

Context: Fast forward to a few days before Thanksgiving. Hopper discloses he thinks he finally found where Vecna has been hiding out in a crawl. Will realizes the full extent of his powers when it comes time to face Vecna, helping El to battle him. An unexpected character finalizes Vecna's death. El makes a decision that will traumatize the rest of the characters.

## Chapter 11

Joyce, Nancy, Mike and Will are all at the Byer's residence. They're preparing food in advance to cook for Thanksgiving dinner. Jonathan and Hop are on their way to pick up their free turkey from Bradley's Big Buy supermarket -

"Why is cranberry sauce always included in Thanksgiving and no one ever touches it besides someone's grandma or weird uncle? But it's *always* bought and served..." *Mike wrinkles his nose and scowls as the gelatinous slime slides slowly out of a can into a glass dish -*

"You look like you're going to gag Mike." Nancy giggles

"I think it gained popularity during the Civil War, it was served to troops as a reward and sweet treat. But, for Thanksgiving? That was the Native Americans, they taught European settlers how to boil down the bitter cranberries to a sweet goo and it enriched savory and salty meals. Some guy named Marcus Urann, the founder of 'Ocean Spray', created the canned version in 1941 and Americans started using it largely in their Thanksgiving traditions..." Will says casually  
*Joyce, Nancy and Mike all stare at him blinking -*

"Honey. I think it was a rhetorical question.."

"You're such a nerd... I love... *I love that you know* silly little fun facts like that..." Mike gulps when he realizes he almost slipped up in front of Joyce and Nancy

*Will looks at Mike doe-eyed because he caught Mike's almost slip - Nancy and Joyce share a mutually confused expression by the boys responses -*

*\*Nancy clears her throat\**

"Ahem, here's the, *uh..* The lid for that glass container Mike. Seal that up tight and place it in the fridge?" Nancy attempts to break the palpable awkwardness in the air

"Uh, thanks Nance."

"What else needs to be prepped, Mom?"

*Joyce is still kind of zoned out, she's noticed some really odd behavior between Mike and Will lately but she thinks she's overanalyzing -*

"Mom? Hello?"

"Huh? Sorry. Uhm, can you cut up this celery and carrots for the stock and stuffing?"

"I can dice the sausage too for the stuffing if you want Joyce" chimes in Nancy

"That would be great. Thank you." *she tries to smile but it comes out a little lopsided because she's still lost in her own head -*

"Ms Byers? Are you ok?" Mike looks at her concerned

"I think I just need to maybe lay down? I'm so tired all of a sudden? Is that ok?" she lies

"Of course... Do you want water? Maybe you're hungry?" Will implores

"No sweetie. I'll be alright. I'll just go lay down for a little before Jonathan and Jim get back." She kisses Will's cheek and goes to her bedroom

"Do you think she's really ok? She just like...*zoned out*?" Nancy asks worried

"Maybe her blood sugar or something? Or she genuinely just got hit with a wave of exhaustion. We've all been there." Mike responds

"Oh, *for sure...* I remember just a few weeks ago Mike, *you were like the sandman* the last time you came over for dinner, you took an intense

nap beforehand...” -Will smirks watching Mike’s eyes widen because he knows exactly what Will is referring to, the sex nap-

Mike is too ruffled by flashbacks and stunned Will would say that in front of his sister, he just stands there. Will continues to smirk smugly, satisfied by the reaction he intended -

“What is up with you two? Is there mold in here or something? Your mom and now Mike just... *stunned*?” Nancy squints her eyes and says in an accusing, mildly annoyed tone.

Her inability to put her finger on the tension she *knows* she feels between her brother and Will is driving her to madness lately. It’s not negative tension but it’s still *tension*...

***\*Crackle... crackle. -Static- \*crackle\****

*Saved by the walkie talkie -*

“Will? Mike? Do you copy?” Lucas reverbs through the walkie

“We’re here. Nancy is with us too. *Over.*”

“Perfect.. Is your mom too? *Over.*”

“Yes? What’s going on Lucas...”

“Jonathan called us from a payphone downtown. He said Hop told him he has big news, meet us all at The SQUAWK, 1 hour... *Over and Out*”

***\*They all arrive at The SQUAWK - Jonathan, Hop, Robin, Max, Lucas, Steve, Dustin and El are already there\****

*“Strawberry Fields Forever” by the Beatles is playing at they walk in -*

Hop tells everyone he thinks he finally found the portal to get to where Vecna has been hiding out, trying to recover and regain his full power. Hopper thinks Vecna has created a dimension within the dimension that is the Upside Down, like a thin layer of skin similar to the portals that have opened throughout Hawkins over the years.

He hadn't thought about it until recently, where would be one of the most unlikely places for Vecna to choose that would go over all their heads? That Hop hasn't crawled? The old abandoned warehouse where Billy went missing- it's one of the only places he hasn't looked and still somewhere of significance to Vecna because he has used the warehouse as an entry point to Hawkins before.

"Holy shit." Max is the first one to speak after Hop is done with his speculation.

"Why out of all places would he choose there though? It's kind of.. *Random?*" Lucas questions

"That's *exactly* why Lu, it's random and we haven't thought of it yet. But, Hop is right, it *does have* significance to Vecna because he has used it to access Hawkins before..." Mike replies

"I agree. I think it's *definitely* worth speculating." says Steve

"OK. So, if the majority of us agree it's worth checking out and taking seriously that *he is* there... What's our plan?" Dustin asks

"I think we have El try to get inside his head and distract him, the rest of us can attack.. There's more of us and one of him and if he's weak or distracted he won't be able to sick the Demos on us..." Nancy adds

"I think that's a great plan, but I'm too far away, I'd have to take a bath to reach inside his mind and I can't do that *and* be at the warehouse to help defeat him. And that's *if* he's there. I can try and get inside his head and find out where he is from the bath and then we can ambush him?" El says worried and not as confident as usual -

"So hypothetically if he can have help from the Demos? Then what? If El isn't with us physically, she's right, that's a risk we'd have to be willing to face and deal with it if it presents itself... unless..." *Dustin contemplates for a second* -

"Will..." Dustin and Mike say in unison

"ME?!" Will gasps

"Yeah... you're still connected to the HiveMind too, what if you can gain access to the Demos? And slow them down while we fight Vecna and El is in his mind?" adds Lucas

“Hold on! We are **NOT** just *using my son* as **BAIT** and hope everything works out for the best! Absolutely not.” Joyce roars

“I don’t think anyone is implying we use Will as “bait” and we also still have flamethrowers we can use against the Demos if we need to..” Hop adds

“The last time we used fire against the Demos it almost **KILLED** Will!” Jonathan is just as anxious as his mother now

“Everyone shut up!” Will yells over everyone rambling over each other in disagreement

“El, I want to talk to you. Alone. Everyone out.” Will says sternly

“Will? Why did you tell everyone else to leave?”

