Pretending became easier to stomach than facing reality. Life as you knew it was over. During a North American tour things become a nightmare with an unexplained viral outbreak occurring. They soon find themselves fighting the elements and more in a desperate attempt to find refuge. With only each other as support they’re unsure where isn’t effected and decide to traverse the odds to find safety in Europe.

EDIT! 05-19-19: Revisions complete!

Notes

This is unbeta'ed, so apologies for any inconsistencies or errors.

EDIT: 12/01/18

Originally this story was meant as a starting point for my growing interest in both Gorillaz and writing fanfiction. Under normal circumstances I can write something, return weeks or months later and be pleased at the outcome. However with the rushed nature of this story a lot of it left me feeling discontent. It seemed incomplete and hurried. So to rectify that I’ve taken up refurbishing previous chapters to give it the far more serious undertones I initially wanted. I’ve removed scenes that I felt were more cartoony (haha) given the circumstances...
of the story and replaced them with more appropriately themed scenes. Dialogue is redone (though there are a few lines here and there of the original).

I built up a slightly more troubled yet coming to terms Murdoc who previous to the outbreak was attempting to clean himself up. 2D is more frustrated this time and somewhat capable of articulating.

Otherwise enjoy the changes! :D
Chapter Summary

Evening of the dead?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Dinner had been a pleasant affair, what with all of them on speaking terms after years of radio silence. Nobody was being shot at, no ominous dark cloud hovered over them, and cyborg was mysteriously missing; everyone was at ease. They had come together once more to create a new album which quickly followed into a tour. They were in the US leg of their concerts, momentarily taking a night to themselves. It was suppose to be a simple set of gigs, interviews and maybe a couple appearances.

The atmosphere surrounding their table at the time had been relaxed, Murdoc spared the name calling and kept his alcohol consumption moderate. Things were going swimmingly in Stuart's opinion, they were friends again, a family. Unfortunately nobody accounted on a bizarre and rapid change in their immediate situation. He couldn't recall how they were separated, granted it was a free for all following the panic. Someone should have known to grab him, should have kept him close because following the rush of people he remembered losing them quickly. It was dizzying and horrifying how fast he got disorientated among towering buildings during the frenzy at the start of the outbreak.

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He swung his freshly obtained bat, chalk full of nails and spikes courtesy of some unlucky bloke two streets over, halting a walking corpse mid groan. Like a sack of potatoes the body dropped, a grotesque squishing noise following the thump. Quickening along, 2D barely waited to confirm the thing was actually dead. He meandered through an alleyway following it down to the opposite opening and paused beforehand to catch his breath. This tour was suppose to be easy. Sing for hundreds, chit-chat in some mindless interviews and go home.

Pressing his back to a welcoming solid brick wall, 2D heaved as he attempted to gather himself. He clutched the bat betwixt trembling, white-knuckled hands while he hesitated a moment. Seventy-two hours in and things had fallen apart before his eyes; it all went to hell in a hand basket. Letting his head fall back he mentally belittled himself for managing to become further lost as time went; for getting split from the other three. As he regained his breath he patted himself over, feeling for a carton of fags he knew were on him. A faint scraping sound gave him a start and so he cautiously peeked around the mouth of the alley, seeking the source. 2D sighed spotting a crow picking at trash left askew on the road beside an overturned car. Returning to his task, 2D slid the pack out one handed and maneuvered it around to get a cancer stick between his lips. Using his knees to hold the bat he pulled a gaudy purple lighter from the same pocket. After a few attempts at getting the cigarette lit, he was inhaling.

Just the action of smoking eased his nerves. He exhaled slowly and let his shoulders sag. He enjoyed a good zombie flick every once in a while, but it was better when safely tucked under a blanket, possibly high. This was too much.
Somewhere in the distance there blared a repetitive car alarm, drawing attention from zombies in the vicinity. Despite having a draw for flesh or brains the creatures congregated among the vehicle, attracted to disruptive sounds. Crows had flocked to the city to scavenge the debris and bodies littering the roads. Nobody would complain as it was near empty save them and the undead. Any of the straggling survivors had hightailed from the core of the metropolis in hopes of avoiding the brunt of the outbreak. 2D wondered if his friends had taken off as well, it would be understandable given the circumstances. Sighing again he flicked the finished smoke away, resting there minutes longer than he should.

A shrill ringtone jingled from his pocket, a rudely happy tune specifically picked to annoy Murdoc. Coming abruptly out of his thoughts, which caused him to drop the weapon, the singer was momentarily surprised the bassist was calling, that phones still seemingly worked. Heart jolting with panic he scrambled to bring the device out and answer.

Pressing the smartphone to his ear, 2D waited for a greeting. When none came he cleared his throat. "Hello?"

Desperately waiting for a response he strained to hear anything. He frowned, curious if he was pocket dialed. A muffled sound came through closely followed by a resounding thunk by what 2D guessed was the other man's phone dropping.

‘Get it in the head! The head!’

'I know! Watch your back!'

They were getting further from the phone and he could hear it. He gripped the device, frantic to garner their attention regardless of how unlikely.

“Guys! Russel, Murdoc! It's 2D, please don't go!”

He could make out some sort of shuffling and disembodied groans. Russel said something more but a strange thump reverberated and the line cut out. 2D eyed the phone, hoping someone would call back. He knew they wouldn't.

“Don't panic, don't panic.” He muttered the words like a mantra, struggling to keep his cool. They were alive and so was he, that was good enough for now.

Shoving the smartphone into his pocket, 2D stooped and grabbed the dropped bat. Smacking the brick with a determined grimace he poked his head out, gave a precursory glance and nodded. Moving from his spot he hastily took off down the street, examining the mess of wrecked stores and general destruction. He had to find a safe area to hole up before dark, anywhere other than some space with garbage bins. He would take his chances finding the others tomorrow when he had more daylight.

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Hours after outbreak most people had taken refuge either in their homes or took to fleeing. Murdoc and Russel found after separation it was easier to hole up in their hotel. Both had been too stunned in the aftermath of their restaurant escape to coherently formulate plans outside hiding. Russel suggested staying put in hopes 2D and Noodle would find their way back. Their hopes dwindled as hours turned into days and on the third morning it was decided to look for them. Ever vigilant, they soon discovered the rapid change in the surrounding area and took up arms for protection. During their travels they found it easier to avoid main locale where zombies gathered. However it became increasingly difficult to completely avoid the freshly distorted corpses so Murdoc suggested the
nearby mall for shelter. It gave them a moments reprieve; they would need to move again too make full use of their daylight.

Shouldering their way into the surprisingly empty shopping center, from what could be seen, Murdoc nodded to a stairwell. Russel ascended behind the satanist, occasionally scanning either side as he went for any unwanted attention. At that given time it seemed they would be left in peace, for how long was any ones guess.

"This can't be real.” Russel wiped his brow of sweat. He flexed a hand, then swapped his crowbar to do the same with the opposite palm. "I thought Kong was a contained thing. Noodle cleaned it up so this can't be the same shit."

"Of course not.” Murdoc massaged his temples, he gave a small pained moan under his breath. Russel winced at the noise, well aware the bassist hadn't drank anything for three days and was probably fighting through withdrawal symptoms. He briefly felt sympathetic over Murdoc's minor plight, though not enough to suggest looking for a substance to abuse.

"Bugger, this fucking headache is persistent."

"There might be a drug store here. Should point out it's noon and we really can't be standing around, man."

“This whole situation is fucking great.” Murdoc grunted, he mashed the heel of his hand into his one eye, rubbing firmly. "I've lost my singer and Noodle."

Murdoc tried to keep his voice steady and low, conscious that noise would draw zombies in. The drummer planted himself on a small metal bench and rested his stained weapon on his lap. His blank eyes caught sight of some brain matter stuck to his sweater. Grimacing he carefully picked the bits off, pretending it wasn't human tissues covering his shoulder. He watched Murdoc pace from his peripheral.

“Didn’t know you cared.”

“Of course I care!” Murdoc forced himself to calm, voice leveling off. "Despite popular belief I sometimes enjoy you people. Even faceache is tolerable on occasion."

The percussionist left unsaid instances where Murdoc found 2D more than just tolerable.

"The feelings are mutual.” Russel peered up towards a skylight. "we shouldn't be sitting here. I worry 'bout 'D and Noodle. Mostly 'D."

Russel realized he was repeating himself, but felt it important to continually point out the incredible circumstances. He wasn’t sure if it was shock or disbelief.

"Fuck. We're completely fucked."

Clearly growing more agitated, Murdoc pivoted and booted a waste bin. The wobbly sound echoed throughout the mall. Both of them jerked and Russel motioned silently at the the satanist, fear and exasperation printed across his face.

“Don't make so much noise Muds. Do you want them coming about again?” Russel only spoke after no undead came crawling out of corners. Murdoc rightfully looked contrite. "Look, Noodle can definitely handle herself. 'D will probably just hide or run so he's probably fine too. Lets just take it one day at a time and keep hoping for the best.
Noodle had proven how capable she was and although not explicitly said, 2D was rather resilient after years of torment. Russel had some doubts but figured voicing it was moot given how obviously distressed Murdoc was over the singer and guitarist. Sugar coating it felt more appropriate.

They whipped around at shattering glass from a level down. Exchanging a short glance, Murdoc pressed his index finger to his lips and gestured to a darkened store. Scurrying into the jewelry shop they both ducked behind some counters, careful to avoid stepping on anything noisy. In that moment Murdoc removed his brass knuckles to crack and massage his fingers. It soothed his anxiety some, however ultimately his withdrawal was giving him shakes that no amount of fidgeting could hide.

"Y'think it's another zombie?"

"I can't tell." Russel edged his face up over the opaque part of a display case, eyes darting about. "I can't see nothing. Maybe it's looters."

Murdoc remained seated, unsure what would be worse; a mangled corpse out to eat them or an unlawful looter willing to fight them for useless trinkets. Russel sat down, tense in the shoulders. They both listened, waiting for the inevitable groan or voice of a survivor. What they unexpectedly heard instead was a yelp and the pounding of shoes, tailed by gurgling moans.

"It's a survivor." Russel shifted to stand only to be halted by Murdoc grabbing him. He squinted through the dim security light flashing over them, puzzled. "We can't leave them, they probably need help."

"You leave and we give up hiding, Russ, and for what? A survivor who'll possibly kill us or get killed? Don't bother playing hero."

"We could use the help watching our backs man." He yanked his arm from the bassist, disquieted by Murdoc's cowardice, yet seeing some logic in the statement. "Lets just see if we can help, humanity doesn't need to rebuild on disingenuous actions."

"Fine, lets go be good civilians in the face of certain fucking doom. Don't bitch to me if this goes tits up."

Russel pushed to his feet, ignoring the bassist in favor of getting out of the store quickly. Murdoc grunted when his stomach flipped in discomfort; either his racing pulse made him want to vomit or he hadn't eaten properly for hours. Maybe a bit of both.

The percussionist slide back in the entry of the establishment, eyes wide. Faltering, Murdoc stared back, hand clutching to an undamaged portion of the display case to steady himself. The look made his heart pound harder.

"Hurry up! It's 'D. He needs our help, they're all over."

"Fuck." Murdoc clambered to trail after Russel, shoving his brass additions on. "Where is he?"

For a minute he could hear nothing but the rush of blood in his ears, fear addling his already jumbled mind.

*What if he gets hurt? What if he dies?.*

He was pulled from his thoughts, quite literally when Russel pulled him towards the stairs. "I saw 'D run this way, c'mon man wake up, we've gotta get to him before those damn monsters do."
They nearly tripped on their way down, catching sight of the vocalist. 2D had climbed up a cellular service booth while attempting to beat a hungry creature back from clawing feebly at his trouser leg. Russel gave a hearty roar while clubbing them away from the singer; he hoped to draw attention to him and Murdoc and allow 2D a chance to get down. The satanist felt immense relief wash over him at seeing a bedraggled vocalist thankfully devoid of injury.

“I am so glad to see you two!” 2D sagged against the upper portion of the wrap around sign when his leg was freed. The tension visibly drained away from him.

"We're glad to see you man.” Russel shoved what looked to be previously a fast food worker away, whacking another viciously. Murdoc clocked an unaware zombie in the neck, satisfied when it crumbled.

“Where’s Noodle?”

“We got separated.” Murdoc shifted closer to the booth and reached out, palms up. "Get down from there you idiot, Russ can hold them a minute."

2D took the offer gratefully, almost tumbling off into Murdoc. Russel came barreling into them, urging them towards the other direction. "Lets get out of here. Way too many coming around."

Rather unintentionally, that 2D could discern, Murdoc gripped his thin wrist and dragged him through the shopping center.

Murdoc had an overwhelming urge to keep the vocalist near, fearing the man would vanish if he let go. The drummer dodged a couple new comers while he kept in step with them. Upon discovering an exit they pushed and pulled at the locked doors.

"Oh of-fucking-course these doors would be locked."

"Do we go back?" 2D peered over his shoulder at the slow moving members of the dead, ambling towards them. "Never mind."

"They move slow, lets just find another way out.”

Russel sighed and turned round to face the small crowd.

"Let's go before they swarm."

Edging around the horde of zombies, the three of them made a break for it once in the clear. Russel lead them out into the parking lot through the set of doors they first entered. Outside was no better and among the vehicles and rubbish were more stumbling undead. Murdoc nudged both men and they promptly vacated the vicinity.

As they wandered they happened across a firearm store between a coffee shop and antiquated building that had condemned stickers. Russel rolled his eyes behind the other two when they pressed up against the caged glass. He was underwhelmed seeing such a place, noticing his companions were surprised made him grumble.

"Should grab us a couple guns."

Russel stopped beside Murdoc and peered in as well, shaking his head partly. "You've never fired a gun Muds, what makes you think it'll be any easier."

"Well I don't know! I can't keep punching my way through this shit.” Murdoc held his hand up to
point to the brass adorning his knuckles an irritated sneer on his lips. "It gets fucking tiring. Wouldn't you rather have energy to keep moving?"

“You should have thought ahead, grabbed the damn wrench I offered you.” Russel grit his teeth and took a deep breath. "I don't want to dissolve to arguments every time we stop, lets get your guns and go. We need shelter, food and water... and we still don't know where Noodle is."

"I hope she's okay.” 2D pulled away from the shop front to try the door, miraculously finding it unlocked. Murdoc pushed the door further open and stepped in, 2D waited for Russel before following them in, closing the door gently. "Do you think she went back to the hotel?"

"No. We waited for you and her to return."

Russel examined some of the weapons lining the wall of the establishment; guns deeply bothered him, but if it meant life or death he would take up arms, begrudgingly. Murdoc removed the metal from his palms and slid himself up over the counter, foot bumping small displays onto the floor. Thankfully sealed away in the store it barely made noise outside the space they occupied.

2D remained by the door, anxiously eyeing the surroundings beyond the glass. He couldn't make out any nearby zombies but his eyes honed in on a single crow perched on a tipped trash receptacle, staring at the singer with its small head cocked unnaturally. It was deathly still. Shuddering under the strange gaze, 2D moved from its field of view.

The vocalist was unnerved by the animal and so watched Russel and Murdoc. "Where do we go from here? How are we to find Noodle at all?"

“How should I know.” Murdoc grabbed a case of shotgun slugs. "Search high and low for her and survive. That's the plan for now."

Setting two black shotguns upon the countertop, Russel snatched a box of ammo to load the weapons. He didn't trust either man to properly do so, plus he had a better working knowledge of the items. 2D stepped a little further into the store. He inspected the black gun in Russel's palms, wary of the device even though they had done promotional pictures with said things. Those were props and these were real, far more dangerous if mishandled.

"Do we need guns? Theys moving pretty slow out there, I imagine we can get around without making more ruckus."

"And what do you plan on using when your bat breaks? I hardly see you scaring the undead with your girlish screeching and flailing.” Murdoc leaned forward on the counter. "it would be amusing mind."

Incensed at the sarcastic insult of his person, 2D frowned at the bassist. It seemed, if momentarily, they would come to blows but Murdoc bowed his head, hiding a brief look of guilt. The singer relaxed and glanced away, assuaged by no following barbed comments. Russel cleared his throat, uncomfortable in the growing silence.

“Enough of that, we have more important things to focus on.”

Despite his attempt at dissuading further unease between them, 2D and Murdoc remained quiet. Their silence occasionally disrupted by Russel loading slugs. 2D rubbed his abdomen when his stomach chose then to gurgle angrily, clearly hungry. Somehow that brought a lighter atmosphere to the three of them and both Murdoc and Russel chuckled.

"Can we find something to eat? I'm starving.”
“Clearly.” The bassist picked at his nails.

"Probably should before you fade away."

"And rum."

"And apparently rum.” The drummer snorted. "Because of course you need that."

"I do. Would you rather I vomit constantly and pass out due to dehydration? Just curious, asking for a friend.” Murdoc deadpanned while tapping his nails against the counter. Agitated due to the withdrawal.

"Yeah, yeah."

With the shotguns fully loaded and a bag of ammunition ready, the drummer pushed one towards the satanist while keeping one to himself. Hesitating a tick, Murdoc grabbed up the weapon, cradling it delicately. With none of them eager to leave, Russel sighed and took initiative. He scrutinized the road outside before tensing.

“Here we go.”

One by one they strode out into the road, sticking close. None of them sure where to start or where to go.

“We came from that direction so lets head this way.” Striding forward with purpose, Murdoc gestured down the road opposite from where the mall sat. Neither drummer or singer had complaints and thus followed his lead.

They proceeded between vehicles, ears acutely tuned for stray zombies or possible survivors. Although slow moving and cautious, they made good time traversing the mostly deserted city. Thankfully they had no need for the guns and everything remained eerily quiet save a couple scraps of paper fluttering around. As the sun dipped they found themselves moving around at a quicker pace, searching for a place to hole up. Barely a word passed among them while seeking shelter.

Matters became worse when their main source of light dwindled until it was car fires and flickering signs clinging to the last bit of power flitting throughout the city casting a glow. Murdoc muttered curses under his breath and within moments the three of them were huddled closer to each other, more so than before.

“I can’t see shit.”

“Me neither, we should have gone into that apartment a block back.” Russel griped, trepidation coating his words while he sought out a viable building not ravaged by bodies or crashed cars.

2D whimpered and accidentally bumped into the satanist. “Watch where your going, idiot.”

“Sorry.”

Something clattered in a side street causing them to jump.

“Lets just go into that place.” Russel urged. “I can’t see any bodies around, probably safe enough.”

A couple groans echoed from an unknown location, melding together with new sounds of hasty stumbling. 2D whipped his head about looking for the source, heart in his throat. Distracted as he was, the singer yelped when Murdoc roughly grabbed the scruff of his coat, unceremoniously
dragging him towards a building.

The three of them disappeared inside, hiding behind some potted plants in the entry. Nearby in the lobby a putrid smell of rotting flesh invaded their senses. 2D gagged, eyes watering.

“Smells awful.”

“Shush.” The satanist hissed. “Breath through your mouth.”

With the blanket of near darkness upon them they couldn’t make out who or what was shuffling by faster than a normal zombie. Soon after it passed they all collectively sighed in relief.

“We should get into a room for the night, we’ll have to look for Noodle tomorrow.”

“Anyone got a light?”

“I do,” 2D dug his smartphone out lighting up the screen to open his flashlight app.

“Give me that.” Taking the phone, Murdoc stood and scanned the lobby of the shabby hotel they had stumbled upon. There were overturned pieces of furniture and the body of a woman laying haphazardly over an ottoman, dead.

No movement occurred after a quick look around the space so they silently decided it safe to proceed. Russel took up the rear, turning left and right slightly to keep any surprises to a minimum despite the minimal lighting. Murdoc peered around via the flash light, it looked no different to their hotel minus the quality. Another woman lay draped over the lobby desk, half eaten with aragged, gaping hole in her head. Murdoc cringed, backing away from the desk, quickly glancing over the rest of the counter for useful items but not seeing anything.

With no immediate danger presenting itself, Murdoc made for the stairs, barely getting a foot on the first step when something crashed behind him. Whipping around both him and Russel looked around frantically for the culprit.

2D froze in fear, shoulders hunching as he inched from the mess of water and glass he unintentionally made. When eyes landed on him he ducked his head.

“I can’t do this.” Russel moved to the steps, heading up. “C’mon lets get into a damn room before the whole city knows we’re here.”

The drummer disappeared up the stairs into the dark.

“I’m sorry, it was an accident,” 2D muttered, he wiggled his foot seeing a loose set of laces.

“Whatever, nothing came of it.” Murdoc beckoned the singer over, also glancing down to what had the man so occupied. He sighed seeing the untied shoe. “Sit down, I’ll tie ‘em up.”

Relieved the bassist hadn’t snapped he plopped himself down on the steps. Murdoc leaned the shotgun against the wall beside the singer while propping his leg up and patting his thigh. Understanding the silent prompting, 2D lifted his foot and planted it against the older man’s leg.

“Thanks.”

“Should invest in velcro.”

Muscles loosening, 2D snorted at the suggestion. He watched deft fingers expertly tie double knots into his laces. With the flashlight app shining upwards it lit up the room so when something
lumbered behind the satanist 2D was able to see it. Bloodied hands came out towards the bassist and without thinking he put his leg down to yank Murdoc away from the creature, causing them both to fall into the stairs painfully. Murdoc gave a confused grunt. 2D hissed, tense all over again with an arm full of bassist.

“For fuck sake Stu—”

“Zombie!”

Turning partly while against the singer he caught sight of the bulky looking male zombie. 2D gripped unrelentingly at his shoulders, blunt nails digging into the material of his shirt not allowing much movement. The monster was closing in on them so Murdoc struggled to shove his foot into the middle of the rotting torso, keeping it back.

“Let me go! I can’t do fuck all like this!”

Seemingly realizing how unhelpful his hold was, 2D released Murdoc. The satanist got the shotgun up, angling himself to lay on the singer’s chest to smack the butt of the gun into the zombies head as it came back. With enough hits the creatures neck crunched and horrifyingly it waned towards them. They both stared wide eyed, momentarily scared. Thankfully the corpse wavered, falling backwards and twitched but didn’t get up. A beat passed where Murdoc sagged against the vocalist, arms draped to the side of each long leg pressed to his ribs. 2D noticed he had bunched up the older man’s shirt yet again and released the fabric.

“Russ is probably wondering what the fuck we’re doing.” Finally removing himself and standing upright Murdoc held his hand out to the singer. “This place is giving me the creeps.”

Mildly surprised at the offer of help a second time in a row, 2D grasped the hand and got to his feet. Retrieving the phone, both of them trailed up after Russel. They didn’t give a thought to how close they came to death just minutes prior.

“What the hell were you two doing down there? I heard some noises.”

Pausing in the hall to the first floor of rooms, Murdoc fumbled over an explanation. He avoided throwing 2D under the bus and made a quick lie about getting disorientated. Russel left it at that and jabbed his thumb over his shoulder.

“Most of the doors are locked but that one isn’t. Pretty sure it’s safe, save the body laying in the doorway. One of you help me move it.”

Murdoc sighed and pushed his gun into 2D’s arms. With Russel taking the torso and Murdoc at the feet, they both moved the actual corpse from the door. 2D held it open for them when they returned and after a perfunctory search of the room they sealed themselves in. Russel slid the latch closed and visibly slumped, shoulders lowering.

Giving an experimental flick of the switch, Murdoc grumbled, “guess power is officially gone. How much battery life you got left on your phone Dents?”

“Forty-three percent. I’ve been conserving it in case.”

“Hand it over, I can’t see fuck all.”

“Muds it drains the battery, just use my lighter.”

“Yes, fine, gimme your damn lighter.”
The satanist waggled his hand, unsure where 2D had moved too in the room with the flashlight off. A small object was placed into his hand which he graciously turned on. Fire light brightened the small hotel room.

Russel spotted an unused queen and quickly claimed it by setting his shotgun on it. Murdoc squinted around the room for a fridge or booze. He deposited his gun on the desk supplied in most rooms and squatted next to the nearly camouflaged fridge.

“I’m getting some shut eye. I suggest you two do the same.”

“Will do.” Murdoc grinned widely while he pulled out a six pack of beer.

2D kicked his shoes off and settled on the second queen nearer to the window. He reached out and tugged the curtains mostly closed and placed his bat against the material to keep them drawn. With so little light coming off the lighter he could barely make out the room, but what he did see were two beds, a television set on a wall mount, kitchenette and a desk where Murdoc currently stood. Said man was chugging through what appeared to be his second beer, hands trembling. The tremors are what ended up stifling the small flame and dousing the room back into darkness. It was at that exact moment that Russel gave a half snort, half snore, fast asleep on the bed he chose.

“How can he sleep after all the shit we just went through?”

“Maybe he’s too tired to care?”

Caught off guard, mostly due to no visual cues, 2D started at a weight dropping on the bed next to him. Despite the darkness he knew it was Murdoc if the smell of cheap beer was any indication.

“You should slow down, you might not get anymore after this.” 2D shifted his coat off, gently placing it off the side of the bed. Murdoc grunted in irritation but didn’t verbally respond. “Do you think Noodle is okay?”

“Sure.” There was a hesitation like Murdoc intended to speak some more but the quiet was replaced with Russel’s soft snores.

“That sounded unconvincing.”

“I’m not going to fill your head with bullshit altruism. Noodle’s a tough kid and I’d hate to be on the receiving end of any sort of pain she deals out. Is she okay? I have no idea, I can only imagine she is given the type of person she is.”

Murdoc could be quite affectionate towards Noodle, even if he couldn’t discern the man’s facial expressions he could hear it in his words.

“Can I have my light back?”

“I don’t know, can you?”

“Muds c’mom, just give it back. Please.”

He huffed when the small object was pressed into his chest uncomfortably hard. Taking the item he grumbled about Murdoc’s lack of tact. Shuffling his body down he turned onto his side, back towards the other man. The pillow held the scent of cologne and shaving cream which reminded him this wasn’t his own hotel room, that everything was all too real.

Somewhat rancid breath ghosted over his cheek while a firm arm slithered around his waist. He
jerked up into a sitting position, which he was sure startled Murdoc more than the man would ever admit.

“What are you doing?” He knew exactly what Murdoc was doing.

“Thought that was obvious.”

“You’re drunk.”

“Barely.”

“I don’t want to do this again Murdoc.” He sounded far more tired than he felt. Far older than he remembered.

For an instant he assumed the bassist had receded, resigned himself to either sleeping on the floor or turning away.

“I thought I lost you.” The admission wasn’t slurred or rushed.

It was unnerving how genuine the comment sounded. He wanted to fall into the false security Murdoc always created between them. So desperately wanted to pretend their past didn’t exist, that they could start over. He needed to put distance between them.

“Do you think I could get a shower going?”

Murdoc made a puzzled noise at the question and thus didn’t stop 2D from climbing off the bed.

“Wanna bet I can make it work?” 2D chuckled awkwardly while patting the ground for his discarded coat.

“Stuart—”

“Gonna have me a nice shower, yeah? You just stay put.”

A hand groped for him in the dark so he hastily tripped his way around the furniture and sealed himself in the washroom. Slumping against the wood 2D sighed heavily, his chest clenched painfully. He fiddled with the handle for a lock but found no such mechanism so he gave up and felt around for the shower-bath combo. The darkness was suffocating and he tried to ignore old memories surfacing. He completely forgot he had a source of light.

His hand bumped a tap which he twisted, hearing the rush of water. “Yes.” He laughed after managing to get the shower running, pleased that despite all of it the water was still working. For now at least.

Stripping down he hopped into the shower, shivering at the mostly lukewarm water cascading over him. Washing the three day old grim from his body and hair was heaven sent and though he wasn’t a fan of lavender, he would use whatever he could get. After he would probably be freezing but for now this was amazing. Only he was disrupted by the door being nudged open somewhat loudly. Had there been light and less duress to keep quiet he would have yelled at Murdoc and possibly thrown a bar of soap at the man.

“Stuart—”

“Murdoc go away.”

“Hear me out—”
“Just stop.”

“Come on…”

2D gave an aggravated sound at the back of his throat, fumbling to shut off the stream of lovely water. He stuck his head out from the curtains, completely unable to see Murdoc’s form in the pitch black.

“Fine, you have most of my attention. Can’t really see you though.”

“Probably better that way.”

“Wait.” 2D frantically felt around near the shower on the wall for a rack or hook with towels. “I’m not talking to you in the nude.”

Murdock gave an impatient sigh, resting into the counter of the washroom. He listened to 2D pat surfaces for a towel, he assumed. The minimal buzz from the six pack barely covered his anxiety, not enough to discuss emotional topics, but he couldn’t see a better moment. Here in the depths of a hotel after a zombie outbreak miles away from home. He heard wet feet touching the tiles and the waft of semi-warm air from the confines of the shower.

“Decent yet?”

“Moderately. What’s so important that you need to talk to me in the shadows?”

Suddenly his idea of discussing the growing rift between them was too much. Everything was closing in on him. All past attempted to talk were faded with intoxication; this one would be fresh in his mind.

“Murdock? You still there?”

“Yeah.” He swallowed, throat dry with his nerves. “Yeah I’m here.” Was he though? He felt far away whenever he attempted to step up for his mistakes.

“Well what did you wanna say? I’m freezing my arse off here.”

“I know shit between us hasn’t always been peachy.” He could hide under the blanket of darkness, it made talking easier by a pinch.

“That’s an understatement.” 2D snorted, voice tight with restrained agitation.

“Lately things have been good yeah?”

“If your underhanded insults in interviews count as good, then yeah, things have been good. Mate.”

“I’ve been trying, give me some slack. It’s not an overnight bloody change.”

“Twenty years Murdoc, it’s taken you that long to realize how terrible you are. You always spin these huge elaborate webs of lies to make everything about you, make people feel sorry for your woes. But where does that leave me? Any of us? I’ve tried for years and I’m just tired.” 2D blinked, surprised by his pent up frustrations just bursting. Today seemed to be the day it all popped.

“Christ.” Muttering more to himself, Murdoc shifted further into the bathroom, leaning from the counter. “Been saving that have you?”
“I think so.”

“Look Stu, you and I both know I’m not a nice man.” Murdoc reached out, fingers catching at 2D’s forearm. The singer flinched out of his touch and he sighed. “I’m working on my shit, which doesn’t mean I’m better by any means, but I’m trying. Can’t we put aside our baggage for now and have a truce? I sorta miss what we had, us.”

“You gonna say it? You gonna say sorry to me?”

“Sorry.”

The apology fell flat.

2D laughed, sharp and high. “Very sincere Murdoc, thank you.”

“I am sorry.” He found 2D’s arms and held them gently. “I’m sorry alright?”

He really didn’t want to do this right now.

Murdoc slid his hands up the damp arms to the singer’s neck, thumb resting against his pulse. 2D gripped his towel tight, heart jumping at the tenderness, something he hadn’t experienced often from the bassist, not for an extremely long time. Definitely not this intimately.

“I’m sorry, really sorry.” Murdoc got up in 2D’s personal bubble, cupping the taller man’s face carefully, thumbs rubbing the others cheeks and smoothing over the remaining drops clinging to the skin.

“I need you to mean it Murdoc.” 2D used one hand to push the other away. “You made me want to die, took advantage of my caring nature and just put me down. It took me years of therapy to be any semblance of me again. I don’t even know who I am anymore.”

“I’m still sorry.”

“I don’t think you even know what you’re sorry for.”

Murdoc fought to find proper words to prove he did. The longer he let silence reign the more he realized he didn’t know what one thing he was sorry for, there were years of turmoil stacked a mile high. Maybe he was sorry for all of it, he didn’t know.

“I’m tired and cold so if we’re done I wanna try sleeping.”

2D remembered his psychologist mentioning forgiveness being a key factor for his healing process. Honestly he could see how that would help sort his feelings out, but out of spite he refused. He forced himself to focus on his anger over the incidents of their previous records, the violent nature of their relationship and the time spent recovering. Even now the bassist could not properly apologize and own the horrors he put the singer through, admit he was wrong. A small part of him wanted to take advantage of Murdoc, hurt him even a little. He would never though. 2D felt his anger drain away.

The bassist was a damaged human, he had serious problems that needed dealing with, but given the state of the world it was pertinent 2D focus on survival. He needed to put aside his boiling rage over Murdoc’s indiscretions at least for now.

“We can have a truce? Like you said.”
“You forgive me?”

“You forgive me?” 2D shimmied in the dark around the bassist. “For now let’s pretend I do.”

Murdock said nothing and when 2D was able to find his discarded clothing and exit without interruption he relaxed. He briefly wondered if he could sleep through the slight throbbing behind his eyes.

Well after the vocalist had left him to his devices, Murdoc awkwardly found his way through having a shower. He mulled over what 2D said, lightly thumping his head to the tiles repeatedly, frustrated at his own lack of empathy or struggle with it. He loathed heart to hearts, opening up and talking about what made him, him always turned his stomach. He always assumed the singer understood his stance on their often turbulent relationship, he hardly hid it with the soppy lyrics he wrote. Obviously he would need to look beyond music to fix the bond between them; would be difficult with all the other fun things occurring.

He joined his bandmates shortly after his shower, donning only his underpants and damp hair. Russel slept on completely oblivious to the heated conversation and apocalypse. Murdoc could hear the snuffled breaths from the drummer, muffled into his pillow. Momentarily he considered avoiding 2D potentially elbowing him in the morning by sharing with Russel, but the muted grey light of early twilight shone through curtains on the lack of space that bed held. Mussing up his hair he made for the half empty bed, crawling under the covers next to the vocalist.

2D was fast asleep on his side, facing away from Murdoc. A bare shoulder was visible in the dim light, peeking out from the duvet. Gentle as possible, Murdoc slipped an arm under the pillows, shifting close to the sleeping singer. He wrapped an arm around the slim waist, maneuvering 2D back into his chest. The man barely stirred, snuggling further into Murdoc unaware. Murdoc nuzzled into the moderately dry azure hair, smiling to himself. He kept his arm tucked around 2D’s middle, pretending that things between them were okay.

He could deal with the consequences later.

———

Light shone directly into Murdoc’s closed eyes making him grumble tiredly. Pressing his face further into a warm neck he breathed deeply, he was content to stay put.

“Muds.” 2D sounded half awake. “Muds you’re tickling my neck.”

Murdock wanted this to last just a little longer. He spread his fingers along 2D’s stomach, snuggling up closer to the tall man. Pleasant memories of early hours after a concert flooded his mind. They would relax in bed for hours, smoking and bouncing ideas off each other while comfortably tucked under warm blankets. Sometimes they would dissolve to more carnal activities. He clung to those select times where his personality didn’t get in the way.

Without thinking Murdoc ran his hand further up 2D’s chest, brushing a nipple. He laid lazy open mouthed kisses from the pulse point to under the quickly reddening ear. Mostly running on muscle memory.

The singer ground his backside into Murdoc’s hips, somewhat eager for more attention. Groggily and unaware of their situation it came as a shock when Russel cleared his throat loudly.

“You two better not get frisky, I do not wanna see that.”

Both of them broke apart, 2D sitting up and shielding himself with the blanket which left Murdoc
exposed. The bassist squeezed his legs shut, mildly embarrassed.

“Wasn’t aware you two were back at it.” The blasé tone didn’t match Russel’s exasperated expression. “Again.”

“We’re not!”

“I wouldn’t have minded.” Murdoc grumbled.

“Ugh.” 2D dropped his flushed face into a hand. “it— no, that wasn’t. I don’t even know, that was just habit.”

“This habit too?”

A hand groped his erection firmly. 2D squawked, both embarrassed and alarmed at the bold move. Not giving much thought he launched at the satanist, knocking them both to the floor in his attempt to wrestle for dominance, spitting vitriol at the older man for being insensitive and inappropriate.

Russel groaned. “Will you two quit it, you’re grown men for crying out loud. If you wanna screw or whatever, do it when I’m not around.”

“For fuck sake— let go of my hair will you, it was all in fun Stu!”

“Fun! That wasn’t funny Murdoc!”

“Stop it. If you two make too much noise we’re gonna have issues other than whatever your shit is.”

Like a switch both men stopped, instantly reminded of the danger lurking just beyond the borrowed hotel room. Disentangling from each other they got up, shamed for their childish antics.

“Get dressed, both of you, we have to get outta here and look for Noodle. I would prefer using all the daylight we can.” Russel rose from his bed and closed the conversation by disappearing into the washroom.

Neither man could look at the other so they dressed, exchanging no words. When Russel came out again they were ready to leave.

Murdoc glanced out of the room, wary of stray zombies possibly lingering in the hallway. He was relieved to see nothing other than a mess and quietly stepped out, shotgun at the ready. 2D tiptoed out after the older man and Russel followed at the tail. Eager to get to open space they moved as hastily as one could manage with little sound. Reaching street level they paused upon seeing a couple survivors wearing gear for protecting their faces and bodies, like patchwork of different outfits, looting about in some vehicles nearby.

“Shit.” Murdoc rounded a corner with the other two and crouched, watching the people via a broken window. “I’m not sure about you two, but I don’t want to meet these people.”

2D nodded in agreement. Russel bit his bottom lip, worrying the flesh anxiously.

“Maybe we should try?”

“No.”

“Who unanimously voted you apocalypse leader?”
2D rubbed his stomach when it grumbled. Murdoc eyed the vocalist a tick before frowning at Russel. He kept his voice low. “I’m the fucking band leader that’s why. There’s no vote. Whatever I say as a band leader applies as a fucking ‘apocalypse leader’, we clear?”

“Crystal.” Russel muttered.

“Good.”

Murdoc left it at that and when they were sure the survivors had moved on they proceeded to the streets. To avoid further run ins they headed opposite to the people, which thankfully ended up being the same direction originally chosen. Having decided it best to find food, mostly due to the singer complaining about hunger pangs, they stumbled into a deserted McDonalds.

Once thoroughly cleared of any threats Russel raided the bits of stale food available to them and sat with the other two to eat. Murdoc picked half-heartedly at a moderately fresh muffin while his companions ate four day old fries and defrosted apple pies.

“Should try eating more than just a muffin, Muds.”

“Not hungry.”

2D offered up half of his soggy pie. Making a face of disgust, Murdoc shook his head. His stomach turned at the idea of trying to swallow the cold, slimy and overly sugary pastry, if he could even call it that. What he needed, no wanted, was vodka or rum. He would take whiskey right now, anything to push his thoughts back down and cover his jitters.

“You can have some of my chips if you want.” The singer tried to share the soft potato sticks and while he wanted to take the offer, if only to squish the growing discomfort in his stomach. He knew it wouldn’t actually do anything.

“I’m fine.”

Nonplussed at being turned down twice, 2D resumed eating quietly, not enjoying the food anymore than Russel or Murdoc.

“Where are we going after this?”

“The same direction we’ve been going for a day now. Noodle is bound to show up somewhere.”

2D stuck another miserably cold fry into his mouth, chewing around the firmness of the starchy potato. He pressed his cheek into one of his palms, blankly staring at the table top, contemplating too many things at once. He shook his head to rid himself of a potential migraine, sighing.

“We could try taking a car, might be faster.” Russel nodded towards the parking lot. “I’m sure someone forgot keys in one of these vehicles.”

“Aren’t we avoiding too much noise? A car could be a target not only for those dead things but other people looking to steal or start shit. I imagine whoevers left is having a bang-up time rifling through the trash.”

Neither man noticed 2D having an internal battle with himself. He paused mid bite to frown at nothing. He hated trying to figure out his feelings, writing stuff down had always helped but now he had no journal. A hand squeezed the back of his neck, it was an affectionate gesture with no ill intent. 2D glanced to Murdoc at a loss.
“We’re pushing on.”

“Oh.” He looked upon the mostly untouched half-spoiled food in front of him. Pushing the stale fast food away he scooted towards Murdoc to get out of the booth. Said man didn’t move so 2D ended up tucked up beside the other. “Er— you gotta move Murdoc, can’t exactly get up.”

“Before we head out, you and me need a word.”

“Okay…”

2D noticed Russel was up by an entrance door, standing guard and turned away. He swallowed around a forming lump in his throat. Sliding back from the satanist he stared at Murdoc’s chest, less confident to the other night in complete darkness.

“Last night, I probably could have made a better effort.”

“I don’t understand.” He raised his eyes to look at the bassist.

“This is difficult for me, uh— satan, okay. Here’s the deal faceache, I’m gonna let you chose one thing a day that you want me to, I don’t know, work on or stop.”

“Like a challenge?” 2D cocked an eyebrow, baffled by the turn of events.

“Sure, that. I succeed you reward me. I fail you can punish me, yeah?”

Pursing his lips in dissatisfaction, 2D looked from the bassist to the fries. “How is that gonna work? Why should I reward you for things you should just do? Being nice to me shouldn’t be some challenge Murdoc.”

“Remember, I’m going to try? This is me trying, I’m throwing up a white flag here. I don’t have my medications or a therapist so I figure we could work like a team.”

2D sighed, he felt exhausted all over.

“Look—”

“Stop calling me names. No nicknames either. It’s either Stuart or 2D, nothing else.” He puffed his cheeks up, glowering at the older man comically. “You manage that one I’ll give you something nice. Fuck up and I get to kick you in the crotch.”

“Uh—”

“Deal?”

“This isn’t quite what I had in mind when I thought it up.” Murdoc cringed.

“Well you want to work together on your issues? This is my first request. Work on it.”

Nodding with a grimace, Murdoc slumped slightly when the vocalist hefted himself up from the booth to climb over the table. As 2D touched down to the ground a zombie plastered itself to the McDonalds window, thumping against the glass repetitively.

Murdoc gave little chance for 2D to recover from his scare before he was ushering the singer to a side entrance. Russel followed through after them, pumping the shotgun and aiming. In unspoken agreement, Murdoc and Russel made sure to keep 2D between them while making their way out of the gathering crowd. The singer remained silent, noticing but giving no objection, it made him feel
Given the noise their movement and Russel's shotgun created, more zombies set about massing around them from all angles.

“Great.” Murdoc sighed. “Fantastic.”

“What about the subway.” Russel indicated to a ground level entrance across the street.

“We really shouldn’t.” 2D shook his head hard.

“We’d be out of sight though.”

The singer remained mute upon Murdoc and Russel making a path towards the subway.

‘What’s the point of putting my opinion out there if I’m just ignored?’ 2D thought to himself while he was forced to follow the men.

They took to the stone steps heading into dank depths beneath the city. Rotting flesh, stagnant water and other foreign yet unbearably overpowering scents invaded their nostrils. The three of them hesitated at five steps from the bottom. It was rather dark save a couple emergency lights running. 2D covered his mouth and nose, breathing through his fingers in a feeble attempt at covering smells. He only ended up tasting it and coughed.

Behind them the groaning horde lingered at the top, putting pressure on them to move. With urgency to get out of danger Russel practically hopped the last steps. Murdoc got a hold of 2D and urged the vocalist into the awaiting carnage.

“This or up there. Down here looks safe to an extent.”

“Muds this isn’t a good idea. Every movie I’ve ever watched always has creepy dark tunnels or subways that zombies come crawling out of to get the main characters.”

“’D, man, this is real, not a movie. ‘Sides, looks like the bodies down here are actually dead.”

The singer whined pathetically, wringing his hands against the handle of the bat.

“It looks flooded though, something could be lurking in the water.”

“Well I’m sorry princess— er, 2D, would you like to go back up there? Maybe get eaten alive? Hm?”

Whimpering softly to himself, 2D cautiously walked to the edge of the yellow line on the subway platform. Appearing black in the low lighting, there was the occasional ripple from water dripping off a burst pipe. The other two stood next to 2D, staring into the unending blackness.

From behind them a body came tumbling down the steps, bones cracking upon impact with the bottom. Faintly a couple gunshots could be heard top side.

“Shit.” Russel lowered himself into the thigh deep water making a face, “no choice now. Wait don’t the tracks have electricity in them?”

Murdoc shrugged. “Doesn’t seem to be on.” He examined the flickering emergency lights. “I think these are on some sort of battery power, maybe a generator.”

2D hesitated, watching Murdoc drop into the water next.
“Ah fuck, this’ll ruin my boots.”

“It’s the end of the world, who cares. We can probably find you another pair.”

“Good point, Russ. Well c’mon 2D, we haven’t all day.”

The vocalist whinged again before finally slipping into the water, cringing at the temperature drop.

Murdoc and Russel moved through the water with ease, just avoiding large debris or the odd bloated body. 2D held his bat to his chest, following the men ahead of him. The few emergency lights that lit the way barely helped once in the tunnel.

As they moved through the thigh high water the sounds of guns and shouting grew distant until all they could hear were their hurried movements. They tromped through the dark, for what felt like an eternity, not speaking. Everyone was on edge, worried any other noises would attract unwanted attention. 2D hoped Noodle was fairing better than them.

Incapable of discerning shapes beyond Russel and Murdoc ahead of him, 2D missed the grotesque body bobbing in the water. When the soggy texture of waterlogged flesh and clothing brushed by his leg he yelped in terror. Upon seeing said body it further fueled his fears and the vocalist jerked away, tripping through the water into a mangled portion of a subway car. When the drummer and bassist whipped around on the man, 2D disappeared under the water, flailing desperately.

“Stuart!”

“2D!”

Squeezing his eyes shut he unintentionally gulped cool yet utterly foul water which made him choke in shock. Unable to get his bearings he jerked in the water, limbs kicking out and catching on something immovable. A line of unexpected pain cut through his leg and he attempted to yell only to get more water in his mouth. For a terrifying minute he thought he would die right there, drowning like an idiot, but then he was yanked up by hands. Shakily he grabbed for whoever it was, clinging while he coughed up disgusting water.

“What the hell happened?”

Distress was written all over Murdoc’s face, his voice edging on panicked. Russel looked no better and without further questions they both got the vocalist to the ledge running alongside the tracks.

“D, man, what was that? Did something pull you down?”

2D gasped sharply when he finished coughing most of the water up. Murdoc pushed his soaked hair from his face, hand moving to rub his back soothingly.

“Just take a moment to catch your breath.”

“Sorry, I’m sorry. I— I was startled… I didn’t mean to cause so much noise.” tears began welling up in his eyes and no matter how hard he fought it they fell anyways. “Sorry.” He hiccuped while roughly wiping at his eyes.

“Are you hurt?”

“I think I cut my leg. I’m sorry.”

Both men set aside their weapons in favor of carefully maneuvering 2D so they could look over his
injury. The singer trembled while motioning to the leg in question. Murdoc rolled up the jeans, squinting in the dimness.

“Doesn’t look that bad, I think.”

“Let’s get out of here, then we can bandage him. We can hardly see down here.”

“Good point.” Murdoc rolled the material down and looked at the sniffing man. “You able to handle that?”

“Y—yeah.”

“Then let us resume.”

Unsure where they were exiting, Russel headed up first, vigilant. The drummer winced against the light, taking a moment to adjust before scanning the area. No zombies presented themselves so he signaled the coast was clear. Murdoc came up next, helping 2D along.

“I guess the first order of business would be to get 2D patched.” Murdoc indicated to the other man’s leg.

Nodding in agreement, Russel took the lead, meandering through vehicles and trash. The city landscape was eerily similar to before with the addition of loose debris fluttering around. Dark clouds hung overhead which had a dreary effect on the buildings.

With Noodle still missing the three men trudged on, ever aware of darkened shops and empty cars. Uncomfortable under the stare of crows hovering about in the desolate city. 2D hissed off and on, his gash burning with the movement. Murdoc aided the singer by keeping an arm around the thin waist, offering his body for support. Miraculously not complaining about the wet line 2D was creating on his clothing.

Had they paid proper attention to the dirty papers lying on the ground and half stuck to buildings, any one of them would have discovered a place to go. A military encampment formed at the international airport, a safe place for survivors.

2D stepped on a couple flyers stuck to the ground, his calf bleeding sluggishly behind the cover of wet trousers. Everyone was on high alert so attention was elsewhere rather than on him or the pamphlets.

Chapter End Notes

Going through and editing some of these chapters to be more consistent to the story line! (10/05/18)

Chapter updated and altered to fit the more serious tone I intended. (12/01/18)
By mid afternoon they ended up cutting their search for Noodle short. 2D was struggling to keep up without wincing and while Russel wanted to keep going, he couldn’t bring himself to push the singer. Holing up in an abandoned apartment for the night proved rather uneventful. They had little struggle getting in and found the place nearly fully stocked. Murdoc assumed the previous tenants had fled without packing, it was good for them. Before bed there was a minor argument over their sleeping arrangement. Russel refused to share a room with the bassist and vocalist again and put a halt to further complaints by hiding in a spare room. Too tired to piss and moan about nobody listening to him, Murdoc retired early.

He hated that his forced sobriety was making everything near impossible to focus on. He found himself quaking in the master bedroom on the right side of the massive king size bed at god knows what hour. He hadn’t wanted to share with 2D while he was a sweaty, shaking mess, but the singer insisted. Probably too scared to sleep alone which was ironic given it was Murdoc he was sharing with. He came out of his hazy thoughts to notice there were no giraffe limbs splayed over him and that his bed mate was damn near matching his quivering.

Murdoc furrowed his brows, puzzled over the odd sleep pattern, he could feel the tremors over his own. Shifting he moved along the mattress towards the singer, leaning over the fitful man. What little moonlight shone in through the window was blocked by his figure.

“Stuart?”

He figured it couldn’t be a migraine, he had watched the singer pop a few codeine caplets from the medicine cabinet. He pressed a hand to the sweaty forehead, 2D groaned in his sleep and squirmed. Pulling back he watched on further confused why the man seemed to be in the throes of a fever. He tugged the duvet back and uncovered the curled up body. Eyes narrowed in the near darkness he examined the singer as well as he could. There was a patch that appeared blacker than the sheets around where he knew 2D had gashed his leg.

“Damn.”
Murdoc was sure what he could make out was blood.

“2D wake up.” He nudged the man roughly.

The singer remained in his feverish state, making a few muffled noises. Murdoc growled and shook 2D harder.

“Stuart wake up!”

“W—wha?”

“You’re bleeding all over the bed.” The bassist patted along the bedside table, attempting to find a small flashlight he put there earlier.

“I’m what?” 2D sounded groggy, but not from sleep.

“Just how many of those pills did you pop?”

2D didn’t answer his question, busy scrubbing at his face.

Murdoc flicked the flashlight on, shining it down towards the singer’s legs. Blood was soaking the makeshift bandage and now the bed. The satanist frowned, it wasn’t like 2D to keep discomfort to himself, he complained about headaches the moment they formed.

“Why didn’t you tell me you were still bleeding?”

“I didn’t want to be a nuisance.” 2D mumbled, massaging his drug addled head.

“Well not saying anything you still managed that.” Murdoc left the bed, absently setting the flashlight aside. Light shone on the singer and room.

Grumbling he went into the connected bathroom, digging through the medicine cabinet for medication and first aid supplies. He probably should have offered to clean the gash up properly. He had been distracted by looking for alcohol. 2D remained where he was on the bed, quaking from feeling both hot and cold simultaneously.

Murdoc realized his folly when he barely made out anything in the cabinets and then attempted to flick the light on, irritated when nothing happened.

“Will you bring the torch, can’t see a damn thing.”

Eyeing the flashlight, 2D hesitated to move off the bed. When the satanist gave an impatient huff he grabbed the small object, light bouncing all over with the movement. Slowly he slid from the bed. Standing he wobbled forwards a step or two before a stabbing pain shot through his leg and he collapsed with a weak cry of surprise.

Rushing out at the sound, Murdoc happened upon 2D laying on the ground, pushing to sit up.

“Okay, take it easy.” The satanist helped the singer get upright.

“I don’t feel good Muds.”

2D held his head. The singer’s stomach rumbled loudly and unnaturally.

A rush of anxiety filled his person as he watched 2D.
“Just get your arm around my shoulders, I’m going to move you back to the bed.” The bassist crouched, an arm under thin legs and a hand settled on 2D’s lower back.

2D slung his arm around Murdoc’s bare shoulders, leaning into him. The bassist grit his teeth, grunting as he hefted the rather heavy singer up into his arms and carried him back to the bed. He dropped 2D gently.

Laying on his back and making no further complaints, 2D shivered and rubbed at his head continually.

“Sit tight.” Murdoc scooped up the light and hurried back into the washroom.

Under the sink he shoved items around until he happened upon a first aid kit. Holding the flashlight between his lips he examined the contents, assuring the rightful things were present. Before returning to 2D he gave a quick scan over the medications in the cabinet. Other than codeine, there were numerous bottles of prescriptions he knew would be useless for the singer. Murdoc put the light in his hand and stepped out, stopping at the bed.

“Be thanking your lucky stars or whatever, I found a first aid kit.”

2D gave a weak smile and thumbs up.

Setting aside the kit, the satanist reached over and undid the vocalist’s jeans. “Lift your hips.”

“What? Why?”

“These are soiled and it’ll be easier to clean up your leg without them on.” He pulled up on the belt loops, urging 2D to lift his waist.

Too ill to dispute Murdoc, 2D lifted his backside slightly. He was also too warm in the face from the fever to feel any embarrassment when the bassist worked the trousers off. Said article found its way to the floor somewhere in the dark. 2D jerked when warmer hands grasped his rather cool legs. The satanist scooped up said limbs so he could sit with them over his clothed lap.

“You should have said something.” Murdoc used the kit to wedge the flashlight so he could use both his hands.

“Sorry for the inconvenience.”

Murdoc removed the soiled bandage Russel had applied earlier in the day. “You should be, bleeding all over.” 2D rolled his eyes while a particularly bad shudder wracked his body. “Satan, you’ve bled a lot.”

Murdoc dug out some alcohol swaps, ripping the packs open to clean up the crusting blood. 2D winced, his skin felt overly sensitive around the injury.

“I’ll try to bleed less in the future.”

Murdoc tilted his head when the blood was cleaned away. Strange black veins spread out from the opening in 2D’s skin, like branches from a dead tree running in all directions. He brushed his finger over the veins quite able to feel the difference in texture. The black lines were hardened under a thin layer of skin with almost no give.

“What’s wrong?”
Murdoc didn’t look up. He prodded the veins closest to the gash, mildly fascinated and disgusted when blackened ooze seeped from the hard lines.

“Murdoc, what’s wrong? Is it worse than we thought?”

“What? No, it’s fine—er, just a bit infected. I’m gonna disinfect it with some rubbing alcohol.”

He knew lying wouldn’t serve him well, but scaring the singer was unnecessary. He grabbed a half used bottle of rubbing alcohol and unscrewed the lid. 2D watched him intently, sweat gathered at his face.

“Try to keep quiet, it might sting.”

Pouting more to himself, 2D nodded quietly and stared on as the bassist pinned his legs with an arm and poured the antiseptic liquid over the wound. A cold burn crawled up through his leg making him squirm. He whined gently and struggled to keep his noises to a minimum. Some part of him wondered if Murdoc got a kick out of causing him any sort of pain. He blinked when the pain ebbed away and he saw Murdoc wrapping the injury neatly.

“You need any more codeine?”

Despite himself he melted under this gentler version of his band-mate. He hated how easily he forgave people.

“And some water, please?”

“Yeah, you get under the covers.” Murdoc cleaned up the mess of medical supplies and tucked 2D under the blanket.

When Murdoc huffed at the big wet spot on his jeans 2D prepared for some snarky comment. Surprisingly nothing came and the older man removed said wet jeans. The satanist sighed and flicked the flashlight towards the bedroom door.

“I’m going to the next room, I’ll be back.”

Unable to stop himself, 2D grabbed for the older man, anxious all over again. “Stay please. I’m scared.”

Murdoc stood next to the bed, silently in agreement with the vocalist. “I won’t be long. Hum to yourself or something.”

Letting go, 2D hugged himself tightly, reminded fleetingly of the dank and wet room back in the middle of the ocean. Even given the years between then and now he still had moments of relapsing memories. Shaking the thoughts away, 2D rubbed his arms humming a song softly. He was safe and Murdoc wasn’t leaving him for days, just a few minutes.

Murdoc left the bedroom door ajar while rummaging through cupboards. There were a few candles scattered around in the kitchen, nearly burnt out with wax dripping onto the surfaces beneath them. It cast a warm glow over varies spots in the room making it seem like it was only a power outage and not some world ending crisis.

Opening the fridge the satanist gagged to himself, shining the light on what might not be off. Grabbing a few bottles and setting them aside he moved to the pantry. Seeing as the previous occupants left in a rush there was a fair amount to pick from. In no time he was moving back into the bedroom, nudging the door shut. He unloaded the items and quickly got the bottle of codeine,
shaking a caplet into his hand. 2D took the medication dry before Murdoc had sat next to him.

Murdoc held the drink up for 2D, aiding the other with somewhat steadier hands. The vocalist struggled to swallow around the thickness in his throat, he drank some of the water before Murdoc replaced it with dry food to eat. Eating little, 2D mostly drank water, finishing two bottles.

Once satisfied the bassist tugged the blankets up and laid back. He motioned the blue-haired singer closer, situating 2D’s head against his upper chest. The vocalist curiously wondered where the charitable streak was coming from. He fought to not flinch when Murdoc rested a hand against his head. When fingers carded through his hair he still winced in preparation of a hit. A discontent sigh came from above him at the reaction.

“If you get sick, wake me.”

“Feels like I’m dying.” 2D wondered if he was dying, everything was aching and codeine did little to hide that fact.

Murdoc made a face 2D couldn’t see. His mind raced back to the black veins.

“Shut up. You’re not dying you idiot. You just have a fever.” Murdoc rubbed and petted at 2D’s hair and neck soothingly.

“If I am, dying I mean, I don’t wanna leave things bad between us.” 2D mumbled against Murdoc’s skin.

“Stuart I swear to satan. You’re not dying.”

Murdoc relaxed when 2D’s breathing seemed to settle out. He finally flicked off the flashlight in his opposite hand, putting it aside. Closing his mismatched eyes the bassist made an effort to sleep. He would have missed 2D talking if the singer’s face wasn’t pressed to his chest.

“I have to reward you for mostly not calling me names.” The words were mumbled. Lips pressed against his chest. “Thank you for trying.”

Murdoc shifted his hand, combing his fingers through blue hair and over an ear. He heard breath hitching.

2D felt warmer than his fever.

“Get some sleep.”

“You can use nicknames.” 2D yawned. “Only nice ones.”

Murdoc rolled his eyes exasperated. “Go to sleep Stuart.” He couldn’t help the small grin forming. “We can talk ’bout this shit tomorrow.”

2D remained silent after that, finally managing to sleep. Murdoc stared at the ceiling in the dark, watching morning slowly filter in.

Upon rousing from sleep, what little he got, Murdoc noticed 2D was tracing patterns along his chest. Occasionally the singer ran his fingers over old scars, unaware Murdoc was awake. The second thing he realized was the vocalist wasn’t sweaty and seemed rather perky. After a moment it seemed the younger man recognized the more alert breathing and stopped touching, leaning up to
look at Murdoc.

“Sleep well then?”

“I feel like I could run a marathon if I’m honest.” 2D smiled faintly, not sure if some sort of verbal assault would come.

“I feel like death.”

“Sorry for keeping you up last night.” The singer sat up, tucking his legs close to himself. “I appreciate it, you helping me. It was nice of you.”

Resting an arm over his eyes, mostly to avoid looking at 2D, Murdoc grunted in answer.

“Your gash looked pretty bad. Probably going to need antibiotics. Or a proper doctor.”

“Well you’re a proper doctor yeah?”

2D teased, resting his chin on a knee, not at all cold while he sat in nothing but his underpants.

“Ugh, hardly. I barely remember that phoney test. All I can recommend is you get something to keep your fever down and painkillers.”

“It feels fine today. I feel rather good, no fever now.” 2D shifted and moved his leg around, intentionally dropping it over Murdoc’s bare midriff. “And it’s not spotting or coming through.”

“Should still redo it, clean it up again.”

Lowering his arm he peered down at the pale calf resting placidly against his stomach. 2D was right, he couldn’t see any blood seeping through. For a short minute he considered yanking the taller man over so 2D was straddling him. He missed the close familiarity and intimacy early mornings held from their past. With what little sun was streaming in through the partially closed blinds, he could briefly admire 2D’s sleepy demeanor, blue hair tussled and eyes hazy but warm.

“I guess, though wouldn’t agitating it make it worse?”

“Cleaning it and getting fresh bandages on help.

2D started to pull his leg back. He halted when Murdoc settled a hand on his ankle. It felt fairly hot on his skin, which he attested to lack of clothes and the cool air.

“2D—”

“Murdoc.”

Murdoc furrowed his brows in annoyance at being interrupted. “Last night you were feverish.”

“I feel fine now.”

“You were shaking worse than me.” 2D shrugged in reply which made Murdoc sigh in irritation. “Today we’re gonna look for a drug store or a clinic. Maybe a hospital, anywhere that carries drugs.”

“But Noodle—”

“Don’t argue. You had a fever, you don’t just get over it in a night.”
“But it’s not bothering me anymore.”

“Stuart!”

2D jerked surprised by Murdoc’s outburst. The bassist spoke softer. “Noodle can wait a few hours. If you’re ill we need to address that right away. Not exactly safe in this situation.”

“Is that your medical opinion?”

“Don’t be a smart-ass—”

“Don’t call me names.” 2D scowled.

“Christ.” His ire was growing so he paused and forced himself to take a couple calming breaths. 2D watched on, astonished by the restraint.

Murdoc pushed himself up and got a firm grip on 2D’s thigh, tugging the vocalist over into his lap. He held fast to 2D’s narrow hips, keeping the man where he was straddling Murdoc.

“Murdoc you can’t just—”

“Listen Sunshine, I need you to do this for me alright? You were ill last night and it fucking scared me. That cut is infected and it has to be treated with more than some rubbing alcohol.”

“Okay.” 2D mumbled, barely audible.

He was mildly stunned by the confession and term of endearment attached to the statement. If his heart sped up at the genuine concern he wouldn’t say.

“We’re stuck in the middle of a fucking crisis, not conducive with an injury or sickness.”

“You haven’t called me sunshine in a while.”

An uneasy silence formed between them. Murdoc chewed the inside of his cheek while drumming his fingers against 2D. He looked anywhere but the singer, not able to make direct eye contact.

“It was kinda nice.”

“Great, sharing time is over, get off me.”

“Wait, Murdoc, it was only an observation.”

Dislodging the vocalist from his lap, less than gently, the satanist got to his feet to stretch and rummage through a nearby dresser. He could feel the dark eyes boring holes into his back, it made him uncomfortably warm.

“Nothing to be embarrassed about.”

Finding some clean clothing that fit semi-snugly, Murdoc continued to avoid 2D’s unnerving stare. He dug through 2D’s coat, bringing out the pack of smokes and purple lighter.

2D huffed. “Those are mine!” He made to clamber off the bed only to gasp sharply when his leg gave out under him, he collapsed much like before.

The bassist gave a surprised noise in his throat when 2D flopped hard to the floor.
“What in the hell? Did you just trip?”

“My leg.” 2D hissed, struggling to hide his pain while griping his thigh. “My leg is having a spasm, it hurts!”

“You just told me it felt fine.”

“Well it doesn’t feel fine now!”

“Sweet satan, give me strength.”

Pressing a smoke behind his ear, Murdoc pocketed the lighter before putting the smokes back. He crouched near the singer.

“Maybe it’s a sign that I was right.”

“For f— just help me up Murdoc!”

Scooping the singer up via his armpits took a few attempts. Upon having the taller standing again he felt nails biting into his forearm.

“Oh, I feel dizzy.”

2D lurched forward, nearly toppling had it not been for Murdoc catching him around the waist with his opposite arm. The vocalist clung desperately to the muscles of Murdoc’s bicep while tilting his head down to vomit suddenly. Startled and grossed out the satanist hastily moved his feet from getting splashed.

“Holy hell, warn a man.”

“I—I’m sorry.” 2D slurred through snot and tears.

“Okay, okay.” Murdoc carted the lanky singer away from the puddle of sick. “Have a perfectly good toilet ready for use.”

He half carried, half dragged Stuart to the washroom. Nudging the toilet seat up with his foot and nearly tumbling at the distribution in weight on one leg, Murdoc carefully set 2D up with the porcelain bowl.

“What’s going on in here?”

Russel pushed the master bedroom door further open.

“I keep hearing shouting and thumping. You two aren’t messing around in here are you?”

“Make yourself useful Russ, go grab some water. 2D is indisposed.”

“He got a headache?”

“More or less.” Murdoc didn’t give further information.

Russel gave an affirmative noise and went about shuffling through stuff in the kitchen.

Under normal circumstances this particular occasion would be routine if 2D had a migraine. Watching the younger wretch into the stagnant toilet water made his gag reflexes act up so he looked away. He winced when small needling points of pain caught his attention. Tilting his head
he spotted a couple bloodied marks on his arm.

“Fuck.”

Without prompting he went to the bed and looked around for the discarded first aid kit, hastily getting alcohol swabs once found. Cursing to himself he scrubbed the small cuts abrasively, hyper aware how bad this situation could be.

Russel paused in the doorway, face carrying a baffled frown over Murdoc’s behaviour, two bottles of water in each hand.

“What’s wrong with you man? Look like you’ve seen a ghost.” Russel chuckled at the somewhat overused joke.


“Did you also bump him on the way there?” Russel raised a brow, mostly teasing as he leaned in the doorway of the bathroom.

Murdoc didn’t answer.

“Hey ‘D, got you some water, think you can keep it down?”

“Maybe.”

While the drummer aided the singer with the beverage, Murdoc paced the master bedroom. He knew something was very wrong with the vocalist, something that started with the gash. Squeezing his shaking hands he groaned to himself, he could barely function beyond simplistic actions and thoughts. Mashing the heels of his palms into dry eyes, Murdoc paused his pacing to articulate a plan. 2D would need antibiotics for the injury on his leg and so would he if his own minor cuts became infected.

“You doing okay?”

“Not really.”

“What’s going on? You two didn’t have a fight again didja?”

“His gash is infected and he had a fever last night. We need to find proper medication, antibiotics.” Murdoc gestured to his arm where the small cuts were beading with blood. “Fuck and now I have these courtesy of ‘D. Whatever is going on with him might happen to me.”

“Do you think it’s related to the undead shit going on?”

“How should I know? Fuck I can’t deal with this.” Murdoc clutched at his sleep-mussed hair. “Noodle is missing, 2D is sick and there is nobody out there to help us.”

Russel stood there, momentarily stunned to silence while watching the bassist dissolve into a frenzied rant.

“I haven’t had a proper dose of liquor in days so I can’t sleep, I can’t fucking think and the tremors are buggering up my ability to do anything. It’s utterly maddening that I can’t find a fucking bottle of anything harder than 5% beers which did shit all!”

Leaning from the toilet, 2D observed from the floor. His vision was blurry from tears over retching
and his hair stuck to his face from cooling sweat.

“Muds, man, it’ll be alright. You’re still capable enough to function, we’ll just find a map and get
to a nearby clinic or hospital. Things are gonna work out.”

