Bram Heathcliff smiled at the nervous guests sitting across from him, offered them a reassuring smile, then pressed a button.

“Welcome, spooks and specters! This is Episode 169—hehe, of the Paranormalist’s Podcast, the Paranormal Hunters Society’s special podcast dedicated to discovering the truth out there!” The jackrabbit spoke into the microphone in front of him. “First off, I wanna thank ya’ll for listening in as we’ve spent this past winter discussing the existence of a Yeti, the evolution of Krampus, and the Dyatlov Pass incident, but now we at the studio have an exclusive interview for today’s episode. And boy, is it a doozy! This story’s got it all: tragedy, Gothic romance, a pair of star-crossed lovers, a bleak English moor, an even bleaker English manor, and what might be actual evidence on the possibility of reincarnation! Before we dive in though, I’d like to introduce ya’ll to our guests, Nate Haynes and Daniel Lierre. Did I pronounce that one right?”

“Uh, you did it just fine there, Mr. Heathcliff,” answered Daniel Lierre, a lean fruit bat sitting beside a well-groomed, nervous English beagle, connected by a reassuring paw.

“Please, call me ‘Bram’. Everyone does,” their host chuckled across from the desk. “So, mind if I ask how the flight went for you two? From what I gather, this is Nate’s first time in the U.S. How’s the Southwest heat faring for you?”

“Correct,” Nate Haynes spoke in a soft English accent, heavily encased in a Cornish dialect. “I shall admit that the…heat, is rather oppressive. Even in February. In any case, it’s great to be here with you and Danny in Nueva Fe. My only complaint was the jet lag.”

“And the ‘oppressive heat’,” Daniel quipped.

“Alrighty, first there’s the jet lag,” Nate corrected for his lover, “and then there’s the heat.”

“Yeah, both of ‘em can be a real bitch, but that’s what I gotta love about New Mexico,” Bram snickered at seeing Daniel exaggeratedly roll his eyes, which Nate caught sight of and flicked his tail at him behind their chairs. “Anyway, I’d like to get us right to the topic: Daniel, you mentioned to me last week that after nearly five months in a long-distance relationship, you and Nate are already planning on not only moving in a house together in Nate’s native Cornwall, but getting a domestic partnership too?”

“Civil partnership, actually,” Nate spoke up, a little more confident and smiling.

“Yeah, you mean civil partnership,” Daniel nodded alongside his boyfriend. “Yes, we’re uh, getting together, and yes, it does sound rushed, but…well, it feels like the next big step for our relationship now. And besides, we’ve technically been together for much, much longer than five months. It feels like we’ve known each other not just our entire lives, but…”

“Well, for forever,” Nate finished for the fruit bat. “It’s a long story though.”

“We got time,” Bram offered a genuine, curious smile. “It’s my podcast, so I make the rules about how long each episode is. I bet the listeners wanna hear your tale as well.”

Daniel and Nate exchanged one more glance, smiled softly, and leaned forward to tell their tale, at long last.

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“Daniel?”

“Hm?” I looked up from my phone and smiled at the vulpine barista, holding my morning latte behind the countertop. “Oh, yeah. That’s me.”

I’d carefully grabbed it from her paws when she asked, “By any chance, are you American?”

“Indian-American,” I added, “On my mother’s side.”

“That’s pretty cool,” she giggled. “What brings you all the way out here?”

My smile almost faltered, then rebuilt itself as quickly while pulling my winged arms close to take a small sip from the latte.

“Ah, that…I just thought Cornwall would be fun to see,” I half-lied to the vulpine, then waved to her as she worked on another order, and I left the coffee shop.

Of all the locations to go during my European vacation, Cornwall had been one of the more scenic. For some unknown reason, I couldn’t help but add the English county as the last place to visit in Great Britain before taking a ferry from Plymouth to the Brittiany coast in France. I’d visited London, Nottingham, Edinburgh, Manchester, followed by a trip to Winchester and Bath to see the Roman ruins, and eventually Bristol. Yet for some inexplicable reason, I felt myself being drawn to a small town on the edge of the Bodmin Moors, to an English town I’d never even heard of.

As they went, Tuskfield felt…quaint. Its unique, family-owned shopfronts and the cozy inn next door to a popular pub helped welcome me amongst a plethora of other tourists who wanted to see the moorlands. Tuskfield allowed us to get a sense of the Cornish culture, its townsfolk, the wonderful meals at a local restaurant, its scenic, small but charming town square. However, according to the tourism stand, the most beautiful and historical site happened to be outside Tuskfield’s limits.

“Fangcrest Manor?” I mumbled to myself while reading the pamphlet. The local bus turned left, right, moving up and down due to bumps on the road as the read the pamphlet a guide from the stand had offered me. The latte had been emptied and abandoned on the empty seat next to mine. “‘Built in the late 1760s, Fangcrest Manor is a unique historical site noted for its idyllic location overlooking towards the Bodmin Moors’…”

I didn’t think much of that information during the ride outside of town. Once the bus finally drove past a vine-covered exterior wall surrounding the estate though, I felt my heart suddenly miss two beats. For a second, it felt like dying, but then I felt a rush of adrenaline that compelled me to be the first fur to stand up and rush past the other passengers. I certainly earned a few annoyed frowns, but all that didn’t matter when I finally felt the gravel on my shoes.

Being there, staring across the empty pea gravel driveway at the manor itself, felt very…familiar. It felt like a distant memory, despite never even knowing it existed. For several seconds, I stood there, frozen, and unable to do anything so much as breathe while taking in the ancient scenery. The vague scents of fresh flowers, flowing pedals, leather baking under the intense sunlight, and the smell of something akin to lilacs filled my nostrils.

“Young man,” a voice echoed nearby. “Are you feeling quite alright?”

I glanced left to see an elderly vole half my height and wearing bespeckled glasses belonging more to a librarian. Her concerned gaze up at me didn’t waver when the other bus passengers streamed by us like water in a stream.

“I. uh, I’m good,” I replied. My reassuring smile didn’t convince her. “I get a little carsick sometimes, that’s all. Or in this case, bus sick.”

The vole laughed with me, albeit a little more forcefully.

“If you say so then,” she sighed before stepping towards the manor’s general direction. “If you require the loo, go straight inside, down to the right hallway, and the second door on the left-hand side.” When I looked at the vole confusedly, I noticed the nametag sticking from her polo shirt, and it clicked. “I work here, by the way. My name is Lily.”

“Nice to meet you, Lily,” I cordially nodded. “Thank you.”

She walked off towards the building, but I remained standing there. Even as the bus roared back to life and gracefully turned around to leave, its driver having taken another group of exhausted tourists back to Tuskfield, I still stood there, gaping at the beautiful Fangcrest Manor.

The property it sat in couldn’t be any better. As I’d seen earlier during the drive over, the surrounding moorland bordered directly near the mossy brick walls surrounding a patch of flat grass, with the old building directly in the center. Overgrown vines blooming from summer drenched the bottom half of the structure, yet none of the many glass windowpanes overlooking the driveway and untouched grass were covered up, while the manor’s architectural style (was it called Georgian?) made me feel as if I’d found myself in a historical drama set in the past.

Speaking of which, that familiar feeling from never went away. It remained at the back of my mind as I finally joined back up with the bus passengers inside the manor’s foyer outfitted into a guest lobby, which was connected to a ballroom packed with other tourists, and a dual staircase as ornate as the walls of the beautiful interior. Each time my eyes glanced at the layout beyond a lobby desk where we purchased the tour tickets, I felt a pang of loss in my chest.

No, it wasn’t loss for something. It felt more like loss for…for…somebody?

I shook my muzzle and reminded myself Juniper didn’t matter anymore. He wouldn’t have even wanted to go on a European trip, let alone join me in one, especially after our grand, epic fight two months back. Ever since then, Mom and Dad had been saddened to hear my college boyfriend and I broke up, mainly because they wanted a grandchild. The species and gender of my future spouse didn’t matter, and neither did the possibility of adoption, if our baby also happened to be a fruit bat like me.

