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this review is going to have many bad jokes and attempts at funny comments because I am, ^{Helm 1} admittedly, tired as I read it. I apologize in advance

X-ray (pre-revisions)

- It's the end of summer, and Basil has returned to his parents' house after having a breakdown two weeks into his fourth year of college.
- After days or weeks of Basil staying cooped up in his room, his mother confronts him and asks him to talk to her. He does not tell her the details of his situation, but he's able to let his emotions out for the first time since coming back.
- That night, Basil wakes up hungry, goes to the kitchen, and discovers a...boy? sprawled on his kitchen floor. The boy seems to know him.
- Basil is afraid and tries to run, but is overcome with dread that there's something worse waiting outside—a fear the boy confirms. Curious, Basil looks through the peephole and sees an eye staring back.
- Basil's mother wakes up in the other room, then disappears, unseen.
- The boy offers Basil food and suggests that he meet the entity outside, which Basil refuses to do. After warning him that this won't stop until he does, the boy leaves Basil alone.
 - I kind of want to rework their first interaction - i feel like I don't have a clear picture of Basil's thinking, and he needs a stronger motivation later on
- Basil conducts a halfhearted search for his parents, but there are no records of them. His family has forgotten their relationship to him as well. Basil is isolated, with only the boy for company and the other entity lurking outside his house, and a sense that time is running out. *Maybe you could reference a search at some point? Though if he's content with the boy's explanation, I guess there's no need*
- I'm not a huge fan of this one; I feel like it doesn't fit well, and doesn't really come up anywhere else anyway
- The entity appears when Basil is outside and begins to follow him. He runs away, terrified.
- The boy appears on a motorcycle, offering him a ride and saying that he had to send everyone away. Basil is now in a world devoid of life besides himself, the boy, and her. It's too much for him to bear.
 - ugh, the motorcycle. It comes out of nowhere. I like the stuff surrounding it, it's just that it pops into existence for no apparent reason. Maybe the boy stole it. *I didn't really question it, tbh. Boy's got magic. Magic motorcycle*
- The boy says that there's no escape, and this is the end.
- Basil asks the boy to stop, and goes to confront the entity. He feels something familiar, and a sense of relief. She tries to leave now that he's ready to face her, but he stops her and promises to speak with her in the morning.
 - I want the ending to stay a little ambiguous, but I think it needs to be clearer *yes please > <*

Triage

- Develop Basil's motivation, have clearer stakes – in the before draft, I feel like it's unclear why he acts/reacts the way he does. I think it's both a character and a plot thing, so I'm reworking his relationships and some of the story beats to hopefully make things fit better. *I wonder if learning about his past could help with some of that—what makes him break? How does he interact with his homophobic dad? What was his life like before this depressive phase? Etc.*
- Build out Basil's relationships and give him and the other characters more depth – especially the boy, since he's also a major character *I want to see more about Her as well, since she's the cause of the conflict and at this point she feels more like a set piece than a character. She drives the story, but isn't a "person" outside of that until the last page*

Reading the chapter on suspense and tension *same!*

same!

sounds
like
depression

run-down
environment, Red Eyes
unfortunate Protagonist

summer

The air conditioning was broken. It was the second Monday of September, and Basil was

laying on his bedroom floor in the same spot as always, with his cheek tucked into his elbow and

one bony hip digging into the worn, gray carpet. By two in the afternoon, the rectangular patch of

sunlight beating down through his window will have crept halfway up his body. When it reaches

his eyes, he will peel his face off his arm, turn his head away from the light, and try to sleep

again. Not that he'll be able to—it's too hot for that.

An occasional gust of warm air carries the scent of dried grass clippings through his open window, and a lone cicada is singing somewhere outside. A droplet of sweat trickles down the

nape of Basil's neck. He shouldn't even be here. It was supposed to be his senior year of college,

he was supposed to be across the country, and it had never been easy but he'd been holding on by

a thread for three years. He was so close, and then, then, two weeks in, something snapped.

It wasn't over. They said he could come back in the spring, or next fall, when he was ready. It's not over, he told himself. The night he got home, he'd lingered in his parents'

procrastinating—shame?

driveway in the dark and promised not to let that be a lie. Then he went inside, let his mom fuss

over him for a moment, shut his bedroom door behind him, and curled into a ball on the floor.

[How could it not be over if he couldn't even bring himself to sit up?]

