

You ever get in a situation that seems to feel like it's going in slow motion? That feeling of complete helplessness as time ticks by. The urge to do something, but yet your body doesn't react. That kind of situation. You think a thousand thoughts in that one split second.

"Will I be able to grab it?"

"Am I fast enough to run it all the way?"

"Will I even be able to get a good grip on it?"

Before you can even answer yourself you feel your body move, you feel time slip on by, you're clutching onto the ball, and in an instant you're on the ground with the ball rolling away in the opposite team's possession.

Part 1: Missing

"Good fucking job, Devonte. You really 'had' that one." The voice rang out followed by a chuckle, and soon by a figure of a lean hyena offering me a hand up.

"If Marcus can just throw it properly next time maybe my ass wouldn't be on the ground!" I replied clutching the gloved palm offered to me.

My response erupted a string of laughter from both Team A and Team B, and as I stood up brushing the dry grass and dirt off my blue "Team A" jersey, the hyena slipped off his helmet. I can tell by his look that if it had been a real game I'd probably be worse off than embarrassed.

"Ain't Marcus' fault you fumbled, and it certainly ain't his fault you stood there with your jaw open catching flies." The yeen stood there holding his helmet down by his hip. The hyena was Taylor or what we all called him, Tay-tay. His dark curly hair covered his eyes, obscuring some of the purple spots dotted across his face. As I stood, he looked up at me, waiting for my response. He wasn't tall by any means, but he was one of the best wide receivers the team has ever had.

I huffed, trying to keep the mouth guard out of my mouth. "Look, I know I can do this! I know I'm cut out for the main team. Please." I said, almost begging him. I was confident, and desperate. I was tired of sitting on the sidelines and watching game after game go on by. I wanted to get active, I wanted to make plays, and most of all, I wanted to prove to myself that I was more than just a sideliner.

It's why we were all here, to see if I had the stuff to replace one of the main team members. The dude who I was slated to replace had just one day up and vanished. Nobody had any idea where he went. His dorm room was completely untouched, no sign of a struggle, and his car was still in the parking lot of the campus. His girlfriend had seen him the night he disappeared, because she walked him to his dorm, and she became the focal point of questions for a whole month. Weeks had gone by without anyone seeing signs of him.

See, disappearances have been quite a common occurrence in the town of Mountain View as of late. And out of a population of around 8,000 at MVU (Mountain View University), 30 students have mysteriously gone missing in the past 2 years. These disappearances sparked lots of assemblies and strict curfews around the campus dorms. It has gotten pretty well known at this point. With some people even considering moving to different colleges. There's even a wall dedicated to the missing people. You can visit the wall to see the hopeful writings of significant others who have lost their partner, or the flowers put there daily by people who haven't given up hope that one day, just one hopeful day, their friend or loved one might show up.

So, when the team heard that he had gone missing, none of us were surprised that the police gave up the search for him after a single month. Nobody wanted to admit that the person we all knew and loved as one of the boys, turned up missing like the others. Even Coach was distraught about the subject. It took three whole months after the searching stopped for Coach to even mention replacing him.

And that is how I'm in the situation I am in now. On one hand I am happy to have a shot at not being a benchwarmer anymore, but on another hand, I can feel the dread looming over the vacant position. Everyone in the team is harder on me because of it. Even though we all stay for the most part close, nobody wants to

admit he's gone. So, they set the bar impossibly high, hoping that nobody will truly take the spot.

Besides, it's not like we can play any games anyway. It's been almost two years now with the ongoing, but not ongoing, pandemic of what the masses have been calling "neo rabies". The airborne illness started in some random country and found its way to the states, where ignorance and incompetence spread it like wildfire. What the illness would do to you, was after a week it would turn anyone affected into a clawing, raving, flesh eating lunatic. Countless stories of entire families eating each other alive, or stories akin to crazy Florida men taking 20 bullets to the chest, cluttered the news. If it weren't for this pandemic, I think the disappearances probably would have had a higher priority.

