A Fragile Existence

by IForgotThisWasGay

Summary

This wasn't supposed to happen. Everything should've gone back to the way it was -- the spell should've taken them back to their original universe.

But... Nobody even knows they were missing. Not even the other boys, apparently. No one remembers those weeks, and life continues like normal.

Except, no one can see him.

Notes

I wrote this while I was supposed to be doing organic chemistry, so it's shorter than I would like, but whatever.

Also, it's written in present tense, while I usually write in past tense. So if you could provide feedback, it would be greatly appreciated!

See the end of the work for more notes
Chapter 1

When Felix opens his eyes, the first thing he notices is that he's not in the forest anymore. The harsh concrete pressing painfully against his left shoulder and hip definitely prove otherwise, and for a moment the realization leaves him in a daze of confusion as he struggles to figure out where he is.

The second thing he realizes is that he's alone.

Panic grips his chest at the thought, and he scrambles to his feet, looking around frantically. He duly notes that he had, in fact, been lying sprawled in a gutter, but is more concerned with scanning the surrounding area for his friends.

*No. No, no-- This can't be happening. We need to stay together. The restoring demon-- Alice--* his troubled thoughts come to a halt as the memories come rushing back.

"That's right," he mutters to himself. "The spell. We should be back home now. But, if that's the case… Where are the others?"

He picks up his bag from the side of the street, and double checks that his Book of Shadows is still inside before slinging it over his torso. As he does so, his knuckles brush against something resting on his chest, and he looks down.

"...The talisman?"

At this moment, Felix knows for sure that something went wrong with the spell. Last he remembered, Andy had the talisman -- why was it back with him now? And even more concerning, he still doesn't know where the others are, or if they even came back here with him, let alone where 'here' is.

He just hopes it's not another alternate dimension, because if the Unmaking Spell didn't work this time, he's not quite sure how he'll get everyone home.

First things first, he decides, the best thing to do is look for his house. His family's reaction to his appearance should be enough of an indication of whether or not he's in the correct universe, and if the others are here, it's the first place they'd look for him. The back alley he's in looks sort of familiar, and he's confident he can find his way to his house from here.

He'll worry about whether it's really his home once he gets there.

By the time he manages to find his way back to his house, the sun is just starting to set and Felix is feeling well-familiar pangs of hunger. He sneaks in through the back gate and around his mother's precious garden, freezing in place when he sees Oscar sitting in the backyard with his sketchpad. His heart stops too, and his lungs feel small at the sight of his younger brother in his wheelchair. A wave of guilt crashes over Felix -- guilt for the initial accident, guilt for not being able to fix it, but most of all, guilt for the relief he feels.

He's home.

"H-Hey! Hey, Oscie! I'm back!" Felix calls out, but gets no response. For a moment his heart sinks, before he realizes that Oscar is listening to music through a pair of white headphones.
He approaches his brother slowly, hoping not to startle him, but Oscar doesn't even look up. Felix frowns, reaching out a hand to shake his shoulder.

"Hey, Oscie, it's me--"

His hand goes right through Oscar's shoulder, passing through the flesh and bone like it's not even there.

Felix scrambles backwards, feeling as though someone dumped a bucket of ice straight into his soul. There's no blood, no sign of what just transpired, and while Felix knows that, rationally, there's no way he could've actually shoved his hand through his brother's shoulder, he can feel the panic bubbling up under his skin like lava. Oscar never reacts, just keeps drawing, pencil strokes steady across the page in his lap.

Felix is hyperventilating, he knows he is, but he can't stop. Oscar won't acknowledge him -- can't, possibly -- and it hurts. It hurts more than in the alternate dimension, where his brother didn't even know who he was. At least there Oscar could see him, talk to him. Here there's-- nothing.

Distantly, he hears his mother calling for Oscar and he takes a few steps back, accidentally putting himself in line with the back door in his panic. When she comes out she walks right through him, going straight to her youngest -- only? -- son. They head back inside together once Oscar packs up his drawing materials, never sparing Felix a single glance as they leave.

