

## No Need To Be Alone

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# No Need To Be Alone

by [GoatVibesOnly](#)

## Summary

Between being forced into doing psychology projects that you don't want to do by your roommate, full course loads with group projects that have (ugh) assigned partners, and being the star player of the football team, college is a lot more work than it was set up to be. But hey, at least everything's better when you have a talking animal companion (and some unexpected, but well-meaning friends) at your side to guide you through thick and thin, right?

(A light-hearted, multi-chapter piece exploring a college-age daemons au with the main cast of Bones.)

## Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

# Chapter 1

Seeley Booth does *not* get paid enough for this.

Sure, he gets decent athletics scholarship at the local state school. But merit doesn't feed empty stomachs, and if Seeley wants to cover the rest of the bill he has to work for it. And even working as many hours as possible on top of being a football star *on top of* a full course load, he's barely making enough to make ends meet.

He doesn't get paid enough for this. Especially during weekend rush hour, when there's a line practically going out the door and he has to move *fast* if he wants any hope of getting a tip, and sometimes the girls think it's cute to flirt with him and he has to act charming and flattered, even though the first few times it happened he was caught so off guard that his wolf daemon had growled and snapped her sharp fangs at them before either of them regained their composure.

People liked to comment on her, too. People liked to talk, period, as a given. But when they see well-built Seeley behind the counter they think, okay, he's a college kid working for some extra cash, and then they see his huge wolf daemon gliding along the floor beside him like a gray ghost, and they think, *oh shit*.

Neither he nor Ailbheann think it's funny, but if they laugh and nod they usually get a bigger tip, so they grit their fangs and bare it.

(God, Seeley *hates* being forced to do something so against his principles like this. But even above his "be treated like a decent human being" principle is his "make enough money to not starve to death" principle, so he doesn't have much say in the matter.)

It's midterms season, so the cafe is even more packed than usual, with students from all of the colleges across the city gathering in one of the best cafe hot spots to cram. So even though the cafe is small enough that it's normally filled with a small but reliable flow of "usuals", it's no surprise when two unfamiliar girls enter the scene. One of them clearly leads the pack, carrying her head held high and her stuff thrown over her shoulder carelessly in a messenger bag. Her canary daemon flits above her black hair, surprisingly boisterous; most bird daemons prefer to settle down neatly on their human's shoulder and not make a fuss.

(Canary, Seeley thinks. Bird: creativity, expressiveness, freedom. Canary: "in the gold mine" -- feeling trapped in a cage or used by others. One of the annoying types to serve, usually way too flirty and chatty. But she'll tip nicely enough.)

She's dragging by the hand someone who, judging by her expression, could either be her best friend or her sworn enemy. Unlike her flashy, showy friend, who's clearly screaming for attention with every molecule of her being, she's entirely average in almost every way: short, but not too short; brown, average-length hair swept up in a ponytail; modest jeans and a cardigan, perfectly suited for today's weather. Her daemon, a small butterfly with iridescent purple and brown wings, hovers by her shoulder.

(Insect: Hard to read, feelings of alienation. Butterfly: lightness, playfulness, transformation, sometimes said to have psychic connections or higher powers of intelligence. In short, not normally the kind of person who looks like she wants to murder her friend for bringing her into a coffee shop of all places.)

“Come on, sweetie, you need to relax. Get your of your head a little bit!” says the first one, with the canary daemon. She flashes a smile at Seeley. “Hi, hon. I’ll have a medium cappuccino with an extra shot of caffeine. And you’ll have...?” She looks at her friend, reaching into her bag and scrambling around for her purse.

“I don’t want coffee, Angela,” says the woman with the butterfly daemon crossly. “I don’t see why you had to pull me out of the dorm for this when I was studying for a very important test!”

Seeley keeps his most pleasant dealing-with-customers smile plastered on his face. “I’ll go make your cappuccino while you decide,” he says. He motions with his hand, and his wolf daemon hops up and puts her paws on the front counter. Ailbheann grins and wags her tail pleasantly at the customers. “Just tell us what you want when you figure it out, okay?”

Angela jumps back a little when she first sees the huge wolf, but then she leans forward and looks her over appraisingly.

“My, aren’t you just dashing.” Seeley makes sure to turn away from them before he grits his teeth and starts to make that cappuccino. He only has thirty minutes left in his shift. He can deal.

He can hear the two women bickering through his daemon’s ears and over the sounds of the coffee machine as it works its magic.

“I should have stayed home.”

“No. Tempe, you spend way too much time cooped up in our room. I refuse to see you throwing away your life like that! At least order a tea and sit with me for ten minutes. Is that too much to ask?”

Typical guilt trip from a flashy canary. The woman with the butterfly daemon sighs and nods to Ailbheann. “One tea,” she says. “I don’t care what flavor.”

“Make it a chamomile,” says Angela.

“Coming right up,” quips Seeley’s wolf daemon. “We’ll get right on it, and I’ll ring you up in the meantime.”

A few minutes later, Seeley hands both women their drinks. “Here you go, ladies. One cappuccino with an extra shot, and one tea.”

“Thanks,” Angela flashes him a huge smile and drops an equally big tip into the tip jar. “Sorry you had to put up with Temperance. She can be kind of a drag sometimes.”

Seeley's used to people with songbird daemons attempting to establish connections with him by trying to include him in on things. If anything he's surprised it had taken this long for it to happen. "It's not a problem."

Angela smiles again, and grabs both of the drinks before whisking herself and her friend off to one of the corner tables by the back. Seeley watches them go before the next customer steps up.

"Squints," says Ailbheann under her breath.

Seeley grunts in agreement.

"Well, he's cute," gushes Angela as she takes a seat. Cher lights down on the edge of the table, hopping up and down in agreement.

Temperance sits down across from her. her butterfly daemon settles down next to the canary, politely far enough away to not get trampled. When she doesn't take her tea (or the bait), Angela sighs and hands her roommate her cup. Temperance takes it and holds it in between her hands. She still has a sour look on her face, like she'll murder the next man that tries to talk to her.

"Come on, sweetie, relax for five minutes. Live a little!" Her daemon *hmphs* in agreement, and brushes Temperance's butterfly daemon with his wing to wake him up. Auster flutters his wings in agitation, but doesn't move.

"I told you, Ang, I need to study," says Temperance. She seems to steel herself, then takes a deep breath. "I know I'm not the perfect roommate that you imagined. You're not my ideal roommate, either. But this is what we've got, so we have to make it work."

Angela frowns. This had *nothing* to do with the fact that Temperance was an awful roommate, and everything to do with the fact that spending all semester in their dorm room was unhealthy. And also was starting to drive Angela crazy. She was being a helpful intervener! "Tempe, listen--"

"I need to go," Temperance cuts in. She scoops up her butterfly daemon with one hand and her tea in the other. "Thank you for the tea, Ange. I need to study. I'll go to the library; you can have the room to yourself if you want."

Angela admits defeat. As she watches her roommate walk away, her daemon hops forlornly onto her shoulder. "What'd we do wrong?" he asks.

"It's not us, it's her," says Angela, more sternly than she meant to.

As she turns back to her cappuccino -- just because she can't enjoy it with her friend doesn't mean it has to go to waste -- she catches the eye of the cute barista as he's walking out of his shift. His large wolf daemon rolls her eyes. Angela smiles at him, and this time she thinks the smile she gets back is a tiny bit more genuine than the one he gave her before.

Ah, fuck. Stupid, stupid, stupid.

Seeley had sat down on his bed for five seconds just so he could change out of his work clothes, and the next thing he knows he's waking up from an hour-long nap by his roommate barging into the room and he's and totally, completely out of it.

He grunts and sits up, exchanging a glance with Ailbheann on the bed next to him, who wags her tail in a consoling way and buries her nose under her paws. She'd fallen asleep, too. He must have been pretty out of it; normally he never power naps for more than a few minutes at a time. Midterms plus busy work shifts plus prep for the big game this weekend must have gotten to him. Which is bad, because he really does not have the time to spare for naps right now.

Unfortunately, Seeley's roommate doesn't notice the emotional turmoil he's going through right now and starts talking like he owns the stage. His pudgy orange cat daemon curls around his legs in pride, her tail curled like a question mark. Her purrs are audible even from across the room.

(Cat: Curiosity, mysticism, the otherworld. Condescending and fickle. Lazy, unreliable, and always getting into trouble. Seeley hates people with cat daemons.)

"So you know how I'm doing that independent study with my psych prof?" Lance was saying. He sits down on the bed and crosses one leg over the other, bouncing it with energy. "So anyways, I'm thinking I finally figured out what I want it my study to be about. I want to study relationships that look like they shouldn't work, but they do. It's fascinating, don't you think? When two complete opposite people are forced together and become friends, despite all odds?"

Seeley shares a look with his daemon. "Sure, Sweets." Despite the fact that they're roommates, he doesn't think he'll ever be on first-name terms with Lance. He's just too nerdy and weird, while Seeley is, well, himself.

"My prof thought it was a great idea! Now I just have to find some study groups. Do you know of any people that fit the criteria and would be willing?"

He remembers the butterfly and the canary from the cafe earlier. "Nope." He scoots off the bed and starts rifling through his clothes drawer, his wolf daemon hopping onto the floor with a stretch and a huge yawn. "Listen, pal, I'd love to help you out, but I have to get ready for practice. You get it, don't you? I'll see you later."

He and Ailbheann are out the door and down the hallway before Sweets even has time to say goodbye - or stop his rambling about his new pet project long enough to realize what he was saying at all.

They get their asses kicked at football practice that night. Ailbheann is a force to be reckoned with; she's the biggest daemon on the team, and her physical prowess is at its peak. Seeley isn't anything to sneeze at himself. But maybe it's his nap or maybe it's a hidden, nagging

suspicion that *something isn't right* that throws him off his balance. Either way, he's battered and sore by the end of practice.

"You alright, Seeley?" asks his coach on the way to the locker room. His small falcon daemon flutters over Ailbheann's back, keening softly in concern.

(Falcon: Freedom, focus, ferocity. Leadership, vision. Always seeking new heights and ambition. A hard coach, one that doesn't accept anything less than 110%, but a fair one that treats his students as his own.)

"I'm fine," Seeley brushes him off.

"You didn't look fine out on the field tonight," says his coach.

"I'm fine," he insists. "I'll be back on my game by this weekend. I promise."

His coach gives him a look that says he doesn't believe him, but he doesn't push it. "Alright. Get some rest, Seeley. See you on Saturday."

"See you," grunts Seeley. Ailbheann snuffles at their coach's falcon daemon as she whirls away, back onto the coach's shoulder, nestled firmly onto the leather shoulder pads that almost everyone with raptor daemons to wear to avoid getting their skin clawed up by their daemon's sharp claws.

Seeley stands alone in the locker room, leaning against his locker. Midterms are hell. He's so tired. He really doesn't get paid enough for this.

"We have a midterm tomorrow we need to study for," his wolf daemon reminds him.

Seeley grunts. This whole college thing is *not* panning out the way he thought it would.

## Chapter 2

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Seeley sees the woman with the purple butterfly daemon at the cafe the next week. She's by herself this time; apparently despite her apparent protests, she likes the Royal Cafe more than she had let on to her canary friend.

She bustles up to the counter, acting perky and alert, but Seeley doesn't miss how her daemon settles down lethargically against her instead of fluttering out and about like did last time.

"One tea, caffeinated." She doesn't bother with pleasantries.

"Coming right up," says Seeley, getting her order ready as Ailbheann hops up onto the counter and completes the payment process with her. This cafe really needs to get another person to work on the shift with him. Most college students don't care if they have to talk to someone else's daemon to get rung up, but there's still a fair share of stuffy conservative people who would start demanding to see the manager if his wolf daemon even opens her mouth. His own family among them, he knows. Hell, he was one of those people, until recently.

(He absolutely hates being proven wrong, but it was his own daemon who pulled him aside and told him to grow up, already. And, well, who is he to argue with his own soul? Well, he is; he does it all the time. But the smoldering look she gave him told him that this topic was not up for debate.)

Seeley hands butterfly her cup. "It's on me," he tells her. "You look like you need it."

She looks startled, then smiles for the first time since coming in. "Thank you. Um...?"

"Seeley. Seeley Booth," he says. "And Ailbheann." His wolf daemon dips her head in greeting.

"Thank you, Seeley. Temperance Brennan, and Auster." At his name, her butterfly wags his purple wings hello in greeting. She nods to his daemon. "Ailbheann. That's Irish, but Booth is English."

Seeley raises his eyebrows. Partly because she had said her name correctly, with all syllables and accent intact, instead of butchering it into two syllables like most do; partly because she knew that Norse and Scandinavian were two different things. (It seems like an easy concept to understand, but Seeley has come to understand that if people can do anything, they will astound you with their stupidity.) "I'm Irish on my mom's side, English on my dad's. Are you majoring in linguistics? Most people don't notice."

Temperance nods, like she had expected as much. "Not specifically. I know a lot of things I consider it in my best interest to know. I'm double majoring in anthropology and forensic science." She looks over at Seeley's wolf daemon, as if judging her. "And you?"



Seeley keeps his face carefully neutral. Forensic science? For a *butterfly*? Who is this woman? He's never met a person who defied their form's expectations and guidelines so blatantly. He wonders briefly if she's one of those rare few who freakishly never settle, or settle really late, and her daemon is just holding onto a form that he thinks no one else will find suspicious. But that's ridiculous; there's no way a squint like her would assume a butterfly looks passing. If that were the case, then her daemon would have been a monkey of some kind, so that he could use his thumbs to help her in her work, or an owl, for his keen vision.

Ailbheann nudges him; he realizes that she's still waiting for an answer. "I'm on the pre-law track; right now I'm doing polisci."

Temperance's butterfly flaps his wings at that. What, does he think it's funny that a jock is interested law? He opens his mouth, a snide remark on his tongue, but then Ailbheann puts her paw on his foot, reminding him to remember his place. He's the barista. If he wants to get into fights, do it on his own time. Not the cafe's.

So instead he nods formally and opens the cashier -- that's another downside of daemons handling the cash; Ailbheann can't separate the cash into the cashier with her clumsy paws like their nimble bird and small mammal coworkers -- and starts to count and organize the change.

"I wouldn't have expected that from you," says Temperance, like she didn't notice that Seeley had already politely disengaged himself from the conversation. "Your physique and stature suggests you'd be going into sports professionally."

"Yeah, well," says Seeley, putting the cash down and leaning his hands on the counter, leaning towards the woman on the other side, "Not everyone has to do everything the way that society says they should."

"Of course," agrees Temperance, surprisingly evenly considering Seeley had disagreed with her. "If we all did what the people in charge wanted all the time, we'd still have slavery, I wouldn't be allowed out in public because I'm a woman, and your religion would prevent you from doing this job that requires you to handle money. But there's no use denying that, physically, you'd likely do very well in the sports world."

That was... surprisingly insightful. Maybe she *is* a butterfly, after all. "I am on the football team," he admits.

Temperance nods, apparently satisfied with his answer. "Thank you again for the tea, Seeley." She drops her change in the tip drawer, picks up her tea, and makes her way over to the same corner table in the back that she had last time, despite the fact that barely anybody else was here and the much nicer seats near the window were all available.

Seeley shares a look with Ailbheann and lets her go.

"Hey. Sweets' study," murmurs his daemon, after she sits down.

Seeley looks at her. "What about it?"

“Do you want to ask her if she wants to join?”

Seeley grunts. “She’s not Sweets’ type.”

He checks the time; he only has a little while longer until someone comes to replace him. There’s no one else waiting to get anything, so he starts to tidy up the counter and clean the machines. Ailbheann waits at the counter, attentive to the front door in case anyone comes in.

Apparently no one wants coffee today, and only a few stragglers come in to order anything by the time Seeley’s coworker comes to relieve him. He clocks out and gathers his stuff, ready to head to his university to hit the books before dinner. Out of the corner of his eye, he sees Temperance, still hard at work. She’s reading the biggest textbook he’s even seen and annotating it with a highlighter, chewing on the cap when she’s not using it.

Ailbheann bumps him again, but he ignores her and heads out onto the street.

...And runs headfirst into Sweets on his way out.

“Oh, hey Seeley!” Sweets chirps.

His cat daemon saunters over and lifts her head up to touch noses in greeting with Ailbheann. She puts her head down stiffly while Seeley regains his composure. “Stick to the right side of the sidewalk, Sweets,” he growls. “Otherwise there’s nothing to stop society from collapsing into mayhem.”

“Right, right, sure,” says Sweets. “Listen, do you want to get some coffee and chat? I have some ideas for volunteers for my study that I’d love to run by you.”

Oh, boy. Thankfully, he has an excuse to get out of this, and it isn’t even a lie. “Sure, sure. You know, normally I’d love to, but my shift just ended, and I have to run. I have a date with Camille tonight and I need to get some studying done beforehand.”

Sweets remains pleasant, not missing a beat. “Oh. Okay! That’s fine. I’ll just head inside anyways, since I’m already here. I’ll see you tonight, then?”

“Sure,” says Seeley, already starting to speed walk to the library. He’s got to make up for lost time. “I’ll see you later.”

Camille shows up at 6:59, sharp. Seeley whistles under his breath as she opens the door to her dorm. Ailbheann, fur freshly brushed and gleaming with a bowtie pressed into her thick neck fur, presses into him, awestruck. They’ve seen their girlfriend dressed up before, but that doesn’t change the fact that she’s drop-dead gorgeous. “Wow.”

Camille laughs. Her northern harrier daemon nods at Ailbheann, not willing to fly down to her level just to say hello. His keen eye misses nothing, and as Camille leans in for a kiss, she murmurs, “Your shirt’s untucked.”

(Northern harrier: intensity, ferocity. A leader, detail oriented and intelligent. Known as “good hawks” by farmers because they eat the pests that destroy crops, a more-than-apt moniker for someone majoring in criminal justice. Also called “gray ghosts”, which is only fitting for someone planning to go into coronary work. Not to mention her “eyes like a hawk”. He couldn’t have thought of form that fit Cam better if he tried.)

Seeley grunts, and struggles to fix his wardrobe malfunction. “I got caught up at the library. Had to rush to get changed and get over here.”

“Studying?” asks Cam. When he nods, she purses his lips. “I know girls are supposed to like a man that’s devoted to his studies, but you need to take a break *sometime* , Seeley.”

“I will,” he says testily. “Just not now. I have a big test coming up.”

“There’s always something,” says Cam. Still, she links her arm with his, and the two of them walk down out of the building to the pub down the street.

It’s not fancy, but it’s all they can afford on their meager college budget. Seeley seats Cam down at her seat, and then the two of them stumble in a conversation. It’s a bit rocky at first, but soon enough the two of them settle into a familiar rhythm.

“So we’re getting assigned partners, which is a completely absurd thing to do to us at this point in our college career, and I’m working with the newbie.” Camille sighs, and her harrier daemon, on the bird perch extending from the back of Cam’s seat, shakes his head. “He’s not just a transfer student, he’s still a *minor* . Skipped his last two years of high school to go to community college and then transferred in. Which would be fine, except he’s got the social skills of a maggot.”

At his feet, Seeley’s wolf daemon rests her head on Seeley’s foot and whines in sympathy. “Well, what’s his deal? Skipping a few grades doesn’t stunt your social growth.”