“Because they were just going to keep talking over one another and we’d be here bickering about a plan for the next two hours and we don’t have that kind of time.” - “Have you been having nightmares?”

“Yeah... actually I have... it’s like they’re visions though? How did... how did you know that?”

“Because so have I. I think you’re right, I think they are warnings. From Vecna, that if we come after him, those dreams will become reality...”

“The fuck they will -” El boasts

“*I am still* connected to the HiveMind and you *would* be most useful if you can get inside Vecna’s mind, at least initially. I agree with all of that. And you could be in the Upside Down, you can use the bath in the old Hawkin’s lab... the vault, it’s still there. And if anything goes awry, the warehouse isn’t far from there. I could probably buy enough time if I channel enough energy to “take your place” in Vecna’s mind until you could get there physically to help fight him... what do you think?”

“That sounds *great in theory*...But, how would you “take over for me” into Vecna’s mind? Because you’d be the closest you’ve ever been to the Hive? You think that would have some type of steroid effect on your abilities?”

“Maybe. We’ll never know if we don’t try and that’s the most solid plan I can come up with, that everyone besides my mom, Jonathan and Mike might object to because it would be jeopardizing my safety. But, I can’t just sit back and do nothing... I have to fight too.”

“Let’s tell the rest... I admire you right now you know? Mike makes you... more brave.. It compliments you well. This ‘new you’ looks good Will...”

Will blushes, “Thank you El. That means *a lot* coming from you. I... I miss you...”

“I know.... Me too.”

***\*Will and El call everyone back into the main room and explain their theory\****

“No. Absolutely the fuck not. **NO!** I know you want to help your friends sweetie. I know you want to be involved but I can’t... *I can’t lose you!* I *almost* did and it nearly killed me...” Joyce shrieks

“Mom. Please... *please* calm down. I understand you’re scared. We’re all scared. Respectfully, I’m not asking for your permission. This plan makes the most sense and I’ve sat back for too long. I need to be there. That’s the only way this will work - if *we all work together* to take down that slimy vile sadist bastard...”

“What if we also build some type of bomb?” Injects Dustin

“A bomb?” Robin questions

“Yeah. Think about it, what’s more final than a massive explosion? It would evaporate the Upside Down and all the exotic matter, along with Vecna’s corpse, dimension be gone... everything would just fizzle into ashes.”

“Alright, everyone raise their hand in agreement for El and Will’s plan and Dustin’s addition for a bomb...” *Hopper takes charge again of the conversation, interrupting whatever Joyce’s objection was going to be -*

Everyone but Robin and Joyce raise their hands.

“12:2 ratio... majority wins. Let’s start prepping that bomb and get supplies and weapons and go find this son of a bitch.” states Dustin

“Who *uhm...* who knows *how* to build a bomb?” Max questions as everyone begins to scatter

“I do.” Mike and Dustin say simultaneously

“Great. You two, get to it.” Hop instructs

Robin and Mike are trying to choose a record to be the bomb’s time release trigger, Mike wants to choose “*Human Cannonball*” by the *Butthole Surfers* and Robin shames him for it.

“I love the concept, but I don’t know if we can kablooey the Upside Down to the dulcet tone of the *Butthole Surfers* Wheeler..”

“I built the bomb? I should be able to pick the record!”

“And I agree, you should, *on one condition* - pick a *good* record!”

“This is a great record!”

“As far as “saving the world” records go, this one is lacking Mike!”

“And what would you pick *Rockin’ Robin*?” mocks Mike, rolling his eyes

“I could think of *plenty* of better replacements to the *Butthole Surfers*!”

“Well then pick one!” Mike responds agitated  
*Will interjects -*

“Hey! Musical geniuses, can you stop the petty bickering and *just choose one and be done with it*? We have so much preparation to do, more important things than the bomb trigger track...”

Off in another room, Steve and Dustin are choosing their weapons for battle and they have a sentimental moment. Dustin tells Steve he’s scared to fail and scared to die. He’s barely gotten a chance at life yet, he can’t believe the fate of the world is in their hands. So much of his childhood has been robbed at the hands of Vecna... he can’t bare anymore loss. Dustin makes a cryptic joke that at least if they fail, the bomb won’t fail, they’ll all be goners anyway. Steve tries to comfort him and remind him that they have so much manpower, El and Will and their abilities and they’ve battled before to almost full success.

Steve says to Dustin, “*If you die, I die...*”

Dustin wants to be optimistic but he’s having a hard time. Remembering what happened with Eddie the last time he was *blindly hopeful*. Tears swell in his eyes as he thinks about Eddie and the key words to Steve’s statement, “*they have battled before, many times - almost*

*defeating Vecna*” but never fully succeeding, he sighs, his pessimism won’t change the outcome, he repeats to Steve, *“If you die, I die...”*

Mike is begging Nancy to let him have a gun near the armory they’ve created and contributed to with Murray’s smuggled contributions over the last few months. He always gets stuck with stupid and useless weapons and he would like to survive and make it out the other side of this, as Nancy and Mike are bickering, Will approaches -

“Hey, Mike? Can I talk to you for a second?”

*Will looks between Nancy and Mike, Nancy didn’t seem to get the hint -*

“Alone...”

“Oh! Yeah! Totally, sorry! I’ll just be over here..” *Nancy walks away but glances back towards both boys, she walks over to Jonathan -*

“What’s up Will? Are you ok?”

“Am I ok?” -*Will chuckles-* “Are any of us? I mean... are you not scared?”

