

Maida

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Maida

by [CaitClandestine](#)

Summary

Northern lights meet milky way.

Jordan joining the band creates a whole new dynamic Lee might not be able to deal with.

Notes

Oli/Lee is my baby but I do have a certain fondness for Jordan so this was the only natural course of action to take, right?

Can You Feel My Heart

In the beginning - and a small part of Lee's brain, the tiny, eight year old catholic school apple of his mothers eye part reminds him that that's exactly how the bible started and didn't that work out well for everyone involved – they're just friends.

Unconventional friends sure, because even back in school when he was thinner and played soccer and dated Caroline Mitchells for a whole three months before she dumped him for Isaac Moham they'd been operating on entirely different levels, loud and quiet, obnoxious and painfully polite. Oli was and is everything that he isn't, tall and dark and not all that mysterious but charming in a completely uncouth, rebellious sort of way and to this day Lee's still not sure why Oli even asked him to be in the band in the first place, just turned up outside his council flat one afternoon in his lemon of a car with their mutual friend Curtis in tow along with a healthy supply of cigarettes and alcohol, origin unknown but hopefully not stolen.

The rest as they say, is history.

Their shitty high school band has made it, so much so that he owns guitars he only dreamed of seeing in shop windows or on Ebay and it doesn't seem so much like bragging now when he thinks that he can actually play them, appreciate them so much more than just a colourful conveyor of angry and loud.

He stays in contact with Curtis even though they've had their fair share of laughs and jokes at his expense, trading off occasional emails and he knows the other man has caught a few of their more recent shows, time enough for all of them, even Oli, to grow up and move past all the negativity.

Him and Oli have always been close, though it'd be a push to say they're the best friends in the band as Vegan's usually his mate of choice and if you're missing both Oli and Matt they're probably together doing something bloody stupid. They're the kind of friends who can be relied upon to understand the other even if no one else does and anyone who's ever met Oli can attest to not knowing what the fuck he's on about at least once a day.

Jona had seemed like such a good thing, a turning point and Lee had made the mistake of trusting him with his and Oli's friendship, letting him into their more private moments, many an epic hangover spent curled up with each other, careful words traded while the rest of the world sleeps. The honesty in Oli's expression is the only thing that keeps him from running when they end up taking things in a direction he couldn't have predicted, trusts himself to know that it's the right thing, what he wants even if he struggles to admit it.

Under the sheets in a dingy hotel bed Oli calls him all kinds of nice things he's sure he doesn't deserve, ragged breath in his ear assuring him that one day he'll be at peace.

It typical British fashion however, when it rains it pours. Jona is mean. Not all the time and not in front of everyone but when it's just the band he's vicious, even more so when Matt's not around to persuade him to back off. Oli gets worse before he gets better and Jona is a

constant drain on what little emotional resources Lee has left after trying to come to terms with just how close they'd been to losing him, words cutting and full of cheap shots about how he looks and how he plays.

He'd would be lying if he said he hadn't considered giving Jona what he was obviously playing at; getting him to leave the band. He doesn't because he refuses to give Jona the satisfaction, go back on the in-retrospect frankly disgusting blood pact they'd made when they'd first become a band, let go of Oli even for a moment no matter how inadequate he feels.

How they're supposed to make an album he doesn't know but when Oli says that's what they're doing they all agree. All five of them retreat to the Lakelands, tucked up in a gorgeous cabin between the fells and an imposing grey shoreline and Oli's ideas are bigger than them all, visions created from desperation and coming out the other side. He writes constantly, sends them all nearly mad with his twisting, turning concepts that are sometimes beyond their ability to create and more than once Lee has to follow him out into the cold to chase away the dark that Jona continues to spread.

The blonde isn't impressed with their mutual agreement to try something different, embrace the more technical elements of music production and is incredibly vocal about it, pushing for guitar parts that even Lee has to argue back are excessive. They come up with sequences shoddily hashed together with Garageband and it quickly becomes obvious they're going to need more people to help them out since Vegan's the only one of them who can play around with software enough to kind-of-not-really add the synth and other instruments they're chasing. Lee decides not to mention his ability to play a few nursery rhymes on piano mostly because he's worried that they'll run with it and next thing he knows there's a song on the album with Baa Baa Black Sheep on loop and that's just a step too far.

Jona and Oli fight their way through their final two weeks and Oli isn't completely blameless, has always been up for a fight, pushing and taunting Jona right back, plates and glasses smashing against the limestone floor before they retreat back to their respective corners faces snarling and lips split. Only once in that time does Lee get anything more than a gentle nudge to the shoulder before they go to their separate beds, a single chaste kiss when they're both awake just before sunrise, cold chill of the open fridge doors they're standing between because he'd had a craving for blueberries.

They end up having to get Ian to drive down to pick them up, Oli and Jona refusing to share a car with each other for the trip home. Matt pats him firmly on the back and shoves him towards the Syke's car, says he'll deal with shit for brains and Lee's quietly appreciative, Oli's head heavy on his shoulder as the other man sleeps the entire way back. He's skinny, all height and bones, stripped down to the core.

A week later finds them in a studio even though all their half-cocked ideas are still exactly that, their producer simply raising his hands in defeat a few days in and leaving them with a few session guys to help them flesh out their fledging thoughts. At first they're nameless faces and it's difficult, working with people that don't know them, judgemental strangers with their own lives and agendas that don't necessarily pander to that of a group of angsty Northerners with heedy dark sides. The violinist is a middle-aged man in tailored pants, Matt

immediately at odds with the percussionist after mentioning his football allegiances and the keyboardist insignificant, always watching them quietly with an eye Lee can't quite work out.

Oli and Jona forge a fragile ceasefire and they do manage to start piecing things together, late nights spent hunched over his notebook scrawling away, the rest of them putting their nervous energy into coming up with something, anything that might fit with the lyrics they've barely seen, melodies that seem only to exist in Oli's head.

They sleep in the building, the floor above holding a few scantily decorated bedrooms, a common room with television and Vegan brings along his Nintendo and X-Box for late night Mario Kart marathons, the ancient lounges piled high with blankets brought along by each of them to compensate for the lack of heating. The keyboardist stays with them in a room by himself down the end of the hall, something about him being from Australia and having nowhere else to be. He's in the studio before them and long after they've gone, Lee only catching him in the kitchen sometimes grabbing a bottle of water from the fridge or throwing away the wrappers from the large amount of takeaway salads he seems to be eating. Jona doesn't seem interested in engaging his antipodean counterpart and so they fall to keeping their distance.

There's no shortage of gear in the studio but definitely a shortage of knowledge between them on how to use it and after about half an hour of Jona and Vegan getting increasingly short-tempered with each other over translating something to midi, a guitar riff that Oli's decided would be more interesting as a distorted piano instead the keyboardist finally makes a move from his space across the room.

"I'd say I don't want to intrude but that's essentially what you're paying me to do" He says gently, "At least let me show you the basics"

"Don't touch the recording" Oli says defensively, dark circles under his eyes betraying the lack of sleep he's getting, the stress he's under trying to get this off the ground, keep himself above water.

"Just the basics, so you can move things around, sequence them, any involvement from me would be on a separate track, just suggestions"

If anything, the keyboardists quiet observations of them have made him cautious, unfrontational. Helpful even, but that could be said of anyone trying to take home a cheque at the end of the day.

It's well after dark by the time they're even close to having any idea what they're doing and the keyboardist has made a couple of quick tracks for them to play with, hands moving effortlessly over the keys and tapping away at the programs like it's second nature, the way Lee himself slides his fingers over the frets of his guitar.

That's been a bone of contention as well; Jona is still of the opinion he's gods gift to the six string and Lee doesn't want to fight in front of these strangers, completely ignores all the shit Jona's saying about rhythm this and lead that until he takes himself off into one of the booths with a bottle of wine and his electric and it'd be a lie to say Lee isn't made happier by the silence.

Matt returns from a drum session sweaty and red-faced, seems perplexed that they haven't really achieved anything while he's been gone.

“You're telling me” He says wryly, “That in four hours all you've done is record a minute and a half of keyboard that isn't even part of any song?”

It does sound stupid when said out loud.

“We should make the whole album drums” Matt continues to mutter, “Much less complicated”

“It's actually helped a lot” Vegan retorts, “Thanks, uh - “ There's a pause where they all seem to realise that none of them know the guys name.

“Jordan” He says politely, as if they haven't just been completely self-centred assholes, “Jordan Fish”

Matt and Vegan head off then, plans to pick up Thai food and beer in the works and they grab Jona on their way out, the silence after they leave very, very awkward. Oli's too exhausted to be his usual charming self, save Lee from the social disaster he always is.

Jordan seems undeterred, pulls out his phone and gives it a cursory look before pocketing it again.

“Anything else you want to know before I knock off too?” He asks and Lee's fully prepared to say no but Oli sits up from where he's been lying on the floor, unsticks a piece of paper that's become stuck to his hands.

“If I told you how I wanted something to sound, could you play it, the way it's in my head?”

It's said so quietly it's merely a whisper, as if Oli isn't sure he should be asking, half-expects to be laughed out of the room.

“I can try” Jordan says, rolling his chair back over to his keyboard, “Have a go at explaining and i'll see what I can do”

Oli hesitates, gives Lee a worried look and Lee shrugs, once again avoids mentioning the only thing he can play being Baa Baa Black Sheep.

Nothing comes of it – Oli struggling to explain exactly the sound he's searching for and Jordan's obviously wary of stepping on anyones toes, looks relieved when Matt hammers on the door and hollers that they're back and if they want to eat they'd better move their asses.

“Did you want to play?”

They've caught Jordan on another trip to the bin, empty water bottles in hand and he pauses, the bright light of the FIFA game they're about to start making his shadow flicker against the back wall. Vegan's apparently decided that the other man is worthy of an invitation and they all fall silent.

“I'm not particularly good” Jordan says carefully, “As long as no one minds that i'd be in”

“You can be on Lee's team then” Jona ribs, “Won't matter much”

“Fuck off” Lee grumbles, he's not that fucking bad.

They're playing two-a-side, Matt ditching them to talk to his girlfriend on the phone in his room and Oli pointedly turns the game volume up a bit.

“I'll ref, thumbs hurt” Vegan announces, handing over his controller and they all have to squish in a bit to make room for Jordan, Oli's bony elbow pressing into his side as he ends up throwing his legs across Lee's lap, warm and heavy and Lee just can't find the energy to bother trying to move him.

Predictably he and Jordan loose, Jona smirking at him and Oli cackling with a far more good natured intent when Jordan manages to kick an own goal on two separate occasions.

Lee works on his own set of notes, tries to remember to write down all the guitar parts he's working on so at least there's something to show their producer, something that maybe they can work from. He tosses ideas back and forth with Vegan, the two of them spending a few hours in a booth playing off each other and swapping instruments around lunch time for a bit of a break. Bass is way harder than Vegan makes it look, one of the thick strings creating a nice, red welt on his hand when he tightens it just a hair too much.

Oli's pacing back and forth with his headphones on as Lee passes him to get a Coke from the ancient but well-stocked vending machine downstairs, Jona nowhere to be seen and he doesn't really think about Jordan until he's on his way back, catches the faintest sound, a familiar song that he just can't place.

He follows the music, picks up the sound of someone singing but not able to make out the words, eventually traces it to a tiny corner room at the very back of the building, Jordan sitting on a small stack of milk crates playing a rather rough looking piano and the song suddenly comes into a sharp focus, Jordan's voice rising and falling with the Bon Iver track and the change from guitar to keys is why it's taken Lee an ashamedly long time to pick out one of his favourite songs.

Vegan can wait, it'd be bad karma to not listen to the rest. Jordan's no doubt more talented than they've been interested in knowing. As is his style Lee just watches quietly and when the song finishes and Jordan picks up something else a bit quicker, bit more upbeat he makes his way out, song now most likely stuck in his head for the rest of the day.

