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CAELUM

By
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A.S Southern Maine Community College, 2019

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A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
(in English)

The Graduate School
The University of Maine
August 2023

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CAELUM

By Alexandra Requena

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Gregory Howard

An Abstract of the Thesis Presented
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
(in English)
August 2023

Caelum is a story about the hidden struggles of mental health told in an alternating chapter format that explores the journey of two characters: an angel, Tacenda, who seeks revenge on Mr. Mystical -an unloving God- and Dorian, a human, who is trying to find his place in life. The two experience parallel situations where they explore their emotions and reactions to life while Mr. Mystical makes everything much more complicated. Tacenda, however, has other plans, and seeks Dorian for help defeating those who have turned against him, causing his demise. As the story progresses and alternates between Tacenda's quest and Dorian's growth, the reader takes on the role of figuring out how the two are connected and learning how to navigate through the chaos that seems to surround the two men.

DEDICATION

For the hidden warriors that charge into battle every day.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to Dr. Gregory Howard, whose enthusiasm, guidance, and encouragement helped me consolidate ideas and allowed me a safe space to build a story about my own struggles in a very real world with fun and interesting twists. Thank you also to Dr. Hollie Adams and Dr. Sarah Harlan-Haughey for serving on my thesis committee.

Much like Steven King mentions in *On Writing*, the scary part is starting. I'd like to thank Graysen, who was a supporter since I pitched the idea during the summer and allowed me to explore the world I wanted to construct and listened with enthusiasm when I struggled to go forward. In a way, they allowed me to start. A big thanks to my Eucalyptus, without you -despite your dislike of angel stories- I wouldn't have been able to achieve many of the scenes or the ending I wanted for my characters. Thank you to all my colleagues in the fall 2021 Graduate Fiction Workshop that read the beginnings of this adventure and guided me on a path that I'm glad I followed. And thank you to Mei, for being a friend and suggester of visuals when I needed inspiration the most.

Thank you to everyone who has read pieces that I have shared outside of the classroom, whether it be in passing, during a conversation, a draft, anything. Thank you to my mother, who has always been my cheerleader and supported me in whatever adventure I wanted to achieve. Thank you Sarah who has allowed me to vent during stressful times, gave me ideas and feedback when the roadblock was up.

Without all of you, *Caelum* wouldn't have been where it is today.

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CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

Alexandra Requena

“What goes up must come down.” Mania causes people with bipolar illness to climb higher and higher then crash like a wave rolling into the shore.”

-Troy Steven.

I am an individual that struggles with bipolar disorder, much like the individual mentioned above. The epigraph to this thesis, from Troy Steven’s *Breaking Bipolar* is for me an important concept in understanding both my disorder and its representation in my thesis. Not only is water a key element towards the ending, but the experiences both characters live can be described as climbing higher and falling, repeatedly. The reason I bring this to light is because there are elements of my own personal struggle and how the world around me approaches this disorder hidden within the lines of the text. Every time I witness the media showcasing a disorder like bipolar I or II the characters are usually violent, not willing to have treatment and unreliable. It showcased a very specific and damaging image of the bipolar individual. I wanted to create a story where I not only channel my own battles, but I give representation in a different way. In this case I took elements of bipolar, like mania, depression, hallucinations and turned them on their head. I made them real breathing and living people. Instead of one character having the disorder, I created characters based on symptoms. I don’t believe everyone will understand these context queues unless they have lived similar experiences to mine but in a way, the process of writing my thesis was a way of healing and coming to terms that this is something that will accompany me. The thesis itself is a breathing beast that takes the reader and has them struggle alongside one of our protagonists (Dorian) and follows him on his journey of life.

In this thesis I have threaded the personal with the fictive, making it a piece that can reach other audiences as well. Conceptually the thesis itself was solidified during fall 2022. I wanted a story that portrayed mental illness in a very specific way. An evil God, a distraught angel and a distressed human. Each signifies a specific aspect of bipolar. There are layers to the concept itself depending on who reads the story and when. For example, I don't expect the audience to initially understand that this idea stemmed from a personal experience with mental illness, on the other hand they might gather the religious aspect and focus on the deceiving God that doesn't care much about his creations. This thesis was meant to be a joyous experience where the reader *feels* the events that unfold. I wanted a certain level of relatability when it came to Dorian. It is a slice-of-life/ coming-of-age, where we as readers grow and live experiences that we can to some degree understand as real human experiences. To some extent we have all loved, felt stressed, traveled so Dorian's journey is something enjoyable until the dramatic end. The concept itself was a good idea, something refreshing even. Also, I just enjoy playing with morally questionable gods and angels that force their own missions on others. I'm not disregarding that there are others that have had similar ideas and executed them similarly, but I feel as if *Caelum* takes on different meanings depending on who engages with it and when.

Executing this project had its complications. First was how to get from point A to point B in my story. I had a beginning and an end, but no idea on how to get my characters to said ending. I am an intuitive writer (I gave myself this title) where I just sit down and write with no plan in mind. I do believe that I could have benefitted from some planning, at least a rough idea of what I wanted and where, because after all my thesis kind of took life and told me where it wanted to go. Knowing this, I would write a chapter here or there depending on which 'mode' I was in, either quest or slice-of-life. This is how the bulk of the thesis was formed, and I'd argue that this was my biggest struggle. These past semesters taught me much about writing discipline and *how*

to continue a project. Also, not every idea you have can fit into one box. For example, aesthetically I also had a very specific image in mind. Initially, there were three sections: Stygian, Alienation and a third unnamed section. Each was encompassed by a word and its definition, alluding to the overall theme of that section of the thesis. This didn't last long, for a variety of reasons. Firstly, the reading became long and unengaging, secondly, it was difficult to see how both Tacenda and Dorian were connected. This second reason was the most important. If the reader couldn't connect the two, then the biggest purpose of this piece would have been lost. The best way to solve both of these problems was to get rid of the sections and have alternating chapters where the characters mirror each other, and I could still keep my wordplay by using a specific word for my title. In case you aren't familiar with the definition of 'caelum' it is both a constellation and sky/heaven in Latin. I also noticed that after switching the format of the chapters, creativity and events that I wanted to happen flowed more naturally than trying to force a specific theme throughout the entire section. Also, when it comes to format, I purposely wrote shorter chapters and alternated sentence structure between long and short. Short chapters (in my opinion) make the piece more dynamic and engaging, also, it allows me to jump from one character to another, make time pass as quick or as slow as I want and finally allow for that chaotic feeling that I created in the final chapter (which I believe is the longest). Alternating sentence structure has two meanings in this case. Firstly, I love run-on sentences, so having long sentences paired with short creates an ebb and flow that mimics the way an ocean's tide comes and goes, and waves crashing against the shore (although readers may not catch this, it is a little foreshadowing towards the ending of my thesis). My personal struggle was realizing that the story *wanted* to be told in short chapters. I thought that because Tacenda's story was a quest narrative and Dorian's was a coming-of-age I *had* to have longer chapters (10 plus pages). My method of writing is rather chaotic to say the least. I don't plan, I don't outline, I don't have

character sheets or vision boards. I write by intuition and as funny as it sounds, vibes. A great example of this is the ripping of wings scene that Tacenda goes through. I had the idea; now what vibe was I going for? I scavenged the interwebs (specifically YouTube) because I am a very sensory driven person. Maybe if a specific playlist or song was played, I could mentally visualize the concept and then from there just write. I came across this YouTube channel by Abbie Emmons with lengthy music driven playlists that were considered immersive writing sessions. At the time I am writing this I cannot find the one I engaged with, but listening to one of those videos and then sitting to write as the music is playing is how that scene came to life and how most of the writing for this thesis was done. I also watched a lot of YouTube videos that authors post about their own writing process and seeing where I aligned and how I could better improve my storytelling.

I somehow wanted to include as much hidden meaning as possible, with Tacenda's name and the name of the thesis, the way chapters were structured (inspired by the short chapters in Percival Everett's *The Trees*). I wanted everything in my thesis to have purpose, whether it be personal (letting my own struggles with bipolar go) or tailored to the audience (the inclusion of a romance, or the struggles with religion). To touch a bit on the second note, I cannot assume what the audience will take away from my story, however I am aware of the heavy religious motifs within it. There is quite a backstory to it. I was raised in Spain in a small town in Andalusia, where religion is prevalent within small communities. All my family were church goers on Sunday and celebrated all religious holidays associated with Catholicism. Since I was introduced to this, I became quite interested in the art surrounding Spanish Catholicism, what it meant, who was there, so on and so forth, especially because the churches and art themselves were heavily influenced by the Greco-Roman art movement during the renaissance. Although I mention a few specific landmarks, like the Cathedral in Almeria, or the Alhambra in Granada (which is of

Muslim descent), it shows another layer of the Spanish world, and mostly, Dorian's experiences are my own. I lived in a strange town, not knowing the language, surrounded by incredible art (I recommend visiting Cordoba at least once in your life). But why the dark twist of an unloving God and animalistic angels? As a queer, non-binary and Hispanic adult, religion itself has become a community of toxicity where 'differences' are no longer celebrated but rather excluded and I found no refuge for those within my community (yes, I am generalizing and I am aware that there is some good, but like everything, there is good in bad and bad in good). I have struggled to find a belief system that clicks with me, and in a way, when I left the Catholic Church in Spain, this was my way of bidding it adieu. Also, I really liked the idea of angels becoming creatures under Mr. Mystical's instructions. I love creating drama in my writing and this was the perfect outlet to do so. The angels themselves are meant to be seen as both perfect and terrifying, and have the audience question "why would they do that to Tacenda?" or "aren't they supposed to be peaceful?" In a way, I wanted to have the audience really try to distrust what the truth was given by Mr. Mystical. This was not an easy task. I had never written a character that was untrustworthy, or even used an unreliable narrator (which is something I want to attempt in the future). So, how could I get the audience to both trust Jacob, distrust Mr. Mystical and at the same time question what is going on with the two connected protagonists? I could only try. I have yet to come up with an answer to this question and as the author of my thesis, I believe there is much that should be changed when it comes to the characters. I'm not saying they lack depth, at least not Dorian and Tacenda, however I would have liked to give more dimension to Jacob and Lucille, since they are both companions on this journey. For example, when I revise this piece further I'd like to include Lucille in the ending scene, have her get on the back of the truck with Tacenda and Jacob and either have a role in the downfall or be a viewer and switch the POV to how she's witnessing the events. I think it could be an interesting twist. Like I have previously

mentioned, I usually do not come up with character sheets, or really flesh out a character when I create one unless I am drawing. For my thesis I had a rough general idea of what I wanted from them, but their personality, abilities, drives and passions all developed as I was writing. Lucille being afraid of a committed relationship, or Dorian's passion towards religious art, Jacob's way of speaking to Tacenda's stern and silent being. All flowed as I wrote, and much like real people, they evolved as time went on in the story. If you read closely, you'll notice that Tacenda ends up practically begging Dorian for help, if we rewind to the beginning of his fall, he would have been more aggressive with it.

I find it interesting to consider my thesis a work of fiction, knowing that so many personal experiences are intertwined with the characters and events, although I do believe it succeeds in combining the real with the possibly real (I don't want to disregard people's beliefs by stating that heaven or God is fiction). It has the elements that make it fiction: characters, plot, setting, POV and conflict. One element that I struggled with is tone, although I had clear ideas in mind, like making Tacenda's chapters darker, and Dorian's a bit more lighthearted, I don't believe I exceeded as I would have liked. I do think there are elements of both tones, which allows the reading to be more dynamic, but in the future, I want to find references or even workshops that focus on how to develop tone within your writing.

There were two things that inspired the concept of the thesis itself, and a few others that inspired how I portrayed the characters. There is a Korean singer named DPRIAN that is bipolar, and his music and music videos are visual and auditory portrayals of his struggle with the disorder. I personally resonated with the song *Nerves*. Specifically, the lyrics that read:

So you came around my house
And you left your marks with your fingertips

I'm sitting where you sat down

And now he's looking for something meaningless

-Christian Yu, "Nerves", *Moodswings In This Order*

Hearing him give voice to his mania and allowing him to create a character behind it (he has lore behind his music, his mania is represented with a character named Miito), struck the possibility of me giving life to my own experiences with my disorder. In the case of this song, it is DPRIAN who is singing about Miito's experience until they switch in the end. So in a way I asked "how can I have these two sides of myself coexist and merge without fully deeming them as Ian and Miito?" and I truly believe that the concept itself of making bipolar tangible is the same in both DPRIAN's universe and my own, but the interpretation of our experiences are wildly different. When he created a second being, or a second version of himself, I took what made the disorder difficult for me and created alternate characters for them. They both represent me, but also aren't a part of me. The second visual that inspired me would have to be the world of Laura Gallego's *Ahriel* series¹. The angels in this world are dark and unemotional. In this case it would be like looking at a rock and calling it an angel. I wanted something similar for my creatures, but I wanted to make them more animalistic. They are cold, mean, and aggressive creatures that are born to exterminate those that fail and basically mess up humanity. The outlier is Tacenda, much like Gallego's protagonist Ahriel. They both are cast away and they both have the 'quest narrative' mindset. Whereas Ahriel discovers her humanity, Tacenda becomes consumed by this vengeance and in a sense does not engage with his human side much or at all. Other inspirations for this project were *Strange the Dreamer* by Laini Taylor because of world building, where Taylor combines 'reality' with a fictional space. This novel is placed in two towns, one where *Strange the Dreamer* lives being the 'real' location, then his dreams, where

¹ Unfortunately, Laura Gallego is a controversial writer that does not support the LGBTQIA+ community and I do not condone this behavior, nor do I support it. Her writing came at a time of need in middle school and forever will remain close to my heart. In this case, I separate writer from craft.

Sarai, a god spawn meets Strange. Although I don't play with dreams or dreamlike states, I used this parallel world and idea to create the liminal space Tacenda is in, and the very real-world location Dorian travels to. Another inspiration is *Starfish* by Akemi Dawn Bowman because of the representation of mental health. In this novel, Ellie, both the narrator and the protagonist, struggles with a controlling mother, a broken family, anxiety, fat-shaming and depression. Akemi Dawn Bowman makes all these experiences real, and regardless of who has had similar moments in life they feel empathy towards Ellie. I wanted the readers of my thesis to feel some empathy for Tacenda and Dorian. They both struggle in their own way; one is castaway and the other suffers from anxiety. *Starfish*, focused on showcasing the reality of these struggles and not dramatizing it, making Ellie feel and seem all that more real. Although I couldn't really apply this to Tacenda, Ellie and the way she navigates mental health were a big part of how I wrote Dorian and his mental decay. Finally, *The Summer I Turned Pretty* by Jenny Han, my first and only romance novel that introduced me to the positive concept of a summer fling, in this particular text, teens fall in love and have a summer romance that turns long term, which was the initial plan for Dorian and Lucille, they struggle, fall in love, accept one another and finally initiate an official romance. Jenny Han makes romance engaging and exciting (and this means a lot, I usually never read romance novels), and in a way I could see the pink colored sunglasses that the protagonist had and apply it to Dorian. Earlier I mentioned Percival Everett's *The Trees*, when it came to chapter structure. In this novel, chapters are short, quick to read and extremely dynamic. The reader is engaged, and he plays a lot with time and how the events unfold within each chapter. What I really enjoyed is that he builds upon what was already there and leaves much up for interpretation. I identified somewhat with this type of reading, so I wanted to try it for my own thesis. I believe I have succeeded, especially towards the end where everything turns chaotic. With the quick reading pace and the shortness of the chapters, the reader is wanting more

and more.

In my second fiction workshop, I worked with concepts that I hadn't really explored as a person, for example, struggles with morality, humanity, or someone being so lost in their depression that life lacks meaning, topics that are hard to read and even harder to write. In a way, I took what was taboo and brought it to light. I wouldn't have done this if we hadn't read the texts we did during class. It's not that they tackled the taboo more so than they brought to light difficult situations or explicit moments. For example, in Giada Scodellaro's *Some of Them will Carry Me* there are some short stories that are very explicitly sexual. I wasn't used to reading these types of stories for class, so imagine my surprise when we did. In a way, this solidified that exploring these themes was valid, so I chose to do that in my thesis. I showcase very real ways people deal with depression, for example, Dorian stops responding to his friend that is overseas, or Tacenda spirals into self-doubt and anxiety, and to be a bit more extreme, I also explore death, a theme that has really interested me in writing since middle school, although I cannot remember a specific example at this moment in time. Another way this course helped me add to my writer's toolbox was by introducing me to Calvino's literary values. In this course, we were to explore these values and then present one (or more) that we find in our writing. In this case I selected exclusion, which I defined as the lack of purposeful information. Within my thesis, Mr. Mystical remains unnamed, no physical being, only a voice that directs. I scatter exclusion throughout my thesis in oddly specific ways, for example, reader, I ask you this, why does Mr. Mystical engage with Dorian? I did not include an answer to this question, nor will I reveal it. Mr. Mystical is meant to be a catalyst and meant to try and control the chaos that ensues within both characters. Another value I used is quickness (and I use this in the more literal sense). Although it isn't clear how much time passes exactly in my story (which is something I'm going to reshape for publication), I do mention specific dates and sort of give the time frame of three months, from

June to August. When does each event happen? It's unsure, mostly because I want the reader to feel lost, as if everything was flying by and happening too quickly, and it didn't matter which story we were reading, Tacenda or Dorian's. Another reason for this quickness is because (at least from personal experience) summers abroad pass rather quickly. When I went to South Korea for two months, time passed with a blink of an eye, and I wanted the audience to feel this as well. Like I said, everything has some purpose within my thesis.

The reason this thesis was shaped, and I bring bipolar to light is because there are elements of my own personal struggle and how the world around me approaches this disorder hidden within the lines of the text. I don't believe everyone will understand these context queues unless they have lived similar experiences to mine, but I wanted to give them life, shape them and allow myself to let go. In a way, the process of writing my thesis was a way of healing and coming to terms that this is something that will accompany me. The thesis itself is a breathing beast that takes the reader and has them struggle alongside one of our protagonists (Dorian) and follows him on his journey of life.