A whole year we spent locked up in our dorms. But, with the eventual vaccine and cure, things slowly turned almost back to normal. Even then, people still debate on taking the vaccine which contributes to the situation we are still in now. That means no college sports games for at least another year. So, we all practice for the inevitable time we finally face off against our rivals "The Devil Hornets" again.

As you can tell, there's a lot on everyone's plate. It's a weight you can feel even when walking back to the lockers. On one hand, it's made the team closer, but on another hand, the fatigue and the constant pressure of the grim current events weighs on each and every player. Including me.

After finishing up on the auxiliary field, we all piled inside the locker rooms. Everyone seemed to be deep in thought, probably because of the 4 month bandage that just got ripped off. I removed my gear with Marcus and Tay-tay standing beside me, slipping the gear off and around my thick dog muzzle.

Tay-tay broke the awkward sounds of shuffling feet and plastic clattering "Alright, Devonte. You can have the position. Marcus and I will let Coach know that we all suggest you for the position." He then lifts up his hair and shoots me a wink.

"Please don't make us regret this. I swear on Germ's sweaty jock! We will make a fool out of you if we put you in an actual game and you fumble again." Marcus chimed in. His lizard features crumpling up into a snarl as his finger pointed at

me. Then he quickly eased up to a toothy smile, patting me very roughly on the back. "I'm just joshing..." then he frowned again "Or am I?"

I looked the lizard in the eyes, fear plastered across my face. Marcus was probably one of the most popular guys on campus. Not to mention that he was the heir to a mega corporation. The lizard was a king at fitting in. Jocks, nerds, preps, he got along with everyone. You could name someone and he'd know them, and most of the time they would owe him a favor. So, when Marcus gazed at me with the intent of scaring me, it was hard not to buy it, even for a second.

Marcus then let out a loud chuckle that broke the tension in the room. Everyone soon started to smile and turned to me, and then Marcus started to say something under his breath. "One of us." Then he repeated louder "One of us!" Soon, the others joined in.

"One of us! One of us! One of us!"

Until a cacophony of sweaty college football players were chanting, shouting, and cheering all for me. It's safe to say the anxiety left my body for a moment and I smiled harder than I had that whole year. Even though I was already on the team, to be a part of the main players was a pretty big thing. And it seemed like everyone had forgotten about the circumstances of my position. That was until Tay-tay broke the chanting with a whistle.

"Hey! Hey! I know we are all happy for Devonte here, but let us not forget Simon." Tay-tay's words quickly changed the mood back to the somber, grim, mess it was before. "Simon is still missing, and until he turns up in a body bag, and even after! He's still a part of us. Let's not forget him."

Tay-tay then places a canvas frame on the locker room wall with Simon's portrait on it. Then signs it, passing the marker along to another member of the team. Each person writes something about Simon, including all of the sideliners. Then, it was my turn. I could feel my ears flatten as I raised the marker to the canvas to write something.

I wrote down that I wouldn't let him down and I'd keep the seat warm for his return. As soon as I capped the permanent marker, everyone cheered again, and

it was like the 4 month long weight, that crushed the team, had finally been lifted... or so I thought.

For I'd soon come to find out what happened to the missing students, and most definitely what happened to Simon.

Part 2: Curiosity

It's no secret that our team is very different. Some of our players titer on the edge of bisexuality, most not even admitting that they do things with the same sex or anyone in-between. Not that I blame some of them, with the social climate as it is. If it became public knowledge that a good amount of us were bi curious, I'm sure things would get pretty heated quick. Even then, everyone in the sports teams accepts one another. Something the coaches drill into us.

So, to be ourselves we have sports club meetings. At these meetings sometimes the guys get pretty touchy. Sometimes nothing happens, and sometimes a lot happens. Not everyone in the team comes to these get-togethers, but it's not just the football team that attends. The soccer, hockey, and even some of the tennis team members can be found at the meetings. Even girls come by for fun too. The club meetings are usually hosted at one of the frat houses or in the locker rooms after hours.