“Of course I’m scared! But, our focus has to be on the end result, not on fear. Remember? Vecna thrives off fear, chaos, pain, suffering, mindgames. We will beat him if we stay focused. With El’s powers and your ability to be a spy? All of us with weapons and the bomb? We’re going to be OK, Will.” *Mike tries to smile and places his hand on Will’s shoulder -*

“What if that’s *all I am*? Just a ‘spy’? I’ve never been this close to the HiveMind before but when El and I spoke, she agreed with me that being that close might enhance my abilities...”

“And I think so too. That’s why, *despite my fear and my plethora of other feelings*, I raised my hand in agreement to this plan. I believe in you Will. You’re brave. You’re capable. You have to believe in yourself though -”

“You make me brave...”

“I think I help bring out the best in you. Sure. But, your confidence and bravery? Your resilience? That’s all intrinsic. I could’ve never survived what you have Will... you’re amazing...” *Mike is looking at him so softly -*



“I want to kiss you so badly right now, it’s killing me that I can’t. Promise me, you’ll be safe. I don’t know what I’d do if I lost you...”

“If you die... I die...” Mike whispers and leans in to hug Will. He risks anybody seeing and kisses Will near his temple and looks into his eyes for a few moments, conveying everything Will needs to hear in the moment without using any words, Will knows Mike is telling him he loves him.

Will flushes as Mike pulls away fully, he notices Nancy looking over at them quizzically. Will darts his eyes around the room, trying to look inconspicuous.

“I’ll see you on the other side of this... I love you Mike.”

“I love you too”

“Uhm Jonathan?”

“Hmm? What’s up babe?”

“Do you know if there’s something *going on* with Mike and Will?”

“Going on? Besides the possible end of the world and our possible death? What do you mean?” Jonathan tries to lie with a soft chuckle

“You don’t need to be sarcastic. I swear I just saw Mike *kiss* Will’s cheek and they’ve been spending *a lot* of time together... And, I noticed this hickey on Mike’s neck a few weeks ago, when I asked him about it, all the color drained from his face...”

“They *always* spend a lot of time together. And that was probably from El.”

“This was *after* they already broke up Jonathan and come on... you can’t even look me in the eyes. *You know something*. Please, what’s going on...” Nancy begs

*Just as Jonathan is about to try and deflect again, Robin comes over -*

“Hey Nance, can you help me with this do-hickey, I can’t figure out how to clip it into place.”

*Nancy sighs and walks over to help Robin. Jonathan is overwhelmed by guilt having to lie to her to respect his brother’s wishes-*

“So how are we all going to get into the Upside Down? We didn’t discuss that. We have to sneak past the military into their giant portal at the MAC-Z.” Lucas asks the group

“Can we call Murray?” Will suggests

“Yeah. He has that big truck and he makes deliveries to them and is approved to access through all their check points. That would be perfect!” Mike agrees

“I’ll go try and get a hold of him.” Hopper excuses himself to the other room where there’s a landline.

***\*A few minutes pass and Hopper returns -\****

“He said he can be here within the hour...”

“Are you guys ready?” Steve asks the group  
They all shake their heads in silent agreement.

“Take a walk with me?” Will whispers to Mike

*Mike nods his head yes and they begin to leave the radio station -*  
Robin jogs after them, “Hey! Where are you two going?”

“We just need to take a walk, clear our heads a bit... this is a lot to process...” responds Mike

*Robin smirks, remembering what Steve said to her, “Got it. Well, be back in a timely fashion, we shouldn’t procrastinate too much once Murray is here.” She smiles at both boys with genuine happiness and acceptance -*

Once far enough away, Mike’s overwhelmed by his emotions, his eyes swell with tears. They pour out of him faster than he knows how to respond, he starts hyperventilating -

“Hey! What’s wrong?”

“What’s wrong? *You could die. I could die. We could all die...*”

“What happened to not allowing our fear to control us? We have to remain calm and collected, ‘focused’. Remember? Breathe Mike...”

“The thought of losing you makes me feel like I’m experiencing anaphylaxis.”

“I understand. I feel the same way. But, I’m not going to let anything happen to you Mike...”

“That’s part of *why* I’m worried. I know that. You’d sacrifice yourself if it meant saving me. I would also do the same. How are we supposed to go into this battle with these feelings? That can get chaotic *really* quickly... I don’t know how to compartmentalize this. I love you *so much*...” Mike weeps.

“Mike, I love you too. *More than anything*. Everything is going to be OK. *Look at me*... Kiss me..”

“But... people could still possibly see us over here... we shouldn’t...”

“The world might be ending. I’m not going into this without kissing you. If this is goodbye, I *need* to kiss you... *please*...”

Mike leans in, his lips quiver and tears stream messily down his face as he kisses Will. He presses his forehead into Will’s and grabs his face with both hands. He opens his eyes and gazes into Will’s eyes, even blurry, he is so beautiful... Mike tries to memorize everything about his face. He senses Will is doing the same. They both cry more. Will pulls Mike into him and kisses him again, both of their tears salty on their lips -

“I love you more than anything in this universe. *Whatever happens*, never forget that Michael Wheeler. You are the greatest thing that has ever happened to me...” Will chokes out

“And I love you William “The Wise” Byers...” *Mike chuckles and uses a pet-name to try and soften the agony of the conversation -*

“You *always* have to have a sense of humor, even in the darkest situations...”

“Always.”

***\*They pull themselves together and start to walk back to the radio station.***

***Murray is pulling in as they approach\****

The group begins to load the truck immediately. Nancy approaches Mike -

“Hey, are you alright? You’re blotchy. It looks like you’ve been crying.. Will doesn’t look great either. Where did you guys go anyways?” Nancy rambles

“Jeez, Nance. That was like three questions just sprung into one... I’m fine. I got overwhelmed, the world might be ending and everything, I had a panic attack. We wanted to take a walk. To try and clear our heads before heading into this.”

“And? That’s all? You just *needed some air*? So you... sobbed into one another?...”

“What? What are you talking about...” Mike’s voice cracks because he’s anxious

“I saw. *Earlier...* You.. you kissed Will’s cheek?”

