

The convenience store was just like any other. With a cool breeze from the air conditioning caressing his face upon crossing the threshold, Jimmy tentatively approached the aisles of merchandise. Not looking at the woman behind the counter, the young boy entered the frozen aisle, his eyes peeled for the elusive Mancynn. It wasn't long before he found him, though not quite as he'd expected.

Philip was standing next to an open freezer, a shopping basket hanging from the crook of his elbow. On spotting Jimmy out the corner of his eye, the teen greeted him by means of a benign smile.

"What do you think they'll prefer? Vanilla or chocolate?" he asked, showing Jimmy the tubs of ice cream he was considering.

"What?"

Taken aback by the calmness with which Philip was conducting himself, especially since he'd just run away from the safe-house, Jimmy drew nearer to his friend at a pace slower than perhaps was usual for him.

"Or what about pistachio?" Philip went on to suggest, as if he hadn't heard Jimmy's confused reply. "But we don't have a freezer back at the house, do we? None of this would keep."

He put the tubs back on their shelves and closed the freezer.

"How about crisps?"

"You're meant to be back at the house," Jimmy brought himself to remind Philip.

The Mancynn was already moving down the aisle, not looking back up at Jimmy, "Well 'here' is an ambiguous term. Also I won't be long."

Maintaining his distance from Philip, Jimmy persisted, somewhat reluctantly, "But what are you doing?"

Philip stopped before turning the corner, his head bowed, waiting for Jimmy to catch up to him while he contemplated his response. Every so often he'd look up out of the corner of his eye to somewhere above Jimmy's head for just a second.

"The others are going to be hungry when they get back," Philip said at last. "While we do have some food, I thought it'd be nice if I brought them back some treats. Some things to celebrate the success I'm sure they'll have. Now come along. I need your advice. Just step over here, please."

"But..."

Philip spun to the side in what was meant to be a friendly gesture as he put his arm around the boy, guiding him up to the corner. In his haste the towering molten creature hiding at the other end of the aisle was barely glimpsed in his periphery. Nevertheless he heard its voice, its vastly-deep timbre that bubbled like the volcanic fires it could conceivably have come from, speaking to the back of his head.

"So you choose to hide amongst the ordinary people. As if you could blend in with their crowds. You will never be one of them. You can never be one of them."

Trying to ignore the apparition's rumbling words, Philip kept on pulling Jimmy along.

"So I was thinking a multi-pack, so that people have a choice..."

Still not comfortable with this suddenly over-friendly Philip, Jimmy once again tried to point out, "But how are you going to pay for all this?"

The boy instantly felt the Mancynn's hand tighten around his shoulder. Little did he know Philip was still too preoccupied with hearing the creature's taunts.

"You would spare him from me? He is not worth it."

From Jimmy's point of view Philip had just stopped, breathing heavily whilst staring at nothing, his hand still immovable where it gripped him. What if he was getting angry?

"I was just wondering how you were going to pay for this food is all..."

"How long before they die?" The voice burnt into Philip's ears just as intensely as he'd envisioned the hovering fiery messages scorching the walls back at the house, "How long before their inability to handle proximity to your powers gets them all killed?"

"Shut up!"

The basket fell to the floor, its minimal contents spilling out around their feet. He'd even let go of Jimmy so that he could rub both his ears with unnecessary and unhelpful force.

"Hey, what are you kids doing back there?" the woman behind the counter called out.

"I was only thinking that we can't resort to stealing," Jimmy explained meekly.

But he did so in vain. Philip was running, running from the store without his carefully-picked food items, muttering "I just want to help them" under his breath all the way.

[INTERVENING SECTIONS OMITTED]

With all his might Philip ran down the street away from the convenience store as Britain welcomed midday. He had to draw it away, lest it go after Jimmy or the woman at the counter. It was fortunate this street was empty of bystanders or he'd fear creating more potential collateral damage.

As much as he knew he should fear the thing behind him, his inbuilt curiosity would not allow him to not at least get a good view of his pursuer. With that in mind, making sure he would not slow down in doing so, Philip looked over his shoulder.

