The Mnemosyne Complex

by CaptainDude (HandbagMurder)

Summary

Kyle is tired of Kenny’s secret vigilante life, but sometimes he struggles to remember why that is.

It’s easy for a guy to forget that even heroes need saving sometimes.

Notes

Give me the waters of Lethe that numb the heart, if they exist I will still not have the power to forget you.
- OVID

It was a warm evening in the waxing spring, and fireflies mirrored the clear sky in their own cryptic constellations on the ground. The boy watched the late night lights from above, a slight figure well into late adolescence, perched on a windowsill only slightly skinnier than he was. The springtime breeze buffered the long cloak he wore around his shoulders, and it sent the curtains behind him billowing into the bedroom to which his window seat belonged.

Behind him, the sound of a door swinging open. Kyle Broflovski swore, and the figure on the windowsill turned around to look at him standing in the door, framed by the bright yellow light from the hall.
“Goddamnit Kenny! Get down from there before you fucking kill yourself.”

He went to switch on the bedroom light, but Kenny held out his hand to stop him. He very nearly lost his balance in the process.

“No light!”

Kyle’s hand froze, hovering over the light switch by his door. Kenny righted himself, clutching the window frame so tight his knuckles looked bloodless in the moonlight. It wasn’t easy to see his face properly in the darkness, his features obscured by his stupid hood. Had he perhaps incurred some kind of nose trauma during his late night vigilante routine? Kyle didn’t know, and he didn’t want to know. He sighed, and let his hand fall back to his side.

“Dude. Seriously?”

He wished he could say this was an unusual occurrence, but he couldn’t even count on two hands any more the number of times he had left his bedroom late on a weekday evening to procure a hot beverage, only to return to this asshole squatting on his open window. He shuffled into the room and closed the door firmly in his wake.

“Who’s Kenny?”

Kenny slid down from the window, landing on light feet on the carpet and making a beeline for the end of Kyle’s bed.

“What the fuck do you want?” Exasperated, Kyle watched him collapse onto his mattress and bury his possibly bloodied face into the pillow. “It’s like… midnight. Class at nine am.”

“Maybe for you.”

Kenny rolled onto his back, and Kyle watched him stretch out his arms above him, his bones creaking like an old man as he luxuriated in the feeling of feather comforters and cotton sheets. “I might skip.”

Kyle didn’t get why Kenny didn’t just drop out of school already. He hardly ever came to class anymore, and Kyle suspected that his not-so-secret double life as the local caped weirdo was only half of the reason for that.

God, what did the guy even get up to these days?

Kyle wished there was a way he could get through to him. From middle school right through to sophomore year, Kenny had become more and more inaccessible to those who used to be his friends, and his occupations became more and more occult to an outsider. Where Kyle and Stan, even Cartman had grown out of the hero schtick around fourteen years of age, Kenny maintained this peculiar hobby for reasons he never disclosed, even to Kyle, and Kyle was the one who, unlike everyone else in the town, got to see the aftermath. The early morning silences that went on forever, and the bruises that spread like wildflowers bloomed all over Kenny’s arms and face. He knew he should feel burdened by this insight into Kenny’s fucked up personal life, or even a little bitter that without his asking it was inflicted upon him. But somehow, deep inside himself, whenever Kenny showed up at his house in the early hours of the morning Kyle’s heart missed a beat, and he started to have thoughts of a unique kind. Thoughts of gratitude. Admiration. Privilege.

Mostly though, Kyle just felt sorry for him. Sorry for him and whatever messed up thing that had happened to make him choose this silent, eccentric, borderline criminal life scaling buildings and getting into fights with wrongdoers by moonlight.
“Dude.” Unsure how to broach the question of why, Kyle set his hot chocolate down on his bedside table and folded his arms across his chest. From this angle, he could look down on Kenny’s long limbs and flat belly, described by the thin fabric of his costume. This was a rare happenstance – usually Kyle’s view of the other boy was from below, as Kenny (like so many others) had at least a foot on Kyle’s diminutive height. From above, he looked much smaller. A lot more vulnerable. As Kyle’s eyes adjusted to the dim, he could make out the glimmer of Kenny’s eyes fixing on his in the night. “Go home.”

“No way.”

Kyle regretted the fact that sometimes, not even a caped avenger could mend the fissures that riddled Kenny’s home life. Maybe that was why he spent so many of his evenings this way.

Kyle hitched his baggy pyjama pants further onto his hips and sat down, taking care to avoid coming into contact with any of Kenny’s limbs.

“Why not?”

“Why?”

“Dude, come on. What are you even here for right now?”

He didn’t expect he would get an answer, and so he was surprised when Kenny paused thoughtfully, propping himself up on his elbows and pushing his hood back off his head. His hair, blonde like straw and always un-brushed, looked silver white in the bleach of the moonlight. Kyle could see well enough now to make out his freckles, and the way his eyes fluttered as they fixed on his bedside and the mug of hot chocolate sitting there, steaming in silence.

“… A drink would be nice?”

It probably would have been selfish of Kyle to decline him.

Kyle picked up the drink and passed it with a sigh, and Kenny sat up cross legged so he could accept the drink from Kyle with both hands. He drained it, almost in one go, and passed the mug back to Kyle before he even realised it was gone.

“God Ky, you’re like the Lois to my Clarke you know that?”

Kyle rolled his eyes.

“Am I your hero, Ken?”

“Hey.” Kenny points at Kyle, finger just a few inches from the centre of his face. “It’s Mysterion. ‘Kay?”

But Kyle could see the ghost of a smile turning the corners of his lips.

“Yes. Sure. Okay. Fine.” Endeared, if reluctantly, Kyle set the cup back down and watched Kenny crawl up off his bed and make for the window. Something about the scene made a ticklish feeling spread through his belly. Maybe he had just been after a drink, after all? He was making ready to depart pretty quickly – none of that silent standing at the window, surveying the view over his yard for a non-specified duration of time like he usually did. Kyle watched in respectful silence and he hitched himself up onto the windowsill, and reached down to extract something from his boot.
“Sleep good, Ky.” He said, turning back to shoot Kyle a smile over his shoulder. Kyle got only a
spilt second glimpse of something bright and metallic shining in his vision, before Kenny was
gone and Kyle was left alone, his head suddenly overcome with a wave of vertigo.

Had he jumped or something? What the fuck?

He got better and better at disappearing every time.

Waiting for the vertigo to pass (probably brought on from eyestrain, Kyle told himself -Trying to
see things in the dark was not a fun time), Kyle stood up and wandered to the window to push it
closed. He could see no sign of Kenny on the ground when he looked down, just the fireflies in
his backyard dancing. Why was the window open again?

He couldn’t shake the feeling of being watched as he made his way back to bed, and there was a
familiar scent lingering on his bed sheets. When he reached over to turn on his bedside lamp, he
almost knocked over a mug sitting there, next to his alarm clock and a copy of the big sleep.

He couldn’t remember why it was he put it there in the first place.

…

Summertime brought with it an influx of possibilities – things to be done before the weather turned
cold again. Places to go which were usually inaccessible to the average teenaged boy. One of
those things, high on the list of activities which didn’t cost money or require a remarkable level of
co-ordination, was camping, and even though Kyle had had some bad experiences in the
wilderness in the past, he couldn’t see the harm in giving it one last try.

They sat around the fire when it got dark, five of them gossiping and toasting marshmallows on
the cinders that smoked around the bottom of the flames. Kyle sat between Butters and Stan,
adjusting his hiking boots and thinking about the morning, when he would wake from a long hard
night of sleeping on the ground and have to make his way back down the mountain like he wasn’t
suffering. Despite the looming threat of dawn, Kyle was having a pretty alright time. The warmth
of the day had bled away with the night falling, but the fire was toasty and Stan at his side smelled
like sweat and home. Familiar voices flooded his ears, and inside his chest Kyle felt light and
calm. He hardly even noticed the sound of branches cracking.