“This illness.” Murdoc motioned palm up, towards 2D. “Has a short window before it kicks you in
the ass.”

Russel waved a hand. “You feel fine now, right? Lets go get medication quick. Maybe there are
military blockades at the hospital, who knows.”

“Y—yeah, hospitals are great places for information and supplies,” 2D rested his head against the
toilet.

Murdoc fixed his hair and took deep breathes. “Yeah, yeah. Okay. We’ll do that.”

“What about ‘D?”

“What about me?”

“Can you even walk?”

“I’ll carry him.” Murdoc grunted.

“We should just leave him here, it’ll be quicker.”

“No!”

“If we leave, we leave together. Stuart can’t be left here to fend for himself while he’s like this.”

“Logically he would slow us down, sorry ‘D.” Russel gave the singer an apologetic look. “We
could cover more ground if you stay put.”

“Please don’t leave me here alone.” Sheer panic emanated from the taller man.

“We’re not.” Murdoc placated calmly, he glanced at Russel sternly. “We’re not.”

“Fine. Whatever man, lets just get outta here before it’s dark.”

Russel left the room throwing his hands up. He worked at packing supplies and other necessary
items.

Murdoc slipped into the washroom and sat himself on the edge of the tub. 2D eyed the older man
anxiously, his hands were tight on the porcelain. The singer was normally pale with his usual
healthy flush. At this given time the man looked sickly with a pallor to envy Snow White.

“We’re gonna figure this out, Sunshine.” Murdoc knew how ridiculous bringing Stuart was with
the other’s condition. Some twisted little piece of him couldn’t leave 2D out of his sight, needed
him constantly next to him.

———

With the singer out of commission, Murdoc put together a light bag for 2D to wear. He re-did the
bandages for 2D and when it came time to leave he stretched his limbs and back in preparation to
piggy-back the tall man.
“Y’sure about this Muds?”

“I wouldn’t have offered if I wasn’t.”

Russel stood at the master bedroom door, impatiently awaiting them.

“What about your back?”

It was an innocent question, 2D was honestly concerned for his well being. Maybe it was lack of sleep or alcohol, probably both, but he felt his hackles rise and tried to bite off his retort to no avail.

“Fuck off, I can manage carrying your scrawny ass around. You weigh what? Eighty pounds wet?”

2D mumbled an apology.

“Lets just get out of here, c’mon,” Murdoc huffed while pivoting to drop one knee to the ground while holding his arms behind himself.

2D hesitated, his face flushing some in embarrassment. This wasn’t the sort of help he expected from the older man.

“Just fucking hurry up 2D before I change my mind.”

Placing all his weight on his good leg he struggled a moment to balance himself. Sliding his arms around the other’s shoulders he grimaced when he couldn’t feel much of his leg from the knee down and thus couldn’t properly bend down. Thankfully he hardly had to think about it when two hands reached around and cupped his thighs. 2D yelped when Murdoc got up and bounced him partly to adjust the new weight. He unintentionally gripped at the muscles flexing under Murdoc’s shirt.

“You feeling me up?”

“No! I don’t wanna be dropped.” 2D hid his face into the somewhat fresh shirt Murdoc was wearing.

“Not going to drop you, relax.”

Russel snorted. “Almost wish I had a camera.”

“Bugger off Russ.”

Murdoc carried the singer behind Russel. Heading down the stairs from the apartments was a test of his muscles. Gritting his teeth he let his mind focus on the discomfort carting Stuart around brought, it distracted enough from his sobriety for now.

They had to stop every so often to allow Murdoc a chance to readjust the singer. At one point he hooked his arms under 2D’s legs, locking his hands together so he didn’t have to shift constantly. Travel was stunted and by the time they reached a proper corner shop for a map book it was midday, granted it took a while to find said location.

Peering around outside the store, Murdoc spotted a bench where he quickly deposited 2D. He near collapsed beside the singer once free of the weight, wiping his brow and face inconspicuously.

Russel searched within the map books for a simple one while they relaxed. 2D massaged his legs, frowning at lack of feeling in the bad one.

“I really need a drink right now.”
“Could have a smoke?”

“Yeah, pass us one.”

2D snickered and grabbed the forgotten smoke tucked behind Murdoc’s ear holding it for him.

“Ah, right, thanks.”

Lighting up with the borrowed lighter, Murdoc took a quick drag before holding it out to the singer. 2D took it gently, copying Murdoc.

“Looks like there’s a hospital a couple blocks over. Think you can manage that much walking?”

“Course.”

An obvious lie that both 2D and Russel ignored.

“After we should try and head to the airport.”

2D looked over his shoulder at Russel. “Why there?”

“There’s a few fliers on the window over here, says there’s a military encampment for survivors.”

Murdoc nearly gave himself whiplash.

“How far is that?”

“A fair distance Muds, I don’t think you can carry ‘D that far.”

“How far?”

“On foot, probably two days travel if we were all capable. Four since 2D can’t walk. That’s just a guess.”

“Maybe Noodle is there.”

“She probably is, I hope so anyways.” Russel lowered the map book he held.

“We should just take a car.” Murdoc nodded to one of the abandoned vehicles.

Russel and 2D looked at the vehicles still operational around them on the streets. Although aware he had suggested it first, Russel let it slide not wanting a disagreement with Murdoc.

“The roads are congested, but we could try.”

Murdoc hopped off the bench, marching towards a vehicle, energy renewed at the prospect of driving. He jiggled a handle, pleased it was unlocked. Getting into the driver side of the vehicle he pried cords out, fiddling. He laid out against the rubber mat while he worked.

2D puffed away on the smoke, massaging his thighs continually with his free hand. Russel sat next to the singer. Both of them observed the bassist.

A few choice words came from Murdoc then the car rumbled to life.

“I’m a genius.”

The satanist stood patting the car, “not anything like Stylo, but it’ll do.”
At the brief mention of the dreaded black vehicle, 2D tensed. terrible memories flitting in and out. Russel seemed unaware and Murdoc hadn’t noticed the change.

“Damn, any other hidden talents?”

“Too many to share. Lets get rolling boys.” Murdoc dragged the R out on rolling as he made a sweeping motion with his arm. “I wanna get this shit on the road. The quicker we fix up and find Noodle the faster we can be outta here.”

Assisting the mute singer into the backseat of the vehicle, Russel smiled gently, patting Stuart on the shoulder. Map book and pack in hand he moved around and got comfortable in the passenger seat, nestling his shotgun by his feet with the supplies.

Murdoc slid into the driver side, door closing abruptly enough to bring 2D out of his mind. With a ton of automobiles surrounding the streets and sidewalks it took every ounce of Murdoc’s concentration to weave through the tight path. Persevering, Murdoc swung the dinky four door Toyota through obstacles like a professional, maybe dinging the sides once or twice. Russel directed the older man, occasionally pointing a direction and reiterating verbally.

The dull ache in his muscles from carrying the lanky man kept him at attention. With forced detoxing clawing away shreds of his mental capacity, he depended on outside pain to keep aware. He hoped, fleetingly, that Russel and 2D were sufficiently preoccupied with finding Noodle to notice his continued agony. He held the steering wheel firmly, it helped cover his trembling.

“It’s raining.” Russel peered forward.

“Astute observation Russ.” Murdoc gave Russel’s dark look a smug grin.

A zombie slammed into the side of the car making 2D shriek. Both front seat occupants were jarred from their small banter when another walking corpse flung across the hood, rain water distorting its already horrifying features.

“What the hell?”

“Where did they come from? I didn’t see any before this!”

Russel yanked up his shotgun prepared to lay down fire if they broke through the windshield. Faintly through the near torrential downpour they could make out zombies amassing among the wreckage of cars and from smashed out stores.

“Muds go faster, there’s a lot of zombies.”

2D’s panicked voice came out shrill and distracting.

“I’m trying my best here.” Murdoc swerved the Toyota in an attempt to dislodge their extra passenger. “These fuckers are clingy. How far is the hospital?”

Russel pointed to a blurry H sign. “Left here, hospital is up the road.”

Obliging, Murdoc whipped the car to the left, finally forcing the zombie off the hood only to stop at how blocked the road was. There were abandoned police vehicles creating a road block at the base of a small hill leading to the hospital. Squinting through rain, Murdoc could barely make out the medical facility.

2D whimpered from the back, sinking in his seat when more zombies began approaching through
the haze of rain.

“We could make a break for it.” Russel looked at the bassist, a small amount of panic written on his features. “They’re slow, real slow.”

“Stuart can’t walk.” Murdoc glanced through the mirror at 2D. “Fuck, the sidewalk is blocked too. Shit.”

“Man we need to make a choice.”

Murdoc shoved his seat back, bumping the singer’s leg accidentally. “We run. Cover me, I have to get Stu out of the back.”

Russel nodded, his breath coming heavier. 2D shot terrified looks between both men.

Sharing one last look, Russel gave another nod as he shoved his door open and hopped out, shotgun at the ready. Disappearing from immediate sight, 2D jumped when the gun went off once, then twice. More shots started to ring out.

Murdoc yanked the back door open and urged the vocalist towards himself. “C’mere Stu, no time to waste.”

Scooting towards Murdoc he shakily grabbed for the man, getting to his able leg unsteadily. With fear coursing through their veins, 2D was momentarily thrown for a loop when Murdoc hefted him up into his arms. Had it not been such a dire situation he might find the stormy weather and being carried bridal style romantic.

“Let’s go Russ.” Murdoc dug his fingers into 2D’s legs and ribs to keep him close.

Russel backed up towards the older man while pumping the shotgun again. “I got three shots left before I have to reload.”

Tucking himself tightly to the satanist, 2D watched the zombies behind them stumble towards them. Russel remained at the rear while Murdoc meandered through empty cars, leaning this way and that to avoid scuffing himself.

“It’s just up the hill.” Russel shouted over the rain. “Go straight there, I’ll catch up. I forgot our supplies.”

Somewhat speed walking between vehicles, Murdoc turned briefly to look down at the drummer firing on another undead that came close. He chewed at his lip, unsure he should power on without the percussionist. The rain drenched him and Stuart thoroughly, chilling them to the bone the longer Murdoc hesitated. Without prompting Russel glanced over and waved his arm.

“Go!”

“You better not get fucking killed!”

As the satanist got further up from the other man 2D could make out less and less over Murdoc’s shoulder, until all he could see were faint outlines of trucks and sedans. He could hear the occasional shot through heavy pattering.

When they finally made it under the cover of the Hospital entry where a red SUV was lodged, Murdoc gulped at air, setting 2D on his feet shakily. The singer held himself up on a beam, shivering from being drenched. Clutching to his knees, Murdoc hunched over breathing hard.
“Fuck.” He fretted. “Fuck, fuck. I should have grabbed the other shotgun and helped. Christ.”

“He’ll be okay.” 2D glanced out into the rain, voice weak. “Russel is smart.”

Both of them jolted when a corpse in the SUV groaned and flailed feebly, trying in vain to climb out but unable due to a seat belt strapping them in. Murdoc pushed his slicked hair away from his face while he caught his breath. They stood near the entrance, waiting for Russel to join them. A couple minutes ticked by where they grew increasingly anxious for the drummer. Then as the rain started to let up a bald head crested the hill near an ambulance.

Utter relief washed over them when Russel walked over, mainly soaked and sporting no injuries.

“Ey’, thanks for waiting.”

“Don’t ever do that again.” Murdoc scowled.

“What? Save your collective asses?”

“Thank you Russ.” 2D smiled sweetly, just thankful the man was okay.

“Welcome ‘D.”

“Lets be quick.” The bassist groused, avoiding and emotional outpouring. It swirled around in his gut, being both thankful and nauseous with no way of expressing it properly beyond grumbling.

Russel caught the meaning behind the attitude. He nodded towards the entry. Murdoc helped 2D hop into the hospital, Russel following behind them. A mangled hand swiped at them as they passed the SUV, but there was adequate space to avoid it. Even though they entered first, Murdoc and 2D quickly lagged behind and so stopped at the receptionist area. Going on ahead, Russel poked his head into empty rooms, searching for a medication section while also clearing the area of potential unfriendly guests.

Watching Russel make his way further, Murdoc paused with 2D in the waiting room beside the check in desk. 2D briefly noticed that the sopping wet clothing hardly bothered him.

“Guess he’s eager.”

“Don’t blame him.”

2D could feel the bassist shaking against him.

“Are you cold or something?”

“No. I’m soaked if anything.”

“You’re shaking like a leaf, what’s wrong?”

“Detox. Haven't been this sober in, well never.” The bassist joked sourly.

Murdoc brought 2D around to a plastic chair, dropping him into it a bit unceremoniously. 2D grunted at the impact against the chair.

“Try not making so much noise Dents, you might wake the dead.” Murdoc snorted softly.

2D scowled, “I didn’t drop myself into a chair Muds, could have been gentler.”
"I’ve been sticking up for your weak arse all day, carting you around like it’s 1997 all over. I even gave you a cuddle before this morning."

He snapped abrasively while rummaging through drawers in the nearby desks. He winced under the sound of his rough voice, knowing damn well it wasn’t 2D’s fault, but still taking it out on him.

Glaring into space, 2D kept from retorting. Quite quickly he let the aggravated feelings slip away. Murdoc was trying and set backs were to be expected. No matter how much he wanted to yell, he knew damn well it wasn’t 2D’s fault, but still taking it out on him.

Murdoc was trying and set backs were to be expected. No matter how much he wanted to yell, he knew a screaming match would do little to solve their problems. He rubbed his hands together, nearly wringing them. Expressing himself with Murdoc was arduous, but he could pull through. This morning had been nice and he honestly missed experiencing early morning snuggling. Memories of years upon years of torment constantly ruined any progress he made towards fixing their relationship. He craved something normal, some semblance of average or pleasant. He wanted the satanist to understand why he was upset, to own his mistakes and apologize once in a while.

"Why can’t you be nice to me? What have I done to receive flack from you? You’ve done pretty good and now you’re snapping at me for being concerned."

Now behind the singer, looking through stuff, Murdoc halted.

"I never asked for this, being constantly shit on for nothing. I realize that not everything will be okay immediately, but what did I do now to have you be mad?" 2D smoothed his hands over the wet jeans he wore, adding more softly. "I hate fighting. I hate feeling insignificant."

Murdoc glanced over through the clear partition at the wet mop of blue hair seated a few paces from the desk. He guiltily cast his eyes downward fighting to find his voice.

"There are nice things." He should stop now. "I made you famous. You’ve gotten to sing and I’m not always at you." He squeezed his fist tightly and pressed it to his mouth mentally preparing for a blow out.

"Ta’ for that, I’m famous." 2D's voice ran dry with heavy sarcasm. "All of it was worth the beatings, the verbal abuse and even Plastic Beach so long as I was famous."

2D felt confidence swell as he pressed on, voice strong.

"You know I suffer from constant sometimes debilitating migraines, nightmares and panic attacks. ‘Course you know that.” 2D gesticulated with his hands while keeping his back to Murdoc. “But yeah I’m famous, so there’s that? And hey, the world is over so I guess my fame did shit all for me."

Admittedly his sourness over the past had faded with time and maybe he was hyper focused on one thing. He felt it necessary to get his bad emotions out. The only remaining issue he truly struggled against was Plastic Beach. However hard he fought those particular memories they were the worst. Part of him wanted to hurt Murdoc, even an iota of the pain the bassist put him through. He had in the past, but it was fleeting and far between. Speaking with a specialist only got him so far and honestly he wanted to stop dragging the baggage around. He couldn’t use music to convey his thoughts, not this time; no matter how easy it was to write out, it never brought across the full impact of what he meant.

"Not sure why I keep trying, it’s stupid. Keep thinking I can change you or something."

Relaxing, Murdoc stared to the ceiling before he felt calm enough to speak. Guilt reigned in his anger, he was supposed to be working on that.
“You’re not stupid.” Murdoc moved around and sat beside 2D. “Sure your brains are scrambled and you forget shit, but you’re not stupid. Brilliant singer.”

“That’s all I am though? A good voice, occasionally a good punching bag.”

“Why can’t we do this when I’m piss drunk?”

“Because you have to own up to your mistakes at some point.” 2D leaned back in the chair.

“I’ve never been a good man.”

“I just want you to love me like I love you. Isn’t that easy enough? I’m not asking for much Murdoc.” 2D stared resolutely at his own lap. “I don’t understand why you make things so complicated… I’ve always admired you and all you’ve ever done is belittle me.”

The whole world stood still and Murdoc felt all the air rush out of him at the confession. He was used to lyrics expressing everything, and sure it was selfish to make Stuart sing his love confessions when the singer was too hopped up on pills to understand. Right now was too much, this frank discussion left bare too much and he wasn’t ready.

A small voice asked him when he would be ready if ever? Now was no more appropriate than the day before or the time before that, but he knew something had to give. Here 2D was laying down the foundation for something better, something healthier. The fact that he was willing to give Murdoc a second, no probably a fifth chance after their history, should be proof enough that he wanted something for them.

“I— satan, words are hard for me. Emotions are fucking difficult.” Murdoc took a deep breath, finding soon after speaking he couldn’t utter anymore.

2D turned bodily in the chair and tilted his head to catch the mismatched ones.

“Twenty years Murdoc. We’ve been dancing around each other and playing this twisted game for twenty years. I’m done waiting for you to get your act together. Either you want to make things work, properly, or you don’t. Simple as that.”

He felt extra sweaty thinking about an intimate discussion into their relationship and the issues surrounding it. 2D watched him, silently urging him to continue with his dark eyes. Murdoc stared at the ground definitively trying to verbalize his feelings.

Coughing to clear the tightness in his throat, Murdoc momentarily glanced at the singer. “I’m shit at this.” Murdoc paused.

“Hard for you, I know.”

“I can’t undo everything or be some picturesque version you have of me knocking about in your head. I’m a monster.”

“You’re not a monster Muds. You just have bad habits.”

“Of course you’d say that, you seem to love broken shit.”

“Maybe I do.” 2D sat back sighing. “I love putting broken things back together and making them work again. Studying the little pieces, the components that make the whole and finding a way to set them together so the whole works. Maybe it’s not perfect but it’s something and that’s better than nothing.”
2D started to twiddle his fingers.

Wiping his palms on damp thighs, Murdoc watched his feet and ground again. "I was seeing someone before."

"A shrink?"

"Sure, whatever." Murdoc grunted. "Point is I was trying to clean up my act."

"That's good Muds, nothing wrong with getting help or talking."

"I know that." The satanist snapped, voice sharp. 2D flinched, instantly making Murdoc feel guilty all over. "Sorry. I'm sorry."

Huffing more to himself, Murdoc reigned his breathing in and focused on remaining calm. He reminded himself that lashing out wasn't helping anyone, he had no reason to given it was just him and 2D. The man wasn't mocking him.

"This would be easier drunk, fuck."

"It wouldn't mean much to me if you were."

"Fair point." Murdoc tapped his foot anxiously. "I want you. I always do, it's distracting and frustrating how much I think about your stupid hair or the stupid smiles you make when you're playing around with your keyboards."

Before 2D could interject Murdoc continued, barrelling forward so he didn’t stop and realize he was rambling.

"I care about you of course, it's terrifying how much. Being a better person than I am, we wouldn’t be discussing this shit. And honestly I want all that sappy shit you prattle about. Waking up together, the cuddling, all of it. I’m scared of wanting that because I don’t deserve it. I just don’t."

2D forced the bassist to look at him by grabbing at the man’s palm.

"Start with a proper apology Murdoc, own up to your mistakes and work from there." He smiled softly. "The best things about us are when we get along. That’s all I want, all the time."

Genuine adoration reflected in the singer’s dark eyes. Murdoc swallowed his pride and came in close to give 2D a kiss. Black eyes widened in surprise.

Pulling back Murdoc shifted his hand over the vocalist’s. "I’m sorry Stuart. I’ll keep saying it till you believe me."

Heart beating rapidly, 2D stared back at the older man partially alarmed. The gently spoken words were followed up by another kiss, it was short and sweet. He blinked when Murdoc brought his cold hand up and laid multiple pecks on the top side.

His voice sounded far off, disbelieving. "Maybe once more?"

"You are really pushing your luck right now." Murdoc gritted his teeth. "I’m sorry."

"I like hearing it." 2D leaned over the arm rest between them. "Again."

Rolling his eyes, Murdoc moved back and crossed his arms over his chest, uncomfortable. He let the singer’s hand go. 2D saw the stiffness in the older man's posture and wondered if he should lay
off.

“I’m sorry.” Murdoc murmured.

What little barriers he built up for dealing with a volatile bassist crumbled away at the continued proof Murdoc was willing to try; for them.

“Thank you.”

2D felt their heart to heart taper off with a grunt from Murdoc. Sliding his hands back to his own lap, the singer glanced over at the noise of Russel returning. Both of them watched the drummer step into the small space beside reception.

“Yo, I found a medication storage, what are you two doing sitting around? I gotta do everything here?”

Murdoc pushed up from the chair. “Yeah, yeah.”

2D grabbed the satanist’s wrist, tugging harder than he meant which caused Murdoc to jerk back a bit.

“What in the blazes 2D?”

“Sorry.” 2D loosened his hold. "And thank you so much for say—”

“For fuck sake.” Murdoc yanked his arm away. "Don't get all soppy on me."

Not waiting, Murdoc walked away, leaving Russel and 2D behind. The drummer glanced down at 2D.

“Sorry man, didn’t mean to interrupt whatever that was.”

“It’s okay Russ. I can stay here till you two are done.” 2D realized saying that was pointless seeing as he couldn't walk.

Hesitating a moment, Russel squeezed 2D’s shoulder in a show of comfort. Soon enough 2D was sitting alone in the waiting room, unable to see further than the reception desk and some seats, 2D traced patterns bored. He picked at his nails a moment later, contemplating things.

He often wondered what a relationship with the bassist would have been like had the man been any semblance of pleasant or normal. He just wanted the jumble of emotions to straighten themselves, he hated being perplexed by complex feelings. Gave him a headaches, though currently he didn't have one which was a miracle in itself. He was unsure if he should fully forgive Murdoc or let their thing work itself out slowly, the man seemed willing to improve.

Quite abruptly something clattered to the floor on the opposite side of the half wall divider. 2D sat ramrod straight looking about for the disruption and who caused it. Nobody was around, but the singer was on edge.

“Guys?”

Soft clicking was heard as something rounded the corner of the counter. 2D peered, wide eyed at the soaked dog standing by the entry of the seating area. The singer wheezed nervously at the sight.

“Nice doggy.” 2D whimpered, he could see patches of fur missing and bloodied spots.
The dog bared it's teeth, growling. 2D breathed faster seeing the blood and flesh stuck between the stained teeth. The dog was infected. The vocalist wondered where the animal had wandered from.

“Oh shit.” 2D panted out, voice quivering.

Attempting to keep his movement subtle, he slowly nudged one of the other chairs in front of himself. The dog growled again, stepping closer. 2D kept his eye on the dog and in the seconds before it pounced he jerked the other chair in the way, yelping when the force ended up knocking him over.

With a plastic chair pressed to his chest he screamed when a bloodied maw chomped at him. The dog was half impaled on a thin metal leg, bleeding all over his thighs while trying to eat him. He shoved up against the chair to keep the dog away.

Murdoc and Russel gave each other uneasy looks while browsing the medicine stock.

“That can’t be good.”

Bolting back to the waiting room, Murdoc reached 2D first. He happened upon a deranged mutt growling and nipping at 2D, trapped on a plastic chair. The singer fought against the animal desperately, not able to shove the chair and dog away completely. Murdoc cast all reason aside and jumped in, kicking the animal and chair off the singer. 2D used his arms to slide away, tucking up under the desk.

Cursing himself for not grabbing the second shotgun when he had a chance, Murdoc backed up from the struggling dog. Said canine was viciously fighting against its trapped limb to try and get at them. Russel slid into the section, nearly toppling when his foot slipped. He paused before silently deciding to shoot the animal.

For a moment Murdoc stood there, wondering if things had been different that 2D could have died. It put things into perspective.

“That noise will attract others, lets do this quick.”

“Yeah.” Murdoc started, trying to regain his senses.

“Get the medication Murdoc. We’re getting the hell outta here.”

2D crawled out from under the desk, quaking. Russel came over and got the singer to his feet.

“C’mon man! Get the medications, we don’t need to waste more time here.”

Murdoc nodded and quickly vacated the area. 2D covered his face, trembling violently his heart hammered in his chest. Russel got the singer seated.

“Alright ‘D deep breaths, through your nose and out your mouth.”

“I’m sorry. I’m so useless.” 2D warbled miserably.

“Well you managed to avoid getting bit so you can’t be that useless,” Russel teased while rubbing the singer’s back.

2D hiccuped while crying into his hands, mortified to be reduced to a blubbing mess yet again. Russel continued to soothe him, even when the bassist returned with a bag of medications. Murdoc
shifted his weight back and forth on his feet. Awkward that the singer was bawling his eyes out; more awkward that he wanted to soothe the man with hugs and kisses.

“Got the antibiotics, lets go.”

“Gonna need another car.” Russel kept rubbing 2D’s back.

“I’ll get a car.”

“We better go together Muds.” The drummer aided the singer with hobbling. “Lets get going.”

Composing himself, Murdoc grabbed the bag of medication and lead them back out. They hastily made for a two door truck, not picky about their vehicle choice.

Murdoc worked his magic as fast as possible, mumbling a swear here or there when he shocked himself. When the truck sputtered to life they wasted no time entering the vehicle.

Practically crawling into the back seat, what with limited space, 2D sniffled to himself still visibly shaken with the incident. Stopping from sitting at the wheel, Murdoc sighed and slipped into the back seat with the singer. Russel made no complaint and took the driver side, wasting no time getting them moving.

Despite the clinging wetness of their clothing, the satanist pulled 2D over into his side.

“You’re alright.”

2D nodded and sniveled some more. Murdoc rolled his eyes while resting back against the fabric seating. He tugged 2D in closer, arm securely around the taller man.

“You’re alive Stuart, no need for crying.”

Russel looked at them in the mirror. If he was honest, he couldn’t understand how an apocalypse was pushing them closer together. Their dynamic confused him and while he got the strange co-dependence they shared, he wondered how healthy it was. Part of him wished all of this was a horrible nightmare. He considered the two men chatting covertly and figured if they weren’t fighting then it couldn’t be all that bad.

“Hope Noodle is safe.” Russel murmured as he ran a hand over his face tiredly.

He needed her to be safe, otherwise he might not stay sane with just Murdoc and 2D as company.

Chapter End Notes

I promise Noodle is ok.
Driving became a nightmare with night creeping closer. The further they got towards the airport the tougher it was to navigate the roads, especially with the headlights flickering. Finally Russel pulled over. He watched the fresh wave of rain continue on as if the world hadn’t ended a couple days back. The drummer gave both back seat occupants a check to make sure they were still alive. He sort of grinned upon seeing them dozing against each other. Whatever pain medication Murdoc nabbed, along with antibiotics, was working wonders on both of them.

Visibility had dwindled with rain at night. He sighed when the truck sputtered. He had no idea where they could go, it was nearly pitch black out.

“Hey, Murdoc.” Russel reached around and nudged the older man in the knee.

“Hm?”

“We have to crash somewhere for the night, truck is hitting empty and it’s dark. I have no clue where we sleep tonight. It can’t be in here.”

“There’s a few shops here with gating on the windows, could always stay in one of them.”

“I suppose that would work. Not very comfortable.”

Murdoc shrugged, yawning. “May have places upstairs or something.”

Russel tapped his fingers on the steering wheel to some unknown beat. The rain hitting the car was mesmerizing. He let his mind wander not hearing the bassist talking to him at first.

“What about that shop? It’s got gating.”

“Hm? What?”

“Here I’m the one high and you can’t be bothered to focus. The store next to us has gates. Lets hole up there for the night.”

“Yeah alright.”

They sat in silence for a moment, rain hitting the metal of the truck continuously. 2D slept on, head comfortably nestled into Murdoc’s shoulder.

“What’d you take?” Russel glanced over his shoulder. “I might want something to sleep tonight.”

“Oxycontin. Fantastic stuff really.” Murdoc pushed Stuart’s head up lightly.
“Really? Isn’t that a bit strong?”

“It helps with the aches since I can’t seem to find a lick of alcohol anywhere. It’s the fucking apocalypse and there’s no booze. How does that even work?”

Russel sighed moving his hands in a placating manner. Murdoc reached around and tried to open the passenger door, fiddling with the handle.

“Fucking door is jammed. Why are all the doors in my life jammed?”

“It’s locked man.”

The satanist squinted and unlocked the door. Climbing out of the vehicle and instantly getting soaked, Murdoc reached in for the tired singer. He grabbed at 2D’s arm, urging him to move out of the car. Russel stood next to the driver door, basking in the rain for a moment.

At this point 2D was heavily doped up, draped over the satanist as the man tugged his limp body along. The singer couldn’t move his right leg at all and it dragged while his left leg half attempted to function. Murdoc was reminded of nineteen ninety-seven all over again and tried to keep the lanky body from slipping completely. Russel took up the rear, keeping an eye through the thick rain for any unwanted visitors. Not that he could see further than a foot. Struggling to get into the darkened shop, Murdoc awkwardly pressed the door open with his side. Once inside Russel locked the door, hoping the glass would do for the night. The musty store appeared rather undisturbed.

Murdoc sighed when 2D’s head lolled forward and the man practically drooled.

“For fuck sake, you've had pain medication before.”

“What did you give him?”

“Same thing as me.”

“You didn’t.”

“I did. What does it matter? It’s keeping him happy. Sort of.”

“Murdoc you can’t give that shit to people with head injuries.”

“He’s had it before.”

“He got off it ten years ago.”

“What? No he hasn’t, I’ve seen his bottles.”

Russel took 2D off of Murdoc and got the poor singer seated in a semi-comfortable spot on the floor. 2D smiled faintly when Russel crouched in front of him.

“’D how are you feeling?”

“Gooood.” The singer drew his word out, drooling unintentionally.

Russel shook his head as he carefully cleaned 2D's mouth with his sleeve, moderately grossed out.

“See, he’s fine.”

Russel scrubbed a hand over his face, feeling the stubble growing in since last he shaved. The store
they were in looked like a comic book store so he wouldn’t be lucky to find more supplies. Setting
the supply bag on the floor near 2D he looked through it for water and food. They were getting
rather low already. Russel tried to ignore his growing stress.

“Oh shit!”

“What?” Russel looked up alarmed. He glanced to Murdoc who had moved behind the counter.

“A good ol’ bottle of rum.” Grinning widely, Murdoc shook the bottle and held it up for Russel to
see.

“You can’t drink that man.”

“Why the fuck not? I’ve been dying for a sip.”

“You took some hard painkillers. That shit doesn’t mix.”

Murdoc looked at the bottle unperturbed.

“I’ve done worse.” Murdoc twisted the lid off only to have Russel yank it out of his hand. “Hey!”

“I am not dealing with you drunk and sick. You’ve been doing pretty good without so far.”

The satanist gestured, a vulnerable expression on his face while eyeing the bottle desperately. His
mouth felt dry. Russel sneered and turned the bottle over, dumping it’s contents. Murdoc slammed
his fist down on the counter separating them.

“For fuck sake! Just one drink wouldn’t have killed me.”

“Spoken like an alcoholic.”

Murdoc kicked the chair near him, knocking it over. "I am an alcoholic!"

“If you keep it up you’ll alert the whole god damn neighborhood.”

Murdoc swore and clenched and relaxed his fists. He gave in finally and shoved a cash register off
the counter in a fit of pique. Russel hissed.

“Murdoc!”

2D stayed put listening but not putting together what was going on. The satanist threw his arms up
and kicked a few things in a rage while Russel put the empty bottle on a shelf. He approached the
bassist and grabbed Murdoc, halting him from flailing like a child having a tantrum.

“Enough! We are trying to survive for fuck sake. I don’t know about you, but I want to live.”

“What’s with those noises?” 2D cocked his head which nearly had him flopping over.

Murdoc snapped his head to the blue hair over the counter. Shame rushed over him at his
ridiculous behavior. Russel let Murdoc go when he saw the man come down.

“Fuck.” The satanist rubbed his face, exhausted and embarrassed. Being sober had it’s merits, but it
also made him feel like an ass.

“You good?”
“Yes.”

The satanist glared heatedly at the drummer standing nearby. He hated how easily his temper flared. His shoulder and arm gave a twinge of pain so he massaged the ache away. A violent urge to vomit overwhelmed him suddenly and with no warning the bassist leaned over and puked. Coughing up what little he had consumed his mind started to race. He felt overly warm.

*How long has it been? Am I already getting a fever?*

“How long has it been? Am I already getting a fever?” Russel stepped back, nose wrinkling in disgust.

“No.” Murdoc wiped his forehead, suddenly less enraged and more scared. “I might be sick too.”

“Like 2D?”

“Yes.”

“Great. Now I have to drag two of you around.”

“At least I can still walk.” Murdoc coughed again, dry heaving.

Russel propped the singer against a shelf. “I’m gonna set up a sleeping area. We’re gonna get out of here tomorrow the instant we can.”

———

There was a soft hum of some machinery, a generator. Murdoc wondered what it was powering, the machine sounded close to finished. Staring to the ceiling, the satanist glanced to Stuart sleeping beside him. Their sleeping arrangements were becoming routine by now. The drugs seemed to help the singer sleep through the discomfort his leg had to be causing.

Russel slept opposite to them seemingly dead to the world and its chaos. Murdoc turned his head to the left to watch 2D’s shoulder shift with his breathing. A small battery powered lamp sat in the far corner of the room giving enough light if they had to leave in the night. Using an arm he lifted his hand to gently nudge 2D’s shoulder.

2D took his sweet time to turn over onto his right side, facing the satanist. He looked rather sleepy.

“What’s up Muds?” 2D kept his voice down.

“Can’t sleep.”

2D yawned and Murdoc sort of smiled.

“What?” the singer blinked tiredly.

Brushing over the question, Murdoc sat up and nodded for 2D to get up as well. The singer frowned in confusion but pushed himself up.

“How’s your leg?”

“Numb.”

“You willing to come with me?”

“Depends, where are you planning on taking me?”
He brought his hand up, brushing the singer’s cheek. “Somewhere private.”

“I guess so.”

“Don’t sound too excited,” Murdoc rolled his eyes while getting up.

2D took the offered hand and carefully stood. He wobbled and leaned into Murdoc while hopping out of the room they were set up in.

“Make a great pair we do.” The singer rubbed his own nose when he spoke.

Murdoc nodded. "It would seem so."

“Sorry for getting you sick too.” 2D peered at Murdoc in the fading light.

“I’m sorry too.”

“What for?”

2D narrowed his eyes, waiting for some nasty comment. Murdoc remained quiet while taking 2D into a separate room.

“I bet this sofa pops out into a fold out bed.”

“Oh?” 2D strained to make out said couch. He sat where Murdoc left him, sure they were in the staff room of the comic store.

Murdoc rubbed his knuckles along the singer’s cheek once more. “I figure this is better than a kip on the floor.”

2D shuddered at the feel of the other's hand a second time. He told himself not to fall for every small gesture. There was a bigger picture.

After taking extra medication, the lack of alcohol was the least of Murdoc’s worries for tonight. He kept thinking about that instant with the dog or the rainy horde and how a split second longer they could have been dead. He moved towards the couch and fiddled around in the darkness until he chuckled.

“What?”

“I was right.” He unfolded the hidden bed.

2D hummed in answer.

The satanist brought the lanky vocalist to the pull out bed, flopping with 2D which made them bounce partly. He laid with the other on the lumpy mattress quiet for a moment.

“What were you sorry for?”

“For being a prick.”

Eyes softening, 2D smiled.

“You really meant it then?” 2D whispered teasingly. “Saying it till I believe you?”

“You deserve someone nicer.”
“I think.” 2D started, joking tone dissipating. “You deserve to be happy. With me.”

Murdoc half snickered, half huffed. “Such an optimist.”

Part of him realized that somewhere during this apocalypse things had become mildly easier to speak about. He attested that to the fact nobody was around to complain plus some pressure to keep their relationship steady. He wondered when it became considerably less difficult to appreciate 2D and his innate ability to convince him to do just about anything. He analyzed the past couple years to pinpoint when, but found he was just a schmuck for the vocalist and it probably started early on. He was slow to notice.

“I look at the positive side of things. I really appreciate this by the way. I appreciate you.”

“Good. Glad to hear it.”

"You need someone there to support you.” 2D hesitated. “I’m still willing to try.”

“Yeah?”

“Yes, but you need to put a bit more effort in.”

"Fresh start then?" Murdoc blanched when 2D smacked his chest rather hard. "I can't undo the shit I've done 'D, it's done. I can keep saying sorry but—"

"Don't pretend it didn't happen and be good to me. I’m not going to be hundred percent every waking moment so be patient, more patient with me, deal? I'll work on catching myself from pushing you.”

“If you wanna be with this fuck up, it’s a deal.”

“We’ll work at it as a team. I mean it Murdoc.”

“Fine.”

Come morning, 2D assumed the man would sink back into his usual argumentative self. He was beginning to enjoy their nightly encounters however fleeting they were, some deep topics were being hashed out. 2D found each time they talked his jumble of feelings started to settle more, so long as Murdoc didn't set them back. Shifting, the singer curled up into Murdoc. He was surprised the bassist didn't pull away or comment snidely. He caressed his hand along the man’s side and stomach, pleased by the small but important steps they were taking.

He took a moment to run his hand up over Murdoc’s sternum and chest, subtly feeling the firmness of muscle.

“Well now I know you’re feeling me up.”

Flushing horribly, 2D thanked the darkness for hiding his embarrassment. He went to pull his hand away but the older man stopped him. He buried his face to muffle his nervous laughter.

“Knew you had a thing for fit men.”

“Shush.”

Murdoc turned onto his side, snickering while casually putting an arm around the singer.

“Whatever happens, you know I.” 2D swallowed awkwardly. “I care about you.”
“Good save.” Murdoc mumbled.

“You know what I meant.”

They settled in the quietness of the room, relaxing to a degree. 2D dozed off shortly before Murdoc, barely catching the man whispering endearing words into his hair. He felt Murdoc press his mouth against his head, careful and with nearly no pressure. Keeping his eyes closed, his heart raced. For an instant it was like they were young and sharing in a private moment together after recording. The satanist use to sing disjointed lines of song when he thought the singer was asleep, his way of being tender 2D supposed. The vocalist smiled stupidly to himself, he shouldn’t be swayed so easily, but then he was a sucker for sweet talk.

Listening to 2D breath he mimicked the pace and before realizing it Russel was waking them both for a new day. The satanist blinked feeling strangely refreshed at having finally acquiring a decent amount of sleep.

2D whined, burrowing his face into Murdoc’s shoulder, obviously not wanting to greet the day. Russel sat, setting water bottles and granola bars down next to himself on the small table.

“Where did you get that?” Murdoc lifted his head only enough to look over at the drummer.

“Found a stash in here. We don’t have a lot left in the way of dry food.”

The satanist rested his head back. Russel cleared his throat.

“We need to get outta here so eat something and lets go.”

Murdoc heaved himself up dislodging 2D who grumbled at the satanist. Russel unscrewed a bottle before passing it to the older man, then when 2D finally sat up he passed another to the singer. 2D chugged the water while Murdoc stared at his bottle. At the insistent prompting from Russel via a firm look, Murdoc exhaled an expletive under his breath. He tried to copy the singer and gulped the water quick, it was tasteless and warm, but his throat appreciated the hydration. He hadn’t realized how thirsty he was until now. 2D shook his head at the satanist when he went to lower the bottle.

“You have to finish that. Part of detoxing is keeping hydrated and well fed.”

“He’s right. Plus since your immune system is compromised it’s best you keep your strength up.”

Murdoc tossed the bottle behind himself after finishing it.

“There. Happy?”

Russel grabbed something, unwrapped it and shoved it at the satanist. Murdoc turned his nose up at the decidedly healthy looking nature bar.

“Don’t give me sass man, you threw up and it was all bile, so eat the damn bar or I’ll hold you down and make you.”

2D didn’t need help taking what was offered, grabbing a few bars to eat. The bassist snatched the bar biting a chunk off and chewing. He found the taste wasn’t awful, but he certainly wouldn’t have picked it willingly. The drummer sat back, pleased the older man had listened. Despite how frustrating both of them could be, they were sort of a strange family. 2D was an easier person to handle in Russel's opinion.
Their situation looked up when they found the weather had cleared. Sun shone down on the unfortunate state the surrounding city was in. Murdoc stood with the singer near the entrance of the shop his hand gripping the jeans at 2D’s waist. 2D brought a hand up shielding his eyes as he looked around. Not a single zombie could be seen, which was odd but completely useful given their state.

Russel motioned to a blue jeep parked along the road, driver side door ajar; a much nicer ride compared to the rickety pick up truck they had ridden there in.

“Maybe you can walk me through hot-wiring a car?”

“Best you let me and Stu handle that, you’re better with a gun.”

The drummer gave an appreciative smile at the compliment. 2D hung onto the bassist’s shoulders, hopping with his good leg as they made way to the jeep. Murdoc let the singer lean against the vehicle while he pushed the door open further, then nodded his head to the steering console.

“Get yourself down to fiddle with the wires.” Murdoc stepped back to let the singer through.

Russel stood guard a few paces away, his shotgun at the ready and the bag of ammunition and supplies hanging off his shoulders. With his own shotgun long ago misplaced in the beige car near the hospital, Murdoc was weaponless. The singer similarly forgot his bat; him and 2D would have to depend heavily on Russel from there till the airport.

Struggling down onto his back, 2D laid out on the mat. It was a little cramped with the steering wheel a mere foot or two from his face. Murdoc reached in and popped said wheel up further so it wasn’t as confining. He shot a quick smile at the older man.

“Underneath the steering column there’s wires and junk, you gotta pull them out carefully.”

2D nodded and turned his face towards the mess of coloured wires left exposed towards the back of the space. He started when Murdoc shifted to stand over his legs and lean down.

“Don’t get too excited.” The satanist leered. “Just making sure you don’t fuck up.”

“You’re practically on me.”

Ignoring 2D he got in relatively close, one arm holding himself against the driver seat so he didn’t topple. He was essentially caging the singer to the mat, granting almost no room to move.

Despite himself, 2D flustered while maintaining a professional face by bringing wires out to see properly. Russel peered over briefly then turned to face opposite once more. He had nothing to say. So long as their flirting didn’t stop them from getting out of here.

“Y’see the red wire there, almost twisted around the white one?”

“Yeah.”

“You’ll need that one. Careful.” Murdoc watched the thin, dexterous digits work the wires free. He loved those hands.

“What now?”

“Uh— you… D’yeah remember after filming 19/2000?”

Face coloring, 2D smacked his lips loudly not entirely certain how to touch the subject.
“You wore that—”

“Yes okay, I remember.”

Some proverbial flood gate was released and Murdoc gave the singer a smug yet charming grin, all sharp teeth. The older man got in far too close for it to be considered anything but improper. He wasn't sure where the change came from.

“Murdoc.” 2D was abashed how fast his heart fluttered in excitement. He did absolutely nothing to halt the other. “We should try focusing.”

The low growl Murdoc emitted was positively predatory and in spite of his previous statement, 2D found his hands delving into mussed up black hair. Their lips crashed together fiercely, teeth clicking momentarily. With his good leg the vocalist wrapped it half ways round Murdoc, mind drawing a pleasant blank if for an instant. Nothing else mattered other than warm hands running along the underside of his thigh and up his shirt on his side. Soft gasps were swallowed in deep kisses and honestly why had he been so opposed to doing this? They practically melted against each other, a mess of eager hands and mouths.

The hand gripping his thigh slid down to squeeze his backside firmly, it caused his hips to jerk up. The friction was fantastic on his growing interest so he ground up against Murdoc making the other man groan into his mouth. They broke away briefly to catch their breaths, barely inches between them.

“I’m sorry.”

“I forgive you.”

“I don’t deserve you.”

2D tugged Murdoc back in, kissing slower and with a sweeter edge. He worried the man’s bottom lip gently while keeping one hand tangled in dark hair. His other hand rested comfortably at the small of Murdoc’s back. The longer their kissing went the more 2D could feel Murdoc tremor against him. Concern flooded him and he parted to ask what was wrong only to have the satanist kiss him fervently, eager to smother him under a barrage equally ardent kisses that rapidly drifted down his jaw and along his neck. He could feel something wet on his throat that wasn’t a tongue. There wasn’t a chance to delve into why the bassist was crying because the man jerked at Russel smacking the jeep loudly.

"Break it up you two!"

Embarrassed at having smacked his head on the steering wheel, Murdoc rushed to disengage from 2D and stumble back. He hurriedly pivoted to hide his obvious bulge. 2D went beet red and bent his good leg to shield himself while fiddling. Russel motioned, exasperated with them.

“Not the best time for that, c’mon.”

“Fuck.” Murdoc wiped at his face somewhat red as well.

Caught in an awkward position, 2D hastily worked at the wires, smiling sheepishly at Russel when the jeep purred to life. Russel glowered, clearly displeased by their lapse in judgement.

“Just get in you two.”

———
With Russel driving, Murdoc took the time to catch some sleep against the passenger window. It was near impossible with the uneven texture of the road. He resolutely kept his eyes shut, too scared to face either 2D or drummer. He didn’t want to explain his earlier actions. Russel drove them through alleyways and back roads, mainly avoiding the ghostly traffic jam in the highways. The ride continued on in awkward silence which despite himself, Russel enjoyed.

Looming in the distance the international airport sat, pristine and clearly in good shape. Among the field and space left open around the place were a few downed planes and straggling zombies. Nearer to the end of the street, Russel contemplated taking them off road. He stopped near the edge. Murdoc roused from his light doze to look around. His head pounded painfully, which he accredited to sobriety or terrible sleep.

“Why’d we stop? We here already?”
2D leaned forward over the storage console between the front seats.

“Nearly. Looks like military whipped up a decently safe place. I can’t get further this way though so we’re going off road.”

“Are those zombies?” 2D piped up while pointing out towards the hordes surrounding the fencing in patches.

Russel nodded. “Guess they’re attracted to the survivors.”

To the side of them, Russel spotted a couple undead wandering close. They seemed uninterested in them. Cranking the wheel to the right, Russel pressed the gas after swapping the jeep into four by four mode.

“Lets see how well this baby handles.”

“Satan can we not, I’ve got a migraine.”

Russel ignored the satanist and took them off the road onto some grass. 2D hooted in the back, bouncing around thanks to the rough terrain. Murdoc scowled as he clung to the handle above the door. Driving towards the airport, Russel put his foot to the ground, laughing deeply. They needed a reprieve from the depressing situation.

Upon closer inspection the military blockade curling itself around the airport was massive and fortified. He stopped the jeep at the gated tunnel, noticing how flimsy this section was compared to the wall defenses. Rather quickly men and women in head to toe uniform opened the gates, spread out around them toting semi-automatic weapons and ushered them through the chain-link tunnel. Once safely tucked inside the same people stood at the ready, guns aimed directly at their vehicle.

“Very warm welcome indeed,” Murdoc muttered.

“Do you blame them?”

A loud speaker crackled to life with a voice holding a distinctly American accent. Definitely someone from New York.

“Step out of the vehicle slowly and keep your hands visible.”

Russel undid his belt. Murdoc looked at the bigger man, partly anxious.

“This looks a little wonky.”
“We can’t back out now Muds. Noodle has got to be here.”

Disallowing Murdoc a chance to refute the drummer climbed out of the jeep, hands lifted in sight for the military officials.

“There are two guys with me in the car, one of ‘em has a leg injury and can’t walk so I’m just gonna give him a hand.”

The military personnel edged closer to Russel and the jeep. The percussionist cautiously opened the back door and motioned 2D over. The singer took a shaky breath before climbing out, using Russel for support. Murdoc stayed seated in the passenger seat, he felt off about the whole set up.

“Come on Murdoc, get out of the car. These guys are serious about doing things a certain way.”

“Better not get shot.” Murdoc slipped out, hands raised.

Russel aided 2D as the three of them were herded towards a makeshift medical station. Guns were still trained on their backs even as they entered the small tent. A couple of doctors glanced over at their entrance.

“These three have to be tested.”

A female doctor waved them over while situating herself at a table with equipment. The set up was haphazard but it worked well enough for the situation. There were containers with vials, swabbing kits and small motorized generators powering electronics. Russel spotted a laptop wide open on a fold out table. He couldn’t read what it said in the print, but the title was bold: Vaccination. It stood out starkly and he considered it a second, wondering if they had cures here.

“I either need a swab or a pin prick of blood. We test the sample with this.” She held up a vial of clear fluid that came out of a pack of numerous vials. “If it goes pink you’re clean. If it goes black, well lets just say we wouldn’t need to put you out of your misery.”

She proceeded to gather up three swabbing kits, handing them off to each of them. When she turned away Russel and Murdoc exchanged a distressed look. The satanist looked from the corner of his eye, watching the military men and women hover. Without consulting his band-mates he turned to them.

“I forgot something of importance in the jeep, think I could grab it before the test. I promise it won’t take long.”

The two military persons closest to him momentarily lowered the weapons and nodded.

Russel took that moment to swap himself twice with his own kit and 2D’s kit before anyone noticed. 2D blinked, stunned both by the act to spare him and the confirmation that the drummer and bassist assumed him infected. He shouldn’t be surprised, the numbness in his leg was a sure sign something was wrong, whether from infection or something else.

“Here.” Russel handed the kits back to the doctor. She carefully tested both swabs getting two negatives which cleared them.

Seeing the pinkness in the fluid eased Russel and made 2D anxious.

During this moment the satanist returned with the military escorts to pass over his swab. The older man fiddled with the purple lighter, having used it as a distraction at the vehicle. When his results also came out pink he was momentarily confused.
“What the he— er... I mean of course I’m clean, why wouldn’t I be?” Murdoc coughed to clear his throat.

“You three are cleared, you can go inside. You might want to take your friend to get treated for his leg injury.”

Neither Russel or Murdoc wanted to hang around and get discovered so they were quick to agree with her. Lead further onto the airport property, the three where deposited by two officials near the main entry. The doors were opened and both personnel motioned them in. They briefly realized their supplies and weapon were confiscated and they were essentially back to square one.

“Go to the information center just up the stairs to get figured out.”

“Thanks.” Russel nodded to them and when they left the three of them relaxed.

“I suppose we should get situated.” Murdoc pulled 2D’s arm over his shoulders, alleviating Russel.

There were a few persons moving around in the building, nobody obviously marked as a regular survivor. It made them nervous not seeing others like them.

“I’m infected.”

“You’re not.”

“I have to be, you two went to great lengths just now to protect me. What other reason would there be other than being infected.”

“Look ‘D, even if you are there has to be a cure or something to treat you. Especially in a place like this.”

Murdoc tugged the singer closer to himself.

“Besides, you haven’t gnawed on us so obviously it’s not infection. Probably a bit of blood poisoning.”

2D paled at the thought. The fever, vomiting and numbness could be explained away with a simple diagnosis of blood poisoning, maybe a common issue. The clawing hunger bubbling up within him for something other than normal food every so often, that couldn’t be pushed away with some simple medical prognosis.

“Muds.” 2D whispered brokenly, more to Murdoc than both of them. “Muds, I’m dying. I think I’m dying. I’m not well.”

“No you’re not. You’re gonna be fine Stuart.”

_Everything is wrong. I’m wrong._ 2D thought. He couldn’t even pretend this thing would be okay.

He felt faint and barely remembered being moved towards a temporary information booth with higher ranking officials. It all blurred and his surroundings changed to that of a triage unit. There were beds lining walls with narrow paths. Russel had vanished from his other side and he panicked, looking for the drummer.

“We’re gonna work this shit out.” Murdoc mumbled while flagging a doctor down only to have them hurry by commenting on the queue. Had his arms been free he probably would have grabbed the man and shook him violently.
Neither of them were prepared for the shriek of joy from none other than Noodle.

“2D! Murdoc!”

They both glanced around for the abrupt voice of the young guitarist. Noodle threw her arms up smiling widely as she nearly barrelled the men over, hugging both of them tightly. She was wearing a red-cross uniform over the clothing she’d been wearing the night they were separated, which meant she had been scooped up right away.

Unable to contain their elation at finally finding the elusive woman both men respectively hugged her.

“I am so glad to see you two!” Noodle smiled through teary eyes, overwhelmed with happiness.

“Hey no crying, we’re fine. Little worse for wear mind, but in one piece.”

“We looked all over for you Noodle. I’m happy you’re safe,” 2D spoke softly, eyes lit up.

“Wait, where’s Russel?”

“He’s waiting for us just outside.”

Noodle smiled wider. “I cannot believe you three managed to find me. I couldn’t leave after they brought me here. I thought the worst.”

Reality of his grave issue returned and 2D sighed, looking down towards his bad leg.

“I’m a bit not good.” 2D said.

“What do you mean? You have to be okay otherwise they would not allow you entry. Though you're in here so there is an injury?”

2D rubbed his face, avoiding Noodle’s searching eyes. Murdoc inhaled sharply. Noodle peered between them, fretting silently.

“He’s sporting a nasty gash on his leg.”

“Oh, well that’s nothing.”

2D frowned at the satanist. “I’m infected.”

“Shut your yap, we don’t know that.”

“Stop lying.”

Noodle drew back at their bickering. She scanned the room for an empty bed before deciding on a corner bed recently vacated.

“Lets get a private spot before we make any conclusions.” Gesturing to the bed, Noodle encouraged them forward.

Both men nodded. The guitarist gave one more scrutinizing look of the room, assured nobody had paid much mind to them before enclosing them with a curtain. Helping Murdoc, she got 2D comfortable before sliding a pair of latex gloves on. She had seen infected individuals brought in, but they never reached triage. She couldn’t let anyone find out about Stuart if he was sick. Using the general background noise and a lower pitch, Noodle explained the overall situation while
grabbing items. She crouched near a wooden box attached to the bed and grabbed up some alcohol wipes and clean needles.

“I’ve been here close to the start. I was discovered wandering around only a couple hours after outbreak.” Noodle paused to have 2D point out his bad leg. Murdoc stood beside the bed, anxiously shifting his weight. “It’s a mess right now. Government has seemingly fallen or abandoned the people and military agencies have taken jurisdiction. Currently they have control over this facility and are working alongside a group of overzealous scientists and medical officials that survived.”

“Why am I not surprised? It figures military take over the instant any world altering scenario occurs.” Murdoc nudged 2D to move so he could be seated on the firm mattress alongside him.

“Let’s have a look and see how bad it is.”

Noodle gently rolled the cuff of 2D’s jeans up. Murdoc chewed his thumb nail upon seeing the black veins had expanded beyond the bandage. They seemed thicker than before and he cursed himself for not doing better to monitor the gash. It could have been avoided had he or Russel properly flushed the injury right from the get go. Murdoc trailed his eyes to the guitarist, gauging her reaction. Judging from the wide eyes and agape mouth it was not a good sign.

“You said it wasn’t bad. You said it was fine.” 2D clutched the blanket under him.

“It wasn’t last I checked. I swear.”

He was digging a bigger hole for himself. Right now he didn’t want to fathom the gravity of 2D’s precarious state.

Noodle chewed her lip anxiously while undoing the bandage, peeling the material back only to halt when flesh came with it. The singer breathed heavier, he couldn’t feel it but seeing his own skin coming off was horrifying.

“Okay, 2D it looks bad. It really does. However I can work with this. We have antibiotics we can administer.”

“My leg is rotting!”

Noodle and Murdoc both shushed him rapidly. 2D held his face between pale hands as he whimpered.

“I don’t feel good. I don’t feel good.”

With clear uncertainty, Noodle grimaced while removing the bandage fully. Thick pieces of blackened skin came off. Using an arm she covered her mouth, fighting her gag reflex at the sight of pus and black muscle tissues. Murdoc abruptly covered 2D’s eyes and shot a grim look at Noodle.

She turned away choking a moment as bile rose in her throat.

“I can’t feel it anymore.” 2D’s voice shook. He cupped his hands over the one shielding his eyes. “I’m dying. I’m going to die.”

“No, no. It’s going to be fine Stu. Noodle’ll fix you up and you’ll be right as rain.” Murdoc wrapped his arm around the trembling vocalist. “Nothing a tetanus shot and some antibiotics can’t fix.”
“Okay.” Noodle swallowed loudly. “Yes, medication— just— uh, stay here and do not let anyone see.”

Near fleeing, the guitarist disappeared through curtains.

Sniffling aggressively, if only to stave off the inevitable crying, 2D gripped Murdoc’s palm in a vice. He was scared. Murdoc tucked 2D into his chest, his free arm and hand curling around his head as if to protect him from everything.

“Focus on breathing.”

Murdoc’s voice soothed over the pounding blood in his ears. He moved his hands to grasp feebly at the older man, clinging desperately. Muffled against the other, 2D bawled, breath coming unevenly.

Carding his fingers through the greasy blue locks and pressing his cheek to the somewhat matted hair, Murdoc felt a horrible ache overtaking his chest. He had no words for the devastated man in his arms so he silently cradled him.

Likewise, 2D couldn’t speak through his gross sobbing, snot clogged his nose and he was sure Murdoc’s shirt was soaked where his face was. His hands stretched the fabric as he held fast. Barely aware of Noodle’s return he kept himself firmly hidden. The bassist continued to stroke his hair.

“I have some things here to treat the site.”

“What sort of medications?”

“This is a heavy cocktail of antibiotics to boost his immune system. It may make him vomit, unfortunately, so I have an IV drip for fluids.”

“Is it going to work or what?” Murdoc examined the varies things Noodle had laid out on the rolling tray. “Don’t give him false hope if this shit won’t work.”

Noodle fumbled for a moment. She was having a difficult time seeing the vocalist like this. Thinking back to the strange room with the glowing, industrial fridges with weird little vials she contemplated mentioning them. There were suppose to be three types, differing in colour if she remembered correctly. Hesitating she fingered the needle, carefully measured antibiotics within it.

“I have heard whispers, doctors talking about an antiviral vaccination. They have been working on it for a while before this whole thing occurred.”

Curtains were parted and a blond man leaned in. Noodle jerked, ears burning while she intentionally blocked view of 2D’s leg.

“Dr. Nelson. What can I help you with?”

Murdoc watched their exchange.

“Hey, I’m down a nurse. Would you be able to assist me? After you wrap up of course. It’s no rush.”

“Give me a few minutes.” She said, adding a charming smile for good measure.

“Thanks, you’re a life saver Natalie. I’m in conference room A3. Come along when you finish.”
Dr. Nelson ducked out before hearing Noodle respond. Murdoc left unsaid how gross he thought the name, there were pressing matters at hand.

“So this vaccination, can you get some? Does it work?”

“I do not know how well the results are. That portion of the rumours are always absent, however I know where they hold them. I can get some later in the evening when the rush dies down. Bear with me until then.”

“Very reassuring.” Murdoc muttered.

“It is the best I can offer. 2D, I’m going to administer the antibiotics okay? Then I will set up your IV. After that I want you to rest.” She placed a gloved hand over the pale ankle.

Leaning from Murdoc’s cocoon of arms he rubbed his face. Eyes puffy and red he only offered a nod.

“Please look away.”

Obliging, 2D rested into Murdoc, exhaustion claiming his body as more tears decided to fall. He closed his eyes and tried to mentally wander from the situation. Murdoc avoided staring directly at Noodle’s hands. She cleaned the site thoroughly, detaching herself from who it was while she wiped away blood.

“How did this happen?”

“Got chased into the subway. The place was flooded and he gashed himself in the water.”

“Were there bodies?”

“Yeah. Fuck, this is my fault.”

“I hardly feel you could control this happening.”

Noodle finished cleaning the location, the wipe came away saturated black and brown. She grabbed the needle and deftly pressed it directly into the worst portion of the injury. Murdoc purposely turned his head.

“Are you or Russel injured?”

“Stu cut my arm.”

Upon looked to Murdoc, Noodle spotted the little crescent shaped cuts. Even from this distance she could tell they were fine. She chose to ask anyways to ascertain her visual diagnosis.

“And you are uninfected?”

“Yeah.”

“How did he cut you?” Noodle tossed the needle and wipes.

“What’d you mean? With his nails.”

“Well had you been bitten or scratched with more depth then you would be sick as well. Have you had any fever symptoms?”
“Not sure.”

“Murdoc,” Noodle sighed exasperated. “Have you or have you not?”

Worn out from terrible sleep and detoxification, Murdoc rolled his eyes.

“Not that I’m aware. I got sick and threw up but attested that to being fucking sober.”

She came over and pushed up the sleeve to eye the tiny cuts. Her deduction was sound, there were no black veins.

“I’m mildly surprised you have remained upright without alcohol.”

The older man looked cross at her statement. Noodle set up the saline bag on a rolling hook which worked through manual means instead of machinery. Prepping a needle she gently prodded 2D to pass his palm over.

“Toochi, please do not distress too much. I will get you the vaccination. You will walk away from this.”

Having not used the pet name since she was fifteen, Noodle wanted to come across more empathetic. She felt awful for the pianist and only hoped her misguided venture to snatch untested drugs wouldn’t fall short.

“Thanks love, I’ll try thinking positive.”

With quick fingers, Noodle did up fresh bandaging over his leg, deliberately covering all of the veins from sight. Noodle patted the singer’s good foot, squeezing affectionately when she finished.

“I will be back late tonight. Murdoc stay with him.”

“I plan too.”

“Don’t make this about you.” Noodle surveyed a couple frustrated expressions from the older man.

“I won’t.” His reply came out gruff.

2D laid as he was, eyes red. Desiring to stay and catch up, the guitarist knew she could offer no other solutions currently. Plus with Dr. Nelson expecting her she really didn’t want to draw attention to her makeshift family. One last resolute nod then she left in a flurry of curtains.

Murdoc marveled at his luck. It was wholly unfair. 2D wiped at his face tiredly, an occasional sniffle coming from him. Their roles should be reversed. Just when they finally found a compromise, a balance to their mending relationship. What would he do with himself if Stuart died?

“When it comes to that—”

“Don’t you dare.” Murdoc gnashed his teeth to stave off blowing up. An irrational feeling took hold. “Don’t you dare ask me that. You’re not fucking dying.”

“If I do—”

“No. Absolutely not.”

“Murdoc please, I want it to be you.”
“It won’t come to that. You’re gonna be fine.”

2D picked at the bedding, eyes transfixed on his own leg.

Murdoc examined the floor, his body was getting an eerie cold sweat and a horrible feeling of impending doom. It swarmed his chest making it harder and harder to breath normally.

Voice barely above a whisper, 2D took one of his clammy hands. “I love you.”

“Don’t do that.” The satanist stood. “Don’t do this to me. You aren’t going anywhere.”

“What should I say then? I want you knowing if things go South.” 2D didn’t look up.

“They won’t. Y’heard Noodle, they have a cure.”

Maybe he was on the verge of a major panic attack or clawing desperately to the tiny glimmer of hope, but he couldn’t admit there may be some truth to 2D’s comments. Should the singer die and become reanimated he wasn’t sure how he would handle it. He sure as hell couldn’t handle the thought of it.

“In the coming days I may not be Stuart anymore.”

In a fit of disparaging emotions Murdoc kicked an unassuming stool over. Jabbing a finger at the vocalist he fought against the burgeoning anxiety claiming his senses.

“Shut your fucking mouth.”

“But it’s not for sure Muds, I’m probably going to die.”

“You’re not!”

“I am.”

Helplessly pacing beside the bed, Murdoc dug two fingers into his pulse and struggled to breath through his nose and out his mouth. He hadn’t suffered a crippling anxiety attack in years, since Plastic Beach.

2D blinked, astonished. “I’m sorry, I hadn’t meant to set you off.”

Reaching out for the satanist 2D was momentarily stunned when said man whacked his hands away. Then as if ashamed of his actions, Murdoc fled from the section. Inadvertently barrelling past a couple volunteers creating a scene.

2D settled his hands back in his lap. After the disruption the room resumed the buzz of activity, aloof to the suffering vocalist. He sat alone, silent and waiting for his untimely demise.

Chapter End Notes

See! Told you Noodle was ok :D

EDIT 12/01/18 - Revised/altered chapter with new dialogue and cleaned up scenes.
He ended outside the building, crouched behind a wall gasping for air while panic overtook him. Under normal circumstances he would hide in his room back on the beach, drink himself to a stupor and pretend it hadn’t happened. With no alcohol available he suffered through the attack without aid. It took a great deal of mental strength to remain still, to not scream in frustration and draw attention. And only when he felt himself did he venture from the spot in search of someone with cigarettes.

Running out on Stuart was not his best moment, but then he had many of those so what’s one more?

He thanked a military man for handing over a couple fags and even lighting one for him. The nicotine forced his nerves to settle some and he wandered the open region of the airport. His mind played over wildly different scenarios where everything ended happily. Tapping the cigarette to rid it of excess ash, Murdoc felt his mind slipping to darker thoughts. 2D might change, but he could always keep the singer, just find a gag for him. Like a sick version of a pet.

He shook his head, frowning towards the ground. That wasn’t appropriate. His body quaked off and on from his sobriety so he forced himself to still and failed. Maybe he could escape into the city with the singer, disappear and leave it at that. Live the last few days with the man in a fuzzy lie. They could set up home in some dead persons place, pretend to play house. Something miserable and desperate wanted to end it. He could get a gun and make a twisted suicide pact with 2D, a fucked up Romeo and Juliet death. Mashing the spent smoke under his boot he tucked his hands into the deep pockets on his jeans. He didn’t know how long he had stood around outside, but the sky seemed darker.

Pivoting he strode back towards the entrance of the airport. Right now he needed to save face and apologize yet again. Pushing the door open Murdoc avoided someone stepping out and headed towards triage. He hoped his absence went unnoticed by the guitarist over the past couple hours. Wandering through the medical room to the back area where the singer was situated, Murdoc hesitated outside the curtain. Taking a deep breath and slowly letting it go he pushed the sheet aside relieved to see 2D sleeping on the medical bed under a blanket. He seated himself on the edge of the bed alongside 2D.

“You feeling okay now?”

The satanist jerked when the singer cracked an eye open.

“I thought you were sleeping.”

“Can’t.”
Murdoc wasn’t surprised.

“Sorry for—”

“Forget it. I’m the one who should apologize.”

2D shifted himself bodily, patting the sliver of space. Murdoc acquiesced the offer, laying on his side with the singer, pressed awkwardly close. He had to allow a slim thigh between his just to avoid slipping off the edge. 2D grabbed the inverted cross, fiddling with it when they were comfortable.

“Think I could make a deal?” 2D winked playfully, but it didn’t reach his eyes.

“Doesn't work like that.”

2D pouted when Murdoc didn't go along. He lowered his hand to Murdoc's chest, petting along the thin material.

“Figured if I went out I would still be performing well into my fifties. Maybe even later. Or doing something boring.”

Murdoc watched the singer’s long fingers trace over his shirt.

“Not saying being in your fifties is old or anything.” 2D looked at the bassist.