*Parents*, I thought to myself. *Liberal in some ways, but conservative in others.*

Part of me couldn’t help but giggle as I stepped forward. The ticket seller sitting boredly behind the desk offered me a weird look, and I brushed it away by offering a credit card as payment. The seller shrugged and accepted it. Before long, I found myself pulled into the tide of furs crowding around a recognizable vole.

“Welcome to the illustrious Fangcrest Manor, ladies and gentlemen,” she greeted us while already having spotted me midway in the back. “I am Lily, and I shall be your tour guide for this afternoon. The main house is rather large, so we mustn’t dawdle if you’re to see all that Fangcrest and its history has to offer you. Right this way then.”

Over the course of fifty minutes, Lilly the Tour Guide gave us an in-depth glimpse into the old tapestry that the manor proudly wore on its sleeve. She told me and the rest of the furs taking pictures or listening in about the Haywood family. This noble family traced their roots all the way back to the Tudor period not long after the War of the Roses. Each of those phrases alluded me, but I did know about King Henry VIII, whose father Henry VII granted the Haywoods an earldom for assisting His Majesty in quelling one of the Cornish rebellions. The mythical story went that an attentive English beagle by the name of Thomas Haywood heard talk of a planned uprising, then literally walked the long trek to inform the King of what his people planned to do. Such a warning allowed His Majesty to dispel the rebellion halfway before it could spiral into yet another civil war.

At least, that was how the story went.

Afterward, the First Earl of Haywood emigrated his enriched family from Cornwall to another available country house on the outskirts of London. This allowed the once lower-class clan of talented carpenters the opportunity to integrate into higher society, as well as expand their business. Decades passed as the Earls of Haywood needn’t even involve themselves with the employees that they trained into the best carpenters in all Southern England. They became yet another chain of nobility under The Crown. However, they still enjoyed infrequently travelling to the region of their origins, and after commissioning an architect to build a certain manor overlooking the Bodwin moors, they then had a place to go for holiday, or simply to escape the growing claustrophobia of an ever-expanding London.

“If you will notice there’s quite a plenty of Venetian mirrors lined along the walls of this hallway, as well as the other hallways,” Lily explained with a clear passion for her job. “Large mirrors were not just seen as a luxury, but they served a practical purpose too. Until the electric lightbulb became commonplace in the late nineteenth century, castles, and large mansions such as Fangcrest Manor required candlelight to brighten rooms. The reason you’ll notice each hallway is filled to the brim with ornately decorated mirrors is because they assisted in illumination. Rather than place burning candles all over the main house, several lanterns would be lit, and their reflections bouncing from the mirrors would allow the owner to navigate from room to room without the chance of burning everything to the ground.”

The tour didn’t help my unease in the slightest. In fact, I felt pretty sure it flared up when Lily started describing the interesting detail. For an odd reason I couldn’t explain at the time, I already knew it. I pictured myself dressed in old Victorian clothing, calmly walking between embellished hallways. A part of me would marvel at the darkness outside the windows being pushed back by the echoes of light dancing from a single source. I could even picture myself holding another small candle, except…why could I also picture needing to keep the bottom of my wings from dragging along the carpet?

Without even noticing, the group of tourists went ahead without me, hanging onto Lily’s words as I stayed back. My palms sweated. My wings felt heavier than normal. My whiskers drooped with perspiration. The air abruptly tasted like bile. I felt as if my own reflections stared into me. I felt as if the walls themselves began to close around me. Lilly the Tour Guide had already gone around the corner to a room, leaving me alone as I stepped towards the right wall.

Just then, a portrait caught my attention. I slowly turned my head upward. As quickly as the sensation arrived, it left, and the bile in the air dissipated as quickly as my breath. Gazing down at me sat a stern yet handsome beagle. He looked no older than thirty but far from reaching forty years of age. He had piercing, dark eyes, the kind that I always found attractive in any guy who caught my interest. Typical of any English aristocrat, he appeared well-dressed in a dark-blue jacket and ashen tie, headfur combed back into a presentable tuft.

A soft chuckle somehow erupted from my lips. He looked quite sharp.

His tan and white fur were well-groomed too, but behind the pristine brush strokes, something else caught my attention; the smile. I didn’t know if it had something to do with Victorian attitudes of showing emotions, or if it had to be the genius of the original painter, but the beagle in the portrait appeared sad. Sad about what?

Whatever the reason, I couldn’t look away from the beagle. Much like the rest of the manor, he felt…vaguely reminiscent of someone I knew. Or…did know? Used to know? Whichever way it went, seeing the beagle’s sad smile also made me feel sad. I wanted to pull the portrait down to the floor and hug its subject until it became flesh, fur, and blood in my arms. I wanted to make him feel no longer sad. I wanted to make the pain go away.

*God, what’s happening to me?* I whimpered while leaning my head against the frame of the portrait. *Look at me. I’m going crazy, and I bet when they see the security footage, I’ll be sent to the closest mental ward this side of England.*

“Davy?”

My joint turned frozen stiff, and I glanced up to see the painting unmoved. Yet, when I looked left to spot movement in one of the mirrors. It was a middle-aged vixen in an old-fashioned housekeeper’s uniform. Her kind eyes stared directly at me through the reflection.

“Lord Haywood requests your presence in the ballroom, Davy,” she said. “You best go tend to him, and fast. He’s quite eager to see you this day.”

“Huh?” I turned around to address the housekeeper, no doubt confused on who I was. “I’m not Davy. My name’s Daniel…L…Lierre…huh?”

Nobody stood in the hallway. It remained as empty as before. The heartbeat in my chest started picking up again, and the thought of visiting the ‘loo’ to wash up/pull myself together suddenly didn’t seem unnecessary. It led me to wandering down a corridor, knowing that it’d lead to the second-floor balcony overlooking the ballroom, and then the foyer where the bathrooms were. During the short journey, I’d glance between the end of the corridor and the rest of the Venetian mirrors. The way I moved down the hallway and looked into them made me feel like a cub trapped in a maze of mirrors.

Except, something happened. Each time I jogged past a mirror, a shimmering image caught the corner of my vision. It felt like watching my reflection transform. My form and species never changed, but my clothes did. The tacky Union Jack t-shirt I’d purchased on impulse during the first night in London became a dark-green jacket. The comfortable jean shorts I brought with me from American became matching black trousers, and the sneaker were polished shoes.

Further proof I was losing my mind.

Certain things were bound to happen during a nervous breakdown though. Sometimes, a crowd of ungrateful onlookers might simply watch it unfold. Sometimes, an onlooker would feel compelled to record it for views from stranger on YouTube. Sometimes, the opposite could occur where an onlooker notices it about to occur and intervenes. Rarely, it might involve a chance meeting that prevents that fur from emotionally falling over the edge.

In my case, it came down to the latter. In my case, that coincidental Samaritan came in the form of a random figure at the foot of the stares, looking up at me the moment we spotted each other. In my case, it was the English beagle from the portrait. He stood down there, at the foot of the stairs, as if he’d been plucked from the portrait and stood in modern clothes like me.

“Huh?”

“What the—”

All noise and thought fell silent. Those piercing, dark eyes stared up at me in confusion, then held the same foreign sense of familiarity I’d been expressing the previous few hours. Between us, the only things moving were our trembling fingers clutching onto the marble railing, as well as our hesitant breathing as tourists walked by us.

Our eyes met, and the feeling of deja vu became stronger than ever. I'd met this man before, long before I saw the painting of him adorning the wall of this estate. And from the expression he had when he saw me, I had a feeling that he did, too.

The stranger smiled, and my heart skipped a beat, and another. Was he a stranger? My mind said ‘yes’—I don't remember meeting any beagle in person before—but my heart said ‘no’. I slowly walked down the stairs, with each step causing a warm sensation of nostalgia and familiarity enveloping my body.