PROLOGUE

Feathers ruffling in the white nothingness. There was enough space between each creature that they'd have to travel quite a distance in order to even catch a glimpse of a "friend." With no clear directions, most of them went from one area of the nothingness to another, tasks appearing in their mind as they moved, guiding them around. In this particular case, one of the creatures flapped, flapped, flapped its wings, moving in a straight line, almost with a fixed destination in mind.

Keep moving. Keep pushing forward. You will find me.

The deep, all-encompassing voice rang through the empty space, inviting the angel to move quicker, a sense of urgency pushing through his system. His ten wings followed a delicate dance, first the top two wings with their white fluffy feathers, then the ones under, and the dance continued until the fifth wing on each side moved, flowing like water trickling down a calm stream. Not one missed the mark or was out of place. It had no face. It had no body. The wings were merely connected by a centerpiece of muscle, flesh, skin, hair. And eyes. Plenty of eyes. This creature wasn't young, but not particularly old either. He, as well as many others have formed part of this never-ending cycle of creation, alongside the birds, the trees and humanity itself. The creature was just meant to put pieces into motion and help the cycle continue.

My son, you will soon be here.

Although bodiless and expressionless, the creature could *feel*. The need to reach the end of the line, the urgency to fulfill its mission, the desire to one and for all, meet the creator. One way or another, the creature will achieve. In between the vast liminal space, it could see others, in different shapes and sizes, bigger wings, lesser eyes, bodies, with limbs, floating or flying. No one was like the other. This creature didn't wonder, didn't care about those that also fluttered like moths drawn towards light. It wasn't curious about their missions or goals. *It* kept on moving

forward. It had no room for mistakes or curiosity. Soon enough, this winged creature struck against a thing. Something clear, invisible to its eyes, that didn't allow it to push forward, although it tried, flesh piece pressing hard against the cold surface. How could something it didn't see, not allow it to find?

Behind the invisible wall, a cacophony of sounds ran through the air, screeching, gurgling, screaming, laughing, all at once. Equally as bone chilling and blood curdling. The creature screeeeeeched as its wings stopped moving in unison, causing it to drop to the ground. Streaks of light surrounded it, its many eyes starting to bleed, its wings, desperately trying to move.

My son, welcome.

You have reached me.

Now, listen closely. I have plans for you.

The creature, that didn't breathe or feel, laid motionless on the ground, if it had a chest, it would have been sunken in. The sheer pressure of The Creator being there caused every bone in its body to shatter to a million pieces and slowly turn into a puddle of goo on the ground. The Creator had no time to lose.

You must go to the human realm, and protect me from there. Others like you will fall. It is on you to stop their revenge.

As The Creator said his last word, the ground beneath the creature opened, causing it to fall.

Go, Jacob.

CHAPTER 1 -

Tacenda wasn't Mr. Mystical's first angel, he was one more of the bunch. He encompassed all that is good. Unlike other creatures that adventured around the liminal space, Tacenda took on the form of a man, slender, tall, dark brown hair that fell graciously over his face, hiding his eyes. He was perfect in every sense of the word. Mr. Mystical had created him in his image - or the supposed image- and the ending product was satisfactory. Because that is all that he was, a product. A figment of Mr. Mystical's imagination come to life. Mr. Mystical wasn't benevolent, but he wasn't exactly evil. He acted upon boredom and created distractions in the human world, his most recent distraction was a pandemic spread across the world and taking millions of lives. They are only playthings, and soon enough Tacenda would learn he is one as well. Although the creatures all came in different shapes, sizes and appearances, Tacenda saw himself as unique. Special.

Tacenda awoke with a gasp, bright white aura surrounding him, impeding his immediate sight, at least through one of his eyes. This was the first imperfection of Mr. Mystical's creature. A blind eye, specifically his left. The angel raised his arms, gazing upon his hands, perfectly sculpted, blue veins shining through his tan skin. He opened and closed them a few times, fingers folding into his palm as he regained feeling in them. He then moved, slowly, almost as if his body had been dormant for years, stretching his limbs until he ended up on his side, pushing upwards. Tacenda then stood up, legs shaking slightly under the new weight of his body and feathered wings heavy against his back. He looked around the bright nothingness.

"Where am I?" He asked, voice echoing through the empty space, cracking slightly being used for the first time.

To give a being a name is to sin, however, the creature was given one, Tacenda. He soon would learn that this was his second imperfection: having a tie to the human realm. A deep faded

voice echoed in his mind, coming from all around him, embracing every cell in his body, making him vibrate with every sound, filling him with an unfamiliar warmth that shriveled his whole being, causing Tacenda to look around panicked.

You are my child. Tacenda. Welcome.

“Who are you?”

I am you. You are me. We are one.

Tacenda didn't know how to respond, he felt connected unwillingly, nervous to accept what was above him, knowing so little about what was around him, so he walked. First stumbling upon his own feet, steps being taken in any direction. Balance wasn't easy, but he had yet to discover his wings. So he walked. Walked. Walked. Walked. Hoping to see something appear before his eyes. And to his surprise it did. In the bright nothingness a small puddle of water glistened in the mysterious light. Things weren't just there, Mr. Mystical placed them with specific purposes in mind. Curious, he kneeled in front of the puddle, seeing his reflection for the first time. Immediately he noticed the difference in his eyes, one pure white, the other, almost black. His curly hair bouncing slightly in front of them, and his jaw tense, marking the jawline and showcasing his well sculpted face. Was he beautiful? If Mr. Mystical created him, he must be beautiful. He must be perfect. Tacenda wasn't one for emotions, he wasn't supposed to feel, but yet there they were, pounding in his mind through a closed door threatening to overflow at any given moment. The overwhelmingness of them caused Tacenda to lose his breath, lungs burning in need of air, so he gasped, taking in all of what was around him in that one swift breath. He was alive.

Tacenda. The voice rang.

He didn't answer, his eyes fixated on the image in the puddle. The whiteness was overwhelming, chest heaving and eyes soon scanning around him in hopes to find something. Anything.

Tacenda you must find me.

Why? What could The Creator possibly need from him? He raised his right hand, splashing the water in the puddle with a force that caused droplets to fall across his face, experiencing wetness for the first time. The cool water dripped on his skin, causing a sensation of glee, only momentarily, the drops rolling down his neck, off the tip of his nose, and again into the puddle.

“What is this substance?” He asked, voice cracking.

Tacenda ran his hands through the cool water slowly, observing how it rippled and small waves crashed against his bare feet due to the movement. Water was a strange thing for the angel. With a newly found need to consume it, he still cupped his hands and brought the water to his lips and took a sip. The coolness now spread through his body like rapid fire, almost freezing his insides. It was divine. He noted that he must drink water to experience this coolness. Almost in excess he continued drinking, until his stomach felt like a personal puddle with waves swishing around with every movement.

Tacenda rose and continued walking, water in his stomach swishing, feet patting on the ground and the echo of his footsteps ringing in his ears. The liminal space was beautiful, or so he thought. Having never seen anything else, all he knew was now water, the voice and white glimmers. As he walked, he noticed other beings rising, others like him, others with wings, some with more eyes, some with no bodies, all scattering around in search for the voice in their heads, but none seemed to notice him, or if they did, they showed no interest. It was then when he noticed the form of those that were like him, all on two legs with huge white fluffy things

protruding from their backs that also moved when they did. For the first time ever, Tacenda looked over his shoulder, discovering part of what is his wing. He brought his hands to his back, reaching for the feathers. Tacenda's fingertips tingled with the softness that they were, all smooth and warm against his skin as his wings slightly flinched, never being touched before. A short gasp escaped his mouth. He too was like these other creatures. It was then when his wings fluttered until opening, casting a shadow over his being, and he was amazed. The now darkness in front of him was a distorted figure of himself with feathery boldness on each side.

It took him a while to get used to the movement, and the now conscious weight they bared upon his back, but once he was in the air, everything changed. His legs were useless, and the wind, now messing with his brown locks, was out of his face. The air was fresh and clean (although there all air was fresh and clean, but Tacenda still thought differently). Tacenda was high above what he thought was the surface he was walking on, masking in the bright light of his "sky". He flew forward, observing the creatures fumble and fall just like he did moments ago. But now, he could move as he pleased, still with no objective in mind other than keep on moving forward. He did notice one difference in these creatures though, they did not have a white eye. Even those with hundreds of eyes.

Tacenda, look.

The deep distorted voice again, but he was destined to obey, eyes scanning the premises until he found a glass ball. He floated to this ball that soon enough rose to his height and idled in front of him, waiting to be touched. Tacenda stretched his arms out and grabbed the ball, pulling it close, and what he observed caused his heart to beat fast, like racing horses and hard against his chest, threatening to come out. His pupil dilated, his mouth agape. Tacenda couldn't look away, nor did he want to. His hands tightened around the ball, breath hitching.

Inside the ball was the world. Humanity as one knows it. Tacenda was fascinated. His world looked nothing like what he was seeing. The orb showcased flashes of green bushy things, colorful specs on the ground, furry creatures that couldn't speak and other feathered creatures that flew like him, but they were much smaller and their mouths seemed to be triangles. The images were changing quickly, from the forest and plains to what seemed like dull, sullen spaces. Towers of an unknown material appeared and creatures that looked like him roamed around what seemed like aimlessly. Tacenda didn't realize he was now standing again. These creatures spoke to one another, and they were all different, skin color, hair type, even physical appearance (gender, clothing), it was all different. He looked at himself, tan skin contrasting with the snowy whiteness of the area. Bare skin exposed to nothing, causing color to rise to his cheeks. He felt *seen*. Exposed. These creatures didn't have wings, and Tacenda immediately felt his stomach churn. Humans appeared perfect, modest. Was he not the Creator's favorite after all? Rage, anger, and distrust suddenly swarmed around Tacenda's brain.

“I'm not enough. I was never enough. These creatures see out of both eyes. These creatures do not need wings. These creatures can walk, interact, and live. I am trapped. He has trapped me.”

Tacenda dropped the ball and it shattered into thousands of small pieces.

What have you done?

The voice rang, pounding in his ears. But Tacenda couldn't hear him. His chest rose and fell with each quickened breath, blood rushing through his veins. Hands were in tight fists, veins slowly rising throughout his forearms with every beat. *Ba-dump, Ba-dump, Ba-dump*. He could only hear his beat pounding against his temples, emotions that he wasn't supposed to feel swirling out of control.

He was not perfect.

CHAPTER 2 -

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Almeria Airport. Local time is 5:45p.m and the temperature is 27 degrees celsius. For your safety and comfort, please remain seated with your seat belt fastened until the captain turns off the Fasten Seat Belt sign. This will indicate that we have parked at the gate and that it is safe for you to move about. At this time, you may use your cellular phones if you wish. Please check around your seat for any personal belongings you may have brought...

Dorian arrived finally. The beaming sun of Andalucia's coastal city Almeria filtered through the windows of the airport. Luckily enough he had passed the TSA checkpoint back in Portugal. With quick and brisk steps he rushed towards the baggage claim amongst other passengers from his flight. With a sigh and a groan he waited. It was his first time away from home. Dorian was used to the humid and bothersome summers of Maine, the mosquitos that were as big as helicopters and the small town life with nothing to do. When he got the opportunity to study abroad, he jumped on it, deciding that it was time to experience the world. He lived with his foster parents, a few minutes away from his school in northern Maine, so there was no real need to leave, dorm or even find apartments. Now, the smell of salty air, dry heat and oceanic breeze was all that he needed, but there was one problem. He barely spoke a word of Spanish, although he could very well understand it. The caregivers at all the foster homes he's been to had said he had a special gift to understand any language spoken to him. That he had been blessed by God. Dorian just thought he was good at understanding context queues, and body language, especially since he had started learning Spanish in elementary school. He grabbed his bags and step by step his heart rate increased as he headed towards the exit. Every time the double doors opened, a wave of heat blew against his face and soon enough he stood right in the middle. He took a deep breath, inhale, exhale...

“OYE! Qué te pasa? Quítate del medio!”

With a small embarrassed smile he looked at the man and mumbled to the best of his abilities..

“Lo siento!”

He rushed outside. He glanced down at his phone once he was out of the way and scrolled through his email searching for the instructions on how to get to the apartment the school had provided.

“Let’s see... Go outside and head to the left. There should be a bus stop with the number 10.”

Dorian’s eyes rushed around, locating the small green bus stop at the end of the drop off zone. As he walked, a few other people followed, they all seemed to be his age, and they all were speaking English. At the bus stop, he took a seat, fanning himself. The temperature on the electric sign read 38 celsius. He had to google what that translated to in Fahrenheit, 100.4 to be exact. The students sat next to him on the bench, one complaining about the heat. Dorian side eyed them, with a faint crinkle in his nose, he then decided to speak to them. Being social was not his forte.

“Hi, I just got here, could you guys help me out?” A disheveled awkward laugh escaped his lips.

One of the girls from the group looked over and beamed a smile, short hair tied up with a clip.

“Sure! What do you need?”

“I’m trying to take bus ten to the city center.”

“Yo! We are too, you could follow us if you wanted”

“Sweet! Just let me know when to get off and I’ll find my way.”

The sign read *10 minutos para bus 10.*

The cicadas were loud, so were the birds, but the sky was blue, not a cloud in sight and he had gotten help, but he desperately wanted to get out of this heat. The bus rolled in, five minutes late and he paid the 1 '10 euro fare to get in. He sat behind the group of students, eyes focusing on the new world outside.

The airport was at the outskirts of Almeria, so the ride was long, filled with traffic but beautiful. He could see the ocean while landing, and the community that surrounded it. As the bus drove away, different scenes flashed before his eyes. The outskirts had traditional housing, walls made of white painted concrete and red terracotta roofs. As they got closer to the city, industrial parks with giant buildings for ceramics, flour and other things Dorian didn't understand appeared, like 'comerciales' and other types of stores that didn't have one specific product to sell, rather than a million different ones. Finally, the city. Buildings weren't as tall as some cities in the United States, but they were big. There were four floored apartments, hotels, community centers and parks, plenty of parks. They even drove by a few cathedrals and churches that Dorian knew he would have to investigate. Luckily enough he had the weekend free, so he'd make sure to spend plenty of time visiting the surrounding areas of the school and his apartment.

"Are you on vacation?" The girl with the clipped hair had turned around to speak to him.

"Huh? Oh, no. I'm here for school. Taking a summer course."

"Sick! We are too, what's your major?"

"History of Art, I'm Dorian by the way."

"I'm here for archeology. That's right! I didn't introduce myself. I'm Lucille. I'm from France."

"I'm from the U.S. Is it hard getting around barely speaking Spanish?"

"Not really, Almeria is a touristy place, so there are a lot of foreigners."

"Thank God, I can barely order a meal." Dorian sighed.

“Is it your first time here?”

“It is.”

“Okay, so, here’s a few things. Shop at Mercadona, like for food and essentials, avoid souvenir shops and avoid the pier past midnight.”

“Noted, thanks.”

“Hey, this is your stop.” Said the guy sitting next to her.

Dorian, almost coming out of a trance, smiled at him, nodding.

“Thanks! Hopefully I’ll see you around.”

CHAPTER 3 -

“What is my purpose? Why do I have to find him? Do I belong? How can I belong when I’m so...imperfect? The others don’t talk, they don’t show expressions or emotions. Why do I? The family I cared for in that glass, they’re gone. They would have known. They would have cared.”

Tacenda fluttered his wings, rising into the sky, eye looking around. He observed the other creatures, all focused on their different orbs. Tacenda had attempted to work with other orbs, but nothing gave him that same sense of warmth or fulfillment like that singular family did. He knew them, and he felt that they knew him. As he flew, directionless, Mr.Mystical did not make an appearance.

“The only thing I have in common with these...things are my wings. My markings. We are similar, but I have a heart. A mind. How can we all be perfect if we are all different? Different skin, hair, eyes, noses. Different bodies, hands, structures... We are all made in his image, but how can he resemble so many people? Has anyone found him? Did they all just accept their fates? I need to find him. I need to understand. How can I understand? Flashes of something cross my mind, possibly a life I once lived. A home, a person, a companion. Is this all fake? Did I once live amongst the creatures I care most about?”

He sat on the white floor, holding one of the glass orbs in his hands. The family inside the glass had gathered around a table, with some sort of colorful cardboard in the middle. Smiles adorned their faces as they soon started what seemed to be playing with dice and plastic pieces that moved across the board. Tacenda observed curiously, gripping onto the ball almost as if it were going to float away. He wanted to be there with that family. Take part in the certain events that happened, like the girl wearing a black cap and getting paper on stage, or the boy, hiding a tooth under his pillow for the parents to then exchange it for currency.

Tacenda spent hours, days observing this family, and he soon felt part of them. When things went wrong, Tacenda would intervene, allowing good to shine through. One day, the family's car broke down and Tacenda sent a person to help. He cared about this family. When they laughed, he did as well, when they slept, he watched over them to ensure they were fine. He would also fly around carrying their orb, and speak to it like he was showing them the wonders of the Void. This raised multiple problems within the creature that he wasn't aware of. Firstly, he had formed a bond, he was attached to their life events and wanted to be a part of them. Secondly, he intervened with things Mr.Mystical started, which means what was supposed to go wrong, had to go wrong, but Tacenda would turn those events into a positive. This infuriated Mr.Mystical.

Tacenda stop.

Tacenda leave them alone.

Tacenda, you have other families to look at.

Were all things Mr.Mystical had said in order to get Tacenda to look away and do his job properly, which was to simply observe. But he didn't know how to not form a connection. His emotions were always present and he wanted to see the family thrive, not fall to its demise, so Tacenda chose to ignore the Father and keep on carrying around his orb.

As he moved through the space, he noticed that other creatures followed him. He didn't know why, but he welcomed the company, dreaming of possibly having a night like the family did. Of course this never happened, and Tacenda grew suspicious of the creatures around him. They soon started trying to steal his orb. Whenever he set it down, a creature would swoop over and kick it far from his reach, but Tacenda could still fly, and he was quick too. He would follow the orb until he found it again, and promptly check to see if his family is doing well. They would create misfortunes for the family under The Father's command, and Tacenda would counteract each and every one. The family lived happily, and Tacenda was happy, at least until a creature took the orb

and shattered it to the ground. Tacenda screamed, lunging at the creature, pushing it to the ground, but soon enough a bolt of lightning separated the two and in their minds a loud and stern

ENOUGH

Rang through. Tacenda felt hopeless, as if they had dug out his heart and put a rock there instead. Without that family, he had no joy. He turned to his other orbs, trying to once again form that connection he once had. A glimpse of happiness, but nothing fulfilled him anymore. He observed the families with sighs and lack of interest, allowing Mr.Mystical to act and ruin their lives if he chose to do so, and Tacenda did nothing.