When evening came, his mother came by his door to tell him it was time for dinner, just like she always did. Like always, Basil told her thank you, it's okay, I'm not hungry. Then she

would worry over him for a moment, he would reassure her through the door that he was fine

and he'd eat something later, and she'd leave, and he'd curl up tighter, smaller than before. This

time, though, he didn't hear her go.

she's worried

"Basil, can we talk?" Her voice was warm and low, comforting in its familiarity. She sounded ^{I was correct >:)} worried—of course she was worried. He didn't want her to see him. He ^{bro's strugglin'} forced his body upright and opened the door.

He didn't know what it was about seeing him that made his mother look so relieved, but there was something about her eyes that was impossible to meet. For a moment, Basil tried and failed to say something reassuring, until she pulled him into a hug and a sob wrenched up through his chest. He realized this was the first time he'd cried since moving back. After a while, she wiped his eyes with her thumbs, gave him one last hug, and told him she'd be there ^{Good mom} whenever he was ready to talk. She shut the door softly behind her, and he fell back onto his bed, exhausted. Sleep finally came, dreamless and uneasy.

SCENE BREAK!!!

Basil woke up hungry and cold despite the suffocating heat in his room. He lay still for a moment and thought about going back to sleep, but his ^{ominous. or ill. or both} twisting stomach said otherwise. He crept out of bed and down the hall, slowing outside his parents' room so he wouldn't wake them. Still half asleep, he stepped barefoot onto the lukewarm linoleum kitchen floor. ^{hungry} ^{even. something about lukewarm linoleum makes me uncomfortable. something made it warm}

^{who is this strange gentleman your first time reader may ask} Of all the things Basil expected to see in his kitchen at three in the morning, ^{It's m'boy! Return of the King?} a lanky stranger sprawled face-down in front of the fridge was not one of them. The figure was pale and motionless, and Basil thought it might be dead. Even so, that might have been preferable to the boy on the floor ^{like a ragdoll} flopping over to face him. He stifled a scream. The boy looked the same age as Basil, but it was hard to tell for sure. His face was strange, the features unstable and awkwardly placed, as if they'd been stuck on by someone with only a vague idea of how humans ought to look. His expression was serene, as if lying in front of Basil's fridge was a perfectly normal thing for him to do. ^{hehe}

Familiarity

Helm 4

"Hello, Basil," he said.

Basil turned and bolted for the front door, but stopped short the second his hand touched the doorknob. The metal was uncomfortably warm under his fingers—feverish. He had a sudden feeling that something was on the other side, waiting for him to come out, and a sense of dread washed over him. But what about the boy lying on the floor?

who may she be? "Don't go outside!" he called out from the kitchen, as if he had heard Basil's thoughts. "She is dangerous. Wait for me."

Basil hesitated, but a gut feeling told him the stranger was right. Still, he went to steal a glance through the peephole. A ^{eww} wet red eye stared back at him. It wasn't human. Basil staggered away from the door.

"Please, don't!" the boy yelled, his voice suddenly urgent. A pan clanked against the stovetop, and across the house, someone stirred in the bedroom.

"Basil? What are you doing out there?" his mother called out, groggily. "It's three in the morning! Are you cooking?"

Something in the air shifted at the sound of her voice, as if, for just a moment, the eye fixating on Basil had snapped to a new target. From the kitchen, the boy let out a wail. Basil heard his mother get out of bed.

"Sweetie, are you alright? Is there someone th—"

Like he's on a plane. Interesting ^{still love this description} Her voice cut out suddenly, as if someone had switched off a TV. A sudden wave of pressure made Basil's ears pop. Hairs prickled on the back of his neck.

"Mom?"

There was no answer as he rushed for his parents' bedroom. The door was cracked open, but there was no sound, no movement inside. With a sinking feeling, Basil stepped into the room.

Remnant of a
MAGICAL POWER?

Helm 5

There was nothing there but him and a thrums of static electricity. Traces of his parents were still there—rumpled bed sheets, his mother's slippers out of place—but they were gone. It was like they'd fallen out of existence. Basil buried his face in his hands.

He didn't hear footsteps, but a moment later, he felt a presence behind him. Basil turned to face the boy from the kitchen floor. Now standing upright, he might have been a foot taller than Basil. He seemed unsteady on his feet, and he was holding a steaming plate of scrambled eggs. *yummy*

"Here, Basil. I am sorry about what happened. You should eat."

He wobbled slightly as he held out the plate. The pile of eggs wobbled with him. Basil accepted the offering, if only to keep it off the carpet.

"...Thanks." He looked at the plate in his hands. Scorched oil pooled around the curds, and there was no fork. His stomach growled. He was going to cry again. "What happened?"

"She wants to see you. The others were not safe here, so I sent them out." They were not harmed. Do not worry." The boy held Basil's gaze, as if he really meant it.

