

[Fractured Heart: The Tale of the Pop Star and the Pauper]

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~Chapter Six~
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Thank god for poor Matt, who had no idea he was all that kept World War 3 from breaking out in the back seat of his Toyota hybrid.

All the long way back to their apartment, Siti kept up her air of civility, asking Matt how his night was going, how long he'd been working as a rideshare driver, if he had a partner and kids, and so on. Theo stayed silent, partly from exhaustion and partly because he was struggling to think of anything he might say in his defense when she *did* finally unleash on him. "*Sorry, I thought it'd be enn-bee-dee that I never told you I was signing a contract to collaborate with a massive celebrity we already decided we hated when we briefly saw him a month ago*" hardly seemed like it would work.

Even though gratuity was built into the app to be paid by whoever had called the ride, Siti paid their driver a little extra anyway, saying how grateful she was for his kind and careful service. The middle-aged man almost blushed at that,

thanking her with a big smile before he drove off, leaving them on the street just outside of their apartment complex.

Then, at last, she rounded on Theo, and her eyes were blazing.

“*Why*,” she began, spitting each word like a dragon breathing fire, “Didn’t you *tell me*?”

“I...” Theo faltered, cringing as he cast a brief glance about themselves, as if anyone passing through Los Angeles would really care if a goth/emo/??? Asian guy and furious Indian-American girl were arguing on the sidewalk. “I d-didn’t...I was a-afraid you’d...”

“What? Disapprove of you associating with him?” Siti scoffed, folding her arms as she rolled her eyes dramatically. “Yeah, probably. But can you blame me? *You never told me Lysander Delion was cool!*”

He blinked at that, although a small part of him wanted to hiss at her not to say the celebrity’s name aloud as if it might summon a horde of fangirls to pester them for Lysander’s address. “He’s...c-cool?”

“Yeah!” Siti shook her head at him as if he’d said something nonsensical. “He’s nothing like the tabloids make him seem...I mean, I guess that’s to be expected, but still. I know we were, let’s say, not nice when we first saw him at Halo, but obviously *something* changed your opinion of him since then or you wouldn’t have agreed to go to his apartment in the first place, and I guess I’m just...I’m hurt that you think I’d be so judgmental that I’d be unwilling to give him a second chance.”

That *was* it, actually—at least, the bulk of why he hadn’t told her. Because despite his best intentions, he was coming to *like* Lysander, and Theo wanted his best friend to like him too.

“S-sorry,” he mumbled finally, frowning as he watched her seething slowly abate to a mere death glower. “I...I guess you’re r-right.” It still felt exceedingly strange to be defending Lysander Delion of all people, a larger-than-life figure

that he'd only met, what, four times now? And only truly spoken to twice...at least in person. DMs didn't count.

The last of her enraged panting eased, and she dismissed him with a final snort before turning heel and striking out for their apartment, Theo falling guiltily into step behind her. Maybe that was all it took for her to get over being angry at him? He could only hope so.

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Two days later, he received a strange text at nearly three in the morning, setting off the cat meowing sound effect just as he'd collapsed in bed after working back to back shifts between the warehouse and concert venue. Groaning, he pulled the phone slowly from the bedside table where he hadn't even found the energy to plug it into the wall yet, and stared blurrily at the screen until he could parse out the meaning of the horribly spelled text—or at least try to.

hey. u up? i got smthn 4 u

It sounded like a spam text—one of those “area girls hot for you now” ones that managed to get through the spam filter now and then. The contact name was unfamiliar... “LD.” Then, at last, he fought through his exhaustion to remember putting in the contact number—duh. It was Lysander. Only he'd hesitated to put the singer in the phone under his actual name out of a paranoid fear that if someone ever stole Theo's phone, they'd lift Lysander's number from it and post it to the internet or something and then he'd be blamed.