“Watch it.”

“You hardly look much older than when we first met to be honest. A little more fit now.”

“My devilish good looks remained timeless have they?”

2D snorted. “Absolutely. I’ve always been a fan of Beatles knock-offs and serpentine tongues.”

“Never complained before.”

“No, I guess not.” The vocalist smoothed a hand up over Murdoc’s arm. He gave it a squeeze, admiring the thick muscle.

Mildly amused by Stuart’s excessive interest in his body he relaxed under the scrutiny and touches. It took a fair amount of work to reach a point where exercising was enjoyable rather than difficult. While the singer gave appreciative gropes to his arm he dragged his own palm over 2D’s thigh, dipping it back over the perk ass hidden in jeans to return a firm squeeze.

2D smiled unflinchingly at the satanist, clearly unperturbed by the hard grope Murdoc was giving him.

“Love you.”

“Don’t get on that again.”

“It took me a couple years after Gorillaz formed to understand what it was. I’ve always admired your irritatingly smooth charm and smug determination to get what you want. I even remember the first time I admitted it.”

“’D can we not?” Murdoc loosened his hold, all too aware of what instance 2D was recalling.
The memory was piercingly clear in his minds eye and he both cherished and hated it. Turn out during that particular encounter was saccharine. 2D panted those words heatedly in his ear while they fooled around under the covers. He remembered them being startlingly sober and how unfortunately he returned to his usual self come morning. He had kicked the singer out. He’d been terrified of falling into vulnerability. The worst part was Stuart’s crushed face when he shouted at him. They would continue messing around for years off and on and every time Murdoc wondered what things would be like if he wasn’t a disaster.

2D’s eyes roved over Murdoc's features while his hand rested over where the other man's heart was. Murdoc maintained eye contact, quiet yet nervous.

“You were scared, I understand that.” He cupped Murdoc’s scratchy jaw. “Gonna miss this, our chats. Sort of got use to them. Almost like the world melts away.”

Taking a somewhat shaky breath, Murdoc brought a hand up to cover 2D’s, cradling it softly.

“Keep talking like that and I’ll start shit.” It was an empty threat.

2D watched their hands. The bassist brought the bony palm down to admire thin fingers. It saved the older man from having to keep their eyes locked.

“Never admit it often. I’ve always admired your hands.”

“My hands?” baffled, 2D looked at Murdoc.

“They’re big and slender. Delicate. Always putting stuff together or playing an instrument. My hands look shit compared to yours. Got scars all over and crooked fingers, just like me.” He rubbed over 2D’s palm. “S’why you’re the singer, much prettier. All slim and elegant looking.”

“Oh.”

Cheeks coloring at the admission, 2D eyed the satanist fondly.

“Everything ‘bout you is pretty. Love tall things, love blue and love you,” Murdoc said it in a rush, avoiding black eyes.

Sucking in air and struggling not to act too ridiculous over finally hearing it the singer swallowed audibly. His heart clenched as he realized everything was happening too fast. He didn’t want to die, he wanted to stay here in this moment forever. Relish in compliments and endearing niceties.

“You’re handsome.”

Murdoc snorted, he left unsaid how little he believed that. 2D kissed his forehead, his voice muted.

“I like the little things, those genuine smiles you give me and your laugh that sounds happy. I even like your gross tongue and rough hands.” 2D grinned. His voice went from teasing to soft. “Or the way your heart flutters when I rest my head on you.”

“Does not flutter. I’m not a bloody school girl with a crush.”

2D rested his head against Murdoc forehead. He gave the older an amused smirk which received a disgruntled look. Cheeks equally as flushed, Murdoc narrowed his eyes when 2D tilted his head to kiss his nose.

“Definitely does.” 2D could feel said heartbeat, how quickly it pounded under his hand.
Murdoc had miserably wasted twenty years not saying anything. Ultimately there was no guarantee the supposed vaccination would work. He slide an arm under 2D’s head and pillow allowing more room for the singer to curl up. They drifted into silence, in a relaxed position against one another until 2D fell asleep. Murdoc stayed with the singer, unsure when he closed his eyes too. Mentally and emotionally drained his dreams were of nothing. He was content to enjoy what time they may have left in amiable quiet.

———

“How bad then?”

“I would say rather bad. He has lost a decent amount of skin.” Noodle sipped from a moderately hot coffee.

Russel sat opposite her nursing his own hot beverage. He didn’t like being right, but he knew something was wrong when 2D couldn’t walk or even move the limb.

Noodle kept glancing to the military gentleman posed near the cafeteria seating. If she spoke quietly he probably wouldn’t hear her.

“What are his chances?”

“Currently not good. However.” Noodle again eyed the soldier. Russel gave her a raised brow at the action. “There are things occurring here that are of ill minds. We need to keep 2D’s condition secretive or risk him being removed from us.”

“When you say that I can’t help but wonder if you mean experimentation is going on.”

She took an unpleasant gulp of the bland coffee. Russel copied her if only to have something to do while he waited for her.

“Upon arriving they asked for volunteers to aid in medical concerns. Being as I had no way of leaving I took up a position.”

Russel nodded slowly. For a third time she peered at the camouflage wearing man, concern written on her face. Russel could see now she was anxious to talk on possibly sensitive subject matter, so much so even the average soldier gave her pause.

“They forced us to secrecy Russel. Asked we not speak to anyone of what nefarious things happened in back rooms. They drag infected individuals in, in any state and they disappear to a sanctioned off area.”

“Aight, keeping ‘D safe is top priority then.”

“I only catch rumors of what goes on. Dr. Nelson, the man you saw me with earlier, he is involved heavily with the experiments. I can only ascertain that they intend to create a cure for the virus, but from what I saw there are three types of anti-viral vaccinations in the works. It seems overkill when there are no mutations that I can guess.”

Noodle mentally ran through an imaginary set of vials, each a differing color and each a separate level of succession to its predecessor. Faintly she remembered browsing a few files on Dr. Nelson’s computer discussing the different reactions each had, but she had only read two excerpts before said man caught her. Thankfully the man had assumed she was waiting for him and let slide the fact she was hiding out in his office.
Russel ran a finger along the edge of the Styrofoam cup, contemplating what to ask. He could safely assume Murdoc was sitting in with the vocalist, they were practically attached at the hip.

“So there’s three types. Do you know off hand what they do? Are they all meant for curing this virus or no?”

“They are colored, I think, and I only know little. The red apparently induces increased rage within the infected person. They become more violent and stronger. The other one I read on was a green vaccination. It creates a bond between the body's white blood cells and the virus to have them work in tandem. So from that I can hazard a theory that it creates an internal immunity but the host becomes a carrier.”

Rubbing a hand over his face, Russel sighed. It was a lot of information to absorb after only supposedly finding safety.

“So they don’t cure it, they exacerbate the virus. What about the last one?”

Noodle shrugged. “I do not know but another doctor, Dr. Webber, mentioned that one succeeded as they intended. I can only assume it does its job.”

“Does Murdoc or ‘D know about this?”

“Not fully. I only had time to explain part of the situation.”

“You planning on getting some tonight then?”

She nodded. Russel sighed again, tired.

“Okay. You need help with that?”

“No, I cannot bring you, it would be too obvious then. Plus I would rather they not know who my friends are, they may punish you instead of me if I was caught.”

“Baby-girl I don’t feel good ‘bout this. What happens if you do get caught? They gonna take you away?”

“Not necessarily. Please have faith in my abilities Russel, I will use every precaution.”

The drummer shifted restlessly. He knew Noodle was a capable young woman, she would be fine. Even so, a small part of him clinging to the little girl she used to be, worried she would get hurt. He wanted to help badly but feared bringing her ire if he pestered. He forced himself to jump to a new topic, something lighter.

“It’s a grace finally seeing you, spent almost a week in Murdoc’s company. Nearly thumped him good for his idiocy. ‘D was manageable, but hell they were a real test of my patience.”

Noodle smiled fondly as she tried not to laugh, for the moment distracted. She rested a hand on Russel’s wrist.

“You are too good a person for that. Besides, Murdoc seems far more subdued without his vices.”

“Yeah, he’s doing okay. Gives us grief occasionally, nothing I can’t handle.”

Lapsing into silent companionship, they both smiled at each other. The two of them looked no better than the other with greasy skin, matted hair and stubble all supplying each with a true apocalypse appearance. Noodle sunk further into her seat while itching at her dark hair. The
temporary bandana she had tied in it barely contained the mess of black locks. Also didn’t help with the discomfort it gave her head. Russel shared in her suffering with a warm chuckle while scratching his chin. The facial hair was grey in parts giving him a patchy appearance.

“Feel you baby-girl. Haven’t shaved in a couple of days and it’s showing.”

“There are facilities here and toiletries you can use. I might use them later my hair is horrid.”

“That rats nest on your head is hair?” Russel teased.

Shoving the percussionist’s arm playfully, Noodle laughed. He gave her a reserved yet delighted smile, pleased to hear that little bit of joy from her despite the current events. Rapidly her facial expression morphed into a pensive frown. He watched how quickly her mood shifted back to upset.

“Whatever the outcome Noodle, know you did all in your power to help ’D. None of us are gonna blame you.”

“I should have ventured out, tried to find you three.”

“Don’t go beating yourself up over it. We’re all safe right now.”

“Mostly.” Noodle said weakly.

She perked up the instant the military official stepped from his posting. Russel shot a short look over his shoulder before turned to her.

“I will make my attempt now. Please go about your evening normally. After I have visited 2D and Murdoc I will come see you. We can meet over by gate C, less survivors around that area and no chance of being bothered by foot patrol.”

“Go on Noodle, I’ll be there when you finish up. Be careful.”

She stood and patted Russel’s shoulder before taking the unfinished coffee with her. Chucking the beverage into a receptacle she headed towards triage.

There was a night doctor with a few volunteers busying themselves with patients so she ducked past. On the other end of the room, which originally was a sort of locker room for luggage, Noodle slipped out the second set of doors. Glancing down either end of the white hallways currently shrouded in generator powered lights she saw no one and relaxed. Hurriedly she walked to the left, deeper into the bowels of back rooms signified only by plain doors with small glass windows. Most of the doors had temporary labels smacked over them to identify the rooms use.

At last reaching the end, Noodle paused in front of particular door labelled simply with a large black X. She looked nervously to the hall she had come down before pushing the door open cautiously. With limited military personnel available after the outbreak Noodle wasn’t one bit surprised at the lack of guards around. Too many survivors in main areas to watch she would guess.

Satisfied she hadn’t been discovered she moved further into the odd industrial sized closet room. The hum of a battery powered generator caught her attention briefly. It was powering the glass fridges set up on a table against the wall.

She gaped in bewilderment at all the clear fluid in the vials lining the shelving within the fridges. They all had white labels and appeared no different from one another.
“No, this— Damnit, they aren’t colored.” Noodle cursed in her native tongue. “I should know better. They color coded based on characteristics. Unless I have the wrong room, I was sure they were colored.”

Groaning, Noodle opened the closest fridge and took a glass vial. Reading the classification label she sighed in frustration.

“What is this suppose to mean?”

The label read: TX: #0000FF, not something she understood.

She grabbed one from the other two and read them as well. It revealed no more than the first one. All three were labelled with the TX followed by a numerical sequence. Putting them all back she leaned into the wall, considering her options.

“I could take all three…”

But that still left her with a chance of giving 2D the supposed red vaccination. Examining all of the fridges once more, Noodle made her decision by grabbing from the first and second glass refrigerated units. She hoped this was the right choice. She pocketed six vials uncertain how many would do the trick. For a moment she wished they were back in the restaurant. Her mind drifted to the warm memory.

———

Their dinners were half finished and the table had the occasional empty wine bottle and cups of varies alcoholic beverages long since drained. It was a cozy atmosphere surrounding them and if they were a bit boisterous, nobody seemed to care. With wait staff weaving between patrons and the near overwhelming buzz of other groups chatting it would be hard to point out their table for being noisy. It was an active evening and the restaurant toted great drinks and even greater times so it was bustling with people.

Noodle clinked cups with each man, grinning ear to ear while Murdoc toasted something or other. Probably exclaiming his genius over producing another banging album. She couldn’t care less with the fuzzy feeling running through her. As they settled in their seats the satanist began to regale them with a farfetched tale of adventure from his time away. Despite being moderately inebriated, Noodle followed along for the most part, giggling in spots when the older man gestured wildly.

Russel laughed, deep and genuine, from across the table. 2D snorted mostly underwhelmed by the bassist spinning his story.

“You got a better one then?”

“Oh definitely.” 2D spoke louder to be heard.

Murdoc gave a sharp smile. “Please go on. I want to know what you consider the most ‘metal’ experience in your life. It oughta be good.”

2D had leaned forward in his seat, pausing for dramatic effect. Murdoc rolled his mismatched eyes at the action. Unintentionally, Noodle also moved closer to heard the singer.

“I once worked at this place, it was kinda boring but it got me by y’know?”

Somehow Murdoc caught on and groaned, exasperated.
“Here I was minding my own, cleaning up supplies when this strange light bounced off me. I thought maybe I was seeing things.” 2D gesticulated with his palms. “paid it no mind and kept at it. There were a couple customers browsing and… BAM!”

Noodle jolted back, hand over her chest as she laughed regardless of the scare. Russel huffed in amusement.

“I was hit by a car and the rest is history.” 2D stuck his tongue out at the satanist for good measure.

Russel started to snicker at Murdoc’s sour expression.

“Oh satan.”

“’D man, I would say that’s probably your best story yet. Really left us hanging till the end.”

“Hardly!”

2D bit his lip to try and keep from smiling. Russel wiped fake tears from his eyes grabbing his drink.

“Cheers mate.” Murdoc bemoaned.

“Awe, you’re welcome Muds.”

Murdoc shot 2D the dirtiest look while the singer snickered. Noodle knew nothing bad would come from the exchange. Murdoc was less abrasive towards 2D as time went on.

There was a crash behind them as someone screamed. The four of them looked over confused at the disruption. People were halted, frozen at the sight of someone biting into a woman’s neck. Blood gushed and time resumed. It almost felt surreal, like an act had the woman not looked genuinely horrified as her life drained away. The person then went further by ripping flesh from the woman, gnashing on bloodied hunks.

“Wha—What the hell?”

Glass shattered as people slammed through windows, groaning and groping at the customers. Some tried to fend off the crazed looking monsters while others scattered. Not sure what to do Noodle yelled over the sudden chaos.

“We need to leave!”

It was a sobering moment.

It didn’t take long for them to get mixed into the crowds of people exiting the restaurant and the people in the streets. Cars crashed, people fled and Noodle felt herself being pushed away from her band-mates. Terror filled her veins when she couldn’t spot blue hair. Someone grabbed her wrist, dragging her away from the restaurant. She tried to fight them off but they gripped tighter. Everything passed in a huge blur. She focused on her labored breathing while running, anywhere, she didn’t know where.

For the first couple hours after outbreak Noodle wandered hopelessly lost, sore and missing her shoes. At some point she had removed them to sooth her feet only to be nearly assaulted by some person who wasn’t really a person anymore. Depending on her innate abilities to fend for herself, she survived. Barely the dawn of the next day and a military caravan had quite literally scooped
her up and whisked her away. She hadn't felt settled or safe.

Shaking her head to rid the memories from her forethought, Noodle cracked the door open a sliver and peered out. Nobody was in the immediate area so she slid out of the room and closed the door softly. Casually striding down the hallway, appearing every bit confident despite being uneasy. All she had to do was reach triage, snatch a couple needles and hide in 2D’s section. Shouldn’t be hard.

“Natalie?”

Noodle stopped, apprehension permeated her as she slowly turned towards Dr. Nelson. An unpleasant sweat formed at her hair line when he approached her, lab coat fluttering with his movement.

“Evening Dr. Nelson. Can I help you with anything?”

“Wanted to thank you for earlier.”

A small part of her relaxed, only some. She didn’t trust this man.

“Of course. You’re welcome.”

“You’re up fairly late. Something bothering you?”

“Just clearing my mind. It is much quieter back here so I wander back and forth. I can leave if I’m causing a problem?”

“Not at all.”

Although hidden, it felt like the vials were burning in her pockets. She knew it was the fear of possible discovery causing her mind to run wild.

“Actually I was heading out.”

“We could walk together.”

“Excellent, I’m meeting with a friend.” She mentally belittled herself for sharing that. Years of interviews should have trained her when it was appropriate to share.

He walked with her, quiet a moment. Noodle felt her palms sweat.

“I was unaware you had friends that had made it.” Dr. Nelson cleared his throat uncomfortably. “Sorry that was inconsiderate.”

“He made it in today, a surprise for me.”

“Well nothing wrong with that.” He continued with her towards the back doors to triage. “How were your last patients? One seemed rather upset.”

Noodle felt sweat beading on her forehead close to dribbling down. Somehow it seemed like Dr. Nelson was probing for answers or that could be her paranoia playing up.

“I assume it was relief?”

The doctor laughed as he resumed walking with her. “Suppose that makes sense. Poor fellow,
probably happy to be safe. Tomorrow evening are you free?”

“I might be, I cannot be certain with unexpected patients.”

“I was thinking if you were we could catch a bite to eat together. If you’re not opposed?”

Noodle wanted to gag. She wasn’t opposed to eating and chatting with strange men, her life had consisted of many occasions such as that. Normally for appearances or interviews. However Dr. Nelson made her uneasy and she knew well enough that he involved himself with the experimentation occurring. She wanted to say no but thought better. It could be advantageous for her to accept.

“Of course not. We could grab drinks and some food in the early evening?”

“Absolutely. I’ll see you around Natalie, I have to go do some work on a pet project. Goodnight.”

Dr. Nelson smiled giving her a wave as he parted ways with her at the entry to triage. Noodle hesitated as she gave the man a small uncomfortable smile, waiting for him to leave. Once sure he was gone she stepped into triage and scanned the room for potential interruptions. Then feeling secure enough, she moved to disappear behind curtains. She hadn’t expected to see both men crammed onto the rather tiny hospital bed. She crouched near the attachment shelf to dig out a couple clean needles.

“Seems you two are in a relationship once again.”

Noodle wasn’t looking for an answer so when Murdoc leaned up to reply she jolted and nearly dropped her things.

“Work in progress more accurately.”

“You're awake.”

“Am I? Hadn’t noticed.”

Noodle rolled her eyes at his sarcasm. 2D seemingly slept on unaware of their conversation.

“Got the vaccination then?”

“I have two types… I made a mistake.” Noodle held up a vial from each pocket. “Not sure which to administer.”

“Ah, might be an issue. Why are there two types?”

“Right. Let me explain the rest.” Noodle set the vials aside while she got a clean needle free of its packaging. “There are three vaccinations, I cannot say why, and each have varying degrees of success. One causes more fault than naught and the other two seem to work moderately well. I have no idea if I brought those two.”

Murdoc’s blood pressure rose and his jaw clenched. He tried to remain calm, but the more Noodle spoke the tenser he got.

“What do you mean there’s three vaccinations? I don’t want you sticking foreign shit in him if it’ll worsen his condition!”

“Murdoc quiet, it is late and we do not want attention drawn to us.”
“Gimme that, I refuse on Stu’s behalf.”

“Wha—? What’s going on?” 2D blinked lazily.

“Go back to sleep.”

“Murdoc I have to give him something. Antibiotics will not do.”

Murdoc snatched the first vial he saw and scanned the label. Noodle huffed, aggravated with the behavior. She prepped the first needle with the secondary vaccination while moving to the bandaged leg.

“Is this the cure?” 2D blinked owlishly at the guitarist.

“In a manner of speaking.”

“She doesn’t know which one it is or what it’ll do.”

Removing the mildly soiled bandages from the revolting injury site, Noodle paused to swallow uncomfortably. 2D stared, eyes nearly bugging out at the black mess. Previously he missed properly examining it. Like before his breathing picked up and to alleviate some of his building anxiety he fiddled his fingers.

“Don’t look at it.” Murdoc grumbled as he replaced his arm around the singer’s head.

He didn’t feel the injection going in but he certainly felt the stinging heat expanding from the injury site. Gradually the hot sensation filled his leg and the blackened area burned more and more with the seconds. Gasping sharply his leg tensed and he hunched forward out of Murdoc’s hold to grasp at his thigh, blunt nails digging into the skin.

“W—what is this? It hurts!”

Triage was dimly lit and mainly quiet, save the odd noise from a fitful patient. Noodle flapped her hand frantically and Murdoc muffled the vocalist with a hand. Despite the obvious pain 2D was in she set about getting her second needle done up. Someone coughed beyond the curtains.

2D grit his teeth behind Murdoc’s palm, fighting to keep quiet through the scorching pain running rampant further up his leg and into his waist and abdomen. Murdoc shot a distraught grimace at Noodle, assuming the absolute worst.

Noodle pinned 2D’s ankle, poised with the other needle when a door creaked open and soft voices reached them.

“That test went better than expected.” A female voice.

“I say the results were skewed. We’ll need a second subject.” An unknown voice.

Under her the vocalist’s muscles twitched and finally he seemed to settle. Murdoc kept his hand firmly planted on the other’s face, tense and still. They could hear the two walk by their section at a slight distance. Not wanted to waste more time, Noodle used her weight to steady the limb in case and started to press the needle in. Unexpectedly 2D jerked violently, freeing his leg. The resounding noise of the needle hitting the floor was almost deafening. The voices abruptly stopped.

Heels clicked as they approached them.

Without thinking, Murdoc dived for the needle and grabbed both it and then Noodle. He shoved
the young woman behind some curtains bunched up against the wall behind 2D’s bed. He put the needle under some blankets and covered 2D’s leg just as a woman with dirty blonde hair parted the curtains.

“What’s going on here?”

Appearing relaxed, seated on a stool safely in front of Noodle’s hidden form. Murdoc casually popped a smoke in his mouth and glanced to the doctor. He only had two left from the soldier.

“Dropped my light.”

“You can’t smoke in here.”

Clicking the obnoxious purple lighter on he inhaled once the end was lit. 2D bunched up the blanket, wringing it nervously while he watched. The burning pain was tapering off.

“Sir.”

“Yes?”

“You can’t smoke in here. There are other patients, some are sensitive to smoke.”

“Y’see him.” Murdoc nodded towards 2D. The woman looked at the singer and raised a brow, but nodded. “He’s terrified of hospitals, look at him shaking on the bed. I can’t leave the poor sod alone.”

She examined 2D once more, confirming he indeed looked petrified. Sighing she rolled her eyes.

“Fine. Don’t make it a habit while in here.”

“Yeah, whatever.”

Put off by his snippy response she turned and closed the curtains, leaving them be. When the voices resumed and disappeared Noodle shimmied from behind the curtain. 2D sighed out in relief.

“Very quick thinking.” The guitarist patted the bed for the needle, producing it a minute later.

“Worked well enough.”

She again pinned 2D’s leg and before anyone could protest she gave the injection. Unlike the first shot this one created a cooling throughout the injury. 2D winced and wiggled his toes, pleasantly surprised he could do so, so quickly. Murdoc seemed to notice as well.

“How are we suppose to know?”

“Once feeling returns to his leg.”

“Well?” Murdoc looked questioningly at the singer. “You’re moving your toes.”

“I still can’t feel much other than a tingle, it’s all cold feeling.”

Noodle discarded the waste in the small bin beside the bed. She caught sight of her bare hands and thanked whatever higher power there was she hadn’t jabbed herself on the needle. She would still need to wash them, in case. Watching the vocalist wiggle his toes with stilted movements made her smile.
“I need to wrap this up and meet Russel. Murdoc there are water bottles and food at the canteen they have set up outside of triage. You need to eat. Both of you do.”

Speaking both figuratively and literally, Noodle grabbed out some clean bandages for the grotesque wound and covered it. When she glanced up to see if the satanist had heard her she was momentarily taken back by the irate expression on said man.

Though speaking at a low volume, Murdoc’s words were harsh.

“You ever fucking string me along like that again I may as well end it myself.”

“Don’t you dare get huffy just cause, Murdoc.”

“You were asking me to fucking end it—”

“Yeah, if I was a zombie. Didja want me stumbling ‘round eating people?”

“No, but that’s aside the point.”

“No it’s not. I was asking someone I care ‘bout to put me outta my misery. Put some meaning into my death instead of a random person doing it.” 2D twiddled his thumbs.

“Ooh I swear.” Murdoc bit his fist to keep from snapping. He opened his mouth once more, to continue their triad but decided against it. “Fine. Whatever.”

2D smiled at his lap, silently elated the older man stopped himself from making matters worse. Noodle smiled haplessly at the commonplace bickering.

“I need to go. Keep an eye on him and check his injury every few hours.”

Unable to wait longer, Noodle patted 2D’s good foot and nodded to Murdoc. She turned, halting when both men mumbled their thanks.

“It is not over, thank me when you are walking and well.”

Not waiting to hear their responses, Noodle rushed out. She wanted to shower before visiting with Russel. Her nerves were fried from all the excitement.

A thick and uneasy quiet settled between them like a haze.

“I’m sorry for riling you up.” 2D whispered.

“Idiot.”

Murdoc sniffed and crossed his arms, resolutely sat on the stool away from the singer. He put the cigarette out with his heel a moment later. He wanted to remain by 2D’s side but needed a momentary distance to mull over the hushed confessions they spewed at each other. Frustrated more with himself, Murdoc was attempting not to take it out on Stuart. It was a struggle.

“You don’t have to be embarrassed Muds, I stand by what I said ‘bout you.”

A palm reached out and rested on the bassist’s arm. Murdoc batted the vocalist away, somewhat agitated. It wasn’t a switch, he couldn’t ignore his growing discomfort over sharing things. He knew there was no reasoning behind it, 2D quite obviously had no plans to belittle him. Much the opposite.
“Oh don’t go closing off. Talk to me.”

“What is there to say? Gone and fucking said it all haven’t I?”

“You’re doing well. Come sit with me please.” 2D pleaded.

Stubbornly the bassist stayed seated, he leaned from 2D once more. The singer sat back heavily with a loud sigh.

“Murdoc come here.”

“No.”

“Don’t be childish.”

“Give me a minute.” Murdoc grunted.

Catching the tense cadence, 2D plucked at the blanket. He knew prodding the bassist continually would lead to a blow out.

“Alright.”

He curled up on the bed missing the comforting warmth having Murdoc close gave him. The satanist stayed on the stool, stewing to himself while being emotionally untouchable. 2D faced away from the other man, tucking his legs up under the blanket, his injured leg was freezing to the touch.

“Being a bit silly.” the singer muttered.

Murdoc peered at the back facing him. "Go to sleep.”

Closing his eyes, 2D endeavored to sleep. His chest was tight and he felt a growing restlessness enveloping him. It was going to be a long night.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the Kudos and comments!

I've had quite a few chapters sort of sitting on the back burner and without trying to dump them all at once I hold off and clean them up. I'm going away soon so my rather quick updates will be on pause till I come back. I will try and post chapter five and maybe six before I leave.

EDIT 12/02/18 - Bit late on this one. Revised/Altered chapter with a more serious tone and added scenes. Changed up the vaccination scenes.
One of my favourite things about the Gorillaz is the strangeness in the lore. Another awesome thing I love is the video game and movie series Resident Evil. I took a lot of inspiration from that game/series.

I wanted to post this before leaving, but missed the opportunity. Now I have two chapters ready to go!

EDIT 12/08/18 - uploading altered/revised chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A whole twenty-four hours passed before either Noodle or Russel visited the singer. Murdoc came and went after the uncomfortable night together. Although the older man came across seemingly fine, 2D was conscientious of the quieter demeanor. Murdoc maintained a decent level of banter with him off and on through the following day but refused to outright talk on any sensitive topics or share the bed. 2D could only assume the bassist was mulling over his thoughts and waiting for a change in his leg and health.

Russel visited first, opting for a one armed hug upon seeing 2D. He sat and chatted to the vocalist about nothing particularly exciting. It kept his focus for an hour before Russel decided to head out and eat. 2D craved the attention and missed when the other left. Quickly following the drummer, Noodle poked in with a small smile while seating herself where Russel was previous. The keyboardist was elated at the visitation. As the percussionist, Noodle stayed for a short time and at the end administered a second shot each, something 2D found made him squirm at the varying sensations. Murdoc was thankfully not present during that.

When she slipped away to work, 2D examined his partially covered leg. The jeans were pulled back in place, covering his ugly marred limb. It still felt incredibly cold, even touching the skin it was cool. He frowned at the limb, concerned whether he would garner more feeling other than that and if wiggling his toes was the limit of mobility he’d get. Murdoc chose that moment to step back into the sanctioned off spot, tugging the curtains back hastily so nobody disturbed them.

2D flipped the thin blanket over his leg. He didn’t want the satanist asking about it.

“Saw Noodle on my way in.”

“She visited for a bit.”

Murdoc hummed thoughtfully, sitting at the foot of the bed. His hand slipped beneath the scratchy material covering 2D's legs.

“What are you doing?”

Instead of answering him, Murdoc rested his palm on the freezing ankle of his bad leg. 2D hated to admit how pleasant the heat felt. He was pleased to feel an inkling of anything in his injured leg. Whatever Noodle had given him worked far better than the intravenous bag he finished yesterday.
“Any better today?”

“Not exactly. Cold feeling.”

“You wanna try walking?”

He eyed Murdoc suspiciously, wary that it was some weird trap. Murdoc raised a brow, though 2D could barely tell.

“Truce.”

“Okay.” 2D sighed and whipped the blanket away.

He struggled a moment to wiggle himself to the edge of the bed. His leg refused to behave how he wanted. Murdoc took the chance to shift said limb for him and help him stand. He gripped both hands when they were offered. And with a deep breath 2D took his first step, almost gasping that he managed to stay upright. His leg wobbled dangerously, but didn’t give under his weight. Charmed to be able bodied enough to move shakily, 2D gave Murdoc a gap toothed grin.

“Looks like Noodle picked right. Lets get a shower.”

Nodding rapidly the singer was keen on a shower despite his Bambi legs. With Murdoc’s support he hobbled with the man out of triage. They wandered a bit to find someone willing to stop and give directions to an area to clean up. 2D turned his head about while they moved, intrigued at the set up within the airport. Partitions for lineups had been cleared away to make room for military stations. Passing by a customs room, the vocalist spied a base of operations where battery powered equipment was being used to monitor what, 2D couldn’t tell.

It was strange seeing something commonly used for travelers being reduced to world crisis response location. 2D remembered, faintly, the night they came in at this very airport. They had been going on empty, straight from their European portion. Russel had slept the entire flight, Noodle listened to music and he yapped Murdoc’s ear off. Secretly he knew it helped ease the other with his dislike over flying. There was no bombardment when stepping off due to the late hour. They had all literally grabbed their luggage, shuttled to the hotel and crashed in separate rooms. Now here he was only a week or so later under entirely different circumstances.

“There’s the area,” Murdoc muttered beside him. “Was beginning to think they lied.”

Only a few days ago him and Murdoc had been on tenuous ground, dancing around the topic of their broken relationship. They, now, having discussed more than he ever expected and sharing an odd truce, working to rebuild something better.

Murdoc lead the singer into a dank yet appropriately lit bathroom. Through the middle was a wrap around mirror and sinks. Opposite to either side were stalls which contained toilets both assumed. Stepping in further the satanist spotted a space between the line of stalls and wall to their immediate right. Aiding 2D along he peeked to the other side to see showering stalls.

Both of them eyed a couple trolleys with bundled towels and toiletries.

“Perfect.”

With assistance 2D was maneuvered into a stall and sat on a fold out bench. Murdoc kept the door open while helping himself to toiletries and bundled towels. The man made small talk while setting things along a small shelf opposite 2D in the stall.
“It’s good you got mobility back.”

“Yeah, I’m glad too.” 2D smiled and hunched forward to work his runners off.

He nudged a shoe off then grunted reaching down to remove his other shoe. Socks came next causing the singer to blanch at his horrendous smelling feet. Waving his hand he sat back up undoing the jeans. After the night in the hotel they hadn’t found another functioning shower. They were reduced to having a quick scrub down with dirty clothes and stagnant water. Straining, 2D lifted his hips with his good foot pressed to the ground. Working the jeans down his waist the singer plopped back and sighed. Perched on the bench in nothing but his y-fronts he wondered how he’d shower with his leg.

Murdock stepped into the stall and nudged the door shut.

“Couldn’t wait I see.”

Shaking his head he carefully got to his feet teetering some, still not capable of full function over his leg. Thanking his long limbs he held onto the top of the stall.

With the limited space there was an awkward air about him now that Murdoc was hovering close. Said man feigned ignorance and began removing his shirt. Before 2D could stop himself his eyes trailed the reveal of skin, enjoying the lingering softness mixing with hard lines of muscle. He couldn’t remember a time when the bassist had looked this healthy. Thoughts tripping over one another, 2D coughed when Murdoc undid his trousers.

“Why are you stripping?”

“Thought it was obvious.”

“Not to me,” 2D wheezed as he avoided looking at the other any longer.

“You’ve seen me naked plenty of times. Hell I’ve seen you in the buff too. Fuck ton of unflattering shit been shared between us, no need to be a blushing virgin.”

“I realize that. It’s just—”

“Just what? Worried you’ll like what you see?”

Some part of him was worried about that. Worried he may get carried away if he started.

He kept holding onto the top edge of the metal, cheeks warm and face downcast. He watched the floor where he saw the edge of Murdoc’s boots. Within moments the boots were gone and it was a bare set of feet in his line of sight.

“Quit that.”

Hands reached over and hooked the sides of his underpants. 2D squawked indignantly and latched onto Murdoc’s wrists to halt him. In doing so the singer lost balance startlingly fast. He felt his leg straining to maintain his upright position.

“Stuart what the hell’re you trying to do?” His voice was harried and the hands had moved to hold him up. “Planning on cleaning up in pants you idiot?”

“No.” 2D grunted and looked at the shorter man. His eyes averted to broad shoulders and he covered his face one handed, somewhat embarrassed at how ridiculous he was acting. “Can we
shower now?"

"Can we?"

Giving a dramatic sigh 2D bodily turned and took hold of the metal wall. Murdoc sniggered as he reached out before the singer could object, or even see, to yank his underpants down, nearly tripping him. 2D yelped at the firm swat to his bottom. The noise reverberated throughout the empty washroom and 2D twisted himself to glare, humiliated and rosy cheeked.

"Murdock!"

"What? Told you, seen it all before. Hurry up will yeah."

Grumbling to himself, 2D stepped out of the last article to cautiously ascent the minute step into the shower section. The unrelenting grip he had on the wall top didn't go unnoticed by Murdoc. Said man shut the curtain, sealing them within the tiled space. For a moment it was quiet, then Murdoc cranked the tap and a rush of stinging, frigid water caught them by surprise. Spitting a couple expletives, the satanist hastily turned to hot.

"Least it works."

For a moment they both stood next to one another half under the spray.

"Hold on. Got some shit for cleaning, nabbed it from the trolleys."

2D spared a short glance at the shorter as he ducked out. He looked forward at the grimy tiles, momentarily lost in thought. Heat from the water felt like pinpricks of pain and he winced settling his entire palm under the stream. It was too much all at once.

Stepping back into the small shower cubicle, Murdoc set a bottle of generic shampoo on a corner ledge. He held up a white bar of soap so 2D saw.

"Need help?"

"Maybe," 2D mumbled. He tried to steer his thoughts away from the gutter.

Apparently satisfied, Murdoc lathered the soap between his hands. He crouched near the singer's legs, head down to focus on soaping up each set of ankles and calves. 2D tilted his head to watch, fascinated to be on the receiving end of such benevolent attention. Meticulously his legs, sans the area of his bandage, were cleaned in quick hand motions. He never knew the bassist could be anything other than rough, especially in a vulnerable position.

"I'd say it’s easier now than before."

"What do you mean?"

"All limbs you were, always having to manhandle you this way and that. Fucking nightmare accomplishing anything."

"Figured you tossed me on the couch during those visits."

"I only wish it had been that easy. Mandated schedule to adhere too. Feeding, cleaning, exercising your giraffe limbs. Real pain."

Snorting loud enough to be heard above the water, 2D used a hand to stifle a laugh threatening to escape. Despite the grousing, Murdoc hardly seemed perturbed over the incident. The vocalist
knew better, Murdoc only acted aggrieved for show.

"My apologies, someone decided to ram-raid my place of work with a bloody car."

"Stood out like a pillock, gawking all slack jawed."

"Difficult to respond any other way with mere seconds before impact."

"Fair point." Murdoc gave a brisk head shake, as if to rid himself of some ill thought. "It wasn’t all horrid. Good for company."

2D shivered under the hands smoothing along his thighs. His awareness of how close Murdoc was in conjunction to his groin made him self conscious. Ignoring the mild discomfort, the singer shifted to alleviate the butterflies forming. It made him feel queasy, like his first time. Rough palms brushed over sensitive spots making him bite his lip. Murdoc drove forward with their conversation, surprisingly polite about 2D's obvious reaction to the touches.

"Managed to get you listening to decent music. You'd listen to anything I blathered on about." Discreetly Murdoc gave the vocalist a teasing brush of his hands while cleaning the other's pelvic region.

Curling his toes, 2D clutched at the metal wall all the more. He was mildly impressed at the restraint not to openly tease him over a semi. He wrongly assumed Murdoc wasn't in the mood or at the least distracted by his need to talk.

"Never got an answer outta you, of course. That part was incredibly boring."

Rising, Murdoc used the bar of soap to trace over 2D's abdomen, scarcely high enough to avoid outright touching singer where he wanted. The vocalist stared at a point in the tiles where mildew had gathered, striving to keep a neutral expression. Momentarily 2D considered a snide response but lost his thought when fingers skimmed his ribs, tickling him. A loud giggle erupted from him which bounced off the walls.

"Always gave off these funny little noises whenever I did that."

"Quit that." 2D flushed.

Still, he loved the familiarity and gentle nature of the gestures. He wished some semblance of his memories during the coma could be recalled. Murdoc tickled over his ribs again, forcing another abrupt snicker out. Huffing, 2D batted Murdoc from doing it once more, a fond smile adorning his face.

"There we are. Got you smiling," Murdoc said plainly. "Been a shit few week, need to smile once in a while."

2D stared directly at the satanist, his heart was in his throat at the action.

"You’re not mad?"

"No?"

With his offset balance he struggled to hug the bassist after letting go of the wall. To his relief Murdoc caught him around the middle with a confused grunt.

"What's got you so soppy?"
"Just happy."

Considerate of 2D, Murdoc pushed the other back to stand properly. He patted the singer on the cheek then resumed cleaning up the taller man. Both were alleviated from matted, uncomfortable hair after using the shampoo, which stunk of imitation grapefruit. From there the shower passed in companionable silence, broken by the alteration in water hitting tile. When Murdoc shut the water off and snatched up a towel he used it on the vocalist first. At first it came across ingenuous, but quickly Murdoc wrapped the scratchy towel about his waist and tugged hard. Forced away from the wall, 2D used broad shoulders to steady himself. He frowned down at the other.

"What'd you do that for?"

Smirking, Murdoc pressed impossibly close, his arms replacing the towel.

"Now's the chance to get a good look."

Guiltily 2D glanced sideways, cheeks warming up.

"C'mon, no need to be shy Doll."

Swallowing audibly the vocalist peered at Murdoc. Hesitantly 2D leaned in and tentatively laid a kiss on the other's cheek then nose, moving achingly slow towards the mouth. Astonishingly Murdoc waited patiently, giving the reigns to the vocalist, allowing the other gauge the speed. Many kisses had been exchanged during their torrid past, always in a flurry with no meaning. Here and now there was no rush to push past a simple feel of lips on lips. 2D slotted a hand into thick and wet dark hair while his other palm gripped at Murdoc's upper back. He tried to convey decades worth of emotions through one long, heated kiss.

Securing his arms, Murdoc pivoted them and crowded 2D into cold tiles. Their kiss broke apart only to be replaced by hot, open mouthed kisses along the awaiting slender neck. A small, breathless laugh escaped the singer at the eagerness. Warm palms stroked over his thighs, one being pulled up so Murdoc could grind against the vocalist. 2D gasped gently while his hands smoothed along shoulders and upper back, getting a feel for the new definition there. He wanted to savor the moment. Only the instant it became more ardent a distracting pain emanated at the back of his skull, spreading out and increasing. Squeezing his eyes shut, 2D attempted to ignore it but it only worsened. Groaning he halted the satanist.

Thankfully Murdoc recognized the signs of discomfort.

“Head hurts.” 2D supplied.

Having spent two decades with the vocalist, Murdoc nodded and begrudgingly brought 2D out of the shower. Knowing the other wouldn't be capable of anything more with a burgeoning migraine he gave the other a peck on the chin to show he understood. He properly finished rubbing down the taller and quickly assisted 2D back into dirtied clothes; they had no other option. When able he helped 2D plonk onto the fold down bench to get himself dry and dressed. It was in these moments he noticed the other holding his head and wincing more and more. An instant concern filled Murdoc, maybe 2D was suffering some latent side effect of the vaccinations.

“What’s wrong? You feeling off?”

“Relax Muds, it’s just a headache.”

He considered the singer before being eased at the notion of it only being just that, a simple headache. Sure everything should be treated as special during however long after vaccination.
However in the end he let two decades worth of familiarity smother his concern and resumed slipping his footwear on. From there he gave 2D something to hold onto while hobbling as they left the washroom and their mess of towels.

———

Every so often 2D would shift, his bottom going numb from the seating. Murdoc cocked a brow over his discomfort while spooning cold beans into his mouth. 2D sighed and leaned his head into an open palm, massaging his temple. Maybe he was just agitated over the persisting headache threatening to become worse.

“Y’know they have shit for migraines, we could have grabbed something.”

“It’s not that bad.”

Murdoc rolled his eyes, clearly not believing him for a moment but not arguing the point.

The secluded little corner they found for themselves made him feel better, he hated strangers watching him in pain. Murdoc set the can down on the table catching his attention.

“Probably off cause you haven’t eaten. Eat.”

Staring down at the open can of chilli in front of him, he groaned while mushing half his face into his hand. The idea of eating what essentially looked like dog food turned his stomach so badly he almost felt he may keel over. Murdoc nudged the food closer to him and gave him a stern frown.

“Eat.”

If only to avoid Murdoc’s true ire he plucked the plastic spoon up and swirled it in the mucky chilli. Grimacing he scooped some up and took the bite. Tasting some sort of meat, vegetables and beans all jumbled up in an almost sweet sauce, 2D choked it down. He wasn’t fond of the meat or really any of it, but figured beggars couldn’t be choosers. Plus the bassist seemed more relaxed with him eating.

Occasionally the odd person bypassed the small seating area, though very few given the hour. 2D watched the large window nearby, rainy weather painted the glass in rivets of water blurring the outside imagery to inky squiggles. He wondered if there were planes outside, sitting in the dark, unused and useless now. He also contemplated where they would go from here, what they would do seeing as transportation was basically gone and zombies roamed near and far. Would they attempt to rebuild?

“Gonna toss this.” Murdoc stood and stepped off to wherever a trash bin was.

Barely a second passed when a strange stabbing pain formed in his stomach. Wincing he smoothed his hand over the area. It increased and within moments 2D was doubled over gasping in agony.

“Shit. What’s wrong?”

Murdoc rested an arm over his back, leaning in close by his side.

He could barely form coherent thoughts let alone words. The pain was overwhelming and it felt like something was shredding his guts from within. 2D moaned, both terrified and incapable of expressing his problem to the panicked bassist. Just when he thought it couldn’t increase an indescribable burning rose through his chest and suddenly he was coughing and puking up blackish bile all over the table and floor.
“Sweet satan that— fuck, okay, c’mon we need to get you to medical.”

Murdock attempted to slide an arm around the tall man but 2D yelled and jerked away. The singer hunched in on himself as he heaved more viscous black ooze out. Some even dribbled from his nose as he shook and whined pitifully.

This was exactly what he worried about. Fretting, Murdoc struggled to keep his voice level.

“Stuart— Stu, listen uh— Fuck, I’m gonna find some help, just, you stay put…”

2D shot hands out and gripped at Murdoc’s shirt, clutching so tight he nearly tore the fabric. He looked up at the man, thick, dark gunk staining his lips and running down his face. His eyes were bright with terror.

“D—don’t leave me!” The singer’s voice was croaky. Murdoc opened and closed his mouth like a fish, eyes darting over the vocalist’s scared face.

“Hey, is everything alright over here?”

Murdock craned his head to look over to who had spoken. He considered the rather young military man and his weapon.

“N—no, no. Nothing wrong here.”

“Muds… Muds I feel wrong, something is wrong with me.” 2D mumbled as pain ebbed away and turned into an intense need for something.

His unrelenting hold to the satanist dwindled and he felt himself slipping into himself. Murdoc turned his back to him to shield the vocalist from the soldier approaching.

“Sir if your friend is ill we have facilities.”

“He’s fine.”

Murdock sounded far less sure of himself than he wanted and clearly the official heard and proceeded to remove his weapon. He had a mere instant to figure out his plan.

Things were decided for him when an inhuman growl emitted from behind him. 2D, or rather whatever the monster was, lunged for him and arms surrounded him tightly. Murdoc gave a startled yelp as him and the vocalist fell back to the tiled floor. The impact dislodged him from the hold and he rolled away, holding his head. Everything spun unnecessarily while he laid on the ground, disorientated. He had no idea how hard he cracked his skull on the flooring, but he saw black dots in his vision. Distantly there was a shout and gunfire. He turned himself slightly to look around only to catch a blur of blue hair and camouflage tumbling to the ground through cafeteria chairs. A shriek of unadulterated horror rung out and Murdoc felt a shiver run through him. Then he heard it, the distinguishable noise of meaty chunks of flesh being ripped apart and eaten, the harsh gnash of teeth around flesh…

He remembered that sound from the restaurant, it was unforgettably distinct and terrible.

Struggling to maneuver himself up, Murdoc hesitated to get to his feet. He groped for a chair while cradling his head in one hand, finally pulling into an upright position. His eyes honed in on black eyes watching him intently. 2D’s mouth was bloody with a piece of human muscle hanging from it. Heart racing, Murdoc stayed put, not sure what to do. Stuart didn’t conform to the average zombie behavior. The man stared at him, clearly aware of him and steady where he crouched by the fallen
soldier.

_He’s not Stuart anymore._

He didn’t want to believe that, he couldn’t. They were just talking not minutes ago.

When 2D made no move, Murdoc felt moderately safe in getting to his feet, slow and cautious. He held his hands out in a defensive manner while backing up.

“Please don’t do this to me Stuart, you were doing fine.”

Although he spoke calmly, there was a slight tremble to his voice and he continued to step backwards. He was anxious to create space between them in case the worst happened. 2D cocked his head and in one smooth motion came to his full height. Murdoc’s breath caught in his throat and he accidentally bumped into cafeteria furniture, stumbling. Any minute someone would come across both his and the soldier’s corpse. There would be an uproar and it would be his fault for not trying to put an end to the monster in front of him. He had to get his hand on a weapon.

The singer casually picked the hunk of human tissues from his mouth, complete articulation as though it was food stuck in his teeth. It was bizarre to witness and for a minute, Murdoc thought it was all a horrible dream. Unwavering, 2D walked one step, then two, towards the bassist, no pain evident in his face over the injured leg. A fact Murdoc was faintly aware of as he hastily tripped over chairs to get further from 2D.

“Okay love, let’s play nice yeah? Please? I know we have a sordid past, but we can look beyond that,” Murdoc gasped petrified.

He put a couple tables between him and 2D, hoping desperately it was enough to dissuade the other. What he hadn’t expected was 2D near leaping over the barriers as though he were in an olympic sport. Giving a weak noise of fear, Murdoc fell over an abandoned mop bucket and ended up flat on the floor, a whoosh of air leaving him. The vocalist towered over him, blood drying on his already filthy shirt. Cowering he covered his face and curled up slightly as if that would stave off clawing hands and dull teeth digging in.

He felt the vocalist hover over him, a face pressing into his hair and breathing deeply. This was followed by a nuzzle. Utterly confused he lowered his arms to peer at the other man. 2D was caging him to the ground with his upper torso, buried into his hair, sniffing like an excited dog. Experimentally Murdoc prodded the man in the side, to see if there would be a reaction. An unexpected giggle escaped and 2D huffed as though coming back to himself.

“I’m sorry for scaring you Murdoc, I’m okay now.”

Murdoc froze, eyes going wide like saucers. He gaped up at the singer who leaned up to eye him back.

“Did I hurt you?”

Stained palms with dirtied nails felt along his head for injury. Murdoc could only blink dumbly while 2D fretted over him.

“Sorry for knocking you down Muds. I got a little out of hand.”

A sharp somewhat unhinged laugh bubbled up and escaped from Murdoc as he gawked at 2D. He was unsure how to comprehend what just occurred.
“A little out of hand” he says— Only a little. Just full on mauled a man to death with your bare hands! How am I suppose to take this? How?”

Another hysterical giggle came from the satanist. 2D helped Murdoc sit up.

“Stay away from me!” Murdoc scuttled back on his hands and backside. “I don’t want to end up like him.”

2D cast a hurt expression at the bassist as he crawled towards the other. Murdoc found himself trapped between an unrelenting wall and 2D.

“I would never hurt you Murdoc. I admit to being tempted, but I couldn’t bring myself to do anything heinous. I thought the man was going to shoot you so I tried to focus on keeping you safe.”

Somehow the admission was endearing. Twisted as the following occurrences were, 2D hadn’t actually intentionally hurt him. The vocalist hadn’t even paid mind to him once Murdoc was on the ground. Narrowing his eyes, Murdoc watched 2D bring a hand forward.

“Please believe me, I wouldn’t hurt you.”

2D cupped Murdoc’s face, leaving a small trail of blood, and leaned in close. He rested his forehead against the satanist’s head. He was sincere and strove to convey that in his eyes.

“This is against my better judgement, because either I’ve died or I’m utterly stupid.” Murdoc brought the singer further in, hugging the man hard to his chest. “You don’t get to do this shit to me Stuart. I’m the asshole, not you. I thought you were gone.”

“I’m here.”

Despite the blood coating his clothing, Murdoc buried his face into the keyboardist’s neck. He clutched the singer tightly. Hands carded through his mussed up hair, soothing him. Everything was wrong. 2D was wrong. He should have put an end to the situation then and there. However the fool in him that loved the man unconditionally had no will to end it. He almost didn’t believe this was happening right now.

Faintly the stomping of many sets of boots approached their location. 2D released Murdoc and gripped the man’s face in a rather firm hold. Murdoc winced under the singer’s hands.

“Muds, they’ll kill me on sight.”

2D was absolutely right, they would see he was an abomination and gun the singer down where he stood. Murdoc hefted himself up and yanked the taller man after himself, dragging him beyond the area and out of sight before soldiers could see them.

The rational part of his mind screamed at him that he would die if he did this. He had no self preservation if he decided to fulfill this demented scheme he was hatching. Pulling 2D around a corner and into an empty Starbucks he ducked with the lanky man. His self-absorbed psyche, the piece of him willing to use others to get to the top, remained surprisingly silent. All he could hear rattling about was fear of getting caught and losing 2D for good. His sick devotion to keeping them together won out in the end.

A wet kiss was placed on his cheek, which brought him from his unnerving thoughts. 2D gave him a gentle smile and all other thoughts vanished. He would keep the singer safe, he would protect the idiot from anyone.
They stayed huddled in the Starbucks behind the counter, quiet and waiting for things to cool down or at least pass them. With the urgency of their situation, Murdoc didn’t mull over the true underlying issue. More focused on wiping the face held in his palm, he considered their options, mind wildly flitting from one idea to the next. Otherwise it was a long hour sitting uncomfortably on the stone floor, breaths held every time someone hurried by or a commanding voice directed someone. 2D kept close to Murdoc and against all odds nobody seemed to spot them.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was shorter compared to the others, but the content seemed heavier than the previous ones. There's an element of surrealism because I wanted to keep it true to the type of content the Gorillaz have in their universe, but with a side of realism.

Normal people wouldn't just smile and nod when this kind of thing happens. Normal people would struggle with the evidence, maybe even snap under pressure.
In the wee hours of the morning a minor alarm was sounded and survivors were woken. Military personnel ushered groggy persons into central locations within the airport where they could be monitored. The drummer found himself standing among strangers while attempting to rub sleep from his blank eyes. He had no clue what was occurring or whether his friends were in the crowd. He yawned while moving through throngs of people, making way for a chair to relax on. Maybe it was selfish, but he hadn’t caught much in the way of sleep and planned on dozing till the crisis was over. Incidentally he bumped Noodle on route to a chair and the woman turned with a surprised look.

“Russ, hey.”

He paused to smile sleepily at the guitarist. “Hey baby-girl. You got any idea what’s going on?”

“No, I’m fairly disorientated to be honest.”

Noodle shared a wide yawn a moment later and Russel nodded his head to the padded chairs. She gave him a thumbs up and wandered over to said seats, sinking into one upon reaching them. Russel plopped down beside her and used his thumb and index finger to massage the bridge of his nose.

“ Seems like a mild crisis,” Noodle hummed next to him. “I think it might be an infected individual either getting in or escaping containment. Never easy to tell, but it has happened before.”

“It has? Damn, this aint no safer than running around in the streets.”

“Probably not, but I would rather stay here with you three. Speaking of which, did you see either Murdoc or 2D?”

Shaking his head, Russel relaxed back into the chairs.

“Saw ’D earlier today, around lunch time or something. Didn’t see Muds, haven’t seen him since the day before.”

“Guess they got mixed into the crowds.”

Noodle peered around the surrounding space to catch a glimpse of blue hair atop the crowd. It would be unlikely since she was seated and had no intention of standing. There were possibly hundreds of survivors in and around the airport in designated safe spots so for all they knew the other two were carted to those groups. Russel patted her shoulder.

“I wouldn’t worry too much ‘bout them. Murdoc’s been all over ‘D since we found him.”
“True. I hope this issue is dealt with, I’m exhausted.”

“Yeah, you and me both. The beds they offer here are crap, but damn if I don’t wanna get back to it soon.”

Chuckling softly, Noodle smiled tiredly at the drummer. She was in full agreement, even if something nagged at her. She felt off, like there was a serious issue occurring elsewhere with the bassist and singer. She pushed the sensation away and leaned against Russel to get a couple minutes of shut eye.

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Jerking a supply closet open, Murdoc shoved 2D in unceremoniously before following the stumbling man. Closing the door he backed from it and waited with bated breath for the patrols to bypass them. 2D used the wall for support, anxious for the same thing. They both gave a relieved sigh when people ignored the unassuming closet and faded out of the gift shop.

With the slots in the door an orange glow filtered in, barely highlighting the space between them. Murdoc occasionally glanced at the vocalist, antsy and uncertain how to broach the subject of 2D’s newly formed condition. 2D noticed and squinted at the shorter man questioningly.

“What?”

“Nothing.” Murdoc shook his head.

But it was obvious the satanist had thoughts so 2D pushed from the wall to stand nearer to Murdoc.

“No, tell me. Now isn’t a time to be all elusive.”

“I’m at a loss. I’m never at a loss 2D, I’m normally fairly sure of myself. Look at me I’m shaking.”

Trembling hands were held up. Biting his lip, 2D took both hands, holding them gently and rubbing his thumbs over the tops. Murdoc stared at their hands, consciously aware they were ripping into clothes and prying at flesh barely an hour ago.

“What are we going to do? Is this going to be a problem? Are you going to fucking jump every person that isn’t me? Satan what the hell do I do— I’ve gone and dug my own grave.”

“Murdoc, hey, this’ll work out. I just need clean clothing and we should be fine. I’m not hungry now.”

“What?” Murdoc scrutinized him, voice weak. “You’re not hungry now? What dictates your new hunger? It could happen whenever, hell you could turn around and eat me without notice!”

“Shh— Muds it’s going to be okay. I’m not going to eat you.”

2D took one hand and combed his fingers through thick hair. He leaned down to press a soft kiss to Murdoc’s forehead. He couldn’t explain it, but he felt exhilarated and full of energy. Like a live wire, he was ready to take on anything.

“I’m still me, still 2D.” The singer rested his hands on Murdoc’s shoulders. “I’m sure of it. I still have the same thoughts and feelings. I feel better, like a better version of me. Kinda feeling extra energetic actually.”
The bassist fought the urge to shove the singer’s hands off himself, still frightened of the man despite the placating reassurances.

“I know before I didn’t seem myself, but I’m okay now. The urge to sate my hunger is gone and while I don’t know if it’ll happen again, I think we can safely assume nobody else, especially you, will get eaten at this given time.”

“That hardly sets me at ease.”

“Truce, Murdoc. We have a truce because we were going to work together. You and me, to make things right between us.”

“I— Stuart I have no idea how to make this better or right. You’re a fucking zombie.”

“Please Murdoc, I don’t think I can do this alone.”

The broken plea left the satanist uncomfortable and he wound his arms around the taller, pulling 2D into another hug. Holding the blue-haired vocalist tight, like their earlier embrace, he buried his face against 2D. Murdoc could feel 2D’s rapid beat through his own chest.

“Can’t go eating people, there has got to be some restraint.”

“Got mad and scared earlier, I thought the man would shoot you and blanked.”

Squeezing 2D firmly, Murdoc sighed despondently. He should be flattered over how protective the singer felt. It was overshadowed by the fact 2D killed someone. Things were starting to get overwhelmingly difficult again, he had no idea how they would manage this abrupt change. Would 2D attempt killing him should he anger the vocalist? That begged another thought, emotions seemed to play a part in 2D’s reaction before hand and he wasn’t directly hurt with intention to kill. They needed to find Noodle and figure out the rest of the mystery.

Leaning from the taller, Murdoc cleared his throat.

“We need clean clothing then we’re going to find Russ and Noodle for help.”

He never expected to be eager for their help or anyone’s for that matter. He was full of surprises. He faintly made out 2D nodding in agreement. Neither of them were excited about leaving their stellar hiding location, but with a moderately decent plan in motion they had too. Murdoc poked out first, trailed closely by 2D. The satanist examined the products available in the store and snatched a big green sweater for 2D and a black pull over for himself. Although he hardly had stains, there were the occasional blotch of blood from touching the other man. Both of them hastily yanked on the pullovers, looking ridiculous. The green clashed horribly with 2D’s hair.

Murdoc took 2D’s hand in his and lead them from the gift shop, casually wandering now that they weren’t obvious. Still on edge despite appearing calm, Murdoc constantly looked about for a soldier. His grip on 2D increased when a pair of military members rounded a corner.

“What are you two doing wandering?”

“My boyfriend needed a piss, we got lost trying to get back.”

Nearly given whiplash at the quick reply, 2D shuffled his foot and smiled to himself over the term.

“Follow us, we can’t have you two moving around freely.”
“Why?”

Murdoc shifted his hand from 2D’s cold one to hold the other around the waist, keeping the singer even closer. He was antsy not to allow the singer away from his side if he could help it. They went with the officials.

“We have a minor threat in the facility. Nothing to concern yourselves with.”

“Now, when you say minor, how serious is that? We talking life threatening or mild?”

2D shot Murdoc a confused look, he couldn’t tell if the bassist was playing a part or anxious.

“It’s minor. That’s all you two need to know.”

With the vague answer the satanist left the topic and gave Stuart an apologetic glance. His nerves were fraying as their charade continued. Momentarily he caught sight of dry blood at the vocalist’s neck and under side of his hair. He hadn’t noticed missing that while wiping up the mess. There was no way to hide it while walking so closely to the soldiers and he sweat nervously against 2D.

Coming about into an open area where they had walked through for the washroom, Murdoc spotted the crowd of survivors huddled by a seating area. They were nearly there, almost home free.

“Please stay with the group until otherwise instructed.”

“Gotcha.”

Not waiting for her to notice the glaringly obvious blood stains on 2D’s neck he hurriedly took the singer among the survivors, disappearing from immediate sight. They didn’t pause until exiting on the opposite side of the large huddle of survivors. Then as if conscious of where his arm was, Murdoc quickly removed it and moved to a seat nearest to the window, motioning the singer over. 2D sat beside him with a wide, idiotic grin on his face.

Murdoc grabbed 2D’s chin and attempted to clean up the dry blood with the oversized sleeve.

“What’s that for? What’re you smiling about?”

“You called me your boyfriend.”

“Had to tell ‘em something. Made it believable,” Murdoc grunted.

Unbothered by the attitude Murdoc was projecting, 2D leaned in further to whisper teasingly.

“So it’s believable being my boyfriend?”

“Maybe it is. Don’t be expecting me to call you that every other day.” Murdoc turned away to mutter. “Still have shit to deal with.”

“Still on about my new-found cannibalism?”

“How are you not perturbed by this?”

“I’m terrified Muds, I don’t know what this means for me. But I can’t live every moment in fear or I’d never move forward.”

2D shrugged.
“Correct me if I’m wrong, which I’m not, but being a fucking cannibal or a zombie, whatever it is, cannot be good. What if you start rotting away?”

“Oh that’s great. Now I’ll be thinking about that. Thanks.”

2D crossed his arms and sat back into the chair, long legs stretched out in front of him. Twisting in his seat Murdoc grumbled.

“I’m being realistic here. This is insane, you ate someone 2D. You literally ate someone. How do you expect me to take this? Of course I’m questioning every fucking aspect.”

“I can’t change this Murdoc, I’m just coming to terms faster than you.”

“So what? You’ve accepted wholly you won’t ever go normal again? Just like that?”

“No— I… I don’t know. I can’t do anything this given moment so I figure it easier to accept it.”

The defeated tone reminded Murdoc of 2D’s attitude during Plastic Beach. The beaten but begrudging acceptance he had made to ease his turbulent situation on the island where his autonomy was forfeit. Murdoc hated how guilty he felt, the heart ache just thinking of the rounds he wrung the singer through and its lasting effects. The very least he could do was join the other in accepting things for what they were.

Now his mind was set to the painfully neon shores, water washing along his bare feet. Middle of nowhere with constant attacks from his past mishaps finally catching up to him.

“I’m sorry.”

“What for now? Your reaction is appropriate.”

“For the beach. For all of it.”

Pulling away, both emotionally and physically, 2D instantly clammed up. His eyes portrayed betrayal and distress, he wasn’t sure what to say. Time hadn’t healed all his wounds properly and one gaping hole was filled with the stupid beach. Murdoc placed a palm over 2D’s wrist, an assuring gesture with which the vocalist yanked away from.

“Why now? What’s different?”

“Because I never apologized for it.”

“Why now though?” Exasperated, 2D stood from his seat and strode to the window. He placed distance between them while hugging himself.

“It’s over and done with. We’re here in the present and dealing with other things.”

“Stuart that— those things were bad. It was a bad time.” Murdoc followed the vocalist, standing alongside the taller man. Murdoc examined 2D in their reflections. “Fucking awful things I did. You shouldn’t forgive me. I wouldn’t forgive me.”

“Y’know how some things upset you Muds? Topic is dropped and we move on?”

“Yes.”

A small pained chuckle slipped out and 2D frowned at Murdoc’s reflection. His voice came out tight.
“For once can you humor me? This isn’t something I want to discuss right now.”

“I know.”

“It’s over.” 2D took a deep breath and when he exhaled he forced himself to relax. It didn't work. “Stuck during this outbreak trying to fix our relationship and I’m struggling with being whatever I am and you bring up—”

“It’s dropped.”

“Thank you.”

The vocalist took a bit to unwind, the muscles along his shoulders and back remaining stiff for a minute or two before he sighed again. With both of them at the window, faced away from the crowd behind them it nearly felt like waiting for a flight. The murmurs of strangers and terrified excitement beyond the glass from soldiers and vehicles disrupted this idea. Below them military personnel ran around, clearly searching for the threat, the elusive infected individual. If only they were aware he was watching them. 2D rubbed anxiously at his arm.

“What if they find out?”

“Not going to let that happen.”

“But Muds, what if?”

“Then we run.”

Their conversation abruptly stopped and 2D inched nearer to Murdoc. Sliding his palm into the limp hand, 2D squeezed gently.

“Truce.”

Murdoc nodded quietly. “Truce.”

Time slipped on until the outside traffic simmered down.

A commanding voice alerted them to a minor commotion at the front of the crowd. Leaving the window they mingled into the group to catch the announcement. 2D kept a hold on Murdoc, fearing he would lose the man.

“The threat has been neutralized and it is safe to return to your activities. Please proceed straight to the area you were previously located. Any questions will be answered at the information booth in an hour. Thank you for your patience.”

Neither 2D or Murdoc felt certain enough to return to triage and silently agreed to hover in the seating area. As people filtered out, muttering among themselves, it was revealed that both singer and bassist had relocated to a corner with seats.

“We’ll give it a bit before looking for Russ and Noodle. Going to assume they’ll be wanting sleep at this hour.”

_____ 

The level of duress Noodle could handle varied depending on who was in distress. If it was Russel she was normally calm, collected and honestly the man was capable without her. Murdoc was another story, sure she had her fair share of panic over the older man, most of which he caused.
Noodle figured he was moderately okay to deal with himself, only occasionally needing her assistance; he never asked. 2D though, he was a walking accident. She always concerned herself whether obvious or not with the man’s well being. When her two highest priority concerns weren’t forth coming after the survivors were dispatched she felt unusually worried. Russel attempted soothing her with platitudes on how they were both adults, how Murdoc would look after 2D and so on. It did little to sate her fears.

“I’m over thinking this.”

“You are. They can handle themselves.”

“We’ve searched three areas and no sign. I cannot help but be concerned.”

“Noodle, c’mon. Muds and ‘D survived this long without you or me.”

Had they been at home this wouldn’t be an issue. At least in a normal world without zombies the only problems would be Murdoc causing general havoc and 2D hiding away to do as he pleased, normally sleep or re-watching old movies.

“They’re fine.”

“You are probably right.”

“Lets grab a drink, coffee will wake us up. It’s what? five now? May as well keep up at this point.” Russel bemoaned.

Finding themselves in the cafeteria section being utilized they grabbed two drinks and sat among many empty seats. Had Noodle been less aware she might have missed the cuban boots sticking out from behind a pillar and a flash of blue above fake potted plants.

“What’re you looking at baby-girl?”

Pointing eagerly she stood and made straight for the two men. Russel grimaced and sipped his coffee before joining her. It was much too early for interaction with either bassist or vocalist.

“Morning— 2D you’re out and walking around! That’s fantastic,” Noodle gushed as she approached.

“Oh yeah, yeah I suppose it is.”

Murdoc muttered under his breath. 2D elbowed the bassist who grunted but refused to acknowledge Noodle’s optimism.

“Morning you two.”

“Morning Russel,” 2D smiled faintly.

“We began to worry you two may be the problem.”

It was meant as a jest, Noodle spoke jovially while sitting across from them. Russel noticed immediately the ill expressions both sported as he too sat.

“Well—”

“Funny you should say that.”
Noodle paused mid sip to eye them.

“How much did you actually know about those vaccinations?”