"Out? What are you talking about? Who is she? Who—what—are you?"

"We are here because of you, Basil," the boy said, not answering the question. He paused to think, and to listen. "Yes, you can go see her if you like. She is calmer with them away. And I can keep her in check. For now."

The thought of facing the thing outside made Basil feel sick. If there had been anything in his stomach, he would have thrown it up. The boy's brow furrowed with concern.

"Oh, no. I understand. I will make sure she leaves tonight, but know that she will not be satisfied until she sees you." He slipped past Basil into the room and reached for the bedcovers,

why? Was that where
his parents were?

Helm 6

going rigid as his hand passed through the space above them. When he turned around, his face was twisted with something like regret. "She will return. Eat those before they get cold."

Basil blinked, and he was alone. His gut clenched. The eggs were already cold, but he ate them anyway and crawled into bed.

The house was quiet when the sun woke him again.

Scene break

bro just goes limp
when inactive

Basil was barely surprised when he found the boy slumped over the stove. He took in the scene: a faint sizzling sound, the acrid smell of burnt hair hanging in the kitchen, oil and eggs laid out on the countertop, and a frying pan teetering next to the boy's head, which rested atop a burner. Basil swept across the kitchen to turn it off. Then, with enormous effort—the boy's body was limp and much, much heavier than it looked, like his bones were made of lead—Basil pulled him off the stove.

"What the hell are you doing?" he asked, fussing over the now not-quite stranger. The boy's pale hair was singed black over his left ear, and an angry welt was already fading from his cheek.

magic

like he's sleepy.
does he sleep?

"Basil," the boy mumbled.

"Yeah?" he replied, but he wasn't listening. His fingertips brushed over the remnants of the boy's burn as he watched the shiny red patches of seared skin melt down into a soft, dull white. The boy went to stop him with a jittery hand, and Basil found cold, pallid fingers lacing between his own. He shuddered, shaken from a daze.

erm... 

"Cooking. For you." The boy dropped Basil's hand and clutched at the pan, seeming a bit stronger than before. He'd raised himself to an upright position. Still, Basil had little faith in his ability to actually stand there and cook.

"I'll make something. You can go sit down." He put out a hand to steady the boy, who ^{they're both built like rotting string beans} had just wobbled alarmingly. "Or lay down. You don't look good."

The boy slid to the floor as Basil reached up to take bread and salt from the cupboard. Eggs on toast. ^{before he went mildly catatonic?} He'd made it for breakfast countless times before, nearly every day until he was sick of it, but now he was desperate for something, anything to be normal. He set the pan on the other burner—the one without charred flesh stuck to it—and tried to stay calm. Bread goes in the toaster. ^{ew} simple instructions to keep focused & calm

"What happened to my parents?" he finally asked, cracking two eggs into the pan. One after the other, they hit the hot metal with a hiss. The boy shifted beside him.

"They're... somewhere else." He hesitated, like he was searching for the right words. "A second space, outside this one. It is safe," he continued. Basil flicked his wrist, sending the eggs into the air. ^{in MLA a space follows an ellipsis} Look at you, Gordon Ramsay

^{SPLAT} "Are you." The eggs slapped back into the pan, yolks bursting on impact. "Going to bring them back." ^{not a little confused when I first read this because there wasn't any indication it would be connected to the rest of his dialogue}

"They will not be safe when she returns. And she will always return. Unless you—"

Basil couldn't look at him. "Unless I what? Go talk to her? That's what you want, isn't it?" ^{why? What makes him different — just that she wants him?}

"It is what she wants. You will survive it. The others cannot—she is not here for them. They must stay away until you appease her." The boy looked uneasy, then. "And... ^{space} it would be better if you do that soon. The second space must not close ^{or they'll be stuck there?} until they have left it, and life attracts life." ^{hence why everyone else disappears}

"You mean, 'like attracts—' ^{add an apostrophe after the em dash since you were quoting 'like attracts like'}

SPACE

"I mean the exchange cannot be stopped partway. Just... please. When you are ready."

The boy slumped forward, and the room went oddly silent, save the hum of the toaster and the crackle of burning eggs. The toast popped up with a clank and a hollow *ding*. It was then that Basil realized Not just people life he couldn't hear birds outside.

