

"I said, *isn't it dapper,*" he repeated, leaning in closer. So close I was lost in the pervading wave of rainwater's scent and heavy drowse. My mind slowly understood the now unimportant sigh he had released, and was trying to focus on the form of my sibling exiting the room. The dangling beads from his wings took more of my eye's attention. A faint awareness of his unevenly cut hair bobbing awkwardly was at the forefront of my mind in his absence. *The outfit was very handsome,* I thought, dwelling in the swirl of vertigo and hesitance.

Samhain reentered the room, as did his atmosphere of unease underlying a mind-numbing fuzz. His words carried an edge, I upset him. I must have been blinking quite a bit. His hand held my cheek, and the last thing I remembered clearly before drifting off was his chestnut hair accentuating his harsh cheekbones.

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My knocks on a lacquered wooden door echoed in the surrounding woods. I fished out a letter I received weeks ago, checking the sender's address once again to ensure this was the right place. There wasn't any reason that I would have been wrong about which tree he would be living in. No other guides seemed to live close by at all. Samhain indeed had trouble with self-isolation... Did he change his mind? Bet he forgot we planned for today. Or "forgot". No, that was too mean to assume. Too.. something unjustly rude. *Focus on your necklace. How smooth it is. Surround yourself within yourself, whatever that means.*

I knocked again. Listening closely, there was some fuss inside; the sound of metal giving a low screech as it's scraped, something heavy dragging across a table perhaps, followed by footsteps. Before I could brace myself, there was the feeling. Weightless weight, lulling me a bit - the door swung open. Blond, shiny, gracefully messy hair was the first to catch my eye. Everything about the guide before me seemed adjacent to the guide I expected. I saw him withdraw some and supposed I looked as dazed as I felt in trying to recognize my own sibling.

"You made it." Samhain seemed a bit cautious now. Reminded of his effect, or maybe even shy. "I'll save a hug or anything for later when we've settled, or eaten or... or, yeah!"

There's all that tension. The unsaid bits.

He ushered me in quickly, already chattering away while trying to salvage some sort of food. I couldn't focus. I wanted to help. I really did. Some small pillows around a low table for seats. A tall hutch filled with ornate colourful tchotchkes. An oblong window with a view to somewhere. Wallpaper on the walls. Wallpaper? Smooth, felt nice to touch. I distantly rubbed my hands against the rug under my pillow-seat. I remembered my self limb by limb and mumbled a few idle responses as Samhain spoke. Was his voice gentler, too?

The more I thought on it, the images began to process between the door, glimpses of Samhain popping in and out of the kitchen, and my strong memory. Even his face had changed. He'd gone through changes before, over time, but it all felt so drastic this time. It was supposed to be gradual. Curved jawline, the lengthy and swooping blond hair, flatter cheekbones more reminiscent of... my own. Something rose in my chest, sweet and morose.

"You actually look happy," he said, quiet and close. "Happier than you did."

A mug of tea was placed into my hands with care. Floral and sugary, I held it close to my face, inhaling deeply to drink its smell first. I smiled a tad. Nodded, gave a hum of listening to him. Sorting thoughts was difficult. But I could do it. Out of everything that rose to the surface, something stepped back to view it altogether, and one thing became clear: Focusing on the Samhain of the past as someone separate wasn't going to help me in the present. This moment in time.

I took a sip of my tea and grinned at Samhain, and smiled yet wider as he grinned back at me. More importantly, his lavender eyes disappeared as his eyes wrinkled at the edges in a forever familiar way.

"Glad we're here," I exhaled.