Stan and Cartman’s debate over which girl had the best legs in the class ground to a halt. The
silence that followed drew on for a bit – thirty or so seconds in which all five boys exchanged
glances, trying to establish if anyone else had heard it at all. Across the firelight, Kenny’s eyes
locked onto Kyle’s. They burned with a brightness Kyle couldn’t decipher.

“… Did anyone hear that?” Stan asked. Kyle opened his mouth to answer him, but for a moment,
he forgot what the appropriate answer was. The shadows and firelight light licking the contours of
Kenny’s face… it was a strange and magical sight to behold. Familiar and yet deeply primal, Kyle
wondered fleetingly if he had ever seen a male face before, composed of angles and smooth skin
and lips which twitched upwards as he felt Kyle’s eyes lock on him.

Kyle remembered something, something vague and ghostly, like a memory of a dream. Kenny’s
eyes fluttered, and he raised his pointer finger to his lips in a gesture of silence. Kyle was hardly
sure he even had a voice any more.

*Heroes aren’t real*, he thought fleetingly, and then Kenny was speaking, and breaking the spell,
and feeling the heat of the fire on his cheeks Kyle looked down at his boots again, and the criss-cross of his laces in the firelight.

“Hear what?”

“That noise!” Stan sounded a little worried – of the five of them, he was probably the most experienced camper, and hearing the strain of fear in his voice made Kyle a little uneasy. The hair on the back of his neck pricked, and the feeling as though all of them were being watched started to stir in his core.

They were silent again, long enough for the noise to repeat itself. Along with what sounded like a low, long growl. Kyle’s blood turned cold in his veins, and he remembered the stories of wild beasts in the Colorado woods. Of alien abductions and cryptozoological paradoxes involving teeth and claws and the appropriation of an unsuspecting victim’s skin. Butters’ breath, shallow and dizzy with anxiety, whistled in his ears.

“It’s probably just the wind, right you guys?”

He sounded like he was on the verge of tears. Even Cartman, who would usually have something cynical to say, was staring wide eyed at the others trying to figure out if this was a joke, or if it was really happening.

“Uh, sure. Probably.”

Kenny didn’t sound convinced. Beside Kyle, Stan sniffed testily, and honestly of all the people who probably should have been able to brave whatever the wilderness threw at them, Kyle probably would have chosen Stan. He couldn’t help but feel aghast, and a little disappointed, that he was doing nothing.

“… Someone go check it out.” Stan murmured, and through the darkness he could feel his hand groping to find Kyle’s wrist between them. “Cartman? Kenny?”

“Fuck off Stan! Why don’t you go!?” Cartman sounded pissed that he would even suggest such a thing. “You’re the fucking quarterback here! Your uncle taught you all this shit!”

“Hey! You’re the one who-“

They never found out what Cartman was the one who. Stan’s retort died in his throat, with the sound of the wind rustling the branches of the pine trees around them, and the scraping of claws on rocks in the shadows, beyond the circle of light thrown by their campfire.

God.

Kyle really thought he was going to die.

Living in a mountain town, the threat of wolves and wildcats was always present, but never realised. Every year people went missing on the mountains, but with the naïve sense of invincibility unique to the young and beautiful, Kyle never really believed it would happen to him. Before he could help himself, he found himself calculating. Who would he save? Who did he think he could run faster than? Cartman for sure. And Butters. Maybe if he held Stan’s hand, he would be able to hitch his carriage to Stan’s star and streak down the mountainside to the salvation of highway lights before he caught ear of Butters screaming.

He would have time to be disgusted with himself later, hours lying in bed remembering guilt, but not remembering why he was guilty. Something about danger, about hot white fear pricking the back of his neck like a spider bite, and about the blur of leaves and gravel crunching under his
boots.

“Nobody move.”

Kenny’s voice stirred him from his paralysis, and dredged his mind from the cruel, animalistic thoughts that possessed him. “Everybody sit perfectly still. It’s just a mountain lion or something.”

Kyle watched in awe, dazed and a little bewildered, as Kenny slowly heaved himself up off the ground and extended, towering his full height over the rest all sitting tense and pale around the fire.

“Dude!” Stan was aghast. “What are you doing?!”

Kenny dismissed him with a wave of his hand. Moving slowly, he edged toward the border of their circle, where firelight melted into darkness as if he was trying to peer beyond the circle of firelight. Kyle felt a breath escape his chest, and a word like a ghost tracing a finger down his spine.

*Hero. Saviour. Wonderful, beautiful, impossible dead thing.*

He blinked, and suddenly he was staring at nothing, and Stan and Cartman were engaged in a furious debate, and the fire was crackling loud like someone had turned the volume all the way up. The needles on the trees around them rustled like sheets (or a cape?) billowing in the breeze, and Kyle felt a wash of heat over him. He realised he was sitting too close to the fire, and the ends of his boot laces were starting to smoke. What had he been thinking about that had distracted him?

“How Kenny?” he asked Stan, pulling his feet back from the fire. Stan paused his argument (that Bebe’s legs were the best because they were muscular and toned from playing volleyball) and gave him a quizzical look.

“Kenny didn’t come?” he said. “We invited him, but no show. Again.”

“Yeah.” Butters pouted, one cheek puffing out as he regarded the clearing around them. “He’s probably baybysittin’. Say, do anyone of you guys feel like you’re being watched right now?”

Kyle felt a frisson of something move up his spine, and around him reality flickered in the firelight like a bad scratch on a DVD. Snowfall on a TV set. Something that made him feel kind of dizzy. Vertigo again? Maybe he was coming down with something.

“Guys…” He stood up shakily, and the world around him seemed to swim and flow like water in a shallow bowl. “I feel kind of sick. Mind if I turn in?”

“Nope. Good with me.” Stan gave him a little smile, and Cartman rolled his eyes.

“Fucking Pussy Kyle.”

Kyle felt too sick to answer. He hobbled to the tents behind them, his ears ringing, and he thought for a moment he heard something lurking in the trees beyond. A Mountain lion maybe? There had been a few spotted in the area this season.

When he crawled into his sleeping bag, he found the fabric smelled funny. Like faded roses.

Eventually, he falls asleep.
Kyle woke up at eleven sixteen pm and for a moment, he lay in bed trying to remember how he got there. When he pulled himself upright into a sitting position, he strained his ears in an effort to detect his parents watching late night television in their bedroom next door. He heard nothing – only the sound of his own breathing, and the quiet sound of an open window bringing the chilly autumn air inside. For a moment, his chest seized – he thought he saw a shadow of a figure squatting on his window frame, but when he snapped his head around to look through the hazy dark he saw nothing. Just an ordinary square of dark sky behind an open window. The clouds, burdened with the coming winter snow, were thick and black and suffocated the stars. What was the last thing he remembered? Was it dinner time? Was it coming upstairs and brushing his teeth? Was it closing his bedroom door behind him, and finding his charger so he could plug in his cellphone?

Recollection struck him, like a shaft of something piercing his guts. But unlike a regular memory, he struggled to make sense of the influx of images and ideas and sensations that passed like a cyclone through his mind. Blonde hair. Blue eyes. Warm skin. The details slipped from his grip, dancing just beyond his comprehension, and it hurt to have a head filled with motion and sound that he didn’t understand. To not be able to classify these memories using the five meagre senses integral to his perception.

He gasped and fell back against the pillow, something heavy and hard pressing on his chest. The flashback passed, and Kyle found himself unable to know what it was he had just remembered. When he tried, he found only a mind block, hard and unmoving like concrete, and he had never encountered a mental borderline so severe before. It scared him. His hands tried to push aside the unseen heaviness on his sternum, with no success. He could hear himself breathing heavily, but his own breath was mixing with the breath of a ghost he felt like he knew. The jut of bones, the rattle of air in someone else’s lungs. Just when he thought he was getting close, the memory eluded him.

It fell like a word from the tip of his tongue, and the pressure against his front slid off him like butter melting off the blade of a heated knife. He caught his breath, barely even acknowledging that whatever it was, it was lost forever beyond the clutching fingers of his memory. He rolled onto his side, and looked at his window. The curtains were twitching in the frosty breeze. The ivory lightness looked white like pearl through the darkness – they fluttered with an electric dynamic, like fat flowers blossoming and bleeding a heady perfume into the air. The static made the hair on his arms prickle, and as he lay awake watching the hours on his digital alarm clock tick over, he became aware of a slow, cloying ache deep between his legs.

