Summary

Frank Iero's just your average high-school guy on his last year of schooling. But with the sudden return of his best friend and his brother, an annoying crush and some supernatural influences, how is he going to survive his life shaken like a cocktail? Features feels, Starbucks, deep thoughts and a dash of IKEA.

Notes

Crepeygirl has done a complimentary mix for this fic! Find it at: http://archiveofourown.org/works/8054404

This is my first full-length fic, despite writing for a long good now. Enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes

-Hell, 7,389,023 Hell Years (2016 in human years)-

“Lindsey, did you get my Hellbucks coffee?” Jimmy Urine looked up from a small crystal ball. Standing carefully as to not move the ball (it had taken him quite a while to find such a suitable one), he brushed aside the stained purple tablecloth to take the cup from his sidekick.

“I got the usual, Jimmy. Black Kilimanjaro, right?” Lindsey Ballato’s jet-black pigtails shook a
little as she cocked her head slightly to the side; brown eyes questioning behind her thick glasses.

Jimmy raised an unkempt eyebrow. “You’ve been getting me coffee for the last 15,000 years, Lindsey. Even the baristas at Hellbucks are surer of my order than you are.” He chuckled slightly, scratching a bit behind his horns. “Thanks for the coffee,” he said, taking a sip from the brown paper cup. He set it down next to the crystal ball.

“How is the earth monitoring, anyway?” Lindsey craned her head to take a glance into the crystal ball. Jimmy indignantly raised his free arm slightly, barring any further intrusion into his personal space.

“Fine. I have a slight problem though.”

“What is it?”

“Gerard Way.”

“Oh, you mean that human psychic kid?” Lindsey chuckled slightly, “Well, uh, didn’t you say he was harmless some time ago?”

Jimmy huffed. “That was before he found that accursed tutor of his. He’s dangerous now, Lindsey,” he stood and paced around the tiny table, gesturing wildly as he spoke, “Now, we have GOT to get rid of him. Lindsey, he’s been trained in exorcism. EXORCISM!” Jimmy stood in front of Lindsey and shook her shoulders, “He could kill us before we say “EXORCIST!” He could kill us and we’d probably be reborn as demons again! I’ve already put up with 30,000 years of Hell’s shit! I’m not going to go through this aga—”

“Jimmy,” Lindsey interrupted, adjusting her glasses, “Calm the fuck down. We’ll just go and kill the kid, and we don’t have to worry about being killed. You’re a powerful demon, remember?”

Jimmy, snapping out of his hysteria, nodded mutely. Even in hell, there were demons who made amazing friends. Lindsey the imp was one of them. Regaining his composure, Jimmy straightened up and cleared his throat.

“Now, then, Lyn-Z, let’s get some business done.”

Lindsey’s eyes lit up. This was the Jimmy she knew.

-June 25, New Jersey Academies, previous year-

In his red-trimmed graduation robes, Mikey Way looked the symbol of success and perseverance. He had just graduated from the hellhole they called the New Jersey Academy, after all. Adjusting his black and white glasses, he accepted another bone-crushing hug from his crying mother. Mikey’s father stood to the side, trying to discreetly wipe a tear from his eye.

To Frank Iero, Michael James Way was a symbol of the freedom that was just out of reach. It would be another year until he himself could drag himself out of high school. Lucky bastard.

He had promised his graduating friend that he’d celebrate with the Way family as well, and once he had cleared that with his mother, Frank found himself walking lazily into the auditorium. Shivering slightly from the sudden burst of air-conditioning, he buttoned up his blazer as he spotted Mikey in a sea of graduates and their families. Shuffling towards his friend, he slalomed expertly through the throng of people (such was a rare occasion where he was thankful for his short stature). Once he deemed himself close enough, Frank ran up and tackled Mikey from behind. Mikey let out an “oof” as Frank’s hands made a sloppy attempt of covering his eyes, falling
forward slightly.

“Guess who?” Frank sang, as Mikey made an attempt to shove him off without dislodging his glasses. Frank’s grip was already slipping, so he promptly jumped off Mikey’s back before his nails started ripping into Frank’s skin or something. It had happened the first time that Frank had jumped on him, and there were still small pink scars on Frank’s hands from that incident.

Mikey Way’s nails were probably forged from titanium in the pits of Tartarus by dwarves or some shit. Well, it had seemed that way at the time.

When Mikey turned around to face him, Frank ran in for a hug. Mikey wrapped his arms around Frank’s small body, patting his back awkwardly.

Frank murmured, “Don’t leave me, motherfucker.”

To Mikey’s relief, Frank let go and stepped back. To his chagrin, Frank’s eyes were sparkling like those of a fair number of sad puppies.

But since Mikey had an ice-cold heart, he shook it off easily. Mikey was like that.

“Deal with it, because I am.”

“Where are you going?”

“Thailand, with Gerard.”

Gerard was Mikey’s older brother who had eschewed university to get “life experience”, as he had said before he jumped on a plane to Bangkok, never to be seen again.

Frank’s eyes widened. The last time they talked about this, Mikey was desperate to start his engineering career at Rutgers.

“Why aren’t you starting college in September?”

Mikey shrugged.

“I don’t wanna go without you.”

-October 6, present day-

“Frank! Stop spacing out. Mr Fowler will notice sooner or later.” Jamia Nestor’s glare was the first thing Frank registered when he was brought back into reality. His Chemistry classroom was the second. A pop quiz in front of him was the third.

“Oh, damn.” He hadn’t studied organic chemistry like he had told himself to last night, instead finding himself looking for Animal Crossing patterns for his friend Ray Toro to use. It wasn’t like he was failing the subject or anything, in fact, he was on a solid 6. On top of that, this quiz didn’t even count towards their final term grade. So why did he care so much?

“Mr Fowler thinks you’re a punk kid who deserves to die in a hole. It’s good that the exams are cross-marked, or you would be failing miserably.” Jamia elbowed Frank’s ribs gently. “You should do everything perfectly to prove yourself.”

“It’d piss him off even more,” Frank sighed. Looking down on his pop quiz, instead of questions on organic chemistry, they were about… atomic structure?
“Frank, this isn’t our pop quiz.” Jamia had realised as well. Raising her hand, she called over Mr Fowler. He was a mousy man, not much taller than Frank, and had Harry Potter glasses perched on the end of his nose (“He wears them like Mikey”, Frank had noted).

“What’s the problem, guys?” Mr Fowler gave Frank a pointed glare, which screamed “You won’t get any help from me, punk.”

Frank, returning the sentiment with a blank stare, pointed to Jamia, who pointed to the top of the pop quiz. It read Class 103 Quiz Atomic Structure.

“We’re class 121, sir,” Jamia half-whispered, brushing back a flyaway lock of hair.

Mr Fowler’s eyes bulged out of his head in the realisation that he had made such an elementary mistake. The sight was so much like a surprised owl that Frank couldn’t hold back a small snicker. After giving him another death glare, Mr Fowler clapped to get the attention of the class.

“I gave you the wrong quiz! If you haven’t written on yours yet, pile them up here,” he tapped a corner of his desk, “I’ll be right back, so sit tight!” Mr Fowler then bolted out of the classroom, leaving the door squeaking on its hinges.

Frank and Jamia gave each other a look, but a tap on Frank’s shoulder turned his attention to another of his friends, Bob Bryar. Bob was a guy of few words, and he and Ray were practically inseparable. He also had a weakness for gossip (something that Frank had found out just recently).

“Kitty and Jack are playing Minecraft on their phones.” Bob pointed to the mentioned pair huddled in the back of the room. Jennifer “Kitty” Dunn and Jack Barakat were childhood friends (Frank could remember them being attached at the hip in elementary school), and a thing they had in common was an ingrained sense of laziness. They still got decent marks, though, to everyone’s annoyance.

“You’d think they’re going out, huh?” Jamia drawled, doodling on the corner of her school diary. Frank forced himself to agree, but somehow he couldn’t help the sinking feeling in his heart. It’s not like he’s rumoured to be going out with anyone, or told he’d look good with someone or anything, and that’s the most excitement an undateable guy can get without breaking the law.

Mr Fowler decided to choose that exact moment to fall face-first onto his desk, pop quizzes floating like dust mites out of his hands. As he got out of his seat to help pick them up, Frank couldn’t help but think his life needed some sudden change.

-Lunchtime, same day-

After grabbing his lunch from his locker, Frank finally managed to drag himself up to the roof where everyone had their lunch. The school they attended was akin to an office building, and it just so happened that Frank’s chemistry classroom was on the bottom floor and the elevators were under repair. Finally making it to their spot in the shaded far corner (oh why did they choose this spot?), Frank slid and collapsed against the concrete barrier.

Jamia looked up from her laptop and raised a perfectly groomed eyebrow (Frank wondered where she got the time to do them considering her life was practically just studying).

“You didn’t take the D-block lifts?” Oh, yeah. Frank had forgotten about those. They had been out-of-order for so long everyone had thought it was a joke when the school announced that they were once again useable last week. Welcome to the public school life.

The group that Frank sat with consisted of: Ray and Bob, who occupied their corner of the roof;
Jamia, who sat at the picnic table doing homework (and thus wasn’t really part of the group, but she was nice); and of course, himself, who just took any spot against the concrete wall (he had once been dunked with paint at the table, and since then had stayed well away from it). Grabbing his lunchbox, he had just unwrapped his sandwich when his phone growled and Frank noticed he got a message from Mikey.

*Mikeyway: got some gud news 4 u. cant have you happy in nja so ill tell you when schools over*

Even from behind a screen, Mikey Way had a talent for making it clear how much he cared about your emotional wellbeing. That is, not very much.

Frank sent a message to Mikey:

*Frnk: I’m asking but you’re not telling*

*Mikeyway: the chance i tell is slimmer than a gucci model n soz frnkie coz i g2g*

Frank sighed and turned off his phone. When Mikey actually said he had to go, he actually left. No point keeping his phone on and letting it distract him, anyway.

Ray squealed, and noticing Frank’s raised eyebrow, he shouted, “I finally finished my virtual fossil collection in my virtual museum!” Frank nodded uncertainly, knowing that if he congratulated Ray verbally it’d sound sarcastic and everyone would be sad. Even though Frank was mostly indifferent to people’s feelings, he still liked keeping Ray happy. Well, it was mostly because he was a bitch when provoked (Frank and Bob had both learnt that the hard way).

Gulping down the last of the sandwich and licking his fingers, Frank put his phone away and grabbed the container of delicious-looking vegan cookies when a shrill voice interrupted his thoughts.

“Bob, do you want to study Maths after school?” Gabe Saporta pranced as gracefully as one could when holding a guitar and an oversized box of chocolates towards the former. Ray looked up for a moment before continuing to play on his Isabelle-patterned 3DS, while Bob very slightly backed away. Gabe Saporta was arguably the school’s best musician, with both of his parents being world-famous in jazz and classical circles. He had shamelessly hit on Bob from day one and his obsession seemed to get worse and worse. Bob had taken it like a champ at first, but now made it clear how he felt.

“I have to do stuff for my grandma after school, I’m really sorry, Gabe.” Bob’s voice raised a few octaves, making his distress obvious. Obvious to everyone else but Gabe, it seemed.

“Oh, ok. Um, som –“

“My grandma is wanting me around for a very long time. She broke her leg, you know? So uh… I won’t be able to study with you for at least the next 6 weeks. Um, sorry. I –”

“But Bob!” Gabe put his free hand on his heart dramatically.

Frank just chomped on his cookies as the drama unfolded. They were a much nicer alternative to popcorn in these kinds of situations.

He didn’t even feel sorry for Bob anymore. He should probably get his morality checked.

-Suvarnabhumi Airport, Bangkok, ditto-
Gerard’s pale face was set in an exaggerated frown as he pushed his and Mikey’s luggage into the airport terminal. Mikey trailed next to him, tapping incessantly on his phone.

“Freaking hell, Mikey. Which check-in counter do we go to?” Gerard poked his brother’s shoulder, which earned him a strong jab to the ribs. While Gerard was groaning in pain, Mikey looked up and turned to him.

“Uh… T4, I think.” Mikey pointed to a sign on the other side of the terminal. Gerard’s frown did the impossible and drooped even further down his face.

“You have got to be kidding me, motherfucker. We’re standing at rows C and D right now! Why didn’t you have the foresight to get the taxi to drop us off over there?!” Gerard gestured wildly to the other end of the terminal, earning the pair a few strange looks from other patrons.

“I don’t know, Gee. Maybe I was busy doing other shit!” Mikey had put his phone in his pocket and crossed his arms over his chest. He was definitely paying attention now.

“Like what? Checking your Insta feed?”

“I had to reply to a work email on my phone.”

“Oh, cry me an ocean and leave me be. You could have been doing that later.” Gerard shook his head and continued pushing their luggage to counter T4.

“You spend half your day drawing and doing other lazy shit, Gerard. So don’t tell me what to do. And besides,” Mikey pinched Gerard’s cheek, “You need to work off this more often.”

Gerard gave him a sideways glare.

“Did you just call me fat?”

Mikey mockingly mimicked Gerard’s expression, albeit with a mischievous smirk and perpetually blank eyes behind the black and white glasses.

“Yes.”

Gerard would have punched his little brother, but he was in a public place and in a conservative country. He would have to be the better person for now.

Gerard would get Mikey back later, for sure.

He’d be back.

-2nd Homeroom, New Jersey, ditto-

Mr Brian Schechter, Frank’s economics teacher and his homeroom supervisor, was already sprawled in his chair at the front of the room when Frank entered. Mr Schechter tapped his computer’s screen (attendance was on there now, to everyone’s surprise) as Frank took his usual seat by the window. Nobody he liked was in homeroom, so he tried his best to remove himself.

“You look like a cliché, Frank.” Mr Schechter looked up briefly and smirked.

“Thanks, sir,” Frank droned. He made it a point to pretend to be bored in homeroom.

Because his school was weird, they had homeroom twice each day, except on Wednesdays. It was just to take attendance and make sure nobody was skipping. The majority of the students didn’t see
the point of it, since attendance was taken in every class, and strictly too. However, Frank found it a good opportunity to rest for a bit before he put up with the rest of school.

But thanks to his inexplicably horrible luck, Mr Schechter was one of the worst homeroom teachers ever.

“Hey Frank, I met a girl with a glass eye.” Mr Schechter had marked the attendance (everyone was there), shut the laptop between his calves and shifted slightly in his uncomfortable-looking position. Either his chair was really comfortable or Mr Schechter had an ass of steel.

Mr Schechter always told his dad jokes to Frank (despite being single with no end in sight), so Frank rolled his eyes and indulged him.

“How’d you know?”

“It just came out in the conversation.”

Frank giggled slightly with the rest of the room; this was a new joke, and it was actually funny. Well, as funny as dad jokes get, anyway. Frank may have been guilty of re-telling some of these jokes to Ray, who told them to Bob, who didn’t tell them to anyone because he never told jokes. What a shame that poor Bob was just a killjoy.

“You can’t have come up with that yourself, sir,” one of the freshmen in the back yelled out. Frank had never bothered to learn their names, and they never bothered to learn his. An eye for an eye, right? Except instead of an eye, it was no eye.

What do you call a blind deer? No idea. Get it, because no eye deer?

God, Frank himself was catching Schechter-itis.

“Was it that obvious? Stole it off QI the other night.” Mr Schechter looked up at the clock (it was based off Monty Python’s Silly Walk, with John Cleese’s legs being the hands) and put away his laptop, “We have a couple of minutes left, guys. What do you kids have next?”

“Art,” the same freshman piped up. Frank should probably learn the kid’s name. She was cool.

“Maths HL,” one of the juniors shouted.

“Ew, maths. I have Lit,” his friend replied.

“I’ve got Economics in here,” Frank murmured.

Mr Schechter whooped subtly.

“Best class ever, right?”

Frank shrugged.

“Eh, it’s decent.”

Mr Schechter gasped and put a hand on his heart Gabe-style.

“If I could give out detentions for offending me, I would have given you every possible slot, Frank.”

Frank’s lips tugged upwards.
“Glad to hear that, sir.”

As the bell went, Mr Schechter’s eyes widened as he clicked his fingers in realisation.

“Hey, Frank. Gerard Way and his brother are flying back today.”

Frank straightened in his seat slightly. Mikey never told him he was coming back. But then again, the last time he had good Wi-Fi was two weeks ago.

Once the last of his homeroom had trailed out, he finally answered.

“When’d you hear?”

“Just now, actually. They’re boarding their flight now.” Mr Schechter held up a pink Samsung phone. Noticing Frank’s confusion, he sighed, “My niece picked it out. I took it like a good sport.”

“What a pushover, Mr Schechter.”

“Yeah, well, I’m nice. Unlike you, I-don’t-mind-watching-my-friend-get-harassed-by-that-Saporta-kid Frank.”

Frank’s body flinched backwards momentarily.

“Wha –”

“It was camera duty for me this lunch.” Mr Schechter waved in the kids waiting outside for the economics class. A little known fact about Mr Schechter was that he did a little bit of security work in the school, having been a security guard at the school before getting his teaching degree.

“There’s cameras on the roof?” Being in Homeroom Schechter for two years, Frank thought he had been told every NJA security secret that could have ever been known. Well, it seemed not.

“Sure is. Though I know that Saporta is a little much on that Bryar kid, so I guess you’ve tried and failed to deal with him.”

Frank sighed and nodded. Now he thought of it, his school life was a bad soap. Well, at least the drama with Gabe, anyway. His face smooshed against the wooden desk as he massaged his temples.

Hey, maybe Mr Schechter wasn’t that bad after all.

-Sitting on the Way brothers’ plane, somewhere in the sky-

“Let’s explode the plane, Jimmy.” Before they had left for Earth, Lindsey had bought herself a chai latte, which she was drinking cross-legged on top of the Thai Airlines plane.

“That’s not dramatic enough, though. I totally would, but that’s too much like MH370, you know? I want G. A. Way’s death to be straight out of an action movie, except original.”

“Isn’t it, now? If you say so.” Lindsey gulped down the last of her tea (it was ridiculously cold from the altitude) and uncrossed her legs as she leant further back into a window over the right wing of the plane.

Jimmy, from his perch on top of the plane’s top fin, threw his empty coffee cup down into the clouds. Lindsey looked up, eyebrows scrunching irately.
“Oi, littering’s bad, you know? What if you hit a bird? Or even worse, what if it falls into the ocean and gets eaten by a fish that goes on to have a chronic disease and DIE?!”

Jimmy shrugged non-committedly.

“I’m not even sure that’s possible. Hellbucks cups are biodegradable and they’re from a completely different dimension. We have absolutely nothing to worry about. Heck, we’re demons. Why do we care?”

“Because we still have the capacity to be good! Like that Uri kid.” Lindsey peered into the plane, seeing their target slap his brother with a copy of People Magazine. Snapping her fingers, her empty coffee cup disappeared.

“Say, Lyn-Z. What’s the chance that Gerard Way will be blown up by a terrorist?”

Lindsey stopped staring into the plane like a creep and her short tail twitched in irritation.

“You just offended a billion people!”

“Who cares if we offended them with the mere mention of terrorists? It’s not like they can kill a couple of demons sitting on a passenger jet.”

“What if Way was one of that billion?”

“Hey, now. He can’t hear us.”

Lindsey sighed in defeat. That much was true, judging from how carefree his interactions with his brother were. No doubt he knew they were there, but…

“If I could kill this kid with my bare hands, I think I could actually go through another 20,000 HY of demonhood.” Jimmy sighed wistfully as he looked up and burnt his eyes looking directly at the sun.

“Lindsey, let’s go home!” Jimmy grabbed his eyes as blood trickled down his arms. Hell was a very dark place, after all. Demon eyes weren’t meant for this.

Lindsey shook her head in exasperation. It’s not like planes were very comfortable on the outside, anyway. And with Jimmy’s eyes bleeding, they couldn’t do much right now.

“Ugh, fine, Jimmy.”

Both disappeared with a poof.

-Meanwhile, Hell Academies, Hell-

Today was not a good day for Pete Wentz.

He had woken up in the hot, humid and horrible place that Pete, when he was human, thought was just another figment of the Christians’ imaginations.

Pete had woken up in Hell.

Running his hands through his short, dark brown hair (making sure to negotiate around his new horns, of course), he walked slowly with the other newborn demons into the sleek, modern building their guides called the Hell Academies.
He wasn’t sure what he was expecting when he walked in, but he sure didn’t expect an old-style classroom with benches and bloody *inkwells* and everything.

The teacher at the front gestured to the entire area.

“It’s a heritage-listed site, this part. All the modern stuff is for the few of you who want to take any optional courses.”

Well, looks like Pete would never see them.

Pete took a seat in the middle of the left half of the room. It wasn’t as occupied and it made him less conspicuous than if he sat in the front or the back.

His teacher took the form of a middle-aged man in a wheelchair. Maybe he was nearing the end of his life? Pete was told demons aged the same way as humans, but slower. The man had impressive ram-like horns which curled around his head (vaguely like Princess Leia, Pete thought), and he wore a black bandanna and sunglasses. The rest of his body was hidden behind a large desk, so Pete shifted his attention to the demon next to him.

That demon, leaning casually on the wall, hid their face inside a blue dotted motorcycle helmet. They wore a white crop-top with *NOISE* emblazoned on the front, and blue leggings. Raising their hand, a simple click of their fingers silenced the entire room.

"Welcome to hell, motorbabies. I’m Doctor Death Defying, but if that's too much of a mouthful, you can call me Steve," spoke the first demon. Dr Death Defying (Steve?) raised his hand lazily.

“Dr D is fine, anyway. That there’s Show Pony, my protégé.”

Show Pony waved and skated around the room slowly (Pete did not see those rollerblades earlier), and gestured as they spoke.

“Welcome to demon school, kids. Lesson number 1 is timelines. Dr D, could you explain that to them?” Show Pony then stopped and leant against one of the pillars in the back corner, just out of Pete’s peripheral vision.

Dr D wheeled out from under the desk and a stick of white chalk materialised in his hand.

“We can only make estimates, but this is the approximate conversion. 1 year in hell is 1 day on earth. 1 year on earth is 1 day in heaven. Nirvana has no time. The end.”

Pete contemplated saying that Hell had shitty teachers, but decided against it. Suddenly, a small sound piqued his attention.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

“Pony. Stop.” Dr D pointed an accusing finger at the other demon. Show Pony stopped whatever they were doing and shrugged, and a small chisel fell out of their hands and clacked on the wooden floor. After a few seconds, it went up in smoke.

“Pony, go to earth and fuck things up there. Seriously, motorbaby. I can’t have you killing a protected building, even with my political power. Satan would dust us both if this place collapsed.” Dr D sighed and Show Pony giggled as they disappeared with a poof.

Pete wasn’t sure what to think. Hell was a very *different* place.
“Mikey, it costs $3 for a choc-chip cookie. I refuse to pay $3 for a 2.5 inch piece of baked good.” Gerard pointed to the tempting picture of a cookie in the airplane menu.

“We don’t get a cookie with our meal?” Mikey had snatched Gerard’s copy of People Magazine and leant forward in his seat, engrossed in a story about what looked like Kim Kardashian and her ass.

“Pfft, no. They give us yoghurt. It’s nice, but I’m really craving the cookie right now. You’re richer than me; can you buy one for me?” Gerard leant his head on Mikey’s shoulder, looking up with puppy eyes and a child-like pout. Mikey looked down at him blankly.

“No way. You can either pay the monopoly their ridiculous price or wait half a day until we can get a pack from Walmart.” Mikey pushed Gerard’s head off his shoulder, making sure to pinch Gerard’s head painfully.

“Why must airplane food be so expensive, Mikey?” Rubbing where Mikey’s nails had assaulted his precious scalp, Gerard continued staring at the menu.

“There’s no competition, Gerard. They’re the only supplier of cookies in the area, so they can drive up the price as much as they want. And since you’re really fucking desperate for a cookie, you’re going to pay whatever it takes to get the fucking cookie.”

As if on cue, a baby from a few rows behind them started crying. Mikey closed the magazine and hit his head on the back of the seat in front of him.

“Why didn’t you get the noise-cancelling headphones like I told you, huh?” Gerard smirked as he got his iPod Nano out and turned up the volume on the Misfits.

-New Jersey Academies (henceforth NJA), after school-

“Finally! I thought I was gonna die in Maths class.” Frank dragged his heels out of the school building, after having to swipe his card at the door five million times because it too was under repair. Everything seemed to be broken in the school. Welcome to the public school life.

Like seriously, what was the point of all these cool-ass things if they couldn’t afford to maintain them?

“It wasn’t that bad, was it, Frank?” Ray’s afro bobbed as he jogged up to catch up to him. His over-sized pink backpack made him look a little bit like a tortoise.

“Oh, I guess that’s true. Miss Orzechowski was in a good mood today.” Frank grabbed his phone and turned it back on.

“Hey, is that a message from Mikey? I haven’t heard from him nor Gee since they left for Thailand.” Ray craned his head over Frank’s shoulder (not that he needed to, Ray was a head taller than Frank already, and was still growing).

Mikeyway: we’ll be at airport at 5 ish

Mikeyway: b there 2 pick us up or ull go mia

That was sent right after he turned his phone off at lunch. And of course, right now was 3:10. He had a couple of hours to get to the airport.
“Agh, fuck. Ray, is Bob free this afternoon?” Frank spotted Bob finally walking out of school but really couldn’t be bothered waiting for him.

“Yeah, he could take us. His car’s in the parking lot. Wait for him first, though.”

Bob, after a million years of slow walking, finally caught up to the two waiting at the carpark gates.

“Bob, can you take us to the airport? Mikey and Gee need someone to pick them up,” Ray asked.

Giving only a silent nod, Bob trailed into the parking lot, and Ray and Frank followed behind.

Frank decided to use this time to call his mum.

“Hello? Frankie, when will you be home?”

“Hi, ma. Mikey wanted me to go and pick him up at the airport today, so can I go?”

“Sure, sweetie. Be home before 6:30, alright? And remember my rules?”

“Yes, ma. No sex, no illegal drugs, no alcohol and no getting preg – er, stealing IB exams.”

“Close enough. Stay safe, my little marshmallow.”

“Bye, mum.”

Frank pocketed his phone, and wondered why Bob thought it was a good idea to park so far away.

Bob then stopped suddenly to unlock the car, and Frank almost tripped trying to not run into him.

Ray jumped into the passenger seat, despite not having claimed shotgun. Eh, whatever.

“This is my car. Get in.”

“Why is it pink?”

True to Frank’s question, Bob’s car was a fluoro pink hot-rod. The hot-rod part was cool, but that was second to the fact that the car was fully spray-painted an obnoxious shade of fluoro highlighter pink.

“Long story short, my cousin Greta got the car, and would only give it to me if she could choose the colour and write her name inside the chassis. I was pretty desperate at the time, so she got both her wishes. In fact, if I open the hood, you’ll see her name on the inside. Now get in. I have a bone to pick with Mikey Way.”

-Way Brothers’ plane, meanwhile-

“Gee, what’s wrong?” Mikey asked while petting his plush unicorn Charlie (which had come out sometime in the last 20 minutes).

“Your protectors are serenading your life again.” Gerard glared at the fuzzy forms of Mikey’s protectors, Freddie Mercury and David Bowie, who shrugged and continued singing.

The ghost of Freddie Mercury had always been Mikey’s protector and, ever since Gerard had discovered his ability to see spirits, had always been serenading his life. David Bowie, after he died, decided to come and join him, making the constant din five times worse.
Gerard, after discovering them in spirit form, had completely lost his taste for their music.

“It’s the terror of knowing what this world is about,” sang Freddie.

“Watching some good friends screaming, ‘I’m a celebrity, get me out of here!’” sang Bowie, and Freddie put a hand on his friend’s shoulder, shutting him up.

“David, I don’t think that’s right.”

“Is that so, Freddie? Being a ghost does take a few things away from you.”

“Like your memory? Well, I’ve forgotten what you’re supposed to sing, too.”

Both ghosts laughed obnoxiously.

Gerard rolled his eyes at the exchange so hard he felt as if he had almost dislocated them.

“Can you both shut up?” he whispered low enough so only they and Mikey could hear.

“Well, excuse me, Princess G. Don’t mind us old folks,” laughed Bowie. Princess G was a nickname that had stuck to him as a result of Gerard’s destructive bitch fits. Even Mikey used it occasionally.

Gerard lifted his head enough to glare sideways at the pair.

“Did you just quote Legend of Zelda on me?”

Bowie and Freddie grinned.

“Yes, and we’ll be waiting for you at the airport, spoilsport!”

With that, both ghosts disappeared.

Gerard let out an exasperated whine as he snatched Charlie from Mikey and hugged it closer. Mikey had had Charlie since he was a child, and it got restored in Thailand with much nicer fake fur than it originally had.

“Mikes, my life is a very bad soap,” Gerard wailed.

Mikey just snatched back Charlie and passed Gerard his crappy airplane pillow.

“If you sleep, you’ll forget all your problems. Sleep is like drugs, but better,” Mikey replied.

Gerard promptly took that advice.

-En route to the airport, Bob’s car-

“Turn on your indicator before you beep me, motherfucker!” Bob seethed as he turned a corner.

Frank giggled at his friend’s behaviour. For a quiet guy like Bob, nobody would have expected him to have such extreme reactions to people misbehaving on the road.

Ray had fished out an apple from his bag in the meantime and the crunch of him eating could be heard over the ambient rumble of the car on the road.

“Hey, Bobert, how long to go?” Frank asked.
“Eh, about 20 minutes if this speeding bastard in front of us doesn’t crash into something.” Bob slammed his hand on the horn, scaring away the birds in the trees lining the road and Ray, whose hair bobbed as he flinched.