One thing Tacenda did take interest in was how the seasons changed. He had observed the first family for a full year, and the world around them was fascinating. From beautiful green trees, to hues of red and orange. From whiteness like his world (which caused him more excitement than he should have felt) to gloomy wet days. It all was new and Tacenda wanted to know what it was like first hand. He wanted to touch the rain, eat the snow and roll around in mud. But he wanted to do this with his family. Did he even have a family? The emptiness he felt when he lost the orb wasn't something he took lightly. The creatures around him were nothing like him. They came in different colors, different wings and they all had beautiful blue eyes, (that he assumed worked). They never talked and they all spent time alone, working on their orbs. Some would look his way, but those that had faces were emotionless, expressionless, empty and Tacenda found them terrifying. He couldn't see himself in them, and they couldn't care less about Tacenda.

CHAPTER 4 -

The apartment was everything Dorian expected and more. When he walked in, after putting in the code in the lock, he was received by an open living room. The walls were off-white, and there were two glass doors at the end of the room that led out to the balcony. The doors were covered with beige curtains. Against the wall there was a beige L shaped couch, with a glass coffee table in front of it. On the wall directly across from the sofa, was a cherry-wood tv stand, decorated with a few fake plants (that were slightly dusty) and a small tv screen. To the left of the sofa, there was a wooden table, with mismatched wooden chairs. Down the narrow hallway of the entryway there was a door that led to the kitchen. It was small in size, with only a few silver glass cabinets to store plates, cups and pots. There was a four burner stove, and underneath it an oven. There were a few staple appliances like a coffee machine and a microwave. Luckily enough, apartments in Spain are usually furnished, so when Dorian went to the only unoccupied room (out of three), he was pleasantly surprised. His room was rather small, but bright. There were two windows that pointed to the street allowing the summer sun to filter through the sheer white curtains. On the back wall of the room there was a full sized bed, with the most horrid sheets Dorian had ever seen. Striped gray, pink, brown and blue linen. He shivered slightly.

“It could be worse...”

There was also a wooden dresser and a closet on the side of the room, and on top of the bed, hanging on the wall was some strange buddhist painting. He really didn't understand the decoration of the place, but it was for free. He plopped down on the bed, with a grin.

“I can't believe I'm here...”

The front door opened, so quickly he stood up, exiting the room. In the living room, sitting on the sofa were two guys roughly his age.

“I swear Prof is going to kill us.” Said the one with longer hair.

“Dude, I know, it’s what you get for not submitting your shit on time.” Sighed the brunette.

Dorian stood in the hallway, hands slightly sweaty. They were the people he would be living with. He bit his bottom lip, entering the living room.

“Hey, I’m Dorian, your roommate, the one from the U.S.”

The guys looked at him, heads tilting slightly. The longer haired guy had lifted his shirt, airing out his skin due to the heat. They both grinned, before waving.

“I’m Charlie. From the U.K” Said the brunette.

“I’m Raja, from Pakistan.” He tied his long hair up in a bun.

“When did you get here?” Charlie asked.

“Not too long ago, maybe been here for ten minutes?” Dorian sat on the longer side of the couch.

“Cool, do you need help with anything? We were about to watch a game” Raja stated, with a hair tie in his mouth.

“Nah, I think I’m going to unpack and then head to the Merca something”

“Mercadona. There’s one down the street.” Finally, Raja’s hair was in the bun.

“ ‘K. Let us know if you need anything”

Dorian smiled before walking back into his room. Classes started on Monday, and he wanted to spend this weekend exploring. Instead of unpacking, he scrolled through his phone, trying to find landmarks to visit. He knew he would probably have to study these for his research project at the end of the summer semester, but he really didn’t care.

CHAPTER 5-

Those that surrounded him were silent until they weren't. Groans, screeches, gurgles and roars escaped the lips of the creatures that had mouths, hands, claws and wings soon all over his body. Some poked and probed at him, while others were doing the main work. Rips, tears, breaks all happened at once, a myriad of hands, arms, legs, pulling and thrashing. Some even used their teeth. Their once perfectly smooth skin, now covered in deep red. A whirlwind of feathers and bone flashed in front of Tacenda's eyes, too much in shock to let out any sound. He thrashed, arms flailing in hopes to get them away. Legs kicking as he was a horse getting rid of a threat. The creatures jumped, pinning his body to the floor, air leaving his lungs. Bones cracked and a loud SNAP soon proceeded, two dense pieces of bone falling to the ground. Tacenda was now wingless.

Faint sobs escaped the angel's body as he observed, face planted in the ground as the others flew away. Tacenda didn't have the courage to move. His back was warm and wet, and there was a searing throb traveling through his shoulder blades. He didn't move for a minute, drool pooling under his head. A rushed breath escaped his lips, coming to, while slowly he tried kneeling on the ground, something thick and sticky dripping down the skin on his back. Tacenda's arms shook, weak to the weight of his body. Around him small droplets of blood, surrounded by feathers and what appeared to be boned segments from his wings. Heart beating quickly in his chest he looked over his shoulder, to find nothing.

With difficulty he stood, hands on his knees finally grasping the gravity of the situation.

"I am imperfect. I am weak." He then sobbed.

Tacenda observed the remnants of his wings on the floor, pure white feathers covered in blood. This was the first time he was seeing blood, a thick red liquid that came from himself. Did everyone bleed like he bled? He recalled humans that were injured. Tacenda gasped, surprised

that he shared another thing with these beings. Could he be one of them? Bent over he took a feather between his fingers, emotions bubbling in his chest. First it was sadness, eyes tearing and hands shaking. Then it was rage, blood boiling and brows furrowed. Hands to fists, feather squished between his fingers.

Time passed, what seemed like eternity, with him just standing, staring into the pure white abyss. Then, Tacenda opened his mouth and let out a throat scratching scream, raking across the area, for no one to hear but himself.

Tacenda.

No answer.

Tacenda keep going.

Still, no answer.

You MUST find me.

Tacenda's whole body shook, the voice ringing deep in his mind. Mr. Mystical seemed to be getting closer and angrier by the second, and the angel couldn't understand what he did wrong.

"I am not one of them."

The realization hit Tacenda like a brick being thrown into glass, shattering all that he once knew. He wasn't a creature any longer, and he soon started to consider himself more of a human than any of them could be. This was a dangerous thought and little did Tacenda know that Mr. Mystical knew how he felt, and thrived with the chaos created inside the creature. His stomach and sides were covered with dry blood, his hands sticky still, grasping the feathers he collected from the ground.. He didn't belong. He wasn't a creature, not anymore.

Soon enough he understood that he would never find Mr. Mystical, for all he had known was false. Nothing was perfect, not even the humans he once loved. Corruption filled his mind, taking

the first clumsy steps forward, hands clenched in fists and eye darkened even further. As he walked, a trail of bloody footprints followed, and in desperation more glass orbs like before started floating in front of him. Each one showcasing an aspect of humanity that Tacenda once loved. He paid no mind to them, although those that got in his way crashed to the ground shattering into thousands of small pieces.

Tacenda stop. Stop destroying. This is not you

“DO YOU KNOW ME?”

Tacenda you're being irrational. Come, my child.

Tacenda threw another orb on the ground.

“COME FIND ME” he challenged.

CHAPTER 6 -

The summer semester started without much fun. Dorian sat through lecture after lecture of the historical landmarks of Spain. He noted that the most intriguing part had to be the combination within the cities of different religions showcased through architecture. An example was the mosque in Cordoba, where there was a catholic church, a mosque and roman mosaics. Luckily enough this weekend he would start visiting and researching different landmarks of Almeria, especially since he had decided that his final paper was going to be about the cathedral. Sun beamed through the glass windows, curtains dancing in the orange hues of the early morning. It was already hot, skin sticky and hair pressed against his forehead. With a groan Dorian stretched in the messy bed, only entangling himself more in his white damp sheet. Next to him the buzzing of a rotating fan on max speed that he bought from the small mom and pop shop on the corner of the street pushing and huffing the hot air of the day. His eyes opened, staring straight at the ceiling, unamused. His brow furrowed, wrinkles in between deep and pronounced. His lips pursed in a pout. He had been focusing a bit too much on absorbing the material from his lectures instead of socializing. Friends? He didn't know those.

"It's my one day off!" He groaned.

Dorian turned to the side, grabbing his phone to look at the time, brightness bothering his eyes. 7:00a.m.

"God, and it's already this hot..."

He then proceeded to doom scroll through whatever social media he fancied this morning, looking at pictures of friends at the beach, others at parties, while he was stuck doing research (although he was fortunate enough to be doing this in a foreign country). Around 9:00am he sat up, pressing his feet against the cold tiled floors of his bedroom, stomach protesting for food. Dorian ignored it for now. As he sat, the fan continued buzzing, pushing his bushy oak hair all

over the place, while his forest green eyes stared into the empty space of the room. With another groan he walked to the bathroom, running the cold water of the shower. He needed to cool off and wake up. His roommates were more dead than alive, each sleeping in their room, too hungover from their late night shenanigans in the city. Since he was awake he decided that he would have a productive day, sort of. The water rolled down his body, head leaning against the wall. He wasn't prepared for 110 degree weather, knowing it was nearly 85 already.

After his usual routine of caffeine and a chocolate croissant from the infamous Mercadona he wandered off using his phone to get to the Catedral de la Encarnacion, near the center of the city of Almeria. He had heard about this cathedral in one of his classes, and according to his professor Jose Leon Martinez the architecture of the building was amazing. Also, he decided that this would be the subject of his research. As an art fanatic, and appreciative of biblical imagery Dorian thought it would be nice to spend some time visiting the places that his higher ups thought were important.

Sunglasses on, fanning his face he walked into the cathedral after paying the small fee. He was in awe. High ceilings, a balcony surrounding the main mass area, a gigantic pipe organ, gold traces all over the place, and where the altar was a giant golden cross. In the hall there were stained glass windows, with depictions of biblical characters. He stood in the entryway, jaw dropped and camera up high.

“Quítate del medio hombre!”

“Oh! Perdona” Dorian responded to the annoyed man.

He moved to the side, taking his time to walk around the cool building, observing paintings all around him, as well as statues for the Holy Week processions and everything filled with flowers. It was beautiful. He should have listened to his professor sooner, but he wanted to make sure he made the right decision when it came to his research. Although the temperature of

the building was slightly better than the outside desert, Dorian was still sweating. This wasn't unusual, knowing that his body was adapted to Maine weather and never regulated easily to temperatures. Then the lightheadedness came.

CHAPTER 7 -

Blood rushing through his veins, heart palpitating and mind spinning. Tacenda was overwhelmed. He ran as quickly as his feet took him, until he slammed against a transparent wall. Hands pressed against what appeared to be glass, and on the other side he observed the rest of the creations, each with an orb that they stared into. Some seemed so lost in trance that they didn't notice him. Those that did simply stared. Tacenda began pounding his hands against the glass, screaming, but not saying words. The creatures couldn't hear him, or they chose not to. He started running to one side, following the glass, thinking that for sure there had to be an end to it, but there wasn't. Soon enough he hit another wall. Then another, and another. He was boxed in. Kneeling on the ground, Tacenda sobbed, eye staring upward, hoping to see Mr. Mystical, or to at least have his help. But he was a broken creature, he had no place in the Void. The box started shrinking, and a hole opened up in the ground near Tacenda. Quickly he rose and tried to get away from it, frantically looking around, pounding and banging, hoping for escape. Mr. Mystical made himself present, pushing with his force the creature to the ground, causing him to slowly kneel, hands trying to grab onto something that wasn't there.

You have failed me, Tacenda.

He sobbed louder after the voice spoke, pushing against the glass, but he was slowly being dragged towards the hole. Wind filled the glass box, and no matter how hard he tried, he kept on being pushed by the closing glass to the hole. The others just watched. Again Tacenda looked up, hoping to see anything. Hoping to catch one glimpse of Mr. Mystical, but he only saw light. Soon enough he was right at the verge of the hole and the glasses kept on moving.

You shall never be my child again.

Tacenda "fell" into the whole, loud scream escaping his lips as he plummeted into the air. Regret echoed through his mind. He had become comfortable with the Void, dependent on it. His

eye glistened in the darkness, focused on what now was a new type of void. A darkness so cold that his skin prickled and his breath hitched. Around him suddenly a black sky appeared, filled with gas lit orbs that were stars, that soon burned bright enough and started falling with Tacenda. In this section of the fall Tacenda's chest was heavy and being compressed. His skin turned blue and he couldn't breathe. He was incapable of moving, his body being compressed and molded into fetal position with his back facing the earth, he could only let himself sink deeper into the world he was soon to discover. Hair covered his eyes, and suddenly the dark sky changed to a bright blue, and clouds started forming around him, almost like a tunnel. In this space, he was surrounded by them, and above him he could see the darkness he had come from. Around him, streaks of red and orange light started shooting down alongside the falling stars, accompanying the creature's descent into humanhood. Gusts of wind caused Tacenda's body to move from one side to another, rain hit him harshly in the face and finally he could breathe, and once he started accepting the fall, he crashed. Sand flew everywhere and a large crater was formed right where Tacenda landed. He had lost all strength in his body, so he laid curled up in the warm sand, sun beaming on his tanned skin, and eyes fluttered shut, until the blackness caved in.

CHAPTER 8 -

Today was Dorian's first encounter with Almeria's brutal summer heat. He sat on one of the benches at the back of the church, head spinning.

Did I drink enough water?

With a sigh he reached towards his backpack, rummaging through trying to find his trusty emotional support Hydroflask, groaning softly since he didn't find it. His eyes rolled, running a hand through his hair.

"My desk..."

He could see it, the yellow bottle placed neatly on the side next to his trusty laptop. He already was experiencing profuse sweating, clammy skin and slight tremor in his hands. Dorian stood up, looking around for a water fountain. He was used to these things placed in touristy buildings for profit, but in Spain, a water fountain was quite rare. While standing up, his head started spinning, and he had to brace himself. An older woman noticed his discomfort, walking toward him quickly. She forced him to sit, and she was speaking rather quickly for Dorian to understand, at least in the state he was in.

"Chiquillo, ¿qué te pasa? ¿Estás bien? Necesitas algo?" Her voice trembled, Dorian didn't know if it was because of age, or because of nerves.

He was confused, could barely speak, but he tried. "Agua"

"¿Qué? Habla más alto, nene."

"AGUA" He managed to scream for water.

The older woman quickly turned to what appeared to be her husband and said something, meanwhile, Dorian was fading in and out of consciousness. The man brought her a water bottle, and she quickly opened and then pressed it to Dorian's lips. He weakly tried to drink, and the woman started waving a pamphlet in front of his face, fanning him.

Luckily enough, her efforts were helping and as Dorian drank he started to come to. About five minutes have passed, and a crowd of people surrounded the three. Once he sat up properly, the crowd dissipated but the lady stayed, fanning him and pushing the bottle towards his chest. In an attempt to communicate with him, she tried to say something in English.

“Water. Hot today. Please go home.”

Dorian nodded slightly, and with a faint smile he finished the water. He probably was going to end up at a bar having a quick soda to bring his sugar up.

“Gracias.”

The lady left him, and Dorian grabbed his backpack from the floor and headed out. He stooped to the shade, trying to avoid the beaming heat of midday. For some reason, he had lost a few hours. He had arrived at the church around 10:00 am, and suddenly it was 2:00pm. He didn't understand how he could have been there for four hours. On his way home, he noted a few busy terraces packed with people enjoying their tinto con limon, cervezas and tapas. Passing by, he heard a familiar voice calling him, being Raja, his roommate.

“Yo! Dorian, c'mere bro!” His long hair again in a bun, arm above his head waving.

Still a bit awkward with his peers, he walked towards the table they were at, under the parasol. He looked around the table, not knowing anyone except for the French girl he had met on the bus.

“Lucille!”

Raja looked at them confused. “You know her?”

“Yeah, we met on the bus at the airport!” She mentioned with a bright smile.

Raja pulled out a chair, pointing at it for Dorian to sit, which he obediently did. The roommate was quite puzzled, but with a playful smile on his face.

“Wow, the world is small.”

The bar was tiny, rustic and dated, but apparently popular. He couldn't see the inside, and he wasn't interested in it. Around them were four other plastic tables, each decorated with Coca-Cola stickers or the infamous Fanta, and parasols. The chairs were also plastic, matching the cheap tables. Beers came and went, and with each beer a small plate of food was placed on the table. The so-called tapas. Dorian drank, and ate tortilla, salmorejo, salpicon, a variety of small spanish dishes until it was time to move on to the next part of the "feast", the mixed drinks. In Spain, they were called cubata, and it usually entailed some sort of hard liquor mixed with soda. They drank, snacked and continued talking and laughing, the heat dissipating with every drink they put into their system. Lucille was beaming, Raja was complaining about the weather and the other guy tossed napkins at everyone sitting at their table. They ended up sharing a meal together, and for once, Dorian felt like he belonged.

He made a few mental notes about the people he was with. Raja was loud and rambunctious, very knowledgeable in the astrophysics field (the only reason he knew this was because of his excitement about the upcoming meteor shower, Las Lágrimas de San Lorenzo). The other guy that was there, was a biologist, studying the desert of Almeria, he was quiet but enjoyed vino a little bit too much. On the other hand, Lucille seemed the most special to Dorian. She was equally quiet and loud, she loved sharing her knowledge about archeology with the group, and apparently she loved making sand castles. This was all information that Dorian was going to use in the future.

At the apartment, Dorian flopped into his bed, smiling softly. He had consumed quite a bit of alcohol, so he was a bit more cheerful than he usually was. Slight flush on his cheeks and mind racing, Dorian couldn't think of the past, or his problems. He assumed that Spaniards drink as much as they do for that precise reason. His mind bounced between Lucille, and the fact that he was actually enjoying his life (memories of the heat stroke long forgotten). Dorian lied on his

side, hugging the body pillow his bed came with, and sighed. He was dressed, a bit too lazy to take his clothes off, and even to turn on the rotating fan at the foot of his bed. His eyes drooped, until finally staying closed, and with thoughts of a new day he drifted to sleep.

