

## 1055

~~Day 16~~

One week later, the pathology results came back. About time, because David was one day away from dying again, Mia's ghost hands wrapped around his ghost throat. He didn't dare tell her they got lucky and the doc ordered a priority test, fearing a bio hazard issue. It could have taken almost a month.

"All results negative." The doc sighed as she shook her head, standing beside David's body. Sixteen days of being dead made him look pretty damn gaunt and gross. David didn't mind, but Mia couldn't look. "First time I've been stumped in a long time. The school reports no health issues anywhere. They've checked their water. They've checked the food these poor kids were eating, if you can call it food. They've checked the air filters. They checked the plates for any traces of a toxic chemical. Nothing. Even their brains looked perfectly fine, no tumors, nothing. And with no family history, no family of any kind to look into, I have no choice but to consider this a death by unknown natural causes."

David winced. He winced harder when Mia punched him in the shoulder.

The two of them sat on the curb outside the morgue, middle of the night, and watched the traffic go by. Not a busy part of the city, and it was the middle of the night, in Canada. There was no traffic.

"Satisfied?" Mia asked, gesturing back behind them toward the morgue with a hand flick. "Two weeks."

"Sixteen days."

"Shut up. Christ, I can't believe I waited."

David gestured to the building across the street, a clothing store, with its glowing gold door inviting them to come into its warm embrace.

"You really didn't want to know how we died? You could have left any time."

"I wanted to know, but when the doc said there wasn't anything obvious, I was cool to leave," she said.

"Then--"

"I wasn't going to leave my brother!"

Sighing, he smiled at her and gave her a small nudge with his shoulder.

"Thanks."*w w . N o ( v ) é l ( w ) © r ® . c o m*

"Yeah, well, I was also terrified of doing this alone."

"Likewise."

"So... what do we do?"

He gestured across the dark street to the glowing door. "We work up the courage, and cross the threshold into a new world we know nothing about, unable to return."

"Fuck me, you couldn't say that in a nicer way? A more optimistic way?"

"Sorry. Uh... we'll... be going to Heaven."

"We're atheists."

He shook his head. "Speak for yourself. I'm agnostic."*W W w . N ó V é l ( w o ( r ) m . c o m*

"Just a pussy atheist."

Laughing, he stood up, and held out his hand to her. "I don't think whatever's waiting for us through that door is a horrible place, Mia. It doesn't feel horrible."

She grabbed his hand and stood up, eyes locked on the glowing door waiting for them.

"Could be a trick, by some cosmic horror thing, you know? Like, an angler fish that feeds on souls."

He stared at her. "Uh... what?"

"Just, something I read."

"Stop reading scary stuff. You're like one of those women who listens to crime podcasts to fall asleep."

"I've only done that twice," she said, scrunching up her nose.

"Lies. At this point, I'm sure you could not only successfully get away with murder, but you'd enjoy it."*W w w . n o v é l ( w o R m . ( c ) o m*

"Lies!" She punched him in the shoulder again in that weak way she did when she was nervous, and squeezed his hand. "Convince me to go."

"Alright. Like I said, it doesn't feel horrible. It feels nice. It feels... welcoming, right?" He pulled her toward the glowing door. A car drove by, and cut through them. They didn't react. Sixteen days of wandering around the world as a ghost desensitized them quite a bit.

"It does. Feels warm."

"Feels like... like..."

She squeezed his hand tighter. "Home?"

He squeezed her hand tighter. "Does it? Feel like a home?"

"No idea. I'd always hoped it'd feel like this."

"I guess... I guess I did, too."

David and Mia talked about everything. From the music and movies they liked, to their weird sexual interests. They talked about the things and the people they hated. They talked about school shit, and the friends they'd made but could never keep.

They didn't talk about home, and the lack thereof.

He stared at the glowing yellow door leading into Clyde and Martha's clothing store. There was a bar down the street called The Last Night, which would have fit so much better, but whoever was putting the gold doors everywhere didn't seem to care about that perfect opportunity. So, Clyde and Martha's clothing store it was.

They came closer, and squeezed each other's hands tighter as the glowing gold aura enveloped them. The door was still closed, but they were close enough to touch it, close enough all they had to do was reach out and push it open, assuming they could touch it at all. He didn't touch it yet, neither did Mia, and the two of them stood in the glow as it buried them in the strangest, most inviting, delightful, relaxing sensation he'd ever felt. And he knew Mia felt the same.

She was right. It felt like coming home to a warm fire, with a family, and a nice bowl of porridge with bananas and brown sugar wailing--or sugar cereal, even better. Or, it was how he always imagined that sensation in the stories he read. Shitty, juvenile stories about people who get lost in the woods and stuff, and manage to find their way home after a hard journey. A guilty pleasure, and he knew Mia read those stories, too.

"So, uh..." He gulped, and peeked down at his sis. "Wanna open it?"

"You want me to do it?"*W ( w ) w . N o Y e l ( w ) © m . c o ©*

"You're better at this sorta stuff."

"What?" she asked. "Opening doors?"

"Being brave."

She sucked in a harsh breath. "Bullshit. I still can't squash a spider."

"You yelled at that cashier when he double charged you a few months ago. Doesn't get much braver than that."

After a weak chuckle, she took a deeper, better breath, and nodded.

"Alright."

Mia reached out, and pushed open the door.

More gold washed over them, warm, inviting, something that soothed his ghost muscles until he almost fell asleep standing up. But no, it wasn't a need to sleep that pulled him. It was the deep warmth that told him everything would be alright, that everything would be right and whole and make sense if he just walked forward, and left all his burdens behind.

Mia took a step forward, her hand in his, and he followed.