The idiot in front of them took no notice of Bob’s extreme road rage.

Ray took a final bite of his apple as Bob turned onto the highway. Noticing that there was no bin in the car, he rolled down the window and threw the apple core out. By some miracle (or curse), it hit a motorcyclist (with an open helmet) in the face.

“Dag nab you whippersnappers! I’ll tell on you!” the motorcyclist could be heard shouting before Ray shut the window and Bob turned left on an intersection.

“Frank, you right? You look like an emo music video on a sunny day.” Ray turned to face Frank, an uncharacteristically bemused smile on his face and a weird glint in his brown eyes.

“I am emo, Ray, at least in my soul. And it’s much too sunny. What, did you expect me to sing?” Frank rolled his eyes.

“Of course! I don’t know; make something up,” Ray shrugged, grinning at the prospect of Frank ad-libbing something and failing.

Sighing, Frank sang the first thing that came to his head.

“If we wait, it may be too late…”

-On Bob’s car, at the same time-

“Why didn’t we just stick with Gerard this entire time? The pink is burning my eyes.” Patrick Stump pulled his fedora down further over his face. The white feathers on his folded wings flapped wildly in the wind.

“Would you spend a ridiculously long time with Bowie and Freddie? I’d rather burning to death on this car, thanks.” Brendon Urie didn’t have a hat to shield himself from the sun, and instead had taken off his gold blazer and used it as a shawl. His pointed tail floated with the breeze.

Patrick and Brendon were Gerard’s protectors, and like their ward, absolutely detested Mikey’s protectors. Despite being an angel and a demon, respectively, they both cared for Gerard a lot, but…

“I bet you wish you were with your wife right now, Trick.” Brendon, making sure his blazer didn’t blow away, nudged Patrick’s shoulder roughly.

“Shut up, Beebo.” Patrick rolled his eyes.

…they didn’t care so much for each other.

Spotting an apple core fly out the front right window and hit a motorcyclist in the face, Patrick gasped, because that’s what all good angels are supposed to do.

“What is with these kids? Jeesh, if they weren’t destined to help Gerard, I would have told them off in their dreams!”

“I dunno, Trick. ’S pretty funny,” Brendon laughed, his large canines standing out from his face.

“Your oversized forehead is funny,” Patrick retorted, slapping away a stray leaf.
“For an angel, you’re pretty rude.”

“For a demon, you look ridiculous. Wearing gold like that is pretty tacky, you know?”

Brendon looked down at his outfit: white shirt, gold bow-tie, gold pants and brown shoes, accessorised with gold cufflinks and the chain of a gold pocket watch. It was quite a lot of gold for one outfit, maybe a little bit too much gold. Maybe for once, Patrick was right.

“Ouch.”

That still didn’t soften the metaphorical stab to Brendon’s heart.

-Saporta mansion, meanwhile-

Scratching the back of his neck, Gabe Saporta continued to write down lyrics for yet another song about his unrequited love, Bob Bryar. However, the pen had stopped flowing with his ideas as he felt a very strong heated gaze that disappeared every time he turned his head.

Gabe’s parents were always away on tour, so he was usually used to the quietness of the family’s much-too-large house. The once serene silence gave way to choking foreboding as he turned back once again to the half-full sheet of A4 paper. Turning back to the doorway of his room, Gabe swore he saw a glimpse of a human-like figure.

“H-hello?” he called out feebly. After a few seconds of silence, Gabe shook his head and turned around. He couldn’t be scared of his own house!

Gabe read over what he had already wrote for Bob.

Bob.

You are my life and my light. Please marry me.

Gabe scrunched his forehead in annoyance. This was a lot less creative than what he usually did!

“Bob, why can’t you just be mine, already?” Gabe hit his forehead on the wooden desk, narrowly missing the glass inkwell to his left. The force of the impact sloshed the black ink in the well enough for a few stray splotches to hit the piece of paper. Gabe paid them no heed.

A shuffling sound behind him had Gabe straightening immediately and looking around. A flash of sky blue in his peripheries had him turning around in his chair and facing a person wearing a blue motorcycle helmet, a white crop top and polka dot leggings. The stranger placed a hand on their hips, pointed tail swinging behind them.

“Kid. You want to take his heart? Well, I have a deal for you.”

-At the airport, a bit later-

Being a Thursday afternoon, it didn’t take long for Bob to find a parking spot close to the airport terminal’s entrance.

Ignoring the looks he got from other patrons upon exiting his car, Bob pocketed the parking lot ticket and locked the car as Ray and Frank walked ahead of him.

“Mikey better not have brought in anything questionable from Thailand. I am so done with bailing myself out in school that I’m not bailing him out,” Frank spoke as they entered the much-too-cold arrivals terminal. Bob jogged up to them a few seconds later.
“What’s the time, anyway? I want to know how long I can play Happy Home Designer before Mikey and Gee come.” Ray looked over at Bob, who looked at his watch.

“4:30.”

“We’re pretty early. Knowing Mikey, he’ll be out of customs at 5 sharp because he knows how to predict time and shit,” Frank mumbled distractedly as he read a text from Mikey.

Mikeyway: we landed n hopefully they dnt hold g up 4 bringing weird shit
Mikeyway: i ddnt bring anythng weird so unless theres crack on my clothes i should be out by 5
Mikeyway: pls tell me ur already here

Frank took the liberty to reply as the group sat as close as they could to the door from customs.

Frnk: We just got here
Frnk: Bob n Ray took me

Mikeyway: fckin cheat m8
Frnk: You only said to be here by 5 XD
Mikeyway: smartass
Mikeyway: brb ill b with u soon
Frnk: Don’t die mofo

Ray was designing a fire-themed house in his game, so Frank decided to help.

“Hey, why don’t you do a sign saying “Welcome to Hell”?”

Ray’s eyes rolled around in thought.

“That’s a pretty good idea. What about having tiki torches around the bed?”

“I’d have tiki torches around my bed.” Bob had also become interested and leant in towards Ray.

Frank was starting to understand why Ray really liked these games. They were hella fun.

-30 minutes later-

After Ray had finished his fire house, the three decided to stare at the customs door and point out anything cool in the ugly pattern. It was like cloud watching, but without the clouds. The amount of time the activity could waste was the exact same, and so Frank wasn’t too bothered that he could have done the exact same thing out in nature.

“That’s Fowler’s owl face near the railing over there,” Frank pointed out, his finger circling aimlessly in the air.

“To the left of that’s Schechter’s favourite bobble-head.” Bob gestured to the left.

“There’s Gaskarth’s face!” Ray swatted his hand upwards to direct their attention to the spitting likeness of Mr Gaskarth (Ray’s English teacher)’s face.
Frank spotted Mikey come out of the doors, but noticed that Ray and Bob were still distracted.

“Near the door, that looks like Mikey.”

Ray flinched.

“Frank, it is Mikey!”

Frank laughed as he ran up to hug his best friend.

“Mikey, I missed you!”

Mikey returned the hug as best he could with his luggage in the way.

“Frank, I’ve only been gone for a few months,” he hummed, a giggle coming out despite himself.

“I still missed you.”

Letting him go, Frank looked behind Mikey for any signs of Gerard.

“Where’s your brother?”

“He’ll be out soon. He declared some stuff so he’s getting that checked.”

In this time, Mikey and Frank had made it to where Ray and Bob were waiting. After accepting a tight hug from Ray and a nod from Bob, Bob made grabbing motions with his right hand.

“You still haven’t returned my copy of Tekken 7.”

“I have it right here. I was really fucking horrified when I found out I still had it, man.” Mikey scratched his head a little bit under his beanie while he rooted around in his backpack. When Bob got his game back, a small smile tugged on his lips.

Gerard chose that moment to stagger out of customs, completely wiping the smile off Bob’s face like a stain off a window.

Ray bounded over and hugged him, causing Gerard to flail on the spot.

“Gee, Ray, get out the way. People need to get past you,” Mikey shouted. “Oh, that rhymed,” he added, sotto voce.

Gerard and Ray then dawdled over to where the group were standing near a small brochure stand.

Frank stood back a little bit from the group, just taking in how Mikey and his brother had changed. Even after only a few months (years, in Gerard’s case), both had come back almost unrecognisable.

Mikey exuded the same confident yet lazy aura, but had changed the way he looked dramatically. When he had left, most of his wardrobe consisted of hoodies, band shirts and jeans. Coming back, he kept his “precious” beanie, but with his collared shirt, casual tie and dress pants, Mikey’s wardrobe had taken a turn for the semi-formal. He was still Mikey, with the glasses perched on the end of his nose and the blank look in his eyes, but upgraded. Frank mentally filed away this transformation as “Mikey EX”.

Gerard, however, was most definitely not the same shy, chubby high-schooler he had been. Frank was so tempted to ask Mikey who this dashing stranger was and who had disposed of Gerard. His hair had been cut short and dyed blond, accentuating rather than hiding his eyes, and his usual
nervous smile was replaced with a smirk. A (surprisingly clean) Batman shirt sat underneath a leather jacket that emphasised his now lithe figure, and Frank found himself mentally (thankfully not actually) drooling. Maybe if he saw Gerard often enough, he’d go gay. Or bi, depending on how many attractive girls he saw in the meantime. Gerard was enough to blow any hot girl out of the water though, so to speak. And thus, Frank found himself doomed to become gay. *This* transformation was filed away as “Gerard NEO” and “I have finally discovered my true sexuality”.

“What took you so long, Gee?” Mikey had now turned to his brother, who jumped from the sudden tap on his shoulder.

Maybe Gerard, like Mikey, hadn’t really changed too much.

“Oh, um, the customs officers were all trying to get my number. I didn’t give it, though.” Gerard giggled nervously.

Frank raised an eyebrow. When he had seen Gerard last, he was lucky if he even got a second look.

“Are you kidding me? Since when did you turn into such a babe magnet?” Ray jumped on the spot excitedly.

“He was already a babe magnet when I got there,” Mikey replied, “While I was with him, he had all these girls visiting him and taking us places.”

Gerard sighed. “They all had crushes on me, I swear! But they’re so nice to me, I’m really reluctant to tell them that I’m a flaming homosexual.”

Frank cheered internally because he had a chance, then scolded himself for doing something so un-Frank-like. Gerard probably sold his soul to the devil to get his magnetic charisma. Therefore, Gerard was secretly evil. Frank decided that thought would help stop his sudden and dangerous attraction, because if Gerard told Frank to jump off a cliff right now, he would have done it yesterday.

“That’s kind of evil,” said Frank. “*Like you,*” he forced himself to add mentally.

“You’ve learnt from the best, my dearest brother,” Mikey laughed.

“I-i-ignorance is bliss, though, isn’t it? And Thailand would be impossible to live in without them helping me.” Gerard flopped his head onto Mikey’s shoulder, whining. “Mikes, I’m tired!”

“Should we go home, then? Bob, you know where we live, right?” Mikey petted his brother’s head, and turned to Bob.

Bob nodded.

“I moved, so now I live across the road from your place.”

“What are we waiting for, then? It’s cold and we all want out,” Frank complained. The less time he had to spend with Gerard, the better. Frank lived a lot closer to the airport than Bob did, and since it was a school night, there was no chance of a party being held that he’d be forced to attend. For now, Frank was safe from Gerard’s wily charms.

Whoa, wait, “wily”? Another symptom of Schechter-itis was using ridiculous words like “wily” and “nincompoop” (both were words that frequently came out of the teacher’s mouth). Frank prayed to whatever higher powers existed that he could work out a cure before he turned into Brian Schechter II.
“Yeah, I agree. Lead the way, Bob.” Gerard removed himself from Mikey and passed a bulky backpack to Ray.

“Rayman, can you hold this?”

“Uh, sure.” Ray shouldered the backpack awkwardly on top of his own.

Bob and Mikey hurried to the car (Mikey had taken the majority of the luggage with him), while Gerard and Ray walked and chatted, Frank trailing a small distance behind them.

After a laugh-fest following the Ways’ discovery of Bob’s car, all five piled in: Bob and Ray were in the front, and Frank had been squeezed between the Way brothers in the back.

With the mental resolution to avoid Gerard for the rest of his days, it was just his luck that he could feel the smooth leather of his jacket smooshed on his arm. Frank cursed whatever higher power had decided to tempt him with those oh-so-sweet hazel eyes… No! Bad Frank! Frank mentally slapped himself.

“What day is it today?” Mikey asked.

“It’s Thursday, dumbass,” Gerard replied.

“Agh, damn, we can’t party until tomorrow,” Ray added.

“We can’t do tomorrow or the weekend either, Ray! Don’t we have that stupid English presentation to prepare for?” Frank grumbled. He wasn’t lying; everyone in the cohort had to ad lib an analysis of a text for 10 - 15 whole minutes. Frank and Ray were scheduled first up on Monday morning.

“Oh, that’s right, IOCs are on. We could do something small today, then. How does Starbucks sound?” Bob asked.

Everyone cheered.

-Jimmy and Lindsey’s apartment, Hell, in the meantime-

“Lindsey, as we have just seen, it is much too dangerous for us to go and do reconnaissance on the surface.” Jimmy paced along a wall in their small shared unit.

“You mean too dangerous for you? You’re the once whose eyes started bleeding like some saint.” Lindsey sat bored on their shabby wooden dining table, taking a small sip of her third cup of coffee that day.

“Oh shush, let me have my cool moment, Lindsey.”

“Jimmy, I can’t let you go out into the world by yourself. Hey, why don’t we ask Steve for one of his greenhorn demons? The new ones aren’t as sensitive to sunlight and are weak enough spiritually to blend in.”

“Lindsey, you are a genius!” Jimmy suddenly wrapped his arms loosely around Lindsey’s shoulders, the latter’s tail swishing uncertainly. He left and went to the corner of the room where an antique telephone sat. “Hopefully Steve won’t mind me calling at this time,” he mumbled as he turned the dial.

-On top of Bob’s car, on the way to Starbucks-
“Why are you here?” Brendon had scooted closer to Patrick in an attempt to stay as far away as possible from Freddie and Bowie while not falling off the car. Since the sun had set a little, Brendon and Patrick weren’t so concerned about burning in the sun as they were of the two ghosts sitting half a metre away from them.

“We’re Mikey’s protectors. We have every right to be here.” Freddie turned to Bowie. “What song should we sing next?”

“How about nothing?” Patrick mumbled.

“Why don’t we have something light hearted to go with the mood?” Bowie replied, oblivious to Patrick’s remark.

“How about “We are the Champions”?” asked Freddie.

Bowie and Freddie gave each other a high-five. Brendon and Patrick gave each other an exasperated look.

“Do you want to join in?” Bowie asked.

“It’s fun to sing along!” added Freddie.

“Um, we’re good,” replied Brendon awkwardly.

“Your loss, then. Let’s start, David.” Freddie looked over at his friend, smiling expectantly.

“I’ve paid my juice…”

“David, that’s not –”

Patrick and Brendon promptly disappeared.

-Saporta mansion, at the same time-

“A deal? Where are we going with this, stranger?” Gabe may have been starstruck with unrequited love, but his mother raised no fool (despite her being absent for most of his life).

“Please, Show Pony or just Pony’s fine.” Show Pony stuck out their right hand, which Gabe shook tentatively.

Gabe eyed Show Pony’s tail warily.

“You’re not human, are you?”

Show Pony laughed raucously, a sound that clashed with their pastel attire.

“Hell, no, human. I’m a demon. And you’ll probably join me down south if you take the deal, but hey, at least you’ll have this… Bob character around your little finger for the rest of your human life.”

Gabe visibly flinched at the mention of Bob’s name.

“You can make Bob love me?” Gabe’s eyes widened in child-like wonder.

Show Pony shrugged.
“Of course. All for the price of your soul and eternal damnation when you die.”

“Do you have toilets in hell, at least?” Gabe smirked as he relaxed back into his chair, putting his feet on the bed.

“It’s damnation without relief, human. At least for you; we demons have perfectly usable toilets.” Show Pony rolled their eyes (not that Gabe could see through the helmet) and sat down on Gabe’s queen bed (making sure to avoid the latter’s feet).

Gabe sighed audibly, drawling, “My name’s Gabe.”

“Like Gabriel the angel?” Show Pony laughed again. “You’re most definitely not cut out to be an archangel like your namesake.”

That earned the demon a small kick to the side by Gabe’s sock covered feet. Show Pony promptly scooted over to their right, not wanting to be any nearer to smelly human feet.

“I didn’t name myself, Pony,” Gabe remarked tersely.

“I know, it was just funny.”

Gabe cleared his throat.

“Anyway, how is this deal going to work?”

“You sign this in blood and I get a picture of your man. Love is hard to induce, so we’ll need to do a bunch of rituals later. This is just binding us so we can work together better, you know?”

Gabe turned to his desk and grabbed a pin and an empty fountain pen cartridge. Stabbing the pin into his index finger, he let the blood fill the cartridge until it was a quarter full. Inserting the cartridge into one of his fountain pens, he tried to read the text on the paper. The letters swirled around and blurred in and out of his vision. Gabe wasn’t ready to reject Show Pony’s offer, however, and so he signed it nevertheless.

“Kids, don’t do a Gabe. Always read the fine print,” Show Pony mused, “Oh wait, you can’t.”

“You’re not going to read it?”

“Nah, as long as I get Bob…Oh! I have his picture.” Gabe went into the bottom drawer and pulled out a small Polaroid of a stocky blond boy, which Show Pony took and studied for a few moments. They pocketed it, made the contract disappear and clasped their hands together.

“I like your attitude! Here’s what we have to do…”

-Starbucks, a little bit later-

The Starbucks near Frank’s house was empty as the boys made their way inside. Frank lived in a quiet, relatively isolated neighbourhood, so this came to no surprise to any of them.

The shop itself had a much cosier atmosphere than most other coffee shops, but whether it was the soft lighting or the varnished wooden walls, none of them could pinpoint what exactly made the place different. A lone barista stood cleaning a cup behind the counter, making the place feel more like a bar than a coffee shop. Most of the time, 4pm onwards meant that employees could mess around because of the lack of people who drink coffee after mid-afternoon, and more often than not, you’d hear Avenged Sevenfold on the speakers rather than some generic jazz soundtrack.
Here, though, with the suburb being saturated by Christian housewives with sticks up their asses and an odd penchant for coffee at this time of day, this Starbucks didn’t have that freedom.

Choosing a small 70’s-style booth in the far corner of the shop, the boys squeezed themselves in as best they could. Frank and Mikey were on one side, while Gerard, Bob and Ray were on the other. Frank looked out the decorated window; the sun was setting and the window had fogged up slightly on the outside, hinting to the arrival of rain later that night.

Gerard glanced as discreetly as he could over to the small boy that had been sitting next to him for the last half an hour. Frank hadn’t grown very much since Gerard had left America around 3 years ago – in fact, he swore Frank was still the same height – but the seemingly permanent frown and sharp glint in his eyes made it very clear that Gerard wasn’t dealing with the same Frank he had known.

That was what made him all the more attractive.

Frank’s aura glowed like the cliché light at the end of the tunnel, and it was what caught Gerard’s eye right before Ray had tackled him at the airport. He could tell that Frank was really uncomfortable being around him, but a spiritual smokescreen around the boy prevented Gerard from probing any further.

This had never happened before; he’d have to ask Patrick or Brendon if they knew anything. Speaking of which, he hadn’t felt their presence since they left the airport…

Gerard snapped out of his thoughts as “Bohemian Rhapsody” started playing on the speakers. Groaning, he rested his head on the table with a small thump.

“Don’t worry about it. He really hates Queen,” Mikey explained.

Frank gasped.

“How could you hate Queen? They’re amazing! They’re why I love music as well. Mikey, what’s wrong with your brother?” he babbled.

Inside Frank’s head, alarm bells were going off in every direction and even into the seventh dimension. Queen were amazing and Gerard had absolutely no right to hate them. Maybe it was a matter of overexposure, but still, whatever he could use to curb this sudden gay crush was worth it. Breathing a mental sigh of relief, he filed this information away into “Reasons why I can hate Gerard”. But even so, if Gerard told him to go sacrifice his soul to Satan, he’d still do it. Hopefully Gerard had more flaws that –

“Guys, we should get coffee. We can complain about the music later, anyway.” Bob stood up to order at the counter, and everyone but Frank and Gerard did the same.

“Mikey, you know what I want,” both of them said at the same time.

Wait, what?

Gerard looked up and met Frank’s equally surprised eyes. They stared for what felt like a century until Ray slowly put his hand between them and waved rapidly.

“You can gaze into each other’s eyes later, lovebirds.”

Mikey made an amused sound.
“Gee, you want an Americano and Frank, you also want the Americano. Right?”

Both the aforementioned turned to Mikey and nodded mutely. They both liked the same coffee?

“You can go back to staring at each other now.”

Both shook their heads, vehemently refusing to meet each other’s gazes.

“No thanks,” Frank replied. Gerard’s eyes were so clear and deceptively innocent; if he looked into them any more than he had, he’d find himself falling – more – for the guy for sure.

“I’m good,” said Gerard. Frank’s eyes were really tempting to draw, but it’d be really creepy if he gave in to the urge right now.

Mikey rolled his eyes, exasperated. After staring at the two for another moment, he silently turned and slinked to the counter.

“Bob, Ray, what’d you get?” he asked.

“You can get drinks that aren’t on the menu here since we’re friends with the baristas. Ray got an affogato and I got the Vienna.” Bob gestured to the barista, who waved distractedly.

“Hmm, I’ll just stick with a latte, actually, but thanks for the offer, Bob.”

Ray turned to the barista.

“Jon, you heard what Frank and Gee wanted, right?”

“Two Americanos, I heard, and the cute guy in the glasses wants a latte. Oh, yes, I forgot to ask what size, Ray.” Jon glanced over to where Ray was standing briefly.

Mikey’s eyebrows raised momentarily before resuming their usual position.

“Don’t take it to heart; Jon calls every second guy cute,” Bob whispered.

“I feel so special, Bobert.” Mikey glanced over to his friend blankly.

“Venti, like us, please. We’ll be here a while,” Ray answered Jon, who nodded and returned to working the coffee machine.

“I really hate this place. Don’t bother paying; it’s on the house tonight. Manager ain’t ‘round, anyway.”

Ray, Bob and Mikey re-joined Frank and Gerard at their table.

“Jon Walker is the best barista in this area. He’s been thinking about opening his own coffee shop, actually. But property prices have sky-rocketed for a while so he has to wait until prices fall again,” said Ray as he sat down next to Gerard.

Frank glanced at him questioningly.

“How do you know this?”

Ray shrugged.

“My sister’s a real-estate agent and a friend of Jon’s as well. She’s going to let him know when she
“We are the champions, we are the champions…”

Frank straightened with a start and looked around frantically, catching everyone’s attention.

“What’s up, Frankenstein? You look like you got told that your mum was actually a potato or something.” Ray glanced around for the thing that surprised Frank. He turned up short.

“N-n-nothing, but I thought I heard “We are the Champions” playing somewhere,” Frank replied.

“Frank, your love for Queen is too much! Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5 is on the speakers right now.” Bob smirked almost unnoticeably.

“How would you know that, Bob? I thought you hated classical music,” Frank retorted.

“My sister is a professional violinist. She drilled all of this music knowledge into me.”

Frank risked a glance over to Gerard, whose mouth opened, eyes wide. After he blinked, though, Gerard’s expression was back to his normal goofy grin. He supposed it would be about Bob being learned in classical music; heck, even he was surprised. Frank turned his gaze away as he checked out the dessert case. “Should I get a cheesecake for Mum?”

Gerard could slightly make out the forms of Bowie and Freddie in the opposite corner of the shop from where they were sitting, singing “We are the Champions”. Mikey gave him a questioning glance, which Gerard answered with one of his own. “I have absolutely no idea; why are you asking me?!” Where were Pat and Bren when you needed them? Frank most definitely heard Bowie and Freddie just now.

“So Gee, what do you think?” Ray had turned to Gerard, who for the second time that day was snapped forcefully out of his thoughts.

“I missed the conversation, Rayman,” Gerard answered sheepishly.

“Oh!” Ray gave Mikey a mischievous glance, “we were just comparing Frank to an emo music video. Do you think he looks like one?”

“Uh,” Gerard stalled.

“Come on, Gee. You’ve been in daydream-land since you’ve been with Frank!” Mikey teased.
“Hey, give me some thinking time,” Gerard retorted, “Hmm, Frank doesn’t have the right aura to be in an emo music video. He’d suit a stage more, actually.”

Everyone at the table, excluding Gerard and Frank, “oohed” excitedly.

“Five bucks, Ray. I told you he wouldn’t let slip that he likes Frank.” Mikey kept his gaze on his brother as he made a “gimme” gesture with his left hand across the table.

Ray grumbled as he dug a crumpled $5 note from an overly cute Rilakkuma purse. He handed it to Mikey with a huff.

Gerard and Frank glanced away from each other. Frank was still denying having any romantic feelings for the man in front of him while Gerard was hoping to every higher power he knew that Mikey was joking. Well, his brother had definitely hit the jackpot, but he didn’t need to know that.

“Ray, Bob! Everyone’s coffee is ready. Did you guys want anything else?” Jon shouted from the counter.

As everyone got up to get their coffees, Frank walked to the counter and asked quietly, “Could I get the New York cheesecake to go, please?”

“Sure thing, small one. This for you, or…”

Frank decided to ignore his height being mentioned. It was a slightly sensitive thing for him.

“Nah,” Frank shook his head, “My mum loves the cheesecake here, and it’ll keep her in a good mood for a while.”

Jon nodded understandingly as he boxed the cheesecake and passed it over the counter.

“Your coffee’s already been taken over, by the way.”

Frank flinched a little in surprise.

“Oh? Um, thanks.”

When he walked back to the table, cheesecake in hand, Gerard pushed the mug of coffee across the table to him.

“I brought it over for you,” he said with a soft smile.

Frank looked up, blushing slightly. Is this guy trying to win him over? Because Gerard trying just made this game much harder for Frank to win. Thanks, whatever higher power decided to play with him. Thanks a lot. Both of them liking the same coffee was a lot to digest, but this… this took the metaphorical cake.

“Th-thanks.”

As Frank took a small sip from the cup, Gerard couldn’t resist the urge to draw this beautiful person any longer and pulled his sketchbook out of his bag. Opening to a blank page (it looked like he’d need a new book soon), he grabbed his favourite mechanical pencil (it was a skinny one he had consequently christened “Mikey II”) and just drew. Thankfully for him, Frank didn’t think much of his withdrawal from the conversation and started talking.

“Hey, Mikey, remember when you bought the coffee machine from Italy?” Frank looked over to his best friend, who looked up in thought.
“Oh, yeah, I still can’t work it. Why?”

“Latte is milk in Italian.” Frank grinned cheekily in anticipation.

Mikey looked away for a second, and his face bloomed to an almost content expression in realisation.

“I think I just learnt all the secrets of the universe.”

Frank giggled. Gerard’s lips quirked slightly in thinly veiled delight. What had possessed the higher powers to make Frank so perfect? No, he shouldn’t ask that; *don’t look a gift horse in the mouth* was the proverb, wasn’t it?

“You forgot an important one, actually,” Frank said after a beat.

Mikey looked back at him, confused.

“What is it?”

“Caffé latte is the button you press for a latte.”

Mikey turned his head, stared out the window and grinned.

“I feel so sm –”

“Pride is the failing of many, little grasshopper.” Bob looked up, smirking behind his cup.

Mikey’s face fell back to its usual expressionlessness.

“Bob! I was about to take a photo of him!” Ray whined, putting his (surprise, surprise) pink phone back into his pocket. Frank swore he could see the guy’s afro droop a little. Ray Toro was the poster child for cartoon logic, he thought.

Mikey pursed his lips slightly (at the thought of having a photo taken of him, Frank guessed).

“Ray, your phone has the same case as Mr Schechter’s and I have no idea how to feel about that.” Frank’s eyebrows scrunched a bit in confusion.

“There’s not many nice pink phone cases for Samsung phones, Frank. Deal with it.” Ray rolled his eyes and took another sip of his affogato.

Mikey finally realised that Gerard had stopped talking completely and was so engrossed in drawing that he didn’t even bother trying to cover what he was doing. He reached over and flicked his brother in the temple, but Mikey happened to look down as he was doing so.

“Whoa, Gee, that’s Frank you’re drawing, right?”

Gerard squealed and closed the sketchbook as fast as he could.

“No, it’s not!” He stuffed the sketchbook into his backpack and hugged it close. “This picture will never see the artificial light of this Starbucks, ever again!”

Oh, god. It was so obvious that Frank was exactly who he was drawing.

Mikey raised an indescribable eyebrow. Unlike everyone else in this story, Mikey’s eyebrows didn’t have any interesting features. It wasn’t like he cared, though. And he shouldn’t have,
because Mikey was so much more than just his eyebrows.

Ray grabbed the backpack and took out the generic black sketchbook because Gerard actually wanted it to see the light of the Starbucks again. Gerard was very roundabout like that, which still amused Ray to this day.

“It has now.” Ray leafed through the book until it fell on the last page that Gerard had drawn on.

The sketch was messy, but Frank’s features could be made out in the mess of lines: his faux-hawk, his alert eyes and one of his rare grins.

Frank himself blanked out in thought.

Gerard decided it would be a really good (albeit slightly too quick) time to ask him out, but because he was a shy idiot…

“Frank, please be my muse.”

…it didn’t come out quite right.

Mikey groaned and facepalmed in frustration. Gerard mentally mirrored his brother; he really wanted to throw himself off a cliff right now.

Frank looked up and for a moment his and Gerard’s eyes met. Gerard’s eyes had a hopeful shine to them but Frank’s frown just deepened.

“No.”