Something in him wants to share Jordan with everyone, so he slips around and recruits them, curiosity pulling Oli from his pacing and Matt from his drums with ease as he leads them back to Jordan who's playing something else now, mournful and classical but his voice is still just as good. They peer around the corner in comedic style, height order all on one side of the door, just their heads and finish out the song, quickly disappearing when it ends just in case Jordan turns around and catches them stalking him like creeper.

“He's not too bad, in'he?” Matt says, loudly – too loudly for how close they still are walking down the hall.

“Not half-bad at all” Vegan agrees.

“He was playing Bon Iver before, that's how I found him” Lee adds and Oli snorts.

“You're such a fanboy”

Lee flips him off, because if he's done some social media stalking no one needs to know but him.

The House Of Wolves

It turns out Jordan also possesses genuine, bona-fide programming skills, a fact loosely discovered by Matt of all people, gathering each of them much like Lee had done to corner Jordan in the studio where he steps away from the pad almost guiltily.

“Sorry, I know i'm supposed to be working for you guys and here I am messing around on my own”

“We usually have to get someone in to do that kind of stuff for us” Oli says accusingly, “Didn't think to mention it to the hiring company?”

For every single record they've ever done it's been a struggle to find someone reliable and not a piece of shit to add the flourishes they can't, mix things they can't. Their last guy, a mate of Oli's had been pretty good but he's since moved to Germany with his wife so Jordan's newly discovered talent could end up working out quite nicely just as soon as they've got something the guy can actually work with.

One night with the rain pouring down Lee finds himself in Oli's room with the other man buried underneath a mountain of blankets having an Inbetweeners marathon, both of them snickering every few minutes and setting each other off – they're tired enough that anything and everything is hilarious on an entirely new level and Vegan bangs on the wall, yells something about how it'd be less annoying if instead of giggling they were fucking which is a credit to how out of control they are, no doubt red-faced and Oli's gasping for air, tears tracking down his cheeks.

They've finally settled, Lee's laptop abandoned on the floor beside him and Oli contentedly breathing into his neck when Jona marches in and he must've been saving up all his assholeery from the last few days, is substantially sloshed with a beer in his hand and despite their rather polite requests from him to go away he refuses, eyes glinting darkly as he screams the most terrible, awful things about them, how disgusting they are and all the usual jabs at Lee personally and the worst part is that Lee knows there's no way Jordan can't hear what's going on. Oli throws himself out of bed and attempts to shove Jona out all the while trying to get him to shut his fucking mouth, the two of them smacking each other into the doorframe until Matt appears in his penguin pajama pants and grabs Jona by the back of his shirt and drags him backwards easily as they continue to swear at each other, Oli taking the provided opportunity to pick up the bedside lamp and throw it in Jona's direction where it hits him in the shoulder nearly starting a full out brawl.

“We're going we're going” Matt grumbles, “You're both fuckin' assholes”

Oli sits down heavily on the end of the bed after they're gone, breathing roughly and wringing his hands. Lee's still mostly hidden under the blankets, like he'd been trying to hide and maybe he was, hates confrontation if he can at all avoid it. Jona's mostly words anyway and as much as they hurt by tomorrow he'll have started boxing them up to put in the back of his mind.

Eventually Oli comes back up to him, wiggling under the blankets without a word, arms curling around Lee's middle as he pushes them together, feet cold and prodding at Lee's warm ankles.

Lee's awake around sunrise, even if in typical British fashion it's not visible behind the clouds – there's enough light in the room for him to slip out of Oli's grasp and make his way to the kitchen without tripping over the mess of stuff all over the floor and Jona's words from last night roll over him again, still sharp and cutting even in his head.

He makes his cup of tea, three sugars and what his mum considers an abhorrent amount of milk and wanders downstairs out to the tiny, concreted outdoor area, he's supposed to have stopped smoking so he just intends to hold his cup and stare moreseely into the distance, be by himself for a while.

Finding Jordan already there startles him, the other man sitting at the mouldy wooden table with a mug of his own.

“Mornin”

“Morning” Lee echoes, immediattely wanting to turn around and go back inside but he can't be that impolite. He leans back against the brick wall and they stay in silence for a while before he cracks and has to say something because maybe, just maybe they need Jordan for the record and he'll be damned if he's the one that fucks it up if it isn't already.

“Sorry 'bout the noise last night” “He mumbles and Jordan meets his eyes as he smile wryly, shurgs.

“I've heard worse, got a mouth on him though accent and all doesn't he?”

Lee doesn't have time to come up with an adequate response to Jordan's nonplussed one before the dead air becomes truly awkward. Jordan knows things he shouldn't and this could all go so very wrong.

Jordan swills the last of what looks like coffee in his mug, swallows it in a single gulp.

“Whatever's going on is entirely your business, glass houses and all that, but that's not to say I don't know what I believe you'd call uh, a right twat when I hear one”

“Understatement of the fucking year that is” Oli's rough morning voice chips in and Lee starts, tea sloshing out of his cup and down his fingers. Jordan doesn't seem surprised by virtue of facing the door, merely nods.

“He'll argue with anything that moves, but if you wanna fight you pick 'em with me, alright” Oli continues and at this point Lee's just about out of embarrassment related fucks to give so Oli defending him is barely a blip on the radar right now, he just hangs his head and lets the tea dry sticky on his hands.

Jordan's wry smile returns. “I generally only try to start things I might have a hope of winning”

“I need tea” Is Oli's response and Lee takes the opportunity to escape, following him back inside and watches the other man make his own cup of tea in the dinosaur mug he'd brought along, pouring water from the kettle and on his way to the fridge for milk to help Lee finds himself being pressed against the counter, Oli's face very close to his own.

“Seriously, if he's got anything to say - ” Oli lets the words hang, a very weighty threat given his propensity for picking fights and though he's been wrong before Lee doesn't see it in Jordan to be that cruel.

Oli starts trying to lay down vocals, fit them with the hardly done melodies and Jordan's again more talented than they think, easily wrangling the recordings for them, ever patient with the to'ing and fro'ing of all their indecision. Jona is rarely around if he is it's short and sharp and they're all at breaking point with him really, a ticking time bomb with every night he disappears.

Yet another night without Jona finds them working late – or early depending on what kind of person you are, Oli would say late and Vegan early. Jordan's with them, all of them sat in a circle with a couple of acoustic guitars and he's not that great but he's surely better than Matt who's abandoned his for a pair of bongo drums they'd had to wipe the dust off, shine up a bit with spit – the album could be very interesting when Jona finally deigns to join them, stumbling through the door all bloodshot eyes and unbuttoned shirt and he starts at them, head tilted.

He's going have something to say no doubt.

“That my replacement then” He finally slurs, “You fucking him too Sykes?”

It's a cheap shot, fueled by liquor and Oli's on his feet in an instant, Matt right behind him.

“Fuck off” Oli snaps but Jona does the exact opposite, coming further into the room and slamming the door behind him.

“Gee I didn't hear a no there, he must be an improvement on Lee at least or maybe you're still doing him, your own little faggoty harem”

The humiliation washes over Lee in waves, quickly followed the kind of anger everyone else seems to have already reached. How dare Jona do this in front of someone else. How dare he do it at all, after all they done for him, for all they've trusted him.

“Get out” Matt hisses, shoving Jona roughly backwards, “Don't fucking come back until you can see straight”

“Hah” Jona squawks, “You wouldn't know straight if it fucked you up the ass”

Oli seems to move in slow motion, flying past Matt and doing what even Lee wants to do right now, punching Jona in his stupid smug face.

“Out” He snarls as Jona's hands fly to his face, blood pooling in the split in his lip creating quite the picture as he grins at them, red in his teeth. He looks past them to Lee and Lee holds

his stare. Jona must be so fucking drunk because usually he's one to fight straight back, faster and harder and stronger loathe as he is to admit it.

“Always sticking up for you aren't they, can't imagine why”

It's one of the lesser offensive things he's ever said but the words still sting and Jordan's just sitting there, watching them with a wide-eyed expression.

“Fuck off” Lee says shortly, repeating Oli's earlier sentiment, “Just fuck off”

“Aw what are you gonna do if I don't, cry?” And that's it, Lee's out of patience now. He marches up to the blonde man and arrogant as he is Jona doesn't even move, just smirks and Lee shoves him like Matt had done, sends him wavering back a few steps, Oli immediately trying to pull him away but Lee's not about to back down, wrenches out of his grasp.

“Get out of the way” He snaps, “He's mine”

He swings but Jona dodges at the last minute, bolts for the door still howling with laughter and when his voice fades away there's a collective sigh of relief but him being gone only makes Lee angrier, what kind of man is he that he couldn't even land a hit on someone so out of it?

Oli kicks a few plastic chairs across the room, mumbling something about fucking cunt this and cunting fuck that.

Vegan shifts from foot to foot awkwardly, never really one for violence.

“We can't keep ignoring it” He says.

“Sorry” Lee finds himself apologising again.

“He's the one who should be doing that” Jordan ventures mildly and he looks like he's got more to say but they're all distracted by thudding from outside.

“He's probably breaking something we can't afford” Matt says and as the noise continues Lee's curiosity and how pissed off he is get the better of him and he heads back towards the door.

“Don't” Oli says, “Just leave it” But Lee's angry and he's going to end this right now.

“I'll finish it” He says lowly, “If he won't walk then I fucking will”

They're fighting words and he hopes he won't regret them later. Oli starts back towards the door as well and Lee just beats him, having to break into a run and Matt's swearing before coming back as well. He opens the door, steps out into the hallway and it's gone quiet before Lee can register the sudden, agonising pain in his head quickly followed by Oli screaming blue murder and then a sharper, shorter pain in his shoulder as Jona comes into his view, still laughing as Matt throws himself forward to wrench the broken bottle from his hands, shove him up against the wall while yelling for Vegan and Jordan to do something, call someone

and Lee's fine, he's going to give the bastard a piece of his mind just as soon as he can move Oli out of his way.

His face feels wet and warm, the walls and floor mixing in a way that makes him want to throw up but he'll be damned if he doesn't land his punch first.

“Lee, stop!” Oli sounds too loud, too frantic for someone who should be enjoying the fight. “Please you're bleeding everywhere you can't get him, you can't”

Oli's eyes flash darkly as he turns to Jona, a tall shape as something runs into Lee's eyes making it difficult to see.

“I'll kill you you fucking cunt, i'll kill you!”

Vaguely, Lee processes more screaming, Oli leaving him and Vegan appearing and leading him along somewhere and he's too tired to protest, finds himself out in the front yard with a now shirtless Vegan – why is he shirtless? Jordan's there too, blood on his hands and shirt and his hands are pressing something against Lee's head and Lee never meant for Jordan to get hurt, be involved in this.

“Sorry” He mumbles, “Sorrysorrysorry” Everything's out of focus and there's the sound of things breaking inside and Lee wants to tell Jordan to go away, leave them be but he can't find the words beyond the creeping fog in his mind.

He can't see much really, eyes stuck together somehow, sirens in the distance and Vegan's still there, voice a constant familiar hum that gets overtaken by strangers, people asking his name over and over, his birthday, what day it is and Lee's dimly aware that it's Jordan's voice beside him as climbs into the ambulance, Oli nowhere to be seen. He needs to get up, find Oli before he really does kill Jona like he threatened but whenever he tries to get up he's being pushed down and the pillow beneath his head is cool and soft.