The club is kinda a traditional thing that got turned into a safe space for most of the college's players. A place to unwind and talk about stuff that, in other parts of the campus, would be social suicide. Some people come for the social talk and leave when stuff turns, for the most part, gay.

Usually, that would be me. I would leave the club right around the time that things would be planned to happen. The guys would usually do risky dares or just out right meet for sex. I never truly understood it, but some part of me wanted to. I never considered myself to be attracted to the same sex... but I don't think I ever truly thought about it. That is why I started attending the club. I was curious.

I was never confident in my body, or let alone my face. I felt as an Akita my ears were too big, my coat not uniform enough, and my eyes too far apart. Although,

being on the football team gave me a pretty good body. I still felt like I never deserved it. So, I never thought I would ever be another guy's type.

At one of the Club meetings, held at one of the frat houses, they had a small contest to see who could win at arm wrestling. Usually this was my sign to leave... but this time I stuck around. The rules of the contest was, you have to arm wrestle everyone. If you lost you had to take off an article of clothing. Then if you still felt brave, with nothing but your sheath and balls hanging out, you can keep playing. If you lost after that, you were at the mercy of the person you lost to.

I knew I wasn't going to lose, I was confident in my strength. I've at least lifted half of these guys here. So, I gave it a try. For the next hour I went undefeated, stripping some of the guys' clothing myself. I took pleasure in the fun of seeing them blush from it. Eventually, people would come up to my seat and sigh, having to face me.

Soon, I found myself beating almost everyone, and I decided to relax and watch a few guys go at it. Then the inevitable happened, and one completely naked gator lost his match. The guy he was up against, a large pitbull, let out a cheer and high fived a few of the other guys.

"Suck my dick, Lawrence! I know you've been eyeing it in the lockers." The pit bull barked his order at the gator for all to hear. It was obvious that the gator was into it, despite his scowl, his blush was clear through his brown skin. Part of me wondered if he lost on purpose.

Soon enough, the croc was muzzle deep in the pit bulls' crotch. I couldn't help but watch, and then I found myself full mast in my pants. My knot already creeping out of my sheath. I tried to hide it in my seat, adjusting myself to accommodate my growing member. That must have gotten this person's attention, because as soon as I finished adjusting, they sat right down placing their elbow on the table.

It was a cheetah, and I recognized him. He was one of the hockey players. He looked very intently into my eyes and shook his hand, waiting for me to grab it. I looked him up and down with my blue-grey eyes.

"Don't worry, I'll go easy on you, puppy." He said in a deep voice, just loud enough for me to hear over the soft 80's rock playing in the background.

I don't know what it was. Was it the music, the hard-on I was rocking, or the other guys starting to fuck? I may never know, but I found myself lost in the moment looking at this cheetah across from me, and things moved in slow motion again. With that, many thoughts raced in my head.

"So are you gonna be a pussy, or?" He talked again over the music, which snapped me out of my trance.

"Ye- yeah... I mean, no! Hell no!" I then lifted my arm and dropped my elbow on the table, causing the table to shudder under my thick arm. My arm must have been twice the size of his in thickness. I thought to myself for a moment that this was surely suicide for this cat. But, he was persistent, and deep down I really wanted to be the first one that stripped a piece of clothing off him.

"I didn't see you before, you join in late?" I asked him, as I took his hand, ready to begin.

"Yeah, I was busy doing some practice." The cheetah replied.

"At this hour?" I replied stunned, it was encroaching 12 AM now, and honestly I was surprised he got through curfew.

"Mmhm! I had some issues and slapping away at pucks always clears my head." He paused and adjusted himself "I don't think I've seen you around here. You new?"