I was home.

We were home.

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“Once every year or so, I had the same dream,” he said meekly with a nod. “I usually don't remember my dreams, but those were special. They were so vivid, so lucid, that they stayed with me long after I wake up. They didn't feel like dreams but more like watching old cinema in a movie theater all by myself. The dreams almost always involved this place, and…and you were in it.”

“I was?” I blinked a few times. “Did we...meet somewhere before?”

The beagle frowned. “That's the thing. I don't remember meeting you before, Daniel, but now that I hear more of your voice, I’m beginning to doubt my own memory. You sound...so familiar.”

“Do you remember what you and the bat were doing in your dreams?”

Nate looked a little uncomfortable when he answered. “Sometimes, the bat and I, we just stared at each other. Sometimes, we cuddled. Other times, we…”

A noticeable blush crept up his cheeks—and I did the same when my imagination complemented the scene that Nate must have intended to describe, in all its risqué details.

The beagle cleared his throat loudly and said, “This place appeared in my dreams too. If I didn’t find myself wandering it, I likely found you wandering it.”

He sat directly beside me on the old marble steps leading from the back entrance of Fangcrest, down to the back garden leading directly to the estate’s surrounding stone wall. Nate and I thought it best to find some alone time to talk. Unfortunately, the number of tourists roaming around the manicured hedges, taking pictures of either the blooming flowers, the occasional stone statues of Greek gods or the intricately carved water fountain as the centerpiece tying the cobblestone, it led us to simply sitting on the steps. Furs either walking up or down it didn’t pay attention to us, and we could gather our thoughts on this…strange day.

A working-class English Beagle born and raised in Southampton; Nate was a quiet but intriguing fur to talk to. Handsome too, the more I sat next to the canine. It almost left me as flustered as him. Once we could finally speak, we started off slow, either bringing up where we came from or what brought us to Fangcrest. I described the vague feelings of understanding once I left the bus, the foreboding nostalgia, how overwhelmed I got and seeing ghosts while fawning over a portrait of him.

“A portrait?” He pondered over it. “You mean, an actual painting of me?”

“Yep.”

“So, that's why the tour guide looked at me funny when I first came here.” Nate shook his head.

“You mean Lily?” I chuckled at the insanity of my next words. “It looked almost exactly like you, but you appeared more…older. But the moment I saw you at the foot of the staircase, I knew…I knew it really was you.” I groaned at how eerie it made me sound. “Ugh, I know, I know. It sounds really creepy…”

“Not really,” Nate said. He relaxed his enclosed arms so they touched the marble stairs leading down to a cobblestone pathway engraved into soft grass. “I didn’t know about this place, at first. I always just saw it as a dream. I've always thought that the dream must have been inspired by a Gothic novel I was assigned to read in state school, or a documentary on the Victorian era, or maybe my overactive imagination as a writer.”

“You're a writer?” I asked. “Like...do you write novels?”

Nate chuckled. “I aspire to write one. But so far, I'm just a novice. I graduated from university not too long ago, but I haven't done anything to make a name for myself yet.”

He ran his fingers down baluster of the marble stairs. “After graduation, I worked on my novel every night after I finished my day job. I was doing some research in preparation to write a story that was on my mind for a while. That was when I learned this place actually existed. But it wasn’t until today I actually decided to come all this way to a place I’d never been to, and now I’m seeing a fruit bat from my dreams I’ve never met before, but…it feels like I have.”

“Same here, and...that’s weird, dude,” I confessed to Nate. The beagle held back a self-aware laugh, only to fail as I joined in. “So, what made you decide to come here? If I remember correctly, Southampton’s quite a long way from Tuskfield, isn't it?”

“It is. That’s why I never really bothered coming here,” he sighed. “Last week though…I had a longer dream. We, or at least, me and the fruit bat who looks like you, were lying on this big bed. We were both naked but didn’t do anything but lie next to each other. You were pale and crying. I was crying too. I…I tried to say something, but I couldn’t…you were then sobbing, calling me ‘John’ over and over until I woke up.”

A haunted look flickered in his expression. I found myself gently placing a paw on his knee, to comfort him as he continued, “The second I jumped out of bed, I couldn’t stop curling up on the couch crying the entire day. You...I mean, the bat who looks like you... he was dying, or looked like he was about to die, and calling out to me, and…”

Nate's eyes opened wide in terror for a second, then he covered his face in his hands as he leaned forward, as if he was about to be sick. His breathing got shallower and faster, and his entire body started trembling—but I couldn't tell if it was because of anger, fear, or sorrow. Maybe it was all three.

With an exasperated cry, he muttered, “Oh God, I felt like I was dying too. I felt so afraid, so helpless. W-When it happened again last night, that’s when I knew I had to get here to Fangcrest. My heart was drawn to it, to this location, and I felt l-like…I felt like I’d regret it for the rest of my life if I didn’t come here.”

Nate was visibly shaken up. So, I hesitantly offered him a hug. He accepted it easily. Words didn’t need to be spoken for him to know that he found me. I found him. Whatever was going on, we could figure it out together.

The two of us spent a little more time on the steps before eventually, we decided to stand back up. Neither of us had eaten lunch, and dinnertime would arrive quickly, so I quietly suggested returning to Tuskfield for dinner at a charming pub. My treat, of course. Nate tried suggesting we could split the check by the end, but I only left it at that: a mere suggestion. After his long day travelling from Southampton to an isolated manor, he deserved a well-earned meal.

Frankly, I did too.

During the ride back and the awkward wait for our waitress to serve our meals (half a pint for me, half a pint for him, and dual servings of greasy fish and chips), ideas were thrown about. It did not take long for us to settle on the best possibility, however insane it sounded: reincarnation.

The thought sounded baffling until several minutes of Google searching led us to discovering the same portrait of Nate online.

Jonathan Haywood, the 15th Earl of Haywood.

“That explains why I called you ‘John’ in your dreams,” I mused aloud as Nate continued perusing through the other beagle’s minimal history. “It also explains why you look almost exactly like Jonathan in that portrait, right?”

“I guess…” he mumbled aloud.

My ears perked at the defeat in his voice. “What’s wrong?” I asked him.

Nate set his phone down on the table, leaned back into his corner booth seat and sighed.

“This is unreal,” he mumbled again, before finally looking at me with a mixture of disbelief, longing, and deep confusion. “So, let’s just say this is all real. Let’s…Let’s say I actually am the reincarnated soul of an earl from Victorian England. Who were you then?”

“Jonathan’s secret lover?” I shrugged. “That vixen I mentioned to you called me ‘Davy’.”

“Davy?” He inquired in-between searches.

“Yes, Davy.” I nodded back. “It might have been my name.”

“Sounds like it,” Nate showed me the results of his searches, “but I’ve tried typing in ‘Fangcrest Manor Davy’, ‘Fangcrest Manor fruit bat’, ‘Fangcrest Manor bat’, ‘Earl of Haywood bat’, and all that’s come up are articles about British colonialism and the number of Indian bats who worked as servants. No names though. It…could’ve been a nickname.”

“Could’ve been a nickname?” I repeated his words while staring down at his finger scrolling down the results. A thought suddenly came to mind. “Maybe I was a servant of yours? I doubt there’d be any online records of somebody that low on the totem pole. We could go to the library and see if there’s any records to go off. Do you work tomorrow?”

Nate almost answered my question when our foods arrived. I thanked the kind waitress as the smells wafted over us. One look down at the freshly cooked fish, the crispy chips, and our drinks gave us literal food for thought. A glance up at me sealed the deal for Nate.

A smile broke out across his muzzle, and he grabbed a piece. “No, I do not,” he said, finally taking a bite out of it. “When do we start?”

Smirking across the table, I reached over to start digging into my own plate, “Soon as we’re done eating, handsome.”