“Nance. *Come on.* You must’ve misinterpreted. We were just having a conversation about the plan and everything...” *Mike’s hands are starting to sweat and he feels heat in his cheeks. Nancy is looking at him, pleading with her eyes, he can’t stand the pressure and quickly diverts his eyes -*

“Mike... you can talk to me. About anything...”

“There’s nothing to talk to you about Nancy! Drop it.” Mike snaps *Nancy flinches at the sharpness in his tone -*

“Fine. I love you. Be safe, be smart. You’re lucky I gave you that gun. You better make it count -”

As they all get into the truck, Mike grabs El’s wrist. She turns to look at him down on the ground -

“Hey...” - “We, uhm.. We didn’t and haven’t really gotten a chance to talk...”

“I think you said everything you needed to say in your poem. It was pretty direct. “*Maybe it was never true love at all.*” Remember?” El jerks her arm away and out of Mike’s grasp. Mike winces.

“I deserved that. That’s not entirely fair... I didn’t mean that I didn’t truly love you. I meant, I think we loved one another to the capacity we could. But, we weren’t the *right fit*... you and I both know that... I want you to find somebody that loves you and *only* you. I couldn’t be that person for

you. I thought I was being selfless letting you go, I was hurting all three of us trying to deny what I felt for him..." Mike replies hushed

"Yeah. Will is your missing puzzle piece Mike. I get it. What do you want?" she growls as a whisper

"What do I want? How could you say that to me? In these circumstances especially? I still love you El. I have love for you. That hasn't changed... I just... I just wanted to tell you I hope you stay safe and I know you've been training vicariously for this... We couldn't do it without you..."

"Well thanks for the sentimentally and encouragement Mike. You *really always* have a way with words..." -*she huffs*- "I'll always love you. You were half of my heart..." -*El's eyes burn trying to hold back tears* - "I'll see you on the other side. Be safe too."

*El turns and sits on the complete opposite side of the truck, all of her willpower on holding back tears in front of everyone -*

"We're getting close to the gate! Hold onto your chicas and your chakras! It's gonna become a bumpy ride!" Murray screams into the back portion of the truck, he floors the gas pedal, the truck accelerates to its fullest capacity. Hopper braces himself and his weapon, ready to react to the military guards -

"COWABUNGA suckers!!!" Murray bellows as he slams through the military gate, three guards shoot erratically at the truck, completely caught off guard, their aim is terrible. A few bullets ricochet off the siding of the truck, one bullet hits a tire rim and causes the truck to momentarily lose balance and momentum.

Murray regains control of the steering wheel and pushes the pedal to the floor again, he makes a sharp right towards the MAC-Z portal opening, multiple military personnel attempting to follow and disable the truck. The group braces for impact and Joyce lets out an involuntary scream -

"Who the fuck is this madman?!" shouts one of the guards  
Just as the guard's superior is about to respond the ground rumbles, shaking violently. A crack begins to shoot rapidly along the previously

opened lines in the cement filled cracks between their legs. All the military men stop in their tracks, their eyes wide watching the earth crack open, an ominous red glow seeping through the pavement. Murray has navigated to the metal platform, they all feel the violent earthquake type rumbling beneath them too. As Murray's truck emerges through the portal access point, three Demogorgons sprout out of the menacing, radiant red cracks in the Earth and sprint full speed towards the truck, following it into the Upside Down - *The military soldiers stare slack jawed in disbelief -*

"Holy fuck! Did you guys feel that? Do you think that was Vecna? He knows we're coming..." Dustin yells, panicked

*Just as Dustin finishes his sentence, they all hear the snarling and clicks -*

"Demos..." Mike, Will, Lucas and Dustin say muted, in unison

One of the Demos latches onto the side of the truck, once again throwing the truck off balance, Murray regains composure of the truck but now two Demogorgons are on the vehicle, the third still running alongside. The one still latching the side digs its claws into the metal and drags it in a violent swipe -

"Holy shit! Move! Move!" Mike yells at everyone on that side of the truck to avoid impalement -

Will, Robin, Max, Lucas and Joyce's bodies all crash into the opposite side of the truck as Murray continues to drive turbulently.

Hopper shoots at the roof of the truck, the other Demo attempting to enter through. After 3 close range shots, they all hear a whimper of agony and the Demo bounce and roll off the metal roof. That Demo is at the very least, significantly injured and slowed down. They still have two rapidly on their tails.

"Hold onto your panties!" Murray whips the truck violently, slamming the brakes as he maneuvers the truck into a sloppy parallel park in front of the old lab. The Demos snarling, still sprinting forward -

Hopper and Nancy jump out of the truck together, both wielding machine guns, they rapidly shoot at both Demos, attempting to at least slow them down. El jumps out next and then Steve arming the flamethrower as backup. El screams, her arms extended towards both Demos, her nose dripping blood - one of the Demos legs snap, it howls out in pain. She throws the other into the wall of the building, stunning it.

“El! Come on! Let’s go! Door, now! Run!” screams Hopper

Nancy continues to stand guard as the rest of the party unloads, Joyce stays in the truck with Murray, slamming the latch to the loading dock as the last kid jumps out, she momentarily makes eyes with Will and Jonathan, her eyes adjuring, *“Please come home to me.”*

El and Hopper make it through the front doors of the old lab and continue to sprint towards the water tank.

They make it to the room with the tank. Both panting, sweat beading down their faces. They try to take a second to steady themselves and lower their adrenaline. Hopper is 98% positive neither Demo followed them inside, now it’s time for them to begin their part of the process - Hopper grabs the suit and helmet, he hands it to El and tells her to change, he turns to give her privacy and guard the doors and access points, his old military training coming into play, he scans all the exits, his alertness pinpointed -

“Dad? I’m ready...”

It takes every bit of spare focus he has to not break and cry hearing El say, “Dad.” He takes a deep breath and turns towards her -

He tries to smile at her, tears glazing over his eyes,

“What could possibly go wrong ? Right kid?”

“If something *does* go wrong, you have to promise me you won’t pull me out... not until I know where he is...”

“Then, I’m going to need you to promise me something in return...”

“Deal, what?”

“Well, first and foremost - Doctor Kay and her goons are a problem for another day, remember that.”

“Okay?” El responds, slightly impatient and confused where this is going -

“Jane, I *need* you to fight... One last time.”