“I have no clue,” says Cam. She rips into one one of her bread rolls with a controlled intensity. “But if this keeps up I’m going to have to ask if we can get graded separately. There’s no way he can give a presentation and not mess it up.”

“What’s his form?”

Cam raises her eyebrows. “He’s an octopus of some kind. He wheels it around in a portable tank.”

Seeley nods, thinking for a moment. “Octopi are intelligent, good at escaping their cages or hiding from responsibilities, and incredibly uncharismatic; not people persons. They tend to be hard to read. Not well socialized.”

Cam laughs quietly and shakes her head. He knows Cam thinks his ability to read daemons is mostly fluff, but she can’t deny that more often than not he can peg a person by their form alone. “You got it. But knowing that doesn’t help me out.”

“If you make it to the other end alive, you should join my roommate’s project,” jokes Seeley. “He’s doing a study about relationships that shouldn’t work, but they do.”

“Oh?” says Cam. “Well, that would be interesting. Except for that this is a relationship that shouldn’t work, and it doesn’t.”

Seeley laughs and spins his fork idly around his fingers. “Yeah, you’re telling me. I could say the same thing about my roommate and I, except he seems dead set on being the opposite.”

“How about this: I’ll join Lance’s study with my partner from hell if you join with him.”

Even Ailbheann laughs at that one. “Hah. Nice try, but no thanks. I need money, but I’m not desperate enough to work with *him* .”

“Yet,” says Cam, face deadpan, but her daemon breaks the facade this time, chirping out in laughter. Cam smiles and reaches her hand across the table to hold Seeley’s. “We’ll get through this,.”

Their entrees arrive before Seeley has to respond, and he diverts the conversation to the food.

After they finish their meal, Seeley walks Cam back to her dorm. Her’s is nice, she managed to snag a single by some luck. Seeley wishes they could have lived off campus in an apartment together, but while he went to the local state school, she was going to the local higher end school nearby, and their campuses were just far enough apart that neither of them wanted to deal with making the transport back and forth from a centralized apartment to class every day.

Seeley gives his girlfriend a goodnight kiss, and this time Cam’s harrier does light down onto Ailbheann’s back to give her a nuzzle. She growls happily and twists her head around to snap playfully at him before he takes off again.

Man and wolf leave to take the subway back to their dorm. Seeley sticks his hands in his pockets and strides down the street, for all appearances not a care in the world. Only a certain hunch in his shoulders and his daemon, golden eyes glittering as she sweeps her eyes around their surrounding, her ears perked to every sound, betray his wariness.

The subway is full of other college kids heading home after work, or dinner, or some other miscellaneous activity. It’s not as crowded as it would be on a weekend night, so they have no trouble finding a seat where Ailbheann can lay down without worrying about someone tripping over her. Accidental bumps happen all of the time, especially in crowded cities like this. They’re not nearly as bad as intentional grabbing, but that doesn’t mean that Seeley has to enjoy the jolt it rips through his gut.

They don’t speak at all on the way back to the dorm. Seeley quietly does a mental checklist of everything he’s done and everything he still has to do today. Maybe if he pushes back finishing up his essay tomorrow, he can actually get to bed on time tonight. That’s a nice thought. Ailbheann yawns her agreement at his feet.

Once they get off at their stop, they're only a short block away from their dorm. Booth can't stop thinking about his bed the entire way over.

He walks up the staircase, down the hall, unlocks his door--

The girl with the purple butterfly daemon from the cafe is there. She's sitting on the rug, back against Sweets' bed and her feet tucked underneath her. Her daemon butterfly rests lightly on top of her head. Beside her, her canary roommate is reclining and writing (or sketching?) something down in her notebook. Her daemon glances over at the door from his perch on her shoulder, but otherwise they give no indication that they noticed him entering.

Sweets looks up from his spot where he's sitting cross-legged on the floor. His cat daemon, curled up in his lap, starts to purr. "Oh, hey Seeley!"

Temperance waves. "Hi, Seeley."

She nudges Angela in the arm, who looks up. "Oh, it's you! Hi, again."

Ailbheann growls; Seeley puts his hand on her head to warn her to stand her ground. "What are you doing in here?"

Sweets grins. "We're just finishing up filling out all of the waivers and paperwork. Temperance and Angela will be the first volunteers for my study!" He frowns. "She said she knew you, and she was more than willing to help out. Why didn't you ask her about my study? You said you'd ask your coffee shop customers."

"I told you you should have told her when you had the chance," grumbles Ailbheann so quietly that only he can hear. "He's never gonna let this one go."

Finals are approaching.

Or, not really. They're not for a few more weeks, at least. But Jack and Zack aren't about to stop them from getting in some prime-time studying. (And no, they aren't siblings, no matter how many times people ask that question after pointing out their similar names and the fact that they live together in the same off-campus apartment. They don't even look anything alike, yeesh.)

Professor Goodman's midterm questions really raked Jack over with a pitchfork, and there's no way he's going to let that happen to him again. Who would have thought such a quiet man with an unassuming turtle daemon could have asked such vile, head-turning questions?

"And what is the order of primary succession?" Zack asks Jack, reading his chicken scratch scribbles off of the top of the stack of index cards he holds in his hands. At his side, his octopus daemon, currently a stony gray-blue color that makes her meld into the background of her tank, eyes Jack's own scruffy black-and-white dog daemon with an eerily fierce intensity.

“Pioneer species like mosses and lichens; herbaceous flowering plants from wind- and animal-dispersed seeds; shrubby plants like willow that shade out the herbaceous plants; and then sitka spruce and cottonwood which out-compete the willow,” rattles of Jack. His daemon wags her tail, pleased they’re doing so well. They know this material. They’re going to ace this test. There’s no other option. “These are too easy. Ask me something harder.”

“I’m going through the questions in chronological order,” protests Zack. “It’s important that I don’t get the order mixed up-”

Jack grabs the cards out of his hands and starts to shuffle through them. Zack lunges for them, and his octopus daemon spins around in her tank, turning a vibrant red and orange. “Hey! Give them back!”

Thankfully, Zack has about enough weight and force behind him as a peanut, and he can easily hold him back with one hand as he reads reads over him and his daemon’s protests. “Here we go! Describe and explain the importance of the ten macronutrients needed for -- what does this say? Pranks?”

“It says ‘plants’,” snaps Zack, snatching the cards out of Jack’s hands and trying to put them back in order. His octopus daemon stops spinning and sloshing water over the sides of her tank, though she remains an angry red. She glares at Jack’s dog daemon, who sticks her tongue out back at her.

There’s a knock on the study door, and Jack looks up in time to see the third member of their study group walking in, bag of study materials slung over her shoulder, purple butterfly trailing behind.

“Temperance!” greets Jack. His daemon wags her tail again.

Auster waves his wing in what Jack thinks might be a greeting -- really, who can tell with insects? He loves studying the real thing, but daemons are so hard to parse -- and Temperance sits down and unloads her bag. “Sorry for being late. I had a meeting with someone else.”

“I was wondering where were,” says Zack.

“Ooh. Who was it?” presses Jack, leaning in. “I thought you didn’t have any friends besides us. Ooh, was it a guy? Was it a date?”

“Really, you’re just as bad as Angela,” Temperance frowns. “And no, it wasn’t. I was talking to Lance Sweets. Angela and I are doing a study with him for his psychology independent research project.”

“Psychology?” echoes Jack. “But you *hate* psych.”

“I know,” Temperance sighs. “But I need the money, and Angela said it would be a fun ‘bonding experience’. I told her that if she wanted to do bonding activities we could study for our exams together, but she insisted.”

Jack's daemon puts her furry paw over his foot before he says anything stupid. Sometimes he forgets that Temperance is here on a merit scholarship, unlike Zack and himself whose parents could pay for it out of pocket -- well, Zack was getting some financial aid, but they're covering the rest of it. No one knew about Jack's own financial status, and he intended to keep it that way.

"I agree, the onus roommates put on each other to needlessly bond is pointless," Zack says, his octopus daemon nodding. "Why put all of that effort into harmonious living when we aren't going to ever see each other again after we graduate?"

"Hey!" says Jack, crossing his arms and sticking his chin out. His daemon curls her lip in warning. "It's rude to talk about your roommate issues when I'm right here. And I don't think asking you to wash your dishes instead of leaving them in the sink is asking all that much. It's not even asking the bare minimum."

"Jack is right," Temperance says. "It's important to get along with your housemates, even if it's only temporary. Compromise is an important part of living together as a unit, no matter for how short a period of time."

"And if you don't compromise, mold grows on the dishes."

"I thought you liked mold," protests Zack, lifting his hands up so his palms faced out in a sign of surrender. His daemon burbles angrily and waves her tentacles.

"Not when it's on my dishes!" says Jack. "And do you know how hard it is to wash off cheese once it gets all crusty?"

"But I'm busy! Do you really expect me to take the time to wash my dishes when I'm in a study groove?"

"Yes! But whatever," Jack waves his hand at him, and his daemon stops growling, though she doesn't rest her fur all the way back down. "I don't care if you hate me. You're stuck with me until the end of the school year, and then you can find someone else to live with. Just don't blow out my Hanukkah candles, alright? I don't care if you think it's breaking the rules because we aren't supposed to light fires. That's religious intolerance, and I *will* bring it up with the class dean if you fight me on this one."

Zack and Jack glare at each other. After a few moments, Auster wanders in between them, waving his wings to get their attention. He settles down on the table, and Temperance clears her throat to get their attention.

"This is a great opportunity to invite you to join the study with Angela and I," she announces. "Lance is studying the relationship between people whose relationships shouldn't work, but they do."

Jack glances at Zack. "I don't know how much our relationship *does* work."

"That doesn't matter. Maybe Lance needs a control group. People whose relationship doesn't work, and it doesn't. I can give you his contact information."

“It could be fun,” says Zack. “And having some extra cash would be nice.”

*I don't need extra money* . “It would be,” he allows. “Give me his number. I’ll call him tomorrow morning.”

## Chapter End Notes

Thank you to everyone who read and commented or left kudos on chapter one! Here's the next installment! I wrote this chapter while I was studying for my own finals last semester, haha.

INB4 someone says that Jack is a stereotype because I made him Jewish but he's also super rich, I just want it known that as a jewish person, relate strongly to Jack, which is why I hc him this way. (also, his actor TJ Thyne is Jewish, which basically means that Jack is jewish too, right? :P)



# Chapter 3

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

After her first visit, Temperance starts to visit the cafe regularly. Sometimes she comes in during Seeley's shifts, and sometimes she doesn't. When they do line up, he gets her her drink (always tea, no sugar or milk) before she reaches the counter.

She thanks him, sits in the corner booth, and works until Sweets shows up. He's working his way down the menu, and sometimes attempts to order items that don't exist, that he insists are on the "secret menu". Seeley reminds him that this isn't Starbucks and he needs to shut up.

After finally ordering something that usually has way too much sugar, with a croissant or cake on the side, Sweets takes his order and saunters over to Temperance's table. His cat daemon hops up next to him and puts her paws on the table. She says it has something to do with four-eye and that it gives him a better understanding of how the human-daemon relationship affects his results, and that his daemon helps him take notes, but all Seeley can think about is how grubby those paws are after walking all over the city streets, and how he'll have to scrub down that table with bleach after they leave.

But he doesn't have the time to focus on that right now. He has to put his nose to the grind and get studying. The football season finally ended, which means that Seeley can finally focus on his studies one hundred percent. Well, one hundred percent of the time when he's not working. Maybe like fifty percent of the time when he's at work, and he sneaks looks at his notes in between customers.

He doesn't have the time to be lenient. So he'll read up on criminal justice policy in post-revolutionary Bosnia now, and worry about cleaning up the table later.

For all of her party attitude, Angela is a self-professed finals goddess. She reserves out her favorite art room every night for a week before finals, and for the entirety of her school's reading period, and she brings all of her textbooks and junkfood, and gets to work.

The great thing thing about being a fine arts major is that she hardly ever has to write essays. The horrible thing is that she's somehow expected to craft three full-scale projects out of thin air like it's nothing, and make them look *good* while she's at it. And she took a computer science course, just to get her science requirement out of the way, except she's actually really enjoying the class and needs to set time aside to study, because god help her but she's planning on taking more classes in the spring.

"One thing at a time," Cher reminds her, fluttering about her head as he examines Angela's budding sculpture. Right now, it looks more like a sad octopus. Sort of like Zack's daemon, she supposes, though she's only talked to him briefly when picking Temperance up from their study groups to drag her out to dinner. "And remember: better finished than perfect."

“That’s simple,” says Angela, “but not easy.”

“Not easy,” agrees her canary daemon.

Angela turns on her iPod, turning on her focus playlist. Immediately, an upbeat classical piano piece starts to play. Perfect. She hacks away at her sculpture, canary daemon offering input and advice, such as “no, not there,” or “a little to the left,” or “oh no, honey, you won’t want that when you see it from *this* angle.”

Neither of them take stock of how much time has passed until she notices a change in the quality of the room, and turns around to see that someone had opened the door. In the doorway stands another college student, with a mop of curly hair brown hair and the saddest excuse for a beard she’s ever had the disgrace to see. At his feet stands his scruffy brown and white mop of a dog daemon, fur covering her eyes. When she sees that Angela has noticed them, she starts to wag her tail.

“What do you want, Jack?” says Angela, pulling out her earbuds. Her canary daemon hops over her shoulder and huffs, digging his claws into her shoulder.

“I was heading over to Wong Fu’s to get dinner, and Temperance asked if I could stop by the art building since it was on my way, and invite you out with us. She didn’t think you would go unless someone forced you.” He shoves his hands in his pockets and smiles with what he probably thinks is a charming look, his dog daemon mimicking the pose.

Angela shares a glance with her canary daemon, who shrugs his wings. She might as well; not that he mentions it, she is hungry, and a quick glance at the clock above the door tells her that it’s past her usual dinner time. And maybe Jack’s smile is a little bit disarming and puts her at ease. Maybe. “Sure, I’ll come. Thanks for getting me.”

“It’s no problem.” Jack straightens up and his dog daemon leans over, looking at something behind Angela. “That’s a nice statue you got there.”

“Oh, this?” Angela looks down at her work and her canary daemon chirps in embarrassment and pride. “Thanks. It’s nowhere near perfect, but it’s a work in progress.”

“Is it you?” asks Jack, nodding at the sculpture. It’s a miniature rendition of a little girl sitting cross-legged on the ground. At her side is a rough oblong-shaped object that will, eventually, become her armadillo-shaped daemon.

If she’s being honest, it looks more like a human-shaped blob than anyone in particular, and Angela isn’t sure if he has some sort of sixth sense or if it was just a lucky guess. “It is, yeah, from when I was a child. We have to do a self portrait. How did you know?”

Jack frowns and shrugs. “Something about the way she carries herself seemed familiar. Now, come on. Zack and Temperance are saving us a seat, but they’re going to order without us if we don’t hurry up.”

“Alright, I’m coming.” Angela grabs her coat and slips it on; her canary daemon buries himself under her hood where he’ll be warm against the outside chill. Angela hesitates, then

decides to speak her mind, because it's not like she's going to be spending a whole lot of time with this guy in the future anyways. "Why do you put up with Zack? It seems like he's getting on your last nerve more often than not."

Jack shrugs again, and his scruffy dog daemon woofs softly. "He's the only one who will put up with me, I guess. Besides, he's not that bad once you get to know him."

Jack loves studying. Studying is one thing he's really great at. All he has to do is absorb everything, hold it in his brain like a sponge long enough to take the test, and then wring himself out and move on. No harm, no foul.

Except now Professor Goodman is asking them to write an essay for their final. Even though it's an advanced biology class, which makes no sense. Except that it sort of does; he should have seen this coming the minute that man waltzed into class with his turtle daemon propped under one arm and waxed a soliloquy about the beauty and mystery of science. He really has no one to blame for this except for himself.

Temperance is taking to this surprisingly easy. She has to write a lot, anyways, with her anthropology classes. Zack and himself, on the other hand, are struggling.

The two of them have been getting together to write this essay every day since classes got out, and so far he has about a page of word vomit, and Zack has even less. Eventually Jack left him to work alone, and went back to their apartment to write. At least here it's quiet, and he can work while he listens to music, or cook something to eat.

After what feels like forever, Jack finally has what feels like an a shoddy, but perfectly functional, rough draft. Temperance had agreed to workshop it with him that afternoon her in her new favorite study spot, the Royal Cafe.

(It's not clear to Jack what she sees in there that's so attractive; as far as Jack is concerned it's pretty mediocre. But she does seem to be getting her work done, and she can get those meetings with that Lance guy about that study out of the way while she's at it, so he guesses he can't knock it till he's tried it.)

Jack gets his coffee from the barista at the counter (Khaika wags her tail at his wolf daemon. She ignores it.) and makes his way over to Temperance's table. He sits down, and his daemon lifts her nose to snuffle in greeting to Auster, who flutters over the edge of the table to touch on her forehead before floating back up to the tabletop. He lands on the edge of Temperance's paper, which she holds in one hand as she uses the other to chew on the end of her pencil.

"Hey, Tempe," says Jack.

Temperance doesn't look up. Her hair is pulled back in a ponytail and some of her hair is starting to frizz up. "Hey, Jack. How's your essay coming along?"

"That's for you to decide." He takes a folder out of his bag and opens it up to the current draft of his essay, still warm from the printer. He slides it over to her and she puts down her own

work to look at his. Auster migrates from her paper to the top of her head and alights on some of her stray hairs, looking down at Jack's paper with her.

Or, Jack presumes he is, anyways. It's not like the butterfly has eyes, or a face. It makes it hard to tell what he's thinking.

Jack bounces his leg up and down and sips on his coffee while he waits for Temperance to finish reading through. Lying on the ground at his feet, his scruffy dog daemon huffs and thumps her tail against the ground once or twice.

"The argument in your first half is all over the place," says Temperance. "You said one thing in your introduction and then end up directly contradicting yourself here. This is a runon sentence, and here you don't even have a verb. And you shouldn't be drinking caffeine if it's going to make you restless like that; you'll never get to sleep tonight."

Jack forces himself to stop bouncing his leg. "It's not the coffee that's making me restless, it's you," he snaps, "But I did write the first half while I was trying to deal with Zack at the same time, before I left him and went back to studying at our apartment. I'm not surprised if it's a bit of a mess."

"A bit of a mess is an understatement. You'll have to rework most of this." Blunt as ever, Temperance cuts straight to the point, and starts marking up his paper with her pen. For a brief moment, Jack wonders how a freshman managed to become so authoritative to boss around a junior like himself. But maybe that comes with the territory of having the privilege to skip almost all the prerequisites required for her major straight to the big boy classes. Either way, he's not complaining.

"But if you put the effort in, I think Professor Goodman will be pleased with your work. You have some good thoughts, Jack; we just have to unbury them from the dirt surrounding them. Oh, hmm." She stops covering Jack's essay with red lines long enough to jot something down on her own papers.

"Wait a moment. Are you copying my ideas?" Jack leans forward and grabs her papers.

"Of course not!" snaps Temperance, reaching for them. "Give those back."

Jack had already scanned over the papers by the time she grabs them and shoves them back into her bag. "That isn't your essay," he says, stunned. "Is that... fictional prose?"

"It's for my creative writing class," Temperance scowls. Her purple butterfly daemon flutters over her head in dizzying circles; his face is too tiny for Jack to see, but he can *feel* the frustration radiating off of him.