CHAPTER 9-

People, nature, the void, my creatures, all are connected through a mysterious line.

Threads of energy bring people together, push them apart, all destined to the same fate, to perish and join my creatures in the Void. Sometimes, I play with these threads, pick a favorite and pull them to pieces.

A detached hand moved across the space, picking up an orb, lifting it up to the nothingness in the void. In said orb, Tacenda appeared lying in the sand of a desert, in fetal position. From the Void a deep, unsettling laugh echoed.

One gets pushed away, attempts to take charge of its life and return to the space they were created in. They do not have a singular, individual thought. When I pick them, they are created with the mindset of emotion and vengeance. They are created to entertain me. They live to die.

The hand shook the orb, before placing it on a golden stand that materialized out of nothing. It simply appeared. An eye, red as dark as the pits of hell, white as light as the Void stared into the orb as the hand disappeared.

Tacenda, my son. You will not fail to entertain me. No one ever has. You, however, have something that I failed to give most. A part of me. You'll find it. I know you will, child. The pieces are already moving, Jacob is already searching for you. You're not the first, nor will be the last. Some of the fallen had called me cruel, I cannot confirm nor deny this statement. Tacenda, you see, as old as I am, boredom settles in quickly. I'm sure you understand.

Voices merged, changed, echoed throughout the space, although the creature Mr. Mystical was speaking to couldn't hear him. The eye disappeared, and as the orb on the stand remained floating in the liminal space, the voice slowly started fading.

You are just a piece of my cycle, a moment in time that is bound to repeat itself until the day I die. Luckily enough, I'll never perish and the cycle will remain as infinite as time itself.

CHAPTER 10 –

When Tacenda rose, he was in an unfamiliar place, surrounded by walls of linen and various tapestries of scenes of men battling creatures. He also was clothed. Tacenda sat up, head still spinning, noticing the faint smell of something peppery in the air. It was then when his stomach grumbled, asking for something it had been long denied. His body now had new needs, like thirst, food, sleep. Cautiously, he stood up, leaving the small tent he was in, blinded instantly by the sunlight hitting his face. It was the first time this happened. He brought his hands to his face, covering it instantly with a whine, until he heard a voice approaching him.

“Hey, yer awake.” The voice said, a strange accent being used.

It was unknown, different, real. He had been so used to The Father’s voice that he wasn’t aware that others could speak, even after all this time observing humans, he still didn’t understand how they communicated, but apparently it was just like him. With a voice.

“Where...Where am I?” Tacenda asked.

“We found ye in the middle of a crater, and yer lucky, the vultures would’ve gotten to ya. That was quite the fall there ey.”

“Fall...?”

That’s where it all clicked. He was banned from the Void. From Father, from the others. He no longer had a place, and wasn’t special. He was alone.

“Mhm, ye came from the sky, and landed here, in the desert. Like some sort of angel. And ye were naked. Had to give ye some of my clothes. What were ye doin’ up there? Sky divin’ without a parachute? Yer lucky to have lived that one. C’mere, lemme get ye some food.”

The strange male placed a hand on Tacenda’s back, causing him to flinch, his wings were once there, but he followed the man to the fire pit in the middle of camp, where he sat on a chair, staring into the flames. He didn’t understand. He couldn’t understand. He had done no wrong,

why did Mr. Mystical cast him out like that? Why did the others watch? Without realizing it, his breath quickened and he gripped his knees tightly.

“I talk to God but the sky is empty” Tacenda mumbled.

Eye fixated on the flames, flashes of the fall surrounding him, suffocating his mind and losing touch with reality. At least until a bowl was placed in front of him. He blinked a few times, grabbing the bowl between his hands, looking at the person to his left, paying no mind to Tacenda. He noticed that she used the utensil to bring the liquid to her mouth, just like he had done with water and his hands, so without a doubt he tried.

“Whaddya say?” Jacob asked, plopping next to Tacenda.

Immediately his taste buds woke, pepper, garlic, turmeric and other spices swirling around his mouth. As he swallowed, warmth spread across his body and soon enough his stomach stopped gurgling for more. A total of two bowls he ate, people mostly leaving him to his own devices. The sun was setting, and the man returned to Tacenda.

“Name’s Jacob. We’re studying the weather patterns of this place. Locals said some strange stuff been happenin’ here.” Jacob said, waiting for the creature to introduce itself.

“Tacenda. I...I don’t know how I got here. Or where to go.” He confessed.

“Tomorrow we’re packin’ up and headin’ back. Do...Do you need anythin’? We’ll give ye a ride to the city. There ye can find all the help ya need. For now, get some sleep, Tacenda.”

He pointed at the tent behind them, the same one Tacenda came out of hours ago, and smiled. Tacenda then handed him the empty bowl while shaking his head and left, attempting to get some rest. He in fact didn’t sleep and spent the night restless, mind jumping between moments lived: observing the humans, his mission to seek Mr. Mystical, his joy when he found others. But soon it turned dark, his wings getting ripped out of his body, the feeling of being lost, the dreaded glass box and finally his fall. Why didn’t Mr. Mystical help? Why did he cast him away?

“Why did you do this to me?” Tacenda whispered into the night air.

A faint sob escaped his lips, hands trembling as he latched on to the pillow. A failure, that was all he was in Mr.Mystical’s mind. He deserved no better than the ones he sent into the Unknown. What Tacenda didn’t know was that someone was standing outside of the tent, listening, waiting.

CHAPTER 11 -

School was debilitating. Dorian fully believed that he would have more time to adventure out into Andalusia and discover other amazing sites, but research, field trips and overall homework had him tied down to Almeria. He had been planning a few weekend trips to visit Carboneras, Playa de los Muertos or Agua Amarga, but the idea of venturing out into Spain alone wasn't all that appealing. Dorian had become close with Raja, and on multiple occasions he had tried convincing him to travel with him, but Raja always kindly declined. He had a summer fling and wanted to spend as much time with her as possible. Dorian tried to understand, but he didn't. Today of all days, Dorian had to go grocery shopping (arguably one of the most daunting tasks for someone who doesn't speak spanish), so as usual with his tote bag he headed out to the Mercadona right down the street.

Since it was market Thursday, luckily enough the supermarket itself was rather quiet. The giant green letters stared at him, as he stared back.

“Okay, let's do this.”

Every time Dorian had shopped, something, somewhere had gone wrong. The last time he had dropped a yogurt container and it exploded on the floor. The time before that, it was a carton of eggs. He rummaged through the aisles, eyes fixated on the price tags of certain food items like oil, milk or bread. A couple days ago he heard two elderly ladies complaining about how the prices have risen and that the government was out to make people poor. He wasn't sure about the last bit of information (since it was mostly old lady gossip) but he did want to make sure he was getting a good deal. Dorian grabbed a few things Raja needed and then made his way towards the register. There, an older man was side-eyeing him, but because Dorian was the way he was, he simply smiled and waited in line. The man walked up to Dorian, cutting in front of him in line, and of course, he heard Dorian sigh. He whipped around and almost instantly started screaming

Spanish nonsense. Dorian didn't understand much because he was speaking rather quickly, other than a few words that even he deemed too harsh to mention. Man got kicked out, and Dorian basically ran home.

“What just happened? What the fuck?” He mumbled climbing the stairs of his apartment complex, gripping the tote bag filled with groceries. Hands still trembling, he opened the door. Little did he expect to see Lucille exiting the apartment next to his. He knew her and Raja were friends, but he hadn't met his neighbors, so he had no idea why she was there. Still looking disheveled, he offered her a smile, waving faintly. The awkwardness was more than apparent. Lucille squinted her eyes, trying to recollect somewhere in her memories who that dude was.

“It's Dorian? We met at the airport, hung out at the bar with Raja..”

She beamed a smile, sparks in her mind finally connecting the dots.

“Oh! I remember you. How, uh, how is the classes going?” Her french accent thick, stirring something unknown in Dorian's system.

He raked his fingers through his hair, in a subtle attempt to appear more attractive.

“They uh...They're going well! Yeah. A lot of interesting stuff. How about you?”

“Not too bad. We're planning on going to a dig site next week.”

“Oh, that's right, archeology”

Lucille combed her hair behind her ear, nodding slightly. She slightly shuffled, before taking out her phone, checking the time.

“Where's the dig?” Dorian asked.

“Oh! It's by Agua Amarga, it's a staged dig, just so we learn common practices, but it seems like it'll be fun!”

“I've been meaning to go to Agua Amarga! I heard that the beach there is beautiful, and that the architecture is very traditional coastal spanish”

“Really? I’ve seen a few pictures, but haven’t thought much about it. Do you want to come? I could probably sneak you in for the day.”

“That would be awesome! I can hang out at the beach and then we can meet when you’re done?”

“Sure, I’ll text you the details, I have to go, I have plans with friends”

She handed her phone to him. Quickly, Dorian fumbled and punched in his number, before handing her his phone. She named herself Lucille followed by a flower emoji and a bone. Dorian smirked slightly, before putting in the code of his door.

“That way you know who I am when I message you”

The door locked again, and Lucille jogged down the stairs.

His roommates weren’t home and thank god he wasn’t because he was pretty sure he looked insane. He had to be going insane. Between trying to flirt with Lucille (in a failed attempt) and that moment at the market...he was not okay.

CHAPTER 12 -

Tacenda was intrigued by the world around him. Although anger and revenge filtered through his heart, pumped his blood and were his main motivator for survival, there was excitement to be amongst the creatures he had for so long observed. On the back of a truck his eyes wandered around, the barren landscape seeming beautiful to his eyes. The sun beamed upon the group, winds blew sand in all directions and soon enough, small desert plants started appearing. Around them dunes grew in size, becoming small mountains and Tacenda was beaming, literally. He wasn't used to temperature changes, and the clothes became too much. The once soft fabric was now covered in sweat and stuck to his body in places Tacenda didn't even know existed. Jacob was sitting next to Tacenda, phone in hand and focusing on something on the screen. Curiously, Tacenda watched, head tilted to the side.

“What's that?” Tacenda asked.

“This? Me old phone” Jacob responded, handing the device to Tacenda.

He took the phone between his hands, and like a child started pushing buttons on the screen. Different images flashed by and sounds soon started playing. He had seen his family using these devices before, so he had a basic understanding of how it functioned. Jacob laughed, taking the device from the creature.

“We'll have to get ye one of these when we get back to the city” He said.

“One for me?”

“Yuh, or else how am I gonna keep track of ye” Jacob replied.

Tacenda smiled, soon imagining the images he would have on his screen.

The trip across the section of the desert was long and exhausting, mostly because of the heat. Although Tacenda stayed put in his place in the bed of the truck with other crewmates, he

felt his limbs heavy and his head boiling like a kettle. They arrived at a village, and parked in front of an inn.

“Wait here, I’ll be back in a second” Jacob told the creature.

Tacenda obeyed, too dazed with the bright neon signs that read:

-VACANCY.

- AC

-WI-FI

-POOL

And although he didn’t understand fully what any of those things were, he assumed they were good. It was then when in the city of Almeria he heard a voice in his head, but it was broken, like a radio tuning in and out.

Shush... I’m...voices...enough

He couldn’t make out a whole sentence, but he was connected to something, someone here on Earth. Tacenda clenched his fists, trying to respond.

“What voices? Who are you?”

Voice...alone.

He was unaware of the receiver, he didn’t even know if that receiver could get his message. Tacenda needed to know. Was this Mr.Mystical? He looked up at the sky, dark eye glimmering with the full moon. Shaking him out of his trance, Jacob returned with a key in hand, giving it to Tacenda.

“You’ll be sharin’ a room with me” He said. “We’re on the top floor, close to the pool. Got nice views”

Jacob was a cheery fellow. Understanding and strangely calm, eerily calm but Tacenda didn’t know this was strange. He didn’t know much, but he knew more than others above. Thanks

to his observations with “his family” he could understand certain aspects of humanity, although maybe not all the social queues he needed in order to survive alone. Jacob was about 5 foot six, well built and with incredible tanned skin (Tacenda had made a note of the differences between them) but most importantly, he had both eyes. Jacob tugged on Tacenda, making him leave the truck, he linked their arms together and with a backpack swung around his shoulder he brought Tacenda to the room.

The sun shined bright through the transparent tissue-like curtains of the room, causing Tacenda to start. He sat upright in the bed, eyes wide open. Again, like the day of his creation he looked down at his hands, tan skin slightly glistening with sweat. He wasn't used to this climate, or any climate at all. Was this something all humans had to deal with? This discomfort, and the feeling of something crawling inside their own body begging to come out? The voice had disappeared, but Tacenda knew he needed to find it. He needed the confirmation that it was indeed Mr.Mystical. He was walking upon the same grounds as him. A somber expression came across Tacenda's face, brows furrowed, hair stuck to his forehead and lips pursed in a fine line. If Mr.Mystical was here, that meant that Tacenda could avenge his fall.

Anger was an interesting emotion Tacenda felt. He could feel his blood running through his arms, boiling, bubbling. His body would get tense, muscles solid as rocks. Jaw clenched, eye fixated on the unknown and mind racing. His thoughts varied, from simply begging to go back, all the way to ending Mr.Mystical's life. Tacenda was sure he could kill a being, but he didn't know how or where to begin.

Next to him, on a separate bed lied Jacob, sprawled out under the sheet, snoring away. Now would be a perfect time to go. But where? Tacenda got out of bed and got dressed with the clothes he borrowed from Jacob, heading to the door, until his voice stopped him.

“Where are you going? You heading to breakfast without me?” Jacob said sleepily, in perfect English. Much like Tacenda spoke.

Tacenda froze, turning around immediately, brow furrowed with the change of voice.

“Breakfast?”

Jacob stared at Tacenda, soon realizing that there had been a shift within himself.

“Ya, the first meal of the day, ya know? The most important one”

Tacenda blinked, hand sliding off the door handle, walking towards the bed again to sit.

“This place has some good food, I was thinkin’ I’ll show ya around after we eat”

The fallen nodded, eyes fixated on the ground. The only thing running through his mind was the need to find the voice. Jacob got dressed while Tacenda was in his thoughts, placing a hand on the creature's shoulder he startled him.

“Let’s go, we’re gonna miss out on some great coffee.”

CHAPTER 13-

Two orbs circled each other, floating and bobbing up and down, close, but never touching. Two hands from the Void kept on pushing them closer, closer, until they merged, pulled together with a force comparable to the opposite poles of a magnet.

Dorian, Tacenda. You two are the same, one human, one angel, that never belonged. Both of your lives are direct parallels, discovery of emotions, places where you fit, places where you don't. Your journey has led you to this moment. Tacenda, you are part of me, Dorian, you are a part of creation. Made of stardust, who has been returning since the beginning of time. I make sure you forget every time I have killed you. Every moment you attempted to escape, I had placed a fallen by your side. Now, your time has come. You too will join me.

The new orb cracked, until the right hand grabbed it and clenched its fist so hard it shattered.

Tacenda, do your duty. Jacob, guide my child. Dorian, you are more than just a simple human. You, out of all 8 billion people, have always been my favorite. A soul that recycles, a soul I reject and keep alive. I can't wait to see you shatter again. Fail again. Although Dorian, this particular life...you were pathetic. I had plans for you. Mors certa, hora incerta.

The shards of glass floated around the hand, twinkling and sparkling as a beam of light hit them. Those inside had their fate sealed and set in stone. Mr. Mystical was bound to make the cycle complete itself. Acting out of sheer boredom, narcissism, and a need to use his power, he pulled at the strings that connected people to the Void and to others, toyed and moved his puppets as he pleased. Dorian, a soul that he never allowed into the liminal space and kept on moving from body to body, Tacenda, a creature created for his own entertainment, and Jacob, a pawn in the active game of life, death and manipulation.

CHAPTER 14 -

June 7th, 2022.

Dorian: Hey! Glad I finally got your number
I meant that in a “I want to be your friend” way
Oh god, I’m sorry

Lucille: Hahaha

You’re fine! I want to be your friend too. :)

So, how’s the day treating you?

Dorian: Good! Today we got an assignment about Almeria’s Cathedral.

I have to head there at some point and look at the pretty paintings.

Wbu?

Lucille: Wbu?

Dorian: English slang, sorry

What about you?

Lucille: lol

We’re preparing for the dig

Saturday morning, 8:00am from the Plaza Campoamor

DON’T BE LATE >:(

Dorian: I won’t! I promise!

The week flew by quickly, mostly due to the amount of work Dorian was putting in to get ahead in order to enjoy the day trip to Agua Amarga, but also part of it was his excitement to leave and spend time with Lucille. The small town was about an hour's bus ride away from their departure point, weaving through the inner parts of the Province. There was no beach view on the way, so most of the scenery was formed by the hundreds of home gardens and olive fields that

many countryside residents had. Dorian, sitting next to Lucille, was hoping to spot the infamous Playa de los Muertos and its huge rock, but she had pointed out that it was on the other side of the town they'd be visiting.

The bus dropped them off at Bar La Hoya, almost right next to the plaza. Here, Lucille and her team ventured off into the countryside on a brief hike, leaving Dorian to his own endeavors. Despite being surrounded by mostly barren land (because Agua Amarga was within the desert area of Almeria), the town seemed to flourish. There were palm trees lining the streets, as well as small orange trees. The buildings weren't taller than two stories high and all made with some sort of clay painted white. Dorian had read that they were built that way to maintain the cool in the summer and the heat in the winter. Most of them had interesting entryways, by molding the clay into circles, or rounding the corners of the houses themselves, giving them a more fluid and delicate appearance. The streets Dorian walked down on his way towards the beach were small, barely fitting a car or two, and tourists plagued the area. During his adventure, he took the time to take pictures, especially of the stone staircase he found in a small residential park. He didn't mind that feeling of being lost, and he didn't ask for directions. Walking solely by intuition, he wanted to see where he would end up. Later on when Lucille was done he could relay the beauty of the small intricacies of the town itself.