Still...Christ, famous celebrity or not, didn't Lysander have *any* manners? Too tired to bother with niceties, Theo texted back, *It's 3 am. I need sleep.*

A long pause, then his phone meowed again, buzzing twice where he was still holding it in front of his face while lying on his stomach in bed.

shit! Came the text, followed by an animated gif of a cartoon dog looking sad and bowing in apology. *sry, didn't notice. been on a binge.*

Binge? Drug binge? Lysander hadn't *seemed* like a druggie, but then, he was a major figure in the entertainment world where it was pretty much expected that every member had to go through at least *one* period of cocaine addiction or you weren't considered a real celebrity. Concern had his eyebrows drawn together as he couldn't help glancing to the tattoo on the inside of his wrist on the same hand currently holding his phone—a small, stylized outline of a panda face next to the date 2019. Shuddering, he tried not to let his worry show as he texted back, *Guess all those "not even once" high school PSAs didn't work after all.*

A laughing duck emoji meowed, then, *not that kind, silly. i mean video binge. look.*

A link followed at the end of the text, so Theo clicked on it and a video started playing—it was an EDM song set over some kind of psychedelic animation of the shape of a nude woman made of glowing white neon light, writhing rhythmically in impressive mo-cap to the beat of the song. Maybe he was just incredibly tired, but the video was mesmerizing—he watched it through all the way without realizing it, and the eerie, melodic voice that had woven into the synths and reverbs and other sound effects still echoed in his mind.

That was beautiful, he texted back finally, and he meant it.

rite? A long pause, then, *thts wat i want our music 2 feel like.*

"Our music." Theo smiled despite himself, rolling onto his backside and resting the phone on his chest while still wearing his soft smile. He was almost asleep when the phone meowed once more. Blinking, he lifted the phone up before him, and butterflies exploded annoyingly in his stomach.

n e wayz, sry 4 waking u. goodnite, Theo.

"Goodnight, Theo," Lysander had murmured as Theo had left his apartment two days prior, the blonde's breath warm and sweet against his skin as he'd held the door open for Theo to slip beneath his arm.

Ahh, fuck. This was getting bad.

Willing the electric shock that had shot through him at the memory to dissipate, Theo used both hands to hold the phone steady as he texted back, *Goodnight*.

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The text cursor in the half-written Friendlink post blinked back at Theo as he stared indecisively at it, hesitating for way too long with his mouse resting over the “publish” button.

He’d booked another DJ gig—this time at an even smaller but less sketchy hole-in-the-wall venue called The Bat Cave he’d played at only once before. It would be his first show since he’d met Lysander outside of the last one, and right before he’d clicked to publish a post about it to his DJ Friendlink page, he found himself dreading whether the celebrity would sneak into the show again—or how disappointed Theo would be if he didn’t.

Forcing himself to click “publish,” Theo then pushed away from his small desk topped with a laptop, then glared at his phone for a moment before drafting a text.

I have a gig next week, at a place called The Bat Cave, on Reed St. Might as well be honest up front—Lysander could easily just “stalk” him on his Friendlink page anyway, so at least this way he could find out if the singer was planning to show up or not.

Lysander didn’t respond immediately, and Theo tried not to feel disappointed, forcing himself to work on other things like looking online for new royalty-free sound effects to experiment with. Of course he couldn’t expect the celebrity to reply right away every time Theo texted him—he was as busy as Theo was, probably busier, just on different kinds of projects.

Finally, while Theo was heating ramen up for dinner—he tried to eat healthier, really he did, but healthy food was *expensive* and besides as long as he threw an egg and some frozen veggies in with the ramen, that was basically

the same as a “real” meal, right?—his phone meowed and he grabbed for it with embarrassing alacrity, glad Siti was (as usual) not around at the apartment to judge him for it.

o yah? when?

Thursday at 8.

oh... The sad-dog-apologizing gif again, apparently one of Lysander’s favorites. sry, can’t go 2 it then. good luck!

Sour disappointment writhed in Theo’s stomach, and he had a hard time ignoring it as he choked down his meal. This was *exactly* why he kept telling himself not to even entertain the idea of dating a celebrity—their lives were just too different. Even if Lysander wasn’t the stuck-up asshole Theo had initially thought he was, he still had too much going on, and there was no way Theo could compete with all of it. *If* Lysander was even interested in something like that—maybe he just wanted to “scratch the itch” and see what sleeping with Theo one time felt like, then mosey along on his merry way to the next thing that “made him curious.”

The acidic feeling worsened, and Theo dumped the second half of the ramen cup without finishing it, deciding to smoke a bowl and watch cat videos before he pissed himself off any further.

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Thursday came, and once again he found himself hauling his DJ stuff onto the bus then sinking into the uncomfortable plastic seats while he began the long journey to the rave venue. He was *definitely* falling out of his goth phase again—even though the air had grown crisper by the day, he’d been eschewing his flared leather jacket, dressing in tight jeans and graphic Tees instead with only a minimal amount of makeup to match. His hair was growing longer again too...the sheath of bangs he now kept tucked behind his ear most of the time, having neither the time or the money to go to a salon to get it cut again, and he didn’t trust Siti with scissors near his hair since she’d first tried to follow a

WeTube hair tutorial three years prior. He'd had to shave nearly all of it off just to recover from that nightmare.