“I know. I am. *We are..*”

“Stop interrupting me, we don’t have a lot of time. Let me say this to you, please -

Life has been so unfair to you, your childhood was taken from you, you’ve been attacked and manipulated by terrible people. People who treated you like a machine or an experiment, not a person. But, you never let it break you. *Promise me* you’ll fight for the days on the other side of this, fight for a world *beyond* Hawkins. We will end this, *together* kid and then you can get to living the life you’ve always needed and deserve. Fight for *your* life above all else. Promise me?”

“I... I promise... Now, lower me in. We have to get started...” El barely is able to say her words through the sting in her throat, holding back tears -

“I’ll see you on the other side... I love you Jane...”

“I love you..”

Hopper lowers El into the tank and seals the lid tight. He grabs his walkie -

“What’s going on out there? Are you all OK?”

“Jim? We... we’re -” Joyce cuts out

The lights inside the lab flicker irregularly, Hop can barely breathe he’s so nervous.

Murray and Joyce are both shell shocked at the adrenaline dump. They just watched their loved ones get chased down by two Demos as they sprinted towards the warehouse. The Demo El injured is writhing on the ground outside, shrieking in pain. The one Hopper shot at is definitely disoriented and less powerful but came running as the kids were all running away in the opposite direction. The one El threw into the building, following shortly after at full pace.

Joyce isn’t sure if it’s the adrenaline spiking hot in her veins, bitter rage of what Vecna and this place has done to her family or just sheer motherly instincts but she gets out of her seat, goes to the back of the truck, sees a firefighter axe in the dock, under the seating. She picks it up,



unlatches the back door and hops out of the truck. Murray is yelling incoherently at her, frantically questioning her behavior. She doesn't process what he's saying, just the volume and sound of his voice, echoing together with the booming of her heart beat in her ears.

*She snarls back at the Demo, picking up her pace, her hands shaking with fear and the axe is quite heavy -*

She approaches the injured Demo convulsing in pain and anger, she wields the axe above her head and crashes it down into the Demogorgon's chest. It shrieks again in anguish. She repeats her motion, screaming out again, the veins in her forehead engorged, she brings the axe back down, cutting off one of its arms with a clean cut. She raises the axe once more, her biceps trembling and exhaustion taking over her visceral rage, she slams the axe down into the center of the Demo's throat. All sound and movement from the monster silences, as blood squirts out of the newly inflicted wound. *Joyce drops to her knees, her whole body trembling, she drops the axe weakly beside her and begins to weep - Murray runs to her side.*

“Joyce? Joyce! What the fuck?!”

Joyce is still panting, her shoulders slumped, “I needed that fucking thing to suffer. And shut up.”

Murray looks around distraught, “Please get back in the truck? Come on...” He lifts her up from under her arms and picks up the axe once Joyce has steadied herself. She looks down at her handy work and the deceased Demogorgon, stomach bile begins to rise in her throat, she salivates and her palms itch, she turns away from Murray and vomits.

“Appropriate response. That was badass and gnarly. Let's go back to the truck. Come on...”

*Murray helps guide Joyce back to the truck. She feels like she's having an out of body experience, paralyzed by the crash of her emotions mingling with the very present fear she still feels about both her son's safety...*

Having had a jumpstart on the Demogorgons, one of them being dazed and the other slowed down and injured from Hopper's bullets. The whole group makes it to the warehouse. They run inside and try to board and block the sliding doors to the best of their abilities. Hearing the monsters' metallic snarls and clicks quickly approaching, they're all out of breath and trying to recenter and brace for battle with their assigned weapons.

Will starts to twitch a little, small noises of discomfort escape his mouth. His mind flashes into the point of view of one of the Demogorgons. His neck snaps unnaturally towards the ceiling -

"Will?! **WILL!**" Mike is shaking him violently

"They're... here. They're... coming..." Will manages through gritted teeth, his body is trembling and he's trying to escape the infrared hypnosis -

The Demos throw themselves violently into the warehouse doors. The random objects used to try and slow down or prohibit their entrance, not holding well against their fury. Both bust through and snarl viciously. Will drops to the ground when Nancy begins shooting at the Demo he's currently intertwined with. Will screams out in agony.

"Nancy?! Nancy! **Stop!** You're hurting Will!" Jonathan yelps

"We have to kill them Jonathan! They will rip us all apart! I'm sorry!" Nancy continues to shoot and Will contorts vehemently on the ground.

"**NANCY!**" Mike and Robin both beg together

*Still in the Demogorgon's point of view, Will sees and senses the Demo is determined against the bullets. It starts to approach Mike, spitting at him violently, body quivering and beginning to raise an arm to slash down at Mike's body, the other charges towards Lucas -*

*Will stands, moaning gutturally, his body quavering, his eyes have glazed over a ghastly, milky white -*

*"The Sound of Silence" by Disturbed in the background:*

***"Hello darkness, my old friend. I've come to talk with you again.***

***A vision softly creeping, left its seeds while I was sleeping. And  
the vision that was planted in my brain, still remains -  
Within the sound of silence...***

***I turned my collar to the cold and damp, when my eyes were  
stabbed by the flash of neon light that split the night -  
And in the naked light, I saw ten thousand people, maybe  
more...***

***But my words, like silent raindrops, fell and echoed in the wells  
of silence.***

***People bowed and prayed to the neon God they made and the  
sign flashed out its warning***

***And I whispered in the sound of silence..."***

Mike and Lucas both freeze, bracing themselves for the Demo attack, raising their arms in front of themselves instinctively and cowering with their eyes closed. Dustin, Max and Nancy all yelp out helplessly, panicked. But then...

*The Demos freeze in their positions, their bodies paralyzed, shrieking with ear piercing terror, both beginning to float off the ground -*

The whole party now looking towards Will, intemperately groaning, both his trembling hands with palms towards the ceiling, breathing heavily... a single blood splat dripping from one nostril, sweat beading down his face and neck, eyes still ghostly, his jaw clenched, he squeezes both palms closed and screams gravelly

*Both Demos' necks and limbs snap, still floating in the air, they collapse harshly with a thud -*

Will drops to his knees, slumping his heaving shoulders and panting. As Will lifts his head, pure exhaustion in his expression as his eyes change back to his own, the cloudiness disappearing, he wipes the blood from his nose with the back of his hand as he looks directly at Mike. *Mike runs towards him before everyone else, mesmerized, pupils dilating -*

“Holy shit! You’re a sorcerer! A real life fricken sorcerer!” Mike drops to his knees in front of Will and wraps his arms around his neck in a hug. Everyone else rushes towards him too.