I let the question sink in for a second, and I gripped his palm, wrapping my beefy fingers around his. "T-this the first time I've stayed around..." I couldn't explain it, but I started to feel warm in the face as soon as I gripped his hand. I even started tripping over my own words.

"Good, I think you'll fit right in, puppy boy! Ready to be my bitch?" He smiled.

"Re-" before I can even respond fully he started pushing my arm to the table. I tried to resist it, but I was too late and my arm rested against the table.

"Go on ahead, I want them shorts off, pup." He then pointed and motioned his finger in a way to suggest me dropping my pants.

"Wait, wait. Who the fuck your calling 'pu'-" before I could finish, he interjected again.

"You, now off they go." He then leaned in and watched with a sly, content smile. I really wanted to punch him, but I agreed to the rules, and I was feeling strangely content with him calling me that.

As I slid off my shorts, I could feel the eyes of dudes in the room watching. I awkwardly maneuvered my shorts around my still throbbing member, letting them slide down. I couldn't hide my shame and shyness as my shorts finally slid down onto the floor. I then looked back up at him and groaned.

"Happy?" I huffed sitting back into my seat.

"Very." His long spotted tail flicked as he grinned.

We then sat for a bit and chatted. It seemed like everyone forgot about the contest. They either lost, or found someone to partner up with. So, me and him got a good talk in. I found out his name is Kevin, and he's majoring in electrical engineering. I disclosed some information about myself, told him that I just got promoted to be one of the main offensive lineman for the football team. He said that he wasn't surprised that I was, based on my size.

We must have talked for a good two hours, it was hard for me not to try and grab his hand again throughout our conversation. Soon people started to leave, and others began to clean up messes.

"So, I guess I should get going, it was nice to meet you Devonte. Or should I say, puppy?" He snickered and then grabbed my hand again. I couldn't deny the shiver of pure excitement that shot up through my body. "You need to work on your arm wrestling skills." The cheetah winked and then turned to leave.

I froze again, suspended in time, watching. I found myself in that moment asking myself "Was I-? No, I'm not..." I then found myself moving autonomously, grabbing his arm. "Please, let me take you back to your place."

At first it looked like he was offended, but then the emotion in his eyes was replaced with something else. I definitely could see that he was hurting about something now, and the fact I asked to come back to his place dredged up tucked away emotions.

"Look, Kevin. People have gone missing, and I'd hate to lose a good friend I've just met." I looked down at him and his eyes softened.

"Dude!... F- fine okay... but after I get settled in, you're out." He poked my chest. "Got it!? Now pick up your shorts, dude."

I smiled at him like a young pup that just got a whole cookie jar of fresh milk bones for dessert. And, like that, I followed him back to his apartment.

Part 3: Release

We stepped out of his car and made our way to his door. He fumbled with his keys a bit, and finally got his locks unlocked. His apartment was pretty bare bones, I could see he was a fan of some fantasy stuff, very "Dungeons and Dragons" kinda stuff. He plopped his bag down on his couch, flipping on his kitchen light.

"Want something to drink?" He said to me as he reached for a glass out of his cabinet.

"Umm sure, I don't mind some cola, if ya got some." I replied, looking at his posters and book collections.

I couldn't help but watch him work. Then the hot feeling flushed my face until I couldn't stand it any longer. I wanted to know- No! I needed to know how it felt to touch him, like I would a girl. To know if I really felt that way about a dude.

I slowly wandered over to him, and placed my hands around his waist as he poured us some drinks. This made him stop in his tracks.

"Heh, dude... that's a bit close you know?" He chuckled nervously.

"Yeah, and? I thought I was gonna be your bitch, what happened to that?" I then used my size to my advantage and held my whole palm over his hand helping him set down the cola bottle. "Unless, big kitty is all talk." It felt good to hold him, like I belonged there.

He sat there for a good while. At first I thought he was gonna kick me out, but despite his face, he was purring. He then started to press back against me. And I could swear I saw the first blush out of him that night.

