along as they race into the dark. Gunshots echo after them, ricocheting off of trailers and into the night. Patrick doesn’t know whether he wants to laugh or scream.

Sara chases after them, yelling curses and their names. Patrick shoves Pete in front of him, knowing that Pete knows the layout of the trailer park better than he does. Pete takes the lead easily, taking sharp turns and sprinting through empty trailers. Patrick becomes lost in the feeling of Pete pulling him along, leading him through the pitch black dark. He shuts his eyes. It’s the greatest feeling he’s had in awhile.

Pete stops suddenly and Patrick’s eyes snap open. They stand before a line of trailers shoved together, a small space appearing between the two in front of them. It’s large enough for someone to slip through unnoticed and Patrick looks at Pete with confusion.

“A fence lines the back of these but there’s enough room for someone to walk between it and the trailers. Follow the fence until you get to the opening. Keep running and don’t stop until you’re safe. I’ll stay and distract Sara,” Pete says hurriedly. Patrick’s eyes grow wider with each word Pete speaks and he shakes his head by the time Pete’s nearing the end.

“You’re crazy if you think I’m gonna go in there without you. We go in together or not at all,” he says. Sara’s shouts for them grow louder and Patrick knows she’s getting closer. Pete begs him with his eyes but Patrick refuses to give in. “We can make it together, Pete. Trust me.”

“Patrick!”

Sara’s scream cuts through the air like a knife. Patrick grabs Pete and shoves him into the opening just as Sara appears. The shadows hide him from the woman but Patrick’s still in plain sight.

“There you are,” Sara says. Patrick can tell by her voice that she’s smirking. Patrick tries to shove Pete further into the hidden area. He knows that he can’t follow Pete or Sara will know where they are. It doesn’t matter to him. Pete’s safe. That’s all Patrick wants. He stares into Pete’s eyes, tries to tell him to leave and that everything will be okay. Pete just holds onto Patrick’s arms, refusing to let go.

“Why won’t you turn around? Are you scared?” Sara taunts as she draws closer. Patrick’s heart races. “Face it. There’s nowhere else to go.”
“Go,” Patrick whispers to Pete, too soft for Sara to hear. Pete shakes his head and Patrick wants to cry tears of frustration.

“What’s your friend? Did he leave you? Did he finally realize what a waste of time you are?” Sara asks. Pete’s eyes glisten with murder but Patrick pays no attention to it. “Lucky him. I guess he won’t be the one to die tonight.”

Sara’s footsteps stop. By the look in Pete’s eyes, Patrick knows that she’s raised her gun.

“Stop. Breathe. Count to three,” Patrick says instinctively, trying to calm himself down. This is fine. Everything’s fine. Sara will shoot him. That’s okay. Then Pete won’t have any reason to stay. He’ll run and he’ll be safe. Patrick’s willing to die if it means that Pete is safe.

“Really?” Sara mocks. “Fine then. One.”

Patrick’s pulse quicken; his breaths are erratic. He wants to pretend that he’s not afraid but the thought of death—so soon, just two more seconds—is enough to make him panic.

“Hey,” Pete whispers, so soft Patrick hardly hears. “I’m right here.”

“Two,” Sara counts, drawing out the word with a derisive laugh.

Patrick looks into Pete’s eyes. He tries not to cry.

Pete’s grip on his arm tightens and another hand reaches to rest on Patrick’s cheek. He leans in close, pressing his lips to Patrick’s. It tastes like an apology and Patrick savors it, expecting Pete to finally realize that there’s not enough hope for them both. He expects for Pete to run.

“Three.”

Patrick cries out suddenly, gasping so harshly his lungs begin to burn. In the moment between one breath and the next, Pete’s hands tighten and he spins them around. Patrick scarcely has time to blink before he and Pete have switched positions, Patrick now staring at Sara as she aims the gun.

Patrick now staring as she pulls the trigger.

“NO!”

The cry rips free from him like it’s dragged out on rusted hooks. Pete collapses before him, eyes wide and mouth open in a silent scream. His knees hit the ground with a sickening crack but nothing’s louder than the sound of Patrick’s screams.

“Pete!” He shouts, falling down next to Pete and pulling him into a desperate embrace. “Pete, Pete, Pete, no!”

Pete grows limp in his arms, smiling weakly at Patrick through the pain. Patrick hates that smile, hates how dull the light in Pete’s eyes is. He can’t stop screaming. He can’t stop thinking that this is all his fault.

He should have just gone. He should have run. This should be me, I should be the one with a bullet in my back, in my heart. It can’t be like this, it can’t, no no no

Pete grabs onto Patrick’s hand, his grip feeble. His eyes speak of destructive agony but he can’t stop smiling at Patrick as he falls into his chest.

“Love you, Patrick. Until…” he trails off and Patrick fights back a sob.
“Until we die, Pete. It’s supposed to be until we die and-”

“And that’s right,” Pete says, his voice fading out. “And we haven’t died yet. You gotta stay alive, Trick, okay. Just… Until we die or…”

Patrick doesn’t notice when Pete stops rambling but he feels when he stops breathing, when his breaths stutter and refuse to continue. He feels blood sticking to his hand where he’s pressing onto the wound. He feels Pete’s heart stop.

“How sweet. Though, you can’t be loved by someone that’s dead.”

Sara’s close, toying with the gun in her hand.

Patrick never wants to hear her voice again.

In an instant, he’s tackling her to the ground, slamming his hook into her wrist to make her drop her gun. She screams in pain, calling him names and demanding for him to stop. Patrick can’t listen. When he slaps her with an open palm, Pete’s blood stains her cheek.

“You killed him!” Patrick screams. “You were supposed to kill me, not him!”

“Same thing, right?” Sara laughs. And that’s the last straw.

Patrick’s hook lands in Sara’s chest and he rips down her torso, tearing her open like a science experiment. She lets out a scream that fades into gurgles as he raises his hook again, stabbing into her body over and over. He tears into her chest and her stomach. He cuts into her throat so she can never speak again. She stops screaming after the fifth blow. She stops breathing after the sixth.

Patrick doesn’t care, his own screams filling the air as he slams his hook into her again and again. Blood coats him like a second skin and his arm grows weak. Still, every time he shuts his eyes, he can only see Pete’s dead ones staring back at him.

“You deserve this,” he growls, mutilating the woman’s body. It’s too much, too violent, for someone like him but he doesn’t care. Everything that’s been building up fuels his actions, his anger and rage exploding from him as he cuts into the Vixen.

She released those pictures.

She kidnapped him and his band.

She tortured him.

She took pleasure in his screams.

She killed Pete.

Patrick’s voice is gone by the time he finishes, exhaustion claiming him as he crawls back to Pete.

He knows that it’s a waste of Pete’s sacrifice that he doesn’t run. He knows that Pete would hate him if he knew how Patrick’s just curling up beside his body and sobbing. But Pete’s not here. He’ll never be here again.

“Please wake up, Pete,” Patrick whispers, pressing against Pete’s side and placing his head on his chest. He wraps his arm around him and shuts his eyes. “Just… Just say something, please.”

When silence is the only response he receives, Patrick screams out another sob.
“I’m so sorry!” Patrick cries, fingers digging into Pete’s skin as he tries to pull him closer. “This is all my fault! Just...Just wake up, please! I promise that I’ll make this right. I’ll do whatever it takes just...just...don’t...”

Patrick can’t finish the sentence and his throat is too sore to scream any louder.

Seconds become minutes and Patrick’s losing track of time. How long has it been since Pete was taken from him? For all Patrick cares, time has stopped.

“This wasn’t supposed to happen,” Patrick whispers finally, breaths still shaking. “I…After I saw those lyrics and you said that you still loved me…I thought we were going to be okay. We were supposed to escape and help each other heal. We were gonna find a way to live again, Pete. I wanted to tell you how much I missed you…I thought of you every day, you know. During the hiatus, not a day went by where I didn’t think about you. And...And it hurt because I thought that there was no way you could be thinking of me, too.”

Patrick pauses, taking a breath as more tears slip free from his eyes.

“It wasn’t supposed to be like this,” he pleads to no one. “I…My first thought- after I asked you what we were going to do next- was that I wanted to show you the music I wrote for you. Because you wrote so many beautiful lyrics for me and I didn’t deserve them but I wrote a song for you and, for once, I thought that we were even…”

Patrick’s voice trails off into a tortured whisper. The wind blows- gentle for the first time in years. Patrick shuts his eyes and breathes in Pete’s scent.

“Don’t panic, no not yet. I know I’m the one you want to forget.”

Patrick sings his song for Pete, too lost to imagine any other option at this point. His throat burns with the agony of screaming for the better part of the past few weeks and exhaustion continues to try to claim him. Still, Patrick sings to Pete and refuses to do anything else.

He finishes his song but pushes forward, whispering Saturday and then mumbling Lullabye. He’ll sing every song they ever wrote, tricking himself into believing that- maybe- this will bring Pete back.

He’s halfway through Hum Hallelujah when he hears footsteps coming their way. With tired eyes, he glances up.

Rosa walks towards them, a flashlight in one hand and a dirtied briefcase in the other. The light flashes over them and onto Sara. Rosa’s eyes widen when she sees the body and then she’s rushing over, madness in her eyes.

Patrick knows he should run. Instead, he moves more on top of Pete, protecting him from the Vixen’s rage.

He wonders if he should feel guilty for how Rosa lets out a strangled sob at the sight of Sara’s body. It’s a horror to behold, blood splattered everywhere and face cut beyond recognition. Looking upon it now, Patrick sees just how much damage he caused. Still, he knows he would do it again in a heartbeat. He sighs and Rosa looks his way as if she’s shocked to see he’s still alive.

Funny, Patrick thinks. He doesn’t feel alive.

“Was it you?” Rosa demands, dropping the briefcase and pulling her own gun out of its holster. “Did you do this?”
Rosa sounds maniac, her screams hurting Patrick’s head. He shrugs and Rosa points the gun at him.

“I asked you if you did this!”

Patrick’s too tired to speak so he just looks Rosa in the eye and nods.

She cries out, stepping forward until the gun is pressed against his head.

Patrick feels no fear, not like when Sara was aiming the gun at him. He looks down at Pete and smiles.

The gunshot that follows is as loud as the breaking of Patrick’s heart.

Chapter End Notes

So, I'm assuming this didn't go down the way you expected? I'm hoping that's a good thing? I dunno about you but I'm actually really happy about the way this turned out! They say that if a writer has no emotion while writing then the reader has no emotion while reading and I was bouncing in my seat and tearing up at some parts. Hopefully that emotion got through to you guys as well?

Anyway, thank you so much for the lovely comments you all always leave. You have no idea how much they mean to me, seriously. This fic would be nowhere without your support :)

The updates will follow in the regular schedule. The next one's on Tuesday!

Happy Halloween!!
Chapter Notes

Hey guys! Here I am with another chapter! We're nearing the end, are you sad yet? I am, but not as sad as I should be! Honestly, I'm just excited that I'm so close to finishing my first fic and, trust me, I have plans to write a ton more :)

Chapter Playlist:
- "New Tomorrow" by A Friend In London
- "It's Time" by Imagine Dragons
- "Rhythm Of My Heart" by Blake Lewis
- "Save Rock And Roll" by Fall Out Boy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A Little Less Life, A Little More Dreams

“Open your eyes.”

They’re the first words Patrick hears when the dark and chill of night become the stagnant feeling of an abandoned building and the silence in his chest reminds him of being alone.

“I said to open your eyes.”

It’s a demand but not like the ones he’s been given the past few days. There’s no malice or mocking, just the certainty that he will do as he’s told.

Patrick’s not certain if it’s his own choice when his eyes slowly open.

The first thing Patrick notices is how dark it is, a dim light flickering overhead. He’s in a rusted elevator that doesn’t seem to be going anywhere. He flinches and grimaces. This is too reminiscent of the building the Vixens had taken him to first, of that place of torture. Fear takes hold of him suddenly with an icy grip. He’d thought that Rosa was going to kill him! He’d felt the gun pressed-cold and unrelenting- against his temple and had sensed the surety rolling off of her. She wouldn’t have let him live, not after what he did to Sara. But what if she decided otherwise and brought him back here for more torture? What if this is her revenge for Sara? Patrick had accepted death, had thought that once there was a bullet in his brain that he’d feel no more pain. But, now, he’s shaking as he imagines more knives and electric shocks. He can’t go through that again. He can’t.

Another crueler part of his mind mocks that maybe he never left the torture chamber in the first place,
that nothing of the past week really happened. Maybe, this entire time, he’d been strapped down and
so desperately in pain that his mind created a hallucination where he can escape with Pete. Maybe
the Vixens are controlling what he sees and feels and hears. Maybe he’s still the only one that was
caught and his insecurities are the only reason he so vividly imagined the others being hurt because
of him. Maybe Pete is still safe…

No, Patrick thinks, shutting his eyes and taking a deep breath. Pete’s arms around him and lips on
his… No Vixen could ever cause him to replicate emotions like the ones he felt in that moment. And
the pain at Pete’s death… Patrick is certain that all of it is real.

He opens his eyes again and raises his hand to his head, brushing over the spot where Rosa had shot
him. Sure enough, his fingers skim over a deep and gaping hole where the bullet had entered. Patrick
feels sick but the wound doesn’t hurt. He only shivers when his fingers brush over it and, with a
nauseous feeling, he drops his hand again.

The lights flicker again, casting the room in total darkness for a second. When they reappear,
Patrick’s eyes find Sam standing in the corner.

“What’s going on?” Patrick asks, wary of the boy. “Where am I?”

Sam smiles, straightening the tie he’s now wearing. It’s such a strange contrast to the clothing he’d
been wearing before- the hat and jeans he’d had on when Gerard had shot him.

“So the monster can speak,” he says, grinning meanly at Patrick. Patrick recoils, stepping back with
a hurt expression.

“I’m not a monster,” he says with more conviction than he would have had mere days before. Sam
chuckles.

“Well,” he says. “We’ll see.”

Patrick tilts his head to the side, confused when Sam points to something behind him. Patrick turns
his head to see what he’s gesturing to, not trusting Sam enough to turn his back completely.

A knife that definitely wasn’t there before rests on a small table, embellished with dark jewels and
shining brighter than anything else in the room. Patrick reaches out to grab it before he realizes what
he’s doing.

The knife feels good in his hand. It’s a comfortable weight and he likes the way that the gems reflect
the light in the room. He’s grinning down at it when, suddenly, the elevator doors open.

“Please, please, I’m sorry. Just let me go!”

Patrick’s lips are turning up in a disgusted sneer before the doors are entirely opened. He recognizes
that voice, even if he hasn’t ever heard it begging in fear.

“Please!”

Rosa stands before him, blindfolded with her hands tied behind her back. She struggles to free
herself, shouting out with tears running down her face. Shackles around her ankles keep her in place
and Patrick smiles sadistically. He can’t help but feel as if she deserves this.

Sam leans forward, a similar expression on his face. “Don’t you wanna kill her?”

Patrick jolts back, looking at Sam in shock. Kill her? Patrick’s not sure if he can do that, not to
someone so defenseless. Sam continues on, unaware of Patrick’s sudden inner conflicts.

“I mean, you already killed the other one. Why not this one, too? She’s just as guilty as Sara was.”

Sam pauses, laughing lightly as Patrick stiffens at Sara’s name. Patrick’s eyes widen and then narrow. Yes. Yes, Sam is right. He did kill Sara, didn’t he? Rosa’s just as bad. Someone like that shouldn’t be allowed to live.

“Think about it,” Sam presses. “It’ll complete your revenge against the Vixens. They controlled you and made you do awful things. They kidnapped and hurt not only you but your entire band! I know you’ve been wanting to kill her since she cut off your hand. So why don’t you take her life while you have the chance?”

With each word Sam speaks, Patrick grows more convinced that this is the right thing to do. Rosa and Sara were abominations. They’re evil and corrupt and the kind of creatures that the world doesn’t need. Patrick will be doing the world a favor if he kills her, he’s sure of it. Besides, what’s one small life compared to the many that the cult has destroyed?

Patrick takes unthinking steps forward, the knife tightening in his grip as he nears the girl. Sam’s voice rings out in the background.

“She helped to torture you! She made you a monster!” Sam shouts, shaking with excitement. “She deserves this, you know it! She taunted and beat you with every chance she got. She killed you.”

Patrick stands before Rosa now, revulsion causing his expression to contort into a grimace. Sam’s right. Rosa killed him and brought him here. She deserves to die.

Patrick rests the knife against her cheek, placing the tip under the fabric of the blindfold. Rosa’s tears come faster now and Patrick pulls back swiftly, cutting the blindfold in half. It falls to the ground, useless, and Rosa looks at him with horror in her eyes.

Good. That’s what Patrick wanted to see.

“P-Patrick, please,” Rosa begs, falling to her knees. “Please, I know you’re a good person. Please don’t do this.”

Patrick looks at her, contemplating. Was this really someone he was so terrified of for so long? This person, now groveling for mercy at his feet, haunted his thoughts and nightmares? He doesn’t know what’s more pathetic, him or Rosa’s tears splashing against the ground. Not as if it matters, though. She’ll be dead soon enough.

“Please,” Rosa chokes out, lowering her head to stare at the ground. “What we did to you was wrong and evil. You didn't deserve it and you have every right to be angry but… but, please, have mercy. You don’t have to be a killer.”

Patrick scoffs at her words. Doesn’t Rosa see that it’s too late? He became a killer the second they hooked those electrodes to his head. He became a killer the moment he looked up at the Vixens from the torture table and wished that they were dead.

He’s a killer now and it’s all their fault.

Patrick places the dull side of his hook under Rosa’s chin and lifts up, causing the girl to expose her throat to him. When she shuts her eyes in fear, Patrick places the knife against her pulse. It’s sickeningly satisfying to see the tender flesh denting beneath the edge of the knife. A flash of memory shoots through Patrick’s mind of when Rosa had behaved in much the same way, smiling in glee as she lined her knife up against his wrist.
“Look,” she had said. “Look at how fragile you are.”

Yes. Patrick’s certain that killing her is the right thing to do. He remembers the pain and agony her actions have caused. Nothing can convince him that he should pull the knife away now.

But then he looks down. And he sees his reflection in the knife.

His eyes shimmer with yellow and animalistic rage. Dried blood decorates his features, dripping gruesomely from the bullet wound on his head. His lips are curled in wild wrath but no one can deny the joy found in his expression. Bloodlust lights up beside the anger in his eyes, wild and manic. He’s shaking in anticipation of this next murder.

Patrick barely recognizes himself.

Patrick’s unsure of himself now and looks upon this scene with new eyes. Rosa’s tears stream steadily from her eyes and she keeps mouthing pleas for forgiveness. Patrick’s grip on the knife in his hand grows slacker and he steps away, horrified by his actions.

Is this to be his permanent state? A killer? Is he to forever be controlled by bloodlust and rage, tearing apart any living thing? Where is the man that would smile shyly and thank people politely? Where is the man that wanted nothing more than for positivity and kindness to fill the world? Was he ever truly that man if he can so easily resort to murder? And, if he was, is that person lost? Is Patrick Stump gone and replaced with this vile creature of destruction?

“No.”

Patrick steps away again, turning to face Sam with a new determination in his eyes.

“No more of this,” Patrick demands, tossing the knife onto the ground. “This isn’t who I was meant to be.”

Sam’s eyes widen and Patrick expects to be rebuked, for a radio to appear from nowhere and activate the evil side of his mind. Sam, however, raises an eyebrow and presses a button on the elevator. The doors begin to shut and Patrick turns just in time to see Rosa’s figure disappear like the wind.

A test, he realizes. This was all a test.

Patrick doesn’t allow himself to worry about whether he passed or not. Even if letting her live was the wrong choice, he knows that he would make it again.

Sam’s finger hovers over another button and he smiles at Patrick warmly. It’s a strange expression for him to wear. No malice taints the edges of his lips and no cruelty hides in his eyes. Patrick’s too confused to smile back.

“Perhaps you’re not a monster after all.”

Warmth floods Patrick’s being at the words but he doesn’t have the chance to respond.

Sam presses the button and Patrick’s world explodes into a white light.

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There’s only one thing worse than dying, in Pete’s opinion, and it’s watching someone you love react to it.

Arriving in Heaven had a lot less fanfare than Pete would have expected had he expected to go to
Heaven at all. Standing in that elevator with Sam watching him with an eerie smile, Pete was certain
that the cables were going to be cut and he was going to descend into Hell at any second. Not
because he thought he was an awful person who deserved eternal torment and pain but because
Heaven promises a perfect world and no world, for Pete, could be perfect without Patrick.

So when Sam had wordlessly pressed that glowing button beneath his fingers and the elevator lifted
up, Pete didn’t know what to expect. The bright lights and white everything were pretty stereotypical
in his opinion and he was certain he’d be blinded before long. Gazing out at the emptiness of the
strange room he’d somehow arrived into, he had half a mind to turn back and declare this loneliness
to be Hell.

And then Andy had called his name and Joe had run up to give him a hug.

Amidst the tears and face-splitting smiles, Pete had forgotten about any fanfare.

Pete had held onto the other two for as long as he could, pressing his face into Joe’s neck and
gripping Andy’s arms so tight that he was afraid they would break. He’d made a comment about
how now he can consider the place Heaven; Joe had laughed and claimed that Pete would have
loved Hell.

It was Andy who asked about Patrick.