“All that I explained. I only ever read a couple paragraphs from a computer document and rumors. Many doctors here whisper about them, but there was never anything definite. I was sure of the ‘red’ vaccination being dangerous. Everything else was conjecture from what little information I gathered. Why?”

“How many doses did you give Stuart?”

“Two each of the three. It seemed to work and 2D never complained beyond the first shot.”

“Can it be reversed?”

Baffled the guitarist lowered her cup. “Why?”

“Let’s say— Hypothetically speaking, that this vaccination causes the infected person to develop strange habits uh, say strange eating habits. Would there be a way to reverse ‘engineer’ the changes?”

A beat or two of awkward silence crawled between the four of them. An uneasy suspicion was growing in Noodle and she lowered her cup to lean further off her seat, towards the two men in front of her.

“What happened?”

“I didn’t mean too,” 2D blurted. “I was scared a—and angry— It just happened! I was tryna’ keep Muds safe—”

“Satan ‘D! Shut your mouth, we don’t need the whole vicinity knowing!”

Murdoc hushed the blabbering singer. He whipped his head around looking for any nearby persons possibly in hearing range. Once clear he faced Noodle and Russel, hissing.

“We have a problem. A flesh-eating-zombie sort of problem. Stuart ate a soldier after throwing up the equivalent of liquid hell from the depths of his stomach and I’m not entirely sure how to deal with this.”

“It happened after I ate a can of chili. I got stomach pains and then coughed up black stuff. It was horrific Noodle, I thought I was dying!”

“I don’t... This shouldn’t have happened, I think,” Noodle offered weakly.

Rubbing his scratchy face, Russel groaned.

“Let me get this right, ‘D ate someone, like he full on ate another person? I thought you was vegetarian?”

“Oh har har Russ, real apt time to be making fucking jokes.”

“I’m definitely a vegetarian.” 2D laughed despite the severity of his problem. “The guy had eaten fruit and canned corn before I got to him, so I suppose it counts right?”

Russel shook with restrained laughter. Murdoc rolled his eyes skyward listening to the singer and drummer. Noodle looked unsure whether to join them or be serious.
“Your eating habits are debatable, don’t go making it funny while we discuss how to fix them.”

They ignored Murdoc as their weird exchange continued.

“If I only ate hair, since it’s technically dead already, would that be considered vegetarian?”

“What if you only eat vegetarians?”

“Russel that’s brilliant.”

“How are you okay with this? What part of 2D being a fucking zombie is a-okay for you Russ? He killed someone.”

“Mood killer,” 2D mumbled.

“I dunno man, weird shit always happens to us. Otherworldly shit. I mean some stuff we’ve done is done for the fans, but you can’t explain all of it away with promo shoots and word of mouth.”

“Russel has a fair point,” Noodle added. “We are rather in tune to some interesting happenings. As for this ‘zombie’ issue, I need to gather more data.”

“There’s no rush to fix it Noodle, I feel rather well. Heads pretty clear actually and I’d hate to go back to the muddled mess I normally am.”

Murdoc raised a brow, listening to the singer talk affluently. He hadn’t noticed till now how well spoken the taller man had become in recent time. Maybe there were pros to the ailment.

Noodle hummed in thought. “I should still try. We need to assume this is a singular phenomena though, I never heard of anyone else having this outcome. They do extensive testing and nobody has walked away, yet.”

“Where do you plan to snoop for information? If it’s sneaking ‘bout I can help.”

“No. There is a man willing to share details. He, mh… He likes me.”

“Elaborate ‘likes’,” Murdoc growled.

“Dr. David Nelson, he works in and around the temporary labs they have set up. You can rest easy Murdoc, I’m not in any danger accepting a date.” Noodle purposely drank from her cup, leaving a heavy atmosphere. She dared the satanist to comment about needing protection.

Pursing his lips, Murdoc kept quiet. Approving the lack of response, Noodle stood from the seat.

“In fact, he should be awake now. I will have a breakfast with him and see if I can charm him into discussion.”

Russel grunted at the thought of some greasy doctor putting the moves on the guitarist. Noodle rolled her eyes. Murdoc sort of smirked, delighted he wasn’t alone in feeling an iota of concern. They may not be her biological parents but they sure as hell raised her in a manner of speaking.

“Dr. Nelson is harmless, mostly. He knows important secrets and I think he would be willing to share with me if I agreed to a date. I lure him in and trap him, should be easy.”

Impressed with the callous nature, Murdoc nodded in agreement. He didn’t have to like the situation, but he would be supportive.
“That a girl. Go kick ass and all that.”

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“Not a fan, but it’s a promising idea,” Russel sighed.

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Nodding in assent the guitarist crushed her empty cup.

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“I’ll destroy him if it gets out of hand.”

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Moving off, Noodle headed towards where she was sure to find the doctor, assured that none of them would follow her. The drummer watched the guitarist leave and sighed once more.

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“When did she grow up?”

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“When did she grow up?”

“Since day one.”

“Since day one.”

“Since day one.”

“Since day one.”

“Suppose you’re right, man.”

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“Suppose you’re right, man.”

Finishing the tepid coffee, Russel hefted up from the seat.

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“Don’t know ‘bout you two but I’m exhausted. We’ll convene later on, figure this crap out. Just hold out till then yeah?”

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2D tilted his head in agreement. Russel wandered off in search of a miserable lumpy cot to rest his weary body, leaving Murdoc and 2D alone.

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“Y’know what, lets do the same. I could use a good sleep after this cluster-fuck.”

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Murdoc urged 2D along. This time he kept their hands entwined, ignoring the somewhat sweaty feel of his own palm. It wasn’t much in the way of apologizing, but he would keep doing whatever it took till he believed himself forgiven.

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———

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“Natalie, morning. You’re up early”

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“After the alarm it was easier to stay awake. Care to join me for some breakfast?”

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“Well how can I say no to an offer that good?”

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“Not for another four hours. I may ask to assist sooner though. Have you started or are you just rising?”

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“I came from the laboratories. Been a terribly long night, was working all through it.”

“I came from the laboratories. Been a terribly long night, was working all through it.”

Although Dr. Nelson was classically handsome, strong jaw, straight white teeth and startlingly blue eyes, Noodle found him repulsive. He was a slimy asshole with a twisted sense of morality. People
like him waited for opportunities such as this to swoop in on what remained of humanity. He offered salvation through deceit. Despite his medical inclination he hardly assisted with patching up victims of the outbreak, more interested in messing about with serums and medications or infected individuals.

“We’re working on a new vaccination, hopefully one that can actually eliminate the virus completely.”


“I keep telling you, Dave is enough. Thought we established that?”

He chuckled despite his cadence carrying an undertone of anger. Noodle simpered and patted his arm in a flirty manner, not enough to be too forward.

“Of course, silly me. Sorry Dave.”

Approving, Dave lead her towards the canteen within the cafeteria.

“Let us grab something, we can talk over our meal. So long as you’re not opposed to canned fruit.”

Smiling placidly and moving towards the canteen Noodle examined the posted soldiers around. She only hoped they would be uninterested in the following conversation. Thinking over how to behave while she acted out a false attraction to Dr. Nelson made her all the more exhausted. This ‘date’ idea sat heavy in her gut, turning everything up with discomfort.

“Pretty scary earlier with the break in,” Dr. Nelson, or rather Dave commented.

“I figured the military had things handled.”

Essentially they did.

“I suppose you’re right. It wasn’t one of ours of course, looks like someone kept their infection hidden.”

Dave spoke low so not to alert others around them. Noodle blinked at the insightful tidbit, semi-worried he may discover the truth on his own. Squishing her baffled feelings and momentary wide eyes Noodle cleared her throat while grabbing a pre-opened can of fruit and defrosted bread from the counter.

“That’s mildly concerning.” She applauded the lack of surprise in her voice.

“Given the time span they would have come in already a couple days into infection. Most likely arrived here twenty-four to forty-eight hours ago.”

Noodle chewed the inside of her cheek, impressed by his correct assessment. Her mind whirred with the moment upon which Dr. Nelson had interrupted her and the other two. She prayed he wasn’t capable of piecing two and two together.

“We have had many people come through from the outside in the past forty-eight hours. It would be difficult to narrow it down to one specific person unless we had samples.”

Dr. Nelson took his meal and wandered to a table. Once seated Noodle realized quickly they were strategically seated center ground to four soldiers in differing directions. It was an open spot, but with clear line of sight in case of disruption. She might have been overly paranoid or Dr. Nelson
had suspicions about her. She ignored the red flags waving frantically in her head and proceeded to eat.

“I have a good idea who it might be.”

Dave stared intently at the guitarist making her pause.

“Why do you say that?”

Suddenly he grabbed her wrist, fingers digging into skin. It was inconspicuous and no one around gave impression to having seen the rough gesture. Noodle gave him a barely veiled frown.

“You took vials from the vaccination fridge.”

“You kill people in the name of medical science. What’s your point Dave?”

He let her go, an easy, yet sleazy smile pulling onto his irritatingly wide mouth. Noodle sniffed and took her arm back to eye him, waiting for him to motion soldiers over and have her carted off.

“I could be convinced to keep it private, between us, if you shared who it is.”

“I may share that information if you tell me what each vaccination does,” Noodle countered.

“Ah, you’re not in a place to bargain. I can have you detained on stealing alone.”

Noodle leaned back. Admittedly she had no intention in sharing 2D’s identity but she went in this with intention of gathering new information. Examining her nails as though blasé about the current mood of their discussion, Noodle contemplated her options.

“Well as I see it, Nelson, I know the identity of said person and therefore I could withhold that information until I see fit. You can detain me all you want, but really I know it would eat you up not knowing who it was. They could escape under your nose and you’d never know how or what caused them to end up as they were.”

The slimy grin melted away into a sneer. Dave practically growled at her, near spitting as he spoke.

“Don’t try my patience Natalie, I will have you locked away. Maybe we’ll sign you up for live trials.”

Eyes narrowing she launched forward and snatched up the collar of his uniform, dragging him across the table to meet face to face.

“Do not threaten me. You have no idea what I’m capable of. Unless you give me the information I want, I’ll break your neck here and now. No issue for me, I might sleep better.”

“You want info? Ask Dr. Webber. You aren’t getting anything from me you bitch.”

Shoving Dave back so he toppled to the ground, Noodle caught movement in her peripheral. The soldiers had shifted to convene on them. Dr. Nelson waved them off and righted himself with a grunt. A few huddled survivors were watching from the line and other tables.

“It’s someone you know. Someone you love.”

Abruptly standing, Noodle gripped her side of the table. Dr. Nelson rolled his shoulders to ease from the impact a moment prior.
“A friend or perhaps a family member.”

“Shut up.”

“Family then.”

“Shut up!” Noodle forcefully pushed the table into Dave. “You stay away from my family or I’ll kill you.”

Not able to enjoy momentary satisfaction at Dave’s grimace of pain having hit him in the crotch, Noodle whipped around and strode away. Unsurprisingly two of the four military personnel halted her. Still recovering from her aggressive gesture, Dave once more motioned them away. Although surprised and worried, she wasted no time rushing out of the cafeteria. Her stomach ached with hunger and anxiety.

Everywhere she went there were men and women in camouflage, toting weapons. Increasingly nervous at possibly being stopped she hurried to Triage to fulfill her shift early. She had no idea why Dr. Nelson allowed her to leave. Sliding into the small side room to grab a uniform, she tugged on a random red cross coat. It hit her suddenly. He expected her to lead them to 2D. She was essentially bait.

Crouching with her back to the wall Noodle buried her face into propped up knees.

“I’m an idiot. Such an idiot.”

The singer’s condition took precedence over all other things and she had messed up her one prime opportunity to get information. Smacking her head to the wall she groaned.

“I need to warn them.”

Some fond memories of her former years came to mind when thinking of them. The stupid lopsided cakes, awkward puberty moments, move nights and a strikingly clear birthday where Murdoc gave her beer. Russel had lectured the bassist for hours. Somehow she would warn them and find a way to get them out. Clearly it wasn’t safe anymore.

Inhaling deeply Noodle calmed her nerves as she shimmied up the wall. Until she had an opening, she would wait. Despite having ruined her chances, she could play this game of cat and mouse for however long Dr. Nelson wanted. Nodding to herself, Noodle made her way out into triage, face set in determination.

She would win this battle or so help her.

Chapter End Notes

This was actually a rather difficult chapter to write. Editing and re-writing took longer than I expected seeing as I had it done a few days back.

EDIT: I altered the 'date' scene because Dr. Nelson wasn't an idiot, he saw Noodle with them at the start and in the hallway after stealing vaccinations. Of course he put two and two together XD
Russel began worrying after Noodle avoided or outright pretended he was nonexistent when they passed each other. Upon meeting with both vocalist and bassist to discuss things and see if 2D was worse off, Murdoc commented she had done something similar to them. Already having spent twenty-four hours with the guitarist skirting around them they finally backed off. The second day drew on and the three of them wandered, talking to keep occupied. Or to act as normal as possible since they wished to avoid raising suspicions. When Noodle wasn’t forthcoming they called it a night and retired to a private location for drinks and food.

2D swirled his tea gently, eyeing the innocuous green liquid as though it may leap from the cup and assault him. Where they were seated was hidden behind a wall of artistic decorations, tastefully depicting an idyllic field. Opposite to that was a ceiling to floor window showing the darkened airport grounds and empty land beyond. Somewhere out there people were struggling to survive, completely unaware of the airport and military, or at least 2D thought so.

“This is ridiculous. Are we suppose to hope and wait she’ll come ‘round and spare us a moment?”

“I ‘unno man. Something seemed off about her behavior, like she was trying to ward me away.”

Glancing to his two companions, 2D let his eyes slide to the cold, unappetizing meals set in front of each of them; both half finished. Part of him was tempted to try eating normal food once more, the other part was terrified to have another lapse and attack someone. He caught Murdoc gesturing and looked to the man next to him.

“Try a sip, see how you feel.”

Sighing to himself, 2D looked once more at the tea before bringing it to his lips. He hesitated, anxious he would vomit again.

“A small sip Stuart, I’m not asking you to chug it.”

Chewing on the Styrofoam for a moment, 2D closed his eyes tight and took a bit into his mouth. Swishing the pleasant taste of mint and ginger he figured it was now or never and swallowed the hot liquid. He only cracked his eyes open when he felt the warmth settle inside him with no following pain.

“Well?”

“Tastes good.”

“How do you feel?”
“Fine. Warm?”

Russel relaxed against his seat and chuckled, a deep sound. Even Murdoc felt relief wash over him.

“Good. That’s good.”

Tickled pink over one simple pleasure not being revoked by his unnatural condition, 2D took a bigger gulp of the tea, humming in satisfaction. Russel finished his own beverage and in the moments after a solemn look filled his face.

“I hate leaving this but I’m beat. Noodle clearly can’t talk to us without risk so I’mma hit the hay. We’ll see what can be done tomorrow yeah?”

Clearly displeased at the prospect of waiting yet another day, Murdoc pressed his closed fist into a cheek, resting against it.

“Yeah. Nothing for it. Same place tomorrow?”

“Yep.”

Russel yawned as he stood. He grabbed up his unfinished meal and empty cup, disposing them into a garbage receptacle nearby. Waving lightly the drummer headed back to one of the designated sleeping quarters. Something told him Noodle was in trouble. He wanted to extend his help but felt in doing so it would worsen her situation. It was a sticky position and he grumbled just thinking about it. He also knew leaving 2D as he was any longer would be detrimental for the singer, they may have less chance reversing the problem. Scrubbing his face he tried alleviating the worrisome thoughts by focusing on a bed and sleep.

He climbed stairs to the second floor to reach his destination only to be stopped by a couple of military members. Frowning tiredly at them he sighed.

“What's this? Ain't got much energy for any bullshit.”

“Sir if we could have you come with us, there’s a high chance you were exposed to the virus during the incident early yesterday morning. We’re screening all survivors.”

Despite the official sounding nature of their request, Russel felt his guts twist uncomfortably. They were lying and something here wasn’t right. When he hadn’t moved or answered right away the two soldiers got moderately tense, hands shifting unnoticeable, itching to grab weapons. To keep the situation from escalating he shook his head and grunted.

“Figures. Yeah a’ight, lets go. Sooner we finish, the quicker I can sleep.”

The atmosphere eased and both took him beyond the sleeping area to the main floor again. He scanned his surroundings for an opening to slip away or avoid where they were taking him. And although they were much smaller in stature to him, he refused to use violence as an out; unless absolutely necessary.

It became apparent they were leading him further into the airport, passing all final quick escapes and dissolving into narrow halls with doors. Fretting, Russel realized all too quick that his decision to avoid violence was misplaced and cursed not utilizing his size advantage. One stopped at a door and opened it. The second one backtracked to be behind him.

“In here please. A doctor will be with you shortly.”
“No. Not going in there man, you two are acting shady.”

“Sir this is normal procedure, as well as lengthy, we have to do a full screening of everyone and only have so many rooms and doctors. I apologize if this seems odd, but given the extreme circumstances this is the best we can offer.”

Peering into the room he spotted Noodle, clear as day, tied to a chair and gagged. She looked back with wide eyes, distraught and unable to do anything about it.

“What the hell?”

The soldier behind him lowered the weapon off their shoulder.

“In the room. Now.”

Growling, Russel stepped into the room, hands visible.

“Unbelievable. You people ain’t doing shit to help here by locking us up.”

“Ms. Niccals stole sensitive materials and breached her vow of secrecy by sharing said materials both physically and verbally. Until otherwise notified, you and her are to remain here.”

Russel turned on them, but remained where he stood, nearer now to Noodle than the door. He scowled as they removed themselves from the room and locked them in. The drummer wasted no time assisting the guitarist from her bounds, grumbling as he did so. Once capable of verbalizing, Noodle rushed to explain herself.

“Dr. Nelson knew about my taking the vaccinations, he knew and wanted to use me as bait to draw out 2D. I tried to keep you three away, I’m sorry. I did not do a good job.”

“Baby-girl are you okay? Hurt or anything?”

“No, only my pride. I’m sorry for ignoring you three, I thought if I could keep a professional distance until a later time we could avoid this.”

Noodle rubbed her wrists with a deep sigh.

“Does he know it’s ‘D?”

“I’m not sure. I think he is having us gathered to figure that out.”

“Damnit. This thing is getting outta hand. We need to get out of here.”

“There is a door at the back of the room that connects to the next one. I was unable to use it.”

Glancing around the storage locker room, Russel spotted said exit door and moved towards it. Nestled between two rows of lockers with an unlit sign he would have missed given how dark the room was. For whatever reason they had decided to keep a lantern for them, obviously not wanting utter dark in case of assault at the hand of their prisoners. Shoving at the door the drummer huffed when there was no give. Ramming his shoulder into the metal door he made a noise of exertion when said thing remained stead fast.

“Maybe it is locked?”

“It has to give under enough battering.”
Noodle gave a curt nod and she motioned him aside. Positioning herself she drew up her leg and kicked the door hard with the flat of her entire foot. After a couple attempts the opposite door opened abruptly and a soldier marched in with his gun at the ready. They both halted with their hands up.

“Get on the floor. Floor! Right here where I can see you two.”

Nervously both of them moved to where he pointed with his weapon. Laying on their stomachs with palms flat and visible they waited, hearts pounding.

“Stay there. No fucking around or I’ll shoot you.”

“You can’t expect us to sit here and do nothing—”

“Shut up! You talk again and I’ll fucking shoot. No speaking at all.”

Russel shot Noodle an uncomfortably scared look. She shared a similar expression, uncertain how long they would stay like this, trapped on the floor in some back room.

———

Following Russel’s departure the other two sat in companionably silence. Murdoc finished his drink, soothed at the splash of vodka the coffee hid. Keeping a moderate level of intoxication without being obvious took years of practice, something he had honed. It was an airport filled with hundreds of survivors and too little military presence, he easily slipped off and found himself some booze from a restaurant. 2D had noticed but remained mute, he understood the edge of pure agony withdrawal brought. Besides, Murdoc wasn’t utterly wasted, the man was aware to keep himself level headed to deal with their circumstances.

As the satanist gulped down the last of his spiked coffee three soldiers approached them. Instantly on the defensive, Murdoc and 2D watched intently, unnerved at their arrival.

“We need you two to come with us.”

“Why?”

“During the incident yesterday there may have been a chance for either of you getting exposed to the virus. We’re currently testing each individual slowly to put everyone at ease. So please, come with us.”

“No.”

“Muds…”

“No, we’re not going with you lot. I know how CDC handle their screening during outbreaks and you aint doing it right.”

“You said that test was phoney,” 2D mumbled.

“Sir you have to realize with limited personnel and supplies we have to do it rather slowly. It takes time and we’ve been screening throughout the day to confirm everyone is clean. Please don’t make this difficult, come with us.”

“And how do you know we’ve not been screened already?”

“We take each individual’s personal information to catalogue the survivors.”
“Why not do that when we enter? What a waste, you could have had this done ages ago.”

“I will ask once more. Come peacefully or we will resort to force.”

Murdoc grabbed 2D’s half full tea and splashed the moderately hot beverage all over the three individuals. He quickly grabbed the singer and yanked him from the table, bolting.

“M-Murdoc! We should’ve gone with them!”

“Hell no, they’re fucking liars.”

The higher ranking official wiped his face.

“Use mild force, nothing deadly. Dr. Nelson wants the infected unharmed.”

Nodding the other two followed in hot pursuit.

Murdoc dragged 2D through the space between darkened gift shops and restaurants littering the airport, rushing to put a good distance between them and the military. Every time he glanced behind them he saw them closing in so as a last ditch effort to lose them he yanked things over, his hand caught a rack of clothing, knocking it askew behind them as they continued. 2D stumbled along with him, trying not to trip when Murdoc jerked them a new direction.

He almost collided into the satanist when said man drastically turned them around a corner and slammed into a washroom. Disoriented and somewhat startled Murdoc apparently had known where to go he only had seconds to comprehend where he was being directed.

“Get in here, up on the toilet, c’mon.”

Confused and out of breath, 2D stood where told and blanked when Murdoc backed up to the stall door.

“Do **not** move from here no matter what you hear, got it?”

“But—”

“*Got it*?”

2D nodded quietly. Murdoc disappeared out of the stall, closing it gently. He noticed last second the man had a wad of clothing in his hand and a piece of rack. He had been moving so fast he didn’t notice the other actually shook a portion loose. As his panting lessened he was acutely aware of Murdoc breathing elsewhere in the washroom. The soft whine of the door being nudged open reached him next, followed quickly by the sickening sound of metal on soft tissue. There was a shout of surprise and something clattered to the ground. Wringing his hands he desperately hoped the noises of grappling were the bassist winning.

“Where is he? Obviously you’re hiding him ‘cause he’s infected.”

“We split up, Just you and me buddy.”

There was a pained grunt from Murdoc as, from what 2D could tell, the man got shoved into the counter or hit.

“He’s gotta be in here, start searching Roger.”

Another squeak of the door and ‘Roger’ entered the large washroom. 2D sweated anxiously when
he heard stall doors get kicked open on the opposite side of the room.

“C’mon man, I don’t wanna have to shoot your friend here for being trouble. We don’t need him really, just you and if you come forward we won’t hurt him.”

The soldier spoke loudly so 2D could hear.

“Fuck off,” Murdoc spat. “He’s not in here.”

“Oh he is. I know his type, frail and shy. No backbone. Saw it when you spoke for him at the table. You wouldn’t leave him off on his own.”

That was patently untrue.

A deep seated frustration built at the words, boiling over into rage at the jabs. 2D felt his mind slipping and fought to keep from letting it consume him. Gripping the stall edges on either side of him he waited till military boots stopped at his stall and kicked out, flinging the door into the unsuspecting man. Leaping from the toilet he flew at the recovering soldier and shoved him to the ground. He didn’t see Murdoc or the first man, though he hardly had his focus on anything other the other pinned beneath him.

Punching in vicious succession to keep him down, 2D jolted forward at being clocked in the back of the head. Momentarily stunned, ‘Roger’ grabbed him and flung him to the side against unforgiving tiles. He blearily saw the butt of a gun rush his vision before everything went peacefully black.

Upon waking from unconsciousness, both bassist and singer found themselves tied to office chairs along side Noodle and Russel. There were four men and women, maybe more behind them, with guns trained on them. Momentarily they attempted to catch their bearings before making any choice feelings known.

“Guess that date went sour?”

“You could say that, yes.” Noodle glanced to Murdoc, disgruntled. “I’m sorry for getting both of you pulled into this mess.”

“Couldn’t hide forever I guess.”

The door opened to reveal four doctors, two of which Noodle recognized as Dr. Nelson and Dr. Webber. She scowled.

“Ah, looks like you gathered them without much issue.”

Someone from behind 2D placed a heavy hand over his blue hair, gripping tight and tugging. The vocalist hissed at having his head craned back.

“This one fucking jumped me. Busted my god damned nose, lucky I didn’t fucking shoot his ass.”

“Where’s Joseph?”

“That asshole broke his wrist and nearly gouged his eye out. D’yeah see the claws on him, fucking freak.” The guitarist and drummer peered at Murdoc who sneered while sporting a split lip and smarting cheek.

“Unfortunate, but he’ll survive. You both will so quite bitching.”
2D grunted when the man shoved his head forward less than nicely.

Dr. Webber, a woman of little taste in fashion wearing beige toned clothes beneath her lab coat, pulled a pair of latex gloves from a pocket.

“You said one of them was injured?” Dr. Webber turned to Dr. Nelson as she spoke.

He nodded and motioned to 2D. She slide the gloves on, tugging gently to assure they were properly placed. She approached, her heels clicking obnoxiously in the small storage room. 2D froze and tried to scoot backwards only to have the Roger fellow stop him.

“Goodness, you act as though I intend to cut you open. I wanted to see your injury site.”

Although clinical sounding, she smiled sweetly, swaying 2D into relaxing enough to shift his leg forward. His band-mates watched intently while the woman rolled his trouser cuff up. Removing the bandaging she tilted her head inquisitively at the blackened area. Even 2D stared, somewhat surprised to see no jagged, open wound or flesh, just smooth black skin with dark veins crawling every which way. Dr. Webber prodded the site gently and felt the location to access whatever it was she needed.

“Interesting.”

“What?” 2D looked from her to his leg repeatedly.

Instead of answering she pulled the jeans down and stood.

“Bring him to my lab, I’ll need to take samples and run some tests.”

“Alright, Roger, you heard the woman.”

Blinking and darting his head about, 2D dug his heels in when Roger pushed to move his chair.

“No! I don’t wanna be cut open and experimented on!”

Roger spun the singer around and dragged the chair out. 2D fought against the bounding on his arms and chest, legs flailing desperately. The singer vanished out the door with Roger and Dr. Webber.

“You can’t fucking do this!”

“Well we are.”

“Bring him back! He’s a human being for fuck sake!”

“Is he?”

Noodle wiggled this way and that in a futile attempt to free herself. Russel clenched his fists tightly.

“This aint right man, you can’t just do whatever you want, there’s laws and rules!” The drummer snapped.

“We're the law in this place. Have them taken to Jim’s lab, prep them for examination.”

Two of the three remaining lab-coating wearing men exited, presumably to wait for their arrival. With renewed vigor they struggled. Dr. Nelson produced a small case from somewhere on his
person and passed it to a soldier near himself. Said man opened it to reveal small syringes, with which he plucked out one by one and gave to another military official. Despite their fight each one of them received a needle in the neck.

Noodle felt increasingly woozy the faster the drugs took effect. She had an inkling of what was effecting her, but couldn’t stave it off. As she blinked, vision blurry, she watched them take her friends before she too was taken.

———

He fought against the men but ultimately failed and found himself uncomfortably strapped down. Dr. Webber moved this way and that around him and it only increased his anxiety. When she finally paused, it was to cut away part of his jeans to reveal the nasty patch of flesh on his calf.

“How did you receive your injury?”

2D looked to her, to the best of his ability given his head was also pinned.

“Oh, so you’re talking to me now?”

“Answer the question please.”

She retrieved a scalpel from a rolling trolley at her side. 2D eyed the small knife with panic. His face broke out into a terrified sweat.

“I—I got it in the subway… Please don’t cut me up. Please.”

“How though? Did you get scratched? Cut? How did the infection enter you?”

When she halted to look at him, 2D was briefly thankful for the distraction.

“I stumbled in dirty water and cut it on something sharp.”

Humming thoughtfully, Dr. Webber nodded while leaning over his leg. Instantly aware of metal against his leg, that he could feel it fully, 2D whimpered in fear. A sharp, hot pain seared along his healed skin as a sizeable chunk was carefully cut away.

“S—stop! Stop please, it hurts.” 2D wriggled in his bounds.

“Oh hush, it doesn’t hurt that much.”

“It does. It does hurt that much.”

Clearly disinterested in dealing with his whinging, Dr. Webber tuned out and picked the portion of black flesh off him. She got it in a small dish and set it aside.

“Fascinating. Your blood is tainted at the site.”

2D stared at the ceiling sniffing, his voice wobbled, “please just let me go… Please.”

He hated hospitals, hated doctors and medical procedures. He hated it so much.

She resumed her gathering, swabbing the area and his mouth, and drawing blood at his arm. She needed a sample collection to study. Not bothering to bandage him up, she left him to bleed on the table while looking through a couple slides. 2D tried to breath easier when she finally backed off, but found his panic only exacerbated by the quiet muttering and squeak of Dr. Webber’s chair. Dull
pain radiated from his leg and he wanted to squirm at open air touching his filleted flesh.

“You’re a unique individual. It would seem the vaccination has adhered to the virus and mutated. I can’t be entirely sure but this would be a totally new outcome to what we’ve seen.”

2D didn’t speak, fearing his voice would break. Dr. Webber went back to her samples, mostly quiet again. He closed his eyes tight and willed away his anxiety, wishing this horror show would be over.

———

Elsewhere beyond reach of the general populous within the airport a shriek rang out, muffled behind a door. In the dimly lit room Dr. Nelson cut small skin samples from Noodle’s leg, picking varies spots on the bare limb. As restrained as she was it was impossible to move from the scalpel. Dr. Nelson chuckled, a humorless sound, while carefully collecting the piece of flesh for slides.

“We haven’t even hit the best part.”

“I’ll kill you! I’ll kill you all when I get loose, you asshole!” Noodle raged.

Dr. Nelson rolled his eyes while sliding along the floor on his chair to where another doctor worked over Murdoc. The satanist barely knew up from down and lay limp against the bed, arm hooked up to an IV drip. He stared upwards, unseeing and utterly spaced. Unlike any other drug trip he’d dabbled in, this was sickening. Everything spun, he felt increasingly dizzy and wondered if he may throw up from that alone.

“How about you shut her up so we can hear ourselves think?”

“Where’s the fun?”

“This isn’t meant to be fun, David. It’s meant to be study. Study requires peace and quiet.”

“Spoil sport, I’m nearly finished. How goes your collection?”

“Now that he’s mildly cooperative, quickly.”

The unnamed doctor pried Murdoc’s mouth open with gloved fingers and swabbed inside his cheek. Removing his fingers he put aside the swab once sealed and removed his gloves to retrieve a tool.

“I need to remove a tooth for comparison after infection is introduced.”

“Ah, right. I forgot to do that.” Dr. Nelson glanced to where Noodle lay, trapped against the bed wearing only her underpants. The three of them were all in nothing but their undergarments.

“Christ, do it after you’ve medicated her.”

Noodle tensed when eyes fell on her. She forced her head to look over, eyes like saucers as she watched Dr. Nelson and the other man, pliers in hand. Apparently feeling more vindictive, Dr. Nelson shifted so she had a clear view of Murdoc laying prone on the bed under the other doctor. Without breaking eye contact, Dr. Nelson leered at her.

“Go on and get that pearly sample from him. I’ll drug up Natalie and get hers after.”

Having returned focus on Murdoc, the man parted the slack mouth again and lowered the pliers. Blinking hazily the bassist moaned weakly.
“Stop it! Stop! Don’t hurt him!” Noodle pressed against her restraints yelling desperately.

Dr. Nelson gave her a mock pout while sliding his chair over to her. Noodle growled and fought viciously.

“Leave him alone!”

“What was that about killing us?”

A couple muddled yet pained noises escaped the bassist as the doctor moved, blocking Noodle’s view while he worked. Helpless, Noodle tapered off into angry crying, spitting words of hate and murder when a bloodied tooth was produced. Dr. Nelson tsked while grabbing up some supplies near to him.

“Filthy mouth you have.”

“Where’s Russel? Where is he? What have you done to him? Why are you people doing this?”

“Oh don’t worry sweetie, we finished him before wheeling you in.”

She felt a needle entering her hand and winced.

“You’ll be joining your little fucked up family soon.”

Breathing became harder, heavier as a new drug entered her system. Everything felt compressed or like something was sitting on her. Panicked she gasped for air, fearing she may die from asphyxiation. Dr. Nelson patted her cheek roughly.

“Don’t worry dear, we’re going to take care of you.”

Her anxious breathing made her vision swim and it all greyed at the edges. As she passed out the bed she was strapped down to moved.

The other two were brought in to lay next to Russel. The drummer was unconscious with a trail of blood near his mouth. With Noodle also out like a light, Murdoc was the only moderately aware individual. He feebly turned his head and sluggishly spat blood out. He felt awfully eager to be unconscious at the moment. Fuzzy mumbles were bouncing around beyond him, getting closer until someone muttered over him. Whatever they said he missed because following their presence and disappearance he felt pleasant nothingness claiming him.

———

Eyes cracking over to a blinding light, 2D blinked rapidly, unaware when he had passed out. Someone grabbed his chin in a vice like hold, pulling down on his jaw to apparently see his mouth. When the flickering orbs dissipated from his vision he glanced up at Dr. Webber. She scrutinized him while examining his teeth.

“What happened to your eyes?”

Once his mouth was free he worked his jaw a bit before frowning.

“Double Hyphema.”

“Hm, interesting.”

She once more backed from him and grabbed some device. When she settled it over his eye,
forcing the lids open he yelped and tried to blink.

“W—what is this? What are you doing?”

“Hold still, I’m going to remove your eye.”

“What!”

“Joking. It measures your pupil reaction. It’s a little archaic, but it works well enough.”

Tears welled up in his eyes, stinging the one stuck open. Dr. Webber huffed at his reaction.

“I can’t get an accurate measurement if you’re crying all over it.”

“You— You just, you’re horrible. I want to leave.”

Giving a disgruntled noise she removed the metal contraption after two false readings and set it aside. Stepping to the foot of the bed she contemplated the singer a moment before leaving the room entirely. A soldier stepped in and any thoughts of potential escape left 2D. He watched the other man, straining his eyes. Not long after leaving the woman returned with a vial.

“Pupil dilation and restriction can be measured at any point,” she said as though continuing a thought. “For now we’ll move on to testing this.”

Bewildered he darted his eyes to the innocent vial of clear fluid.

“Your infection has mutated beyond what I can measure given my equipment. I can only assume its meshed with your regularly occurring bodily functions, working in tandem. Somehow you maintained higher functions and seeing as I have no point of reference to how you were before hand we shall move forward.”

Verbally scrambling to keep her from doing any more than she had, 2D blurted out the first thing he could think, “I fell outta a tree as a kid and it turned my hair blue. I was hit by a car and then flung outta one and it scrambled my brain real good so I wasn’t overly bright y’see and just recently I’ve stopped suffering headaches. It’s been wonderful so please don’t take that away. If you let me go I’ll tell you whatever you want, please!”

Dr. Webber eyed him.

“Please just let me go,” he mumbled. “I won’t hurt anyone else. It was an accident, a one time accident.”

From the confines of her lab coat she produced a handheld tape recorder. Clicking the stop button she tilted her head.

“You’re naturally blue-haired?”

“Yes, god yes. It’s all real. Please— let me go, please.” Normally pleading was reserved for other settings, right now he hoped it helped his case.

Pressing record, Dr. Webber brought the recording device to her mouth.

“Subject 40 seems capable of emoting despite having suffered the virus approximately five days to a week. After receiving two doses of type one and two of the anti-viral vaccinations the subject has created an almost symbiotic bond to the virus. I’m going to administer Vaccination TX-#FF0000 and proceed to observe changes in subjects mentality.”
“No,” 2D moaned in distress.

“Once observations are made, subject will be placed in contained space with regular non-infected individuals.”

“W-what? Don’t do that!”

The singer felt hot tears pool in his eyes again at being ignored. He struggled against his clasps. There were two on each limb, one over his head and a final one over his chest. Apparently undaunted Dr. Webber continued her one-sided discussion. 2D felt humiliated at being trapped and disregarded.

“Subject appears distressed. I am currently loading a syringe for administration of the ‘red’ vaccination.

“Of course he’s distressed! You’re ignoring me and planning to stick me!”

Somewhere he remembered Noodle mentioning the ‘red’ vaccination, but he couldn’t recall what dangers it held. His tears fell in rivets down his temples when Dr. Webber came to his side. She set her device down and prepped his arm for injection. He sniffled and tried to blink his tears away.

“You don’t have to do this.”

“I’m sorry. We haven’t had a break through in months.”

Bewildered, 2D peered up at her.

“Months? It’s only been two weeks?”

“Talking won’t do any harm,” Dr. Webber muttered distracted while she tapped his arm. “This whole mess started approximately three months ago.”

He couldn’t see the needle and prayed it wouldn’t effect him negatively.

“During some routine testing of a virus there was an unexpected outcome. The virus mutated too rapidly to account the changes and an unfortunate mishap lead to the entire lab being sealed. Quite quickly though the virus altered again and it was suddenly in the water. From there you can imagine how quickly it spread. That’s just a summarization of our current situation.”

He felt the needle pressing through his skin and whined in despair.

“Unfortunately with symptoms taking twenty-four to forty-eight hours to present itself, people would leave the origin location infected for short trips and very quickly it got out of hand.” She lightly slide the needle out, dabbing the spot. “Those of us still able-bodied have been working tirelessly to find a way to eradicate before it becomes wildly out of hand. As it stands the entire East coast has succumbed. With the spread being so rapid, it won’t be long before North America is a wasteland.”

When 2D remained mute, his fingers twitching at the burning in his arm, Dr. Webber smiled demurely and patted his cheek almost affectionately. Her words, despondent, hung heavily on his chest despite wanting to hate the woman.

“You remind me of my boyfriend, he never liked needles. He tried to help a little girl trapped in a car, not realizing she was infected and already gone. Had I been faster he would’ve been here with me.”
She leaned away and turned to toss the needle into her bio-hazard bin under the desk. Her smile turning solemn.

“I really am sorry… I never caught your name.”

“2— Stuart, mh… It’s burning.”

“You two have the same name,” she mumbled weakly.

Burning filled his veins, creeping up his arm into his shoulder. The singer whimpered pathetically, incapable of moving to ease the sensation away. Dr. Webber stepped from his side and the minute following a rapid fire clicking came. Distantly 2D knew it was a computer keyboard. Although empathetic to her situation he couldn’t help feel a fury building in him. Nothing ever seemed to be in his control.

“It burns so much… Make it stop.”

Delirium overcame his senses and his words became slurred muttering until he quieted down. Everything had turned red and he wished for death. His veins were on fire and it traveled from toes to head, filling him with nothing but pain. He couldn’t comprehend much and as red faded to black he wondered for the millionth time if he was actually going to die.

Dr. Webber glanced to the prone singer, curious that his movements and murmurs had stopped entirely. Standing to peek at him she felt for his pulse. There was none.

“That’s unfortunate,” she stated.

Pulling back she tapped her foot impatiently.

“This wasn’t the result I hoped for.”

Disappointed, she huffed and flopped into her chair heavily, twisting to type something furiously. She needed positive results, ones that showed complete removal of the virus from a healthy system. Realizing her results would have been skewed regardless, not knowing the medical history or prior physical information. She had hoped this would be their big break through. The others would be so dissatisfied.

As the minutes ticked by she paused her typing to glance at her silent but steady military guard stood by the door.

“Have the body transferred to our temporary morgue and don’t tell David. I don’t need that asshole breathing down my neck about this.”

“Shall I have Dr. Mackenzie prep for autopsy?”

“Yes, tell her I’ll join shortly.”

“Of course ma’am.”

“Thank you Mike.”

Not hesitating, Mike moved towards the blue-haired vocalist and began removing the straps over his arm. Dr. Webber sighed and her interest diverted back to the flickering computer screen. She’d hear an ear full for this mistake.

Mike briefly spared a glance to Dr. Webber’s back, hands busily undoing the head clasp. With his
eyes elsewhere he missed dark orbs staring at him. He also missed the hand shooting out and clutching at his windpipe. A startled choke escaped him and before he could scramble for his side arm the singer squeezed impossibly tighter and tore his neck open. Blood showered out in a spectacular arch, covering both 2D and Dr. Webber who turned in shock.

Momentarily she couldn’t grasp the situation.

“Jesus Christ!” She scrabbled for purchase, attempting to dislodge the handgun kept under her desk.

2D growled low in his throat and violently tore his remaining straps off. Leaping from the bed he came at the doctor only for her to desperately scoot away having not reached her gun in time. Dr. Webber screamed in terror, trying and failing to move faster on her chair. The bloodied vocalist smiled grimly as he descended on her, knocking them both to the ground as his mouth bit into her jaw viciously. She clawed at his face and hair in a weak attempt to beat him off to no avail.

With all the noise the posted guard outside busted in to the singer hunched over Dr. Webber’s slowly dying body, eating a meaty morsel from her torso. He lifted his gun, seconds from firing when 2D jolted up at him with startling speed. A shot rang out and grazed the singer’s shoulder as he tackled the man. With increased strength he broke the man’s arm, bone piercing skin with his brute force.

The soldier yelled in shock, fighting hopelessly against the vocalist’s frenzied movements. It was futile and in moments the anguished cries gurgled out into final breaths as 2D ripped open his jugular. He was half eating and half destroying the threats, not entirely aware of his actions.

When it was obvious the immediate persons were all full well and dead, 2D paused. His panting came out guttural as he rose from the fresh corpse. Painting the picture of true horror he stalked out of the room and down the hall, following sounds further away. He trailed blood as he went, searching for someone or something his muddled brain knew was missing.

———

Dr. Nelson tapped a vial of blood in time to the beat playing from a battery powered CD player. His partners in crime worked simultaneously on Russel, having separated the man from Murdoc and Noodle to run an ECG and take blood pressure. The percussionist was still under and thus easy to monitor.

“I went and saw this band live with my sister,” Dr. Nelson commented.

“You’ve mentioned.”

“Did I also mention I found the music god awful?”

“Yes.” It came out as an annoyed grunt.

Setting the vial in its rightful place, he got up and came striding over to the drummer and doctors.

“How much longer shall we give Cynthia?”

“Jim go check on Cynthia, I can finish this.”

Said man nodded and set the arm cuff aside to scurry away. A soft click was heard as the door closed behind the other. Dr. Nelson craned his head to peer at the other band-mates, safely disabled. Curious by their resting faces he looked at Russel again.
“If that other man was here, I’d say they look like the band members.”

The other doctor, growing frustrated with David, sighed. He began removing the small patches and putting it with the ECG machine.

“His heart rate is regular.”

“Good. we’ll use him for the second portion.”

Rolling the cart the ECG machine sat upon, the unnamed doctor moved towards where Noodle and Murdoc lay. While he applied the sensory pads to Murdoc, Dr. Nelson prodded Russel’s eye open.

“Does this man have cataracts?”

“I’m not sure, he seemed capable of seeing us earlier. It may be a birth defect or genetic trait.”

Humming in thought, Dr. Nelson let Russel be and went back to his table.

“David, this one has an abnormally fast heart rate given he’s currently medicated.”

“So?”

“So it may be a sign he’s prone to heart attacks or other serious heart problems. Maybe we should keep him aside?”

“Give him something to relax.”

“I can’t be adding shit on top of the sedative we’ve administered. Which we gave more than necessary to put him out.”

“Then leave him be.”

When Dr. Nelson turned away the other man threw his arms up before shaking his head. For the following minutes an excited beat played. Both doctors ignored one another while performing varies tasks. Dr. Nelson bobbed his leg to the music, trying to place why their current guests looked familiar.

An unexpected thump came from the connecting room making both men jump and glance to the closed door. Dr. Nelson watched warily as his partner approached the door cautiously and opened it a crack. He opened it wider in shock.

“What in god’s name happened in here?”

The CD player chose that moment to slide into the next song, a buzzing yet electric beat gradually thrummed from the small machine. Dr. Nelson gave an abortive noise when the other doctor stepped into the room and 2D appeared in the space the man had occupied, face bloody.

“Hank watch out!”

Whipping his head around, 2D cocked his face and leered blankly at David before he pivoted and vanished out of sight. Hank screamed while getting dragged violently beyond the open door. Hesitating a moment too long, Dr. Nelson dived under his table, yanking for the weapon he had. All of them had to have them.

He looked frantically for the tall blue-haired monster, seeing no one. He turned back to undoing the latch over the gun, hands shaking. The silence was filled with the eerie sound of the singer’s
almost disembodied voice chanting charger. Then as Dr. Nelson finally freed the handgun the table was whipped up and away from him, also flinging said weapon away. Towering over the blond, 2D breathed raggedly, fresh blood staining his clothes and features.

Rushing over him like waves, Dr. Nelson recalled the singer on stage. How his sister screeched in thrill upon seeing the vocalist, how she chanted the lyrics along with the man in front of him.

“What a way to go…”

2D’s eyes flashed with something sinister as his mouth parted. The last thing Dr. Nelson saw was empty eyes and blue before his face was shredded by blunt nails and dull teeth bit into his skin.

Taking the time to actually gorge himself, the singer picked flesh away from the bone. He only stopped when his ears picked up on a beeping. Twisting himself he looked around for the odd noise, getting to his feet slowly. His eyes landed on Noodle and Murdoc, both still strapped down and out cold. Not completely registering who these people were to him he wandered closer only to pause at seeing Russel. Detouring to the drummer, 2D salivated at more food. As he reached to grip the slumbering man he paused, head shaking. Yanking away as if burned he clutched at his head growling.

Russel was his friend. Russel was important. He couldn’t eat Russel.

2D smacked at his own head hissing as he started to feel his normal self bleed back into the forefront of the haze. Groaning he stumbled into the bed, catching against the guard rail.

“I’m sorry Russ, promise it won’t happen again,” 2D muttered more to himself as he walked about the bed to remove the sedative IV drip.

He cringed seeing sections of the man’s skin missing. He was somewhat glad he killed the medical staff, they had deserved it. Carefully heading back over to Noodle and Murdoc he removed their IVs. He searched for their clothing while trying to come to terms that he just killed and partially ate seven people. If he didn’t think too hard on it, it felt more like a dream than reality.

Returning to Russel he dropped all their clothing onto the drummer’s bed. Unlocking the wheels he rolled the man over to Noodle and Murdoc, parking him beside them. He unstrapped them and struggled through redressing them haphazardly with haste. Unintentionally the singer left traces of blood on fabric of almost all the articles.

“C’mon wake up…”

He stared at them while twiddling his fingers. They looked utterly ridiculous in their rumpled clothing.

“You all have heart rates so you have to be okay. Please wake up.”

Fretting by twisting his stained shirt, 2D stepped close to Noodle and leaned in. He listened to her breathing just to confirm she was in fact alive. Pulling back he sighed. They couldn’t stay here like this, someone was bound to notice the disastrous mess he left. He would have to move them.

———

Waking sweaty and gasping for breath, Noodle feebly yelled in the darkened room. She grasped at her chest while striving to calm herself. Half her face ached and there were spots on her leg that stung. A light was flicked on, shining directly at her. Squinting in panicked confusion she shielded herself, trying desperately to see who was at the other end. She noticed then that she had clothing
“What a relief, you’re okay.”

“2D?”

“Sorry for blinding you,” 2D said as he turned the light upwards.

The room was highlighted with a dim torch that 2D set on a shelf. She glanced around warily.

“Where am I?”

“We’re in a maintenance closet. Wasn’t easy cramming you three in here on stretchers, but I made it work.”

As he spoke, Noodle’s adjusted eyes landed on Russel and Murdoc positioned opposite her on their respective beds. They were all angled awkwardly to fit in the moderately small room. She went to slide off the bed only for 2D to rush over, halting her.

“You’ve been under for a bit. Give it a minute.”

Moving a hand to gingerly hold her face she gave a slight nod. Moving hadn’t felt good anyways.

“What’s wrong with your face?”

“It is nothing. Was hit,” Noodle lied.

“Once we’re all able, we’ll leave.”

Russel gave a muffled sound, coming too. Both looked to the drummer as he weakly rubbed at his face. 2D anxiously hovered around the man as he roused himself.

“Russel hey, good to see you awake. Hope you’re feeling decent?”

“Hell no.” Russel grimaced as he worked his jaw. “They ripped my tooth out and cut my leg up. I aint feeling any amount of nothing except pain.”

“Well uh— you’re okay, safe I mean. Yes, safe.”

“Mhm.”

The drummer closed his eyes tight, fighting nausea from sedatives and throbbing pains emanating all over. He had no strength to deal with 2D’s anxiousness and sighed. Thankfully the singer took the hint, moving to stand near Murdoc.

“I feel so sick.” Noodle held her head.

“Same baby girl.”

A long silence stretched where both Noodle and Russel teetered on the edge of sick and stable. Noodle massaged her temples while sitting up. Her jaw radiated pain where her molar was forcibly removed, still rather bloody. She wondered momentarily if it would get infected since they hadn’t sewn that gaping spot. She tried to keep her mouth partly open without exerting the muscles, if only to alleviate some ache. She watched the singer, really examining him. The light did little to hide his blood stained clothing and although it scared her, she thought better than mentioning it.
2D petted at the bassist’s hair, worried the man hadn’t woken from sleep yet.

“How’re we getting out of here?” Russel avoided touching his face directly. He still cringed at the motion of his mouth.

“I haven’t thought that far. Maybe we could sneak out?”

“It would be difficult to do if they are looking for us.” Noodle closed her eyes, brows furrowing.

Russel finally pushed himself into a proper sitting position. He gripped his bed while the world spun around him. He wanted the dizziness to pass so they could work up a plan. More than eager to leave, the drummer swallowed against the feeling of rising bile and sat at the edge.

“Let’s wake Muds and plan our escape. I need out of here.”

Nudging Murdoc gently, 2D watched for changes in the slack face. Russel slid from the stretcher and hobbled over on weak limbs. Leaning over Murdoc he scrutinized the satanist before glancing to the vocalist.

“Maybe he needs longer?”

“I guess so,” 2D said. “You two should try and get food and water, maybe clean clothing.”

Russel looked down towards the vocalist’s chest as if only noticing now how soiled the clothing was. He took a step back, coming to rest against Noodle’s bed, eyes wide. Both of them finally comprehended how the other appeared. 2D caught them staring and angled himself to hide most of the mess, he avoided their eyes ashamed.

“I’ll stay with Murdoc till he wakes up. You two look less obvious so you should get your strength up,” he voiced delicately. “Make sure to come back here without being noticed. We’ll plan our escape once you two return.”

Neither drummer or guitarist were fully capable of functioning, but suddenly being confined to a room with their band-mate who just ate people was much less appealing. Russel cleared his throat and nodded his head towards the door. Not feeling well enough in the least, Noodle agreed with a small smile.

“We’ll be back ‘D.”

Noodle and Russel exchanged an apprehensive look when the vocalist stood stiff, making no vocal affirmation he heard them. Not having much else to add they cautiously, with heavy exhaustion, left the maintenance closet in search of supplies. Between themselves they divvied up the tasks and Noodle decided to take medication and food. Russel took to looking for clothing and possibly some way to leave. They kept to the shadows to avoid being spotted.

All the while 2D sat beside the miraculously still unconscious Murdoc, threading his moderately clean fingers through dark hair.

“We’re going to get of here, get a car maybe. Be on the open road. Just you, me and the gang.”

2D tried to smile, but it was brittle and he pulled his hands up to look at them. He could make out blood and possibly more under his nails.

“Am I a monster?”
Murdoc didn’t respond which left the other in palpable silence. He cringed the longer he stared at his hands. He hadn’t restrained himself or even tried, yet he had with Russel. Pressing his face into dirtied palms 2D was wracked with swirling guilt, eating up his thoughts and turning his stomach. Was it murder or self-defense? Maybe he had gone too far. He muffled his quivering breaths by mashing his knuckles to his mouth.

_I am a monster._

Chapter End Notes

Strangely I’ve always fancied the idea of the least likely person saving the day.

EDIT 12/19/18 - Bit late in uploading these revisions, apologies! Oh my gosh the scene jumping too, super sorry for that. Never realized how much this chapter had.
Time seemed to drag while sitting in the mostly darkened maintenance closet. 2D mulled over his prior actions, thoughts festering and moulding into negativity towards himself. He tried distracting himself by sitting near the satanist, rubbing Murdoc’s hand gently, almost scared of hurting the other. He had no clue how long they had been sitting in the dark but he was beginning to regret his hasty decision to stick behind.

Some concern poked through his internal despair and he began to fret over how cold the other felt. He leaned over the bassist and felt for a pulse, thankful to find one. He frowned at how erratic it felt and ran his eyes over Murdoc’s features. He appeared the epitome of peaceful, face slack. Then as if staring made the other stir, Murdoc’s eyes shot open.

Surprised, 2D jolted back, nearly falling off the edge of the bed. Holding his own chest he smiled despite it.

“Finally. How do you feel?”

“Like trash.” Murdoc sat up, hand flying to his mouth, “christ…”

He leaned over the bed coughing blood and saliva out. 2D winced while holding the other up. Either especially good timing or poor, Russel and Noodle chose that moment to come in. Noodle closed the door behind her and cleared her throat.

“We have clean clothing for you two and medication.”

Murdoc gave them a thumbs up.

“We need to figure out how we’re getting out of here ‘cause there’s a lot of activity right now,” Russel stated as he set a bag down.

Noodle grabbed a bottle of water from her own pack and came over to Murdoc. “They’re on high alert looking for you 2D, so what ever we decide has to be fool proof.”

Nodding quietly, 2D sighed while watching Noodle assist Murdoc with water. The satanist spat out a mouthful as he groaned.

“Here, take some pain medication.”

“What is it?”

Noodle quirked a brow somewhat confused, she wasn’t use to the bassist questioning drugs.
“Aspirin.”

“Good,” Murdoc said while taking the proffered caplets.

For a brief moment, Noodle considered the older man. Faintly able to see traces of sweat gathered at his face she wondered if he was suffering another ailment separate to pain. Murdoc gave her an award winning smirk which came across more pained than relieved. She decided to leave the issue alone for a time when they weren’t rushed.

———

Redressed and finally clean of blood, 2D aided Murdoc into standing while they all glanced out the door, antsy to get going. Although their plan was no where near fool proof, it had some merits. Russel had suggested they make a feeble attempt at doctors heading off to do something or other with 2D. Granted it wasn’t well thought out or anywhere near as simple as it sounded, they all agreed.

Tiptoeing through dark hallways, 2D lead them in the general direction of the medical rooms, eyes having adjusted extremely well to low lighting. Occasionally the three of them paused for the lagging satanist who continually leaned into the wall to catch his breath. It was an odd thing to see and he glared at them when he received a couple concerned looks.

“Are you sure you’re alright man? You’re panting pretty hard over there.”

“I’m fine.”

“Muds if you need to sit down we’ll stop—”

“No. I want out of this hell hole. No more questions, just fucking go,” Murdoc spit breathlessly.

The other three exchanged worried looks before silently agreeing to push forward. 2D brought them to a room before a corner where voices carried from around it. Sliding into it and closing the door with the softest click, they scanned the room for potential supplies. Anything useful for the hair brained plan. Noodle passed her flashlight over the items lining the room and stopped on an unused, clean stretcher with bunched up sheets.

“Perfect. 2D help me get it over to the door.”

While they worked the stretcher free of its wheel locks Russel examined a couple military grade boxes stacked to the side. There were no weapons among them, unfortunately, but he found military grade food packs and water. Frowning the drummer found it strange they had their own food, yet insisted on giving out perishable goods to survivors.

“What are we suppose to use as a getaway vehicle?”

Everyone glanced to the hunched bassist clinging to stack of boxes.

“I saw unused emergency vehicles near the entrance. Though we only have one exit point.”

Most of his speech was bogged down with a weird sense of grogginess. The sedative used to keep him under left him feeling distinctly achy in ways he knew were not good. Noodle shone the light on herself.

“2D will act as the body, we wheel him off to where autopsies are preformed then take a fire exit. I know there is one. Dr. Nelson made a few of us sit in on a demonstration... From there we take an
ambulance or other obtainable vehicle.”

2D nodded, keen to do whatever necessary to successfully escape. Russel started to line his bag with the military grade food.

“It won’t be that easy,” Russel vocalized. “They’re not gonna let a bunch of survivors out.”

Murdoc stood upright, faltering a moment with dizziness. He wiggled away the feeling of pin pricks all throughout his body.

“It’s going to work, it has too. We’re not going down without a fight.” He struggled to ignore the tense sensation in his neck. “Let’s go grab some lab coats and get this show rolling.”

2D chuckled at the enthusiasm. “Take it easy Murdoc.”

“I’m fine.”

Murdoc didn’t feel fine.

It took exploring two more rooms under the guise of darkness to find the lab coats. With morning creeping past twilight and into dawn they hurried in silence to put the plan into motion. Shoving on the coats, Murdoc urged 2D down onto the medical mattress. He threw a sheet over the taller man while Russel hid his and Noodle’s packs with 2D. Sharing a determined nod each, they finally left the room.

Moving stealthily through the hallways in the opposing way from the voices, Noodle strode at the head of the stretcher, hands set against the portion untouched by 2D’s head. Russel walked briskly alongside it while across from him Murdoc gripped the guard rail so tight he worried the other may bend it. The two of them could see the bassist was certainly not fine as they traversed the airport. There was excessive sweating and wheezing from Murdoc that made their poor disguises obvious. Noodle tried to take the satanist’s pulse but was swatted away. Russel frowned, desperately hoping they made it through this.

“Murdoc what is wrong with you?” Noodle hissed while rounding a corner.

“Nothing. Leave it alone for fuck sake.”

“You’re gonna blow our cover,” Russel added.

“Then stop asking me every five fucking minutes.”

With the thin cotton over his face, 2D couldn’t make out the others. He heard the struggle in Murdoc’s labored breathing as well as the troubled tones of the guitarist and drummer. There was an irritated huff from above his head which he assumed was Noodle.

“Fine,” she said, leaving it at that.

The stretcher jerked to the right and suddenly 2D could see light through the sheet. They must be getting close to the designated area for autopsy and examination.

“Who are you three? What’s all this?”

2D tensed before he could help it. The authoritative voice was commanding and most definitely suspicious of them.

“This is Dr. Niccals and Dr. Hobbs. I’m Ms. Stella Pot, I worked closely with these two during the
outbreak. I was a lab technician and assistant, we are heading to autopsy for examination. Our subject died rather abruptly, making it time sensitive. If we could, we need to hurry along.”

Had he not a role to play, 2D would have laughed at Noodle’s abrupt answer.

“I don’t recognize your names.”

“Should we repeat it again for you or is your pea brain too small to grasp the severity of the situation? We’re in the middle of an out of control apocalypse, it’s claiming American lives as we speak and you want to dawdle with niceties like names? My god man where are your priorities?”

The American accent was absolutely atrocious in Murdoc’s voice, but given the circumstances he was impressed at the improvised dialogue they shot out. There was a thick silence where 2D wondered if the soldier was preparing to shoot.

“Right, I think I remember you now,” came the disgruntled reply. “This way please. We had a containment incident late last night and a couple doctors were found dead. We can’t have you wandering about without protection.”

“Yes, yes, hurry along. We haven’t all day damnit. We’re on the brink of solving this viral mystery.”

With that, there was movement again. Unable to discern where the military official was in conjunction to himself, 2D remained still. They kept going and going, it felt endless and Murdoc’s barely covered panting made the journey all the more uncomfortable. It didn’t help his nose itched thanks to the blanket.

When the stretcher bumped into something wobbly before proceeding forward, 2D blinked beneath the sheet. The only sign he got that something in the atmosphere had changed was the abortive noise Noodle made and Russel quietly cursing.

“What in the hell is going on here?” The soldier snapped.

“Yes what?” Came the voice of some unidentified woman.

Abruptly the sheet was yanked back from him and Noodle was shoving him to get off the bed. Russel was restraining the soldier with his arms looped under the other’s and locked behind his head.

“What in the—”

2D became aware of a startled woman in the middle space of the room with many battery powered lights. She was paused over a corpse with a scalpel. For a short instant he remembered the blade digging into his skin and shuddered. Murdoc roughly pushed at his shoulder, urging him to follow Noodle.

“Russ lets go!”

“Damn okay, just— Shit, go to sleep man,” Russel grunted while forcing the soldier’s head into the guard rail.

The three of them halted at the back door in the rather spacious room. Noodle gestured frantically for the drummer to hurry.

Pushing the military man to the side the percussionist hastily caught up with his band-mates and
they darted out through the door. He would later belittle himself for forgetting their supplies.

Shortly after a rush of four or so soldiers burst into the room. The doctor by the bed pointed to the back door, having pressed her emergency pager. One person remained to check the fallen man while three marched beyond the door with weapons drawn.

A heavy pounding echoed behind them, propelling them ahead with urgency. Blood rushing and breath short, They ran through the narrow fire escape route, desperate for the door to outside. Noodle shucked her borrowed lab coat soon copied by Russel and Murdoc.

Someone hollered and suddenly a shot rang out, ricocheting off the wall over their heads. Noodle yelped and ducked, it brought flashes of helicopters and gloomy skies. For a moment she was back in the grass, a mere child, completely incapable of defending against the onslaught of bullets. Large arms wrapped around her protectively and she came to the present, running through a dinky hallway.

“Halt or we will open fire!”

But it was too late for that. If they stayed here the unspeakable horrors would only repeat and nobody would help them. They had to help themselves.

The door was in sight. It sat unlit at the end of the hall, a minimal light outlining it in the dimness. There was one more shout.

A horrible pain blossomed in his chest and spread across his shoulders and arm. Stunned into pausing, Murdoc gasped sharply and clutched at his chest. His mind screamed at him in a frenzied chant.

Dying! Oh god I’m dying! I’m dying!

2D snatched his hand away from his chest and yanked roughly. He felt barely able to keep going, yet somehow managed to trip after the singer. Before he knew what happened they were all slamming into open air, a shower of bullets hitting metal. He almost couldn’t hear over the erratic thrum of his own heart.

“Go! Go!”

Things seemed to slow, which was ridiculous since time didn’t just do that. Murdoc saw the ground but didn’t register he was running or that his feet were hitting asphalt. Somehow it felt like watching from the sidelines, behind some glass cage or underwater.

Thee soldiers poured out of the exit after them, a couple stray bullets nearly nicking them while scrambling to get away. Russel gestured to the emergency vehicles the satanist mentioned and they all beelined. 2D grasped the bassist’s wrist firmly, jerking the man forward. And although his heart thumped excruciatingly fast, Murdoc sprinted.

The soft glow of a rising sun highlighted the closest ambulance, plus other emergency vehicles nearby. With bullets flying and feet smacking asphalt, Noodle nearly skid around the ambulance. She scrambled to yank the back open. 2D split off from Murdoc and nearly threw the guitarist into the back before jumping in himself. The satanist grit his teeth to pull himself into the driver side, hands shaking as he searched for keys. Simultaneously the passenger side door and back ones slammed shut.
“Get us outta here Murdoc before we’re pumped full of lead!”

Flipping the visor down, Murdoc jolted at keys hitting his face. He anxiously dug them into the ignition, cranking only to hear a dangerous sputtering noise that made all of them tense. With another twist the ambulance rumbled to life. Their victory was short lived when Russel’s window shattered, spraying glass all over the man. Murdoc jerked into drive and slammed his foot to the gas pedal.

Knocking about in the back, Noodle clung to some netting while the singer pressed himself to the opposite wall. The stretcher between them rattled loudly, thankfully locked in. Russel motioned forward.

“Don’t stop.”

Heeding the request, Murdoc spun the steering wheel. He planned to aim for the only weak area in the fencing. People scattered while some fired openly, but most were unable to stop the ambulance rocketing towards the gate. Russel shielded his face when they flew through the narrow area, people screaming as the two gates were obliterated. Metal cracked the windshield when it flung up into glass. Barbed wire caught onto the side mirror before screeching off with said mirror. The poor ambulance rattled with chunks of fence caught on the underside, dragging with them.

Thankfully the vehicle kept going, sending them hurdling further down the road. Further from the shit-show the military were running.

“Sound off. Whose alive?”


“Alive.”

2D groaned, laying in an uncomfortable position in the back. His lanky leg sticking up over the stretcher. The relief came out in Russel’s laugh, short but warm.

“Thank god.”

Murdoc wheezed, agonizingly aware he was reaching his limit of adrenaline fueled perseverance. Behind them the military ceased chase when groaning undead decided to use the opening. Although not many around, it was enough to overwhelm anyone from following the rag tag band. It put Russel at ease seeing it in the mirror.

From the back Noodle burst into hysterical laughter. 2D joined her, snickering as he righted himself. Luck seemed in their favor for the moment.

“I cannot believe that worked.”

“Neither can I. We actually pulled it off.” Russel nudged Murdoc when he noticed the other struggling. “you alright man?”

With continued giggling off and on, 2D and Noodle exchanged a couple murmurs at the back.

“Hey Muds, what’s wrong? You’re freaking me out with all that panting.”

Slumping into the steering wheel, Murdoc unintentionally caused the ambulance to veer right. Russel gave a high noise of shock, hands rushing over to catch the older man and grab for wheel.
“What the hell man?”

“Heart attack,” Murdoc gasped.

He succumbed to the intense pain traveling throughout his shoulders and chest. Everything became distant again, as if through a thick filter. Russel held Murdoc up via one hand while trying to wedge his foot between the cuban boots to slam the brakes.

“Noode, ‘D— Someone, help!”

The drummer straightened them out, arms straining to reach. He was alleviated of the satanist by 2D holding the man up.

The bassist groaned in agony, hand wrenching at his shirt. Russel bit at his lip finally managing to shove his foot into the brake pedal. Noodle bounced about in the back looking for something to aid for a medical emergency such as this.

When finally at a full stop and safely parked, Russel shucked his seat belt off and assisted the singer moving Murdoc to the back. Noodle shoved fallen medical items off the stretcher.

“What do we do?”

“AED, find an AED,” Noodle voiced, tossing items.

Fretting, 2D dug through the disarray of supplies. Russel watched on in distress, he was unable to offer help in a tight space.

2D gave a triumphant sound and waved the AED case frantically. Noodle took it, hands shaking as she tore it open and read over the instructions.

“How do we use it? Do we need a power source?”

Already close to complete heart failure the bassist moved his own shirt up feebly, beyond talking. He jabbed at his torso limply, the spots necessary for the device. Noodle set the AED up and flicked it on. When the machine did nothing she smacked it, panicked. 2D chewed his nails and Russel ran a hand over his head, anxiously looking around for anything to help. Noodle fiddled with the device, she flicked it on and off.