"N- nobody ever like... comes back with me or anything. I'm sorry, I just don't know what to do, dude." He started breaking up, and laughing nervously. I then got the hint from his choking up that he was about to cry. My hunch was dead on, he started to bawl right then and there. I know that kind of cry too, the cry that you try to hold back and tough it out, the kind that just breaks all your walls down and leaves you exposed. The ones that you don't want to show anyone, because you're a "man" and you shouldn't cry.

I turned him around and started to hold him nice and tight. Even though I didn't know why he was crying, or much about him. I knew in my chest, I wanted to be there for him.

He sobbed in my arms for what felt like a good 10 minutes. He then disclosed that he's been fighting with depression and loneliness for a whole year. All his close friends moved away shortly after the lockdown, and he has been trying his luck at the club meetings to meet people, and find new friends, but never could.

He also talked about how he would get close to some guys, but they would randomly find someone else, or ignore him as if they never did anything together at all. He felt I was gonna play him, and he built himself up to tell me off, but as soon as I started holding him he couldn't help but cry.

"So, dude I'm sorry... I donno if I'm wanting to fuck or anything tonight." He said, trying to wipe away his tears. I reassured him that it was fine. I then started to help him wipe away his tears, brushing my large thumbs over his cheeks. I couldn't help but let out a chuckle at myself...

"What?!" He said through a snuffle.

"This is pretty gay, dude." I replied, smiling down at him, brushing fresh tears from his cheek. And, in an instant, we both started to laugh.

That's when it happened, I leaned down, took a leap, and kissed him. I kissed him harder and more meaningfully than I've ever kissed somebody before. Hell, I think I even lifted him up into the kiss too. I couldn't keep my tail from wagging and I most certainly didn't want to let him go. It was clear that Kevin didn't want me to let go either.

I finally answered my question...

Later on, after he fully calmed down, we did some tabletop games. We did a quick two person senario and I got to slay an Orc chief as a dwarf barbarian, saving the princess from certain doom.

"Holy shit... it's 5 AM!" Kevin exclaimed, folding up the manual. "Do you like, want me to take you home, dude?"

"Umm... Do you mind if I crash here?" As I said that, I could just tell he wanted to leap out of his seat, but kept his composure.

"YE- Ahem! I mean, yes." He chuckled and full cheesed a feline grin.

Kevin then grabbed my hand and slowly led me into his bedroom. He stopped, twiddled his fingers for a bit, and spun around.

"Okay... soooo... I know I said I didn't want to do anything, but I think I changed my mind a bit." He looked at me, his ears folded back. "I mean, if you want to that is. I know I like matted your fur with my tears and-"

"It's cool, Kevin, I'd let you cry on me any time, dude..." I blushed a bit "You sure? I was just planning on sleeping on your couch. I don't want you to feel pressured or anything."

Kevin nodded and took my hand again. "Just please don't disappear on me." He said softly.

"This pup crosses his heart." I say, drawing an imaginary X on my chest.

With that, he tossed me into the bed. Before I could even protest, he was on top of me, kissing me. Up and down my neck, nibbling and groping me. It felt so relieving, so right. I rested my palms along his backside letting him lift my plain black t-shirt up over my head. I let him do what he wanted to me, and it felt good to have him in control. He then took my big hands and lifted them atop my head and onto the bed.

The feline slowly kissed his way down my chest, sucking on my nipple and tracing my abs with his lips. Eventually, he was unbuckling my belt, and unbuttoning my shorts. I helped him slide my shorts and underwear off as he took a moment to derobe himself.

Kevin lifted both my legs, and to be honest, I was really afraid for a second. Although, as soon as I felt his lips and tongue brush along my hole, my fears were replaced with groans and moans. The cat's tongue slipped into my hole, leaving my toes to curl with pleasure.

"Fuck! Dude!" I moaned out to him. I felt so good, yet so vulnerable. The feeling, the pure acceptance of something I've known and questioned my whole life. Finally letting it go and being free was the release I needed after so, so long.