“Was it him?” He asked, hesitant and fearful. “Is he why you’re here? We were watching you two
from the fountain but left when you two started fighting. We didn’t want to see if he…”

Pete was quick to correct him, regaling them with the story of how he died. But then he registered
Andy’s words.

“Wait. You were watching? You mean you can still see the living world?”

And, thus, Pete ended up in front of this small pond in Heaven, the pristine water disturbed only by
the large fountain in the middle.

It’s lavish, which is more of what Pete would expect from a place like Heaven. It’s half-indoors, the
edge of it framed in golden tile, which Pete kneels upon. Joe and Andy leave him alone after
explaining how to use it. It sounds simple enough, Pete thinks, letting his fingers drift in the water.
All he has to do is think of Patrick.

The water beneath his hand grows misty, fogging up with a collage of colors and shifting shapes. He
hears Patrick’s voice first, crying out in agony, and Pete’s heart clamps at the sound. Is Patrick
alright? Has he been hurt? Did he at least get away from the Vixens?

The water clears to show an image of the trailer park and Pete’s heart beats fast. Why is Patrick still
there? Why didn’t he run from Sara? Pete bends down, peering closer to the water as the image
enlarges, taking up half the pond. Patrick’s image is closest and Pete feels like sobbing when he
finally understands what it is he sees.

Patrick curls up next to Pete’s corpse, a strange thing for Pete to see though he doesn’t dwell on the
thought. The singer wraps his arms around the body, pulling him close and sobbing into his chest.
Pete lets out a strangled cry at the sound of Patrick’s pain. As Patrick’s sobs fade into his desperate
singing- hoarse and pained as he gasps for breath between each lyric- it’s as if his sadness is seeping
into the room around Pete. They say there are no tears in Heaven but, right now, Pete wants nothing
more than to cry along with Patrick’s songs. He wants to take that pain from him and carry it as his
own. It wasn’t supposed to be like this. He expected Patrick to be sad, sure, but he never expected
for him to seem so broken.

He can’t help but feel guilty for Patrick’s tears. This pain… This agony that Patrick is conveying rips into Pete’s soul and mind.

You did this to him! If you loved him, you wouldn’t make cry like this! You’d be there with him, not uselessly sitting here!

Pete tells himself that he did the right thing, that a broken Patrick is better than a dead Patrick. He knows that, if he didn’t switch with Patrick, he’d be the one sobbing out his lover’s name, cursing the world and himself for not protecting him. He’d be the one suffering and he just wanted to protect himself from it. How selfish is that? Patrick could be here smiling and laughing with Joe and Andy but, instead, he’s alone.

The thought hits Pete like a truck.

Patrick is alone.

Joe and Andy and Pete are dead, watching him suffer from Heaven. God, Patrick has a family but that’s not the same as having friends and… and someone who loves him as much as Pete does! Pete pants for breath, clutching at his chest. Patrick, his Patrick, is alone in the world. And Pete did nothing to stop that.

He looks back down and his heart drops. Rosa stands before Patrick, demanding angrily if he was the one who killed Sara- who Pete notices lying, bloody and disfigured, a few feet away. Patrick nods and Pete feels sick. Patrick did that? Did he do that for him? All because she killed Pete?

Patrick shuts his eyes and Pete does the same, heart racing as he anticipates what’s to come next. In the back of his mind, there’s some irritation. He switched places with Patrick so that he could live but here’s Patrick, throwing that away. Somehow, after hearing those heart-wrenching sobs, Pete can’t really blame him.

A gunshot rings out and Pete’s heart breaks.

His first thoughts are the logical ones, the sad and crushing ones he felt every time he worried that the cult had gotten rid of Patrick for good. It starts in his chest, burning with anguish that Patrick’s life can be extinguished so easily. Patrick- his Patrick, his golden boy from day one- will never see his family again or make music for the world to scream along with. He’ll never have a chance to move on and find someone who loves him like Pete does. He’ll never have a chance to prove himself with his solo career, to stand up to the haters and release an album that makes the critics choke on every bad review they left. He’ll never do any of the things Pete’s dreamed that he would do.

But then these thoughts fade. And Pete gasps.

“He’s coming,” he says to himself, wide-eyed. “He’s coming here.”

Pete’s on his feet in an instant, running out of the room to find Joe and Andy. He screams the news to them, barely able to keep himself from shaking.

“Patrick, Patrick, that bitch of a Vixen killed Patrick and that sucks but doesn’t that mean-” Pete stops, breathless as he looks at the others hopefully.

Joe’s the first to break into an ear-to-ear grin. “Yeah. Yeah, it does.”

Pete bounces on the balls of his feet, energy coursing through his veins as he awaits Patrick’s arrival.
Joe leads him to the staircase that he had first arrived at, stating that this is where Patrick should be coming from. The three line up, grinning at each other like children on Christmas Day. Pete is faintly concerned about how Patrick will react upon seeing Joe but he knows that that can wait. It’s clear that Joe’s forgiven Patrick. Hell, Pete’s positive that Joe doesn’t even blame him. Pete can’t wait to see Patrick’s face when he figures this out as well.

Seconds become minutes and the minutes seem to pass by with each breath Pete takes. The grins on the group’s faces begin to dwindle away until only Pete is giving the others a useless smile.

“It…It usually takes this long, right?” He asks, shifting his weight awkwardly. Joe and Andy share a look and Pete feels like throwing up.

“Pete. I don’t think—” Joe cuts off, running a hand through his hair as he takes a breath. Pete’s lost as Joe grants him an apologetic gaze. “I don’t think he’s coming.”

“What do you mean?” Pete asks, still smiling hopelessly. “I saw him die, Joe. I swear it.”

“No, no, I believe you,” Joe says. “I just mean…I don’t think he’s coming here. He’s not coming to Heaven.”

And, with those few words, Pete’s smile falls.

“You’re wrong,” he says, always the first to defend Patrick. “Patrick deserves Heaven more than anyone.”

“I know but-Shit, Pete, it never takes this long. Not since I’ve been here. And…Maybe it has something to do with that yellow-eyed thing that took control. You know I don’t think that was him and I don’t blame him but maybe God does. Maybe there’s something we don’t know. Just… I can’t think of any reason why he wouldn’t be here,” Joe rambles, eyes desperate for Pete to understand. Pete can’t. He can barely breathe by the time Joe’s done.

“You’re wrong,” is all Pete can say, using the last of his air on the words. “I- You’re wrong.”

The three cast another glance to the staircase, as empty as it was before. Joe’s about to apologize, Pete can tell by the look in his eyes. Pete doesn’t know if he’ll be able to keep himself together if he hears it.

When he turns to leave, storming back to the pond, no one moves to stop him.

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Pete will say one thing for Heaven: it doesn’t seem to have any sense of time. And he doesn’t want to imagine how much has passed since Joe had said...since it’d been implied that...

Pete runs his fingers through the water again, hoping that it will show something other than his and Patrick’s bodies. The only thing that changes is how dark the night is around them. Pete sighs. It seems as if not much time has passed at all. Pete lets his head fall into his hands, trembling but not crying. No. He doesn’t see the point in crying over something he can’t change.

“Hey,” someone says, placing a hand on his back as they sit next to him. “Mind if I keep you company?”

Pete knows who it is before he looks up and, honestly, he’s not really surprised. Though he betrayed them, it was only once and for a good reason. Gerard certainly belongs in Heaven.
“No, go ahead,” Pete says tiredly. “How’re you doing?”

“As good as I can, all alone in paradise.” Gerard sighs, running a hand through his reddened hair. Pete raises an eyebrow at it. So, Gerard’s artificial hair color stayed the same even after he died? Does that mean that Patrick’s hair would still be that bleached shade if he were ever to show up?

It hurts Pete’s heart to think about. It’s not as if he’ll ever know the answer.

“Alone?” Pete asks in an attempt to distract himself. “But I thought that Frank…?”

Gerard shakes his head, reaching to run his own hand through the water before Pete can stop him. The scene shimmers and shifts, colors growing brighter and more people appearing in the scene. Pete blinks. When his eyes open, he loses his breath at what he sees.

Mikey and Ray lie in hospital beds, injured but not fatally so. Ray’s asleep, bandages wrapping around his head and an IV hooked up to his arm. Mikey has his right leg in a cast, elevated to a degree that must be uncomfortable. He flinches but it’s covered by his laugh as he lifts his shirt to show off the array of bruises covering his torso. Someone reaches out to poke at a space between the bruises and Mikey laughs again.

“Stop it, Frank, that tickles!”

Frank pulls his arm away, smiling in a way that is barely apologetic. Pete gawks at the scene, incapable of hiding his jealousy at their joy. Gerard swallows loudly beside him and Pete’s jealousy switches out with guilt as he looks over at the singer.

“She lied to me,” Gerard whispers, watching the scene play out with a sad look in his eyes. “They never had Frank as a hostage; they just let me think they did. He escaped a few days before the cult let everyone else go and that’s why I thought that they were still keeping him- because they never told me about the escape. And I guess Courtney was insulted at the fact that someone could escape at all so when she saw the chance to take out her anger on someone, she took it out on me. She told me that he was dead because she couldn’t bear to tell me that someone was able to escape her clutches. I shoulda guessed, though. Nothing can really keep Frank for long.”

Pete looks back down to the pond, unable to keep his eyes on Gerard for much longer. In the vision before them, Frank and Mikey are speaking animatedly with sparkling eyes. A horrible thought occurs to Pete and he looks up to Gerard again.

“They don’t know, do they?” Pete asks, eyes wide. He doesn’t need to clarify; Gerard already knows what he means.

“No, and I’m dreading the moment that they figure it out. I don’t want anyone to cry over me but… but I know that they will.” Gerard says, bringing his knees to his chest and hooking his chin over them. A long silence stretches out between the two, Pete watching Gerard’s sad smile as he watches his friends and family. Pete had almost forgotten that he wasn’t the only person leaving others behind. The tears collecting in Gerard’s eyes are painful reminders.

“It’s okay, though,” Gerard says suddenly, sitting up and rubbing at his eyes. “It’s alright because I can still watch them from here and that means that there must be a way to protect them. I’m gonna do everything I can to keep them safe. Death’s never gonna stop me from doing that.”

Pete smiles softly at Gerard. “You’re like a guardian angel.”

Gerard manages to laugh as he looks over at Pete. “Yeah, I guess I am.”
Something in the corner of Pete’s vision seems to move and his eyes dart over to see what it is, instincts kicking in.

It takes him a moment to understand what he’s seeing, something barely visible protruding from between Gerard’s shoulder blades. Pete’s eyebrows come together as he follows the shape. It’s hard to see, glinting and flashing with light every so often but as clear as a pane of glass. He’s not even entirely sure what it’s made of. One moment, it seems as solid as a sheer piece of fabric. Another second, it looks like waves cresting through the air. The shape and pattern feel familiar to Pete and he’s about to ask Gerard if he knows that he has this on his back when, suddenly, the shape parts and becomes two. Pete gapes.

“Oh my god!” Pete exclaims. “You have wings!”

“I know,” Gerard laughs, flapping them again. They’re gorgeous, the light glinting off of them like crystals. Enviously, Pete checks his own back only to see that nothing’s there. Gerard chuckles at his pout.

“You don’t have wings, dummy. You’re not an angel. Not yet, anyway,” he explains, smiling at Pete. “You still have to finish a mission on earth. To defeat Courtney as an almighty Defender of the Faith.”

“Oh, Christ,” Pete says, pressing his hands to his eyes as he groans. “I still don’t know what the fuck that means, dude. Like, what does that mean? What do they expect us to do?”

Pete peeks out from behind his fingers to see Gerard shrug half-heartedly.

“I dunno,” he admits. “Save rock ‘n’ roll or some shit like that.”

Pete lets his hands fall and he laughs. “Well, when you put it that way…I guess I like the sound of that.”

Gerard’s smile grows and it becomes contagious, Pete smiling back widely even though he doesn’t know what they’re smiling about. A moment passes and Gerard nudges Pete with his shoulder.

“That’s how I know that Patrick’s gotta show up, you know,” Gerard says, tone unexpectedly serious. “Because you’re all Defenders of the Faith and you can’t do this without him.”

Pete looks down at his hands in his lap. “I don’t know…Joe said that-”

“Joe’s wrong,” Gerard snaps. “And, like, not in a douchey way. He’s just scared. You all are and you’re right to be. But Patrick’s gonna be here, dude. I know he is.”

Pete peers up at Gerard, unconvinced. “I hope you’re right.”

Gerard shrugs. “I know I am.”

“Even if he does show up,” Pete says, fidgeting with the fabric of the white clothes he arrived in, “who’s to say that he wants to see me? I left him alone and, before that, I was a jerk. I was horrible. I keep thinking…What if it was a fluke when he said that he loved me back? What if it was just because he was scared and I was the only person around? I can’t stop wondering if he’ll get to Heaven and suddenly realize what a fool he was to fall in love with me. What if he doesn’t even want to see me? What then?”

Pete doesn’t know where this is coming from or why he’s dumping it all on Gerard. He looks up, meaning to apologize and take it back, but Gerard places a hand over his. It’s instantly calming.
“I think you think too much. Anyone who’s seen you two know how much you love each other. You both literally died for each other. I’m pretty sure he’s gonna want to see you,” he says, raising an eyebrow at Pete. He has a point but Pete’s insecurities will always have a tighter grip.

“But... But what if you’re wrong? What if he hates me?” Pete asks, his voice barely a whisper. He looks at a spot of the white wall over Gerard’s shoulder, too afraid to look Gerard in the eye. He doesn’t want him to see the demons swimming in them.

“Trust me. He doesn’t hate you,” Gerard says. Pete scowls.

“But you don’t know that,” he urges. Gerard retracts his hand and sighs heavily.

“You’re right. I don’t.” Pete flinches at the steadiness of his tone, sure that Gerard’s just going to confirm all of Pete’s thoughts. “So why don’t you ask him yourself?”

“What?” Pete’s eyes snap to Gerard’s. But Gerard’s are looking somewhere else.

Gerard’s eyes are looking at someone else.

Pete’s breathing stops when he follows Gerard’s gaze; his mouth goes dry and he can’t remember what he was even thinking a few seconds before. Teary blue eyes meet his and Pete can almost laugh at the amount of white on this already too pale person.

Instead, he only chokes out one word.

“Trick.”

Patrick runs to Pete without thinking, feet flying across the marble floor as if it doesn’t exist. Everything else is a blur in his mind and vision- a blur of white and uncaring that he doesn’t know how he got here. All he know is that Pete is before him, healed and clean, without a weapon in his hands and without fear in his eyes. Pete makes to stand but Patrick gets to him first, falling to his knees and collapsing in Pete’s arms. He wraps his own arms around Pete, tugging him closer until he can feel the other’s heart pounding against his chest. Maybe he’s imagining it or maybe he’s just a romantic but Patrick swears that their hearts are beating along to the same rhythm. He holds Pete tighter, breathing to the rhythm of their hearts.

“Oh my god, Trick, I missed you. I missed you so fucking much,” Pete sobs, fingers digging into Patrick skin as he tries to pull him closer. “Was so scared...I thought I’d never see you again.”

Pete’s tears soak into Patrick’s shirt but Patrick doesn’t care, knowing full well that he’s doing the same to Pete’s hair.

“I’m here, Pete,” he gasps. “I swear that I’m here.”

Pete doesn’t seem to hear him, tugging at Patrick’s hair to pull him into a sloppy kiss marred by tears and gasping breaths.

“I didn’t think you were coming,” Pete breathes, rubbing Patrick’s back. “I was so scared, Patrick. I never want to lose you.”

Patrick presses his lips close to Pete’s, just hovering above them as he chokes out his response.

“No, no, Pete, you’ll never lose me. Oh my god, Pete, I thought I lost you, I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.”
“Don’t apologize,” Pete growls, voice low as his hands find Patrick’s waist. “Just promise that you’ll never leave me again.”


They pull back to look at each other, eyes red-rimmed and cheeks flushed. Happiness like none other swells in Patrick’s chest and he feels it compete with his sadness because everything feels so right but he knows that nothing is. He knows that Courtney and her cult are still terrorizing the world. He knows that people are going to get hurt and he can do nothing to stop it.

But Pete is here with him right now and nothing else matters but that.

Shame fills Patrick’s body as he thinks of Courtney and everything her cult made him do. He tries to think of what to say but nothing comes to mind. Pete told him not to apologize but that’s all Patrick wants to do. He needs for Pete to know how sorry he is that all of this happened. He needs to earn this forgiveness and love that Pete is granting him.

Pete’s hand comes down towards Patrick’s left arm and Patrick jerks away, eyes wide. He doesn’t want to hurt Pete with his hook, he’ll never forgive himself if he does. He cradles his arm to his chest, a habit he’s gained ever since that hook first made an appearance.

“There’s no freak anymore,” Pete says, reaching out to Patrick again. “Look.”

Patrick’s terrified, watching as Pete gently grasps his wrist and pulls Patrick’s arm between the two of them.

Patrick does as Pete says, looking to where the hook is.

Or, he realizes with a loud gasp, where the hook used to be.

Pete’s hand slides up to hold onto Patrick’s hand, squeezing in a comforting manner. A knot forms in Patrick’s throat as he takes in the sight, forming a fist and laughing lightly at the fact that the hook is gone, that he’s okay, that all traces of that monster have disappeared.

“I’m not their freak anymore,” he says softly, gazing at his hand in awe. Pete shakes his head and brings Patrick’s hand to his lips, kissing each of his knuckles.

“You were never a freak at all,” he says, looking at Patrick earnestly. Patrick smiles so wide it hurts. He’s contemplating pulling Pete in for another kiss when Pete looks around, confusion filling his eyes. “Hey, where did Gerard go?”

Patrick’s eyebrows furrow together. Was Gerard here before? Patrick can’t remember anything more than Pete.

“Gee was here?” He asks. Pete nods, about to speak, when a voice rings out from the doorway.

Yep,” Gerard says, leaning against the doorway with his arms crossed. “I went Gerard away but now I’m here to Gerard stay.”

A moment passes of Pete and Patrick staring blankly at Gerard’s smug smirk. Eventually, Gerard frowns, face scrunching up in distaste.

“Okay, yeah. I thought that would be cool to say but now I just kinda hate myself.” His face evens out to a smile again and he walks over. “Hey, Patrick.”
“Hey,” Patrick says, smiling as Gerard reaches down and helps him to his feet. “How are- oh!”

Patrick’s question is cut off as Gerard pulls him into a tight embrace, wrapping his arms so firmly around him that Patrick feels as if he’ll break in two. He doesn’t care, though, merely returning the gesture, pressing his face into Gerard’s neck and breathing in his familiar scent. Patrick doesn’t know how he manages it, but Gerard has always seemed to carry the essence of a battlefield with him. Gunpowder and rain, Patrick breathes in. Gerard always smells like gunpowder and rain.

“I’m sorry,” Gerard says, stroking his hands across Patrick’s back. Patrick frowns.

“What do you think you have to be sorry for?” Patrick asks, pulling away. Gerard looks at the ground, sheepishly shifting his weight and chewing on his lip.

“I abandoned and betrayed you. I understand if you hate me for it,” he says. Patrick’s jaw drops. As if he could ever hate Gerard.

“Hey,” Patrick says sharply, reaching out to grab Gerard’s arm. “You did what you had to do in order to protect someone you care about. It wasn’t your fault, trust me. I know better than anyone how the cult controls people. Besides, you didn’t abandon anybody. I…I don’t remember much detail from when…from the mind control? But I know that you helped Pete and Andy. You freaking died for us, man. You don’t owe anyone an apology.”

Gerard’s eyebrows raise and his mouth opens, clear shock written across his features. He recovers quickly, though, smiling and biting his lip once again.

“Thanks for saying that but I think there is something that I totally do need to say sorry for,” he says, an unusually timid look on his face. Pete finally stands and moves to be by Patrick.

“What did you do, Gerard?” Something about the pained tone of Pete’s voice makes Patrick feel as if he already knows.

Gerard smiles weakly. “Joe and Andy heard the noise from this room and I told them that Patrick was here. I told them to wait a bit longer but they didn’t seem willing to wait for more than five minutes. They should be here soon.”

Pete sighs and Gerard tries to apologize.

Patrick’s too frozen in fear to notice.

It’s as if he’s been transported back to that hallway in the hospital, Joe’s neck beneath his hands and his pulse beating against his fingers. Patrick can still remember the joy he had felt at finding that cord, the ease with which he wrapped it around his friend’s throat and pulled. He can still remember the horror and fear in everyone’s eyes.

And, Andy. He was killed right in front of Patrick. Patrick could have done something, could have saved him. He knows that, had he had the will to do so, he could have saved everyone.

He suddenly can’t remember how to breathe.

“Patrick? It’s gonna be okay, I promise” Pete says, grabbing his hand. Patrick looks over, eyes wide, and shakes his head. Sure, Pete might have forgiven him. But Patrick didn’t kill Pete. He didn't resort to watching while a weapon was aimed at him. Patrick knows that Andy and Joe have every right to hate him. He just doesn’t know if he has the strength to deal with that so soon.

“No, hey, look,” Pete says, squeezing his hand and moving to stand in front of him. “Listen to me.
They’re not gonna hate you.”

Patrick looks into Pete’s eyes and feels like he’s being tortured all over again. “You can’t know that.”

“Patrick,” Pete says and his voice is stern, commanding. It’s almost comforting and Patrick does his best to pay attention. “Try to calm down, okay?”

“Okay,” Patrick says but he’s only half paying attention.

