

“...Jesus Christ...”

The dog whispered, looking from behind the curtain at the people standing within the theater, dozens of faces he'd never seen before now standing in place waiting for the show to start.

Some looked impatient, as if they had other places to go. Others looked as if they were already bored. The sights made his stomach curl with anxiety, gripping the curtain.

A million thoughts rushed through his mind as he looked at the audience. *‘Will they like the song? Will they even stay long enough to listen? What if my voice fails? What if there's technical difficulties? God, stop thinking about it, you'll be fine, and what the hell's that noise, someone shut it off, just shut everything off-’*

His heartbeat pounded against his ears, his tinnitus ringing out louder than before. His eyes were glued to the audience he was soon going to try and please, and he had to focus all of his strength to not run away.

Just as he feels like he's going to collapse, though...he feels a hand tapping his shoulder.

“Yo, you okay? You're shaking like a leaf-”

“UWAH-”

He jumped at the stranger's touch, lifting his feet off the ground to quickly turn around. He was now face to face with the stranger, who turned out to be no stranger at all.

It was a grey wolf wearing a tank top and dark jeans. His black hair reached his shoulders, but part of it was a mohawk, the tips fading into a bright red. Spiked bracelets adorned his wrists.

He knew this man, as he was the man that dragged him to the stage...and the second member of their impromptu band.

“O-oh...s-sorry, Beat, haha...guess I'm a little nervous...” the dog fixed his glasses back in place, a nervous laugh as he spoke in a whisper, his high pitched voice reaching only Beat's ears.

The wolf looked at this dog for a few seconds in silence, his expression one of either confusion or exhaustion as he sighed, passing a hand through his hair.

“Dude, Jessie...It'll be fine. We practiced this the whole week for this gig, we'll rock their worlds.” The wolf had his guitar on his left hand, more than ready to go out and play the songs they've been rehearsing.

“Y-yeah, true, but...there's just so many people out there, what if I...” The dog, Jessie, didn't even finish his sentence, falling silent as images of failure ran through his head.

At this point, Beat wasn't sure what to say to calm his nerves, simply sighing as he put his hands on the dog's shoulder again.

"Alright, fine, there's a chance it goes to shit...but if it does, promise me you'll keep writing and singing, aight?"

"...Really? You want me to promise that?"

"Dude, your singing kicks ass, and so do your lyrics! If I can't hear them again after this, I'll fuckin' cry. So even if tonight doesn't go well, just...promise me you won't stop trying to sing, okay?"

The wolf's words were sincere, coming right from his heart. He truly wished to hear the dog's voice again, to hear him write those sometimes catchy, sometimes dark, yet always addicting lyrics.

Beat's red eyes looked deep into Jessie's black ones, the dog taking a minute to respond, instead just staring wordlessly at the wolf.

But after a minute, a small smile appeared on his face, nodding.

"Alright...if at least you hear my songs, then I won't stop singing. It's a promise, hehe."

"--!"

For some reason, the moment Jessie said those words, and the moment his light chuckle reached Beat's ears...he felt his heart skip a beat.

This was happening quite often with this dog, he realizes, breaking eye contact as a light blush appeared on his face.

"J-jeez...alright, enough of that gay shit. Let's just go. If we make them wait any longer, they'll start breaking down stuff..."

Trying to hide his blush, the wolf steps away, holding his guitar closer to himself. Jessie stood there for a second, still smiling at the sight of the clearly embarrassed wolf.

"Alright! We'll rock their world, just like you said!"

And with those words, the two of them take a deep breath, ready to step through. No matter what, the dog would continue to sing.

That's what he promised the wolf standing next to him.

With a bright smile...the two of them step forward.

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It wasn't just dozens of people in the theater.

No, now that they were truly standing in front of them, Jessie could see it reached at the very least 100 people, perhaps some more.

The sight was terrifying, and it made him freeze in place...but he had to talk, he had to introduce them.

"H...hey there! Thanks for coming, we've never s-seen a place this packed for us..."

"Well, / have, he'll get used to it soon!" Interrupting, or perhaps trying to support him, Beat talks from his own microphone, winking to the audience with a smile.

His prior band experience gave him a definitive edge. In most normal cases, Best would have been their band's frontman, the one who everyone focused on, the one whose vocals they turned in to hear.

But it wasn't Beat this time. It was Jessie Aria, the guy who looked like he was gonna be blown away by the wind. So he had to keep up.

He takes a deep breath, continuing to speak with slightly more energy.

"I do hope to get used to it! After all, everyone's here to listen to u-us, aren't they?"

While weak, some cheers came from the crowd.

That was enough for him.

"...This is a song I've had written in my notebook for a few years now. Just words to myself, singing them to no one...until this guy here dragged me off my seat, and told me the world needed to hear it...so, here I am!" Holding the guitar that was hanging from his neck, he strums a few notes to the microphone, getting more cheer from the crowd.