Jack snorts with disbelief. "I didn't know you were in a creative writing class!"

"I wasn't aware that you had the jurisdiction to be privy to my full class schedule."

"I don't. But what are you writing about?" Jack leans in, touching the tips of his fingers together and raising his eyebrows.

“Creative things,” says Temperance flatly. “And you’ll stop asking questions if you want me to help you edit your essay.”

Jack puts his hand up, palm facing out, in a sign of defeat. “Alright, alright, you win. I need that A more than I need to satisfy my curiosity.”

Temperance eyes him, and her butterfly daemon settles down on top of her hair once more. “Good. Now, if you look here, your argument directly contradicts what you were saying up here, on the previous page...”

Jack reorients himself to focus on his paper, and the two of them hack away at it until it’s covered with more red ink than computer ink. Jack knew his draft was rough, but he hadn’t realized how shabby his paper-writing abilities were until now, especially when he’s trying to work with a distracted Zack in the room. Thankfully, Temperance is a skilled, if not particularly patient, teacher; she walks him (or maybe “runs” is a more accurate descriptor) through all of the glaring holes in his paper.

Eventually Jack leans back in his chair and stretches. At his feet, Khaika does the same, stretching with her tail in the air and front paws out in front of her. “I need a break. I’m going to go get myself a snack. Do you want anything? It’s on me, as thanks for your help.”

“Another tea would be nice.”

“Coming right up.” Jack makes his way over to the counter. That guy with the wolf daemon is still running the counter, so Jack gives him his order (one chamomile tea, one chocolate croissant) and sits back to wait while his croissant is heating up in the toaster.

While he’s waiting, another customer comes in. Jack tries not to stare too obviously, to be polite, but it’s hard because *damn*. She’s black, with short cropped hair, and she’s dressed in a smart business casual outfit that says she doesn’t take shit from anybody. Her harrier hawk daemon, riding on a leather shoulder pad and glaring sourly at everyone he passes, doesn’t hurt her image.

The barista seems to recognize her, and his face lights up when he sees her come in. “Cam! What a surprise to see you here. The usual? It’s on me.”

The woman - Cam - nods. “Please, Seeley. You do *not* know what I’ve been through today.”

“Coming right up,” Seeley says. He wraps up Jack’s croissant in a napkin, slides down the counter, and then turns around and starts to mess with the espresso machine.

Jack turns to go back to Temperance, but his daemon tugs at his pants to get his attention. “Listen,” she hisses.

Cam was talking, even though Seeley doesn’t seem to be listening. “It’s my lousy partner again. We have to do a joint paper as the final component of our presentation, but Zack’s gone AWOL again. He won’t respond to my messages, and he keeps skimping out on our plans to meet up and touch base.”

“They shouldn’t let people skip grades,” Seeley says. His daemon, propped up on the counter to look at Cam while Seeley works, nods in agreement.

“They should at least make them finish high school first. I think Mr. AWOL here missed all of his classes about teamwork and good communication.”

Jack clears his throat. “I’m sorry, did you say Zack?”

Her harrier daemon glares at him, probably for eavesdropping, but Cam remains carefully neutral. “Why? Do you know him?”

“We live together,” says Jack. His daemon huffs and, though no one can see it underneath her fur, Jack can feel her roll her eyes in exasperation.

“Great!” says Cam. “Can you tell him to get his act together and respond to my texts?”

“If he’s not responding, it’s probably because his phone is dead,” says Jack. “He’s horrible about keeping an eye on his battery. I can tell you where he is, though.”

Cam’s harrier daemon’s face darkens even more than Jack had thought possible. “Take me to him,” she says. She looks at Seeley and notices that while they were talking he had put her espresso on the counter in a to-go cup. “Thanks, babe,” she says. “I’ll see you around?”

Jack decides that watching Zack get potentially pounded into the ground by this dagger of a woman sounds way more exciting than getting an A on his paper. “You two can give each other a goodbye kiss, I need to run this tea back to my partner -- my essay partner, I mean -- and then I’ll be right with you.”

Cam is ready to burn a fuse. She tried to be lenient with her partner, but it seems like no matter how accommodating she tries to be he just wouldn’t step up to the plate. She gives an inch and he takes a mile. Well, no more. She’ll show him a thing or two. On her shoulder, her harrier daemon grunts and flaps his wings in anticipation.

Jack leads her down the block and into the university’s campus. After a few moments, she realizes they’re heading towards the library. Jack’s scruffy dog daemon weaves around his feet as they make their way over.

(Cam can’t understand how he moves without falling on his face, with his daemon moving like that. Seeley’s brother does the same thing, and it drives her up the wall. Thankfully Ailbheann was too big to do the same, or her daemon would strangle her any time they had a date night.)

By some grace of God, Jack manages to not only walks without tripping over his daemon, but keep up a steady stream of chatter while he does it. He yaks into Cam’s ear it up the entire way over to the library. Cam rolls her eyes at her daemon, but she lets him talk.

After climbing up what felt like a hundred flights of stairs (and Cam isn’t out of shape!), and down the world’s most dimly lit hallway, Jack stops in front of a room with a piece of paper

taped to the door that reads RESERVED - Z. ADDY. “This is it,” he says. He steps aside, motioning for Cam to go through. “Ladies first.”

“Steady,” her daemon murmurs to her under his breath. He puts on his best scowl.

Cam takes a deep breath, paints on a matching glare, and plows through the door.

Zack is sitting at a small table in the center of the room, his back facing Cam. His small octopus daemon in the mobile tank beside him whirls around to look when she enters the room. She (He? It? Cam can’t tell and she’s never found a good moment to ask) burbles and taps on the glass to get Zack’s attention.

Zack twists around in the chair to look; he smiles when he sees Cam glowering down at him. His skin looks paler than normal, Cam notices, though maybe it’s the fluorescent lighting in this room. “Hello Camille! Nice to see you here. Oh, and Jack, too. I thought you were staying at the house from now on?”

“Oh, I am. This is just too good of an opportunity to pass up,” says Jack, who is, Cam notices, still standing outside the door.

“Hello, Zackary,” says Cam. She crosses her arms. “You’ve been very good at avoiding my texts lately.”

Zack looks at Cam for a moment and then his face falls as he realizes that this isn’t going to be a pleasant visit. “What do you mean? I’ve been responding--”

“Taking *days* to get back to me is not ‘responding’,” snaps Cam. “Not when we have a strict deadline to meet.” Her harrier daemon doesn’t move; they’ve trained so that he doesn’t give away their every inner emotion. But even he can’t help but tighten his grip on her leather shoulder pad.

“I just wanted to work on one final at a time! It’s more effective that way,” protests Zack. He stands up, hand on the edge of his daemon’s tank.

“It’s not effective if you have a deadline *tomorrow* that you haven’t even started because you’re so busy focusing on a paper for another class that’s not due for another week.”

Zack’s daemon curls up and turns into a rock. Zack’s eyes widen. “Is it really due tomorrow?”

“Yes. And you would know that, if you read *anything* I texted or emailed you in the last few days, or picked up when I called.”

Zack starts to say something, and then he sneezes. Multiple times. When he pulls the crook of his elbow back from his face, Cam sees how glazed his eyes are, and, yep, that’s definitely pale skin, it’s not just the light.

“Zack, when was the last time you took a break?” asks Cam.

If Zack is surprised by how her softer voice and sudden topic change, he doesn't show it. "I don't know. I thought it was an hour or two ago... but my phone's dead, so I don't have a good way to tell time."

Cam's daemon snorts, and she turns to look at Jack. He's leaning against the wall next to the door now, hands tucked in his pants, watching with rapid attention. "Jack, when was the last time Zack came home?"

He shrugs. "I don't know. A few days, maybe? I assumed he was camping out here."

"When was the last time you left the building, Zack? Or got a meal? Or drank water?"

Again, Zack fumbles for an answer. "A while, I guess."

Dear lord. Cam's harrier daemon groan. How on earth did Cam get assigned to be partners with the single most incompetent person in the world? "Okay, new plan. Zack, you are going to go home with Jack *now* and take a nap. Jack, you're going to make sure he gets a shower and something to eat - in his bed, not at his desk or on a couch this time. I'm going to talk to our professor and explain that my partner has *stupidly* gotten himself sick from stress and overworking himself during reading days and ask if we can get an extension."

"Sick? I'm not sick!" says Zack, at the same time that Jack protests, "Why do *I* have to be his babysitter?" their daemons both make noises in protest, Zack's daemon sloshing water against her tank and Jack's dog scratching her paws against the floor and growling.

"Shut up," says Cam. Her daemon flaps his wings until the others quiet down again. She looks at Zack and his octopus, "You lost your privileges to make decisions for yourselves when you proved that you lack even a single modicum self awareness in your thick skull. And you," she glares at Jack, who cowers back against the wall, "are so selfish that you didn't even *try* to look out for your roommate's best interests. So you're on 'babysitting duty', if that's what you want to call it, until you can learn to play nice again."

After she's done, no one says anything. Neither of them move.

"Well?" They stare back at her blankly. Cam's daemon clacks his beak. "Go!" she snaps, and it's like suddenly they're unfreezed; Jack leaps over to help Zack pick up his stuff, and within five minutes they've collected everything and evacuated the rooms. Cam watches them leave, not even trying to hide her exasperation.

"Well, boy will be boys," says her daemon, though even he sounds depressed about it.

"No. Idiots will be idiots."

Seeley had the closing shift tonight. By the time closing time comes around, everyone's already filtered their way out. Except for Temperance. She's still glued to the same spot as when he started his shift this afternoon. In some ways he's concerned, with how much time



and money she was spending here. He has a good read of people, and he can tell that she's not exactly made of money.

Seeley finishes cleaning up the coffee machines and locking everything up before he approaches Temperance. Her purple butterfly daemon flaps into the air as he approaches, but Temperance doesn't look up until he clears his throat.

Her focus is admirable. Not just for a butterfly, but in general.

"Sorry, but I'm closing up," he says. "I hate to kick you out, but I have to lock up now."

"Is it that late already?" she murmurs, checking her watch. "I'll pack up and leave, then."

"There's no rush," says Seeley.

"I should imagine," says Temperance, laughing. "I'm sure you get paid while you wait. "But I'll hurry up so you can get home and study for your finals."

"I've been studying when there's no line," says Seeley. "And I enjoy the company."

Temperance pauses in packing up her bag to look at him. She glances at his wolf daemon, as if she was going to comment on how *of course* he enjoys having company, his daemon's a hypersocial animal, but then she shrugs and throws her bag over her shoulder. "It doesn't matter now. I have to go, anyways. Angela will be waiting for me. She insisted we do a spa night tonight to destress."

Seeley walks with her in the direction of the door. That sounded artsy and stimulating, but not too strenuous; perfect for a butterfly. "That's not a bad idea."

"I don't see why painting my nails would be more relaxing, than, say, kickboxing," sniffs Temperance.

"Kickboxing?" echoes Seeley. He gives her a sideways glance. They've barely held a conversation longer than the time it takes for him to serve her, and yet she never fails to surprise him.

"Sure," says Temperance. "It increases endorphins, improves sleep, raises self confidence... Painting nails, on the other hand, does nothing."

At his side, Ailbheann laughs quietly. Seeley puts his hand on her head. "That sort of thing is important. You know, anthropologically speaking. You tell each other stories, do some bonding. You know, girl stuff."

Temperance bristles and stops walking. "Don't talk to me like I don't know my own field," she snaps. "And don't say that. It's sexist."

Ailbheann snorts quietly. Seeley grabs the door with one hand and pulls it open. "Hey. you were the one who said it wasn't important. I just thought maybe you needed some reminding."

“Communal bonding is not the same as destressing,” says Temperance. She eyes him for a moment, and then strides past him out the door.

“Sure it isn’t,” says Seeley. He waves to her as she walks down the street. “I’m not working again before the finals period is over, so I won’t see you before you finish. Merry Christmas! And good luck on your finals.”

## Chapter End Notes

Sorry for being a few days late! This weekend was so hectic for me. @\_@

A note: I realized that this college system might not make sense to anyone who doesn't live near a big city. They live in an unnamed/fictional town in Virginia), based off of college cities like Boston/Cambridge, where there are a lot of colleges within easy walking distance (or a subway ride) of each other. Seeley and Lance are at one college, and the Squints are all at another.

On daemon names: Angela's daemon isn't legally called Cher. Her dad gave him a name just as equally embarrassing as Angela's birth name, but she refused to ever call him by it. Jack's daemon is Khaika, from "chai" in Hebrew which means "life". It's pronounced with a hard "h", NOT a "k".

Thanks for reading! I hope everyone enjoyed. :)

# Chapter 4

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

At long, long last, finals were over. It had been an arduous week of writing essays, cramming for exams, and pulling all nighters. Jack, after some helpful encouragement from Cam, managed to kick Zack into gear just in time for him to take his exams and do his presentation. Jack completed his essay with the help of Temperance and aced all of his exams. Temperance finished everything with ease, because of course she did. And Angela turned in all of her own art projects - “not perfect, but finished,” as her daemon said.

Angela and Temperance had taken a plane back down to Texas. Temperance was a bit of a last-minute add-on, but when Angela learned that she was planning on staying at school over break to do research and some “studying, but for fun” because she didn’t have anywhere else to go her, her heart broke a little on the inside. Besides, it’s just her and her father, and it’s not like their house isn’t more than big enough for one more.

Angela sheds her jacket before the two of them even leave the airport, and Cher flutters around her, chirping with joy. It’s cold in Virginia, and you can say what you want about how she’s a baby for not being able to tough it out, but Angela is not a fan.

“Is your father here already?” asks Temperance as they pick up their luggage and head towards the exit, puffing in her own jacket. Her butterfly daemon clings to her hair, swaying up and down as she moves.

Angela scans the crowd of waiting faces and points when she sees a familiar face. “Daddy!” Angela runs forward and, dropping her luggage, throws herself into her father’s arms. His long yellowy beard scratches against her face, but she doesn’t mind as he holds her tight. Her canary daemon flutters around their heads, chirping as he dances around her father’s green parakeet.

When Angela finally pulls away, her father smiles at her behind reflective shades. He looks behind her, and Angela remembers her companion. “Dad, this is my roommate, Temperance. Tempe, this is my father.”

“Please to meetya, miss,” Angela’s dad says. As he tips his stetson at her, his daemon lands on his shoulder and does the same with her own, scaled-down version of his hat.

Temperance nods, and her purple butterfly flaps his wings in greeting. If she recognizes him, she hides it well. Angela had considered telling her roommate that her dad was a famous rockstar, but had decided against it at the last minute due to her face-blindness and general lack of knowledge of pop culture figures; she was glad her gamble had paid off.

Angela’s dad helps them load their stuff into the car. The car ride back to their house is short, and Angela spends it the entire time catching her dad up on everything he’s missed over the

semester. He's a quiet man, and doesn't talk much, but she can tell he's listening by how raptly his green parakeet daemon stares at them, drinking in every word she says.

When they get home, Angela shows her roommate her room, drops her stuff off in her own, and then makes a run for the shower. Time to get all of that disgusting school grunge off of her body, please and thank you! Who knows what's in those showers, but Angela knows better than to think they're clean.

When she arrives in the kitchen, fresh out of the shower and her daemon's feathers sparkling from his own roll in the birdbath installed next to the tub, her father is already in the kitchen making cocktails. "Do you want one?"

"Yes, please," says Angela, hopping up onto one of the bar stools next to the kitchen island.

"Do you think your friend will want one?"

Um. Angela looks at her daemon. They'd never seen her go out at night, and even though they had an open alcohol policy in the room, she was the only one to smuggle any in. She'd never thought about it, but her name *was* Temperance... maybe she didn't drink? "Probably not, but we should still make her something, just in case."

Temperance finally came down for dinner after the chinese takeout arrived, and though she accepts the cocktail, she hardly drinks any of it. Angela decides not to make a big deal out of it.

"So, Temperance, tell me about yourself. Where do you come from?"

Oh, boy. Angela practically downs what's left of her drink. "You don't have to talk about it if you don't want to."

"No, it's okay." Temperance's face remains neutral, as if he had asked about something as casual as the weather. "I lived on the coast, with my parents and my brother Russ. My mother had a dolphin daemon, so we had to live in an aquatic daemon-accessible town. But then my parents disappeared, and since then I've been all around the state as a part of the foster system."

"Ah," says Angela's dad, hesitating. His daemon hops across the table towards Temperance, but her daemon's tucked up on her shoulder, where no one can reach him to give a comforting touch. "I'm sorry to hear that."

"Thank you," says Temperance. "Angela tells me that you make music. How is that?"

The transition is abrupt, but they both let it slide. Angela's dad launches into his music spiel, and Angela guides him through so he doesn't end up actually saying anything about being a famous musician. Temperance may not care if they know all about her family secrets, but Angela has some things she'd rather keep under wraps.

Eventually it gets late, and Temperance starts to yawn. Angela says goodnight to her dad and leads Temperance up the stairs. "Sleep well. Don't worry about waking up early, we don't

have anything planned for tomorrow.”

Temperance’s butterfly daemon murmurs something quietly, and she nods. “Goodnight, Ange,” she says, before turning into her own room.

Cher nudges Angela on the cheek. “Let’s get some sleep.”

“Come on, honey, I promise this will be a bit more your speed. There’s lots of people our age, and a lot of them are nerds just like you! It’ll be fun. Your first *real* party will make up for the flop of the last one, I promise.”

Angela had taken Temperance to what was supposed to be a fun Christmas party with her dad’s friends and family, but then Temperance had locked herself away in a back room the entire time, whittling away on her notebook. It had been a bad look, and not to mention super embarrassing when Angela had to pull her out at the end of the night to go home.

But no matter. Angela grabs Temperance’s hand and pulls her out of the car and onto the lawn. Cher darts forward and flaps at Auster, sweeping him off of his spot locked onto his person’s shoulder and into the air.

“Angela, it wasn’t the party, it’s me,” protests Temperance, not for the first time that night.

“Nonsense. Christmas isn’t your thing, and I respect that. Maybe it’s too charged of a holiday. But everyone can celebrate new years’! It’s a party for everyone to hang out, get smashed, and have a good time.” Angela tugs on Temperance’s hand again, and leads her reluctant friend up the winding pathway on the huge lawn to the big house at the end of the property. The owners of this house weren’t technically her friends, but they were friends of friends, and she had gotten inside intel from older college friends who had been before that this is *the* place to be. “Come on. Just until midnight, okay? And then if you still don’t want to be here, we’ll leave.”

Temperance looks up at Angela. “And you’ll come with me?”

“I promise.” Angela soothes, then hikes up her flashy red dress so she can move better. “Now come on, it’s cold and I did not dress to stand around outside all night!”

“It’s not that cold, you’re just acclimated to warmer than average temperatures,” chides Temperance, who didn’t own any party dresses and didn’t fit into Angela’s. Instead she’s wearing nice dress pants and heels and a leather jacket that they had thrifted in an emergency shopping trip earlier that day when Temperance had told Angela she didn’t have any new years’ clothes.

“I did dress appropriately, for a *party*,” snips Angela. She locks her elbow with Temperance’s while her daemon rings the doorbell. She can hear loud music and the sounds of people talking and singing coming from inside. “Now relax. It’s time to let loose and have some fun!”