“Dude?! You’re a fucking wizard!” Dustin squeals, matching Mike’s excitement

In the chaos of the moment and recognition of Will’s new found power. No one notices Mike beginning to disassociate. He hears the grandfather clock and sounds around him become disoriented, he feels like he’s falling, like when you feel yourself falling asleep but instead of jolting, this feels like a spiral into an abyss that he can’t stop. His limbs go limp around Will, still embraced in their hug. Mike falls lifelessly onto the ground next to everyone. His breathing quicker but his eyes glossed over and rolled into the back of his head - he is under Vecna’s curse.

“**NO!** No, no.. **FUCK.** Mike?!” Will howls turning Mike onto his back and shaking his shoulders

“What’s wrong with him?!” Nancy collapses on the other side of him

“Vecna... he couldn’t stop us with the Demos so he’s desperate. He’s trying to slow us down by trancing Mike...” Dustin says emotionless, stunned

“Well how the fuck do we stop it?! Is it hurting him?!” Nancy is sobbing, Jonathan places his hand on her shoulder and furrows his brow at the sight -

“It doesn’t... *“hurt”* in the way you’re fearing... he *can* inflict pain but his preferred method of sociopath behavior usually entails mental anguish over physical...” whispers Max. Feeling triggered recollecting her own experience being under Vecna’s curse.

“Everyone shut the fuck up! I need to think! I need to center myself. *Please...*” Will begs, distressed and sobbing

***\*Will takes a few deep breathes, his bottom lip still quivering...  
The group hears tires approaching and the squeaky brakes of  
the truck.***

***Joyce, El and Hopper all rush through the doors\****

“Mike?!” -*El runs over*- “What happened?”

“Will killed the Demogorgons. He... he was *basically you* for a few minutes, bloody nose and everything and then Mike just.. went limp. He’s under Vecna’s trance. He’s desperate to weaken and distract us so we don’t find him...” Lucas responds

“I did find him! In the bath! Hop was right, he’s *here*.” - “We don’t have music... How are we supposed to get him out of the trance without music?!” El is panicking

“We... We could try a declaration of love? Something meaningful enough to him that it would penetrate through Vecna’s hypnosis and bring him back...” offers Steve

“That worked once with El, Mike’s voice and words were enough to overlap Vecna...” adds Jonathan

*Everyone else in this room besides Hop, Nancy and his mom know about Mike and his relationship. Despite his anxiety, he has to be brave. He has to try -*

“I’ll... I’ll do it...” Will says faintly

*Will exhales slowly. He readjusts his body and puts Mike’s head in his lap, playing with his hair and using his thumb to trace Mike’s jaw, a few tears falling and landing on Mike’s forehead -*

“I don’t believe in fate. But, I do believe in you.

I think even in another life, in entirely different bodies, with new freckles and new voices, I would still recognize you. It doesn’t matter what color your eyes are, they’d still be yours. And I’d know them anywhere.

Even if you didn’t have eyes, if you were the wind and I was a sail, I’d know it’s you that carries me.

If you were the sun and I was a blade of grass, I’d know it’s you that warms me.

We could be anywhere.

We could be on a different planet, thousands of years from now, be a different species, breathing entirely different air and I would still know you. I would still love you.

I would love you until every planet and star explodes into oblivion.  
I would love you until the universe itself ceases to exist.  
By then, I would have loved you for what is believed to be 33 billion years...  
Even then, you could be the empty space and I would be the formless  
molecules within you.

We would not speak words or make a single noise, but I would know  
you're there.

And if there was nothing left, you would be the "no" and I would be the  
"thing" - the thing that loves you, in all of this, our world ceasing to exist, I  
would love you..." Will chokes out the words, sobbing.

Mike's face twitches and his brows crinkle, his eyes starting to return to his  
natural state -

"Keep going! It's working!" Nancy cries

"When I said you looked pretty that one day, what I meant was that I  
could die gazing into your eyes.

I could experience every bit of age and beauty throughout all of time  
and still tell you that you are the most beautiful thing I have ever seen.  
Sometimes that's a bit overwhelming for me...

My sentences become unstructured and my mind refuses to let you  
know that you run circles in it.

But there's a part of me that thinks, I don't have to tell you... you know.

You know I'm not just fond of your smile, but also, the way you spill  
ketchup on your shoes and lemonade on your t-shirts.

That I like your laugh but also when you're so serious that your expression  
says what words can't.

That I like when we talk about mundane things but also when we tell  
each other things not many people know...

That I'm glad you like my pasta, but also know I won't ever order you a  
burger without pickles and a chocolate milkshake.

That I admire your love for nature and watching the way you tie a  
knot in your fishing rod when we go to the river.

That I could listen to you talk about music for hours or the way your  
nose wrinkles when you're super focused.

That I admire how your glasses fog up sometimes when you're writing and I lean in to kiss you, the air from my nose creating fog behind the lenses.

You know that I won't ever think you're perfect and I'll never ask you to be because I will always think you're the most beautiful thing...

Come back to me Mike... please. I can't lose you. We haven't gotten enough time... WAKE UP!"

Mike's eyes continue to flutter, the full color of his iris returning, his breathing more shallow and even. He looks disorientated but a single tear falls from his eyes. He heard every word... he looks up at Will, dripping blobs of tears onto his face, he turns to see Nancy on the other side of him holding his hand and everyone else circled around him, worried expressions and tears streaming down all their faces at Will's words.

After Will's speech Joyce, Hopper and Nancy realize they're more than friends. They're... *in love*.

Mike extends his hand up towards Will's face, his thumb caressing his cheek and his lip quivers, they stare at one another for a moment and Will leans down to kiss Mike.