“He stopped breathing. Noodle! Noodle he stopped breathing.”

The guitarist flailed only to clutch her own hair. Her panic was overwhelming her.

“I— CPR,” she suggested.

“Okay, yeah— I can—”

The AED pulsed suddenly making the bassist’s body jolt partly. Noodle stared momentarily startled. When the device did it a second time the young woman leapt into action, she tilted the man’s head back listening for any breathing.

“What if he doesn’t make it?”

“Find a blanket or something warm to put on him.”

Noodle hovered over the older man and gave a flurry of specifically placed presses on his chest, between the pulses. A light sheen built on her face with the continued action, tiring her arms.
2D sniffed back tears to find a blanket. He grabbed an emergency one from behind some netting, settling it over Murdoc from the waist down. Russel held his breath, waiting anxiously for a positive sign. When Murdoc inhaled, sharp and ragged, Noodle gave an overjoyed cry. She hurried and removed the device, hugging the bassist in a rush of motion. Russel let his breath go in a grateful manner.

“Do not do that ever again! You stupid old fuck.”

2D joined the guitarist, hugging the satanist with her. Russel brushed his thumb over the corner of his eye chuckling tiredly.

“What the fuck is everyone laying on me for?” Murdoc garbled confused.

“You died,” Noodle cried. “Thought we lost you.”

“That all? No need for the water works.”

He patted at both of them, still too disorientated to be awkward. Noodle let a pathetic laugh slip out while wiping at her face firmly. She leaned off the man to check his pulse, attempting to put distance between the situation and her.

“I know we should rest given the circumstances, but we are not far from the base, yes?”

“Probably not far enough,” Russel answered.

“Maybe keep us on the go Russel, put as much distance between us and them as possible.”

“Alright.”

Russel slid himself into the driver seat, adjusting the wheel. He took a deep calming breath before getting into drive and pulling off the shoulder.

Busying herself, Noodle pulled the grey shirt in place and brought the emergency blanket further up over Murdoc. She petted at 2D’s hair cautiously.

“2D let us give him some space, pressing on his chest does not help matters.”

“Leave it.” Murdoc shook his head.

Noodle sighed and moved towards the front only for a hand to catch hers. Glancing at Murdoc she furrowed her brow bemused. He squeezed her palm, face morphing into silent gratitude. She shared a quirk of her lips, relieved, then returned the quick pressure on his hand before slipping away.

“Oh come now ‘D, you’re soaking my shirt.”

Smiling fondly to herself, Noodle joined Russel up front. The ambulance bumped along the road at a more sedate pace.

“Could go for rum.”

The guitarist rolled her eyes upon hearing that. Somehow she wasn’t surprised.

“Muds,” 2D whined, partially muffled. “You just died minutes ago.”

“Stop reminding me.”
“No Alcohol or drugs— none of it. Please lay off with your shit humor too and try recovering?”

2D sniveled and coughed while trying to suck in a proper breath. His voice was clearer now.

“Get back here you soppy idiot, making me feel crap for all the crying.”

Murdoc gathered 2D close, hugging the other awkwardly over the stretcher. Brushing blue hair from 2D’s face the satanist spoke softly.

“No more crying, I’m here. We’re both here, alive and kicking.”

For the rest of the journey towards an unknown destination the satanist contended with 2D. Although having finally cried enough, the singer occasionally sniffed, voice wobbling while discussing hushed topics with Murdoc. Neither Russel or Noodle knew what and felt it better not to ask either. Only as the dial on the gas meter ran lower and lower, trailing the path of the setting sun, did Russel choose to speak up.

“I hate to be the bearer of bad news but it’s getting dark.”

“We need to find shelter,” Noodle added.

An abortive noise escaped 2D before Murdoc appeared, hovering between Noodle and Russel. He held himself by the sides of the gap connecting the front and back.

“Where are we?”

“No clue man. Some town or a small city? Somewhere. We could hole up in a house but that runs the risk of zombies hiding inside.”

Noodle gestured at the passing homes. “Staying here will run risk of a horde, the noise from the ambulance has surely attracted attention even if we see nothing. Wherever we decide it will need to be on foot from here.”

“Sprog's right, we’ll be quick and maybe set the ambulance as a distraction.”

Sunset cast shadows over the foreign debris and Russel found it difficult to judge what was and wasn’t safe to drive over. He agreed with both musicians yet refused to stop. Part of him hoped to just stay in the moving vehicle, safe from harm. His wishes were denied and a short time later the four of them found themselves wandering haplessly through the suburbs. The Ambulance lay a good distance behind them, horn blaring. As it stood none of them noticed a soul, no zombies, animals and certainly no survivors. The neighborhood was devoid of life.

It was slow moving with no weapons. Everyone was on high alert for potential threats, but thus far they hadn’t run into anything.

“Maybe it’s cleared out?” 2D commented questioningly.

None of them answered and the utterance hung in the air. It was unspoken that making it anywhere safe was top priority.

Houses lined the streets on either side, barely lit up by fading sunlight. Most homes looked ransacked or open from people having fled. Toys and other common things laid strewn on spacious lawns, forgotten in the hurry. Noodle rubbed her arm, distraught at seeing children’s playthings laid in grass near a sprinkler. The device was giving a weak trickle of water, otherwise lacking the amount necessary for a stream. Some family vehicles remained permanently trapped in half opened
garages. Yet strangely there were no zombies scattered around.

Something clattered at the side of a home, indiscernible for them where the noise originated. They all turned in opposing directions, straining to see. With nothing to defend themselves, they pressed closer together, hoping this would somehow make them less appealing. Unexpectedly a dark cat came out from under a vehicle, trotting up to them meowing. The group gave a collective sigh of relief upon seeing the untidy cat. It purred curling it’s thin body around their legs, looking for attention and food.

“Poor creature,” 2D mumbled.

“Probably hasn’t eaten much for a bit.” Russel crouched, large hands scratching its head. “Practically skin and bones.”

The cat nuzzled into the man’s hand, purring loudly. Noodle looked around for any other animals or threats.

“Let us take a chance. That house there will do.” Noodle waved her hand.

Russel scooped the cat up, deciding then and there to aid the animal, it relaxed in his arms content to be carried and mostly exhausted. They approached the half open garage, cautiously entering the pitch black space. 2D released and worked the garage door closed, careful to be quiet. Once shut Russel let the cat down. The animal stuck close, purring still.

Despite no visible light for the others, 2D managed to see well enough. He moved with confidence and opened the door leading into the house.

“Let me check the interior,” 2D spoke. “I can see well enough.”

Murdoc made a noise of discomfort, unable to find the singer when he reached out for the taller.

“How about we go together?”

“I’m stronger now. If there’s something in there I can take care of it.”

“Please be careful 2D,” Noodle murmured.

Anxious, 2D nodded to himself before sliding into the house. He allowed the door to close behind him without noise. With no electricity running throughout he had to rely on his strange night vision. 2D crept through the house carefully, checking all the nooks and crannies for any surprises.

He found a pantry full of dry and canned goods. He gagged at the pungent scent of rotting vegetables in the fridge which sat ajar. Nudging it shut he proceeded, vacating the kitchen and headed upstairs. The third step from the top creaked and 2D paused to listen for any movement. He relaxed at no immediate sign of motion and continued. He checked through the rooms.

A momentary sadness washed over him at the sight of a lonely crib sitting among baby toys within the first room. He closed the door softly, resting his forehead on the wood. He hoped in vain that the family and baby were safe somewhere away from all this. Leaving the door he peeked in the remaining two rooms, a washroom and master bedroom. He found no lingering unwanted guests and so came down to thoroughly inspect the main floor. Upon finding nothing else of interest other than an office and guest room he made for the garage. Pushing the door open he poked in.

“It’s all clear.”
They wandered into the darkened home, mostly feeling around to avoid bumping things.

“Er— Hold up, I’ll grab matches or something.”

Digging through kitchen drawers and cupboards the singer snooped for some source of light. Stood about, the other three waited semi-patiently.

“Ah, here we are.”

A match was struck and fire highlighted the vocalist. Noodle used the opportunity to seek out a candle or something they could set on fire. She nearly tripped in her rush to snatch up a pillar candle among a motif centered on a coffee table. Before 2D shook out the match she slapped it down in front of him.

“There.”

“Thanks Noodle.”

Once capable with more light filling the surrounding area they spread out. Looting through cupboards Noodle found a makeshift way to create a contained fire inside some household items. With Russel’s help they cooked soup from dry ramen packets and bottles of water. Murdoc took it upon himself to open a can of tuna for their new, starving companion. The feline mowed down on the salty fish, clearly desperate for food.

He moved away and plonked himself into the sofa closest to the kitchen, sighing tired. Had there been proper lighting it would almost feel like vacation, renting out a strange home somewhere. Not that any of them shared vacations unless he counted Plastic Beach, though that would be an incredible stretch.

“How’re you feeling?”

2D joined him, sitting close to the older man.

“Like shit.”

“Does your chest hurt?”

“Course it does. I did have a heart attack.” he hadn’t meant to snap, but attested it to his agitation from said medical scare. He was reeling over the idea he’d been dead for who knew how long, a minute or two maybe, the thought was terrifying.

“Lets get you laid out, it might help.”

2D rose from the cushions and tugged decorative pillows off the furniture. He gestured for Murdoc to turn length wise. After more prompting, Murdoc huffed and shifted out until he was laying on his back. 2D simpered and plopped down next to the bassist’s upper torso on the ground. The vocalist rested his arm against the cushion and pressed a kiss to Murdoc’s shoulder.

“That feel better?”

“Sure.”

Running long fingers through dark fringe, 2D combed the hair back enough to see Murdoc’s entire face. He pressed his cheek to the other’s upper arm and began humming softly. It had been much too long a day, too harrowing with ups and downs, the worst being the incident in the ambulance.
His humming stuttered a moment when Murdoc returned the favor of petting his hair.

“Are you going to be able enough to eat Murdoc?” Noodle peered over the couch, bowl in hand.

“Yes.”

Russel appeared next, standing alongside Noodle. He scrutinized the two of them while eating his own soup.

“We should set up a guard rotation.”

“I can sit up. Been hard to sleep since getting sick,” 2D commented.

Nobody tacked on how the singers condition would remain until further notice. They had no way of managing it now since they left the airport.

“And we’ll need to start thinking ‘bout planning a route from here. We can deal with it in the morning since we’re all pretty wiped from today.”

“It has been an eventful day. Murdoc please use this time to rest, you of all of us need it most.”

“Yeah, yeah.”

Noodle came around to set the bowl nearby for the bassist before retreating. Russel eyed them a little longer, seemingly confused by something. Murdoc wanted to question the man but he moved away as well leaving 2D and him in the living room.

He motioned to the soup. “Pass it here.”

Following an impromptu dinner the other two musicians drifted off upstairs, seeking a bed to lay upon. The drummer had taken the feline friend to keep potential disturbances down and after some time it became apparent they were completely alone downstairs. Fire from candles lit the necessary areas, allowing them to sit in companionable comfort. Murdoc found laying out had merits and eased the pain developing in his chest. He forced 2D to settle so he could rest his legs over the singer’s thighs.

“Feeling any better now?”

Cracking an eye open to wearily glance at the vocalist, Murdoc sighed. “Some. Quit asking, starting to sound like a broken record.”

“Sorry.”

With both eyes closed once more, Murdoc shimmied himself closer to the edge of the sofa. 2D frowned, worried he would continue and fall off.

“C’mere ‘D, lay beside me.”

Taking the offer, 2D nestled in next to the bassist, his arm draped over the other’s waist.

“Been a busy week.”

“I’ll say.” 2D smiled against Murdoc’s shoulder. “Where are we suppose to go from here though?”

“Anywhere is better. Maybe home.”
Dr. Webber’s disembodied voice echoed in his head, he remembered her saying North America would be overtaken in short time. He was unsure sharing the unfortunate news was worth it. The satanist probably knew in the back of his mind. Ignorance sometimes was bliss and 2D chose to keep the information to himself.

“Try sleeping Muds. I’ll be here.”

“I can’t.”

There was a subtle fear in the man’s voice, the inkling of doubt he wouldn't actually wake. 2D moved his hand, resting it over the satanist’s chest, feeling the steady beat.

“I won’t let anything happen Muds, not again. Just close your eyes and I’ll sing for you.”

Discomforted Murdoc stared at the shadows caused by fire light, dancing along the ceiling. 2D hummed, soft and barely audible if the other wasn’t so close. Murdoc didn’t recognize the tune but he felt a coil within him unwound as he breathed out. Gentle words filled his ears while re-closing his eyes.

*Down by the river by the boats.*

*Where everybody goes to be alone.*

*Where you won’t see any rising sun.*

*Down to the river we will run.*

Mind drifting in and out, he clung to swaying words and fought off the anxiety lurking. He was uncertain when but he managed to fall asleep and remain so.

———

“We started here, the airport,” Russel spoke, beyond the couch. “I’d guess we’re about here. If it’s a boat we need then a straight path here should take us to the water front.”

“Couldn’t we make merry here forever? Make pretend.”

2D sounded despondent.

“I refuse to let this be my final resting place 2D,” Noodle groused. She added in a softer tone, “I know you dislike open water, but we need to make for Europe in some manner. If a boat fails then a plane.”

“Then lets take a plane, it’s quick and we’re not rocking ‘bout in a boat in the water. Please.”

“’D a boat won’t be so bad.”

Murdoc slowly sat up only to halt at the warm little ball of fur curled up on his lap. Rubbing sleep from his eyes he blinked at the cat before peering over the sofa. The other three were congregated among the kitchen island with some paper laid out. Patting the unnamed feline he displaced her from his lap and rose from the cushions.

“What’s this about a boat?”

“Morning Muds.”
“He lives.”

“We are discussing options for leaving North America. A boat is our best choice given the circumstances of our previous escape.” Noodle passed the satanist a bottle of water and granola bar.

Taking the items he leaned into the island via his hip and frowned.

“Why wasn’t I awoken for this? Seems like something the leader should have a say in.”

“You needed sleep. Eat and drink those, you need your strength as well.”

“Thank you mum,” Murdoc huffed. Noodle's stern look made him feel mildly guilty at the jab.

“What is our plan then? We boating across the ocean?”

“I hope not,” 2D said under his breath.

“If we could get a big enough vessel, yeah. We’re just charting a route to the water front. Might be a bit of a walk though.”

Nobody paid the singer any mind. Murdoc munched on the bar, finding it was actually rather tasty. Russel pointed to a outlined area on the paper, which happened to be a large map.

“I think we’re here.”

“Hm, you think it’s a five kilometre walk?”

Murdoc tapped the scribbled out math beside a line from their location to the water. Russel scratched at his neck and shrugged.

“More or less.”

“Do you think people are sick there too?”

The two guitarists and drummer paused to eye 2D.

“Nobody mentioned it spreading further than here,” Noodle replied. “Hopefully that is the case.”

“Dr. Webber said the East coast is gone. She also said it wouldn’t be long for North America to be consumed. For all we know this is a world wide epidemic.”

Rubbing a palm into 2D’s back between shoulder blades, Murdoc leaned nearer to the singer. 2D chewed on his finger nails, teeth tearing one down to skin.

“Quit that, no need for pessimism. That’s my gig.”

“If this is a world wide issue then we risk nothing by trying. It will be a fifty-fifty chance, I don’t know what else I can say. Staying put would be no safer than attempting to leave.”

“Y’know Sprog’s right Stuart, we need to move.”

“I know but— A plane is better innit? Safer? I just feel it would be better than a boat.”

A pensive look crossed Murdoc’s features before he contemplated how to proceed. Clearly 2D was apprehensive about crossing the open sea which was no surprise. Russel spoke up, beating the bassist to the punch.
“You’ll be safe man, none of us are gonna let anything happen to you. We need to stick together.”

Momentarily 2D fiddled his fingers before slumping in defeat. With everyone staring at him so intently he didn’t want to disappoint.

“Yeah, alright then. Boat it is.”

Should Europe be gone they would need to adapt. It was unsaid how stressed they were, constantly on the move as they were so after adjourning their plans Noodle suggested staying put for a bit, allow them to fully catch their breath. Shockingly, Murdoc agreed and the decision was final. Their feline companion chose that time to hop onto the counter, startlingly all of them.

Russel scooped the cat up and Murdoc folded up the map. They could run over the idea later or tomorrow once they were capable.

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Passing around plates with crackers, canned peas and string beans piled on, Noodle sighed. They had already spent well over nine days cooped up in the vacant home. The longer they stayed the harder leaving felt. Given that the previous owners had prepared for something they were lucky enough to have supplies, but as time went those were shrinking.

Sat around the living room coffee table Russel shuffled a deck of cards, highlighted by the varies candles and battery powered lights. At day four they covered all the windows with spare blankets to avoid unwanted guests, it made the house seem more dreary.

“So what’re we betting this time?” Murdoc eyed the peas with a grimace.

Noodle took a seat opposite 2D and Murdoc, next to Russel. Kraken, their aptly named black feline joined Noodle moments later, curling up against her thigh. The creature was gaining back necessary weight and looking slightly better.

“How ‘bout we exchange memories, something funny or embarrassing. Whoever loses has to share one.”

“How— That doesn’t even work. Three people lose each round.”

“Then three of us gotta share something.”

“Fine, sounds utterly stupid.”

2D being unable to handle regular food opted for a cup of tea, which he sipped at occasionally. Noodle took her cards when dealt them and glanced at them. Murdoc nudged 2D somewhat hard and the singer sloshed his drink.

“What was that for?”

“Get your cards and stop staring into your tea like its got the answers to life.”

Grumbling while setting it aside the vocalist snatched up his cards and fanned them out. Russel leaned back some and moved his cards around, his tongue peeking out in concentration. Had she not known any of these men she could say this was casual behavior. However seeing as she did know them she could see clear agitation and an urge for something more. Movement caught her attention and she watched Murdoc hide his cards in one hand to peer over at 2D’s.
“That’s cheating Muds,” 2D snarked while pressing the cards to his own chest. “Bugger off.”

“Just making sure you know how to play is all.”

“I’ll have you know I can play many card games just fine. Go-fish, war… pick up fifty-two.”

“Pick up— Stuart that isn’t a game.”

“You said it was. Not a very fun game, always made me pick them up,” 2D huffed.

“Well,” Murdoc started, voice suave, “mostly did it to watch you scramble about on all fours.”

Noodle eyed them, the satanist was rather close to 2D, his free arm wound around the singer. She squinted, a disgruntled expression claiming her features when she realized they were flirting. Russel seemed to have a similar conclusion and cleared his throat, making the first move. From there they seemed to come out of their ritual and the game proceeded.

Card games were a momentary distraction from the hell storm brewing outside, but following another six nights of hovering about in a foreign home the cabin fever started to disrupt them. Minor arguments or disagreements flooded daily conversation and most often they would split off to stew alone.

Sleeping arrangements had been split into shifts, Russel suggesting someone be awake to keep a watch or listen for any potential threats at all times. It became routine after almost two weeks. They became complacent, too comfortable with being indoors yet antsy to leave. Trapped as they were was better than facing the odds outside. Things would have carried on had the proverbial dam not broken. On day sixteen 2D snapped, surprising the other three.

“I can’t do it anymore!”

Murdoc jolted next to the man having been flipping through an outdated magazine.

“Can’t we leave? We’ve been here practically two weeks, I thought we had a plan?”

Slapping the booklet closed, Murdoc tossed it aside. “We do—”

“So lets do it. Find water, find a boat and sail away. I’m fine with that, please, I can’t be cooped up anymore I’m losing my mind.”

At that point the singer stood and paced erratically while gesturing wildly with his hands. From the kitchen island Noodle and Russel watched on in bewilderment.

“I’ll put up with the ocean if it means leaving.”

“What happened to playing house?” Murdoc also observed the vocalist mildly baffled.

“Ugh,” 2D groaned. “I can’t. I need to move and see something other than the inside of this damn house!”

Looking over at Noodle and Russel, Murdoc gave them a hapless shrug, unsure what to do. Both band-mates nodded towards 2D hastily pivoting around the living room, urging the satanist.

“Get him to cool it,” Noodle commented. “Might attract attention.”

Irked at being dumped with the responsibility Murdoc abruptly got up and grabbed 2D’s wrist, dragging him out of the general vicinity. Down the darkened hallway the singer tensed as
everything morphed into those far away metallic halls. Mildew clinging to crevasses and the tinny echo of cyborg distantly behind him.

“S-stop, I don’t wanna sing again!”

“What in the hell are you on about? I’m not taking you off to sing you dolt.”

Murdoc paused and turned towards him. The other was wearing black clothing not a white jumper or ridiculous sailors hat.

“Sorry I— sorry.”

The palm on his wrist shifted to hold his hand and Murdoc gently tugged him into the main floor guest room. Light streamed in through the partly closed curtains brightening the pastels of the room. They had seemingly forgotten this window. Murdoc brought him to the small double bed and flopped onto it. Their connected hands caused the vocalist to join him, they bounced a moment before it settled.

“What’s got you in a tizzy?”

“Don’t like being confined to quarters, it’s too similar…” 2D left his sentence unfinished, sure Murdoc understood given his earlier lapse.

“We’ll leave tomorrow, okay?”

“Thank you.”

2D swallowed, he was still antsy and sought a distraction from the closely hovering memories of the beach. With the afternoon light filtering in it highlighted them with pastel colors. He glanced at Murdoc, admiring the man relaxed into the bed next to him. Mismatched eyes peered at him.

“What?”

“You look really good in this lighting.”

Murdoc stared at the singer, face set in an unreadable expression. Leaning further in 2D cupped Murdoc’s face, encouraged when the bassist didn’t tug away. 2D dipped his head in and kissed the man. He kept it slow, barely creating any heat between them. Palms settled on 2D's hips, urging him closer until the vocalist took the hint. Straddling Murdoc he kissed harder, eyes pinched as he tried to force the surfacing imagery away.

Further spurred on by massaging of his hips, 2D slid one hand into greasy hair. He pulled until Murdoc arched his neck for him. He held tight to dark hair and watched the satanist a moment, examining him before bringing his mouth down against the prone neck. Fingers dug into his waist but still Murdoc didn’t pull away. A twisted thought clouded his mind. He could kill the satanist right then and there.

“Does it make you nervous?”

“No.”

He grazed his teeth against Murdoc’s pulse, feeling it jump. Despite the obvious yet slight panic coursing through the other, he remained where he was, trapped under the singer. 2D attested it to the spectacular erection digging into his backside and snickered, dark thoughts fading away with the prior memories.
“Have a thing for me being like this?”

“Shut up.”

Grinding against the bulge he hummed in delight hearing Murdoc’s breath catch.

“Excited much?”

“Fuck off.”

Murdoc huffed tiredly while 2D loosened his hold and toyed with his hair. The singer shifted to rest his head under the satanist’s chin, ear against his chest. Murdoc relaxed marginally but sneered at the ceiling.

“Why’d you stop?”

“Noodle and Russ are a room over and we’re loud. This is nice though.”

“Cock tease is what you are.”

“Don’t be a whiner,” 2D muttered.

It hadn’t felt right exerting power of the satanist given his advantage thanks to a viral alteration. He listened intently to the heart beating beneath his ear. It soothed the confusing mess of memories and feelings and he breathed in time to the pace. Murdoc relaxed further and grumbled while bringing a hand up to rub the singer’s neck.

2D bitterly thought it unfair his favored pastimes were ruined by the illness. He was finally calm and tired yet couldn’t find sleep. Even closing his eyes and focusing on the thump of Murdoc’s heart did little to put him under. He recognized the evening of the other’s breathing and sighed to himself. He hated being left to his thoughts when the other three slept and contemplated leaving Murdoc. Part of him enjoyed being privy to the vulnerable side of the satanist, that he was trusted to an extent to see it. Shifting to the side he kept his head planted on the rising and falling chest, deciding to pretend for a moment they were on a romantic getaway.

At the dawn of a fresh day they ran through their plans once more and prepared for the journey. Russel packed them supplies yet again and latched up Kraken to a dog harness while Noodle folded their map up. Murdoc set out some heavy handed tools good for close encounters then tied up the hiking boots he nicked from the previous owner.

“We all set on where to head?”

“We only have six bottles of water so we might have to stop somewhere,” Noodle replied. “Otherwise it should be a straight shot.”

Nodding, Murdoc lowered his foot and rolled his shoulders. Russel slid on his pack, clipping the waist buckle on. He tugged down on the shirt and sweater jacket to cover his arms. Although the four of them appeared prepared for the world at large wearing their moderately armored clothing, they had no idea what to expect. Noodle and 2D put on their own packs and the guitarist grabbed up the wrench sitting on the island. The four of them opted for thicker clothes that covered most areas of skin and facial coverings as an added measure.

“What’s our plan if separated?” Murdoc buttoned the cuffs of the black jean coat, to protect his wrists.
“We all have map books with the emergency location circled,” Russel commented. “Should we get split we head there and wait twenty-four hours.”

“What’s the location?”

“Fire station,” three of them spoke in unison.

“Good. Times a wasting, lets get outta here.”

Playing house had been enjoyable despite close quarters bringing about disagreements. There had been no interruptions from the undead which was the ultimate blessing.

Russel snatched up the hatchet leaving an aluminum bat and hammer. Murdoc attempted to be polite and give 2D the option of the longer weapon, but the singer took the hammer. Surprised the satanist took the bat.

As if to answer the unasked question, 2D spoke up, “with my new strength I don’t really need a weapon.”

Nobody mentioned how uncomfortable that information made them. Before losing more day light they exited the home cautiously. It was a pleasantly bright day with the sun sat high in the sky and not a zombie hovered in the area. Nothing could possibly make it a bad day, nothing.

Chapter End Notes

I would like to dedicate this chapter to my amazing boyfriend who on a tiring, late night shift together jokingly gave me the brilliant ideas on the great escape, including the unfortunately timed heart attack.

EDIT 12/22/18 - Between a major power outage and work/xmas this chapter took way longer to revise than I intended. Anyways I changed up some parts to give the story more bulk. It's still dedicated to my amazing BF since I kept the heart attack!

As always I thank people for the comments and kudos! I appreciate it so much!
Whoever said today would be good was a terrible liar. The sun rose steadily higher causing an increase in heat. Rising temperatures, at almost an unbearable level, had them pause under shade. Catching their collective breaths they held out for a short while until high noon passed. Divesting outer layers in favor of comfort in the oddly high Spring heat quickly became an unfortunate choice. The first bought of cloudy cover soon gave way to sprinkling rain, that seemed a blessing, but rapidly turned to torrential downpour. It was as though the heavens were mocking them, deterring them from continuing. Avoiding being further waterlogged they ducked into a recently looted store front and stood within the entry. Ever present in their minds was linger threats in and around the darkened corners of the store. The rain didn't let up for hours and uneasily they gave in and plunked down, thoroughly displeased.

In the eve of morning the skies seemingly ended their torrent, leaving the land soaked. With skies clear the four of them hastily packed up, tired yet hasty to avoid being caught in such an open area. Another day greeted them and with it came more heat. They tramped through small puddles and mucky piles of varies paper materials. Everything was drying out into a mix of garbage heaps. Today was an easier journey with the weather playing in their favor.

“Do you think it’s okay in Europe?” 2D startled the other three, speaking after a day long silence.

“One can only hope.”

Neither Noodle or Russel had anything to add and the conversation was dropped then and there. Their walk to the waterfront took another day after getting detracted from the original route due to zombies. When they reached the location it was desolate and void of any sea fairing vehicles. In the rush after outbreak it appeared people fled the country by any means necessary. It left them in a pickle and meant they might need to travel even further to find a boat.

Noodle kicked a few rocks while they stood there at the ocean front, despondent. Their new feline
companion mewed softly, twisting herself between legs while purring. Her cord kept getting tangled on their legs. Originally opposed to keeping her, Murdoc had broke his own decision and named the cat Kraken after a specific brand of black rum. Said man dug out a near empty carton of smokes and a scuffed purple lighter. As he lit up the other three stole a smoke each, emptying the carton completely.

“Wonderful,” grunted Murdoc as he crushed the case.

“We can grab more later,” Noodle said. She snatched the lighter as well and got her own cigarette going, then offered it to Russel.

The breeze off the ocean was salty and rather powerful, ruffling hair and clothing. Blowing out into the wind, Murdoc sighed. Their plans hadn’t panned out and now they were here. He caught 2D hesitating to smoke from his periphery.

“Will you quit that. It isn’t going to kill you.”

“I don’t know how anything will effect me now. I have to be careful.”

“It’s a fag, you’ve smoked probably thousands, isn’t going to do any worse than what you have now.”

Muttering under his breath, 2D brought it up and took a drag. He waited a moment before breathing out, shoulders drooping as his body relaxed. Smacking 2D in the back a bit roughly, Murdoc chuckled with the following coughs.

“There you go.”

“Prick,” 2D huffed.

Despite their exchange, two moderately fond smiles were shared before Russel cleared his throat.

“Could keep going along the beach till we find a boat.”

“What’s the point?” Noodle rubbed her eye while she smoked. “We’re tired, hungry, and have wandered from place to place since this shit show happened. At this point we are no further than before.”

Russel finished his cigarette first, dropping it and mashing it out under his sole.

“Could always set up shop somewhere, make a life in the ruins.”

“Fuck that,” Murdoc all but growled, distaste strong in his words.

“You rather we keep meandering till we either die of starvation or infection? Both sound pretty shit man.”

2D listened to them talk among themselves, quietly working on his own smoke. He felt more lethargic as the days wore on. He wasn’t sure why. Entertaining a brief thought it was due to his mutated infection, Murdoc nudged him, jolting the thought away.

“Well?”

“Huh? I wasn’t listening, sorry.”

Murdoc rolled his eyes, irritated. “I asked you what you prefer? Find a boat or play house?”
Part of him wanted to return to England, but the thought of being on some vessel in the middle of the Atlantic terrified him. He shuddered at the thought of creatures in the depths; whales namely.

“Can’t we stay here, maybe give it some time? Someone will come— has too come to help in rebuilding or what not. S’how it works in the movies.”

Noodle flicked her half finished smoke into the water, crouching to scoop Kraken up. She pat the cat softly. “So two against two. Let us flip a coin.”

The satanist waved a hand dismissively, growing frustrated. 2D fiddled with the hem of his borrowed, now his, pull-over. His smoke remained forgotten where dropped. Russel dug through his bag, crouching to find what he wanted. Pulling out a change purse he produced a quarter.

“Why the fuck do you have that?”

“I figured money might be useful if we found other survivors.”

“Monetary value vanished when zombies happened.”

“Shut up, I thought it might be handy, now it is. Heads we keep looking for a boat since you refuse the use of a plane.” Russel received a withering look. “Tails we stay here till we find another opportunity to leave.”

Noodle continued to cuddle Kraken, standing nearer to Murdoc since they both desired leaving. 2D stood by and watched in bated silence. Russel flicked the quarter into the air and they all followed it down as it landed tails up. The drummer looked at Murdoc and Noodle.

“Guess we’re staying for a bit.”

“Fuck.” Murdoc turned away. His tone rose into a sarcastic drawl, “just fucking dandy. Lets go play house till we die.”

Kicking a pile of pallets, Murdoc gave an abortive noise with pain brought on by the abuse. Fiddling his fingers, 2D observed the agitated satanist, moderately concerned at the reaction. Noodle sighed from beside him.

“Let us find a secluded building or home to convert into a base of operations. Something within driving distance, that way we can drive in should we need supplies.”

“Good plan,” Russel commented while rearranging his pack.

“Yeah, fucking great. I may as well throw myself to the fishes at this point.”

“Will you quit your bitching, Muds. None of us are thrilled but we’re making do with whatever.”

2D contemplated mentioning his condition to sway the decision. He didn’t know if he would remain stable as he was now for however long they stayed put. What if he attempted to eat his friends like he almost did to Russel? Chewing his nails, 2D fretted in silence as the group proceeded on.

In the hours afterwards they made use of their remaining day to gather stock and jam pack four vehicles. They detoured from the city center when the commotion attracted attention. They drove for a day an a half before finding a farm stead sat on a large property of fields where tall grass had claimed the space.
A single massive tree resided near the home, shading a portion of the building. Upon pulling up the dirt driveway and hopping out to inspect, it was quickly apparent nobody was within. It appeared as though no one had vacated the place in years. Paint was chipping from the once white paneling and the screen door hung awkwardly from a hinge. The home clearly had seen better days. The steps leading to the door creaked dangerously and for a moment they worried the whole place would collapse. 2D stood back from the building, shielding his face to eye the entirety. He could imagine in its heyday the house was stunning with the pristine white paint and quaint, picturesque farm surrounding it. Despite their misgivings about the place, it would have to do.

Days blurred together as the four of them, sans Kraken, worked tirelessly to zombie proof the home and make it comfortable. Both survivors and zombies seemed unaware of their presence, a small grace. 2D felt his energy slipping as late Spring drifted into Summer. When Murdoc prodded him into explaining the nature of his behavior, the singer had no words for it. He was just increasingly tired.

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At the month mark being on the farm stead, early in the morning sometime in July, 2D collapsed. He made such a ruckus that the other three sleeping occupants scrambled to the scene with weapons drawn clad only in underpants to discover the unconscious vocalist. Uncharacteristically worried, Murdoc rushed to the fallen man’s side and shifted 2D onto his back to check his pulse. A small relieved noise escaped the satanist while holding 2D, who remained uncomfortably still.

“He’s alive.”

Russel relaxed and rested a hand over his chest.

“Damn, I thought for sure one of ‘em got in.”

“He's very still,” Noodle observed.

Feeling over 2D's head, Murdoc frowned as his fingers mussed up blue hair.

“I don’t feel any injuries.”

“Lets move him to the couch.”

Nodding, Murdoc got assistance carrying the limp singer down to the living room couch. 2D was deposited gently, laid out as though sleeping. The three got a couple candles lit and stood around the unconscious man.

“Maybe it was a mild bump that put him out?” Russel gestured helplessly.

Murdoc leaned in and pinched at the bit of exposed skin on 2D’s side. At no reaction he pulled away suddenly anxious the man was in a coma again.

“It must be from the illness,” Noodle spoke, “there's no other plausible reason for his collapse. He complained of fatigue and other strange sensations. I should have paid more attention. This might be some sort of hibernation.”

“Hibernation?” Murdoc rubbed his neck. “From the virus?”

Instead of answering him, Noodle rushed back upstairs. Both men stood in silent confusion until the young woman returned dressed. In the midst of tucking her weapon away she dug keys from a pocket.
“I will return in a day or so.”

“Whoa,” Murdoc huffed, “where are you off too? We’re in the middle of a minor crisis and it’s pitch black out.”

Noodle tucked her hair into a bandana while listening. She planned to go regardless of dispute.

“There was a medical facility, a laboratory, and in it there are probably pieces of equipment I can use for study. We have no idea what is happening to 2D and I honestly forgot it was even an issue until now. It cannot be left any longer.”

“Noodle you can’t go off on your own, what if something gets you? We should always go in pairs or something. C’mon man, tell her.”

Russel urged Murdoc to back him up but the satanist flitted between looking at Stuart and the former guitarist, worrying his bottom lip. It never needed saying how far Murdoc was willing to go to keep the ex-singer safe and here in the living world. When the satanist remained in a state of flux over the circumstances, Russel sighed, deep and grave sounding.

“I promise to be careful. I will return.”

Giving Noodle a resolute nod, Russel watched her leave. Both heard the car she had chose start up and pull away.

“She’ll be fine.”

“She better be,” Russel ground out. “Your… thing with ‘D better not be our downfall.”

“I’m concerned,” Murdoc shot back.

“You’re sick with it. I see how you are man, constantly at him.”

“Would you rather I be screaming at him? Drunk off my arse and belligerent? I never seem to have a happy medium with you lot for fuck sake.”

Scrubbing his face, Russel shook his head quickly. None of them were sleeping or eating properly. The stress was raising tensions between them with close quarters.

“Sorry.”

Sensing the shift in Russel, Murdoc blew out, deflating rapidly. They didn’t need to be at each other, they were a team. Now more than ever.

“S’fine.”

“I’m gonna try sleeping. Don’t hover too long man.”

Waving the former drummer off, Murdoc situated himself on the sofa. He re-positioned 2D’s legs over his lap and settled in for a long night.

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Sometime in the early twilight of dawn Murdoc found himself roused at the odd sensation of someone pressing their nose in his hair. He was unaware when he had drifted off. Batting the person away, irritated and dazed with lingering sleep, he yelped at teeth chomping onto his palm. Instantly alert, Murdoc knew whose teeth if the gap was anything to go off of. Unable to see the
ex-singer he pulled on his hand. The teeth dug harder into his flesh, surprisingly not breaking skin, followed by an inhuman growl.

Digging fingers between the gap he pried at 2D's upper jaw, startled to find it extremely difficult forcing the man's mouth open. Murdoc found himself pinned suddenly, a lanky yet heavy body practically pressing him to the couch. His hand was still trapped between uneven teeth. Real panic set in when it seemed 2D had no intention of relenting.

“Stuart let my hand go you daft idiot!”

2D responded by making uniquely zombie like gurgles around his palm. Murdoc forced himself to remain calm despite his worse fears being presented. He kept telling himself the vocalist hadn't actually harmed him. Yet. He squirmed at a somewhat cool tongue running over the underside of his hand.

“C’mon now, I can’t taste too good.”

A long moment passed where he almost thought he'd have to beat the vocalist off. 2D thankfully lessened the pressure, comprehending just who he was attempting to eat. Murdoc jerked his hand away, rubbing the skin anxiously. He was still utterly trapped against the cushions. With the darkness and weight his panic grew as did his breathing.

“Stuart.”

Despite the waver to his voice, Murdoc strove to sound demanding. However he was rewarded with 2D burying into where his neck and shoulder met.

“What are you doing?”

2D continued to stay mute, creating an awkward silence between them. Murdoc wiggled, making a feeble attempt at escaping the oppressive atmosphere as much as the lanky body atop him.

“Sorry Muds.”

With 2D’s voice a wave of relief washed over him. Murdoc stopped moving and relaxed under the other only so much, moderately glad to hear some normalcy from the ex-singer.

“Don’t do that shit. I thought— never mind. Get off of me.”

“Can’t,” 2D strained.

“Why in the hell not? Just move, you’re squishing me.”

A deep guttural groan emitted from 2D, near to Murdoc's ear. Heart jumping the panic came back full force. 2D's mouth was dangerously close to his vulnerable neck and with a quick movement the vocalist could kill him. Unable to fight off the flight or flight, Murdoc attempted to shove an arm into the other's chest. It was too much and having a pressure over his body made horrible memories resurface. He was too sober for this.

“Stuart you’re literally crushing me. Get off. Now.”

“I'm so hungry right now and you smell great,” 2D bemoaned.

The minor fight put 2D into a worse mood and rapidly the satanist found himself toppling off the couch with the other. 2D growled and before Murdoc made his escape a bony hand griped his calf
and with such force he was yanked across the floor. Shocked into momentarily stillness, Murdoc jolted back into shielding himself when the taller came over him, hands haltingly grabbing at his shirt. In some farcical form of warning, 2D clicked his teeth and leaned in far too close. Murdoc gagged at pungent breath. He waited, desperately hoping it was either a quick death or nothing came of it. Maybe he deserved this.

Swallowing audibly, the satanist stayed put, sweating anxiously. Whatever mental battle 2D was fighting seemed to taper off and finally the dangerously close mouth was removed from his jugular. The vocalist contemplated the former musician, regret instantly replacing the strange haze he stumbled out of.

“Oh— Muds, I… I didn’t mean.”

2D hastily climbed off the other, shame washing over him at the behavior.

Scrambling back, Murdoc gulped loudly and coughed out a nervous laugh. 2D gnawed on his lip, watching the other in the dark. Although Murdoc couldn’t see 2D, the ex-singer could see Murdoc. He plainly saw the lingering panic.

“Please, I’m sorry. I don’t know what happened, I just—”

“Don’t. Just... It’s fine.”

Murdoc took a ragged breath through his mangled nose and fought the instinct to flee. 2D kept his distance.

“You’re aware now, back to you yeah?”

“Sort of.”

“We’ll worry about semantics tomorrow.”

“I’m sorry Muds.”

“You better.”

That sounded more like Murdoc, which caused 2D to roll his eyes. He sat near the older man, not touching. Both were quiet while Murdoc came down from his anxiety. Only when capable of steady breaths did the shorter man urge 2D up from the floor, hesitant to fully touch the other. 2D

...
noticed and slumped, glad the dark hid his reaction. Heading upstairs, 2D parted ways for his own temporary room. Secretly hoping Murdoc would offer sharing. Less surprised by the satanist ducking into the opposite room and closing the door softly, 2D disappeared into his. After the little mishap the older man had every right to avoid him. Sighing despondent, 2D leaned into the door once closed. He was a monster.

Murdoc laid in bed alone and wide awake. He knew closing his eyes all he'd see was 2D, deranged, biting and clawing him. Bringing a hand over his face he took a shuddering breath. He was the monster, not the vocalist. Yet for the life of him, he couldn’t see it that way.

Following her hasty departure, Noodle returned in due time in the following two days. Toting a large box of lab equipment and medical books she hurried to set it on the kitchen table. Peering around the open archway to the living room she was mildly startled to see 2D missing from the sofa. Kraken looked at her from said furniture, ears perked.

“Where is everyone?”

The cat made a small noise before unwinding to stretch. Noodle stepped into the space to pet the black feline, concerned the men seemed absent. Kraken purrs stopped when the guitarist walked past and disappeared into a mud room. The door was wide open and from the entry point Noodle could see both Russel and Murdoc tromping through tall grass. Cocking her head baffled she headed outside.

Forgetting the dangers of too much noise, Noodle hollered to the other two, “what are you two doing? Where is 2D?”

Murdoc jerked at her appearance and grunted to cover his surprise.

“Nice to see you too, Sprog.”

“2D?”

“Currently searching.”

“What do you mean? Where has he gone?”

“Woke to find him missing today. Not a clue where he’s disappeared too, didn’t leave a note.”

Russel waved to both of them, catching their attention. He approached them, 2D in tow. The vocalist stumbled along, face slack and eyes white with a haze.

“Thank satan,” Murdoc muttered.

“He was over by the tree line, don’t know why. Hasn’t said a word.”

Russel gently tugged 2D further into the flattened spot of grass. He waved a hand in front of 2D getting no reaction. Noodle mirrored Murdoc, both sharing a furrowed look.

“C’mere Stu. Enough of your stupidity, gave us a right scare wandering off.”

Taking 2D’s wrist, Murdoc jerked the vocalist somewhat roughly. 2D stared off into the middle distance, blank, seemingly unaware of the gesture. Murdoc silently fought the urge to smack the lack of expression. After their altercation he took to avoiding 2D until today and even still he felt a
minor spike of fear upon touching the other. Russel peered at him questioningly. Murdoc avoided the look and thanked Noodle mentally for deterring further investigation from the ex-drummer.

“Let us take him in. Clearly somethings wrong,” Noodle said, nodded her head to the farm house. “I will take a sample and see what I can discern.”

Leading 2D into the house was a tenuous process when the singer kept trying to turn around towards where the trees sat. Murdoc kept an arm around the lanky man, forcing him into the home once they reached it. Russel closed and locked the door and once 2D was situated in the living room, Noodle retrieved something from the box.

“I have a few textbooks on viruses and the human body. I don’t know how much I can figure out from that alone, but I will make an attempt.”

She held the book up, one of three from the box.

With reluctant nods, Russel and Murdoc escorted 2D to a side room off the kitchen. Setting the singer in a chair they proceeded to assist Noodle in setting up a makeshift lab within the confines of the small office. It only took an hour of continued fiddling and positioning for the three of them to become overly warm. 2D remained unaffected, sat in a chair staring off into space. Noodle shooed the men out and they all broke off to relax in varies spots to cool off.

The day passed sluggishly. Heat from the summer sun warmed the home to extremes and without air conditioning or electricity it was all the worse. Near supper time they all found it cooler to hide under the tree rather than stay cooped inside. 2D was kept close, Murdoc had fingers wound into 2D’s belt loops just in case the man decided to run off. At the continued lack of response, Murdoc felt himself relax a little more around the vocalist.

“This is ridiculous, we need something to cool off. At this rate we’ll all suffer heat stroke before August.”

“I could construct a shower outside,” Russel suggested.

“I would help but I should put my focus into 2D.”

Conversation drifted off as night coated the skies. None of them had the energy to discuss anything and when capable they divvied off to their rooms. Murdoc hesitated in dragging 2D to his room, anxious the man would assault him again. In the end they shared despite the fear.

———

Noodle poured over textbooks and the lab equipment for days, sweat slicking her forehead and face. It was in all the worse places, running down her back, distracting from the words in front of her. Groaning, frustrated, Noodle slapped the book closed and leaned back in the chair.

“This is pointless.”

“What’s pointless?”

Tilting her head further back she eyed Murdoc upside down in the doorway. The man was wearing just shorts, clearly striving to stay cool. At this given time none of them had concerns over appearance.

“The samples don't conform to a standard pathology. It's viral but that is all I can figure out. I cannot even hazard an educated guess to what it means or what it's doing.”
Pursing his lips, Murdoc ventured further into the office and stopped beside Noodle. He peered at the books strewn next to the equipment. Without prompting the satanist made to grab a sample to hold up.

“No touching that.” Noodle smacked the bassist away. “I cannot have you tampering anything.”

“When did you learn to do this shit?”

“During time between albums and tours where we weren't on speaking terms.”

Murdoc gave her a sour expression. She righted herself with a sigh.

“It’s in the past. Where is Russ?”

“Working on his shower contraption.”

“2D?”

“Bedroom.”

The floor boards creaked behind them. With alarming speed both of them whipped around prepared to fight only to find 2D standing there. The vocalist rubbed at his face, appearing tired.

“2D? You are awake.”

“Hungry,” 2D voiced slowly, wavering where he stood.

An awkward yet tense silence settled between them. Noodle rocked the chair a bit, swiveling to face 2D.

“You have not attacked any of us so you are managing yourself well.”

Neither Murdoc nor 2D spoke of the incident from a couple nights ago.

“I won’t—I wouldn’t hurt you guys.”

“Well, until we can be certain, maybe you should stay in the room. For our safety.” She motioned unhelpfully.

“C’mon then,” Murdoc grunted. He ushered the singer from the office. Almost manhandling 2D, the satanist took the other back upstairs.

Murdoc nudged the door open on the room they were currently sharing. It hadn’t been easy squeezing onto the double, but the home sported nothing bigger. Forcing 2D to sit on the bed, Murdoc backed up towards the door.

“Muds I’m still sorry about before.”

Halting at the door he sighed. He had no right playing victim even if for one startling moment he had been. Murdoc plopped onto the bed a minute later.

“I know you’re sorry.”

“You keep avoiding me,” 2D started, “which I can’t blame you for I guess.”

“I’ll make a concentrated effort not to avoid you.”
2D pecked Murdoc on the cheek. He grasped the hand resting on Murdoc’s lap. The older man clenched his teeth.

“Truce?”

“Truce. You better not eat me, I swear.”

“I won’t. Probably wouldn’t taste too good,” 2D laughed.

Huffing in humor, Murdoc shouldered the other man. He stayed with 2D until the man slipped back into an unconscious state. Murdoc was aware the other would wake in a haze. Every other time he would leave, this time he stayed and pet at blue hair carefully.

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Days became weeks. Weeks became months. Before any of them noticed, the weather was dipping into cooler temperatures. October started and Noodle was no closer to figuring out 2D’s condition. Living among the fields away from civilization had pitfalls and bonuses. Kraken regained her health and they made routines, anything to keep from slipping.

They made the farm house their own, playing out some mockery of house. Murdoc found the monotony laborious on his mind, finding no way to alleviate it other than to write in journals he found during bi-weekly raids. He was slowly sliding into a state of sobriety he never imagined achievable having ran out of smokes one month in. Strangely it improved his mental state well enough. The other two found it greatly helped conversation and game nights.

Noodle with her make shift laboratory in the small office off the living room, studied samples day in and day out. The conditions for study were unsanitary, but she couldn’t do any better. The heat during Summer also made slaving over equipment difficult. She found focusing intently on reading textbooks and blood increasingly hard. Russel suggested raiding a hardware store for plastic sheeting to seal the area, she deemed it more work than necessary. The drummer had left that debate alone, focusing on Kraken and making life moderately easier without electricity. Somehow they managed despite snapping at one another off and on.

Occasionally they found new ways to entertain themselves, card games, raiding stores, fireworks, really just anything to keep the draw for self destruction at bay. They even took up instruments in a visit to a music store. Russel found building things for their duration at the farm home created a moderately fun environment. Even Murdoc found methods of keeping distracted during the apocalypse.

However as the days came and went 2D became less active with fewer lucid moments. He would sleep for days on end, somehow remaining as normal as one could while infected. This feature of their new life was the only struggle. Other days the singer would actively wander the house or fields nearby the home, aimless and unaware he was doing so. Occasionally when 2D slipped away the bassist would come into the kitchen harried, scrambling to find the singer. Both Russel and Noodle decided after the fifth time to tie the taller man to a cord so he didn’t disappear entirely. Today was such a day.

Noodle used some string to play with Kraken, leaning on the kitchen table while snickering at the cat. Lingering Summer heat left her too drained to work on the 2D situation. Russel was trying to
construct a greenhouse alone in the front yard, thankfully shaded by the home. In a daze 2D hobbled by the drummer his hand crafted cord leash dragging behind him, hooked around his waist.

“Hey ’D, how’re you holding out buddy?” Russel wiped his brow, glancing to the blue haired man.

The ex-singer mumbled incoherently stumbling off. Today wasn’t a lucid day Russel assumed. He shrugged and resumed working on the wood frame. Despite the lack of electricity and running water, it became essential for them to make something similar to an outdoor shower. It served its purpose despite how horrible it was. At least they could be clean and have a way to keep morale up. Russel was proud of his handiwork regardless of complaints. The front door opened to reveal Murdoc brandishing a towel, soap and a hand cloth. Russel raised a brow in question.

“Not for me,” Murdoc responded as he crouched.

He grabbed up the long cord, yanking the thick line until the singer came back around the house towards him. Russel nodded in understanding.

“C’mere Stu. Feels like I’m taking after a fucking dog.”

“He’s not responsive today.”

“He hardly is anymore.” Murdoc dropped the leash and gently pressed the supplies into 2D’s arms. “Take those. You need cleaning.”

2D grasped the stuff loosely, dropping the bar of soap. Murdoc sighed and bent to scoop it up. He had no energy to feel frustrated at the vocalist or even scared. Setting the soap onto the pile of things he stood beside the ex-singer. Resting a hand on the small of 2D’s back he urged the singer to walk.

“Y’know it might be easier if—”

“I’m an expert at looking after this idiot, I can manage.”

Murdoc lead the taller man around to their make shift bathing station, out of view from Russel. The ex-drummer snorted while resuming his work. Bathing the other was an ordeal that normally resulted in Murdoc getting quite soaked. At the end of it, dressing the tall man was equally frustrating because 2D always insisted in attempting to walk off nude. Today was no different and Murdoc cursed off and on while getting the man into underpants.

“Will you just stop moving.” The bassist forced 2D to sit on the wooden bench near their shower station. “Holy hell.”

Murdoc dried the mop of damp blue hair. He hated how lackluster the ex-singer had been lately. He moved his hands to cup the blank face, thumbs smoothed over the cold cheeks. Murdoc stared down at the hazy eyes. 2D stared back unseeing, yet settled and seemingly content to be preened over. Brushing some damp hair back, Murdoc leaned down and pressed a kiss against 2D’s cool forehead.

“You have to come back Stuart, please.”

He slumped at the lack of response. Pulling away he got the man into a clean shirt and worked the khakis up long legs. Murdoc pushed his disappointment down while eyeing the tall man.

“Y’know as far as your fashion is concerned this isn’t a terrible look for you.”
Murdoc admired the former singer thoughtfully. The soft green polo worked well with the dark brown of the khakis. Maybe it was a bit self-absorbed dressing the singer in one of his favorite colors, but the blue and green were pleasant to see. So little made him happy at the moment so he basked in a minute of adoration for the vocalist.

Abruptly 2D perked up, head cocking to the side like an animal. The former bassist gave him a troubled look, perplexed by the moderate level of awareness. Looking around for what triggered the other’s attention he spotted movement in the field. Squinting he gaped at the appearance of an uninfected individual attempting to hide among grass. Before he was utterly distracted, Murdoc slid his eyes to 2D then the untied leash. He hadn’t redone it yet. He had only just got Stuart into clothes.

As though talking an animal down, Murdoc placated with a hand as he reached for the leash. “Stuart, no. Don’t do it.”

His gut told him the former musician would bolt if he didn’t stop him. In an instant before reaching the other with the leash, 2D bolted. Horrified for a brief moment, Murdoc tossed the cord and gave chase.

“Stuart! Don’t eat him!”

Any other time and Murdoc would be impressed by his ability to keep up with much longer legs. He swiped out at 2D, desperately trying to grab at the green polo.

The survivor gave a surprised shout and jolted to their feet, turning tail and making to get away. By now the shouting had attracted Russel and Noodle, both of which came about looking for the disturbance, baffled. Unbeknownst to them, survivors perched at a distance began driving in to converge on the ex-band members.

With great athleticism, Murdoc leapt at the singer, tackling the other to the ground. Both survivor and Murdoc exhaled loudly while 2D growled, struggling to yank at the pant leg he caught. Panicked, Murdoc pulled at 2D.

“No! Sweet satan you cannot eat him!”

“What the fuck is that?” The survivor kicked at the former singer’s face which aggravated 2D further.

Murdoc panted heavily, striving to keep his grip on 2D. He yelped painfully when 2D harshly elbowed him in the ribs. His hold loosened just enough for the other to surge forward and pin the other man. A stuttered scream rushed out of the other man when 2D bit into a flailing arm, ripping a huge piece of his muscle and flesh off. Stunned into stillness, Murdoc stared on in abject horror. 2D devoured the chunk, practically sucking it down before dipping back in to rip the man’s neck open. A spray of hot blood caught 2D in the face, dripping all over the polo. Flailing arms slowly ceased their movement and the survivor gradually went limp beneath 2D.

Squeezing his eyes shut, Murdoc covered his ears. He had never witnessed such unadulterated brutality at 2D’s hands.

“Oh christ. Fuck.”

A long moment had passed where Murdoc chanted to himself that things were fine, it wasn’t real. Bloodied hands, still warm, cupped at his face, mere minutes after the vicious slaughter.

“Muds,” 2D sounded like himself. “Muds are you okay?”
“No,” he voiced weakly, slowly uncovering his ears. “No I’m not okay.”

“I’m sorry, I couldn’t stop myself. I didn’t hurt you did I?”

The satanist shifted onto his front, stopping at the imagery of human entrails spilling out on the sides of broken ribs. 2D quickly pulled the ex-bassist away from the corpse.

“Ignore that.”

Fighting the urge to yank away from 2D, Murdoc gulped. “Won’t be sleeping for a while.” He was half joking half serious.

“I didn’t mean to scare you.”

2D held Murdoc’s cheeks in soiled hands, watching him anxiously.

“I don’t know what to say.”

The singer brought Murdoc into an embrace, holding the shorter man. An unfortunate and pungent scent of blood carried off 2D. It caused Murdoc to gag and pull back some.

“I’m fine. It’s fine.” Murdoc looked at the ground. “Give me a minute.”

A panicked holler brought them back to reality all too rapidly. At the back door of the farm house armed survivors swathed in mismatched clothing were dragging Russel and Noodle away, bags over their heads. Making to help them, 2D yanked Murdoc back, quickly blocking the older man. Murdoc opened his mouth to protest when a reverberating noise whistled through the air and blood hit him.

Bewildered he grappled with 2D when said man slumped into him heavily. 2D clung to him, face contorted in agony. Momentarily lost, Murdoc searched the man over before spotting a darker rush of red somewhere from 2D’s chest or shoulder. Gripping harshly at the former singer Murdoc stumbled back a step while holding the other.

“Stuart no,” his words slurred together. “No, please don’t do this.”

People with guns trained on them approached cautiously, still a good distance away.

“It hurts a lot,” 2D laughed breathlessly. His fingers dug into Murdoc’s shirt and arms. “Sorry.”

“Who the fuck said you could do that? Why the fuck would you play hero! I’m not worth a fucking bullet.”

Legs giving out, 2D unintentionally dragged the satanist to the ground. Murdoc dropped and sat awkwardly on his knees, cradling the ex-singer into his chest while watching the stains grow on his clothing. People were surrounding them. Distressed Murdoc made an effort to hold 2D up off the ground. A man raised a hand, hesitant.

“It’s alright buddy, we’re here to help you. Let the infected go and come with us.”

Hugging the singer tighter to himself, Murdoc bared his teeth.

“Fuck off! Leave us alone— I don’t want your fucking help.”

“Please, we’re going to take you and your friends to safety.”
Voice edging on hysterical, Murdoc swiped his arm out. “You shot him! You shot Stuart. Stay the fuck away from us.”

“Stuart was infected and he attacked one of my men.”

Grip slackening, 2D breathed softer. Someone circled around them.

“He wasn’t. He wasn’t sick.” Cupping 2D’s head, Murdoc pressed his face into blue hair. “Don’t leave.”

The leader of the group nodded to the other. Murdoc hissed at a small pin point of pain in his neck. His own hold on 2D faltered.

“Everything will be alright. We’re going to take care of you and your friends, you’re safe now.”

The world tilted and blearily he could see Stuart’s body in front of him. Boots entered his fading vision. Everything went sideways when they lifted his body and he saw 2D get further from him as darkness filtered in. Nobody checked to see if 2D was actually dead and the man was left laying prone in the grass and dirt, bleeding out.

When the trucks rolled away a soft breeze blew through the fields, rustling grass. Kraken watched from a window as her new owners were taken, followed by the darkening of the skies. After a blistering Summer it decided today to rain once more.

Chapter End Notes

EDIT: 01/07/2019 - In the process of revising chapter eleven as I post this. Will do a double whammy in the coming days.

This chapter was suppose to be longer but I felt like it was almost too lengthy and drawn out so I cut it down. The following three chapters are going to be split to cover some questions about 2D and the new situation the other three are in.

As a totally separate note - super stoked to see Gorillaz live in October! Going to be my first time seeing them in the entire time they’ve existed and it’ll be my first time exploring a bit of Toronto!
His eyes slowly slid open. Dazed, he winced at small stinging droplets hitting his face. With no rush he cautiously rolled onto his side, hissing in pain when his shoulder and upper chest twinged. Select memories filtered in and with renewed vigor he glanced around. Barely able to see beyond grass on all sides he panicked and forced himself to lean up. To the right lay the ravaged body of the survivor he had eaten. Groaning, he stood despite his joints protesting.

“Murdoc?”

Turning in spot he peered through the moderate rain attempting to spot said man. Other than the corpse nothing stood out to him. Holding his shoulder he stumbled back to the farm house with haste, pushing his way through the back door. From the confines, Kraken trotted over, mewing incessantly. Furrowing his brows he stared at the cat.

“Where has everyone gone?”

Kraken meowed much louder and he cringed at the sound.

“Guess you can’t say much. You’re just a cat.”

Clearly hungry, Kraken kept up her triad of meows, each one more annoying than the last. Pushing wet hair back he huffed with little humor and ambled into the kitchen, careful to avoid tripping on her. Once she was appeased, he explored the home for the others only to find no one else. Mounting anxiety seized him as he opened each room looking for them, each time coming up empty. Slinking into Murdoc’s room he dropped onto the bed, soaking where he sat. Staring through his upturned palms and knees at the scuffed hardwood flooring he realized how alone he was in that moment. The strange people had taken his friends. There in that moment he was so under prepared to function alone.

“What do I do?”

His voice carried and there was no answer. Sighing he spared a glance around the room, eyes honing in on the covered body length mirror. A white sheet covered the item due to Murdoc’s distaste of mirrors. He should access the damage, put his mind at ease for the time being.

His first attempt to remove his clothing, especially the soaked polo, proved extremely difficult. His
shoulder protested movement and skin around the apparent injury felt overly taut. Groaning in building frustration he yanked the offending article off, biting his lip through the burn. He gave himself a minute to catch his breath.

Standing, divested of clothing, he gently pulled the sheet and allowed it to fall. Eyeing himself he gawked at the gnarled black marking that now marred his skin. Sat between his clavicle and scapula with the darkest point dead center, winding lines spread out like a physical manifestation of his virus. Incapable of looking away he tilted his head staring, captivated by the discoloration.

“Christ.” Leaning closer to inspect the bullet wound, all he could see was black flesh and the striations. He barely saw the minor black spot on his upper arm from the previous graze with death.

Prodding the area he gasped when a spark of pain radiated out. The skin had knitted together but remained tender. Concerned he pulled back to gaze at his body from head to toe, seeking any other strange marks. The only changes he noticed, otherwise, was the sickly pallor of his skin; it brought out the black of his eyes and wounds. Backing up he began chewing on his ragged nails. The anxiety washed over him full force yet again and now all he could think was, how long??

Admittedly worried for himself his mind automatically switched to the other three. Pacing he brought both his hands up to muss his damp hair.

“What do I do? What do I do?”

He felt incredibly useless. Not knowing how long ago the strangers had left made discerning where the others were all the harder.

What if they’re already dead? Abruptly he shook his head, ridding that thought from his mind.

“I—I need to clean up and redress. Start small and work up to the bigger things.”

His psychologist use to suggest lists. Make a list of tasks and start with the easiest, gradually working up to the hardest. Eventually it gets done but instead of overwhelming oneself with simple and difficult tasks simultaneously, it was worked in an order. Less stress, so she said.

Sifting through the shared dresser he pulled out grey jeans and two shirts. Hesitating he wondered how Murdoc would feel about him stealing underpants. Minor amusement at the thought made him snort while he snatched a pair of white briefs. Re-dressing was no less a struggle than undressing, but once it was over with he wandered to Russel’s room. Stealing socks and a hat he hopped out while slipping the pink socks on. Slapping the bright red ball cap over his drying hair he returned to the main level to find Kraken perched on a sofa.

“What am I suppose to do with you? I can’t leave you here.”

Kraken peered at him, ears turned towards him. Coming to the animal he gently pet the dark fur, smoothing the fluff down.

“I hope you don’t mind your harness, cause that’s what you’ll be wearing till we find them.”

The feline gave no recognition at the word 'harness', content to receive affection. He paused, which made Kraken slide her eyes open once more.

“Don’t run off, I’ll get your harness.”

He ascended the stairs and grabbed the leash and harness from Noodle’s room. The gaudy magenta
leash was picked specifically should Kraken run off; it could be spotted for miles. He returned to 
the animal and proceeded to get the cat into said item. She was less than pleased but allowed it.

“Trust me, I know it’s not nice. I can’t have you going off. Besides, who would feed you if you 
did? Not smart leaving.” Lightly directing her from the sofa he chuckled at the flattened ears. 
“Hear me out, once we find the others it can come off.”

First he placed her in Russel’s truck, then stepped into the home to pack. Loading up the vehicle 
alone was frustrating. No one told him what was appropriate to pack or how to pack, which left 
him packing only cat food and water. He assumed no need to cater for himself seeing as he quite 
literally ate other humans.

Once situated in the driver seat he stared at the empty farm house, quiet and contemplative. 
Months had passed on the property, months where they made a temporary life; one that felt as 
though permanent. Putting the truck into reverse he slowly positioned them until he could drive 
down the dirt driveway. Watching the home shrink in the mirror made his heart sink. Although not 
entirely aware at points, he had fond memories of the place. He needed to focus on finding the 
other three and less on an emotional attachment to a house.

Powering up the stereo system he was momentarily thrown at Britney Spears’s 'Toxic' coming 
from the speakers. Kraken gave an annoyed look at being disrupted. Rolling his eyes he twisted the 
knob until the music was nearly inaudible. Here he was, trapped in the apocalypse and all Russel 
had for music was Britney Spears. It was too late to turn around with him heading down the street.

“I bet Murdoc had better music in his car.”

Kraken settled once able.

“It’s you and me for a bit, so get use to it. Remind me to feed you or I’ll forget, though you seem 
like that type to do that already.”

Her head was resting on the seat where she chose to curl up. The only sign he had she was aware of 
him were her ears.

“Hope it won’t be an issue, I eat humans. Only bad ones, I think.”

Kraken’s ear twitched at his voice.

“I never hurt anyone that didn’t deserve it.” A flash of Murdoc pinned beneath him made him 
chew his lip self-consciously. “Okay, I may have hurt Muds, but it wasn’t intentional. It isn’t easy 
to control, I didn’t want to hurt him, I don’t think I did. I hope he knows that.”

The cat made an irritated noise when they hit a pot hole. She tucked her legs in when no more 
bumps happened. Reaching out he ruffled the cat which earned him a funny little noise unique to 
felines.

“You seem to like me despite all of it.” A frail smile came to his lips. “Please let them be okay.”

For a couple hours the journey passed in near silent Britney Spears and the rumble of the truck. He 
watched empty fields, homes and streets pass them as day fell to night. He had no idea if his choice 
to head right was correct, for all he knew they were getting further from the others. He could only 
hope he was right.

With no need to properly sleep he drove well into the next morning. The radio long since off, he 
hummed music to himself, if only to fill the striking void. His one man musical was halted by
Kraken mewing at him. Realizing only hours after morning peaked that the animal needed food he pulled to the shoulder and parked.

“See, told you I’d forget. S’good you reminded me.”

Climbing over the middle portion he stretched to grab up the bag with cans of cat food. Peeling the metal lid off one he lowered it to the floor of the passenger seat. Kraken hopped down to get said food, eager to fill her belly.

“Just you wait, we’ll get home and things will be better. I’ll curb my eating and we’ll get a house for you to wander around. Practice music again. It’ll be like old times.”

Leaning up he jerked, surprised to see a zombie right at the window. Eyes wide and hands shaking he quickly put the truck into drive. The undead rebounded over the side of the vehicle when he turned onto the road. Soon the creature was long gone, a mere speck in the mirror. His grip lessened and he breathed easier.

“That was odd.”

The zombie hadn’t bashed or thumped at the glass to get at him, it was just standing, poised. Shuddering, he shook his head.

“Not important. Need to find the others,” he muttered, sparing a look to Kraken. “Sorry about that.”

As weather picked up midday he turned the wipers on, occasionally shifting to alleviate strain on his bottom. With the earlier scare he was hesitant to stop and stretch, but a glance at the gas dial he knew that would be inevitable.

“I hope they’re okay.” He blinked rapidly, throat getting tight. “I really hope they’re okay. They have to be.”

Kraken had her eyes closed, beside him once more and nestled up. Swallowing back the uncomfortable burn of tears he continued on, watching the road through rivets of water.