The door magically opens, and Angela forces her way into the house. It's populated, but not *too* crowded, which Angela is thankful for; she doesn't want to scare her friend off again after all. She takes a few moments to scope out the scene: food and drinks in the kitchen, people in the living room and sunroom, sounds of a movie (or news broadcast of Times Square, maybe) blasting from the basement.

"Alright, game plan," says Angela, turning to her friend. "Get something to eat if you're hungry, and then I'm going to be your matchmaker."

Temperance's purple butterfly daemon stills at that, and Angela raises her eyebrows. "Your *platonic* matchmaker, sweetie. Please, there's no need to get so dramatic. I just want you to get out of your comfort zone, not knock you up."

Temperance tilts her head to one side. "Okay, Ange. Do you want something?"

"Ooh, something to drink would be nice."

"Okay, well, it better be water, because you're our designated driver." Temperance says, backing out and into the kitchen.

"Well, that's no fun," pouts Angela. By the time Temperance comes back with a bottled water for Angela and an IPA for herself (Temperance really does *not* seem like a beer person, but Angela decides not to push it), she's already seen several people she's friends with.

"Thank you, Tempe." Just then, Angela spots a familiar face in the crowd. Cher chirps and flits over her way, waving himself around to get her attention. Angela grabs Temperance's hand and pulls her towards the living room. It's decorated with leftover Christmas decorations, and blinking lights wind all over the room.

A woman several years older than herself with blonde hair swept back into an elaborate bun, with jewelry accents that match her red-and-brown butterfly daemon, saunters over. Her daemon rests on her hair like a hairpiece, the four spots on his wingtips looking like great, blinking eyes as he lazily flaps his wings.

"Angie!" The woman drawls. She wraps Angela in a big hug, bouncing in barely-contained glee as she pulls away. "How are you? How's your first semester of college been?"

"It's been great, Avalon," says Angela. "I'm loving my classes and having the time of my life."

"Meet any cute boys?"

"Oh, a few, but none that are my type." Angela decides not to remind Avalon (again) that she's not straight. "Oh, I did meet another psychology student! My roommate and I are doing a study with him. Speaking of which: Avalon, this is Temperance. We live together."

"Oh, it's a pleasure to meet you!" coos Avalon. She grabs Temperance's hand with both of hers and gives it a vigorous shake. Her daemon flutters off of her head and wanders over to

Temperance's, floating around Auster in what Angela can only assume is a friendly and/or interested manner.

"Avalon's currently in grad school for psychology," says Angela.

"Are you also doing psychology, hon?" asks Avalon, fixing Temperance with an intense stare, focusing all of her attention on her.

"I'm studying forensic science and anthropology," says Temperance. She steps back, and Angela notices Auster flapping his wings in agitation.

"I see you also have a butterfly daemon. And what a lovely specimen he is! Do you know what species he is?"

Temperance pauses before answering. "Auster's a purple emperor butterfly."

Avalon doesn't seem to notice her hesitation and grins, nodding enthusiastically. "Oh, I'm afraid to admit that I'm not familiar on the species. If you want to sit down and tell me about them, I can do a tarot card reading for you."

"Tarot? Do You do readings?" Now Temperance looks interested. Her butterfly daemon hovers off of her shoulder towards Avalon's.

"Of course! The cards are like windows into the soul, you know. It's like I can see the entire universe spread out before me."

Someone nearby but not in the conversation glances at Avalon and rolls their eyes. Temperance doesn't seem to notice. "Tarot cards have been used for years to gain insight on the self and the world around us. They can be very useful in the aid of self discovery and introspection. I've used them before once or twice, myself."

"And did you find them very helpful?" Avalon leans in, her eyes growing wide behind her thick-rimmed glasses.

"I found them useful in terms of directing my attention towards areas within my life that were causing me unnecessary stress and conflict and how I might address that, yes."

"I knew you would understand," coos Avalon. "It's so nice to have another butterfly around that understands what I'm trying to do."

Temperance snorts. "If I understand anything that you're trying to do, it has nothing to do with the fact that we're both *butterflies*. Society puts too much pressure on conjuring up some meaning behind every little thing someone does and relating it to their daemon's form."

Avalon's eyes grow wide, and her butterfly retreats back to her side, flapping his wings in agitation. "But we're one and the same, Temperance! People with butterfly daemons are clairvoyant, they have special abilities to access their spirit guides-"

Temperance brushes Avalon away. "Spirit animals is a concept steeped in religious and cultural meaning, and you casually throwing it out there as if it's something you just have and

not a hard-earned skill that religious leaders spent years developing is insulting and belittling.”

Avalon looks crestfallen. “Surely you must understand. we’re sisters of the soul, aren’t we?”

“No.” Temperance grunts and looks at Angela. “If you’re friends with her, I hope you don’t have the same appropriative and racist beliefs.” She plucks her daemon out the air and holds him to her shirt as she stalks off towards the kitchen.

Angela tries to grab and pull her back. “Temperance, I know you think poorly of psychology and the foofy, spiritual stuff, but please don’t be like this.”

“This has nothing to do with Avalon’s *beliefs*,” snaps Temperance. She glares at Angela with a smoldering eye. “I don’t care if she finds comfort in her cards. I care that Avalon, an appropriative, cloud-headed dunce, thinks that I, a respectable and knowledgeable *scientist*, am anything like her!” She tugs her hand out of Angela’s grip and she ducks out of the way. And just like that, she’s gone.

“So much for getting out of her shell,” murmurs her canary daemon, drooping on his perch on her shoulder. “She’s still the same as she ever was.”

“Don’t be worried, Angie.” Avalon rests her hand on Angela’s shoulder. “We’re both tougher than we look. A butterfly always is. A caterpillar turns to mush and dissolves inside its cocoon, you know, but when it comes out it’s a beautiful butterfly, stronger than ever. And she has a strength of character like few others.”

“You can say that again,” mutters Angela, reluctantly turning back towards her friend.

“I need to head out soon, but I can sense that there’s something you want from me before I go. A reading, perhaps?”

Angela smiles weakly. “Yeah, actually. I was wondering if you could keep up with our tradition of our year ahead readings.”

Avalon smiles, and her butterfly daemon flutters around her head in excitement. “Of course, Angie. I have my cards with me now, in fact. Let’s go find a quiet room and we’ll see what the new year has in store for you.”

Angela hovers outside of Temperance’s room, her hand raised above the door. She hasn’t knocked yet. Maybe she shouldn’t. Maybe she should just leave. Temperance is going back to school early for J-Term, so maybe she should just let her pack--

“Stop procrastinating,” hisses Cher. He squeezes her shoulder with his claws, digging them in hard enough to pinch.

Angela winces. “Okay, okay. I’m going in.” She knocks on the door before she has enough time to second guess herself and lets herself in. “Temperance?”



Temperance is on the floor of the guest room, folding all of her clothes into impossibly small squares and lining them neatly up inside her impossibly small suitcase. Her hair is in a messy ponytail, and she's still in her pajamas. Auster rests on the edge of her suitcase, probably helping her stack things in the most space-efficient way possible.

"Can I come in?" asks Angela.

"You already have," points out Temperance. "But I have time if you want to talk."

"Great." Angelea sits down on the edge of the bed, smoothing her leggings out underneath her hands. "I wanted to ask if you were alright. Things got pretty shaky after last night's party."

"You mean because you almost tried to drive us home while inebriated?"

"No. I mean, yeah, that was pretty bad, and thank you for stepping in and helping out. But no, I'm talking about your conversation with Avalon."

"She was the one who was being racist, not me."

Cher clacks his beak and hops up and down on Angela's shoulder. Sure, Avalon had a less-than-stellar track record when it came to her personal beliefs, but that was *not* the point she was trying to make. "I meant the way you talked to her. You got so defensive once she mentioned your daemon."

"Daemon form symbolism is more of a cultural phenomenon than a biological one. I have every right to correct her when she's wrong."

"But cultural phenomena are *your* thing! Why do you hate talking about it so much?" Angela takes a deep breath, choosing her words carefully. "I want to help, Tempe. But I can't help if I don't know what I'm helping you *with*. Why are you so anti-form symbolism? And anti-psychology? Are you-" Angela starts to rattle off questions she had been holding in for months, but a mindful peck on the cheek from her canary daemon reminds her to practice restraint.

Temperance doesn't answer right away. She scoops Auster into her hands and cradles him against her. When she starts to speak, she talks haltingly. "After my parents disappeared, I got sent to my school's counselor. Auster settled around that time. I don't know when, exactly. It was-- It was a tumultuous period in my life. I wasn't paying attention. It didn't feel important, at the time. But it was to the counselor. She wrote me off because of Auster's form. I was-- I was going through so much, mentally and emotionally, and she brushed it off. She told me that people with insect daemons were hard to understand, from a clinical perspective, because they didn't *feel* as deeply as everyone else did. She said that I had autism, because all insect people have broken brains."

Silence. Angela's heart aches with a physical pain. What the hell could she possibly say in response to *that*? Thank her for sharing her sob story? Protest and pretend that she's not weird, and that her counselor was just lying? "Oh, honey." She crawls to the floor and sits next to Temperance. "Can I give you a hug?"

“No,” sniffs Temperance.

Angela digs her hands into her legs, wishing there was some way to comfort her friend and make her feel better. “I’m sorry you had to go through that. That counselor didn’t know what she was saying.”

“I never paid attention to daemon forms after that,” admits Temperance. She strokes the edges of her purple butterfly’s wings with a gentle finger. “Or psychology. Because if form symbolism and psychology enable people to be as heartless as that, then I wanted nothing to do with either of them.”

“Of course you didn’t. But look, Lance is okay, isn’t he? And his study isn’t bad.”

“Lance is one psychologist, among thousands.”

“So was your counselor.”

Temperance doesn’t say anything. Auster droops into her hands, dull and listless.

Angela shews her lip. “Look. Maybe she was right about one thing. I think you might really have autism. Not because you’re a butterfly, but because you have sensory issues, and trouble socializing, and you seem, well, different.”

Temperance looks down at the shirt she had been folding, which she had crumpled up into a ball. “Labels are powerful. They can be weapons,” she murmurs.

“They can be *tools*,” says Angela. “Now that we know what we’re working with, we can make you feel better. I won’t force you to go to anymore loud parties that make you feel uncomfortable. Or you can ask if you can’t tell if I or anyone else is joking, and I’ll tell you.” She starts to reach for Temperance’s hand, but remembers her aversion to touch and pulls herself back at the last moment. “Just because someone made the word dirty doesn’t mean it can’t still be useful in a different context.”

“You really think this will help?”

“It probably won’t magically transform psychology and form symbolism into topics that don’t make you want to squirm, but with some elbow grease, it can help in other ways. And maybe it’ll help with those, too, in time.”

“Thanks, Ange.” Temperance sets Auster down and looks back up at Angela. “I’d like that hug now, if you’re still offering.”

Angela hugs her roommate -- her *friend* -- and strokes the back of her head. “For you, it’s always an option.”

## Chapter End Notes

I love Avalon, I love that she's so ridiculous and I love how much everyone hates her because she believes in astrology! it's so funny to me!

Avalon's daemon is a peacock butterfly, which I picked a) to annoy Temperance, and b) butterflies are literally a symbol of clairvoyance. Also, the eyespots on peacock butterflies seem fitting for a psychic that claims to talk to the dead.

# Chapter 5

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

To say that winter break was a low way to start Seeley's year was an understatement. He doesn't want to think about it. Thankfully, football season starts early, so he could get out of the house and back to school - the one place he could actually feel like himself - as soon as possible.

He and his little brother Jared has driven back up to school that morning. His brother was still in high school, but he was the only one out of the two of them who had car (he adopted Seeley's after he went to college) so he had to help him drop his stuff off at the end of breaks. Seeley and Jared had just finished moving all of his stuff back into his room (Sweets isn't back yet, thank god, so he had the room to himself for the next two and a half weeks) and are heading out to lunch he knocks into someone on the sidewalk. Ailbheann woofs softly, and he doesn't think much of it until he turns around, and --

"Temperance?"

The regular from the coffee shop stares back at him, suitcase in hand and her butterfly resting on top of her gloved knuckles. Her hair is mussed up, like she just woke up.

(Or, seeing the ticket clasped in her hand, like she just got off of a plane.)

"Seeley," she says, straightening up and smoothing out her jacket. "What are you doing back here?"

"Football. What about you?"

"I have a J-Term class," says Temperance. "It's a creative writing course." She looks behind Seeley, squinting. "Who's this?" She looks back and forth between Jared and himself.

"Judging by the similarities in your jawline and nose, I'm assuming he's your brother?"

Seeley resists the urge to shudder. It's creepy when she just *says* things like that. He nods to his brother, still half hidden behind him. "Yeah, this is Jared. He was just helping me drop my stuff off. We're on our way to lunch, actually."

Jared nods in greeting. "Hey." His daemon steps forward; when she realizes that Temperance's daemon is too small and too high up to touch noses with, her wagging tail stills and she steps back again.

Temperance smiles. "Jared. It's nice to see that it runs in the family." She motions down at his coyote daemon, who looks like a smaller and scrawnier version of Seeley's Ailbheann.

(Coyotes are known for their playfulness and whimsicality. Notorious tricksters. But they're also wise teachers, and they possess the courage and loyalty of any daemon in the canine

family. Seeley couldn't think of a form that would fit his little brother better.)

"Believe it or not, you're not the first person to point that out," grunts Seeley. Jared grunts and crosses his arms. Seeley knows that gets on his nerves that everyone thinks he's just copying his older brother. He ignores him. "Are you doing anything right now? Do you want to go out to lunch with us?"

"I need to put my luggage away, but if you're willing to make a detour with me, then sure."

"Sounds good with me," says Seeley, and his daemon knocks into his brother's before he can say anything.

Thankfully, it turns out that she doesn't live that far away, and it only takes a few minutes to get to her dorm building. Seeley and Jared help her take her stuff up the stairs (there's no elevator, Temperance explains) and into her room. One half is littered with stacks of paper covered with drawings, and miniature figures that look like shapeless lumps of raw clay, hardened and pale after being left out in the dry air for so long. There are photos plastered all over that half of the room of an assortment of people, all of them smiling like they're having the time of their lives.

The other half of the room is almost painfully plain. Even the bedsheets don't have any patterns on them. It strikes Seeley as the room of someone who expects to drop everything and leave at any moment. Even *his* room isn't this bare bones.

Temperance lugs her stuff over to bare-bones side of the room and drops her suitcase on the rug next to her bed. "Alright, let's eat! I can unpack later."

Seeley shakes his head. He'll worry about how uncharacteristic this is for a butterfly -- or anyone, for that matter -- later. "There's a chinese place down the street," he offers.

"I thought we were going to get mediterranean," says Jared, and his daemon wines.

"Yeah, well, now the chinese place is closer, and it's cheaper. Let's go." He shoves his little brother and pushes him out the door. Temperance follows, pausing only to lock her door behind her.

"Sorry about him," Seeley says as they make their way down the staircase, Jared jumping down the stairs ahead of them. "He enjoys being, you know, combative."

"A little sibling rivalry is perfectly health," says Temperance. "My brother and I used to fight all the time."

"You have a brother?" asks Seeley. For all of their casual talk at the cafe, they rarely talked about anything personal. This was the first he'd heard anything about their family.

"I used to."

"I'm sorry," says Seeley in a low voice, when it becomes clear that Temperance isn't going to offer anything else. They reach the bottom of the stairwell, he pushes open the door and

enters the entrance hall where Jared is waiting, his coyote daemon lounging on her side and yawning.

“You took your time. What, were you making out in there?”

“Jared,” warns Seeley. Ailbheann growls.

Jared rolls his eyes and turns away. “Whatever. Let’s go get lunch.”

The chinese place is quiet; it’s late for lunch, but too early for dinner; most of the college kids that make up the bulk of the restaurant’s customers aren’t back in town yet anyways. The three of them make their way over to an empty table (plenty of room in the aisle for Seeley and Jared’s daemons to recline without getting in the way). They sit in relative silence until the waiter comes to take their orders. Some song by Foreigner blasts on the tinny speakers; it seems out of place and a little tacky considering the restaurant’s vibe, but the song is a good one so Seeley doesn’t question it too much.

“How was your break?” asks Seeley after the waiter takes their menus and they’re left to their own devices once again.

“Angela is a good host. She took me to a party for the first time, and was very considerate. That said, I’m very glad to be back at school.”

“Whoa, whoa, slow down,” says Jared, leaning forward towards her across the table. “You’ve never been to a party before?”

Temperance frowns. “I just told you that I went to one last week.”

“But before that?” Jared snorts. “Who’s never been to a party before? You’re in college! And your school is a *total* party school.”

“*Jared*,” warns Seeley again, resting his hands on the table.

Temperance waves him down. “I know that my school has plenty of opportunities to party. Angela invites me out almost every weekend. But I have a very full course load and prefer to stay in on weekend nights.”

Jared gives his older brother a sideways look. Under the table, his coyote daemon nudges Seeley’s wolf. “You’re really friends with this nerd?” she hisses.

Ailbheann snaps her teeth at the coyote’s ear. She doesn’t say anything; what could they say? They’re not really friends, per se, unless making small talk every day at the cafe constitutes a friendship. But to say that would say they don’t condone her actions -- it’s not like he’s out partying all the time either, since he has to juggle between academics, being on the sports team, and work.

“What classes are you taking this semester, Temperance?” Seeley asks, trying to guide the conversation to more neutral ground.

“Nothing you’d find exciting, I’m sure. A few chemistry courses, an advanced anthropology seminar about the Palestine conflict, one about form anthropology, an anthropology independent study, and a creative writing course. I wanted to take more, but my counselor shot down my request for a higher credit overload.”

“Whoa! Are you majoring in anthropology?” Jared asks, leaning forward. His eyes glitter with interest.

“And forensic science, with a possible creative writing minor, yes.”

“And you get to learn about form symbolism?”

Temperance sighs. “It’s a required class for the major, yes.”

“That’s so cool! So can you tell me what my daemon’s form means?”

“The class hasn’t started yet,” says Temperance. “But it doesn’t matter. Settled forms are mostly based on biology and chance, and culture assigns a meaning retroactively.”

Seeley raises his eyebrows and places his hand on his daemon’s head. “Hey, now,” he says. “You can’t mean that.”

Temperance meets his gaze evenly. “It’s more nuanced than that, sure. How much the meanings we assign affect the way our brains subconsciously choose a form and guide towards settling is still up for debate, but it’s not untrue.”

“If that’s true, then how come I can read everyone I’ve ever met like a book?” growls Seeley, pressing down on Ailbheann’s head harder. He’s more shocked than angry, but he can’t help but snap at her brusque tone. “I could tell that Angela was an artist struggling to find herself from the moment she walked through that door. Sweets is annoying, stuck-up, conceited, and constantly pushes boundaries like a cat waiting to see if you notice it pushing something fragile plate off of the counter. Cam is sharp-eyed and fierce, but loyal. And you, you’re...” he fumbles, and trails off.

Jared snorts.

“You can’t write everyone off of your instinct, Seeley. That’s a poor way to judge someone’s character. Besides, I don’t think everyone would agree with your description of Lance. I find him charming and earnest, even if he’s wasting his brain on his obsession with psychology.”