The way Nate blushed madly at my remark left me laughing. The only sounds exchanged were chewing and the faint pit-pat of his tail wagging against his booth chair.

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One of the few modern buildings in town, Tuskfield Public Library stood out from the more scenic structures and edifices. It didn’t carry its vintage history, instead basking in its glass exterior no differently than a downtown office. It harshly stood out from cracked mortal and mossy rooftiles, to the point we didn’t need directions in finding it aside from the street name.

The instant we entered the equally modern exterior, Nate and I immediately went to the front desk and asked for directions to the Archives Room. The sheer number of boxes, binders, and dusty books intimidated Nate at first, but I barely sweated at the thought of sifting through them. After all, they never said solving a good mystery would be easy.

Of course, we were also already aware that the Haywoods were based in London. They only used to own Fangcrest Manor. Any public records of them would likely be there, but we were more curious about the fruit bat called ‘Davy’. So, we shuffled through the names of resident mammals over the previous century and a half. The ones with first names like ‘David’ or ‘Dave’ did not fit the description of a fruit bat or bat of any subspecies. Deduction led us to reasoning that my predecessor—wait, would the title be ‘predecessor’ if we’re actually, technically, the same person?—couldn’t be born before 1840, nor could he have lived past WWII. Nate further theorized that ‘Davy’ could have been something of a caretaker or very least, a servant of Fangcrest who’d been secretly romancing with Jonathan Haywood. Maybe the two Victorian men, knowing the risk to themselves and their stations, only hooked up whenever Jonathan visited on holiday?

Whoever the fruit bat truly was, we knew very little about him while knowing enough about Jonathan. He’d been born on June 1st, 1843, to William and Lisbeth Haywood as the oldest of four cubs. Jonathan grew up as a viscount and held a keen interest in reading, writing, tinkering with clocks, as well as art collecting. A few blog posts and a semi-sourced quote on Wikipedia suggested that some of the ‘fine art’ he collected contained some level of homoeroticism, much to my and Nate’s amused delight.

We came to a further dead end when I thought to the vixen ghost in the housekeeper’s uniform and wondered if finding her could be the big clue. Unluckily for us, we didn’t have a name, a surname, or even find records of a vixen serving as a housekeeper at Fangcrest.

We knew that Jonathan Haywood died from pneumonia at the age of thirty-seven on January 30th, 1881. We knew his younger brother Andrew succeeded the title, then helped bring the Haywood fortune to its peak at the turn of the century, but there remained no mention of any fruit bat, let alone a servant named ‘Davy’. Did they even hire one in the first place?

It had gotten late, and the library closed in several minutes. Nate tiredly looked through yet another binder when he stopped to ask, “I’m a mess, why don’t we save this for tomorrow?”

My heavy eyes glanced to the seemingly infinite number of books I’d examined. The length of the previous few hours gradually weighed down on me when I glanced down at my phone to see the time.

“Eh, sure,” I shrugged. “Why not?”

We wandered out of the Archives Room, out of the local library, and traversed the emptying streets. Several furs came and went from the *Black Fox and Rose* pub, yet the older building beside it remained sleepy of activity. Originally, I wanted to end my evening at the *Black Fox and Rose*, hoping to maybe catch the attention of a handsome stranger and bring him up to my room for a proper British shagging. If not, at least gotten hammered on more than a single pint.

Somehow, I did end up bringing a handsome fur to my room, though not in the way anybody likely expected. As far as rooms went, it happened to be one of the more modest ones spent in during my trip. Unlike other hotels or inns in cities such as London or Bath, this inn didn’t provide a large suite. It didn’t have amenities like a jacuzzi, five-star room service, a large flat-screen TV screen mounted to the wall, or a fantastical view overlooking its downtown area.

Rather, the room I’d booked in Tuskfield happened to be modest. It certainly had decent room service, layout, and a well-maintained bathroom. It even contained a nice view of the street leading to the front entrance. Yet when we entered and I locked the door behind us, Nate reacted as if he’d entered Buckingham Palace itself.

He stood by the window, fidgeting his fingers anxiously. I gestured for him to take a seat on the bed.

“Thank you,” he said as he sat down on the bed. Then, he looked up nervously at me. “I’m...quite sorry.”

“Why’re you sorry?” I asked. “You didn’t do anything, did you?”

Nate slumped backwards onto the single king-sized bed and kicked his shoes off. I could almost make out the tired rings under his eyelids, clearly yearning but dreading sleep.

“I ruined your vacation, that’s what I did,” he whined, dark eyes darting earlier at the luggage I’d placed on the room’s accompanying desk. “Here I was, thinking we’d actually figure out something, find out what this damn reincarnation crap’s all about, and now I’m loitering you out of pocket, out of dinner, and now your room reservation. Fuck, I’m even being a skiver by skipping work this many times, it’ll be a miracle I even have a job left…”

“You’re not ‘loitering me’ and you’re certainly not a ‘skiver’, whatever that means,” I half-lightly chuckled, then sat beside him at the foot of the bed. Raising my right arm, I gently wrapped my wing around his back. “We still have tomorrow, Nate. I’ll admit, today’s been a really, really weird day, but I’m having a great time!”

The English beagle gave me a look that asked if I was serious, and it made us chuckle. His sounded more cynical.

“You call rummaging a library and housing a complete stranger for the night ‘real fun’, huh?” Nate remarked with classic English humor.

“I do.”

The beagle still visibly expected more as to why.

“My parents are filthy rich, I’m not gonna lie,” I said, “Mom’s a social activist, and Dad’s a TV executive in Las Estrellas. As soon as I’m done with my European trip, they want me to settle down with my life, so…I guess you can say I’ve been stalling a bit…”

My eyes traveled down to the plush carpeting, and to Nate’s still toes. No doubt, he listened carefully as I continued, “So far, I’ve just been dragging out my vacation, and I thought Tuskfield would be another town. But then, today happened. First, I saw a ghost, went a little insane, then I met you and discovered we may or may not be a pair of reincarnated gay lover from Victorian England.”

“This wasn’t what you were expecting, huh?” Nate leaned beside me.

“Tis not, my fellow lad,” I joked by using the worst accent I could muster. When Nate finally broke into a smile, the beagle tried pushing me away, but I held onto him until a finger jabbed at my wing’s membrane. “Ow! Easy there, will ya?”

“Sorry, Daniel.” Nate immediately flinched away, sounding concerned at first, then relaxed when I flapped my wings in his direction to send a gust of soft wind into his face. “I think I’d much prefer you over the crappy overhead fan in my flat.”

I faked an offended gasp, and a flash of worry in my new friend’s face turned into a joking grin. “What?” He asked, “You’re fun to talk to. Plus, I’d never have to worry about missing rent again if I have you as a sugar daddy.”

Even Nate paused at the comment, blushing intensely before I burst out laughing and he did too. We lied sideways on the bed, clutching our stomachs and attempting to catch our young breaths.

“You know,” I murmured softly, “what we’re going through might make a great book for you to write. I bet you’d make it an amazing read.”

The handsome canine broke out into a touched smile. “You…think so?”

“I know you would, Nate.” I nodded earnestly. “I’d read it.”

We exchanged a singular look. Call it a decision made in the heat of the moment, genuine attraction obviously building over the course of several hours, our past lives yearning to touch the other again, or maybe all three at once. Whatever the case, I caressed his paw into holding mine as the bottom of my wing brushed against the blanket at our feet, he reached over the short distance to cup my left cheek, and our lips interlocked into a soft embrace.

Oh God. Oh, dear God. Those velvet lips not only tasted like an old lover, but they pulled the air from my lungs and made me feel the urge to fly up to the Moon and back.

Our muzzle reluctantly parted back. My breaths tickled his nose. His cooled my heated face. Our eyes glossed over in lust and further yearning. We exhaled, blushing furiously once more, and somehow found ourselves fast asleep as soon as our ears fell back into the pillows.

Little did I know, we would find ourselves in a dream.