Empire (Let Them Sing)

Lee instinctively knows he's in hospital when he wakes up – mostly by virtue of the few weeks during their very first American tour where they'd all gone way too hard and pissed way too many people off, white rooms are white rooms after all. He takes a few seconds to collect himself, has a passing thought about how ugly the mustard coloured curtains are and how much his head seems to ache before he notices that the person in the chair beside him is Jordan, just Jordan. He's cleaned of blood or maybe he'd imagined it, the pleasant hum in his veins making it difficult to keep his eyes open, concentrate.

Why is Jordan here, where is everyone? Where is Oli?

“Li” He manages to mumble and Jordan's raising his head, moving to pat a cool hand on his upper arm above the blankets. Where is Oli? He should be here, Matt and Vegan too and the only reason for them not is that Jona managed to hurt them somehow – either that or they've been arrested for whatever they'd ended up doing to the bastard.

“Oli's fine, everyone's fine” Jordan assures quickly, “He's a bit upset so I said i'd keep an eye on you while they try to calm him down enough that they'll let him in”

It's a hospital, they're filled with upset people, why won't they let him in?

Lee's sure he's only thinking that thought but Jordan's hand has moved to squeeze his, eyes soft and warm and kind and Lee just stares at him for as long as he can before he has to close his eyes.

“Mildly hysterical maybe, but to be fair you were bleeding a bit i'm sure they're on their way”

Jordan shouldn't have to be here, holding his hand and getting involved in all their band shit. Lee's head itches and he tries to fumble a hand up to scratch it, Jordan halting the movement before he's even really committed to trying, his arms feels heavy, weighed down with lead.

“They've only glued your head together, don't think you should touch it” He says and Lee's too tired to argue with him, the abrupt commotion from outside the curtain distracting him anyway, a plethora of feet appearing underneath it before Oli barges in and Lee's stomach turns at the blood on him, on his cheek and smeared up his arms, lip split again and hair matted to his head.

Jordan vacates his chair and Vegan and Matt appear, Vegan nudging Oli into it. He's trembling and his fingers quiver as Lee manages to grab one hand, hold it tightly. Oli's okay. Everyone's okay. If only there wasn't so much blood on the other man. He closes his eyes, dizzy with the red.

“I should've fucking killed him” Oli says harshly, other hand coming to brush some of Lee's hair out of the way so he can lean forward and kiss his cheek, clearly beyond the point of caring what Jordan might think

“No ones killing anyone” Vegan says calmly, “No ones mother would like that”

“Mum” Lee mumbles in a rush, she'd probably try to kill Jona herself if they've told her. “You di-n't call 'er, right?”

“Speaking of calling people” Jordan says diplomatically, “Police, anyone?”

It doesn't surprise Lee that no one's called the cops, they've always been the kind of band to deal with their own shit, the kind of people who only get into it with the kind of people who don't want the authorities involved. Matt calls it the law of the streets, but it's mostly the fact that if you send someone to jail – especially in their hometown you will get what's coming to you.

“We could sue the motherfucker” Oli seethes and technically they could get him for assault but they'd also get the rest of them as well. Lee wants to make this point but just can't get the words out. Not to mention all the awful things he could say, could tell the world about if backed into a court shaped corner.

“Where'se?” He does manage to ask.

“Don't fucking care” Oli growls.

“We packed his stuff up all nice and escorted him into town” Matt says, cracking his knuckles for effect as he thinks that Lee might actually believe that's true, the more likely story being them throwing Jona and all his shit into the boot and dumping him in the middle of nowhere.

“It was either him or me” He says tiredly and Matt nods. “He's well fucking gone”

They keep him overnight and Oli refuses to move from his chair or let of his hand except to begrudgingly let Matt wipe the blood off him at a rather bitchy nurses request, white cotton quickly smearing pink. Oli falls asleep before he does, hunched over and head resting on the side of the bed. His hairs a little bit gross, unwashed and oily but Lee runs his fingers through it anyway.

He gets an ample amount of Panadol to take back with him, warned to keep his head and shoulder out of any water for the next couple of days and the stress of having everyone watching him pitifully is far worse than the actual injuries. He fucking hates being even close to the centre of attention. They don't really have anywhere else to go except back to the studio and when Lee mumbles a thank you to Jordan for holding the front door open for them he hopes it comes across as it meaning so much more than that.

Vegan brings Chinese food, Matt flicking on the TV as they all gather in the lounge.

“I think we should skip the album for now, go home and start again when we've actually got something” Oli says quietly and no, no, no.

Lee's honestly too tired to argue but the resulting silence from Oli's words imply that someone here has to.

“We're here now, might as well” He counters, and Matt huffs.

“Not sure if you've noticed but we're lacking a guitarist”

“No you're not” They don't need Jona, just like they didn't need Curtis either. Him and Oli have always carried the writing for the band, he can do it again.

“We should probably call the label about that” Vegan ventures, “Don't want him saying we kicked him out for being blonde haired and blue eyed or something”

That at least, they can all agree on. Oli directs him to bed as much as Lee protests – he's an adult, he does not need a nap even if the bed is surprisingly comfortable and Oli surprisingly warm for once.

“The lads'll handle it” Oli murmurs tiredly into his ear and Lee begins to suspect the nap isn't so much about him after all.

When he wakes again there's been success, papers drawn up for Jona to sign and apparently it's been suggested they take themselves away for a little while, work on the album somewhere even quieter. He just wants to go home.

Oli shakes him awake at the crack of dawn, expression serious and eyebrows knitted like somethings legitimately wrong and the ache in Lee's head has returned and it's way too early for anything.

“What?” He grumbles, trying fold the blankets back around himself in a way that doesn't let the freezing air seep in since Oli's sat upright and moved them all over. His head throbs and his shoulder echoes the sentiment, protesting at his movement.

“What if” Oli says carefully, quietly, “What if Jordan came with us, he could do the synth at least and he's not that bad, right?”

Coming from such a person as one Oliver Sykes 'not that bad' is pretty high praise and Lee wonders what exactly it is about Jordan that's got them all intrigued, so willing to trust him. It's not that he doesn't like Jordan, it's just odd that Oli does.

He supposes it's not that odd that Jordan says yes, he'd be honoured – he actually says honoured like they're offering him a knighthood or something and in the following days as they start packing up he's always the first to offer Lee more tea or biscuits – he's been relegated to sitting very quietly and not doing much and the sad, worried look doesn't sit right on Matt's face whenever he gets up so for now Lee's obliging, plied with Panadol and acoustic by his side so he can at least contribute something.

They each spend the weekend at their own houses, catching up on washing and Lee waters his collection of miniature ferns, sorts through the pile of mail, half of which is addressed to the people down the road a-fucking-gain and he's often away for months so the Schwarz's could very well be going to have their electric cut off in lieu of never getting a bill.

A knock on the door early Sunday evening signals Oli's arrival, the taller man dragging his bags inside and leaving them in a pile by the front door. He's not so talkative, putters around the kitchen making tea until Lee has to grab him by the elbow to stop his nervous pacing while waiting for the kettle. He knows better than to push, but directs a very particular look the other man's way all the same.

They're both nearly done, sandwiches eaten by the time Oli manages to say something.

"We should've axed him ages ago" He announces stoically, "He was a cunt for so long"

It's entirely expected that they're going to have post-Jona woes. Angry as they might be there was a point where he was a good person, a good friend and of course him getting hurt has probably just brought into focus how fucked up things had gotten, how long it had taken to reach the tipping point. Oli's always carried his guilt around with him in a big bloody box.

"It is what it is" Lee says, channelling his father, the words which he's heard a million times over. He could've stood up to Jona months ago, is equally to blame.

"I know I can't take it back, but maybe I could make it up to you?"

The guilty look Oli's sporting doesn't mix well with the sudden twinkle in his eye, the way he licks his lips suggestively and maybe it's wrong of Lee not to reassure him that things are fine, he's fine and they'll move on into a Jona-free era of the band and things'll be excellent but to instead find Oli's thigh under the counter, trace his fingers along the seam of his pants.

He lets Oli drag him to his bedroom, teeth against his neck and cold hands down the back of his trakkies, push him up against the wall before he drops to his knees, smug smile on his face like it's an achievement that he's made Lee hard and wanting so quickly – but it has been weeks, after all and Lee's always fallen so easily for any moves Oli wants to throw his way.

They have unspoken rules at this point, little nuances that both of them abide by – Oli keeps his hands to himself, away from the soft rise of Lee's stomach and in return Lee shoves down the weird sense of embarrassment he has everytime he praises the other man, lets out the noises he's always kept to himself.

Writing gets harder before it gets easier but it's not half as bad as it was for 'Suicide and Jordan's hesitant to throw ideas into the ring even though he's been invited to his and Oli's little song-circle everyday for the last few but his most poignant one has been that yeah, he thinks Oli could sing if he wanted. Oli had expressed a fleeting thought that maybe it'd be an interesting thing, laughed it off and said he's a shitty screamer already, doesn't need to know how awful he'd be if he actually tried but Jordan had seemed entirely sincere, the two of them disappearing for a few hours each day to presumably practice where no one can hear them.

The farmhouse has whatever mystical thing it was they'd been missing combined with large open bedrooms, an entire house and the studio in a separate building, forest at the back of the property and barely anyone for miles, just green fields and a few horses in a nearby paddock to keep them company.

In the afternoons they're usually outside, Matt acquiring a soccer ball from who knows where and teasing them into playing with beer bottles for goal posts, winner gets to pick their Fifa teammate or something equally inane. Lee sometimes goes for strolls with Vegan, both of them really getting a kick out of saying strolls and it's refreshing, spending time with someone who appreciates a good silence as much as he does.

Oli's infinitely more at ease though still tired and skinny and drawn, more affectionate than he has been, long legs often thrown over Lee's lap in the evenings while they watch TV. Most nights they sleep apart, refusing to be too reliant on the other and half the time Oli's still in the studio when Lee goes to bed anyway and he absolutely hates being woken up by cold fingers, cold feet. He'd be worried about leaving Oli alone with his thoughts but Jordan's usually there with him, hunched over the console surrounded by a handful of empty mugs.

He's in the living room one night, acoustic swapped for electric with a tiny amp connected to headphones – Vegan gets bitchy without his beauty sleep and he's been playing the same riff over and over for so long he's not even sure if he came up with it or pulled it from the grand guitar library in his head when there's footsteps crunching quickly outside on the gravel, the front door squeaking and when Lee looks up it's in time to catch Jordan practically skidding across the linoleum in his socks, worried look on his face.

“Oli's having a fit or something in his sleep” He says in a rush and his concern seems out of place until Lee's brain catches up with him and he manages to stop playing, fingers still itching to move. Oli's always had some rather interesting sleeping habits, ones that Jordan hasn't been around long enough to see.

“I couldn't wake him” Jordan continues, “Wasn't sure if I should call someone or just let you guys know”

“Would jus' be night terrors” Lee says, carefully setting his guitar onto the ground and standing up.

He follows Jordan back to the studio, both of them walking quickly and Oli's awake when they get there, tangled in his blankets and hunched over, elbows resting on his knees and when he looks up it's obvious he's been crying, shoulders heaving with panicked breaths.

“I can go” Jordan says quietly but Oli shakes his head, wan smile appearing on his lips.

“It's fine” He croaks, “Always been a bit of a fucked up sleeper, didn't mean to scare you, you went all white and everything”

Lee tugs at the blankets, ends up folding them into a useless ball at the end of the lounge.

“You could see me?” Jordan sounds more curious than anything, “That's a bit more than a night terror, isn't it?”

“Sleep paralysis, i'm awake but can't actually wake up or move” Oli offers, “I saw you, the woman sitting on me and the thing trying to kill you too”

He's going for shock value more than anything Lee thinks, pushing to see what kind of reaction Jordan'll give, testing him. The first time Oli had explained the hallucinations – which, combined with the fact that's literally unable to do more than breathe and blink had scared the fuck out of all of them, makes Lee thankful he's a light sleeper and Oli has to do to wake him is breather loudly. He's curious too, what Jordan might think, if this crosses the line between a kind of weird band he's working for and legitimately fucked up.