Seeley glowers. “You can’t deny my gut! Our brains have evolved over millions of years to help us make snap decisions about people and situations, so we know who to trust.” Sweets had told him that one, in one of his excitable infodumps one night. Somehow, that one piece of information had actually stuck. Seeley’s grateful it had, though he’d die before he told Sweets that.

“Our brains make faulty conclusions all the time,” Temperance snips. She motions to Jared, who had been watching them with rapt attention, eyes flicking from person to person as they spoke like he was watching a tennis ball bouncing from one side of the court to the other.

“Jared, you think the fact that your daemon’s form is so similar to your brother’s means that you must be a lesser copy of him, worse at everything he does,” Temperance says. “But anthropologically speaking, there’s a lot of research suggesting that most families have similar kinds of daemons. They think it has to do with the values we were raised with, but it’s also genetic: twins separated at birth often have similar forms, in symbolism and meaning if not in shape.”

Jared’s daemon stands up and rests her head on the table, her amber eyes glittering. Jared looks thoughtful. “Gael has always been a coyote, even before we were settled. Pretty much ever since Seeley settled.”

Temperance nods. “Then you’re lucky. Very few of us settle the way we want to.”

“What did you want to settle as when you were a kid?”

“Before I learned that form meanings are virtually meaningless? A pig.”

Jared laughs, and Seeley is so caught off guard that he blubbers in shock. “You *what* ?”

“They’re very smart!” Temperance adds, like Seeley hadn’t say anything. “Pigs can solve all kinds of tests. Quite intelligent creatures. They’re quite adept at digging for the answers and never stopping until they get what they want. And I can’t deny the fact that they were so seen as so repulsive and forbidden wasn’t alluring.”

“Were any of your family members pigs?” asks Jared’s daemon, leaning into the conversation, wagging her tail so hard she was in danger of touching the people in the booth across from them.

“No. My parents were a dolphin and a killdeer, and my brother was a wolf spider.”

“They must have been glad you didn’t settle as something so big, then, after the dolphin.”

“No.” Temperance stills. “They weren’t around when I settled.”

An awkward silence settles around the table for a few moments, but then their waiter chooses that moment to bring them their lunches. As they dig into the steaming hot food, Seeley guides the conversation away from stormy waters into safer, less weighted topics.

As he talks, his mind whirls. He shares a meaningful look with Ailbheann, who raises her furry eyebrows.

Very few people settle as anything close to what they want to settle as - even Jared’s exaggerating, Seeley remembers a large period of time where his daemon refused to be any kind of canine at all after Ailbheann had settled. But he can’t imagine what kind of person, who felt drawn to the pig’s forbidden nature, would settle as something as traditionally beautiful as a *butterfly*.

But maybe all of these contradictory messages made sense. Insects were hard to read, and butterflies can be enigmatic. But still. A *pig* ? Seeley shakes his head.



The rest of the lunch passes uneventfully. By the time they get out, the cloud-colored sky is that color that says it's not dark *yet* but it'll be starting to get there soon. A dusting of snow covers the ground, and more big, fat snowflakes drift in the air around them. Ailbheann and Gael, as furry, large animals, aren't bothered by the cold, and as Jared's coyote daemon wags her tail and leaps at Ailbheann, she leaps away before pouncing right back. Auster, on the other hand, creeps underneath Temperance's hair and huddles there. If insects could shiver, he's doing so.

"Come on, let's get out of the snow as quickly as possible," says Seeley. When his brother starts to protest, he grabs him by the elbow and drags him forward. "Now." Ailbheann stops frolicking and nips at Gael's ear, emphasizing his point.

Temperance doesn't say anything, just follows quietly behind them as they walk back towards Seeley's dorm.

When they get there, Seeley says the quickest goodbye he ever has to his brother and practically pushes him out of the lobby. He glares through the window while his coyote daemon bounces his eyebrows up and down meaningfully. Seeley scowls at him before turning back to Temperance, who had followed him inside. She didn't live here, and he didn't invite her, but he's not sad that she stayed. "Do you have anywhere to be?"

Temperance shakes her head. "Classes don't start until tomorrow, and I finished all of my reading for the first week of classes already."

For once, Seeley didn't have anything to do either. He didn't have any work to do before practice started again, and he didn't start his shifts again at the cafe until tomorrow night. "Do you want to come in?"

"I already am."

Seeley raises his eyebrows. "I mean come up to my room."

Temperance tilts her head to the side, considering his offer, then nods. "Yes, I would."

"Great. The elevator's over here."

"Elevator?" Temperance sounds surprised. "I would assume an athlete like you would rather take the stairs."

"Yeah, well, I like to give myself a reward for being so great every now and then."

In the elevator, Brennan fishes her purple butterfly daemon out from under her hair. He rests on her finger and shakes his wings rigorously. By the time they make it up to Seeley's floor, he's perked up a lot and looks a lot more like his normal self.

(In the back of his mind, Seeley's surprised that he knows them well enough to tell when an *insect* looks off. But Temperance is a regular customer, and he has a gift for reading people, so maybe it shouldn't come as such a surprise.)

“This one’s mine.” Seeley stops in front of a door that’s entirely plain, except his and Sweets’ names written on paper cut out to look like Pac-man and the blue Pac-man ghost. He pushes open the door and steps inside. He makes a face when he sees that Sweets’ side of the room is still a mess; the technicolor sheets are piled on top of his bed in a lump, and his desk is covered with stacks of paper so high it’s a miracle they don’t fall over at the slightest touch. The desk’s so cluttered that the guy actually uses his bed to do his homework. Seeley’s gotten into arguments with him about how that’s messing up his sleep patterns, but it’s never gotten anywhere. Seeley’s own side of the room is barren in comparison. It helps that he barely spends any time in here, except to sleep.

Temperance’s gaze passes over both halves of the room, her gaze focused. What is she looking for? It’s not like she hasn’t been in here before, when helping Sweets out with his dumb study. “It’s much quieter in here without Lance,” she says at last.

Seeley feels like his shoes echo throughout the room as he pads forward. “He’s not exactly a quiet guy. Do you want to watch a movie? We’d have to go back downstairs to the common room to use the TV, but I brought a good collection of DVDs from home.”

He motions to the shelves next to his bed, and Temperance squats down to look at the titles. Auster leaves his usual spot on her shoulder to get a closer look. “Are these rom coms?”

“What? Oh, those.” Seeley scoffs and waves his hand in a dismissive manner. At his side, his wolf daemon snorts. “I don’t normally watch them. But now that you mention it, maybe they might be fun. You know, for you.”

Auster shakes his entire body in what Seeley can only assume is indignation. Temperance twists around to look at him. “I normally watch documentaries when I want to watch something fun. Do you think they’re fun? You have a whole DVD collection right there.”

At his side, Ailbheann shuffles her paws and starts to pant. Seeley frowns. “Those are Sweets’.”

“They’re on your half of the room.”

“Yeah, you know, he was cleaning his half of the room and things got a little everywhere, and he hasn’t finished putting everything back yet... Oh, look, this one looks good! Let’s go downstairs and watch it in the common room. Go on! Go, go, go.” Seeley pulls a DVD out at random and pushes Temperance back out of the room as politely (but firmly) as he can.

The dorm TV room is cozy, with lots of plush couches, pillows, and low mood lighting. Normally Seeley and Ailbheann like to stretch out and take up an entire couch to themselves, but by the time Seeley gets the DVD into the receiver, starts the movie, and turns to go back to his seat, Temperance is sitting right next to his usual spot and Ailbheann is already sprawled completely over the other couch, taking up all of the space. When Seeley glares at her, she snuffs at him and covers her eyes with her paw.

So Seeley takes a seat next to Temperance, whose own daemon is resting politely on top of her head, and tries to relax and watch the movie. It’s a cheesy romcom, and normally Seeley

relaxes and loses himself in the mindless chatter of it, but tonight he keeps finding himself glancing at Temperance to gauge her reactions.

Eventually Temperance catches him doing it and rolls her eyes. “If you wanted to know what I thought, you could have just asked me.”

Seeley bites back a sharp retort and instead asks, “Well? What do you think?”

“It’s silly and nonsensical, and the plot makes no sense. Why is the woman putting up with this man’s advances when she’s clearly much higher on the social totem pole than him? Realistically, it makes no sense.” Temperance takes a deep breath. “I can see why you like them.”

To their side, Ailbheann picks up her head and swivels to look at Temperance. She doesn’t growl, but she curls her lip, her sharp fangs glinting in the dark light. Seeley fights to keep his agitation from bleeding into his words too much. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Temperance tilts her head again and Auster flaps his wings, and Seeley gets the distinct impression that Temperance thinks he just asked the stupidest, most obvious question known to mankind. “You work very hard, as a full-time student, a valued member of the football team, and as a barista. All of that drains a person of their physical and emotional energy. And watching a silly, nonsensical film like this, is enjoyable without being taxing. It’s the perfect film to relax to.”

Oh. That was actually kind of sweet. He thinks. Ailbheann stops her silent snarl and instead turns her attention back to the movie, her tail tip twitching, almost cat-like.

“Thanks,” Seeley says, shifting his weight on the couch and looking back up at the tv. He lets himself sink back into the rhythm of watching the movie dance across the screen. (Literally -- there’s a random musical number about halfway through, for no disconcertable reason.) Temperance is right about one thing: watching romcoms are mindless and fun. God knows he needs some stress relief after his winter break, cooped up in the house with his father.

Someone makes a corny joke and Seeley bites back a laugh. When the two love interests confess their undying love for each other, Ailbheann woofs in excitement and wags her tail. When they get into a fight, she lets out a low, keening howl. And at the end, when the loving couple reconcile and kiss, she hops off of the couch and leaps in a circle. Seeley claps his hands and lets out a cheer.

As the high of the movie wears off, he notices Temperance watching him intently. Suddenly, getting invested in the movie feels a lot less fun and a lot more frivolous. He ignores the heat in his face as he stares back at her without blinking. “What?”

“I’ve just never seen you happy before.” Temperance shrugs.

“Hey! I’ve been happy before,” Seeley protests.

“But you never show it. You’re usually quite stoic.”

Seeley glances at Ailbheann, who flicks her ear at him in a way that says she won't defend himself against Temperance. "Well, I'm a man, and so I have to be stoic. But when I feel comfortable, I allow myself to be a bit more, you know... open."

"So being around me makes you comfortable."

"No! No, no. I mean, yes. You don't make me *un* comfortable. But in this case, it was the movie. Not you." Ailbheann snorts, and he glares at her. So much for being his other half and actually helping him out when he needs.

Whatever Temperance makes of that, she backs down and doesn't push the issue farther. They make small talk for a little while longer, until she insists that she has to get home so she can wake up for her class early tomorrow morning. Seeley walks her to the front lobby entrance and watches her leave until her form is obscured by the snow still falling thickly down all around.

Ailbheann bumps into him, and he presses his hand down into her thick fur. She woofs softly and wags her tail, eyes sparkling.

He'd never admit it to Temperance's face, but he feels a lightness that's way more intense and lasts for a lot longer than when he normally watches a romcom. And it's not just from the relief of being back at school.

## Chapter End Notes

This went from being the shortest chapter until I had the idea to add the romcom scene, and now I think it's the longest. Whoops! But Seeley spends most of this fic being very, well, serious, and I wanted a reminder of his more lighthearted, goofy side. Also, shoutout to Brennan and her love of pigs! I actually considered naming her daemon Jasper, since she mentions in one of the early seasons that as a kid she wanted a pet pig named Jasper. Obviously I didn't go with that in the end, so we can say that even in this AU, after her daemon settled as a butterfly she still wanted to have a pet pig named Jasper. :')

# Chapter 6

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Winter break always feels like a scam to Jack. Especially since this year Chanukkah is over before finals ended, so he doesn't even get to spend the one holiday of the year that gentiles give a damn about (not that it's even a major holiday) with his family. But it's whatever. He's over it.

Jack and his parents still spend Christmas morning with Jeffrey at Sandlewood Home before getting Chinese takeout for dinner. It's a cheesy tradition, but it's theirs. Besides new years, which he celebrates with some of his friends that are in town for their own winter break, he spends the rest of his break hanging out in the library or walking in the woods and trying to identify all of the species of plants and insects he can find. Anything just to get out of the house.

But that doesn't matter now, because school is back in session and he's back at university where he belongs. Thank God.

Jack saunters into the cafe, his scruffy dog daemon trotting along at his heels, tongue lolling and tail wagging a mile a minute. He strolls up to the counter -- Seeley's the barista, to no one's surprise; does he live here, or something? -- and examines the menu.

Seeley taps his fingers on the counter. "Come on, man, you get the same thing every time."

"Wow! Is that a touch of rudeness I hear?" Jack says, eyes growing wide with mock surprise. "Careful, Seeley, I could call up your manager and give you a bad review."

"That'd be hard, seeing as I'm the manager now," says Seeley. "I'll get you your mocha latte."

"Manager? Wow, congratulations." Jack digs his wallet out of his pocket and pushes his money over the counter towards Seeley's wolf daemon, who counts it and gives him his change - slightly slobbery now, but he's used to it from living with his own dog daemon, and it hardly fazes him.

Seeley hands him his drink, and with a nod, he makes his way over the back, to Temperance's usual spot. As usual, she's sitting with her textbook out in front of her, though this time Lance is there as well, quizzing her about something. As Jack gets closer he realizes that they're discussing Lance's study.

"...The entire break over at Angela's house? Oh, wow, that'll give us some excellent data for this study, Temperance, that's awesome."

"Not the whole break. Like I said, I left early to comeback for J-Term. But I did stay for christmas and new years, yes."

Lance scrawls something on his notebook. “That’s amazing. I can’t wait to break that down with the two of you. When is she getting here? We should really do individual sessions and a double session with the two of you to take notes--”

“Hey, losers,” announces Jack, swinging his bag onto the ground and shoving Lance over so he can sit down.

“Jack!” greets Lance, and his orange cat daemon purrs and bats at Jack’s dog daemon amiably. “How are you? Temperance and I were just talking about my study. Speaking of which, where’s Zack? You two both need to check in soon.”

“I’ll text him to come over, but he won’t be here for a while,” says Jack, digging out his phone. “He said something about meeting someone after class when he was running out the door this morning.”

“On the first day of classes?” asks Angela. “Good for him. He needs more friends.”

*I could say the same about you,* thinks Jack, and his daemon sneezes in agreement.

The door jingles, and Jack looks over at the door. He spots Angela walking in, her canary daemon perching on her shoulder, wearing a cute little scarf that matches the color of her jacket.

Angela prances over to the table. “Hey guys,” she says, putting her bag down. “Let me go get a coffee, and then I’m ready to talk about whatever you want. Okay, Lance?”

“Sure,” says Lance, sitting up straight. “Go help yourself. Whenever you’re ready.”

“Oh, no no no no. Nope.” Seeley hops over the counter and stalks over to the table. His wolf daemon prowls behind him, hackles raised and eyes glinting. At his side, Jack’s daemon spreads her legs and bares her teeth. None of the others seem to notice either Jack or Seeley’s aggression.

Seeley stands at the front of the table and crosses his arms. “This is not allowed, alright? This--” he waves his arms around the table, “This is a Seeley Only Zone, capish? This is not a nerd zone. This is not going to become your ‘place’, because I already staked it out. it’s my place. Get it?”

“Temperance comes here all the time,” says Angela.

“Yeah, well, Temperance sits in the back and quietly does her work and doesn’t disrupt the other customers.” Seeley glares at Lance.

“We’re paying customers, Seeley,” says Temperance in a firm voice. “You can’t kick us out just because you don’t like us. Lance, if you’re going to order off menu make sure to decide what you want ahead of time, alright? Seeley can kick you out if you’re going to take ten minutes to order and hold up the line.” She looks up at Seeley, and Jack has a hard time reading non-mammals like Temperance’s purple butterfly, but he swears he can see him puffing his chest out. “Satisfied?”

Seeley glowers one last time. "Fine. But I just want it known that I do not approve of *this* -" he waves his arms again, "At all. I am not affiliated with you."

"No one said you were, buddy," says Jack.

"Is this because Lance is your roommate?" says Angela, sounding exasperated. "Cut him some slack. I know you don't like him but that doesn't mean you can be rude to him."

"I'm not being rude, I'm being honest," snaps Seeley.

"There's a fine line between the two," says Temperance.

(She's one to talk. Jack covers up his laugh as a cough.)

Seeley waves his hands in the air (not motioning to anything this time, he's just exasperated). "Whatever. Just don't start expecting free drinks or anything like that, alright?" He turns around and whisks back towards his station; his wolf daemon growls before padding after him.

Khaika blows a raspberry in her direction.

"Well, that was... something," says Angela, after the moment passes. "I think I'm going to skip talking to moody boy and pass on the coffee for today." She scooches into the booth next to Temperance and interlocks her fingers on top of the counter. "Okay, Lance, hit me with your best shot. I'm ready."

The four of them work together for the next few hours. Lance peppers Angela and Temperance with questions for a bit, but when it becomes clear that Temperance is starting to get irritated by the barrage of words coming out of Lance's mouth, Angela suggests they take a break for the day. They spend the rest of their time working on their class work together; Jack has more reading than he knows what to do with, and he has to get started early if wants to stay on top of things. Thankfully he managed to rent the textbooks on reserve in the library and photocopy and print them all, so he didn't have to fork over three hundred dollars each.

After the sky starts to grow dark, everyone start to gather up their stuff and, one by one, say their goodbyes and head back to their places. Temperance had a meeting with a professor; Lance had a club. Soon it was just Angela and Jack, alone.

They make light conversations for a bit -- Jack cracks some jokes, which he's glad to see make Angela's face light up in the biggest laugh he's ever seen -- but finally Angela says, "Well, I should probably get going." She gets up and starts to put her layers back on. She has a lot of layers - it must be because she's from the steamy land of Texas - and for once, Jack is thankful because it gives him the time he needs to steal himself.

"Seize the opportunity," murmurs Jack's daemon under her breath.

She's right. This is the real reason he had spent all afternoon hanging out in the cafe with the others. Not that they're not nice and he doesn't enjoy their company and an excuse to get out

of the house, but. He swallows and clears his throat before speaking. “Hey, Ange, are you free tonight?”

Angela hesitates like she’s running through her mental calendar before saying, “Yeah, why?”

“I was wondering if you wanted to get dinner with me later,” says Jack, dialing his charm up to eleven.

“Oh. Um, sure,” says Angela.

“Great!” Jack beams, and underneath the table, his dog daemon starts to wag her tail. “I’ll meet you outside your dorm at, say, six?”

“Sure,” says Angela. “I’ll see you then.”

When Angela bursts into her room late that night, Temperance is still up in her bed reading. She doesn’t look up when Angela enters, but her butterfly flutters in that way Angela’s learned means they’re paying attention, and either way she only half cares. She just needs to *talk*.

“Ohmygod, Temperance, you would not *believe* the date I just had. Jack took me out for dinner, and it was a nice restaurant -- better food than I’ve had in ages -- and it was a lovely night, really, and he insisted he would pay, which I didn’t think anything of, and then he went to the bathroom his phone rang and do you know who was calling?”

Temperance puts her book down and looks at Angela, standing in the middle of the room, hair mussed from running up the stairs. “Slow down, Ange. What happened?”

Angela takes a deep breath. Cher nuzzles her cheek affectionately, then chirps. “The name just said *Cantilever*. You know, like the billion-dollar company?”

“It could just be a junk call, Ange. Or a nickname for one of his friends.”