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*Fangcrest Manor hardly contained a speck of dirt or an inkling of dust to be seen. A true testament to the dedication of its summertime caretakers, walking down a main hallway in the early evening felt more akin to dancing in a dream. Venetian mirrors and candlelit lanterns illuminated the corridor I found myself entering, wondering aloud where he could be.*

*The previous day or so were spent wondering where he could be. Sure, his role as an earl contained important matters, but I still hoped to speak to the beagle before the clock chimed midnight.*

*One by one, I reluctantly snuffed certain lanterns out. Each time I performed the task, I felt my hope in seeing Jonathan wither. Luckily, I didn’t require waiting for long.*

*By the time I made my way to the entrance hall, I heard noises outside. They were the indistinguishable sound of a carriage stopping in front of the large doors, then departing as its driver made haste to Tuskfield’s stables. No doubt, he too needed sleep.*

*However, my thoughts remained on the mahogany doors. My candle twinkled in tandem to my beating, joyous heart. They opened to reveal a canine figure taller than me in height. His shadow and posture indicated nobility, as well as tiredness about to overtake him. Still grasping the lone candle in my paw, I stepped forward to close the door behind him, and smiled widely through the darkness.*

*We didn’t say a word. We didn’t need to. No other guests or distant eyes required me to be cordial, wish my master a good evening, then stoically take his coat before returning to the servant’s quarters on the other end of the manor. Nobody needed to follow protocol at Fangcrest Manor unless they wanted to, or the presence of those other than Jonathan made it an obligation.*

*Instead, the English beagle quietly stole a single kiss from me. A rush of blood to our chests and cheeks left us feeling wider awake than before. Then, he giddily followed me to his bedchambers down a couple rows of corridors. My single candle illuminated the way.*

*Minutes later, Jonathan led me inside to his chambers, a suite completely illuminated by candlelight, which allowed me to set my candle aside and blow it out. He partly closed the door before turning to me. God, what a handsome man. His twinkling brown eyes seemed chiseled from a diamond in the deepest mountains of my ancestral homeland.*

*“Apologies, Davy,” he momentarily frowned. “Father and Mother accosted me before my departure. They insisted I should give more thought about proposing to Lady Marlwood during my stay here. Had it not been for their meddling, I would have come sooner.”*

*The smile across my muzzle stilled. Whatever positive emotions I felt faltered.*

*My excitable mood always soured at the mention of Lady Marlwood, or whenever the subject of a potential wife was brought forth in conversation. Jonathan noticed it in my expression, stepping forward to smile down at me.*

*“I only made it sound like I would consider it though,” he clarified in a soft, comforting tone directed into my warm ear. “Lady Marlwood is nice, but—”*

*“She is only a friend?” I finished for him, to which my master chuckled.*

*“That as well,” he hugged me close and began lightly stroking my elbows and their connecting bat wings, “but I was going to say that she is not you, Davy.”*

*I perked an ear up at his words. I gazed back up at him in time for him to pull me into another kiss. Before, it had been a loving peck. In that instant, Jonathan eased past my lip’s defenses and allowed his canine tongue to dance in desire with mine. Our flaring nostrils tickled the other’s. His fingers held onto my elbows, even as I wrapped my wings around his torso and pulled him slightly downward until I no longer needed to stand on my toes. Seconds went by until our lungs required air, despite the scent of erotic anxiety permeating the bedchambers.*

*“I would never marry myself off to a noblewoman,” Jonathan whispered without so much as looking away from me. “What my parents want does not matter. As far as they should care, Andrew’s wife has already provided the Haywoods a future heir.”*

*“They will be suspicious if you remain single for the rest of your life,” I mentioned while still grinning foolishly from ear to ear. “The other servants whisper about possible rumors back in London.”*

*“How they managed not to find out about us is a glorious miracle,” Jonathan laughed.*

*“Certainly!” I couldn’t help but laugh too.*

*“Regardless, I am still the Earl of Haywood,” he said. Leaning in, Jonathan kissed my cold nose with his own. “As far as they should be concerned, I am already engaged to somebody else, and nothing on God’s Earth will ever change how much you mean to me, Davy.”*

*“You don’t need to convince me,” I giggled, “but it helps to hear it again.”*

*We embraced closely. At any other time of day, when the Haywood’s vacation home of Fangcrest Manor was occupied, such a display would be considered criminal. It would result in us being charged for sodomy. Especially as I felt a clothed hardness press into my lower stomach from Jonathan’s trousers. The delicious heat of the canine’s manhood pulsed through and caused me to harden too.*

*“Mmmm, it has been a long journey for me, servant boy,” Jonathan to the playful, teasing script we often traded in the past. “Would you mind helping me unwind?”*

*A chirp of approval vibrated from me as I said, “How can I simply say no to you, Master Haywood?”*

*Walking a little further until we came to the room’s luxurious canopy bed, Jonathan leaned his back to the closest bedpost, presenting himself for me. The tent in his trousers pointed directly at me. My legs quivered until they gave way, and I eagerly knelt down to toy open the buttons of his expensive trousers.*

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“Quick question, Bram,” Nate interrupted the interview back in the present day, “is it appropriate for us to discuss the uh, heh…not-safe-for-work details?”

Daniel (and Bram) almost chided the English beagle for stopping the story as it was about to get to a rather nice part, but then he paused. “Actually, yeah. That’s a good point,” the fruit bat nodded his head in agreement. “Bram, is your show family-friendly or what?”

“Did you see the sixty-nine joke I made at the start?” Their interviewer snickered. Part of him was relieved neither of his flustered guests were aware of the growing boner in his pants, well-hidden by the table between them. “Seriously though, it’s fine. I’ll make this episode for eighteen-plus listeners only. You…Mm, you can continue, if you want.”

Both the fruit bat and the beagle understood. They continued recounting the rest of the shared dream.

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*My relaxed muzzle bobbed up and down the engorged member without issue. The only firm movements were in the Earl’s steady thrusts and my fingers as they slackened and clenched around his bare buttocks between gyrations. From the noises echoing into my ears, caressed and held onto by the beagle’s paws, I could make out the following: gulps, moans, breathy exhales, drooling panting, a tail smacking against the bedframe, and finally lustful whines, indicating that Jonathan neared his peak.*

*In and out, in and out. His tip entertained the back of my throat. Saliva leaked down the side of my chin as I savored his length. I savored its perspiration, its musky quality, its scents consisting of the man I loved, and the hint of cologne fragrances sprayed on throughout the day.*

*“Oh, Davy…” he moaned aloud, “Oh, Davy, yes!”*

*Ever since the first time, my experience in fellatio had grown exponentially. So had the allure of sodomy. I had my overactive imagination to thank for letting the curiosity fester underground during early adulthood, my master’s mutual attraction to let it pierce to the surface, and our sudden first kiss all those years ago for it to fully bloom. Ever since, we had explored the possibilities together, whether it be in the safety of a bedroom in the middle of the night or in the safety of Fangcrest itself. At first, Jonathan’s manhood could barely fit past my fangs without scraping the wet flesh. However, now I could expertly swallow it whole without little persuasion, as well as bring forth pleasures a virgin male could not fathom.*

*In and out, in and out. Jonathan’s thrusts became faster.*

*“Brace yourself, Davy,” he murmured before clenching his teeth.*

*I did. I always did for him. Dear Jonathan turned aggressive in his thrusts yet made sure not to be too forceful. He always made sure I didn’t hurt, no matter how much passion overflowed him. My tongue danced around his shaft in further eagerness, suctioning it past my lips until his pubic fur brushed my nostrils. In and out, in and out, and in one final time.*

*“Nnnnnnngh,” he tensed up, then released, “Ahhhhh…!”*

*Torrents of warm liquid flooded my maw, then emptied into my stomach. Jonathan never understood why I found his seed so flavorful, even years later. He found the taste of a male’s emission to be too salty for him, but never complained about my opinion.*