Kyle hated Wednesdays the most, because he had two double periods and neither of them were science.

Classics was okay so long as he didn’t let Craig flicking eraser at his head get to him, and his single period PE class was acceptable, but when the clock said 1pm and everyone in the school cafeteria began shuffling down the halls towards their final block, Kyle’s heart sunk to his boots because he knew he had French class and if there was one thing Kyle was truly terrible at, it was French class.
Kyle was the smartest guy in their grade, by far, but even he had trouble in French class.

The real fucking killer though was that Eric Cartman, notorious idiot, was good at it. And in French class (And Spanish. And German.) his grades and ego always managed to put Kyle to shame.

He was considering straight up wagging today, standing outside of his locker looking for his textbook and wondering if an afternoons respite from Cartman gloating would be worth the phone call home to his parents, when Kenny appeared at his shoulder and coughed, his voice muffled by the hood of his puffy parka.

“Hey Kyle.”

“Dude. How many times do I have to tell you? You’re old enough to take the hood off inside.”

He closed his locker door and went to push Kenny’s jacket hood back. This revealed his face, familiar and boyish, and his hair which stuck up at strange, innovative angles.

“Woah, okay Mom.” Kenny leaned against the lockers, and tried to flatten his pointy hair down against his head. “Where you headed?”

“Ugh. French class.”

Don’t remind him.

Kyle’s eyes trailed Tweek Tweak, hurrying past on the way to his own classes with his arms overflowing with books and newspapers and a roll of tinfoil he was probably planning to fashion into some kind of hat. Kenny’s eyebrow quirked, and he gave Kyle a very knowing kind of look. One which suggested he knew what the deal was with Kyle’s reluctance to attend lessons, and sympathised, but doubted Kyle had the audacity to do something about it.

“I thought you weren’t coming to school day.” Kyle asked him suddenly, attempting to change the subject with no finesse whatsoever. Kenny seemed confused. Even taken aback, by this question.

“Huh? Why wouldn’t I come?”

“I dunno. I just…”

Where had Kyle gotten that idea from?

He stared at Kenny for a second, trying to recall the last time they had seen each other, and talked. It was yesterday, wasn’t it? He was on his way to home economics. He had given Kyle a wave, and Kyle had returned it, and then…

No wait. Kyle had seen him after that too. Somewhere where Kenny had told him he might take the day off.

Maybe he was imaging it. Maybe he was getting confused and flustered. He always got flustered around Kenny for some reason. Kyle told himself that was just because Kenny had a confusing and rather frustrating habit of flirting with people for no good reason. Just like he was doing right now.

His face shifted into an expression of smugness, and he hitched his satchel up higher on his shoulder.

“Would you have missed me if I hadn’t shown up today, Ky?”
“What? No. Fuck off.” He pushed Kenny out of the way and began shuffling down the hall with the flow of other bodies headed to their classes. “No more than usual.”

“Psh. Okay.” He hooked his arm through Kyle’s and began strolling with him down the hall, obviously not caring about the sideways looks he was receiving from people for this. Kyle felt his heart begin racing, his cheeks warm and his mood subject to Kenny’s charms. Goddamn him!

He had been doing something with his face recently, obviously. Something different that was making him more handsome than usual. And he had learned how to be much more charismatic. That had to be why Kyle was starting to think of him at random points during his day. Whenever his mind started wandering, in fact.

“If I didn’t know better Kenny, I’d say you were flirting with me.”

He felt his face go red as he said it, and Kenny laughed.

“And if I was?”

“Fuck yourself. “

“Good advice.”

He sniggered and Kyle couldn’t help but smile. Although he wasn’t very happy about it.

“Dude, I really need to get to class.”

The crowds in the hall were thinning now, although Kyle’s self-consciousness was growing thick and uncomfortable inside his skin.

“Aww but I wanted to hang out with you more.”

“So hang out with me later. After schools finished. We can do homework or whatever”

“Homework, eh?” Kenny hesitated, and immediately Kyle regretted using that word.

“That’s not what I meant!”

But it was too late. Kenny was laughing, and giving Kyle a shamefully lecherous wink.

“If I didn’t know better, Ky, I’d say you were the one flirting with me!”

Kyle sat at his desk frustrated, although he couldn’t really remember why. His homework was done, but it had taken longer than usual, and whenever he had let his mind wander from the equations and problems at hand he been unable to shake the feeling that he was forgetting something.

Something important.

He couldn’t remember what he was forgetting though, and that only made him madder.
If he had to vaguely describe the feeling though, it would probably be a sense of disappointment that something, whatever it was, wasn’t happening. Like something was supposed to be taking place, but he couldn’t for the life of him remember what it was.

Frustrated, Kyle sat in his desk chair and cleaned under his nails with a mechanical pencil. He stared at his stack of completed assignments, spun around in his chair a few times in the hopes that when he was done the stack of work might look different or more likely to provide answers, and found neither of these actions had any result.

He swore under his breath and stood up, dropping the pencil on the desk and stalking out of his bedroom door. The hallway clock read 9.30pm when he passed by it, and by the time he left his kitchen with a cup of hot coffee in hand it said 9.38.

He still wasn’t able to figure out why exactly he was feeling so awry.

Back in his bedroom, Kyle set the coffee on his bedside table and realised that he didn’t actually want it. He wasn’t even sure why he had gone and got it in the first place. He sat down on the end of his bed and reached for his cellphone.

No texts.

Was he expecting to hear from someone?

A wave of loneliness, almost longing, washed over him. He opened up his facebook app, and scrolled down his timeline in the hopes that doing so would jolt his memory. For some reason, the harder he tried to recall whatever it was the further and further his goal slipped away. He felt like he was pushing up against a brick wall – a big, solid blog in his head, a blind spot which made him vaguely dizzy the more he tried to map the outline of the blank. Kyle could feel all his blood flowing to his feet. He could feel it suddenly flooding in his head. Light headed and gagging, he almost fell backwards against the mattress on his bed. Cold sweat broke on the nape of his neck, and everything seemed to blur in front of him like the world had suddenly started spinning twice as fast as it always had. Something was wrong. Holy fuck, was he dying?

Panic seized him for a moment, and then passed him by, and as the nausea receded he hauled himself to his feet and stumbled over towards his bedroom window. He opened the latch and slid it up – the cool air cleared his head and he realised he was trembling, like he did when his blood sugar hit rock bottom. He checked his monitor bracelet, and saw that his glucose levels were fine.

Bizarre. Fucking bizarre. What time was it again?

Eleven seventeen, said the bedside clock. Way later than he had intended to stay up until. He didn’t try and remember what he had been doing – he didn’t think it was important.

He stripped off his clothes and crawled into bed. There was a cold cup of coffee on his bedside table. How did that get there?

He checked his phone.

He had no messages...
It was a Saturday evening, and for once Kyle was expecting company through the front door rather than his bedroom window. When he heard the knock echoing down the hall, Kyle made haste to answer the door before Ike did, because Ike was at that stage in his life where he thought he was invincible and for some reason that sense of invincibility extended to the belief that he could be as rude as he pleased to Kyle’s friends. A grey drizzle was falling, and when he opened the door Kenny was already peeling off his parka. The light rain had turned patches on the shoulders dark orange, and the fur which usually framed his face was sticky and wet.

“Hey,” He gave Kyle a warm smile, “mind if I come in?”

“Duh.” Kyle stepped aside, and Kenny shuffled in the door just as Ike came down stairs in pyjama pants and a too-big NHL jersey.

“Oh, it’s him.”

Ike paused at the bottom of the stairs, studying them suspiciously, and Kyle chewed the inside of his cheek and wondered if he was going to have to get into an argument or if Ike would just let it go. Just this one time.

“Yeah. He won’t be here long.”

“Mom said no guests this weekend. “If I can’t have a party, you can’t have him.”