He could feel it disappearing, slowly. The fear and anxiety he's had ever since he stepped foot in. Vanishing like seafoam as something else replaced it, his smile becoming more and becoming more confident as he spoke.

"Alright then, that's enough from me. We're Summer Daze, and we're here to rock your world!"

As he said that, a drumming track began to play, quickly followed by Beat's loud guitar playing, setting the stage for what was to come.

Jessie's eyes, that once looked shy and unable to focus on anything...now faced the crowd with a bright smile.

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His voice resounded through the theater, every corner of it filled with it.

The voice of a loud, confident singer, a voice once hidden behind layers of anxiety and self doubt. A bright voice that caught everyone's attention, mixed with lyrics that made everyone become entranced.

As he played his guitar, and as he did his supporting vocals, Beat couldn't help but smile the widest as he saw the dog play on stage, right next to him.

That light brown dog, with cream spots all over his body, wearing glasses and keeping to himself.

He had always seen him around campus, around their classrooms. Maybe they caught glimpses of each other once or twice, but he never really thought much of him. Just a shy guy, nothing to really mention regarding him.

Until that afternoon, when he met him in that sun kissed classroom, his singing voice reaching him as he walked down one of the halls.

Standing alone in the classroom, singing his lungs out, without fear and without shame, each of his words striking something deep within the wolf.

The energy, the emotion he saw that day...when they actually sat down to chat, it was as if he had become a different person, back to that shy, demure self, writing countless lyrics from his heart to his notebook.

But here on that stage, he was unable to tear his eyes away as he played and as he sang.

Jessie looked just like that day...no, he felt even wilder, even freer, singing with a smirk in his face as sweat fell from his body, the once shy voice now loud and uncontrolled, a few cracks not interrupting his playing in the slightest.

From time to time, he would move around as he played, to point at the crowd, to just walk and show off...or to get closer to Beat, who didn't need to be told to lean onto it, the two of them singing their throats out together, back to back, eye to eye, belting out the lyrics so close to that dog's heart.

It made his heart beat so fast.

But eventually, all concerts end.

And as the last song is played...they both fall silent, gathering their breath under the harsh lights as loud, uncontrolled applause fills the theater.

While catching his breath, Beat turns once more to Jessie, his eyes firmly locked to the audience.

But as if noticing him, he turns to look at Best, his black eyes once again locking with the wolf's bright red.

The moment that happens, Jessie breaks into laughter. Pure, joy filled laughter.

The message was clear, and even if Beat didn't laugh back, he winked at him.

Turning his eyes to the theater's audience, the dog walks to the microphone, finally catching his breath.

"Thank you! Thank you so, so much! To sing to all of you is one of the greatest feelings of our lives! ...Unless my friend here has felt something better. Have you?" The dog says with a smirk, putting the wolf on the spot, as he doesn't know how to reply.

Except for one way.

"Hey, fuck you!"

In response, Jessie just breaks down laughing, along with the rest of the audience.

"Haha! Again, thank you guys! You rocked today!"

And with those words, he waves back at the audience before walking behind the curtain, Beat following behind.

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"Huff...huff...haha! Dude, that was tight!" Beat is the first one to speak as he walks backstage, expressing his joy at a flawless concert by sitting on a nearby couch, laughing excitedly.

"Seriously bro, we had everyone there fuckin' dancing! Not a single sad or boring face! God, this rocks so hard!"

"..."

As happy and excited as Beat was, though, Jessie wasn't responding to any of his words.

"...? You good, bro? Tired after all that?" he stands up as he says that, walking to Jessie and touching his back.

Before he could react...Jessie had turned around, hugging him silently.

"W-woah...bro, give me a warning next time you want to hug, jeez..."

He tried to be dismissive about it, gently pushing him away...but he stops at the clear sound of sniffing.

"...? Dude...? You, uh, you okay...?" Beat didn't know how to react, his hands not touching the dog anymore...but eventually, Jessie breaks the hug as he walks backwards, a smile on his tear covered face.

"S-sorry...hah...just wanted to thank you for everything. For a moment, out there, I...I felt..."

*I felt like me. The real me.*

A sentence that got stuck on his throat, cleaning his eyes from the tears.

Beat noticed the change in his behavior. How he had gone back to acting way more shy...but the fact he had initiated the hug meant something, if anything.

He had a pensive look in his eyes, but eventually, he smiled again as he pats the dog's back.

"Heh, don't worry about it, dude. I told ya. The world needed to hear your voice. / needed to hear it."

With those words, Jessie's smile grows wider...but after a second, it falls into a pensive expression, looking right at Beat's chest.

"...? Something wrong? Got something stuck on me?"

"Oh, no...can I hug you again? Your body's quite buff."

"--!? H-hey, what the--don't just--I'm not—"

The wolf began to blush.

Why was he blushing?

And why was the dog laughing, watching his reaction?

In moments like these, Beat wanted more of the shy, quiet Jessie.