“That's both awful and metal as fuck”

It takes hour upon hour of practice but when Oli finally lets Jordan play them some of the vocal tracks they're all a bit surprised by how good he sounds. Something about him singing, actual bona-fide singing seems right, almost haunting in the way it works in so well and Jordan might be their saviour after all. It's a change but something each of them agrees is the right one. A new direction, pushed along by the old and shaped by the future.

Vegan gives Jordan the run-down on the best ways to wake Oli up without frightening him even more – namely, don't touch his hands or his head and maybe Oli's been saving it up but every single night he either wakes up screaming or frozen, whether he's in the studio with Jordan or the lounge with Jordan or in his bed alone and it unsettles them all to the point they mostly end up all sleeping in the living room, TV constantly on as a distraction, Matt persuading Jordan to sync up a few seasons of Alan Partridge to keep them entertained and it works well to disarm the tension, crying with laughter well into the night and trying to ignore how increasingly strung out Oli gets.

Sleepwalking

After a straight week of Oli being unable to sleep normally for more than a cat nap here and there they all end up a little sleep deprived and it's a push to keep working but if Oli is they all try to be in the studio too, even if he's hiding in the soundbooth and barely talking to even Jordan.

Jordan it turns out, shares some of Oli's religious hang-ups and apparently being a coerced into playing keyboard for his mothers church band has given him plenty of specific things to complain about, plenty of references for them to agree and disagree on.

"It's all getting very biblical though isn't it" Jordan says thoughtfully over a mouthful of spaghetti one evening, "How many nights has it been now?"

"Eight" Oli says grumpily, "I wish hell existed so I could go there"

The next morning Lee wanders with Vegan and Matt into the studio still eating his toast with jam to find Oli with his head on Jordan's shoulder, both of them sleeping peacefully, looking comfortable and right together. They're not that quiet and Jordan's eyes crack open. "He woke up screaming on the soundbooth floor and we sort of just ended up here" He says in a whisper and they all agree to let Oli nap as long as he can.

It's not very long because Vegan trips over something-nothing-everything about ten minutes later and falls on his ass hard enough to shake the foundations.

"We should go into the woods" Matt says, "Beats being in here and who knows, maybe it'll get some creative juices flowing"

They all cringe, but figure why the fuck not.

They all sleep through the night except Oli, who crawls into bed with Lee around three am with his Ipad, rather aggressively playing candy crush.

"Ten" Jordan announces two nights later over lunch, "Ten nights of terrors, got a nice ring to it"

"Could be a song" Vegan says.

"Already did, remember?" Matt chimes in, "Sleep being for the weak and all that, gotta live what you're saying hey Oli"

"I'm considering a rewrite" Oli whines, mashing his cereal around in his bowl before turning to Jordan, raising his hands in the air and waving them theatrically, milk dripping off his spoon.

"Maybe you should pray for me"

Lee isn't sure what side of the great divide he's on so he makes some kind of non-birthday wish, expresses his desire to the universe that it'd be nice if it could just let Oli sleep. He wishes quite often, not to fall over on stage, not to fuck up, not to get snowed in or out all the way down to requesting that there's always Golden Rough's at his local corner shop – in the last three years they've never run out.

Whether the universe cuts him some slack or he's just so, so fucking tired his brain can't be bothered to mess with him Oli does sleep through the entire night and well into the next afternoon, barely moving from being curled on his side in Vegan's bed, which he'd deemed the most comfortable.

At some point their producer turns up to sort through what they've got and Lee records his main guitar parts in two days, nice and simple and easy. Jordan's helping him too, the two of them working out parts that could be better served on keyboard instead of another line. He spends a third laying down the rhythm, still working out a few kinks here and there and they're definitely going to need to find a touring guitarist or the album really will be all drums like Matt wants.

He heads home for a few days, visits his parents and re-dusts his flat, enjoys the comfort of his own bed again, relaxes in the abundance of silence and being entirely alone, responsible for no one but himself.

News has gotten out somehow that they're recording and he lurks on the banks Twitter account, can't be bothered to post anything on his but likes a couple pictures just so everyone knows he hasn't died or anything. Jona hasn't tweeted at all and despite the temptation to delete him from every corner of the internet they share Lee holds off, but barely.

Matt heads off to Ibiza with his girlfriend for the weekend and Lee heads back to the studio to find everyone else absolutely shattered but almost done – Jordan playing him through the tracks and they're good – really fucking good, Oli's new found voice slotting in perfectly.

Oli's gone back to his notebook but is drawing now, endless doodles of circles and flowers and a couple of obligatory penises but mostly the same repetitive circles.

He has to ask, mildly concerned they're going to call them album Circles, Cocks and Carnations if someone doesn't step in.

“We need tattoos” Oli says, like it's completely obvious while entirely failing to answer Lee's actual question.

They get phone calls and emails as interview requests start to pile in but at this point they're saying not to everyone, not ready to face up yet.

On their last studio day Oli finally comes clean about the circles, explains it's actually a flower – the flower of life and Matt say he'd prefer the circle of life which prompts them all to start singing under their breath having had a few Disney movie nights in their time as a band and the concept fits, does make for what'll be a rather flattering tattoo if done right.

They get a few days back at home before being summoned to their label in London to make things officially-official, confirm that Jona is indeed no longer a part of Bring me the Horizon. Jordan comes too, all of them travelling rather glamorously on the train, not even first class and there'll be things for him to sign too. The albums off being mixed and they're treated to a rather nice bottle of champagne and share a celebratory toast of achievement with their label-people and it's not that bad, Oli swans about introducing Jordan to people and Lee's mostly comfortable lingering by the snack table with Vegan, sipping at his glass and hoping he doesn't look like too much of pretentious twat in his plaid suit pants.

It'd be a nice way to spend the evening but after an hour or so Oli starts very pointedly moving them all towards the door.

“What's the rush?” Matt complains, “There's gonna be pizza later”

“We” Oli says with a smirk, “Have an appointment with a lovely gentleman to get some ink done”

Of course they do.

“We do?” Jordan asks curiously and it'd be a dick move to leave him alone with a bunch of people he doesn't know or alone in the hotel rooms Lee presumes someone's booked for them but he's not sure if Oli's plans include Jordan, how he'd feel either way.

“Might grab another beer” Vegan says, disappearing back to the drinks table – he doesn't sit that well for tattoos, and Oli's circle-come-flower has a lot of intricate detail.

“You should come too, he's a good guy I swear, i've really been trying to stop getting shitty tattoos”

Jordan looks like he's considering it, all of them waiting for an answer. Jordan's of course free to say no but it feels important somehow, if he were to say yes.

“Why the fuck not” He says, and it's settled.

The studio is strangely homey compared to the off the wall sometimes weirdly sexual places Oli tends to drag them to, art covering the walls as per usual but a far less manic atmosphere and Matt's still complaining about the pizza he'd forgone until they realise they can order and get it delivered.

Vegan downs a third beer and puts on a stoic face to go first, Matt somehow convinces Oli to feed him pizza during his turn, Oli practically enjoys his and Lee just feels awkward like usual, doesn't like strangers in his personal space so much. Oli stays close, leaning against the chair and reading out ridiculous tweets from fans.

Jordan goes last and he winces a couple of times but seems otherwise chill, the five of them taking a photo afterwards, red and clingwrapped just enough to barely reveal what the tattoos might be of, Oli posting it to the band page.

It's not until they're walking somewhere – Oli trying to chase down the details of their hotel, all their bags left at the label since someone had said they'd get them sent over for them – when Vegan stops straight bang in the middle of the footpath.

“Fuck, they're not gonna know it's not Jona, are they?”

“Who the hell would know us from our arms?” Matt retorts, before the look on his face indicates he's realised that's a moronic thing to say when they're all inked as fuck.

“Sorry” Jordan says and he does look genuinely upset that he might've outed himself as well, whatever it is that he is now. “I didn't even think”

“It'll be fine” Oli assures, “Bit of mystery might hype things up some, we'll deal with it tomorrow”

Their hotel is really fucking fancy, people to take your luggage and marble floors and plenty of posh old people looking at them as if they're nothing, don't belong but all of them are long past the point of caring about stuff like that; a penthouse suite is a penthouse suite and it's always better if it doesn't cost them anything.

The entire top floor is theirs, individual rooms with ensuites, a huge combined area in the middle, outdoor pool and what looks like a hot tub as well. At some point Oli summons them all via text to a band meeting in his room and they spread across the king bed in tangle of limbs, Matt resting his head on Lee's chest and managing to still drink his beer without choking despite being practically horizontal.

Oli's making a certain kind of expression; eyebrows drawn like he's worried about whatever it is he's got to say and they've just recorded the album so Lee can't imagine he's about to break the band up.

“I think Jordan's good for us” He says and they all nod in agreement. Lee can admit, if only to himself, that Jordan is probably what pushed them to successfully get the album done in the first place; if he wasn't around there's a good chance they'd still be in the studio staring blankly at each other or have quite and gone home.

“We got lunch a couple times during break” Vegan offers, “Nice bloke really”

“I don't think he's going to suddenly become a cunt” Matt says, “What, we're all thinking it”

Everyone looks at Lee, as if expecting him to have something to add.

“I like Jordan” Is about all he's got at the moment and it might not be enough, judging by the off looks he's getting.

“We've always wanted someone to help us hit the direction we want to go and he turns up, good at everything and stuff”

It must be enough now, because Oli nods at him.

“We could” Oli says delicately, “He could come with us, on tour and you know, be with us”

“You want him to join the band” Vegan susses out, “Not the worst idea you've ever had”

“He's already got the tattoo, it's going to be a bit shit if we don't ask – he might not say yes but at least we won't look like knobheads”

“Like, right now?” They could, Jordan's just in one of the rooms nearby, probably wondering if they're talking about him.

Oli texts Jordan and he definitely looks nervous as he pokes his head around the door.

“This isn't an intervention, is it?” He blurts out before covering his mouth hastily, “I did not mean it like that” He says and it's still strange, how in-tune with them Jordan seems to be despite them not telling him even the half of anything. From experience, interventions involve a lot less beer.

“It's fine” Oli says sagely, “Rooms not nearly white enough”

The one thought running through Lee's mind is what if Jordan says no? He could, might want to have just done the album with them and be quite happy to move onto the next session job, might want to start his own reggae band or go back to Australia or just secretly hate of them.

He says yes and weight Lee wasn't aware of lifts from his shoulders.

When they do get around to checking the internet yeah, everyone's noticed it's not Jona and Jona's remained silent on the issue so they have to come clean, organising someone to help them write up a quick statement casually mentioning the lack of said guitarist and posting it, waiting anxiously for the inevitable backlash but honestly, people don't seem that bothered.

It takes a lot of self-control for Lee not to go through and favourite some of the tweets they're getting, gems such as 'I always knew he was a shitbiscuit' and 'His hair just wasn't up to standard' which is actually true, Jona never washed his fucking hair.

Of course, this only fuels the craziness over who the mystery fifth arm in the photo is, theories running rampant and they don't exactly announce Jordan just post a picture of him with the caption 'you'll be hearing from him soon' which makes everyone think they're going to replace Oli next, have the stranger sing instead, Oli making things worse by posting his own picture of a pair of maracas and 'A new direction?’

Things get wild, constant phone calls and texts from everyone they know because they haven't told anyone, not their friends or parents or girlfriends – Oli getting a phone call from Tom that was essentially just vague yelling and 'what the fucks'.

Interview requests finally get accepted after much debate on exactly who gets them and they drag Jordan along with little preamble, always striving to introduce him as casually as possible like he's always been there and the other man admits he's nervous but he manages to exude the kind of calm confidence that years in the spotlight have failed to give Lee. Jordan never stumbles over his words, has a smooth, intelligent answer for anything, playing off them with just enough humour and a cheeky smile.