“Ah, this is the feeling of Wanderlust that so many poets write about...” He mumbled to himself, staring at a small virgin statue placed neatly in a small gap in someone's wall. After a few minutes of walking, he arrived at what was known as the second most important attraction of the town: the plaza. This plaza was smaller than the ones in Almeria, but it took the crown for how stunning it was. Surrounded by small white buildings and a few souvenir shops, right in the middle was a white tiled rectangle, with cement benches (also painted white) that formed the borders of the plaza. The seats of these benches were covered with white tiles as well,

painted with light blue ceramic paint that showcased different scenes of either farming, agriculture, fauna or flora of the area. Right at the end, was a small bar that had a few tables out front. There appeared to be a theme, or a sense of pureness with all of the white in this place. He snapped a few pictures and in between two buildings he saw it, the Mediterranean sea. Almost possessed by a race car, he bolted down the street towards the soft, incredibly hot, white sand. Dorian expected the place to be filled with people, especially since the tourists were walking around like him, but the beach was quite literally empty. On the left side of the beach, was a cliff that seemed to touch the sky, on the other side the same. Agua Amarga was secluded. Dorian didn't mind this, plopping down after a penguin shuffle on the sand. He ran his hands through the hot minerals, sighing softly, relaxing. The lifeguard's flag was green, which in Spain meant that the conditions for swimming were optimal, and Dorian could tell. The small ebb and flow of the waves nearly put him in a trance. His eyes were fixated on the clear sparkling water, salt filled his nose and his heart pumped excitedly.

He wasn't aware of the time passing, shirt off, lying in the sand with messy salty hair, until he received a call from Lucille.

"Hey! We're back! Where are you?"

"Welcome back! I'm at the beach, in front of this place called El Playa"

"Sick! We're by the bus stop, so I'll be there in a few, have you thought about lunch? I'm starving!"

"Actually, I have! I'll tell you about it when you get here"

"Fine, fine! I guess I'll have to rush! See you!"

Lucille took around ten minutes to get to where Dorian was, and instead of making him aware of her presence, she plopped her backpack on his stomach. He let out a gasp of air, quickly sitting up.

“Hey! That was so uncalled for!”

“Well, that’s what you get when you spend the whole morning relaxing!” She mentioned with a giggle, taking off the sweaty tank top she was wearing, as well as her denim shorts, revealing the floral bikini she had on. “You coming with?”

She ran towards the water, looking over her shoulder towards a stunned Dorian. He, a bit overwhelmed and in shock, got up and also ran. He caught up rather quickly, taking long strides almost as if he were flying. Splashing around he dove into the water, head bobbing out with a chuckle. Lucille shivered up because of the cool water, but Dorian did not let her escape, he started splashing and forcing her in.

“No! Dorian! It’s cold!” She shrieked.

Dorian with a laugh, took her by the hand and guided her into the water, but she quickly turned against him. With a jump she grabbed onto his back, trying to force him under.

“Get! Under!”

“Gasp! How dare you!” but he complied, sinking under the waves.

“Ah ha! I knew it! He’s a weakling!”

Under the water, Dorian grabbed her by the leg, rising up and dragging her around as she playfully flailed and tried to get away from him.

They played until Lucille’s hunger became ravenous.

“I feel like my stomach is eating itself” Her hair was plopped on her head in a messy bun as she looked towards Dorian, who was now putting his shirt on.

“Well, I thought we could eat at the bar in the plaza. It looks like a good place to have some cheap food”

Shimmying her tank top on and sliding on her Tiva’s she beamed a smile, backpack hanging off her shoulder. “Sounds great! I could go for a beer”

They sat down on the table nearest to the window that led to the bar, deciding that baking in the summer heat as the sun hit all the tables that were outside wasn't the best idea. They eyeballed the menu, picking out a few items from it, varying from traditional Spanish cuisine to something a bit more innovative. Before they knew it, plates and plates of food came out. The waiter, who knew they weren't locals, pointed everything out to them.

"This is the bacalao, calamares, patatas bravas, boquerones, coquinas and albondiga" With a smile, the man walked away.

Dorian almost immediately bursted out laughing.

"Look at that thing! It's huge!" His index finger pointed to the singular giant meatball in tomato sauce.

"I'm guessing that's the albondiga! It's...massive!" Lucille snapped a picture of it, before grabbing her fork to dig in.

"So, Lucille, why Spain?"

With food in her cheeks, she sat up. Her hand covered her mouth and a faint sigh escaped her lips after she swallowed.

"What isn't there to like about this place? Well, at least southern Spain. The culture here is so rich, the food is delicious and the archeological sites are impressive. In Cordoba, there's this town right on the outskirts of it, on a small trail there are ruins of a Roman bath house! Or Granada, with its giant Alhambra, Sevilla and the Torre del Oro, there are just so many things to see and learn about...Sorry, I'm info dumping."

"Did Raja teach you that? The info dumping I mean, and I love hearing about it."

"What brought you here?"

"Well, I grew up in a foster home, and the people that raised me there were super religious. They didn't force that on me, but it rubs off, you know? So I wanted to come to a place

that was rich in religious history, because of the Inquisicion and all that jazz... But I wanted to learn and see the art that was left behind. I'm passionate about that. Want to teach it in the future."

Lucille smiled as she listened, faint pink tinting her cheeks. "Did you know that in the Mezquita in Cordoba, there is a cathedral inside it? And Roman mosaics? Like all of that, in one giant building!"

Dorian giggled because of her excitement, heart suddenly rushing. She made nothing of him growing in foster care, no uncomfortable questions, no pity, nothing like he was used to. He felt...seen.

"Must have been hard growing up without parents" She mumbled, playing around with an empty coquina shell. "I can't even imagine how alone you must have felt at times"

"Alone...Well, I can't say that I wasn't. But as you grow, you meet people. And those people kind of become your family." He pulled out his phone, unlocking the screen. In his background was a picture of him, surrounded by a few friends. He pointed from left to right. "This is Tom, my best friend, Rosalie, his girlfriend, Gina, and Marcus."

Lucille took the phone in between her fingers, gazing down at the screen. Her eyes darted from person to person, however they were fixated on a smiling Dorian in the dead center of the picture. She stayed like that for what appeared to be a few seconds, but to him it felt like hours. She shook her head slightly, small curls escaping from the bun, to then pull out her phone and do the same thing.

"This is my sister, Adrienne, my best friend Noemi and my other friend Lyam"

"They look like a fun bunch"

"Oh, they are, Adrienne? She looves wine. Noemi is the crazy one though, she dances on tables."

“Oh really? Would you believe me if I told you I danced on a table before?” He chuckled.

“You?! At the bar you seemed so...tame.”

“I get that a lot. But you don’t know me, and I don’t know you”

“So, Dorian the mysterious, tell me something about you that I don’t know”

“Only if you do the same!” He took a sip of his now lukewarm beer and grimaced.

“Ouais! I’ll do it too!”

“Well...I know how to ball dance.”

Lucille’s eyes grew wide, her jaw dropped almost as if she was in disbelief. Dorian couldn’t believe it either, but he recalled a time where he danced and danced and danced until his feet hurt.

“Yup, I had a dance partner and everything. We went to regionals and won second place for the vals category. We used to wear those tight suits with sparkles and sequins. It was fun, I haven’t danced in a while.”

“Woah, that’s insane. I’d love to see you dance sometime. You should teach me! But you have to be patient, I have no rhythm.”

Dorian raised a brow, crossing his arms over his chest. “I’ll be the judge of that. Okay, your turn.”

“Ugh, this is embarrassing. I have a tattoo of the word soup in Japanese on my foot, but it’s not professionally done. I got it done in my friend’s kitchen. Actually, I don’t even know if it really is the word soup...” She covered her face, hiding her red cheeks and ears.

“Uh...why did you do that? Like...does it have a meaning?” He leaned forward, head tilted to the side.

“I just like soup. A lot. So...That happened.”

They laughed away the hours, drank a few more beers and steadily made their way to the bus stop. Then it began.

Dorian, I have a task for you.

He shook his head, before looking around, almost as if someone had called him.

“Did you hear that?” He asked in a hush.

“Hear what?”

“Oh...no, nothing.”

Dorian’s hand made its way to his hair, running it through the messy locks. His head was spinning and his ears ringing, but he heard that voice again as clear as day.

Do not worry child, I’ll protect you from him.

Dorian’s vision blurred and soon enough his heart rate started accelerating. He stumbled upon his feet, nearly tumbling to the ground, Lucille caught him.

“Hey! Are you okay? Did you drink too much?”

He nodded slightly, stumbling towards the bus, arm wrapped around Lucille’s shoulders.

“Let’s get you on the bus...”

Dorian, go home.

His eyes widened, staring straight in front of him. Although the voice itself didn’t seem threatening, he wasn’t at ease. For Dorian, hearing things, seeing things could only point to one thing: insanity. He raked his sweaty palms across his thighs, in hopes to regain some sober state of mind, fully blaming what was happening on the alcohol consumed at lunch. Lucille on the other hand looked surprised, fanning his face with her free hand in hopes to make him feel better, all blood drained from Dorian’s face. She plopped him (with much help) on his seat in the bus, and she sat next to him, her hand not leaving his body. She pressed it lightly against his nape, massaging softly, holding a plastic bag in front of him in case he needed it. Dorian was silent for

a moment, but slowly he started regaining color and clarity. He leaned his head against the headrest, because the window was vibrating a bit too much. His dark eyes looked at Lucille, who remained concerned.

“What a party pooper” He called himself.

Lucille smiled faintly, bringing her hand to his forehead. “I know, how dare you.”

CHAPTER 15 -

They arrived at the central plaza of Agua Amarga, and Tacenda was marveled. The white stone buildings surrounding the place almost glistened with the sunlight. Down a road Tacenda could see sand, and the ocean, down another a few shops built into the buildings. There were people all around them, mostly tourists buzzing from one side to another, one shop to another, people at the tables in the bar chatting away and Tacenda's heart was racing. This place was incredibly overwhelming to a newcomer. Jacob linked arms with Tacenda (like he is now getting accustomed to) and perused into the plaza. Voices all around Tacenda were flashing, music was booming from the stores, and just people, people walking everywhere. His breathing started accelerating, eyes darted around from person to person and the fact that they were touching him while they passed made his skin crawl and mind buzz. Then, it happened, the voice.

Yeah, Vals is preeetty easy.

He heard it clear as day. Tacenda frantically started pushing around people to get through the crowd, pursuing the voice. He had quickly gotten used to hearing fragments, bits and pieces of the conversation, but this time, the voice was clear as day. He hadn't been able to respond to this new voice, although attempts were made. Tacenda would occasionally listen, trying to put together the little information about this being's life. The fallen had a difficult time not feeling connected, it was a nostalgic experience, much like observing the family in the orb. The only difference was that this time, Tacenda had no idea about the appearance of the voice. For all he knew, it could have easily been Mr. Mystical playing a trick on him.

“You. Where are you?”

I swear we need to get this meatball again.

“Show me where you are.”

Why is this happening...

“No, no! Don’t go!”

Tacenda started going person to person, voice ringing in his ears. He was close, close to putting a face to the voice that had brought him comfort during his time in the human world. He was aware that he shouldn’t have become attached, that surely this was just another piece towards his vengeance. For Tacenda, there was comfort in living experiences through someone. The creature felt like he was there, he was part of these memories and he needed desperately to find who this voice belonged to if he wanted to either make these memories real, or figure out how to end Mr. Mystical. That particular deep voice, until radio silence. People started looking at Tacenda, while he kneeled to the ground, breath painfully heavy in his chest. The world was spinning, hands were shaking. He was close, oh so close to finding the source of the voice. Tacenda was torn between the need to end it all, and the need to continue moving forward, almost as if he was being ripped by the seams. Jacob suddenly appeared, placing a hand on his shoulder.

“Let’s get ya outta here. I think I have some explaining to do”

Both returned to the hotel, Tacenda visibly shaken between the overwhelming plaza and the voice. Jacob closed the door behind him and sighed.

“Listen, this isn’t easy, but you’ll have to trust me, your revenge is not worth it.”

Tacenda looked up at Jacob confused, not only because of what he said, but there it was, perfect English again.

“I’ve been there before, and it’ll just keep on happening. You’re not the first, and certainly not the last.”

“What do you mean...?”

“I’m a fallen too. The big boy up there cast me away because I got too close to humans. I guess you felt the same?”

Tacenda shook his head to the sides, truth be told he didn't really know what caused his demise.

"I...I'm not sure why he let me go."

Jacob nodded. "He never tells you straight up. Just expect you to live on. You see, I heard the voices, not big boy's but other voices. Humans, meant to help whatever he is succeed. But you see, I killed the darn thing. And boy was he mad." he sat on the chair in the hotel room, legs crossed. "And it happened again. Another one fell. Did he also tell you, you were perfect?"

Tacenda nodded.

"But you're not. I can see it, ya got a missing eye. You cared too much. Have you ever thought about whatcha gonna do if you catch the voice? Killing it won't end the cycle, Tacenda." The creature had closed eyes assimilating all of what was said. He also was a fallen. He was like him. He was not perfect. But why was he hiding? Why wasn't he also seeking revenge? Why did he change his voice? Tacenda frantically crawled to Jacob, hands on Jacob's knees almost pleading. His head continued to spin, questions zooming through like cars on a highway. Tacenda had too much on his mind.

"Help me find him. I need to find him. I- I don't know what I'll do, but I just need to."

Jacob with a sigh pushed Tacenda away carefully, only to stand up and walk to the other side of the room.

"You don't get it do you? Finding the voice will do nothing! It's better if you just forget it exists and continue on. This is what the big boy wants!"

"Mr. Mystical has done nothing but wrong, I don't... I don't think I want to kill the human, I want to kill *him*."

Jacob looked at Tacenda with wide eyes, mouthing to some extent without words unable to come out.

“How the hell do you plan on doing that? He’s immortal, nothing can kill him!”

“I’ll find a way... there has to be a way. The human is the key.”

“The key? To what? Do you have a death wish, boy?”

Jacob was received with silence. Tacenda hadn’t thought about dying. He assumed that living here amongst humans was worse. He was surrounded by perfect beings that were cared for by the creatures above. He was yet again imperfection amongst perfect.

“Look, I’ll help you find the voice, but after that you’re on your own.”

CHAPTER 16 -

Dorian and Lucille had decided to have routine weekend trips, especially after the trip to Agua Amarga had been such a great success. The idea of getting out and adventuring was appealing to Dorian, but even more so spending time with Lucille. After looking at a few websites the day before the trip while they were grabbing something to drink, they had come up with a game plan for the two and a half days they would be spending there. They had decided to take the train, which would bring them right to the north of Granada city, it would take around two hours to get there. They would leave Friday afternoon, and get there by dinner. Check-in to the hotel and then grab a bite to eat in the near vicinity of the hotel. For Saturday they had a packed day. In the morning they wanted to visit the infamous Palace of La Alhambra, then make their way to the overlook of the city, since it was near the palace. Dorian had specifically asked to visit the Basilica de San Juan de Dios, in hopes to see the dome of the basilica. Somewhere in between they'd fit a meal and then head to the Science museum (specifically the butterfly sanctuary) and then end up at a Flamenco show where they'd have dinner, enjoy live music and dancing and then head back to the hotel. Their last destination was on Sunday before heading back, the Arabian baths at Hammam Al Andalus.

Around 6 am on Friday morning, Dorian was already awake, packing and getting ready for the trip. Every time he thought about simply just going somewhere his heart raced and his mind already tried figuring out the best way to enjoy as much as he could from the place in the short amount of time he had. He even texted Lucille once he opened his eyes, although he received no response, at least not yet. He made a quick breakfast, toast with tomato spread, olive oil and salt, alongside a freshly brewed cup of coffee. Raja emerged from his bedroom around 9, hair messy, eyes drooped.

“Morning...” Raja yawned.

“Oh, hey! You’re up early. There’s some extra coffee in the pot.” Dorian scrolled through his phone.

“Thanks, had to get up for an exam.” Raja grabbed a mug from the cabinet and poured the rest of the coffee in it and sat in front of Dorian at the kitchen table. “What’s got you so excited?”

“Heading to Granada this weekend. I’ll be back Sunday. I’m heading with Lucille.” A faint blush decorated his cheeks.

Raja raised a brow. “That archeology chick we hang out with?”

“Yeah. We’ve been hanging out a lot.”

“Sneaky...And you didn’t even tell me. You two have a thing?”

“O-oh! No, not like that. I mean...I like her. But. No. Yeah.”

“Dude, you should go for it!”

Dorian quickly stood up, placing his mug in the sink, before grinning softly at Raja. He grabbed his backpack and shook his head from side to side, although the idea of holding Lucille’s hand was more than appealing.

“I’ll keep you posted, I have to head to class!”

He rushed out the door, leaving a grimacing Raja at the table. Classes couldn’t pass quickly enough. Almost every five minutes Dorian checked the time on his phone, even during breaks he would take a gander, expecting a notification to pop up or for time to have jumped drastically. It wasn’t until the middle of his Religious studies lecture that he received a message.

June 16th

Lucille: Omg! I didn’t even see this text! Are we still on for 5:00pm?

Dorian: You bet! I’m packed and ready to go!

Lucille: Sweet! Wait. Aren’t you in class right now?

Dorian: Maybe...

Lucille: PAY ATTENTION! I'll see you at the station later <3

Dorian: -liked a message-

Finally the 3:00pm mark and Dorian could go home. His bones shook with excitement, his mind already tracing step by step their trip through the palace and stomach growing in order to fit all the amazing food they were going to eat. With a sigh, he opened the door to his apartment, immediately being received by a snoring Raja on the couch. With a soft giggle, Dorian made his way to his room and collapsed in his bed. He lived about twenty minutes from the train station, which gave him around an hour to rest. Sinking into the sheets, he shut his eyes, drifting away until his alarm rang.

Lucille stood by the main entrance of the train station, waiting for a late Dorian. Although he was only a few minutes late, that could have ruined their whole trip. Looking rather disheveled with messy hair and his shirt put on backwards he raced towards her with his suitcase in hand.

"I'm so sorry! I turned off my alarm when I was sleeping..."

"I knew something was up! Next time text me! Come on, we're going to miss our train."

She rolled her eyes, visibly annoyed.

Dorian pursed his lips, following her to the platform. They boarded the train, and almost instantly Lucille turned to Dorian and poked his chest as he was getting his headphones out.

"I thought you weren't coming...Next time please let me know you're running late"

Dorian stared at her for a moment, eyes darting from her own, then to her cheeks (that were tainted a faint pink) and then her lips. He bit his inferior before responding.