It was massive, a beast on all fours whose every muscle was clearly defined. Its flesh was like magma, seeming by appearance to be made of molten rock mixed together with glowing orange plasma. A pair of vicious curving horns erupted from its scalp,

exceeding the width of its hole-ridden torso. As for the face beneath them...well it was as melted as the pavement it bounded upon should by all rights have been. While it did have features they were twisted so out of proportion, its 'skin' stretched over parts of every orifice, that it was only just recognisable as a face. When it spoke the malformed strands of flesh bridging its mouth were pulled taut, their differences in length causing a slight angle to the lips when opened.

"They thought they could defeat me. You thought you could defeat me. But I cannot be vanquished." As it spoke, small flames poked through the bands of flesh over its mouth, "Oh, if they could see you now. How disappointed they would be."

Spurred on by anger, Philip redirected more mass to his legs in an attempt to go even faster. Speeding down the street he dashed over a road and kept going. He had to lead it away from everyone else. Only then would he be helping them. The price was for now just having to hear its seemingly unending jeering.

"You think you can outrun me?"

[INTERVENING SECTIONS OMITTED]

With the sun shining softly in his eyes, Philip stood in the middle of the rows of headstones and fir trees with no idea of where his haunting apparition had gone. In his peripheral vision he was vaguely aware of bystanders watching him a short distance away in most directions. There was no way of guaranteeing keeping everyone safe now. *Open your eyes and run.* Well he'd 'run', that order at least was obeyed, but what could 'Open your eyes' possibly mean? Should he ask it? It was one of the few lines of action he could take so far as he could imagine.

"It means that you should realise your situation," the demon's voice rumbled.

Philip spun on the spot to find the molten creature now standing on its hind legs like a human. It loomed over him, its entire countenance juxtaposing the church backdrop. Without thinking Philip lashed out, raising the heat output of his hand to burning point. Had he been thinking, he might have anticipated the lack of effect this had when he pressed his palm against the fiery hide of the beast.

Now he was definitely thinking fast. The thing's enormous fingers were about to take a hold of him, he had little time to come up with a contingency plan. If he could in theory ignite objects by increasing the heat he emitted, maybe he could do the reverse, suck in the heat from his surroundings. It was worth a shot.

But his window for theorising had elapsed. He suddenly found his arm caught in the vice-like grip of the creature, its claws digging into his skin through his jacket. He would have to work out this potential ability on the fly. Trying to imagine what the

sensation of freezing what he was touching would be like, Philip was amazed to see that there did indeed seem to be small ice crystals forming around his fingers. The creature tightened its grip, but not it would seem because the cold was effecting it. No, none of the ice actually touched it. Moreover, as soon as its grip had tightened, the freezing effect shot outwards through the air. In shock Philip stopped. Staring up at the thing's face he saw the glint in its eyes, the sign that it was in fact toying with him.

Time for a new plan. Philip began rearranging his molecules, reducing the number in his arm in order to make it small enough to slip out of the thing's grasp. This worked, in a way. Philip went stumbling backwards, suddenly free as planned, but his transformation had gone further than it should have. To his horror his arm had shrunk dramatically while every other part of him was expanding. Writhing on the warm earth, Philip tried to shake himself back to normal, all of his limbs flailing. This seemed to be successful, but the string of strange occurrences wasn't stopping there. In the midst of his writhing a cluster of headstones had shot up from the ground and were now hovering around the demon, looking as though they were poised for an attack against the Mancynn.

"You have seen what I can do," the creature leered. "You cannot stop me. I am inevitable. And when I am done with you, you will no longer be Mancynn."

"You're wrong," Philip retorted, pulling himself to his feet. "My friends and I, we will defeat you."

The headstones had dropped and the monster took one large step forward. With one swing of its own arm it took hold of Philip again, this time by the throat, lifting him up high off the ground, drawing him level and close to its nightmarish face.

"I am Marz," the figure roared through its horrible melted mouth, "and I do not die!"