Kevin then started to finger me. Pressing one or two fingers inside me. I grunted, but eventually relaxed as he slid his fingers in and out of my hole. I didn't notice but I had already painted his sheets with pre cum from all my excitement.

"Bro... Put it in me, dude." I said as I looked at him, my face red-hot with excitement. I wanted to watch him slide himself into me. To say the least, I wasn't disappointed.

He responded to me with a nod, grabbing a condom and some lube, preparing my hole. When the cheetah lined up his tip against my hole, I was indeed shocked at his size. To be honest, I wasn't able to get a good look at it, but by what I could feel he was at least well above average.

"Ready, pup?" He teasingly asked me.

All I could reply back was just a small grunt and nod, I was too woozy from excitement to even form words. Just like that he slid himself inside me, and a tinge of pain hit me. Then slowly but surely, as he relaxed inside me, the pain went away.

"You good, Devonte?" He asked rubbing my tummy.

I bit my lip, my dick throbbing like crazy. "Mmmhmmm!"

He continued, sliding himself in and out of me. I was surprised by his strength, he was able to rock me back and forth as I layed on my back, using my body to slide me down all the way into his base. Each thrust from him twisted my insides, making me feel like I was gonna burst into an orgasm. All I could do in the moment was grab onto his sheets and moan out his name when I could.

Moments passed, and his thrust got more violent, the clapping of his balls against my cheeks filled the room. I couldn't hold it anymore, and without touching myself, I came all over my tummy and his bed. I couldn't help it, and I gripped onto his arms. I couldn't tell if it was the flexing of my hole, the sight of me cumming, or the fact I gripped onto his arms so hard. But, as soon as I came, he followed right after. I could feel his nice sized member pumping away inside

me. I wrapped my legs around him, pulling him in. I then gave him a nice soft kiss, as he unloaded inside me.

Part 4: Truth

I can't remember what happened after that. I was so tired I ended up falling right the fuck to sleep, but when I woke up Kevin was nestled under my arm. I stayed there, and I found myself taking his hand and lacing our fingers together. His hand was so warm and rough. You can tell he spent time practicing a lot.

I spent the next half hour looking him over, admiring him. He was indeed really handsome, and the little quirks and things that made him who he was just made me smile inside. I felt good with him in my arms... I then found myself entertaining the idea of asking him to be my boyfriend. I came up with fond scenarios in my head of us doing normal life things and before I knew it, I was in the zone again.

He eventually woke up and looked at our hands and back at me. "Yeah... you're a keeper alright." He said in a raspy "just woke up" voice.

Like in classic me fashion, I couldn't keep the burning question from off my lips "Hey uhh... Not to jump the gun or anything... but umm.." I couldn't finish "Nevermind." I said looking away at the corner of the room

"What?" Kevin rubbed his eyes, but then a spark entered them as they opened. "Were you gonna ask me to go steady or something with you?" He was grinning from ear to ear like back at the club.

"Me? Pshhh! Noooo- besides it's too soon... and-" before I can finish, he leaned in and kissed me.

"We can see where it goes, puppy." Kevin said as he kissed my hand.

We then got dressed, and did a bit more making out. I then said goodbye to my new love interest, and went on my way to catch the bus back to my dorm.

I wish I could say things went great, I wish I could say that I went back to my dorm right after... but no. I saw something, and it changed everything.

I walked a bit down the street from Kevin's complex down towards the bus stop. The morning air was cold and filled with that really nice morning dew, to the point that it was almost foggy. My head was full of daydreaming of Kevin, I wish it wasn't. For if I had paid attention, maybe I would have felt the warning signals. Maybe, I would have caught the thing gazing at me from behind the fence sooner, and ran away before I got a good look.