It took a Herculean effort (and then some) for Gerard to keep his face from changing expression.

Brendon had told him his newfound charisma would work with anyone and everyone and Gerard really regretted listening to him right now. The next time he saw that demon…

Mikey decided that he needed to break the silence before someone (read: he) choked to death from the tension.

“Gee, show everyone your drawings or something. You look like you’re about to cry.”

Frank snuck another glance of Gerard’s eyes and he could see a slight moistness that wasn’t there before. “I have successfully resisted the evil that is Gerard,” turned instantly into “Frank, you monster! He’s about to cry and you caused this.”

Frank mentally squashed that annoying little voice. He was succeeding, thank you very much. He totally did not feel sad or guilty at all. Ok, maybe a little bit.

Gerard flipped the pages of his sketchbook until he got to the very front.

It was a stylised caricature of Patrick and Brendon as comic book characters. Patrick was wearing a white toga and his usual exasperated expression, while Brendon wore his usual gold suit and was drawing on Patrick’s fedora with a Sharpie. It had actually happened, but that was something that Patrick wanted to keep to just the three of them.

“Their names are Patrick and Brendon. They’re characters I’ve had since I moved to Thailand,” Gerard lied. Nobody (except Mikey) had to know about his protectors. And of course, his protectors weren’t even here, so they didn’t have to know about this entire exchange.
“No matter how cliché the tropes get, angels and demons are always pretty cool,” Ray remarked.

Gerard laughed. If you didn’t know any better, that was most definitely true. He had had the same feelings when he had first discovered the two, but now they were like older siblings or very close friends. After the Sharpie incident, the awe had long worn off.

Gerard flipped past some anatomy studies until Mikey stopped him.

“Isn’t that the drawing you did when we both had that weird dream?”

Gerard had completely forgotten about drawing this picture. It depicted Mikey and a demon in a flower field making daisy chains. The demon had horns that drooped down like long pigtails (no, really, that was the only description he could think of), and sported a neat hairstyle most would call low-key emo.

“Mikey and I both had the same dream one night. This picture was basically the summary of what went on in Dreamland.”

“All I remember is being all “Pete! Let’s make some daisy chains!” and giggling like some pre-teen.”

Frank smirked slightly, intrigued. Mikey had told him about that dream the night after he had it, almost as hysterically as he was acting now. Frank hadn’t thought much of it at the time, but now that he knew Gerard had the same dream…

“That’s either coincidence or a really fucked up situation,” Frank thought aloud.

…that was very interesting. It totally proved Gerard had some evil powers, at least. If powers existed. Whatever. Gerard was evil, and that was that. Not even his cute button nose could tell Frank otherwise.

“Well, um, it kinda was,” Gerard laughed uncomfortably, “Anyway, there’s a bunch more pictures of Pat and Bren here.”

Gerard slowly flipped through pages and pages of Patrick and Brendon’s interactions over the past year: there were occasions where they were struggling with technology, eating new foods and fighting childishly with each other. He was thankful neither of them were here to reprimand him for showing their most intimate moments. Well, as intimate as frenemies (both refused to admit they were best friends) could get, anyway.

He stopped on a less light-hearted drawing.

“I had a nightmare once. It had these two demons here messing shit up,” Gerard pointed to two demons: one had glasses and pigtails, and the other really crazy (and obviously styled) hair, “and this one came out of the ground and ate some kid,” he pointed to another made of fire.

Mikey turned to his brother and looked at him with a slight frown. A warm light sat above him, accentuating the bags under his eyes (and glasses).

“You never told me about that, Gee.”

Gerard shrugged.

“It’s not like it’d happen for real, right?”
“Welcome to your final day of compulsory lessons, motorbabies!” Dr Death Defying raised a hand in greeting as he wheeled himself to the front of the classroom.

Everyone else in the room cheered. It was the final day of sitting through Dr D’s horrid teaching for everyone, since he didn’t take the optional classes (“They’re better at their fields than I am,” he had said).

“Well, our last lesson is about the various species you will meet and some you may not in your demonic lifetime.” Dr D wrote up a list. “Demons are us, of course. You can feel that we’re your kin, but visual features are horns, tails and occasionally wings for some sub-species. Imps usually have very short horns and tails, while succubi have much longer tails and wings. The details don’t really matter much to you, though, so take a look at your textbooks for more examples if you want.”

Dr D then pointed to the next item on the list, visibly shuddering.

“Angels are our physical opposites. They all have feathery wings, but if they’re falling apart, that’s a fallen angel and you should probably run in the opposite direction. They suck, and don’t bother being nice to them. Unless you’re Brendon Urie, who’s protecting a human with one. Don’t be a Brendon.”

Small giggles bubbled around the room. Pete just sank further into his seat.

Dr D coughed a bit, recovering quickly.

“Humans. People. Homo sapiens sapiens. Whatever you want to call them, they are the most annoying species on this planet right after angels. Sure, some of them are stupid enough to summon us demons, but they are mostly destructive, evil and selfish. Do not make friends with humans. They mostly suck. Unless you think they’ll grow up to be not a jerk, then feel free to help them or protect them or whatever.”

One shy hand went up, which snapped back down to its owner when Dr D glared at them, tail snapping indignantly.

“No, don’t even THINK about falling in love with a human.”

Pete sighed. Free love, his ass. Couldn’t he just be human again?

“There’s also different types of spirits, including but not limited to devas, ghosts, fairies and leprechauns. They’re mostly weak and friendly, but ghosts in particular have been known to kill some of the more unsuspecting ones of us. Be careful with these guys.”

Dr D rubbed out the list and wrote in a new one.

“There are countless worlds but these six are the main ones that everyone knows about. They are Heaven, Hell, Middle Ground, the astral plane, the etheric realm and the devic realm. Heaven is where angels live, Hell is here, Middle Ground is where the humans live, the astral plane is the plane in between all of these realms, the etheric realm is on Halley’s Comet and the devic realm is spread out in Middle Ground like a spider web.”

Dr D rubbed everything on the board out and everyone cheered.

“That’s it for your compulsory lessons, demons! Just one last thing before you go, though.
Two demons materialised next to Dr D. One of them had long, straight horns that pointed back and crazy mad scientist-like hair. The other had short black pigtails and oversized hipster glasses.

“Jimmy and Lindsey here want one of you for a recon job. They’ll look after you and make sure you settle in ok, too, so don’t worry about that. Anyone?”

The two demons at the front looked a little out of it, but Pete didn’t want to spend any longer in this building, and it’d make his transition into hell a little easier with mentors. He raised his hand, causing a surprised expression to quickly cross Dr D’s face. The imp with the pigtails looked taken aback as well but nodded after a moment.

“We’ll take you. Come with us.”

-Pete had trailed behind Jimmy and Lindsey awkwardly until they had reached the dingy apartment the two called home.

Now, he was sitting awkwardly on a small wooden stool at the worm-eaten dining table as the two of them stared at him, possibly judging him with their minds.

“So kid, what’s your name?” Jimmy spoke first, having a strangely nasally voice for his weary yet wild appearance.

“Pete. Pete Wentz.” Pete could feel himself shrinking back into the stool, which really wasn’t normal for him because he was an extrovert and he was supposed to be outgoing. The real Pete would be out-extrovert-ing these demons sitting across from him and making them as uncomfortable as he was feeling now. This shy demon sitting on the stool like a scared child was not Pete. Pete was not this shy mess sitting on the stool. It was a point that needed emphasis.

“Cool. I’m Lindsey Ballato and that’s Jimmy Euringer.” Lindsey smiled and gestured to her left.

“Jimmy Urine!” Jimmy retorted, glaring at his friend.

“He prefers that,” Lindsey shrugged casually. There was a small drag of her coffee cup on the table as she picked it up and took a sip, but the awkward silence pervaded the atmosphere again once she was done.

After a beat or two, Pete was eager to get this over and done with.

He mumbled timidly, “Anyway, what do you want me to do?”

“We need to get information on this human, but the last time we went, Jimmy looked at the sun and burnt his eyes.” Lindsey sighed exasperatedly as Jimmy groaned, clearly embarrassed if his pinking cheeks were anything to go by. Jimmy’s eyes had healed quickly when both descended back into Hell, but there were still tell-tale tender sunburns around his eyes.

Pete made the mental note to not look at the sun, but he realised he already knew the advice from watching the Transit of Venus a little bit before he died. “Don’t look at the sun with the naked eye; you will go blind!” the flyer he received had said. Maybe Jimmy and Lindsey had been down here for so long they forgot how dangerous the sun was – well, Jimmy did, at least. Pete promptly lost faith in the competence of his “mentors”. So much for wanting his human life over with; he wanted so badly to go back to earth.
“So where do I come into this?” Pete took a small sip of the coffee Lindsey had made him; a small smile gracing his face as he finally had a sip of good coffee for a while (the last time was 3 years before he died, right before he lost all his money and his life went to shit).

“You’re a new demon, so you know how to fit in the human world better. Be careful, though; the guy we want to kill is a psychic and can see spirits.” Lindsey visibly shuddered, as if the very thought of their target was the very image of disgust.

“That means you gotta learn to hide, Peter Panda!” Jimmy laughed condescendingly, earning a quiet growl from Pete. The latter composed himself after debating punching his mentor in the face and deciding it would be a very horrible idea.

“Please don’t call me that,” Pete pleaded.

“I think Peter Panda is cute!” Lindsey cooed, stroking the side of Pete’s face like one would a child. He fought the urge to shy away, knowing that these demons were much more powerful than he was.

“Lindsey, not you too!” Pete whined. The effort he made for them to stop was futile, because they just bounced back with greater force. Figuratively, of course.

“As your bosses, we have every right to call you what we want,” Jimmy drawled, smirking triumphantly.

“Fine,” Pete huffed.

“By the way, we’re going to need to teach you how to open portals and how to hide your energy. Come along with us to the park.” Jimmy stood up and grabbed his coat from the rack at the door, Lindsey standing up to do the same. Pete awkwardly stood up and pushed the stool out of the way, following them like a lost puppy.

“Wait, are we talking the one near Cerberus?” Lindsey enquired.

“Yeah, Lyn-Z.” Jimmy replied absently, having grabbed his keys and being in the process of opening the door.

“What’s with Cer–” Pete was interrupted as Lindsey grabbed his wrist.

“You’ll find out soon enough,” she chastised.

-Outside NJA, the Monday after Frank’s English presentations-

Gabe Saporta had never realised how cool it was to have a demon roller skating behind him the entire time. At first it was a little disconcerting, but because of his lack of personal space, that initial feeling wore off quite quickly.

He walked to school because his house was really close, and Show Pony had insisted on tagging along with him “just to take a squiz” at his school.

Turning the corner and ignoring that annoying poodle that barked incessantly when Show Pony tried to stroke it through the mesh fence, Gabe finally caught sight of his school.

He turned suddenly when the poodle stopped barking.

“Pony, what the fuck?”
“It was being mean!”

The dog was hanging upside-down in the air, legs flailing helplessly. There was a small pink aura that Gabe assumed to be Show Pony’s magic.

Show Pony giggled as it floundered pedantically, trying to land safely on the ground.

Looking around and relieved in finding that the street was practically deserted, Gabe whisper-shouted, “Pony, put the dog down. I gotta get to school.”

The aura around the poodle dissipated as it landed with a thud and ran back to the safety of the porch, trembling and growling pathetically at Show Pony. The latter flipped it off and glided back behind Gabe, who had already started walking.

“That’s my school over there, in case you’re wondering.” Gabe pointed to the tall building that they were approaching.

“You go to school in an office building?” Show Pony asked.

“Nah, we’re just too cool to conform.”

The NJA school building towered with the sleekness of a typical skyscraper, the morning sun reflecting brightly off the mirror tiles that adorned the sides. The place looked quite picturesque, with the well-groomed garden and fountain before the front entrance and the parks surrounding the school. Gabe had planted some of the hydrangeas that now sat around the fountain, which Gerard Way had designed and made.

The fountain itself was impressive; its figurines held the regal postures of old Greek or Roman statues, but was really just a mismatch of superheroes and sci-fi characters standing on a bowl (he’d know, he’d seen it made). Chewbacca spat out the main spurt of water, with smaller ones coming out of Hulk’s chest, the Alien’s mouth, and Superman’s eyes. While not being a large fountain, the plastic of the figurines had been painted over to look like real granite, giving the centrepiece a very professional and expensive look.

“That’s not real stone, is it?”

“Nah, it’s plastic. One of our alumni made that for a project.”

“Hmm. How impressive.” Show Pony circled the fountain slowly, inspecting it.

They re-joined Gabe, and asked the latter, “Gabe, tell me about what you do here.”

“Well, this is just school. The teachers want us to suffer, and there’s not much more than that.”

NJA was a selective public school, which made it an affordable option for people who were truly talented at something yet didn’t have the money to go to more prestigious places. They all did a different curriculum called the International Baccalaureate (AKA Satan’s curriculum to the students).

Gabe’s parents may have been rich, but they weren’t willing to spend their hard-earned money on their “wayward” son. So while many of his social peers went to prestigious private schools, Gabe used his musical talent to enter this (quite sub-par, in his opinion) public school. Luckily for him, the school had a decent education and Bob was attending as well.

Speaking of which, there was Bob walking into school right now.
Gabe ran up to him calling, “Bobby! I wrote a song for you!”

Show Pony smirked under their helmet, slipping from sight.

-At the lockers, before homeroom-

Frank dragged his heels through the crowded hallways of his school. The school thought it was a good idea to stick the lockers all in one place, and for someone as small as he was (he couldn’t keep denying that incontestable fact, as much as he wanted to) it was a struggle getting to his locker. It was located (quite conveniently) in the middle of the biggest group of lockers.

Luckily for him, Ray’s locker was right next to his, and if Frank stuck behind him when they went to the lockers, Ray’s size (because seriously, the guy was bigger than some of the jocks in the nearby boys’ school) bulldozed a clear path for him.

Unluckily for him, Ray was already getting his stuff for the first few classes and there was no clear path to his locker.

Frank was already thankful that he wasn’t getting pushed around by bullies like in middle school, but he really couldn’t bring himself to accept that he’d have to shove through (or squeeze through, depending on how incompetent these idiots were) people to get to his stuff.

It was only about 10 minutes until homeroom, so Frank had made it to his locker in the record time of 2 minutes. There weren’t as many people hanging around than there would be usually; “Maybe someone’s doing a dance-off at the cafeteria again,” Frank thought.

Grabbing his key from his pocket, Frank unlocked his locker and stuffed his bag inside. Checking his timetable that was stuck on the door, he grabbed his laptop, his chemistry textbook, his extensively annotated copy of *Jane Eyre*, his pencil case, the regulation school diary and his actual diary.

The school diary was nothing special, in fact, it was so full of that ‘positive education’ shit that only a third of the diary was usable. That was including all the pointless worksheets inside the diary as well.

Frank used it as a drawing pad; even though his artistic talent didn’t compare one bit to Gerard’s (he *had* made that impressive fountain in front of the school, after all), he was still enthusiastic about drawing vampires and zombies and werewolves and the odd Samara (“It’s Sadako,” Mikey always argued).

His actual diary was made of pink pleather and contained all of his homework, thoughts and more drawings. It had been on sale at their local newsagent, and every other diary in the basket had either been the wrong size or too ugly. It had only cost him $5, a fact he was ridiculously proud of considering how much use he got from it.

Frank’s homeroom was on a different floor, so after taking the stairs (the lifts had broken down again), he turned down the wing that had his homeroom in it. He saw a glimpse of Ray’s nest of hair, and noticed that the former was talking to an obnoxiously sniggering Mr Schechter.

As Frank approached Ray waiting outside of his homeroom (their homerooms were next to each other), the latter turned away from Mr Schechter, who slinked back into the classroom with a cheeky wink aimed at Frank.

“What was that all about, Ray?” Frank enquired warily.
“Nothing special, Frankie. Prying’s rude, you know?” Ray replied, figuratively tongue-in-cheek.

Frank rolled his eyes.

“Come on, man. It takes a lot to make Schechter laugh like someone just gave him a bag of laughing gas.”

Ray retorted smarmily, “It’s still nothing.”

“I’ll tickle you.” Frank raised his free hand, fingers poised. After a few seconds, taking care to keep his stuff intact, Frank wiggled his fingers right behind the front of Ray’s collar (it was Ray’s most sensitive tickle spot).

“Neve – ahahahahahahahahahaHA stop, dude, I’ll tell you, STOP! Ahahahahahahahahaha…” Ray sighed as he adjusted his collar back to its former flawless state.

“There, that’s better. Stop ruining my uniform, Iero.”

Ray had never needed a uniform pass for a reason.

“So?” Frank raised an eyebrow.

“I may have told him about you and Gerard. Like, how much you hate him. Gee was his favourite student, so uh…” Ray trailed off uncertainly.

“Oh, I never knew that.”

“Of course you didn’t. He was saying that he could imagine you two getting along very very well.” A Cheshire cat-like grin spread evilly on Ray’s face. It must have been for dramatic effect, but Frank just thought it looked almost Photoshopped.

“No, I don’t like him that way! In fact, I don’t even like him at all.” Frank sighed exasperatedly as he shook his head.

Ray only laughed.

“It’s so obvious the two of you are wanting to get married and have each other’s babies. Like, come on, Frank. Iero-Way is a sexy last name.” He waggled his bushy eyebrows suggestively, eliciting a similarly exaggerated gag from the shorter boy.

“Ray, we’re not getting married!” The sheer volume of the declaration was met with a very awkward silence, because everyone within ear-shot (i.e. half the second floor) had stopped their conversations to gawk at the midget who had just made it obvious he liked someone. Even Ray’s eyebrows were slightly raised.

Frank honestly didn’t care, and flipped off anyone who so much as looked at them. (Which was a lot of people.)

“Frank, you almost shattered my DS with that shout, Jesus Christ.”

Frank deflated after a pause. He chuckled nervously, replying sheepishly, “I might have, ha.”

Ray took the device out of his laptop bag, opening it quickly. His eyes lit up as he turned it off.

“What?” Frank asked.
“I got 10 playcoins from walking around! I don’t need to waste any more battery.”

“Right.” Frank held the urge to roll his eyes, but was saved from the effort by the shrill ringing of the bell.

“We got homeroom now. See ya in Maths.” Ray turned and casually strolled to his homeroom.

“Bye, Toro.” Frank was about to enter his homeroom when Ray called out to him again.

“Just a sec, Iero, can I be your best man?”

Frank flipped him off as he walked in, grinning.

“Bye, Toro!”

-Homeroom-

Mr Schechter was sitting properly in his chair as Frank dawdled through the door. Dodging a bright pink piece of bubble gum on the lino floor, Frank dumped his stuff at his usual spot by the window and put his feet up on the desk. What? He had senior privilege.

“Yo, Frankenweenie. How’ve you been? Your IOC went really well, I heard.” Mr Schechter grinned from where he was sitting, moving back into his usual ass-of-steel position. (Frank had just noticed the deputy principal walking past their homeroom, and that was probably why Mr Schechter was sitting properly in the first place.)

“Mr Gaskarth’s a harsh marker, sir,” Frank shrugged. He knew he did decently in his IOC, but getting really good marks when your examiner was Mr Gaskarth was relatively unheard of. No, scrap that, it was impossible.

“I realised, but he seemed very convinced that you were a good child. I set him straight.” Mr Schechter chuckled playfully as he closed his laptop.

Frank groaned and rolled his eyes.

“Nice to know you really want us to succeed, Mr Schechter,” he replied with a faux-annoyed tone, grinning cheekily.

Mr Schechter laughed.

“Speaking of success, how are you doing without Old Bates gracing the English room?” Dr Bates, Frank’s old English teacher, had probably seen the dinosaurs die off and was strangely obsessed with butterflies. Mr Schechter had never heard the end of Bates’ rancid dentures clacking away as he had violated the school’s joke of a dress code, again. (It was usually a “sliver of sinful ink”, i.e. tattoos, that was actually some stray paint from helping Mr Kemp move student work everywhere.) When Dr Bates got fired for evangelising a Muslim kid, the students were most definitely not the only ones celebrating; Mr Schechter’s behaviour on that day was buried deep in Frank’s phone in a folder called “Blackmail”. He’d get around to sending it to Ray eventually.

Frank’s new English teacher was a peppy young woman named Ms Claret. The theatre kids worshipped her incessantly because of her limitless knowledge and her years of experience in professional theatre. The English nerds worshipped her because she actually understood Shakespeare enough to teach people how to understand it. “Wherefore art thou Romeo” actually was a question about why Romeo had to be a Montague, and not a question of his whereabouts. The more you knew, huh?
Frank raised his eyebrows.

“Actually liking English classes, why? Everything else is out to kill me.”

“There’s a Green Day concert uptown at Club Reset Thursday evening if you’re up for some good music and a way to not go insane from all the work you’re doing.” Mr Schechter decided that the deputy principal could come back anytime and changed back to a normal posture. He leaned forward, an expectant look in his eyes.

As much as Frank worshipped Green Day, their punk-ness and Billie Joe Armstrong, he really wasn’t in the mood for a concert at the moment. He was not going in the middle of assessment week.

Of course, Frank was too tactful to say that, so he just went along with it (and played stupid).

“Green Day are that band that just became famous, right?” Frank asked.

“That’s them!”

The bell for first period rang, and Frank stood up to join the rest of his homeroom rushing out the door like bats out of hell.

“I should get going. Thanks, sir.”

He had only made it past Mr Schechter’s desk when the latter tapped on his shoulder. It just so happened that his next teacher was overly strict about lateness and Frank really didn’t feel like standing out today.

“What’s up? I’ve got Mr Fowler next,” Frank grumbled.

“I have an extra ticket because one of my friends is ditching. You can have it.” Mr Schechter pulled a piece of paper out of his planner, jabbing it into Frank’s waiting hand.

“Oh. Thanks.” Well, so much for not going (who’d say no to free music?). Frank took the flimsy piece of paper and pocketed it carelessly.

“And Frank?”

“Yeah?”

“Gerard’s going as well.” Mr Schechter wore the exact same evil grin that Ray had attempted to pull off only 10 minutes earlier. This time, though, he nailed the expression so well Frank felt an involuntary shiver up his spine.

“So Ray was right about your little crush. Now shoo, or Mr Fowler will roast your butt cheeks on a spit.” Mr Schechter shooed Frank away with his hand, emphasising his point.

Frank turned to see Ray’s bush of hair surrounding the latter’s mischievous smirk in his line of sight. After about a few seconds standing paralysed like a rabbit in headlights, he lunged out the door and pursued his cackling friend.

“TOROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!”

-Somewhere in the vicinity, while Frank got roasted in Chemistry-
“I haven’t found myself floating in this shit-dump for a while, Trick. What do you say to me messing with some of the kids there?”

Brendon and Patrick were floating around the park that was next to the school; there were usually kids swarming the place at lunch time but this was the start of the school day and they had the place pretty much to themselves.

That was if they didn’t count that rabid-looking poodle looking like it wanted to rip a chunk out of Brendon’s neck on the other side of the park.

Patrick rolled his eyes, brushing a stray leaf off his fedora.

“No blood dripping down walls or anything, Brendon. I had to answer for you literally scaring a kid to death last time I checked in above,” he replied blandly.

Brendon had “accidentally” killed a jock in Gerard’s grade the last time they had come to the school. Really, what more needed to be said? The kid was bullying their ward.

Brendon gasped dramatically in mock-offense.

“He was a pro-lifer. He totally deserved it.”

Brendon may have been a demon, but after being a just nameless soldier in the Crusades (his birth name was something ridiculous like Malcolm or something), he kept some of his sense of justice in Hell. This made him a very frequent victim of relentless teasing from more unsavoury demons.

Patrick whined, “The kid was 16 and was going to invent the best things ever!”

“He was going to kill lots of people in the process.” Brendon rebutted.

“Hmm. I didn’t see that in his future.” Patrick turned away slightly; most would think it was his way of admitting defeat, but Brendon knew it was his way of showing he was thinking.

“You see different things to me. That’s why we’re working together looking after Gerard, you know,” Brendon reassured.

Patrick turned back and smiled.

“True that. I saw his little Fate-worthy romance, and you saw him fighting a powerful demon. We fought over who’d protect him and since he was so powerful we both decided to keep the kid under check together. He’s doing really well by himself now, though,” he reflected thoughtfully.

“Yeah, I guess. How’s the book for Madam Fate coming along?”

Patrick chuckled nervously. “Really well, actually, but if Frank doesn’t fall in love with Gerard pronto then Madam Fate’s gonna get pissed. She hates slow burning romances.”

Patrick’s job in Heaven (apart from protecting Gerard) was as a writer. He had been hired by Madam Fate to write her books on the plans she had written for disasters, births, deaths, etc. He had been assigned a romance novel based on Gerard’s relationships, and after 22 years of hoping something good would come along, Gerard had met Frank (Patrick had not witnessed their first meeting, sadly, and had to take Gerard’s word for it when he had ranted passionately about it a few nights ago).

“I can’t believe she planned this for them. Though, I guess they’re kind of cute together.” Brendon
commented blandly.

“They are so cute together; what are you talking about?”

“Sorry Trick, I’ve gotta disagree. I’m a demon after all, romance is kind of icky.”

Demons weren’t too keen on positive emotions or energy, all morals aside. Brendon, much to his own chagrin, couldn’t bring himself to condone romance.

“Beebo, you know better than to insult romance in front of an ex-cupid.”

Before Patrick had scored the writing gig, he had been a cupid. Cupids were angels that sparked and fuelled love between people or other spirits. He had been one of the best cupids around, and the romance novel he was tasked with forced him to stay passive in Gerard and Frank’s relationship. It gave him a new perspective as well as an undermining frustration in his psyche.

“Well excuuuuuuuuuse me, fairy godmother.” Brendon rolled his eyes, tail swatting at a random butterfly that had been unlucky enough to cross his path.

“I’m not even a fairy!”

“Fairies are bitches anyway.”

They may have had varying opinions on different types of spirits, but Patrick and Brendon had agreed very strongly that fairies were the true hell spawn of this world.

That was not including demons, who were actually hell spawn.

“True that,” Patrick commented, distracted.

Brendon looked up when there was a lack of response from Patrick. Spotting the blinding white of the angel’s wings at a nearby shop, he teleported over to where his partner was standing.

Looking over his shoulder, Brendon asked tentatively, “Patrick?”

Patrick had landed in front of a DVD shop, and one particular series had caught his eye.

“Brendon, it’s the new season of Crappy Romantic Soap Opera 3000 on Blu-Ray!” Patrick turned and smiled sunnily, his blue eyes gleaming in the sun.

Brendon wondered whether it was actually the sun’s doing though, because Patrick’s fedora was placed firmly over his forehead, shading his face. He then decided not to think about that anymore, because if he did, his brain would probably explode. Angels were strange creatures, he decided. It was better not to pry further than that.

“Patrick, we don’t even have a Blu-Ray player,” Brendon deadpanned.

Gerard and Mikey had moved into a new apartment and, because they had only been there a week and they were the laziest fuckers in the universe, had not bought anything useful.

“Can we get it?” Patrick pleaded.

“Patrick…” Brendon mimicked with the same tone.

“Please?”
“Patrick…”

“Brendon.” Patrick turned his expression up to eleven, but his tone was annoyed with Brendon’s refusal to acquiesce.

“Gerard hates it,” Brendon pointed out.

A beat passed in silence.

“Brendon.”

“Patrick.”

“I want it,” Patrick huffed.

“You can’t have everything,” Brendon replied smarmily.

Patrick implored, “It’s $15.”

Brendon raised an eyebrow, interested. He leaned closer, but not too close.

“How many episodes?”

“25.”

25 30-minute episodes for $15? Even though Brendon hated the show, he thought better than rejecting Patrick now and having Gerard be guilt-tripped into buying something even more expensive.

“We’re getting it.” Brendon complied.

A smile split Patrick’s face as he clapped his hands together in delight. He slowed down after a beat, his face reverting back to confused expression.

“What about Gerard?”

“We’re getting him,” Brendon replied, disappearing.

The only trace of the two ever standing in front of the shop window was a large white feather floating to the ground.

-Right Cerberus Park, Hell-

Pete hadn’t really mastered teleporting yet, so he, Lindsey and Jimmy had decided to take a good old-fashioned walk.

In hindsight, that hadn’t been the best idea, since Hell had too many crazy “residents”, and no roads whatsoever. It had taken them a solid hour to get from one end of the suburb to the next, and the distance would have only taken them 10 minutes if not for the various characters who either thought Pete would be a great eat or Lindsey would be an easy fuck.

Jimmy had deterred the hungry ones quite successfully, and Lindsey may have kicked more balls than a prostitute would suck in her lifetime. Pete could only stand back and watch helplessly from the sidelines.

Turning the corner on the eerily normal (if slightly decrepit) concrete pavement (according to
Jimmy they were made with the skulls of the murderers), Pete looked down at the crimson grass and up at what had to be the biggest and ugliest dog-head he had ever seen. No way was he seeing that up close, and in life Pete was a dog aficionado. The body was too far away to see, but the head seemed to be a cross of a Pinscher or a German Shepherd and Shub-niggurath.

Its breath came out in pungent sulphur clouds and rained on the park like some mad scientist’s excuse for snow. Looking up at Lindsey’s hair, it kinda looked like dandruff had sprinkled her head and shoulders like some anti-beauty pepper shaker…

“Welcome to Cerberus Park, Pete,” Jimmy cut in to Pete’s thoughts obnoxiously.

“Hell has some very creative names,” Pete shot back flippantly, staring at some kids who were casually kicking around a human head. Its long blond hair had been matted for a long time, and any former trace of beauty in the woman’s face had long been kicked away. Pete felt no twang of sympathy for the woman; she had probably deserved it.