"I'm sorry, I'd never do that, I promise."

She smiled vaguely, before ruffling his hair. They both put their headphones in and proceeded to watch the landscape out the window. There wasn't much difference between Almeria and Granada. The trees were mostly olive or vineyards, a few bushes here and there, blue

sky and few clouds. The weather couldn't get better, they didn't even mind the hundred degree heat of the day. Dorian had spaced completely, mind filled with the sound of Houndmouth, a recent discovery on Spotify. His hands rested on the armrest of his seat and was paying no mind to Lucille. She, on the other hand, instead of watching the landscape, was watching him. Her eyes moved from his messy brown hair, down to his long eyelashes. His pointed nose or his plump lips. She also enjoyed how soft his jawline was in comparison to other men. Her gaze trailed down his neck, to his shoulders, and from there she made her way down to his hand. It was bigger than hers, longer fingers and wider palm. She took a second to look at her own hand, tan, dirt under her painted nails, small chubby fingers. Lucille bit her lip. Slowly, she slid her hand under Dorian's, fingers intertwining.

Dorian felt a sudden electric shock in his body as both their hands united. Firstly, he hadn't expected it, secondly, he wanted to make the first move. He didn't pull his hand away, instead, he tightened his grip around hers, turning his head slightly to look at her. Lucille was shorter than him, but not by much, so immediately he was staring into her eyes. She smiled, crimson red painted across her cheeks and ears. Neither of them said anything. He smiled back, before looking out the window again.

They arrived a few minutes later, and as stubborn as Dorian was, he understood he needed to let go of her hand in order to get the suitcases and head to the hotel. Although both their palms were sweaty, both hands felt the sudden emptiness and that sent a chill right up to their hearts. Granada was bubbling with people, since after all it was tourist season. The check-in at the hotel took longer than expected, and neither of them had brought up the fact that in the train, just an hour ago they were holding hands. The room was big enough for the two of them, two full sized beds side by side, a closet for their suitcases and a small tv, table and chair. The selling point of

the room was the balcony that faced Sierra Nevada, the mountain in Granada. Dorian stepped outside, leaning on the railing, with a faint sigh.

“Maybe she didn’t say anything because she doesn’t know how...” He mumbled.

He felt a hand on his back, softly patting it, causing him to turn his head to the source.

There was Lucille, eyes fixated on the mountain in front of them.

“Next time we come, we have to make our way to the mountain” She smiled.

Her eyes shined slightly with the setting sun, and she still had that reddish tint to her cheeks. Dorian turned fully towards her, taking her hand in his again, electricity running through his veins at the touch.

“Lucille, we need to figure this out.”

She looked puzzled, sighing slightly. Her grip tightened on his hand, before letting go and crossing her arms.

“Why can’t you just let things happen?”

“I...I just thought.”

“Look...Dorian. At the end of the summer you’re going back to the U.S, I’m going home to France, let’s just enjoy what we have. Not label it. A traditional summer fling?” Her eyes looked at him, filled with pleas.

“A summer fling...Does that mean you do feel something?” He stepped closer, reaching out to place a hand on her cheek. “I...I don’t know what I feel. But I like being with you, "he admitted.

To that, Lucille tilted her head towards his hand, eyes closing for a few seconds as she listened. “They say summer flings are intense and short-lived. I want to live that with you.” Dorian smiled, wide, teeth showing and all. One side of him was happy, he had always wanted to experience the traditional summer fling he had seen in movies, but the other side didn’t want it to

end there. He decided to bury that side. Taking advantage that Lucille's eyes were shut, Dorian leaned in and pressed his lips softly against hers. Her hands wrapped around his shoulders, pulling him in for a much longer kiss. When they parted, they both stared at each other in awe, well, Dorian thought it was in awe. Lucille on the other hand giggled.

“You're a horrible kisser.”

“Am not!” Dorian huffed and tried to lean in again, but Lucille slithered away and made her way into the bedroom.

“Let's go! I'm starving!”

They had spent Saturday morning at the Alhambra, following a tour they did not pay for. The building was obviously a beauty, and they made sure to take plenty of pictures for memories, that included some of them acting lovey dovey. After this they made their way to the overlook, and since it was still early, well early on their terms, around 11:00 am, it was still pretty empty. They sat on the cement ledge, looking over at the palace they had just visited, a faint summer breeze running through. The area was covered in trees, many of which either of them knew the name for. Dorian took a couple pictures of the scenery, and took deep breaths.

“It feels unreal to be here.” He mentioned.

Lucille took her time to speak. All morning she had seemed distracted, mulling over something in her mind. Finally, she shifted in her seat, looking straight at Dorian.

“We need to set some ground rules.”

“Ground rules?” He raised a brow, expecting more information.

“Since we agreed to a summer fling, no ‘I love you's’. We can act as a couple, but...No real expression of those types of feelings. Right?”

“Right...?” He decided to let her finish talking, then he'd add on to it.

“So, we’re together, but not together. We’re exclusive, and we’ll spend time together, but also time apart.” She ran a hand through her hair, tying it up with a clip. “So...comment ça c’est dit...No labels?”

Dorian blinked a few times, before looking out to the landscape again. He needed a minute to process everything she had said. He for sure didn’t love her, it was too soon for that, but...He didn’t like the idea of not having a label. The bridge of his nose wrinkled, his hands held onto the hem of his shorts and a faint sigh escaped his lips.

“I’m okay with all of that, although...The label part, kind of doesn’t set well. But also...I’ve never had a summer fling so I don’t know how this goes.” He confessed with a faint smile, mostly because Lucille was fidgety, picking at her cuticles, a clear sign of nerves. He patted her thigh softly, trying to gain her attention. This conversation was a make or break for their dynamic, he knew that, he felt that. His heart raced (as per usual when being around her), and he assumed hers was as well. “I’m willing to try, but I’d rather have some sort of label. Doesn’t have to be boyfriend and girlfriend, maybe we can say we’re in the ‘getting to know’ phase?”

Lucille’s breath hitched at the mention of boyfriend, however, as he continued talking her expression softened, and she nodded.

“That...I’m okay with that.” She then got closer to him, enough to place her head on his shoulder while looking out towards the treeline. “I’ve been hurt in the past, labels aren’t fun for me anymore.” She spoke softly, her fingers tapped his fingers rhythmically and unconsciously as she continued staring out into the landscape.

Dorian, instead of responding, placed a gentle kiss on her head, then resting his cheek there and gazed out.

“I’m doing this so neither of us get hurt, you know that right?” She asked, voice cracking.

“I know, it’s okay. I’m agreeing with you, I’m willing to try.”

Lucille then smiled, aware that he couldn’t see her. She squeezed his hand tightly, before speaking. “Have you been hurt?”

Dorian sighed deeply, chest disinflating to the point where his spine rolled and he hunched over a bit. “I have. She cheated on me after two years of dating. I was going to propose to her a few months after I found out. Obviously I didn’t.”

She raised her head, eyes wide and mouth slightly ajar. “She DID WHAT?!” Her hands cupped his face, forcing him to look at her. “We may not be a thing, but I will NEVER do that to you. Promise. Oh! Another rule, we must communicate what bothers us. Say yes or I’ll throw a rock at you.”

A bubbly laugh escaped his lips, placing his hands on her wrists in order to move her hands, in order to talk, since his cheeks were squished, lips pushed out like a fish incapable of speaking like that.

“Agreed, agreed! Why are you so aggressive?”

CHAPTER 17 -

Jacob tossed a shirt towards Tacenda that landed perfectly on his head, covering his face. Said face held in between his two hands as he was slowly spiraling into a tornado of thoughts and plans.

“You have to quit thinking so much boy. It isn’t gonna get you anywhere.”

In the privacy of their hotel room, Jacob was more himself. He spoke properly, shared stories about the Void and other fallen, even the voices he once heard and now ignored. Tacenda took the shirt off of his head and put it on after standing up. His eyes were decorated with dark circles, and his good eye was dark, almost shadowing how consumed he really was by his goal to end Mr. Mystical.

“How can I not think? I need to figure this out...I can hear him, but then, he’s gone!”

Jacob looked in the mirror, combing his short hair, pretending to make himself look better because there was no way to tame his cowlicks.

“Listen, you’ll find him. Has he spoken to you? Or...Do you just hear him?”

“He hasn’t engaged. But I feel...this connection, Jacob. He needs me.”

It’ll work. I’m helping you. Aren’t I?” Jacob sighed, fully believing Tacenda was pushing his own agenda on the innocent boy.

Tacenda nodded vaguely, combing his long locks in front of his eyes. Then, they both headed out towards the city. Almeria was bubbling, not only with people, but with heat. Jacob had a few places to go, and he didn’t trust Tacenda to be alone, so store by store they went through the city. Jacob did most of the talking and the angel solely listened. One of the abilities that had stuck with him was the capability to understand other languages. He listened to grandma’s gossiping, aunties selling food in the market, younger generations speaking about love. Tacenda knew nothing of it, well, more than not knowing, he didn’t care.

Tacenda hadn't been eating much since he arrived, consumed by the desire of vengeance. Jacob tried force feeding him, treating him like a child at restaurants and forcing him to finish his plate before he got up. This afternoon it wasn't any different.

I'm so sorry! I turned off my alarm when I was sleeping

The angel jumped out of his seat, eyes scanning the perimeter.

“Hey! Sit back down and finish yer food!”

Tacenda ignored Jacob completely. The area that they were in was busy, tourists coming and going from the bus station, others running to catch the train before rush hour and Tacenda had heard that voice as clear as day. The thing was...Jacob had heard it too.

“Tacenda! I paid for this ya know?!” Jacob pushed.

He ran. He couldn't follow any specific direction, he only followed the voice. The voice that now seemed troubled.

I messed this up...

“Messed what up? What did you do?” Tacenda responded, but received no answer.

First he stopped at a store, near the train station that was across the street. Then, as ongoing traffic was in the road, Tacenda crossed the street without looking. A few honks here and there, but luckily enough he crossed safely. Behind him, a nervous Jacob followed.

Hopefully we can talk and I can apologize...

The voice grew stronger and Tacenda's breathing got heavy. His head was filled with this other person's voice and he was about ready to tackle whoever he thought it was coming from. Soon enough, inside the train station he started going man to man, turning people around. His one good eye observed their faces until they pushed him away calling him “loco”, “bicho raro” and other variants of spanish insults. Jacob was catching up, apologizing to every person Tacenda had bothered, giving some half-assed explanation towards why he was acting like that.

Are we...Alhambra...

The voice started breaking up, and Tacenda started shaking. In between the people, he started looking all around, in circles, not knowing where he came from, where to go, who to follow. His heart beat fast, causing dizziness to settle in and his mouth was dry.

“No...no,no,no, NO!”

Jacob finally caught up, grabbing Tacenda by his shoulders and shaking him slightly. Tacenda however was unresponsive. His one good eye was glossed over, and he kept repeating “no” to himself over and over. Jacob sighed, guiding the fallen to a bench, where he sat him down. Both stared at the train leaving the station, and then it clicked: who they were looking for was on there. Tacenda took a deep breath, elbows on his knees and hands pulling at his hair, mouth open as if he were to scream but no sound came out.

“I’m guessing radio silence, kid.”

CHAPTER 18-

Lucille and Dorian were enjoying their weekends together, although during the week, Dorian was quite literally a ball of stress. Ever since the first wave of dizziness happened, it has been occurring more and more frequently, and now to add to that he was having auditory hallucinations due to said stress. He never voiced this to anyone, his foster parents, his friends, Raja or Lucille. He believed he was tough enough to deal with it alone, after all, his big project was due in a few days, and now his focus was solely on getting that done. He could celebrate later, and when he finished, those stupid voices would disappear.

They call me the Creator. I'm here to help you.

“Oh, no, no, no. This isn't real. This can't be real. I've officially lost it.”

You haven't lost anything. Follow my lead and you'll be safe.

“Safe? SAFE? From what? From who? Who are you? Leave me alone!”

Dorian, I've told you already. I am the Creator, and I'm here to protect you and guide you.

“No, this isn't real. I just need to sleep. Yeah. Sleep.”

The voice didn't respond. The brunette hadn't gotten used to the presence of this voice in his head, although he spent some time speaking to it. Sometimes, he'd answer, others he'd ignore. He had named it “God” because that's what Dorian thought God would sound like if he were real. He quickly undressed and plopped in bed. He was pretty sure he was hallucinating. It was 3:00p.m. He closed his eyes, but the ringing in his ears was getting louder, until another unfamiliar voice showed up in his mind.

Jacob, I need to know the truth. Who are you?

He covered his head with a pillow and let out an exasperated sigh, burying his head deep in the mattress. Although he listened attentively to the conversation happening now.

“Great, now, two of them are talking in there.”

You’re...like me?

Dorian sighed, nose wrinkling, head pounding, hands clenched in fists digging deep into the pillow. He just wanted to sleep. To be left alone. He didn’t care about who was like who. He had no attachment to this voice, to some extent, it even made him clench his jaw and let out a puff of air in frustration.

I...find...Mystical.

Dorian, don’t listen to him. He’s not important. YOU are.

Right as he was about to respond, Raja asked through the door

“Dude, who are you talking to? Are you on the phone?”

Dorian whined into his pillow, before answering. “Sorry, was on the phone with my mom. Going to take a nap now.”

“Gotcha, it just sounded...loud, if you need anything, let me know, I’ll be studying in the living room.”

Dorian woke up with a start. He had been having nightmares for as long as he remembered, ghosts, ghouls, persecutions, all of the above. This time was no different, plus the added hearing of random voices made everything worse. The damp sheets from his sweat clinged to his half dressed body as he stirred around with a groan. His eyes opened just to check the time on his phone: 5:00am. The outside world was still dark, but his mind was already racing. He eventually got out of bed and made a cup of espresso, before sitting at the coffee table and opening his laptop. Dorian was in the midst of his summer course and he needed to catch up, after his adventure at the cathedral, he hadn’t had the same capability of concentration. His project was due and he was incredibly behind.

Art history was a passion of the brunette. Where motifs came from, the stories behind it, something deep inside him pulled to this world, and dare he not listen to his heart for once. Always a passion driven kid, he knew that the Reformation would be his area of interest. He wasn't necessarily religious, but the imagery of Jesus, the Virgin and other saints decorated with gold had something mysterious and elegant that attracted Dorian to it. Hence his study work of the day. He was studying the facade of the Cathedral constructed by Juan de Orea in the 16th century.

"Apostles...Prophets...Saints...Easily classical style." He mumbled whilst sipping on his espresso.

He skimmed through the information about the outside, wanting to get to the juicy stuff, the interior.

"First temple in Almeria, gothic, baroque tower. Bla bla bla."

"Bingo!"

A picture of a golden interior shone in front of him, exactly where the altar is located. There were four large paintings each representing a different saint, surrounding the golden cross with Jesus in the middle. Around the paintings were ornate golden decorations, mostly representing nature with leaves, swirls, crowns and columns, extremely organic. He was speechless.

"This is...Amazing."

There was little known about the artist that created the centerpieces, and little known about the building itself, with its high gothic columns, exposed beams and all fresco paintings. It was clearly a masterpiece. With sudden urgency he gathered his things, and practically ran out the door, time reading 10:00am directions on his phone and a bright smile adorning his face. He needed to see it in person. Lately, time seemed to escape the brunette, hours and minutes rushing

by as the river's waters swished and renewed every second. Dorian was completely unaware of this, but it was all leading up to something.

As he ran down the stairs, coins jingled in his pocket and heart raced, it was little the times he was this excited about art, specifically biblical art, there wasn't much where he came from. With brisk steps he made his way to the center of the city, where the cathedral was located, anticipation boiling in his blood. He stood at the door, admiring the columns it was built upon, feeling suddenly small. Architecture like this always made him question his existence, his past and ancestors. It was the wonder of art, the wonderful things humans used to do, but now they don't. After paying his ticket he walked in, eyes widening and hair on his arms standing. His steps echoed throughout the interior, -click, clack, skid- and he wasn't capable of muttering a word. He dipped his index finger in holy water, doing the usual cross across his forehead and chest before fully immersing himself in the space. He wasn't a religious person, but he respected it enough to do certain gestures that most others found necessary, almost ritualistic. Dorian ran his hand across a pillar, feeling the rugged cool stone under his fingers. His eyes fixated above.

“Corinthian..”

He whispered, almost as to not disturb whatever had happened in that sacred space. Slowly, step by step he made his way to the front, eyes wandering and darting around from pillar to pillar, taking in every single detail of the ornate building. In front of the altar, he slowly got on his knees, hands clasped together, as if he were to worship. Which in one way he was, but particularly, the art. Suddenly, a pit formed in his stomach, and a fine layer of sweat appeared on his skin, breath hitching. Lately, every time he wandered into a sacred space, his body reacted horribly. His hands grabbed the rail, helping him stand up, at least to move to one row of the pew chairs, seating himself there. He lowered his head, elbows digging into his knees and hands into his skull as the world spun.

“Not again...” He mumbled.

Dorian closed his eyes, faint ringing in his ears.

Dorian, you need to leave. He's close.

With a groan, Dorian decided to listen. As of right now, God was quite pushy, as ill as he physically felt, sometimes God had been rather soothing, helpful even. Although Dorian was pretty sure he was borderline psychotic, if not full blown schizophrenic. Usually he blacked out with the voices, but after that one simple command, every symptom escaped his body and he felt...normal.

He's close. I can hear him.

This voice was the same as the other night, and Dorian didn't like that. He had heard it menacing, threatening, although the little bits and pieces he had gathered from its conversations were like a child slowly discovering the world. He reached into his pocket and took out a small pill bottle, struggling to open the cap with shaky hands. Pill fell onto tongue and it was followed by one dry swallow. He then slid through the crowd until he made his exit.

No! He's... How...find...?

The deep voice started breaking up, and Dorian assumed the pill was finally working. With a sigh of relief, he continued walking, eyes scanning the perimeter just in case he saw someone that looked as much as a lunatic as he assumed he did. After all, he was speaking to himself.

“He's gone. Any other tips?”

No response. With a sigh, he wandered the heated streets of downtown Almeria, on his way to the pier. The pier was his sanctuary, his place of peace and quiet, where he would sit and stare out to the water. Lately, his thoughts were about missing home. He had left two months ago, deciding that studying abroad was a great opportunity, and it had proved him right until now.