“That’s what I thought too,” says Angela, and she sits down on the edge of her bed, still wearing her jacket and holding onto her bag. “But when he came back and saw that he had a missed call, he stepped out to take it -- on a *date* -- and before he got out of earshot I heard him talking to someone like he knew them very well. Very well,” she repeats for emphasis.

Temperance raises her eyebrows. “So it’s a good friend with a silly contact name,” she says. “Maybe it’s a sugar daddy.”

“What? Ew, gross. It’s definitely not that.” Angela makes a face and her canary daemon ruffles his feathers. “Besides, he took me to his place afterwards -- don’t look at me like that, we didn’t do anything worth writing home about -- and his apartment is *massive*. Like, grand suite massive.”

“Like he’s got stock in a billion-dollar-company massive?” asks Temperance.



“Like he *owns* a billion-dollar-company massive,” says Angela.

“Ange, did you actually ask him about any of this?”

“No,” she sighs. “I chickened out. It would make things weird. Besides, I’m a good spy, and very persuasive. I can weasel the truth out of him eventually.”

“You’re jumping to conclusions, Ange. And you know how I feel about that.” Temperance pauses, and Angela realizes that her daemon is speaking, though so quietly she has to sit up to hear him properly.

“It would explain why his daemon’s a tibetan terrier.”

Angela stares. “What?”

Temperance shrugs. “They’re an old, rare breed of dog with a long, rich lineage. I did think it was weird that his daemon was that breed specifically, but I didn’t think much of it.”

“Hang on, you *knew* he was rich and you didn’t tell me?”

“I didn’t say that!” Temperance snips. “I only observed out loud that his daemon is an interesting breed of dog.”

Angela sighs and rubs her temple. She loves Temperance but sometimes she can give her a headache. “I thought you didn’t believe in form symbolism. You told me it was a bunch of mumbo-jumbo, remember?”

“People put too much stock into worrying about what different forms mean, when scientific research says that results are semi-random at best, and based on genetics and culture more than personality.” snaps Temperance. “But that doesn’t mean that isn’t important, anthropologically speaking! I found a page about dog breeds when I was looking through the textbook earlier today, and I saw that one of them looked an awful lot like Khaika. I read the caption.”

Angela groans. “I think Seeley is rubbing off on you.”

Temperance scowls, and Auster flutters back onto her shoulder, sulking. “He is not!”

It’s a quiet day in the coffee shop. Seeley knows that Sweets and his friends were supposed to get together earlier today to touch base about their project, but none of them ever came by the cafe. *Guess they must of found somewhere else to be.*

Of course it had to happen on the one day he could have really appreciated a distraction.

Seeley spends the some time tidying up the store and pretends it isn’t because he needs something to do so he stops looking up at the door every thirty seconds. His daemon lies on the ground, head on her paws, watching quietly.

Movement catches his eye and Seeley jerks his head up in time to see Temperance entering the cafe. Ailbheann rises to her paws, tail wagging, and Seeley takes a deep breath to calm down his sudden racing heart.

“Fancy seeing you here. I thought you had all decided to find some other, crappier place to hang out when you didn’t show up earlier today.”

Temperance shrugs and her butterfly daemon flutters around her head. “Lance thought it was best to give you some personal space for a while. He knows that you don’t like him very much. But you said that I could stay, and I like how quiet it is here, so I came back.”

“I don’t *hate* my roommate,” protests Seeley.

“I never said you did.” Temperance slides her bag off of her shoulder and starts to open up the front pocket for her wallet. “I’ll take my tea.”

Normally Temperance stays to talk longer. Seeley shares a look with this daemon, wondering if she was mad at him about his outburst, but no, she isn’t the kind to get passive-aggressive. From what he’s heard from his roommate’s excited ramblings at night, Temperance doesn’t understand how to be anything but glaringly blunt at all times. Which makes her a fascinating contrast to the subtle artistry of Angela, and blah, blah, blah, to be honest that’s usually when Seeley stops listening. “Coming right up,” he says. “But don’t worry about paying.”

“Oh?”

“Yep. If you buy 50 drinks, the next one is free,” grunts Seeley, grabbing a cup and pouring hot water into it.

“And you’ve been keeping count.”

“Don’t worry about it. Here’s your drink.”

Temperance takes her drink without comment and migrates over to her usual spot in the back. Seeley tries not to look like he’s too invested in what he’s doing, but Ailbheann sneaks glances every now and then in between cleaning and serving customers.

Eventually it’s time to close down the shop, and Seeley hangs up his apron and hops over the counter. “Hey, Temperance?”

She’s the only person left in the cafe besides himself. She looks up from her notebook and seems to realize for the first time how late it is. “Are you closing up?”

“Afraid so.”

Temperance puts her stuff away. Seeley leans against the counter, waiting for her, Ailbheann prowling back and forth at his feet. “Stop looking so antsy,” he hisses.

“Stop *being* so antsy,” she snaps back, fur bristling.

Temperance throws her bag over her shoulder and glances at Seeley's wolf daemon. "Is everything alright?"

"Yeah, no, I'm fine. It's nothing." Seeley tries to wave her off.

Temperance doesn't question it. "If you say so. The two of them walk towards the front of the store.

At the door, hands on the handle, Seeley sighs and turns turns towards her. "Camille broke up with me."

Temperance doesn't say anything at first. Seeley doesn't look at her, but through Ailbheann he can sense her daemon flapping his wings in an agitated manner. "I'm sorry to hear that," she says at last. "You two seemed happy together."

"We were," he admits. "But she's very opinionated, and you know how these things go."

"Not really."

Seeley looks at her in surprise. "What? Have you never--?"

Temperance scoffs. "Dated somebody? Of course I have. But I've never been in one as serious as yours. Cam told me that you were coming up on your two year anniversary."

When had she-- oh, right. Ever since her disaster of a project with Zack, Cam's taken to mothering the poor kid like he can't do anything on his own (which he can't, and by the sound of it, his roommate hasn't been any help at all). She must have run into Temperance while she was with Zack at some point.

Ailbheann blinks and twitches her ears, and Seeley realizes that Auster had fluttered down from Temperance's head to land on her forehead, wings flapping slowly.

"Yeah, well" Seeley sighs again. "She's a hawk and I'm a wolf. We were both too hard-headed and stubborn to give way. I should have known this would never work out."

"Seeley," for a moment he thinks she's going to offer condolences. Then her voice hardens. "You shouldn't stereotype like that. With that attitude, your relationship was over before it even began."

He's taken aback by the ferocity in her voice. On top of his daemon's head, he can feel her purple butterfly shaking with force. "It's true, though. When was the last time you saw a lasting couple between two apex predators, huh? They don't work out. Believe me, I should know. Both of my parents were."

Temperance scowls. "Correlation doesn't equal causation. For all I know, your parents would have been incompatible regardless of form. People need to stop forcing so much meaning into their forms! Don't let that decide who they are and how everything will work out. Let us be defined by our actions, not by our appearances."

Seeley stares. Ailbheann freezes. Temperance is clearly worked up about this, nostrils flaring, body tense, glaring at Seeley in defiance. “Who are you, Temperance?” he murmurs.

“What does that have to do with the conversation at hand?”

“I mean, how did you become you? Why are you a butterfly of all things, when you have the soul of a fighter?”

Temperance scowls. “You’re doing it again, Seeley.” She reaches for the door.

“No, wait.” Seeley leans against the door, keeping her from exiting. “Tell me. Please.” His grip tightens on her arm. “I won’t let you go until you do.”

Temperance raises her eyebrows, but though she still tense with anger, she doesn’t seem scared or upset. “An employee preventing his customer from leaving? That’s not legal.”

“I’m not asking as your server,” Seeley says. “I’m asking as a friend.”

Friend. It was the first time that any of them had said that word. Because despite the countless times they’ve seen each other, and the one awkward time they went out to lunch, most of their interactions were confined to sterile, meaningless back and forth. But it was true. Seeley thought a lot about Temperance when she wasn’t around and had no ill-will toward her. He wanted her to succeed... and he wanted to be there to watch her do it.

Temperance scowls, but then she softens. Her purple butterfly daemon flutters back up towards her and she cups him in her hands. “He’s a purple emperor butterfly,” she says.

That doesn’t mean anything to him. “And?”

“And... they eat carrion.”

*Oh*. Of course. Everything clicks into place. The forensic science, the way she sticks out like a sore thumb, her inner ferocity, it all makes sense. Seeley laughs. “Of course they do.”

Temperance glares. “What? What’s so funny?”

“Nothing,” chuckles Seeley. “Except for how well that explains, well, everything.”

He straightens up and removes his grip on her arm, moving it to rest his hand on her shoulder, giving it a friendly squeeze. “You are one special woman, Temperance Brennan. I hope you know that.”

“Of course I am. I am exceptionally smart and very good at what I do.” She smiles, like she recognizes the compliment even if she won’t openly acknowledge it. “What about you?”

“What?”

Temperance motions to Ailbheann with a nod of her head. “Why are you a wolf?”

Seeley hesitates. At his side, Ailbheann rumbles, so low he can feel it more than hear it. “You know, that’s not really important.”

“If my form is so important to you, then logically your own form should be just as important.”

She’s got a point. He can’t deny her asking; it’s only fair, after all. He braces himself and prepares for the worst. “Wolves are soldiers,” he says at last. “They’re good at taking orders. They’re persistence hunters, and once they have their target, they won’t stop until they achieve their ambitions. They’re harbingers of death. Killers.”

There’s a tense silence where Seeley can’t bring himself to look Temperance in the eye. He waits with baited breath for Temperance to announce that she’s never coming back to this cafe ever again if that means she’s going to be served by someone who’s as good as a murderer.

“And?”

Seeley looks at her sharply. “What do you mean, ‘and?’”

Temperance scoffs and gives him that look she reserves for when she thinks someone’s being stupid. “Wolves are excellent parents. They’re loyal, they’re protective, they trust their own instincts. They’re symbols of wisdom and guardianship, and are revered as spiritually important in many cultures.”

Seeley stares. “How do you know all that?”

Temperance raises her eyebrows. “This is basic anthropology. I would have thought you of all people would know that you can’t pick and choose your form meaning. You have to embrace all of it, or none of it.” She brushes past him and opens up the door. “I’ll see you around, Seeley.” As the door swings shut behind her, she swings out into the street, sliding down the pavement over slush and ice.

Seeley watches her go before locking the door and letting himself out. “See you around.”

## Chapter End Notes

More fun daemon formology! I do feel a bit bad that this fic is filled with so many stereotypical charismatic predators, but I think they all fit rather well. I actually really love a wolf for Booth; all of their negative and positive stereotypes describe his wears-the-fact-that-he's-murdered-people-as-a-permanent-burden side and his protective, loving side to a T. (even if he isn't a soldier in this au, aha.) I also hope this chapter shines some more light on why I picked a butterfly for Brennan, as I know at first glance it feels a bit out of left field. :) Enjoy!

# Chapter 7

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

For a while, the seven of them had been largely separate, only loosely associated. There was Lance's study, sure, and Temperance, Jack, and Zack had regularly study sessions together, but they never really felt like one, cohesive whole. Not all at once, at least.

It happens gradually. Angela barges into the squint's study session one day, canary daemon fluttering around her head like a tiny yellow comet, and explains that she needs to stand in on their sessions so she can use them as models for her free-life drawing class. Jack agrees, because why not, but also because it means he gets to see Angela that much more often, and who wouldn't want that?

The first time she comes, he makes sure to have coffee ready for her. It's her favorite, after all, with lots and lots of caffeine.

But then Purim's coming up, and, what the hell, he might as well bake some seasonally appropriate foods while he's at it, right? So he stays up late the night before, melting butter and poppy seeds in pots and rolling out cookie dough pastry.

Zack wanders in at some point to get a snack, pulling his octopus daemon in her tank behind him. The water sloshes as he stops and drips over the edge. "What are you doing?" he asks. His daemon turns a bright red, which Jack has learned means she's curious and engaged.

"I'm making hamentashen," he tells him. "They're little triangle-shaped cookies with filling in the middle. They're for purim."

"Purim?" Zack leans in, crowding Jack's space. "Is that one of your holidays?"

"It's a Jewish holiday, yes," snaps Jack. "They represent the hats of the evil Hayman--" He pauses as his dog daemon woofs good-naturedly, making noise to cover up his name as is traditional-- "who tried to kill all of the Jews in antiquity, but failed because Esther and her cousin Mordecai foiled his plans."

"Why would you eat the hats of the man who tried to kill you?" asks Zack.

Jack starts to growl out a reply, but his daemon pressing her paw against his feet reminds him to take a deep breath. Zack is just being genuinely curious, after all. He shouldn't punish him if he's not hounding him about how God isn't real and fire is a safety hazard, and blah, blah, blah. "It's just how the tradition goes," says Jack. "Here, do you want to help make them?" He moves over so Zack can fill in in front of the dough, which he had just rolled out. "Use the cup and use it to cut out circles."

"This seems superfluous. What's the point of even celebrating --"

“Just shut up and do it,” snaps Jack. To his surprise, Zack snaps his mouth shut and does as he’s told. Turns out he’s pretty good at following directions, once he stops questioning everything. “Great, and then once you have the dough cut out, you spoon a bit of this poppyseed stuff in the middle, and fold it on three sides like so, so it’s a triangle. No- no, you want to leave the middle exposed, so you can see the insides, okay? Like this.”

So the two of them make hamentashen until way too late into the night, and when they’re done cooking they have to give them a taste test, and well, they taste pretty damn good, if Jack says so himself.

“Ange is going to love these,” he says, and his daemon wags her tail happily at his side.

“Do you think I could give some to Cam?” asks Zack, munching on his cookie in tiny bites. “She’s been helping me out a lot lately, with keeping organized and basic hygiene. It would be nice to pay her back.”

“Just get her a Starbucks gift card,” grumbles Jack. “Neither of you celebrate the holiday so it doesn’t even make any sense.” But then his daemon gives him that *look*, and he groans. “Fine. But only a few, okay?”

When he presents the hamentashen to Angela the next day, she’s appropriately thankful and only needs a minimum amount of explanation to understand what they are. Turns out she went to a high school with a lot of Jewish kids, so she knows most of the holidays pretty well.

“I can’t possibly eat these all. Do you guys want some?” Angela asks, mouth full of cookie, pushing the container towards the middle of the table.

“Thank you, Jack,” says Temperance, taking one before Jack can protest. “I’m happy to help you celebrate your holiday. I understand that food is an important part of Jewish traditions.”

“And it tastes good,” adds Zack, helping himself to a handful.

“Yeah, well, it’s nothing,” says Jack, feeling flustered by the praise in spite of himself.

Making snacks for their study sessions quickly becomes something of a ritual, and the four of them take turns bringing in their favorite or most traditional treats to share with the group. Temperance is an amazing baker, it turns out, and after tasting her triple chocolate chip cookies any annoyance Jack had felt about letting her use his kitchen quickly melts away. “It’s just following the recipe,” she says, when everyone crows over how good they are in study sessions the next day. “I’m very good at following instructions.”

*Only when you want to be*, thinks Jack, but he isn’t complaining.

Despite being a smaller, less attractive Temperance in so many ways, Zack is a self-professed disaster at cooking. As in, he’s never done anything more complex than make ramen. Jack had noticed his tendency to eat leftovers or eat out most nights, but hadn’t thought much of it until he’s woken up one morning by the smoke detector going off and runs into the kitchen to find it covered in a blanket of smoke so thick he can hardly breathe.

“I wasn’t sure if it was done yet, but apparently it was very done,” admits Zack, about the blackened charry mess he scraped out of the oven pans. “Can you teach me?”

“You’re beyond help. Just buy something at the grocery store and bring that to study group, okay?” says Jack. He couldn’t use the kitchen now, not in this state, and he’s rushing to get ready and leave the house so he could stop by the cafe for breakfast before class started.

“But nobody else buys anything! I don’t want to be left-” Whatever else Zack was saying was lost as Jack runs out the door.

But Zack shows up to study session that afternoon, to Jack’s surprise, with a freshly-made fruit salad in hand, and a one Camille Saroyan hot on his toes.

“Somebody said he was a lost cause,” says Cam, and her harrier daemon gives a pointed glare in Jack’s direction. “But he just needs to take some times to learn the basics, and then he’ll be fine.”

“I can’t thank you enough, Camille,” says Zack.

“Don’t worry about it, Zackaroni.” Cam affectionately ruffles his hair in a way that, at one point, would have definitely made Zack flinch, but he hardly seems to notice now. “Now that I’m not around Seeley or Jared anymore, it was only a matter of time before I found someone else to mother.”

Seeley’s doing his normal night shift at the cafe when Jack strolls in. The truce to meet elsewhere held for about a week or two, but then Seeley caved in and begrudgingly invited Sweets back to the cafe one night. He and the rest of the squints, as Seeley has affectionately (or maybe not-so-affectionately) nicknamed them, have been living it up here ever since.

“Listen, Jack,” says Seeley. He hesitates, wondering if it’s not too late to change his mind, but the iron-hot glare of his daemon on his back makes him change his mind.

“Yeah?” says Jack, clearly not really listening.

“So I have to take this biology course to graduate, right? But it’s a major pain in my ass and I can’t seem to get it.”

Jack looks up now, his eyes glittering. “And?”

“Eh, I was just wondering if I might be able to help you and your little squint study group? To get some help?”

Jack snorts. “That sounded about as painful for you as pulling out your own teeth. We meet in the library at seven on Thursdays. Does that work for you?”

Seeley’s heart sinks. “I have practice then.”



“Ah.” Jack looks at his daemon. “Well, maybe I could try tutoring you on my own. We can find a time that works for both of us, then.”

“You’d really do that?”

“Of course. You’re a friend of Tempe’s, which makes you a friend of mine.” He motions to the back booth, the Squints’ usual spot. “You know where to find me. I’ll wait until your shift ends.”

That night, Seeley flops onto his bed, exhausted as usual by his long days that never seem to end. Ailbheann flops just as bonelessly into her daemon bed on the floor, closing her eyes and closing her ears.

“How was your day?” asks Sweets -- *Lance*. He’s blissfully unaware of the tension between them, as always, though for once Seeley realizes that he’s not annoyed at his roommate. It’s nice to have someone to talk to that’s not a customer, his teammates, or himself.

“I think I’m officially a Squint now,” he says, somewhat dazed. He had made plans with Jack to meet up later that week for lunch. His dog daemon had nuzzled Ailbheann’s in a way that had made him feel uncomfortable at the time, but looking back at it he just felt grateful. Welcomed.

At the time, he kept thinking that he should have asked Temperance instead. But maybe this is better. It’ll be less distracting, at least. Even if Jack does like to get derailed with this conspiracy theories.

Lance, curled up on his bed with his cat draped around his shoulders like a scarf, raises his pen like it’s a wine glass. “Cheers.”

Lance is sitting in the usual spot at the back of cafe. He doesn’t even notice Temperance until his daemon headbutts him in the side. He looks up and puts his textbook down, startled.

“Hey, Temperance. You’re here early.”

“I got out of class early,” she says. “I thought I might as well come and save my seat.”

“Well -- sure, if you want. But it’s not like anyone was going to take it.”

Temperance nods. “Sure.” She sits down, and her purple butterfly flutters across the table. She gets out her own book -- a thick novel of some kind, not a textbook like Lance’s; it must be for one of her anthropology classes -- and a notebook and sticky notes. As she reads, she flags passages and writes comments down in her notebook.