Felix does the only thing he can think to do.

He runs.

Hours later finds Felix sitting in Bremin Park, kicking at the sand around the swingset. He's discovered, since he left his house, that he can touch objects, but apparently not people. No, to everyone else, he was essentially a ghost -- invisible and nonexistent.

He finds an almost morbid sense of humor in the fact that he is -- for lack of a better word -- basically a poltergeist now. If he weren't so distraught over this fact, he'd probably be having a lot more fun with the situation.

Hell, maybe he'll go haunt Ellen tomorrow. She'd get a kick out of that.

He hasn't gone to see anyone else yet, not wanting to have to face the fact that he's alone in his own hometown. Jake, Sam, and Andy have yet to make an appearance, and Felix fears the worst.

He's messed up and ruined everyone's lives. Again.

Maybe it's best that the others aren't around, he thinks bitterly. This way they're safe from me.

He spends the night on a bench in the park, drifting in and out of sleep. His dreams are plagued by the thought of what might have happened to the others, and when the sun rises the next morning he's awake to greet it, feeling even more restless than the evening before.

With nothing else to do, Felix heads to Bremin High when it nears time for class, seeking out Ellen as a source of entertainment. He's almost grateful for his nonexistence as he walks through the crowded halls, simply letting everyone pass through him on their way to first lesson. He has a bit a fun while he can, reopening Ellen's locker every time she attempts to close it, but eventually
lets her win after she almost slams his hands in the door and then she's gone too, off to class with everyone else.

Just as he's leaving the building, he hears something from around the side of the school and goes to investigate. When Felix rounds the corner, he sees a couple of guys in the school uniform, but one in particular catches his eye.

Tall and blonde, with a popped collar -- it's Jake.

"Jake!" Felix lets out a relieved breath; the others are here after all. "Jake, where are the others? We need to--"

Jake laughs, interrupting him. He reaches down and snatches a backpack from the ground, emptying the contents onto someone that Felix can't see. Whoever it is lets out a loud protest as their belongings are scattered, and Jake and the other two boys there -- who Felix now recognizes as Trent and Dylan -- walk away.

With them out of the way, Felix can see the person on the ground, although he already had an idea about who it would be. He watches as Andy begins to pick up his things, sighing under his breath. Knowing that it's probably pointless to talk to Andy, but unable to go without trying, Felix speaks up.

"Andy?"

As expected, the other boy doesn't react. With a sigh, Felix does what he can to help, gently nudging some of the further away objects back towards Andy. He can't resist stealing the apple out of his lunch, though, and leaves Andy behind with his meager breakfast in hand.

Sam Conte is in first lesson, alternating his time between smiling flirtatiously at his girlfriend, Mia, next to him, and staring out the window, daydreaming. School has never really been able to hold his attention for long, and he much prefers these methods of passing the time, much to his girlfriend's exasperation.

While Mia is distracted by the teacher's talking, Sam turns his attention back to the window. He looks just in time to see a boy in a black jacket -- black everything, really -- walk across the parking lot and off the school grounds. He wonders who the other boy is, briefly, wondering about how he got out of classes, before the teacher calls on him and he's forced to turn back to the front of the classroom.

He forgets all about the unknown boy by the end of the class.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Sorry this took so long. I actually had the majority of the chapter written out for the longest time, but couldn't get down the last 600 or so words for the life of me. It's finally here, though!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Felix sits outside a small coffee shop in town, flipping through his Book of Shadows in search of answers. He needs to figure out what went wrong with the spell, and he needs to do it soon -- the longer he spends here, the more danger he's potentially in. There's no way to tell if the restoring demon followed him here until it actually comes after him, and he'd really rather not go through all that again. He hopes it won't have to come to that, but who knows.

He lets out an exasperated groan and shoves the book away from him after another minute or two, placing his head in his hands. What's the point? He thinks pessimistically. Even if I find a spell to get home, the talisman won't work without the others. And they can't see me. No one can.