"Ya know, for a reporter, you took *forever* to realize Mike and Will were a couple..." Jonathan teases Nancy

"Jonathan. I swear to God -" Nancy sighs heavily and laughs

"Are... are you... in love?" Joyce whispers

"Did you hear that speech? Joyce come on..." Hopper adds

"I knew you two were up to no good." teases Hop

"If all you saps are done here. Shall we? Let's kill this evil fucker -"

Steve snuffles

"Where is he El?"

***\*El leads the group to where she saw the portal in the tank\****

She reaches out one hand and focuses intently on the wall. Her forehead wrinkles and blood drips from her nose. She uses her powers to reopen the

portal Vecna tried to keep hidden, the vibrant red glow pours through the opening -

“Will, I’ll need your help.. Do you think you’re ready for this?” El turns to ask, wiping the blood from her nose

“Of course. We got this far, let’s finish this once and for all...”

“Wait...”

*Will turns to face Mike as he reaches out for Will’s hand -*

“Everyone knows now... kiss me. Please. I don’t... I don’t know if I’ll see you again or vice versa...” tears swell in Mike’s eyes again

Will hesitates for a second and then kisses Mike tenderly, melting into the kiss as if they were the only ones in the room. El feels her heart muscle tighten and constrict. Max looks over at her haunted expression and furrows her brow in sympathy. She walks over to El and hugs her tightly.

“I love you Jane. Go kick his ass...” Max encourages and tries to distract her

*Will and Mike disconnect themselves and he follows El through the portal -*

*“Emergence” by Sleep Token in the background:*

***“Well you were laid in verse, living on a promised word.***

***Well, I am the rose you relinquished again.***

***You and I are down head-first, in another world I heard -***

***But I have a feeling we’re close to the end, so, come on, come on-***

***Out from underneath who you were. You know that’s it’s time to emerge -***

***So go ahead and wrap your arms around me....”***

Will and El see Vecna suspended from the ceiling, vines connecting him in a web, his eyes are closed but his heart is beating visibly, harsh and rapidly in his chest. The rest of the group enters behind them, weapons drawn and ready. Murray is assembling the bomb back outside near the warehouse and has the truck ready for escape -



***“Are you the carbide on my nano?  
Red glass on my lightbulb. Dark light on my culture. Sapphire  
in my white gold.  
Burst out of my chest and hide out in the vents -  
My blood beats so alive, might bite right through your lends,  
it’s midnight in my mind’s eye -  
Drowning out the daylight, God speed to my enemies -”***

El looks at Will and they nod at one another. El crosses her arms in front of her in an “X” and swipes down towards her hips, ripping Vecna from his suspension with her telekinesis. He crashes to the ground with a thump. Will takes a deep breath, closes his eyes and focuses -

***“Go ahead with your arms around me...  
Dark days for your solstice, dancing through the depths of  
Hellfire on the winds that started from within my blood that  
beats so alive might tear right through my skin -  
In lockstep with the universe so you’re well-versed in the  
afterlife  
You know I’m sanctified by what’s below. No matter what you  
do, no matter where you go...  
You might be the one to take away the pain and let my mind go  
quiet... And nothing else is quite the same as how I feel when I’m  
at your side.  
You know it’s time to emerge, out from underneath who you  
were...”***

Will thinks about his cosmic love for Mike. A movie reel from when they were kids flashes through his mind, polaroids of moments dance together, flashing so many prevalent memories throughout their friendship and present relationship. These moments prevail through the darkness and chaos of the present moment. The only thing stronger than hate is love.

His strength is his immense love but also his ability to channel his rage from everything Vecna has taken from him over the years... his eyes begin to gloss over, ghostly once again and his body trembles, his upper lip

twitches. He channels every ounce of strength he has left and growls viscerally. Vecna begins to float into the air, similar to the Demos - Will is raising him off the ground with his mind, Vecna is groaning viciously, now conscious and aware but unable to move. El and Will work together to lift his body and disable him.

El extends her arm to the left and Vecna crashes into the wall. Disorientated but fueled by pure rage to be awoken from his slumber and scheming, he shoots out an extended tentacle, nearly impaling El's ribs, she tucks and rolls out of the way. She crouches and charges towards him. He stops her mid sprint. He snarls. In an attempt to help El, Will begins to turn Vecna's head in his mind, motioning with his hands twisting in front of his own body, gritting his teeth, Vecna still attempting to remain in control of his own mind and body against them both.

"El... Run!" Will screams "Focus on me. That's what you've always wanted right? I'm right here!" Will baits Vecna snaps out of Will's mental grasp but diverts his attention away from Eleven, he yanks Will towards him with his telekinesis.

"Silly William... you really thought *you* could beat *me*? You're weak. That's why you were the first... you were *so malleable*. Doing exactly what I needed you to do... *My Spy*..." Vecna growls, face to face, inches away with Will. Suspending him off the ground. El and the group stare, horrified and frozen -

"Hey asshole! How's this for weak?" Mike yells and shoots his glock at Vecna's face

The bullets enough to daze Vecna, Will falls to the ground out of the trance. Before he's able to retaliate, El throws Vecna again across the room. She's losing momentum though. *She's so tired*... Steve yells and charges towards Vecna blasting the flamethrower, he torches Vecna for a few moments -

Unpredictably, Joyce, still wielding her axe from earlier, charges towards Vecna as he tries to steady himself and rise to his feet once more against the flames. She swings the axe into his body. It gets stuck in his back, he yells out in agony. He turns violently and attempts to hurt Joyce but he is hurt and sloppy, she hops backward to avoid his weak attempt and then kicks him behind one knee, Joyce uses her foot for leverage against his

kneeled body and rips the axe out of his charred spine. He looks at her in disbelief and cold-blooded rage -

“You fucked with the wrong family you piece of shit -” Joyce spits  
She looks into his eyes and hammers the axe down into his neck at an angle, his head rolls across the room. She collapses to the floor, weeping.

Everyone stares stunned... out of all the outcomes. That was not what any of them expected. Will’s eyes are glazing back to moss and he collapses to the ground, exhausted. Mike and El run to his side. Jonathan and Hopper run towards Joyce.