*I killed Joe. I practically helped kill Andy. This is still all my fault. Nothing is going to fix this. They’re going to hate me, I know it.*

Patrick isn’t aware that he’s swaying until he feels Gerard and Pete holding onto him, keeping him from falling. Gerard watches him with a worried expression.

“I’m so sorry,” he says. Patrick feels too sick to tell him not to apologize. “I didn’t think it was gonna be this bad…Should I go tell them not to come? I think I can hold them off for a while.”

“No,” Patrick blurts out, placing a hand against his chest to try and calm his racing heart. “No, I’ll be fine. I need to see them sooner or later, anyway.”

Gerard tosses him a dubious look, mouth set in a thin line. Patrick does his best to glare through the dizziness spreading through his head.

“I said, I’ll be fine,” he snaps. Gerard’s lips press together even tighter but he doesn’t say anything.

Footsteps begin to race down the hall and towards the room. Patrick lasts all of five seconds before stumbling into Pete’s arms again. Terror builds up in his heart and streams through his blood. His hands begin to tremble and he can’t think.

“Oh god,” he gasps. “Oh, god.”

“Okay, that’s it. You’re not okay. I’m gonna tell them to wait,” Gerard says, rushing to the doorway just before Joe and Andy run in. Faintly, Patrick hears Gerard telling them that he’s not ready to see them yet. He’s more grateful than he is embarrassed.

“What do you mean we can’t go in?” Joe demands.

Patrick’s blinking twice at Pete before he realizes how horrified he is. He tries to speak but the words stick in his throat. Not like it matters. He can’t even get his thoughts straight,

Pete’s quick, moving so that he’s holding onto Patrick’s shoulders, stabilizing and grounding him. He watches Patrick intensely, searching to see how bad this is. Patrick’s lungs ache from his strained breaths and he blinks twice again. Pete’s hands grow more gentle and he nods to himself, rubbing Patrick’s arms.

“One for yes, two for no, right?” Pete asks, more out of routine than anything else. Patrick blinks once and Pete smiles softly, even though some concern lingers on his lips.

“Can you breathe for me, baby? Regularly, I mean?” Pete asks. Patrick shudders at the term of endearment and forces himself to take a deep breath. It’s shaky and hurts as it drags down his throat. Still, he feels the calming effects almost immediately. Again, he blinks once. Pete’s already prepared with the next question.
“Do you really want to see the others right now?” Pete speaks slowly, enunciating each word to be sure that Patrick understands. Patrick hesitates, looking down and chewing his bottom lip. Does he want to see them? More than anything. He needs to make sure that they know how sorry he is. He just doesn’t want them to hate him. But he can’t control that and that’s what makes it terrifying. Is seeing his friends again worth the hate he’s certain will come with it?

When Patrick looks into Pete’s warm brown eyes, he blinks only once.

Pete seems confused for just a second as if he doesn’t understand what’s bothering Patrick so greatly. His eyes scan over Patrick’s body, taking in his shaking form. Something must click because then he’s smiling again and asking questions.

“Are your thoughts bothering you?” Pete asks. Patrick hesitates even longer than before but still signals yes once he’s evaluated the insecurities flooding through his mind. They’re why he can’t think; they’re the only things he can focus on.

“Do you need help quieting them?” Pete asks. Though he’s confused, Patrick’s answer is an immediate yes. Pete smiles and his hand travels to rest beneath Patrick’s chin. It’s a familiar position and Patrick’s heart beats fast, his thoughts too frenetic to really focus on what Pete’s doing. When Pete’s lips meet his, warm and soft and chaste, Patrick’s eyes slip shut and he wraps his arms around Pete’s neck. It’s nice to be able to kiss Pete without wondering if it will be their last or without feeling as if he doesn’t deserve it. Pete’s tongue flicks over Patrick’s lips but retreats back into his own mouth, merely teasing. Patrick moans and presses closer, desperate for more. He can’t quite recall why he allows himself to get so upset when he has someone so wonderful at his side.

“Called it! Told you they were making up for lost time, Hurley, you fucker!”

Joe’s voice is sudden and booms throughout the room, echoing off the walls and causing Patrick’s cheeks to flush red when he yanks away from Pete in shame at being caught. When he hears Joe and Andy laughing as they draw closer, he’s too embarrassed to be scared. Pete’s hand still reaches to wrap around his and Patrick looks up to see Pete watching him with the smile that he always wore whenever they kissed before- the smile that said he couldn’t believe it happened and that he feels like the luckiest man in the world. Patrick never understood how anyone can look at him like that and he fears he never will. But he’s getting there, he feels. If Pete keeps looking at him like that, he’s certain he’ll get there someday.

“Patrick,” Joe says. Patrick’s afraid again, too fearful to turn around and face his friends. Pete gives his hand an encouraging squeeze and, with a deep breath, Patrick turns around.

“Guys, I’m so so—”

Joe runs up to Patrick, enveloping him in the warmest and tightest hug Patrick’s ever had. He’s silent, just holding Patrick and pulling him close. Patrick’s hesitant to return the gesture, his arms wrapping around Joe uncertainly.

“But,” Patrick says, barely a whisper. “But don’t you hate me?”

Impossibly, Joe’s hold on him grows tighter. “As if.”

Patrick’s eyes grow wide and he looks up to see Andy watching him, smiling as if nothing is wrong. He steps forward, reaching to place a hand on Patrick’s shoulder.

“It’s good to have you back, Patrick,” he says. “We missed you.”

And it’s strange the way he says it because, Patrick thinks, it hasn’t been that long since they’ve seen
each other. Granted, the last time Patrick saw Andy, he had been under the cult’s control and trying
to kill them but-

Oh.

Oh.

Patrick’s eyes well up with tears as he realizes what they’ve done, what Andy’s words mean. He
means it as if Patrick hadn’t been there when it had happened and as if he had never hunted down his
friends with the intent to kill them. As if he wasn’t the one to kill Joe or stand idly by as Andy’s
throat was slit. It’s as if he was never there at all. Because, Patrick realizes with a tear slipping down
his cheek, he wasn’t there. He wasn’t the monster, was he? He didn’t do those things; he would
never do those things. Andy continues to smile at him as if it’s the first time they’ve seen each other
in years. Joe holds onto him like they’re long lost friends who’ve been reunited. And Patrick
understands.

He wasn’t the monster he feared he was and his friends could never hate him.

Patrick holds Joe tighter and shuts his eyes, a smile gracing his lips.

“Yes,” he whispers. “I missed you guys, too.”

Chapter End Notes

There's still QUITE a few chapters left, btw, I just mean that we're on the last song and
that's gotta be bittersweet. I can't wait to get to the ending, though. I can't wait for
everyone's reactions :)

Fun Fact: This girl on my floor is taking a news writing class and decided to interview
me for it and, long story short, her project is gonna be about fanfiction. It was awesome.
I brought up Fall Out Boy and she said "I only know one member...I only know Patrick
Stump" and AS A PATRICK GIRL (do ppl still say stuff like that? heck if I know) I
was ecstatic. Not gonna lie, I was prepared to hear that she only knew Pete. (tho she did
end up saying "he's the one with saint right" but if she knows the kids' names, that's just
more points for her in my book)
**I Only Plugged In To Save (Me And You)**

Chapter Summary

There's always gonna be a problem, isn't there?

Chapter Notes

Please love me, it's 2am and I have work in 4 hours.

Unedited because I'm falling asleep guys, I'm sorry

Chapter Playlist:
- "Save Rock And Roll" by Fall Out Boy
- *

*typically chapter playlists are just songs I listened to while writing this + the song that the music video is from but i lost my earbuds so :( no playlist

See the end of the chapter for more notes

**I Only Plugged In To Save (Me And You)**

A loving smile forms on Pete’s face as he watches the scene before him unfold. He lets out a relieved breath. Though there was never a doubt in his mind that Joe and Andy still care for Patrick, Pete had been worried that Patrick wouldn’t allow himself to believe it when the two finally saw him again. He takes care not to interrupt, content with just watching. Warmth fills his being at the sight of Patrick holding onto Joe so tightly. It gives him hope that they aren’t broken beyond repair. It makes him think that they’re stronger than everything that’s been done. When Patrick laughs, rubbing at his teary eyes, Pete’s heart swells. When was the last time he’d seen Patrick this happy? Even before the cult intervened, Patrick’s smiles were halfhearted at best. Pete’s certain that it’s been years since he’d seen Patrick giggling and smiling without a care in the world. Pete vows to himself that he’ll never let anything get in the way of that smile again.

Pete’s eyes shift over to Gerard, expecting the other singer to be reacting in much the same way as Pete. Instead, Gerard’s eyes are on Pete and he gestures to the doorway before walking that way. Pete takes the cue and, though confused, follows Gerard to speak privately in the hallway. He glances back at Patrick before leaving completely, letting the sight of his grin ease Pete’s mind. He laughs at Joe’s stories of Hell, eyes wide with amused disbelief. Andy stands beside him, making jokes at Joe’s expense of why he was the only one to go to Hell before coming to Heaven. Pete smiles softly. Everything is as it should be. With the assurance that Patrick’s alright, Pete turns to face Gerard.

Gerard leads him a bit further down the hall, until the sound of the others’ laughter is just barely audible. Pete looks at Gerard with an eyebrow raised. He opens his mouth to question his motives
but Gerard seems distracted, peering over his shoulder as two women dressed all in white pass by them without a second glance. Pete watches them, curious. Like Gerard, they also have wings protruding from their back—though theirs are larger and carry more of a silver shade. White robes and glowing flower crowns adorn them as they hurry down the halls. Each girl carries a silver platter and their eyes fail to leave the object even as they make quick turns. As they disappear from sight, Pete looks back to Gerard to see the singer shaking his head as if in disagreement with the women’s actions.

“Don’t worry about them,” he says. “They’re just preparing things for when the big guy shows up.”

Pete raises an eyebrow. “The big guy?”

“You know,” Gerard says, flapping his hand dismissively. “God.”

Pete stares at Gerard in sudden disbelief, a chill sweeping through him at the thought. For a moment, he can’t form words.

“Oh,” he says finally, still gaping at Gerard. “Oh, shit.”

Gerard merely laughs and Pete forces himself to calm down.

“Oh, come on,” Gerard says, leaning against the wall. “You have to know that there’s a God if there’s a Heaven.”

“Yeah, I guess,” Pete says, sounding a bit whiny to his own ears. “I just…I didn’t expect.” He cuts off with a heavy sigh, unable to continue. When Gerard looks at him, Pete merely shrugs and shakes his head. “Nevermind.”

Gerard looks away again, eyes focused on the wall on the other side of the hall. Pete copies his action, leaning his back against the wall and thinking of everything that’s led him and his band here. Now that they’re all together and happy, he can do so with only a small twinge of pain and regret. It still hurts to know that they’re all dead but at least they’re dead together— as morbid as that sounds.

Pete can’t help but feel bad for Gerard and his band, tossed into this unwittingly. They had no idea what they were getting into, had no way of knowing what the cult even wanted. They were the greatest victims, ignorant and oblivious. They were all so innocent.

And yet…

Something pulls at Pete’s mind and he looks over to Gerard, a new suspicion in his eyes.

“How did you know?” Pete asks, drawing Gerard out of wherever his mind had taken him. Gerard looks over at Pete, eyebrows furrowed.

“About God?” He asks. “Well, I would think it’s pretty obvious. Joe said he met Satan so I guess—”

“No, no,” Pete says, pulling himself off the wall and shaking his head. “I mean about everything. You knew a lot more about the cult than you should have for someone just mistakenly thrown into this. I don’t think they’d be so foolish to just tell you about the Defenders of the Faith or what their plans were so how did you know? And why are you so calm? I don’t care how long the cult had you, no one just reacts so calmly to a group of people trying to destroy the world as we know it. I don’t think I’ve seen you freak out once since this thing happened and I’m trying to figure out why. This...This was always about more than Frank, wasn’t it?”

Pete’s more than prepared for Gerard to grow angry with him, to toss himself off the wall and spit
insults into Pete’s face. He knows how accusing he sounds and he knows it’s well within Gerard’s rights to get defensive.

Instead, Gerard just looks...defeated.

“Frank,” he says, looking at the ground with slumped shoulders. “He was always the main priority. Aside from when I was under the cult’s control, I never lied to you guys. I was always just trying to save Frank and, when I thought he was dead, I was trying to avenge him. But…”

Gerard trails off, pausing to take a shaky breath. Pete tries not to be impatient, biting his tongue to keep from demanding that Gerard continue.

Eventually, Gerard straightens his back and runs his hands down his face, sighing loudly as he does so. When his hands fall to his side, he looks Pete in the eye.

“Everyone has a role in life, whether they know it or not. Everyone has a title that they must live up to, a mission to fulfill. You and your band are the Defenders of the Faith; Courtney and her cult are Silence the Noise. Unknowingly, we all fall into our places whether we like it or not.” Gerard’s voice grows stronger as he speaks, though he does seem hesitant to continue. “While… When… When the cult had me...I had a dream. It was the night before they let us go. It showed me who I was supposed to be during this. There was, heh, God showed up and you won’t believe what he looks like. He- You know what, you can find that out on your own. Anyway, he told me that I was meant to be the Herald. He told me that, when my band was freed, I was to find yours and to help you. I was shown the future, basically, and told to use that information to be sure you succeeded. I was supposed to be his messenger.”

Gerard takes another breath, looking away from Pete now as he speaks.

“But, he warned me, there was another path I could take. He cautioned that, if I did not follow the path of the Herald, I would be forced to take the path of the Death Adder. This path he showed me was darker. It was evil. God said that the Death Adder would betray the Defenders and aid the cult in their plan to kill them. He said that I’d lose everything. I thought that was impossible, that I’d never betray anybody. But then our band was freed. And I was told that Frank would be killed if I didn’t do as the cult said. I became the Death Adder and I didn’t even know it. I like to think that I redeemed myself like Patrick said but…I still have more I can do. I still have the information and vision of the future and- if you’ll have me- I think I’d like to be the Herald now.”

Pete’s mind reels from Gerard’s speech, his thoughts racing to piece the story together into one that makes sense. He can see it clearly, though. It’s not hard to picture Gerard in the cell the cult must have kept him in, shaking with anticipation of being released. It’s not hard to imagine how well he could have done as the Herald.

Pete’s mind clicks everything into place and he can’t help but feel a bit angry.

Gerard had all the information that they needed- he was the informant they required, not Stephanie. If Gerard had never betrayed them, if he had only trusted his vision and helped them, the cult could be destroyed by now. No one would have ever needed to die. No one would have ever needed to suffer.

“Pete,” Gerard says. By his tone, Pete can’t help but wonder if Gerard has somehow read his mind. He knows that Gerard knows what he was thinking. “I thought Frank’s life was in danger. Wouldn’t you have done the same for Patrick?”

Pete pauses but he doesn’t even need to think about it- he knows he would do anything for Patrick.
“Exactly,” Gerard says before Pete can even respond. When the two lock eyes again, Gerard smiles bitterly. “It’s not very healthy but…Some people are worth everything.”

Pete returns the smile, though his is more genuine than Gerard’s. He thinks back to Patrick, his laughter ringing through his head like his favorite song.

“Yeah,” he agrees. “And some people are worth forever.”

Gerard chuckles but it sounds forced. His smile fades and he steps closer to Pete, voice dropping to a low, conspiratorial murmur.

“Listen,” he says, eyes shifting in a paranoid manner. “There’s something you need to know before you meet God.”

“What?” Pete asks, taken aback by Gerard’s sudden fearful nature. Gerard shifts his weight, eyes searching the hallway as if he expects to see cameras or spies. Pete reaches out and grabs his arm, bringing Gerard’s focus back to him. “What is it?”

Gerard takes a deep breath and then nods, steadying himself.

“When you meet God, he’s going to tell you that the original contents of the briefcase have been changed by the cult. There’s going to be a greater, darker power that you’re going to need to defeat in order to restore order back to the world. Don’t worry, though. God will equip you with what you need to win,” Gerard says. When he pauses, Pete’s heart beats fast.

“Well?” Pete asks. “What’s wrong with that? We’ll win, won’t we?”

Gerard sighs, dropping his head to stare at the floor. His voice is bitter and his lips curl around his muttered words.

“There’s always a cost.”

Pete’s blood runs cold and he steps away, hand falling from Gerard’s arm.

“What do you mean?” Pete asks in a whisper. “Gerard, are we going to win?”

Gerard shakes himself out of his angered silence and then looks up to Pete, resolve adding a new light to his eyes.

“Yes,” he says. “You will win.”

Pete barely has time to take a relieved breath before Gerard is continuing.

“You will win and you will be heroes,” he says. “But there’s always a price that must be paid in order for the world to be saved. God wants you to win this battle but, when it’s over, he’s going to take someone as a sacrifice.”

Gerard steps towards Pete until they’re just a few inches apart, fear and boldness mixing between them.

Pete’s terrified to hear the rest of Gerard’s statement; he fears he already knows what it is.

Gerard continues anyway.

“He’s going to take Patrick.”
“You were dead and Patrick was in jail. Do you think that was anywhere near my priorities?”

“Ok… So you definitely got some end of the world sex from the hot secret agent?”

“No!”

Patrick laughs at Joe’s and Andy’s antics, smiling from behind his hands. He’s surprised at how easy it is to forget about his anxiety and insecurities around them. He’d been so scared that they’d hate him. It’d been such a weight on his chest, an iron mold around his lungs that prevented him from breathing too deeply. Even when he was with Pete, that dread still lingered like a bad dream that won’t leave him alone. Now that he knows that the others have forgiven him—or, better yet, never blamed him to begin with—it’s as if he’s taken a much needed hit from his inhaler. It’s as if he’s awoken from a nightmare that’s lasted too long. It feels like the first time he stepped on stage and heard a crowd scream his name.

It feels like the best moment of his life.

Joe continues to pester Andy over the girl who’d helped them—Stephanie. Though he’s irritated that this girl waited so long to tell Pete and Andy about the cult kidnapping him again, Patrick’s glad that Andy was able to find someone to make him happy during the darkest time of their lives. Even if it didn’t include end of the world sex, as Joe put it.

“Hey,” Gerard says, walking back into the room. Patrick looks over, noticing for the first time that Pete and he had disappeared for a while. Patrick smiles at Pete but the other boy seems shaken, face pale and hands tightened into fists at his side. Patrick raises an eyebrow at him but Pete merely shakes his head. Patrick decides to leave it be, refusing to be sucked into anymore negative thoughts. For once, everything seems right and he’ll give anything to keep it that way.

Gerard smiles at the group as he nods towards the hallway. “It’s time for you guys to go.”

No one questions Gerard, Joe too busy with bothering Andy and Andy too busy ignoring Joe. The group follows Gerard out and Patrick hurries forward to fall in step with Pete. He smiles at him and Pete smiles back distractedly, clearly lost in thoughts.

“Hey, what’s wrong?” Patrick asks, reaching out to grab Pete’s hand. Pete runs his thumb over Patrick’s knuckles, distracting the singer and sending shivers down his spine. When a few seconds have passed, Pete sighs.

“Hey, Trick,” he says. “Who do you think got it worse? Frank or Gerard?”

“You know, over Gerard’s death,” Pete elaborates, causing Patrick to cringe in fear of Gerard overhearing their gossip. Pete pushes on, however, disregarding the thought. “I mean, Gerard’s dead, sure, but Frank has to live with that. In my opinion, I think Frank got it worse. He has to live without the person he loves, wondering forever if there was any way he could have stopped it. Hypothetically, wouldn’t you be happier in Gerard’s place? If… If something like that were to happen to us, you’d rather be Gerard, right? You’d rather watch over me from Heaven instead of feeling guilty for my death, right?”

Pete’s hand squeezes Patrick’s tighter as if he knows he’s being selfish or presumptuous. It’s a
strange question, though, and Patrick tightens his grip on Pete’s hand as he ponders it.

“No,” he says finally and firmly. “I don’t think that’s right at all.”

Patrick’s eyes remain on Gerard, who looks back and raises an eyebrow as if he can sense them speaking of him. He doesn’t confront them, however, and Patrick wonders if he can even hear them at all. As a precaution, Patrick lowers his voice though he feels guilty as he does so.

“You see, I’d much rather be Frank. Of course, I’d feel guilty as hell and I have no doubt that I’d become depressed and…and contemplate joining you in Heaven but…” Patrick pauses, takes a breath, and continues. “Frank can still remember Gerard as a hero- or he will, once he finds out what happened. Frank’s memories of Gerard stop with that. But Gerard…He can still watch Frank. He’ll have to watch him as he mourns over him- as everyone mourns over him. And that will hurt a lot. And then he’ll watch as Frank has to choose one of two paths- mourn forever or move on. Both will hurt to watch. Either Gerard will hate himself for putting Frank through so much and pain and not being there to comfort him or Gerard will be forced to witness Frank falling in love with someone else- watch himself be replaced.”

Patrick takes a deep breath and looks at Pete earnestly, trying to figure out what this question means.

“Anyway, what I guess I’m trying to say is that I was tortured and even killed-” Patrick takes note of how Pete winces at his bluntness and takes a moment to stroke the back of his hand with his thumb before continuing “-but nothing sounds worse than being locked in Heaven away from those that you love. I never want to go through that.”

Pete’s silent; Patrick wonders if this was a test and he answered incorrectly. Eventually, though, Pete nods.

“Yeah,” he says. “I can see that. You’re right. But don’t worry. I promise I’ll make sure that never happens to you.”