The two of them work in silence for several minutes. Lance keeps glancing up at Temperance, but she’s staring intensely at her book like she’s trying to win a staring contest with it, her brow crinkled up as she focuses.

“Temperance - why are you going into anthropology?” Lance asks suddenly. She’s also so direct and convinced that there should be the One Right Answer, if he hadn’t known better he

would have assumed she was going into a STEM field. And she is, and it suits her, but anthropology (and creative writing?) feel like outliers on what otherwise seems to be straightforward and easy to understand, if not always easy to get along with.

Temperance looks up and puts her notebook down. She takes a deep breath, and her daemon settles down on her hair, like his tiny, miniscule weight can act like a reassuring touch. “When my parents disappeared, I couldn’t understand why they left. I was heartbroken. I want to understand why-- why people would do that,” she takes a deep breath, her words matter-of-fact despite how heavy the subject was. “I want to understand how people work, so I can prevent tragedies like this from happening again.”

Lance shares a glance with his own daemon, who rubs her head against his arm in a soothing manner. “I understand,” he says, his voice low and serious. “I... I also don’t have any parents. I spent time in the foster system with some people who did- who did horrible things.” He shudders; the long scars racing down his back from an abusive foster parent don’t hurt anymore physically, but mentally the pain is still as fresh as the day he got them. His own daemon shivers, too; she has her fair share of tooth and claw marks riddled over her body, but thankfully her fur is long enough to hide them to all but the most scrutinous eye. There are some things that not even years of changing forms can change. “That’s why I’m doing what I’m doing. To understand why someone could be that horrible, and justify that to themselves.”

Temperance nods, her face somber. Her butterfly daemon lifts himself from her hair and flutters down onto Lance’s daemon’s face, tapping her forehead with his legs in a soothing manner. “We both had to suffer through so much,” Temperance says. “Sometimes it’s in people’s natures to be cruel.”

“But that’s just it!” says Lance. He straightens up and leans in. His daemon brightens up and bounces in her seat, popping Auster right off of her face into the air. “That’s what I’ve learned over the course of my study. *Individuals* can be cruel, yes. But human nature, as a whole? We want to help each other. We *want* to be good people.” He starts speaking faster now, and he moves his hands to emphasize his words. “Angela helped you out when you first started living together, even though she thought you were a creep and a hopeless case. Camille helps Zack even though she has no reason to, because she feels an obligation to help those less fortunate than herself. *You* did this study, to help me, even though you think psychology is bogus! And Seeley -” he falters, realizing he shouldn’t be speaking so openly and brazenly.

“Seeley lets us use his cafe,” offers Temperance, and her purple butterfly shakes; after a moment Lance realizes that the squeaky sound coming from his direction is laughter.

“Yes, Seeley puts up with us, because deep down, he does care,” finishes Lance. “In the beginning, I was studying a larger pool of people, so I could have a larger sample size... but no one was as exemplary as us Squints are. You guys started out scattered, but were pulled into each other’s orbits like stars. You became one, cohesive whole, even though you shouldn’t. That’s what makes You truly special. Other people were nice, sure, but no one was *as* nice - or as *interesting* - as you guys are. ”

Temperance grunts, clearly not as impressed by Lance's findings as he was. "We're not special, you just like us because we let you into our social circle. And stars don't get pulled into each other's gravity, meteorites do."

Lance isn't put off by her flippant attitude. "You're like meteorites, then. And special can be subjective!"

To his surprise, Temperance laughs. "I guess it can."

## Chapter End Notes

You can tell that when writing this chapter I intended to have it published a lot earlier, since Purim was in February this year. whoops!

# Chapter 8

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

June is pride month.

This is a problem, because if you're in college, then you know that school isn't in session during June. So how are you supposed to celebrate with your gay school friends? The solution was pride in Not-June.

June is a good month for pride, Angela thinks, because it's actually *warm* out, no matter where you are. This is never a problem in Austin - it's the opposite problem in Austin, if anything - but thankfully Virginia has good weather even by the end of April, and it's balmy and sunny out most days.

Angela doesn't remember when, specifically, she came out to the Squints, but it was such a nonevent that it was hardly even worth the anxiety and fuss she made over it. Temperance had started to go on a tangent about how straightness was a construct, and blah, blah, blah - "I'm still happy for you, but I want you to know that this shouldn't *have* to mean anything" - you know the spiel.

Cam acted like she had known all along. With that intense seeing-into-your-soul hawk gaze she has, Angela wouldn't be surprised if she had.

Jack said that he thought it was hot. Angela couldn't decide if she should be mad with him about that or not, but it's not like he asked to see her make out with a girl so he could watch, and he says a lot of the things she does are hot, so it's not worth picking a fight over.

Angela and Temperance are sitting down on the floor in the center of their dorm. They had been studying together, in the loosest sense of the term, and somehow their conversation had drifted into the territory of weekend plans. "You're coming to Pride with me, right?" asks Angela.

"I don't know, Ange," Temperance scoops her daemon up in her hands and holds him close.

"Come on, it'll be fun!" Angela nudges her roommate affectionately. "Don't worry about whether or not you belong - support is support, and it's not like anyone will be able to tell just by looking."

"It's not that," says Temperance, for once actually sounding distressed. "I've been questioning some things lately myself. It's the crowds I'm worried about."

For so little words, there's a lot there for Angela to process. "Whoa, whoa, whoa; you're *what*? And is this about the shooting statistics again? I promise you it'll be fine."

“No, crowds are noisy and distracting,” says Temperance, fussing with her daemon in her hands. “They hurt. And I’ve been thinking about... some things, lately. I guess you could say I’m the Q, for questioning.”

“Do you think you’re gay?” Angela gasps. “Did Seeley flirting with you turn you off of men?”

“No. You know that’s not how it works.” Temperance scowls. “It’s sexuality, but also gender. I know I’m not a man, but it’s hard to narrow it down farther than that. Things are... confusing. Now that I know that I have Autism, it made me realize that other certain aspects of my identity are hard to define.”

Oh, honey. Angela wants to wrap up Temperance in a big hug, but she knows her roommate isn’t a big fan of physical contact. So instead she rocks backward and leans on her hands. “I know how much you like things to be concrete and easy-to-define, but you don’t have to rush to define yourself right now. Why don’t you just come with me to the parade tomorrow? I have some earplugs and some sunglasses you can borrow. C’mon, it’ll be fun!”

“Alright.” Temperance agrees, but it doesn’t sound like her heart’s in it.

Angela sighs, and gets up. She knows by now when it’s worth ribbing on her roommate for not sounding enthusiastic. “I’m going to get ready for bed, then.”

Cam meets them outside their building that morning, all decked out in comfortable sneaks, a hat, and a backpack stuffed with enough water and snacks to last for a week. Angela’s not sure how she ended up bringing up the topic of pride to Cam, but she sounded so enthralled that Angela couldn’t say no when she asked to come. Even though she was quick to affirm that she’s just going as an ally, not a member.

And what “ally” is so enthusiastic about going to a pride parade, Angela has no clue, but it’s not her place to push it if Cam’s hiding in the closet or working through some stuff.

The three of them head over to the school cafeteria for breakfast. Angela walks Cam through the schedule for the day, and checks to make sure that Temperance still has her earbuds with her and she doesn’t need to buy more when they get there. When Cam notices how unusually still and lackluster Auster is and realizes that Temperance is nervous of all things, she instantly kicks into mom mode. She drills Temperance on the best ways to deal with sensory overload in crowds and that she should let one of them know if she needs to take a step back because she should never go anywhere without one of them knowing where she is at all times, and--

She keeps babbling. Her harrier daemon hops up and down on her shoulder, like he wants to reach forward and comfort Temperance’s, but her purple butterfly daemon is too small for him to reach.

When they’re finished eating, the three of them grab some snacks. They pick up Jack on their way (who looks very hot, in his summertime shorts and striped shirt with the collar unbuttoned). From there it’s just a short T ride to the center of town, and by the time they get

off it's already crowded with people dressed in pride paraphernalia and clustering around the sidewalks, trying to get a good spot before the parade starts.

Temperance nudges Angela. "I'm putting my earplugs in, so tap me on the shoulder if you want to get my attention." Auster had moved from her shoulder to the top of her head, so Angela didn't have to worry about accidentally touching him if she needs to talk to her. But she doesn't need to say anything else, because a cheer passes through the crowd, and Angela realizes that the parade is finally starting to come by.

The parade is loud and fun and a whirlwind of dancing, screaming, music. Angela spends the first thirty seconds worrying about Temperance, and the rest of the time totally caught up in the experience. She had even brought her own disposable camera (she knows, it's tacky and oldschool, but she loves the aged vintage look) but totally forgets about it until Jack bumps into her bag as he takes off his own backpack and opens it up to get his water bottle.

"Shit," Cher mutters, drooping on her shoulder.

"Well, better late than never." Angela digs her own disposable camera out of her bag, and turns to face the others. "Hey guys, do you want to take a picture to memorialize the occasion?"

"Sure," says Cam. She gets Temperance's attention, since she was still watching the parade as it trails around the block. Angela passes off the camera to a nearby stranger, and they all pose for the photo.

Angela also gets one of Jack and herself kissing in front of a wall that's been painted with graffiti in bisexual colors, and snaps candid of the others they examine some pride memorabilia on a street vendor. Temperance gets in a heated argument about gender (or maybe they're having a passionate discussion), with a stranger before Cam drags her away.

They get ice cream for lunch (the parlor is adding on pride-themed rainbow sprinkles free with each ice cream!). Jack orders the world's largest banana split and attempts to eat the entire thing by himself. Angela laughs and takes a picture of him mid-bite, his dog daemon looking dazed at his side as the brain freeze kicks in.

Cam is much less amused, especially when Jack falls into a food coma afterwards.

"Oh, let him sleep," says Angela. "We can chill out here for a bit."

"I thought you wanted to go see that concert?" says Temperance. "Didn't you say your favorite band was playing?"

"Yeah, but I just said that to guilt you into coming. I've never heard of them before." Angela waves her off, licking the remains of her own mint chocolate chip ice cream off of her fingers.

"That was rude," Temperance sniffs, and her butterfly daemon flaps his wings in irritation. Angela doesn't take it personally.

The three of them make small talk until Cam checks her watch. “Oh, shoot. We have to go if we want to get to the game before it starts!”

Cher divebombs Chaika until Jack wakes up, and, still rubbing the sleep out of his eyes, the four of them shuffle onto the subway back towards the university. Now that the high of Pride is wearing off, the exhaustion starts to set in. Cher tucks his head under his wing; even Auster looks still for once, not even giving a lazy flap of his wings. Jack’s scruffy dog daemon doesn’t even pretend to stay awake as she sits down with a thump and leans heavily on Jack’s leg, closing her eyes. Cam’s harrier daemon looks better off than the rest of them, but even his keen survey of the train car is noticeably slower than it was this morning.

Looking around, exhausted but with eyes still glittering with the last remains of the emotional high, Angela feels a burst of affection for her friends. They didn’t have to come, and with the possible exception of Temperance, don’t belong to this community. But still, here they were.

If she wasn’t crowded by people in rainbow on all sides, and the emotions she was feeling in her heart could be expressed in a photo, she would have pulled out her camera. Instead, she smiles, and turns her towards her daemon to affectionately rub her cheek against his head.

Before any game, Seeley liked to take some time to himself to sit and meditate on his game plan. Sometimes he used that time to warm up, too, but today something tells him he shouldn’t do that. So he finds a quiet corner in the locker room and sits on a bench, staring into Ailbheann’s eyes and thinking.

His teammates used to tell him to stop because the sight of the two of them staring unblinking into each other’s eyes for any extended period of time was creepy. He didn’t stop. Now they just leave him alone whenever he does it. Which is fine for him, because the less distractions he has while trying to get into the zone, the better.

Which is why he doesn’t bother looking up when he hears voices talking nearby, and then shouting, and then someone running through the locker room. No one bothers him, so it’s not his problem.

Except a small, miniscule force slams head first into Ailbheann’s face, causing her to blink and look away. She growls and snaps at the purple butterfly, who flutters backwards, unharmed and unbothered by her display of aggression.

Seeley frowns and looks up. Temperance is standing right in front of him, face flushed from spending all day out in the sun, and a smug expression plastered on her face. “What are you doing in here? This is the *men’s* locker room.”

“I knew I wasn’t going to find you if I looked in the women’s locker room,” says Temperance matter-of-factly, ignoring Seeley’s teammates as they snicker at her remark. “I wanted to let you know that we’re all here to watch you play tonight.”

“You could have called.”

Temperance nods to the sign that reads CELL PHONE USE PROHIBITED in large, angry letters.

Seeley sighs. But he can't help but feel a pleasant twist in his gut, that someone cared enough to break the rules to come see him. "Thanks, Temperance."

Temperance doesn't move to leave. "Well? Are you going to come outside to say hello?"

"Come on. Let's all put our hands in the middle and say, 'rah'! That's how it goes, right?" Temperance says, her butterfly flapping in circle around her head. She had dragged him outside so that the rest of the squints could all wish him luck before the game. Cam, Seeley, Jack, and Angela all look sunburned and tired, but trying to hype themselves up; Zack and Lance, who had come early to claim them a spot, looked much more put together and alert, though the way their gazes wandered and the twitch in the octopus's tentacles and cat's tail told him that they felt lost and out of their element here.

"It's more like, 'go team', but I appreciate the thought," says Seeley. Ailbheann wags her tail.

The squints look at each other for a moment, and then Angela says. "Oh, come on, let's do it. What's the harm?"

Seeley isn't the only one to role his eyes, but they all gather into a clumsy circle and put their hands in the center. Jack, Lance, and Seeley's daemons stand underneath their legs, and everyone else's daemons perch on their shoulders.

"Okay, on the count of three. One, two, three!"

"Rah!" everyone says, throwing their hands to the sky. The winged daemons launch into the air, flying in close-knit circles. Temperance's hair gets mussed up, probably from knocking up against Seeley and Cam's shoulders, and Jack and Angela both had ice cream stains on their shirts. Even Cam's shirt looked rumpled and unkept for once. Lance is trying to play it off cool, but Zack looks around at everyone else, clearly bewildered by the entire process.

Seeley starts to laugh.

"What's so funny?" demands Temperance, but Seeley can't stop laughing long enough to answer, and soon the others are joining in, too.

"Okay, you know what would make a great photo? This?" says Angela, still giggling. "Get close, everyone. We're going to do this one selfie-style."

"I have selfies." Seeley scowls.

"Well, it's good that you're not the one taking the picture then! So for you it's just like a regular photo." Angela gathers everyone close, daemons peeking out from shoulders or underneath arms. "Okay, everyone ready. One, two, three." *Click.*



Seeley pulls back, and Ailbheann shakes out her fur. “Thanks for coming out to watch, guys. I have to get back to my team. The coach will be giving us a pep talk any moment now.”

“Good luck,” Temperance says. The others start to move back to their seats, echoing her statement with varying degrees of enthusiasm. But Temperance stands where she is, gaze serious as ever. Auster flutters down to Ailbheann and skims over her nose, his touch as delicate as a kiss.

Seeley stands up straighter, and his wolf daemon licks her nose and looks away. “Thanks, Tempe.”

“Go get ‘em,” Temperance says, reaching out with one hand like she wanted to knock him on the shoulder or give him a hug, but thinks better of it and pulls away again. “We’ll be watching you.”

“I know you will.”

His head is full of fuzz and static the entire walk back. He can’t stop thinking about the echo of Auster’s wings against Ailbheann’s fur, or, despite his protests, how warm and accepted he had felt when they had taken that group photo.

“What are you smiling for, Booth?” one of his teammates asks when he gets back to the locker room. He gives him an affectionate shove, and his gopher daemon swats Ailbheann. “Did your girlfriend drag you into a corner and kiss you?”

“What? No. It was nothing like that.” Seeley forces himself to stop smiling, and he realizes that he’s been grinning like that ever since the photo. His face hurts from the force of it, but it’s a good kind of hurt. Ailbheann presses against him in silent agreement. “My friends were just wishing me good luck, that’s all.”

“It’s nice of them to come watch,” says another teammate.

Seeley nods in agreement. “Yeah. It really is.”

The rest of the game goes by in a blur. The coach breaks down the game plan. The team goes out. They go to their starting points. The football gets thrown. Seeley runs. And that’s it. It’s just Seeley and Ailbheann, and their team, and the ball. And that’s all that matters. Ailbheann keeps the people at bay, he makes his attack.

The stress of school, of keeping up his GPA and his performance to the team so he can keep his scholarship, of making enough hours at work so that he can support himself but so many that he can’t get enough sleep at night, all of it melts away. None of that is real anymore. The only things that’s real is the game, right here, right now.

Until they’re down to the last thirty seconds.

The ball comes his way.

Time intensifies. It’s not a blur anymore. Everything feels *real*. And slow. He feels the bond between himself and Ailbheann so solidly he could reach out and touch it, and the bond

between himself and his teammates - and his *friends* , out on the bleachers, how could he forget them? Knowing they were watching him, and hearing their cheers in the crowd, has been energizing him all night - almost as much. Sunlight flares onto his face but he squints to see through it. He plucks the ball, gentle, like he might a flower, out of the air. It feels rough and textured under his hands.

He runs. Ailbheann paws thud against the ground in time with his own feet.

He feels free. He's a spirit on the wind. Even freer than those witches on their cloud pine brooms. He can do this! He can do anything he wanted.

Then something pummels into him with a thickening thud. He gets wrenched sideways, and his neck gets whipped backwards with the force of it.

Something - some *one* - else jumps on top of him. His arm twists unnaturally underneath his body, and the bodies of everyone else on top of him. Somewhere, dimly, like it's far off, he can feel Ailbheann's pain as she cries out.

Somebody else shoves him, and his shoulder blooms with the most intense pain Seeley has ever felt in his entire life.

The world sparks white, and then everything goes black.

## Chapter End Notes

The penultimate chapter! How exciting! o: The thought of Angela taking everyone to a Pride Parade was actually what originally inspired me to start writing this little story. :')

# Chapter 9

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Seeley spends the first few days in the hospital in so much pain he could hardly move. He spent the rest of his stay bored out of his mind. Agonizing over pain gets old real fast, but once he moves on from that, there isn't much he can do.

The worst part about the entire thing is how Ailbheann is quarantined to a dog bed on the ground, out of his line of sight. He can feel through their bond that she's alright -- a bit battered, but nothing she can't recover from. Not being able to visually confirm it aches in a way no injury ever could.

They talk, when they're left alone. They talk a lot. They don't have much else to do. It's the next best thing to being able to see her, hearing her voice.

"What's going to happen to us now?"

"I don't know, Seeley."

Eventually the nurses give him the all-clear; they wrap his arm in the world's tightest sling and send him home. But once he's at home, he can't turn on the lights or do anything even remotely distracting because of his concussion, so it's more of the same.

At least this time, Ailbheann can crawl up in bed with him. Touching her soft, thick fur is comforting. Even if seeing the way that her tail crooks to the side at a weird angle makes his stomach churn.

He didn't get to finish the game. He didn't even get to finish his fucking semester. Not that it mattered anymore. There was no way he'd be playing football again anytime soon. Not with this shoulder injury. There goes his pretty scholarship, and with it, all of his hopes of ever getting a degree.