Felix stands with a sigh when he looks up and sees an elderly man approaching his table, gathering his messenger bag from the chair next to him and picking up his Book of Shadows again. He vacates the table just in time for the older man to take his spot, completely unaware of Felix. The fire elemental hasn't actively sought attention in years, but he's suddenly struck by the urge to do something reckless if only to have someone -- anyone -- see him again.

He's really missing the others by this point, and it hasn't even been a full twenty four hours since he last saw them. Or rather, the real versions of his friends. Hell, he even misses the alternate Phoebe and Oscar, and he's only known them for two weeks. Distantly, Felix wonders when, and how, he became so dependant on others. He's not quite sure whether to feel fond or scared of the feelings this realization brings.

He thinks of his family as he heads towards the forest, seeking out familiar ground in the form of the boy's hideout in the last alternate universe. He wonders if they're happy here; with only one son, and free of the only thing that caused them real grievance.

They must be, he decides.

At the edge of the forest, Felix pauses, looking back at the town of Bremin behind him. The forest seems a lot less daunting with three others around. Alone, there's no telling what could happen, especially with the possibility of a restoring demon looming over his head and a powerless talisman around his neck.

He sighs and heads in anyways.

♀

It's not until later that Felix remembers the spell they did to reconnect with their mothers.

When the idea hits him, he bolts upright from his position sprawled across the floor, scrabbling for his Book of Shadows and a pen from his bag. The spell is still there, hastily scrawled down on
one of the pages towards the back of his book. He'd skimmed over it during his flips through the book earlier, more concerned with finding a way home and less with protecting kin that couldn't even see him, but now he knows just how useful the spell could be.

*If I can just tweak it a bit…* He thinks to himself, chewing absentmindedly at his pen cap. *I just might be able to reconnect myself with Jake, Sam, and Andy. From there, hopefully I'll be able to get home.*

He doesn't have the tablet they used in the other universe, obviously, but if he can get all four elements together in one place, it may work. He'll need objects from each of the other boys that can be used to make the link, though, and somehow have to manage to keep them all together long enough to complete the spell.

Felix tries to calculate how long it's been since he left the school, and estimates that it probably hasn't been that long. He should still have time to sneak into the other's houses and find the objects he needs before the three get home from school -- because, even if he can't be seen, floating objects would definitely raise suspicions.

His first stop is Jake's house. He already has an object in mind that would fit the spell's qualifications, but finding it may be an issue. Likely, Jake might have it with him at school, and in that case Felix will have to find another object to substitute.

It takes a while, but Felix manages to pick the lock on the back door, which has a loose handle and is out of immediate view. He feels bad about it, and resolves himself to finish searching as fast as possible. Thankfully, he's right in his assumption that Jake’s mum is working today, and the house is empty. He quickly locates Jake’s room, which is surprisingly clean. Felix searches thoroughly, but finds no sign of the football Jake frequently used to torment him back in their universe.

Frustrated, Felix knocks over a small pile of papers on Jake’s bedside table, stalking over to the closet and throwing the door open. If he can't find the football, he'll have to take the next best thing -- which, in this case, is a flannel shirt with a grey hood. The shirt Jake was wearing when they got lost, which should have enough memories tied to it to be efficient.

He heads to Andy’s next, cautiously peering through the front window in search of Nai Nai. He doesn't doubt that, if anyone could see him, it'd be her -- and he definitely doesn't want to get on her bad side by being caught breaking into her house. He doesn't see anything, so he takes a chance and grabs the spare key hidden inside a fake rock. He knows it's there from his time spent watching Andy for magical potential, and is glad he doesn't have to pick any more locks.

Once inside, Felix ascends the stairs to Andy’s room as quietly as possible, wary of the fact that there may in fact be people in the house with him. He didn't spend a lot of time with Andy in their universe, and honestly can't think of an object that would be significant to the both of them. Instead, he takes the easy way out and picks up the blue fisherman's hat from it's (oddly placed) spot on the top shelf of Andy’s bookcase.