———

Driving for a while lead him into a moderately small city. Rather quickly the noise from the truck attracted slumbering zombies and while needing gas he chose to bypass the forming horde. Outside the city on a back road he parked and hopped out to stretch. Kraken followed him out and he lead her to a safe area to do business.

“It’s sort of eerie,” he commented to no one, “the lack of noises other than wind. Where are the birds? The bugs? It’s almost like everything vanished.”

Kraken sniffed around the bushes at the side of the road, uncertain where to go. He watched her quietly, amused.

“Just you and me Kraken, no need to be shy ‘bout it.”

It took him turning away for Kraken to feel comfortable enough. He stared off into the open space surrounding them. He had no clue where they were in conjunction to where everything had started. It seemed so long ago that he was performing on stage alongside his band-mates. He jolted from his thoughts when Kraken hissed and darted up into the ajar driver side door, cord extending from the device in his hand. Confused he approached the truck to peer in at her.
“What’s wrong now?”

Kraken remained huddled in the farthest corner of the vehicle, hissing at him or rather at what was behind him. He yelped at the feel of a hand brushing his hair and a distinct scent of putrefaction. Jerking around he beat the zombie away with an elbow, desperate to climb into the driver side seat backwards. Said undead feebly pawed at him and the truck to make for Kraken. Panting with building panic he leaned further into the seat, to avoid the zombie. The side of said seat dug into his back, reminding him that he’d need to lift himself to get away. However, It became apparent the zombie was after Kraken and not him. Frowning he pulled himself up onto the seat and kicked the creature away, almost offended. It stumbled from the truck so he yanked his door shut and cranked the key. The vehicle stuttered a few times before going. Wasting no time, 2D sped away, grumbling at the stench of rotting flesh on himself.

He forced himself into breathing normally while glancing to the road and mirrors.

“That was— It didn’t even notice me, I was practically invisible!”

Kraken relaxed after some distance but he continued to question what just happened.

“Am I invisible? Maybe it thought I was like it… Do I smell?”

He sniffed at his underarm and gagged.

“I reek. Maybe I smell like a zombie to them.” A budding plan formulated and he grinned. “Maybe I’m immune. This could be a good thing, I think.”

Said feline remained in the backseat.

Over the next two days he paused in places to siphon gas while Kraken stayed safely locked in the truck. With nothing else clouding his mind he kept on top of caring for her. Other than excessive and desperate need to find his friends, he was a model pet owner. Zombies became less of a threat when he was proved correct; they were uninterested in him, normally walking right past. He attested it to smelling infected despite being unable to smell it himself. While Kraken was safe he took to exploring the areas he stopped, looking high and low for anything that stood out as a clue. Nothing was obvious to him and begrudgingly he pushed on.

Fifteen days in and he began to worry he may never find them. No matter how many townships or cities he bypassed, no clues cropped up and nothing came across as previously disturbed by other people.

Occasionally he would catch a glimpse of himself in a reflection on stores or in the truck and grimace. He had an awkward mustache and beard coming in. Brown against blue looked utterly stupid. Anytime he caught a look, he hated the off set colors. Given his urgency he spared no time on personal grooming. Had anyone been with him, they would surely complain about his hygiene.

As it stood he was driving once again, listening to something more tasteful than Britney Spears. Kraken was comfortably snuggled into the passenger seat hardly aware of anything outside sleep. He spared a quick glance at her, a glum smile adorning his face.

“What a situation we’re in, eh?”

She gave no response as per usual.

“What if I don’t find them?” Frowning he clenched his jaw. “I need to stop thinking like that. Positive thoughts. Dr. Scott said making positivity your image makes you happier. She never
mentioned how hard it is keeping it up.”

He brought the truck to a halt next to a hardware store. Jumping out to stretch he closed the door with his hip. The locale was deserted save a few piled bodies out front a hair salon. Eyes darting back to the half burnt heap of corpses he stared, mind scrambling to figure out what it meant.

“Someone had to have done that. Zombies can’t just set themselves on fire.”

Renewed energy at a possible clue he strode to the smouldering pile, eyeing it cautiously. Here or there he could see embers and smell the continued burn of flesh or fabric.

“This was recent. How recent?”

He cocked his head looking around, eyes straining to catch anything important. As the many times before he spotted nothing. Frustrated he groaned and mussed his hair up.

“Where am I suppose to go?”

Increasingly agitated with the lack of direction he lashed out on surrounding fixtures. He was incredibly lost with no way of finding his friends. A heavy buzz filled his ears and for a brief moment he panicked. He dreaded slipping into another hazy comatose state, like he’d experienced at the farm house.

*I swear, it’s like you wanna get lost. Focus. Don’t wander off you dozy idiot.*

He shook his head, momentarily startled to hear Murdoc. Strangely the buzz became increasingly loud, almost a drone, of what sounded like jet engines. Befuddled he moved into the middle of the street, temporarily distracted. He whipped back and forth as his panic dissipated for a moment. Curiosity took its place when he saw nobody around. As the noise increased he finally looked up, eyes comically wide while watching an aircraft fly overhead, lower than normal. In a state of awe he ran underneath said plane, shoving past a couple bins to watch it continue away beyond trees and more buildings.

“A plane! An actual plane!”

*No shit, Sherlock.*

“Oh shut up Muds, it means people elsewhere are okay. Things are normal beyond here, we can go home—”

He turned to talk to the shorter man only to find he was utterly alone. Hands moving to his shirt hem, he twisted the fabric. Fingers anxiously twitching with the material, he swallowed, throat tight.

“I should probably keep going. I can share the news when I find them.”

Nodding to himself he marched back towards the truck.

Buckling up his thoughts jumped to a documentary he faintly remembered. It discussed the effects of isolation, how people tended to latch to anything remotely similar to companionship.

“I can’t be that far gone,” he whispered, “I have Kraken. I have someone to talk too.”

A cat wasn’t much for conversation.

“There was a plane Kraken.” His voice shook. “Once we find the others we can go home. Won’t
that be nice?"

He started up the truck, eyes catching movement from his periphery. Glancing to Kraken his eyes landed on a thigh. Trailing up he blanched at seeing the ex-guitarist, casually petting at Kraken as though she were actually there.

“Noodle?”

It’s going to be okay 2D. She smiled at him.

He blinked rapidly and the apparition faded. It was just Kraken sitting next to him. Facing forward he avoided looking in the mirror or around him and began to drive. He turned up the music and refused to acknowledge the voices.

—

Although his vision came in and out of focus he had an understanding of his surroundings. His hearing and sense of smell increased ten-fold. The Summer breeze was warm, carrying varies smells from nearby flowers. He had no idea why he was outside or what drew him here every day. The muddle of his mind told him something was here, there was food. He didn’t know what food was, but his entire being craved it.

Peppermint and musty cigarette smoke rudely consumed all other scents as a blurry image of Murdoc stepped in front of him. The normal part of him reached out, reminding himself not to hurt said man. This person smelled like food but he wasn’t allowed to eat him. Murdoc was important.

“What are you doing wandering out here? Keep this shit up and we’ll tether you up like a mutt.”

He understood the words but struggled to formulate any to give in return. His mouth refused to work. Distantly he heard a crunch, like dry underbrush being crushed beneath a shoe.

“What’s so goddamned exciting about trees? Quit doing that, it’s fucking weird. C’mon.”

Murdoc was tugging him further from the strange yet appealing noise. Maybe it was food?

“Stuart I swear, stop being difficult you twit. There’s nothing over there.”

If he just ate something he could be 2D again. Murdoc wouldn’t need to fret over him.

He wanted to protest or explain his reasoning for being outside. Alas his brain stubbornly remained obstinate. He was so hungry. Murdoc lead him into the building they all resided. The faint voice of reason spoke up once more, like a computer prompt, telling him not to hurt Noodle, Russel or Kraken. They were all just as important. Friends.

It frustrated him.

“Tonight I’m gonna strap you down. Don’t get any naughty ideas, it aint meant to be fun. Unfortunately.”

They stopped somewhere, time and movement seemed nonexistent to him while like this. It was cooler and shaded so clearly he was fully inside. He felt a warmth along his waist and a hand grasped one of his limp ones.

“One step at a time Stu.”

Despite the acuity of his hearing and smell, his motor skills suffered. He struggled up the stairs
with guidance. A part of him desperately wanted to thank the other man for his continued patience. They stopped at the top. Murdoc abruptly cupped his face and pulled his head down. Up close he could make out details, eyes capable of focus only at this range.

“I miss you.”

He missed Murdoc too.

“Why are you doing this to me Stuart?”

Confused he stumbled over what the other man meant. Details of Murdoc’s face became distorted. Ragged gashes and blood covered the man’s face. The palms at his cheeks turned cold. Chunks of skin peeled away as the older man began to rot. The grip on him turned vicious and suddenly he was fully aware, fighting to pull back. This wasn’t part of the memory.

“You’ve done this. You killed me. You killed all of us. It’s your fault you monster.”

Finally able to move he pushed the other away only to fall backwards down the stairs. Before he hit unforgiving wood steps, all faded to black.

———

Jerking up from the steering wheel he gasped, hands latched to the rubber wheel cover. Looking around frantically he tried to piece together what happened. Kraken hissed and spit from the backseat, fur raised. Scrambling to undo the restricting seat belt he stumbled from the truck, just barely remembering to shut the door behind himself. He got four steps from the vehicle before collapsing heavily onto his knees, panting. Oppressive nothingness in the air surrounded him, pressing in. His anxiety flared at the feeling of utter loneliness in the middle of some unknown place.

The moon lit the ex-vocalist with pale light. They were on a side street skirting a town. He basked in the night air, forcing himself to breath evenly. Despite himself, he only worsened his breathing and instead worked on hazy memories, trying to recall things. Once his mind was capable of coherent thought he backtracked to when he passed out. Bits and pieces filtered in. He felt increasingly despondent in the overwhelming silence encasing him.

“It’s been five days, I don’t even remember any of it.”

Rubbing at his face, arms and hands shaking, he gulped in a ragged breath. The tears came before he could stop them. They felt hot against his cool skin, almost stinging.

“I can’t— I need to focus. I have to find them. Damnit!”

Slamming his fists into the asphalt he cried angrily. He needed to remain aware. But he felt it clawing its way closer. The sharp pangs of hunger. In the coming days he would have less lucidity and he was no closer to finding them. An invasive idea pried its way into the forefront of his mind. Kraken was in the truck—

“No! No, Russ and Noodle would be angry— disappointed. I need to control it. I’m not a monster. I’m not.”

Scrubbing at his wet face he shuffled towards the truck. Climbing back into the vehicle he took a deep unsettled breath before relaxing. Fiddling in the dark he cranked the key only for the truck to make an indistinguishable noise of defeat.
“Please no,” he moaned while twisting the key again and again. He finally gave it up and pressed into the seat.

“I’ve run it dry. Of course I have.”

Staring out into the moonlit area he sighed. Rubbing at lingering wetness along his face, he contemplated what to do next.

“I’m sorry Kraken. For scaring you I mean.”

Glancing into the backseat he faintly made out a furry blob huddled in the corner. She stared intently at him, green eyes reflecting the minimal light.

“I’m okay for now. I promise.”

She remained still regardless of his prompting and after a moment he let her be.

“Tomorrow morning we’ll be walking. Hope you like me again by then.”

———

At the break of dawn he had the bag strapped on and Kraken in her leash. Starting out was rough when the feline decided to scratch at him, clearly not over his lapse. Thankfully by noon she settled and the journey continued without a hitch. His momentary slip and subsequent breakdown was ignored. With nobody there to comment he was allowed to push the issues away, let them fester for a later point. He had other matters to deal with.

“Could be at this for weeks y’know,” he commented to the feline, well aware he may not make it more than a week. “The aimless wandering. I hope not.”

Kraken trotted beside him like a dog following their master without question. She had very little choice.

“It’d be nice if you could answer me. Wouldn’t feel so alone, which is stupid, ‘cause I’m not. I have you. You’re keeping me sane.”

*Man, there’s nothing wrong with the voices, I lived with them for years. Get sorta use to them after a while.*

His pace faltered a moment as he held his head. A small laugh escaped, making Kraken perk her ears at him.

“Y’hear that Kraken? It’s normal to hear voices, says Russ. He would know all about that.”

Brushing his hand further through his greasy hair he groaned. He resettled the hat to avoid thinking about how messy he was. The blue locks were much too long.

“Guess when we get together again, I’ll need a haircut. I can tie it back at this point.”

*It suits you 2D.*

“Thanks Noodle.”

He gave the cat a broken smile. Things would only get progressively worse from here on out.

———
Eyeing the road sign wearily, they both stood still. They were the only creatures present among the area. The road forked just beyond them and he had to make a choice. A serious decision given one way could lead to the others or not. He had no clue whether that was true though.

Looking to the right he saw trees. Glancing left he saw… trees.

“This is unfair.”

Hopelessness was a growing factor as the day dragged by.

“I mean who makes two similar roads practically parallel to each other? It’s like they wanted travelers to be confused.”

Just go right.

“Well that’s easy for you to say Muds, you’re a voice in my head.”

Well the way I see it, being right is a good feeling, which I am by the way. So right would probably have a similar feeling. No risk in trying.

“Only my slow descent into madness.”

The disembodied voice of the former bassist remained mute. He snorted, convenient timing that even a figment of Murdoc chose opportune times to disappear.

“Right it is, I suppose. After all, the only thing to lose is me.”

Halfheartedly pumping a fist as a cheer he and Kraken walked the right way.

Further along there were vehicles haphazardly scattered up and down the road. They reached an overpass with miles of congested vehicles all over. He paused with Kraken, momentarily in awe at the sheer abundance of cars and trucks. It had an eerie appearance of an automobile graveyard. The motorway had them parked or awkwardly piled up in apparent accidents, frozen in time. It looked as though everything had been undisturbed for months, possibly longer.

“Looks like a movie set.”

He spared a glance to Kraken. The feline peered up at him.

“No choice now, we’ve come this far.”

Cautiously he and Kraken took the easiest route through. Many of the vehicles were blocking the road and shoulder. It exacerbated his desire to get somewhere with clues, anywhere that indicated where the others were. At the first sign of movement or noise both of them halted and he looked around frantically. His only sign it was a zombie was Kraken hissing and skittering under a car. Somehow knowing it was an undead eased him more than the prospect of a fellow survivor.

“We don’t have time for this.” He crouched by the car. “Please Kraken, I’ll keep you safe.”

Shuffling passed behind him which peaked his interest when it continued by. Glancing up he watched a gaggle of rotting corpses amble away towards an unknown source. Looking to Kraken he urged her to come out.

“See they don’t even want you. C’mon Kraken, I haven’t got time for this.”

Yet, still, she refused to approach the ex-singer. He groaned in mounting frustration and lowered
himself until prone. Reaching out under the vehicle with one long arm he strained to grasp at her furry limb.

“Kraken,” he voice grew exasperated, “please c’mere. It’ll be okay. They’ve gone off already.”

Out of nowhere someone fired off a gun causing him to bash his head at the underside of the car. Panic swelled in his chest as he leaned up partly to look about anxiously. At his position he couldn’t see anything other than the crowd of vehicles. Another loud bang sounded and suddenly he was aware how precarious the situation. Ducking down he forced himself half under the car and grabbed Kraken desperately.

“Sorry— I know, but now we can’t fool around.” He pulled her out against her will and scooped the small feline up into his arms.

A couple hoots drifted well above the cocoon of cars and trucks. The other survivors were cheering some sort of victory, one he wasn’t interested in learning about. Kraken gave him a disgruntled meow.

“Shhh,” he hissed while soothing her.

Beyond their spot he heard the other people shuffle through vehicles, chatting enthusiastically about keeping score. He gulped and with shaky movements he crawled through the automobiles, one arm holding Kraken tight to his chest. The voices were coming nigh and he felt dread in every fiber of his being. What would they do if they caught him? Would they kill him? Would he kill them?

“Did’ja see the tits on that one zombie?”

“Gross dude, it’s fucking dead.”

“Still a nice set, too bad really. A waste.”

A third person snorted, not adding a verbal comment. Their footfalls were nearly upon the former vocalist and Kraken. Struggling to cram himself and the cat into a tight spot, out of view, he held his breath when he could see them over top the hood of a car. They appeared no different than the survivors that had taken his friends. Wearing the same mismatch of clothing and toting semi-automatic guns, the three men looked like a source of information. He briefly wondered how smart it would be to jump out on these men and demand information. Despite his reservations about revealing himself he leapt to his feet once they were well past. Kraken gave an abortive noise at being jostled which had all three men whipping around on 2D. Guns trained on him, he yelped and lifted his arms, Kraken landing to her feet when dropped.

“Please don’t shoot me! I just need some help!”

“Jesus you scared the shit outta us.”

“What the fuck you doing hiding like that dude?”

Lowering his arms as they lowered their guns he fidgeted while keeping his head tilted just right so his dark eyes were barely visible. The red ball cap had managed to stay on his head all this time. And given the state of the world he didn’t want his abnormal features being the reason someone shot him. Surprisingly he managed to keep his hold on Kraken’s leash, he gave himself a mental kudos for that.
“I didn’t mean to hide, I was scared you would shoot me had I approached.”

“You’re English,” one stated matter of fact. The leader if he hazarded a guess.

“I am, yes. I’m uh… I’m 2D.”

“The hell kinda name is 2D? You got depth perception issues?”

“No.” He couldn’t help the small laugh that bubbled up. “It’s my stage name— I’m a singer… was a singer. Maybe you’ve heard of me? I’m from Gorillaz.”

He chanced a glance at the three men, watching the lack of recognition on their faces. A part of him felt offended at the response. The more pressing side of him pushed his ego aside a moment.

“That’s not really important actually,” he coughed. “I’m looking for my friends. We were separated a few weeks ago. Maybe you three know a place where survivors get taken? Some strange people came along and whisked them away.”

“Strange how?”

“Uh— well, please don’t take offense, but they were similarly dressed to you three. They had trucks and weapons as well.”

A few whispers were exchanged between the three, uneasy expressions adorned their faces. It made him all the more uncomfortable. One man looked up, his brown eyes conveying sadness. He bit his lip, unsure he wanted to hear what came next.

“You should leave it be buddy. If they were taken by who we think you’re talking about, chances are they’re already dead.”

A creeping sensation of despair crawled into his being at the thought of the others being dead.

“Do you know where they take them? Please, just tell me where to go, I’ve been looking for weeks.”

“We can give you a rough map where. I warn you though, these people are not to be trifled with.”

The leader nodded to the person on his right. The other dropped his pack and dug out a rolled up map book. He watched with bated breath as the guy stood and opened it to a particular page, pressing it flat to a car hood. Cautiously he came closer and the other two surrounded him and the map book.

“We’re about here on this stretch of major highway.”

He watched the man’s finger move up and down the map.

“How that couple miles down.” The man gestured the direction beyond where they had come from. “There’s an exit. Take that, it’ll lead you into a small city. There’s a university campus in the upper portion of the city where these people have set up a community. If your friends were taken, that’s probably where.”

One of them produced a worn pencil from a pocket and leaned in to draw a line. He marked each position with an X before tearing the page from the map book. Taking the proffered paper, he smiled graciously at the men.

“Thank you so much, if I had anyway to repay you I would.”
“Forget it. It’s nice meeting a fellow survivor.”

“I never caught your names.”

“Ethan and these two are Quinn and Alex.”

“Thank you again, honestly I’ve been at wits end.”

Unable to contain the elation at finally having a direction to go he waved and hurried on with Kraken. The other three waved back, one shouting to him to be careful and well wishes in finding his friends. In the hour that came after meeting the three men he felt a renewed sense of purpose. His thrill barely contained, he walked for hours, only pausing to allow Kraken time to eat.

“We’ll finally be reunited Kraken. It’s all going to work out now, I can feel it.”

By nightfall they reached the edge of the city. He lead Kraken into an abandoned shop and with no other intentions laid out on his back. Kraken surprisingly curled up close to his side, purring softly.

“Tomorrow we’ll see them again. They’re going to be so shocked.”

Buzzing energy swam through his limbs making him vibrate with partially veiled excitement. Had the cat not needed sleep, food and water, he would rush out to the university now in the dead of night. Sighing in content, eased in the knowledge he was safe and soon the five of them would be safe together, he closed his eyes. Although sleep evaded him, he was capable of dozing. He didn’t dream, not really, but he formed up happy thoughts of seeing the other three again.

Come morning Kraken was gone. Sitting up in alarm he looked around the store.

“Kraken? Where have you gone off?”

Getting up and sliding the pack on he fixed his hair under the cap. He saw nothing bright and magenta.

“Kraken lets not do this today. We need to get going.”

Looking in and around all the overturned furniture he saw no cat nor cord. Quickly his heart began to pound as he scrambled throughout the store near tossing things over in his search for the feline. Rushing out of the store he turned about staring down each street end. His hands picked and worried at the hem of his shirt.

“Kraken please don’t leave me alone…”

Aimlessly wandering the area he slowly felt his mind slip further and further down the rabbit hole the higher his anxiety became. The haze that came with his new hunger buzzed in his ears and clouded his thoughts. Suddenly he didn’t remember what he was doing or where he was. His shoulders and body became loose and the surety of his steps became stumbles until he was no different than the others. He cocked his head at the faint sound of laughter.

Ambling along he made slow work of his travel through the city, soon joined by other undead. Had he been more aware he would complain of smell yet be pleased at the camouflage he had. He could hide in plain sight.

His posse walked, more staggered, deeper into the city. They bypassed lower income housing and then higher end houses. He turned his head when he heard another giggle, closer now. Any previous thoughts of caring for Kraken or finding the others were overshadowed by his need to
feed. So despite disgusting corpses brushing him, leaving ooze and foreign fluids on him, he continued well into another night with the growing horde. His bright hair hidden under a weathered ball cap made him appear incognito among so many rotting bodies. However the lack of missing flesh and diseased appearance made him stand out as a pale, moderately normal looking person.

An Undefined amount of time passed while he searched with his brethren for the source of the sounds. The part of himself that had a conscience sat in the recesses of his mind, silent and unable to fight the zombified haze his person was in. He felt trapped. It was as though his body had switched to autopilot while he mentally sat back. He watched the world blur by, comprehending things through a fog. Had he been more prepared or aware maybe he could have forgone this strange state.

He knew cats could look after themselves, of course they could. They were independent. But Russel and Noodle would be furious with him. He was irresponsible and lazy. He should have tried harder.

Distantly there was a noise, like a couple of voices. It triggered some interest in him and the other zombies surrounding him. Their path was altered and shortly they reached a small forested area, trees spaced far and wide. He paid little mind to the foliage and more on the smell and sound of people. Survivors. Something he could eat.

As the group reached a perimeter, something whizzed through the air. The noise emanated from a stone wall that seemed to circle a property. A body near him collapsed and congealed blood hit his shoulder. He shuffled with the others seeking an entry point. The groaning of the horde grew until he was incapable of discerning their noises from the gunshots ringing out. His human portion warned him to avoid being shot or it was over. Helpful as it was, his motor skills were dulled. He feared being unable to move fast enough and dodge being shot again.

Abruptly someone shouted and there were a few more shots, one nearly catching him. He pressed himself to a cold, unforgiving wall while the other zombies were shot down. A fight broke out above him until all fell deathly silent. He lingered at the wall, pawing at it as though it would fall away under the feeble touches. He could smell fresh people beyond the stone. It caused his mouth to salivate. In his weak attempts to climb the wall someone grabbed him somewhat roughly. He was squeezed hard and a palm pressed his face down to a shoulder. He was being hugged within an inch of his life and though starving, his mind stuttered to halt at the scent of peppermint. What little function he had of his body allowed him to hold to the back of Murdoc’s shirt.

This was safe. He was safe.

Chapter End Notes

EDIT: 01/31/2019 - I've really cleaned up and changed the undertone of the chapter. Someone on their own, desperate to find loved ones would have a hard time so I tried to reflect the frustrations one might feel in that situation.

PS: Will be uploading a hugely overhauled chapter 11 with more detail and added/removed portions. It should be up sometime either tonight or tomorrow Feb 1st.

Thank you to all who've read thus far and given kudos, bookmarks and lovely comments! I always appreciate it!
Murdoc spent the early part of the journey unconscious. By midday of the next one he roused to the loud noise of Noodle demanding they be released and Russel thumping his feet into the flooring of the vehicle. Looking around the enclosed space of what appeared to be an armored truck, Murdoc winced at the volume of Noodle’s voice.

“Satan please, will you quiet down.”

“Murdoc you are awake.” Noodle flopped down onto the bench seat she used to prop herself up.

“Yes, unfortunately.”

“How’re you feeling man?”

Rubbing at his skull, Murdoc attempted to alleviate his drug induced headache. As he did so he became aware Stuart was absent. Lowering his hands he spotted long dried blood. Forgoing an answer to Russel’s question he peered questioningly at the other two. Both shared a somber look while avoiding Murdoc’s silent query.

Stomach empty and roiling from the tranquilizer, Murdoc felt his nausea increase at the thought of 2D bleeding out, alone.

“How are we?”

“No idea,” Russel answered.

“The small window is blocked, we have no idea how long it has been.”

“We have to go back,” Murdoc voiced in desperation. He cautiously stood and stumbled into the back doors of the truck, pushing on them.

They could all feel the telltale rumble of a moving vehicle yet Murdoc shoved, with growing force.
“They had no right,” he muttered, “no fucking right to take us.”

“Murdock.”

“We were doing fine. Sure it was rough but we made it by… We were surviving.”

“Muds.” Russel furrowed his brows, watching the former bassist pry at the sealed doors. Concern flooded him when Murdoc’s hand slipped, scraping his knuckles. “Murdock stop that, c’mon. There’s no use—”

“No! Shut up. We’re just giving up. I refuse. Stuart is going to have a conniption without us.”

Noodle wrung her hands together on her lap. She hated the uncomfortable sensation settling over her in preparation of an argument. Russel smacked a palm onto the bench beside himself. The noise resounded throughout causing Murdoc and Noodle to jump simultaneously.

“Sit your ass down,” Russel started, voice softening as he continued, “you’re not gonna get anywhere hurting yourself.”

Eyeing the ex-percussionist, Murdoc gave and slumped into the seat. For a fleeting moment nothing was exchanged between them. As the silence dragged it gave more time for them to comprehend the severity of their circumstances. Murdoc internally fought the idea 2D was actually dead. He couldn’t imagine a world where the man wasn’t in it.

Noodle broke their solemn atmosphere.

“What do we do now?”

“We’re gonna keep doing what we’ve been doing baby-girl. Survive. Whatever is in store for us when they stop, we’ll be prepared.”

“What about 2D?” She spared a glance at Murdoc catching the way he tensed.

Russel sighed, “if ‘D survived then we’ll have to hope he’s okay till we get back.”

“There is no if. He’s alive. He has to be.”

Unable to attest the conviction about 2D, Russel heaved another sigh. The rest of the trip continued on in uneasy silence.

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When the vehicle stopped, at some unknown location, the three of them roused. Despite hunger and exhaustion soaking their bodies they poised at the doors, ready to attack if necessary. Unexpectedly the doors swung open and blinding light shone in on them, shrouding their captors. Abruptly, before any of them could adjust to the light, arms shot in and grabbed each of them and they were dragged from the vehicle.

“Take ‘em to be cleaned up. I’ll alert the council.”

None of them had a chance to protest the treatment as they were hulled off to a building separate from a larger cluster of buildings. With little energy it proved easier to go along with the men pulling them. Beyond the bright lights it was night and most of the grounds remained covered by darkness. Noodle spotted some people by the further building, watching curiously. The moments following she and the other two were brought inside a building that resembled a changing room.
with actual proper lights. The space was lit up well and it seemed rather clean.

Their captors pushed each of them abrasively further in until they reached the sectioned off area for showers. One of the men vanished a moment while the other two, guns now in hand and pointed down, stood watch over them. Murdoc rubbed at his shoulder of the arm he was yanked about by. Unintentionally the three of them huddled closer together. Faintly the satanist recognized one of the men but he couldn’t place why.

“Here are your clothes and towels. There are bathing supplies in the shower portion.”

The man spoke as he stepped into view with said items. He set the towels and clothing bundles down on the small tile ledge.

“I don’t know what your sizes are, so we’ll see after the fact if anything fits.”

Russel eyed the plain beige clothes distastefully. Both Murdoc and Noodle exchanged an uneasy look when the men remained.

“All new survivors must be cleansed. No outside clothing or items are allowed here.”

“What if we don’t wanna be here?” Russel asked.

“You’re safer here than out there, trust me.”

Murdoc rolled his eyes. “Surely you saw we were fine before you fucked everything up. We don’t want to be here.”

“Look, we understand. We didn’t approach this very well, but hear us out. We have electricity, running water, food, and protection. This is basically an oasis in a desert. We pick up survivors like you three all the time, that’s our job. We’re just trying to help people rebuild.”

“We were fine,” Noodle stated.

“After you three have cleaned up you can meet the council, they’re eager to greet you.”

Russel rubbed a hand over his face. The three of them were growing agitated.

“Let’s just get this over with. Maybe they’ll be more open to listen.”

“Fine. Quit fucking staring so we can wash up—”

“Sorry, but we don’t quite trust you three yet so we need to remain until you finish.”

“What in the fuck are we going to accomplish in a shower room? Murdoc gestured around the area. “There’s no escape and no weapons, so the lot of you can bugger off, we’re not going anywhere.”

“Unfortunately you three may use your clothing or the toiletries to assault us or escape. We can’t risk any creative plans hatching. Please comply, if you three would divest your clothing and shower, we’d like to continue on.”

Normally unafraid of most challenges in life, Noodle paled and tucked herself behind Murdoc. The idea of strange men staring at her while completely nude and vulnerable made her insides twist uncomfortably. Both former-band mates noticed. Stepping forward, Russel got up and personal with one of the men. A gun was pressed to his sternum but he leaned in anyways.
“Leave. I won’t ask again man. You know exactly how this looks and if you want our cooperation you’ll let us clean up in peace.”

Grasping the gun with one large palm, Russel easily tilted it away from himself in a show of strength. The man grunted while attempting to pull it out of the grip.

“Catch my drift?”

“Yes. We’ll be right outside, no funny business.”

Releasing the weapon, he watched the men step back and retreat from the vicinity. When the outside door closed and they were completely alone they relaxed. Murdoc grabbed a bundle and turned to hold it out to Noodle.

“Go first, we’ll wait.”

Mumbling soft gratitude the ex-guitarist took the proffered supplies and stepped into the showering portion. Both Russel and Murdoc took a seat on a nearby bench, backs to the young woman.

“We need to leave,” Murdoc commented only when the water started up.

“Agreed. Something aint right here. They have electricity and running water.”

“Was more referring to their desire to watch us naked, but yeah, too convenient.”

“Lets play their game for now and learn a way out.”

Thoughts of 2D laying in his arms, bleeding profusely flashed in his mind. Biting at his lip, Murdoc sighed and his shoulders hunched.

“We need to leave now. Soon.”

“We will Muds, just have a bit of faith. He’s probably sitting with Kraken.”

“Russ they shot him. He was bleeding… so much.”

Unsure what to say, Russel rested a hand over Murdoc’s back, hesitating before rubbing the older man. Surprised at not being shoved off, he continued to soothe the other, a little awkward given who it was directed at.

“He’s not dead, he can’t be.”

“Nah, he’s probably fine.”

And though neither said it, their voices conveyed their doubt. Murdoc felt it was better to lie to himself than accept a possibly of 2D being dead. The more he thought on it, the more guilt wracked him. Guilt over his misdeeds, the horrible words, and violence. Somehow it felt as though he was the catalyst for 2D being shot, as if he could have altered how things panned out had he cared more. Burying his face into his still soiled palms he struggled to keep things under wraps, especially in front of Russel.

“Things will work out.”

“What if they don’t Russ? What if this is it?”

The idea of offing himself silently in the night crossed his mind. Although he no longer had the
option to drown himself in alcohol or drugs, he still found the darkness in him always hovering, waiting for an opportune moment. Maybe it would be today.

“Then we gotta stick together and continue forward. You don’t get to cop out now. Think about Noodle.”

Clenching his jaw, Murdoc nodded silently, face turned down. Russel gave his back a final pat while standing.

“Done baby girl?”

“I am. Thank you.”

“No problem,” Russel said. He turned towards Murdoc’s form, somehow smaller with the curl of his shoulders. “C’mon Muds, we need to appease them.”

Swallowing back the uncomfortable burn of emotions bubbling over, Murdoc gave Russel a thumbs up. Standing and snatching up his bundle, they both entered the open showering space. Noodle sat herself quietly on the bench, politely keeping her back to them while she waited. She, like the other two, was exhausted, it seemed to be the standard state of things as of late.

The grounds surrounding the university campus had a large stone wall protecting them from the outside world. By the time they emerged from the unit, no longer used for sports events, the sun was highlighting the sky in a soft grey. More people had come from the confines of the main cluster of buildings to tend to tasks unknown to them.

The cool air was brisk on their clean skin and wet hair. None of them commented as they were lead across the grass towards the largest stone building.

Closer to the facility were more persons wearing the drab beige uniforms scurrying around. Occasionally, as they stepped inside, people would stop and stare. Curiosity seemed frowned upon as older beige clad people shooed them along. Inside was set up like a network of sleeping quarters and storage. The odd room was dedicated to games and other fun things. Noodle caught sight of children playing in a room with an adult supervisor and despite herself she smiled. It appeared as though within the grounds a community was blossoming. Albeit a strange one.

“Where’re we going?”

“To meet with the council,” answered the one man whose familiarity sparked something in not only Murdoc, but Noodle and Russel.

Much too tired for further prodding, Murdoc shut his mouth and the three of them trailed the survivors. It was as though they were the shiny new toys and everyone was interested. To some degree it made them self-conscious, what with the ridiculous uniforms.

The lead man paused outside a door with a glossy window laid in the dark wood. He rapped his knuckles against an upper portion of the door, waiting. A moment later an elderly man opened the door to reveal an opulent office space toting exotic plants in baskets and expansive bookshelves full with ancient texts. The man in question barely reached Murdoc’s shoulders. He had a neatly trimmed beard and no hair on the shiny surface of his head.

“Well come in, please.”

All warm smiles and soft spoken, the man made a grand sweeping gesture with his arm. With the prompting they entered, followed closely by their personal entourage. As the door clicked shut the
old man turned towards them, crooked smile still firmly in place.

“Have yourselves a seat on the couches, you three must be exhausted. I can fetch for drinks or food before we talk,” he offered cordially.

Stomachs empty and throats parched, the three of them nodded. They were hesitant to accept something from strangers, but oh so desperate to sate the growing discomfort. As the small rotund man weaved beyond furniture to an adjacent door they cautiously perched on the available leather couch. More unnervingly the three gun wielding men stationed themselves behind them, weapons ready. Despite the inviting atmosphere of the room, bathed in warm rich colors, they were on edge.

“How rude of me,” the man chuckled as he approached them. “I’m Sefton, Sef’ for short. I’m the head of our community’s council. These three men behind you are Frank, Isaac and Jason.”

None of them swapped introductions with any of the four men. Sefton held out his pudgy hand to shake Noodle’s first. The action didn’t escape their notice seeing as the young woman was seated between Russel and Murdoc. When she stared at the offered palm, refusing to be subjected to whatever twisted view these men had Russel rushed to shake Sefton’s waiting hand.

“Russel.”

A micro expression crossed Sefton’s face, but only lasted mere seconds before settling into a pleased look.

“A pleasure to meet you Russel.”

Bringing his hand back he attempted to shake Noodle’s once more. Only this time, with a rather sinister sneer, Murdoc repeated Russel’s previous move. Grasping the fat, dry hand in his scarred one he shook the palm almost viciously. A curious frown crossed Sefton’s face as he applied some force behind his grip to match Murdoc.

“I’m Murdoc. This’re is Noodle. She’s not all fond of handshakes.”

“An interesting name,” Sefton commented. When he found his hand still held in a vice he eyed Murdoc.

“You got any spawn Sefty?”

“Well no, but—”

“Real important they are. Parents usually go absolutely bat-shit if anyone harms ‘em.” Murdoc’s barely veiled threat hung between the lines and Sefton nodded slowly as he finally understood.

A brief and tense silence sat between them until Sefton replaced his furrowed brows with a plain, wide smile. It revealed two gold capped teeth and a chipped one.

“I’ve asked for food and drinks so while we wait how about I explain the community?”

“Excellent, maybe you could start with why we’re here?”

Not appearing ruffled despite the abrupt query, Sefton continued on.

“We normally send out squads for supplies and to see if any other survivors are struggling. It’s not a good time to be alone.”

“We have each other,” Noodle muttered.
“Of course and we never want to split up families or friends, but I imagine you three were barely surviving. No electricity, no running water. It must have been very hard.”

“Four.”

Sefton gave Murdoc a thoughtful look, eyes flashing something dark. He forced yet another smile, his lips trembling to keep that position. Narrowing his eyes, the satanist scrutinized the older man, watching the annoyed ticks. Noodle dug her elbow into Murdoc’s ribs, inconspicuously trying to shut him up. It didn’t go unnoticed by the elder and as he resumed the pitch of his voice became patronizing.

“Often we notice people unable to deal with the outcome of family and friends becoming infected. Your case isn’t an uncommon situation, tying them up and speaking to them as though they’re still conscious. They aren’t of course, after the fever the person dies and all that’s left is a husk.”

Unwilling to back down, Murdoc leaned forward some, a firm glare set on his face.

“He was not a husk,” the former bassist spat, incredulous at the very idea. “He was more than capable of talking and thinking for himself.”

“No, he wasn’t. You only imagined that.”

“‘D is able to talk and stuff.”

Sefton contemplated them with a concerned face. After years of doctors and psychiatrists giving him the all too familiar look, Russel grunted in annoyance.

“I can see how this may look from your position, but ‘D wasn’t like that. Isn’t.” He corrected himself rapidly.

A tentative knock came to the door and Sefton held a hand up, halting any other retorts. Answering the door, three women came in holding large metal trays. Each looked no older than Noodle and all donned the same boring uniform. They watched the women be directed to set the trays in front of them on the table. Noodle glanced to the brunette in the middle, eyes immediately drawn to the discoloration at her neck. Upon noticing the ex-guitarist comprehending what the bruise was she leaned up fast and ducked her head.

“Thank you ladies.” Sefton motioned them out just as quickly as they appeared. Once able he closed the door and approached them.

“Lets put aside the other topic for now. Please eat. I’ll give you three a quick run down of our facilities in the meantime.”

The plates were filled with steaming vegetables, potato and what looked to be ground beef with gravy. None of them were given the chance to ask questions as Sefton jumped into explaining the hows and whys.

“We have a large storage of frozen foods as well as gardens that are tended too by designated individuals. Eat for heaven’s sake.”

Unnerved they calmly began eating. At points Murdoc made faces at the flavor of the meat, tasting something off but unable to pinpoint it. Sefton pressed on, choosing to ignore the uncomfortable atmosphere.

“We have a system for choosing individuals uniquely equipped for certain jobs.” Sefton cupped his hands together and smiled. They were growing weary of that expression. “Now that you three have
joined up we will place you in jobs to earn your keep.”

The former musicians were far from interested in staying. Until the option to escape arose it seemed they were stuck. As Sefton nattered on, thoroughly covering jobs and locations on the campus, they sat and listened. When it came time to be escorted to rooms, Russel requested they be given a shared space, citing the older man on not breaking family apart. For a drawn moment it seemed Sefton would deny them but he acquiesced. They were shown to a small room, a dorm within the building, that held two beds and two dressers. The student room was cramped but once alone it was the safest location they had.

“What a nightmare,” Murdoc groused.

“We’ll have to try leaving at night, I can’t see it being easy during the day.”

“This place is malignant.”

“Agreed. We need some plan to get outta here and fast. Didja see how them birds were acting? Skittish, one of ‘em had bruising on her neck. Obviously there’s some sort of twisted hierarchy going on.”

“What was up with that meat? Shit was gross.”

“Yes, it was rather sweet, almost honeyed in flavor. It would seem without an appropriate governing body a select few have taken command. We would be best to leave tonight if we can.”

Of course, nothing could be so easy. At the first chance to flee they were cornered and rather brusquely escorted back to their rooms by none other than Jason. He tutted at them as though scolding children and closed their door. It was locked from the outside and rather cause more of a scene they retired to bed. Although the sun was rising in the sky, Noodle roughly drew the curtains to shroud them in darkness. Russel claimed a measly double to himself while Murdoc and Noodle contemplated the other. Both too weary for a compromise decided to arrange themselves awkwardly on the small mattress and promptly passed out. Tomorrow for sure they would make a grand escape.

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Except they didn’t.

In the following morning the three were forced from the room and marched to the University cafeteria for breakfast. Jason was silent while leading them and any questions were ultimately ignored. They quietly realized how sticky their situation was becoming.

Upon entry a separate guard urged Noodle to tables arranged in the back portion of the room where only women sat. Neither Russel or Murdoc had a chance to react before they too were pushed to a table with seats. The spark of anxiety in them grew when it was apparent Noodle had been seated out of sight. They scanned the other persons at the table, all of which stared back in slight interest. Self-conscious of the constant gaping both Russel and Murdoc averted their eyes and traded a couple mutters about being in the twilight zone.

Near the head of the space a couple tables were set up to seat Sefton and six other elderly men, each one more white and decrepit than the last. Russel grunted, noticing immediately what was wrong with the so called council. Sefton used a mic to quiet the murmurs down by tapping said item. Clearing his throat he greeted everyone jovially.

“Morning my brothers and sisters, I hope all slept well?”
Nobody answered. Sefton chuckled and spoke again. “No matter. If everyone could bow in prayer, we must thank the lord for our bountiful harvest.”

As if attached to some strange machine, everyone excluding them and Noodle, bowed and pressed their hands together.

Sefton honed in on them, not that it was difficult given everyone leaning forward.

“I know some may not celebrate the lord, that’s okay. God loves all his children regardless of your sins. Please still partake so that we may push on with morning prayer.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me.” Murdoc sneered.

“Muds,” Russel warned as he bowed his head. “Just play along.”

“No,” he hissed back. “It’s brainwashing.”

Sefton covered the mic and gave a nod towards Murdoc. The satanist scanned the crowd until his eyes lay upon Jason. Said man was making for him, a black baton in his grip. Mildly panicked, Murdoc tried to remain absolute in his decision. He refused to submit under violence, it wasn't right. The whole set up was wrong.

Barely a meter from Murdoc, Jason raised the baton. With widened eyes, Murdoc had seconds to comprehend the item coming down hard over his face. Suddenly he was on the ground, stunned. A flurry of pain radiated throughout his skull while he lay there, thoroughly scrambled. He faintly heard Russel give a shout and the shuffle of the bigger man standing. Sharp pain exploded from his abdomen when Jason gave him a swift kick. Groaning in confused agony, Murdoc pressed the uninjured portion of his face into the ground. No more assault came.

The sickeningly sweet twang of Sefton came through speakers, "If you two refuse to behave, so soon too, I'll have to detain both you in isolation."

Murdoc wasn't aware of anything beyond the thundering sound of blood in his head. He was fairly certain something was broken. Had to be. Large hands were on him, heaving him up to his feet where everything spun dangerously. Russel steadied him and in silent gratitude he leaned into the large man.

"Jason if you could," Sefton spoke as though a disappointed parent would their kids. It was humiliating given half his face was already swollen.

Jason jerked his head. Murdoc hobbled with Russel's help. Still dazed he tried to work his jaw only to wince and keep his mouth still.

As they made their slow journey from the cafeteria, neither saw Noodle's face. Russel gave a relieved sigh. Jason lead them into a converted nurses office. Upon entry a petite woman greeted them with a quiet nod, gesturing for Murdoc to be seated. Russel deposited him and grumbled. The ex-drummer stepped back and seemed to struggle with something, frustrated.

“Why the hell would you do that man? Just— just do as they say until we can leave,” Russel rubbed a palm over his head upset.

The mousy woman assessed the former bassist’s face before she applied a cold compress. She expertly kept her eyes trained elsewhere while dealing with them. Murdoc stared at an unknown point beyond Russel, one eye swelling spectacularly. A hand waved in front of the older man.
“Hello? You all there Murdoc?”

“I have a splitting headache, excuse me if I’m not talkative,” Murdoc spat, instantly regretting it when his face burned.

Cupping his own face, Russel sighed, loud and audible even to Jason standing two car lengths away by the door. Murdoc finally spared the bigger man a pitiful look.

“How do you push and push? Because this is what happens.”

“How was I to know?”

“Extrapolate Murdoc! It was obvious with their segregated seating and flagrant behavior towards Noodle. This place is run by a bunch of bigots. Religious bigots.” Murdoc watched the other man pace a moment. Russel stopped in near to the satanist to whisper harshly, “please, if not for me or Noodle, then for 2D, don’t make this harder. We wanna leave, we need to play their game until we have an opening. Ya dig?”

“Yes.”

“Good.”

It wasn’t long before they were taken to separate rooms for solitary confinement. Meals were brought to them but otherwise they were sealed from the outside world for hours, possibly longer. It was hard to tell.

———

Time dragged and following their lockup Sefton personally placed them into suitable jobs. Suitable being a loose term. It felt more like a lengthy punishment for making a scene their first day. Russel worked the gardens for hours a day, weeding, watering, toiling, and bringing fresh food in or planting new stuff. It was difficult and his body ached by the early afternoon. Thanks to the extensive size of the garden patch he seemed to always have work. In the first few nights he passed out mid conversation, incapable of staying aware.

Noodle found herself placed with other women her age. The work was demeaning and the men placed to supervise created a feeling of being trapped as though in a prison. She kept her head down and did the work given to her. It was best she avoid being harassed lest she create a similar scene to Murdoc. Said man was disallowed to work until his face healed, which was tedious. Trapped in the confines of their shared room he had nothing to occupy his mind.

After almost six days the satanist was granted his freedom only to be slotted in with the women. Not entirely opposed to the idea at first he quickly understood why he was placed with them...

“Faggot.”

Rolling his eyes he worked deftly to thread the needle and do whatever it was the other women were doing. The long tables were put in rows with women on either side, diligently working away on varies tasks. Between him and the lady opposite sat a pile of clothing, which she and others grabbed from. If he tilted just enough he could spot Noodle. She was two tables away, facing him. She kept shooting looks his way, concern written all over her face. With the distance and the bruising still prominent, he was unable to convey anything. Breaking eye contact he peered at the woman beside him, watching her nimble fingers sew up a hole on a pair of shorts.

“Eh, I supposed to fix up whatever then?”
She glanced at him, eyes wide. Tension formed in her jaw as she seemingly fought the need to talk. The opportunity was taken when a man leaned between them, glaring down at Murdoc.

“No talking faggot.”

“That’ll get tiresome. I do hope your vocabulary is more creative.”

“Shut up and work, homo.”

Recalling Russel's heated words, Murdoc bit his tongue. Focusing on the shirt in his hands, he grit his teeth while learning to sew through trial and error.

———

After nine days he was beginning to feel demoralized. Repetitive menial tasks while under the ever watchful eye of the guards ground down on his resolve. He was constantly on the receiving end of verbal slurs and occasional physical assault; mostly being shoved around when escorted. He dreaded each morning thereafter. Somehow opening his eyes and seeing the same dreary dorm room made his unease grow. It became a learned response to stay silent. Noodle and Russel acted similarly.

The twelfth night just after dinner they had gathered in their room for bed. Save for the faint hum of electricity it was quiet.

“It’s been three days,” Noodle spoke softly, “could you say something? Anything? Let me know you are still here.”

Despite being pressed against him, facing away, he felt as though he were miles from her. Across the room they heard Russel’s breathing even out. Murdoc was sure she knew he was awake.

“Go to sleep Noodle.”

He felt her shift and tuck her legs up. The sharp inhale following the movement made something in his chest ache. There was a growing isolation between them, crushing their hopes of escape with each day. The monotony of their tasks made days blur by into nothingness. No words, no meanings, just nothing.

Noodle itched to play an instrument again. He heart yearned to be home, safe and with the others, arguing over takeout or movies. The words sat, stuck at the back of her throat just as it did during the daytime. She heard a muttering before Murdoc turned and draped an arm around her. The man squeezed her into an awkward hug.

“I’m here,” he muttered.

Though long outgrown a need for a parent to cling too, Noodle felt grateful for the freely offered affection. Despite Murdoc being a generally awkward person over showing empathy, Noodle appreciated his attempt. Both of them struggled for words in the dark.

"D'yeah remember when we drove the Geep?"

Squinting through the dark, she dug through her memories for the particular moment. There were a couple times he allowed the ex-guitarist a chance at driving.

"You were thirteen, Stuart had a migraine as usual—"
"Yes, you were extremely drunk and we were returning from a party. Russel gave you a lecture."

"Ah, yeah, well it was a good night."

"It was certainly something," Noodle remarked blithely.

"C'mon now. You and I played till four in the morning."

Smiling fondly to herself, Noodle gave a quick nod. Murdoc huffed at getting her hair in his face.

"It was a good night," she echoed.

Another silence fell over them, this time pleasantly swayed by memories of her childhood. Unconventional as it was, Noodle found she probably wouldn't change it. She closed her eyes, ready to sleep.

Murdoc murmured, nearly inaudible had he not been so close. "Not good with this." Noodle heard the unease in his voice and chose to wait if he had more to say. Said man inhaled loudly. "Care 'bout you sprog."

Memories of growing up, Plastic Beach, and the few years prior had her swallowing quietly.

"I know."

Murdoc exhaled noisily.

“Good. Go to sleep. Done with all this sentimental shite.”

Murdoc shifted himself around to face the wall. Noodle shimmied around until their backs touched. It was all she needed, that small point of contact.

Come morning they would all fall into the horrid routine of eating, working and sleeping. In this instance, Noodle could close her eyes and pretend for a moment that things were okay, that it was just a late night after recording.

———

Day fifteen. A day longer than two weeks.

It was night, and millions of stars twinkled overhead. Noodle sighed out a thin stream of smoke, satisfied to finally have a break from the humdrum of menial jobs as a captive. Well after supper she disappeared outside for a smoke, having snatched up a pack from a table. Alongside her Murdoc exhaled a large cloud of his own, relaxing as tension left him. Their small conversation three nights ago broke down a couple barriers making certain topics more approachable between them. Russel had forwent smoking to sleep, commenting he felt ill after their meal.

“It’s nice.”

“Hm?

Murdoc tilted his head towards the stars. Noodle glanced upwards, admiring the flickering lights. Lack of emissions granted the skies a chance to appear clear. Murdoc absentely hummed what sounded like Starshine. Noodle stubbed her cigarette out while listening. Turning to peer at her he stopped mid song to blow more smoke out.

“Horrible influence we were on you.”
Noodle snorted, she didn’t smoke nearly as much and cravings never struck. Murdoc finished his own before starting a second mere moments after.

“Fairly certain it was more a nature vs. nurture,” Noodle exhaled in amusement, “thankfully I knew the difference between good and bad.”

“Obviously not well enough, you stuck around.”

“What has you emotional?”

Murdoc took a deep breath, “this whole thing is pretty fucked up.”

“Being replaced with a cyborg was fucked up.”

There was no bite to her comment yet his shoulders went rigid. He knew she forgave him, but he had yet to forgive himself.

“Nobody wants to let that go, the world is fucking over for pete sake.”

“Sorry, no idea what I said it for.”

Murdoc grumbled under his breath before slouching.

“I’m sorry too. Should have tried harder.”

“You know it’s not your fault, right?”

“Isn’t it though? It’s always my fault. I wanted to go through the subway.”

Noodle furrowed her brow confused. She paused to give him a sideways glance.

“What are you talking about?”

“We were surrounded and Russ suggested the subway,” Murdoc struggled to keep his breathing even, “Stuart didn’t want to and I ignored him. He got the fucking gash down there in the water. If we hadn’t gone down there none of this would have happened.”

Noodle stood closer to the older man and dropped her head on his shoulder. She slipped an arm around his, holding it tight.

“You cannot be sure of anything Murdoc.”

The satanist continued to smoke while she leaned into him. Noodle watched the wisps of smoke curling around them.

“Let us steal a couple bottles of wine and get raging drunk. We can wake Russ too.”

They shared a mischievous grin, eyes glinting. Murdoc ditched his half finished smoke and they headed inside through a side door. Dodging around patrolling guards they made it into the kitchen after hours and dug around in the stock. Their anxiety was high, yet they kept looking. Noodle spotted a few bags of unidentified meats that she ignored in favor of grabbing two bottles of wine. When her and Murdoc looked to one another they both laughed. Abruptly they quieted to soft snickers. With four bottles there was no way it wouldn’t go unnoticed. If they were caught it was a one way ticket to being punished heavily. They stealthily stalked out with their booty and miraculously got into their room unscathed.
Sitting up at the noise, Russel rubbed the sleep from his eyes to find both ex-guitarists in the doorway. Looking far more exhausted as the days went on, he scrutinized them from the bottles to their faces before giving his best apathetic expression.

“You’ve got to be kidding me.”

“Absolutely not. Here.” Murdoc took two strides and held out a bottle of Merlot. “You, me and Sprog are having a drinky.”

“Tell me this was his idea and not yours,” Russel peered at Noodle imploringly. When she gave the man a sheepish smile he groaned.

Murdoc shook the wine with urgency. “C’mon, quit being a spoil sport.”

“Yeah alright.”

Once the bottle was grasped, Murdoc hastily cracked his own open and took a lengthy swig. Wine had never been his first choice with alcohol, not even his fifth or sixth choice. With so little selection he wouldn’t complain, booze was booze. Even if a wine hangover was terrible. Coming back to himself he wiped his face and caught the other two staring.

“What?”

“Boozer.”

“Been months since I last had a drop. Give me credit.”

Russel waved a hand, placating. “Fair enough.”

Noodle followed Murdoc’s lead and got going on her own. The Pinot Gris made her face pinch up at the dry taste.

“Ugh, this is horrible.”

“Beggars can’t be choosers.”

For a time they exchanged no words while laboring through gulps of disgusting wine. Each sip closely followed by a cringe or gag. The former drummer lauded Murdoc’s restraint not to chug the liquid in chase of intoxication. Half way in, the older man wiped his face and rested the bottom of his wine against his thigh.

“Silence is boring. Hows about we liven this up?”

“I hate to agree but lets have it.”

Murdoc shot Russel an annoyed look.

“A drinking game. Only way to make cheap crap taste good.”

“Oh?” Noodle set her bottle down and made a place for herself on the secondary bed. “What do you suggest?”

“I dunno.”

Had it been visible, Russel would have put emphasis on his eye roll. Thankfully Noodle beat him to it and even gave a small noise of discontent.
“Never have I ever,” she suggested, “I think we all know how to play?”

“Yeah, yeah. That’s a good one.”

When neither former musician offered any comment, Murdoc lollled his head with exaggerated movements. There was a loud cracking noise when he popped a joint.

“Ooh that felt good. Shall I start then?”

“May as well.”

“Never have I ever,” Murdoc drawled, “had a threesome.”

Barely waiting a breath for them to respond, Murdoc tilted his drink back. Noodle hastily yanked it down and gave him a heated frown as she slowly sipped her own beverage. Momentary shock filled the satanist as he gaped at the young woman; his face morphed into amusement while Russel shared a similar look.

“Do not be so surprised, I am perfectly capable of enjoying myself.” Her smile was sharp. “Also, that is not how you play old man.”

“Who in the hell you having threesomes with?”

“I do not kiss and tell. My turn yes?”

“Christ.” Russel rubbed his face, a small laugh bubbling up. “Go ahead baby-girl.”

“Never have I ever had a car accident.”

“Rude.” A long suffering sigh trailed after his utterance. “I have two or six little vehicular incidents and suddenly you’re a bad driver.”

Taking a chug off his bottle, Murdoc eyed Russel. The former drummer contemplated what to say. When the satanist lowered the drink he cleared his throat.

“Never have I ever slept with a man.”

“We talking sex or laying side by s—”

“C’mon man, obviously sex.”

“Semantics matter,” Murdoc stressed. Russel gave him a pointed look.

Unsurprisingly Murdoc once more took a drink only he choked when both Russel and Noodle copied him.

“What the hell was the point of that then?”

“Your expression.”

“Do we need a run down of the rules?”

“No.”

Murdoc rubbed the bridge of his nose. “Never have I ever stepped foot in a fairground.”

Attempting to recall a time where maybe any of them had entered such a place, Noodle shrugged.
Russel gave it a long pause to think ultimately lowering the wine.

“Huh. Suppose it’s just me.”

While Murdoc drank from his bottle Russel cupped his chin in thought.

“Never have I ever—”

From outside the room people walked by, voices muffled through the door. The three of them quieted down, breaths held while waiting for them to move by. Once safe they exhaled.

“What we should be doing…” Russel placed the Merlot on the dresser nearest to him. “Is working on an escape plan. What are we doing this for?”

Noodle peered at her Pinot Gris, a pensive look on her face.

“I thought we needed a reprieve. They have every corner of this facility protected, escape has… It seems unobtainable.”

“Don’t say that. They’re getting complacent with us. We could probably sneak off tonight if there was more time to grab shit.”

“That kinda planning will get us killed,” Russel sighed.

“What do you want then? What’s your brilliant idea Russ? We could talk our way out, oh wait. We tried that.”

“No need to get your back up man.”

“Do not fight. Please.”

Gripping the neck of his wine, Murdoc clenched his jaw to keep a retort from spilling out. Noodle picked at the blanket under her, quietly exasperated. Both men looked anywhere else other than the young woman.

“Maybe I can trade occupations,” Murdoc grit out. “Ask for a post as a guard. I haven’t given them reason to think worse of me.”

“Better you, I’m not getting anywhere working hard.”

“I’ll have a chance to see how well they hold up perimeter patrols. That work for everyone?”

“Yes.”

“Yeah.”

“Good. Utterly ruined the mood of the game.”

“Should probably get some sleep.”

Noodle took it upon herself to hide the left over wine in a hole they made within the wall. Shifting the dresser with Murdoc’s assistance, she crouched and tucked the bottles away. Briefly wondering how many others were copying them, Noodle stood to push the furniture back.

Once the three of them had arranged themselves for sleep, Russel spoke up.
“Think the rest of the world is still going? Like maybe this shit hasn’t spread anywhere else but here.”

“I want compensation if so.”

Russel muffled his amusement. “Of course you would.”

“I feel compensation is appropriate,” Noodle added. “Maybe recognition for dealing with this.”

“Yeah, extra fame wouldn’t hurt.”

“Could work on another album, man I miss that.”

Noodle and Murdoc hummed in agreement.

“Could change our image. More zombie themed, like the earlier concepts.”

“Christ, no. Stuart would be all over that. After this ordeal we are not talking ‘bout zombies again.”

“I hope 2D is safe.”

“Me too.” Murdoc felt there should be more added but had no words for it. They all worried for the ex-singer.

In the time after their conversation tapered off, everyone slowly drifted into a dreamless, fitful sleep.

The longer they remained the more estranged and detached each of them became. Every passing morning was an over-saturated nightmare they learned to navigate by assuaging their captors. Although their plans for escape were prevalent in their minds, everything had to be played out carefully. After a forty-eight hour period Murdoc proposed a job change to Sefton, playing the part of an ever dutiful follower; and, somehow the act worked. Over the span of three days thereafter the satanist was trained to handle a weapon.

On the fourth morning, with fresh gear and semi-automatic weapon, Murdoc trailed Michael, his tower partner. The arrangement was less than ideal seeing as the satanist hoped to be alone during the shifts.

In a single day Murdoc learned Michael was no more special than most of the beige wearing survivors. He had a wife and daughter on campus who he protected by conforming to the utter insanity Sefton and the council enacted. They easily bonded over this aspect and in a matter of days, Murdoc found a shaky camaraderie between him and Michael. However, his trust in the other man wasn’t high enough to entrust their plans of escape. It was safer that way.

———

It had been weeks since being forcefully adopted into the oddly religious cult. Between the ever growing need for freedom and menial jobs, the three of them had discovered talking. In the wee hours when the three of them were confined to their measly room but unable to sleep, conversation flourished.

Topics previously left unspoken were finally broached. Plastic Beach, although difficult to touch on, was discussed in detail. Somehow there was a chance to forgive and forget through talking. Past indiscretions were apologized for and future ideas were hatched. Nothing about their circumstances made life easy or normal, but in someway it helped them find balance between each
Befriending Michael made patrol shifts pass far quicker. There were never undead wandering around at the backside of the university wall. Anytime they spoke, Murdoc made sure to bring up generic topics. In these talks he found Michael was originally an accountant with a side passion for drumming. Murdoc bit his tongue on announcing his fame and settled for mentioning being a former-bassist.

This night was no different. Both of them were perched in chairs, guns leaning against the ledge while they discussed the minutiae of music genres before the collapse of the world.

“Listen, K-pop had its place. I may not like it but Casey, my daughter, was adamant that it had a unique sound.”

“Listen mate, you can’t convince me it’s worth a listen. I’ve heard it and it’s bland, generic tones with some dolled up boys singing shite lyrics. It’s basically Bieber but in another language.”

Michael gave a hearty laugh, “hear me out—”

“No you hear me, come back when you’ve listened to some real music. Waste my damn time with *K-pop,*” Murdoc snorted, amusement lighting up his face.

The ex-accountant was a relaxed individual and very quickly warmed up to Murdoc. The satanist almost felt bad at the prospect of leaving him here when they escaped. Their chuckles tapered off upon hearing a rustle beyond the stone wall. With the setting sun casting enough light they both moved to glance into the bushes and trees lining the property beyond the wall. Neither could see anything worthwhile.

“Maybe an animal?”

“Just how many of those have you seen since this started?”

“None if I’m honest,” Michael murmured. “It can’t be an infected, I’ve been here for over a month and there hasn’t been one spotted at all.”

“First for everything.”

Michael brought his gun up and positioned himself for the inevitable appearance of an undead. Jerking surprised, Michael fired off one round when a black furry blur rushed through bushes and in the wrought iron gates a couple meters to their right. Murdoc smacked the other and frowned.

“The hell are you doing? It’s a cat.”

“It startled me,” he exclaimed.

“You go firing off shots and Jason will come and inspect. We could get dumped in isolation.”

Nodding shakily, Michael lowered the weapon and took a calming breath. Sure he was fine, Murdoc took his chance to see where their feline visitor disappeared too. The former bassist hopped from their tower and scanned the grounds. His eyes instantly honed onto a startlingly familiar magenta leash poking out from a few bushes. Confusion flooded him as he rushed towards the colored cord. Tugging on it and dragging Kraken from the underbrush his heart sped up in recognition.

“Kraken?” He whispered in question, “how?”
Scooping up the feline he hissed at claws catching the uncovered part of his arm. Said cat squirmed in his hold, meowing pitifully.

“Oi, not going to hurt you. You know me, you furry devil.”

It took a minute or two of soothing pets and cooing for the animal to settle. Murdoc mumbled to her, trying to understand how she managed to make it here on her own.

“Is it infected?”

He barely heard Michael.

Suddenly things clicked into place. Kraken was in her harness and leash, which only Noodle and them knew about or where it had been.

“Stuart’s alive,” he said aloud, “he survived.”

“H-hey! Get up here, there’s a bunch of infected.”

Mind racing much like his heart, Murdoc deposited Kraken. Everything in him filled with dread at the sound of gun fire. Whipping around he ran to the ladder, scrambling to get back up.

“Mike stop shooting!”

“There’s a horde, we have to dispatch them,” was his response.

Nails catching on the wood of their watch tower, Murdoc grunted while hefting himself up with haste. He stood and leaned at the edge Michael was using to shoot from. Eyes jumping from each rotting corpse hobbling between trees he desperately sought out blue. Fading light lent no help and he cursed being unable to spot the familiar dark eyes and blue hair. With surprising skill and ease, Michael fired on each zombie as they approached.

“Grab your gun dammit. I can’t keep them off myself.”

Ignoring the other he gripped the edge of the tower, straining to spot anyone that stood out.

“Stop shooting for a minute,” Murdoc waved frantically. Michael side-eyed him as though he were delusional and kept on.

Murdoc felt his hope waning when none of the distorted faces stood out. Michael cursed Murdoc’s lack of help and ran his rounds down until he had to switch to the unused gun. A group of three got too close. Michael killed the lead and the body dropped to reveal 2D ambling behind it, face disheveled and almost unrecognizable with a bright red ball cap on. Blue peaked out at the side of his face, matted to his skin. Stunned to momentary stillness, Murdoc caught Michael aiming for the ex-singer.

“No!”

Shoving the weapon, the bullet missed the taller man. Relieved, Murdoc exhaled loudly.

“What are you doing? We need to clear them out before Jason and them come over. It’ll be our skins if we let them in.”

“Just leave the one in the red hat.”

“Why? He’s infected.”
“He’s not,” Murdoc shook Michael, urgency to his voice.

Shoving Murdoc off, Michael turned back and fired on other zombies he could see. 2D was out of sight against the wall. Angling himself to reach in a strange position, Michael prepared to take out the last threat. In a panic the satanist took up the empty weapon.

“Sorry ‘bout this.” Murdoc lifted the gun and clubbed Michael over the head.

Said man slumped into the small wall around their perch, rifle tumbling out of his hands to the ground. Palms sweaty and heart pounding, Murdoc looked around to make sure nobody saw the commotion. Once assured he practically leapt from the tower and came to the metal gates. Using the butt of the weapon once more he busted a rusty lock off. Hands trembling while unlatching the gate, he pushed the ancient looking metal open, dropping the useless gun as he did. Finally outside and essentially free he ran straight for 2D, almost barreling the younger man over. Holding tight to the ex-singer he squeezed his eyes shut.

“You stupid idiot. You almost got yourself brained for fuck sake.”

2D made garbled noises against Murdoc’s hair. Pulling back he held 2D out to glance at him. Other than some hygiene issues, the younger man appeared no worse for wear. The satanist brought his palms up and cupped 2D’s face, fingers brushing the facial hair. It was a strange look for the ex-singer, but he hardly cared.

“I tried not to think you were dead, but hell it was hard.”

Tugging him in, Murdoc held him again. 2D swayed in his hold, incapable of standing steady. Murdoc swore he felt 2D hold him back, but it might have been his imagination. He pressed his face into 2D’s chest, hands clinging to the soiled shirt at the ex-singer’s back.

“You can’t do that to me Stu, you just can’t. I don’t know what I’d have done without you had it been true.”

“Hey!”

Jolting around, Murdoc saw Jason. Jason squinted at him and 2D through the dark. There was a sizeable space between them that twilight made it hard to discern who was who.

“The hell is going on? Who is that?”

“Hey!”

Jolting around, Murdoc saw Jason. Jason squinted at him and 2D through the dark. There was a sizeable space between them that twilight made it hard to discern who was who.

“The hell is going on? Who is that?”

“I need help,” Murdoc said, unsure what he was implying, “it’s another survivor.”