I heard a chain link fence rattle, and looked to the direction of the sound. When I saw what made the noise, I couldn't quite make it out. It was a figure, a person, gazing at me. At first I didn't think much of it, but as soon as I rubbed my tired eyes, I looked on in horror. I- it was Simon. The Simon. I would know him from anywhere. His beak, the plumage. There was no doubt it was him. But... something was off, his eyes... his eyes were different. Bigger, longer, sunken. And he was gazing right at me.

Simon was hitting his face into the fence. Ching! Ching! Each impact ringing out into the morning air. I can't lie to you, I wanted to run. Right back into Kevin's arms, but I knew if I ran and that was indeed Simon, and he was in trouble, I would never live it down. I meekly walked about half way up to the fence, and the hiss of the public bus stopping turned me around. Although, in true city bus fashion, it came and left super quick before I could even try and get on. So, I was stuck there for another 15 minutes. "Just great." I groaned. I then whipped back around to see that Simon was no longer behind the fence. Instead, he was closer and still gazing right at me.

I took a step back "Simon, bro? It's Devonte, remember me?" I held out my hand. "We used to chill out after practice, and you used to tell me I had the potential to be a draft pick."

There was a crawling sensation at the back of my neck fur, every part of my body screamed to run. Run! But, despite my better judgment, I stayed. I looked on in

horror as the void of Simon's big hollow eyes gazed back at me. He didn't reply to me. No, instead he opened his mouth agape. I wanted to look around to see if anyone else was around, but I was afraid to look away and have him run away... or worse, get closer.

Nothing escaped his mouth, that is... nothing directly from him. It was as if something was speaking through him, through me. Like, his lips didn't move and his mouth stayed unnaturally unhinged.

"Devonte? Devonte, it's me Simon. Help me Devonte. There's others, we need your help!" The voice that sounded like Simon, and talked like Simon, but definitely wasn't Simon. Came from seemingly in my head. I took a small step forward, at least what I could muster.

"Follow me!" The thing exclaimed and then started to slowly shamble away.

I took a step and as soon as I did, I was stopped by a hand on my shoulder. I gasped and turned around to see Kevin looking puzzled at me.

"Devonte? Didn't you catch the bus?" He said confused.

"Oh...oh my god! I'm so fucking glad it's you, bro. Holy shit I just witnessed-" before I can finish, Kevin interjected.

"Who's that bird dude you were talking to over there?" He pointed at Simon limping away.

That definitely ruled out this being a dream. "Uhh, shit... I think that's Simon? I donno." I responded

"You mean the missing football player, Simon?" Kevin said, raising his eyebrow.

"Yeah, the very one." I nodded and turned back around to Simon turning the corner, into a bleak suburban alleyway behind some old wooden fences.

I filled Kevin in to what just transpired, and I could tell he was unnerved by it. He then said if there was a chance at saving the others then we have to follow. I

nodded and we followed a good distance behind Simon. I spent some time on the trip calling the private investigator that was put on the case after the police dropped it. It opened up to his voicemail, and I left a message telling him where I thought Simon was heading.

Simon would occasionally look back at Kevin and me. It almost seemed like now we were trapped in a bubble. A separate place cut off from the real world. No cars passed by, no houses were lit, and no animals either. The more we walked, the more alone I felt, and Kevin agreed.

The houses and suburban alleys seemed to meld together into a maze. Deeper, and deeper we followed the limping Simon into what seemed to most certainly be a trap. Eventually, I couldn't keep up with the mental map I made in my head. There was no turning back.

Right when I started to question if we were even still in the suburb. I started to smell things, things that reminded me of home. My mom's cooking, the smell of my bedsheets. Things that made me feel secure, but each smell was oddly off. Like, imitations of what I remembered. As if they were trying to be those exact smells, but coming up short. It was as if these imitations were trying to put me in a false sense of security. An eerie, grim, sense of security. I had asked Kevin if he smelled strange stuff, but he said no. Instead he said he heard the faint sounds of his bustling old family home in the direction we were heading.