He ends up two blocks away from his own house on his way to Sam’s, and pauses for a moment to consider how much time he has. He knows that he should really keep going, gathering ingredients for the spell, but his curiosity gets the better of him.

*It'll just take a few minutes, he tells himself. I just want to see how they are.*

But when he gets to his house, he's surprised to see that his room is still there, exactly as he left it
two weeks ago.

This new discovery leaves Felix more confused than ever, peering through the window into his own bedroom. He wonders if there's another version of him in this world, and if that would explain why no one can see him.

He shakes himself out of his stupor when his mum comes out wearing a pair of gardening gloves and a smock. He watches her for a moment, looking on nostalgically as she settles down in the garden with a peaceful smile, before turning away and continuing on his way. He'll just have to sort out this new mystery later, hopefully with a few friends by his side after he completes the spell.

Getting into Sam's house is by far the easiest task of the day. The Contes usually keep their backdoor unlocked during the day -- probably for the best when you have three sons always on the move -- and Felix knows this full well after Sam repeatedly exploited it in the other alternate universe. All Felix has to do now is find an object with ties to both him and Sam, or Sam and his magic, and he'll have all the necessary ingredients.

He nearly has a heart attack when he steps into the living room and sees Sam's mother sitting at her easel, paintbrush in hand. Felix has to remind himself that she can't see him before his heartrate calms down again. Her ears are covered in a pair of pink headphones, to which Felix lets out a sigh of relief, which he promptly chokes on as Pete comes barreling down the stairs.

Felix reflectively darts back into the kitchen before his mind catches up with his body and reminds him of the fact that he's invisible. He pinches the bridge of his nose, eyes scrunching closed in annoyance, as Pete stops to talk to his mother then pecks her the cheek before racing out of the house. Felix takes a minute to collect himself, and just as he's about to head for the stairs, a voice stops him.

"Uh, what're you doing in here?"

Felix would've ignored the voice -- no need for yet another reminder of his non-existence, thank you -- but the familiarity of it makes him look on instinct. Sure enough, Sam is back from school. But what's surprising is that he's looking right at Felix.

They hold eye contact for a minute, Felix frozen and unable to move. It's almost like he can actually see me-- No.

He shakes his head, coming out of his stupor, and looking into the living room where Sam's mother is. Surely his question was directed at her.

But then why was he looking at you-- Stop it.

Much to his distress, Mrs. Conte has replaced her headphones is entirely unaware of the situation unfolding behind her.

There is no situation. You've already established that no one can see you--

"...Goth dude?"

Well. Shit.

There goes that option.
Felix's head whips back around to stare incredulously at Sam. The other boy is still looking at him -- *he's looking at me* -- with a confused, and maybe slightly concerned expression.

Felix is left floundering. For all his wishing that morning, he is entirely unprepared when someone can suddenly see him again. When Sam takes a hesitant step forward, Felix takes two back, plastering himself against the kitchen island. The edge of the countertop is biting into his hips, but he's too focused on Sam to notice.

Sam stops where he is, hands half-raised as if to reassure him that's he's not threatening. Felix should really be taking this opportunity to explain the situation, but only thought at the forefront of his mind is *get away*.

Sam opens his mouth again, but Felix beats him to it. "I--" He's not sure how he's going to get out of this, but there's one thing he has to say before all else. "I'm sorry."

The other boy relaxes a little, looking slightly appeased. "Okay, it's cool, no problem, dude. Now why don't you tell me--"

"Sam?"

They both pause and look towards the living room, where Sam's mother is removing her headphones. "Sam, honey, is that you?" She stands. "Who are you talking to?"

Sam blinks, confused, turning to face his mother as he opens his mouth again. "I don't know, but he was here when I got ho--"

Felix is gone before he even finishes the sentence.

Sam turns back to the strange boy in black, pointing his mother's eyes in the right direction, only to find no one there.

"'He' who, sweetie? Did you bring a friend over?"

"N-No!" Sam shakes his head, brain trying to make sense of what's happening. "No, mum, there was some stranger in here--!"