Jason cautiously approached, gun at the ready. Under his palms Murdoc felt 2D tense. To his utter surprise 2D slid arms around him more firmly and moved them about until Murdoc was behind the ex-singer. Jason paused and brought his gun up.

“What the hell is this? You should be dead.”

“So it was you who shot me,” 2D growled.

“Stuart?”

“You talk?” Jason asked incredulously, voice overlapping Murdoc.

A small inhuman noise escaped the former vocalist as he flew at Jason, hands simultaneously shoving the gun aside and grabbing for Jason’s neck. The force knocked the man to the ground, 2D
following as he made attempts to bite into the man’s jugular.

“What the fuck! Call him off,” Jason yelled.

Standing by the wayside, Murdoc watched quietly. His momentary shock faded rapidly. Somehow this felt like poetic justice. All the harassment and mistreatment came to mind when he looked at Jason struggling beneath 2D. He couldn’t bring himself to care.

“No hard feelings mate,” Murdoc commented, as though talking about the weather.

“Are you nuts! Get him off me!”

A dark look crawled onto Murdoc’s face as he sauntered over, pausing just out of reach. He casually tucked his hands into pockets while Jason fought against 2D.

“I’m a fair man, I believe tit for tat, y’know. eye for an eye or say, life for a life.” Crouching, Murdoc sneered at Jason. “Hell of a way to go eh?”

Murdoc dodged a hand swiping for him.

2D sunk his teeth into bare flesh at Jason’s forearm. A panicked sound escaped the other man as his free hand shot out, smacking and hitting at 2D’s face. The ball cap fell away and Murdoc stood again, backing up. With his full weigh, 2D forced himself closer until he bite into a cheek, dull teeth ripping the flesh open to reveal Jason’s mouth. Horrified and in pain the man shrieked and made every attempt to fight 2D off to no avail. An undamaged hand groped at 2D’s hair, yanking in a last ditch attempt to free himself from the unrelenting attack.

“You better not muck his hair up, I happen to like it.”

A part of him realized how incredibly wrong standing to the side look. How unwilling to help looked. For weeks he dealt with Jason whispering slurs, shoving him about, and generally treating him and the other two like dirt. He felt rightfully pleased the man was getting the ending he deserved. Still, it didn’t stop Murdoc feeling ill at the sound of cries for help that finally gurgled to a stop. He covered his ears and closed his eyes, unable to stomach watching 2D quite literally eat another person. Dulled by his hands, he still heard the grotesque sound of chewing. That aspect of the ex-singer never got any easier to experience.

Rather suddenly 2D grabbed his arms and yanked him around, pulling him into the trees. Behind them there were shouts and the flicker of light. Mildly disorientated at the movement he tried to glance behind them only for 2D to tug harder.

“They have guns, don’t stop.”

“Russ and Noodle! No! Shit, Stu we can’t leave ‘em behind!”

A couple shots sounded, landing nowhere near them as they weaved between foliage. 2D’s grip remained unrelenting.

“We’ll come back,” he panted.

Abruptly the ex-singer halted, head whipping back and forth. Murdoc squinted through the dark to see what stopped the man.

“It’s a steep hill,” 2D answered, “I came up the road and around, this must be the backside of the school.”
“So lets go slow.” Murdoc peered down, mostly unable to see details.

A beam of light shone on them. “There they are!”

“Don’t let go of me,” 2D said, voice eerily calm.

Murdoc had no time to sass before the former vocalist was leading them down the hill. Underbrush and dirt slid beneath their feet, and at points Murdoc was sure they would fall. Voices hollered above them, growing distant.

Upon reaching solid soil they took off running. In time it became apparent nobody had followed. 2D lead them out of the small forested portion and into the city, where they stopped in a narrow alleyway, both heavily panting.

“Need to stop meeting like this,” Murdoc muttered.

“Are you hurt?” The taller man quickly invaded his personal space, examining him for injury.

Close like this, Murdoc smelt nothing but blood and rot. He gagged, forcing himself to swallow back against the urge to vomit. Gentle pushing 2D back he shook his head.

“Quit that, I’m fine.”

“It’s really you. You’re really here and okay.”

“Yes. Yes that all happened and I’m actually here.”

2D gave him a crushing hug, smearing semi-dry blood on his cheek. The stench swarmed his senses and although he felt overwhelmed by it he hugged 2D back. Unexpectedly the man began crying against Murdoc’s shoulder. Despite how tightly he was being held, Murdoc patted at the shaking back. He struggled to breath through his mouth, trying to ignore how he could nearly taste the smell.

“C-couldn’t find you and— and I kept hearing things. I thought you were dead.”

“You thought I was dead? You were shot!”

Somehow that made 2D cry harder. Feeling moderately shamed for incurring even more crying, Murdoc held the taller man more securely.

“Enough waterworks, I’m fine. You’re fine,” his voice steadied out. He rubbed awkwardly at 2D’s back. “All is well. C’mon, no more crying.”

“I was certain I wouldn’t find you b-but some nice people directed me here. I started to feel off and — but I found you! This is real.”

“Yeah, it’s real.”

A groan resounded somewhere beyond them. 2D yanked back. Murdoc gulped in some fresh air upon having space. He mentally thanked Satan the younger man seemed distracted enough not to notice.

“We’re not safe out here.” He sniffed and wiped at his face.

Cautiously traversing the city in the dark, 2D lead them into a home by busting the door handle. Once inside they blocked the door and made quick work to assure all other entries were blocked or
covered. It ended up being the former vocalist doing most work with Murdoc handicapped. Murdoc sifted through the dark for some source of light when 2D flicked a match. Following the discovery they lit up some ancient looking oil lamps to assist with highlighting their space.

Most of the time passed without words. Other than the noise of shifting, the house was silent. After a comfortable amount of light was created, 2D skulked around for certain supplies. And to not appear desperate, Murdoc divested his guard uniform and wiped his face. He stripped down to beige clothes and socks. Part of him wanted to rush the ex-singer again, keep him in his sight. He avoided appearing clingy by remaining where he was in the master bedroom. He was curious what said ex-singer was doing, but rather than hover stayed put. He watched the shadows bounce along the ceiling while laying back; meanwhile, his thoughts drifted to Jason’s pleas.

*Is that murder?*

He heard 2D curse from the connected washroom. He remain spread eagle on the king-sized bed, comfortable. His thoughts were too loud in the quiet.

*It’s not murder though, right?*

“*I wouldn’t be too upset Muds,*” 2D spoke from the bathroom. “*He wasn’t a good person.*”

Murdoc left unsaid how unnerving it was for 2D to know how he felt.

“*They were all bad.*”

“*Ow— Then why are you so worried?*”

“*What are you doing?*”

“*Nothing,*” exclaimed 2D.

“*Clearly untrue.*”

“*Just stay there, it’s a surprise.*”

“*Fine. Whatever.*” Murdoc glared at the ceiling. He still felt off about the whole thing, like he should be guilty but wasn’t.

At the sound of gargling he turned his head towards the open doorway. The candle within the lavatory outlined 2D’s shadow. He could guess what the other was doing just by the sounds alone. Focusing on the ex-singer helped put his mind elsewhere.

Rolling onto his side he watched the bathroom door. “*You cleaning up then?*”

“*No.*”

“*Uh-huh.*”

“*I’m— it’s suppose to be a surprise.*”

A strange sound came from the bathroom. Curious, Murdoc rolled off the bed and righted himself. Stepping to the doorway he was halted by the door swiftly closing. The whoosh of air shook the tenuous flames lit around the room. Leaning into the door, Murdoc rolled his eyes.

“*It’s obvious you’re cleaning up. Thought surprises were suppose to be, y’know, surprises.*”
“We haven’t seen one another in weeks. I’m disgusting, I thought cleaning up would be… romantic.”

“Romantic. Right.” Murdoc looked to his sock clad feet. Romance wasn’t his thing. Maybe a little of it to woo a partner to bed, but after that there was no need. “I don’t need that garbage.”

“Go lay down Muds, I’ll be done soon enough.”

Disgruntled but obeying, Murdoc flopped back on the bed. His mind easily drifted back to earlier. Frowning at the ceiling he squeezed his eyes shut, as though it would push the thoughts away. Mentally counting away the seconds while putting himself elsewhere, he missed when 2D finished in the washroom. A weight along the bed, settling on either side of him, alerted him.

Cracking his eyes open he stared up at the ex-singer. 2D had shaved away his awkward facial hair, seemingly nicking himself a few times at the chin. Confused, Murdoc tilted his head while examining 2D. The small smile on the other man’s face waned under the scrutiny.

“What?”

“Your hair is off.”

“What you mean?”

“It’s lopsided.”

“Oh,” 2D sighed and sat up. He straddled Murdoc’s thighs and pouted while fingering at his hair. “I thought I did a decent job.”

Admittedly the differing lengths on either side suited the taller man. Murdoc quietly observed him. The light falling over the former-singer was soft and orange, it made the younger man appear warm and inviting. A stark difference to when he was on Jason.

“It looks fine.”

“Y’think so?”

“Yeah. C’mere.”

Motioning 2D closer, the former vocalist smiled once more and leaned over Murdoc. 2D attempted to come in for a kiss, but received the older man’s cheek instead. Perplexed he pulled his head up to stare at Murdoc. The other looked contrite while biting at his lip.

“Why’d you do that?”

“Er— it’s not that I don’t want it, just…”

“I rinsed my mouth and brushed my teeth. Should be minty, promise.”

To prove his point he blew his breath over Murdoc, grinning. It was fresh, something the satanist was more than eager to take advantage of. Cupping 2D’s face, he brought the other in, practically smashing their mouths together.

“Mh!”

An amused noise escaped the older man as he slid his hands into tangled blue hair. Keen on sharing a private moment uninterrupted, finally, Murdoc moved one hand down. It rested along
2D’s lower back, just above where his jeans started. The ex-singer broke their kiss to take a deep
breath.

“Be gentle Muds,” 2D grumbled. He ran his tongue over his lips. “I’m not going anywhere and
neither are you, I hope.”

“Course not.”

Sparing no more words, Murdoc caught 2D’s trim waist. Bringing the man closer he kissed far
softer, chapped lips cautiously coaxing 2D into reciprocating. The ex-singer threaded pianist
fingers through black hair. Murdoc smirked into the kiss, relishing the teasing nips and feel of
tongue pressing at his lips. After months apart, figuratively speaking, Murdoc wanted nothing
more than to sink into one another, enjoy the moment of freedom.

The hands wound in his hair slid down over his chest, stopping above his pecks. 2D grasped the
beige material tightly. Murdoc gave a disappointed noise when the other broke their kiss.

“Prefer you in black,” 2D muttered.

The sound of shredding fabric filled the air. Dumbfounded, Murdoc blinked, eyes darting between
his own bare chest and 2D. Swallowing audibly, Murdoc became hot all over. Eyes pinching with
his wide grin, 2D lifted a hand to brush his knuckles over the older man’s cheek.

“Red suits you too.”

Embarrassment filled the gaps between his arousal. Draping an arm over his face, Murdoc shied
away under the gaze.

“How ‘bout you shut up?”

Lips latched onto his collar, sucking warmly. Teeth grazed dangerously along his flesh. Despite
himself, Murdoc shuddered and inhaled sharply. He felt overwhelmed in the best way, trapped
under the taller man. Cool palms massaged his chest, working down towards his waist. He should
be terrified of 2D, the man was capable of tearing him to shreds. He became further aroused at the
prospect. When fingers tucked into his loose bottoms he lifted himself partly until the clothing was
removed. He moved his arm to tug at 2D's shirt, which the other ignored in favor of grasping him.

Distracted, Murdoc dragged 2D in for a couple messy kisses, gasping into his mouth. He held onto
the ex-singer's nape, hair caught between his fingers. 2D twisted his wrist just right and
unintentionally Murdoc broke away to breath harder, panting along 2D's cheek. He knew it
wouldn't last long so he rode the sensations building in his abdomen. 2D turned his face, burying
into Murdoc's throat. The ex-singer made a trail of nips, cautious not to break the skin as he
reached Murdoc's ear. Any thought of danger flitted away as his climax rushed over him. It took a
moment for Murdoc to come back to himself, body sagging into the mattress.

2D wiped his stomach off before flopping beside him, still fully clothed and hard. Murdoc
considered assisting the other when 2D chose to speak.

"Feeling better?"

"If you mean, do I feel less tense, then yes."

"You're still thinking about earlier."

Murdoc scrubbed a hand over his face, the afterglow slipping away. "You had to bring it up?"
"Sorry."

"Another thing to add to the list," Murdoc commented casually, "of being a bad man."

"Oh, he was much worse, Muds. He'd been eating other people."

Lowering his hand, Murdoc shot 2D an alarmed look.

"What?"

"His stomach contents. He ate someone recently," 2D explained.

Jason's horrified screams pressed at the forefront of his mind. Squeezing his eyes shut, Murdoc winced more to himself when his stomach turned uneasily.

"Murdoc?"

"He was eating people?"

"Yes. Middle aged woman, maybe late thirties. She had, had cancer."

Running on autopilot he stood from the bed and stumbled to a dresser. Slamming drawers open and closed, Murdoc hastily yanked on clothing better suited to him. The upset in his stomach worsened until 2D gave a noise of surprise behind him when he hunched over to vomit. Hands settled at his back and upper arm.

"Muds, it's okay."

Heaving up bile made him shake. 2D tried to move him away from the puddle of sick.

"Lay down, I'll get some water."

“How in the hell can you know that?" Murdoc asked abruptly. 2D peered at him perplexed.

"Know what?"

"What age she was and... and the cancer?"

“The taste? Almost like ground beef, but definitely human."

At the ashen look on Murdoc's face, 2D scrambled to correct his folly.

"Lay down," 2D repeated. "You need to rest and water."

Mechanically the ex-bassist laid once more upon the bed, eyes trained to the ceiling. All earlier feelings of relaxed limbs and dopamine flooding his head were chased away by his growing dread. Noodle and Russel were stuck at the deranged facility, eating people. Ground up human flesh and organs made to look like a sick facsimile of pork or beef. The bed dipped by his side and 2D wiggled a water bottle above his face.

"Please drink something."

He drank the water, quiet and distressed. 2D remained at his side much the same.

After a time the room grew darker until Murdoc realized 2D had put out the oil lamps. He felt the former vocalist beside him. Patting in the blackness for 2D's hand he gripped the bony palm once
found. The gesture was returned. It put him at ease, if only some.

Drifting off to the sound of 2D's soft breathing, Murdoc slept fitfully. He dreamt of a butcher hacking the others into small bite size pieces, served up on fancy silver platters while Sefton chuckled in the background. Some disembodied hand kept force feeding bits of Noodle and Russel into his mouth while another worked his jaw. He didn't know where he was, all he could see was Sefton's grinning face.

*Taste like pork.* He heard himself mumble.

*  *

Jolting up, Murdoc gasped sharply, his body soaked with sweat. Clenching at his hair he whimpered while drawing his knees up. It took him a time to calm down, enough to realize 2D was missing. Instant alarm put him back into a panicked state as he rushed off the bed, looking first in the bathroom then exiting the room.

"Stu?" He shoved open a door in the hall. "Stuart?"

His frantic search lead him into the open space of the kitchen and living room. The patio door, previous blocked, was wide open and outside air brushed the curtains. 2D stepped in that same minute and the musician felt relief and anger swell simultaneously. Murdoc marched towards the taller man, intent on berating the other when 2D gave him a wide, gap-toothed smile. 2D held up some rather small apples making the ex-bassist stop half a meter from reaching 2D. As if all his anxiety driven emotions vanished, Murdoc felt a small smile tugging at his lips.

"Apples?"

"Yeah, there's a tree out there. Guess the previous owners liked fruit. Here."

Taking the proffered fruit, Murdoc hesitated to bite into it. He almost feared it would turn to rotten mush.

"Go on, it's a late season apple. It might be a bit tart."

2D passed Murdoc and gently dropped his bundle onto the kitchen island. Murdoc examined the dark colored fruit before sinking his teeth into it. Bitter-sweet juice filled his mouth, and despite it he found the flavor satisfying. Eating the apple he joined 2D at the island.

"This where you buggered off too? I thought you had gone."

"Yeah. I can't sleep much, figured I could get a head start on supplies for after we get Noodle and Russ."

The idea of returning to the closed, cannibalistic society made Murdoc fret. 2D placed a cool palm on his shoulder.

"We're going together, it'll be okay."

"Right."

Disconcerted over the journey to come, Murdoc unhurriedly ate his apple. His appetite was quickly dwindling. 2D dug around through cupboards for containers while Murdoc watched. Wondering
for a minute, how an apocalypse pushed them together after years of fooling around, Murdoc regarded the ex-singer. 2D gave a triumphant sound and held aloft a lunch box.


"Can put the apples into it, protect them from getting bruised."

The satanist helped 2D arrange food supplies into containers, stacking them on the island. Soon after they pilfered throughout the house for other necessary things for a long trip. As they worked together to gather items the time slipped from early morning to afternoon. Neither of them were the wiser to the goings on of the cult up the hill. Neither knew how Russel or Noodle were faring.

Chapter End Notes

The adventure continues :D

EDIT: 10/02/19 - Midterms have come upon me so I haven't had a proper chance to sit and just write. CH2 of Universal will be on the back-burner until revisions and tests are complete.
Chapter Summary

Welcome to the meat factory.

Chapter Notes

EDIT 02/21/19 - Entirely updated this chapter! Changed up the injuries leading into chapter 13. Working to finish up my revisions to CH 13-16

Warning for brutality/physical assault. Murdoc suffers a fair amount in this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Following the death of Jason and Murdoc’s subsequent escape, Noodle found herself in possession of Kraken. Confused by the appearance of said animal and, afterwards, lack of Murdoc, Noodle questioned what had happened. Of course her speaking out of term was belittled and the ex-guitarist wound up in the shared room sans answers. She paced the small space in wait for Russel, while outside there was a flurry of activity. With their room facing the front end of the property she saw nothing and grew frustrated. Noodle took turns between muttering to herself and petting Kraken. She was able to understand what the harness meant and hoped Murdoc had left with 2D unscathed.

Russel returned to the room, escorted by two guards. The man joined Noodle in the room where the door was closed abruptly behind him. They shared a troubled look before the former drummer sat opposite her and Kraken.

“I suppose you were dumped here after the debacle?”

“Yes. Do you know what happened? I had no chance to gather information.”

“Seems Jason was killed.”

“Do you think Murdoc…” Noodle shook her head. She couldn’t believe, despite his short comings, that Murdoc was capable of murder.

“Nah. Looks like a zombie got him.”

“Maybe 2D then?”

“Yeah. I think they were chased off afterwards.”

“I wonder what that means for us.”

Russel had no words and offered her a shrug. Noodle sat once more and for hours they exchanged little while keeping Kraken content. If anything, having Kraken soothed them, if only a little.
Waiting made matters tense until finally their door was opened to reveal Sefton. He entered the room, silent. Having the man in the otherwise safe enclosure made both Russel and Noodle uncomfortable.

“It came to my attention early on that you three were trouble.”

“Where is Murdoc?”

Sefton became flushed and he clenched his jaw. His self restraint barely hid the growing fury emanating from his person. Russel prepared for a blow, a moment where he may have to jump in and protect the ex-guitarist. Sefton settled, face still decidedly red, but expression smoothing out.

“Your father is gone. He left late last night in the company of some infected thing. Of course, right after murdering Jason.” Before Noodle, or Russel for that matter, could retort, Sefton growled. “You two will pay the punishment of his crimes. For the murder of Jason, a cherished member of this society, you two are to be banished.”

Momentarily Russel and Noodle shared a look of surprised elation. Noodle glanced to Sefton and attempted not to smile.

“Banished? We can leave?”

“Yes,” Sefton snapped. “You two are to be escorted far from here so as to not come wandering back. We refuse to have you two back after the disturbances you’ve caused.”

Although neither of them had made trouble since the first day, they had no issue agreeing to the terms of their punishment. They would meet up with 2D and Murdoc and things would be fine, all of them could go off on their merry way.

“When can we expect to be banished?”

Sefton ran a hand over his beard, contemplating the question.

“Soon. Tomorrow morning. You two may share in one last meal here before we send you off. Please understand I do this with a heavy heart. If there were another way to handle the situation, I would. Unfortunately with Murdoc missing and having murdered Jason… I cannot have that sort of disruption here.”

With that, Sefton left them in the room. Noodle shot Russel an excited grin, hope restored at the prospect of leaving. The former drummer smiled as well, clearly sharing the sentiment. Noodle cuddled Kraken, mumbling to the animal how eager she was to finally taste freedom again.

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“This is Brent and Will, they’ll be escorting you two.”

“Why do we need escorts if we’re getting the boot?”

“To lower the risk of return,” Sefton answered.

Neither of them intended on ever returning. However, to avoid argument, both conceded the strange treatment and were led from the grounds. Brent and Will, both rather large men standing at six feet, were silent while walking them to a black late 2000s jeep. Once comfortably settled into the back seat and buckled, the vehicle started. Brent drove them from the confines of the university property. Noodle glanced back to watch the school disappear behind the hill it was perched on. Her
body sagged, relaxing. Russel gave her shoulder a comforting pat, sharing the briefest look of relief.

“Where are we going to be dropped off?”

“Quiet.”

Brent gave them a fierce stare via the rear-view mirror. Will chuckled and peered at them over his shoulder.

“Excuse him. We take exiled individuals to the industrial region of the city. Hey, that’s a cat.”

“Her name is Kraken.”

“Haven’t seen too many of those around,” Will commented.

Brent grunted. The look Will gave Russel and Noodle said, ‘this guy, am I right?’. Noodle covered her mouth to hide a burgeoning smile. Will faced forward once more and the ride resumed a quiet atmosphere. Neither of them could disguise the happiness. They would be free soon. Noodle and Russel exchanged a couple words below the rumble of the vehicle, discussing what to do once on their feet. They would have to regroup somehow and move from there.

The drive was a short one, leading through winding roads into a decently organized section of industrial buildings. Neither Noodle or Russel had paid any mind to the immediate area, engrossed in conversation. It escaped their notice when the jeep pulled into a fairly lit up packaging plant. As the vehicle stopped entirely the two looked up, confused at the bright facility. Brent put the car into park and stepped from the jeep. Will followed suit and then both men opened the back doors.

“Out.”

“Where are we?” Russel peered around, refusing to step out.

“Well this is where we drop exiles,” Will explained. “Out of the car you two. Leave the cat.”

Noodle held Kraken closer. The former percussionist huffed in irritation.

“What is this? Send us on our way and we’ll go. You aint gotta worry ‘bout us coming back, we definitely won’t.”

Brent reached in and fought with Russel to unbuckle the man. Noodle kept Kraken in her arms while attempting to kick Will.

“Don’t make things difficult.”

“Don’t make them difficult,” Noodle snapped.

Will groped a calf and forced himself into Noodle’s personal bubble, hand scrambling to undo the buckle. With her hands occupied the ex-guitarist struggled against the man with her free leg.

“Get off me!”

Russel fared no better and in seconds they were being dragged from the jeep. Kraken was dropped in the backseat, ruffled and confused at the commotion. Noodle yelled and kicked out when Will hefted her up, arms trapping her own to her sides.

“You’re a wild one,” Will strained.
Noodle slammed her head back against his nose and the man yelped in shock. His hold on her loosened until she could wiggle free. Rubbing the back of her skull she slammed the back door closed and attempted to get into the front.

“Oh no you don’t, you bitch!”

A hand snatched her wrist, yanking harshly. Noodle angled herself around with the motion and kneed Will in the stomach. She cursed and did it again in the groin causing the man to moan in pain, stumbling away from her. Russel hollered over the noise as he slid into the driver side.

“Noodle get in! We’re outta here.”

Hand reaching for the passenger side door, Noodle was startled by shrouded individuals convening on them. Her eyes honed on a canister and mask held by one of the people. The hesitation was ultimately what stopped her from reaching the jeep door. Someone grabbed her from behind and suddenly there were multiple people surrounding her. Fighting them desperately she watched the silicone mask descend nearer.

The gas tasted like bubble gum. She barely heard Russel shout for her as the edges of her vision became fuzzy.

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“Here brat.” Murdoc stopped her in the halls of Kong Studios, an unopened low-percentage beer in one hand and a lit cigarette in his other. “Happy birthday or whatever.”

Noodle smiled up at the grouchy bassist and took the cheap alcoholic beverage. She held it tight with elation. However, she hesitated, unsure how to proceed. Murdoc grunted and lowered a hand, finger tugging the tab until the beer made a fizzle.

“Knock yourself out Sprog.” Murdoc took a drag on his fag, watching her.

Ever attempting to reach his approval, despite him holding nothing but praise for her, Noodle sipped the beer. Grimacing at the utterly foul liquid she stuck her tongue out. This seemed to amuse Murdoc as he gave a genuine laugh. He reached out and ruffled her hair.

“Acquired taste, give it a couple years.” Noodle wasn’t sure she would ever enjoy the beverage but she nodded regardless.

Russel chose that moment to appear in the hallway, she couldn’t see his face. Murdoc hastily snatched the beer from her. She eyed the older man, confused.

“What the hell Muds? Beer?”

She heard the heavy steps as Russel approached. She still couldn’t see his face, no matter how hard she stared.

“What? A little beer never hurt anyone.”

“Christ man, she’s only twelve. You cannot give twelve year olds alcohol. No kid should get that for a birthday!”

She hated when they fought.

“Well fuck me, I don’t know what little girls want.”
She watched them fight, all she could see was the low-percentage beer in Murdoc's hand and Russel’s clenched fist. She remembered Russel being their voice of reason. Between Murdoc and 2D being incapable addicts, Russel had raised her. Their voices became distant until she noticed they were far from her as the hallway extended.

“What is wrong with you man?”

“Fuck off.”

Please stop fighting...

Please help me...

They got further away.

———

Russel lifted his hands from the steering wheel. He watched through the mirror as Noodle was carted off to who knew where. He grit his teeth.

“Step out slowly, you’re coming with us big-boy.”

Cautiously stepping from the vehicle he kept his hands visible. The gun dug into his neck.

“Lets go. No funny business or I’ll end it here.”

Swallowing, Russel walked where directed. A part of him considered making an attempt at taking the gun. The other part of him knew it unwise and continued deeper into the facility. With Noodle out of sight he had no way of discerning how dangerous acting out would be other than his own demise. And try as he might, the tremble of anxiety worked through him until a cold sweat broke out over his body. He could feel it, the uncharacteristic sensation of impending doom. It came on so strong he was briefly reminded of his teens back in Brooklyn on a particular night.

“Shit would have been easier had we knocked you two out ahead of time.”

Russel closed his eyes a moment, if he tried, he could pretend none of this was happening. The sharp point of metal digging into the small of his back brought him into reality. They walked and walked, further into the depths of the building. Every other room had persons clad in black garb dealing with frozen portions of meat. It took Russel a long minute to realize some of the pieces were human limbs.

By that point they were stopped in front of an industrial sized freezer. Two people stood guard on either side, each toting items that resembled cattle prods. The devices looked altered. He became faint at the realization of just what was occurring. The door parted and freezing air poured out. His eyes stared into the eyes of a frozen corpse. A terrifying numbness swam up through his body as he was nudged closer.

“In you go.”

“I’m not… I’m not going in there. I won’t.”

There was a snide laugh, abrupt and harsh sounding.

“Yes you are.”

“No way,” Russel said.
With his choice forfeit the man shoved him into the darkness of the frozen catacomb. Shaking visibly now, Russel whipped around with eyes wide. The man sneered him down as the door began to close.

“It’s better this way,” he comforted. “Stress makes the flesh taste off.”

Dawning horror adorned his face as the man vanished from sight. They were going to eat him. Rushing the door he pounded on it desperately.

“Let me out! The fuck is wrong with you people?”

Beyond the doors he could hear nothing. His skin became cool as heat wicked away and so he stood closer to the door. Any attempts at keeping warm would help while looking for an escape. Although his mind was struck with a haze of panic he tried to keep focused on staying warm and aware. He glanced to his side barely making out a frozen person pressed to the wall beside the door.

“I can’t die here. Fuck, don’t let me die here. Please.”

Squeezing his eyes shut he shook with shivers. Tucking his hands under his pits he forced himself to remain calm despite his mind screaming at him that he could die here. He sought out a latch for the door in the darkness, there had to be one inside the freezer. He swapped between touching the cold texture of the inner walls and hiding his hands to conserve some warmth. He wasn’t sure how much time had already passed, but he was beginning to lose feeling in his extremities. He tried once more to find a latch when the door started to part. For an instance his heart stopped, fearing they had come to slaughter him.

Murdoc stared at him, a handgun in his palm. On either side of the door both guards lay slumped over, one stuck with both cattle prods. The other lay unconscious.

Russel blinked, almost concerned he was hallucinating. The moderately warmer air drifted over him.

“Well don’t just stand there,” Murdoc remarked.

Rushing from the confines, Russel rubbed his freezing hands together. His limbs slowly gathered sensation as Murdoc urged him along. The satanist tossed the gun, clearly uncomfortable holding it. Russel wondered where the man even got it. He chose not to ask as they moved.

“Damn, I’m so happy to see you man. Thought I was a goner.”

“Like hell, we’re a team.”

Practically jogging, both of them meandered through the building. Neither of them were aware that there was a silent alarm tripped and people were gathering.

“Yeah man, we’re a team,” Russel agreed. He gave a pleased laugh and gently nudged Murdoc to direct him the correct way. “We need to stick together.”

“Right you are, Russ.”

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Incrementally, Noodle slid her eyes open. There was a momentary dizziness from the lingering effects of anesthesia. It wore off rapidly as she grew more aware of her surroundings. Bewildered
she swung about on the hook, arms dragging against a frozen floor. Around the space other bodies hung, long since dead and frozen.


She was already incredibly cold. Curling her arms up towards herself she gasped at the lack of sensation. She was beyond shivering and that worried her more than hanging in a meat locker.

“Let me out!”

Her head felt hot and stuffy while simultaneously feeling overly cold. Swaying she tried to spy something to assist her. Of course nothing was forth coming and she choked on her scared breathing.

“Okay. Okay.” Noodle closed her eyes tightly. “This is bad, this means I might die.”

Forcing her terror down she looked up the length of her body at the hook. It was a futile idea. With so little time remaining she shook her hands to regain even an iota of feeling in them. Weakly grasping at her own body she tried to drag herself upwards. As it was, she had no strength left and after two attempts she flopped down. Dangling there she sucked in shaky breaths.

Her world narrowed to a point as a flush of false warmth rushed over her. Deliriously she thought she felt sweaty. The door at the other side of the room opened.

“Noodle?”

Whispering she tried to alert 2D of her presence.

“I’m here. Please.”

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Please don’t leave me…

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Miraculously she survived to her fifteenth.

Said fifteenth birthday had been amazing. Russel bought her CD’s she wanted, even though given their recent bout of success she could have purchased them herself. The thought was there.

2D had haphazardly baked a cake for the occasion, lopsided and distinctly too salty to be edible. He was covered in flour and flakes of icing sugar when he presented it to her, expression timid in expectation of rejection. Despite the flavor she thanked him profusely, stomaching a piece to make him smile. The two of them delved into hours of back to back zombie movies. She had loved everything…

Except Murdoc had seemingly forgotten her birthday, or at the least she assumed so. When all was
said and done she retired to bed, smiling to herself. In the coming year they had video shoots to do for their lead hits, for now they could relax back on the coattails of so many chart toppers and royalties.

Upon opening the door for her room she had been startled to find the bassist sitting on her bed, looking over a CD case. He looked rather casual in his usual dark fitted clothes. Confused she had hesitated in the doorway to her own bedroom.

“How’s ‘bout you ’n me go for a spin in the Geep?”

“It is raining though.”

“Is it? Right, maybe another time.”

The satanist rose from the bed, dropping the CD lightly.

“Got a better idea, come share a couple of drinks with ol’ Murdoc, celebrate your birthday with some style. None of that kiddie bullshit.”

A couple years prior she would have readily agreed and still even then she had wanted to say yes. A disembodied voice of Russel told her alcohol was bad. Biting her lip she had fiddled her fingers, a strange nervous tick she acquired from 2D.

“Russel has said it is bad, should I not listen to him?”

“Now listen here Noodle,” Murdoc had stepped closer, hand cupped near his mouth as though to keep others from hearing even though nobody was about, “the way I see it you either live your life how you want, other people be damned, or you follow someone’s rules till you’re as dull as the rest of ‘em.”

The guitarist saw the logic in his crude statement, but also the flaws.

“‘Sides, drinking while you’re underage is fun, the thrill of danger and all that other shit.”

Smiling softly she remembered nodding in agreement. The satanist had lit up like a Christmas tree, seemingly surprised she had agreed. He had slid an arm around her shoulders while grinning. He had lead her off to their in house recording studio where apparently he had prepared ahead of time. She assumed he would have drank either way. At the time she wondered why.

She recalled him telling her how miserable he was, skirting something important. He had never gone into detail, but somehow she knew what he was talking about. Her fondest memories were always of them drinking or Murdoc drunkenly telling her things. Things she never told anyone.

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“Noodle hold on okay? I’m going to warm you up. You’re so cold.”

He cradled her body while hurrying to arrange her into the vehicle. Bundling her up in blankets that him and Murdoc had taken from the home, he fretted.

“I’ll be back Noodle. I promise. I need to find Russel and Murdoc.”
Unsure what else he could do he closed the door and dashed back across the street and through an alleyway. He paused near the mouth of the alley and watched the sniper atop the building pace away from the front side. Once safe he darted towards the facility and used the side door to sneak back in.

2D searched hastily through the building, antsy at potentially getting caught. He couldn’t understand where they were. The facility wasn’t that large yet both Russel and Murdoc were nowhere. Sprinting around a corner he halted like a deer upon a group of people also stopping in front of him. Eyes widening in surprise he whipped around and made a break for it. There were shouts as they followed him.

“Shit! Shit!”

Regardless of his change in physique and adrenaline, 2D huffed as he disappeared around a corner. Ducking into a small space with pipes, he plastered himself to the furthest spot. He covered his mouth to stifle his panting. Amazingly the people ran by, missing him completely. He only stepped out once sure and moved to the upper levels. The walkway up there was made of metal and had multiple rooms on one side. Originally used to conduct business in varies offices, now held prisoners and supplies. Running by the rooms, some with large windows, 2D desperately scanned each, hoping one would have Murdoc and Russel.

Jerking to a stop at one room, where the label slot said: FRESH MEAT, 2D spotted the familiar mop of black hair. The room was dimly lit and there were four other people in the room with Murdoc and Russel. Both of them pressed to the window separating 2D from them.

“I’m going to get you two out,” 2D said, unsure if they could hear through the glass.

“Hey!”

2D looked to the guard coming up the stairs, cattle prod in hand.

“Crap.”

Moving from the window he aimed for the door and rammed his shoulder into it. The unknown occupants all scattered at the noise. Russel and Murdoc remained at the thick glass.

“Stop that!” The guard waved angrily.

2D panicked and threw himself into the door with more force. “Please,” 2D ground out. “Just open.”

The sound of a person approaching made the ex-vocalist pause. He yelped and jumped away from the door when a cattle prod swung out. Both former musicians watched on as the ex-vocalist dodged wild jabs. 2D gasped in fright while just barely missing getting hit.

“Whoever you are, it ends here.”

“I just want my friends! Let them go!”

Feigning right, the guard quickly jabbed 2D in the left side, electrifying the man. Yelling and tensing up, 2D fell like a board. He groaned at impact while his muscles attempted to regain normalcy. He literally felt frazzled from toe to head.

“Nifty huh? We altered them to keep you fucks in line. Now be a good boy and stay down.”
When Russel and Murdoc thumped against the glass, mouths moving, the man paused. Glancing between 2D and the other two he lowered the prod towards 2D. The former musicians got more vicious.

“Ah, these are your friends.”

“Let them go,” 2D croaked. “We’ll leave and never come back. We won’t even disrupt your meat thing. Please.”

At another jolt of electricity, 2D shrieked, body going rigid. Once the immediate pain was gone he gasped pitifully.

“How about I just have you all harvested?”

Everything tingled sharply. Faintly he heard the sound of more footfalls. The twitching in his limbs made moving difficult and so he laid there pathetically.

“What’s this?”

“I think he was the one causing trouble with the other guy.”

“Put him with the others—”

“I’m infected,” 2D spat, his sentences were stilted. “Can’t eat me. Make you sick.” What little sensation he was recovering went straight to the growing fury. If he pushed himself over the edge he could disappear, use his new found strength.

The shock to his thigh tore away any hope of fighting back. He could hear a shrill noise and only realized it was him when it stopped. Moderately delirious with trembles and pinpricks all over his body, 2D blearily looked about while breathing hard.

“Kill him. We’ll deal with his friends.”

2D didn’t want them dealing with his friends. Dealing with them meant cutting them up and eating them. He struggled onto his side while the men discussed how exactly they would deal with the other two. His tormentor stabbed the device into his side viciously and he saw white. It only stopped when there was a shout above him. The item hit the wall somewhere near him.

“Just get out of here Stu!”

He craned his head slightly, muscles protesting movement. A bunch of oddly dressed individuals were dragging Murdoc and Russel away. To the side he saw the dented cattle prod. He tried to piece together what happened and just couldn’t. A deep seated anger bubbled up in him, something so fierce and visceral he almost feared how his following actions would play out. His ears filled with a buzz as pained sensations faded from the forefront of his mind. 2D growled and leapt at the man before he could trade off for a gun on his holster. He clenched his hands into the man’s clothing and lifted.

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“Fuck!”

He never swore, well never under normal circumstances.

He hissed while removing the knife from his side. Covering the wound he weakly fumbled by
garbage bins towards the waiting truck and Noodle. A high powered shot hit the brick just behind him. Propelled by panic, 2D ducked and ran harder. Throwing the door open he hopped in and gasped.

“I’m sorry, I’m so sorry,” he mumbled over and over again. Jerking the key he got them speeding off from the facility.

Noodle barely stirred with the motion and he quickly remembered how cold the woman was. Flicking the both seat warmer and the hot air on he worried he left her too long. Reaching across, eyes darting between the road and her, he felt for a pulse. He sagged in relief upon feeling one.

“Noodle I— Please don’t hate me. I left Murdoc and Russel behind. B—but I didn’t want too! It was too overwhelming.”

Before he knew it the waterworks were going while he clutched the steering wheel. His vision blurred badly.

“I—I… what do I do? Noodle what do I do? I left them! I left them there! I should have tried harder.”

He yelped when a deer appeared on the road. Swerving to avoid it he slammed the breaks until the vehicle came to a skidding stop. They were sat half on the shoulder on an angle. Staring astonished at the animal as it hopped away, he missed Noodle groaning.

“What— what happened?”

“Noodle!”

“Toochi?”

2D reached across and hugged the bundle of blankets Noodle was sat in. She gave a confused noise.

“You’re okay,” he wailed. “You’re alive!”

“Yes?”

She weakly pet at his head. “Where are we? What happened?”

Glancing about she saw the expanse of road beyond the vehicle. Peering into the back she spotted Kraken but no Murdoc and no Russel. “Where are the other two?”

2D gripped her tighter and shook as a wave of fresh sobs escaped him. Her heart sunk at the sound.

“I had to leave Noodle, I had to go. They were everywhere— I didn’t want too. Please believe me.”

“I believe you.” She continued to pet at his hair, as though to soothe a child. “Toochi, you are bleeding.”

Moving from her, 2D spared a look to his side where the material was stained dark red, almost black. Noodle reached out to inspect but he leaned away.

“I was stabbed.”

“Let me see. It looks serious.”
“It’s fine Noodle, it’ll heal on its own.”

Noodle stared at him baffled. He rubbed at his eyes to rid them of tears. At her intense stare he turned his head. It took her a moment before she slowly nodded, understanding.

“The virus?”

“Yeah.”

Shivering, Noodle tugged the blanket closer to herself. They could deal with the virus once all of them were present. “We must go back for them. Please, Toochi. We need to go back.”

“But Noodle—”

“No, turn us around. We are going back."

A brief and tense silence passed where they eyed each other. 2D looked miserable, eyes rimmed in red from crying. Noodle watched him, intent in her budding determination to return. No matter how terrifying it felt they had to go back.

“Noodle—”

“Go back!”

Jolting, 2D looked stunned. Noodle clenched her fists under the blankets. She relaxed herself until her voice came out evenly, less harsh.

“Go back please. We cannot leave them there.” She inhaled deeply, only breathing out once the minute trembles lessened. “The more time we waste the less chance we have of rescuing them.”

“Okay Noodle. We’ll go back,” 2D said. He sounded unsure.

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When Noodle had stumbled through the off white studio perched upon Plastic Beach’s tallest point, shouldering her way into his office, Murdoc was rightfully surprised. Having spent years assuming he killed the then young woman, he was beyond words seeing her. Their fated meeting was short lived when she hauled him up and into a wall. He gripped at her thin wrists, momentary terror on his face. He attempted to simper, voice jovial.

“Noodle! You’re alive. I figured those rumors had to be just that, y’know, but here you are in the flesh!”

“How could you Murdoc? You replaced me with that trash can wearing a facsimile of my face! Do I mean so little?”

She exerted herself by dragging him further up the wall. It was both impressive and terrifying to Murdoc. He held to the trembling arms.

“No never, Noodle, I— I needed a guitarist—”

“Of course you did. That is all we are to you, hm? Money making machines for your ever growing need to be wanted and desired.” Her mouth twisted into a snarl. “Where is 2D? What have you done to him? Or did you replace him as well? Does she sing too?”

“H—he’s safe. He’s here. Noodle, Sprog, listen to me, I never meant to replace you. She’s nothing
but a terrible imitation to you. I—I thought you dead. We all did.”

It was a half truth about 2D’s condition. Safe was a relative term. Noodle seemed to accept the information as she finally dropped him. When she shoved the mask away from her face he stared up at her damaged face.

“I was ready to forgive you. I really want too, but then you go and fuck it up Murdoc. You always ruin things. I looked up to you…”

He scrambled to stand. He managed to still be taller than her by a small gap. “I made her… I missed you.” He reached for her, holding the guitarist close. “I missed you so much.”

She hesitated to hug back until finally she held fast. With her face mashed into his shoulder she stifled her cries.

“I’m sorry Noodle,” He muttered. “So sorry.”

He was a monster. None of them should have ever forgiven him.

———

His head ached something fierce. It didn’t help that he had memories of pink sand and Noodle bouncing around his skull. Upon cracking his eyes open, slow and wary, the world was upside down and red. An overbearing scent of blood pervaded his senses, nearly making him choke.

“W—what… Where?”

Twisting his head he got an eyeful of an unfortunate victim, hacked apart and dangling next to him. Jerking only made him swing into another body, equally as mutilated. It also alerted him to his apparent nudity. Breath coming in short pants he felt bile tickling his throat. Beyond his position two men worked separate bodies, cutting and slicing portions off. One of the men paused and looked directly at him.

“Well looky’ here, someone woke up.”

With nowhere to go, Murdoc froze up in dread as the man, wearing protective clothing and a plastic apron, approached. With a meat cleaver in hand, stained red but still reflective, Murdoc caught his own terrified expression upside down.

“Aint much meat on you is there?” The flat side of the blade ran over his thigh making him flinch.

“Real shame. Your friend on the other hand, now there’s a meal.”

“Looks like you don’t need another meal, fat-arse.”

Russel had warned him about his mouth.

Murdoc was no stranger to pain, however it still came as a surprise when his inner thigh was sliced. It was minor and other than a wince, he gave no satisfaction to the other. He was overly conscious of how close said tool was to his genitals, that made him more anxious than the cut.

“Watch your mouth, I may just cut it off.”

His stomach was patted roughly with the knife. When the butcher backed off, Murdoc scanned around him for Russel. He couldn’t see past the bodies hung up around him.
“Don’t you worry your ugly little head, I’ll fix you up nice and proper in time for dinner.”

Once out of his immediate space, Murdoc relaxed only a little. His head felt muggy the longer he hung there. As the man moved completely from sight, Murdoc felt his fear spike. He needed out of this horror show. Though disgusting he grabbed the body next to him and attempted to crane his head around to see for an exit or Russel.

“Hey now, don’t go damaging food.”

Murdoc lost his hold and swung to his proper spot. From below all he could see were legs and a strange narrow device in the man’s hand. Said person waggled it in front of his face.

“This here is for draining animals. You stick it through their chest and bleed ‘em dry.”

His eyes were trained to the item. When it came closer his hands flew to it, holding it still. A growl of annoyance came from above him as the item was jostled. Squeezing his hands about it he looked around frantically for... anything.

“Let go damnit.”

The narrow metal rod was yanked from his hands. Unable to prepare for a second assault, Murdoc yelled when it abruptly pierced his shoulder. His hands gave spasms at the pain and he tried to pull it out. It only dug in more. Someone new entered the room and cleared their throat. Both butchers glanced at the newcomer.

“What?” Said the man furtherest from Murdoc.

“We have a minor mess, lend us a hand. Both of you.”

The sharp prong ripped out and Murdoc bite back on his pained noise. His blood began to drip from his shoulder. Covering the gaping injury he watched the man retreat.

“Lets get this over with, I have work to finish.” The first man’s voice drifted away until a door closed. In the deafening silence there was a soft dripping and panting. It was his own panting.

He had no clue how long the men would be gone, but he didn’t want to stick around. Despite the burning from his shoulder he lowered his arms to grab at the grating below him. Using it to pull himself over he reached for the pronged tool left to lean against the table. Fingers brushed it but missed. Murdoc grit his teeth and swiped for it once more, triumphantly grasping it. He allowed himself to swing back. As he stopped swaying he used it to try and weaken the hook he was attached too.

“C’mon you stupid piece of shit—” he spat. The metals scrapped each other until suddenly he was flopping to the ground with an expletive.

Laying in a heap he gasped, regaining his bearings. The door opened at that exact moment and the men stopped, staring at him. Instant panic flooded his system and with it a burst of adrenaline. Murdoc scrambled to his undo his feet. Once up he rushed to a table, taking up a meat cleaver from beside a bloodied torso. Both butchers circled the moderately large room, occasionally disappearing behind a mangled corpse.

“Come now buddy, you’re injured. If you come peacefully, we’ll spare you.”

With his preferred arm and hand trembling, Murdoc held the cleaver in his left hand. He stepped back, cautious of where his feet went. They started to close in on him. While scanning the
surroundings for a possible way around them he spotted a control panel.

“Come here—” One rushed him and Murdoc grunted as his lower back hit a table when jumping away.

Tripping down the slight incline on the grating he fell into a body when avoiding another grab. Breathing heavily he shoved through and pushed one corpse into an attacker. Weaving through the ravaged bodies he ducked past them to reach the panel.

“There you are, slick little fucker aren’t you,” the second butcher chuckled, meaty hand clasping down on his wrist.

Without thinking, Murdoc turned and swung the cleaver up into the man’s side. Shock filled both their features when the man let go to stare down at the blade in his side. Blood staining the area. Whipping around, Murdoc caught the original butcher coming at him. Leaping away he reached out over a table for the panel. Smacking his hand down over the faded buttons two things occurred simultaneously. Both men were knocked over when multiple mutilated bodies dropped and Murdoc felt his ankle grabbed. Yelping as he got dragged down, Murdoc kicked at the hand to free himself.

“Let go! Let go you fat fucker!”

“You’ve caused more trouble than you’re worth!” The hold over his ankle was unrelenting. His body was yanked closer to the slowly emerging man. “I’m gonna carve you up real nice, use your head as a trophy!”

Murdoc saw the glint of metal before the man was entirely over him. The man pinned his body and using the leverage began to press the knife down, closer and closer to his neck. Murdoc strained against heavier man, eyes honed to the knife point. Rancid breath came nearer to his face as his injured shoulder protested the exertion.

“After I cut your head off I’m gonna use your corpse,” a dark laugh followed the comment.

Abruptly the man pulled away and raised the knife, prepared to stab downwards. Hands raised in defense, Murdoc cowered. Flashes of a broken beer bottle replaced the knife. It came down in a flurry of quick motions, his hands and arms getting slashed while he tried desperately to protect his face, neck and chest. He emitted terrified noises mixed with pained cries while he suffered the onslaught.

Then suddenly there was nothing. The weight slid off him and Russel appeared in his blurred line of sight. The former drummer knelt next to him and carefully helped him into a sitting position. A mere foot or two away the headless body of his attacker lay in a heap with a cleaver. The head sat nearby. Murdoc shook, his arms and hands bloodied. Russel got an arm around the older man and assisted him to his feet.

“It’s gonna be alright man, I’m gonna look after you.”

They got barely two steps before Murdoc started to collapse, hyperventilating. Catching the man, Russel helped him to the doorway, near dragging the satanist.

“Stay with me Muds, just hold on. I’ll get us clothes and we’ll get outta here.”

It took them a short moment to find a side room dedicated to clothing and other articles. Clearly arranged to be the last space before death. Russel wasted no time ushering Murdoc to sit while he dug around for clothing. He couldn’t recall them moving from this room to the next, so he assumed they had been medicated. He tossed random shirts and pants out of the bins, all the while talking to
the panicking man. “Once we’re outta here it won’t be so bad. We’ll go find ‘D and Noodle. Till then it’s gonna be you ’n me aight?”

“I can’t breath,” Murdoc wheezed.

Russel’s brows pinched as he chucked on whatever fit and quickly came to Murdoc’s side. Using a purple t-shirt he tore strips off and wrapped the cut on Murdoc’s thigh. “Hey, c’mon Muds. Focus on me yeah? Look at me man. Deep breath, in and hold for a bit then exhale.”

“I—I almost died…”

Struggling to work stiff legs through the underpants, Russel nodded lightly. “Yeah, you almost did, but you didn’t. You’re here man.” Once he had Murdoc in trousers he went about wiping up the gashes.

Some were deep, others shallow. The worst of them Russel wrapped best he could with cotton clothing. The shoulder injury was bound and covered tightly to staunch bleeding. When it seemed Murdoc’s breathing was more subdued, Russel leaned out to look at him.

“You gonna manage, ’cause from here we need to run Murdoc. They are not gonna like us and they probably gonna chase us.”

Murdoc seemed to contemplate him before he sniffed. He cautiously wiped his face, hesitant to move his arms and hands. “I’m fine.”

“Far from it,” Russel commented while standing. “C’mon man, let’s get the fuck outta here.”

Breaking free of the facility was exhilarating as much as it was terrifying. Shots hit the ground near them as they fled between the neighboring buildings. Without shoes Russel cursed at catching his foot on something sharp. Murdoc backtracked and although in his own agony, gave the man a shoulder. Hobbling through alleys and trash they disappeared from the sniper’s line of sight. It wasn’t long before others pursued by foot. Neither of them had a moments reprieve to comprehend the horrors they had endured. Murdoc forced himself to focus on breathing. For now it worked in staving off the impending attack he would suffer.

They had the unfortunate attention of a couple straggling zombies upon finding the forested area in the location. Dodging them and their pursuers took them into the lower portion of the city.

“Christ,” Russel mumbled. They were poised to run again, but until then they needed a breather. Hidden between houses they panted as well as listened. “Who cares if we escaped. Right? I mean why chase us? What’s so damn important about catching us.”

“Bruised pride, I don’t know. I don’t fucking care. Let’s move.”

Sharing a nod they were off again.

———

The drive back was longer than 2D remembered it being when leaving. Noodle pressed her face to the passenger window, body still wrapped in blankets and Kraken nestled into her lap. She was idly stroking the dark fur, humming to the CD they had playing. It was on the second run through of the songs. 2D tried ignoring how much it ground on his nerves not talking. How much the music was shaving away at his patience. He barely had Murdoc back before the man was taken away. Now he had Noodle and yet words escaped him. She seemed unaware of his internal fight. His mind wandered and with it came thoughts of seeing and speaking to her when the woman hadn’t been
present. Squeezing the steering wheel he chewed on his lip.

“What?” Noodle looked at him, he could see it from his improved peripheral.

“It’s stupid,” he started, “I have all this stuff I want to tell you, but I can’t say it.”

“What stuff?”

He tapped his fingers against the wheel. “I saw a plane a week— two weeks ago? Doesn’t matter. A plane Noodle, it had a European logo.” He smiled at her. “Europe is okay!”

She didn’t seem to share his sentiment, face set in a serious expression. His smile slipped.

“A plane means nothing 2D. Maybe people were fleeing Europe and figured here was safer. It could mean anything.”

His mood deflated. Noodle looked out the window once more, content to leave the conversation there. 2D slumped and watched the road. “O—oh, yeah. Okay. That’s fair.”

They resumed silence, a silence that spoke volumes to how determined Noodle was to rescue the other two. Or at least that's what he thought. She seemed stand-offish and unwilling to start conversation. When the songs ended and the CD restarted 2D reached out and flicked it off. The action had her glancing his way. He focused on the road… Only Noodle reached out and turned it back on. Moderately surprised at the gesture he turned it back off. Noodle was fast to flick it on. They shared a heated frown, something so similar to their earlier years. It had him reminded of their minor fights, like two siblings.

“I want it on.”

“I want it off,” 2D huffed.

“Well,” Noodle said, voice irritatingly blasé, “I want it on.”

“I’m driving, I get to chose. Driver’s rules.” He borrowed that from Murdoc. She intentionally turned the volume up. His face contorted into exasperation. “Noodle turn it off.”

“No.”

“Why are you being so difficult? Turn it off for a bit then we can put back on.”

There was a hesitation where the ex-guitarist struggled to find her voice. When she did it shook with anxiety. He couldn’t understand why she was anxious to explain herself.

“I had no control over anything 2D, nothing, while stuck in that place. I have had so little control over myself during these past few months. Nothing makes sense right now and I just want… I want some normalcy. I miss normal.”

The dam broke and Noodle began crying, fat tears falling off her cheeks. Kraken mewed in confusion when tears hit her fur. Bringing the vehicle to a stop he parked and waffled.

“Noodle I’m sorry, I didn’t mean— Don’t cry, we can have the music on.”

The reaction exacerbated her crying and 2D stared, uncertain how to appropriately soothe her. Kraken vacated her lap when Noodle grabbed up blanket to scream brokenly. Her body was wracked with sobs. He had never seen her in such a manner before, it scared him. After a tick he finally reached out and scooped Noodle with the blankets into his lap. It was awkward, but he
cradled her and combed her mussed hair from her face.

“It’s gonna be okay, well— It’s gonna get better, I hope.”

It took Noodle a bit before she was capable of speaking. “You’re terrible at this,” she sniffled. The hand in her hair paused.

Unable to stop himself, 2D snickered. He hugged her closer while smiling softly. Noodle smiled faintly, resting against his chest.

“Things will work out Noodle. They will.”

———

Russel pushed Murdoc behind the dumpster, both breathing hard and frantic. They flinched at the gun fire from just beyond them on the road. Two burly men were scouting the area, clearing out zombies while looking for them.

“What are we going to do?”

“We gotta find somewhere to hide. We need proper medical supplies or all these injuries are gonna get infected.”

Murdoc motioned him to quiet. They strained to hear. It was deathly silent, no groans or talking, just nothing. They jerked when something banged against the opposite side of the bin. Metal rattled from the assault and they both skittered away. Russel saw the tip of a gun peeking from over the top and grabbed Murdoc. The older man made a pained noise, but the former drummer ignored it in favor of getting them moving. They disappeared further into the labyrinth of back alleys, every corner offering less and less in the way of escape.

“We need to get out of the city,” Murdoc gasped.

“First we need out of here.”

When they did manage to find a way out, they were instantly greeted with a group of zombies hovering around. Dodging the groping hands, they rushed down the street. Two voices hollered at them which only encouraged them to run faster. Russel hardly felt the pain running up his leg from his foot, fear pushed him past it. At the first shot, nowhere near hitting them, Russel shoved Murdoc.

“Zig-zag man! Zig-zag.”

With no viable options for hiding places, not with the men capable of seeing them, they avoided gunfire by running haphazardly. At the end of the street it dipped down a hill which offered them cover at least until the men caught up. Russel urged them towards the residential area of the city.

Before potentially being spotted they quickly ran through yards and narrow spaces between homes to fine one with an unlocked door. As luck would have it they saw one such home and hastily locked themselves in. They fumbled through the darkness of the house to block the main entry. Only one window in the living room was broken, boards missing, where light streamed in from the early morning sky. They had no time to waste. Russel sought out an artificial light source while Murdoc sifted through things for a medical kit or first aid supplies. Both were running on near empty, limbs aching and throats parched.

Murdoc winced while tossing a pack onto the counter. Russel shone a flashlight over it.
“Gimme your foot.”

“No way man, you first. Your arms and shoulder are worse off.”

“Russ don’t fucking argue with me—”

Something thumped into the front door. Heads turning to said entry they stared when it happened again and again until it grew in noise. Following the sound was groaning. Murdoc looked at Russel, stepping over to snatch the torch from his hand. Scanning the ex-drummer’s feet he hissed.

“You’re trailing blood!”

“Damnit.”

The furniture in front of the door shook with the force at which the zombies exerted on the door.

“Give me your damn foot,” Murdoc snapped. “Those men are going to get drawn here thanks to them.”

No longer refuting, Russel lifted his leg and rested it against the kitchen island. Cleaning and bandaging the injury, Murdoc bit his tongue through his own discomfort. The front door waned and caused splintering along the frame as Russel lowered his foot.

“We need footwear and other shit.”

“They’re getting in.”

A rotting arm reached in through the gap between frame and door.

“Fuck.”

Time was tight, but they hurriedly got footwear. Russel insisted on redoing the bandages on Murdoc. As they were fleeing out the back patio door there was a gunshot at the front. All the men found in the home once cleared of the threat were the makeshift bandages from Murdoc and a mess of blood.

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Cresting the hill they both stared down the length of road ahead of them. It stretched for miles, sparse trees decorating either side. Further beyond sat a couple homes that were only visible at their position. They resumed walking, bodies leaden with exhaustion. Despite the sun steadily rising above them, the Autumn air cooled their sweat. A couple shivers ran through them, which was the least of their worries.

“Thanks,” Murdoc mumbled, voice tired.

Brow raised in question, Russel peered at him. “What for?”

“For back there. Helping me.”

A hand settled at Murdoc’s lower back, gentle and comforting. They walked closer to one another.
“Aint nobody gonna mess with you again man, we’re a packaged deal. They wanna come at you, they go through me first.”

No further words were needed. Murdoc relaxed into Russel’s side, which spoke volumes. They more stumbled than walked, enjoying the ease leaning into one another brought. Whatever was in store they would look out for each other.

Chapter End Notes

EDIT 02/21/19 - Kept some flashbacks the same and altered one to fit the change in the overall theme of the chapter. Almost finished my revisions!
Almonds - I *

Chapter Summary

Out of the freezer and into the great beyond.

Chapter Notes

EDIT: 03-29-19

I've utterly changed the chapter (and chapter 14) to match the original draft I had. I've altered the timing for certain things. It's a little hard to tell, possibly, but a couple hours occur between 2D leaving the facility and driving away. Thus a few more occur when driving back. Which is why neither pair meet up halfway since they're just slightly off from each other.

It's also intentional the parallel scenes with either character getting shot and how it's dealt with.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

By mid afternoon they reached the facility. The ex-singer worried they had already taken too long, that the other two were long dead. He, of course, didn't voice such concerns; Noodle was probably already thinking the same. With them parked out of sight in a nearby building, 2D spared a short look at her.

"Are you sure? I can go in alone." He rather not, but figured he should offer that opportunity.

Noodle shook her head, face set in a deep frown. "We go together from now on." Although unease settled into every fiber of his being, 2D nodded slowly.

They emerged from the vehicle and proceeded with stealth. 2D had to pull her back from sight when he spotted the sniper. Both waited then darted towards the building. Hearts were pounding a mile a minute at the thought of being back. Noodle swallowed and they shared a quick look of understanding. 2D lead them in through a side entrance that miraculously had remained unlocked even hours later. Entering the facility they hid among boxes or in darkened corners. The entire place was in an uproar as members were moving to and fro. Neither of them understood what the panic was and set about finding a source.

Crouched behind crates stacked in the loading bay they watched two bodies get hauled out on stretchers. Noodle cringed upon seeing one without a head. Curiously the bodies were taken outside.

"I want those two found," a familiar voice. Noodle peered through the spaces between the crates to spot Sefton.

"Sir, we have Brent and Will out looking for them."
“Once they have them, alive, bring them in. We’re going to draw the other two out. End this little shit show here and now. I do not want our operation getting disrupted anymore. Do I need to spare more security?” Sefton was red in the face, voice barely restrained. 2D watched with Noodle.

“No sir.”

“Well clearly,” Sefton sneered, “I do. You can’t seem to follow a simple set of rules. How do four people cause so much goddamn trouble in the span of a few hours?”

“I’m sorry sir. We didn’t expect one of them to be infected. He wasn’t like the other infected— Sir he was far stronger and more erratic. He was aware.”

Sefton waved a hand. “I don’t fucking care, find them and bring them in. Is that simple enough?”

The other man ducked his head and muttered a response. Noodle tilted her head to catch 2D’s eyes. He nodded his head towards the general direction of the side door and she dipped her head in silent agreement. As quietly as possible they slipped away. At reaching the hallway to their exit a man shouted at them. Suddenly everyone was alerted and they were running. Noodle slammed out the door first, closely followed by 2D who had no time to shut the door.

Noodle grabbed 2D by his shirt, tugging him down the small set of steps at the door. Both ran out into the sniper’s line of sight. The man from the facility burst out the door, hollering. Over the yelling 2D heard the telltale whistle of something fast and without thinking pushed Noodle away from himself. The ground rushed up and he found himself flat on his front, momentarily stunned. The all too familiar sensation of torn flesh and muscle swam up from his thigh. He groaned into the dirt.

“Toochi,” Noodle shrieked. She crawled over to him from where he knocked her over, hands and knees covered in dirt.

Noodle desperately got her arms around him, pulling him with a grunt. There was another shout from the man, but she paid him little attention while hauling 2D. A trail of blood followed his body and he wondered when he would stop getting shot.

“Toochi— 2D, talk to me. Where were you shot?” Noodle scrambled to get them under cover, just as another shot hit their hiding spot. She hunched her shoulders, terrified.

“Leg,” he mumbled, voice disbelieving. “Leg… Noodle you need to get the truck. I’m okay. I mean I’m not, it hurts a lot—” He reached a hand down and paused, unsure he should touch the ragged spot where part of his thigh was missing. He avoided looking at it. No matter how sure he was he would survive, he couldn’t stomach seeing the injury. The irony wasn’t lost on him. “Go get the truck Noodle, bring it here, I’m not much use at the moment, but if it was closer we could use this van for cover.”

Noodle parted her mouth multiple times before hurriedly tearing her shirt off. Tying off the gaping wound she stared at 2D. He stared back, pain written all over his features from the sheen of sweat and grimace on his lips.

“I’ll be back.”

“Hurry.”

Another high powered shot hit the van, which Noodle could assume was the only reason the other man hadn’t pursued. 2D gripped at his thigh above the gunshot injury, small whimpers escaping his mouth. She hesitated, scared to leave the older man.
“Noodle go!”

She jolted and poised at the edge of the van before finally jumping into a sprint. Heart in throat she focused on reaching their hidden vehicle. Thankfully the sniper seemed uninterested in her and she vanished into the adjacent building, practically leaping into the truck and jerking the ignition. Kraken gave a terrified meow from the back when she whipped the vehicle through the building and onto the street. Slamming the breaks once beside the van she climbed over to the passenger side, shoving the door open. 2D dragged himself into the seat with Noodle’s help. When the roof of the truck was shot she sat back and drove them away as fast as humanly possible, ex-singer yelping at nearly falling back out. 2D quickly shut the door with a gasp of relief. One more shot hit their truck so Noodle swerved them around, now facing the meat packaging facility’s doors.

“Noodle— Wait! What?”

“Hold on,” she yelled, foot digging into the gas pedal.

Hastily buckling himself in, 2D covered his face in terror when they rammed the loading doors at the front of the building. The metal screeched off its tract and they flew into the facility. People scattered and one unfortunate man tumbled over the hood. 2D watched on through his fingers, strangely reminded of Murdoc. Noodle grit her teeth, spinning the wheel while simultaneously hitting the brakes. The truck swung around, tires leaving tracks. Switching to gas she had them speeding back out the ruined door. The vehicle bounced when it ran off the curb. With everyone scrambling to deal with the damage and injured persons, Noodle drove off without worry of repercussions.

A tense moment passed where 2D caught his breath, brows still knitted together in pain. She couldn’t tell if it had lessened or not, 2D looked no less uncomfortable than he had when on the ground.

“When— How did you learn to drive like that? That was terrifying.”

“Oh,” Noodle offered unhelpfully. “I had practice.”

“You absolute madwoman.” 2D wiped sweat from his face. “It was Murdoc?”

All the conflicting emotions in her burst out in the form of an overly loud laugh. 2D joined her, his laughs a little more shaky until both of them were almost in tears. The nervous energy poured out of them between gasped sniggers. Noodle drove them away from the industrial region. She knew she should be concerned for Russel and Murdoc, but something about their predicament was lighter. The terror washed away and suddenly the earlier darkness hovering over her was dissipating. The two men were alive. Her and 2D would find them and things would once more be… fine.

Nothing would be okay, ever, but they could aim for fine.

———

Russel and Murdoc often glanced to the sky or to the tree line. They silently decided walking closer to the ditch was safest. At the least if they had to run it was a short jump across to the trees.

“How’s your foot?”

“Damn sore. What about you?” Russel wasn’t sure which injuries to ask about and opted for an open ended question. Murdoc lifted his good shoulder in an attempt to shrug.
Russel shot Murdoc a sympathetic look while they trudged along. It occurred to the former percussionist that neither of them knew where 2D or Noodle were.

“Should catch our breath. Wandering off aint gonna do Noodle or ‘D any favours.”

Making the small hop across the ditch they settled under a tree. With no food or water it quickly became apparent how sick they felt. Stomachs shrunken and throats itchy they wet their lips and swallowed against the sensation. Shaded from the sun gave them some solace, at least for the moment. From the corner of his eye, Russel caught Murdoc staring at his bandaged arms. As expected, the deeper gashes had bled through. They would need to find better medical supplies.

The faraway look on the older man’s face was worrisome. Russel cleared his throat to draw the other out of his funk. Murdoc spared him a short glance.

“We could hole up at that house down the road, then at the least we aren’t running off too far.”

“Sure,” Murdoc agreed, voice softer than usual. Russel wasn’t acquainted with Murdoc’s docile side, which concerned him more than the actual injuries.

“Lets get going then. I think we’ve sat long enough.”

Conscious of where he grabbed the satanist, Russel helped Murdoc to his feet and they got situated on the road again. At first it was peaceful, almost uncomfortably so. Then distantly, at first, there came the rumble of a vehicle. Both turned their heads, dread creeping into their tired bodies. A flash of light bounced off the windshield as the truck sped down the hill towards them.

“Shit.” Russel eyed it, uncertain if it was friend or foe. As it grew nearer the occupants became more visible.