Huh? Maybe his new demonic morality would take some getting used to.

“We’re too busy fucking things up to bother with silly things, Pete. We leave creativity to the humans and morality to the angels,” Jimmy dismissed with a laugh.

Lindsey rolled her eyes and groaned.

“Jimmy, this is why we never get nice things in Hell!”

Pete looked around. She was right; the stuff here would have been considered quite rudimentary in most of the world (on the surface). There weren’t any roads; strange people lurked on every corner and in every alleyway; the apartments were like the sort of thing you’d find in human slums, and dead bodies of sinners were strewn everywhere like streamers at a killer’s party. That wasn’t taking into account that demons were magical beings with magical powers; even then, they could afford a few material luxuries, right?

“The hard truth is that it’s overcrowded here, Pete. All the Grim Reapers from Heaven came down here to keep the crazy ones under check. Well, there’s more of both nowadays and that brings the angels down south. They’re kinda the closest Hell has to a police force.” Jimmy cast a pensive glance at Pete, knowing that he knew exactly what was meant by “crazy ones”.

“Uh… Grim Reapers?” Pete asked stupidly, turning away slightly in embarrassment.

“There’s lots of them. Humans only know about the most famous one, M. Shadows. It’s a hard job, you know. Heck, you might even see him around today. He’s a pretty diligent guy,” Lindsey explained kindly, patting him on the shoulder reassuringly.

“Oh. Ok.”

The three walked across the largest patch of grass, Jimmy kicking a stray soccer ball (yet another human head) back to the local kids’ team. After the kids shouted their thanks and returned to their game, Jimmy, Lindsey and Pete found themselves in a relatively empty patch of grass well away from the kids and well underneath Cerberus’ head.

Pete was tempted to look up, but Jimmy and Lindsey had paid no heed to Cerberus, so he fought the urge the best he could.

“Well, anyway, we gotta teach you to hide your energy. Close your eyes and take deep breaths, Pete,” Jimmy directed.
Pete complied, breathing in to the count of one of his old songs, and breathing out again. After a few minutes of doing so, he could see purple creeping out in his peripheries.

“Now what?” he asked shakily.

Lindsey asked, “You can see little purple tendrils around you, right?”

“Yeah…”

“Concentrate on pulling them towards yourself.”

Jimmy.

“Inside?”

“Yep,” both replied.

Pete could now clearly see the tendrils reaching out of him, and he concentrated on rolling them back inside him, like a plant growing in reverse. After what seemed like a fruitless 5 minutes, the tendrils easily rolled back until there were no longer any purple blobs in his vision. Relaxing slightly, he was pleased to find that the tendrils didn’t spring out again like he had expected. Keeping the tendrils in check with the back of his mind, he opened his eyes to Lindsey and Jimmy gawking like stunned mullets.

Lindsey started, “Pete, that’s surprisingly quick learning. It’s like… uh…”

“A plot device?” Pete supplied.

“Pfft, nah. We’re in no story,” dismissed Jimmy.

Pete relaxed fully, feeling his energy being released again.

“So, what about portal opening?” he asked.

Lindsey flinched with a start, and stammered, “Well, uh… portal opening is literally cutting a hole in space with your finger and thinking about the place you want to go.”

Pete wanted to start small and go behind Lindsey first (about a couple of metres away, his brain supplied helpfully). He ran his finger down in front of him until he saw a tear about his size. Stepping into it, he chanted mentally “Behind Lindsey. Behind Lindsey. Behind Lindsey,” as he walked along the darkness and jumped through the first light he saw.

Jumping out, Pete released a breath he had been holding subconsciously and found himself right where he wanted to be. A grin split his face as he spun around to see Lindsey’s eyes crinkled in a proud smile right in front of him. Jimmy smirked a little less maliciously than usual in the background.

The adrenaline was still pumping as Pete breathed, “That’s it?”

“That’s it,” she confirmed.

Cerberus had started to wave his head around, Pete supposed because of the sudden display of power.

“Cool. Can we leave?” he asked, looking up at the pure blackness of the underside of Cerberus’ chin, cowering slightly.
Jimmy shrugged casually and strolled back the way the three had come. “Sure…”

The stink of sulphur hit his nose in a tsunami of stink as Lindsey let out a small gasp. Turning abruptly, Jimmy cried, “Wait; watch it, Pete!”

“Pete, no!” Lindsey whimpered, looking helplessly above her.

It was too late to dodge as Pete felt a shooting pain in his side and the disgusting moistness of dog spit dripping down his arm. Daring to open his eyes, he saw a glimpse of the hound’s red irises, looking down at him unforgivingly as Cerberus’s right head growled. Seeing that the other heads were sleeping, Pete thanked his few lucky stars that they had not decided to share their new chew toy. Tentacles situated around the mutt’s mouth ran themselves over Pete, smacking him around. Pete could only whimper helplessly, not finding the energy in himself to scream.

He coughed violently as another suffocating cloud of sulphur hit his nostrils and tears of pain sizzled audibly as they hit the ground. The pain of Cerberus shaking his body around like those new-fangled doughnuts closed the curtains on his eyes, plunging Pete into oblivion.

-Back at their apartment, while Pete was healing-

“You nearly let him get killed, Jimmy!”

“It’s not all my fault, Lyn-Z.”

It had taken the pair quite some time to find a Grim Reaper who wasn’t busy kicking crazy demon ass, since they were the only ones able to knock Cerberus out safely.

Pete thankfully only had a couple of puncture wounds where the canine’s teeth had grazed him, and those weren’t on any of his vital organs. The demon now lay helplessly on the couch (they couldn’t afford a spare room), covered in cheap linen bandages and a makeshift ice pack on his face. The dog spit had caused a few small rashes along Pete’s body, and Lindsey was thankful that what was left in their savings account was enough to cover the costs of the medicine.

It was payday in their small IT business tomorrow, anyhow.

“The kid’s got some gall, if he’s still alive after all of that. And at such a young age, too,” Jimmy remarked quietly.

A few silent minutes passed by, both demons hoping they could get the younger awake and into the world. They still had Way to deal with, after all.

Standing up abruptly, Lindsey asked, “Do you mind if I take a look at the crystal ball? I just want to check up on some things.”

Jimmy waved a hand dismissively. “Go for it.”

Lindsey sat down and her eyes glowed red, activating the ball.

“Oh hell no,” she whispered, causing Jimmy to snap his head in her direction and walk towards her.

“What is it, Lindsey?”

“He’s gone and met the descendant of Frankus Iero the Teenage Wizard of Rome.”

Frankus Iero was a problem back when the pair were young demons. The wizard was wiping out
demons left and right, and everyone was desperate to bring him down. Jimmy and Lindsey were in an arrangement like Pete’s, and were tasked to get rid of the guy. In human history books, their effort was written off as a freak accident involving a grape and the guy’s own moustache. In Hell, they both earned respect and fear really quickly.

With a Great Depression happening in Hell, however, that respect didn’t get them anywhere anymore. Old animosities arose with the decline in wealth, leaving the two with more enemies than friends.

“That is a ridiculous name. What’s the kid’s name?”

“Frank Iero Jr.”

“Oh gawd, this family sucks at naming their kids. That’s better than Funky Oreo the Teenage Witch of Shanghai or whatever, though.”

Lindsey rolled her eyes. “Frankus Iero the Teenage Wizard of Rome, Jimmy.”

“Whatever.”

She leaned forwards, eyes glowing intensely. “Anyway, the kid’s a muggle. But…”

“But?” Jimmy’s ears perked up comically.

“They’re both idiots in love,” she deadpanned.

“And?”

“It’s a Fate-made pair.”

There. The bomb was dropped. “No! We can’t kill the kids separately then,” Jimmy shouted, shushing himself immediately afterwards. He scolded himself and sighed when he noticed Pete was still blacked out.

“We could forcefully separate them…” Lindsey considered thoughtfully.

“No, have you heard of what happened to Mikey Chapman when he tried to separate a Fate-made pair? Old Lady Fate came down south herself and forcefully disbanded Mallory Knox with a walking stick!” Jimmy waved his arms around frantically, nearly knocking over his Hellbucks coffee.

Madam Fate’s plots involving two humans had to be followed, and any major changes where that couldn’t happen made her take her anger out on the poor sucker that caused it, directly or indirectly.

Mallory Knox was a demonic band, in both the musical and the bounty-hunting sense. Their prosperous careers were driven to an abrupt end when Mikey Chapman tried to woo a human girl and she happened to be in a Fate-made pair. Right now, the members were either permanently out of commission or dead.

Madam Fate’s walking stick was probably forged in Tartarus by dwarves or some shit. Jimmy wasn’t even sure if they had dwarves down there, but still.

Lindsey looked up in thought, irises darkening back to brown. “No way! We gotta make this a tragic romance worth reading then.”
Madam Fate’s partiality to a good book was no secret. Heck, she probably didn’t care if the plot was slightly different to what she planned…

Hmm.

“Manipulate her plan so it doesn’t foil our plans and keeps Madam Fate happy? Oh hell yes!” Jimmy decided to be cliché and laughed evilly, Lindsey joining him soon after.

They said manic laughter was good for the demonic soul.

Pete blinked blearily as he vaguely heard something that sounded like the hyenas from *The Lion King*, but because he was so tired and his body was still rebelling against Cerberus’ bites, promptly went back to sleep.

-Some seedy record shop, Tuesday morning-

A few days after Pete was up and about (it only took him a day to recover, him being a demon and all), Lindsey and Jimmy taught him basic combat and sent him on his way to wherever Gerard was.

Pete stepped out of the tear in space to a safe distance outside where the target (as he had started referring to Gerard Way in his head) was, and caught sight of him and someone else entering what looked like a small record store. Glancing around, the area around uncomfortably reminded him of the area around Cerberus Park, so he hid his power and slipped in behind them.

The really great thing about being a demon is that you could pass through solid walls (or in this case, glass doors) when you pleased, and Pete was living out his ghost dreams.

The musty scent of old paper was the first thing Pete noticed about the shop. It was basically bookshelves and boxes of records sorted only by price. Gerard and the other boy were the only ones here at the moment, and *whoa*, did both of them have power.

Pete now understood what Lindsey had meant with all of those warnings about Gerard Way. Sitting idly on the windowsill, he was more concerned about the identity of the really cute guy that was accompanying the target. The boy’s glasses slid lower down the bridge of his nose as he rifled through a box, pausing only to flick aside stray locks of brown hair from his eyes.

Pete’s dead heart skipped a beat. “Hello, sailor.”

“Mikey, have you found it yet?” Gerard asked suddenly, causing the boy – Mikey – to flinch.

“Nah.” He looked around, squinting intensely in Pete’s direction. Pete shrunk back, glad to find that his power wasn’t leaking out anywhere. “Gee, do you feel, uh, something strange? Like, I don’t know, a demon?”

Pete squeaked, slapping his hands over his mouth and shrinking even further back into the windowsill. He’d been found already?

Gerard paused, scanning the small shop for any signs of things amiss.

“Nah, I think you’re just being paranoid.”

Pete let out a sigh of relief, his tail ruffling the lace curtain a little bit. He snapped out and grabbed the tip, cursing his unfamiliar new anatomy.

Mikey pursed his lips, noticing the movement at the windows.
“Thanks for being such a supportive brother, Gerard.”

Pete raised his eyebrows. Brothers? That made his job a little less easy. He couldn’t kill Gerard and propose to Mikey without some work, could he? Pete mused that he could pull a Macbeth, but really, that was too much work.

Gerard paused his shuffling, and triumphantly pulled out a record. From his perch at the window, Pete couldn’t see much other than faded psychedelic packaging.

The boys wordlessly paid and left, and Pete faded away soon after.

-Club Reset, Thursday evening-

It turned out that Bob and Ray were also going to the concert, and Frank had caught a ride with them. He jumped out of the hot-rod, narrowly avoiding a few glass shards that littered the dirty sidewalk.

“Bob, watch where you park, jeez. I almost cut my dainty feet on the glass, mate,” Frank complained jokingly.

Bob only rolled his eyes in response as he locked the car and motioned for the two to follow him.

Club Reset was situated in a back lane that veered off one of the city’s many highways. Because the establishment didn’t have its own parking (there was only so much space in this part of town), Bob had to drive around a little bit and ended up parking 10 minutes’ walk away.

It was just as seedy as where the club was though, and it made no difference to anyone.

As the faint scent of fresh lemon (the pleasant, real sort, not the shit in detergents) hit the noses of the boys and their feet hit the first clean stone step of the club entrance, relief washed over them as they got to their destination safe. In this suburb, it was worth celebrating. Bob half-expected to have to fight off a bunch of prostitutes or something. Ray had brought a small can of pepper spray because there was no easier way to ward off dangerous drunkards. Frank hadn’t brought anything because he was too lazy, and he knew his friends were prepared.

What Frank knew of the location was that Club Reset was the result of refurbishing an old theatre. The owner was an eccentric entrepreneur in his 30s and his wealth was most apparent in the foyer; the granite floors snaked around marble pillars (at least what looked like them, did Frank look like he knew his rocks?) and real plants sat happily in art-deco pots on the sides of the hall. Ornate sconces held flickering candles to the walls and the glass beads of the chandelier reminded Frank a little of a fancy disco ball.

He had been too busy taking mental pictures of the beautiful interior to notice he was about to run into a marble statue.

The impact of the cold stone on his chin caused Frank to jump back liked a startled cat, causing raucous laughter to come from Bob and Ray behind him. Recovering from the fleeting embarrassment, Frank took a good look at the statue he had just run into.

The head was quite large for the body, so he knew it wasn’t human. It wore what looked like a work blouse and a skirt, with no shoes. Looking up at the face, it looked cartoonish and a little… doglike?

Ray interrupted, “That’s Isabelle from Animal Crossing. You know, my game?”
Frank shot back, “You’re kidding. This guy made a marble statue of a game character. And not something cool as in the Assassin from Assassin’s Creed, but a dog from a kid’s game.” He knocked once on the statue, not really knowing whether it proved his point or not. It did hurt his knuckles, so he shook out his hand grumbling, “I dunno whether that’s real marble, but it hurts like a bitch when you hit it.”

Bob shook his head wordlessly and grabbed both by the wrists and dragged them to the entrance of the main hall.

The entrance to the main hall was cordoned off, needlessly though, because there was no queue whatsoever. There was only one staff member there (not counting the security guards because they were pretty much furniture) playing what looked to be a very intense game of Flappy Bird on his phone. After losing quietly, the ticket guy looked up and gave a lively wave to Bob, who dug his face into Ray’s shoulder and audibly groaned. Frank then recognised the boy as Jack Barakat from his Chemistry class.

“Bob, it’s just Jack. Calm down,” Ray soothed, petting Bob like he was a cat.

Bob only responded with a very un-Bob-like whine, dragging his heels towards the door like a groggy zombie. Ray had kept everyone’s tickets (both Bob and Frank had tendencies of misplacing things), so he handed them over to Jack.

Jack remarked as he punched the tickets, “Have fun tonight, Toro, Iero. The sound check sounded pretty good, so you’ll have a good show for sure,” handing them back with a flourish.

Bob just grumbled and slunk inside. He gave Jack a death glare over his shoulder and Frank swore he saw a teasing sliver of white coming out of Jack’s pocket, disappearing as quickly as it came. Blackmail, probably.

Ray shook his curls out and followed their grumbling friend inside. “He lost a game of Uno to Jack last week and Bob’s still being a wuss about it.”

Frank bit his lip, holding back the urge to introduce Ray to the concept of blackmail.

Inside, the lights had been dimmed and the floor littered with brightly coloured round beanbags. The bar had (smartly) been cordoned off with signs saying “It’s Thursday, don’t drink!” The bartender was lying bored on the counter, playing what seemed to be a very intense game of Pokémon.

Frank sniggered, “It’s a smart thing to do, especially if you can’t control yourself. I wouldn’t want to wake up on a Friday with a killer hangover.”

“That’s probably why there’s nobody here, Frank,” Bob grumbled.

Ray rolled his eyes, muttering “Oh, Bobby,” and put a hand on Frank’s head, ruffling the younger’s hair slightly. Ignoring the younger’s growl, he said suddenly, “You know the owner of this place was gonna pay Green Day to play in K.K. Slider costumes?”

“That’s another Animal Crossing character. ‘S a dog with Ray’s eyebrows that plays music,” Bob added helpfully. A small tinge of red brushed the boy’s cheeks afterwards, causing Frank to wonder how much Ray had dragged him into playing that game of his.

But, a dog with Ray’s hairy caterpillar eyebrows? Yeesh, no thanks.

Frank pursed his lips, replying quickly, “I probably wouldn’t touch that money before touching
Gerard.

Time seemed to dilate as Ray and Bob turned to the shorter boy with incredulous looks. Looking around frantically, the gravity of his statement punched him in the face. The silence and the others’ intense stares snaked around Frank’s confidence and shattered it like his most fragile dreams.

“Ah, fuck,” Frank chuckled nervously.

“What did you just say?” Ray whispered.

The strange expression still glued onto his face, Bob added, “That’s not really saying much, Frank.”

“What isn’t saying much?”

Frank whipped around and glimpsed Gerard’s teasing smirk gracing the man standing confidently in front of him. A Black Flag shirt sat under the same leather jacket that he was wearing at the airport, and his face glowed in the dimmed area like a new Messiah.

The Christian mums in his suburb would probably kill him for thinking that, but Gerard’s face was really radiant.

“Gerard!” Ray greeted the former with a crushing hug.

“Where’s Mikes?” Bob piped up.

Gerard looked up thoughtfully, a shit-eating grin on his face. “Dead? Nah, he’s actually tech crew for Green Day since he knows this place inside-out.”

Ray raised his eyebrows. “That’s pretty cool.”

“What’s even cooler is that Ray snagged us a chance to actually talk to Green Day afterwards,” Bob added.

Frank flinched. “How?”

“Connections,” Ray shrugged, snickering obnoxiously.

Frank rolled his eyes in reply.

“I’m not gonna pry any further,” Gerard laughed.

There was a small silence as he looked around.

“For a concert, it’s not that crowded.”

“The tickets for this place didn’t sell because it’s on a weekday,” Ray pointed out.

He squealed as a hand slapped onto his shoulder painfully.

Gerard’s eyes lit up, waving. “Oh, hey, Mikes, you’re on break?”

“Yeah,” came the younger brother’s bored response. “There’s nobody here, so they’re pretty relaxed with us at the moment. Not that they’ll be when the show starts, but you shouldn’t look a gift horse in the mouth.”
“Hey, well, more room for us, right?” Frank gestured to the space around them, dotted sparsely with small groups of cringe-y punk kids.

“And these bean bags are ridiculously comfy!” Bob fell backwards into one, giving a thumbs up.

Mikey then copied him, missing Frank by a fraction of an inch. The latter turned to him, raising an indignant eyebrow. Mikey flipped him off.

“This is more comfortable than my bed,” came the monotone agreement.

Frank gasped. “Your bed’s comfy though, Mikey!”

“We got a place near my parents’ because they have my cousins staying there long-term. Cheap IKEA mattresses are shit,” Gerard clarified.

Frank’s face fell. “Oh, I see.”

Mikey’s bed was made of clouds, and they ditched it?

Mikey added, “We gotta go and buy stuff for it. We’ll be in New Jersey a while.”

“Since when did you become such a home-maker?” Bob teased.

A hush came over the hall as the curtains opened to reveal Green Day preparing for their set. Both Mikey and Bob got up, since they couldn’t see over all the tall punk kids standing in a blob in front of the stage.

“Shh, they’re on-stage,” Ray whisper-shouted redundantly.

“I can see that, Toro!” Mikey shot back.

“I can’t!” Frank complained, jumping on the spot to prove his point. True to his claims, he only reached Mikey’s shoulders with his best efforts.

Gerard turned his back to Frank and bent down.

“Here, Frank.”

Frank’s eyes glanced quickly down to the sliver of pale flesh Gerard had exposed by bending over, and back up to the latter’s questioning gaze. Gerard’s eyes narrowed slightly, but not accusingly. Frank gulped.

“I don’t like you very much, but I guess I could stand being on you for the next couple of hours.” Frank looked down and blushed deeply, knowing that Gerard had caught him glancing at his ass. Walking towards him, Frank jumped suddenly on Gerard’s back, causing the latter to flail slightly before grabbing the younger firmly under his thighs. Hoisting Frank up carefully, Gerard felt the hot tendrils of an impending blush as he felt a warm pair of arms wrap solidly around his neck.

Gerard turned his head slightly, disappointed that he could only catch a glimpse of Frank’s black hair. He asked, “You good, Frankie?”

“Yeah, I should be good,” Frank replied coolly. He could only hope that nobody noticed his blush and his rapidly increasing heart rate. He had a dignity to keep, and that meant not being flustered by being on a cute guy’s back.

Ray rolled his eyes bemusedly while Mikey gagged exaggeratedly. Both earned simultaneous
middle fingers from Gerard and Frank.

Bob sniggered in seeing the scene unfold before his eyes. Now that was quality content.

-Backstage, after the concert-

Frank had dragged himself behind the little wooden door, closing it carefully. Ray had sent him ahead to let Green Day know that they were coming (Ray needed to grab something).

Expecting at most a small bunch of rooms with rudimentary furniture (because really, most people only cared about the façades), he was genuinely surprised to find that the fanciness extended back here, too. It wasn’t as over-the-top as where the guests were, but the marble tiles clacked with every step and there were chaise lounges everywhere.

“Whoa, backstage looks pretty comfortable,” he thought aloud.

An unfamiliar voice replied behind him, “It is, kid. You’re here with Ray?”

Frank flinched, but turned and found himself face-to-face with Billie Joe Armstrong. Frank said without a hitch, “Yeah, but wait, you know him?”

How did Ray and Billie Joe Armstrong know each other?

Billie Joe laughed, running a hand through his messy hair. “Of course, before the whole touring thing started, I was his guitar sensei.”

Huh. So that was why Ray was kickass at guitar.

Frank raised his eyebrows, impressed. “Dang, that’s pretty cool. He never told us.”

“You’d expect that from him. A strange one, that kid. Never told anyone anything but what they wanted to hear.” Billie Joe scratched a bit on his neck, leaving a red mark.

“That’s unless you smash his DS, then you get a very honest opinion,” Frank sniggered.

The slam of a door behind them and the sound of running feet made Frank turn (again) to face a panting Ray and Bob. Ray was holding a bag, but Frank wasn’t really interested in it.

“I hear people bitching about me,” said Ray.

“Not anymore,” Frank retorted, earning a chuckle from Billie Joe next to him.

Gesturing for the boys to follow, Billie Joe led them straight to his dressing room. Mike was wiping down his bass lovingly with a pink cloth and Tré was reading what looked like a shoujo manga. If Frank didn’t know any better, it felt like the precursor to a very bad porno.

Not that he watched porn or anything, it was just a feeling.

No, seriously.

Ray obnoxiously cleared his throat and gestured to all three in turn.

“Well yeah, anyway, guys, this is Billie Joe, that’s Mikey Number 2, and that’s way too Tré Cool.”

“Hey!” Tré waved, putting down his manga and joining Billie Joe’s side. Mikey held up a finger while he gently put away his bass (one would think it was made of glass or something), and copied
Tré.

Frank noted that the three looked pretty formidable standing together.

“You guys were awesome, by the way,” Bob said suddenly.

Ray mock-gasped. “Coming from Bob, it’s his eternal pledge of allegiance.”

Tré grinned radiantly. “Wow, thanks. My dad always complained about the noise we made in the house. But hey, we made it.”

“We’re making it, Snoo. We’ve still got a long way to go,” Billie Joe reminded gently, leaning an arm on his friend’s shoulder, even though Tré was only two centimetres shorter than him.

Frank turned to Ray. “What took you so long, anyway?”

“I got ya this,” Ray presented the bag he was holding to Billie Joe, who eagerly grabbed the plastic and grinned even wider when he saw the contents.

“Ooh, cake!”

“Ma opened the El Toro Bakery last year, and when she heard you guys were in town, she baked your favourite,” Ray explained.

The El Toro Bakery was Mrs Toro’s way of keeping herself occupied during the week, and it had proved popular in their small neighbourhood within a couple of weeks of opening. Every baked good Frank had had during the last year (except for Starbucks cheesecakes) was from this bakery. It wasn’t just loyalty to Ray, either (though that played a major part), but the food was genuinely the best thing that Frank had tasted. His own mum couldn’t bake for shit (she freely admitted this after an attempt at a casserole) so Frank was confident in his judgement.

When he asked Ray about the name sounding a bit like a pub, he had only been shushed and told “not to ever mention it in front of Ma”.


“Our favourite, BJ!” Tré pouted.

“Oi, not now, boys,” Mike chastised. He pried the bag from Billie Joe’s grip and passed it to Bob. “Could you put this in the fridge for us?” Mike pointed to the corner closest to where Bob was standing.

Bob walked off, attempting to stuff it beside what looked like a 4kg box of Turkish delight in the mini-fridge.

“Anyway, how do you guys know Ray?” Frank asked.

“I used to be his babysitter, and when we were working on our music in the really early days Ray’d always be around,” Billie Joe answered.

Ray piped up, “I think I broke one of BJ’s guitars once. I remember pole vaulting with it into the kiddy pool in his yard.”

Everyone broke out into laughter except for Billie Joe.
“Oh god, don’t remind me,” he chuckled nervously, shaking his head in his hand.

“It was after that you started teaching me how to play, though.” Ray remarked thoughtfully.

The guitarist shrugged. “Yeah, I thought I’d have to keep you out of trouble, somehow, so I decided to keep you busy the only way I knew how.”

“I was seven at the time. It sure as hell worked.” Ray shifted a stray lock of curly hair behind his ear as Bob successfully pushed the cake in the fridge.

“Ray’s amazing at guitar, BJ. Have you heard him play lately?” Frank gushed, because Ray’s guitar skills were godly.

Billie Joe replied with a prideful smile. “I know. I’m his mentor, after all; none of my students are allowed to be shit.”

“Ray’s your only student, BJ,” Mike droned.

Billie Joe mock-gasped. “Let me have my moment of coolness, Mike,” he cried indignantly.

Tré snickered, slapping Billie Joe on the shoulder. “Let him get used to it, Mike. We’re rock stars. We’re meant to be pretentious.”

“It’s a conscious choice?” asked Bob, leaning against the wall.

Frank gulped nervously, the screaming from his bladder too much to handle. He shouldn’t have drunk all of that coffee before coming here.

He piped up, “I, uh, gotta use the bathroom.”

“Right across the hall. Don’t die.” Billie Joe pointed out the (still open) doorway to what was clearly the sign for the men’s room.

Frank chuckled.

“I won’t. Be right back.”

-Once Frank finished his business-

Frank splashed the ice-cold water on his face, watching the faucet turn off and fixing his hair. His reflection stared back coolly behind dark bangs and baggy eyes.

Picking a piece of fluff off his t-shirt, he felt out of place. Each stone sink had an individual gilded mirror hanging above it, and there was a sleek pot of bamboo sitting happily in the corner.

He shook the water off his hands, ignoring the hand dryers in favour of wiping them on his jeans. Pushing the door of the bathroom open with an elbow, a snippet of conversation caught Frank’s ears.

“There’s demons hanging around you guys, Gerard.”

Frank paused, shuffling sneakily next to the open doorway. He consciously slowed his breathing, and held back from the temptation to look inside the room. Whose voice was that? It seemed familiar…

“I know, but they’re too weak to do anything.”
Gerard. So that’s where he disappeared to; not that he had been wondering in the first place.

“They want to separate you and Frank!”

Frank wanted to be separated with him, mystery familiar guy. He sidled slightly closer to the doorway.

“I can protect him fine, Brian.”

“Ah, so it was Schechter he was talking to…” Frank thought.

Wait.

What the fuck did Gerard and Schechter have in common?

Frank’s eyes flitted around rapidly.

“Gerard, there’s a powerful demon hanging around someone at Frank’s school. Frank may not be in immediate danger, but if the demon does anything to that kid –”

“Frank won’t be in danger if I’m with him. I couldn’t care less about the other kid.”

“What I’m trying to say, Gerard, is that letting the demon wreak havoc could affect Frank indirectly. And how are you going to protect him anyway? He doesn’t even like you.”

“That much was true. But back to that demon…”

“I can’t tell, Brian. I told you that his aura is invisible.”

“Ooh. Interesting.”

“He doesn’t trust you with his life, then. And you know that if you want to protect someone with charms and the like, they’ve got to trust you.”

“That I don’t,” Frank smirked proudly. His head cocked higher, hoping he could catch a few more titbits of this conversation. He wasn’t nosy or anything, just dangerously curious.

“I’ll win his trust eventually, Brian, and maybe his protector’s favour as well.”

“I have a protector?” Frank mused. Hearing a slight shuffling inside the room coming towards him, he scuttled hurriedly over the marble back into Green Day’s dressing room, not even bothering to hide his discomfort as he slammed the door shut.

So much for being stealthy.

Noticing his return, Ray turned to him nonchalantly. “Frank, is there zombies outside or something?”

“Nah, I was trying not to get caught eavesdropping on a conversation,” Frank muttered shiftily.

“What a good job of that you did,” Mike remarked sarmily, cleaning his bass’s distinctly pink cleaning rag with a green rag. One could never be too careful with cleaning, it seemed.

Before Frank could do any speculation as to why Mike was so dedicated to his bass, Bob pulled the boy over to a small pile of clothes in the corner. He grabbed what looked like a piece of Green Day merch, and new releases too, as Frank had never seen these in his life. (He had every piece of
merchandise he could get his hands on, so he would know.)