Tonight he was DJing for a show, so he'd put a little more effort in than he had been—using gel to give himself a bit of a fo-hawk, coating his already pale skin with white, using eyeliner to draw in cat-eye lashes and bright red lipstick instead of black. He still wore the graphic-Tee-tight-pants combo, but tried to make it at least a little more interesting with a plaid long-sleeve button up draped over the Tee and fishnet stockings that peeked through the rips in his jeans.

Even as relatively modest as the outfit was compared to some of his others, it was enough to get stares on the bus, including from a trio of dudebro types who looked him over without flinching then snickered amongst themselves. God, he was *not* in the mood to deal with this shit.

“Fag,” one of the dudebros called out to him with another snicker, as his mates let out dramatic whoops that reminded Theo of gibbons. He was too annoyed at Lysander missing his show to even bother flipping them off, just rolled his eyes and went back to reading webcomics on his phone while the bus thundered on.

Apparently the assholes were not happy with his lack of a reaction, because one of them stalked over to Theo, bent down close enough for his odious breath to wash over Theo's face, then hissed the slur again loudly enough that most of the others on that section of the bus blinked and tried to look busy rather than intervene. One girl in her teens even got her phone out and immediately started filming.

Slowly, balefully, Theo turned his dark gaze towards the “alpha male,” mostly just to make sure he didn't get too close to the mixing board on the floor next to Theo's feet.

Just as Theo had that thought, the bully dropped his stare to the board and sneered, his booted foot jutting out to give the side of it a not-so-gentle nudge. “What's this shit, *fag*?” the brute demanded, and as Theo couldn't stop

himself from putting a protective arm in front of his gear, that ugly sneer broke into a full-on smile. At last, the bully was getting a rise out of his victim.

“Dude, break it,” one of his friends jeered encouragingly from where they still stood a couple feet away, jostling the third friend next to him with an excited chuckle. “Fuck his faggy shit *up!*”

It was one of those extremely long buses with the circular center that allowed it to bend around corners—the driver was nowhere near them, and wouldn’t have been able to intervene without slamming the breaks on and pulling the bus off to the side of the road. None of the other passengers seemed interested in helping, either unbothered or afraid of retaliation. It was up to Theo to defend his equipment, or else risk having the second-most important thing in his life—well, non-living thing—destroyed by a trio of smears of human excrement.

Rising to his full height—which wasn’t all that impressive, but at least the platform boots gave him another inch easily—Theo sneered at them, black nails curling at his side like cat claws, though of course they weren’t nearly as strong or sharp. “*Fuck off,*” he hissed, speaking at last, but his seething command only made the bullies laugh harder.

“Yeah? ‘Fuck off’? That’s it? How you gonna make me, *fag?*”

Couldn’t they be at least a little more creative? They’d just used the same slur four times in a row. Idiots. Though he knew anything he said would likely just inflame their derisive amusement, Theo couldn’t seem to stop himself as he said, “B-being an asshole w-won’t make girls want to f-fuck you, bro.”

Shit—now they had a stutter to mock as well as continue to insult his race and alleged homosexuality. Well, words he could ignore...but unfortunately the feverish infection of toxic masculinity between the three of them—reinforced by who knew how many hours of “how to be a *real* man” alpha male podcast episodes—had them too wound-up to be content with mere verbal abuse.

Just as he'd feared they would, the first bully put his foot against the side of the board, leaning lengthwise against the suitcase carrier, and *kicked*. Theo felt something break inside of him as the expensive piece of equipment slammed hard into the floor of the bus, and it was all he could do not to scream his frustration and rage. The mixer was a \$4,000 device he'd miraculously managed to find used for \$2,500, and even *that* had taken a year of working himself to the bone and surviving off ramen to save up enough to buy.

And now this piece of shit had most likely broken it, just for a mean laugh.

"*Fucker!*" Theo seethed, and he slammed himself against the bully shoulder-first, with no plan other than trying to knock the brute off-balance.

Though he had the brief element of surprise, the much meatier bully recovered easily, holding his stance until Theo had to stagger back or fall over. His expression had shifted from amusement to open contempt, and a fist shot out, punching Theo hard in the cheek. "Don't touch me, freak!"

