Basket(ball) Case

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Summary

Danny Fenton wasn't normal. Everyone in Amity Park, minus Danny's parents, knew this in some capacity.

Only Wesley seemed to acknowledge it, though. No one else, be it friends, bullies, or strangers, ever pointed out the weirdness of Danny Fenton. Maybe they were scared of what the not-human-boy truly was. Maybe they were just used to it, given the general weirdness of Amity Park. Maybe it was an unspoken rule to not delve deeper into the paranormalities in town. Wes was never good at unspoken rules. He was more afraid of the unknown dangers of the world than the terrifying realities of it.

And so, when Danny Fenton started... Whatever all this was? Westley Weston paid attention.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

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Danny tripped a lot more, but not in a clumsy way. No, no. Danny would trip through things. Fall through solid objects. Hell, solid objects fell through him sometimes!

He would get out of impossible places, ones where most people wouldn't be physically capable of escaping.

His rows of sharp teeth crammed into a mouth too small with a grin too wide, his face and ears pointier, fingers more elongated and clawlike.

His hair was wispier, like a small breeze somehow got inside and tussled only Danny's hair.

His pupils became more cat-like, dilating and expanding with intense emotions that caused his irises to flicker with (neon? Electric? Radiation?) green. Hell, Wes was sure he'd seen them reflect the way animals' do in the dark. The way humans physically can't.

And, you know, Danny's whole disappearing act. The one where Fenton literally disappeared and came back as the town vigilante-slash-hero Danny Phantom. Danny. Phantom.

The town's ignorance, be it wilful ignorance or otherwise, pissed Wesley off to no end. He told only the people who would listen, at first. They laughed him off, treating him as a joke. So, he starts procuring evidence. Sightings, photos, any word of mouth he could get. He told other people, not caring on how much they would listen anymore. He just needed someone to see the truth; how much danger they were in. That's what he told himself.

Everyone saw Phantom as a hero.

Everyone saw Fenton as a loser.

Wesley saw how easily Danny could hurt people, if-when he decided to stop playing nice. If-when all the stress of part-time ghostly, hero part-time outcast student got to him.

But nobody listened. Nobody cared. Nobody acknowledged the truth. Until someone did.

"Stop. Stalking. Danny." Danny's friends, Sam and Tucker, had metaphorically cornered him. He was rhythmically practising shots; the motion helped him focused on his thoughts. Dribble, aim, jump, shoot, repeat.

"What she means is, why are you stalking Danny?" Tucker's voice and face were calm and curious, but his body was tense and ready to run; either towards, or away from Wes.

He continued practising. Dribble, aim, jump, shoot, repeat.

"What, uh. What are you talking about?" In all Wes' researching, sorting evidence, making cue cards and presentations, in all his planning every single way to quell whatever doubts someone had about the truth, he had never thought of a response for this.

"You know exactly what we're talking about." Sam forced eye contact, glaring intensely at Wes. Maybe it would have worked, if Wes and the rest of the town had not constantly faced murderous ghouls. His eyes locked back onto the basketball. Dribble, aim, jump, shoot, repeat.

"... I don't stalk people." That was safe, right? Danny wasn't a person.

"Bullshit."

"I have video evidence of you trespassing, harassing people, and stalking our friend. You don't cover your tracks very well." Tucker's words made his entire body seized for a moment, as though he'd been shoved in freezing water with no warning. He forced himself to breathe; to continue the calming motions. Dribble, aim, jump, shoot, repeat.

"What uh," Wes glanced over at the two, who were watching his motions like a hawk, "Who would you go to with that? The cops? His parents? My parents?" Sam scoffed.

"As if we trust any of the 'authority' in this town to do something, no," Wes briefly sighed, "but, we can get you blacklisted from every College, University, and future job that you want. Isn't that right, Tuck?"

The pair smiled slyly, and Wes noticed the too-sharp teeth filling their grins. Not sharp enough, and not nearly as many, as to compare to Danny's, and surely not noticeable if you weren't staring, but still.

He felt like vomiting. His heart beat in his throat. His body felt distant. He heard his nails scratch along the bumps and grooves of the basketball; the sound echoing in his ears. The pattern, the rhythm, the calm, the safety, of the motions, were gone.

"IF YOU KILL ME I'LL COME BACK AS A GHOST AND ANNOY YOU FOR THE REST OF MY AFTERLIFE." Wes managed to shout, despite the thick feeling in his throat. The words rung in his ears, booming and staticy. So close, yet so distant. He felt like he was drowning.