“He’s only going to be here a few minutes.”

Kyle was lying, but he hoped Kenny wouldn’t be stupid enough to point out that they had actually made plans to have a sleep over. Kyle had been kind of lonely on weekends, since Stan had been taking Wendy on dates and stuff like that, and he figured that having Kenny over on a scheduled basis would be preferable to having him drop by unannounced. Seeing him out of his hero costume, dressed in civilian clothes, was a welcome change. Although Kyle was starting to warm to the tight fitting slacks.

Ike’s nostrils flared, as though he was weighting up the advantages and disadvantages of threatening to tell their mom. Eventually though, he decided he would overlook this trespass and carry on with his life.

“Whatever. I’ll be in the lounge watching TV.”

He stalked past, and Kyle sighed because that was clearly his way of designating Kyle and Kenny the sterile, uncomfortable kitchen, while he made himself comfortable on the couch. Joke was on him – in about ten minutes the two of them could creep upstairs into Kyle’s bedroom, and having had free reign of the kitchen they would have access to plenty of goodies to keep them entertained until the morning, when Kyle’s mom returned and Kenny had to steal down the drainage pipe by Kyle’s window to avoid the pair of them getting in trouble.

In a little under a year, Kyle would be a college boy with countless liberties, but for now the illicit thrill of going against his parents rules brought him pleasure that kind of embarrassed him, to think about. He felt like a ten year old again, as he gestured for Kenny to follow him into the kitchen, and as he did their eyes locked and Kenny’s eyebrows arched enough to let Kyle know he knew. He acknowledged, even if he didn’t understand, the secret rebellion of a sheltered upper-middle class boy against his overbearing mother. And this knowing, this seeing, made Kyle feel a little bit naked as they trotted into the kitchen and Kenny took a seat in one of the breakfast table chairs.

“You got anything to eat Ky?”

“Yoghurt and tinned peaches?” Kyle told him, making his way towards the pantry. “Cold lamb,
apples, a packet of pop tarts…”

He flung open the pantry door and regarded the shelves, realising for the first time that he was hungry too. He had been in his room studying all afternoon, with nothing to sustain him besides a granola bar and a glass of diet soda.

“Yoghurt sounds good.” Kenny told him, and Kyle hummed, reaching for the tupperware container which contained date scones, and brought it out for the pair of them too.

“Have a couple of those as well,” he said, passing him the container and heading for the fridge.

Within two minutes they were tucking in to evening breakfast – oats and berry yoghurt with a handful of frozen blueberries on top. Kenny finished his bowl in about thirty seconds, and reached out to polish off a few scones. Kyle watched him silently as he ate, and thought about the way he felt okay right now. He hadn’t felt this good in a while...

“I don’t have a headache today,” He murmured, pressing the back of his cold spoon against his mouth. Kenny hummed in question, swallowing the last of his second scone and asking him, quite rudely, to repeat himself.

“I said, I don’t have a headache today. For the first time in ages.”

Kyle dipped his spoon into his oats, stirring it slowly so the yoghurt mixed with the berries and flakes of cereal and watching the way the blue red of the squished berries bled into the contents of his bowl. A small crease appeared between Kenny’s brow.

“Have you been having headaches?”

“Yeah. Lots. Bad sleep too. And memory loss. You don’t think I’m dying do you?”

He said it as a jest, the idea hardly having occurred to him outside those vulnerable, anxious spaces between wakefulness and rest. Every time it happened, he told himself he was being ridiculous, and clearly sharing this opinion Kenny rolled his eyes.

“You aren’t dying.” He said, and the small turn at the corner of his mouth was strangely endearing. It was almost as though he is having a laugh at Kyle’s stupidness. But in an affectionate way. “Trust me. Have you been sleeping okay?”

Kyle shrugged.

“Maybe I’d sleep well if a mysterious, caped asshole didn’t keep crashing through my window at strange hours of the night.”

Kenny’s eyebrows flew up in surprise, and Kyle had another mouthful of his night-breakfast. Now the berries were melting, the sweetness filled his palate in a way which made his toes curl deliciously in his socks.

“Is that so?” Kenny asked lightly. Kyle nodded, and scraped his spoon idly around the rim of his bowl. From the lounge, the sound of the TV crackled. A re-run of *The Nanny*. Kyle used to watch that show with his mother when he was little.

“Well, have you tried just pushing him out again?”

“I’ve thought of it. But I don’t want to be responsible for recklessly endangering him or anything.”

“If he’s jumping through your window, isn’t he the one doing the reckless endangering to
himself?”

Kyle shrugged.

“Yeah? I dunno. He’s not that bad I guess.”

My very own hero.

Kyle scraped the last of the contents of his bowl into his spoon. For some reason, he was having a hard time meeting Kenny’s eye. The room felt warmer than it did five minutes ago, and he thought he could smell something warm and lovely at the back of his nose. A dusty, floral smell that made him think of funeral homes, and gardens in autumn, and sunsets on the banks of starks pond. He wondered if he was flushing, or if he just felt hot because the food he was eating was cold and sweet. Kenny’s empty bowl scraped over the table as he pushed it softly aside, and then there was nothing between them except for Kyle’s own bowl, and Kyle thought, quite spontaneously, that he had nice hands. Bizarre hands. Scarred and tanned on the back, hard on the edges from laborious work. But they looked soft, and welcoming, and he found he had to meet his friend’s eye because he couldn’t look at his hands any longer.

Wonderful, beautiful, impossible dead thing.

Kenny was staring at him with eyes so intensely blue they felt like portals to the sky in the middle of summer. His freckles seemed uncountable, like the stars of grains of sand underfoot.

“... You’ve got yoghurt,” he said, after twenty seconds of extended, unspeaking eye contact. “On your face.”

He pointed to his bottom lip, indicating whereabouts the errant smear was located. Kyle mirrored his action, trying to wipe it off. He missed, and Kenny shook his head just an increment, before leaning forward to push Kyle’s bowl aside.

“Let me get it?” He asked, and Kyle wondered if he was being hypnotised because without question or hesitation he nodded, allowing the other boy to crane his body over the table and close the stretch of space between their mouths.

Kyle had never kissed another guy before. He wasn’t sure why, but he probably would have thought it would be different to this. The sudden flood of perfume, more intense than dusky roses now, almost burning like ozone and wood fire and rosemary and gas, gagged him, but the softness of his lips was electrifying as Kenny’s slid over the contours of his own. Underneath the heat, through gaps like the scars that lightning etched on a stormy sky, Kyle thought he could taste oil and charcoal and dirt, but on his tongue the last ghost of blueberries cajoled him into returning the kiss; it grew in intensity once he allowed himself to kiss him back. He feels as though something inside him is blooming, dark coloured blots like Rorschach figures spread over him and made him feel like he was hooked to a wire, vibrating with static and snowfall which grew louder and louder over the sound of rain pattering outside. His pulse was racing, like a hammer against the inside of his chest, and when hands which were soft with scar tissue and burning glided against his neck Kyle felt himself shudder, dizzy and choking and aching to get closer across the unyielding wooden table between them.

This must be a dream.

And then without warning, he was being released.

Kenny pushed him back into his seat, sat down and stared at him almost expectantly, his cheeks red and his pupils the size of pennies and gaping so Kyle could see what hid beyond them, deep
Inside, Kenny McCormick went on forever and ever. Inside, he was an eternity contained in flesh and bone.

Nausea rushed over Kyle, a sense of vertigo as intense as if he was standing on the edge of a huge cliff. He felt himself gagging and could barely make it to the sink in time before he was retching, bringing up nothing but a taste that felt like it belonged within the confines of the grave. Kenny swore, and the chair scraped loudly over the linoleum as he leapt forward to thump Kyle’s back. On the edge of the sink, Kyle’s knuckles were bloodless. He could feel his headache coming back as he coughed and choked. It crept through him like ivy creeping over crumbling stone. As he started to regain control of himself, he realised that his cheeks were wet. As though he had been crying. He was shaking like a leaf in a storm.