Jared offers consolation and a welcome distraction whenever he can, but he has a summer job, so Seeley's left to his own devices during the day. Thankfully, his father also has a job, so he gets a break from *him*, too.

He listens to music. It's one of the only things he can do, really. He can't stare at anything too hard or his brain will implode. He listens to a lot of Foreigner. The songs remind him of the school year, before this happened and his life went to shit.

Ailbheann's fur becomes disheveled and dull from lack of care. Seeley's own hair gets shaggy and unkempt. What's the point in grooming himself? It's not like he's seeing anybody.

Late one night, after everyone else had gone to sleep and Seeley was drifting off himself, he suddenly sits up in bed. Ailbheann lifts her head, watching him.

Seeley turns to look at her. For the first time in a long time, a glimmer of hope. Ailbheann's eyes sparkle at the prospect of having a future again.

"We'll call first thing in the morning."

"Tomorrow," Ailbheann agrees.

"They can't refuse us. We'll do great."

"Of course."

Seeley lies back down again, one of his hands finding Ailbheann's ear and rubbing it in between his fingers. Thinking, for the first time in a long time, that maybe he won't be a deadbeat just like his dad. Maybe he does have a future, after all.

Cam stops by the next week.

Seeley comes downstairs, freshly showered, Ailbheann finally starting to look like her old self again (well, except for her crooked tail, which Seeley still winces at every time he sees) to find her chatting it up with his little brother.

"Camille? What are you doing here?" Seeley stops in the doorway to the kitchen, his daemon threading through his legs and standing in front of him, legs spread in a defensive stance and eyes stretched wide in surprise.

Cam gives him a quick onceover, and her harrier daemon ruffles his wings. "I just wanted to say hi, see how you were doing, Seeley. We were all worried when we saw what happened. And then the hospital said you weren't accepting visitors, and then you were sent home. This whole time, you never said a word to any of us. We were concerned, as you might imagine."

For the first time, Seeley notices the bags under her eyes, and the way her harrier's daemons feathers look more ragged than normal. Even Jared looks haggard, and his coyote daemon pants anxiously as she watches the exchange go down.

Seeley's heart falls into his stomach. "I'm sorry. I hadn't realized."

"I know you hadn't. That's why I took it upon myself to do a house call." Cam sniffs.

Seeley rushes forward, stumbling to make up for lost time, "Please, make yourself at home. Do you want a drink? I--"

"Jared's already helped me help myself, thank you."

"Has he, now." Seeley stops again. His daemon brushes up against his leg, a comforting, consoling presence.

Camille stands up. "I can't stay. Truthfully, I'm not here just to make a house call. Jared asked if I could give him a lift to work because his car's in the shop, and we can't be late. But

don't think this is the last you'll be seeing of me, Seeley."

"Of course," Seeley says. He trails after them as they gather their belongings and leave through the door, trying to find the right words and for once at a loss.

If Cam had been planning to make good on her threat to see Seeley again, she was sure taking her time. She didn't come by at all over the next two weeks. Summer's crawling by, and soon it'll be time for her to go back to school. She'll be a senior. Seeley hopes she graduates *cum magna laude* and gets accepted into grad school immediately, like she hopes to.

As he starts to get better, Seeley starts to leave the house to go on walks. He itches to be able to run or lift weights, but between his shoulder and his concussion he's still all-too-limited in his capabilities. He feels like he's gone soft and gooey. Even Ailbheann looks more chunky than she used to.

But the walks got them out of the house, especially when their dad was home. Sometimes he'd stay out until long after it got dark, and he'd have to climb up to the second floor of his house, hefting his huge wolf daemon up with him, and break into his room so his dad wouldn't sneaking back in so late at night.

Which kind of defeats the whole point of "taking it easy," but hey. He's doing the best that he can.

One day he gets a text from Jared telling him to come back home because he has a surprise. Which is cryptically vague and could mean literally anything, but Seeley's just bored enough that he takes the bait.

Cam's car is in the driveway when he gets home. Seeley looks at his daemon and raises his eyebrows.

"Took her long enough," Ailbheann sniffs.

Seeley grunts his agreement and lets himself into the house.

Then he stops dead in the doorway.

It's Cam.

But it's also Zack, Lance, Angela, Jack, and most importantly, Temperance. All here, together.

They're all standing around the kitchen, leaning against the counters, except for Angela who's sitting on top of the kitchen counter. Jared's deep in some story with Jack and Cam that has the former in stitches and the latter smiling with a grin that says she's heard this story a thousand times before. One of them got a hold of some wine - nice, too, by Seeley's quick assessment of the label on the bottle - and everyone has their own glass, even his little brother.

Temperance is the first to notice him coming in. "Seeley!" she shouts, raising her glass in his direction; her daemon starts to flap around her head in excited circles.

The others turn at her call, and soon everyone rushes him, in a tide. Jack pulls him into the center of the room, Zack hands him a glass, everyone is talking over each other about how glad they are to see him. Half a dozen furry and feathery animals climb all over Ailbheann, nuzzling her in greeting.

Seeley waves them all down, but he can't fight back the grin forming on his face. "What are you guys all doing here?"

"We wanted to see you," says Lance.

"Yes, we were very worried when you got hurt. Especially when no one heard anything after you got discharged from the hospital," says Temperance, scooping her butterfly out of the air. Auster was the only one not to greet Ailbheann, and Seeley knows he shouldn't take it personally; he's delicate and not good at rough-n-tumble activities, but he can't stop the twinge of regret in his stomach. "I tried to go and see you, but they wouldn't let me."

"We all did," says Cam. Her harrier daemon unlatches from the wolf daemon and hops back onto the counter next to her, glaring at Seeley again. "You can imagine how peeved I was when you weren't answering my calls and I had to call your little brother to figure out what was going on."

Seeley looks at his daemon. She stands back up and shakes the rest of the daemons off of her, who scatter back to their respective humans. She tilts her head, as if asking, *well?*

"I was just busy, that's all." Seeley crosses his arms and frowns.

"Busy doing nothing," Jared mutters.

"Jared," Seeley scowls. "Besides, it's not like anyone of you reached out to me, besides Cam. How come it took you this long to come, huh?"

Temperance clears her throat. "I was doing an internship in Guatemala. I just got back last week."

"We didn't think you'd want to see us unless all of us were here," says Angela, but he can read between the lines.

No one says anything. Everyone turns to Seeley as if waiting for his response. After an awkward silence, Temperance says, "And Angela was in Texas. We had to wait for her to get back." As if that makes it better.

Seeley shuffles his feet and coughs. "Well, uh. Thanks. I appreciate you all coming out here. For me."

Lance taps him on the shoulder with his fist and flashes him a grin he probably thinks is a lot more suave than it looks. "Don't worry about it."

The conversation slowly shifts back into gear. Seeley learns that Jack and Zack are still living together this year, despite the fact that Jack spent most of his time looking like he was three seconds away from strangling his roommate. Seeing the way his dog daemon affectionately jumps up on Zack's octopus tank to splash the water, he thinks maybe they've managed to smooth the worst of it over.

Angela's still making art, but she's not living with Temperance again, who managed to get into a science-related living learning community and snagged a single.

"Good for you, getting a single in your second year." Seeley tips his wine glass at Temperance and grins.

Zack is still a mess at life, but (according to Cam) he's getting better. "My goal is for you to prepare, cook, and clean up after an entire meal for Jack by the end of the semester, without burning the house down,"

"I could do that already, if I wanted to!" protests Zack.

Jack snorts, but covers it up with a well-timed sneeze.

But despite his best efforts to keep the topic at bay, it always circles back to him in the end. "So, what are you doing? Are taking a semester off on medical leave?" asks Angela, hopping back onto the counter again.

Seeley considers telling her to get back down because his father will rip him a new one if he sees her doing that, then decides that his father can't tell them what to do, so fuck it. "I lost my scholarship because my injury means I can't play on the team. So... I'm joining the military. I leave in a few weeks, once I get medically cleared."

The squints miss a beat. Silence. Like no one had really expected that. Even Jared, who knew what he was planning, stares quietly into his wine glass, coyote daemon unusually still.

Eventually Angela blurts, "That's awesome, Seeley! I'm glad you found something that makes you happy."

Lance pats him on the shoulder, his cat daemon rubbing against Seeley's wolf in sympathy. "I'm really sorry about your scholarship, Seeley. I'm going to miss being roommates with you."

"I'll miss you, too," says Seeley, and he means it.

"The US army takes funding away from areas that actually need it like education and has entirely too much power. It enforces the old imperialist and colonialist identity we forged hundreds of years ago and claim to have moved on from, but have really just buried with sand and pretended that if we don't acknowledge it, it doesn't exist," grumbles Jack. Angela elbows him in the gut and he coughs, then mutters, "But I'm happy you found something that works for you."

“I have something for you, actually,” says Lance. “Think of it as a going away gift.” He disappears out the door for a moment while he digs it out of Cam’s car, and when he comes back he has a fresh, new binder, with that new school supply smell still lingering on it.

He hands it to Seeley, and when he cracks it open he finds several dozen freshly printed papers with lots of tiny print. He flips to the first page. “A study of friendship and how opposites attract,” he reads aloud.

“It’s the study I worked on all last year!” Lance announces. His excitement can’t be contained and he grins, and his cat daemon’s purring can be heard throughout the room. “It’s not finished yet, of course, this is just a rough draft. But I thought you would want it. Think of it as a way to remember everything we all did together.”

Seeley murmurs his agreement, staring at the front page. His heart is a whirlwind of emotions and he can’t work out what words to say.

“If you want to join us back here on earth, I have something for you too,” says Angela, rooting Seeley out of his thoughts. She doesn’t have to leave the room -- just reach into her jacket pocket -- and she pulls out something tiny, square, and flat.

Seeley takes it and flips it over. It’s a polaroid picture of all of them, arms around each other, sweaty from the early summer heat and grinning like it was the best day of their collective lives. Angela’s face pokes out of the corner of her impromptu selfie. Seeley’s scowling in his football gear, but Ailbheann, poking her head out in the bottom of the frame, has a big, toothy grin that betrays their true emotions.

“It’s the only picture I have of all of us,” says Angela. “I know it’s bittersweet, but I thought you would want to have it. Especially if you’re going to leave the country for a long time. It’s something to remember us by.”

“Yeah,” Seeley doesn’t know what else to say. Ailbheann presses her face against his leg, also at a loss for words.

One by one, everyone offers a parting gift. Cam gives him some stern words of advice and a peck on the cheek. Jack gives him a lecture and a plate of jelly doughnuts -- why he didn’t give them out earlier is a mystery to Seeley, but he unwraps the plate and passes them around for everyone to enjoy. Apparently they’re for Rosh Hashana, which is the latest upcoming Jewish holiday. Seeley doesn’t know anything about that, but he can’t deny that Jack’s cooking skills are tough to beat.

Zack shyly hands him a giftcard to a coffee shop. “To thank you for all of the coffee you got us,” he explains. “I wanted to bring some myself, but Cam said she doesn’t allow hot beverages in her car.”

“She would,” agrees Seeley. He didn’t know the young student as well as the others -- not so young now, since he had had his birthday over the summer and was officially an adult -- but he couldn’t deny that he was touched by his gift. “Thanks, Zack.”



Then it was just Temperance left. He looks at her meaningfully. "What?" she asks, clearly not, or pretending to not, understand.

Angela laughs quietly. "Come on, guys, let's give them some space." She starts to herd the others back out through the front door. "We'll be waiting outside, okay? Take your time." Jared tries to stay inside to watch, but Cam's harrier daemon latches onto his daemon's scruff and pulls the coyote forward until he pads out after the others.

"Hey now, it's not like that--" protests Seeley, but if the others hear they ignore him.

It's just the two of them, now. "So," says Seeley.

"So."

Seeley swallows thickly. He hadn't known Temperance the longest out of the squints -- that would be Cam -- but he couldn't help but feel an unusually strong affection for her. All of those hours she whittled away in the coffee shop had whittled away at his heart. "I'll miss you."

Auster leaves Temperance's shoulder for the first time and lands on Ailbheann's muzzle. She blinks at him, and starts to pant happily.

"I'm grateful for Angela's quick thinking," say Temperance, after another pause. "I didn't want to say anything, but I felt... self-conscious at the thought of giving this to you while the others watched."

Seeley raised his eyebrows. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"You'll see." Temperance picks up her bag and starts to rifle through it.

Seeley looks at his daemon, wondering what she could possibly have for him. Something racy? A declaration of love?

She straightens up and hands it to him.

"A journal?" says Seeley, trying to hide the disappointment in his voice. This was a bit of a letdown, after being told she didn't want to give it to him in public. "What do you think I need to write for? Do I need to fall in love with the scientific method like you have?"

"Open it."

Seeley flips through the pages. It's not empty at all. Every page is filled with lines upon lines of writing, in Temperance's own, neat scrawl. "It's a book?"

"It's the one I've been working on all year." Temperance pauses, like she expects Seeley to ridicule her.

Instead all he says is, "You've been working on a book? Since when?"

“Every time you saw me writing in that notebook. It started off as just a one-off exercise in my creative writing class, but it’s grown into something... more. I want you to have it.”

“I can’t possibly,” Seeley shakes his head and tries to hand it back to her. “You should try and publish this! Don’t just hand it off to me where it’ll get lost or ruined.”

“This isn’t the only copy I have,” Temperance says drily. “Don’t worry. Think of it as an early release. And look at the first page. I signed it. When it becomes a bestseller and I become a world-famous author, this will be very valuable.”

“Yeah, but I could never sell this,” Seeley murmurs as he opens up to the first page. “In Your Bones,” he looks up. “Bones, huh? That’s fitting, considering you’re going to be a forensic scientist and all. But please tell me you’re going to try for a writing career now instead, after this. An entire book? In one year?”

“Oh, please.” Temperance brushes it off. “I’m good, but it’s not perfect. It needs another round of editing before it gets there. But I am planning on adding a creative writing minor.”

“Wow.” Seeley closes the book and looks up at Temperance. “Thank you. Really. I don’t know what I did to deserve this.”

“You were my friend,” says Temperance, like that explains everything.

In some ways, he supposes it does. “Hey. I’ll see you when I get back, right?” he asks.

“What?”

“When I get back from the military. You’ll be around to catch up?”

“Well, sure -- I’m sure we all will.”

“Yeah, but I want time to catch up with *you* .” Seeley emphasizes the last word and hopes that Temperance will understand what he means.

Evidently she does, because she smiles and Auster starts to flap in circles around Ailbhean’s ears. “I’d like that very much.”

“Great.” Seeley hesitates. “You should probably get going now.”

“Angela said we could take as long as we want!”

“Yeah, well, people say a lot of things. They rarely mean what they say.” Seeley holds his hand to Temperance, expecting to lead her to the door, but to his surprise she moves in and hugs him, wrapping him up tight. He returns the hug, breathing deep and savoring the moment. She’s warm, and as much as Seeley appreciates Auster’s shape, he’s a poor substitute for a real, physically affectionate daemon. It had only felt like half a relationship before now, without the sensory experience of touch.

But eventually Seeley has to pull back. He still rests his hands on her, loosely gripping her upper arms. He feels a sudden urge to caress her hair, but holds himself back, remembering

how that she doesn't like overwhelming physical contact. Temperance feels warm and right to his touch, her eyes bright but unfocused and dazed. Ailbheann snorts on Auster affectionately, and he flaps his wings over her eyes.

Seeley finds his voice and the courage to say something he's been wanting to say for a while now. "Hey, Temperance?"

"Yeah?"

"You don't have to be afraid anymore."

"What?" Temperance frowns and pulls away from him.

Seeley lets her go, but he doesn't stop talking. "You never said anything, but you didn't have to. I could tell, clear as day. Especially with how touchy you get whenever someone tries to bring up form symbolism. It's clear that you don't think butterflies fit you, no matter what you say."

Temperance stammers, and Auster flutters backwards in alarm. "That's because--"

"But," says Seeley, "It's clear to me that they do. I was just as confused as you at first, but the more I looked the more I saw it: in your passion and dedication, and your search for the higher truth. You let the downfalls roll right past you, like a butterfly on the breeze. You both look sweet and unassuming, but neither you nor emperor butterflies act like how you're expected to."

Temperance looks at Seeley for a moment, like she's gauging how serious he is. Then she laughs lightly and shakes her head. "That's not it at all, but I'll accept the compliment nonetheless."

"Sure it is," says Seeley, undeterred, "You just haven't realized it yet." He holds out his hand again, and this time, Temperance takes it. Slowly, but much quicker than he would have liked, he leads Temperance to the door. "I'll see you around."

"Write to me," says Temperance. "I want to know what you think of the book."

"Of course." Temperance lets go of his hand, and Seeley expects her to go out the door towards the others. Never in his life would he have imagined that Temperance would turn back towards him and, in a flash, press her lips to his. He wouldn't have imagined that she smelled like old books and flowers, or that her lips would be soft and lovely.

And then she pulls back, grinning from ear to ear, and he doesn't have to imagine it anymore, because it actually happened.

Seeley touches his lips with one hand, starstruck. Temperance laughs, and her purple butterfly daemon circles around Ailbheann's ears one last time before fluttering over to rest on his person's shoulder. Temperance swings her bag over her shoulder and waves goodbye to Seeley, that huge grin still plastered on her face. "You forgot the most important part."

"What?" Seeley's head is still spinning, and he doesn't follow.

“My form isn’t simply a butterfly that eats carrion. He’s a purple *emperor* butterfly. And emperors rule over their kingdoms, just like how I’m going to be the best in my field.” She swings open the door and looks over her shoulder, eyes glinting. “I’ll see you around, Seeley Booth.”

For a person who hates psychology so much, she sure is good at it. “See you around, Temperance Brennan.” Seeley stands on the steps and watches Temperance go to the car. He waves as the cars pull out of the driveway and drives away, everyone packed like sardines in Cam’s tiny car, except for Jared who was sprawled out on the lawn, Coyote daemon resting her head on his stomach as they watched clouds past.

Yeah, the fact that Seeley had to leave the one place where he had made some of the best friends he’d ever had really sucked. And that was putting it mildly. But this was just a goodbye, not a farewell. He’d see them again someday.

And maybe when he did, he thinks, stroking his wolf daemon behind the ears, they’d have even more stories to share.

## Chapter End Notes

The End. :) This has been a project six months in the making and now it's finally complete! I've made my fair share of fanfiction ideas in my life, but this was my first-ever attempt at a multi-chapter fanfic. Thank you to everyone who made it this far, and I hope you enjoyed my work!!

## End Notes

Title from the song In Your Bones by Crooked Colours.

Thank you everyone for reading the first chapter of my new work! I've been working on this for several months now and am really excited to share it with you all. This is a super indulgent au with a little bit of everything going on. Everyone is friends, nothing bad happens, and we all get to play around with everyone's favorite au, the one with daemons! There will be 9 chapters total, and depending on how well this is received (and how I feel) I might write some one-shots later down the line, either to this specific au or to the more general "regular bones 'verse, but with daemons" au.

Quick shoutout to my friend Kam, who has spent hours brainstorming bones' daemons and discussing various characterizations and headcanons with me. This fic wouldn't exist without his help! Please check him out at <http://durpacerangerrogjro.tumblr.com/> c:

Updates every weekend. See you next week, and enjoy!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!