There's always more people looking to just speak to Oli which is fair enough but their frontman takes to dragging Jordan along with him to quite a few anyway, easy reprieve between as they discuss the album, laying out a tempting trail of clues about their new sound. Oli's a nervous wreck off-camera and now it's not just Lee's thing to calm him down anymore because Jordan's there when he isn't, gentle words and endless patience.

He's there in a way Lee can't be, self-assured in public in a way that Lee can't be. Maybe he's better at it, too.

Go To Hell, For Heaven's Sake

While their release date is still undetermined decisions need to be made, things like exactly what shade of beige the cover should have and what kind of font – things Lee doesn't really have an opinion on one way or the other as long as the music is good which it is, so he's happy.

The internet is divided on whether they think Jordan is shit or not despite not having heard any of the songs yet and the other man seems entirely too relaxed about the whole situation, the fact that a lot of people hate him right now and it's yet another thing Lee hasn't mastered in all these years. It's not that he can't take criticism but the relentless viciousness of it tends to grind on a guy, is most of the reason he's pretty limited on what he does on social media, gets in and out before he can find too many offensive things – also he's just very lazy and doesn't really care, Oli posting enough for all of them anyway.

Jordan takes himself on a pseudo-tour of the UK, visiting friends and distant relatives and doing all kinds of tourist stuff but he keeps in touch through their group chat which quickly becomes mostly pictures of him frowning at the clouds, rain and general British greyscale weather and it's nice, always brings a smile to Lee's face.

He doesn't do all that much, savours his alone time and finally organises some of the adult things he's been putting off like getting a painter to re-do his spare room, a tiler to fix the one tile in kitchen he broke last year by dropping a keg of beer on it, files his tax return and hopes he hasn't fucked up it enough to owe the government money.

Oli comes and goes, working on a new line of clothing for his label and he's got his own beige related questions and still Lee doesn't really have an opinion, just nods at what he thinks are the appropriate times.

They decide to gather at Oli's house on release night by virtue of him having the nicest house and he's done the place up, cliché fairy lights they'd bought together at least years Christmas clearance sales strung up everywhere and there's a proud little smile on Oli's face as he presents a wide array of snacks and drinks complete with a selection of equally edible and not-so vegan cheeses more expensive than the drinks. By some feat of organisation they manage to arrive mostly together, the dogs greeting them while Matt spies the mountain of the crisps and promptly starts a duet with Oli of their infamous crisp song.

“I'm finally getting to meet the real celebrities here” Jordan says brightly, hands full with an overexcited Oskar, the little dog a big fan of terrorising new people and Vegan snorts, makes a beeline for his favourite spot on the lounge.

Things don't go terribly like Lee's had more than one nightmare about, in fact it's the opposite as the night eases into morning and more people are awake, more people listening to the thing they've achingly crafted from everything thing they are and it never seems to get any less stressful no matter how long they've been a band, every single album has Lee thinking

he'll have to wake up the next day and start slinging groceries at Morrisons, sharing smoke breaks with Matt.

Jordan finagles with Oli's considerable amount of technology to bring Twitter up on his projector screen and together they scroll through all parts of spectrum – people are loving it, hating and wanting Oli to fuck them in the ass, sometimes all in the same tweet. There's an obligatory amount of 'Jordan has ruined the band' but a surprisingly minimal number of death threats, though Lee's aware that there'll probably be more to come but that's not a Jordan specific thing, people tend to hate them just for existing anyway.

He needs a little prompting to post an appreciative tweet of his own but eventually caves and does so just to get Vegan off his back. They stay awake until the sun comes up over the hills just because they can, demolishing the snacks and embarrassing the hell out of each other with the videos Tom's left on Oli's computer of their early days, footage both terrible in quality and because they were rather wild, Jordan sprawled on the floor he's laughing so hard he's crying but he's laughing with them, not at them, mostly.

At some point Vegan kicks them off the lounge claiming it as his and he'll be having a kip and if anyone wakes him before lunch he'll cut them, Matt calling the spare room and there's a sideways glance from Jordan as they consider the remaining sleeping options.

“If you stay on your half I guess we can split” Matt says begrudgingly and Jordan looks hesitant.

“Are you sure?”

“Five of us were on a single once, sharing with you is still pretty Hilton”

Jordan seems satisfied with that and Lee definitely remembers the night in question, the damp floors and some kind of animal shuffling about in the roof, being sandwiched between a warm Oli and a freezing concrete wall.

Lee digs around in Oli's top drawer for the pair of sleep clothes he keeps there – distinctly not pyjamas but comfortable old things, explainable things given the amount of time they spend together writing music and that kind of thing.

Being the smart man he is Oli's invested in blackout blinds in his room, pulling them down and effectively cancelling the sun on the rare occasion it's actually out and not hidden by clouds, folds back the stupidly expensive but extremely comfortable sheets.

He's awoken at some point by heavy kisses to the side of his neck and Oli slung over the top of him with with a warm, reassuring weight and oddly, naked.

“Whareyedoin'?” Tumbles lazily out of his mouth, body tired and brain still catching up.

“Top of iTunes” Oli announces, “Celebrating”

With that, he very not subtly grabs Lee's hand and drags it down between his legs, lets him feel how hard he is and then below, where he's soft and slick and open and christ, Lee's

suddenly very much more awake.

His eyes flick to the door because he's not the type to want to broadcast well, anything about this kind of thing to anyone else least of all Matt who still enjoys teasing him about the one time in Scotland he'd had a girl in the bathroom at the bar or when he and Oli had been particular desperate in back room of venue once, maybe twice. Jordan too, doesn't need to know anything else about them.

“Locked it already” Oli assures him, fingers tugging at the hem of Lee's shirt, “Heatings on too so no excuses”

It's no secret Lee's not the greatest fan of being naked, which makes the way he lets Oli divest him of all his clothes in quick succession with little hesitation the exception rather than the rule. He sits up, wrenches the covers back and pins Oli underneath him, the smaller man letting out an undignified squeak before grinning impishly up at him, looping his arms around Lee's neck.

Oli's beautiful like this with all his ink on display and idly Lee reflects back to a conversation they'd had with a tattooist in Milan who'd been trying to convince Oli that dick ink was a thing and Lee hopes he's entirely forgotten about it, loves the way Oli's cock reddens and stands out against the mess of black and pale skin.

“C'mon” Oli coaxes, “Can admire me later”

Interviews and photoshoots blur into each other and it's cool, how the kids are creating concepts of things even Oli hadn't considered, taking the album and making it their own and Lee's willing to admit he's a bit proud every time someone he considers worth listening to compliments him on the guitar work, likes the reassurance that it's okay they tossed Jona and didn't replace him. He's apparently still the most unattractive member of the band in way more discussions than should be strictly necessary – they all know Oli is the favourite and generally revel in mocking him for it, pulling pages from magazines and leaving them everywhere for him to find.

What he can focus on clearly is Jordan. Ever confident Jordan who's still being dragged around by Oli, has started relaxing into his role now and Lee's both impressed and mildly blindsided when the other man turns questions to him, freely admits he's not been that involved with how they got to the point of making the album in the first place, thinks that Lee's the right person to answer – and he's not, is the thing, panics and stumbles over his words and Oli has to bail him out again.

He can't explain the last year, what they've been through.

Jordan starts picking up on the little things, how Vegan always needs someone to check his hair whenever he steps out of plane, train or automobile and knows to immediately remove Matt's cutlery from him when they're at posh restaurants to stop him from drumming and offending everyones pretentious grandmothers who are somehow all related to royalty.

There's other things too, how he doesn't make a big deal out of Oli's rushed whisper in the middle of a crowded street they're on headed to a signing that Lee doesn't like crowds, the

attention so much and if he could let him walk next to Oli instead, just easily moves away and starts a tradition of following closely behind and they're to the point now where Lee actively seeks both of them out to walk with no matter the occasion.

Their plans for the year aren't huge – possibly a few festival shows with plenty of rehearsal time to get Jordan sorted, figure out how exactly they're going to do things and find another guitarist.

They argue about what their first music video will be, all have very different favourite songs and Matt very politely ejects everyone from the label from the room while they discuss, eventually end up picking three songs and leaving to Oli to create some kind of conceptual masterpieces for them in whatever order he likes. Oli loves scripting their videos so they mostly leave it to him, he's always nice enough to include them all in whatever bizarre ideas he's got.

Being included is not all it's cracked up to be when they end up on a tiny island in Germany in the middle of fucking winter getting frostbite. The snow is knee high in some places and Lee's got it the worst because everyone's taller, is only getting mid-calf at worst.

No number of coats keeps them warm enough, huddling together when they're not required and of course they need nights shot too, dropping the temperature down to something truly unholy. It's one of the few times that having Oli pressed up against him in public doesn't put him off because they have a legitimate excuse.

While Matt responds to the cold by being as loud and active as possible and Vegan's just his classic stoic self Jordan seems confused by the entire experience, switching between cussing and plaintive whining, furry hood of the top jacket he's wearing pulled tightly around his head and by the time they're done they're all fucking out of it, disorientated by the cold, Oli tackling Jordan to the frozen ground and demanding he makes snow angels with him, both of them grinning like maniacs and snows started to fall again covering them all in a fine dusting of white.

Jordan finishes first, sitting up and raising his arms to the sky, tongue stuck out to catch snowflakes on his tongue and Lee finds himself staring, watching the other man with his eyes shining blue and cheeks flushed pink before catching himself and going back to watching Oli, who's struggling to make his angel work.

It's a horrible, terrible revelation for him to realise that Jordan is a pretty attractive bloke. Not because Lee thinks he shouldn't – well he does a little bit, but every day that goes by with Oli not tossing him to the gutter reinforces that it's completely fine to be who he is – he just actively tries not to think about the people he works with in any attraction related capacity.

Oli is again to the exception to the rule and maybe Matt has what he'd call a cute sleeping face but him and Vegan and Curtis and Jona and ninety-nine percent of the guys he sees on a regular basis just don't do it for him so why, why is suddenly the most difficult thing in the world not to look at Jordan?

The tiny German hotel they've booked is packed to the brim with locals who've been snowed in, precious few rooms available and Jordan ends up in his and Oli's room, Matt and Vegan in

with Sheep and with how the guy snores they've gotten the worse end of the deal, at least Jordan sleeps quietly.

There's two double beds and enough extra blankets to go around, hot water at a premium and they all shower quickly, creaky taps and rust around the bottom of the shower.

Lee feels awkward coming out of the bathroom, Oli curled up in what's obviously going to be their bed and Jordan sitting on the edge of his, digging through his bag, cords and cables flying everywhere.

It's still cold, but not cold enough to legitimise being as close to Oli as he wants to be. He walks towards the bed, physically hesitates to move into the spot Oli's now made for him, blankets pulled back. Jordan knowing and Jordan seeing are two very different things.

“Don't worry about Jordan” Oli deadpans and Lee cringes, wishes he wouldn't bring his insecurities straight out into the open like that, would be annoyed but knows that's just how Oli is, is trying to be helpful.

Jordan looks up, seemingly surveys the situation.

“You guys do whatever it is that you'd normally do, don't mind me” He says before he pauses, “Well, i'd mind me a little bit” and he winks at them as Oli laughs and Lee's cheeks warm as he climbs into the bed, confronted with Oli's freezing hands and colder toes as the other man gets as close as possible.

He falls asleep to Oli warm against his chest and the clacking of Jordan's laptop keyboard.

Shadow Moses

Back in the UK Oli's still working intensely on his new clothing release, disappearing with random people at all hours searching for the exact right group of models – he always asks but Lee will never, happy to wear whatever Oli brings home for him but unwilling to set aside just how much he hates getting any kind of photos done and Oli's work deserves the proper kind of model to show them off anyway.