~~The boy's warning was accurate. She came back a few days later, and again a few days after that, and again, and again. It became something of a routine, where she would appear in the night to wait outside the house, quiet, still, and staring, until the boy convinced her to leave. He was there, too, every time asking if Basil was willing to meet her. He wasn't.~~

~~Basil thought the boy would be frustrated with him, but that never seemed to happen. He only warned him that she would not wait forever.~~

~~Basil knew time was running out. The boy was at his house every night now, and he seemed worried. It took him longer every time he went out to send her away. He thought he could hear the boy arguing, then pleading with her. Sometimes during the day, Basil felt like he was being watched through the windows. He didn't dare to look outside until the feeling passed. He barely left the house at all, only making short trips to buy necessities, but even that was becoming too much to bear. He was terrified of being caught in the open.~~

Basil had never been a runner. There were plenty of times when he'd wished that were different—when he signed up for the track team in sixth grade, for example, or on his nineteenth birthday when he came out to his family and saw the look on his father's face, or four minutes ago as he was hurrying back from the grocery store, and saw her watching him from under a tree

are there still
clerks? any other
people to react to the
missing life?

still willing to let him stay home - but that's an uncomfortable living situation. How does his mom feel? Is she a mediator? Does his dad even want him home?

across the street. He'd never seen her like this before, he'd tried so hard not to see her at all—but it didn't matter. It couldn't have been anyone else.

She was a wall of damp, bloodshot eyes, a mass of flesh and teeth tall enough to brush ^{as though he had power over her} against the branches above her. They both stood there for a moment, transfixed by the other's ^{somehow} gaze. Then, with a hollow scream, she jolted towards him.

Basil had been crying earlier that evening, and he wanted to cry again now—in any case, IS SHE GOING TO TAKE HIS EYES? Alternatively, twinsties ↓ his eyes would have been right at home among hers. It was a strange thought, but Basil found

himself unable to shake it as he dropped his groceries and began to sprint. He hardly glanced at his house as he passed it. He just needed to get away, as far away as he could.

The pounding of his boots on the pavement sent shocks up through his ankles. His calves YOUR FORM IS IMPROPER, BASIL! burned, and pins and needles shot through his thighs. The mild night air felt like it was ripping through his throat. His mouth tasted like metal. He couldn't breathe. He couldn't think. He couldn't go on.

He stumbled to his knees on a deserted street corner. She was still close behind him—she wasn't fast, but Basil hadn't made it far, either. Under the dim orange glow of a streetlight, he took a long, shuddering breath. Where was the boy? He was always there when she came. Basil couldn't do this, he couldn't face her, not yet, not alone—

A motorcycle roared in the street, and Basil would later wonder how the boy got it. ^{Apparently, so does the author} 

"Get on the bike, Basil."

Relief washed over him, but his breath caught in his chest when he saw the boy's face. For the first time, he looked afraid, and exhausted. ^{Why does he spend so much effort helping Basil?}

"I had to send everyone away," the boy said flatly. "You have to come with me, now. She ^{to the second place} will not listen to me this time."

"Everyone? I don't—"

"Now, Basil!"

It felt like they had been riding for hours, but the moon never seemed to move in the sky. ^{magic taking a toll on him?} Its light glinted in the boy's hair. His body felt feverish under Basil's arms. They were on a deserted, apparently never-ending stretch of road, far from the now-empty houses of his neighborhood. ^{where does he live?} A cool breeze whipped around his ears. He could see the ocean.

Despite his racing thoughts, Basil was quiet. Everything had fallen apart in an instant. ^{oddly peaceful sight} Again. A sob shook his body, and the boy looked back at him.

"You know you cannot escape her. At least, not like this," the boy said. He paused as if he was unwilling to push Basil any further, despite everything. Finally, he said, "This will be the end. You already know what to do. I am just giving you time."

"I'm not ready."

"I know that. Even so."

"Why can't you send me away like everyone else?"

^{How?} "She would only follow. She is tied to you. Much like I am."

Basil closed his eyes and let his head fall forward to rest against the boy's back. Why was he even afraid anymore? There was nothing left for him to lose.

"We can stop now," he said, after what felt like an eternity. The boy pulled over to the side of the road without a word. Basil got off the bike and turned to face the way they came. Without looking back, he sensed that the boy was no longer behind him. He blinked.

She was right in front of him. Heat radiated from her body. Hundreds of eyes stared into his. Basil again fought the urge to run away, and as he looked back at her, he saw something familiar. A pressure in his skull, one that had been there so long he'd forgotten it, lessened slightly. Words began to form in the back of his mind, and as if she knew what he was thinking, she began to shrink away. But she couldn't be satisfied now—it couldn't be over yet. He reached for her, and his fingertips were only inches from the raw skin under her ever-weeping eyes. At the last second, he pulled back.

"I'll talk to you in the morning, okay?"

Who is she? Is she a metaphor
for... something? His
shoddy mental state?