His mother looks concerned, glancing around the kitchen. When her eyes land back on her son, she smiled reassuringly. "Well, there's no one here now," she pats him on the shoulder as she walks by. "C'mon now, wash up! You're going to help with dinner tonight."

Any protest Sam tries to make is cut off before it can be articulated, and he resigns himself to figuring out this mystery on his own. However, as he works alongside his mother in the kitchen, one thought plagues his mind.

*Why did the boy seem so… familiar?*

Chapter End Notes

You guys have been so kind, and please know that I do read comments, I just don't
like to respond in a thread because it gives an inaccurate representation in the story's stats.

And, yes, I am painfully aware that I cheaped out in regards to magical objects.

Thank you for all your support!
And you thought the last chapter was late.

After sprinting a block and a half, Felix determines that he is far enough from the Conte’s house that he can slow to a walk. He's out of breath already, and his legs ache. His heart is racing, but he's not completely positive that it's an effect of all the running.

*He saw me-- He could see me--*

His right hip hurts from where his bag has repeatedly slammed against it, but Felix doesn't think he'll end up with a bruise. Indeed, he's escaped the situation unscathed, but it doesn't feel like it.

*How-- How did Sam--? No one could, but he-- he--*

His thoughts are all over the place, bouncing around his skull and tripping over themselves in the process until all that's left is a giant mess of tangles. He stumbles when his foot slips into a pothole on the road and his ankle twists, but he barely notices the twinge of pain that shoots up his leg. He keep walking, destination unclear and probably looking like someone just died but it doesn't really matter anyways because no one can see him--

But that's a lie. Because somehow, against all odds, Sam *can* see him.

*Sam can see me.*

Felix feels almost lightheaded at the realization. He stumbles again, and jerks to a stop. He nearly crumples, tumbling down to rest on the curb. The sleeve of Jake’s shirt pokes out of his bag, and the sight of it makes him sick to his stomach.

He didn't get what he needed.
He'll have to go back.

He'll have to see Sam again.

Felix rips off his bag, accidentally scraping the strap against his cheek in his haste, and throws it away from him. He pulls his knees up to his chest, burying his face into his hands. His heart is still racing, body burning up from the inside.

Felix takes in a deep, shaking breath, holds the air for two seconds, then lets it out slowly. He repeats the action again; in for five seconds, hold for two, out for five. It's a trick that Ellen taught him after Oscar's accident, and has helped him more than once.

As his breathing settles and regulates, Felix attempts to assess what just happened. Somehow, he's not as invisible as he believed he was, because there is no doubt in his mind that Sam had seen him back there.

*But why Sam?*

For the life of him, that's something that Felix can't figure out. Why *can* Sam see him? No one else can, not even his family.

That sparks another train of thought. If Sam can see *him*, then does that nullify Felix’s theory of there being another him in this universe? Surely even magic couldn't bend the laws of the universe enough to allow two of the same person to exist within the same reality.

Could it?

But, if that's the case, then Felix has no plausible explanation for why no one else can see him.

He groans into the palms of his hands, the beginnings of a headache forming. Now that he's somewhat calmed down, he can also feel that ankle is throbbing painfully. He's in no mood to get up, much less go anywhere, but he doesn't want to stick around in case Sam decides to come looking for him.

With a great sigh Felix pushes himself to his feet, slightly off-balance as he favors his left leg. He
walks carefully over to where his bag landed, picking it back up and scanning the ground for any fallen items before placing it on his shoulder. He tucks the exposed plaid sleeve back into his bag, frowning at the thought of going back to Sam's.

*It'll be fine,* he tells himself. *I'll go when he isn't home.*

But, a small voice in the back of his head tells him, he'll have to face the other boy eventually.

Ξ

In the end, Felix decides to just get it over with and talk to Sam directly.

Really, Felix wishes he could say he came to this conclusion after a lot of rational thinking and weighing of various other factors, but the truth of the matter is a lot simpler than that.

He doesn't know what to take from Sam.