“Put these on,” Bob said as he forced one of the t-shirts over Frank’s slim shoulders, “We just wanted to see whether the small size fit you or not.”

Frank jokingly did a twirl, but stopped short of knocking Mike’s bass off what seemed to be a makeshift pedestal of college textbooks and Stephen King novels. He spotted a full-body mirror near where Bob was standing, and admired how the shirt looked apart from the fact that his current t-shirt could be seen underneath it.

“Nice. I’d totally buy that, model and all.”

Frank whipped around to find Gerard leaning casually in the doorway, raising his hand in greeting to everyone in the room. His hazel eyes stayed locked with Frank’s own, and Frank wondered whether he had any idea that he was eavesdropped on about a couple of minutes ago. A drop of sweat trickled quietly down his face, landing on the floor with a plop.

The awkward staring was thankfully broken by Ray hugging the shit out of Gerard (again) and Mikey swinging through the door, tripping his brother over in the process. Groaning, Gerard tried to pull Mikey down with him, but failed miserably because Mikey walked away, whistling obnoxiously.

The tension in that silly moment was then broken by Mr Schechter trailing into the room. Billie Joe and Tré waved in greeting, and Mike acknowledged him with an absent nod, dusting the bass and its pedestal.

Looking over to Gerard having crawled his way over to Frank’s legs (to the latter’s extreme discomfort), a smirk broke through his neutral expression.

“Hey, the lovebirds are together now.”

The resulting silence (minus the hum of the fridge) was enough to hear Frank and Gerard’s increasing heart rates. Nobody did, though, because everyone was too busy staring at the pair.

“Lovebirds?” Billie Joe whispered.

“Oh, Mr Schechter, nice of you to join us!” Ray giggled.

Frank narrowed his eyes at him, knowing full well that Ray had told Brian about this… situation. Gerard had gotten on his feet in the meantime, and was sprawled over the red leather couch.

Brian waved Ray off coolly. “Just Brian’s fine, boys.”

“Bri’s here for some tech stuff,” Billie Joe explained.

Brian nodded in agreement, scratching an itch on his cheek.

“I’m gonna ask again, but Frank and Gee… lovebirds?” Billie Joe grinned mockingly.

Frank shifted his narrowed gaze onto Brian, who only grinned wider in response. Mr Schechter – Brian – knew full well from what Ray had told him, so he must be informing Green Day in a very roundabout way. What a wily – goddammit, he was infected with Schechter-itis.

“I like me some love sometimes,” Tré commented, quite clueless to the undermining implications of the conversation.
Billie Joe turned to Mikey. “I see where you’re coming from, Mikey. They *are* cute together.”

“He told him too?!” Frank and Gerard mentally exclaimed. They looked frantically at each other and everyone else, the surprise quite obvious on their faces.

“So, are you guys getting married yet, or what?” Mike drawled, cleaning the cleaning rag that was to clean the cleaning rag for his bass.

“Oh nooooo. I’m poor again,” Mikey drawled coolly as Ray cried out in pain as he accidentally hit his hand on the side of the couch.

“Come on; you were gone so long you must have made out.” Billie Joe turned to Gerard and Frank, who shook their heads heatedly.

“Nope,” Frank replied.

“They didn’t,” Brian confirmed, leaning casually on the brick wall of the band’s dressing room.

“That’s another $5, Mikey,” Ray smirked.

“Oh hell no.” Mikey begrudgingly dug out another $5 from his wallet, which Ray took eagerly.

“I’ll be rich soon,” Ray sing-songed.

“You only *have* $25 between the two of you. Mikey has no money to his own name,” Gerard retorted, rolling his eyes.

“How would you know? Mikey, I understand, but me? I could be loaded,” Ray replied mock-defensively, looking down at Gerard with his arms crossed.

“You’re not, though. Your family owns a TV with bunny ears, Ray.” Gerard laughed.

“Yeah, I guess you’re right.” Ray acquiesced, shrugging.

“Stop pretending you’re rich, Gerard!” Mikey exclaimed, slapping him upside the head.

“I *am*, though. I got $10,000 for one art commission in Thailand.” Gerard replied smugly, a small smirk on his face.

“In Thai baht or…”

“Dollar equivalent, Mikes.”

Mikey’s eyes widened in surprised.

He whispered to himself, “My brother is loaded with his own money and I never knew.”

“See, we look like hobos, but we’re in a band.” Billie Joe interjected.

“A really, really good one.” Mike agreed, adjusting his bass on its pedestal.
Frank took off the Green Day t-shirt, contemplating knocking the bass over for shits and giggles. He then realised that Mike would probably take his head as a trophy, and incinerated the thought.

“Prepare for trouble,” Billie Joe started suddenly.

“Make it double,” Mike laughed.

“Wait, who’s Meowth?” Tré exclaimed. There could only be two humans in Team Rocket, so someone had to play the part of the redundant animal mascot (and third wheel). He prayed to the Pokémon god that it wouldn’t be him.

“Tré, you can be Meowth.” Billie Joe waved his hand in Tré’s direction, causing the latter to blink indignantly.

“Whoa, don’t ask my opinion. It’s not like I’m a free man with an opinion. No, sirree.” Tré slinked backwards a little, closer to his beloved drum kit.

“Nobody cares about your opinion, Tré,” Mike retorted.

“Shots fired,” Frank sniggered.

“Sometimes, I hate my bandmates.” Tré whined to Ray.

Ray pat him on the back reassuringly. “You need more than three, Tré, if you don’t wanna be lonely.”

“We should get another guitarist, just in case those two get married or something.”

“Actually, I know a guy…” Brian started, but was interrupted by Billie Joe.

“Mike, I need a nap.” He yawned to prove his point.

Mike winced. “You had 16 hours of sleep already today!”

Gerard rolled off the couch in time for Billie Joe to land on it. He stood up and walked to a spot between Frank and Mikey. Mikey pet his head comfortingly.

Billie Joe groaned. “Yeah, still, I can’t stay awake without making music.”

Mike sighed, grabbing a sleep cap and a blanket. He tucked Billie Joe in, whispering a “Goodnight, little birb.”

Tré rolled his eyes, evidently sick of seeing this.

“Is it just me, or is BJ Armstrong a human sloth?” Frank turned to Gerard, raising an eyebrow in bemusement.

“I was just thinking the same thing,” Gerard confirmed, mirroring the former’s grin.

The two locked gazes for a few seconds, before Mikey promptly coughed loudly, bringing both back into reality.

Ray had noticed the two staring at each other like they just found a gold statue in the back of the gym (which, surprisingly, had actually happened a year ago) and frankly, if they didn’t do their couple-y things in private soon, he’d die of a fluff overdose. Wanting to break the resulting silence, he cleared his throat as well.
“That’s the secret of Green Day,” Ray laughed.

Mike narrowed his eyes in Ray’s direction, face melting into a laugh.

Billie Joe let out a snore.

“So about that guitarist…” Tré turned to Brian, eager to finally grow out of being a third wheel.

-NJA, Monday-

Frank was really getting sick of Ray’s nosiness, but violence wasn’t condoned in the school rules. He fidgeted absently with his fingers as Ms Orzechowski droned on and on about calculus in the background.

“Come on, Frank. You and Gerard are the embodiment of loooooooooove,” Ray whispered obnoxiously.

“Ok, kids! I’m ducking out for a few moments to grab my laptop charger, so start on the exercises for 20J!” The teacher rushed out of the room as her laptop died.

Frank looked up at a pdf of his textbook and realised he had no idea whatsoever how to even do implicit differentiation. He thought he was pretty great for working out basic calculus, but this was not basic calculus.

“Ray, help me.”

Ray rolled his eyes. “Whatever, I’ll teach you,” he acquiesced. “The most important part of implicit differentiation is that it’s like the chain rule in that you differentiate each function separately. Y is a function of x, and if we think of it in terms of u and v, y is u and x is v. So you basically apply all the same rules to y as you do x, but you add dy/dx next to it because you want the expression to be in terms of x. It’s like, um, differentiating y is doing the outside function and adding the dy/dx is telling you to do what’s inside as well.”

Frank tried this logic on the first question. It worked. “So because we don’t know the relationship of x and y, we just add dy/dx so we know we need to differentiate it?”

“Pretty much, but you gotta get dy/dx on its own too,” Ray agreed.

“Huh. I gotcha.”

It was actually pretty easy.

His computer got an email and Frank found it was from Mikey.

To: fiero14@nja.edu

From: unicorngod@gmail.com

Subject: help

Oi Frankie, I know your phone is off but this is urgent. So don’t blame me for knowing your school email. But I really need someone to come furniture shopping with us on Saturday. Bob’s coming, so if Ray’s there with you ask him to come as well.
“Ray, you up for a furniture shopping trip with the Ways and Bob?” Frank asked, elbowing his friend.

“Eh, sure. Tell him I’m coming.”

To: unicorngod@gmail.com
From: fiero14@nja.edu
Subject: RE: help

Sure, and Rayman said yes too.

xofrnk

“You done? Orzechowski’s coming back soon,” said Ray.

“Done,” Frank confirmed, closing the window.

Frank got through a couple of questions before he sneezed suddenly, causing mental alarm bells to turn themselves up to eleven.

“Agh, damn, Frankie. You getting sick right before exam season?”

“I sure as hell hope not. Being sick is hell on earth,” Frank whined, refilling his mechanical pencil.

Frank knew full well that his immune system was really horrible, after a stint in hospital with pneumonia in the middle of elementary school. Once he succumbed, it took weeks to get better.

“There’s a really easy spell to stop yourself getting the flu, you know,” Ray mumbled as Ms Orzechowski walked back into the room.

“What spell?”

“Doing lots of maths.”

Frank paused and turned to Ray. “Maths?”

“You kill the virus with an unrelenting barrage of knowledge!” Ray giggled, returning to his work.

“What the flying fuck, Ray?” Frank mumbled, quietly so Ms Orzechowski couldn’t hear.

-Economics-

Frank trailed slowly to his Economics class, to no avail because he was still the first one there.

“Ah, Frankie, come on in,” Brian called out from the room, lazing around in his ass-of-steel position.
Frank spotted something in the teacher’s hands as he sat down in his usual spot.

“Brian, are you playing on a GameBoy?”

“Yeah, I got a copy of Fire Emblem: Sacred Stones, so I decided to play it,” he replied, putting the device away as other students trickled in.

Bob came in and sat down in his usual spot next to Frank. The two acknowledged each other with a nod, and that was ok because Bob was a guy of few words (excepting a lot of occasions).

Brian stood up once everyone was in the room, tapping twice on the whiteboard.

“Ok, kids, we’re starting monopolies as a market structure.”

He tried to write something on the board, but the marker had run out of ink. Frank sniggered, making Brian give him a pointed glare.

Chucking the marker gracefully into the bin, Brian turned to Frank. “So Frank, can you tell the class what a monopoly is, seeing you’re being a rude little boy today?”

“Uh, sure. A monopoly is when a single firm is a market, pretty much. That’s only when barriers of entry are huge, and the firm makes a relatively unique product that doesn’t have close substitutes.”

Brian nodded, obviously pleased. “Can you give us an example?”

“Uh… Microsoft have a near monopoly in the IT industry, I think.”

“That’s right! Here’s a little bit of food for thought for you though, Frank.” Brian started grinning like the Cheshire cat, and Frank gulped quietly.

“Yeah?” Frank mumbled.

“Judging by the definition you just gave, would Gerard Way be the monopoly in the market for your heart?”

Frank’s face darkened. “What?” he hissed.

Bob started laughing, and slapped Frank on the back. “Schechter, 11/10!”

A girl behind them piped up, “Wait, Gerard Way, as in the Mikey Way’s brother?”

The class then descended into chatter.

“He was so nerdy back then, though.”

“I saw him with Mikey the other day. He’s hot now.”

“Oh my gosh! That’s so cute.”

Frank seethed, “Why is everybody in this class a gossip loving fucker?!”

The class shut up, and Brian’s grin did the impossible and widened.

“Iero, detention!”

-Tiffany’s Diner, Thursday afternoon-
Mikey sipped at his coffee, the nostalgia of this diner giving him a very warm, fuzzy feeling.

Those afternoons and evenings he spent with his parents and nerdy big brother at Tiffany’s were some of the fondest things he remembered, but being here alone wasn’t too bad either. It gave him time to reflect on his life, and time to quietly take in the world.

Tiffany’s Diner was situated only a five-minute walk away from his parents’ house, with the added bonus of the staff being close family friends. Tiffany Smith, the namesake of the diner, had passed away when Mikey was still in elementary school, but her son Spencer had done an amazing job of keeping her dream alive. Spencer was around Gerard’s age, also eschewing college for something he knew was more satisfying: the diner he had lived and worked in his entire life. Mikey was admittedly a little jealous; he had always felt a little lost when it came to his career and passions, and the classes he was taking in university were a little lacklustre to say the least.

Mikey leant back on the cushioned booth, feeling a little selfish for taking up so much space but not really minding as there was next to nobody in sight. The rays of the autumn sun reflected off the metal edges of the tables, making intricate patterns on the dark tiled floor, and Mikey took another sip of his mocha. Spencer was probably busy with managerial work, and Mikey was too comfortable to get up anyway.

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Pete knew that he was actually supposed to stalk the older brother, but Mikey Way was truly a sight to behold.

The lazy yet graceful way he leaned back to the booth, the way he so blankly sipped at his coffee with his perfect pink lips… Pete was falling, and falling faster than a coin off a skyscraper.

He shifted slightly on the plastic table, waves of pain travelling up his legs; it was easier to avoid people when he wasn’t sitting comfortably.

Flicking his eyes away from the tawny haired human sitting so deliciously in front of him, Pete always found his gaze back intensely on Mikey’s eyes.

Subconsciously licking his lips, Pete clenched his fists and tried to not think of how beautiful the man in front of him was, and about how he could use Mikey to Jimmy and Lindsey’s advantage.

It didn’t work; every blink of Mikey’s feathery eyelashes, every sip from the boring white cup he held, every small energy shift in his body… they all served to distract Pete from his true mission.

Sighing, Pete decided to go check on his actual target. Cutting a hole in space, he jumped in without a second’s hesitation.

What he didn’t notice was Mikey snapping back to reality, seeing the ripple of the hole in space sealing up.

-Way brothers’ apartment, Saturday morning-

Frank held his breath as Ray knocked cheerily on the door of the Way brothers’ apartment. It really should have been a sin to be happy this early in the morning, he thought, rubbing his eyes as if the sleepiness would also rub off. It didn’t.

The door opened to reveal a dishevelled Gerard in a large Black Flag t-shirt and pink checked shorts, grumbling and blinking blearily at them. It seemed like he and Frank agreed on this matter. If Frank and Gerard lived together, they could get up late…
No. Gerard was evil and had evil powers, as Brian had inadvertently proven. He’d never live with this guy unless Mikey and his morning-loving ass were there to protect him.

“Ray, stop being such a goddamn morning person. Seriously kid, Mikey hasn’t even finished my coffee yet.” Gerard yawned, exposing his smaller-than-normal teeth. Kicking what looked like a duffel bag out of the way, he gestured to the two boys to come inside. “Welcome to the second branch of the Way house. Bob’s meeting us where we’re going, and close the goddamn door behind you.”

The apartment was more empty than messy, and that was a bold statement seeing as there were pizza boxes, dirty clothes and art supplies strewn everywhere. Frank only noticed the lack of furniture when he found Mikey balancing a cup of coffee precariously on a stool.

“Oh, great brother of mine, here is your addiction, lovingly made by me, your amazing brother.” Mikey called out bluntly, dodging a staggering Gerard, who grabbed the mug and glugged half of it down in one go. Mikey winced at seeing his hard work go down Gerard’s hatch so quickly and slipped out of the kitchen to join Frank and Ray on the cleanest bit of their parquet floor.

“Whatever. Thanks, Mikey,” Gerard drawled. Scratching the back of his head, he stumbled into his room, presumably to get changed into something more decent.

After a small awkward pause, Mikey turned to the two.

“So, kids. Thanks for going furniture shopping with me. If I had to go alone with Gerard,” Mikey shuddered, “it wouldn’t be pretty.”

“No worries, Mikey. Frank and I are really glad to help out. Aren’t we, Frank?” Ray elbowed Frank, making him nod.

“Yeah. This is a bit early in the morning, though.”

Mikey snorted. “It’s to avoid the rush of people, duh.”
Frank raised an eyebrow.

“Where are we going, exactly?”

-IKEA-

Frank pursed his lips, clearly unamused. Bob had welcomed them cordially to the IKEA branch owned by his family, but that didn’t make things better.

“Why are we here?” he asked.

Mikey gave him a confused look. “We need furniture.”

“Yeah, but why here?”

“What wrong with IKEA?” Ray retorted.

“Who wants cheap minimalistic furniture with weird Swedish names? It’s so lame.”

Gerard gave Frank an exasperated glance. He really did have a huge crush on him, but IKEA was the god of furniture shopping. “I dunno, it sounds pretty good.”

“Especially the cheap part,” Mikey concurred.
Gerard placed a hand on Frank’s shoulder, squeezing lightly. “You also have no right to complain, Frank, because it’s my house.”

“Our house, Gerard,” Mikey reminded, poking his brother’s cheek.

Ray and Bob looked blankly at the scene: Frank was trying to get Gerard’s hand off him without being obvious, Gerard was enraptured with Frank and completely oblivious to the latter’s discomfort and there was Mikey repeatedly poking his brother’s oblivious face.

Mikey poked a little too close to Gerard’s lips, causing the latter to poke out his tongue and get saliva on Mikey’s finger.

Mikey wordlessly wiped a hand on his shirt and backed away slowly, lips pursed and eyes questioning behind the glasses.

Ray coughed. “So, what exactly do you guys want to get?”

“We need another bed, a table, 4 chairs, a couch, some shelves, a Blu-Ray player and a closet,” Gerard replied automatically, tuning out enough to accidentally let go of Frank.

“A closet?” Ray questioned, a grinning bubbling up on his face.

“No, Ray, no closet jokes,” Bob interjected.

Ray’s face fell like an anvil off a cliff. “But Bob…”

“No,” Bob emphasised obstinately, walking to the escalator that led to the showrooms.

Frank had slipped out of Gerard’s grasp, and followed Ray and Bob to the escalator.

Mikey and his brother lagged behind.

“Why a Blu-Ray player, Gee? We can’t even get one here,” Mikey asked quietly.

Gerard sighed. “Patrick wanted to watch one of his crappy soaps and we bought it on Blu-Ray.”

Mikey nodded. “Huh. We should stop by that mall near our place to get one soon.”

The two caught up to their friends, adamant in getting what they wanted at the end of this shopping trip.

---

Mikey was right about there being a morning rush in IKEA.

What he hadn’t been right about was the fact that they could never beat the crowd.

“Is this place a fucking maze or what?” Frank muttered as he dodged the 5th pram to nearly take his toes off.

Ray had found yet another brochure stand and grabbed a copy. From where Frank was standing, he could tell it was the one for bathrooms. How did he know? Well, it did say “bathrooms” on it…

Gerard and Mikey were looking around a small model house: Mikey was actually taking notes on what furniture he wanted while Gerard was too busy playing with all of the bits and bobs on the furniture. Frank completely understood where he was coming from; pressing closets were quite a
great way to waste time.

Bob and Ray came in, with the former trying to pronounce the Swedish on the labels (and butchering as badly as a stereotypical Westerner butchers Japanese) and the latter just being himself.

“You know, I’d like to live in a house like this. Think about it, a small dinky house in the woods where nobody has any expectations for you,” Frank mused aloud.

Bob slapped a hand on his shoulder, and after a beat, replied, “There’s no internet out in the woods, you dingus.”

“Well,” Frank sighed, “there goes that plan.”

He wandered into the model bathroom, admiring himself in the surprisingly clean display vanity. He slicked back his hair, spotting Gerard coming into his personal space.

“This mirror isn’t big enough for the two of us, Gerard,” Frank said, bumping into the former’s shoulder.

“Shut up and let me fix my hair, Frankie,” Gerard retaliated by bumping Frank back a little rougher.

Ray walked out of the little laundry and right into the bathroom.

“TMI, TMI! Haven’t you people ever heard of closing the goddamn door?” he exclaimed.

Frank and Gerard turned to him, unamused.

“There aren’t any doors around, Ray,” Frank retorted, exiting the room.

They all walked out of the model house into the wardrobe section.

“Hmm, this ‘Meråker’ style would go well with our apartment…” Mikey thought aloud, scribbling onto his little sheet of paper.

“Hey Frank,” Ray called out from a couple of metres away, “I bet you can’t fit in this closet!”

“Try me,” Frank muttered as he stood up quite comfortably in another of the display wardrobes.

Ray shook his head, pointing to the next one.

“I want you to fit in that dinky compartment.”

Frank rolled his eyes, crawling into the compartment. Ray closed the door, to his amusement and Frank’s panic.

“Hey Frankie, I think it’s time you stopped being such a closet case. Come out!” Ray taunted.

Frank tried to open the wardrobe and found himself unable to open the door. He shouted back, “Ok, I’m gay!” because he knew this was exactly what Ray was going for.

Gerard turned to the ruckus going on a very short distance away from him. Frank was gay? Hooray.

“Now let me out of here, Ray! Let me actually come out.” Frank’s muffled voice came through the wood of the closed door.
Gerard couldn’t help giggling.

Ray opened the door, allowing Frank to tumble out.

He said as he brushed himself off, adjusting his hair, “That was traumatising.”

Mikey finished taking notes on possible wardrobes and the group started looking through model rooms again. Gerard jokingly posed on a chaise lounge and begged Mikey to take it home.

“Gerard, we do not need a chaise lounge. We already decided on a couch that seats more than 1 person.” Mikey chastised as he dragged his older brother off the furniture.

Frank, meanwhile was looking through a cookbook in one of the model kitchens. Knowing how obliviously disastrous a cook Frank was, Mikey grabbed at his collar and pulled him away from the book.

“I was getting to the good bit!” Frank whined as he struggled against Mikey’s grip.

“You can’t even cook, Frank,” Mikey replied.

Frank tried to turn his head around to bite at Mikey’s hand, failing miserably. “Don’t crush my dreams, Mikey!”

The group found Ray sitting in an office chair, spinning around and eating the display crayons being fed to him by Bob.

Bob was still sane, however, so he dragged Ray away from the chair and his new wax addiction when he spotted Mikey and the rest.

“Ok, guys, we really need to find things,” Frank said, wriggling out of Mikey’s grip and adjusting his collar.

“Let’s go!” Mikey crowed, pointing in a random direction.

-An hour later-

Under Mikey’s direction, they all found what the Ways were looking for and now were down at the storerooms.

“Bob, Ray, you’re pushing trolleys. Frank, Gee, you’re looking for things,” Mikey said, checking the 5000 pieces of paper he was holding.

The whole operation went quite smoothly: Ray and Bob followed Gerard’s lead while Frank scouted ahead with Mikey’s papers.

It went smoothly to a point.

Frank had stopped and stared at something, the others eventually catching up to him.

“What is it, Frank?” Gerard asked, joining him.

Frank turned and stared at him blankly.

“Garden gnomes.”

Garden gnomes stared out from underneath their plastic packaging, their blankness only surpassed
by Mikey’s own blank expression. They were quite scary, he thought.

“They’re scary,” said Gerard.

“Yeah.”

“Gerard, why did you stop?” Mikey called out from the other end of the aisle.

“Garden gnomes!” Gerard called back.

“Shut up and get me a ‘Meråker’!” Mikey yelled.

---

It had been at least 20 minutes and they had moved about half a metre in the line for checking out. Bob was starting to fall asleep on one of the trolleys and Ray had brought out his 3DS and was playing Happy Home Designer again.

Frank looked over, interested. “Are we making a hell house again?”


Gerard, kicking Bob awake, leaned around Ray’s shoulder. “Art studio? I want one like that.” He called out to his brother, “Mikey, can Ray be our interior designer?”

“No!” was the exasperated answer.

Frank sighed. It was going to be a long time until he could get home and sleep.

-Another long hour later-

“Mikey, I’m hungry,” Ray whined, clinging onto the sleeve of Mikey’s jacket.

“Hi hungry, I’m Mikey,” was the bored reply. Mikey was updating the to-do and have-done list on his phone and nobody could intrude on this time.

Gerard looked up and noticed that the food court wasn’t as crowded as the checkouts were.

“How about we get something to eat here, Ray?” he pet the latter’s head fondly.

Ray replied, “Yeah, it’s so convenient, having food here.”

“Don’t do it, Gerard!” Frank said fiercely, causing everyone to turn to him.

“Wha?”

“IKEA food is shit,” he clarified.

Gerard walked up to him until he was towering over the shorter boy. Frank gulped, backing away until he realised the trolley was blocking that path.

Gerard leant down so his mouth was at Frank’s ear. “How would you know?”

“Uh…” Frank stalled. Gerard was ridiculously close at the moment, so what was going to happen? He closed his eyes in anticipation, opening them again when the lack of Gerard’s hot breath on his ear was apparent.
Gerard stepped back quickly, grabbed Ray and grinned cheekily in Frank’s direction.

“Exactly! I’m gonna buy something.”

The two were gone before anyone could say “It’s too dangerous to go alone, take this.”

“Do we tell them?” Bob asked groggily, rubbing his eyes.

Frank snickered. “Nah, let them learn the hard way.”

A moment of silence settled on the group, before Mikey had an idea.

“Let’s go try some samples!”

---

As hungry as both of them were before, neither Ray nor Gerard were very pleased with the hot-dogs they had bought.

Mikey wasn’t happy either, seeing as he had probably tried a bit too much cloudberry jam at once, and was complaining about getting diabetes until some diabetic person threatened to beat him up.

Frank thankfully wasn’t suffering from the food he had tried, but he wasn’t too thrilled with any of it either.

Bob on the other hand…

“These marshmallows are the best!” he laughed as he stuffed more into his already full mouth.

…had cleaned out the store’s entire supply of Swedish marshmallows, which thankfully wasn’t very much, because at the rate he was eating them he had an actual chance of getting diabetes.

After the five had finished stuffing furniture into Mikey and Gerard’s car, Bob waved his goodbyes and walked home.

Ray made a point of telling Bob he shouldn’t eat so many marshmallows at once. Bob pointedly ignored him, stuffing marshmallows into his mouth as he left.

The four found it a tight squeeze in the car: Frank was stuck using the middle back seat, and Gerard was half squeezed into the door as a result; Mikey and Ray had a piece of furniture between them, squeezing them into their respective doors.

The trip back to the Ways’ was short and uneventful, save for Mikey accidentally driving into some low-flying birds.

“Mikey, what have you done?” Frank teased.

“I’m on a freeway surrounded by old ladies in SUVs! What else do you think I would have done?” Mikey irately replied. As revenge, he swerved recklessly throughout the trip just to see Frank’s face when he got squished into Gerard.

---

“IKEA is Swedish for ‘fuck you’.”

Gerard turned to Mikey, who was still trying to stick the same leg into the same chair. He looked
down at his own work, which was no better.

After Ray, Frank and Mikey finished the wardrobe, Ray and Frank had left. Ray needed to go to his part-time job, and Frank had a lunch date with some relatives.

Mikey got the leg in the chair, stepping back and raising his arms in triumph.

“I have done it, Gee! I put a leg in the cha –”

Said leg rocketed out of the chair and ricocheted off the wall, making Gerard wince. That wall was going to have one massive dent.

The tell-tale sizzle of the release of energy made Gerard instinctively take a step back.

Whimpers filled the room as a demon revealed himself cowering only centimetres away from the dent in the wall. Brown slitted eyes looked up under dark bangs, contrasting with the light horns and the light dress shirt he wore.

There was something familiar about him that Gerard couldn’t place at the very moment; the thought that was screaming in his mind right then was the fact that there was a demon in their house.

Mikey should have warded the place properly, goddammit.

The demon was powerful enough so that Mikey could see him as well, but Gerard noticed something a little off with his reaction.

His brother was just as surprised as Gerard was, but his eyes were clouded over with an unreadable expression. Gerard blinked, trying to decipher that, but chalked it up to that really strange familiar feeling he had towards the demon. Mikey probably had it too.

A few moments passed before Gerard decided to break the silence.

“Who are you and what are you doing in our house?”

The demon stood up slowly, backing as far as he could towards the wall. His tail twitched, a sign that he was flustered and ready to run.

Mikey flinched, breaking out of his reverie.

The Ways stepped closer, knowing that it would be intimidating to the poor sap, who looked like he was about to wet his pants.

Gerard was quite relieved that none of their protectors were around; Mikey’s were out for a walk and his own were messing around at NJA. The demon looked scared of the brothers enough.

“P-Pete. Pete Wentz. I-I-I was sent here to spy on you because… um… my bosses want you dead,” the demon – Pete – stammered, slicking back a few unruly locks of hair.

Mikey raised an eyebrow, eyes narrowing. Pete gulped, understandably too, because Gerard had been on the receiving end of Mikey’s glare countless times and there was something wrong with Pete if he wasn’t ready to dig himself a hole to China with his bare hands.

Mikey growled. “Leave, and tell your bosses that ain’t happening. Ever.”

Pete left without another word, the only trace of his former presence being a piece of wall falling
out of the dent.

Gerard turned to his brother.

“I’m pretty sure I’ve seen him somewhere.”

Mikey looked back at him, blank as usual.

“He’s the guy from our dream,” he said automatically.

Gerard turned away in thought, trying to sum things up in his head.

Mikey sighed, deciding he would probably drop the bombshell now. “He’s kinda cute, actually.”

-Jimmy and Lindsey’s apartment, Hell-

“So, Pete, I see you failed.”

Jimmy stood over him menacingly, Lindsey (with any shred of kindness gone from her countenance) behind him, holding two frozen herrings.