What was he supposed to do when he felt like this again? Be a man and suck it up? No, no, that's unhelpful, even if his dad thought otherwise. Go somewhere safe? That felt right. But safe, his house, his room, was too far. What else is safe? Where else is safe? Not here. Not Amity Park. Not anywhere they could find him. But where wouldn't they find him? Wes didn't know.

His legs buckled under his weight, knees hitting the concrete with a loud Thunk. He fell to the side, and luckily his arm took most of the impact, because his head hit the smooth, rock flooring immediately after.

He blinked and–oh. When did Sam and Tucker get in front of him? Were they about to kill him? Wes knew whatever he said to convince them not to was probably stupid, seeing as it surprisingly something he didn't plan for. No true reasoning skills behind it, just a last minute plea fuelled by looming doom. Wesley's eyes scrunched so tight it hurt.

Then, someone to his left was holding him up, rubbing circles against his back. Someone else, to his right, was holding his hand against their chest, taking deep breaths. Wes started doing the same.

"In. Hold it. Out. Hold it." He heard someone repeating. He mentally echoed the sentiment. In. Hold it. Out. Hold it.

"You good?" The other asked. He nodded, opening his eyes and–oh. Still here. Still with Sam and Tucker. His breath hitched, and he forcefully instilled the mantra in his mind. In. Hold it. Out. Hold it.

"... Why did you..." Wes half-asked, hand dropping away from who he recognized as Sam. Tucker's hand stopped, resting briefly before allowing the air to take his hand's place. They both shuffled back slightly, giving Wes some breathing room while keeping him within arm's reach.

"It's what Jazz does when Danny has a panic attack."

"You're not supposed to touch people. When that happens."

"I mean, you didn't bite our hands off, so I think we're good." Tucker chuckled as Sam rolled her eyes. Wes just hummed, hand holding his wrist, thumb pressing too hard into it. His pulse thumped back. Still alive.

Wesley tried to collect his thoughts. To stabilize himself. He couldn't let go of his wrist, because not knowing if he was alive was worse than knowing if he was dead, so his nails scratched the back of his wrist in time with the beating of his heart.

"... I. Agree. Not to continue telling people the truth about Danny, if you promise not to kill me." The pause gave him some time to think, to use some

"Deal!" Tucker went to shake Wes' unoccupied hand, before Sam put her arm out.

"No. Agreeing isn't the same as a promise. Even if it were, you could continue trying to inform people about Danny without directly telling them. Also, we're not going to kill you anyways." His scratching paused, nails pressing slightly deeper into his skin.

Why wouldn't they kill him? She was right, he probably would find away around 'not telling people the truth,' even if people still wouldn't listen. Even if he did stop completely, his insistence must have–could have– maybe have planted at least the connection in some peoples' minds.

"Sam, you didn't have to tell him that."

"He literally passed out after shouting at us not to kill him. Unless you wanna go through that again?"

"... Point taken. So, corkboard,"

"Wes."

"It's either corkboard or stalker. Take your pick." Wes grumbled, scratching to the rhythm of his heartbeat again.

"That's what I thought. So, corkboard, why're you stalking Danny." They both knew Fenton and Phantom were one and the same. They're the only others to accept it, even if they keep refusing to acknowledge it. So, step 1 was already out of the way for him. Time for step 2.

"Simply put, he's dangerous. He holds unfathomable power compared to people. He's even stronger than every ghost to come out of the portal! Enough to take on multiple at once. All it takes is something for him to snap, and he won't be playing hero anymore. Given the stress of pretending to be human with school, bullies, and his parents; and constantly fighting ghosts and, again, his parents, who want to kill him a second time? There's no way he wouldn't snap eventually, even if he is a ghost. Especially because he is a ghost.

"Even with our current ghost hunting technologies, it's often faulty, or he knows the ins-and-outs of it in the way most people never will. He could easily tamper with it, and render any defences we have obsolete. Not to mention the incompetence of our local 'ghost hunters,' who've caused far more damage than any previous ghost has!" Wesley breathed heavily, letting go of his wrist as he did. The intense red and white imprints seemed vibrant against his pale skin, and his hand was tinged with light purple. He flexed his fingers, trying to get the blood flowing and the numb prickles out.

"... That was 'simply put?"' Tucker chuckled, reminding Wes that he did, in fact, have an audience that listened to him without interrupting with stupid objections. An audience that wasn't an object.

"Sam." Tucker was leaning towards her, hand vaguely raised. Like he was going to whisper a secret to her. Or grab her. He couldn't tell what Tucker was trying to imply to her, but he could tell how pissed Sam looked.

