

The rolling intro floats out across the roaring crowd. “Long Long Long Time” from their *Loose Tea* album. James feels the floor vibrating under his feet to Mal's steady drumbeat and his chest thrums in sync with the screech of the guitar and high melody of the piano. He waits, and the lift and howl of the crowd, like a thousand glowing volts, surges forward. The collective voice buoys the familiar lyrics around him, and he is struck by the smell of so many bodies, beer and shampoo and vape and weed and cologne and grit and sweat. It is the smell of a crowded New York city subway train, the smell of rage and resignation, of youth and age, of all the chemical elements that soak in or slough off skin during a day settling in a cloud of funk. His limbs carry the rhythm, sliding and grooving, channeling the energy like a frantic marionette. As long as he doesn't think about what is happening, his body knows what to do next.

He could be standing anywhere, in any time, in any city, in any lifetime, and it would always feel like this. The smoke, the heat of the crowd, the anticipation, the abyss. James steps onto the stage and readies his mind for the screams, the energy, all for him. He punches the air like a maniac and takes the atmosphere of the venue into his lungs.

As always, he wants the fans to forget themselves, to soar into the songs, to lose it and break into some sort of spirit dance. He spies some dopes near the front, guys pulling a running man or hamming up some dorky move. Years ago, he might have tossed a beer can or some crap thrown on stage in their direction, or said something shitty to them. Now he recognizes the awkwardness. These guys don't know how to let go, don't know how to find the power and the joy. They're fighting themselves, sad, and not worth his time.

He looks for the fans who'll go with him into the trance. That tall guy, shaking his head, letting his arms loose. He's there. A trio of girls, their eyes screaming their ecstasy at him. A burly man and his chunky mop-haired pasty friend near the front, punching air and bumping