“What are you going to do to me?” Pete whimpered.

Lindsey cackled menacingly. “We don’t want to do any damage to you, Peter Panda.” She passed a herring to Jimmy.

“That’s right,” Jimmy added, “you’re too precious to us. But, we still need to punish you.”

“So,” Lindsey snickered, “we’re going to beat you up without actually hurting you.”

“Introducing our new favourite game: ‘How many times can we beat Pete with a herring?'”

-NJA, Wednesday-

Frank sighed as he filled in the stupid survey they had to do for their Positive Education class. Ray sighed in reply next to him, because his laptop was being a bitch and not loading his results.

Positive Education was a class every student in the school had to take, because according to the principal, they weren’t meant to be “total unsocial nerds” and needed to “understand the real world”.

And here Frank was taking a survey to find out his best traits. So much for preparing them for the real world.

Their teacher was Mr Gaskarth, Ray’s English teacher. The really good thing about him was that he was actually a competent teacher (shame Frank didn’t get him for any of the important subjects now, huh?) but that was neutralised by his love of picking on the people he knew (i.e. Ray) and the people around them.

“What’d you get, Frank?” Ray asked leaning over Frank’s shoulder.

“It looks like ‘Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence’ is my best trait,” he replied, scrolling down the list to find forgiveness his worst trait. Huh.

“Mine hasn’t loaded yet,” Ray whined, “the internet here is so crappy!”
Frank snickered. “You have a Mac, though. Windows computers don’t have that problem.”

Ray looked over blankly at his screen.

“You have that error.”

Frank turned to his laptop to find that it was restarting for no apparent reason.

“Oh god.”

---

“Ugh, why did my laptop have to take, like, three hours to restart the only time when Gaskarth actually wants evidence of your work?” Frank whined, looking down at his watch to find that there was only half of lunch left.

Ray sighed, ruffling his friend’s hair. “Stop complaining, geez. I had to stay behind until the internet was working.” He paused for a second, causing Frank to glare up at him.

“What’s the deal? That was nice, Rayman.”

Ray looked down, eyes shifty with some sort of realisation.

“I need to get the cake Mum made for your birthday, because I can’t come over for Halloween tonight. My German oral exam tomorrow is really important, haha.” He strode off down the hall.

Frank smiled, following the former to his locker.

“It’s a shame, really. It’s the first year you haven’t been able to come over, Ray. Are you sure we’re still friends?” He teased.

Ray only shook his head fondly in response, grabbing the trademark orange box of El Toro Bakery and placed it gently in Frank’s hands.

“This is my penance. It’s an almond meal orange cake, courtesy of Mum and me, of course. Sweet, but not too sweet, just how you’d always liked it.”

Frank smiled warmly, the gratitude of having such an amazing friend (despite all Ray’s faults) tickling the edges of his dark and gloomy soul. Just the edges, and not the inside.

Frank had standards for his inner emo, ok?

-Home, after school-

“Thanks for picking me up from school today, Mum.” Frank gently closed the door of his mum’s second-hand hatch-back, knowing that’d she’d lose her shit if he slammed it like he usually would.

“No worries, honey. It is your birthday, after all. How was school today?” Linda grabbed a load of their laundry and put it in the dryer, motioning for Frank to help wash the whites.

The latter quickly complied, setting his bag down near the machine and dragging the wicker basket over the concrete towards where he was. Linda tutted disapprovingly.

“Frankie, if you keep doing that, you’ll ruin the basket and the floor. Pick it up next time, ok?”

“Sure.” Frank unceremoniously emptied the laundry into the washing machine. He grabbed the
bright red canister of detergent and poured exactly a capful into the drawer. Chuckling to himself, Frank closed the lid of the machine and grabbed his bag from where he had set it down earlier. Slinging it over a shoulder, he grabbed some of the grocery bags and waltzed inside.

Well, he walked, but figurative language was perfectly acceptable.

Shedding his shoes at the door, he put away the groceries he was carrying. Padding upstairs to his room, he set down his bag in the usual corner and collapsed onto his queen-sized bed. Staring at the stark white ceiling of his bedroom gave him a little time to reflect on his life.

It had only been a couple of weeks since he had thought to himself that life needed a few changes, and he was pleasantly surprised he got his wish. It had been the same boring routine before, anyway: wake up, go to school, come home, study, sleep, rinse and repeat.

Gerard and Mikey coming back from Thailand was probably the biggest change. It was since then that he felt that life was worth living, because he was looking forward to every adventure the Ways, Ray and Bob would drag him into.

Yeah, both Ways. Mikey was his best friend, but Gerard had probably brought the most spice to Frank’s life. Sometimes he would daydream and find himself wondering how Gerard was doing, what Gerard was doing. He’d wonder what Gerard was feeling, and how he’d feel if Frank was there with him.

The only reason he even decided to hate him in the first place was because of Gerard’s new charisma. Frank was all for genuine feelings, and he really wasn’t sure whether his sudden crush on the guy was genuine or was induced by seeing Gerard so different to who he was before. Gerard was now the sort of person who could manipulate emotions, but he wouldn’t do that, would he?

“Frank! Mikey and Gerard are here,” Linda called from downstairs.

Frank groaned, rolling off the bed and rushing downstairs. True to his mum’s word, Mikey was standing outside their open front door in vampire garb, and Gerard, dressed like a skeleton, bouncing excitedly behind him.

Mikey blew on a party blower, but somehow managed to make it the most depressing thing in existence. “Woohoo, Frankie. You’re legal now.”

Frank looked down at his watch. “It’s 4:00. My BS hours are over.”

Gerard laughed, giving a fluoro pink tote bag to Frank.

“We couldn’t think of a present to get you, so I made you this instead.”

Frank took the bag, opening it to find a really well made Frankenstein’s monster costume.

Mikey snickered, inviting himself and Gerard inside. “You’d better like it, because he put more time and effort into this than he did into his own costume.”

Frank looked up, shifty. “Are you actually trying to win me over?”

Gerard grinned. “Good muses are really hard to come by.”

“Oh stop, Schechter’s had his fun already today. Not you too, Gerard.” Frank rolled his eyes.

Gerard frowned. “No, really, I mean it.”
Mikey started rummaging around in the pantry, taking out all of the candy Linda had bought for Halloween.

“Mikey, sweetie, are you going to hand out candy with us today? That’s so sweet of you!” Linda laughed at her own joke, to everyone’s chagrin. Mikey kept the smile plastered to his face.

“Yeah, because Gerard and I moved outside of the trick-or-treat area,” Mikey replied, resuming his search, “and because Gerard loves kids, too.”

“That’s great!” Linda cooed, “I’m going to go upstairs and do some work, boys. Behave yourselves, ok?” She grabbed her backpack and walked up the stairs, giving a small wave as she left.

“Oh good, she’s gone,” Mikey said, grabbing a pink object from his pocket. Passing it to Gerard, he said, “Blow this up, will you?”

Gerard complied, his face going red from the amount of air he tried to put into the thing at once.

As it was being blown up, Frank noticed a little something off about the inflatable dolphin.

“Mikey, what the fuck is that pink blow-up dolphin in my good Christian suburbs?”

Mikey stopped his search and looked back at him quizzically.

“You’re not even Christian, you nutjob.”

Frank rolled his eyes, sighing. “It’s a pink blow-up dolphin that looks like a fucking dildo, Mikey. I’m not gonna get prosecuted by some anal Christian mums for showing their kiddiwinkles something as unsavoury as that.”

“We’re not going to show it, Frank. If you poke a hole in it, it starts screaming,” Gerard explained, “It’s a really good effect.”

“If someone stuck a hole in me I’d start screaming,” Frank retorted.

“So we’re gonna put it outside now,” Mikey decided, taking the fully inflated dolphin and some string outside.

Gerard turned to Frank, smiling shyly.

“We should set up for trick-or-treating, huh?”

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“So I was like, “Doctor, what’s wrong with me?” and I shit you not, he literally said “You sick!””

Frank laughed, knowing exactly where Gerard was coming from; his own GP was Chinese with a sick sense of humour as well. (Not “sick” as Brian would use it, but evil sick.) Heck, that GP even gave him the exact same line when he was coughing his lungs out with another bout of bronchitis. He scratched at his neck, secretly admiring Gerard’s handiwork that was his costume.

It was only 5 in the evening; the first trick-or-treaters wouldn’t come for at least half an hour. But if both Ways were dressed up, he might as well have been too.

Mikey looked down at his phone, frowning. “Ray and Bob aren’t going to come today; that sucks.”
Frank put an arm around his best friend, snickering. “You have us, at least.”

The sound of footsteps caused all the boys to find Linda Iero with a DVD in her hand behind them.

“I was going to go and watch a movie, but would you boys like some cake that the Toros made for us?” she asked as she grabbed the orange almond cake and set it on the counter. She stuck a candle in the middle and lit it, looking expectantly at the boys.

Frank turned to both Ways.

“Don’t you dare sing –”

“Happy birthday to you,
Happy birthday to you,
Happy birthday, dear Frankie,
Happy birthday to you!”

The Ways descended into laughter after probably the most (deliberately) out-of-tune rendition of “Happy Birthday” in history.

Frank blinked. “Never mind.”

Linda clapped, gesturing to the candle. “Blow it out and make a wish, Frankie!”

Frank complied, feeling his face redden as he caught Gerard giggling in his peripheries.

He wished for good luck.

Linda grabbed a small knife from a drawer and cut a few small pieces from the cake, putting each on small plates she had grabbed from the cupboard.

Frank grabbed one of the small cake forks she had put next to the cake and sighed heavily when the first sweet morsel entered his mouth. Mrs Toro’s cakes were the best.

Linda had passed each of the Ways a piece of cake, and was currently munching on one herself.

“Oh!” she realised, “I’ve set up a legit birthday party for Frankie on Saturday, if you boys can come. I might not have seen much of Gerard, but I’m sure Frankie would love to see you both there!” She winked at Frank, sending a shiver down his spine. He did not like the older Way. She had barely seen the older Way. And here he was, passive as he saw Gerard being invited to his own party that he didn’t even know about.

“We’d love to, Linda! We can let Ray and Bob know too,” Mikey replied as smoothly as he could with cake in his mouth.

Linda waved him off. “Don’t worry about that, Mikey dear. I’ve already let their parents know and both families have said yes too.”

Frank looked at his mother quizzically. “Why didn’t I know about this?”

“There’s a few little things I’d like to keep a surprise, dearie!” Linda winked comically as she washed the plates and put the cake back in the fridge. “If you boys would like more, just grab some. Make sure to clean up after yourselves, though, ok?”
She exited with the DVD she had before, humming a strangely familiar tune.

---

It was a couple of trick-or-treaters later when Frank heard screams coming from the living room, where his mother was currently camped out watching her movie. Another scream came from the room, and he and Mikey turned to each other silently, very confused. Gerard was too busy giving candy to kids to notice.

“Doesn’t your mum hate horror movies?” Mikey asked.

Frank shrugged. “She’s the woman who watches Disney movies for fun, man. Are you sure it’s not the dolphin?”

Mikey shook his head. “We aren’t supposed to be able to hear the dolphin from inside.”

“We’ll go check on Ma, then. Like all,” Frank wiggled his fingers, “sneaky sneaky.”

Mikey snickered, “How articulate.”

Frank only pouted in reply, and padded slowly off in the direction of the living room.

Mikey followed him, but less theatrically.

When both boys reached the entrance of the living room, Linda was too engrossed in the screen to notice her son and his friend being creepy. As Frank and Mikey looked up at the screen, they saw…

“The bush-stone curlew, like most stone-curlews, is nocturnal. During the day, it shelters in tall grasses and shrubs, using its plumage as camouflage. It is common in the north of ‘Straya…”

…a curlew documentary.

They slinked back to the foyer, feeling strangely disappointed.

Gerard had finished handing out candy to the most recent group of trick-or-treaters, and was waiting for them, arms crossed and casually leaning back on the kitchen counter.

“I heard that screaming too, ya know. Didn’t have the decency to wait for me?”

Mikey rolled his eyes, a look that clashed badly with his elegant costume.

“You were too busy handing candy to kids and we were impatient. Besides, it was only an Australian curlew documentary,” Frank explained.

Gerard laughed, all chagrin gone. “Fucking Australia, man. You wouldn’t be able to tell a murder from a bird.”

A frenzy of knocks at the door signalled the arrival of yet another group of trick-or-treaters.

---

Frank coughed, wiping up some stray mucus with a tissue. Thankfully, Gerard had provided a mask instead of face-paint for his costume.

“You getting sick, Frank?” Gerard asked, worried.
Frank nodded, setting off another chain of violent coughs. It was around 9:30 now, and late nights usually made him feel worse than usual.

Mikey slapped his back, eventually stopping Frank’s fit.

“I’ll go grab some meds,” Frank said as he walked down to the bathroom, where the medicine was kept.

As he rummaged around in the cupboard he felt a small wave of energy knock him into the sink. Grabbing the newly unveiled box of tablets, his legs gave out. As he fell, the formerly empty bathroom had two people materialising in front of him. Frank gulped, unsure.

“People” may not have been the most appropriate word. The person on the left (who Frank guessed to be a demon) had small black horns and a tail that seemed to have a mind of its own, swinging and twisting in the air. Otherwise, he looked quite human, with a prominent forehead and the strangely tacky gold suit.

The person on the right was quite obviously an angel, as could be seen by his white, feathered wings. He wore a fedora which shaded his face, but Frank saw that his ice blue eyes shone underneath nonetheless. He was dressed a little more casually, with a grey hoodie on an anime shirt.

Frank’s gaze shifted between the two, feeling a little faint. The thud of distant footsteps resonated in his head.

“Why the fuck are you standing above me?” he asked weakly, feeling the beginnings of a migraine. He tried to stand up, but his legs were paralysed.

“Because it’s Halloween, it’s your birthday and we can make ourselves visible,” the demon shrugged.

It was at this moment that Gerard and Mikey rushed into the room. Both of them flinched at seeing the angel and demon there. Frank winced, the migraine getting worse.

“Patrick, Brendon, what’s the deal?” Gerard asked, panicked.

Wait, Gerard knew them?!

Both angel and demon shrugged.

Mikey knelt down and put a hand to Frank’s forehead. Frank contemplated going to sleep right there on the floor, because it was warm, but through Mikey’s hand came a rush of revitalising energy that had him ready to get up and run around or something.

“What the fuck, Mikey?” Frank groaned, standing up, both wondering where the hell that energy came from and why he knew these other people.

Mikey sighed. “Don’t “what the fuck” me, Frank! It’s all Gerard’s fault!” He pointed an accusing finger at his brother, who flinched at the mention of his name.

“I, uh, I can explain, Frankie,” he giggled nervously.

Frank raised an unamused eyebrow.

“I’m psychic, and uh… Patrick and Brendon are my protectors. Mikey’s got special healing
powers, so that’s why you’re not bed-ridden right now. Patrick’s an angel and Bren’s a demon, but I guess you could tell,” Gerard laughed good-naturedly, “I was in Thailand to train my powers, and Mikes followed me so he could heal people better. Brian was the first one to find out I had talent, because I only found out about my powers in my senior year. He was someone I really looked up to, and he gave me all I needed to start protecting other people. And um… I was trying to protect you, but um…” he looked down demurely, “I guess Patrick and Brendon were really curious about who you were.”

“That’s cool,” Frank mumbled automatically, “I’ve just gotta digest it.”

Frank couldn’t help a small smile; once Gerard started talking about helping other people, there was a really cute expression that lit his face. His eyes cleared, showing his genuinity. The red flush on Gerard’s cheeks and his cute smile were probably fit to be painted and displayed in the most prestigious art galleries in the world. If Frank wasn’t so artistically challenged, he would have started tonight.

Gerard was just really glad Frank took it as well as he did. Psychics were unheard of and branded as fake in this country, so seeing Frank understand so quickly was something that warmed his heart. Also, that smile was probably the one thing he’d remember if he suddenly went blind.

Mikey saw the mental states of his brother and his best friend, glancing sideways at Patrick and Brendon, who waggled their eyebrows in reply.

For two completely different types of spirits, Patrick and Brendon were two peas in a pod.

The boys (and spirits) returned to the foyer and decided to take down their Halloween display; it was quite late and all the trick-or-treaters were probably home asleep.

Frank was quite surprised to find Patrick and Brendon were actually really easy to talk to, despite their age and insistence that he and Gerard should get married immediately.

It was when they had left (something about updating Madam Fate on something) that Linda came downstairs to call Frank to bed.

The Ways said they would let themselves out, waving as they closed the front door behind them.

-NJA, Friday morning-

“Jams, what were we meant to be doing today?” Frank whispered.

Jamia opened the term planner for their French class.

“Uh… we were meant to do a review of passé composé.”

“So why is our sub being a weirdo?”

True to his word, their substitute teacher was 10 minutes into the lesson and still going on about housekeeping.

“So my name is Mallory Aimes, yes yes, but you must call me Monsieur Aimes because zat is ze respectful way, yes.” Mr Aimes scratched at his moustache.

“What’s with the chair in the corner?” asked Jack, who was sitting in the front row.

Mr Aimes grinned evilly, putting a cold shiver down every spine in the class of around 15. Jack
gulped, shying back as far as he could into the plastic chair.

“Zis, zis is ze Naughty Chair. If you are naughty,” he pointed to Jack, who whimpered, “you must zit in ze chair. If two of you are naughty,” he pointed to Kitty, “you must both zit in ze naughty chair. If all of you are naughty,” he gestured to the whole class, “you must all zit on ze naughty chair.”

“Monsieur, what if we get to the ceiling?” Jamia called out.

“If you get to the ceiling, I will cut a hole in ze ceiling so you can all fit!”

Frank and Jamia gave each other a look.

Patrick and Brendon, who were behind them (out of sight, Frank wasn’t strong enough to see them all the time), gave each other a look as well.

“Hey Pat, let’s prank this guy,” said Brendon.

“Why not? We came all the way out here, anyway,” replied Patrick.

---

Brendon picked up an eraser from the ground, pegging it at Mr Aimes’ head.

“Oi! Who threw zat?”

Nobody responded, so he turned around and glared at every student in turn. When nobody responded to that, he turned back to the board and kept writing.

Patrick found another eraser conveniently at his feet, and hit Mr Aimes square in the forehead.

He then made a light appear above Jack, who was oblivious to the illusionary cherubs and angels circling around his head.

Mr Aimes, noticing the bright light pointing to the kid in the front row, pointed at him and then the naughty chair.

“You! You threw zat rubber, didn’t you?”

“Uh, no?” Jack replied quietly, confused as hell.

“Too bad!” seethed Mr Aimes, “You can zit in ze naughty chair anyway!”

Jack stood up and slinked over to the chair. He sat down in it, relieved that it wasn’t actually that bad a chair.

Patrick and Brendon snickered, proud of their work so far. One kid down, fourteen more to go.

Mr Aimes, satisfied, turned back to the board.

---

Frank had no idea how he and Jamia were still in their seats.

Everyone else had been framed by an unnatural beam of light after Mr Aimes’ head got assaulted by unidentified flying objects. Jamia nor anyone else had noticed it, so he thought he was
hallucinating.

He heard giggling behind him and caught what seemed to be a glimpse of white wings crossing his vision. Pausing for a few seconds after not seeing any more, he took a glance at the precarious tower of students sitting on the naughty chair. Jack was on the bottom, not as satisfied with the chair now that he had 12 other kids sitting on him. Kitty was on the top, and her head was bent at a weird angle to the ceiling, so Mr Aimes would have had to cut a hole in the ceiling if Jamia or Frank were framed. What? They’d never throw things in class.

Mr Aimes dropped the whiteboard marker he was holding, and in trying to pick it up, made it roll away from him. He chased it still hunched over, causing Jamia to snort.

Time slowed down. Frank’s mouth opened to a comedic “O” shape and Patrick hi-fived Brendon in the background.

Mr Aimes pointed an accusing finger right in Jamia’s face. “You! You did this! You must zit on ze naughty chair!”

“But –”

“To ze chair! And take zis saw with you; you will need to cut a hole in ze zeiling.” Mr Aimes gave Jamia a disproportionately large hacksaw (against school rules and probably the law) and pointed to where Kitty’s head was.

Jamia stood and moved slowly, not wanting to ruin her reputation as the model student just because some crazy sub had just told her to cut a hole in the ceiling.

Patrick and Brendon held their breaths, scuttling closer to the back of the classroom to avoid Frank’s line of sight.

Frank held his breath as Jamia approached the leaning tower of students, raising the hacksaw.

The blades grew closer to the plaster. Until…

The bell rang.

Jamia dropped the hacksaw, grabbed her books and wordlessly left the classroom. Frank blinked after her, and did the same.

“Welcome to public school, where your subs probably belong in a mental hospital.”

A flash of gold entered his peripheries and left as quickly. Thinking of the gold-clad demon he had met a couple of nights ago, he shook his head and kept walking. What business would they have here?

Watching the students trickle out of the classroom, Brendon said, “That was fun.”

Patrick only smiled in reply.

Even though neither of them were happy to admit it out loud, they really were best friends.

-Hell, meanwhile-

“So, Pete, we’d like to get a shrubbery,” Lindsey ordered, sipping at a pink lemonade.

Pete had been doing Jimmy and Lindsey’s every whim after he was discovered on Earth, and boy
was he done. He regretted every believing that he could get himself a new family like his old band here in Hell, and well, he should have expected Lindsey and Jimmy to be jerkasses, anyway, because they were demons.

He’d have to find a way out of this mess, the way he couldn’t when his life came crashing down. Pete would get out this time.

“We’d like a small azalea bush, white picket fence, you know the deal,” Jimmy added, bringing Pete back into reality.

-Frank’s house, Saturday morning-

“We’d like a small azalea bush, white picket fence, you know the deal,” Jimmy added, bringing Pete back into reality.

-Mum? Why is there a jumping castle in our backyard? And not to mention the kiddie pool, the table of candy, the trampoline, and the petting zoo.”

Frank had woken up to a ruckus in the backyard, so he had gotten dressed and gone downstairs to check out what was happening. He hadn’t expected it to be his birthday party.

Linda laughed gently, petting her son’s hair. “Well, sweetie, I thought it was your last chance to be a child, so why not turn the child up to eleven?”

Frank grumbled. “How long until my friends get here?”

Linda looked down at her watch. “Twenty minutes.”

Frank put his face in his hands, groaning.

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His friends arrived together in their usual fashion. Mikey was wearing a jacket very similar to Gerard’s usual jacket (Frank suspected it was actually the same one) while his brother wore a sweater with the Misfits logo on it and a black beanie.

Ray was wearing what looked like his little sister’s hairclips (which were quite hard to see in his bush of hair anyway) and Bob was wearing his usual Bob-like fare.

“You’re going to love what’s out back,” Frank deadpanned.

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To Frank’s chagrin, everyone actually did love what was out back.

His mum had gone to work a few minutes after his friends had arrived, saying something about taking someone else’s shift before shutting the door of her car and speeding away, cackling.

Being the animal lover he was, Frank decided to check out the petting zoo first.

The keeper was talking to Mikey.

“How’s everything been, Kristin?” Mikey asked, petting a goat. It bleated, attempting to gobble up Mikey’s glasses. Mikey effortlessly smacked it down gently, letting it nibble his fingers.

The keeper – Kristin – shrugged. “Life’s been pretty good. College is eh, and this job is just to pay the bills.”

Frank sidled quietly to another goat, who decided to fall asleep on Frank’s lap and immobilise him.
Petting it awkwardly, Frank sighed. Kristin and Mikey noticed his presence.

“Oh, are you the birthday boy? Your mum’s the nicest client I’ve ever had, you know. Keep her alive as long as possible.” Kristin grinned, and Frank noticed how perfect her teeth were.

Forget Gerard being a babe magnet, Mikey was the one true magnet.

Frank chuckled, tickling the goat on his lap under the chin. “Heh, she’s only ever nice to anyone who’s not me. I guess the entire thing’s pretty cool, though. And why are you talking to me like a kid? I’m 18.”

She flinched in realisation, chuckling nervously. “Sorry, I’m so used to talking to kids I kinda forgot,” Kristin laughed, “and besides, you look so young, anyway!”

Mikey doubled over in laughter, surprising the goat he was holding and making it gallop away. Frank shuffled over as best he could on the hay stacks (with the goat still dead asleep on his lap) and slapped Mikey in the face, knocking off his glasses and forcing the latter to race that cursed goat to his glasses. Luckily enough, Mikey won, sloting his glasses back into place. The goat bleated stubbornly.

“What the fuck was that for, jerkass?” Mikey mock sneered. But seriously, that wasn’t cool.

Frank shrugged, laughing heartily. He carded his fingers through his goat’s fur.

“Sorry, your face is really slappable.”

It was at this moment Bob and Ray decided to join Frank and Mikey, Bob picking up a chicken hell bent on pecking out his eyes and Ray tickling a calf on the stomach.

Bob snickered. “Mikey’s no Ted Cruz, but yeah, his face is pretty slappable. We did the theory in my Psychology class, so I should know.”

Mikey rolled his eyes. “You guys are jerks.”

“Hey, birthday privilege!” Frank reminded.

Mikey gave him an exasperated look, lips pursed. He sighed, “You, yes, but Bob doesn’t have his birthday for a while.”

Bob raised his free palm passively. “I plead to being an expert with the irresistible need to impart my knowledge upon the younger generations.”

“At an expert in slappable faces? Dr Bryar, teach us.” Ray played along, biting his lip to hold back a giggle.

Bob, as best he could with a chicken trying to murder him, gave a prideful wave of his hand. “Yes, indeed, kiddiwinkles. I got my PhD through researching slappable faces.”

Kristin was laughing her head off, wiping tears from the corners of her eyes.

Mikey groaned, walking out of the enclosure to the teasing laughs of his friends. He rolled his eyes.

“You guys are ridiculous.”

The goat bleated.
Kristin had to leave quite soon after; it turned out that she had another party to go to and she wanted some time to set up. The boys had given their tearful goodbyes to the animals, except for Mikey, who was glaring at the goat that had tried to eat his glasses. It had bleated obnoxiously before Kristin drove away.

Ray and Gerard were now jumping on the trampoline, having challenged each other to do something cool. Ray, being the idiot that he was, decided to jump off the side of the jumping castle, panicking as he sailed past the trampoline and into the kiddie pool.

He surfaced after a few tense seconds, giving everyone watching a thumbs-up.

“Physics, huh?” Mikey mused.

Frank gave him an exasperated look. “He just defied the laws of physics, Mikey!”

Ray shouted gleefully from the pool, “You jealous?”

“No way!” Frank shouted back.

Gerard had jumped off (safely) from the trampoline and was looking to jump somewhere a little safer (he couldn’t risk having Ray land on him). He was quite surprised to find Bob napping in the jumping castle, and a devious idea started forming in his head. Bouncing over to Bob’s other side, he started jumping and moving Bob’s body in the direction of the opening and out of the door.

Bob tumbled onto the grass, waking up with a start. Ignoring the raucous laughter coming from his friends, he stuck his hand in the castle and gave Gerard the finger.

Frank noticed a cake sitting on the table of food, and beckoned for his friends to come over.

“We have cake!”

Frank really couldn’t emphasise this further, but Mrs Toro’s cakes were ambrosia on earth.

His mum had bought a berry almond “boy bait” (the strange name was from the recipe) and the sourness of the berries along with the sweetness of the batter lightened his dark, emo soul for just a moment.

They had realised Linda had strung up a piñata of Donald Trump as well, so after Frank ran inside to grab a scarf and a mop, they started hitting the piñata.

Ray was the first one to land a solid hit, and the piñata burst open to release a sizeable amount of what looked like coloured rocks onto the ground. To everyone’s protest, he grabbed one and put it in his mouth.

Everyone stared, holding their breaths as Ray played with it in his mouth. A beat passed before Ray spat it out on the ground, wiping his mouth with a sour expression.

“That is actually a rock. Voting for Donald Trump is a lie,” he cried as he ran inside to wash out his mouth.

The other four gazed a little distastefully at the spit-covered pebble on the ground, staring at it for a bit before Frank broke the silence.
“I guess Mum’s a little strong about her political opinions, huh?” He chuckled nervously.

Ray emerged, ruddy-faced, rubbing at his mouth with his sleeve.

“I don’t know about you guys, but the food on that table looks pretty good.”

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“Ray, Bob, you’re leaving already?” Frank cocked his head sideways, seeing Ray and Bob gather their things. Ray’s clothes had dried over the last hour, and he had already forced everyone to do their share of cleaning up from lunch, so Frank wasn’t worried, just surprised.

Bob replied, “Yeah, we’ve got a volunteering thing down at school in half an hour.”

“Sorry for not telling you earlier, we were having too much fun,” Ray apologised.

Frank waved them off.

“No worries, guys. Have fun!” he teased lightly.

Ray pouted before getting into Bob’s car, giving him the finger.

Frank laughed freely as he waved at the retreating hot rod.

“I’m never going to get over the fact that Bob’s car is pink,” said Mikey, leaning on Frank’s right shoulder.

Gerard chuckled, leaning on Frank’s other shoulder. “I don’t think anyone will.”

A shout and thud behind them caused them to face a bruised and disoriented demon. Gerard and Mikey relaxed in realisation. It seemed like this was another of their supernatural friends. Spotting Mikey clench his fists, Frank realised this was a familiar enemy, as Mikey only clenched his fists in uncomfortable situations.

“Uh, Pete? What the fuck?” Gerard muttered, voice cracking.

Frank looked frantically between his friends and the demon.

The demon put up his palms in a sign of pacifism. “Do you mind if I join you? My bosses, Jimmy and Lindsey, are first-class jerks.”