Until the voices started. He desperately wanted to go home, but there was only one month left. By the end of August he would be free and hopefully sane. He remembered that day in the church with full clarity, the dizziness, the rapid heart beats, then in Agua Amarga..the first voice appeared. It was more like a combination of voices, all deep, making his soul vibrate. It felt like some superior being was trying to communicate with him, to no avail. He usually tried to ignore it. On the other hand, the second voice appeared recently, bright and urgent, singular and needy. That voice was obviously searching for something, but Dorian assumed it was just the stress getting to him. He never mentioned the voices to anyone, until they got bad. About a week ago, the voices were so prominent in his mind that he couldn't hear his own thoughts. He had the deep voices basically screaming and asking him to leave, whereas the other voice kept on getting louder and closer, almost as if he found his objective. That was the day Dorian went to an emergency psychiatrist.

He was diagnosed with something, not sure with what, so the psychiatrist prescribed him a strong dose of rest and what he wanted to believe was ibuprofen, but the strong kind. Although he knew it wasn't. He was told to take them daily, however, he took them every time he heard the voices. He wasn't the biggest fan of medication. Sometimes the pills worked, sometimes they did not. At this point, he thought he'd get used to them, but the physicality of the apparitions was something he was never prepared for. There didn't seem to be a trigger, and that's what frustrated Dorian the most.

He gazed at the water, waves coming and going. The Mediterranean ocean had no tide, and according to Dorian, the water of the ocean remained the same. Stagnant. To him, it wasn't like a river, always changing and shifting. Although there was movement, for him it was still, much like his life. Dorian knew that he was lucky to have good opportunities given to him, especially after being raised in foster care for the majority of his life. Once he turned eighteen he

left for college, started working and built his way up to the top of the class. He wanted a future, to make a name for himself, but everything seemed like a routine. Wake up, research, class, study, sleep (lose time). Regardless of where he was, what he was doing or who he was with. He reached into his jean pocket, pulling out his phone. In front of him, a couple of birds were perched on the rail and he took a quick picture. With a sigh he stared at the screen.

“Another static thing.” He mumbled.

The roar of the waves hitting the rocks under the pier somehow soothed Dorian’s anxiety about life. Only temporarily. He knew that once he left, the build up would happen again, and the voices would return. He recalled a time where his mind had been silent, back in the U.S. College was indeed stressful, but at least back home he had friends, who gave him the occasional update about life without him. Dorian clicked on the messenger app, scrolling through a few texts he had sent friends, trying to catch the exact moment where his mental health had started to decline.

June 5th, 2022.

Tom: Hey dude! How’s the course going?

Dorian: Hey! Not bad! Went to this awesome museum today.

Tom: Nice! I just got back from my road trip with Rosalie.

Dorian: Nice! Blue Ridge Parkway, right?

July 12, 2022

Tom: Hey, dude. Haven’t heard from you in a week.

July 13, 2022

Tom: Is everything alright?

Tom: I’m worried about you.

July 17, 2022.

Dorian: Sorry, I have a lot going on. Ttyl

July 20,2022

Tom: Dude, it's been 2 days.

Dorian: Sorry...I'll message soon.

And then it was radio silence, although Tom messaged every day.

The decaying social relationships were a complete contrast with the scenery around him.

Bubbly people going to and from on the pier, the tourists taking their pictures but yet again

Dorian couldn't identify with them. He also wasn't a local.

Where did he fall?

CHAPTER 19 -

Tacenda was well aware that the day of his vengeance was near, he knew that his purpose would be fulfilled, but he was still missing that crucial piece to the puzzle: the human. He felt in his bones, in the way the air moved, how the stars seemed to align, that soon, soon he'd have what he wanted. He only had snippets of the voice in his head, a deep yet soothing presence. He had no idea what the man looked like, or if there were any distinct features that could draw them to him. He had basically nothing, other than his voice and the person he cared about, a girl. Tacenda wasn't sure if this voice was meant to accompany him, or become part of him. Or if he was the voice and the voice was him. Jacob had noticed that he indeed was dependent on it, there wasn't a day where Tacenda wouldn't search for it.

Jacob and him walked the streets of the outskirts of Almeria. Tacenda had come up with this plan of making their way towards the pier, he knew he had to be somewhere. After the failure at the train station the other day, Tacenda didn't want to take any more chances. They swept street by street, and while Jacob would point in certain directions (which Tacenda would blindly follow), Tacenda was still tense, mind focusing on hearing any snippets of voices he could hear. Sometimes, he heard similar things to what the human would say, other times he willed himself into hearing what wasn't there. Jacob, on the other hand, was calm wandering from one side of the street to another, stopping to take in the occasional conversation with the elderly. Tacenda just assumed that this was his way of finding things.

While Tacenda stood at the edge of an intersection listening as he does, Jacob pulled him back, frustrated, brows furrowed deep into the center of his face.

“Can we take a minute to eat? We been runnin’ around for hours! I’m starvin’!” His grip tightened around the fallen’s shoulder.

Tacenda noticed that Jacob seemed tense, his shoulders were raised, his other hand in a fist. Even his eyes were wide and had a certain...wildness to them. The fallen tilted his head, wrinkled his nose and veered his sight towards the side street.

“We’re close, I can sense it, Jacob.”

“He ain’t goin’ anywhere! I *need* food, or else ya can do it without me!”

With a sigh, Tacenda shook his hand off of his shoulder and pointed at a small restaurant on the road they had just walked down.

“We can go there. But make it quick!”

Jacob beamed a smile before turning around and walking towards the place. Once in the restaurant, at a table with their drinks, Jacob decided to order half of the menu, and asked the waiter to bring it out whenever a plate was done. The waiter nodded and walked away.

“What did you do that for?!” Tacenda’s voice cracked slightly, in an attempt to not seem mad.

“I told ya I needed food. Ya didn’t listen to good ol’ Jacob” he tilted his lips to the side and cocked a brow, figuring it would be a good idea to bother the fallen a bit.

“That doesn’t mean order everything of this paper...” A faint grumble escaped his throat.

“Well, yer gonna eat too! You lookin’ like a sick chicken, all skin and bones” Jacob gestured with his right hand, pointing towards the body of Tacenda.

Tacenda looked at himself, the bridge of nose wrinkling softly while his brows furrowed, deep in thought. “I do not look like that vile creature.”

“Then yer gonna eat!”

The waiter brought plate after plate, while Jacob consumed like a ravenous animal. Food falling from the corners of his mouth, splashing and crunching sounds as he stuffed his cheeks. Tacenda was sure he probably unhinged his jaw like a snake at some point during the meal. He

had a few bites here and there, but he was more amazed with how much Jacob was putting in his system. Over the days they had spent together, he had seen Jacob eat, but not that much. Tacenda didn't take this as a coincidence. Having been 'above' himself, he was very conscious about the other winged beings putting things in motion. If Jacob was eating this much, only someone above could have caused it. Nothing happened naturally in this world.

A few hours had passed and Tacenda's leg was bouncing quickly, up and down in a frantic and physical manner of exposing his anxiety and impatience. Jacob noticed this and slowly stood up after paying. He patted his stomach a few times, before stretching, arms raised towards the ceiling and let out a groan.

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAGH. That hit the spot. Ready to go kid?”

Tacenda's dark eye grew even darker, fist clenched as annoyance (an emotion he had become all too familiar with) surfaced.

“You're doing this on purpose. I know it.”

Jacob grimaced, raising his right hand to his chest, over his heart. “Me? I dunno what yer talkin' about.”

“No. Not you...Them.” Tacenda pointed subtly with his index towards the sky.

Jacob rolled his eyes, starting to walk out of the building, followed by Tacenda, who now hugged his body with his arms.

“They couldn't have found out, right? Jacob. Hey. Listen. They couldn't have...”

“Listen, they know what we're doin'. Remember I was in yer shoes a long time ago. I dunno what they got planned, but it ain't gonna be pretty.”

I'm so over this...

Tacenda almost immediately whipped his head to the side, pupil of his one good eye growing wide. His heart pounded in his ears. It was *him*. He was close. It was *time*. Jacob, on the other hand, sighed, grabbing Tacenda by the arm.

“Don’t regret this. You could still live a good life without this.”

“Jacob, I *have* to do this. We’re connected. It was meant to be.” Tacenda wiggled his way out of Jacob’s grasp and started running. Jacob closely followed.

If it’s not Lucille busy with exams...It’s my grades.

As they approached the market by the waterfront, more and more people gathered. To Tacenda, they seemed to all spawn in the same area, although he was well aware that they were mostly tourists or locals getting their shopping fix, but something just seemed off. Noise was everywhere, drilling inside his head. If it wasn’t the waves crashing against the shore, it was a kid screaming, or a group of friends talking.

What’s that guy...

“Jacob! He has to be here!”

Tacenda pushed through a group of people, leaving Jacob behind apologizing to them. Then, he saw a head rushing through the crowd. This person was pushing people left and right, and although he couldn’t see his face, he could tell with how he moved that he was indeed distraught.

“You...”

The fallen then started rushing, heart beating so fast that even the voice faded and that being the only thing he could hear. *Ba dum, ba dum, ba dum*, as he approached, it only went faster and faster. People screamed around him, cursing his existence for running that way in a multitude, but Tacenda didn’t care. He was there and that’s all he needed. Jacob lingered behind, watching the events unfold, fists clenched.

“I cannot let this happen again...”

CHAPTER 20 -

Nightfall rolled by and Dorian still hadn't moved. His eyes fixated on the water in the distance. He blinked several times, coming to, eyes opening and limbs raised above his head with a long and very much needed stretch. After all, his body was awaking from a statue-like state. Hands on his thighs he pushed himself up, hair swishing in the late breeze. Temperatures had dropped as usual and he noticed a figure standing at the edge of the pier, staring straight at him. Lucille had told him to avoid the pier at night. The time on his phone read 1:00am. With quick steps he started to walk away, towards the city, and the figure followed. Every time he stopped, the figure stopped. Dorian tried to ignore it, knowing that it would take him roughly twenty minutes to get to his apartment. Hands in his pockets he started to approach the crowd that surrounded the market, glancing once over his shoulder. The figure was now a man, and he was gaining on him. Dorian's palms were sweaty, hands shaking, his heart pumping blood quickly through his veins. His mouth dried up, and he felt the sudden urge to vomit. Quickly he moved, shuffling through the market in hopes that the man would stop following. If it weren't enough (he assumed it was panic induced) the voices started chiming in, sending the world spinning. Dorian started running, pushing people from one side to the other.

Dorian, hide!

He started panting, chest and lungs desperate for air. God was guiding him, telling him to turn, run, jump. But no clear direction. No clear way to be saved. The other voice, that he had learned to hate and decided to call Satan, kept on creeping up. Getting closer, louder, head pounding with only the urgent tone of his voice.

Jacob! I can hear him! He has to be here!

Dorian, go! Leave!

Tears rolled down his cheeks, crashing against the ground. He stumbled, audible sob.

This way!

Wrong way!

Hurry!

Dorian crashed against a man, both tumbling to the ground. The voices quieted, the world stopped and Dorian could only hear his heartbeat. He sat up, trying to stop squishing the stranger. The stranger sat up, eyes directly staring at the brunette's face.

“You...”

Dorian recognized the voice, it was the same one that was in his head, it was Satan. He moved to the side, hurled over the bushes and vomited, side effects of anxiety and panic. The stranger stood up, and a friend of his caught up, placing a hand on his shoulder to hold him back. The roads were suddenly empty.

“Jacob, it’s him.” The taller of the two spoke.

The man named Jacob glanced over towards the deplorable figure vomiting in the bushes, nose wrinkled.

“He’s supposed to be the one that helps you?”

Dorian turned around, still shaking.

“You know me...?” Dorian’s voice was shaking, as well was the rest of his body.

Jacob then walked over to Dorian, extending his hand in an attempt to introduce himself, possibly calm him down.

“I’m Jacob. And this is Tacenda. We...kind of know you.”

Dorian’s eyes darted from one man to the other, gently grasping with his clammy and sweaty palm Jacob’s hand.

“I’m Dorian...But...How?”

Tacenda took a step forward, eyes dark, face like solid rock, stern and observant.

“Is there somewhere we can talk? We’re being followed.”

Tacenda then gestured with his head, slightly to the side, curls bouncing lightly against his forehead. Dorian then turned in that direction, in a not so discreet manner, noticing that the man that had been following him was behind a tree, staring at their interaction. The brunette cleared his throat, turning his back to the two strangers that he so quickly seemed to trust and started walking. He wasn’t familiar with the parks of Almeria, but he assumed that the teens that were hanging out wouldn’t mind a few young adults in the corner talking in a foreign language.

Dorian paced back and forth, while the two men took a seat at a bench in front of him. He constantly ran his hands across his face, in hopes to wake up possibly from this never ending dream that the night had presented. Of course whoever saw him pacing knew he was either paranoid or something serious was going on. He simply assumed that everyone could see the two figures with him (and they could) but yet again, Dorian was still unaware of the plan.

Tacenda stared with his one good eye, letting out a faint sigh. Jacob was the first to speak.

“You’ve been hearing voices, am I correct?”

Dorian, stopped in his tracks, head whipping towards Jacob. “How..How did-

“Because it’s happening to Tacenda as well. He *heard* you since his fall. Although, I’m imagining there’s another one in there?” Jacob lifted his right hand, pointing towards Dorian’s head.

Dorian nodded, whilst Jacob let out a small chuckle. As he opened his mouth to speak, Tacenda interrupted.

“You’re going to help me defeat Mr. Mystical.”

Jacob pushed Tacenda slightly, letting out a deep groan.

“Who is Mr. Mystical, and why do you need me?”

“You can’t just tell him that man! You’re gonna sound insane! Mr. Mystical...is well, the Creator.”

Dorian stopped in his tracks, letting out one singular laugh.

“This is it, I’ve lost it. I’m done for. Insane.”

“No, Tacenda..He doesn’t have a way with words. We need your help.” Jacob pleaded.

“Help? You two aren’t even real! Not here! Non-existent!” Dorian’s voice cracked.

“We’re very much real.” Tacenda said, while clenching his jaw. “I need your help. We’re connected, two pieces of the same game. I hear you, you hear me. It was meant to be, that’s all.” Tacenda wrinkled his nose, standing up to confront Dorian. Tacenda was slightly taller than him, more built, definitely he thought Tacenda was more good looking. The fallen angel poked his chest with his index finger, causing the human to back up.

“Listen, I have been all over the place, looking for you. You have no choice but to help.”

“With what?! Even if you were real, I wouldn’t help just two random strangers!”

Jacob stood up, pulling Tacenda back so he could sit. His eyes were fixated on Dorian.

“Listen, Tacenda’s had a hard time. He..uh.” Jacob’s lip quivered, memories of his past flooding him. “He’s a creature. Well. A fallen one. Cast away.”

Dorian’s mouth was left slightly ajar. “Yeah, sure, okay. I’m out.” He turned around and started to walk off. Jacob followed, after glaring at Tacenda, who complied and stayed still. Jacob trotted behind Dorian, grabbing him by the arm.

“It sounds crazy, I know. But believe me, we *need* your help.”

CHAPTER 21 -

Dorian was sure that he had lost his mind. In the hotel room of Jacob and Tacenda, he sat on the bed, hand placed on his left temple, massaging, more so putting pressure on the area due to his headache. One voice still remained and at this point it was loud, searing in the back of his head almost trying to drill a hole to make its way out. His skin felt clammy, losing all color and the panic that had set in earlier was still present in his system, pumping adrenaline through his veins keeping him alert.

Leave. Don't trust them.

The human sighed, while both strangers stood in front of him, arms crossed and towering over.

“Listen, I know we sound crazy, but this guy has been lookin’ for ya since his fall” Jacob mumbled, ending up taking a seat next to Dorian, who shifted uncomfortably in his spot.

“You and me, we need to finish Mr. Mystical.” Tacenda interjected, crouching in front of Dorian, placing a hand on his knee.

“Who the hell is this Mystical guy? Like...Why me?”

“Do ya hear voices? Like...this guy tellin’ ya to go?”

Dorian, stop.

Dorian nodded softly, hand running across his face.

“He sent me away, and we need to end this.” Tacenda looked up at Dorian, healthy eye burning into the others.

Dorian, don't listen to him.

“Ye, so that voice? The all mysterious one, Mr.Mystical. The other one was this guy right here” Jacob pointed to the sky then to Tacenda.

“So...What you’re telling me is that Tacenda, that’s your name, right? Could hear me, and that’s how he knew to find me? And this Mystical dude is trying to get me away from you?”

Jacob nodded letting out a sigh.

“Wouldn’t that mean he’s protecting me? Why should I trust you?”

“Do ye remember anything about your childhood? Like, have distinct memories of it?”

Dorian sat for a minute in silence, hands clenching on the sides of his body. His stomach churned, bile pooling in the back of his throat. He didn’t remember a thing.

“My earliest memory is leaving the foster home...”

“That’s because ye didn’t have a past boy.”

Tacenda ended up standing, walking to a side of the room, eyes peering outside from the drawn curtains. Then, Dorian heard it again.

That’s not true. You lived.

They’re lying.

Dorian, please. Go.

Dorian.

Dorian.

Dorian.

The human tilted his head forward, raising both hands towards the back of his head, squeezing tightly, pulling his hair. He felt the world spinning beneath his feet, closed eyes darting from side to side in an attempt to keep himself grounded. Jacob placed a hand on his, removing it from his deathly grip.

“He talkin’ to ya?”

Tacenda whipped his head towards Dorian, almost running across the room. The fallen’s hands gripped his shoulders, forcing the human to look up.

“What is he saying? Tell me!” He shook Dorian slightly.

“Hey, Tacenda, back off.” Jacob pushed the fallen away. “He’s already stressin’ out.”

“He’s saying...you’re lying. That I need to go.”

NO! WHY WOULD YOU TELL HIM?!

Jacob let out a dry chuckle, crossing his arms over his chest. He pulled out his phone, looking on the virtual map for the nearest place with few people. It was roughly 3:00 am and the city was quiet. He had an idea of where to go, and getting there would be fairly easy. The street lights flickered, orange hues now filtering through the windows of the hotel room. The air suddenly seemed stagnant, and their breaths grew hot. Dorian was uncomfortable with the silence that now surrounded them, his right leg bouncing up and down in an attempt to calm himself down. Tacenda, on the other hand, seemed energized. He was standing up straight, swaying his arms softly back and forth, waiting.