Being the token new guy however, means that Jordan can and has been convinced, constantly dressed in something, usually a coat, from the label and when Vegan mocks him he just shrugs and says he's not one to turn down free clothes and that they're quite nice. No one but Lee notices that Oli's across the room when he says it, smiling to himself.

Jordan suits the clothes too, tall enough that they don't swim on him, skinny enough to not look like a chubby penguin despite all the layers.

They do a few magazine shoots and Lee's more than happy to fade into the background as usual, the only good thing about them is that their aesthetic or whatever Oli calls it means he doesn't have to pretend to be happy to be there, put on any kind of pleasant facial expression. Jordan is all smiles, eyes bright and looks be enjoying himself, lingering at the refreshment table in their break to throw grapes for Matt to catch in his mouth, shoulder to shoulder with Oli as they compare filters for the selfie they just took, Jordan's arm around his shoulders.

Lee's never been the type of person to seek out affection even from his family, prefers things simple and outside of the perimeter he's set for himself bar the few people he lets in but it seems that it in all his conversations with everyone no one's told Jordan. The affection the taller man shares easily with everyone else extends to Lee as well, a hand on his arm or friendly nudge at a humorous piece of graffiti, being squished together in lifts and knee to knee in the van he never pushes Jordan away and if he notices how awkward it sometimes is despite Lee's best efforts not to show it he doesn't say anything, doesn't pull away but never seems to push beyond Lee's invisible limits.

Often now he finds Oli and Jordan together in all the places he'd usually be, sandwiched into tiny airport terminal seats, Jordan with his laptop open and it's resting on both their thighs and it doesn't mean anything, just another late night flight and Oli needing to be kept entertained otherwise he gets up to all kinds of moronic things with Matt but a low feeling settles in Lee's gut at how they look together, matching bloody coats and everything.

Oli's more touchy-feely with him too and it only takes a few nights of the other man in his bed for Lee to realise just how much he's missed his constant presence, knowing he's right there to wake Oli up if needed, can tug him close. He doesn't talk about it, doesn't have the kind of friendship with anyone really to be discussing his personal life in such depth but things have been rough between them for a while.

They've never reached breaking point and Lee's sure if they were going to it definitely would've happened already. Oli had pushed him away and in return Lee had pushed right

back, the two of them fighting over everything from putting the butter back in the fridge to the girls he'd come home to find Oli in bed with and even in his worst moments, Oli's worst moments they've stubbornly refused to leave the other, even if Lee's sure he was more tethered by the fear of finding Oli dead in his house than any sense of loyalty at the time.

He's long since let go of the resentment, the drugs no excuse but since he's come home Oli is different – not magically, religiously changed but not off his face at every given opportunity, hasn't given Lee any reason not to trust him, shines a little brighter every day they share.

Rehearsals start for tour with a huge rented out space that's three steps away from being the setting of the next Midsomer Murders murder, an old factory building that's only real selling points are that no one can hear them and the acoustics are excellent. They round up all their usual tech suspects, start working on what's no doubt now a rather long and pricey list of all the things they want to do, want to try. As long as the pyro and anything else wild they end up with is far enough away that both he can and Vegan – especially Vegan can't fall into it Lee's game for just about anything.

Jordan turns up on the third day with an assortment of his own gear, none of which Sheep their tour manager deems anywhere near suitable, that and the fact that for some reason half the things Jordan needs did not make it to the order list.

Sheep's not a morning guy even though that's when a lot of his actual work happens and he grumbles loudly, swearing and tearing pieces of paper into little tiny pieces in pre-coffee frustration. He's always sharp around the edges, vaguely threatening in the way that you've got to be to have been in the business this long. Jordan seems to get a read on him quickly, producing a new list and even offering to track it down himself and then bring back coffee.

Behind Lee and squished in between his tour-guitarist and Matt's drum kit a place for Jordan is found, up on a riser and Lee's not sure how he feels about having Jordan being able to watch him all the time.

He's trying to find the missing power cord for one of his pedals in a large pile of cords when there's the sound of raucous laughter and swearing from up front and Lee pokes his head over the top of the crate.

It turns out Oli's made a last minute addition to the gear list because there's a giant fucking gong in the middle of the room and no one else would be stupid enough to mess with Sheep like that.

“What the fuck are you even going to do with that Sykes, how the fuck are we supposed to get that on a plane?” Sheep, understandably, is furious. It's a pretty big gong.

“It comes with it's own case” Oli says sheepishly, would look guilty except for the smirk he's trying and failing to hide. “It's really cool?”

There's a solid few minutes where everyone abandons what they're doing to take turns hitting the gong.

Rehearsal progresses to the point where things start to stick and they find places for Jordan in some of their older songs, though there's still a few where he unequivocally doesn't belong and one or two he refuses to touch, says he's done his fair share of Googling and doesn't actually want to get murdered if he messes with the classics. Having the other man at his back isn't so bad, sometimes Lee turns around to poke at an amp or just to have anything other to stare at than the boring brick walls and Jordan's always got a smile or wave of hand for him, the two of them united in their laughter whenever Vegan trips over, the more clearly it's marked the funnier it becomes.

The US is their destination and all of them are nervous, the states not their home turf like Europe is, critics harsher and they tend to collectively shrink into themselves a little more, not least because American dudes always like to start fights and well, guns are a thing. They never come for him but Lee carries a certain amount of worry around with him that Oli will get shot for running his mouth, probably drag Matt along with him because Nicholls is never not up for a fight.

Finding out last minute that they've been bumped up to business class, just the five of them much to Sheep's disappointment, the poor guy trying to wheedle the attendant into finding an extra seat with no luck is a nice surprise. Lee doesn't like long haul flights, the cramped space for hours upon hours with no escape in the usually chaotic space of economy or premium economy if they're lucky.

Business class could make things a lot more bearable.

Ever polite, Jordan offers to trade seats with Oli to let them sit together when it turns out they'll be sitting together and Lee's about to politely refuse – If he's in the wrong kind of mood Oli's terrible to fly next to and it's barely dawn as it is so things aren't in his favour – when Vegan pipes up, says he'll take the next row with Matt and all three of them can sit together which is his very nice way of saying he doesn't want to sit next to Oli either.

There's plenty of space in business though, little compartments in the same row meaning there's enough distance between them, a tiny little window like thing they can pull up to ignore each other if they want, still close enough to fight over each others complimentary blankets. It does mean at the very least that he can't fall asleep on Jordan or something equally embarrassing.

He naps on and off, occasionally poking his head around to check on Oli who rarely sleeps for risk of anything happening both in-flight and in his sleep, accepts Jordan's offer to split a beer and makes two terrifying trips to the bathrooms, fucking hates how creepy and cramped they are.

It still morning when they touch down, only Matt having managed to get any decent sleep – Jordan spending most of his time buried in a book, Oli with his movie marathon and Lee's been glued to his backup phone he keeps all his music on specifically for flights, takes advantage of the free sleepmask to block everything and everyone out, hoodie pulled over his head and blanket on his knees.

The warm weather hits them quickly, jackets and jumpers traded in for t-shirts and Lee wishes he'd had the energy to iron his before he left, fabric crinkled in a way that not even

international flight excuses.

First show jitters run rampant through all of them and the shows sold out too, a big city with a big venue and it's the only time Lee gets to pretend he's the calmest, cool and in control when really he's just well versed in keeping things to himself. Oli's trying but ends up pacing back and forth muttering lyrics to himself, Matt attacking his practice pad and Vegan getting in a last game of Street Fighter. Lee's go to is just holding any available guitar, pretending to be tuning or playing but actually just running his hands up and down the neck to keep himself together.

Jordan comes and goes, expression serious but voice upbeat and cheerful, confesses to being way out of his fucking depth.

"I was only in a little band" He says, "Nothing like this"

Oli marches up to him, pokes a tattooed finger into Jordan's chest. "Stage fright is not an option" He says firmly, "Honestly, i'd be more worried about someone jumping security and coming to tell you just how much you fucking suck"

Vegan snorts and Jordan's whole face sucks up into a cringe like he hadn't considered that.

"You know just what to tell a guy, don't you?"

Vegan comes over to pat his shoulder. "It'll be fine, they always go for Oli first"

For an American show it goes great. Possibly excellent – there's the requisite number of haters and it still amuses Lee to this day that people will pay just to yell insults at them live and in-person but no one tries to fight them and hearing the songs they've worked so hard on sung back to them is never anything less than an ethereal sensation.

The mix of old and new on the setlist goes down a treat and while Jordan's voice wavers a few times and he loses a few seconds hunting for the right cues he doesn't majorly fuck up, doesn't throw up even though he'd threatened he might.

It's been so long since they've played that the adrenaline rush is almost too much to handle and Lee struggles to contain himself, unsure what to do with the excitement when he normally plateaus out quite quickly, easily. Matt's gleefully dunking himself in bag of ice and Oli's putting some down his pants, both of them drenched in sweat but only one of them really capturing Lee's attention. Oli's practically glowing, grinning from ear to ear and all of a sudden his excess energy channels itself into one rather specific train of thought.

"Is this because you missed me o-or the shows?" Oli can barely get the words out, head thrown back against the tiled wall of the shower, water streaming down his heaving chest as Lee adjusts the bruising grip he's got on the taller mans thighs, pressing him harder into the corner, fucking into him with a determination he wasn't aware he possessed, couldn't stop his brain forming the idea of fucking Oli in the showers, couldn't stop his hands from reaching out and grabbing Oli's sweaty shirt, tugging him out and down the hall past everyone and too worked up to give flying fuck about the impression they'd be making for once.

A little bit of both Lee thinks, unsure of whether the truth will piss Oli off. He'll probably find it hilarious, is probably why he asked but Lee's not that fit that he's got the energy to spare to answer in anything more than a vague grunt.

“Fuck, I don't even care if it's the shows, just don't stop”

Vegan wolf whistles when they subtly try to stagger their arrival back at the dressing room.

“Good show, huh?”

Oli flips him off lazily, satisfied smirk on his face. “Was alright” He drawls and from his place on the couch Jordan snickers.

“Do I want to know what happens if it's an excellent show?”

“Well” Matt says thoughtfully, “We had what I think Lee called a 'fucking good time' last time we were in where was it, Mexico and let me tell you it must've been because -”

“Matt!” There's no way Lee's going to let him finish the story, breaks out his trademark death stare and Matt just laughs.

“Later” He promises, “I'm off to shower anyway, hope you two cleaned up at least”

Jordan continues to look amused and it's both a blessing and a curse that he's so comfortable with them, makes Matt and Vegan comfortable enough to make jokes in his and their presence, like he's been around for years and not precious few months.

Lee locates an ice cold beer, some American brew that tastes familiar enough, seats himself on the other end of the couch from Jordan, leans his head back. There's a burn in his shoulders, an ache in his neck now he's cooling down, hair no doubt looking absolutely shit because he hadn't washed it, just let it get wet.

Jordan hasn't made it to the showers yet, shirt still sticking to him and everything about the way he's slung across the leather is entirely relaxed and content. It hadn't been so bad having him at his back and Lee thinks he might come to appreciate having someone else to play off, interact with because he knows people tend to dislike how introverted he is, how little he leaves his side of the stage and it's rare that he does more than cross paths with Vegan and give him a friendly nod, hang his head in a state of awkwardness that really should've worn off by now as Oli calls out his solo.

Tour bus life is universal, not too much difference these days beyond the different power adapters and their tendency to buy weird, wacky and occasionally offensive souvenirs. Oli takes a top bunk as usual, Lee snagging a middle below and Jordan's new guy status means he's on the bottom on the other side, closest to the eau de shoe.