Mikey casually cracked his knuckles, his usual stare a little darker than usual. “Do explain, because the last time we saw you, you were spying on us, for them.”

Pete backed away slightly, waving his open palms incessantly. “You gotta know that they beat me within an inch of my life with a herring,” he scratched his head in embarrassment, “Also, Mikey’s kind of cute, and so I wanted to get to know him better.”

A dusting of pink appeared on Mikey’s cheeks, disappearing before Frank could register that it had existed. Both Ways sighed, knowing that the demon would be stupid to make a scene here.

“Oh yeah, Frank, this is Pete. Pete, this is Gerard’s hopeless crush, Frank,” Mikey’s voice went back to its usual quiet monotone as he introduced the two.

Both acknowledged each other with a nod.
“I’ve gotta ask, actually,” Frank thought aloud, “but why are you here?”

Pete shrugged dismally, face falling. “I really can’t be bothered serving Jimmy and Lindsey after the beating they gave me. You guys seem better.”

Gerard, being the kind soul he was, gave Pete a small pat on the shoulder. Deep down inside, he was worried that Pete was powerful enough to be visible to Frank, but…

“Well, join the party, Pete,” he said kindly.

Frank grinned, taking quite quickly to the demon. “Both figuratively and literally.”

Pete’s eyes lit up, a small smile gracing his bruised face. “Thanks!”

“But first of all,” Gerard said, beckoning to Mikey, “we need to initiate you into our group of friends.”

Mikey seemed to catch was Gerard was planning to do, so he and Gerard grabbed Pete a little bit like a battering ram.

“What?” Pete panicked.

Mikey snickered. “It’s harmless, don’t worry. This is to prove you’re with us instead of Jimmy and Lindsey now.”

Gerard counted down. “On three, two, one…"

Water soaked Frank’s bangs as Pete emerged sopping wet from the kiddie pool.

“Now you’ve joined the party, Pete,” Gerard announced jovially.

Pete couldn’t help but smile in return.

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“Pete, how are you on the roof of the jumping castle?” Mikey shouted, eliciting a teasing giggle from Pete.

The sun had almost set, but the party was still going on. Everyone had warmed up to Pete quite quickly, any animosities from their previous encounter disappearing without a trace. Demons were quite human, and Gerard was still surprised that neither his nor Mikey’s protectors had returned from their business. He would have liked them to have met.

“I teleported. Watch this!” Pete shouted, jumping off the castle, onto the trampoline and right into the kiddie pool. After getting wet the first time, Pete didn’t seem to mind getting wet afterwards.

Frank heard the rumble of his mother’s car coming down the driveway, and quickly told Pete to piss off or be discovered.

Pete thankfully wasn’t too worried about that, and said he understood.

“Thanks for the party guys, but I gotta go lie about where I was after Jimmy cools off. See ya later!” he waved and promptly disappeared as Linda walked into the backyard.

-Saporta mansion, meanwhile-
Show Pony gazed at the boy uncontrollably writing songs for his love interest. Gabe Saporta fell under the spell of insanity a little sooner than they thought.

No matter.

“I think you’re worthy enough to get this, Gabe,” said Pony, passing Gabe a leather-bound tome.

“So you’re finally giving me the tools to get Bob, huh, Pony?” Gabe cackled, taking it and flipping to the bookmarked page.

“Yes, Gabe, but the spell is in Hellic Runes. I’ll translate it for you, don’t worry about it,” Show Pony crooned.

“You won’t even realise I’m lying to you.”

-Way brothers’ apartment, Monday afternoon-

The door of the apartment opened suddenly, startling Mikey. Gerard was already home, and apart from his parents, the only other person with a key was…

“Mikey, Mikey!”

Mikey looked up to find Frank looking uncharacteristically panicked. “What?”

“I need express tutoring on Chem because I never listen in Mr Fowler’s classes. My exam is next week!” Frank wrung his hands, eyes wider than Gerard’s globe-like head.

Mikey, being really uncomfortable with emotional situations, decided to calm Frank down before hammering any sense into him.

“Breathe, Frank.”

Frank complied, calming down a few minutes later.

“So yeah, I need some tutoring because you got a 7 in Chem,” Frank explained a little later, when they were seated at the kitchen counter with some coffee.

“Interesting,” Mikey replied, standing up, “I’ll grab you something that can help.”

He came back with what looked like a very unassuming 2B pencil.

“This is the multiple-choice pencil,” Mikey explained.

Frank looked at him like he was going insane.

“What the fuck, Mikey?”

Mikey pointed to the end, which had the letters A-F written on each side.

“Roll it and write the answer down. 90% of the time, it’s right.”