Stars danced in Theo's vision, and he felt himself sinking, though luckily he managed to catch himself on the plastic chairs along the wall rather than embarrass himself by faceplanting straight onto the floor. Someone was screaming angrily—finally, some of the other passengers had been roused to intervene, or at least try to alert the driver at the far end of the bus. Panicked expressions flashed across the dudebros' faces as they realized they'd just opened themselves up to assault charges, though *technically* Theo had 'attacked' first, so a slimy lawyer could probably argue that the bully had acted in self defense.

Still recovering from the punch, Theo felt the bus slow abruptly, pulling onto the side of the road in an unscheduled stop, and a loud, angry voice commanded over the intercom that everyone *sit down* and wait for the authorities to show. Authorities—fuck. He wasn't going to make it to his show tonight, was he? Not that he had a working sound mixer to play it with anyway.

At the mention of “authorities,” all three bullies had started making their way towards the driver, most likely to make their appeals that it “totally wasn’t their fault, bro,” and would they please let them off the bus now because they were such nice boys, all attending ivy league schools and who would never, ever hurt anyone based on their race or orientation or gender or anything like that—

Theo had finally recovered from the punch enough to reorient to the situation, though he worked his jaw slowly and touched a hand gingerly to the spot along the ridge of his cheekbone where the bully’s fist had connected strongest—yeah, that was definitely going to leave a bruise.

“Are...are you okay, hun?” A woman who had been sitting further in back came closer to bend near him with a look of concern—an older Black woman, purse in one hand and cane in the other, wobbling slightly on frail legs but still coming over to check on him, which was more than could be said of most of the other passengers.

“M fine,” Theo mumbled in automatic reply, though he was very *not* fine—he couldn’t help staring at the fallen mixing board without his chest tightening. Finally he compelled himself to pick it up, to awkwardly inspect it for damages, though he wouldn’t really be able to tell if it was truly broken until he got to a flat surface with a screwdriver to open it up and look inside. *Maybe* it still worked...it was just one little fall after all, only a sideways topple; it wasn’t like it had been dropped from a building, or run over with a car.

Either way, he was not making it to his gig on time—*certainly* not as soon as a police car pulled up to the sidewalk and two agents entered the bus, moving down the line methodically to get a statement from everyone about what they’d witnessed. They stayed with Theo the longest, asking him every detail about the exchange, offering to take him to the hospital to have his cheek checked. Knowing that he was unlikely to have permanent damage—and more importantly, that there was no way in hell he could afford a hospital bill—Theo declined, trying not to let his impatience show while they repeated the same questions several times.

“Sir, I’m gonna have to ask you to leave the bus.”

Still scowling at the ground once the cops had *finally* stepped off the bus to join their comrades where they stood just outside of the bus questioning the three bullies—who Theo noticed with some pleasure were in handcuffs—Theo blinked and looked into the tight, frustrated face of the bus driver. “What?” he said, feeling stupid.

“You were involved in the assault. I need you to get off the bus.”

Theo’s brows lowered thunderously, and he couldn’t stop himself from glaring back at the driver. “It’s n-not my fault. *They* a-attacked *me*.”

The driver sighed at that, evidently not pleased about having to follow protocol, but enforcing it all the same. “Even so, I need you to leave.”

Theo’s mouth dropped open as he tried to think of what he could argue towards his case—that this was *bullshit*, that he still needed to make it to the gig and at least *try* to play his set if there was any time left, but as he struggled for words, the kindly Black woman hefted up from the disabled seat she’d sunk into during the questioning and approached again.

“You will *not*,” she began lecturing the driver in the voice of someone who’d birthed and raised babies, then the babies of her babies, and knew how to handle a whining child, “Kick this young man off the bus. He did *nothing wrong*—” Easing her weight back onto one foot, she pointed her cane towards Theo for emphasis. “And you *will not* kick him off, you hear me?”

The driver hesitated, casting his glance between Theo and the woman uncertainly. Her glower intensified, and at length the driver nodded, then beat a hasty retreat back to his place at the front of the bus.

Theo’s shoulders sank with relief, even as fury still roiled inside of him, fury at the damage to his equipment, fury that he’d most likely missed his time slot, fury that the boys were evidently rich, and therefore extremely unlikely to face any real consequences. “Th-thank you,” he murmured, forcing a smile he didn’t feel.