He ended up spending most of the previous night trying to think of what object could be used in the spell, but came up empty-handed. There was always his hat or skateboard, both things that the other boy kept in the other universe, but Sam usually had those items with him at all times.

Meaning, he'd only have a chance to get them when Sam was sleeping, most likely. Unfortunately, the back door would already be locked by that point, and the Contes had much better security than the Riles did. Waiting in the house before then was out of the question, since Sam would see him and cause a lot of problems that he was not prepared to deal with at the moment.

Thus, Felix had decided catching Sam *before* he went home, when he was alone, would be the best course of action.

Felix waits for school to end, and watches from a safe distance as the crowd of students rush out of the building. He scans them carefully, looking for a glimpse of Sam. When he sees him, he's not alone. Mia is with him, pressed up against his side with his arm around her shoulders, along with a few other skaters that Sam sometimes hangs out with.
But that's okay, because Felix expected this. He tails them at length, keeping out of their sight -- not that any of them are looking behind them anyways.

The group ends up at the skate park, and Felix sits down on the grass several feet away under the shade of a tree to wait. He's removed his jacket to make himself look somewhat less suspicious, but no one even spares him a single glance.

And, even if they did, they wouldn't see him anyways.

He keeps his eyes on Sam, until he sees him skate over to Mia and take off his helmet. Sam picks up his skateboard in one hand, taking his girlfriend's hand into his other one, and the two say their goodbyes.

Felix stands, and walks away from the couple. Time to put his plan into action.

Sam is skateboarding back to his house after walking Mia home when he turns onto another street and suddenly stops. The sole of his sneaker scrapes against the ground as he slows, coming to rest just in front of someone sitting on the side of the street.

But it's not just anyone--

“I-It's you!” Sam can feel his jaw drop as his brain catches up with what his eyes are seeing. “You're the guy from yesterday!”

Said guy doesn't even looked surprised to see him. All the fear he showed yesterday is gone from his face, replaced by a collected calm. Sam notices that his fingers are repeatedly clenching around the black fabric of the jacket in his lap, however, and thinks that maybe the other boy isn't as fearless as he's trying to appear right now.

“I am,” the other boy agrees. “What of it?”

Sam is so flabbergasted he is actually speechless for a moment. “W-What of it’?” He repeats incredulously. “Y-You broke into my house!”
The other boy nods. “Yup, that was me,” he lets go of his jacket, instead reaching up to fiddle with his necklace.

*Definitely nervous,* Sam thinks.

He's torn between trying to calm this strange person down or getting angry. But that's a ridiculous thought in itself, because *of course* Sam should be getting angry -- why would he try to reassure a *criminal?*

But then he thinks back to yesterday, and the scared look in this boy’s eyes, and the way his voice sounded as he apologized. He was *terrified.*

So, even though he really should be reporting this guy to the police right now, Sam finds himself relaxing. He's not exactly comfortable right now, but he also doesn't want to scare the other boy off again. After all, who knows when he'd see him again? It was just a coincidence that they were even meeting right now--

*Hang on.*

“Are you stalking me?” Sam blurts out, before he even really knows what he's saying.

To his surprise, the other boy *laughs.* Sam doesn't understand what's so funny.

“No, seriously, are you?” He asks. “I mean, you obviously know where I live, and you're here now-- And, you actually seem kinda familiar? Do you go to Bremin High?”

The boy looks away, teeth sinking into his lower lip. “That's.. a little complicated.”

“Dude, that makes it sound like you are *definitely* stalking me.”

“No, not that!” He snaps, then lets out a sigh. “I meant about Bremin-- you know what, forget it. That's not why I'm here.”
Sam is immediately suspicious, and eyes the other boy warily. “Then why are you here?”

The other boy meets his gaze steadily. “We have a lot to talk about, Sam.”

Chapter End Notes

Felix is a mess. I'm (not) sorry.

End Notes

Hopefully the next chapter will be longer. You can think of this as a prologue of sorts, I suppose. In any case, thanks for reading!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!