"Do you not know how hypocritical you are?!" She stood, quicker than Wes could blink, and Tucker followed. Both the boy's knees were slightly bent, both arms half raised. In case she fell. Or needed to be held back. Wes jumped up, her locked-on gaze and fully visible teeth uncomfortably giving him the feeling of predator vs prey.

"It–"

"No. We listened to you without interrupting. You will listen to us." His heart beat faster, along with his scratching. What had Sam said before? 'In. Hold it. Out. Hold it?' He could do that again.

"You, Wesley Weston, are an uncompassionate, inconsiderate, hypocrite. You call him dangerous because he might snap. You give reasons he might snap. You know some of how bad it could be if he did snap. Yet somehow, in none of your stalking, did you think about how you are literally one of the reasons Danny could snap.

"You're a nuisance in and out of school, you bully him through stalking, stealing, rumour spreading, name-calling, and other general harassment, and no I don't care if you're 'spreading the truth,' because it's still verbal harassment, and you endanger him to ghosts, ghost hunters, and whoever else out there wants to kill him, which yes, include his parents, by constantly telling people about his identities!

"How have you, with all your red string theories, not put this shit together? Or do you just not care about what happens to him? Because, with how much you talk about Danny, you never said what you think would happen if people did believe you! Danny would never be safe here, fuck, he might not be safe anywhere if people were determined enough to, what, kill him? Capture him? Torture, experiment on, and otherwise maim him? Because you and so many other people see him as 'not a person,' or 'less than human,' because he died? Is that what you're hoping for?"

In. Hold it. Out. Hold it. He couldn't have another freak-out, especially now. He's not weak. He could take being yelled at. People being mad at him wasn't a personal attack. ... But this was personal. This was a judgment of who he was. And he was a... Bad person. A part of him weakly protested that he was trying to keep people safe. That he was trying to protect others. He knew he wasn't. He wanted to be right. To not be a joke. To be taken seriously. To not be a weird kid who talks about weird things and doesn't care about others. But he's doing exactly what he doesn't want to be, and none of what he does. Because the truth, even if terrifying, was more comforting than the mystery of the unsolved. But hurting and endangering others because he was scared of the unknown? Is that what he meant to do?

"I don't know." And if those words weren't a death sentence. Tucker was staring at him, in some kind of shock, or maybe disgust, body tense and arms no longer floating near Sam in any capacity. And Sam, she was no longer sizing him down, watching his every move. No, she was ready to attack.

"You don't know." Voice low and rasp, she ground her teeth.

"I didn't want to. To hurt anyone."

"Yeah, and we haven't watched Danny drink a beaker of ectoplasm." Tucker scoffed. Wesley hoped that wasn't sarcasm.

"I didn't think about what would happen. I didn't consider myself as a stressor. I didn't care about anything besides proving I was right." He could have sugar coated it, could have tried to defend his actions, to convince them, to convince himself. He didn't think he deserved it. Bad people, people who have hurt others, dangerous people, deserve what's coming to them, don't they?

"Catch." Was all the warning he got before his forgotten basketball thwacked him in the back of the head.

"HEY DI–" Wes turned, sputtering to a stop as he realized who had said that. What had said that.

His eyes and grin appeared first, sharp and mischievous, like the Cheshire Cat. His features blinked from existence, and the air where his body would be started pulling and contorting,

pressing his shape into reality itself, vacuuming the beam of the streetlights–how long had he been here? Been out?–like a black hole. The air stretched and weaved, threading together and tearing itself apart. And then, he was there. Wes hadn't realized how quiet everything had been until sound returned.

Tucker whistled, "That's new." While Sam groaned, rolling her eyes, "Show off." The two were closer to him than he remembered, probably to watch their friend's appearance.

"Thank you, thank you!" He bowed, laughing with a voice that sounded as clear as a bell's chime in an open cave.

Wes could see his ghost form clearly now, rather than through staticy photos and high speed battles. Every inhuman feature Wes had caught on his human form was intensified. Sharper teeth that had no definitive start or end. Black scleras with impossibly green irises. Elongated limbs that made his body seem stretched. Literal claws that could cut through flesh. Breeze-blown hair that defied gravity. How could anyone see that as a person? A white gloved claw waved in front of his face.

"Earth to Wes? I know I'm to die for, but you don't have to stare." He snorted at his own joke, floating around as Wes continued to stare, wide-eyed. He frowned, and somehow his teeth didn't tear through his mouth.