“Of course, sugar,” the woman replied, matching his smile with a gentle one of her own. That smile faded as she added, “I’m so sorry those bullies were mean to you. Don’t listen to that trash—you’re a beautiful soul, don’t you let those mean things they said make you doubt yourself.”

She couldn’t really know the first thing about Theo, and yet she was being so kind to him, so compassionate, that he felt tears stinging the corner of his black-streaked eyes. Not trusting himself to speak without his voice wavering, he nodded, watching her smile return before she hobbled back to the seat and sank into it. People could be so strange, so varied—a trio of assholes had very likely ruined his chances of making music, certainly of DJing any time soon, and yet here was this other total stranger who had defended him without knowing him at all.

Arms shaky as he loaded the board back onto the suitcase carrier, Theo stayed silent for the remaining half hour of the trip once the bus finally pulled back into its route, too numb and shaken to even occupy himself on his phone. As the bus slowed into his stop, he forced his legs to move, to carry himself and his gear out of the door, trying not to cringe as he eased his load down the distance from the bottom step to the pavement, then struck out to walk the two blocks remaining before he arrived at the outside ticket window to the small venue that was already letting in a stream of people, presumably already into the set that came after his.

The young man with a bright red mohawk and red eyeshadow like Theo was wearing looked him up and down before dropping his gaze back to the clipboard on the counter in front of him. “You’re *way late*, man. They already moved on to the next set.”

Theo grimaced but nodded—he should have called as soon as the bus had started moving again, should have let them know what had happened and that he was desperately *trying* to get there on time, but he’d been so stunned by the incident that it hadn’t occurred to him to do so.

“Th-the bus I was on h-had an emergency stop,” he offered in his defense, deciding it wasn’t relevant that he’d been part of why the bus had made that emergency stop.

“Doesn’t matter. You miss the time slot, you miss the gig.” The ticket attendee lifted the top page attached to the clipboard to look at the one below it, not bothering to raise his eyes back to Theo as he spoke. “You can still watch the rest of the show if you want, though.”

Expression tightening, Theo deliberated, then at last nodded, heading not for the entrance to the building but around the side of it, dragging his equipment with him. Well, fuck. He’d come all that way for nothing—and now his gear was broken to boot.

As he leaned against the side of the building, breathing shakily, he reached into the backpack slung over his shoulder and dug around until he found the pack of cigarettes buried at the bottom. He tried not to smoke much these days—tired of Siti lecturing him for how much he smelled afterward, even though he always smoked outside—but he was feeling nervous and frustrated enough that he lit one anyway, taking a long slow drag then releasing it with a long sigh.

He was already exhausted from working earlier, and now he’d missed his gig, *and* would likely miss any future ones for a while, at least until he was able to save enough money to (fingers and toes crossed) get whatever damage had been caused to his board fixed by a local repair shop. Thinking of the bullies again, of the sneers on their faces, the boundless hatred for him simply for what they perceived him as, had the hand holding the cigarette shaking with rage.

Why were so many people in this world so shitty? Why was it he’d gone to all the effort of escaping his judgmental small town, only to find much of the same bigoted hatred even in LA?

Taking another long drag, Theo finished off the cigarette, then, too tired to bother finding an ash tray somewhere, flicked the butt of it into a gutter and tried to pull himself together.

He was almost tempted to blow a chunk of what little money he did have to hire a rideshare just to get back to the apartment, but he'd need that money to save up for repairs, so he grit his teeth and headed back to the bus stop. If anyone tried to fuck with him *this* time, he *would* scratch their eyes out, assault charges be damned.

Luckily he made it back to the apartment without being harassed, forcing himself to be gentle as he pulled the suitcase carrier up after him to the apartment on the second floor. He longed to bitch about his night to Siti, but she was gone *like fucking always* and he had only Rogue to complain to, who purred and rubbed against his legs as he sank onto the couch and glowered. But complaining to a cat who couldn't understand him just wasn't the same.

Finally, he decided sleep was the only answer, so he dragged himself to the bathroom and started to wash everything off his face, leaving his broken gear tucked against the corner in the living room. His anger had faded to sadness by the time he'd stripped off his clothing and boots, tossed it all into (or at least near) the hamper into his room, then sank into bed wearing only boxers, closing his eyes tightly as he struggled not to let the tears that kept threatening to gather set loose. *Boys don't cry.*

That was when his phone meowed from where it lay on the bed beside him, startling him into blinking up at the ceiling then peeling himself up to sit cross-legged on the bed. He stared at the text, his stomach churning uncomfortably with nerves and sadness and fury and, now that he'd gotten the text, a little bit of happiness, too.

hey, plane just landed. had no signal. howd the show go?