*I wiped my chin and stood back up. Jonathan regained his strength as I began undressing. He followed on cue and kicked down his trousers, followed by his shoes, his frock coat, his vest, tie, suspenders, and dress shirt. My wardrobe required little time to discard. Soon enough, we stood before each other in nothing but our birthday suits, admiring the other enough that Jonathan’s manhood throbbed back to erection.*

*“It doesn’t take much for you, does it?” I jested.*

*Jonathan licked his chops after observing my nakedness.*

*“Nope,” he stepped forward to kiss me once more…*

*…only for a quick knock at the door to interrupt us.*

*“Eep!” I jumped away and tried hiding behind one of the canopy bed’s curtains.*

*Jonathan flinched for a moment but remained composed as he spoke up, “Who is it?”*

*“Lord Haywood, sir, this is Emma. I apologize for disturbing you,” she said to us through the wooden barrier. “May I come in to speak with you?”*

*Jonathan glanced at me, smiling softly and just as completely naked.*

*“I’m afraid you may not,” he answered in a calm but strict voice worthy of his title as Earl of Haywood. “I am not dressed, but you can talk to me through the door.”*

*“I appreciate your courtesy, sir,” she snorted out a laugh on the other side. “May I ask how your journey went on your way here?”*

*“The ride here went splendidly, thank you for asking, Emma,” he replied. “I trust the rest of the manor has remained in good shape since my last visit?”*

*“Certainly is, my Lord.”*

*“Good, good.” Jonathan clicked his tongue. “Is there anything else I need to be privy of?”*

*“Not to you, specifically,” Emma spoke up. Her voice became louder. “Davy, I know you are inside the master’s bedchambers, and you can hear me loud and clear. You said you would turn out all the lanterns yet forgot the one outside the drawing room.”*

*I muffled my own gasp and Jonathan audibly fought back a childish snicker.*

*“Do not forget to finish your designated chores, next time. If the master requires your presence, then at least inform me you couldn’t finish your task, so it won’t be forgotten. Is that clear, Davy?”*

*Gulping down my dread and embarrassment, thankful at least she didn’t barge in unannounced to see my erect nakedness beside Jonathan’s, I meekly said, “U-U-Understood, E-Emma…Ma’am.”*

*“Good. Is there anything else you require, Lord Haywood?”*

*“Privacy and uninterrupted sleep would be best,” Jonathan said. “And Emma?”*

*The vixen asked, “Yes, sir?”*

*“I trust you won’t bring this up to my father or mother?”*

*As if he even needed to, I thought to myself.*

*“Of course not, my Lord,” Emma answered back, “I wish you two a wonderful night. However, I still expect you to be up early to help prepare the master’s breakfast, Davy.”*

*Protocol once again dictated that I say aloud, “Y-Yes, E-Emma. Ma’am.”*

*“Sleep well then,” she said, “and good night, my Lord.”*

*Emma’s footsteps receded down the hallway like a specter of the night. The apprehension from before went with her while shame lingered. That is, until Jonathan and I suddenly found ourselves on the bed giggling like schoolboys.*

*Jonathan straddled my lithe body. He held my arms above my head, leaving me exposed to his masculine mercy. We stared into each other’s eyes for what felt like the endless seconds of an eternity, and then, he leaned down to lovingly lick my chin all the way over my lips, the side of my heated nose, an eye, and my forehead. He did it again, then licked along my jawline, the Adam’s apple of my neck, shivering in delight at his touch, further teasing me until I released some fussing chirps and moanful noises only a fruit bat could make.*

*They instantly caused Jonathan to throb against my abdomen.*

*“I love those sounds you make,” he huffed. “By God, I love it!”*

*“Hehe,” I breathily said, “I know you do…”*

*Thus, I made those sounds more audible for his manhood’s pleasure. I made them louder and more passionate. I transformed them into a chorus as he reached for the secretive bottle hidden in his nightstand, lathered himself liberally, and shifted his body back so I could spread my legs wide for him. We exchanged flustered winks. I brace myself. I felt his tip kiss my anticipating entrance. I felt him push forward after earning my approving nod. Then, I felt ecstasy wash over.*

*His pulsing shaft inside me, slick and warm as it brushed the spot within me, his fingers squeezing me as I squeezed him back, my wings blanketed around his shoulder blades like a cape, and Jonathan’s steady yet blissful gyrations. Jonathan and I never committed sodomy.*

*We made love. We made love in its most beautiful form, together.*

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I imagined myself lying in a bed. We were in a lavish mansion out in the wild countryside, sleeping beside each other and feeling whole, his arms wrapped around my torso and his snout rested on my shoulder as we soundly slept. It wasn’t until I opened a crusted eyelid though that I spotted a modern lamp on the nightstand, and my sleepy, relaxed brain fully realized where and when it was.

Nate and I were still dressed, thankfully. We still wore our clothes from the previous day, but I somehow had been turned into Nate’s body pillow. One the one paw, I couldn’t complain about the position: the beagle’s fluffy arms holding my smaller form, his hot breath tickling the back of my neck, and how it all brought me back to the dream as well as my first time waking up with a handsome man holding me in my bed.

He wasn’t too much of a stranger though. At least, compared to other situations.

I reached for my phone on the nightstand. The blinking time said it was twenty-three minutes past eight in the morning. Clouds outside the window indicated a sleepy day, but I remained awake as I perused through my notifications. Mom and Dad asked me how Tuskfield went, and if I could post any pictures to MuzzleScroll, one of my friends in America asking about England and Bath. I kept my replies simple but brief.

A minute or so later, Nate stirred awake. Before I could do or say anything to lighten the mood, the beagle suddenly gasped in fright and pulled his arms away from me.

“Good morning, Nate—”

“Did we just…?” He tried to say, “I-I mean, in the dream, did we…?”

“Yep, I think so,” I said amid a yawn, turning to look back at him with a soft smile to show him I didn’t mind how he held me earlier. Then, I stared up at the ceiling to notice a small rafter. The weight of the dream slowly replayed in my mind. “It felt so…so real.”

“Same here,” Nate meekly nodded. “I swear, I could smell those candles in the lanterns…and remember undressing myself from old Victorian clothes.”

“I remember the way you—or Jonathan, I guess—made love to me,” I blushed heavily, almost as much as Nate did when I brought it up. “That was so romantic”

“Yeah,” he chuckled nervously, “and I remember the look on your face when Emma…”

We froze in our spots. We stared at each other as if a gargantuan puzzle piece finally placed itself into position on a table. Emma, the vixen housekeeper from our dreams was also the same one I encountered the day before at Fangcrest Manor! Not only that, but—

“She could be another link to help us find Davy,” Nate said it aloud.

We promptly decided to get ready. The library archives could wait if we looked semi-presentable, smelled good and ate something nice for breakfast. As Nate went into the restroom to relieve himself and use some borrowed deodorant and spare toothbrush, I’d noticed my left wing feeling sore. Moving the arm up and down caused me to partly regret sleeping on it.

“Thank God, you’re up there,” I muttered while staring up at the rafter.

Fruit bats like myself didn’t always fit the stereotype of sleeping upside down. It boiled down to a few pros and a few cons, the latter of which mainly revolved on practicality and how much leg strength I possessed. Most of the time, I liked to hang upside down either to amuse some friends/potential dates or stretch my wings out as far as I could. Today felt no different. Jumping up and gripping the rafter by my footpaws, I heard my wing’s muscles crackle and pop back into place like soothing water on hot coal.

During my stretching, Nate exited the bathroom to see me. He paused for a minute or two before nervously approaching me right-side up. I chirped amusedly at his awe. Without thinking much of it, I leaned forward to bridge the gap between us, and peck him on the lips. It apparently worked to break the English beagle from whatever trance he’d found himself in, and he started babbling about being hungry and going out for breakfast.