It’s a strange thing to say but Patrick pins it on the fact that the band has been through too much not to make promises like this. He smiles at Pete, nudging him with his shoulder.

“And I’ll do the same for you.”

Pete doesn’t smile back.

“Well, here we are,” Gerard exclaims before Patrick can question Pete’s unusual mood. He looks up to see a large room with an ornate staircase before him, everything appearing to be white marble and gilded in gold. The staircase itself curves up to an unimaginable height, disappearing into a bright light that causes Patrick to squint. Gerard works quick, though, distracting him as he works the band into a respectful line at the base, placing Patrick and Pete on opposite ends. Patrick tries again to flash a smile Pete’s away but receives yet another strange- almost pitiful- glance. Concern dances around in Patrick’s mind and, this time, he’s not quite certain whether or not he wants to ignore it.

“So, as I assume you all already guessed, this is where we part ways,” Gerard says, beaming before them. “And most people would give a speech here but I know that the world is depending on you so I’m gonna keep it short so you can go and kick ass like you need to. I’m more than honored to have been part of your story- even if I wasn’t in it in ways that I should have been. Unlike me, I know that you’ll succeed in doing what is right.”

Pride swells up in Patrick’s chest as Gerard speaks, his words as powerful as his lyrics. Still, his mind wanders with possibilities as to why Pete is looking at Gerard so sorrowfully. Perhaps he’s going to
“More importantly,” Gerard says, glancing Pete’s way and meeting his forlorn gaze. “I know you’ll succeed in doing what your heart believes is right.”

As if it’s a magic spell, Pete’s tense muscles visibly relax and he smiles at Gerard. “We will. Thank you.”

Patrick is quick to follow Pete’s example, stepping towards Gerard with a wide smile on his face. “Really. Thank you for everything you’ve done.”

Gerard looks to Patrick and, upon seeing the look in Gerard’s eyes, he’s not really surprised when he’s pulled into yet another tight hug.

“I always knew it was gonna be someone like you,” Gerard whispers. “Patrick fucking Stump is gonna save rock and roll.”

Patrick’s breath hitches as he hears Gerard’s words but he can’t find it in him to ask about it, to voice his thoughts. The phrase Gerard had uttered stick in his mind, though, like glue and his brain works vigorously to put together puzzle pieces. Save Rock And Roll. Patrick makes a note to ask about it later, if he ever gets the chance. Now, however, he just wants to enjoy having Gerard in his arms for he knows that this may be the last time they meet. Their hug lasts longer than it should, reminiscent of summer days in hot tour buses as both their bassists screwed around, unaware of the second affair unfolding behind the scenes. Patrick holds Gerard a bit tighter, noting the way the angel in his arms seems to glow brighter at the action. Patrick watches the light around Gerard in fascination, nearly feeling the warmth settle into his own skin. When they finally break apart, the question of Gerard’s phrase is on his lips, waiting to be asked.

He never gets the chance.

“They’re ready,” Gerard says suddenly, pulling away from Patrick. Before Patrick can protest or even say goodbye, two women take his place. One woman holds a platter with guitar picks on it; the other delicately grips the handle of a gleaming goblet. They smile warmly at the band before them and Patrick’s too confused to remember what his previous question was.

“Welcome, Defenders,” one woman says, her voice as smooth as silk. “We’ve been awaiting this day for a long time.”

The other woman steps forward, speaking just as softly as the first. “For years, we passed on the prophecy of the Defenders of the Faith - the band that will one day save the world. For some, this was merely a fairytale but, to those that believed, we knew that you were heroes waiting to be born.”

“Surely,” the first girl picks up, “glory and honor await you.”

“Angels and mortals alike will praise you,” the second says as they go back and forth.

“The highest thrones in Heaven shall be your seat.”

“And the Cult of Courtney you will defeat.”

“We know that you are our heroes and it is with great pleasure that we welcome you to Heaven. Our Lord shall be here shortly. Please, accept this communion as a sign of loyalty to the forces of Heaven. Soon, all power shall be yours,” the first woman finishes, holding up her plate of guitar picks. Upon closer inspection, Patrick notices that they’re not truly picks, just small wafers of bread formed in the shape of them.
As the girls begin to pass out the communion, Patrick feels emotion prickling at his skin. He thinks back to the girls’ words of honor and heroism and the excitement merely grows, his hands tingling at the thought of finally defeating Courtney. It’s not an unwelcome feeling.

As the girls grow closer with the communion, placing a pick on Joe’s tongue, he can hear them whispering about the rewards they will receive. They promise the greatest treasures and swear that all their favorite desires will be fulfilled. Patrick doesn’t exactly know what that means but he hopes that it includes Pete. When the girl with the bread stands before him, he opens his mouth willingly. The girl smiles at his solemnity and respect Patrick wonders if she can tell what he’s thinking.

_I will do anything you ask if you only keep Pete safe. He is my greatest treasure. He is my favorite desire. Keep him safe and, I swear, I will be your slave_.

The first girl moves on and Patrick drinks the wine that is given to him, nearly moaning at the ambrosial taste. It dances across his taste buds with a flavor he’s never experienced before—something addicting and sweet. If the feeling of passionate kisses and desperate ‘I love you’s had a flavor, this would be it. The wine of Heaven may make him take back any promise he made while writing _Run Dry_.

When the cup finally parts from his lips and his eyes slip open, the girl is still standing there. Patrick smiles awkwardly as she lingers before him, wanting to look to Pete for help but finding he can’t.

“Do not worry, Patrick,” she says in her melodic voice. “For the pains you have suffered, your rewards shall be greater than the rest. It is my promise to you that, once you have defeated Courtney’s cult, you shall have no more pains nor sorrows. Only pleasure awaits.”

Patrick’s eyebrows furrow together. He will be receiving the greatest reward? That doesn’t seem fair to him. Sure, he was kidnapped first and tortured the most but does that really outweigh the emotional pain that they all suffered together? Surely, the others deserve just as much as him, if not more. He opens his mouth to say as much but the girl is already walking away. Patrick turns to question the other three but then a bright light fills the room and he looks back forward.

Someone appears at the top of the stairs and Patrick can’t look away. The other three stare in shock, as well, as the being descending the stairs turns out to be….Elton John?

Patrick blinks a few times, even rubbing at his eyes. The image of this legend doesn’t fade away.

“Blood brothers,” the man booms, his voice echoing throughout the entire building. “Welcome.”

Perhaps it’s just the way he speaks or maybe it’s how he called them blood brothers. Either way, Patrick realizes with a loud gasp that this is God. His jaw drops in awe. Somehow, he never considered that they would be meeting God.

God continues to speak, his presence demanding and voice earth-shattering.

“I know that you know who I am and I welcome you to my home. Defenders. Brothers. Welcome.”

When God stops before them, smiling and patient, Patrick can’t think of anything to say. It’s Pete who speaks up, his voice strangely surly and bitter.

“If you’re God,” he snaps, “why do you look like Elton John?”

“Oh my Go- I mean, gosh, Pete! You can’t just ask God why he’s Elton John!” Patrick exclaims in embarrassed astonishment. Pete shoots him a sarcastic glare as Joe and Andy begin to laugh but God speaks, drawing the focus in the room back to him.
“It is alright. I understand his meaning,” God says, looking to Pete with a fond smile. “My true form is not one that mere mortals- including the Defenders- may look upon and still survive. I decided to choose a form that you would both recognize and respect. From your reactions, I assume I chose wisely. Now, shall we move on? There must be more pressing questions you wish to ask.”

Everyone grows silent and the tense feeling of intimidation fills the air. Patrick tries not to let his mind wander as the past few days catch up with him but, as the silence gives him time to think, these thoughts have no choice but to take over. He thinks to Gerard and how he’s gone now, alone in Heaven just because he decided to play a part in this twisted plot. He wonders about the briefcase and how it just so happened to appear that night, so many years before all of this began. He thinks of the same thing he thought about everyday since he saw it- why did it happen to them? Why were they chosen for this task? And why could nobody- not even Gerard, not really- play a larger role? Why did it just have to be this band when there are so many who could have done so much better?

How’d it get to be only them?

Andy clears his throat from where he stands next to Patrick. Patrick looks up to him and Andy indicates to the front of the room. Patrick looks towards God only to see that the deity is now standing before him, a patient smile on his face.

“I can tell that you have questions, Patrick,” God says. “Please, feel free to speak.”

Patrick hesitates, words sticking in his throat as he feels the power of billions of years rolling off the man before him. He looks at his friends for confidence before swallowing loudly and looking back to God.

“I-I was just wondering,” he begins, fidgeting as he speaks. “How’d it get to be only us? Like, there are so many other bands but it feels like we’re the last damn kids still kicking, who still believe. I just… I just don’t understand how that happened to be us.”

“Don’t you see?” God asks, gesturing to the group of four in front of him. “This is the only band that can save the world. Though it may not seem it, every other band is too dysfunctional or temporary. Despite your break from each other, you still shared something that no other band had- not to the extent that you did. The strongest bond that a group can have is through love- familial or….otherwise.” Patrick feels his face grow red when he sees the subtle glance God gives to both him and Pete. Though, he notes with glee, he seems far from angry as so many on earth would have him believe. The only expression God wears when he says this is one of open acceptance and care. It makes Patrick smile.

Furthermore,” God continues. “You each carry a trait that allowed you all to succeed. You could not have come this far without each other. This is a fact. Andy’s clear-headedness allowed you to find your way through situations that emotion would have you going on suicide missions for. But Joe’s emotion, however, was necessary to keep you from tearing each other- and yourselves- apart. Pete’s protectiveness over his friends is what fed your adrenaline and fight, forcing the cult to see you as a force to be reckoned with. And, you, Patrick. You may have the most important trait of all.”

Patrick’s voice falters in disbelief. “R-Really?”

God nods, folding his hands before him. “Of course. For you have a pure heart and that is what prevented the cult’s control from taking a deeper root. A weaker and more evil man would have succumbed to their torture. You, however, did not. Surely, a place among the angels is already being set for you.”

Patrick hears Pete’s hiss of breath from across the room and he wants to roll his eyes.
It’s just words, Pete, he wants to say. No need to be jealous

Instead, he leans forward intently to ask God more questions.

“So, what else do we need to do?” Patrick inquires. God steps back to the center so that everyone can see him.

“The rest is simple. You will complete an oath and I will give you the weapons necessary to defeat Courtney’s demon in battle.”

“Why didn’t you just give us these weapons in the first place?” Pete blurts out, crossing his arms over his chest. Patrick turns to glare at Pete, meaning to snap at him for his rude behavior—towards God of all things. But there’s something more to Pete’s irritability, something deeply hidden in his eyes. It causes Patrick to bite back his scolding.

“Not all battles can be fought with weapons,” God answers patiently. “The cult needed first to see that they cannot easily defeat the Defenders. Also, the fact that they believe you all to be dead will only prove your power once they see that you have been resurrected.”

“But will all of us be resurrected?” Pete asks, raising an eyebrow in challenge. Patrick narrows his eyes at him. What is he getting at with these disrespectful questions?

God doesn’t answer his question directly, merely stating that “All will be as it should.”

This doesn’t seem to be enough for Pete and his other eyebrow raises. Patrick interrupts him before he can even begin.

“Can we take the oath now?” He asks, impatient to take vengeance on the cult for everything they’ve done— not only to him but to everyone they’ve ever hurt. No one should have the power to hurt so many people. It’s not right.

God stands back, smiling gratefully at Patrick. “Yes. You should all already know it.”

Everyone stares at God blankly, confused. With a soft chuckle, God begins.

“I will defend the faith…”

As if by magic, the rest of the words pop into Patrick’s head and he begins to speak, the others doing so as well.

“Going down swinging-” Patrick tries to smile at Pete, vividly recalling the proud words Pete had boasted the night they had found the briefcase. Instead, though, Pete gazes at the ground frustratedly as he speaks. “I will defend the songs that we can’t stop singing.”

“Perfect,” God says. Patrick feels unreasonably proud at the praise. “Now, I will give you your weapons.”

The angels from before appear again, walking forward with instruments in their hands. God starts with Pete, passing him a black and white bass. As he continues, giving Joe a white guitar and Andy a pair of white drumsticks, confusion swirls through Patrick’s mind. These are what they are to use to defeat Silence the Noise? They’re nothing more than instruments!

And then God is standing before Patrick, a perfect replica of his signature Stump-o-matic in his hands. When Patrick takes it, he suddenly understands why these are their weapons.
A thrum of power rushes from the guitar and into Patrick’s hands, filling him with a rush of adrenaline, not unlike the kind he received whenever he fulfilled a command given to him by the cult. This one’s stronger, though, rushing through him as if it’s taken the place of his blood. A crooked smile forms on his face. He feels as if he can destroy the entire cult with just one chord from this guitar. He hopes he can.

“There is a piano over here,” God says, walking towards the back of the room and sitting on the bench before the instrument. “I will play first. When you feel the call, you may join in.”

The first notes from the piano fall into the room like raindrops, splashing into the air and demanding attention from the band members in the room. Patrick listens as the music weaves its way to him, the chords and melodies dancing through the air like a gentle breeze. God’s music is a gentle spring rain.

When Joe’s guitar joins in a few seconds later, it becomes a rainstorm. The rhythm picks up and God’s hand slides down scales like he invented them which, Patrick supposes, he had.

Andy’s next, adding thunder to the song with his drumming. Patrick smiles at the sound. He’d like to make an album with God one day if that’s possible. Who knows? Maybe that’s part of the reward everyone keeps telling him he’ll receive.

Patrick moves to step forward, the music drawing him in like the current of a rushing river racing to make it downstream. His fingers press against the strings, a nostalgic feeling he thought he’d never experience again. Just as he’s reaching for one of the picks placed on top of the piano, Pete steps before him.

“Patrick, wait,” he hisses quietly. “Do we really want to do this? Do you even know what you’re doing? Do you even know what we’re getting into?”

Something about Pete’s hands catches Patrick’s eye and he looks down at them, raising an eyebrow when he sees Pete softly strumming his bass.

“Do you?” he responds, gesturing to the way Pete’s playing. Pete follows his gaze and his eyes widen, as if he hadn’t realized he’d been playing. He continues to try and speak to Patrick, demanding to know if this is a good idea. Patrick smiles at him in a way that he hopes is comforting.

“Pete, I can feel a power in this guitar, like nothing I’ve ever felt before. It’s so much stronger than whatever control they had me under. It’s stronger than the cult, that’s for sure. Don’t worry. I’ll keep us safe”

Patrick’s never been more confident in his life and he moves past Pete to grab a pick. This time, Pete doesn’t try to stop him, though the fear in his eyes grows to become terror. Patrick ignores it. He’ll keep Pete safe. He’ll show him that he never has to fear anything again.

The guitar calls for Patrick to play and, almost subconsciously, he does so. The sound is subtle but power flows from the strings and into Patrick’s body. He shuts his eyes, reveling in the power he feels.

Yes. Yes, with this I can keep them safe. I can keep everyone safe.

A light flashes in the room, like someone shining a flashlight over his eyelids. Somewhere in the background, Pete cries out.

Patrick merely smiles and plays another chord.
I'm so dead. I'm sorry for the grammar and spelling and other errors that I didn't have time to correct. I just...I need more than three hours of sleep please understand

I didn't read this over. I don't even remember writing the last paragraphs, they just showed up. Please let me know if any errors impact the readability or understanding of the plot. Otherwise, enjoy!
This Is How It Gets (To Be Only Me)

Chapter Summary

It feels like a lot of things but most of all it feels familiar

Chapter Notes

I am actually so irritated with the election right now. I haven't checked in awhile but that's only because I was getting too angry while watching the live coverage. Anyway. Have a chapter to distract you.

Chapter Playlist:
- "Blink" by Revive
- "Angel With A Shotgun" by The Cab
- "Determinate" from Lemonade Mouth (Yo, this move is actually a fav of mine? I'm pretty sure I started a fob au of it a few months ago don't judge)
- "Hero" by Charlotte Perrelli
- "End Of Innocence" by Kamelot
- "Save Rock And Roll" by Fall Out Boy (this song's gonna have the most parts, I shoulda warned all of you about that whoops)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

This Is How It Gets (To Be Only Me)

Patrick opens his eyes and he’s entirely unsurprised by the sight before him. Rust. Metal. Broken instruments and people dressed in black. Patrick’s eyes narrow. They’re back with the cult.

Memories come rushing back at him, cutting into his thoughts like knives. For a second, he can still see the Vixens laughing and mocking his pain. For a moment, he can remember how it feels to have his gaze go yellow. All of the pain and torture and control- it happened because of these people.

The last time Patrick was here- really here, without a yellow haze over his eyes and without cruelty wrapped around his heart- he’d been terrified. He’d been half-alive, certain that the cult was going to torture him or worse. He’d been huddled against a wall like a child, hopelessness telling him that no one would come to save him. He’d been afraid.

This time, though, he feels no fear. Neither anger nor terror mixes into his sight as he glances coldly across those spread out before him. The cult looks upon the band with malicious intent and Patrick recognizes the bloodlust in their eyes. Patrick has no time to entertain it. He needs to destroy this cult. He needs to save the world. That is his destiny, after all. Right?
His fingers are still flying across the strings of the guitar and he grins down at the instrument, something feeling as if it is speaking to him through the music. The more he plays, the more aware he is of the soft whispers spreading from beneath his fingertips and through his veins until reaching his mind. There’s a message in this instrument, words hidden in the guitar that only he can hear. Patrick grins and shuts his eyes, allowing the divine mutterings to embrace him.

There is something coming

The whispers have no voice, nothing familiar for Patrick to grasp onto. It’s merely the brushing of a breeze against sharp blades of grass. It’s nothing more than the sound of a fire dying out. Still, Patrick understands.

There is an evil creature that the cult created- a demon. It has unimaginable power and it must be destroyed

With each chord he plays and with each word spoken through the guitar to him, Patrick feels the thrum of power beneath his fingers grow stronger. It teases him, making his fingers tingle when he grows close to playing the right note that will eject this power somewhere else. It grows, warmth spreading throughout his being at the sensation of holding so much energy. For once, he can protect his band. For once, he can fight back.

There is a group within this cult that controls the rest. But it has lost control of the demon it summoned. And this creature seeks to destroy all in its path. No one is safe unless it is dead

The words fade into feelings, replacing Patrick’s thoughts with its own. It’s a little like being under the cult’s control but Patrick shakes that feeling off. No. No, this is nothing like that. If he’s thinking thoughts that aren’t his own, it’s only because God requires him to know more than he does. It’s all for a good reason.

Or so he tells himself.

As Patrick plays, grinning up at his bandmates as the cult members grow closer, that string of power in the guitar grows to a rope, tightening around Patrick’s thoughts and mind like a noose. It tells him that he is the only one who can defeat this demon, that he’s the only one with the power to do so. He has to do this alone. He can’t risk letting anyone else getting hurt.

But...wasn’t that where they went wrong in the first place? Splitting up and acting as if they could solve this briefcase problem on their own? Patrick hesitates to play the next note as these thoughts enter his mind. Surely, there must be a way that they can defeat this demon together? Does it have to be him alone?

You know it has to be

As if wiping a slate clean, the hesitations leave Patrick’s mind. He’s not quite certain who or what washed his worries away but he feels he should be grateful. After all, if he’s to save the world, he can’t be worried about such mundane things as teamwork.

Patrick’s not certain what he’s playing anymore as these thoughts fly through his mind but, as he shares a smirk with Joe, he begins to play more intensely. He needs to prove that he can do this on his own. He needs to listen to what the voice in the guitar is telling him. He needs to prepare to destroy this demon with or without his band’s help.

Will you?

Patrick turns to face the cult members surrounding them, frozen in place as if enraptured by the
music. Patrick wants to scoff but the whispers in his mind grow into a frenzy until it’s as if a mob is within the confines of his mind, screaming for his answer.

Will you accept this task?

Will you defeat this demon?

Will you kill it?

Will you save the world?

Will you protect your band?

Will you?

Patrick knows the answer before the questioning is through. His fingers find a chord, one that would feel out of place in this song. He doesn’t know why his hands are in this position but there’s something about the way the strings feel under his fingers. There’s something about the way he knows it will sound.

Will you?

Patrick slams his pick over the strings.

“Yes.”

No one has time to question the sudden exclamation from the singer. They’re too concerned with the beam of white light that bursts free from Patrick’s guitar, coating the cult members in its stream. Joe, Andy, and Pete look away, blinded by the light. Patrick, though, can’t take his eyes off of it.

When the light fades away, the cult members are dressed in white and the anger is free from their eyes. Patrick feels pride swell up in his chest. He did this. He changed them. And he knows he can do so much more.

Patrick plays the chord again, aiming his guitar towards the members lingering in the back. The same light occurs and more people are healed.

Patrick feels a rush at the thought that he is doing this, that he is changing the world by doing what he loves most—playing music.

Never again, he thinks. Never again will music be a weapon used against him. From this day on, Patrick swears that only he can wield that tool.

“Hey!” Joe calls out, causing Patrick to look over at him. Joe smiles widely, his own fingers forming a distinct position on his guitar. “I can do it, too!”

Joe plays and, just like Patrick, a ray of light shoots out from his guitar and onto the remaining cult members. Patrick grins at him, even as he feels a bit of irritation prick at his skin.

That is your place. That is your power. Do not let them take it. Prove that you are better.

Patrick watches as Joe laughs, sending meaningless beams of energy into nowhere. Pathetic, Patrick thinks, wrinkling his nose. The whispers in his head are right. Only he understands the severity. Only he can stop this.