They've got a Playstation and an Xbox to curb any arguing over the better system, Nintendo for their ritualistic late night Mario Kart battles and as the days pass and shows go on things are going better for them in the US than they ever have before.

Jordan gets dragged to every early morning interview or radio gig, Vegan more than happy to pass up his spot for a sleep in and often Lee wakes around midday to find the two of them napping in the back of the bus, coffees abandoned and at opposite ends of the lounge, Jordan's bare legs against Oli's inked ones. Sometimes they'll know he's poked his head in, shuffle sleepily around enough to make room for him and his cereal of choice – he can't help but enjoy the boxes of sugary sin America is known for and Oli usually waits for him to be half done before sticking his fingers in to grab a milky handful, provide a review as he licks the stickiness from his fingers. Jordan is far more polite, socked feet resting gently against Lee's thigh as he closes his eyes again, mumbles something about how gross Oli's fingers probably are and Lee makes a noise of agreement but can't really complain, not after the few times Oli's forgone food altogether.

And The Snakes Start To Sing

The tour progresses, state lines blurring together and the summer heat is relentless, something Lee never adjusts to. He's a British boy at heart, feels most at home under an overcast sky. It gets hot enough in California that he tags along with everyone to the beach, obligingly joins in a long chain of exceedingly pale dudes slathering the highest rating sunscreen onto each others backs and while he refuses to take off his own shirt he does purchase a pair of board shorts, wade into the water and try to keep out of Oli and Matt's roughhousing, hates getting water up his nose.

He seeks sanctuary with Jordan to explore some rock pools, both of them careful not to cut their feet and it's peaceful, the only sounds the crashing of waves and Vegans deep, cackling laughter echoing from up the beach.

"This is nice" Jordan says as they find a big, flat rock to sit on, have their feet dipping into the water – only after checking for mildly dangerous sea creatures, which it seems sufficiently void of.

Lee agrees, makes some kind of noise that he figures will convey the sentiment. He's so damn white compared to Jordan (Compared to anyone). He's thinks maybe the variety of tattoos on his legs helps to compensate, even if some of it's ancient and needs redoing.

"Everything is nice, I mean" Jordan clarifies, "The whole Bring Me The Horizon experience and fuck, that sounds even cheesier out loud than in my head"

For the first time, Jordan sounds unsure of himself.

"I just, and this going to sound stupid, I wasn't sure you'd all like me even when you invited me on tour"

Lee tries his very best not to sound like a sarcastic wanker because he truly means what he's saying, just lacks the finesse to find a better way to put it.

"Of course we like you, if Oli didn't you would've been out on your ass before you could blink and Matt's never kept a thought he's had to himself"

Jordan shoots him a small grin before he turns his head back to the water.

"It's not always about Oli though, is it?"

For Lee, things generally are. He defers most things to the other man simply for the ease of not having to worry and he wouldn't do that if he didn't trust him. That's not to say they haven't learnt in excruciatingly painful detail the reality that sometimes Oli can't be trusted but when it comes down to things involving the band, poor choices in guitarists aside, all of them know he's got their backs.

Lee's not sure what Jordan wants him to say.

“Generally” He says thoughtfully, “If people can tolerate him they're alright”

Oli can be absolutely infuriating beyond the point of no return and suddenly it occurs to Lee that maybe Jordan isn't really talking about Oli. It's obviously apparent by the amount of time the two of them have spent together, in-studio and now on tour, that Oli is pretty fond of their new addition.

Jordan stays silent as Lee clenches his fingers against the rocks and makes the inevitable logical jump.

“I like you just fine” He mumbles, feeling entirely too awkward, like he's some teenage girl on Coronation Street admitting to a highschool crush. He knows he's hard to read and doesn't even try to work on it, happy in the slightly removed little bubble that his position and personality afford him. If Jordan hadn't spent the last few months being a nice, caring guy it'd be weird that he'd even care whether Lee hates his guts or not but well, Lee's inclined to believe he really is just that nice.

Jordan's smile returns and he wiggles himself close enough to nudge Lee with a friendly shoulder and he might be going to say something but it's interrupted by a blood-curdling scream from up the beach, where Vegan seems to be doing his best to suffocate Matt underneath a pile of seaweed, has him pinned down into the sand right where the waves are breaking. Oli's bouncing around between them like he's unsure who he's going to back to win.

It's only at that very moment that the idea sinks into his brain for the very first time. Maybe Oli does like Jordan more. Jordan who isn't half-bad when shirtless and wet, hair slicked back against his head and just starting to dry, curling uncharacteristically at the ends. They've never really discussed their previous relationships beyond short-lived girlfriends and long strings of people Sheep's had to kick out in the mornings and the most Oli's ever let slip about who he finds attractive when he's not drunk or high is limited to Chester Bennington, Sam Carter and Mrs Nicholls. It's been so long since Oli's been in a relationship with anyone else that Lee struggle to think back, consider the possibility.

Ostensibly he knows that it's a ridiculous thing to even consider but everyone always used to comment on how back in the day him and Oli had been practically attached at the hip even in friendship and now whenever he turns around Jordan's never too far away.

Somewhere days away from Los Angeles the heat turns to an almost familiar cold, torrential rain and endless storms, the ever present threat of flash flooding blocking them from the next destination. It doesn't help that they're right on the edge of the aptly named tornado alley and every night that clouds fill the dark sky all of them, even if they won't admit it, are scared out of their fucking minds.

They manage to cope mostly by having a constant connection to every single weather report possible, acquiring a few bottles of tequila to take the edge off and sharing hotel rooms even though they've got one each. The hotel they're staying in at the moment is huge, twenty three floors of potential hurricane devastation and it must be a definite threat because in the little drawers beside the bibles is detailed 'what to do if the shit hits the fan' guide, complete with directions down the the purposely fitted out basement.

They're on the twentieth floor but not even Matt cracks a joke about them not being to make it.

It's another good show despite the storms outside, the kids almost absorbing the energy above them and returning it two-fold and there's a group of guys commandeering the middle of the crowd like they're being paid, saluting Oli as they split the floor right down the middle. It's more fun than Lee's had onstage in a while and he even ventures outside of usual chunk of stage, leaning up against Vegan in a rare moment of contact that has their bassist beaming at him before he whirls away, coming dangerously close to an amp or two.

Eventually everyone else heads up to their rooms from the lobby bar they've been lingering in, watching the lightning flash across the sky outside the windows and it's just the three of them, Oli on one side and Jordan on the other. They've each got a comically bright blue cocktail complete with little purple umbrella and Lee's not really involved in the conversation, present in body but mind a million miles away not really thinking about anything at all. Bits and pieces do get through, the other two discussing something about whether it would be possible to organise a circle pit within a circle with each of them going separate directions. It's something worth coming back to, even if they just recruit a bunch of mates to try it out, Lee's pretty sure it'd be hilarious.

Oli's knee is resting against his, a solid weight as he swirls his drink around in the glass, expression bright as he snickers at Jordan's suggestion of attempting a conga line as well and they should probably be heading to bed before either of them get any other great ideas.

Jordan seems to read his mind, downing the last of his cocktail and sighing heavily. "What time've we got bus call?"

"Fucked if I know" Oli's never been great with time and tour only makes him worse but that's why day sheets were invented, why Sheep gets an extra nice Christmas present each year for safely and promptly navigating them around the globe.

"Eight" Lee's always got an alarm set, doesn't hate being late but hates being the one who's holding everyone up.

The lobby is quiet as they wait for the lift, piling in with Oli playfully nudging them out of the way so he can push the buttons. A tinny, outdated tune plays through the ceiling and idly Lee's fingers tap against his thigh, mind wandering again. He's content, looking forward to a solid six hours of sleep, continental breakfast in the morning.

Jordan shrieks before he can register the rattling under his feet, metallic screeching before the lift comes to a grinding halt, lights dimming before coming back on and Oli swears, hands braced against the wall.

"Fucking hell" There goes his relaxing evening. They stay frozen for a few long moments but when nothing else happens Jordan releases his grip on the handrail and swears, Oli echoing him before reaching out to press the door button but nothing happens, they're stuck somewhere between the ground and their floor, no way of telling where.

“Righto then” Jordan says and if there's a little waver to his voice Lee's not going to call him out when his own hearts hammering in his chest in fright.

There's an emergency button but they quickly discover it doesn't work, Oli stabbing at it in fruitless frustration, shifting from foot to foot and he's not claustrophobic exactly but Lee knows he'd prefer to get out of here sooner rather than later.

Jordan calls downstairs, strikes up a polite conversation with a lady named Karen, who's trying to get someone to come and get them out because it's only their luck that because of the storms emergency services are in short supply and the maintenance man doesn't know anything about lifts. Jordan's nicer than any of them would be about and Oli's getting worked up, pacing back and forth. Lee grabs Jordan's attention and mouths the words claustrophobic and then points to his phone and Jordan dutifully repeats the message in the hopes that it'll hurry the process, both of them looking over at Oli who flips them off but continues pacing.

By the time Jordan's hung up – Karen will apparently call back if there's any news to be had, it's looking like half-hour wait at least – Oli is rapidly reaching the end of his his limited tether. He's usually fine in small spaces but Lee knows that lifts trigger a certain set of memories, that a tiny windowless metal room isn't so different from the tiny windowless white ones designated for seventy-two hour holds. Even he's uncomfortable being in here, has his own set of nightmares where he relives Oli at his most desperate, most strung out on whatever he'd taken, violent and uncontrollable to the point he'd been tied down and literally left to scream it out alone, the only view from a small plastic gap in the door and it's no doubt that's where Oli's head is right now too, pacing abandoned to curl up knees to his chest in the back right corner, head bowed and shoulders shaking.

Lee texts Matt, tells him to come on down to anywhere they might be so that there'll be someone familiar outside.

Jordan watches silently, hands around his phone like he's not quite sure what to do. Lee's not entirely sure either, Oli never follows the same playbook and anything he tries will be a gamble between making it better or worse for the other man.

Karen calls back just as Oli's gotten up and started banging at the doors, fingers scrabbling against the metal before he snarls in defeat and drives his fist into it, once, twice before Lee can manage to pull him away, push him up against the opposite wall. She must be concerned because Jordan relays the option to have paramedics there as well and Lee quickly shakes his head, that's the very last thing they need.

Reluctantly he has to let Oli go, holding on to him for too long will only make the flashbacks worse, joins Jordan leaning against the wall and Jordan leans into him, looking worried but willing to go with Lee's calls on this one.

Ten minutes pass and then fifteen and Oli's half-way to hyperventilating, keeping up a constant stream of unintelligible words under his breath as he starts scratching at himself, dragging his fingers against the denim of his jeans, down to the soft skin between the bottom hem and the ankle socks he's wearing and Lee does have to intervene then to stop him from drawing blood, cautiously dropping to his knees beside him and closing his hands over Oli's

trembling ones, guiding them back up to his knees. He can't get him to completely stop but welts they can deal with, are the lesser evil here.

Another age passes before there's sounds, voices outside and finally they're a step closer to getting the hell out. If anything it makes Oli worse, chanting turning to barely controlled sobbing and fuck, they don't need anyone outside the door trying to help when they manage to get the door open. Lee leans forward, grabs Oli by the shoulders and shakes him roughly.

"You have to stop right now otherwise they're going to come in here and try and take you, do you understand?"

He makes the words, his tone far harsher than he wants, the only way he knows how to get them past the panic. He hates how the words roll so cruelly off his tongue but they really don't need some do-gooder thinking they're trying to help and Oli geared up for a fight.

"You can't be fucking serious" Jordan's voice interjects immediately as he wedges himself between them looking positively scandalised. "You think saying that's going to help?"