Frank crossed his arms. “Prove it to me.”

~~~-~

“Holy fucking shit. Mikey, you’re a saviour!” Frank’s eyes brightened, finding that all the seemingly random answers from the pencil were right. He picked it up with a new sense of
reverence, admiring it. “Though of course, you going through all the stuff with me was helpful too, but the pencil was cooler.”

Mikey shrugged, taking another gulp of coffee. “Gerard made it, actually.”

Frank flinched slightly at the mention of Gerard, but kept his composure.

“Whoa, that’s pretty awesome,” he giggled, “I’m taking it, by the way. It’s going to be my lucky charm.” Frank hopped off the stool, walking to the Ways’ front door with a bounce in his step.

“You’d better give it back!” Mikey called after him, getting only a light laugh in reply.

-That evening-

“Oh, is that why Frankie was over today?” Gerard asked, “I was going to give him a charm, but I hope praying will suffice.”

Mikey sighed, picking at their dinner of beef stew. “Don’t overdo it, Gee.”

Gerard chuckled, chewing on a mouthful of vegetables. “It’s not like I can make him ace it with my prayers, Mikey, geez!” He rolled his eyes to further illustrate his point.

Mikey only replied with a half-lidded glare. Sometimes, Gerard really underestimated the power he had. He was almost certain Frank would be getting a very pleasant surprise on his report card.

-NJA, Wednesday afternoon-

Today was Careers Day at NJA, a day which Frank was glad existed because he didn’t actually have to do anything the entire day except be at school and hang out with Ray and Bob and Jamia.

Actually, scrap that: there was one important thing.

“Come in,” Brian called from inside Frank’s homeroom. Frank opened the door and walked in. He took a seat in the chair that had been dragged across to the front of Brian’s desk; the close proximity had him as nervous to leave as he was nervous to come in.

Every homeroom teacher had to talk with their senior students about their career paths today. And right now, it was Frank’s turn.

“I know you’ve told me that you want to pursue music, but you also know it’s not a stable job,” Brian raised his piercing gaze, “What are your plans, Frank?”

Frank sighed, gulping down the lump in his throat. “I’m not sure, but I know that I have to do something that I can fall back on.”

Brian looked up thoughtfully.

“You’ve been getting good marks in Economics, Frank. Maybe you could get yourself a foundation in that that you could fall back upon, and take up music as a side job,” he suggested.

Frank nodded wordlessly, not sure how to reply.

“There’s also IT as well, because that business is booming at the moment and you’d do well with tech-y foundations,” Brian continued.

Frank looked up. “You think so?”
Brian shifted his gaze for a few seconds, then sighed.

“Truth is, Frank, I’m telling you to be sensible, and I’m glad you’re taking me up on that. But don’t let sensibility overtake your passions. I hear you in your music class a lot, and I know you’re a very capable guitarist. You’d do well in a band, but I also don’t want you throwing yourself into your passion only to find disappointment when you’re forced to switch jobs.”

The lump fell from Frank’s throat.

“I’m glad you’re supporting me, Brian,” he replied coolly, “but I’ll take your advice and get a business degree I can use if my passion goes to bust.” He laughed humourlessly, but the relief inside his heart was genuine. “Really, though,” he smiled, “thanks.”

Brian nodded towards the door. “Good. Now get out, and be happy.”

-Way brothers’ apartment, Friday afternoon-

“Oh, Mikey’s not home at the moment. He went out to get some milk,” said Gerard as he stirred the pot of bolognaise sauce.

Frank sighed, looking out at the rain outside the window. A rumble of thunder shook the building.

“How long will he be? I can’t go home in this weather.”

Gerard looked up, adding a pinch of salt, “About 10 minutes, I think. He took the car, so he shouldn’t be held up too long.”

Frank was here to ask Mikey for some help on a chemistry question he was really stuck on, but it seemed that he wouldn’t be getting help now.

“Stay for dinner, Frank. It’s around that time, anyway,” Gerard offered, draining the pasta, “Mikey just texted me to start dinner without him, and after all of this I can’t send you home empty-handed.”

Frank shrugged. “Sure, I love pasta.”

Gerard paused, turning to him with a bemused look in his eye. “I hope that extends to all Italian foods, because you can’t love just pasta.”

Frank snickered. “You kidding? Italian’s the best, and I should know, because I’m Italian.”

“Excuse me?” Gerard retorted, ladling sauce over bowls of pasta, “Mikey and I have Italian blood too.”

“Well, there’s a similarity then,” Frank thought aloud, “Say, what’s your music taste like?”

“I have a Misfits shirt on, Frank. What do you think?” Gerard passed a bowl of pasta to Frank, which he accepted.

“Thanks. You got cheese?”

Gerard opened the fridge, flourishing a bowl of grated parmesan. “Of course!” He joined Frank at the table, piling cheese onto his bowl of pasta. “Hey,” he said, chewing thoughtfully on a piece of meat, “What if I started a band?”

Frank stared at him, about to bite into a mouthful of pasta. Gerard noticed the streaks of bolognaise
already around his mouth, but said nothing. It was actually kind of endearing. “Who are you going
to get to join you?”

Gerard paused for a second, then resumed his chewing. “Um… Mikey, Ray, Bob and you, I guess.
That’s if you wanna join…”

Frank looked at Gerard like he was an idiot. “Of course I’ll join if you decide to make it, dumbass.
I’ve always wanted to be in a band.”

“What said something about a band?”

Mikey slammed the door shut behind him, suddenly regretting shouting out as he had just
disturbed a cute moment between Frank and Gerard, it seemed. Dammit.

He knew he looked a wet mess to his brother and his best friend right now; the carpark was twenty
or so metres away from the apartment building, and with the rain coming down as hard as it did, it
took half a second to soak its way through his clothes.

He could hear the droplets of water coming off his body and dripping onto the floor like the tears
off some crying statue of Mary. He shivered, wanting to bolt under the really awkward gazes from
his brother and best friend.

Wait, did Frank have sauce around his mouth? Mikey pushed the possible implications to the back
of his mind, not really willing to think of all the things they could have been up to without him.

He decided to break the really awkward silence. “So you guys started dinner?”

-Way brothers’ apartment, Saturday morning-

The pencil in Gerard’s hand danced lazily on the paper, its path becoming yet another picture of
Frank. This time, it was of him being sopping wet at his birthday party, laughing.

Brendon was lazing on Gerard’s bed, looking through Gerard’s sketchbooks.

Patrick was looking through the small purple binder that contained Gerard’s lyrics. He looked
quite interested in what he was reading, which was quite the opposite of how Gerard felt about
them. Gerard only ever wrote lyrics when his emotions were out of control; he couldn’t swallow
down his pride otherwise. He liked keeping his emotions inside, and writing them down in lyrics
was a way to keep himself calm.

“You know, Gee, you should start a band,” Patrick said, flipping a page, “These lyrics are
awesome.”

Gerard looked up from his drawing. “Frank said that to me yesterday. It’s a great idea and all, Pat,
but what do I call it?”

Patrick paused, eyes glazed over. He started slowly, “You know when Mikey had that job at the
bookstore?”

“Yeah?”

“Remember that time when he ran home because he had this band name he really wanted to tell
you?”

Gerard nodded with realisation. “I’m pretty sure the name was My Chemical Romance, right?”
Patrick gave a small clap, as best he could with the binder in his hands.

Gerard really liked having his protectors around; they were understanding and they would remember a lot of the things he didn’t. He really felt alone without them around lately; it seemed that they had business to attend to. But speaking of their absence…

“Why were you at Frankie’s on Halloween? I never really got the chance to ask you.”

Brendon threw the sketchbook he was looking at on a pile on the floor with a thud.

“You draw him too much.”

Patrick looked up curiously, then resumed reading through Gerard’s lyrics.

“We were there to tell him to hurry up and marry you. Our power kinda made his sickness a little worse, though.”

“Oh,” Gerard said stupidly.

“Yeah,” Brendon replied.

Reaching up onto his desk, Gerard grabbed a little notebook. “I’m really not ok.”

“Write a song about it,” said Patrick, putting the binder down, “I’ve run out of things to read.”

Gerard laughed. “What do you think I’m doing, Pat?”

-Frank’s house, that afternoon-

“Why are we here?”

Ray was over at Frank’s to study, but they decided that rather than driving themselves to insanity, they had decided to go web-surfing for a bit.

“Why not?” Frank snickered.

Ray sighed. “Seriously though, Frank. What the fuck is Eurovision?”

Frank shrugged. “My relatives in Italy go crazy for this show every year. Do you know how many angry texts I got from my cousins when Italy lost last year? I had my phone on silent all the time then because if I didn’t, it’d go ping every second. It drove Mum and me fucking nuts.”

Ray watched the screen as Frank scrolled down on Google. “Hey, Love Love Peace Peace looks like a good song.”

-~~-

“Holy shit, this shit is good.”

Ray looked at Frank, amused by the gawking on his face. “Now you know what your relatives were raving about all this time, huh?”

Frank snorted. “Måns Zelmerlow is now my favourite celebrity.”

Ray gasped, mock-offended at Frank’s lack of patriotism.

“He’s Swedish, Frank.”

“Ok, maybe it was great and those oiled-up dudes on the drums really made it,” Ray acquiesced.

“*Thank* you, Ray.”

Ray grinned cheekily. “The sexy milkmaid was the greatest part, though.”

Frank rolled his eyes. “Traitor.”

Ray pointedly ignored him, scrolling down on the YouTube suggestions. “Hey, do you actually know who made Cthulhu?” he asked, seeing a video about the Cthulhu Mythos.

“Some guy named Lovecraft, if I’m not mistaken,” Frank replied, pulling the blanket he was under over his head.

“What else did he make? He can’t have just made Cthulhu and get ridiculously famous for it,” said Ray, googling Lovecraft.

Frank clicked on the Wikipedia article. “There you go, Rayman. Satisfy your thirst for info.”

---

Frank knew the point of web-surfing in its purest form was to get to random places, but he really didn’t expect himself to be listening to this music from a genre he had never heard of.

“Ray, how did we get here?”

Ray looked at him like he was an idiot.

“We looked up Lovecraft’s other creations, which went to other Lovecraftian creatures, which went to Shub-niggurath, which went to the band named after him… to here.”

Frank looked back the screen. Zeuhl was really scary shit.

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“Did we just land on a porn site?” Ray asked stupidly, unfazed by the blatant exposure of female body parts. Frank really regretted not going into incognito mode.

“Stop wondering and get off it!” Frank took over from his friend, closing the tab and opening Showbiz to cleanse his mind. Showbiz was where he went for news on his favourite bands and stuff about music in general.

Frank always enjoyed checking out the music that Showbiz played while he was browsing; even though most of it was whatever was on the top 100, sometimes it was old music that played.

Right now, it was a catchy song called “I Don’t Care” by a band named Fall Out Boy.

“Nice song, Frankie. Let’s google them.”

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According to the really tiny Wikipedia article on them, Fall Out Boy was once a very successful band around the time his parents were his age. They would probably have been immortalised much
like ACDC or Metallica had the lead singer, Patrick Stump (who looked uncannily similar to the Patrick he knew), not died in a freak train accident right before what would have been their biggest concert.

The lead guitarist and the drummer then proceeded to die in similar circumstances, leaving the bass player, Pete Wentz (who looked quite similar to the Pete he had met at his party) to descend into madness, go broke, get disowned by his family and finally commit suicide by jumping off the rooftop of Patrick Stump’s old house. Talk about dedication.

“Kinda sucks when you lose yourself like that though,” Frank commented solemnly, staring at the white screen.

“Yeah, I know. Fall Out Boy’s music was really good.”

Frank looked down in thought. “They was around when our parents were young though…”

Ray’s eyes lit up in realisation. “Hey, maybe your mum fangirled over him once!”

Frank remembered his mum’s collection of music from her adolescence. “Yeah, I think she mentioned that to me a couple of years ago.”

Ray got up, urging him to do the same.

“Go and ask her if she has any old records of him! They’re worth a fortune now.”

-That evening-

Ray had left a little while ago, and Frank was now grabbing his pyjamas from the wardrobe. His mum found a bunch of Fall Out Boy records and the boys had listened to them before Ray had to go home for dinner.

There was something still niggling him, though.

Two of the members of Fall Out Boy they had read about, Patrick Stump and Pete Wentz, had uncanny similarities to Patrick the angel and Pete the demon.

Patrick had the same blue eyes and auburn hair as the picture in the article, but the angel was much trimmer in physique and didn’t look as nerdy.

Pete looked exactly the same as the picture on his Wikipedia article, right down to the dark rings around his eyes.

Frank chuckled, shaking his head. It was only a coincidence that these long gone figures shared all these things with the spirits he barely knew, right? They couldn’t possibly be the same people.

-Tuesday evening-

“Get yourself together, Frank. You’re gone for the guy.”

Frank really hated the nights when his mum wasn’t home. It gave him time to think but his thoughts kept circling back to the one place.

“I really don’t like him. His charisma’s unnatural; how do I know my feelings are real?” He questioned his heart.

“You’ve never been fooled before, Frank. You love him, admit it!”
“No way! I’d rather die than get with him.”

“No, you wouldn’t.”

Frank sighed. His emotions were being especially annoying tonight. “I don’t like him that way.”

“You’re too scared to admit that you have feelings, Frank.”

“Excuse me?!”

“Feelings have been a sign of weakness to you, ever since your father left.” That much was true; Frank’s parents’ divorce had given a grey wash over an otherwise happy childhood. Frank hadn’t been really much of a feely guy ever since. Gerard was actually the first crush he had ever had.

“So?”

“So, you’re unwilling to open up to a guy who’d probably look after you, who’d save your life, who’d catch a fucking grenade for you. Promise me this, Frank.”

“What?”

“The day he saves your life is the day the day you tell him.”

Frank snorted. “It’ll never happen.” He secretly hoped it would.

“Won’t it, now?”

-Tiffany’s Diner, at the same time-

Mikey really regretted inviting his brother for a heart-to-heart at Tiffany’s.

Their parents had been in Australia for some ungodly reason (“curlew watching”, they had said) and Mikey was finding it a little lonely going to Tiffany’s by himself. But judging from the way Gerard had been acting for the last ten minutes, Mikey would rather take that loneliness than the word vomit that his brother was spewing.

“Mikey, I really want Frank to be my boyfriend, but it’s so obvious that he doesn’t like me!”

Mikey’s blank gaze shifted to his brother.

“Gerard, he loves you too. He’s just too busy lying to himself because you’re too cool for him. Calm down, dingus.”

Mikey was observant enough to know that he was telling the truth. Both Frank and Gerard were too far gone with each other. Frank just hadn’t accepted it yet.

“But Mikey!”

Mikey sighed exaggeratedly. “Seriously, Gee. He’s had a huge crush on you for ages, but he’s too dense to realise it just now. Shut up about him; he’s literally all you’ve talked about ever since we’ve come back.”

“But –”

“Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy?”
Gerard groaned, sobbing into his hands dramatically. Queen actually didn’t bother him too much (though he really did hate them), but it was enjoyable pretending to have a fatal weakness to a band (and David Bowie).

Mikey laughed for the first time that night.

“I’m kidding about Queen, but serious about you shutting up about Frank. So, Gerard,” Mikey put down his coffee as Spencer came around with their dinner, “how’s your latest art project been?”

-Way brothers’ apartment, Friday afternoon-

“It was really sudden of you to invite us over for a sleepover, Mikey.” Frank dumped his bag in a corner of the living room.

Mikey shrugged defensively. “Well, I dunno. I guess, why not?” Mikey didn’t want his true aim of getting Frank and Gee together revealed. He deliberated telling Ray, but decided against it. Ray had the self-control of a wildfire.

Ray collapsed onto the couch, causing Frank to pout because he wanted to be there. “Let’s get some homework done before we have too much fun and do everything on Monday morning.”

Bob looked up from his phone. “You serious? We’re going to spend five seconds staring at it and give up.”

Gerard emerged from his room, carrying a box. “True, true, Bobby. Who’s up for Monopoly?”

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“So with you running out of money, Mikey,” Frank crowed as he counted his coloured banknotes, “I win the game.”

Mikey threw up his cards in frustration. “Gerard, if you weren’t so nice you’d have won!”

Gerard shrugged, shamelessly eating an entire can of sour cream and onion Pringles. “He’s too cute to resist. I just had to give him all my money.”

Frank gave a dramatic hairflip. “Look at this greatness. I could totally grace a magazine or something. Kerrang would sell a billion copies with my face on it.” He gave a blinding grin, waggling his eyebrows.

Bob snatched the Pringles can from Gerard’s hands and downed what was left of it. “How would you get on the cover of Kerrang, genius?”

Gerard slapped Bob upside the head for stealing his (mostly empty) can of chips, grabbing another full can of Pringles sitting next to him. Peeling it open, he raised a finger. “We should make a band. Then all our faces can be on the cover of Kerrang.”

Ray nodded slowly, his hair fluffing up. “Sure, why not? I don’t really give a fuck about school, anyway.” He closed his 3DS (Frank hadn’t even noticed him playing it) and looked up in thought. “What would we call it, though?”

“My Chemical Romance,” both Ways replied simultaneously. Mikey turned to everyone, who nodded their agreement. “Gee and I decided after came up with it at school. What’re our parts?”

Ray kept nodding like a bobble head. “I’d be lead guitarist, because I was tutored by the great BJ
Armstrong and I’m too cool to be rhythm.”

Gerard raised an eyebrow. He never really realised that Ray had *that* much faith in his guitar skills.

Mikey looked at Frank, who he knew was a very capable guitarist, questioning. Frank shrugged. “I’m not much of a solo person, so I’d rather be rhythm anyway.”

“I’m learning bass,” Mikey said.

Bob tapped a rhythm on the empty Pringles can. “I’ll drum.”

Gerard popped a chip in his mouth. “Aiwl shing,” he said with his mouth full. Swallowing, he added, “Since that’s the only part left…”

Frank nodded in agreement. Reaching into his bag, he grabbed a couple of DVDs. “Who’s up for a Monty Python marathon?”

-Saturday-

After everyone fell asleep in the middle of *the Holy Grail*, Frank woke up early to have a shower. It was cold, but it was worth getting rid of his uniform and the sweaty smell stuck to it.

Everyone else woke up slowly one after the other, with the last one up naturally being Gerard, who came out of his room garbed in a pink bathrobe, a light blue onesie and striped socks.

“Let’s play some music,” he said after he got his hands on a mug of black coffee.

“What about homework?” Ray asked, stuffing a rasher of bacon in his mouth.

Frank snorted into his cereal. “No way, man. I’m not touching that Math homework with a light-year long pole.”

Mikey set down his cup of coffee, washing his plate. “We’re gonna write parts for our first song, okies?”

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“And with this,” Gerard said, writing down a last note, “every part of ‘I’m Not Okay’ is finished!”

Ray started playing the opening chords, Bob leaning down on the drum kit he drove home to get.

“Let’s see if we can get this song good enough to record!” Frank raised his guitar, which he had called Pansy, above his head, spinning around in an office chair.

-5:30pm-

“We’re done. I’m not practising anymore, because we missed lunch,” Mikey said, putting down his bass and going into the kitchen. “Gee, do we still have pasta?” he called from the kitchen.

“Yeah! Just heat it up now that you’re in there,” Gerard called, opening a box they forgot about when the brothers had moved in.

He rummaged around until a small blue and white striped makeup bag caught his eye.

“Oh!” he exclaimed, picking it up, “I was wondering where my stage makeup went.”
“What would we use it for?” Ray asked, eyes glued to his 3DS.

Gerard rolled his eyes. “We need some sort of image to define us, Rayman. We should experiment.”

“At least you’re experimenting with lipstick and not with illegal drugs,” Frank snickered, leaning over Ray’s shoulder.

Gerard glanced sideways.

Mikey reappeared in the living room, brandishing a ladle and a stained white apron. “I heard every bit of that conversation, Gee,” he declared, running a finger on the ladle and licking it off, “but we should probably eat first.”

-Sunday-

“Oh god!” Bob cried from the bathroom, waking Frank up. He rushed to the bathroom to see Bob leaning towards the mirror with an angry red pimple on his right cheek.

“I guess we know shit about washing off makeup and face paint, don’t we?” Frank chuckled nervously, knowing that Bob really valued his countenance and had a high chance of lashing out at people if his face wasn’t perfect.

The group had spent ages trying out looks for the band: Ray did some fake dirt and grease to look like he was some vigilante from the future (at least in his words); Gerard did a black bar over his eyes and said that was good enough; Bob had painted his face like a skeleton; Frank had used the red face paint to draw crosses over his eyes and Mikey fell in love with the eyeliner.

Being guys, though, nobody really had any clue how to get rid of all the gunk on their faces now that they had had their fun. So, everyone had tried techniques ranging from attempting to use Gerard’s face wash (which the latter defended fiercely) to getting a sponge and literally scrubbing it off.

“Ugh, Greta’s gonna laugh at me forever for this,” Bob moaned as he packed his stuff a little later.

“Bob, must you leave early?” Mikey asked, grabbing a t-shirt from the floor.

Bob zipped up his bag. “Yeah, I have a Physics assignment due tomorrow, so I should finish it up.”

“Don’t forget band is here on Wednesday after school,” Gerard called groggily from his bedroom.

“Yes, mum,” Bob teased.

Frank waved at Bob as he was about to leave, then accidentally rolled off the couch and hit his head.

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Frank and Ray were staying until Monday, and since they would be wearing their blazers over their uniforms anyway, they didn’t bother ironing their shirts like they usually would.

Ray turned to Frank after they set out their clothes, eyes narrowing. “We have to do homework someday, Frankie.”

Frank pursed his lips, mirroring Ray’s expression. “Yeah, man. How hard could it be?”
It wasn’t until around 8:30 at night that Frank and Ray finished all of their homework. The only breaks they had taken were lunch and waking Gerard up at noon after he fell back asleep.

“I’m so fucking tired, Mikey,” Frank complained over their dinner of casserole.

“It’s 8:30, Frank,” said Mikey as if it was a law of the universe to not go to sleep early. That was to be expected of Mikey Way, since he was the definition of night owl.

“You have been doing homework the entire day, Frankie. It’d be pretty draining,” Gerard added, blowing on a spoonful of casserole.

“It’s a school day tomorrow, too,” Ray reasoned, “It’d do us good to go to sleep early today.”

“We’ll drop you off tomorrow,” Mikey offered, “It’s been a while since we’ve gone to NJA, anyway.”

Gerard swallowed before replying. “It’s a good idea. I’d like to say hi to Schechter and some of the other teachers.”

“Orzechowski?”

Gerard rolled his eyes, mock-offended. “Shut up. She was the absolute worst. I swear she’s a witch in her spare time. Nah, scratch that, she’s a witch full-time.”

Mikey only laughed agreeably, everyone else joining him at Gerard’s expense. Soon enough though, Gerard joined in as well.

Gerard and Mikey had a weird moment and decided they should all sleep on Gerard’s king-sized bed all together like old times.

So, Frank found himself stuck between Mikey (who hogged the covers) and Gerard (who he didn’t want to be near for really obvious reasons) for the night.

Once he actually got stuck between them, though, Frank decided it actually wasn’t too bad a situation. He usually found it hard to fall asleep on his own, but with the combined warmth of the bodies around him and the sense of comfort he had being with his friends, he fell into sleep a little more gently than usual.

Frank opened his eyes blearily to the pitch black of Gerard’s train wreck of a bedroom. Not really bothered with getting up, he reasoned it was the middle of the night.

There was an arm draped across his waist, and Frank felt a comfortable body against him. Being unable to think clearly due to his sleepiness, he snuggled further into the warmth.

Dreamless sleep overtook him again.

-Monday morning-

“Frank, Gee, get the fuck up.”
Frank awoke with a start to Mikey’s face glaring down at him. Looking to his right, Frank’s eyes met the pale flesh of Gerard’s neck. He realised he had been snuggling into that the entire night. Red splashed across his cheeks.

“I let you guys sleep in because you were really adorable cuddled up like that, but you have 45 minutes to get your shit together and get to school.” Mikey looked down at Gerard, who was miraculously still asleep. “Oi, shitdick,” Mikey called, pinching his brother’s cheek, “get up!”

Gerard blinked sleepily, hazel eyes dilating seeing Frank in his arms. “Good morning, sunshine.”

“Are you ignoring me?!” Mikey exclaimed, backing away quickly when Gerard slapped him away.

“What day is it? I wanna sleep in,” he declared, wrapping his arms around Frank and snuggling closer.

Frank was still too stunned to shake him off.

Mikey facepalmed. “It’s Monday, you idiot. We promised to drop Frank and Ray off at school today.”

Gerard’s eyes widened with realisation, peeling himself off Frank and getting out of bed. “Oh god, I hate to quote that stupid fictional orange cat, but I hate Mondays.” He turned to Frank. “Go get ready for school, Frankie. I can smell coffee on Mikey, so breakfast should be out.”

Frank, still reeling from having Gerard hug him so unabashedly, could only nod mutely. His face was hotter than a volcano as he raced off to get changed.

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Mikey unlocked his car, gesturing for everyone to get in.

“Pile in, guys. Let’s get to school and walk in awesomely like some gang from a chick flick.”

Gerard groaned. “Oh god, I told you not to watch Mean Girls again, and did you listen to me? Noooooo, you didn’t.”

“Excuse me?” Mikey flipped his hair, adjusting his glasses. “I’m the driver, and you know what you don’t do to the driver?” Mikey lifted his head, widening his eyes and looking down dramatically. “Offend them.”

Ray had already taken the passenger seat during the entire exchange (to Frank’s chagrin, as he was stuck with Gerard again), so Gerard and Frank took the back seats while Mikey started the car.

-NJA, a little later-

“Guys, what the fuck is that and why is it around our school?”

Frank was hoping for the Ways to drop him off and get it over with, but Lady Luck wasn’t smiling down on him today. Oh no, she was baring her teeth and growling like a rabid dog.

The school was surrounded by some sort of dark fog, and if that wasn’t enough, there was thunder circling above it like something straight out of a really bad fantasy film.

“I’m not sure it’s a good idea to go there, Gerard,” Mikey suggested, seeing the defiant look in his brother’s eyes.
“It’s not a good idea to leave this alone, either, Mikes,” he replied absently, scrutinising the fog and lost in thought. He regained his composure a few minutes later. “We’re going in.”

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Frank was starting to feel dizzy from the dark fog hanging over his eyes, but Gerard’s hand on his wrist kept him running in the right direction. As the school grew closer and closer, the fog subsided slightly, but Gerard held on tighter to the point that Frank’s hand would have fallen off from blood loss. After slinging Gerard a death glare and a small growl, the vice grip on Frank’s wrist loosened, but only slightly.

“I don’t want to lose you. This fog gets thicker randomly; I’ve been in it before in Thailand.” Gerard squeezed Frank’s hand comfortinglly, making the latter try his hardest to ignore the heat that rose to his cheeks.

If Frank was going to be thankful to the horrible fog for one thing, it would be for hiding his blush.

Mikey and Ray had long run ahead, and they were standing next to the front door of the school when Gerard and Frank arrived.

“The door’s open, but I wanted all of us to go in at once. If we die, we die together.” Mikey gestured to the broken open door. “The door’s been broken in, so we can just step inside. The fog can’t affect us too much in there, so it looks like you’re keeping your hand, Frank,” he chuckled humourlessly.

“I can see that, dumbass!” Frank grumbled as he stepped over the large shards of glass on the tiles. He paused to let Gerard catch up, but looking up, he noticed a body sprawled about 10 metres away from where he was standing.

Gerard noticed the body as well, so both of them ran up and realised his identity.

“Bob?!”

Sure enough, Bob’s blond hair was matted with blood and his blue eyes glassy as he lay limp on the ground. Gerard knelt down and put his hand on the former’s neck, and after a few tense seconds, stood back up and shrugged.

“He’s still alive. Just… suspended, I think. I’m not even sure how he is.”

Ray and Mikey had run over in the meantime, and while Mikey stood back and tried to look around for more bodies, Ray had knelt down and hugged the body of his best friend briefly before standing back up.

“Do you think that he’ll wake up once this fiasco is over?”

The tense silence was both unwanted yet appropriate for the situation.

Mikey flinched as if he saw something and ran outside, ignoring Gerard’s yells to stay inside.

Frank noticed a light in his peripheries, and he saw that Bob’s phone had turned itself on. Stepping over Bob’s arm and pulling Gerard along with him, Frank grabbed the phone and gasped.

*Unknown Number: You will be mine.*

Gerard looked equally surprised and took the phone from Frank’s hand. Swiping aimlessly before
realising the phone’s screen was frozen, he put it back on the ground as a red flash momentarily blinded them.

Mikey ran back inside after the flash, and during the second one shouted, “It’s coming from the roof!”

Ray had pulled himself together in the meantime, and had frantically pressed the button for the elevator.

Frank stood and watched his friend’s desperation dumbly.

“Looks like the elevator’s out,” he shrugged.

“Don’t use elevators during dangerous situations, Ray!” Frank threw up his hands, kicking open the door to the stairwell.

“It’s fine if it’s not a fire.”

Frank looked back at his friend; Ray’s eyes had glazed over in thought, and while he too was really disconcerted about finding Bob in this state, they couldn’t use this as an excuse to be out of it.

“This is a possible demon summoning. It’s even more dangerous than a fire!” Mikey shook Ray’s shoulders, his glare apparent from behind the glasses. Ray only blinked, confused.

Gerard gently pushed Mikey aside, walking up to the confused boy. He placed his hands gently on his shoulders, gazing intently.

“Ray, I know that seeing Bob like this has taken a toll on you, but we really need to get moving.”

Ray’s eyes cleared up slightly, and he wiped what looked like a tear from his eye.

“…Yeah,” he whispered.

-In the fire escape stairs-

Frank cursed his short legs as he fell behind in the group rushing up the stairs. Thankfully, the fog had not gotten into the staircase, but that didn’t make his work any easier.

“Hurry up, Frank!” Mikey called, huffing.

Frank groaned, nearly slipping on one of the concrete steps. “I’m ridiculously unfit, alright?”

“Stop complaining, Mikey! It’s not every day that you have to run up 4 flights of stairs because some idiot decided today would be a good day to summon a demon.” Gerard grabbed Frank’s hand and kept his hold tight. Frank’s heart skipped a beat, and his steps were surer on the stairs. It didn’t help too much because he was still slipping everywhere, but he was making an effort.

“Well, at least this is a good chance for you to work off your puppy fat, Gerard.” Mikey commented, oblivious to the heart-warming moment going on right behind him.

“Mikey! That’s rude,” Ray chastised, beads of sweat rolling off his body.

Frank sighed, annoyed. “He’s his brother. Of course he can be rude. Then again, I wouldn’t know since I don’t have one.”

Ray retorted, “Frankie, we don’t need you lowkey complaining that you’re lonely.”
“You don’t think Gerard is good enough?” Mikey teased.

Frank squawked in indignation. “That is not what I was thinking!”

They had reached their destination, and Ray shushed them, opening the rooftop door. “Hey! Here we are.”

-NJA school roof-

They really did not expect to see Brian fighting what looked like a demon wearing a blue motorcycle helmet.

The demon seemed to be fighting with sound waves, which Brian was intercepting by manipulating water with his hands. Frank got over his initial reaction of Brian being a real-life water bender and more concerned for his health; while Brian was on par with the demon right now, it was obvious he was wearing down.

Once he noticed the boys standing stupidly, he waved and shouted to Gerard. “Hey, Way! About time; help me fight this guy!”

“I’m non-binary!” the demon screeched, sending another sound wave in Brian’s direction.

As Gerard rushed to help Brian, Frank turned his attention to something a little more sinister in the middle of the roof.

“Ray, that’s Gabe!” Frank whispered.

Gabe, wearing his school uniform, was standing in the middle of what looked like a circle drawn in black ink. There was a packet of firelighters, a Totoro plush and various sigils which sent shivers down Frank’s spine as he looked at them.

Ray’s eyes rolled back as he fainted, his body crumpling on the ground.

Mikey held Frank back, knowing that he would rush into the circle otherwise. “That’s a demon summoning circle, Frank. He’s going to summon someone powerful, too.”

Frank’s eyes widened in shock. He looked frantically between Gabe, Ray on the floor and Brian fighting the demon.

Everyone’s attention was on Gabe as he laughed maniacally, a sound that would stick in Frank’s ears like a tick for a sizeable amount of his life. Frank shivered.

“You guys are too late! All I need to do is pour my blood into the circle and chant some Lorem Ipsum and Bob’s heart will be mine. MINE!” Gabe grabbed an army knife from the front pocket of his blazer, snapping it open and slashing his wrist. Globs of blood dripped onto the concrete, and Gabe ignored what looked to be a painful wound with a crazy grin distorting his face. His eyes had glazed over, reddened with what looked like countless nights of losing his mind.

Frank already missed the overbearing Gabe that he had looked down upon a month ago.

“Gabe’s lost it, Frank,” Mikey observed redundantly.

“Can’t we stop him?” Frank demanded.

Mikey shook his head sadly. “He’s got a force field around him. We can only watch.”
Frank stepped back behind his friend, all bravado gone. “Mikey, I’m really fucking scared.”

“I don’t blame you, Frankie,” Mikey replied, ruffling Frank’s hair affectionately, “I’m scared as well, you know.”

A flash of white light heralded the arrival of Patrick and Brendon, who promptly joined the (seemingly unfair) fight against the demon with the helmet.

“Patrick! Brendon! About time you came,” said Gerard, smiling even with the numerous wounds he sported.

Brendon shrugged casually. “We had some business to deal with, G-Way.” He deflected a few bits of shrapnel with his tail.

The demon with the helmet giggled disturbingly. “You’re just in time to watch the return of Mammon, Urie.”

Brendon looked up, flinching as he realised the identity of the demon he was fighting. “Show Pony!”

Show Pony stopped their endless barrage and took Brendon aside, giving Mikey a chance to heal Brian and Gerard. Frank followed closely behind, regretting leaving Ray unconscious and defenceless. It was safer for him to stay close to people who could actually defend themselves. Ray wouldn’t draw attention where he was.

“Relax, Urie,” Show Pony waved a hand, “I can forget that you ever sided with this kid. When Mammon takes the boy, we can go and destroy the world together.”

Mikey’s magic did its magic: Gerard’s bruises faded and the various cuts Brian got sealed themselves up. Frank watched raptly the scene between the demons in front of him, not noticing when Gerard put a reassuring hand on his shoulder.

Brendon crossed his arms defiantly. “No thanks, rich kid.”

Show Pony, from what could be seen, wasn’t really too bothered by Brendon’s answer. They tutted, stepping away. “Suit yourself, Urie. You were a disgrace to demonkind, anyway.” They turned to the summoning circle, and it was clear why.


The circle glowed an unsettling purple, the light rising around him.

“He’s chanting *Lorem Ipsum*?” Gerard asked Brian.

Brian shrugged, not really having much idea about it himself. “Maybe the demon likes to troll.”

Frank’s eyes were still glued to the disturbing spectacle in front of him.

Gabe’s blood, still spurting out incessantly from his wrist, set on fire. Gabe, too busy crowing in his “victory” over Bob, didn’t realise this before his pants were half burnt and the fire started to lick his face.
Frank held back the urge to vomit, but couldn’t look away.

Gabe, skin boiling as he looked frantically around for an escape, cowered away from the ring of fire he had created with the firelighters he had laid around the outside of the circle. The fire was consuming his lower half now; his waist charring and crackling like a pork roast in the oven.

“Getting Bob’s heart is pointless if he dies,” Mikey whispered, his disgust clear in the usually blank eyes.

As the fire rose to his face in a hot, horrible crown, Gabe’s smile faded as he gave Show Pony a hurt, betrayed look.

“Pony. You lied,” Gabe cried as the fire fully consumed his body.

Pony laughed jovially, unfazed by the dying screams of the boy. “I did, Gabe, I did!”

Frank was paralysed as the fire turned into something more sentient, its maw closing over Gabe’s head and Frank could see what looked like digestion in the middle of the fire. On top of that, the crunch of bones and crackling skin and the squelch of flesh flooded Frank’s mind with the inescapability of the demon in the circle. It was something they could never attach a life bar too. It was something that would haunt them like a persistent stain.

Gabe’s remains disappeared within the fire, causing it to transform into a long haired demon. His hair kept smouldered for a bit, but eventually revealed enviably shiny brown locks.

The demon stepped confidently the remains of the circle without hesitation, giving a one-armed hug to Show Pony. “That was one desperate soul you fed me, Pony. How’d you do it?” he asked, licking his fingers.

Mikey shuddered. He was actually eating Gabe?

Show Pony shrugged. “Manipulation.”

“It was a rhetorical question, Show Pony,” the demon punched Show Pony’s helmet playfully.

The exchange could have been considered normal had the conversation not been about sacrificing an innocent (yet insane) boy and not between two demons.

Three tears in space opened to the right of the summoning circle, revealing a demon with crazy hair, a demon with pigtails and a demure and solemn Pete. Frank guessed that they were Jimmy and Lindsey, Pete’s bosses.

“Whoa, it’s Mammon in Middle Ground. Show Pony, did you do this?” The crazy-haired demon – who Frank assumed was Jimmy – asked obnoxiously. Frank understood Pete’s pain; getting a tongue-lashing from that nasally voice would probably drive him to check himself willingly into a questionable mental facility.

“Just a little manipulation and I had enough desperation in the kid to summon Bert and keep him here,” Show Pony replied, crossing their arms.

“I’m still a little delicate, though,” said the long-haired demon – Bert – as he scratched his head.

Show Pony turned to Jimmy, all lightness gone. “His life is very important, Urine. If he dies in this body, he dies, alright?”
“I can’t get out of here, now, can I?” Jimmy realised, a drop of sweat falling off his nose.

“No. You will protect Bert McCracken, or Mammon, demon of Greed, with your life. If he dies, you’re both getting arrested.” Show Pony pointed at both Jimmy and Lindsey.

“How too?” asked Pete.

Bert shook his head, grin still on his face. “No, you’re only a greenhorn. Can’t blame you for anything yet.”

“That’s no fair, Peter Panda!” Lindsey cried.

Frank was brought back into reality by a sudden hug from Gerard.

“You right?”

Frank snorted. “I literally just watched a person I knew get burnt and eaten alive by a sentient flame that turned into that demon with awesome hair. Never been better.”

Patrick asked, “Who’s ready to fight for freedom?”

Everyone (on his side) gave their silent agreement.

Patrick threw an open Sharpie at the back of Show Pony’s helmet. It drew a jagged black line down the helmet, and directed the demon’s attention to the humans.

“Whoa, rude much, angel?” they said.

Patrick wore a smirk as he shrugged. A spear materialised in his palm.

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Brian went and fought Bert, which was a really smart idea because water beat fire, right?

Wrong. Totally and utterly wrong.

Brian’s bullets of water vaporised against Bert’s spurts of white-hot fire. With the fog replacing much of the water vapour that would usually be in the air, Brian struggled to defend himself from the fireballs. The brick in his stomach was the fact that he could never win. He could only stave away certain, fiery death.

Jimmy and Lindsey aimed for Mikey, who was completely defenceless despite being a proficient healer. Frank had no choice but to back away; he couldn’t defend himself either.

To their surprise, Pete stood between them and Mikey.

“You’re not touching him.”

Lindsey laughed shrilly, sucking the fog into her lip-sticked mouth. “Suit yourself!” shouted her distorted, disembodied voice.

As Pete protected Mikey from a stray fireball from Brian’s battle, Jimmy pounced and was about to stab Pete through the head with a knife when…

“Pete!”
… Patrick and one of his spears came between them.

Pete was stunned, not only from the adrenaline of nearly dying in vain but also that he literally just reunited with his best friend from his humanity.

“Patrick?”

Patrick parried another blow from Jimmy. “We can catch up later! Help me first.”

It was at this moment Lindsey vomited out a black goop, moisture leaving her body as her skin shrivelled and her hair dulled. This slime dissipated as quickly as it came and surrounded the other demons (excepting Brendon and Pete) in a dark cloud.

She resumed sucking in the fog, her body returning to normal.

Gerard and Brendon were fighting Show Pony, and if they were struggling against their soundwaves before, they were playing this game at veteran difficulty now.

Brendon took the brunt of a particular strong attack, retreating so he wouldn’t be killed permanently. He gave Gerard a hushed apology before disappearing in a flamboyant cloud of glitter.

Gerard barely had any time to adjust before Show Pony sent a small attack straight through his lung. Time slowed as Frank’s cry pierced the air and Mikey attempted to get to him, but collapsed as his legs weren’t working.

If Gerard was going to die, he didn’t want to die to Frank and Mikey’s crying faces.

Behind Mikey, who fruitlessly tried to get his legs moving, Lindsey gave Jimmy another dose of black goop, which he used to soundly defeat Pete and Patrick with an explosion of dark energy. Patrick dissipated into a beam of soft white light, leaving Pete to stare weakly at Mikey struggling to move, eventually wearing out and collapsing.

Looking around helplessly at his friends in these hopeless states, Frank was starting to deeply regret asking for a change in his life so many weeks ago. Even if he now had Gerard, a person who would actually dedicate his life (and death) to, even if he now had all his friends and their misadventures, even if he now knew so much more about himself, what was the point if they were all doomed to die a nameless death in this sticky, nauseous fog?

Bert stopped his assault on Brian and walked towards the other demons, Brian fainting from exhaustion behind him.

He beckoned to Frank, who despite being paralysed with fear, stepped forwardly apprehensively.

Bert passed him a wine glass. Responding to Frank’s quizzical look, he commanded, “Go grab me some Pepsi. I’m thirsty from all that fighting and I want to be fresh for when we destroy the world. Also, it has to be in this wine glass. I only had the best, back in Hell.”

Frank scampered away, heading to the nearest vending machine. Noticing that the demons weren’t keeping an eye on him, he turned to the machine to find it was out of Pepsi. Rooting around for some change, he grabbed a can of Coke Zero instead. There wasn’t any difference between the two, he thought.

He opened the can and poured its contents into the glass, discarding the can over the railing.
He walked back a little more confidently to Bert, who took the glass without hesitation and downed it.

Time slowed down as he choked. “This is Coke!”

Frank stepped back, eyes darting anxiously.

“It’s all the same, isn’t it?” he fretted.

It wasn’t to Bert; red rose up his neck, painting his face in crimson. His face scrunched up, trembling until Frank was blinded by a flash. Looking up, all that remained of Bert was his feet and the shards of the wine glass.

Jimmy and Lindsey looked at each other, the colour draining from their faces.

“Oh. Fuck,” Lindsey uttered.

Jimmy panicked, shaking his friend’s shoulders. “He’s dead!”

“We’re dead, Jimmy!”

Both of them screamed girlishly in realisation.

Show Pony, unfazed, mused, “I’m legally immune, but we need to arrest someone for killing Bert.” They looked to the distance, covering their eyes. “Oh, look. Here come the Furies.”

Three shadows could barely be seen on the horizon, their wings beating.

Jimmy hugged Lindsey close, tears streaming down his cheeks. “Lindsey, before we die, I want you to know that you’re my best friend in this world and I’m gonna miss having all these adventures with you.”

Lindsey hugged back, sniffling. “Jimmy, I am so fucking glad you said that.”

“We’re getting blasted for the last time,” Jimmy wailed.

The Furies landed on the railing of the roof. They weren’t winning any beauty pageants anytime soon: their beady eyes sat above a whole farm of warts on their noses, and their bird-like claws and their bat-like wings made them look like creatures of Hell. Then again, they were creatures from Hell.

The one on the right noted, “That looks like a right dead demon to me, Anita.”

“If little Ricky can’t go to jail for this, who will?” The one the left mused.

“Gloria, we gotta hound someone,” the right one implored.

“Anita, Maria, I think these two will do just fine,” the middle one – Gloria – gestured to the two cowering demons.

“Now now, young’uns. How should we punish you?” Anita crowed.

“Please, I –” Jimmy begged.

“How about a millennium in the boiler?” Maria interjected.
“Or a million years on the rocks with Prometheus?” Anita suggested.

Gloria clapped her shrivelled hands together. “Oh! How about a lifetime at Akashic Records?”

“I heard that lots of people are needed there. You’ll fit right in.” Maria added.

Jimmy and Lindsey screamed as they were dragged away by the Furies into a jagged tear in space.

Show Pony yawned. “Eh. I’m bored. I’m gonna go back to Hell. And don’t worry about me coming back to fuck things up; I’m gonna be incredibly busy for a while.” They disappeared with a poof of blue glitter.

Frank, now isolated, rushed straight to Gerard’s side.

Gerard’s breath came out in short puffs, and thankfully for him, the wound to his lung had long since clotted over. It was a miracle he was still alive.

“Gerard,” Frank cried, “stay with me!”

Gerard smiled sadly, “Mikey can’t heal me now.”

“Gerard!” Frank wiped a tear from his eyes, gripping Gerard’s hands tighter.

“Frank… I love you,” Gerard whispered, eyes closing.

The tears flowed freely from Frank’s eyes as he gripped Gerard’s still warm body. “That’s no dying quote!”

-??-

*Thump. Thump. Thump.*

Gerard’s eyes had turned into the Sahara Desert as he blearily blinked, eyes darting around the strange space. Groaning, he propped himself up with his arms, feeling lighter than usual. His vision had not yet cleared up, and there was an almost surreal air to the plain white room he woke up in.

As his bare feet hit the cold floor, the impact of his situation hit him like a tsunami.

He, Gerard Way, was dead.

He was dead.

Dead.

As in not living, and not breathing.

He had left Frank crying his eyes out wherever they had been. Where was that again?

Strange, he couldn’t remember.

Smoothing down his white robe (since when had that gotten onto him?), Gerard slowly padded his way out the door, and right into an expressionless robed man with intense grey eyes gazing intently at Gerard.

The latter gulped quietly.

The man abruptly put out a hand, which after a beat Gerard shook nervously.
“Zacky. Zacky Vengeance.”

“G-G-Gerard Way.”

“Welcome, but you won’t be here long.” Zacky quirked his lips upwards and took this chance to turn and walk down the hallway, Gerard hesitantly doing the same. It took a few seconds for the latter to fall in step.

“Where am I?” Gerard blurted out suddenly.

Zacky only gave a brief, bored glance, steps unrelenting.

“You’re on the Reapers’ Plane; you’re only visible to reapers and other souls here.”

To Gerard, that definitely made sense. Patrick and Brendon had free access to a lot of places, but they had mentioned not being able to enter the Reaper’s Plane.

“Oh, is that why Patrick and Brendon don’t know I’m here?”

Zacky scrunched his eyebrows in confusion, but decided to ignore the unfamiliar names.

“Indeed. If you’ll come this way, we’ll process your death and send you on your way to Purgatory.” He suddenly turned a corner into what seemed to Gerard to be a completely identical hall, and walked to the end, where he grabbed a key and unlocked the surprisingly generic door.

Opening it, Zacky gestured for Gerard to come inside, to which the latter complied.

The office was a lot less clinical than he expected; it was bright and cheerful with 1970’s décor. Zacky gestured to a couple of beanbags where they could sit.

“Sorry about being all stiff earlier. They have cameras all over the place, but in the offices nobody gives a fuck what you do,” Zacky explained, grabbing a laptop and sitting down.

“Huh,” Gerard replied dumbly.

Zacky opened the laptop, typing a few things before looking up at Gerard. “We’ve gotta fill out your application for Purgatory, now. Full name?”


“Date of birth? Day and month, please.”

“9th of April.”

Zacky nodded slowly.

“Occupation?”

“Freelance artist, psychic and spirit medium.”

Zacky’s eyebrows raised, impressed. “Whoa, that’s impressive. Spouses or partners?”

“None, but I confessed my love for Frank Iero right before I died.”

Zacky bit his lip, eyes widening. Gerard was about to ask what was wrong, but the expression disappeared. “Oooooooh shit. A Fate-made pair, then.”
“Fate-made?” Gerard queried.

Zacky shook his head. “Never mind. Cause of death?”

“I got stabbed by some demon called Show Pony,” Gerard confided.

The reaper paused, fingers right above the keys. “Ooooooooooooooooh shit. Is your body mangled?” he asked, looking up.

Gerard looked away, deliberating. “No, it was just a small flesh wound when I died.”

“I see…” Zacky replied absently.

A beat passed. “Zacky?”

Zacky clasped his hands together. “What do you say to seeing your Frank again and forgetting we ever met?”

Gerard was taken aback. “What?! Why?”

The reaper yawned. “I would have to fill out a shitload of paperwork because you got killed by a demon and you were under Fate’s supervision. I’m lazy, too.”

And humans complained about a lack of work ethic… this was the thing saving Gerard right now.

Gerard scratched at his neck. “Um, ok. How do I leave?”

“Force your way back into your body after you take that portal. I’m not gonna stop you,” Zacky pointed to a mint-green portal that had opened right behind him.

Before he stepped into the portal, Gerard turned back and waved at the reaper. “Thanks, Zacky. We should hang out on earth sometime, when you’re not busy.”

Zacky laughed lightly. “I doubt it, Gerard. Life for us reapers is always ridiculously busy. It’s a shame, I know.”

“Well, um, I’ll see you when I die the next time, then,” Gerard decided.

Zacky gave a wave as Gerard stepped into the portal. “See you later.”

-NJA school roof-

“Mikey, you can walk?” Frank asked, bloodshot eyes staring down at Gerard’s peaceful, dead face.

Mikey sighed, placing a hand on Frank’s shoulder. “The fog dissipated ages ago, man. It’s a shame that he had to die, but he died saving the world.”

Gerard’s eyelashes fluttered.

Frank hugged his body tighter, Mikey rushing to his brother’s other side to heal him. It wasn’t needed, though.

The wounds that Gerard had sustained during his fight with Show Pony faded away with a reassuring mint-green light.

Frank had never been gladder to see Gerard’s hazel eyes open.
“Gerard!” he cried, hugging the shit out of him. “I didn’t want you dying with those shitty last words!”

“He confessed his love to you, Frank, why were they shitty?” Mikey questioned.

Frank nuzzled into Gerard’s neck. “Because I didn’t get to tell him I loved him too, Mikey.”

Gerard’s cheeks flushed. “Y-you love me?” he stammered, shyly putting his arms around Frank’s small body.

“Of fucking course, dingus,” Frank crooned, kissing Gerard’s cheek like he had been wanting to since they had seen each other the first time all those weeks ago.

Pete had gotten up (with difficulty) in the meantime and meandered over to the group.

“Well, now that’s confirmed,” Pete snickered, putting a hand on Mikey’s shoulder, “How about a date for coffee, Mikey? Just you and me.”

Mikey beamed, the light reaching his eyes. “I’m up for that.”

Frank snorted indignantly, face still against Gerard’s chest. “You stole our moment, Pete,” he whined.

Pete laughed, ruffling Mikey’s hair. “You can’t take all the attention.” Taking Mikey’s hand, he asked, “How about we make that date now?”

“Sure,” Mikey agreed, and they teleported away as Ray regained consciousness, yawning.

“What did I miss?” he asked, spotting Frank and Gerard having a tender moment.

“The end of the world,” Frank replied absently, lulling himself to sleep in Gerard’s warmth until…

“Guys! What the crap is this?!” Bob slammed open the door to the rooftop, surprising everyone there (including Brian, who was getting up). “Orzechowski is around and she’s pissed to see the front door of the school broken in.”

“Do we look like we know?” Gerard retorted, holding firmly onto Frank as they walked towards their friends.

Brian made up a lie to Bob and Ray that there had been vandals at the school and Brian, Gerard, Frank and Ray were there to fight them off. Ray had fainted before he saw any action, Gabe had unfortunately been a hostage and was set on fire by the vandals, and the vandals escaped after beating everyone soundly with a sleeping gas.

Now if only that story would hold up against the police.

As they walked back down the steps, Gerard chuckled suddenly.

“What’s up?” Frank quizzed.

“This is a great way to start a Monday morning.”

Frank paused, looking back at him bemusedly. “You mean dying, saving the world and coming back to life again?”

“Nah, I meant finding out the love of your life returned your feelings.”
Frank hummed. “You’re a weirdo, you know that?”

Gerard giggled. “You wouldn’t have me any other way.”

Frank walked out into the hallway, heading towards his locker. He chuckled. “I guess I could deal with that.”

-Where Mikey left his car, meanwhile-

“So, what’s the story, Charlie? It’s a shame Mikey didn’t take you anywhere, or else I would have noticed those demons sooner.” The kitsune sighed, a defiant hand on his waist.

The unicorn doll shook its head. “It’s ya own fault for having the time of your life in Sweden, Ryan. Just desserts, as they say out West.”

“Hey, I’m just shy, alright? Besides, I think I might reveal myself soon. That Gerard kid’s protected Frank even though I put that spell over his aura. That’s pretty good,” Ryan shrugged, all nine tails twitching.

Charlie transformed into its true form: a legitimate unicorn. “Well, I think I might head on home, pardner,” it neighed, cantering in the direction of Mikey’s apartment.

Ryan hurriedly followed alongside. “You’re a unicorn, not a fucking horse, Charlie.”

“I’m just gonna be on that lad Mikey’s bed if you need me, Ryan,” Charlie dismissed.

“That sounded a little off, Charlie,” Ryan grimaced.

The unicorn neighed, shaking its rainbow mane. “Like protector, like ward, I say. Pervs, the both of ya.”

“Charlie!” Ryan whined.

Charlie paused, causing Ryan to backpedal slightly. It gestured to the building of NJA. “Now go on, don’t you want to see how li’l Frankie’s doing?”

-Akashic Records Inc., a week later-

“Ms Ballato, we have a request coming in from some silly teenagers from California!” A high pitched disembodied voice resonated in the demon’s head.

“For Satan’s sake, why must everything be from California?” Lindsey muttered, haphazardly grabbing papers and sending them down chutes to people who accessed the Akashic database.

Ever since she had started working here, she and Jimmy had been separated; she worked at the actual database, giving information to those who needed it, while Jimmy passed this information on to humans who accessed the database.

“Attention all workers!” an announcement blared from the speakers, “Attention all workers! We have received word of a new leader in Hell! The new leader is the new governor, the demon that runs the world below, second to Satan himself! The new governor is Ricki Rebel, also known as Show Pony. The new governor is Ricki Rebel, also known as Show Pony.”

Lindsey paused momentarily. If Show Pony had already become governor of Hell…

“Steve’s dead.”
This is probably the first and last BBB I'm going to participate in for now, haha. It's been a good way to spend some time practicing my writing, and maybe in a few years I'll come back to this sort of challenge. I seriously hope you enjoyed the fic if you got down to this point.
Don't expect a sequel, but there may be one in the works.

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