“Try aiming for the banner on the wall,” Andy shouts, appearing as a firework with the way his
Patrick wants to ask Andy how he knows. He wonders if he has a voice in his head telling him what to do. But he doesn’t want to risk losing this unique feeling of holding such a secret within him. Instead, he turns his back on Joe and his fingers find the chord again.

“I’ll do it,” he says, softly and to himself. “Only I can do it.”

Doesn’t he deserve this, Patrick wonders? After everything he’s been through, doesn’t he deserve to be the one to bring this to an end? The angels had told him that his suffering was greatest and, at the time, he hadn’t believed them. But, now, watching Joe and Andy smiling so carelessly, he can’t help but wonder if they were right. Why else would he be the only one with such clear conviction to end this cult? Why else would there be these whispers in his mind, promising that he will be the one to take down this demon?

Yes, the voice whispers. Yes, it must be you

But Joe doesn’t listen as Patrick prepares to play his chord. Joe moves to stand by Patrick and he looks to him, nodding as if Patrick offered to let him play as well. Patrick knows better than to object, though. The cult members stand around them, cheering at the music, and Patrick doesn’t want to risk pausing the melody just so he can have a second of glory.

That glory will come later, I promise

Joe and Patrick play together and power bursts from both of their instruments, striking against the symbol on the wall. A bright light fills the room and, this time, Patrick has to look away.

Ice and flames eat at his skin but it’s not an unpleasant feeling. It’s a bit like being remade. It’s a little like tasting fresh air for the hundredth time but appreciating it for the first.

When Patrick opens his eyes, the banner of the cult's symbol is shredded. And Patrick realizes that he is glowing.

Not just him but his band as well. They’re lit up like Christmas lights in a dark neighborhood, flashing like searchlights through the night sky. If Patrick had thought he was powerful before, he’s certain that he’s immortal now.

Joe and Andy shout out in glee as they realize this new feature, laughing as they do so. Patrick can’t blame them and he turns to share a smirk with Pete. He wants to see the victory in Pete’s eyes, to see him be proud of Patrick for what he’s doing. He expects that Pete will be wearing the same shade of joy as he.

But Pete’s expression is anything but.

His eyes are dark with worry and concern, watching Patrick as if he expects him to disappear at any moment. His hands play relentlessly across his bass but it’s strange and stilted as if he’s fighting against it. His mouth is set in a frown and he opens his mouth to call out Patrick’s name.

“Patrick,” he says. “Patrick.”

Patrick’s eyebrows furrow together and his lips part as he plans to respond. But he quickly finds that he can’t speak. He can’t even move a step closer to Pete. It’s as if a wire has wrapped around his muscles and bones, holding him in place to play this heavenly song.

His eyes widen at the realization.
You must stay focused. Do not grow distracted

This makes sense to Patrick. Of course, it would be easy to be distracted by Pete and to start a conversation with him. Patrick’s budding anxieties are cut away and he shakes his head at his own folly. He needs to trust that God has a reason for this. He only wishes that Pete would share that same faith. When Patrick meets Pete’s eyes again, it’s only so he can blink once.

Pete doesn’t seem to understand and he shakes his head intently. Patrick rolls his eyes and looks away.

Pete will see. Everything will be okay. The guitar continues to mutter soft encouragements to Patrick, swearing that he will be a hero and that Pete will not be hurt. Patrick plays until it feels as if his fingers should be bleeding. He accepts each statement from the guitar and wonders if his blood on the strings is like signing a contract.

“Help!”

A piercing scream and a cry for help draw everyone’s attention to the back of the room. Patrick shudders at the familiar voice but grows nauseous at what he sees.

Rosa stands in the doorway of the room, pristine white clothes stained with blood. She holds her hands over her stomach, leaning against the doorframe for support. Patrick watches as she gasps for breath, eyes hazy and unfocused. Patrick wants to look away, to shield his eyes from the gaze of this dying girl. But, instead, his eyes fall to look upon her wound.

It’s sickening. It’s revolting. It’s horrible. It’s wrong.

Something has carved into Rosa’s stomach, slashing her apart until Patrick can see her entrails spilling out. Blood gushes from the gash, pouring through the girl’s fingers and dripping onto the floor in a tuneless rhythm. Drip-drop. Drip-drop. Patrick watches in horror as she falls to her knees. He watches in terror as a creature emerges from the dark behind her.

The demon

Patrick had imagined something with horns, something dressed in red with a tail and pitchfork. His mind had conjured images of Halloween costumes and stupid cartoons. He wanted to convince himself that it wasn’t going to be this evil. He wanted to convince himself that it wouldn’t be something like this.

But this demon towers over everyone in the room, a bloodied scythe in each of its hands. A dark cloak rests over the creature’s body, so black it appears as a shadow. Nothing, though, can hide the monstrosity that is its face. With a sharp beak and hollowed eye sockets, it’s reminiscent of a plague doctor mask. The thing barely seems to breathe as it steps forward, blood coating its face.

Patrick feels as if he’s seconds away from breaking down, from turning away and praying that he’ll never see this thing again. He’s moments away from slamming his eyes shut and letting whatever happens happen. He’s breaths away from begging Pete to save him because he’s honestly scared for his life.

No. You must save him. You must save all of them

Patrick knows that he must listen to the voice.

The creature moves throughout the now screaming and fleeing crowd, silent as a ghost. He cuts through them without a care; he kills without a thought. Chaos takes the place of Patrick’s vision and
he has no choice but to try and makes sense of it.

Stop. Breathe. Count to three, Patrick. You know what you must do

The music ends. And Patrick fights back the terror building in his gut.

“Someone has to do something,” Andy says as he moves to stand next to the three. “That thing…It’s going to kill everyone. Not just the cult but…Can’t you feel it?”

Patrick can. Forget feeling, he can nearly see it. He blinks and sees a blood red sky, this creature standing over the bodies of everyone it’s killed. He blinks again and his imagination is full of death. This demon won’t obey the cult. The cult overestimated their power over such a being, believing that they could harness its evil to work for them. They changed the original objects of the briefcase into this monster and there’s nothing they can do to put it back. The demon will kill everyone and everything in its path. It revels in the pain it causes. Its sole purpose is to destroy.

“You’re right,” Joe says. “Here, let me try this again.”

His fingers reach for that powerful chord of before and he catches his bottom lip between his teeth as he aims for the demon. Anticipation builds and Patrick’s breath comes quick. It won’t work, it won’t work, he knows it won’t work because it has to be him, the voice said that only he can kill this being.

Joe plays the chord and the notes are all wrong. It’s sour and twisted, like the guitar’s suddenly gone out of tune. Everyone cringes and the sound of screams takes over.

Patrick looks at Pete, instinctively searching for the man he trusts most. He wants to believe that Pete has a plan and a cocky grin just like before. But, instead, Pete just looks terrified.

“Pete,” Patrick pleads, begging for Pete’s widened eyes to turn away from the demon before them. Pete’s gone pale and his hands shake. Patrick wants nothing more than to hold him, to protect him like Pete’s always done for him. But he still has those whispers in his mind. He still can barely move.

“We can’t fight that thing,” Pete says, his voice barely a whisper. It’s a wonder that Patrick hears it over all the screaming in the room. “We can’t fight that and win.”

Patrick’s tempted to agree, the image of that demon haunting his thoughts. But another scream rings out and he knows that he could never turn his back on this situation.

He thought that he wanted the cult to bleed in the way that he did, that he desired for them to mimic his cries of pain. But something about that doesn’t feel right and that anger redirects towards the creature torturing those in the room.

Patrick didn’t come this far to let more people die.

Unthinkingly, Patrick reaches for the chord from before but something feels off. His pick hovers above the strings but it’s like he can taste how sour those notes will be. It’s like watching someone rest their nails against a chalkboard. He’s hating the noise already.

His fingers shift. The strings pulse beneath his fingers.

This. This is what he needs to play.

Kill this creature. Save the world. Save your friends. Sacrifice your-

“Patrick, what are you doing?” Pete exclaims suddenly. Patrick’s jarred from his thoughts, realizing
that he’s been taking subconscious steps forward. Pete’s hand rests on his upper arm, his eyes wide as he tries to keep Patrick in place. Patrick wants to fall into his arms, to assure him that everything will be alright.

But Patrick knows that Pete will never believe him. And Patrick doesn’t have the words he needs. That’s always been Pete’s job and Patrick can’t speak until Pete gives him the lyrics to do so.

“I’m going to try and fight it. We can’t just let these people die,” Patrick decides on saying. Horror paints over Pete’s face and Patrick prepares himself to hear his disagreement.

It’s Joe that cuts him off.

“Patrick’s right,” he says. “We’re supposed to be Defenders and that means we have to defend everyone. Even an evil cult. If Patrick goes, I’m going too.”

“Me too,” Andy says, spinning a drumstick around his fingers. Patrick smiles gratefully at him, glad to have the support. Finally, when enough seconds have passed, he turns his gaze to Pete. His worry is still there, distress causing his muscles to seem tense and his eyes to seem hard. But there’s something else, as well. There’s something in the twist of his lips and corner of his eyes. When he looks at Patrick, it’s almost….

It’s almost sad.

“Yeah,” Pete says, breaking Patrick out of his contemplations. Patrick looks up to see Pete gazing at him with a soft smile on his face. “I’ll always go with you, Patrick. Of course, I will.”

Patrick smiles brightly at the man before him. Pete does not return the joy.

It doesn’t matter. He will see. When you become a hero, they will all see.

Pete moves to stand next to Patrick, looking down to see the singer’s fingers wrapped around the guitar, still prepared to play that final chord. The band moves to stand in a line, each sharing a look of determination. With the sound of screams around them, Patrick breathes out.

Now or never

And they move forward.

The demon looks upon them and, though it has no eyes nor true face, Patrick can’t help but feel as if it’s mocking. It pulls its scythes free from another person’s torso, spraying blood and guts everywhere. The gore splatters across Patrick’s face. He doesn’t care, though, moving only to wipe it away.

He can stop this from continuing. This will never have to leave this room.

Save the world and none of that pain will have been in vain. Play that chord; destroy this demon. Make up for everything you have done

Patrick jolts, just enough that Pete sends him a doubtful gaze. Patrick shakes it off, ignoring the worried glance of the man beside him.

Make up for what he’s done? But…That mind control wasn’t his fault. No one in the band blamed him. What does he have to make up for?

Breaking up the Defenders of the Faith. Falling into the Vixens’ traps. Being so weak that their
hypnosis worked…

Make up for it all

New determination arises with Patrick. Of course. His band members may have forgiven him but that doesn’t mean that he did no wrong. This is the final step in eradicating that guilt. Destroying this creature, saving the band… It will all make up for the agony he dragged them into the second he allowed himself to get caught. He’ll pay whatever cost for that guilt to go away.

But what will that cost be? Patrick’s mind wanders again as they draw closer to the creature, that hesitation from before screaming at him that these thoughts aren’t right, they aren’t even his. He knows that it’s not his fault. He knows that there is no price that he needs to pay. It’s terrifying how easily his mind turns against him, though, tearing apart these caution signs and screaming at him that he needs to

Kill it! Destroy it! It must be you, it has to be you, no one else will prevail

Patrick looks up and the demon is before him. He’s too focused to feel any fear. He can’t help but wonder if that’s normal.

“Defenders.” The creature speaks in a taunting tone, sounding like a corpse being dragged across rocks. It’s rough and bloody and causes Patrick’s stomach to twist in unpleasant emotions. “Do you really imagine that it is in your power to defeat me? I have existed since before you were born and I will continue to do so when this world is gone. Do not convince yourself that you can so easily erase a creature such as I. But it will be a shame when I kill you. There is much…potential in this band. Perhaps you will reconsider and join me?”

Patrick scoffs loudly, smirking in disbelief. Join this demon? After everything they’ve been through? Patrick can’t help but be amused.

The demon’s head turns towards Patrick and tilts to the side, considering.

“I can see the power within you, Patrick Stump, and it would be a waste to destroy it here. Will you not join me as you did the cult? I can see your mind. I can see Saturday.”

Though something cold rushes through his thoughts at the word, Patrick can’t help but laugh.

“I don’t believe that you can see into my mind,” Patrick says confidently, shocking those around him. “Or else you would see that I’m going to be the one to kill you.”

Yesyesyesyesyesyesyes

The whispers in his mind begin to grow in volume, to multiply to that mob again. Patrick lets it fuel his bravery.

“That may be so,” the demon says. “But I will take you with me.”

YES

Patrick raises his chin, staring the demon down. “We’ll see.”

He presses down on the strings beneath his fingers. He raises his other hand to prepare to strum, to tear this creature to pieces. He looks down at what he’s doing; he takes a breath to steady himself.

Time slows down as the demon raises his scythes above Patrick’s bent head. Patrick doesn’t notice.
The pick just makes contact with the first string.

And then he’s being pushed to the side.

Patrick crumbles to the ground. As his hands fly out to catch himself, he screams. When his fingers leave the strings, it feels like something’s being ripped from his brain and reprogrammed. It’s like opening his eyes in a different world. It’s like kissing Pete and being free from the cult’s mind control.

Patrick looks up and sees Pete standing in his place.

“No.” Patrick gasps, able to speak his own words now that the connection to this cursed instrument has been severed. He realizes what those voices meant. He understands what they expected him to do.

They wanted him to be a martyr.

They wanted him to sacrifice himself.

They wanted him to die.

But now Pete stands where Patrick was and this situation is too familiar.

Goddamnit! Why does Pete do this? What does he think he’s proving? Patrick tries to stand in time to shove Pete to the side, to fulfill what Heaven requires of him if it means that Pete is spared another death.

But it’s too late.

Pete looks to Patrick, an undecipherable meaning in his eyes. His fingers find the chord that Patrick was about to play. And Patrick realizes why Pete was watching his guitar strings so intently.

“Pete, don’t!” Patrick shouts, shoving himself to his feet. Pete looks away and back at the demon. He’s too fast for Patrick, he always has been.

The chord rings out through the room, loud and clear. Another bright light, like none other, takes hold of Patrick’s vision and forces him to stumble back. There’s the smell of burning flesh and infested bones. There’s the feeling of blood shooting across every surface in the room. There’s the sensation of falling to the ground, the heat of this light pressing everyone back.

But, over everything else, there’s the sound of Patrick screaming Pete’s name.

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Blood splashes over Pete like a tsunami wave and he shuts his eyes just before it hits. He’d seen the Demon tear apart and explode like a bomb was implanted within it. He’d seen Patrick with wide eyes, begging him not to do this. He’d seen what he thought was his last image of Patrick….again.

He doesn’t know what’s going on but Pete suddenly feels disconnected from his body. Everything is suddenly a rush of warmth and calm, a shot of acceptance and peace. It’s almost like a hug after being apart from a loved one for too long. It feels nice. And it just keeps getting better.

The sensations spreads through Pete’s body and, for a second, he swears that he’s a hero, that he defeated that creature and deserves recognition. He’s more than a mortal now that he saved the world. He deserves to be a god.
But then those feelings vanish and Pete just feels like he’s gasping for breath. He opens his eyes and rubs the blood away from his face, wiping it off his now red-stained suit. With the desperate gasps for air and bright light causing him to blink, it feels a little like being born. His eyes adjust and he shakes the blood out of his hair.

“What have you done?”

It’s anticlimactic to Pete when he sees that he’s merely back in the music room of Heaven, the large window and staircase hiding behind him. God stands before him, though, demanding his attention. Blood coats his own white clothes, marring the image of perfection. Pete stalks forward, holding his head high.

“I will not let Patrick be your martyr,” he proclaims. God’s eyes harden but Pete feels no fear.

“You should not have known of Heaven’s plans. How did you come upon this knowledge? What allowed you to destroy this prophecy?” God demands. Pete opens his mouth, prepared to toss out Gerard’s name. But the fury in God’s eyes are like a storm and Pete doesn’t know if Gerard will be punished. He shuts his mouth again, smirking.

“It doesn’t matter. What matters is that you were going to kill Patrick. And I refuse to let that happen.”

God glares at Pete for a second more and Pete almost feels hysterical. Eventually, the deity turns towards the piano and lets his fingers rest over the keys. He plays a few - random yet seeming to have a purpose, like so many things in life. The sound makes the inside of Pete’s skin crawl and when God turns back to face Pete, there’s a certain sadness in his eyes.

“You speak of things you do not understand. This is a sacrifice that must be given,” he says placatingly. Pete refuses to fall for the kind tone, baring his teeth and stepping forward.

“We’ve given enough,” he snarls. God’s eyes narrow.

“And what do you believe you gave?” God’s voice is a challenge and, God or not, Pete wants to launch himself at him.

“Are you kidding me?” Pete screams, listing off their sacrifices on his fingers. “Patrick was fucking tortured for at least a week. His hand was chopped off and he was basically insane while under the cult’s control! Joe died at the hands of one of his best friends and Andy lost the chance to fall in love because we were too busy saving the damn world. We gave up so much for that fucking briefcase and you can’t tell me that you can’t see that. Our freedom, our innocence, our lives. Or do those mean nothing?”

“Those are not worthy of being called a sacrifice!” God bellows, his voice echoing off the walls around them. “All that you have mentioned has been restored. Your lives, your freedom from this pain, your lover’s hand. All of it. There must be a sense of lasting loss for a sacrifice to occur. There must be something more.”

“Why does a sacrifice have to be given at all?” Pete screams, his throat sore from the action. He expects to be rebuked or maybe even struck by lightning. God, though, meets his eyes with a saddened gaze.

“Because that is the way in which the world works,” he says, his tone resigned.

Pete falls silent, stunned at the sudden change in tone.
“What?” He asks finally, bringing his eyebrows together. “I don’t understand.”

“It is part of a deal I had to make so that the world should never perish,” God says, pacing the room. “The Devil, you see, is a restless soul but his demons are even worse. Satan is content to rest on his throne, toying with the human world but never destroying it. His demons, however, are not so calm. He keeps them on a chain most of the time, preventing them from doing anything worse than possessions and natural disasters. But sometimes they break free of this. Sometimes, they put the entire world at risk.”

God pauses, takes a breath, and continues.

“The first time, many devils ran rampant across the earth, spreading incurable disease and insanity. My angels and I tried to force them back to Hell and, for the most part, we succeeded. Everything would have been fine but Satan had other plans.” God’s voice grows cold as he stares at nothing, seeing memories that Pete can’t comprehend. “Satan locked the gates of Hell and claimed that it is not in the rights of the angels to control his demons. He said that locking away the demons would be like locking away my angels. Nothing would be gained by him. No, he wanted to be compensated for babysitting his little devils. If he were to lose his chance at corrupting the world then Heaven, too, must lose its chance at saving it.

“I had no choice but to make a deal. It seemed simple at the time, worth the millions of lives that Hell surely would have taken. But it was not a one time deal as Heaven supposed. No, for the demons found clever ways to escape Hell. Often, we let them roam free if the damage is not so bad. But sometimes a particularly evil spirit will release into the world. And Satan will come knocking at Heaven’s door, claiming that he will kill his own demon if we pay up. I have not broken the deal in millennia. And I refuse to withhold my payment now.”

A long silence follows but Pete still can’t understand what this story means. Thinking about it hurts his head.

“What is your payment?” His words are barely a sigh. “What must you give?”

God looks Pete in the eyes and, for the first time, Pete feels as if he needs to look away.

“The purest heart,” God says. “Satan requires the purest heart to die.”

No. No. Pete doesn’t want to think. He doesn’t want to feel. He doesn’t want to comprehend what this means so he covers it up with ignorance.

“That has nothing to do with Patrick, right? What does that have to do with Patrick?” His voice is desperate, not really looking for an answer. He receives one anyway.

“Isn’t it obvious?” And Pete’s head whips to the side to see Gerard leaning against the doorframe with his arms folded across his chest. “Patrick has the purest heart.”

Pete’s fears are confirmed and he feels like he is dying. Gerard walks further into the room, a hateful gaze turned on the god before him. He’s brave and Pete wishes that he could be the same. Instead, his eyes are begging.

“That doesn’t make sense. What the fuck does pure even mean? And how did you decide that it happened to be Patrick?” Pete’s shouting, begging, pleading all at once. He doesn’t care how crazy he sounds. He just needs time to think of a way out of this. He needs time to save Patrick.

“It is clear, Pete,” God says, ignoring Gerard’s spiteful glare. “Patrick Stump is the one human on earth without malice in his heart. He is the one being who would sooner blame himself than a cult for
the evils done to him. He has faults, as all humans do, but he is the one who tries the hardest to overcome them. When the world turns against him and hates all that he does, when even the one he loves most leaves him, Patrick refuses to turn on the world. He, instead, tries to be the best version of himself that is possible. He is honest. He is good. He loves without expecting anything in return—though he yearns for the approval of those he cares for. Patrick is the kind of person to want nothing but the best for others. As self-destructive as it is, he will always put others before himself. He is the brightest spark of hope on earth. He is the last remaining human that could save your generation and those to come. And that is why he must be the one to die. Before you speak, consider this, Pete Wentz. If Patrick Stump does not die today, this war will continue and there will be no way to end it. Millions of people will die. Is that what Patrick would want?”

“But,” Pete begins, searching for a loophole or anything to pull Patrick free from this deal he wasn’t alive to witness. Pete’s mind aches with the speed his thoughts fly at but nothing sticks. He can’t find a way to save Patrick. He can’t talk his way out of this one. “But it’s not fair. I need him. You can’t take him from me. What will I do without him?”