Theo hesitated, wondering if he should pretend the show had gone *swimmingly*, that nothing at all had gone wrong on his way there and everything was great. Then he remembered Lysander's lecture inside of his

apartment—the anger and hurt that had been evident in the singer’s voice. *No more secrets.*

Couldn’t make it. Something happened on the bus and I missed my time slot.

Minutes passed and no reply came—finally, Theo decided it was time to stop staring at the screen as if waiting for a pot to boil and he sank onto the bed again, dropping the phone next to him and folding his arms tightly over his chest in pathetic lieu of a hug.

Then a few beats of music sounded out—a clip of one of his own songs that he’d decided to set as his primary ringtone in a fit of hubris—and he almost jumped, not expecting a call that late at night. Fingers shaking, he pressed to accept the call then held the receiver to his ear, feeling too anxious to speak first.

“What happened on the bus?”

It was the first time he’d heard Lysander’s voice through the phone, he realized with a start. The singer sounded tired, but concerned. Where was he right now? He’d mentioned a plane, but not where it had landed. He might be in Australia right now for all that Theo knew. It wasn’t as if they were close enough for the singer to be sharing his schedule with Theo, not unless it impacted their ability to meet up to work on their collaboration.

Theo hesitated for a long time before finally answering, “There was a, uh, fight on the bus. Th-they pulled over and cops came on, a-asking everyone for statements.” He paused again for an even longer moment before adding, “I think m-my mixer is broken.”

Lysander drew in a breath at that, and his tone was simmering with anger as he replied, “Are you alright?”

The fact that *Lysander Delion* was asking if he was alright washed over Theo, still stupefying him with the strangeness of how he’d somehow found himself having a late night phone call with a famous celebrity he’d up until

recently despised for no good reason, talking to the pop star as if they were actually friends.

No more secrets. “M fine,” Theo mumbled, and for the most part it was true—at least, now that he was on the phone with Lysander. Eager to change the subject, wanting to keep talking to the singer even though they were both worn out, Theo asked, “Wh-where are you right n-now?”

“Atlanta,” Lysander answered without hesitation, then loosed an empty laugh. “Fuck, I’m so tired. I had a show in Dallas, then they immediately threw me on a plane to fly here for another show tomorrow. But there was turbulence so I couldn’t even take a nap.” He was that exhausted—and yet he’d taken the time to call Theo, just because Theo had said over text that “something happened” on the bus.

Warmth blossomed in his chest, and Theo couldn’t keep his tone from sounding ever so slightly affectionate as he replied, “You sh-should sleep, then.”

“Yeah...” A sigh on the other side—halfway across the country from him—then Lysander asked one final time, “Are you *sure* you’re alright?”

Theo wanted so badly to complain to him, to say that no, he *wasn’t* alright, that he’d been assaulted, punched in fact, and his precious gear had been kicked to the ground, probably broken, just because some assholes had decided he’d be fun to torment. But he didn’t want to burden the singer with all that, so he said only, “Y-yeah, I’m fine.” Then, “Go to s-sleep.”

“Alright.” Though it was impossible to know for certain, Theo had the impression there was a soft smile on the other side of the phone call. “Goodnight, Theo.”

Goodnight, Theo. Why did those words have such an effect on him? Was it just the memory of Lysander’s breath against his neck—the jolt of longing he’d felt in response to that—the desire to turn right towards the famous singer, the dazzlingly handsome blonde he didn’t know the first thing about, and jump onto him for a kiss? Suppressing all those feelings with great effort, Theo kept

his voice neutral as he replied, “Goodnight.” Then, not waiting for Lysander to respond, he ended the call.

Fuck. His heart was hammering, and he felt other stirrings that he hadn’t felt in a long time. Even in the second half of his nearly-two-years-long relationship with He Who Shall Not Be Named, he hadn’t actually wanted to *be* with his partner, not really.

What was he doing? Was he really that lonely? Maybe it was time to let Siti try to set him up with an acquaintance, maybe get on the hookup apps and try to find someone on his own...someone to work out these urges at least, even if he wasn’t ready for an actual relationship again.

But he didn’t *want* to find some random guy to fuck. He wanted Lysander.

Goddamnit. He was so screwed.

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