“I’ll show you.” Tacenda then spoke, lurking next to Dorian. He pulled up his shirt and showed Dorian his back. Right by his shoulder blades were two bright pink scars, big and deep enough to have held some substantial weight. “There were my wings. He took them from me.”

Dorian stood, focusing on those scars. Gently, he placed his fingers on one of them, running across it softly.

“Just making sure it’s real.” He mumbled when he noticed Tacenda tense up. “Do we have a plan?”

Tacenda sighed, faint breath escaping his lips as he turned around. He ran a hand through his messy hair as he leaned against the table in the room, sight avoiding looking at Dorian. Jacob, on the other hand, sat next to the human, placing a hand on his back.

“It came to him in a dream.” Jacob mentioned, softly, almost trying to allow Dorian to process.

“I...Dorian.” Tacenda sighed, finally looking straight at the man. “You need to die, in order for it to end.”

“Excuse me, what?”

“A sacrifice.” Interjected Jacob. “As well as Tacenda. Supposedly, you’ll both appear where *he* is, and that’s where it will happen.”

Dorian’s face drained all color as he stood up and quickly made his way to the door. Tacenda put himself in between, hands with a stone firm grip on his shoulders, impeding further movement.

“It’ll just keep happening. More you will come, more me, more Jacob. He’ll keep playing, destroying. Dorian, we *need* to stop this.” Tacenda’s good eye glimmered with plea. “There has to be a way to make you stay...”

“Knowing that I’m going to die?” Dorian’s voice cracked, higher pitch ringing in the room “Why would I willingly die?! I have a whole life ahead of me, and you just...you just want to take it away?!”

“I’d do it for humanity. I’d willingly die to save the humans, or a human I cared about.” Tacenda’s tone was cold, firm. He removed his hands from Dorian’s shoulders, stepping aside to let him leave if he truly wanted to. “If we don’t do this now, you’ll live this again. And again. And again.”

Jacob softly nodded, locks of hair bouncing. “The big guy has something out for you kid. I don’t know why, but you’re his special plaything.”

Dorian turned, looking at Jacob, eyes wide.

“He told me. Ever felt *deja vu*? Like you’ve lived this before? It’s because you have. This is the furthest another one of my kind has gotten to ending him.”

Silence reigned in the room after Jacob spoke. Uncomfortable and thick, almost as if one of the three could rip out a piece of tension fog from thin air and the fog would still hold its shape. Dorian's breathing got heavy and shaky, chest bouncing as he opened and closed his fists. He rubbed the palms of his hands against his thighs as his eyes were glued on the red tile of the floor of the hotel room. His mind thought about everything and nothing, every possible direction his mind could take would then suddenly shift, turning it on its back and pointing somewhere else. Dorian's mouth was horribly dry as he moved his tongue against the raspy inside of his cheek.

"So... We go, off ourselves and then appear with God?" Dorian asked, voice caught in his throat.

"Sort of, yes."

"And then it's over?"

"And then it's over."

"Where do we go, for this thing?"

"Where the Void meets the Earth."

"I know where to go." Jacob mumbled. "La Playa de los Muertos. Beach of the Dead. It seems like the only place with no people at this time of night, where the sky connects with the ocean. Where there's mountains and ground."

"I know where that is. I went there on my first weekend here." Dorian mumbled.

Dorian, you have failed me.

Dorian grimaced, shoulders close to his ears, hands holding on to the front of his shirt. Had he deceived Mr. Mystical? Was he cast out just like Tacenda supposedly was? Tacenda then made his way to the door, swinging it open wide, hitting the wall and making a small indent in the cement.

"Let's go. We're running out of time."

Dorian hadn't made his mind and before he could protest, Tacenda had grabbed him by the arm, pulling him out of the room and towards the end.

CHAPTER 22 -

Luckily enough Jacob had access to the truck that brought the creature and him to Almeria in the first place. He signaled for Dorian and him to get in the bed while he drove. Dorian was reluctant to go. Initially he had no intention of following along, but if those two were lying, how did they know about the voices he heard? Tacenda sat in front of him, hands pressed together on his lap. Dorian could tell the fallen was tense, the muscles on his arms were bulked out, veins traveling down his forearm, clear sign of the tension. He really didn't know what to say. Tacenda (in Dorian's eyes) seemed too set on 'finishing it all' whatever this 'all' was. They hadn't given him a clear plan, nor really explained why Tacenda was on this mission. It's almost as if Dorian had a chain in his chest that Tacenda was pulling and not letting him go. He felt like he had no choice in this situation, and maybe for once, he was okay with that. Dorian had been staring at Tacenda, specifically at his white eye, although he wasn't aware that he was doing that.

"I was created like this. With the eye." Tacenda mentioned.

"O-oh, I...Sorry. I didn't realize I was staring."

Tacenda shook his head, finally unclenching his jaw and relaxing his hands.

"It's fine. I've gotten many stares since I've arrived. I hope you know, you were meant for this."

Dorian wrinkled his nose and looked away towards the road. He wasn't sure whether he believed in Tacenda's words or not. The only truth he had, is that somehow they were connected. In its darkness he couldn't make out the shapes of trees or bushes, not even the city lights they were leaving behind. The world was shutting them out. A faint valley fog rolling behind them, and catching up quickly. Soon enough, the truck had been engulfed by these land clouds.

"You'll be okay. This is his way of telling us we're going in the right direction."

Dorian still didn't answer. His heart dropped, sank straight into his stomach, at least that where he could feel his racing heart beat. If this was real, what had been of his life? Short and rapid breaths started escaping the human, chest heaving and desperate for air. His palms glistened with sweat as Jacob pulled into a parking lot on the top of a cliff. Faint sounds of waves crashing against a rocky beach surfaced and traveled through the air, but other than that, the world was eerily silent.

August 8th.

Dorian: Lucille, if you see this, I just wanted to let you know I'll miss you.

The message never sent. Jacob got out of the truck, slamming the door shut, hand still on his truck as he walked to the bed to open it up.

"Alright. We're here. Let's head on down." Jacob's voice cracked.

Tacenda pursed his lips, jumping off the truck, scanning his friend. He could read humans fairly well, and Jacob hit many of the marks he had learned from the family he observed. The way he spoke was unusual, suddenly formal, his eyes wouldn't remain on the person he was talking to, and the information he was giving was slim to none. He waited for Dorian to get off the truck to then head to the small trail that would lead them down into the cliff surrounded beach. The last time Dorian was here, people wandered back and forth, collecting rocks, shells, and other small creatures. They ate, drank, swam in shallow waters, they ran, played games and basically lived life. How was this the place where it all would happen? As they wandered down the trail, the sound of waves grew stronger, almost as if the Earth was trying to capture them. Once they stepped on the stone beach, the wind picked up, the front part of their shirts clinging to their skin, the back part flapping. Tacenda made his way to the front of the group, pushing against the wind. Ever since Mr. Mystical last spoke to Dorian, he hadn't returned. Jacob lingered in the middle,

trying to catch up to Tacenda. Right on the shoreline they stopped, Dorian still struggling to get closer.

Dorian watched the pair, right as he noticed in Jacob's right hand a small glistening thing. His eyes widened and as he tried to run closer to the fallen, a gust of wind pushed him back.

“TACENDA WATCH OUT!”

The fallen turned just as Jacob bent down and ran towards him, tackling him to the ground. Tacenda let out a gasp, breath leaving his chest, trying to regain the oxygen that left.

“Tacenda... I can't let you do this!” Jacob raised the blade, in one hand, his free hand pushing the fallen against the ground by his neck.

Tacenda bent his legs, and raised his arms, trying to push Jacob off. Dorian finally made his way to the two, arms wrapping around Jacob pulling him back. The human landed on his back, Jacob placed on top. Dorian wasn't the strongest, so holding Jacob down wasn't an easy task. Tacenda reacted quickly, jumping on the two. He straddled Jacob, grabbing his wrists and placing them to the sides of his body, this way pinning him quite literally to Dorian.

“GRAB HIS KNIFE” Tacenda screamed over the sound of crashing waves.

Dorian let go of Jacob, wiggling his way out from underneath him. Jacob was screaming, nothing coherent, just a conglomerate of sounds and noises trying to break through Tacenda's stone grip. Since the fallen hadn't been on Earth for a long time, his bodily structure was still one of a creature, like he used to be. Once one was trapped by him, it was nearly impossible to get out. Dorian scrambled to the side of Jacob, feet slipping in the rocks, and grabbed the knife. At this point the waves were strong enough to reach the three of them, icy cold salt water rushing over their bodies.

“Why Jacob? You were supposed to help!” Tacenda's eyes filled with tears, and a faint sob broke through his chest.

Tacenda had never cried like this before. He had experienced a similar emotion when the creatures ripped his wings, but this was new, cold, vile. Whatever warmth he had towards Jacob had now frozen over and rotted. He grabbed the knife out of Dorian's hands, who was kneeling next to them in the water, shaking, unsure if it was the cold, the wind or the sheer fear.

“He's gonna kill you all. I warned you! He'll be here! Creator! I did what you have asked! Let me return!”

“We could have done this together! You know this! Why now?”

Jacob let out a maniacal laugh, loud, high pitched and ear searing. His body relaxed, and he raised his head, just to get a better look at the creature that had him pinned to the ground.

“He's already coming, don't you feel it?”

Tacenda scrunched his face, brows pointing downward, meeting in the middle, eye sharp, dark, mouth tightened in a straight line. He wasn't going to let Jacob speak more nonsense. He didn't need him, he had the human.

“Tacenda, please, don't” Dorian reached toward them, but Tacenda had already made up his mind. His fingers tightened around the blade and without a second thought he dug it deep into Jacob's neck, blood starting to gush out.

Dorian let out a guttural scream, hands on his own cheeks. His stomach turned into a bubbling mess and before he could stop it, he emptied the contents into the water next to him. Tacenda on the other hand turned the knife and pulled it out, splatters of the red liquid covering his hand, and finally letting go of the body. Jacob, who had the faintest fight for life in him, reached towards Tacenda, in an attempt to grip his wrist, body failing at the last second and falling to the ground.

“You're going to regret this...”

Tacenda raised, ignoring Jacob's last words. He bent over, grabbing Dorian's arm pulling him up. Dorian tried pushing him away, the fallen's fingers digging deeper into his flesh, acute pain running up his arm.

"Tacenda...LET GO! YOU KILLED HIM!"

This was Dorian's first time seeing a body, his first time seeing someone *kill* another person. Tacenda, with his jaw clenched, let go of Dorian, just to push Jacob's corpse onto his stomach. He raised his shirt and pointed at the two scars on his shoulder blades. Then, he grabbed Dorian's chin and forced him to look.

"He was me at some point and he did nothing. He deserved to die."

Dorian broke loose, scanning Jacob's back, then looking straight at Tacenda. He pushed him, although Tacenda didn't move.

"No one deserves to die..."

Tacenda scoffed, tossing the knife to the side, before grabbing Dorian again, pulling him towards the giant rock that stayed in the middle of the beach.

"We need to go this way," Tacenda grumbled.

Dorian tripped over his feet as he walked, the valley fog now making its way onto the beach. The whiteness surrounded them, as the darkness above pressed even darker and deeper. The closer they got to the rock, the more violent the waves got, the thicker the fog rolled in and the darker the sky above turned. At this point, to Dorian, it was pitch black.

Dorian, Tacenda, you will not survive.

CHAPTER 23-

Tacenda pulled Dorian to the giant volcanic rock at the right edge of the beach, dark eye somehow glistening despite there being no light. The wind was violent, the small rocks from the sand flying in all directions, causing Dorian to cover his face.

“We need to go up.” Tacenda loosened his grip on Dorian, dropping the bloody knife in his other hand into the water.

“Up? Climb this thing?!” Dorian stumbled, tripping over the bigger rock surrounding the boulder.

The fallen didn't reply. Instead, he climbed a few rocks, before clinging to the rugged side of the boulder. He pushed his hair back, finally taking the first step towards climbing. Instead of going up on the side where the waves were violently crashing, he went up the dryer side. His fingers clenched the rock, slowly making his way to the top. As he got higher, the wind pushed them down, further and further, stronger and stronger, in an attempt to get them off the rock. Despite the attempts of mother nature, Tacenda made it to the top. Dorian soon followed. His fingertips bloody from the volcanic rock cutting into the delicate skin of his hands. He huffed his way upwards, legs giving out when he stepped in false. Tacenda tackled the climb with relative ease, however Dorian, lacking the physical ability the fallen had, took frequent breaks as he made his way to the top. They had both made the 230 foot climb successfully. When he reached the top, Tacenda was covering his face with both arms, tumbling slightly backwards, and Dorian swore if he leaned forward, the wind wouldn't let him fall.

Almost crawling, hands still gripping the porous rock, parts of it digging into his legs, he made his way to Tacenda, finally kneeling beside him.

HOW DARE YOU DEFY ME

The voice dug into both of their heads, dark, thick, causing pressure in Dorian's mind. Tacenda, on the other hand, embraced it. He opened his arms wide, raising his head to the sky, a vicious smile appearing on his face.

“You did this to me! You will pay!”

Where did I go wrong with you? Out of all my creations, you were the epitome of all that is good. The utmost of my potential.

“ And I'll make sure to be your last. You created me in your image and now it's time to create mine in yours.” Tacenda interrupted.

Dorian's ears rang, a strong singular tone that grew louder as they both spoke. His breath hitched, having a hard time catching it, not only because of the climb, but because somehow, the air seemed thinner, although he deemed that impossible, from what he understood it was fourteen thousand feet. He brought his hands to cover his ears, trying to wish away the ringing, feeling a warm wet liquid escaping from both. Eyes glossed over, he brought his hands close to his face, trying to see, noticing the sticky red liquid, then, he felt the same coming from his nose.

“Tacenda...” He called.

The creature turned towards the noise, crouching then in front of him, getting close to his face, good eye squinting. When he noticed the blood, his body turned cold, skin prickled and raised.

“No..no. LEAVE HIM ALONE” The angel then stood and turned to the sky. He received no answer.

It was then, when the clouds opened into a tunnel surrounding them and the rock, still thick and dark, showcasing images Tacenda was all too familiar with. From the sky, streaks of orange, red, yellow started falling, crashing heavy into the Earth. With each fireball that passed, the ringing grew louder, and Dorian found himself crouched over on the rock. Tacenda hadn't

come up with a plan, nor an idea on how to destroy Mr. Mystical. He had figured that he would personify himself, they would fight hands on, and Dorian could go home at the end of the day. He failed to realize Mr. Mystical controlled it all, the water, the wind, the sky. Everything that Tacenda and Dorian had known had been created by him and now would be destroyed. The streaks of light grew stronger, and slowly closed into the rock. Dorian couldn't even flinch. Tacenda grabbed him, pulled the mostly deadweight human onto his shoulder and ran. Not knowing exactly where he came from, or where he was going, he solely relied on the sound of the sea to guide him towards safety. The wind switched, pushing them further in the direction Tacenda was heading, until he reached the ledge of the boulder. Behind him, the fireballs fell closer and closer to them, until one hit the rock, sending shards of hot volcanic residue in the sky.

LEAVE HIM TACENDA.

DORIAN, THIS IS YOUR PURPOSE.

DORIAN.

DORIAN.

The human raised his head the slightest bit, slowly fading in and out of consciousness. His hands gripped Tacenda, and unable to speak he thrashed a few times, before causing them to both fall into the water below.

Compared to the pleasant seventy degrees that the water usually was in the summer, when they crashed into one of the waves, it was like ice stabbing into their bodies. During the fall, Tacenda had let go of Dorian, in an attempt to land in the water safely. Both sinking deep beneath the waves, the world seemed at peace, despite the chaos that reigned above them. Tacenda soon surfaced, hair clinging to his face as he took in a deep breath, head frantically spinning and turning, looking for Dorian, the piece to his puzzle.

“DORIAN?! WHERE ARE YOU?!”

He fought against the waves that slowly grew in size, feet not quite reaching the sea bed. Under the water, he felt a certain pull, pulling him deeper into the Mediterranean. The wind had stopped, the tunnel disappeared, but the darkness remained. With every breath, his lungs captured small gulps of salt water, his body reacting with a wet cough in hopes to help him survive. In the distance, Dorian surfaced, arms thrashing back and forth. Even though Mr. Mystical had stopped speaking to them, his presence still affected the human. His skin was dull, his eyes bloodshot. The pressure his sheer presence caused, pushing Dorian under every wave that threatened to bring him under. Any strength he had climbing the boulder was now gone, body slowly falling under the waves. He was too far from the shore, and Tacenda attempted to reach him, the waves (or Mr. Mystical) wasn't letting him.

“TACEN-”

Every time Dorian tried speaking, a wave would crash into him, filling his lungs with salty water; his throat burned as if a thousand needles had been plunged into it. Soon enough, he was pulled under, not only by the current, but also by losing strength. Cold water filled his lungs and blood pounded behind his eyes. Tacenda could only partially watch. Finally, Dorian didn't resurface.

“WHY?!” Tacenda was able to scream.

Surrounding the fallen, a deep laugh vibrated his bones, as the current shifted under him, slowly starting to spin in circles that little by little were picking up speed, trapping Tacenda in the middle. All by himself, bare to the world, hands rolling over tissue, tendon and bone he got dragged into the deep water. Ice cold soon filled his insides, as he looked up one last time beneath the surface, sinking slowly and deeper into the void. He saw the exit, but no longer had the strength to survive. Mr. Mystical had won. As the two men sunk to the depths of Beach of the Dead, the sky parted, showing the hues of pink, orange, yellow and deep blue, sun rising and

greeting the world. The waves relaxed and the fog rolled across the water, disappearing into the horizon. Peace seemed to have returned to the small secluded beach. The remnants of the fireballs dissipated, as if they were never there and the first hikers of the morning embarked on the trail leading to the beach. Jacob, who had faded away in the hands of a vindictive and resentful angel, found his place again with Mr. Mystical. In the end, those who fall perish, and the cursed cycle begins again.

FIN.

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