"Yes" Lee snaps, "Back off"

Right now there just isn't enough time to explain things, convince Jordan that despite how bad it all looks he's got their best interests at heart. He looks back at Oli who's fallen silent but is only vaguely watching them, still mostly inside his head.

"He needs to come back to reality, I can't pussyfoot around with him right now"

It's the best Lee can come up with on such short notice because there's vigorous scraping from outside and Oli's not in any state to be found just yet.

"It's not the way" Jordan insists and Lee doesn't want to fight with him, let's himself be pushed away and replaced, Jordan kneeling down and adopting what is probably supposed to be a soothing tone but coming out not quite right and as soon as his no doubt well intentioned hands land on Oli's shoulders he gets kicked for his trouble, Oli not pulling back in the slightest and getting him right in the thigh, Jordan's face saying all the curses he isn't as he recoils.

"I fucking told you" Lee hisses and sure he could've warned the guy but being right feels everything but. "Let me do this, it's not hurting him and we all want to get out of here in one piece"

A crowbar shoves it's way into a tiny crack in the door and Jordan relents, clutching his leg and he looks pissed, like the minute they're free all hell is going to break loose and maybe it will.

Oli scrambles out of his arms and bolts the minute he's able to climb out of the newly created cap in the lift door, propped open and quite high up as they're in-between floors, disappearing from view.

"I got 'im!" Matt hollers from somewhere and that's the best Lee can hope for.

He ends up needing a hand from a gruff, grey-bearded fireman to get out, the ledge just a little too high for him to jump up to and there's a crowd gathered outside, Sheep, Vegan, hotel staff and an entire trucks worth of firefighters. Jordan crawls out beside him before Lee remembers to move, that he needs to go and track Oli down.

“They went downstairs” Vegan supplies, “Said something about the rain”

The stairs are mostly unused, covered in ratty red carpet that hasn't been updated with the rest of the building and Lee takes them two, three at a time, unaware he's being followed until Jordan's longer legs overtake him, pin him in the corner of the fifth or sixth landing.

“If you're just going to yell at him more I think you should leave him alone” His voice is steady and he looks entirely serious, angry and he's got things so wrong. It pisses Lee off that he's the default bad guy here, that Jordan thinks he knows enough to pick a side.

“I had to” Lee retorts irritably, “You don't understand”

He needs to go and find Oli before Matt loses sight of him, the taller man wiley when he wants to be.

Jordan's brow furrows so much it's almost up into his hairline. “You had to?” He echoes, “I thought you'd know better than that, after all the trouble you've had”

The words instantly cut deep and underneath the frustration hurt wells up in Lee's chest, sharp and bright. This isn't his fucking fault and where does Jordan get off assuming things he doesn't know shift about, think that his months to their years means anything. He wants to turn tail and go to his room, fire off a vicious snark about how if Jordan's so fucking great than he can go get Oli, drag him back inside and patch him back up. He wants to, but he won't. Oli doesn't deserve that from him and that's not what he promised Tom.

He shoves Jordan, who makes a surprised little sound, out of his way, throws parting words as he continues down the stairs practically daring the other man to follow him.

“You don't know shit”

Seen It All Before

The next morning Oli disappears from their bed before the sun rises, tells Jordan enough to have the other man slinking into room alone looking like someones gone off and run over his cat. It's far too early and Lee's barely awake, wiggling up the bed into a sitting position and more importantly, he isn't fucking interested in whatever bullshit apology Jordan's no doubt got. He's barely slept, mind rolling around the idea that maybe just because it works, that Oli lets him makes it okay to deal with that kind of panic in the way he does. Maybe it hurts Oli more than he lets on. No one else has ever said anything about it but maybe they're just relieved it's not them doing it, or that in comparision to before it's so much beeter.

Part of him is plenty annoyed that Oli's had to stick up for him again, that he balked at explaining to Jordan himself. He doesn't need Jordan trying to make him feel better.

Jordan approaches tentatively and sits at the vey end of the bed, hands clasped tightly in his lap.

“I'm not going to apologise for caring” He says quietly, “But even before Matt and Vegan came down on me like a ton of bricks I realised that I crossed a line”

Underneath a childish sense of resentment a small part of Lee warms at the knowledge of it not just being Oli that has his back. Matt and Vegan are his brothers but they often leave Oli and him to each other.

“I didn't mean to insinuate that you guys don't have your shit together because Oli just made it very clear that you do and he trusts you”

It's not entirely out of left field what Jordan's saying, Lee didn't honestly expect the guy to come out swinging and indignant or anything but that doesn't change the fact that the words had hurt, that he's had to bare another part of his and Oli's relationship.

He picks at the bedspead, aware that as much as he wants to curl back into a very rockstar-esque sulking ball under the blankets Oli is outside somewhere worrying about what he's going to do, whether him and Jordan will work it out or start a punch up.

“We've tried everything” Lee murmurs, “He just gets stuck in the panic and there's nothing else that works, otherwise people you know, get hurt”

Jordan offers him a wry smile.

“I have the makings of a bruise that proves it”

Despite the apology, things don't slide straight back into the easy way they were before. Lee spends a lot time running things over and over in his head, watching every interaction between Oli and Jordan with eagle eyes for no reason he can work out, just a wariness now that Jordan is revealed to be as fallible as the rest of them.

Oli's soft and gentle with him, something Lee can't bring himself to resent because it's such an oddity, has been missing for so long.

Lee's not-not talking to Jordan but it's mostly only business now and they're still functioning fluidly as a band even if they're now sitting as far away as possible from each other at interviews and using their respective techs as intermediaries. Jordan allows the distance, stops being the other presence at Lee's side when they walk.

It takes three days to break their self-imposed silence, a shitty venue in the desert hotter than hell itself and after the show they all pile into one long row of cheap showers, stripping off in the casual way only many, many years of seeing each others cocks allows. Lee's on the end, Oli beside him and he's not looking – the only one of them with an impressive package is Matt and it's gotten increasingly less impressive the amount of times Lee's had it waved in his face but he catches a glimpse of Jordan behind him, of the dark purple bruise on the other mans thigh. Oli's apologised more than once, the last time when they were changing for encore the other night and Jordan's been nice as always, shrugging it off and freely admitting it was his own damn fault.

They have to get right back on the bus, on the road and when Oli heads straight to his bunk Lee realises it's been taking it's toll on all of them, him being a hold out. He'd noticed but had been ignoring the fact that Jordan's been hiding away from dark till daylight, sitting carefully away from Oli in the mornings over breakfast, only being polite enough to get by. Lee didn't realise how normal it'd become to see the two of them together, the affection.

Maybe he misses Jordan being friendly with him as well, the stage empty with the distance between them.

Lee stows his laundry bag and sets his shoulders. He's going on thirty and being a proper, socially functioning adult is still sometimes really fucking hard.

It takes a good few minutes to coax Oli out of bed, the dark circles under his eyes back again and Lee's not sure if he's partly to blame this time but eventually he manages with a minimum of words, fingers clenched around a thin, bony wrist as he tugs him along to the back lounge to Jordan. He doesn't linger but figures they can both read between the lines when he pushes Oli in the direction of the couch and brings them all a cup of shitty tea.

By the time their next full band interview rolls around he's escorted safely between them again and the difference it makes is startling even if he's back to being just as awkward as he was when they first met. Him and Jordan don't speak directly about it but they've started giving each other the nod before they take the stage again.

They get pretty drunk – him, Jordan and Matt a week later at a honky-tonk bar somewhere by a lake and they've long since passed the point of cheerfulness, instead having a right old whinge about anything that crosses their minds, Oli and Vegan having left them behind to have an early night.

Matt's tone is mournful as he describes the pair of shoes he'd left behind backstage at their last stop, how bloody expensive they'd been and Lee joins in with Jordan's mocking because really, they were an absolutely ugly pair of sneakers in shades of bright green and orange so

hideous that Matt's woman wouldn't even kiss him while he was wearing them and suddenly Jordan's clenching at his glass and staring off into the distance.

"I was gonna get married once" The words are so quiet that at first Lee thinks he might be imagining things.

"Fuck, really?" Matt says sagely and Jordan just nods, head bobbing a few extra times for emphasis.

"Left three weeks before the wedding, packed all her shit when I was away on tour"

They all know how the touring life is but Jordan's face is so sullen and sad that Lee feels bad for him, reaching over to slap him on the back like guys do.

"Savage" Matt adds, swigging at his beer. "What'dyer do?"

Nothing about Jordan screams that he's a violent raving lunatic or even the type of guy to cheat.

Jordan leans against Lee's shoulder, lets out a hollow laugh.

"Fuckin' nothing" He spits, "I swear, she was the love of my life"

After that he goes silent for long enough that Lee manages to finish his beer and contemplate whether or not he really knows where their bus is parked. He has to piss too but he's avoiding it, relaxed enough not to mind Jordan's slumped weight against him.

"You know what it was" Jordan says suddenly, surprising Matt in the middle of his very intense building of a coaster tower causing him to knock it flying with a deep frown, "She thought i'd leave her for a bloke"

Of all the things Jordan might've said this wasn't even close to what Lee was imagining was going to come out of his mouth.

"If you wanted a bloke why wer'ya marrying her?"

"I didn't want a bloke, I just mentioned that I was bisexual"

Lee's going to need another drink because his slightly drunk brain is not nearly saturated enough to deal with that kind of answer.

"So you did want a bloke" Matt's too far gone for the kind of depth their chat has taken, puzzled look on his face.

"No" Jordan says petulantly, "I wasn't gonna cheat on her with anyone, I loved her"

Matt's face scrunches up. "So why'd she care if you might've touched a dick?"

"That" Jordan's voice has taken on a proper miserable whine now, "That is the million dollar question"

They don't mention any part of the conversation afterwards but Lee keeps the knowledge tucked away in his head where it gnaws at him during moments of quiet, the idea that Jordan is both now attractive and not as completely cut-off as he'd hoped.

He takes off early on the morning of their next day off, even Jordan still sleeping in his bunk, hand dangling over the side and something suggests to Lee that he should shove in back in but he doesn't, keeps walking.

He roams the city, secure in the knowledge that no one will recognise him even if he didn't have a hoodie on, he's just not that kind of guy. As much as people would presume about him Lee actually enjoys walking, heads off whenever he can to explore and relax, focus on nothing but the music in his ears and the smack of his feet against the ground. He's not stupid, doesn't walk at night and never carries anything too important with him, adheres to a strict rule of keeping at least a hundred in cash on him in the event he gets mugged, the train of thought being that if he's got something to give them they won't get pissed and shoot or stab him.

The hours pass quickly and he finds a commercial coffee chain for a solo lunch which he eats in tiny booth with a window view to the street outside and it's always nice to see a kid or man or two in their merch or Oli's clothes.

They're probably out looking for said singer who's known for both sightseeing and being a bit too liberal with his Twitter details for someone who says he doesn't want to be found. Personally Lee isn't that big a fan of major attractions once he's seen them, prefers to seek out the little unknown treasures. He doesn't always find good places, usually ends up in industrial areas just like home, structures familiar even if the accents aren't.

He ends up on the roof of an abandoned building – he mightn't have been the worst kid but he's long since known what to break into and how – watches the sun go down, a few noisy birds chattering from the steel beam trusses below him. It's a nice enough view to the city skyline that he manages a picture, even makes the effort to post it to his Instagram.

His phone chimes with a message, interrupting the guilty-pleasure bit of country he'd been listening to. The guys never bother him until it's getting dark and Lee appreciates that, the respect they have for his weird little nuances but someone always remembering to make sure he hasn't actually been abducted.

Just checking in, ladsr thinkin about thai night? Reads Oli's text and as if on queue Lee's stomach protests his meagre lunch. Thai and a couple of beers sounds good.

No recs from Mat m'in He replies, forever wary about any suggestions Matt might have after the Ukrainian kebab incident of '03, *Heading back*

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