We had been following Simon for what felt like an hour now, and every few turns, Simon would stop, turn around, and check if we were still following him. I soon could see that now Kevin was feeling the same way I did about the situation. Afraid.

"I don't know about this anymore. This is very strange, Devonte... That doesn't look anything remotely like him... and we have been at this for like an hour." Kevin whispered to me.

"Well, hopefully this guy calls me back. I don't wanna just leave him here." I replied, waving my Wizephone.

Soon Simon stopped at a dead end, and that "run" feeling crept up again. Simon gazed at the ground for a bit. Then turned to Kevin and me with its mouth fully agape.

My Wizephone buzzed with a message and it was that PI. The message read "Don't follow it! Whatever you do, don't follow it!" Reading the message made my skin crawl. Then, I was hit with the realization of what I already knew all along. That thing wasn't Simon. As I looked up again, it spoke in my head.

"Here are the others, help us. Come with us and help us." The sourceless voice echoed in my mind. I glanced over to see Kevin wincing from the voice. I grabbed his hand and tugged.

"We have to go! We have to go now! Whatever that is, that's not Simon anymore." I shouted, trying to drown out the loud voice in my head.

"Help us. Help us! Closer! Help us! Closer!" It's voice kept repeating and repeating, louder and louder as more voices joined in.

I looked behind us and was met with the grim realization that the way we came from was no longer there, and instead, we were boxed in by the same, dingy, brown, suburban fences that lined the path to this spot. There was nowhere to run.

When I looked back to Simon, I saw them all. The 30 lost students and more. And all of them were in the same state, same but different. Eyes large, elongated hollow, and sunken in. The voices got louder and I gripped my head, I couldn't help but drop to the ground in agony. Soon Kevin followed, weakly flopping over to his side.

Part 5: End

I wasn't going to give up. I wasn't gonna stand and do nothing this time. I wasn't going to become another missing person, and I most certainly wasn't going to let Kevin die here. I gathered all the strength in my body, clearing my mind. Instead of the horrors that surrounded us. I filled my thoughts with me and Kevin. The

feeling I had when I held his hand, the laughter we shared playing D&D, and that damn grin of his. As soon as I got the energy to stand and fight, the voices started to fade away.

Before I knew it, I opened my eyes, and it was the middle of the night. In my arms layed Kevin, blood spilling out of his ears. We were stuck in the spot where we started walking, right by Kevin's complex, we hadn't moved a muscle. I immediately called 911, and got an ambulance to get Kevin. The paramedics insisted I also get medical attention, so I agreed to get treated.

I checked my phone for the call I made to the PI, and as I thought, it was around 10 AM when I called him. The doctors continued to ask me what happened, but I couldn't tell them. Why would they believe me? Why would they believe that Kevin and I saw the missing people turned into some kind of monsters, and we just happened to lose 11 hours of time sitting in the same spot. It was just better that I stayed silent.

Kevin and I ended up suffering from acute ear ruptures and extreme dehydration. Kevin more than me, but to say the least... We were both okay. The hospital wanted to keep us overnight to make sure we were truly okay. I stayed by Kevin's hospital bed the rest of the night, and kept him company. We tried not to speak to each other about what happened, it was better that way.

Come the next morning the PI comes into our hospital room. He wore a long trench coat and these black sunglasses you'd only see in "The Matrix". He was a fox of pretty good stature, and as he took off his Neo wanna-bes he looked genuinely concerned.

He sat down and filled us both in. He told us that what we saw, never existed, and that the people that went missing were just that. Missing. He took both our Wizephones, and when we protested, he told us it was for our safety. I slowly began to understand what he was doing... and now I wish I never knew the truth.

There never was another missing person after that, at least not for a good long while. Despite that, I know my life will never be the same knowing the truth. To this day I still lay in bed, holding onto Kevin, unable to get their faces out of my mind. Their faces, and their damn sunken eyes.