“Holy shit! Ms Byers! You’re a fucking savage! You did it! You killed Vecna!” Dustin and Lucas ramble together

“It... it was a group effort...” Joyce pants

“You didn’t just kill him... you decapitated him Mom!” Jonathan adds

“I have fantasized about doing that for years... he hurt my baby..”

“Will? Are you alright?” Mike looks into his eyes frantically, white knuckled, gripping Will’s biceps

“I.. I’m ok. You saved me... Ow, Mike... your fingernails, they’re digging into me...”

“I shot a gun twice. You, El , Steve and *your mom* saved *all of us*... please..” Mike chuckles and loosens his grasp

Robin, Nancy, Max and Steve are still stupefied. They haven’t moved.

“I don’t know about everyone else... But, let’s get the fuck out of here please!” Robin exclaims

“Agreed.” The majority of them say simultaneously

***\*They all meet Murray at the truck and load themselves inside, as the last person gets inside, Hopper flicks the trigger beginning the timer to the bomb’s explosion and jumps into the truck\****

Hopper smacks the metal siding to let Murray know it’s time to drive off.

“Hey... that was grizzly back there... A mother’s love and rage is no joke huh?” Hop teases Joyce

“You have no idea...” Joyce responds, her voice raspy from all her violent screams tonight and exhaustion is settling throughout her entire body... *it’s finally over* -

*“When Doves Cry” by Prince plays in the background as they approach the exit back out to the MAC-Z*

“Hey Nancy? Can you give this to Mike later?” El asks, her hands trembling

“Sure? Why can’t you give it to him though? Are you ok? You’re shaking...” Nancy takes the folded paper from El

“*Please...* just.. Give it to him. He’ll understand...” El replies cryptically with a sorrow behind her eyes.

Nancy looks into her eyes, trying to see what’s behind them... she crinkles her brows together confused and just nods in agreement. El goes back to her seat and closes her eyes, leaning her head against the metal. A few silent tears wisp down her cheeks.

“We should be prepared for the military to detain us, we busted through a high security location, destroyed their gate and trespassed. At the very least they’re probably waiting and will question us.” Hopper says generally to the group

“They’ve been searching for El, how do we get her out of here without them noticing?” Mike adds

“I have a plan... Don't worry about me...” El whispers  
Her and Mike meet eyes. Mike furrows his brow and frowns, something about the way El said what she did makes his stomach knot. There’s this look in her eyes. He’s seen it before...

“I love every single one of you. More than you will ever know. You have shown me kindness, taught me friendship, welcomed me into your lives and homes but also your hearts when I was nothing but a stranger. You all stuck by me throughout all of the unimaginable chaos these past few

years and your own losses and tragedy. We could not have defeated Vecna any other way than through group efforts.

Joyce, Hop - I couldn't have asked for better parents. I was simply an experiment, from the day I was born. But, you gave me a chance at love, at life, to learn and to laugh...."

"El... This... this sounds like... you're saying goodbye..." Mike feels panicked

"I will *always* be with you. It's not goodbye..."

*She smiles weakly at Mike, the pain in his eyes almost enough to change her mind -*

Just as El finishes her sentence, Murray propels through the portal back to Hawkins. No one is able to respond to El because the truck violently comes to a halt, the military put out spike strips, popping all four tires and disabling the vehicle. They all jerk around the truck chaotically -

"Get out of the truck! Get out! NOW! Hands up -" A guard is screaming at Murray, gun pointed at his face, already opening the driver's side door and dragging him out

"Alright! ALRIGHT! You don't need to be handsy!" Murray protests. The guard slams him into the side of the truck, squishing his face into the metal, cuffing his hands behind his back.

"Where is El? Where did she go?!" Mike is darting his eyes around the truck, disoriented from the commotion and suddenness of the truck stopping short.

"The passenger door..." Max whispers, tears streaming down her face

"She must've snuck out when they were detaining Murray..." adds Lucas

"She said she had a plan... she probably ran to the tunnels..." Dustin says hopeful

Even he is not convinced by his tone though, not after her speech.

Before anyone is able to respond to Dustin, two sharp bangs and a gunshot reverb pierce all their ears, the military shot off the clasp of the back door

and threw a flashbang into the truck. All of them perplexed and frightened, the soldiers begin pulling them out of the truck one by one.

Hopper notices her first, standing just beyond the portal frame. Objects whipping around violently like a tornado behind her. Their eyes meet and Hopper screams, falling to his knees at the realization. His reaction makes everyone else look towards the portal -

Mike's eyes expand with panic and realization, he tries to run towards the portal but two guards grab him, holding him back. Running into the portal would be a death sentence.

Mike screams El's name in raw, agonizing terror. He tries to wiggle his way out of the soldier's grasp, helpless. He cries out in pain, the objects around El whipping faster now, the buildings behind her collapsing.

"Mike! Mike!" Nancy screams, a guard holding her back as well. Her heart shatters watching her brother's agony and the sight of El in the Upside Down as it vanishes piece by piece -

Mike continues to scream, everyone else onlooking in horror -

There is a huge flash of white light and a final BOOM. They all close their eyes to shield themselves from the intensity of the light, the bomb completing its detonation.

When they open their eyes, there is only rubble. El's body is no longer there. Sheer devastation brings Mike to his knees. He looks forward to the violent release and handiwork of *his bomb*. He is now completely quiet. Staring horrified. *She's really gone...*

The entire group, including Doctor Kay and her men, simply stare feverishly and dazed at the metal portal frame. The entirety of the Upside Down reduced to ashes.

"There's no way anyone could've survived that..." states one of the guards, insensitively to one of his fellow men

Mike feels like he's underwater. He can barely process the sound of Nancy and Will's voices at his side. All he hears is a string of ringing with muffled tones and distant sounds. He continues to stare straight ahead, dissociated.

His lips in a harsh straight line, his eyes devoid of anything other than torment. Single tears fall from both his eyes as he blinks slowly.

Nancy grabs one of his arms, Will grabs the other and pulls him to his feet. They're still trying to talk to him but he simply looks through Nancy's face. Swaying from side to side. He doesn't feel in control of his own body but he realizes after a moment, his legs are moving and the two of them are guiding him away from the MAC-Z. In the background, Mike hears Hopper still sobbing in agony. *Faintly, Mike hears Will say, "Let's go home..."* -