"You're scared of me in this form? I guess most people don't come close enough to see all this, huh?" He vaguely gestured to himself, one-handed clapping before snapping his claws, "I'll change, since you know already. Close your eyes, kay? No peeking!"

"NO." Wes stepped back, falling slightly into Sam and Tucker.

"... Yes? There's like, a blinding light when I change forms? It causes permanent eye damage if you stare at it."

"Don't. No pretending to be human." Wes felt a cold creeping up his throat as he stared. Wes stared back, noticing the spattering of freckles across his green-tinged skin. The two tensed behind him, Wes watching as he glanced over at the both of them.

"Hey, guys? Could you maybe... Leave for a second?" Their protests had already formed, blurring together in Wes' ears as a puddle of loud. A gloved claw was raised, and the two quieted.

"I wanna talk with him alone, kay? Just to clear up a few things. I'll be a shout away if I need you." Sam and Tucker both seemed to agree, as they both were leaving, but Wes didn't hear what they said over the sound of blood pumping in his ears. Maybe they wouldn't have killed him, but would he? Was it about the refusal to see his human disguise? Did he just get sick of Wes? Was he... Did they...

A clear rumbling sound, like a purring cat, forcibly quashed Wes' ability to hear his own thoughts. He watched a certain ghost make exaggerated breathing motions on the ground in front of him, even though ghosts didn't need to breathe, and Wesley couldn't remember when either one of them sat down. In. Hold it. Out. Hold it.

And for the second time today, death in some form or another had calmed him down. Wes kept his head low, closing his eyes.

"Wes, 'm not gonna hurt you." He sighed, sounding maybe-tired-maybe-disappointed. Wes didn't look up, "Not upset, either." Wes still didn't look up, but now wondered if he could read minds. Wes mentally screamed, loud and continuous. A foolproof plan against mind readers.

The rumble of purring resumed, though Wes hadn't realized it stopped in the first place. He glanced up, not expecting to see the glisten of tear tracks.

"You kinda seemed tense? So I. Yeah," He mumbled the last bit, seeming a bit embarrassed, "Some ghosts can sense and influence emotions. I can't influence them, but I'm more... In tune? With the wavelengths emotions give off? Sounds kinda stupid sayin' it out loud, I know." He nervously chuckled, habitually swallowing. Wes stopped mentally screaming.

"You were crying."

"Yep," a beat passed, "Oh! It's nothing. From, like, half an hour ago anyways." Wes hummed.

"Why'd you make them leave?"

"I asked, cause I... Wanted. To talk. With you? Alone? You're stressed around any of us, and it looked like Sam was about to strangle you, and I doubt Tucker would have stopped her, so," he did weak jazz hands, "you're stuck with me! Woo!"

"Why do you pretend to be human?"

"Y'know, 21 questions is supposed to be a back 'n' forth thing." He chuckled, Wes didn't say anything, "*Oookay* then. I don't pretend to be human. I'm not denying I'm dead, either. I'm half-ghost, half-human. Died and brought back in the same breath. Fun stuff. Even if I were fully ghost, I'd still be a person. You don't just lose your personhood with death." Wes' face scrunched up, trying to remember when he mentioned that to him.

"...How long have you been listening." A sigh echoed through the air, and the half ghost began stretching in place.

"Okay, yeah, done being asked stuff. Got better things to do than be a questionnaire. Like laundry." He stood, and Wes stood with him.

"No! Don't! You can't! Not yet. Not now."

"I can. And I will."

"*Please*. I. You. *Agh*," breathing in sharply, Wes scrunched his eyes and scratched at his arms, "I didn't... I *don't* want to hurt people. I don't want to be a bad person. I just... I want to know what the fuck is going on and why no one else realizes. I feel like I'm going insane."

"Then have a conversation with me like I'm a normal person!"

"I don't know how to talk like a normal person."

"And I'm not asking you to! I'm asking for us to actually talk, and not be so one-sided!" Neither of them spoke, and Schrödinger's boy sighed once again, feet floating slightly off of the ground as he prepared to leave.

"I'm Wesley Weston!" Wes stuck out his arm, hand perfectly perpendicular to the ground, "I play on Casper High's basketball team. I'm decent at most subjects, but my mom says I don't focus enough. My dad says I'll drop out. I don't care what happens. I prefer photography, and the study of supernatural beings, even if people don't take it seriously. I like knowing the truth, because unknown dangers are more terrifying than reality is." Wes blinked, keeping his arm out. A haunting laugh rattled through him, and Wes wilted, arm shrinking back to his side. Of course he should have gone with a more acceptable introduction. Why wouldn't the literal kinda-ghost think it's stupid?