“Are you okay?” Kenny asked him, and he sounded haunted. Kyle nodded weakly, knowing he would need some ibuprofen soon, and stood upright. Even though he hadn’t brought anything up, he turned on the tap and did his best to rinse down the kitchen sink.

“Yeah. I’m Fine.”

“I’m sorry, I wouldn’t have done it if-“

“It’s okay. I told you. I’ve been a bit sick lately. I’m fine.”

He twitched his mouth into a smile, and hoped this would be reassurance enough. Kenny was unconvinced – he looked as though he had just seen a ghost.

“I thought you wanted me to,” He said. “I’m sorry.”

“No. Don’t apologise! You didn’t do anything wrong!”

For some reason, his apologies were incredibly annoying. Kyle wanted to tell him that his reaction hadn’t been because of the kiss, that it had been the fault of some other fucked up thing happening inside him that the shock of being kissed had brought out. But for reasons unknown even to himself, he wasn’t sure how. It sounded stupid somehow. Like he was only saying it to make Kenny feel all right.

Kyle heaved a huge sigh, and Kenny slid his hand awkwardly off Kyle’s back.

“I like you.” He heard himself saying, without any direction of his conscious thoughts. “So it’s okay. You can kiss me. But not in front of Mom or Ike.”

He rubbed the back of his hand against the side of his face, the pressure made the splitting ache in his head throb tiredly.

“I like you,” he repeated, and he didn’t really understand why. “I like you. I like you.”

The more he said it, the more he felt himself regain control. His headache started to ebb away, and slowly reality began to reassemble itself. The kitchen. The bowls on the table. The sound of the TV in the next room.

And Kenny.

Handsome, valiant, golden hearted Kenny. Kyle turned to look at him directly and mustered all the strength and confidence he could find in himself to say it one last time. It felt like he was pushing something great and heavy off his back as he did so, and the relief of finally being able to
“I like you.” He said, and as soon as the words fell from his lips he saw the entire world around him grow brighter. His headache dissolved like sugar in water. It was like a spell had been broken, and Kyle had never seen so much colour in his life. He had the strangest feeling that had he been living his entire life blind, until right now. “A lot. I can’t believe I never told you sooner...”

He trailed off, overwhelmed by the intensity of everything around him. Kenny inhaled deeply, and ran his hand through his hair. He seemed concerned – Kyle wanted to tell him that he shouldn’t be concerned. How could anyone be concerned in a world so fucking beautiful?

Wonderful, beautiful, wonderful, beautiful...

impossible dead thing.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure.”

“I’m just asking because you know. You and me. You aren’t gay. Are you?”

He frowned, and Kyle gaped at him, trying to think of the words to explain it. The way that there was something in him which ached for Kenny. Craved Kenny. Needed him in a way that Kyle had never needed anything before.

“I can be gay.” He said, and Kenny made a weird face.

“Oh... Are you sure?”

“No. I’m fucking with you. Stop asking me if I’m sure about the things I’m saying.”

Kenny sighed, and shook his head just a little bit.

“This whole afternoon got strange.” He said. “I need to go. Maybe if you sing the same tune when I see you again, I will be able to take you seriously.” He smiled sadly and gave Kyle a light punch on the shoulder. “But if it’s any consolation, I like you too Ky. I’ve liked you for a long, long time.”

He stood on his toes, so he could place the briefest kiss, like a small static shock, on Kyle’s lips.

“Pray for me to get home safely,” He said, before turning around and made a beeline for the exit. Kyle stared at him leaving, not able to process what he had just said. The same tune when I see you again? What was the supposed to mean?!

“Hey! You can’t just leave right now!” he called after his friend as he slipped from the kitchen, disappearing into the Broflovski’s hall. Kyle cursed, and made to follow him. When he reached the kitchen door, he expected to be able to see him by the front door, picking his parka up off the floor.

But he didn’t.

The hall was empty, the only evidence anyone had been here less than two seconds prior was the wet patch on the floor, where Kenny’s parka had lain. Kyle thought suddenly of all those evenings Kenny had disappeared from his windowsill just as swiftly. They all seemed dreamlike, in the brightness of the middle of a rainy day.
“... Ike?”

He called to his brother, padding into the hall in puzzlement and peering around the doorway, into the lounge room. “You didn’t see Kenny leaving, did you?”

“Uh... what? No. Why? Did you have him over?”

Ike looked peeved, like he was going to demand that he have a friend over as well, if Kyle had done it. This wasn’t the thing that struck Kyle though, when he saw him. The thing that struck him, leaving him breathless in surprise, was the way that Ike looked different. Like a stranger, with a familiar face and familiar clothes and sitting in the corner of Kyle’s sofa. There was something bizarre in the way his features were put together, as though they weren’t composed quite right, and Kyle likened it to looking at him through a frosted window. Except with all the details and all the aspects of someone Kyle knew in his heart he should have known.

His stomach turned over, and he recoiled, deciding that regardless of how confused he was about Kenny’s sudden disappearance, he would be better off to just quit while he was ahead. He would talk to him tomorrow. Maybe Monday. He knew without so much of a hint of anxiety that he would be seeing Kenny again.

“Uh, no. No reason. I’ll be upstairs if you need me.”

Kyle exited the lounge room, and returned to the kitchen. When he got back he saw that there were still two empty yoghurt bowls on the table, waiting to be set in the sink.

…

It was raining.
Inside, it was warm, the heat pump humming silently as Kyle pulled back his duvet and made ready to climb in to bed. He almost didn’t hear the sound of tapping echoing on the glass of his windows.

“Kenny?!”

Who else could it possibly be?

Kyle rushed to the window and opened it, pulling the sodden boy dressed in a cape inside onto his carpet and closing his window against the cold of the winter outside.

“What are you doing?”

And he hissed to keep his voice low, wanting to avoid waking his brother in the room next door, even though he could barely contain the giddy laughter that seeing Kenny in this state rose in him.

What a mess.

What a reckless, beautiful, blonde haired wreck.

Kenny huffed and sat up straight, back leaning against the wall beneath the window, legs bent and dripping water into the carpet below. Rainwater ran down his cheeks in rivulets, and his hair stuck in sodden fingers to his cheeks, but mostly his stupid Mysterion outfit was saturated. Kyle could have almost believed that the thing would never be dry again.
“Well, right now I’m trying to catch my breath. It’s fucking cold out there you know.”

“Yeah. Yeah I bet it is.”

Incredulous, Kyle looked out the window, and saw only the dark haze of sleet beyond. A shiver stole over him, and he sighed fondly, reaching down to push Kenny’s hood back.

“Rough night protecting the town then?” He asked, taking a seat on the edge of his own bed. “You should be ashamed of running out on me like that.”

“Like what?”

“Like you did this afternoon.”

Kyle wasn’t about to let that little incident go. In the low light, he saw Kenny’s body stiffen, as if he was surprised to hear Kyle mention this.

“... What happened this afternoon?” He asked suspiciously, and if Kyle didn’t know better he would have thought he was testing him.

Kyle humphed, pulling off his hat and allowing his hair to fall free.

“You kissed me, you fuckin ass. Then you fucked right off like you had done it on accident or something.”

Kyle felt a little self-conscious for a moment. He had had all afternoon to reflect on how strange it was, that somehow between evenings hauling him through his window, and afternoons at the back of a boring history class, Kyle had fallen for Kenny and his stupid hero thing.

Kenny sighed, and pulled his shoulders into an apologetic shrug.

“Shit. My bad. I didn’t think you’d remember that.” He started to fumble with loosening his cape. “I guess that means you’re serious huh?”

The wet cape fell to the bed, and slid down off the edge to the floor. Kyle felt a little bit insulted, by his insinuations.

“Why would I joke about that?”

“You wouldn’t.” Kenny told him, matter-of-factly. “I know you wouldn’t. You’re too lawful good for that kind of bullshit. I respect that.” He lent over a little, nudging Kyle’s shoulder with his own.

“Sorry I diched out on you. I got a little nervy. I never seriously thought of shacking with you before.”

“You think of shacking with everyone,” Kyle told him, not without sulking just a tad. Kenny shrugged.