“Sounds like fun, Nate,” I quickly jumped back onto the floor and eased my wings downward. “I could go for some grub! And coffee.”

Nate held back another yawn, “Me too.”

A quick peruse through a search map on our phones led us to a pleasant corner restaurant ironically titled the Café Corner. Inside, the subjects of locally drawn pictures and indie photographs stared down on customers coming and leaving. When a table opened for me and Nate, we were given one near the front entrance. Not a bad choice. The chairs felt comfortable, we faced each other across a tiny table, plus, the establishment’s atmosphere reminded me of why I enjoyed small towns sometimes.

“So…how’d you sleep?” Nate asked out of the blue after we sat down.

I smiled, “Rather well.”

“Ah, good…good,” he timidly placed his paws underneath the table and glanced down at it and out the window. Morning mist on aged windows resembled raining mist. “Uh, Dan? Can I call you Dan?”

“Sure, if you want to,” I cleared my throat, nodding. “What were you gonna ask?”

An expression resembling nervous curiosity crossed the beagle’s face.

“I just…can we talk about something?”

I perked an ear high at the way he said it, and how Nate seemed to hate asking it.

“Sure, we can…talk about something,” I stated reassuringly. “What is this ‘something’?”

He held back a small laugh. “This ‘something’ is…us, you could say.”

“Us?” I repeated the word on my confused lips. “Us, as in…?”

“You and me,” he clumsily yet cutely explained, “This apparent bond we have…had? Currently have and had at the same time! Our…experiences shared in the past twenty-four hours, I mean, you must admit that it’s wild and far-fetched.”

“Far-fetched, huh? Not really,” I answered with a wry grin. “I’m sure we’re not the only two men in this country or even this town to discover rebirth might be a real thing…”

“Yeah right,” Nate scoffed at my sarcasm, mirroring my grin somewhat. “You’re absolutely right. It ain’t far-fetched. For all we know, one of the waiters is Princess Di. Mum back could be Amelia Earhart. The Prince of Wales could be George Washington.”

“Haha, now that’d be ironic,” I giggled, which seemed to relax the beagle. “One minute, you’re an icon of rebelling against the Crown. The next, you’re in line for the Crown.”

“That would be something,” Nate shook his muzzle, then exhaled as he sipped from a complementary glass of water. “In all seriousness though, Dan, I need to ask. You and me, what we’re going through…let’s just say reincarnation is all true. It is as much a fact as the sky is blue and we circle around the Sun once a year. In that case, what does that make of us?”

I cocked my head at his question. “I’m not sure if I understand, Nate.”

“I’ve been thinking about this through the night, Dan,” the beagle spoke, “and I still can’t wrap my head around this entire situation. I can’t help but wonder, are we the same people as those who died and were reborn or are we different individuals who had those people’s memory passed down to us?”

I was willing to bet any eavesdropper in the restaurant would think we’d escaped a mental facility or were simply into New Age shit. However, the more level-headed part of my brain won out at the beagle’s genuine question. I grinned wryly and asked back, “Like the difference between an old house that just got a fresh coat of paint, and a new house that happened to be built on the same foundation that was used by the previous, older house?”

Nate almost coughed out the mouthful of water that he was in the process of drinking. After hastily gulping it down, he chuckled. “I guess that’s one way of comparing it…”

I leaned back in my chair and looked up at the ceiling and the fan that rotated to circulate the air inside.

“You know, I don’t know for certain, but I have the feeling that it’s the latter. We’re not Jonathan and Davy—we’re Nate and Dan. But as Fate has it, we happened to look like Jonathan and Davy, and we also just happened to have small bits of their memory as well. Or their souls, who knows? But does that make us the same individuals as those two? I don’t think so.”

The beagle nodded. “Makes sense,” he said. “And now, we can move on to my next question.”

“You had two?” I asked jokingly.

“I have a lot more,” Nate answered solemnly, “but for now, yeah, just two. So, if we aren’t the same as Jonathan and Davy, but we share the same memories or souls or whatnot, then… do you think we will be compatible as boyfriends?”

This time it was me who almost spat out water from my muzzle. “Boyfriends?” I asked, blinking.

“Well, yeah. We did kiss last night, after all, and that means we’re now boyfriends, right?”

The beagle’s naivete almost made me dizzy. Yes, we had kissed last night, and although it was a spur-of-the-moment thing, I enjoyed it a lot. In my imagination, we were going to have to have a few more hours of chatting and discussing and—if it came to that, exploring each other’s bodies to make sure we were sexually compatible—but never would I have thought that Nate would take the kiss as my quasi-proposal for a relationship.

I mean, it was normal for one-night stands or casual hookups to engage in a passionate kiss before sex, but such a kiss never meant that they were in a romantic relationship. And the beagle in front of me was taking it as just that, which told me all I needed to know about his past relationship—or lack thereof.

But it was convenient for me, in a sense. Striking up a conversation about whether we wanted to be romantically involved was always an awkward ritual, so the fact that I could skip all the dancing around the issue and get straight to the point was a godsend.

“Well, about last night,” I began after clearing my throat, “I kissed you because I was attracted to you… both sexually and emotionally. I didn’t know if you wanted to be romantically involved with anyone, let alone me, and I also didn’t want to make you feel uncomfortable, so I didn’t bring it up. You know, kissing doesn’t always mean that people want to be a couple.”

“It doesn’t?”

*God, he’s just too adorable*, I thought.

“No, and to answer your question… at this point in time, I don’t know if we can be boyfriends. At least, not yet. There are still a lot of things that we don’t know about each other, and just because we were lovers in a previous life doesn’t mean that we can be in the same relationship in this life.”

“Because we’re different individuals, I know.” Nate seemed a bit disappointed. “But for what it’s worth, I also felt a strong attraction toward you when we first met. It wasn’t anything I’ve experienced before. That’s why I don’t know how to react to it, even though it’s supposed to be my own feeling.”

He then sighed before looking out the window.

“How can I even be sure that this feeling is my own?”

As if the universe didn’t want me to answer that certain question, a waiter served our piping hot meals. For several eternal seconds, we stared down at our delicious food and the decorative plates they came on. Both contained flowery, almost Art Nouveau-esque designs. I had decided to order a full English breakfast, minus the baked beans and black pudding, instead asking for an extra helping of mushrooms alongside the Sunnyside eggs. Meanwhile, Nate settled on having poached eggs with a heavy dosage of homemade hollandaise sauce.

Our meals eventually entranced us into eating them. The uncomfortable silence remained in the air, but at least the magnificent cooking distracted us. I let myself be pulled in by the spices, well-baked bread, and greasy bacon washed down by egg yolk, and let Nate enjoy what I presumed to be his first taste of hollandaise sauce in years.

The heavy silence continued well after paying the bill (Nate insisted he do it this time, and I relented). We arrived at the library less hungry and more determined to solve the mystery we’d unintentionally discovered, or perhaps by fate. Half an hour later, I started to think it was more of the latter, when the beagle found our housekeeping vixen named Emma.

“Ah, here it is!” Nate pulled me over to the census book and carefully pointed a trimmed claw to a listed name. “Emma Josephine Lawrence, née Parker. Born October 22nd, 1829. Died on July 7th, 1926. She worked for the Haywood Family as a secondary caretaker and part-time housekeeper at—aha! Fangcrest Manor.”

A thrill of knowing we were getting close had me feeling giddy as a schoolboy.

“Does she have family?” I asked, to which Nate immediately went to another opened census book and pointed down to another name. “Josephine Barnes, born January 22nd, 1949?”

“In the U.K., census records open to the public only go far back as seventy years,” Nate mentioned, “Josephine’s not labeled as deceased, meaning we

* Go to current address and run into Ellie, the foxy barista from the coffee shop, who is Josephine’s granddaughter.
* Shows them the diary that she kept while under employ at the manor, and in it they find an old photograph of Davy, plus his last entry.
* They talk to her and she's extremely skeptical about their story until she hears about Emma, her grandmother's grandmother who secretly held onto Davy's journal after the latter's death. From it, they all discover Davy's last entry.