God steps forward, placing a hand on Pete’s shoulder. Pete can’t find the strength to move away.

“Deals with the Devil aren’t meant to be fair,” God says. It sounds as if he’s trying to be consoling. Pete only feels as if he’s being mocked.

“You planned this,” Pete exclaims, moving away from God and glaring at him with burning eyes. “You created Patrick and the Defenders. You knew that this would happen! You made him to have that heart, you made him that way! But you can’t just create someone with the intent to kill them! You can’t let them fall in love and let other people love them back just so you can take that away as some sort of dramatic climax in your never ending battle with Satan! It’s not right! It’s not fair!”

Pete’s aware that he’s close to sobbing, that tears are stinging at his eyes and that his voice is cracking. But God’s gaze is relentless and emotionless. He simply doesn’t seem to care.

“Think of how selfish you are being,” God scolds, causing Pete to draw further away. “Has not Patrick earned his place in Heaven? Does he not deserve to finally rest after all the evils done to him? He has suffered enough. Will you truly try and take away his chance to escape those pains forever?”

Pete’s breathing heavy and he doesn't want to give in. He doesn’t want to let God have that satisfaction. But his thoughts are moving quicker than his lips, as they often do, and he can’t get the breath to say any of them.

Gerard clears his throat, alerting the room to his presence once again.

“You know, I get what you’re saying, Pete. I really do. So let me put this out there. God has to destroy the purest heart. And Patrick is more than just his heart.”

Gerard’s voice is the loudest thing in the room, his words filling the air like over inflated balloons. And when Pete understands what he’s saying, he gasps loud enough to pop them all.

“He’s right,” he whispers, looking to God. “Patrick’s heart is the only thing that makes him eligible for this deal but the rest- his body, his mind, his life- that isn’t yours to take. Can you…Is there a way to destroy a piece of his purity? Would that work?”

God is silent for a long time, looking back and forth between the musicians as if he can’t believe what he’s hearing. Finally, he groans and rubs at his temples.

“I…suppose,” he says. Those two words are enough to restart Pete’s heart. “If we could destroy
even a piece of his purity, then that would be enough to say that the purest heart has been eradicated. But it will be difficult. Every event up until now has been strategically placed so that his goodness will flourish. It may be tricky to undo any of that. Unless…”

God trails off and looks to Pete. Pete feels as if he should be afraid of that pondering gaze but he’s too preoccupied with worry for Patrick to feel anything else.


“An important piece of Patrick’s purity is that it reached its full potential when he finally overcame the cult’s control. When he realized that you returned his love. If we can take those memories from him then the purity would be incomplete and Satan would have what he wants,” God explains.

Pete’s heart sinks. Gerard steps between him and God, placing his hands on Pete’s shoulders.

“It’s the only way to save him, Pete. I know that this is hard but I promise that things will turn out okay so long as Patrick survives.”

Pete doesn’t hear a word of it, stepping away. Too close. Everyone is suddenly too close. The room’s too hot and his mind is blurry.

Patrick can’t just forget about Pete loving him, can he? After all the pain they went through and the years of worrying that the other hated them, Pete and Patrick finally received the closure they deserved. Is Pete really willing to give that up so easily?

“He can’t…I…Love is supposed to be stronger than anything, right? Can’t we just take away the memories from that moment but keep the rest? He can forget about the lyrics in the briefcase and the kiss but…can’t he remember everything that came after that? Our kisses in Heaven, my sacrifices for him…Those have nothing to do with his purity, can’t he keep those?” Pete begs, looking at the two before him desperately. It’s selfish, he knows, to ask for more. But Pete doesn’t know how he’ll survive if things go back to the way they were over the hiatus. If Patrick forgets that they’ve forgiven each other. If Patrick knows he’s supposed to love Pete but won’t act on it because he fears Pete won’t feel the same. Pete’s heart hurts at the thought.

“Maybe,” Gerard answers as God nods in agreement with his response. “But there’s no way to know for sure.”

Pete wants to hate Gerard for siding with God, for not giving him an easy out. He wants to take longer in his hesitation, to pretend that it’s a hard decision. But, even as his mind wars against itself, he knows what his answer will be.

“Anything is better than Patrick’s death,” Pete murmurs. “And this is the best compromise we’re gonna get.”

“Good,” God says, moving forward to stand by Gerard. “Then I will give you what is necessary to destroy those memories.”

“You’re going to make me do it?” Pete asks, looking up with tortured eyes. God nods sympathetically. He holds his palm out and creates a fist. When his hand opens again, there is a small sunset orange pill inside it.

“Carry this back to Earth with you,” God instructs, not really answering Pete’s question. “Have Patrick take it. It will erase the most important memories of your love story during these past weeks. If you are lucky, he may remember bits and pieces. But prepare yourself for the possibility that he will remember none at all.”
Pete nods sadly, his heart in his throat as God places the pill in his hand. He raises his hand and Pete shuts his eyes, assuming that God is going to send him back. Instead, he’s interrupted by Gerard’s voice.

“Wait,” Gerard says. “I need to give him a proper goodbye this time. I’ll send him off.”

Pete opens his eyes to see God nod and step away from the two. Gerard takes Pete’s empty hand and leads him deeper into the room until they’re standing next to the window.


“I’m not going to get my hopes up. I can’t bear another heartbreak,” he says. Gerard frowns back at him before pulling him into one last warm embrace.

“Just don’t forget what you have to do,” Gerard says. Something in his tone tells Pete that it’s more than giving Patrick this pill. He opens his mouth to ask what Gerard means but the taller man shakes his head. “I already told you. I can’t risk repeating it.”

Pete still opens his mouth to respond.

But then Gerard’s pushing him through the window and Pete collapses through it, the sound of shattered glass following him into darkness.

Chapter End Notes

OK So I know that Pete sacrificing himself for Patrick again is really redundant but it had to happen, ok?? I'm sorryyy

Anyways, here's the scoop on future chapters as we're nearing the end. There are two official chapters left according to my outline. One of them is meant to be an epilogue but if that epilogue does not give you the closure you need, I'm more than willing to write a oneshot or so to help you gain that closure, haha. After that, I have a few "bonus features" to add. They're not chapters but I feel like they belong :)

Fun Fact: Satan's deal was originally going to be that God had to kill off an angel for every demon that was destroyed and Patrick was going to be a half-angel so Pete could argue about "WELL YOU CANT KILL ALL OF HIM IF HES ONLY HALF" but then I decided that the memory loss was much more dramatic, haha.

Thank you for reading! Leave a comment if you're so inclined!
I've Cried Tears You'll Never See (And You've Given Kisses You'll Never Remember)

Chapter Summary

My writing style can be best described in the following lyrics: "~Everything I do is bittersweet~"

Chapter Notes

Why is this chapter so much shorter than all the rest?? Like, it's about a couple hundred words shorter than the average and that kinda irritates me? But if Hemingway can get away with saying as little as possible in all his novels, I can get away with not saying as much as usual in one chapter.
(yeah, i'm no hemingway. but let's all pretend that i am)

Chapter Playlist:
- "Thank The Watchmaker" by And Then There Were None
- "Heartbreak On Vinyl" by Blake Lewis
- "Save Rock And Roll" by Fall Out Boy (this is the last srar chapter!)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

I Cried Tears You'll Never See (And You've Given Kisses You'll Never Remember)

Patrick kneels at Pete’s side, determined to be the first person he sees when he wakes up. Which, Patrick knows, he will do. Wake up, that is. Patrick's certain that Pete has to wake up.

He just doesn’t know when.

After Pete had played that chord and the light had faded from the room, everyone had turned to see what could only be the aftermath of the demon exploding. Blood and gore covered the walls and its scythes were broken on the floor. Cult members who had just been murdered by it began to stand, their wounds healed and clothes pure white again. None of the blood covered Patrick, Joe, or Andy either. Everything seemed fine.

But then Patrick had seen Pete.

At first, Patrick’s heart leaped into his throat and his brain stopped working. It was too similar to how Pete appeared after being shot by Sara- crumbled on the ground amidst a pool of blood, eyes shut, and chest barely moving. Patrick had been the first to fall beside him, screaming his name and begging for this not to be happening again.

It was Joe who pointed out that Pete was still breathing; it was Andy that brought up the way that
Pete’s eyes moved around beneath their lids.

He’s still alive, they assured him. He’s still alive.

Joe and Andy had left him with Pete, too afraid to move the bassist, and went to aid the cult members instead. Many had been brainwashed- to a lesser extent than Patrick but brainwashed all the same- and had loved ones to call, relationships to repair. Andy had searched Courtney’s office but had returned with the confused claim that she was gone.

It took two hours to account for all the cult members and for each of them to reconnect with family members they’d left behind upon joining it. It took another hour to console them that this wasn’t entirely their fault.

Throughout all of this, Patrick never left Pete’s side.

Joe and Andy had left a while ago, Joe to be sure that the lingering cult members could get a ride somewhere and Andy to tell Stephanie the good news. They’d tried to get Patrick to leave but their arguments were weak- as if they knew that nothing would change Patrick’s mind.

“If he doesn’t wake up by the time you get back, I want to take him to a hospital. Andy, do you think Stephanie would take us to the closest one? I don’t know where we are,” Patrick had said without once looking away from Pete’s face. Andy had nodded and left with Joe.

Now, the room is empty and the lights seem dim after the brightness that Pete had created. Patrick holds Pete’s hand, watching his eyes dart around beneath his eyelids. Is he dreaming? Patrick fills the time by imagining that Pete’s dreaming about him.

“I don’t know if you can hear me,” Patrick says eventually. “But I need you to wake up soon, Pete. I know you’re going to wake up but I don’t know when. And that’s terrifying so….Just, please, wake up soon.”

His answer is another even breath from the man sprawled out on the ground beside him. Patrick sighs.

There are few windows in this room but Patrick can still tell that it’s growing late. His eyes constantly try to shut and he fights back yawn after yawn. He needs to stay awake, though. For Pete.

He refuses to let Pete wake up alone. He can’t imagine anything lonelier than that.

Just as Patrick’s pressing his fingers into the flesh of his thighs, hoping the pain will keep him awake, something twitches in his other hand. Pete’s hand tightens around his own and Patrick is suddenly wide awake.

“Trick…Patrick,” Pete groans, opening his eyes and rubbing his head. Patrick hurries to help Pete to sit, placing an arm behind his back for support.

“Pete, oh my god!” Patrick exclaims, not really feeling sorry for the way Pete winces at his loud tone. “Are you alright? What was that? What happened?”

Pete seems to finally realize that he’s awake and that Patrick’s beside him, eyes finding Patrick’s face and immediately growing sad. Patrick’s excitement fades into concern.

Pete smiles softly, reaching to cup Patrick’s face in his hands, stroking his cheeks with his thumbs.

“It’s fine. I just had a long talk with God and Gerard,” he explains in a small voice. Though Patrick’s
worry begins to bubble at the strange tone, he can’t help but try to lighten the mood. Maybe he’s misreading Pete’s emotions. Maybe Pete’s just as tired and exhausted as Patrick and that isn’t melancholy in his eyes- only weariness. Maybe his talk was a screaming match and he’s speaking so lightly because his throat hurts. Patrick smiles and tries to convince himself of these things.

“God and Gerard?” Patrick asks, laughing a little. “Are we sure they aren’t the same thing at this point?”

Pete laughs for just a second, enough to put Patrick’s worries to ease. But then his smile is fading and he’s looking at Patrick like it’s the last time he’ll see him. Patrick lifts his hand to wrap it around one of Pete’s wrists, caressing his precious pulse.

“What’s wrong?” Patrick asks, unable to fight away the anxieties in his head. Pete merely shakes his head and Patrick’s not really surprised at that response. Pete shifts his hand until Patrick’s no longer holding his wrist but is gripping onto his hand for dear life. Pete smiles down at their entwined fingers before glancing back up into Patrick’s worried eyes. He tightens his hold on Patrick’s hand.

“No matter what, Trick, I’m always gonna love you,” he says, putting more emphasis on the words than he ever has before. “Until we die or forever ends.”

“Whichever one comes first,” Patrick finishes with a weak smile. It fades as quickly as his breath when Pete leans forward. “Pete, please. Tell me what’s wrong.”

Pete either doesn’t hear or chooses to ignore him, pushing himself up to his knees until he’s towering over Patrick, still seated on the ground. He pulls his hands away from the singer, shoving them into his pockets as his eyes dart frantically around the room. It’s almost as if he’s searching for something in those pockets, what with the desperate way he’s fidgeting. When he finally looks back to Patrick, his eyes are wide with fear.

“I don’t want you to forget that. I don’t want you to ever forget that I love you.”

There’s something about those words that terrifies Patrick. There’s something about the unshed tears in Pete’s eyes that breaks his heart. He moves forwards towards him, a hand outstretched. He doesn’t know what Pete’s talking about but he sounds more than sad. He sounds broken and all of Patrick’s instincts are telling him to fix it.

“Pete, baby, come here. It’s going to be alright. I promise,” he says. Pete sits back down, shuddering with pent-up sobs and Patrick’s heart aches at the sight. “I’ll never forget you, okay? I promise.”

It’s the wrong thing to say. Pete breaks down, covering his mouth with both hands to fight back his sobs. No tears race down his face but they collect in his eyes, staining them red when they find Patrick. Patrick freezes in place, unsure of what to do- unsure of what even to say.

When Pete’s hands fall to the side, his voice is shaky and lost, the way it should never be after the victory they just had.

“No, it’s okay if you forget. Don’t promise me that. Just promise that you’ll stay alive. Promise that you won’t let this go to waste,” Pete begs, his voice thicker and stranger than before- as if his emotions are clogging up his mouth and preventing his tongue from performing the words he needs. Patrick’s eyebrows furrow together but he knows better than to question Pete. Pete looks as if he may fall apart if Patrick does anything other than what he’s asking.

“Alright,” he says, nodding. “I promise.”

Before he can truly finish the word, Pete’s lips are over his.
Pete’s lips are like goodbye; his hands are apologies. He kisses Patrick like he can’t breathe or find the words to say. Patrick, though confused at the sudden action, kisses back in the way that he knows Pete needs. He needs passion and assurance. He needs love.

Patrick wraps his arms around Pete’s neck, pulling him closer and easing the trembles wracking through the older man. Pete fists the fabric of Patrick’s shirt in his hands, so tight Patrick imagines he hears it tear.

Pete’s a hurricane, ripping through Patrick with no concern of damage to either party. His tongue forces Patrick’s lips apart and Patrick moans into the kiss. He’s almost forgotten about Pete’s strange behavior from before. He shuts his eyes, blocking out everything that isn’t Pete.

And then he feels it.

Something small and round and tasting all wrong dances in his mouth, mocking and jeering as he tries to pull away. He tries to let Pete know that something’s off, to convey his fear.

But Pete holds him closer and Patrick suddenly realizes that Pete already knows.

He knows because- between parted lips and desperate tongues- Pete had placed it there.

Pete holds him still, deepening the kiss and keeping the pill in Patrick’s mouth. It tastes like death on Patrick’s tongue, seeping into his teeth and the insides of his cheeks like a poison. With each second that passes, the pill dissolves into a blood-flavored mess in his mouth. He wants to scream; he wants to throw up the contents now taking root in his body. He shoves Pete away, an accusation and demand for answers on his lips.

The moment to speak is stolen from him the second he feels a sharp shredding sensation cut through his mind. The very same second that the pill takes effect.

It feels like mind control in reverse, unlocking and restoring the memories of Pete kissing him in that trailer park until they’re vivid, basically playing out right in front of him. New colors paint into the scene, giving it edges and meanings he hadn’t known to look for. He shuts his eyes; he wants to understand what this means.

But then he knows nothing but fire.

It’s like the Vixens all over again, tossing their music into the flames and laughing as they did so. It’s like Sam handing him an autograph and Patrick having no choice but to watch it burn. Sparks lick at the inside of this mind, eating away at every thought and engulfing him in pain. He screams, crumbling onto the floor as heat races through his blood, burning so hot he’s certain that he’s going to die. It’s worse than the torture of his hand getting cut off; it hurts more than the electric shocks of the Vixens’ control. This is killing him from the inside out.

This was caused by the person he trusted most to never hurt him again.

Pete’s arms wrap around Patrick and Patrick is too weak to move away. He cries tears of betrayal and pain into Pete’s chest, begging for mercy and for the agony to stop. I’m so sorry, his mind screams as if Pete can hear him. I’m so sorry for what I did that made you want to do this to me.

But Pete doesn’t sound as if he’s taking delight in Patrick’s pain. He holds Patrick closer, unaware of how the smallest touch sets Patrick’s nerves aflame. He cries into Patrick’s hair and, with each tear on his skin, Patrick’s astounded that the fire beneath his flesh doesn’t cause the dampness to fade away.
“I love you, I love you, I love you,” Pete sobs. “I’m so sorry. I love you.”

Patrick tries to hold onto his voice, to let it keep him in place. But his eyesight is going dark and he’s certain it has nothing to do with the exhaustion he’d been feeling before.

Patrick feels weak. It’s as if he’s dying and his muscles are giving up. He wants to be outraged at Pete but the other man’s words swim in the air around him until he has no choice but to believe that they’re true.

“I love you, Trick, I love you.”

Patrick reaches and grabs Pete’s hand in his own, tears beginning to stream down his own face. He’s not sure why he’s crying. Maybe it’s the pain; maybe it’s the fact that he’s starting to realize what that pill has done.

Patrick knows that Pete loves him. He knows that Pete confessed his love to him and proved it with hundreds of beautiful lyrics hidden inside a briefcase.

But, for the life of him, Patrick can’t remember how he knows that. He can’t remember it even occurring.

Patrick’s eyes slip shut and he begins to shake in Pete’s arms, falling limp with each breath he takes. His insides feel like they’re burning up and he imagines that each breath he exhales is nothing more than smoke. Still, he shakes as if ice has been injected into his veins.

Patrick’s breaths begin to slow, becoming deeper and more calming. He rests against Pete more than he leans towards him, feeling his mind slipping away.

He’s going to sleep and he’s going to forget this. He can already feel the last strands of his memories unwinding from his mind. He can already feel his consciousness fading away.

“Until forever ends,” Patrick says tiredly, tongue too thick to work properly. “Until it ends or we…”

“Shh,” Pete says, rocking them back and forth. “Just until forever ends, Trick. Don’t worry about dying, ‘kay? We’ll stay young until forever ends.”

Patrick smiles and it feels lazy. It slips off his face before even trying to stick.

“Pete. ‘M tired,” he says. Black. His mind is a mess of black and darkness infiltrating his brightest moments and stealing him away from this.

Pete presses a kiss onto Patrick’s temple- or at least Patrick thinks he does. Something in his mind tries telling him that it never happened.

“It’s okay, Trick,” Pete whispers, his voice the last thing Patrick hears. “Just sleep.”

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Pete’s name is the first word out of Patrick’s mouth when he finally wakes up. His eyes slide open and see nothing but the silent darkness of a room with the lights shut off. His hands fall to the side, expecting to find the cold cement floor. Instead, they connect with the scratchy fabric of hotel sheets.

Patrick sits up, his mind hurting dully as if he had just a bit too much to drink the night before.

The night before…
What did happen the night before?

“Pete!” Patrick calls out before stopping himself, slamming his hands over his mouth. Why is he saying that? Why would he call out for Pete? Something bounces around in his mind, too quick for him to catch. Pete. Why, after all these years, would he be thinking of Pete?

Patrick tries to catch up with his thoughts but it only makes the headache worse. He decides to give up, glimpsing around the room as his eyes try to adjust to the dark. Something about the utter blackness of the room terrifies him, though, and he rushes to his feet. He hurries to the most assured light source- the curtains drawn too tightly over the early morning sky. His hands fumble as he yanks them apart, letting the sunlight stream in. He breathes out a sigh of relief as it hits him and fills the room. Safe. He’s safe.

But why wouldn’t he be? Patrick feels sick as he tries to answer his own questions.

His hands fall to his sides, brushing soft cotton as they skim across his clothes. He looks down, his confusion multiplying when he sees he’s dressed in the batman pajamas he’d packed a month ago while preparing for this tour. There’s nothing strange about them except for the fact that he doesn’t remember putting them on. He doesn’t remember much from last night, to be honest.

Patrick rests against the wall, shutting his eyes tightly as he tries to remember. Flashes of performing a show return to him, bright lights and a sore throat. He recalls the haters and the awful things they said.

He recalls fighting off tears backstage. He recalls Pete and the cruel words they exchanged.

So is that why Pete was his first thought upon waking up at? Because he returned to remind Patrick of how hated and awful and despised he was? No, Pete had to be there for another reason. Patrick’s certain that Pete wouldn’t come to see him out of the goodness- or hatred- of his heart. Patrick strives to remember and one word stands out among the rest.

Briefcase

Pete came to get the briefcase.

Patrick’s eyes fly open and he gasps, suddenly remembering the entirety of their conversation. Amidst the insults and unshed tears, Pete had ultimately only come to retrieve the briefcase. But Patrick hadn’t had it. He’d left in his hotel room. It was an admittedly stupid mistake, who knows what could have happened? Almost on instinct, Patrick’s running to the small hotel closet, where he stashed the briefcase upon arriving.