“Not seriously. Not that I’m not into it! It’s just... I don’t really know how this happened. You always seemed so...” he paused for a moment, lost in thought. “Out of my league? No matter what I did you always seemed to be the first one to forget me, and I guess that’s why I ended up bothering you so much. If you forgot about it afterwards, where was the harm?”

“Dude, I have no idea what you’re talking about.”
“It’s not important. Never mind.”

The pair of them receded into silence, Kyle listening closely to the soft sound of Kenny’s breathing through the dark and rolling these strange comments around inside his skull. He felt as though there was something worth pursuing here, but was distracted by his awareness that the cool night still clung to Kenny’s wet clothes. A small shiver passed down his spine.

“Want to take the wet costume off?” He asked eventually. Kenny nodded.

“Yeah, if you don’t mind.”

Kyle bit his lip, knowing he didn’t have any clothes that would fit him. He would be fine in just his underwear though, right?

“I’ll grab you a towel.” He stood up and made his way into the hall, to retrieve a towel from the linen cupboard. When he returned, the hall light illuminated a slice of his room, and a fraction of Kenny’s bare upper body glowed in the warm light as he pulled off his shirt and cast it aside. Kyle closed and locked the door, passing Kenny the towel and reaching to switch on his lamp.

“Are you decent?” he asked. Kenny cackled, and told him to wait a few more seconds. It wasn’t as though Kyle couldn’t have seen him in the weak light from outside, if he had cared to do so. Just a glance to his right would have rendered his company in gunmetal and silver the thin shadows cast by the rain on the window making his skin look like it wept. Nonetheless, Kyle waited the few seconds before he turned on the lamp, and as he did he turned to look and Kenny was sitting on the edge of his bed, securing the towel awkwardly around his waist.

“I got it,” He said, delivering a faux confident smile. Kyle’s stomach turned over as he realised that for the first time in history, Kenny was vulnerable. Unsure about something Kyle didn’t understand, and that he himself couldn’t say in case he limited its meaning to mere words. Scars ravaged his arms and shoulders, and Kyle knew somehow that they would also mar the bare damp skin on his back. His scar tissue shone in the lamplight, and his eyes were bright, but guarded, as they followed Kyle’s motion to sit down.

“It’s warm in here.” He said matter-of-factly. Kyle lay his hand discreetly on the rumpled top of his duvet.

“You can stay here the night still, if you need to. There’s no way I’ll let you out in the rain like this.”

Kenny nodded, making a face that said he wasn’t going to argue. The pair of them crawled into Kyle’s king single bed, and the squeeze was considerable, and for some reason it all felt stranger than it ever had before. That said, it was a pleasant sort of strange. A strange that sent a quiet thrill down Kyle’s spine when he felt Kenny’s ankles touch against his own.

“Save anyone important this evening?” Kyle asked him, re-arranging the pillow as best he could. Kenny said he didn’t, but that it was unimportant.

“I’m just trying to figure out if tonight its my turn to be saved.”

Kyle decided he could survive one night sleeping on a flat pillow. He let his head fall into it, and asked him what that was supposed to mean, if anything.

“It means I’m having some kind of hero-complex crisis. I don’t know if Mysterion will ever be the same.”

“How come?”
“Well, because. Mysterion is supposed to be you know. Mysterious?”

This made Kyle laugh. A loud. He thought that was typical of him. As someone so often slighted, Kenny was frequently blind to how idealistic he could be, sometimes.

“You’re not that mysterious Kenny. You skip class a lot and you’re a serial home invader. Maybe you can fool everyone else but you cant fool me.”

This made Kenny’s lips quirk, and the guarded expression behind his eyes seemed to dissipate incrementally. From this close, Kyle could see his eyelashes, and the creases and cracks on his bottom lip.

“You got me,” He said. “You are too smart. I guess it had to be you all along.”

“Had to be me what?”

Kenny winked, leaning close enough to press a chaste kiss against Kyle’s temple. The contact was like heaven, warmth spreading down his body like molten gold. He couldn’t help but shiver, and missed the fleeting contact when Kenny pulled away.

“Nothing.”

And he leaned in, and kissed him proper.

There was something so primarily satisfying about kissing Kenny. Something that said he was okay to kiss him rough, and hard, because Kenny kissed him rough and hard back and neither was as good as they would have liked but still the back of Kenny’s tongue tasted like cinnamon and smoke. The fact that Kenny was smooth and pointy didn’t occur to him. Kyle had kissed so many girls, but only when he was kissing Kenny did he feel like he was sharing some part of himself, and expressing thoughts and feelings he couldn’t say out loud.

The skinny bed was hardly large enough to take them. As Kyle lay on his back on the mattress, he listened to his breath coming in short puffs while Kenny kissed his neck, and then his collarbones, and then his belly, finally coming to kneel between his legs and regard him.

The places his eyes touched felt ticklish, as though he was mapping the terrain with his hands. Kyle could feel blue eyes look into him, the fingers which examined all the little muscles twitching, from his belly to the junction where his pelvis met his legs learned all his secret places by heart. His head felt like it ached but there was no pain, only dullness. A thumping, hot feeling which bled like pleasure over him like when they were children, and Stan used to run his fingers down the knobs of Kyle’s spine.

Except this was better. By far.

Kyle cursed breathlessly, turning his face so he could pull the corner of his pillow between his teeth. Kenny murmured something and slid Kyle’s underwear down over his hips. Time seemed to be slowing, the incomprehensible swing of the earth creaking and groaning to a halt. Nothing seemed real except the hands that explored him, and the mouth which followed the narrow map from his navel to the bottom of his cock.

Kenny was playing on him. Delighting in him like a child in a meadow, and as he romped Kyle twisted his fists in the sheets and gasped softly because feeling this good felt like it should be illegal. Like it ought to be against some natural law of god, or like what they were doing had never been done because somehow, no one had ever thought to do it before. It went on forever, across aeons and aeons of time, but simultaneously Kyle found it over much too soon.
“You need to arrest yourself,” He told him, when Kenny came up for air. “Stopping like that is worse than criminal.”

“For once I’m going to let the bad guy get away.”

Kenny kissed him, and Kyle tasted dust on dusky lips. He could feel the cracks inside Kenny with his tongue, and sliding his arms over Kenny’s shoulders he held him close and discovered all the knots and scratches which compiled his whole. Fleetingly, Kenny felt like a force of nature. Like a god, or a devil, or a hurricane. But then suddenly he was a teenaged boy, a human man, and he was reaching between them to loose himself and sliding his erection against the side of Kyle’s open legs.

“Let me fuck you. For justice.”

Kyle thought that after a satisfactory application of lube and fingering, he could allow that.

Yielding to him was like being split open. His weight pushed all the breath from Kyle’s lungs, the blunt press of his cock made Kyle’s legs quiver, and Kyle felt himself moaning in pain and awe because for all the agony of accepting him the pleasure of knowing him induced some strange state of ecstasy the eluded description or recollection. It was singularly and uniquely wonderful, and for a fractional, infinitesimal second, everything that had ever been and everything which ever would be seemed to be a lead into this moment. He didn’t even wonder if Ike or his parents could hear them, through the walls.

“Are you okay?”

“I’m dying.”

Kenny chortled, his face pressed tight against Kyle’s neck so Kyle could feel his breath warm on his skin. Under his fingers, Kenny’s shoulders were prickling with goosebumps, his hair smelled like roses and Kyle could feel the power which kept him stilled even in pleasure, Kyle’s heart echoing the hammer of his inside his chest.

“Don’t die on me Ky. I’ve done some weird shit in my lives bit I’d never forgive myself for fucking a corpse.”

Kyle thought this was the most horrendous conversation. He went to complain, but Kenny cut him off, kissing him with an open mouthed recklessness that made him ache in a special way. A bittersweet kind of way. And as Kenny brushed a finger idly over the crest of Kyle’s hip bone, Kyle separated from him, his head falling back on the mattress and his breath catching as Kenny rolled his hips and then pressed back inside between Kyle’s thighs.