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[date]

Says that Jonathan's parents were furious after discovering that their son placed his fruit bat lover as a beneficiary in the Earl's will.

>>>>>>> Intended to give well-earned inheritance to Daivik and his family, whom the Haywoods have long relied on as servants over the previous three generations.

A massive verbal fight ensued after Jonathan discovers Davy had been arrested and beaten up by police after the bat's own parents learned about their affair and reported it to the authorities. Jonathan bails him out after being privately disowned by both their families, and the two flee for Fangcrest right as a massive, historical snowstorm is sweeping over England. They barely make it inside before getting snowed in, and the entry ends with Davy saying he's not feeling well.

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By the time that me, Nate, and Ellie Barnes each finished reading through the journal’s last entry, we three became exhausted; emotionally, mostly.

>>>>>>Ellie insists on keeping the journal for safekeeping, but recommended we exchange contact information. She wanted to talk further with her parents.

>>>>>>Conversation about his novel during shopping.

>>>Daniel and Nate conclude that whatever the relationship between their past selves had been, they still care about one another and will give a relationship between them a shot.

Me and Nate hurried on over to the cozy inn like giddy teenagers about to purchase a six-back of beer with a fake I.D. We tossed our bags into the corner of the room once I closed the door, and we were all over each other. We locked lips. We fell backwards onto the bed, letting him straddle me and wrapped my nimble wings around his broad shoulders. Our tongues danced in unison as if our maws became a lust-fueled ballroom. Our pause wandered as we slowly danced and rocked together to the heartbeats of our racing chests.

Surprisingly, Nate was the first to undress. He pulled away from my lips and eagerly peeled his clothes off one by one. It wasn’t until he began kicking his pants and underwear off that the weight of what he was about to do seem to hit him all at once. Nate suddenly looked as if he felt self-conscious of his own body.

“Feeling alright there?” I asked him. “You’re beautiful, y’know that?”

“N-Not as much as you,” he said back. The beagle’s eyes marveled at me while ignoring his own body, which while domesticated from years of working in retail, still remained muscular. “I uh, I used to have a six-pack, but…yeah. I really should cut back on there discounted meals they sell at the store…”

“I think you look perfect,” I giggled and scooted backwards until I had enough room. Then, I started to undress for him.

A twinge of pride coursed through me when I witnessed Nate’s flaccid cock instantly harden once I discarded my shirt and reached for my jeans. Kicking them down left me wearing nothing but a pair of white briefs clashing against my dark fur. That apparently drove his erection insane, to the point Nate pounced atop me and began slobbering my neck as his fingers fondled each inch of my body.

I shivered at his drooling tongue lathering my chin and nape and neck. I let out a whimpering chirp when he pinched my left nipple, and it sent jolts of pleasure up my spine. My heartbeat quickened. His did too. Finally, I let out a low moan when one of his fangs brushed at the bare skin beneath my fuzzy neck, making me chirp louder. It left me squirming underneath the pleased beagle.

“Thought you never did it before…?”

“I didn’t,” Nate chuckled. “Doesn’t mean I can’t show pleasure though…”

For several minutes, he wound me up by rubbing his bare shaft against the tenting fabric of my briefs. He let me tease his chest with my fingers as much as he did to me, and more. We danced along the edge and back from the chapter before an afterglow and a building storm of passion.

Eventually, the two of us couldn’t wait longer. I discarded my briefs and basked in our nakedness, letting our leaking cocks bounce and throb between our bodies in tandem to our interlocked lips. The taste, the feelings, the intense fervor bonded to us, it felt so familiar and yet foreign. God I was already thinking like my Victorian counterpart.

“Are you ready, Nate?”

“…ready, Dan.”

One fresh condom and a half-bottle of lubricant later, we unknowingly recreated the same dream shared the previous night. Legs spread open wide, my wings wrapped around Nate like a cape, and kisses in-between thrusting to movements.  Only, we were in a modern-day hotel room, and Nate’s inexperience in sex shined through in how he pushed inside me.

“Ow, easy!” I flinched when his cock scraped something. “Little tender there…”

He pulled back, muttering apologetically. “Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry…”

“I’m fine, just…” I sighed and smiled up at him, “be careful, okay?”

My first time happened back in high school. Much like Nate, he’d been a virgin who’d only seen the act on either a computer screen or a dirty magazine. The lack of experience or practice on a real-life partner showed. He’d been too brash and enthusiastic in his motions. Luckily for me, I could guide the beagle away from a painful, awkward ending for his first time. So, rather than keep lying back and letting the beagle recklessly piston in and out of me, I opted for a more…active approach.

“Wait, what’re you—“

“Hang on, I’m just…”

Repositioning ourselves led to Nate kneeling on the bed and me straddling his cock. A touch of subtle hip movement led to the beagle hardening right back up, as well as eliciting a deep moan, and his paws gripping my tensed ass for support. Not to say I was heavy, but still.

“You okay, big guy?” I huskily murmured. After earning an approving grunt from the surprised dog, I explained to Nate, “Take slow thrusts now. I’m lubed, b-but that doesn’t mean I’m free estate, heh. Just push up a little, like so, and l-l-let me guide you—ohhh!”

After precious moments of acclimating ti his thick shaft, my walls spread open for him without any other issue. What other issues could be found? My guidance and his enthusiasm for my pleasure helped us bond in a way I’d never felt for previous boyfriends before. His rough yet gentle touch, my swift yet pulsating movements, our beautiful union similar yet far from the ones likely felt in a past life. Nate and I weren’t just two strangers from opposite ends of the earth. Our relationship transcended foreign, untethered bonds. We were two males reunited, literally and figuratively, after years apart.

Even so, the English beagle who brought me to a talented orgasm wasn’t named Jonathan Haywood. He was Nate Hayes. The American fruit bat who brought him to a passionate climate wasn’t named Daivik, but Daniel.

So, we lay there together on the bed, spent and flustered and panting and exhausted and coated in the other’s hot seed, but grinning like two of the biggest idiots in love.

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*I had insisted Davy rest in my bed during recovery. Emma tried telling me to*

>>>>>>>>>As a result of the travelling by carriage through blistering cold, Davy developed severe pneumonia as they were snowed in. Jonathan dropped all niceties and pretexts on societal hierarchy and spends all his time nursing the sick bat. During this, he gets sick too and joins his lover on the master bed and they remain isolated in the manor.

>>>>>The two proclaim their love for each other, with Davy bringing up his Hindu beliefs and how he might see the love of his life again in another time. Jonathan hopes that whenever they met again, and wherever it may be, at least the world won't care about the two being in love. The dream ends with them presumably dying, and Daniel and Nate wake up sobbing and comforting each other.

>>>The story shifts back to the interview with Bram, who asks about their time as a couple since Tuskfield, how much they've been getting along with each other's families, and debate on Davy. They talk about speaking to the present-day Haywoods in secret, who neither confirm nor deny that a fruit bat by the name of Daivik existed. The Haywoods don't deny though that the recovered journal isn't authentic, or that it isn't possible a past Earl had a homosexual affair or two. Dan and Nate eventually conclude that the past Haywoods covered up the romance as well as Davy's existence, rewriting the will and such, but not before Emma managed to steal Davy's journal to prevent it from being destroyed. The interview comes to a close as Dan and Nate say that the fact they're reincarnated lovers doesn't make them feel they have to be together, but because they choose to be together. For now, there's no big plans for marriage, but it will likely change in the future once they begin living together in England.

>>>>>> The epilogue ends with Bram thanking our duo for the interview, wishing them luck on moving in together, and then he's all alone in the room, and ponders on reconnecting with his ex-boyfriend, a certain male calico named Zack Leander.

Jonathan the Earl of Haywood -> Nate Haynes

Davy -> Daniel Lierre