He acts too quickly, though, somehow behaving as if he expects to be stronger than he really is. He throws open the door to the closet and promptly- from the inertia of trying to stop running so suddenly- falls inside. His hands fly out in all directions, grasping for anything to stop his fall. One scrapes across the wall, not hurting as much as it should. The other grabs the rack above him and only makes matters worse, dragging a handful of hangers on top of his head. Patrick rubs at the now aching spot on his skull and stands, cursing at the mess he’d made. Briefcase momentarily forgotten, Patrick bends to pick up the objects scattered on the floor.

His left-hand wraps around a hanger and something about the hooked shape makes him freeze in complete and utter terror.

It all comes rushing back and he suddenly remembers.

Oh God.
He remembers.

Visions of torture and Vixens cover his sight, reminding him of when this hook held in his hand was more than just a hanger and when he didn’t have a hand here at all. He remembers screaming in pain and agony and begging for it all to end. He remembers sitting in a van- tied up and gasping- as flames ate away at the air. He blinks and he sees Pete’s eyes looking down at him, wide and worried- but why would Pete ever worry about him?

The next scene rushes into Patrick’s thoughts, eradicating his questions with its intensity. Sam. He remembers Sam. He remembers Gerard. He remembers believing that he was still in love with Pete but realizing that Pete didn’t love him back- that he could never love him back.

He remembers falling asleep next to Joe- Pete’s eyes on him the entire time- and he remembers the walk to the abandoned hospital. He remembers that strange, sad look in Gerard’s eyes as he watched Patrick and Patrick remembers the fear and panic he felt, causing his heart to race even now. He remembers blinking to Pete for help, the memory so vivid that he does the same, standing alone in his hotel room. The edges of his memory take on a dirty yellow hue, fading away into rage and hate as Pete calls out his name. Hospital halls and screaming until his voice was nearly gone. He remembers everything.

But then it’s strange because he remembers Joe with a wire around his neck, mouthing words that Patrick can’t hear. He knows there’s something else, something Joe must have said. But it’s been blocked out, carved away, and he can only see as the life drains away from Joe’s body at Patrick’s hands.

Jail and being kidnapped by the Vixens. Saturday and Courtney Love. His memory tortures him with these scenes, flashing before his eyes in perfect detail. He remembers Andy and Gerard dying as he did nothing. He remembers hating Pete. He remembers wanting him dead and chasing him into a trailer park. He remembers not knowing his own name. He remembers the emptiness he felt.

He’s on top of Pete in his memories, hook pressed into his neck as Pete tries to get him to remember. He blinks and then he’s opening the briefcase, fumbling as he does so. His memory slows down and he takes a breath. He remembers the number of papers that flew out.

But then his thoughts go black.

It’s not like having his eyes covered or a TV screen going to static. This is worse. It’s like opening his eyes in the deepest part of the ocean with no idea how he got there. It’s like looking into the sky on a cloudy night and suddenly believing that there are no such thing as stars. It’s like having an entire song on the tip of his tongue because he knows that something must have happened. Something big and monumental and larger than life occurred in those stolen moments and he just doesn’t know what. It’s like waking up and realizing that he no longer has a heartbeat. It’s like a piece of him was killed.

His memories play on, despite his frantic search for the missing ones. It skips to Sara taunting him over Pete’s dead body, saying he can’t be loved by someone that’s dead. But why would she say that? He knows that she’s the one that sparked the fight that ruined their relationship and, furthermore, she’s the one that showed him the proof that Pete never loved him. But those words ring through Patrick’s mind, loud and clear. You can’t be loved by someone that’s dead.

Perhaps she was talking about his unrequited love. Perhaps she was taunting him. It makes the most sense but it doesn’t feel right at all.

Heaven bleeds into Patrick’s thoughts and that makes even less sense because it’s blurry and
distorted. Did he really run into Pete’s arms, sobbing as he swore that Pete would never lose him? Did he really get that close, hovering his lips over Pete’s as Pete cried about how much he missed him? And what about when Joe and Andy appeared and Pete distracted him by pulling him close and pressing their lips together? Everything in Heaven is all wrong. Patrick can’t make sense of it, can’t understand why Pete’s acting like he loves him in these memories when everything else is a testament to the opposite.

Maybe, his mind whispers, it’s because it was Heaven. Maybe he didn’t really see Pete or Andy or Joe in that place. His thoughts are distorted when he thinks of anything after that and he tells himself it’s because it was a trick, it was Heaven giving him what he wanted most- his band back. The rest is insignificant to him as he thinks of the Demon and of Pete shoving him to the side. Of course, Patrick tries not to question that too deeply. Pete’s a good person, despite his cruelty towards Patrick. He’ll always save others before saving himself.

Patrick’s memories begin to end when he remembers Pete waking up. The second Pete’s eyes open, Patrick’s thoughts grow dark.

And the last thing he remembers is opening his eyes in this hotel room.

Knock Knock Knock

He’s not sure if the knocking is saving or merely distracting him. He stands up straighter on shakier legs than before, looking at the door, uncertain of who he wants to be on the other side. What he wants doesn’t matter, though. He already knows the first person his mind went to- for better or for worse.

Patrick moves on autopilot, walking to the door and opening it without really being aware of his actions. It’s not until he sees who it is that he takes control, blinking in shock.

Joe and Andy share expressions of calculated concern, scanning Patrick as if searching for remaining wounds. Patrick steps to the side, silent, as he casts the same look upon them.

It hurts his brain to think about the past weeks but when he does he remembers the pain they all went through, the tortures they faced together. Joe and Andy show no signs of this. There’s not a scratch or bruise to be seen. If anything, they look even better than the last time Patrick had seen them- before the cult and everything, of course.

But there’s a certain trauma in Joe’s actions, from the way his hands keep tugging the collar of his shirt lower and lower as if it’s too tight. There’s a sadness in the way that Andy stands, never calm but tense as if he’s ready to defend someone he loves.

It’s not much but it’s enough.

“It all-” Patrick stammers, choking on his words as he wraps his arms around his middle. He takes a breath. It doesn't help. “It all happened, didn’t it?”

Joe and Andy seem to deflate at the same time. It’s as if Patrick’s words have sucked out their remaining hope.

“Yes,” Joe says, looking upon Patrick sympathetically. “It did.”

Patrick expected this answer. Still, he staggers back at the confirmation, sitting on the edge of the bed with heavy breaths.

“Oh god,” he breathes, holding his head in his hands. “I didn’t…I didn’t want it to be real.”
Andy sits next to him, placing a comforting hand on his back. “Patrick... How much do you remember?”

He says it with enough hesitation that Patrick looks up to frown at him. The words are innocent and they make sense with the lapses in Patrick’s memories. But Andy’s tone holds more than friendly concern. It’s discerning and it’s probing. It tells Patrick that these two know something that he doesn’t.

“I don’t know,” he answers honestly. “Most of it? But there are parts at the end where it all goes black. And Heaven feels all wrong.”

No one speaks or responds with the answers that Patrick so greatly needs. Joe and Andy share a sad gaze with one another and Joe moves to sit on Patrick’s other side.

The sudden feeling of two friends beside him makes Patrick’s head snap up in realization. Two. There are only two of them here.

“Where... Where is he?” Patrick asks, head whipping back and forth as he looks from Andy to Joe and back again. “Where’s Pete?”

Hesitation. Caution. Patrick’s heart stops at the implications.

“He’s fine if that’s what you were worried about,” Joe says eventually, wringing his hands in his lap and failing to meet Patrick’s eyes. “But he said he’s gonna lay low for a while. He needs time to recover from... from everything. We all do.”

For some reason, anger rises up in Patrick’s gut. Pete shouldn’t be isolating himself from everyone. He shouldn’t be leaving Patrick alone with hundreds of questions that don’t seem to have answers. Though he doesn’t understand why, Patrick feels abandoned- the way he did when Pete denied their love on some meaningless interview so many years ago. After all of this- after the torture and the pain and saving the goddamn world- Pete still can’t stand to see Patrick.

It’s enough to make Patrick want to scream.

“You can’t be mad at him,” Andy says suddenly, looking to Patrick with earnest eyes. “He has his reasons. And he’ll talk to you when the time is right. He won’t keep you waiting forever.”

No, Patrick thinks bitterly. **He’ll keep me waiting for longer than that.**

Still, Patrick looks to his hands. He doesn’t voice these feelings. They don’t make sense.

“Ok,” Patrick says, in a small and lost voice. “Ok.”

Joe and Andy leave just as the sky begins to grow dark. They linger for awhile, watching Patrick with fearful eyes and asking if he’s really okay with being on his own. Patrick fake a smile and nods, promising he’ll call if anything- the memories, the dark, the silence- gets to be too much for him to handle. It’s a lie and they all know it. Patrick’s never been one to ask for help.

Joe pulls him into a hug before he goes, Andy joining in with a smile. Patrick grins as he wraps his arms around them both, feeling the happiest he’ve been all day. There’s still doubt and confused chaos in his thoughts but, for the few seconds that his friends are holding him, it quiets enough for his smile to become genuine.
“We have to get together sometime,” Joe says, pulling away. “I miss you, man.”

“I miss you guys, too,” Patrick says, a knot forming in his throat from the honesty of it. Andy gives him one last look over, searching for pain or the desire for company. Finding neither, he waves and follows Joe out the door.

The second the latch clicks into place, Patrick’s thoughts expand to fill the room.

He doesn’t know why Joe looked at him so sadly or why Andy seemed more protective than usual. He still doesn’t understand why he’s the only one with missing memories or why Pete’s still avoiding him. He can’t comprehend why that last piece suddenly hurts so much.

Patrick’s hotel room is filled with everything he’d brought when he’d arrived so many weeks ago. Joe and Andy had explained how the staff had been under the cult’s control and moved everything to storage in the basement. As Pete changed him into the first pajamas he’d found- a thought that makes Patrick blush more than it should- Joe and Andy had worked on bringing his belongings back to him. Patrick had told them that they didn’t need to do that and was embarrassed at the fact that they felt the need. Now, though, as he desperately powers on his computer- plugging it in and jamming the power button so hard it should break- he can’t help but be grateful.

He curls up on the bed, smiling to himself as he pulls up Garageband. It’s been too long since he’d had the chance to create any music and- though he still feels tremors down his spine whenever notes begin to play- he’s missed it.


He’s missing a lot of things tonight.

Maybe that’s why he opens that file he should have deleted. Maybe that’s why his first instinct is to work on Miss Missing You.

He’s not aware of how much time passes as he plays with rhythms and beats. But hours go by and the song isn’t perfect yet. It’s not even close. It’s almost midnight and he realizes what…No. He realizes who his lyrics have been about. Who they’ve always been about. He frowns and tries to make music that means more than the lyrics- that will distract any whiskey-eyed listener from catching on as well. But, Patrick knows better than anyone, lyrics will always mean more than music.

As he’s chewing on his lip and contemplating life, Patrick’s phone suddenly buzzes with a text. He cringes at the sound. When he’d first turned on his computer, it’d been overflowing with emails from his current bandmates- though calling them his bandmates somehow feels like he’s betraying his friends, like they’ve been mistakenly replaced- as well as a few other colleagues asking about his tour and if he plans to continue. Apparently, when he disappeared, the dates had been postponed. Patrick’s a bit offended that no one thought to report him as missing but he consoles himself with the thought of the cult convincing authorities that it’s not important.

He contemplates ignoring the text, certain that it’s someone else questioning him about the remaining tours. If he answers, he’ll have to tell the truth and let everyone down. He’ll have to let them know that his heart and mind are too confused and he can’t focus on anything other than what Pete Wentz is making him feel. He has all these thoughts in his mind that don’t add up, actions and feelings that have no right to be making a comeback. And Pete is ignoring him, refusing to even see him after saving the world. Patrick doesn’t know how he’ll be able to perform with a smile on his face if he can’t even smile convincingly here, alone in this room.
But. Maybe he does need a distraction. Something to take his mind off of Pete Wentz and his summer skin. Maybe he’ll write another album and keep doing tours. Maybe he’ll keep up this Soul Punk persona for just a bit longer.

Right. Because that worked so well last time.

With a loud groan, Patrick forces himself out of the bed, hitting pause on the music he’d been playing. He drags himself to the phone on the desk on the other side of the room, frowning deeply at the distance. The light of the screen’s already switched off and Patrick wonders if he really has to be a mature adult right now. He deserves some time to himself, doesn’t he? Still, he’s already at the desk and there’s no turning back. Without thinking of the consequences, he picks up the phone and opens the text.

“forever isn’t over yet, trick”

Patrick’s eyes grow wide and his breath becomes a gasp. His blood goes cold. His stomach drops. He nearly lets go of the phone.

It’s an unknown number but Patrick still knows exactly who this is.

His fingers hover over the call button, those five words lighting up thousands of questions. Why is he saying this now? What does it mean? Does it have something to do with Patrick’s missing memories? And, for the love of god, why couldn’t he come and say this to Patrick’s face?

An evil part of Patrick’s mind says it’s because he’s reading the situation wrong and jumping to drastic conclusions. These words can be nothing more than a celebratory message over the fact that they’re not dead or another cruel taunt. Besides, Patrick’s been too quick to confess his feelings before; he’s not prepared to do so again.

Slowly, his fingers type out a hasty response.

“But what happens when I feel like a piece of me has died?”

Patrick holds his breath as he presses send. He waits all night for a response.

And, just like so many times before, he’s greeted only with silence.

Chapter End Notes

So. You have the last chapter comin’ up on Tuesday. And you guys are either gonna hate me or...I don't wanna say love me because that's kinda egotistical but...I mean, I hope you don’t hate me? There's a great chance that you won't hate me, though. Just. You know that interview with Patrick during the Soul Punk years where he's telling people to come see his show and he's like "I think I put on a pretty good show. Just come see it. You might...you might not hate it? You might not hate my show..." and it breaks my heart? Yeah, that's how I feel right now. I think the ending's pretty awesome. Just come read it. You might...you might not hate it? You might not hate my ending?

All jokes aside, I can't believe we're so close to the end. I think I've said this in earlier
chapters but this fanfic is- as silly as it- such a dream for me to write. This idea's been bouncing in my head forever and seeing the positive reactions and comments I've been getting has really warmed my heart. I love you guys. I really do.

Annd, before I get too emotional, I'm gonna change subjects. Yes! This was posted a few hours earlier than usual because I have an astronomy midterm tomorrow and I totally can't fail it like I did the first exam so I'll be studying all night. So, if you liked this chapter or you like this fic in general (bc I know this chapter was sort of a return to angst) please pray for me to pass this test. Let Elton John have mercy.

Anyway, thank you so much for reading :) See you next time!
He Begged Me "Don't Hate Me" (We'll Find Ourselves Anew)

Chapter Summary

I would refer you back to the previous chapter's summary

Chapter Notes

It's the last chapter and I'm only slightly crying.

Like, I said, everything I do is bittersweet. I love bittersweet stuff :)

Hey! Hey! If you get the chance, I meant to ask this last chapter but failed so listen up! I love to see how predictable or unpredictable my stories are so if you trust yourself not to read or spoil anything for yourself on the way, I think it'd be cool if you left a comment predicting how you imagine this chapter will go! Or you could just write it down or imagine it and then let me know when/if you leave an actual feedback style comment for this!

Now. Thank you so much for joining me on this journey. I won't keep it from you any longer.

Chapter Playlist:
- The Entirety Of the "Save Rock And Roll" Album (by Fall Out Boy)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He Begged Me “Don’t Hate Me” (We’ll Find Ourselves Anew)

The first week of his self-isolation, Pete breaks down no less than eleven times. Four of those occur within the first twelve hours.

He needs to reaccustom himself to a life where he can’t kiss Patrick whenever he wants, to the world where he can’t bring himself to call and ask how he’s been. Fear and hesitation tangle together in his throat whenever he tries to dial the numbers. It’s like a trigger, taking him back to that night in the dressing room. To the night where it all began.

“Then give me your number, then. You seemed to have forgotten to inform me when you switched numbers. That or you have me blocked.”

“Don’t imagine you’re so important. Give me your hand.”

Pete had never had Patrick blocked; he never even lost his number. Even when the hiatus began and he cut off ties with everyone connected to the band, he deleted every number but Patrick’s. He kept it
scrawled safely on the inside of a worn notebook with lyrics he never had the chance to fill the briefcase with. He’d changed his number but he’d never changed the way he’d felt.

He’d only pretended to.

Now, as days and weeks pass by with aching indifference, he wonders if he’ll be able to do so again.

He’s already started off the way he had, albeit with a different band. To say he was shocked to see Bebe apologetically wander into his office one day would be an understatement. She’d, apparently, been resurrected with a few other cult members who’d been manipulated and controlled. She’d tried to beg for forgiveness and explain that they exploited her emotions and used it against her. She’d tried to make it alright.

But Pete can never forget how desperately she wanted him to hate Patrick. Breaking up the Black Cards was the kindest response he could give. It was also the easiest.

Nothing that comes after is easy.

Every morning’s the same thing: wake up from a nightmare, cry out for Patrick, realize Patrick’s not there, cry himself back to sleep, repeat. Every day is even worse because it varies. Sometimes he’ll think he’s doing fine, adjusting to this loneliness better than ever, but then he’ll hear a certain song or see a specific shade of gold and he’s back on his knees, gasping for breath. But the days that hurt the most are the days where he knows he’s not okay because those are the days he’s convinced that he must have done the wrong thing.

Why would anything good cause this much pain?

But Pete suffers through it with his heart buried deep within his chest. When it’s all said and done, when night falls and he’s slipping away with Patrick’s demo song- the one he said he should have never sent- playing in the background, Pete knows that this is alright. This is okay. He may never feel strong enough to see Patrick again but at least he’s confident enough to whisper his name. It’s almost like his nightly prayer or a bedtime story wrapped up in one word, one name.

“Patrick,” Pete whispers when the sky grows dark. “Patrick.”

It’s been about a month since the last time Pete’s seen Patrick.

Specifically, it’s been one month, three days, four hours, and fifteen minutes. The only reason Pete doesn’t count the seconds is because he doesn’t know. He makes it up, sometimes, imagining that it’s actually thirty seconds away from being another minute, instead of thirty-two. It drives him insane. Or maybe it keeps him sane. He’s never been very good at telling the two apart.

He fiddles with the papers in his hands, not really reading them as light streams in from the office window. After the Black Cards fell apart and Pete pretended to pull himself together, he’d hurried back into the Decaydance office, desperate for any and every distraction. It’s boring and it sucks but it’s a hell of a lot better than all the self-destructive distractions that ran through his mind on the drive here.

_Crash this car. Drive off that bridge. Take every pill you have and sleep with every stranger you find. Do something, do anything, do everything to make this pain go away_

Pete shakes his head, so quick it’s painful. The papers begin to make an irritating sound, rubbing back and forth in his shaky hands, and he drops them to the desk with a scowl. It’s been a month. He
shouldn’t be this nervous. He shouldn’t be this broken.

Though, he thinks with a wry grin, it should probably be expected. He did go through a bit of a traumatic experience, what with all the death and murder. He deserves to be a bit scared of his own shadow for a bit. There’s no shame in a little aftershock anxiety.

But Joe and Andy are just fine. Sure, they have their demons but at least they aren’t alone. They have their families and their friends. They have each other and they have Pa-

No.

Stop.

Distraction. He needs a goddamn distraction.

Pete scrambles to open the laptop on his desk, hands flying over the keys as he types in his password. For a moment, he’s almost worried that he’d forgotten in after being away for so long. But, deep down, he knows that’s impossible. He’s had the same password for years and he’s never neglected it once. Though, for some reason, he feels sick as he types it in. It takes six tries to get it right.

SATURDAY, he types with his eyes shut. Even with the asterisks blocking the letters, he feels as if he’ll break down just from seeing it.

Isn’t it ironic, he thinks to himself, that a word meant for Patrick is now such a trigger for me?

He doesn’t dwell on that thought for long, pulling up his email and scrolling through them with little interest. Most are spam or from random new bands looking for a label. He reads the subject lines of each and stars a few, trying not to be too judgemental on the few words alone. It’s hard, though, when each one somehow reminds him of the naivety and eagerness of his own band so many years ago.

His troubles only multiply when he sees the most recent messages and who they’re from. Joe and Andy.

Pete knows exactly why they’re emailing him—other than the fact that he’s been ignoring their texts. They want to tell him about Patrick.

Pete’s not willing to hear what they have to say just yet. Give it another week or a month perhaps. Hell, with the way he’s feeling, give it another two years.

Pete tries his best to ignore the emails, he really does. But all of them are like click bait, each subject line carrying Patrick’s name in it somewhere.

Patrick update

We went to go see Patrick

More Patrick info

Patrick’s been asking about you

Patrick ;)

Pete grits his teeth and tells himself it’s a horrible idea. Still, he clicks on the one with the winky face. It’s the least likely to have serious news.
Pete notices a moment too late that it’s from neither Joe nor Andy. The email address is a jumble of letters and numbers. The body of the email has no name—only a video clip.

A second passes, giving Pete the chance to close the window or delete the message. But Pete only uses that time to make the video screen larger. It is a distraction, after all.

“Hold me, distract me, dress me up in bubbles, baby, save me from the troubles of my own skin…”

Pete jumps back, nearly falling off his chair when an image of Patrick loads on his screen. His heart goes into overdrive and his vision goes blurry. It’s as if his blood has started flowing backward or his lungs have been popped. It’s an attack. It’s an assault. It’s so much more than a mistake.

But he can’t stop watching.

He recognizes this night—and, if he didn’t, the date and venue in the video title are more than enough clues.

It’s filmed from the point of a view of a fan standing near the front, aiming their camera up to see Patrick swivel his hips and sing his heart out. In random parts, there are odd edits that make the video seem strange and jumpy. But Pete knows what’s been left out. He was there.