It was strange, being fucked. Uncanny. There was something infinitely sublime about it, a disgust which resounded with a feverish want for more, and Kyle felt himself hypnotised by the nakedness of the feeling so that he rocked his own body up to meet him even as he thought, suddenly, that they must look ridiculous joined like this. Like some kind of eldritch creature, a fusion of blood and flesh, and when Kyle closed his eyes he had to focus hard on the sound of Kenny’s ragged breath because otherwise he could have found himself gazing into the deep dark shadows behind his eyes. The shadows were towering and incomprehensible, depicting Kenny with angels wings and a thousand eyes and a halo which burned like fire for aeons and aeons and when Kyle thought of that, he thought he could feel himself gagging to scream. Blonde hair rubbed against his face, Kenny’s lower belly rubbed against Kyle’s balls. Kyle tasted blood, and he realised he had bitten his lip to splitting, because Kenny was fucking him just right in a way that made his eyes tip back in bliss and see all those unsayable, unthinkable things. Those feathers. Those ashes. Those bones.
In the aftermath, Kyle caught his breath, and at the back of his mind he was already fearing the possibility that Kenny had just had sex at him without any serious plans to follow up because that was the sort of thing Kenny did all the time, and suddenly Kyle saw it differently now that he was potentially on the receiving end. How awkward would it be, when they saw each other in the school hallways? How awkward would it be, to have to convince himself he wasn’t in love, because who could be in love with a boy like Kenny who might have been a monster like a fallen angel or perhaps some numinous alien being who made the fabric of reality waver as he walked down the street.

*Wonderful, beautiful, impossible dead thing.*

*My very own hero.*

Kyle felt his guts churn and when he opened his eyes, to look the body sitting up in the bed next to him, he was almost surprised to see the shadowy person with light coloured hair. His skin was warm like human skin, and when Kyle looked at him, and they made vague eye contact, Kenny smiled.

It was a small, unreadable smile.

“Alright?”

“Uh huh.”

“Sorry I didn’t pull out in time.”

Kyle didn’t care. He grunted, and closed his eyes again. Kenny sighed.

“I don’t know what to do now.” He murmured. “Usually, after I fuck someone, I know what to do. But with you I have no idea...”

“Are you going to ditch me?”

Kyle’s eyes snapped open in alarm. He thought he felt his blood turn cold in his veins. His concern made Kenny snigger fondly, though, and he shook his head, and Kyle figured this must be a good sign really. Just enough reassurance to allow him to let out a sigh of relief.

“No Ky. I’m not going to ditch you. I’m just feeling a little bit... I dunno. Helpless right now?”

“Helpless?”

“Yeah. Conflicted. I just...” he sighed and started picking at his fingers. “I feel like I’m drowning. Like suddenly, I’m the one who needs a hero. Isn’t that stupid?”

Kyle felt the world blur and flicker round them. As if for a split second, reality with which he was familiar dissolved. He saw the curtains fluttering, he saw the glimmer of the late night deep in Kenny’s eyes. He saw the carpet, and he saw the dark scratches he had left on the back of Kenny’s shoulders and neck.

“It’s not stupid,” he said, and in the depths of his brain, Kyle could feel himself starting to get a headache again. He forced himself to quash the feeling. To push it away deep deep into the core of his mind. “We all feel like we need to be saved from time to time.”

Kenny looked thoughtful for a moment, his face a handsome profile silhouette. After a while, he heaved a massive sigh.
“You’re right.” He told Kyle quietly. “It’s probably nothing. In a few more days, you will have forgotten all of this, and everything will be the same as it always was.”

Kyle was too sleepy to be paying attention. Kenny’s closeness was soporific and he could feel himself edging into the hedonistic and dreamless sleep of the grave.

He did not reply.

... 

Kyle rolled over in bed, and groped for the body next to him on the mattress. When he found there was nobody beside him, he sat bolt upright and lifted the blankets, as though the someone he was expecting might be tucked up underneath his sheets.

There was no one.

Bewildered, Kyle gazed around his bedroom. At the open window and the daylight which filled the corners of his room. The world seemed bright, as though someone had turned up the exposure on reality, and all the solid things around him seemed gauzy and paper thin. He could feel something in the air – something that felt wrong and unnatural - and for some reason he thought that the world was struggling to convince him of something that wasn’t quite right. Something he couldn’t put his finger on...

He jumped, when he felt his mother’s fist falls on his bedroom door.

“Kyle! Are you awake? We have to leave in fifteen minutes!”

“Leave where?” Kyle called back, through the door. He reached for his phone, sitting on his bedside. He unlocked it and threw back his duvet, and had to double take when he saw the date on the top right corner of his screen.

It was January.

The phone said it was the fifth of January.

Kyle shook himself, and told himself it was a mistake. His phone had just fucked up or something – he made to enter the settings and reset the date to November, and as he did so he wondered why such a stupid little thing had unnerved him. Maybe it was just the strange feeling in the air this morning. The disorientation, like he had just been sleeping for

Two months

A hundred years. He climbed out of bed and looked around, and half expected to see Kenny’s still wet superhero costume on his bedroom floor.

“Leave where?” He yelled to his mother, still having not heard a reply. The silence informed him that Sheila Broflovski had already gone downstairs, and exasperated Kyle stripped off his pyjamas and sought a fresh pair of jeans in his drawers.

After dressing, He made his way downstairs on legs that didn’t feel like his own, and the vividness of everything around him made him squint at things which he had always thought of as familiar. Even mundane. The carpet felt weird under his socked feet, and when he walked into the
kitchen he was most surprised, to find all three of his family members chatting and taking breakfast in a way that made Kyle sure he had seen this all before.

He sat down at the table, in the spot his mother had set for him and the bowl of milky captain crunch, and glanced briefly at the calendar on the kitchen wall.

It said January fifth.

Kyle was suddenly overcome with nausea. The world around him sucked into a skinny, narrow ring, fringed by black at the edges of his vision and squeezing like he was being crushed between two walls. He felt himself shudder in his chair, pain raking over the ceiling of his skull, and with his hands clawed against the surface of the table Kyle fell forward and knocked his cereal bowl, spilling milk and breakfast over the table top and onto the floor.

And then, he saw and he thought nothing more.

... 

Reality came upon him like a bubble bursting, a sudden start which found him sitting alert and bewildered on a hard wooden seat, his hands crossed demurely on his lap in front of him. He was hot under the glare of the midday sun – sweating in a black knit sweater and dark jeans. Beside him, he could hear Stan shuffling, as though he was sweating too, and as he let his eyes wander in awe across the rows of people sitting outside in perfect silence, Kyle noted that all of them were dressed in blacks and navy blues and greys. The sun was shining, but it was that watery weak sunshine of early spring, and as Kyle adjusted to the brightness of the open outdoors he thought he could remember vaguely the events that had lead him up to this moment. Shapes of recollections, moving behind a frosty and indistinct window just out of reach. He lifted his hands and stared at them for a moment, waiting for it all to come back to him. Was he dreaming?

He thought he couldn’t be. Kyle felt awake and alive, even if the rest of the people around him looked mesmerised, and far away. A small twist of panic started in his stomach told him something was awry – he craned his body forward, trying to spot his family or someone other than Stan he might have known. Beside him, his friend turned to give him a weak little smile. Kyle noticed with a gut wrenching lurch that Stan’s eyes were red rimmed and weary. As though he had been crying.

Alright? He mouthed. Kyle parted his lips to say no, but before he could reply he became aware of the way in which he was hearing. The leaves rustling overhead, the sound of a low, droning voice ahead. He turned his face toward the front of the seated crowd, and saw what it was he must have come here for.

A funeral. Presided over by a Roman Catholic priest in a black robe. Kyle couldn’t think of any reason he would need to attend a Christian funeral. He couldn’t think of any reason he would need to be at a funeral at all. His bewilderment only doubled as ahead of him, the priest finished praying, and all around him the crowd of attendants shared in the closing of the prayer.

Amen.

“And now, I would like to invite the close friends and family of the deceased up, to scatter some soil upon the grave.”