"No, no–" the boy breathed out his last laugh, reminding Wes that he could sense feelings, "I'm not–I'm not laughing at you. Swear. Promise. You just... You sound like me. I still remember it too, yeah?

"Hi! I'm Danny Fenton, son of Dr. Fenton and Dr. Fenton, brother to Jazz Fenton. Even if they're both obsessed with ghosts, they still support what Jazz and I want to do! I love everything about space, and I *am* going to be an astronaut. I find it fascinating how grandiose the universe is, and how little humanity has discovered of it. It is, after all, both our beginning and end!" Danny coughed into his elbow, "I haven't. Used it since before... High school began."

Wes scanned over Danny again, the boy now on the ground. His wide smile was to express joy. His bright eyes were to be a light to others. His claws were sharp to protect others. His appearance was warped to protect him from others.

Danny was just like anyone else, just... The weird kid. A weird kid.

"How do I be friends with you?" Danny snorted, but Wes wasn't deterred.

"Besides not trying to out my secret identity, or treat ghosts as less than, or stalk me?" Wes nodded, biting his tongue. "Well... If you're not doing all that... We could just, I dunno, talk with each other? Be friends with each other? Friendship is a two-sided thing, ya know." Danny's hand moved within Wes' vision. It was angled upwards, calm and unpractised, "Friends?"

Wes slid his hand into Danny's, loosely gripping the boy's hand as they shook it one, two, three times.

"Friends."

"Cool. HEY GUYS!" Wes jolted as Danny cupped his hands around his mouth, calling to the two who he pissed off less than an hour ago. Maybe. He couldn't tell how long it had been. They sprung out from whatever corner they had been hiding behind, and Wes promptly moved behind Danny.

"Oh! HE GOOD! WE GOOD!" The duo gradually slowed from murder-sprint, stopping in front of Danny.

"He good?" Tucker asked. Danny nodded.

"Are you sure?" Sam eyed him suspiciously. Danny nodded again.

"Sam and Tucker, Wes. Wes, Sam and Tucker. He's gonna sit with us tomorrow!" Wes choked as Sam and Tucker let out varying level of protests. Danny raised a hand, and the two fell silent as he looked over at Wes, "You got anything tomorrow? Basketball, clubs, detention..?" Danny's hand waved in circular motions as he trailed off.

"I, uh. No? No. I don't. Uh, tomorrow."

"Cool! Cya then!" Danny took Sam's and Tucker's hands, guiding them away as they began whispering, "Oh, Wes?"

"... Yes?"

"Catch, here!" Wes locked into a defensive stance, feeling as his basketball–oh hey, there it was again–was tossed lightly at him. It bounced against the concrete. Danny snorted, "You sure y'play basketball?" And the trio was gone.

Danny Fenton wasn't normal. Wesley didn't know who knew, and wasn't too keen on telling others anymore.

He wasn't the only one to acknowledge it, Danny's other friends–because he was now one of Danny's friends, too–would acknowledge it, but only when it was safe. Or when they had to. Because there was a rule about not delving into the enigma that was Danny, though it's reasoning had been spoken. Because there was fear behind that rule. Not aimed at Danny, no, but at what might hurt him.

And Wesley Weston wasn't going to be one of those things anymore.

End Notes

1. I dunno what time it is. Wesley doesn't know what time it is. Whatever time it is, he's home late enough to get in trouble. Sorry Wes.

2. Wes was gonna call Danny a dickhead. Maybe he'll get to one day. ;)

3. Danny's "appearing act" is kinda based off of gem reformation from Steven Universe! I wanted to do something with the light being warped and sucked in like a black hole, and it reminded me of gem reformation, so I tried to do an inverse of that! I think it's cool :D

4. Danny putting up his hand to get Sam and Tucker to quiet isn't like a power or anything. He's just raising his hand to speak lmao

5. Cats don't only purr when they're happy! They also purr when stressed, or when someone is hurt, because purring has like. Healing properties. Also I like fics where Danny purrs hehe

6. Wes didn't see this, because he thought Danny was making fun of him, but when Danny laughs of some euphoric feeling (Joy/happiness/excitement/etc), his freckles glow. They're also in the shape of a star cluster and/or constellation, but I couldn't tell you which one yet.

7. I didn't initially intend for Wes' and Danny's introduction scripts to have mirroring ideologies. Sure, most of it was meant to show, "you're not so different, you and I," thinking, but Danny loving the wonder of the unknown, and Wes fearing it? I completely pantsed that. Actually, pantsed the whole fic. I'm not much of a planner.

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