He was there to hear the abuse and hate thrown at Patrick as he just tried to share his passion with the world. He was there, standing in the back, telling himself that he didn’t care about how fake Patrick’s smile was growing as the show went on. He smirked at the stage all night, just in case Patrick happened to glance his way. Even so, his mind was sharing a different story.

“No one wants to hear your shit!” One fan had yelled. Pete had to dig his nails into his arms to keep himself from lunging at the boy who had spoken. He wasn’t a Patrick defense squad anymore. Besides, didn’t Patrick say he didn’t need him anymore? This is what he deserved.

“Bring back Pete or go away!” Pete wasn’t sure how to react to that one but he smiled on instinct. It’s a sign, he’d told himself. It’s a sign that Patrick wasn’t meant to exist without him.

“Who fucking cares if we’re Patrick Stump haters? Pete Wentz himself started the trend, haven’t you heard?”

But that was the one that made the smile fall, the one that gave Pete pause, because that was the one that had hurt him and Patrick both. Despite the hurt in Patrick’s eyes onstage, Pete was able to see that he had believed what he had heard.

He had fucking believed it and Pete hated them both for ever letting that be the case.

Pete turns up the volume on his laptop, drowning out the sound of his own mind. He knows that there are some memories he’ll have to deal with but, somehow, the memories of death and torture are less painful than the ones where Patrick seems to have forgotten what forever means.

But it’s like a floodgate has been lifted and now Pete can’t stop wondering whether or not Patrick would carry that look in his eyes today. If he believes that Pete hates him. If he believes that they could never fall in love again. Pete wants more than anything to prove those thoughts wrong, to wipe the doubt from Patrick’s eyes like tears, but his fear is like a chain around his neck, yanking him back in place when bravery starts to show.

He reaches to shut off the computer. This video isn’t a very good distraction at all.

But then Pete sees the light in Patrick’s eyes as he sings about Chicago of all things. He dances with
Patrick looks ecstatic to be playing his own music and singing his own words and it breaks Pete’s heart in every way possible.

Will Patrick be that happy again? He may not remember Pete’s love for him but he sure as hell remembers the torture and mind control. He remembers everything but the parts that made it worth it. And Pete knows that that’s more than enough to kill this bright-eyed version of Patrick forever. Pete’s fingers glide across the screen, stroking the figure of Patrick as he dances. Does he even look like this anymore? In the one text he’d accepted from Andy- because Andy would never force Pete to hear things he doesn’t want to know- he’d been informed that Patrick’s dyeing his hair back to the red-brown that Pete didn’t know he’s been missing. He’d thought it was a good sign until Andy sent the follow-up text; Patrick couldn’t bear to see that much yellow anymore. Pete hadn’t responded.

Yellow, Pete thinks, focusing on the mess of blond hair on Patrick’s head. Pete doesn’t remember ever using such a bland word for Patrick. Even when his eyes were glowing and he wanted nothing more than for Pete to be dead, Pete only ever saw Patrick as golden.

Golden. Patrick is his golden boy. Some things never change.

But Patrick isn’t one of those things. He’s going back to that rusted shade, the red from his past. And Pete doesn’t know if that’s a good or bad sign. He wants to believe that it’s a rebirth, a symbolism of forgetting the past and moving on. But it could also be a regression. It could be a coping mechanism. It could be a sign that Patrick’s moving back to the younger version of himself, terrified to so much stand on stage, let alone perform on one. It’s as if a piece of him has died.

A piece of him has died. And those aren’t Pete’s words.

As the video continues, moving to a bit where Patrick tries to banter with the audience, Pete finds his gaze falling on his phone, abandoned on the corner of Pete’s desk. He had reached out to Patrick only once, testing the waters and waiting for the correct response.

forever isn’t over yet, trick

He’d thought it was clever- bittersweet with just the right dash of hope. He’d waited for minutes that felt like years, chewing on his lip and begging for Patrick to remember. He’d wondered if Patrick would call or text back, saying anything that would confirm or deny that his memories are gone. Pete just needed a solid answer. Good or bad, he needed to know if Patrick still knew he loved him.

But what happens when I feel like a piece of me has died?

That.

That could mean anything.

His memories. His affections for Pete. His emotional stability. His desire to ever see Pete again. What piece has died? Pete drags his gaze back up to the screen. That text was sent a month ago. He hasn’t messaged since but neither has Patrick. Maybe the signs weren’t in Patrick’s words but in the absence of them. The thought burns.

The door to the office swings open unexpectedly and Pete slams his laptop shut, heart racing in fear of getting caught- even if he doesn’t know what he’s getting caught doing. He raises his eyes, prepared to scold this person for not knocking. How dare they enter without permission? Without so much as a notification from the front desk? Pete grimaces. He’ll have to have a talk with the secretary.
and-

He looks up.

His mouth goes dry.

“I’d ask if you were watching porn but we both know you’re too loyal to Patrick to do that.”

Gerard paces the room, though his actions are more of a sassy saunter than an anxiety-riddled walk. He avoids Pete’s questioning gaze, even when Pete manages to take a breath sharp enough to be considered a gasp. Gerard ignores the astonished sound, moving to the desk to pull out the chair before it. He fixes an accusatory look on Pete’s face as he sits. Pete has no choice but to recoil in slight terror at the intensity of that gaze.

“Though,” Gerard continues, his voice taking on a sarcastic edge, “one would wonder, if Pete’s so loyal to Patrick, then why is he ignoring him?”

Silence falls and Pete forces his breaths to calm down.

“What are you doing here?” Pete demands once his thoughts slow enough for him to catch one. “Shouldn’t you be dead?”

Pete cringes the second the words leave his mouth. Gerard, though, merely raises an eyebrow.

“I mean. Technically, yeah. But I got kicked out a while ago,” he says simply. As if it should be obvious. Which, Pete supposes once he thinks it over, it probably is.

“Oh,” he says, knowing better than to question how Gerard managed to get kicked out of heaven. He shakes his head, realizing that Gerard ignored the first question. “But that still doesn’t explain what you’re doing. Like. Here. In my office.”

Gerard waves the question off, sighing as he does so. “Because it seemed more polite than showing up unannounced at your house. Now, why are you ignoring Patrick?”

Pete wants nothing more than to continue to pester Gerard with interrogations, to ask him why this is so important or if he has a solution. He wants to treat this in a way that won’t stir up emotions he wants to bury. He wants to treat it like a game. Like a distraction.

But then Gerard turns that judgemental ‘are you kidding me’ look on him and Pete sighs, defeated.

“I need him to remember,” he says, relaxing back into his chair and spinning it slightly. “And I’m scared to find out that he doesn’t. If Patrick can’t remember that I love him, I can’t imagine how I’ll survive. It’ll be just like the hiatus but worse because then I knew where we stood. I knew how to act around him. Now, I don’t think I’ll be able to hear him say my name without wanting to cry. The day that Patrick remembers that I love him will be the day I can speak to him again. But that day obviously isn’t anytime soon so what’s the point in waiting for something that’ll never happen? Besides, this is all my fault. All I ever wanted was to protect him and I couldn’t even do that. I’m not healthy or safe for him to be around and I’m starting to think that maybe this is a sign of that. Maybe him forgetting is for the best in more ways than just saving his life. I broke his heart once. Maybe this is just preventing me from doing so again. It’s better for him. So it’s better for everyone.”

Pete feels worn out by the time he’s done speaking, thoughts he’d only barely entertained spilling forth from his mouth. But he finds that he agrees with each idea. If Patrick can’t remember that he and Pete were on the road to ruin once again, then they won’t have to follow through. They won’t have to relive the past, to go through the scars and pains of heartbreak. Pete consoles himself with the
thought, looking to Gerard for validation.

Gerard stares blankly back, his nose slightly wrinkled in disgust.

“Well. That’s lame,” he says eventually, taking Pete by surprise. “I mean, if you love Patrick it shouldn’t matter about whether or not he remembers. It should only matter if you love him.”

“But,” Pete whines, “it won’t mean the same. It…What if the only reason he thought he still loved me was because we were in such a desperate situation and he wanted the comfort of caring for someone? Or, what if he hates me for taking away those memories? What if he doesn’t believe me? What if God didn’t just take his memories- he took his feelings, too? You don’t understand, Gerard. There are a thousand ways that this could go wrong.”

“Oh, so what?” Gerard says, leaning forward. “There’s a thousand ways this could go wrong. I’ll give you that. Maybe there’re even a million ways. Maybe Patrick’s changed because of the trauma and decides he can’t love anyone. Maybe you get together and both realize it’s not what you want. We can sit here and speculate all day. But fuck those reasons. They don’t matter. Because, despite how many ways it can go wrong, there’s only one way that it can go right. And that way is Patrick still loving you. Shouldn’t that be worth every risk?”

Pete bites his tongue, hurt and rage mixing together in his chest. He’d be a liar if he said that he hadn’t thought of that, of saying screw it and throwing caution to the wind. It crossed his mind daily. But it sounds much crazier when it’s just in his head.

How is Gerard making it make sense?

“You don’t understand,” Pete repeats through grit teeth. “You don’t know what it’s like to feel abandoned and lonely with nobody to blame but yourself. You haven’t cried yourself to sleep each night with the hope that, somewhere, someone is doing the same for you. I tried reaching out to him, Gerard. And the results weren’t exactly what I’d call hopeful. He’s fine without me. He has Joe and Andy and a dozen other people who care about him. He doesn’t need me. Not in the way he used to.”

Gerard’s silent. Pete watches him, hesitant and certain that he’s crossed the line. Because his band wasn’t the only one to go through this. He wasn’t the only one who had to make drastic choices to save someone he loves. He’s not the only one affected. If he has any hope of anyone understanding, it would be Gerard.

“Don’t you wonder why you don’t see videos like that anymore?” Gerard asks finally, nodding towards Pete’s laptop. Pete frowns, confused, before he remembers what he had been watching. His eyes widen before narrowing. Of course.

“You sent it,” he says. Gerard merely shrugs.

“You’re avoiding the question,” he says instead. Pete frowns, his lips a thin line. Yes, he is avoiding the question. He doesn’t want to think about the answer.

It’s true. He’d checked Patrick’s website, scouring through posts to find the one with his tour dates listed. If it’s to be believed, videos of his concerts should be all over the internet. But Patrick’s seemed to have disappeared, merely answering a few twitter questions here and there. He should be performing across the country, doing what he does best. But those dates have been changed from postponed to straight up canceled and Pete feels sick when he tries to imagine why.

Gerard sighs. “He misses you, Pete. Even if he doesn’t remember why.”
Pete feels like a child that’s been scolded and he wraps his arms around himself for comfort. “But… But I want him to remember.”

“More than you want him to not feel alone?” Gerard challenges. Pete’s arms grow tighter, hugging himself. He knows he’s been beaten.

With a sigh, he lets go of himself and reaches for his phone, powering it on with a wince. He opens his messages as Gerard watches. Patrick’s text is the first thing he sees.

It hurts just as much as it did the first hundred times Pete read it.

This message...It's his fault. He hurt Patrick and he broke a piece of him. He doesn’t know how or what part was broken but he does know that he’s the cause. If Patrick didn’t need Pete to fix him, if he didn’t want Pete to know he was hurting, he wouldn’t have responded so openly. And that openness is what terrifies Pete the most about this situation. At the best of times, Patrick’s unpredictable. But at his worst, he’s an open book.

Pete clicks on Patrick’s name. He can’t text him back; he’d feel too apathetic if he did that. No. He needs to call him and find out what he remembers. He needs to put Patrick together and he needs to do it in more than just written words. His finger hovers over the call symbol and before he can click it, Gerard laughs contently.

“I knew you’d do the right thing,” he whispers, looking up to Pete with a smile. “You really love him. That’s all I needed to know. You- If this were some sort of test, you’d pass.”

There’s something strange in Gerard’s tone but Pete’s too fixated on his words to care. “I do love him. It’s the one thing I’m sure of. I just wish Patrick could remember how sure of it he used to be, too.”

“Don’t worry,” Gerard says, smiling wider. “Memories like that aren’t really lost forever.”

Pete looks up skeptically, feeling as if Gerard’s trying to mess with his emotions. “And how would you know?”

“I was an angel, remember? Heaven has a lot of secrets if you know the right places to look and the right people to ask,” Gerard responds with a cocky grin. Pete can’t help but smirk and huff out a laugh of his own.

“Yeah. Too bad you got kicked out,” he says. Gerard’s smile grows fond and he lowers his eyes for a second.

“I just hope it was worth it,” he says softly. Pete’s about to question him when Gerard shakes his head and laughs. “Whatever. I’m sure kicking me out was just God’s way of saying that my moping over my friends was getting to be too much. He’s a softie.”

“Worth it,” Pete repeats, mind whirring with possibilities. “No. Gerard, what did you mean about that part? What do you mean it was worth it? Why did you really get kicked out?”

Gerard’s eyes widen as if he hadn’t expected for Pete hear those words. But then his smile grows cryptic and he brushes his hair out of his face. “The cult wasn’t the only one who knew how trigger words work.”

The dots in Pete’s mind begin to connect into patterns he’s been ignoring for the past month. No. It’s not possible. Gerard’s messing with him, he doesn’t mean this, it’s too good to be true, oh god what if it’s a dream?
Gerard grabs a pen and paper from Pete’s desk, his lip between his teeth as he looks to the bassist. Finally, Pete speaks.

“What, exactly, do you mean?” Pete asks, barely allowing any emotion into his voice. Gerard’s grin becomes a smirk.

“Oh, come on, Pete. I told you what you guys were going to do. And I told Patrick, too. I just need you to write it down and, well, I’m sure you’re smart enough to figure out the rest.” Gerard taps the tip of the uncapped pen onto the paper, dotting it randomly. Pete swallows thickly as his mind slows down.

One phrase has repeated through Pete’s mind incessantly since Gerard had said it. He’d thought it was something cool or motivational. He even started writing lyrics around it. He’d never thought it’d be this important.

“It’s impossible. That can’t work,” Pete says, even as he takes the pen from Gerard’s hand and pulls the paper towards himself. Four words. He just needs to write down four words.

“Well, not yet,” Gerard says with a carefree shrug. “But that’s where I come in.”

No further explanation is given. It doesn’t matter. Pete’s already scrawling the phrase onto the sheet, his hand shaking so much that his handwriting is nearly impossible to tell as his own. He passes the page back to Gerard, who reads it with a smile.

“Perfect,” he says, tucking it into his jacket. His hands fiddle in his pockets and he pulls out a few black accessories that make Pete frown. Gerard pays no attention to his expression, merely focusing on pulling the beanie over his hair and tying the bandana around his face. When he’s done, his eyes are twinkling. “If it were the early 2000s, would you recognize me?”

“I…I don’t even think I knew you in the way early 2000s,” Pete says, astonished. There’s something familiar about this look. He just can’t quite put his finger on it.

“Oh, cool,” Gerard says, zipping his jacket up. “I was kinda lying when I said God kicked me out. I mean, he technically did but he said that since I’m coming back to Earth I might as well do a favor for him.”

“What’s the favor?” Pete asks. Gerard rolls his eyes.

“Oh, I’m sure if you think hard enough you can figure it out. All you need to know is that this piece of paper in my jacket is going to end up in Patrick’s hands. I’ve got enough angel in me left to do this errand for God and to enchant this sheet with half a hundred memories. It’s just up to you to do the rest,” Gerard explains. He adjusts the bandana around his face one last time before waving. “See you, Pete. And don’t worry. He’ll remember everything.”

It’s been a month since Pete’s last seen Patrick.

Well. It’s been a month, four days, sixteen hours, and 36 minutes. But he’s not really counting anymore.

His conversation with Gerard the day before echoes through his mind like a dream he can’t believe he had. He plays through all the words, giving them different intonations and pronunciations. Maybe if Gerard said this word that way, it’d mean something completely different. Maybe Pete just heard it wrong and is jumping to conclusions. He doesn’t want to make a fool of himself.
But, fool or not, he already knows what he has to do.

He’s in his room, sitting on his bed with his shoes still on. It’s midnight but the curtains are drawn and the lights are brighter than ever, allowing Pete to pretend that it’s day. Maybe he can pretend that Patrick’s awake enough to answer this call, too.

Pete dials Patrick’s number and hits the green call symbol before realizing that he worked up the bravery to do so. As soon as the first ring fills the air, Pete’s as afraid as the day he realized Patrick was missing. But this is a different fear. This is a selfish, shallow concern. He fears that Patrick will ignore him. He fears that Gerard was joking. He fears that, any second, he’s going to wake up.

It’s midnight. But Patrick still answers.

“Pete?”

His voice is groggy with sleep, cracking on the one syllable. But that one syllable is Pete’s name and it gives the man hope.

“Pete,” Patrick repeats, sounding more awake. More alert. “What- Are you- We need to-”

And Pete’s mind jumps into a frenzy without his permission. No time for emotion. No time for tears. His brainwaves become frequencies he can’t hope to understand, causing him to tremble with energy. Everything is suddenly happening too fast and Pete races to catch up.

“Hey, okay, so listen,” Pete stammers, unsure of where he plans on going with this conversation. His eyes land on the calendar on the other side of the room and he jumps to his feet, rushing over to it. With one hand holding the phone to his ear, he uses his other to grab a pen and start marking days off. He used to count how many days have passed since the hiatus began but…Well, he’s never been very consistent at counting days.

“Alright,” Pete says when Patrick sounds like he’s going to speak again. “This break’s been, like, three years long….two years long…Three years long?”

Pete trails off, trying to do math in his head when Patrick’s tired voice carries through the speaker.

“Three and a half…” Patrick mumbles, sounding disoriented. Pete doesn’t blame him, even as he continues this strange tirade.

“We gotta fucking come back, man,” Pete says, turning his back to the calendar and bouncing on the balls of his feet. Oh God, he doesn’t know what he’s doing. But he didn’t know what he was doing when he first kissed Patrick and that was probably the greatest moment of his life. “We gotta come back strong.”

Patrick sounds exasperated, as if he, too, is abandoning emotions to focus on the conversation at hand. “Pete, I don’t understand. I need to ask you about-”

“We gotta make this shit legit,” Pete cuts him off, stumbling over the words and shaking so much he can barely understand what he’s saying. Too fast. The world is moving too fast and Pete only wants to slow it down for just a second. Because too soon he’s gonna reach the part where Patrick says that he doesn’t remember. He’s gonna reach the moment where he says those words and Gerard’s either going to be a godsend or a filthy liar. Pete’s scared to find out. “It’s gonna be fucking dope. We’re gonna make a fucking record that sails the skies. We’re gonna call this record-”

“Pete!” Patrick all but screams. Pete pauses, catching his breath as Patrick huffs irritably through the phone. It’s enough to soothe Pete’s racing blood, to cool him down. The sound of Patrick saying his
name is enough to stop time itself and Pete feels as if he’s hit a wall at a hundred miles an hour from the sudden change in speed. “Pete. I want to know what I’m missing. I want to know why…why I feel things I shouldn’t be. I want to know why I feel like you might love me when I know that…I know you said you didn’t.”

It’s exactly what Pete was afraid of but he doesn’t let the sorrow and anguish set in just yet.

Stop.

Breathe.

Count to three.

“Save Rock And Roll.”

Silence.

Heavy breaths filled with fear and sadness.

And then Patrick gasps and….

And Pete feels…


It’s not the greatest reaction but Pete still feels like crying and a wide smile splits his face in two.

“Forever isn’t over yet, Trick,” he says, his voice shaking. Patrick laughs and it sounds as if he might be crying.

“And our band isn’t dead,” he says breathlessly. “Get your ass over here, Pete. We have a fucking album to make.”

THE END

Chapter End Notes

OK So I don't know about you but I felt like that ending was pretty awesome when I was outlining it and, though I worried whether or not it would be anticlimactic in response to all the angst, I saw no other option. Let me leave you with a smile instead of tears for once :)

UNLESS you have tears because this story is over because I've been so sad this whole day thinking about how this is actually the end! I mean, officially. If you guys want any oneshots or have plot ideas for this AU (like, expanding on the Peterick past, exploring scenes that were implied but not detailed, something more sappy after all of this, etc) I am more than willing to fulfill those dreams. Honestly, I love this AU more than I love the original novel I'm trying to write. Leave me a comment with what you want and,
trust me, I'd be happy to write it.

Also, you may see one or two chapter updates but they won't be actual story pieces. More like playlists and other random stuff I'd like to share. I think I described it as the "bonus features" on a DVD and that's the best analogy I can think of.

As you can see, I'm trying to stay away from any emotional talk because if I do I might just start crying in front of my roommate and we don't want that. But, seriously guys. I love all of you. I don't care if you don't want it, you have my love. Nothing is more exciting to me than seeing comments from the people I've come to recognize through the chapters. You all have a piece of my heart and I hope to see you in further fics to come.

Speaking of which, this one was such a journey that I'm gonna wait a few weeks before completing my other one. But fear not! It will be completed! And hopefully I'll have all of you there to journey that one with me :)

So, I suppose, this is the end! I'll see you all later, though! If you want, come talk to me on my tumblr: remember-me-for-sinturies. I'd love to see you there!

We'll talk again!

-Charlotte

End Notes

This was totally inspired by some art I saw on tumblr of YBC Patrick in different eras. It sparked an idea in my head that could not be forgotten. IF YOU MADE ART LIKE THIS LET ME KNOW AND I WILL CREDIT YOU

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