Stan cocked his head at him in invitation. Kyle was suddenly overwhelmed by a sense of
foreboding. He watched as Stan stood, and awkwardly he raised himself up on wooden feeling legs as well, following dutifully behind him and resisting the urge to cling to the tails of his shirt for reassurance as they edged past seated funeral attendants. When they made it to the aisle, Stan leaned in close enough to speak to him.

“Are you alright?” he asked. “You look pale?”

Now he was standing up, and able to see that they were a pair amongst an audience of maybe fifty, Kyle thought to ask himself a very important question.

Where was Kenny?

“I’m fine.” He muttered, ushering Stan in the direction of the front of the crowd and looking around for a familiar flash of golden hair in the audience. He saw nothing but the coffin ahead of them, made of thin particle board and overflowing with white lilies and carnations, being lowered via pulley into a pre-dug grave. A small line of three, including Kenny’s haggard looking mother, was already assembling and scooping small handfuls off the top of the dirt pile to the left of them. Kyle felt a dull throbbing start at the back of his head, and it unsettled the clarity which rendered every detail of the scene. A tickle started at the back of his throat, and as he drew closer to the coffin he felt it spreading. When it started to drip from his nose, Kyle sniffed, and when he rubbed at the dripping with the sleeve of his shirt Kyle pulled his wrist away and saw it was blood.

His stomach lurched, and when he looked to Stan to ask if it was noticeable he saw they were standing in front of the dirt mound, and Stan was taking a handful of dirt from the side. Kyle’s eyes wandered over the ocean of flowers, the cloying scent of them making him feel strange, like he was slowly being lifted out of his body. Blood trickled down his philtrum, and his eyes found the framed picture standing underneath a wreath of white roses. He recognised the face as it blurred in and out of focus, although something about it didn’t look quite right printed in 2-D. Blonde hair. Blue eyes. Familiar.

It came back to him then, a rush of memories which came together like a collage. Nonsense which formed a photo-realistic image when one stood far back enough to see it. There had been an accident. No, several accidents. Kenny had died, and there had been a funeral.

Or wait, maybe this was a different funeral? There had been another accident, and Kenny had died. Then there was another accident. Kyle cried on Stan’s shoulder and went to school the next day. There was another accident. But that time there wasn’t a funeral. And then Kenny had died. And then Kenny had died.

And then Kenny had died.

And then Kenny had died, and Kyle remembered somehow watching them bury him even though that couldn’t be because Kenny had fucked him not long after that. And there had been evenings in Kyle’s room and hikes in the mountains, and then Kenny died and Kyle felt nothing. And then Kenny died and Kyle felt something, but he had forgotten something important which hovered at the back of his mind like a ghost and then-

Kenny had died.

The pain was like feeling his insides shattering. Like everything turned to glass, the imploded on itself, and the crushing knowledge of his loss brought tears to scratchy puffy eyes, and Kyle remembered tasting rainwater, the sound of soft moaning and the smell of warm skin. As he did, his little blood nose suddenly became a fountain, the ache at the back of his head grew blinding like someone had thrust a railroad spike through his brain. The vacant, distant eyes of everyone in attendance, like people lost deep in hypnotic dreaming, looked on as Kyle swayed where he stood, his hand thrust out and hovering claw like over the pile of grave dirt at his side. Even
Kenny’s mother was staring.

“Holy shit Kyle, you’re bleeding.”

_We all feel like we need to be saved from time to time_

Stan dropped his handful of dirt on the ground and it fell in slow motion. When he reached out to touch Kyle’s face, his fingers felt like they were touching Kyle through wads of cotton. Kyle was being torn apart from the inside out. There was so much blood... blood everywhere. He struggled to take one breath of cold fresh air before he was pulled into darkness again, and the sound of Stan’s voice echoed after him through infinite spaces, and immemorial brackets of time.

“Kyle! Kyle are you okay?”

Kyle was too far away to hear him now.

... 

The bell startled him.

At first, he thought it was his alarm, but when he woke up and threw his arm out to turn it off he found himself standing in the hallway at school instead, very nearly smacking the junior who had the locker next to him in the face.

“Fucking watch it!” the girl said, and Kyle stumbled backwards in shock, muttering an apology and trying to figure out what had happened. How had he gotten here?

Hadn’t he been somewhere else before?

Confused, and more than a little disorientated, Kyle looked around for a face, a person he recognised, someone who could shake him out of this peculiar blank he was currently experiencing. The hall was bustling with people, and by the sound of the chatter and the looks on their faces it must have been the bell to indicate the start of the first period class. Kyle checked his watch and confirmed it was nine am. Was he having some kind of an amnesia episode? What was the last thing Kyle could remember doing before right now?

He had just finished conjuring up the memory of white flowers when he felt someone thump him amicably on the shoulder.

“Hey Ky.”

Kenny. Had to be.

Kyle spun around and stared at the short youth as though he had never seen him before, and startled Kenny took a step back, his satchel swinging and drawing attention to its contents – a cape and hood which looked suspiciously like the stupid outfit ‘Mysterion’ wore when he _regularly broke into Kyle’s house_!

Relieved to remember something, at least, Kyle didn’t even get mad at him for giving him a fright. Instead he sighed, and rubbed his hand against his forehead.

“Fuck Kenny. Way to give me a heart attack.”
“Sorry, accident. Are you alright? You look peaky?”

Kenny frowned, and put out his hand to test Kyle’s temperature with his palm. When he did, Kyle suddenly remembered something else. Something which was disjointed, and couched in the hazy unreality of a dream. Although it also had the effect of making the reality he was currently experiencing feel even more bizarre.

“... I had the weirdest dream that you died.” He said, and Kenny hesitated, his hand pressed against Kyle’s brow as cold as that of a corpse.

“What?”

He asked.

“I had a dream you died,” Kyle repeated, as he thought harder about it, the memory seemed to slip away. A twinge of pain made itself known at the back of Kyle’s head, and he stopped trying to force himself to remember. Kenny dropped his hand, staring at him as though he had just grown a second head. It was making Kyle slightly uncomfortable. Kyle noticed that Kenny had several obvious love bites on the side of his neck, and this made him even more uncomfortable. Maybe even... jealous?

He rubbed his own neck uneasily, dismissing the feeling, and looked around the emptying halls. He thought that maybe he was starting to remember coming to school this morning after all. These memories, unlike the misshaped idea that he had been at some sort of funeral, were familiar and warm and much more likely to be real. They had to be, right? He was here, after all. And Kenny couldn’t be dead, because he was here too. And he had the stupid cape in his stupid satchel to prove it.

Kyle found himself quite convinced that he remembered getting up that morning and eating porridge. Which made sense because that was what he ate every morning. He remembered showering, and driving to school, and he remembered that last night he had done his homework which had been difficult, but not impossible.

“What do you mean?” Kenny asked him. Kyle shrugged, and slid his hands into his jeans pockets. They would be the only people standing in the halls soon, but Kenny didn’t seem at all like he intended to move. He was staring at Kyle with an unfamiliar intensity, and for some reason this stirred something in Kyle almost like arousal.

Fear.

“I dunno. Nothing. It was a stupid dream.”

He glanced at Kenny’s arms, and at the shape of his legs in old jeans, and another odd memory rose to the peripherals of his mind. Something about Kenny’s ankles? He had pointy ankles? This memory made Kyle’s head hurt too, and it had that weird unreal feeling about it, so like the white flowers and the funeral he pushed the recollection aside.

“Sometimes heroes need saving too”

This struck Kyle as a weird thing to say. He frowned, studying Kenny’s face for some kind of elaboration, but he found only intensely blue eyes and an expression he couldn’t place. Like a longing. An endless and unfathomable longing. Kyle thought for a moment that Kenny looked at him the way a person looks when they miss something that’s gone.
“... What?”

He was more than a little alarmed when Kenny jumped at him, flinging his arms around his neck and crushing him in the most breathless, painful hug Kyle had ever had the misfortune of experiencing.

“Promise you will never forget about me Ky.”

Kyle remembered the smell of winter roses blooming. The vague shape of a figure on his windowsill. The stars in the clear night sky.

He says he never will.

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