“Damnit,” Murdoc hissed, “it’s the men.”

In seconds they took the jump back into the trees, legs straining as adrenaline kicked in. The truck screeched to a stop behind them.

Rushing through the trees they made for the general direction of the closest home. The occasional gunshot nicked a tree, thankfully missing them. They had no time to consider whether their pursuers intentionally missed or were just terrible. Murdoc ducked from a tree when wood splintered off in his immediate path. Russel yanked him over a mound and both of them slid onto their backsides, disappearing from sight. Backs pressed to a rotting log they suffered through dry pants and pounding hearts.

“This is beyond ridiculous.”

“Clearly it’s personal,” Murdoc commented. He gently wiped his brow of sweat and in doing so left a smear of blood.

Sounds of approaching feet made them stiffen and hunch. A tense moment passed where one of the men was quite literally a meter from them, looking around. When Brent and Will bypassed them, they exhaled in relief. Climbing over the mound they made towards the road.

“They fought through exhaustion to put ground between them and the other two. At first it seemed both ex-musicians would be left to escape, however the two men quickly returned to stalking them. Sprinting through the trees with renewed energy they kept in pace to one another. Alarmingly Murdoc made a noise between agony and astonishment before going down quite hard. Russel nearly tripped while stopping. He scrambled to Murdoc’s aid.
Murdoc lay on his side, breathing hard through clenched teeth while clutching his thigh. Red formed around his hands on the dirtied pants. Russel watched in awe for a second, almost disbelieving.

“Shit.” Russel stared, drawing a blank. “Shit.”

Murdoc whinged in pain while digging his hands into the covered wound. Distantly a disturbance in the brush worried them, the men were coming. The satanist groped at Russel with a bloodied hand to catch his attention. Voice wrought with distress. “Russ—Russel! For fuck sake, please—Help me! Help me up or—or tie off the wound, you cannot leave me here.”

“Yeah,” Russel swiped a hand over his face, dirt and sweat mingling on his features. “Right, yeah.”

Crouching, Russel tore material from his clothing. Placing the thick strip of fabric around the site he tied it off firmly making Murdoc grunt. A small explosion of bark and moss rained down on them. Without further fuss Russel swung the bassist’s arm over his shoulders, dragging the man to his feet. They hurried off through the trees.

He realized in that moment how unreasonable it was to carry dead weight.

Russel shook his head. Murdoc wasn’t dead weight. The man was his friend. The ex-drummer could almost laugh at himself, somehow the satanist was damn near as important to him as 2D was to Murdoc.

Glaring into the foreground Russel fought to keep moving while the satanist gripped at him. Dehydration and starvation was keeping them on the fringe of delirium. The trees started to blur together until they noticed the shooting had tapered off. Russel slowed down. He looked around, confused. The road was suppose to be this direction, he was sure of it.

Finally the exhaustion caught up to them and they stumbled until gradually dropping. Hitched breathing passed between them while they laid side by side. Murdoc watched the trees sway far above them. He heard Russel inhale deeply, as if to gather himself. The sting from his leg barely pushed him to put pressure on it. It was bleeding through like his arm injuries. A tiny dark portion of himself hoped he died right there, bleeding out on dirt. It’s was the least he deserved.

Blinking back wetness, Murdoc smacked his chapped lips. “When I pictured my death, it was a little more dramatic. More flare, y’know. Was planning to go out in a blaze of glory. Something appropriate for me. Something that left me feeling satisfied with my life.”

Russel made a sound of acknowledgement.

Swallowing, Murdoc strove to keep things tightly held back. His emotions were too close to the surface, poking holes in his resolve. “Russ I don’t want to do this anymore. I don’t want to keep running. I’m tired.”

Somehow Russel understood, the man always seemed to know. A hand patted his shoulder, barely missing the ragged injury there.

“It’s shit, but you aint allowed to cop out man. You and me are gonna see this through till the bitter end.”

They laid in silence, waiting for the men to come upon them and take them. Time ticked by and wind whispered through ruffling their clothing. Staying still was more comforting than moving. Murdoc grimaced when he shifted his leg and spikes of burning pain ran up and down the limb, he felt like a pin cushion covered in injuries.
Growing mildly curious, Russel heaved up on elbows, glancing around them. The drummer saw no one in their general vicinity.

“Ey’ Muds, don’t go writing your will yet. I think they stopped.”

Murdoc cracked his eyes open, unaware he’d closed them. He licked his chapped lips, cringing at how thirsty he felt.

“Are you sure?”

“I’m seeing no one, I think they actually left.” Russel pushed up into a sitting position, body protesting the motion.

“So that’s it then. They seemed so eager.” Murdoc remained where he was.

“Well I’m telling you, there isn’t a soul around. They’ve left or gotten lost. This could be our chance, c’mon Muds.” Russel forced himself to his feet. Murdoc shook his head.

“Don’t do that man, just grin and bear it. We’ll get you fixed up at that house,” Russel huffed. He stared down at the older man, waiting impatiently. “C’mon, we lived.”

“Live another day just to die tomorrow,” Murdoc grunted

“Lets worry about tomorrow when it comes.”

Russel hefted Murdoc to his feet and they once more made their way towards where the road was suppose to be. It took them longer than strictly necessary to re-orientate themselves, but when they managed to make it to asphalt the sun had dipped beyond noon. It was rather dim now, something neither had noticed in their ensuing chase. Their stomachs had passed the point of grumbling and Russel knew they direly needed water.

Stumbling up onto the road they continued to walk. Miraculously the truck and men were gone. All that greeted them was the happy sight of an empty road and houses, that up until earlier, were far closer now.

They had survived far worse in the past twenty-four hours alone, to succumb to the elements; or their own injuries. Murdoc hung off Russel, body sagging more and more as they walked. With a frustrated grunt, Russel tried to right him. It didn’t seem to work.

“This is a two way street, you have to help me help you.” It was meant to come out authoritative, but his voice cracked. When Murdoc’s head bobbed, dipping slightly, Russel grew alarmed. “Hey man c’mon, this isn’t a time for a nap.”

Bumping the older man up some he glanced at the other. The gross pallor to Murdoc’s face had Russel panicking. Looking up he gripped tight at Murdoc. “You better not die on me man.”

The first home loomed in the immediate area. Large overgrown lilac bushes, flowers long since dead, were strategically placed just inside a wooden fence. Taller than the top, the bush hung over the fence, nearly concealing the broken gate between them. He paused at the edge of the property, almost cautious to approach. The windows were boarded and the front door had a large black X. Despite having no previous knowledge as to its meaning, Russel could hazard a guess. The home had probably been searched already, which meant it was safe; however, it also meant it was possibly empty.

Concern and fatigue won out and Russel dragged Murdoc up the weather worn cement steps.
Carefully lowering the man onto the porch, Russel hurried to try the door. He shook the handle when he found it locked.

“Fuck, I’m gonna check the back.”

Murdoc slumped unhelpfully, breathing softer. Russel stepped down off the small porch, barely a few paces away before the door rattled and unlocked from within. Shocked, Russel climbed the steps once more. A small elderly woman blinked up at him. She side-eyed the satanist hunched to the side. She looked mildly startled by their presence. Russel stared dumbfounded.

“What in heavens are you people doing? I’ll have you know it’s a crime to break into a person’s home.” Her voice came out assertive despite her diminutive stature.

“I— We had no idea,” Russel supplied. He came to Murdoc’s side. “Please, we need help.”

“What a state you two are in. Heavens. Come in dear, bring your friend,” she said, hand gesturing them in with haste. Not pausing to question anything in that moment, Russel helped Murdoc into the house.

He was pleasantly surprised to see it well lit up with battery powered lights. The elderly woman glanced this way and that before closing and locking the door. She eyed Russel and Murdoc. Russel smiled sheepishly, unsure what to say.

“My daughter can patch you two up. Go make yourselves comfortable in the living room.” When Russel hesitated she motioned urgently. “Go on, please. I can’t imagine the discomfort you two are in.”

At the insistent prompting he carted Murdoc through a wooden arch to a homely living room. Each couch toted pastel stripes with floral patterned pillows. It clashed terribly, but Russel wasn’t in a position to make home decorating comments. Settling down on the cushions, sure they would stain it, he propped Murdoc up next to him.

“Russ.” Russel spared him a look between worry and relief. Murdoc closed his eyes and breathed shallowly, “I feel shit, everything is spinning.”

“It’s alright man, we’re safe. You’re gonna get patched. Got to hold out.” Beyond the room he heard the lady call for a Yvonne.

Murdoc barely nodded, body mostly still other than the rise and fall of his chest. Russel rubbed his face and held his head in his hands. Staring at the faux wood floor, which was littered in scratches from furniture being moved, Russel began to wonder for the first time whether they would survive. He was sure for himself, but only for the time being. With everything happening it almost seemed impossible. He gave the room a quick scan, eyes catching black and white photos, a violin locked in a glass case, and two small single pane windows. The curtains were down at the moment, most likely to avoid undead interests.

He tilted his head at the sound of someone coming downstairs. The older woman appeared in the room, closely followed by a tall blonde woman. She carried with her a massive first aid kit, one Russel had not seen the likes of before.

“This is my Yvonne.” She gestured to Murdoc. “The poor man is in dire need of medical attention.”

“But mother—”
“Yvonne no arguing. Help the man.” Yvonne seemed to consider them before sighing. The older woman smiled, slow and easy. “How rude, I’m Ines and as you know, my daughter, Yvonne. While she fixes you up I’ll fetch some clean clothes for you and your friend.”

Russel felt it wrong to ask, but knew he and Murdoc desperately needed it. “Water, I— We need water too. I know it’s a lot to ask but we’ve had none for a bit.” From the corner of his eye he caught Yvonne gently lifting one of Murdoc’s arms.

“Absolutely, goodness I forgot. I will be back.” Ines stepped out and there was noise from the kitchen.

“How did he get all these? This is extensive,” Yvonne questioned. Her medium length, wispy blonde hair dipped into her face so she pushed it back.

Russel eyed Murdoc then her. “We were attacked, he got the worst of it.”

Yvonne nodded. She proceeded to open the pack and get gloves on. “I’m going to remove the bandages on your arms okay?” Murdoc grunted in response. “Good enough, I suppose.”

Peeling back the first bandage she grimaced at the amount of gashes. She cradled the older man’s arm gently and retrieved some items from the bag. Russel watched on anxiously. They were momentarily disrupted when Ines brought bottles of water.

“Here we are,” she said. “Don’t drink too fast.”

Russel took the proffered bottles, grateful. He unscrewed the lid and shifted to get Murdoc to drink a little before himself. Murdoc drank what he could before pulling back. Yvonne began cleaning the injuries making Murdoc hiss. Russel took a sip, forcing himself to take it slow while he observed.

“What in heaven’s name happened to you boys?”

Russel considered how to answer the question without scaring the women. Murdoc beat him to the punch. “Hell.”

“So it would seem.” Ines cupped her elbows while she stood there. She peered at Russel. “I didn’t catch either of your names.”

“I’m Russel. That’s Murdoc.”

Ines nodded. She brought a finger up and smiled warmly. “Food, let me make you two something to eat. No good recovering on an empty stomach.” Ines quickly made her way back into the kitchen. Yvonne sighed to herself while cleaning cuts, something Russel caught.

“We’re grateful,” He started. Yvonne gave the former drummer an irritated frown. “Really, we are. I can’t begin to express how thankful. We would’ve been goners otherwise.”

“Thank us once your friend is out of the danger zone.”

Murdoc made a noise under his breath. Yvonne produced a kit with dissoluble sewing thread and a set of curved needles. At seeing them, Murdoc dropped his head back to stare at the ceiling, throat constricting. She noticed the reaction and offered a small pat on an uninjured portion of skin. “I’m quite adept with this, I’ll be fast.”

Russel looked away as well. Yvonne set up a needle and went to work right away on a particularly
deep gash on Murdoc’s forearm. She kept her head down while doing up the gash.

“Fuck, can’t I have something for this? Anything?”

“I don’t have anesthetic, I’m sorry.” Yvonne sounded apologetic. Murdoc choked on a noise, caught between panic and pain.

“Vodka then? Satan— Mmh, please get me some hard liquor. Hell, hit me over the head.”

“It’s gonna be alright man, just try not thinking ‘bout it.”

“I can’t. I can’t— Fuck.”

“You’re dehydrated, I can’t give you alcohol. I promise to be quick.” Yvonne shot Murdoc an especially contrite look while she finished the first gash.

Murdoc clenched his opposite hand when she started on another. No matter how hastily she sewed up each gash the sensation of the needle going in and out made his body queasy. His panic subsided into an uncomfortable feeling of cold sweat and nausea. He hovered at the edge of intense anxiety, teetering between wanting to run and cry. Russel tried chatting to him to keep his mind distracted, but it only exacerbated the need to flee. Somewhere between his first arm and the second one, Ines returned with warm food and began discussing something with Russel. With his mind occupied with the pain and nauseating anxiety, pressing dangerously at panic, he missed most of what was said.

Suddenly Russel was sliding an arm around his shoulders, cautious of his wound there. Confused he blearily looked at the other man. He blinked some to clear up his vision only to realize he was crying. Immediately he ducked his head, humiliation filling his chest, mixing with all the anxiety and fear. Russel squeezed him lightly, careful not to jostle Murdoc and mess up Yvonne.

“You’re gonna be okay.” Russel rubbed at his upper arm.

No matter how soothing the gesture, Murdoc couldn’t make eye contact. Worse yet he couldn’t wipe at his sodden face and felt even more embarrassed. He just wanted it to be over with. All of it.

———

“How did you two avoid being dragged into that mess?” He was referring to the world at large, as far as he knew.

“My mother lived here alone after my father passed, and once everything happened I rushed to be here with her. Since then we’ve really kept to ourselves.” Yvonne set her cup of tea down, staring into it. As the day wore into night, Ines had switched to a couple oil lamps. They were sat in almost darkness. “It’s been both a blessing and a curse. I have to go out and scout for supplies with every precaution. I spray painted our door and the following homes along here to avoid confrontation.”

Russel hummed in acknowledgement. He contemplated the tall woman across from him. Her face was sunken as though she was ill. He could imagine living like they were was depressing and probably taking a toll.

“I— We appreciate you two taking us in, and for patching us up. Really, for everything so far, it’s been immensely hard finding other survivors not out to kill us.”

Ines shook her head. “It’s a shame. We need to look out for our fellow man, especially now more
than ever.” Russel gave a curt nod of agreement. “Otherwise what are we truly left with? It’s a real mess out there, I pray people like you and your friend have managed well despite it.”

“It hasn’t been easy.” He leaned sideways to peer into the darkened living room. Murdoc was laid out, fitfully resting after the whole ordeal. Russel sat back and sighed heavily. “It’s definitely not been easy at all. Two of our friends got separated from us.

“That’s no good.”

“Yeah. No clue where to look at this point.” He scrubbed a hand over his face.

Ines finished her own hot beverage and reached out, patting Russel’s palm. He gave her a tiny smile.

“Have faith Russel, I’m sure they are out there looking for you two.”

“I would suggest going on as soon as possible,” Yvonne trailed off, almost unsure sounding. Russel peered at her once more. “However with the extensive set of injuries on your friend I can’t recommend that. He needs to rest and heal. I cannot even begin to understand the trauma you two have already suffered.”

“I figured it would mean staying put. I hope that isn’t a strain for you two? I’m willing to assist however I can.”

“I might take that offer.” Yvonne rose from the table. Her face morphed into a darker look as she stared beyond Russel. “I’m going to set up our two guest rooms. I suggest you wake your friend and bring him upstairs.”

With that, Yvonne dumped her cup and then took to the stairs outside the living room. She vanished from sight in the darkness. Ines took Russel’s cup and her own and moved to the sink to wipe them down.

“Thank you for the food and water,” Russel said. He pushed his chair in and paused at the archway between the kitchen and living room. “We’ll try not to overstay.”

“Stay as long as you need dear, we don’t get visitors often,” Ines chuckled.

Stopping at the couch he glanced down at the satanist. He sighed tiredly.

“Hey, think you can walk?” Murdoc slid his eyes open and squinted up at him. “Yvonne is setting up rooms for you and I.”

“Yeah.”

Murdoc eased himself up from the cushions, careful of his arms. Russel stood by in case the other tumbled over. Thankfully Murdoc seemed stable as he walked gingerly towards the stairs. The smaller man held his arms close to his body as though fearing anything touching them. They ascended the steps, Russel pausing behind Murdoc every time the man halted to steady himself. At the top Yvonne gestured with a flashlight towards a room. Murdoc shuffled in and lowered himself to the bed, laying on his back. Russel poked in.

“Do you want me sitting in with you?”

“No.”
“You sure man? It’s no issue for me.”

The resounding noise of annoyance made Russel retreat. “I’m gonna be next door if you need me. Night Muds.” He closed the door softly and looked at Yvonne. She appeared annoyed, though her face smoothed out when he fully turned to her.

She handed him the torch. “It might take a few weeks for those injuries to fully heal. Emotionally I’m not sure how long, it’s not easy to forget some things.”

He had nothing to add to the statement and only offered a shrug. Yvonne left him to the other spare room. Enclosed in the room he scanned the space with the flashlight, moderately intrigued at the old books and hilariously small furniture. He plopped on the bed, frowning when he sunk into the ancient mattress with a whine from the frame. Laying out he groused at the texture of lumps in the mattress. It was going to be a long night.

And no matter how exhausted he was, sleep didn’t come easy.

Flashes of ravaged bodies dripping blood all over kept flitting in and out of his dreams. The horrifying image of the butcher over Murdoc, brutalizing the man came through and finally at some ungodly hour he sat up with a sweat. A pale grey light was covering the room via a thinly covered window. Groaning he rubbed his face, fingers massaging his dry eyes.

He slipped from the room, walking tentatively towards the other spare. His foot ached so he walked half on it, avoiding putting too much pressure directly on the injury. Parting the door he glanced in on Murdoc, relieved to see the other man breathing. Mentally he reminded himself that the older man was alive, that they both were. However, it settled his nerves knowing they were safe, at the least for now. He closed the door and wandered the home as silently as possible. The place was littered with antique furniture and fixtures; something he tried not laughing about. As dated as the place was, it was well kept. No dust or debris to be found, which he thought amazing. He figured it was due to lack of entertainment.

Stepping into the living room he examined the encased violin then the old photos. He recognized Yvonne in some of the newer pictures. The woman looked healthier in them, face flushed and hair not as limp. He felt it a shame, the woman was quite pretty. He knew the apocalypse hadn’t been easy on anyone, including himself. Leaning from the photo he looked down at himself, patting his stomach. Stress and being malnourished gave no favors and he could see the change acutely. Sighing he removed his hand and moved to a covered window. Pushing aside the half bleached curtains he peered outside. All he could see was the rocky driveway and an old wine red sedan. Behind him the floor creaked causing him to jump and whip around. Ines gave him a warm smile as she tied up her housecoat.

“Morning dear, did you sleep well?”

Russel exhaled and massaged his neck. “Not really.”

“That’s no good. How about a good cup of tea and some biscuits?”

Coming from the side window he nodded. “That’d be great. Thanks.” Ines motioned him to follow and they went into the kitchen.

“What had you so occupied?”

“Oh,” Russel awkwardly started, “sorry, I wasn’t trying to snoop. I couldn’t sleep anymore, figured I’d stretch my legs.
“No need to apologize.” Ines got some cookies out, placing them on a plate which wound up on the table. Russel sat, striving to appear every bit polite while grabbing two from the ceramic dish. “Please, eat as many as you want. More for you than me.”

“Thank you.”

“When your friend wakes I can have a bath arranged.”

“You have running water?” Russel sputtered, eyes widening.

“We do.” Ines smiled. “I run on well water. The pressure is terrible and the water comes out rather cold, but it’s fresh.”

“A bath would be amazing.”

———

It wasn’t until nearly noon that Russel decided to check in on Murdoc, mildly worried the other had croaked. Upon stepping into the room he was startled to find the other at a mirror, shirt lifted and examining himself. Murdoc was quick to let his shirt drop. Not fast enough before Russel caught sight of a wiry, almost too thin torso. Mismatched eyes caught his in the mirror.

“Look, Muds—”

“Don’t.” Murdoc pursed his lips and looked away. “I’m well aware of the causes. What brings you to my doorstep?” The humorous lilt fell flat and Murdoc sagged when Russel gave him an exasperated look.

“Ines has running water and I spoke with Yvonne, she said you can clean up carefully. I fully suggest we take the chance too.”

“I think I’ll manage without, thanks.”

“It wasn’t open for debate Murdoc. You’re filthy and littered in injuries. Best thing to aid in recovery would be to keep clean.” Russel gestured the older man over. Begrudgingly Murdoc complied. “I realize this shit isn’t ideal, but you need me and I need you. So we’re gonna look after each other aight?”

“Fine.”

“Good.”

Set up in the washroom with two large towels, more clean clothing and supplies, Russel got the tub filled with freezing water. Murdoc stood at his side staring at the cool water.

The washroom was an awful salmon color with teal accents. The mirror held cracks from something and the claw foot tub was ridiculously sized, making the already small room seem all that smaller. While the water flowed, Murdoc moved and sat on the tiny toilet, the seat cover added some cushion. Russel stood and gathered the soap and cloth, pausing only to look at Murdoc.

“You need help getting your clothes off?”

Grimacing, Murdoc lifted his arms, one lower than the other. Catching the silent request, Russel set the items aside and assisted the older man in removing his clothing. Incapable of using his
hands and arms fully, Murdoc sat silently while Russel gently cleaned him. It was peaceful other than the slosh of water. If the older man was embarrassed at being doted over, he didn’t let it show. Russel suspected the other was overthinking, but found he had no topics for distraction.

When finished he aided Murdoc in buttoning up the borrowed shirt and sliding into some sweat pants. The satanist tried to retreat hastily after, but Russel stopped him.

“You should brush your teeth.”

“What are you, my mother?”

Russel recognized the familiar bite to Murdoc’s voice. He hissed vehemently, “if I gotta be, then yeah, I’m your mother, since you won’t do it on your own. Brush your teeth. Then you’re gonna eat something and drink water. Once I’m sure you aint gonna drop dead, you can go rest.”

The astonished expression on Murdoc’s face was comic and Russel fought the need to laugh. It would diminish his stance.

“Satan’s balls, fine.”

Delicately taking one of two new tooth brushes and the paste, Murdoc slowly brushed his teeth, hand trembling while doing so. Russel stripped down slowly, occasionally glancing at the other. Miraculously the older man did as he was told and then left the room while Russel was in the midst of cleaning himself. In that instance he felt aimless. He didn’t know what to do with himself and quickly drifted to the spare room. Curling up on the rickety bed he stared at the wall feeling lost. Everything ached and certain spots throbbed more than others.

Staring down to his hands and arms, Murdoc ran his eyes over the varies sutures. He looked like a patch work monster. He wasn’t left to his thoughts long as Russel quickly pushed the door open.

“You didn’t wait,” Russel commented. “C’mon we’re gonna get something to eat, you definitely need it.”

And so the rest of his day was blotted with Russel hovering around him like a concerned mother. He didn’t have the energy to be too irked. Considering his current state it was probably best the former drummer was in his business. Mostly he felt like a dull light, losing power to shine brightly. Ines and Yvonne kept them company during the quiet times and no matter how nice, he felt uncomfortable around them. Then it was dark again, Russel ushered him to bed and he was left to himself once more.

Upon laying in the terrible little bed for a third time, stomach full and mouth not parched, he scrutinized the ceiling. Yesterday he had been so drained that sleep came easier, tonight he felt more aware. Not for the first time he craved 2D’s presence, the soft pressure of the man laying against him and whispering to him. Closing his eyes he conjured up a phantom of said ex-singer in a sad attempt to ease his mind.

It barely worked and an hour later he was sneaking out of the room. The floor creaked so he hesitated and listened. Assured the others had retired to bed he disappeared downstairs to snoop. He sifted through drawers in the kitchen until he managed to find an old style storm-proof lighter, the perfect type for nightly exploring. Taking the item he lit it and cautiously stepped into the living room. Some part of him, probably due to the numerous times other survivors had been a lie thus far, didn’t trust either woman. Something about them put him on edge despite the exhaustion.

He gently parted the bleached curtains on the side window in the living room. Faintly capable of
making out the red vehicle and gravel driveway, he strained to see more. Giving it up as a lost cause he moved to the secondary window at the back of the living room. He paused at the violin, eyeing it softly.

“Why keep it locked away? Waste of a perfectly good instrument.” Rolling his eyes he moved onto some old photos sitting on the shelving unit next to the mantle. He spied old pictures of Ines and Yvonne before leaving them.

Pressing the curtains aside on the second window he peered out into the darkness of the backyard. Frowning in confusion he squinted until he understood what he was seeing. He stood upright, allowing the curtain to drop back into place. There were multiple vehicles back there, far too many for a little old lady and her daughter.

“It’s a bit late to be up.”

J jerking around, he stared at Yvonne, heart pounding in terror at being caught. He swallowed and tried to appear relaxed.

“Couldn’t sleep.”

“I see that.”

For a minute it seemed they were at an impasse. Yvonne remained at the entry point to the living room, hands cupping either elbow, mirroring her mother’s previous stance. Murdoc felt an eerie calm wash over him, something he recognized as his body’s response to a serious threat. He couldn’t for the life of him understand why Yvonne triggered such a feeling.

“I could make you something to help you sleep?”

“Would you? That’d be lovely,” Murdoc lied. He watched her finally retreat to the kitchen, bathed in complete darkness.

Russel and him needed to leave. His mind screamed at him that it was unsafe. He didn’t know why or how he knew, he just did. Walking around the couch he made for the stairs, only to be halted by Yvonne. She stood in the way, looking down her nose at him. Something about her hazy stare seemed familiar, similar to another person he was acquainted with.

“It’s been hard, living like this,” she explained, “just my mother and I. Nobody else around. I can only imagine how difficult it’s been for her.”

Baffled, Murdoc backed up a step, hand gripping the lighter hard between sore fingers. Yvonne barely moved towards him.

“I try so hard to be a good daughter.”

“Yeah, ’m sure you are. Look, y’know, I’m feeling tired now. How about we hold that cuppa or whatever for tomorrow,” Murdoc cajoled, voice dipping towards unnerved.

Yvonne seemingly came back to herself and smiled, small and crooked. She had a gold capped tooth; it reminded him of Sefton. Too many of her features in the fire light became similar to the bald leader, the shape of her mouth, the arch of her brows. Murdoc stared, increasingly uncomfortable with the observations. Yvonne stepped aside.

“Sorry for keeping you.”
He took to the wooden stairs, ascending them in haste. Yvonne remained at the base of the stairs, watching him.

“Make sure to get lots of rest. Would hate for your injuries to impede you.”

He shot a brief terrified look at the woman before fleeing to the spare room. Closing the door and pressing his back to it he gasped. He heard the creaking of the floor beyond the door. Swallowing he turned and fiddled the lock into place before backing up to the bed. And much like he would as a small child he buried himself under the blankets, feebly hoping it would keep the threat away. Squeezing his eyes shut he desperately hoped Yvonne would leave him be, that whatever he just encountered was a fluke, not a trend. He could have sworn he heard the door whine as it opened, which was impossible seeing as he locked it. He was sure he did.

A heavy hand rested over his upper arm, jostling him slightly. He jerked and yanked the blankets off his head to reveal a bright room and Russel looking him over in concern.

“You alright man? I’ve been knocking and knocking.”

Sitting up he scanned the door then Russel. Disorientated he gave the former drummer a confused face.

“Wha— No. No I’m not… Russ we need to leave,” he spoke with a rushed slur. He hadn’t noticed falling sleep last night, he certainly couldn’t remember doing so. He felt strangely groggy and when he tried focusing on the incident of last night it became a blur. His anxiety spiked.

“You’re in no shape to leave.”

“We have too. Please, Russ listen, there is something off about these birds. We should leave, take our chances.”

He felt the start of a constricting sensation, building in his chest, tightening in preparation for an attack. He tried to stave it off and tried to breath evenly.

“Hey, man, c’mon you’re getting worked up. You probably had a shit dream, we’re safe.”

“Russel there’s cars— fuck, I feel strange…” He paused to rub gently at his face, mouth cottony. “Look in the backyard, there’s way too many cars for two people. It’s fishy.”

The skeptical expression made his stomach drop. Russel sighed and it furthered his oncoming panic.

“Muds it’s alright, we’re safe. Nothing is gonna get you okay? I told you I’d look out for you man.” Russel sat on the edge of the bed, sinking. Murdoc fought off the need to hyperventilate. “How ‘bout you rest today? I’ll bring you food and water.”

“Well clearly I haven’t a choice,” Murdoc snapped, “you don’t even believe me!”

“I think you’re suffering a fuck ton’a trauma man, this is your body and mind’s way of helping you deal with it. You need to let your body do its thing.”

Clenching and relaxing his fists, Murdoc made a restrained noise. He ducked his head and pulled his knees up, gasping as panic wracked his body. Russel rubbed at his back in slow and soothing circular motions. It helped some.

“Deep breaths, through your nose.”
He glared at the bedding as it became blotted by tears. Breathing raggedly through his nose he shook while fighting the overwhelming need to thrash or yell. Russel stayed by his side throughout the entirety, calmly stroking his back or offering soft words. He hated being so weak, especially in front of the other; he hated even more how exhausted he was afterwards and that he even acquiesced to resting. Russel left him to doze, closing the door gently.

He knew there was something off, could feel it in his gut. Proving that fact would be arduous. His body seemed eager to make him appear a liar. Part of him clung to the idea that Noodle and 2D were out there looking for them, and he hoped they stumbled across them.

Noodle breathed out.

“Noodle…”

Cracking her eyes open she inhaled deeply. She wiped her hands off on her jeans. The man’s face was barely recognizable and his body lay limply on the ground. 2D stood nearby, face turned away.

“I’m good,” she mumbled.

Brent lay in a heap close by, half his face and head missing from an unfortunately placed shot. Noodle picked at her nails to clean the blood out from under them. 2D pushed off the truck and stepped over to her. Nearby Will and Brent’s truck lay half in the ditch, where Noodle had chased them.

“We should probably try going further on, see if we can’t find Muds and Russ. Maybe they holed up in one of them houses in the town nearby?”

“If they were on foot, I guarantee they have. It would be hard to travel with injury.”

2D nodded in agreement. Noodle could see the urgency in his dark eyes, the need to continue on and find the other two. She silently understood, she was frantic to locate them as well. If what either guard had mentioned was true, the former musicians were in dire need of medical attention and more than twenty-four hours had already passed. Giving one more look to the ravaged bodies she faced 2D.

“Let us leave. We are losing day and I don’t want to be around if the undead are attracted by these.” She gestured to the two bodies. 2D nodded again, quiet.

Returning to the truck they were on the move within minutes. Noodle pressed her foot to the floor, speeding dangerously towards the small town in the distance. At their right a couple homes blurred by until they were nothing more than specs in the mirrors. 2D sighed to himself, slumping into his seat awkwardly.

“Something wrong?”

“You didn’t have to be so—” 2D motioned helplessly. “Violent.”

“I could say the same of you.”

He shot her a scornful look. “You know I can’t help my actions. What I do, when I do, is not my fault.”
Noodle sighed, shoulders drooping partially. “Sorry.”

An awkward silence filled the space until neither of them knew what to say. Noodle focused on driving them into the town, easing on the gas pedal. When she ran down a zombie, the rotting corpse flinging off the truck, 2D hissed.

“Is it necessary to drive so recklessly?”

“Are we not in a hurry?”

“Yeah, but—” 2D jolted when Noodle ran down another undead. “Christ Murdoc, why don’t you drive us through another building too well you’re at it?”

Abruptly she slammed the brakes, Kraken made a noise along with 2D at the halting motion. Jerking the vehicle into park, Noodle flung her belt off and slammed out of the truck. 2D rubbed his collar and slipped out, following her. Ignoring the questioning look on the ex-singer’s face, Noodle climbed up onto a tire, hand tossing aside the tarp covering the supplies 2D and Murdoc had gathered. When her hand landed on a large wrench it was covered by 2D’s palm. Finally they caught each other’s eyes.

“Talk to me.”

“There is nothing to discuss. I am going to search the buildings,” her response was brusque and she brushed the hand away. Snatching up the tool she jumped down off the tire.

Again 2D stopped her, his eyes imploring. Noodle furrowed her brows.

“What?”

“Noodle, talk to me.”

“I need to relieve stress.” Brushing past the taller man she walked towards an undead, ambling from a darkened store. “I’m sick of being compared to Murdoc.”

With great force she swung the wrench out. The impact was messy and satisfying, crunching bone and putrid tissues into mush. Noodle landed a swift kick into the walking corpse to knock its body to the ground where it stayed. 2D twiddled his fingers while observing her.

“I hate being compared to him,” Noodle barked, “I hate it. I hate it so much…”

As another zombie approached, slow and close to falling apart already, Noodle yelled and flung the tool at its head. With a loud thunk the creature and wrench flopped to the ground. She stared down at the body and quite rapidly the anger drained out of her.

“I hate that you are right.”

“Noodle, I didn’t mean to— You, well… You take after Murdoc more so than me or Russ.” He bit his lip, contemplating how to continue. “It’s hard to say you act like either of us when you do that,” 2D remarked, pointing to the wrench lodged in the skull of the zombie.

“I know,” she responded.

“It’s not a terrible thing taking after your parents… Or legal guardian in this case. I see parts of Russ in you too, but honestly you’re your own person as well. Don't take it terribly, it can be a compliment too.”
Noodle tilted her head to peer at him. “Thank you. I did not mean to scare you.”

“Let’s find the other two,” 2D offered.

Noodle nodded, suddenly exhausted. The little deviation helped alleviate the building frustration, if only a little.

During their exploration of the deserted town the ex-guitarist discovered 2D’s ability to ward off zombies. It was advantageous for them while scoping the shops in the main district of the town. Zombies moved away from the taller man when he intercepted them. Although still attracted to the young woman, it was mostly deterred by 2D and they had no trouble.

Their only issue was turning up empty handed. Noodle was disheartened not finding neither Russel or Murdoc. They returned to the truck and moved onto the next section, but no matter, it became apparent both men were not present. They sat in the vehicle at the edge of the town, stumped.

“They couldn’t have gone further, right?”

“No. If they were injured they would stop at the nearest place, surely.”

2D flicked his fingers making Noodle glance to him, startled.

“There were some houses along the road, we passed ‘em on our way here.” He jabbed a thumb over his shoulder in an approximate gesture towards the homes. “We really don’t have much else to lose at this point.”

Hope renewed, Noodle cranked the wheel and got them turned around. Turning onto the empty stretch of road she lead them back towards the row of houses. The sky was darkening, signifying the third day without the other two if they weren’t lucky. Neither had realized how many hours they had spent turning over every item in that town.

Noodle parked them in front of the first home and they shared a brief look of determination.

———

Murdoc shot up from the bed at the telltale sound of an engine. He was damn sure he heard right and rushed to climb out of the blankets. Part of him knew it was possibly the two guards out there searching for them still. A small bud of wild desire bubbled in him, hoping it was 2D and Noodle.

shoving the curtains up he looked out, thankful he had a perfect view of the road from his position. Squinting he saw what looked like a black truck driving by at a dangerous speed. His heart jumped when he saw the orange tarp flapping in the bed of the vehicle. He recognized it, of course he would; 2D and him had used it to protect the supplies they gathered. His breath caught in his throat and he hurried to the door. They could leave, they could get out of this unnerving home with its enigmatic occupants.

Except the door was locked…

“What?”

Scowling at the knob he jostled it again. It was locked, but not on his side. Russel had left him be only an hour or so ago, surely the man hadn’t locked him in. Bewildered he shook it harder. He pounded on the door, which caused him to hiss in pain. In a matter of moments the door was unlocked and opening to reveal Yvonne. He was quick to put space between them.
“What’s wrong?”

“What’s wrong? You locked me in. Let me out, I need to speak to Russel.”

“Of course,” Yvonne spoke delicately. Murdoc eyed her suspiciously, body tense. “He’s downstairs.”

Ignoring the crawling skin vibes he got from the woman he pushed past. Descending the stairs in haste he wandered into the kitchen first. When he didn’t spot Russel there, he moved to the living room and then the sitting room. The former drummer was nowhere to be seen. Neither was Ines for that matter. Rounding the doorway from the sitting room he bumped into Yvonne which startled him. Shying away he glowered at her.

“What is he?”

“Downstairs.”

“I’m currently downstairs,” he growled.

Yvonne floated by him towards the kitchen. Following at a distance, he watched her pull open a sturdy door. One he never saw in his journey around the home. It sat tucked between another door and the pantry nook. The other door he knew would take him outside onto the gravel driveway. This door definitely didn’t do that. Within were a set of old wooden steps, incrementally darker than the last as they sunk into the blackness. A cold air spilled out, drifting over his feet, filtering through the socks he had on.

Yvonne nodded to the eerie entry. He wondered, fleetingly, if this were a horror movie; he wanted there to be cameras and a set, then he could laugh at how ridiculous everything was. Of course none of that was true, it was all too real.

“He’s down there.”

Every red flag shot up in his mind. Yet, as though controlled outwardly by some force, he stepped closer. He peered into the depths, mild anxiety setting in.

“He’s down there?”

Yvonne nodded.

“I’m gonna grab him and we’ll be on our way,” he explained. “See, I saw our friends, which means we are leaving. Of course.”

Putting emphasis on them leaving felt important. Like reiterating their plans would allow them to come to fruition.

“Of course,” Yvonne parroted.

His eyes darted between her and the abyss.

“We’re leaving,” he murmured as he stepped into darkness. “We’re definitely leaving.”

Yvonne kept the door open as he took each step, slow and cautious. Every few steps he glanced back to assure himself the woman was keeping the door ajar. Then he was at the bottom, light from the top streaming down on him and the piles of items near the base of the steps. And with a slam he was plunged into darkness. A resounding click followed, overwhelmingly loud in the pitch
black.

“Russel?”

“I’m here man.”

Relief filled him as he sought out the former drummer. When he found the other he relaxed, if only a little. Now all they needed to do was find a way out.

Chapter End Notes

EDIT: 03-29-19

Almost finished my edits! Working on chapter fifteen right now, then it's just 16. For the final two chapters I'm mostly looking to expand the dead time between scenes to build up the atmosphere of the story. Then I'm working on Universal and another small segment for Time To Pretend, possibly a few chapters long blurb with more down time for the characters like an anthology.
Sun sets in the East.

The basement was shrouded in a thick darkness, disallowing much in the way of seeing. Murdoc barely saw more than a millimeter if he squinted. Patting himself he felt the telltale bump from the lighter he nicked. He was quick to bring it up. The glow of the small flame highlighted both him and Russel, standing across from one another in the crowded space. Surrounding them were piles of knick-knacks and other assorted trash. A couple rusted bikes leaned into an old armchair with missing patches. Upon the chair were a stack of gaudy gold framed paintings straight out of the 1800s. Murdoc scanned the place by holding up the lighter, looking around them in mild bafflement. His eyes caught sight of a poorly held together science skeleton; a few bones missing.

“There’s a lot of crap down here,” Russel commented. “I figure they lead interesting lives before everything.”

Murdoc turned to Russel once more, heart skipping a beat in his excitement.

“Russ, I saw 2D and Noodle, they’re out there.”

“What’re you talking about? It’s those men, they’re still looking for us, Yvonne said so.”

“No! She’s wrong,” Murdoc huffed.

Russel tilted his head in concern and momentarily Murdoc fretted. He took a deep breath, calming himself as to appear less erratic. Russel watched him with a raised brow.

“I helped 2D with the truck beforehand, we put a bright orange tarp over the supplies. I know what I saw, it’s them.”

“You’re certain?”

Murdoc nodded his affirmative. Not pausing to deign Russel further confirmation, he started to scope out the basement. Wandering through the useless items he held the lighter aloft, hoping to find something heavy and blunt.
“Yvonne locked us down here,” he started, “clearly she has other plans for us.”

“She said it was for protection.”

“Some protection,” Murdoc muttered. “I don’t see any windows.”

There was the sound of Russel shuffling around to reach him. He pivoted in his sock feet, mild fear clenching in his chest at the noise. Thankfully nothing came of it and he relaxed seeing Russel at his side.

“You’re absolutely sure? You’ve been a bit out of it.”

Something about his tone set Murdoc off.

“Damnit Russel, I’m not losing my marbles! I helped ‘D load the truck, I know the orange tarp. How many other fucking survivors do you think are driving around in dark green fords with orange tarps?”

Russel placated him with some gentle hand waves. Murdoc bit at his bottom lip and inhaled sharply to avoid another anxiety or panic attack. He had been having a lot lately.

“Okay.” Russel commented casually. “It’s them. What sort of plan do we have for getting out of here? If Yvonne locked us up then we’re limited on options. ‘D and Noodle aint gonna be knocking on the doors of each home, they might not even come back this way.”

Suddenly unsure, Murdoc lowered the lighter. It was greatly apparent how stuck they were.

“Yeah, we’re fucked if we can’t get outta here.”

Murdoc stared at the flame.

“Fire. We could start a fire.”

“No way Murdoc, we’d die from inhalation before they even noticed.”

Gruffly grabbing at his hair, he winced at the ache in his injuries from the movement.

“We need to find a window, there has got to be a window in this fucking dungeon.”

“There are,” Russel lightly directed Murdoc back through the small path of garbage. They halted under a boarded up spot on the wall where faint light was shining in. “My guess is, after outbreak they sealed up all potential entries to avoid being attacked.”

Murdoc looked at the boarded up window. Neither of them were overly tall and the window sat above them, nearly flush with the ceiling.

“Great. Let’s find something to pry it open.”

Both turned to face the barely outlined heaps of items littered around the huge basement. Working as a pair, where Murdoc lit the way and Russel sifted about, they looked through the stuff. At one point Murdoc spotted what looked to be a bone, but he wasn’t entirely sure with the dim fire light. He nudged it and found it mostly stuck under something. About to crouch and examine it further he was halted by Russel making a noise. Distracted he came over to the other. The former drummer was triumphant in finding an old brass candle holder. Murdoc left the potentially horrifying discovery at the back of his mind.
They rushed to the window, nudging a large wooden trunk under it so Russel could reach. More able-bodied, Russel was quick to wedge the beveled end of the holder into the somewhat rotted wood; the wood being beyond disrepair meant the windows had been boarded far longer than the apocalypse, something both of them ignored.

To avoid being pelted in the head with wood chunks, Murdoc stood to the side with the lighter. Rapidly the boards were pried from the frame and early evening light shone in on them. Russel lowered his arms and inhaled deeply.

“Why’d you stop?”

“Ines is in the backyard,” Russel mumbled, voice soft.

Shutting the lighter and pocketing the small item, Murdoc carefully joined Russel on the trunk. They both watched the small elderly woman work at a sharpening something. Neither of them were fully able to see the details through the grainy glass. However, Russel was finally starting to believe Murdoc might have a valid point. He spared a short look at the many vehicles parked in the yard, some loaded to the nines with supplies. When Ines made movement, his eyes darted back to her.

“What in the hell is she doing?”

“I don’t know man.”

They stood there, eyes transfixed to the woman. Quite suddenly Ines stopped and rose from the table she was at. They could see then it was a machete. Sharing a brief look of confusion they turned back to observing her. She walked by, passing out of immediate sight.

“Now do you believe me when I say we need to leave?”

“For all we know that’s completely normal for them.”

“Russel we are locked in a dank, cluttered basement. What about that is normal?”

Russel didn't tack on how nothing about their current situation, world ending crisis included, was normal.

“We don’t even know what Yvonne is thinking,” Russel stepped down. “For all we knew they’re preparing to defend us. Or think they are. Did you tell them it’s our friends?”

“Yes of course I told her, she still locked me down here with you.”

“Maybe we should try talking to them?”

“Brilliant Russ, let’s talk to them.”

Russel gave the him a deep frown. Murdoc pursed his lips in irritation.

“You really expect them to listen? She locked us down here, Russel. There’s no need for that if they really believe they’re protecting us.”

“Maybe she had a valid reason—”

“Oh yes, yes she did,” Murdoc snapped, “maybe some mashed tater and gravy, sounds perfect to add alongside some sautéed you and I!”
“They’re not cannibals,” Russel yelled back. “What the hell would give you that idea? They’ve been nothing but nice to us!”

“That’s just their cover, being nice. You saw all those vehicles! Ines was sharpening a machete for fuck sake. What in the ever-loving-fuck does she need a machete for? Oh I know, to cut you and me up for supper!”

“Shut up—” Russel gestured.

“Why? Afraid of the truth?”

Russel shushed him by covered his mouth. Murdoc struggled a moment before he stopped, listening to the muffled sound of an engine approaching the property, distant and echoing as though just in the backyard. Not wasting a breath more on their argument, they both moved and stood up on the trunk. Russel reached out and pushed at the filthy glass, desperately attempting to shove it open.

———

In the fading light they searched the houses along the strip, hearts growing weary with each empty room. Noodle became more frustrated, to the point of kicking doors open while forcing her tears back. 2D hurried throughout with a flashlight, scanning the basement and then the other main floor spaces. Other than odds and ends disturbed from their positions and dirtied foot prints long since dusted over, there were no signs of recent activity.

“I do not understand,” Noodle shouted from upstairs, upset clear in her voice. She came down with heavy stoms.

2D joined her at the main entry point. He rubbed his face in a similar state of agitated dejection over their unluckiness.

“I’ve checked the basement and the main floor. We should maybe have a peek around the property.”

They stepped out and made a quick sweep of the yards, front and back. Noodle peered in a parked car before she thumped her head to the window. She started upon 2D resting a hand on her shoulder.

“There’s one house left.”

“Yes.” Noodle wiped at her face. “We must hurry, the sun is going down.”

With quick steps they climbed back into the truck. They drove the short distance to the last home along the road, parking in the driveway behind the wine red sedan already there. Upon exiting the vehicle they were rapidly greeted by a woman holding a rifle. She stepped down from a side door beyond the sedan, blonde hair swept back in a tight pony.

“Leave.”

Stunned, 2D and Noodle gave each other a sidelong look. Noodle cautiously strode forward, hands raised preemptively. The woman pointed towards her. Had she been a different person, more fearful, her steps might have stuttered. However, Noodle continued till she was only a couple feet from the woman, jaw clenched.

“We are looking for two men, older men. Maybe you have seen them?”
“I said leave.”

2D cleared his throat, drawing her attention a moment.

“They were injured,” he started. “One is heavier set and bald. The other is short with dark hair. Please.”

She stepped closer, menacingly nudging the gun into 2D’s chest when he attempted to also approach. The ex-vocalist jolted back, startled by her forcefulness. He wasn’t so sure he could survive a direct blow at close range. Lifting his hands partly he smiled nervously.

“We’ll leave, sorry to have bothered you.”

Noodle shook her head slightly and 2D gave her a firm look, head tilting towards the truck.

“Yeah, leave. Get off our property.”

Cautiously they moved towards each side of the truck, opening their doors slowly. The woman backed up and came to a stop near the side entry she had originally exited. She kept the rifle held firmly, aimed directly at one of them, constantly drifting between them. At glacier speed, Noodle slid into her seat at the driver side. 2D lifted a foot into the floor of the passenger side only to pause, head tilting at a strange noise.

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“I aint gonna fit through there,” Russel declared. He gave Murdoc a once over. “You on the other hand.”

Shifting around to have a proper look at the small square, Murdoc could understand what Russel meant. The angle for one was above their heads plus the space was narrow, far too narrow for the ex-drummer. Although not overly fond of the idea, Murdoc nodded. He felt it wrong to leave Russel alone in the basement, trapped. Russel hopped off the trunk and approached him.

“I’ll boost you and you climb out and grab them, don’t let them leave. Easy enough right?” Russel was nervous, he could sense that from the tremble of his voice.

“I can’t leave you here,” he contended.

“Damn well better not.” Russel tugged Murdoc closer to the trunk. “Just— You gotta do this. Don’t leave me hanging man. Get them and then come get me.”

Staring into the foreground, anxiety spiking again, Murdoc nodded. Awkwardly stepping up onto the trunk beside Russel, he used the wall for support to get his foot on cupped hands. With surprising strength, Russel boosted him up to the window, which once level with was far tighter looking. Swallowing he slid his arms through, careful of the bandages. Palms touched grass and groped at the ground. He distantly heard Yvonne telling someone to leave while he grunted and dragged himself out. He yelped at catching his injured thigh on the window frame.

Quite suddenly there came more noise, like rushing feet on gravel. Scrambling completely out he huffed and laid a moment to catch his breath, anxiety making his chest uncomfortable.

“You alright man?”

“Y—yeah, yeah. I’m good.”
The sky was glowing a soft purple with the setting sun, yet he could see stars and the wisps of left over clouds. Turning over he got onto his hands and knees, almost in the process of standing when hurried footsteps came about the corner. He couldn’t make out much other than the outline of tall person. Shakily he got to his feet, facing the person. He had no way to defend himself should the person attack so he hesitated, breath held. Unsure and incapable of making out the face, Murdoc weighed his options, sure it was Yvonne.

“Murdock?”

He exhaled loudly and in a matter of seconds they met halfway. He ignored the pain in his arms and shoulder while pressing as close as humanly possible to the other. 2D hugged him firmly, though thankfully aware not to squeeze too hard. A cheek was pressed into his hair.

“Should put a tracker on you,” Murdoc commented sarcastically, voice wavering as he fought to cover his utter relief.

“I could say the same,” 2D shot back, voice cracking. 2D leaned out and cupped Murdoc’s face, quick to kiss him.

For a brief pleasant moment the world and all its issues melted away. He trailed his hands up 2D’s back and tugged him in flush, kissing back eagerly. The back of his head was cupped while the other large palm settled around his lower back. They broke apart with a jolt at Noodle’s yell of pain, coming from somewhere in the house.

“Ines. Shit.” Murdoc split from 2D and ran around to the side entry. Yvonne was unconscious on the ground. Hot on his heels and coming up behind him on the gravel was 2D.

They both slammed into the house to find Ines standing over a face down Noodle. A flashlight lay on the floor shining on the wall, highlighting the room softly. A pool of blood was forming around the woman. Ines hardly waited for either man to comprehend as she swung blindly at them with her bloodied machete.

Both dodged opposite directions and Ines chose to chase after 2D. Taking the opening, Murdoc unlocked the basement door and yanked it open.

“Russel get up here, Noodle’s hurt,” he shouted urgently.

From the darkness he heard the rush of feet and rattle of wooden steps. Murdoc stepped over to Noodle’s prone form, almost terrified she was dead. He wasn’t sure whether he wanted to see the damage. When Russel reached the top step the man was at his side in an instant, hovering over Noodle. The former drummer wasted no time in turning Noodle over to examine her. There was so much blood on her face it was hard to discern where the origin was. It made his stomach flip with nausea.

“Look we don’t have time to perform surgery,” Murdoc stated, swallowing around bile, “I’ll get Yvonne’s kit and you take her to the truck.”

“Hey baby-girl,” Russel started, “I’m gonna move you, just hold on ‘kay? Everything is gonna be aight, we got you.”

Murdock made for the stairs, rushing up them in the dark. He could hear 2D trying to calm Ines down by talking to her. It wasn’t working if the scared noises he uttered were any indication. He put it out of mind for a moment as he shoved Yvonne’s door open. Her room was lit with a red battery powered lamp and littered in human skulls. Stopping at the entry he looked all over,
ignoring the terrifying human catacomb on her shelves. Despite the red glow he spotted the medical kit and took three strides in to grab it up.

He practically flew down the stairs and outside, jumping over Yvonne’s unconscious body. Russel was hunched over Noodle, who was laid out in the backseat of the truck. When the kit was deposited to the ex-drummer he felt split between helping the man and going back for 2D. Noodle was murmuring now, aware and clearly in a large amount of pain, but she had Russel. Murdoc hesitated before finally turning away and going back to the house. He snatched up the rifle from limp arms and marched into the home.

A clatter came from the living room so he stepped to the archway. The light beam off the torch kept the space lit well enough.

“Ines I swear to satan, drop your machete and let us leave.” He took aim at Ines, aided by the forgotten flashlight. He was mildly amused seeing 2D, a coffee table length between them, looking scared of the tiny machete wielding elderly woman.

“What have you done to her? Where is my Yvonne?”

“She’s fine, unconscious. She won’t be if you keep this shit up. Now,” Murdoc ground out, “drop the machete and back off or I’ll go blast your daughter’s brains out.”

It felt wrong threatening someones child, but after what had just happened to Noodle it felt appropriate. The machete dropped like lead and Ines brought her hands up. Murdoc kept the rifle on her and nodded his head to 2D.

“Noodle and Russ are at the truck, go.”

2D scurried by and stopped at Murdoc’s side.

“Let’s go, c’mon.”

Lowering the rifle he nodded and hastily they took the side entry out. Ines shouted from the confines of the home, running after them. Much faster than her they easily got in the truck, rifle chucked somewhere, and quickly reversed out of the driveway. Mere seconds and they were driving away at dangerous speeds, thankfully leaving Ines and Yvonne far behind them.

2D drove them while Murdoc leaned over the console, attempting to assist Russel in bandaging Noodle’s face and shoulder. No matter how many times they kept wrapping it around it seemed to seep through. It was staining his own bandages along his hands.

“I don’t know what to do man, she won’t stop bleeding. Ines cut her face and shoulder open.”

“Put pressure on the worst areas,” Murdoc instructed. “Stuart we need to stop somewhere safe.”

“There is nowhere safe out here,” 2D protested. “Anywhere we stop is going to attract attention.”

Murdoc growled, “Then stop here, Noodle needs help.”

2D slammed on the brakes and put the truck into park. Both men hopped out of their respective seats onto asphalt.

“Make a clear spot in the bed,” Russel hollered.

Murdoc and 2D hurriedly shoved items around at the back. 2D yanked the tarp further down and
flattened it. Working in the moonlight was difficult so the ex-bassist grabbed some flashlights and set them up like spot lights on the bed of the truck. Only a minute later Russel was carting Noodle’s body to the back and laying her out. Russel hastily disappeared and returned with the medical kit, setting it somewhere within reach. Each of them climbed up into the bed and Murdoc scrambled to yank out latex gloves for all of them.

“What are we suppose to do?” 2D questioned while tugging the gloves on.

“We need to sew up her face and shoulder,” Murdoc replied while digging out the same set Yvonne had used on him.

“What? I don’t know how to do that.”

“None of us do ‘D, but we gotta do something. She’s losing blood and her face is cut open.”

A beat passed where they all stared down at Noodle, her face ashen with blood loss. Her labored breathing brought them out of their stupor; some of the breath escaped through the flap that was her upper cheek. Murdoc shakily set up the thread and needle. “Russel you’re in charge of cleaning up blood and making sure she’s aware. Stuart you’re in charge of lights. I need to see what I’m doing.”

Russel looked through the bag for something to clean up blood. 2D grabbed up a flashlight and shone it on the young woman’s face. With Russel’s help Murdoc removed the gauze, of what Russel had feebly used to staunch bleeding, and assessed where he should start. He wanted to vomit. He could see the woman’s gums and teeth through her slashed cheek. Russel covered his hand suddenly and he glanced to the other.

“You’ve got this man.”

Murdoc nodded and inhaled gently.

“Okay.”

Noodle moaned weakly when the needle pressed into her flesh. It was a good sign. Russel pet the dark hair from her face, talking to her soothingly. Murdoc concentrated on keeping the sutures even and clean. His hands trembled slightly and his own bandages, now trapped under latex gloves, made his hands feel overly hot. 2D chewed on his nails while his free hand held the flashlight at a decent angle.

He had watched Yvonne at points while sewing him up and he had sewn himself up before then; those were darker times though. There had been an instance during Cyborg’s creation where he remembered sewing the false flesh together, knitting it up with sutures. He thought it a coincidence he was here doing something so similar. By no means was he a doctor, but strange skills he’d acquired throughout his life lent him the needed ability for right now, when it mattered most. Finishing off the opening on Noodle’s face was beyond relieving. His gloved fingers were bloodied. He tied off the sutures and re-threaded the needle, he had to do her shoulder.

This wasn’t how he expected their reunion to go.

———

They drove for hours, occasionally swapping between the three of them. They just let the road take them wherever, beyond Yvonne and Ines, past Sefton and his cult, and further. It was cathartic, if only it could last. They stopped to relieve bladders or refuel from the supplies in the back, but otherwise were constantly on the move. It was the break of the fourth or fifth morning when they
finally pulled up the driveway of the farm home. The place seemed no worse for wear other than
the dust that had settled on the abandoned vehicles.

Putting the truck into park, Murdoc glanced at Russel and then the backseat passengers.

“We’re home.”

“Finally,” Russel commented.

Each of them exited the truck and stretched, enjoying the freedom from the confinement of the
vehicle. 2D brought Kraken out and on her feet lightly, leash in hand. He yawned before joining
the other three at the front of the truck.

“We’ll unload after we do a sweep of the house.”

And sweep through they did. The house was devoid of zombies or other unwanted guests. They
quickly unloaded, situating themselves like it had been an extended vacation away. Food was
stored, new clothes put away, and bedding added to rooms. By the early evening they were relaxed
in the living room, candles set out. Windows had been covered to avoid another confrontation like
weeks ago.

Noodle was relaxed back in a chair, legs propped up and Kraken curled up in her lap. She was
comfortably high on painkillers, face mostly numb. Next to her the sofa was occupied by Russel
who was reading a novel quietly, stretched out with his bad foot up as well. Adjacent to the man,
2D and Murdoc were tucked together on the love seat, buried in blankets. It was the first truly
peaceful night where all other matters were put aside. 2D’s condition had become the norm and the
constant violence from others was far from them.

Any plans for their future were on hold until everyone present had healed. No matter how urgent
they were to keep going they needed a reprieve to gather their wits.

Nobody had the energy to talk so the night drifted by in companionable silence.

———

Three weeks later...

“Murdoc I swear.” 2D gave the other a heated look, brows drawn tight. “I’m fine.”

“Y’sure?”

“Yes.”

“It’s been weeks.”

2D motioned at Murdoc’s arms, currently covered by long sleeves. Murdoc shied away under the
gestures.

“Why are we talking about me? You still haven’t told me how you got them, and Russel won’t tell
me either.”

“Yeah well you won’t tell me how you got these,” Murdoc snapped, hand yanking 2D’s shirt up
and jabbing the healed black mark at 2D’s side. He then patted at 2D’s thigh where he had been
shot.

2D pulled away with a frustrated grimace.
“You never asked.”

“Well I’m asking now,” Murdoc grit out.

A somewhat betrayed look filled 2D’s face.

“That’s not fair. You can’t demand answers without giving some in return.”

“I don’t want to talk about it, simple as that.”

2D struggled through a few choice words he wanted to say before settling on a long sigh. He cautiously took Murdoc’s hand, grasping it gently, and pulled him towards their shared room. They didn’t need to argue out in the open, Russel and Noodle surely didn’t want to hear it. Once sealed in the bedroom he began taking his shirt off.

“What’re you doing?”

“Taking the initiative,” 2D explained.

“Initiative. Right.”

Stepping over to Murdoc, 2D grabbed the other’s palm again and had Murdoc place it over the blackened mark at his side. He felt Murdoc’s thumb rub over the moderately sensitive portion of black skin.

“I was stabbed at the facility. And,” 2D moved his hands to undo the jeans he was wearing. “I got hurt when we returned to look for you and Russ.”

Dropping the jeans he stepped out of them to kick them aside. Murdoc glanced to his upper thigh, palm skimming its way down to the second marking, much larger and ragged. 2D shivered involuntarily at the warmth radiating from Murdoc’s hand. He wondered briefly if the other thought them disgusting, the blackened marks on his pale flesh.

“Gunshot. I seem to get a lot of those.”

Murdoc brought his hand to one sleeve, contemplating with himself silently. Cold hands took hold of the mauve shirt and began pulling it upwards. Murdoc instinctively pushed it down and shook his head.

“I’ve shown you mine.”

“It’s an ugly mess under here, better not.”

2D tilted his head to the side, eyeing Murdoc intently. “I’d love you no matter what you look like Murdoc, you have to know that right?” Murdoc wouldn’t meet his eyes.

Over the past few weeks they had been in close quarters, constantly discussing safe topics or huddled up just relaxing. Despite that, 2D had yet to see much more than Murdoc’s hands and wrists, where angry pink scars had formed in abnormal spots. He had pressed the issue only to have Murdoc blow up; they hadn’t spoke for two days before he approached the older man to apologize.

Here and now, he had Murdoc in a position where he wasn’t entirely obligated to share. 2D hoped he would feel safe enough to do so.

Murdoc sighed and let the shirt go.
“Go ahead.”

2D pulled his hands to himself, fiddling his fingers, unsure on whether he wanted to push the issue. The defeated tone made him reconsider.

“I don’t want to force it. If you’re not comfortable—”

Murdoc gave him an annoyed grunt and began tugging the mauve shirt off, mussing his hair up in the process. He dropped the article to the ground and held his arms out. His palms to his elbows were littered in pink marks, still freshly healed. At the juncture of Murdoc’s shoulder and neck, just above his collar bone was a far worse gnarled injury, not entirely healed due to its depth. 2D cautiously stepped forward, eyes trained to that particular spot.

“What happened?” He motioned, hand not touching despite how much he wanted to. It bothered him in too many ways seeing the damaged skin. Murdoc tucked his chin in close and tried to peer at said area of marred tissue.

“Butcher stabbed me with some pronged device, said it was for bleeding animals.” Murdoc tilted his head to the side, tone blasé. 2D chewed on his lip. “Hideous, I know.”

“No,” 2D started, “hardly. It’s just another story to tell once this is all behind us.”

A abrupt snort escaped Murdoc as he shook his head.

“There is no putting this behind me ‘D. I’m not going to forget. It happened and it’ll sit there on my skin, reminding me every god damn day what I survived.” Murdoc stared down at his own palms, eyes trailing each scar, wide and suddenly so desolate. “I felt so helpless.”

Unaware when he had decided to step into Murdoc’s personal bubble, 2D took the hands in his larger ones. Murdoc only moved his head enough to peer at 2D through his fringe, much messier and longer than normal.

“I’m here.”

That brought Murdoc’s face into view as he glanced at 2D in mild bafflement. 2D slid his fingers along Murdoc’s scarred forearms until he reached the other man’s elbows.

“I’m here if you need me.” 2D’s lips curled into a soft smile. “Remember we said we’d work on us like a team? Well that includes all this.” 2D quickly swept an arm out to indicate everything around them, a metaphor for all that had happened. “You don’t have to do this alone.”

It seemed as though Murdoc would brush off the sentiment, but 2D was surprised. He was enveloped in a hug, Murdoc’s face comfortably pressed to his chest. Not wanting to miss the chance he held the smaller man close, cheek resting against dark hair. Had he not been so near he would have missed Murdoc speaking.

“I thought I was gonna die… I felt like dying.” 2D squeezed tighter, careful not to crush.

Bitten and blunt nails dug into his cool back. Murdoc mashed his face harder into 2D’s chest, clinging almost painfully to the ex-vocalist. Uncertain how to soothe Murdoc, 2D smoothed a hand over the trembling shoulders and through thick hair. Heart heavy at the almost inaudible crying, 2D cupped at Murdoc’s neck, trying desperately to convey safety.

The broken sounds escaping the smaller man made him both angry and sad. He wanted to find who had done this and rip them limb from limb; he realized that wasn’t an option so opted for security.
He could offer a place in his arms to unwind, somewhere Murdoc could feel content to hide for a moment and let everything out.

It took a solid five minutes of swaying gently and whispering calming words for Murdoc to feel relaxed. By then they moved to the bed and laid out against one another.

The sun was at the highest point in the sky, lighting the field up and filling the upstairs room with warmth. Late fall was in full swing and 2D considered how long he would stay conscious before his hunger hit. Surely, he figured, it would hit soon with all the weeks that had passed. However the longer he thought on it, the more he became aware how little he felt pertaining to his abnormal hunger.

He was brought from his thoughts by Murdoc leaning up enough to glance at him. It was important he understood the trust Murdoc put in him, showing off how miserable he looked. The red, puffy quality to Murdoc’s eyes, followed by bags from sleepless nights. 2D watched him, quietly admiring Murdoc’s features, taking in the new lines from stress and what he thought to be grey hair. He might have been wrong though.

“What are we doing?”

2D looked about, considering his answer.

“Relaxing?”

“No,” Murdoc sighed. “What are we doing here and now? We should be moving. Staying put does us no good.”

Sliding a hand along Murdoc’s bare side he urged him into laying once more. As Murdoc laid his head upon 2D’s chest, 2D carded long fingers through the thick hair.

“Noodle and you are in no shape—”

“Bullshit,” Murdoc cut off. “You two are babying us. We’ve healed.” Murdoc lifted his arm and shook it. “See. Perfectly fine.”

2D eyed the myriad of pink scars. His eyebrows drew up and with a heavy exhale he wordlessly agreed. Physically the injuries were sealed and strength had returned; however, emotionally, 2D wasn't so sure how well off Murdoc was.

“Lets leave it till tomorrow Muds, please?”

Arm lowering, Murdoc grunted into his skin. “Fine. No more dawdling though.”

2D forwent an answer. Tomorrow they could discuss leaving, to where he had no idea. At this moment, subtly returning to the comforting sweetness, he could indulge in Murdoc’s company uninterrupted.

Chapter End Notes

Ines and Yvonne were originally meant to be like this. They're nice enough if you ignore the other qualities...
Morning sun streamed through the parted curtains, brightening the room and its occupants. Autumn was coming to a close as wisps of air blew brown leaves over sagging fields. November had come and they were running low on time to make a decision on how to proceed.

Waking from the overly warm confines of blankets and 2D’s slightly cooler body, Murdoc poked his head out. It was arguably lighter than he appreciated. Soon, before he wanted, antsy desire to leave, to move, filled him and sleep was whisked away. He nudged 2D a bit harsher than intended.

“Wake up, c’mon. Greet the day and all that.” It took him a long moment to realize it odd 2D was even sleeping.

2D cracked open one dark eye, then the next. Something about the hazy expression, which under normal circumstances would be cute, had his heart hammering in fear. He carefully jostled the ex-vocalist once more.

“Stuart,” Murdoc cleared his throat, “you’re not feeling off are you? Has it started?”

“It’s started.” The confirmation had Murdoc scrambling to hop out of bed and yank on clean clothing. 2D lay there in a daze, seemingly unable to articulate more than turning his head.

“Shit,” Murdoc cursed. “I knew this would happen. I knew it. You assured me things were fine. We need to head out today. No arguments.”

2D hummed in response so Murdoc pivoted to see if he missed an expression. The other appeared lax, face somewhat serene and eyes glazed. It was an all too familiar look that Murdoc was beginning to hate.

“Let’s go. Up.”
Murdoc righted the black sweater over a violet tank top before leaning towards 2D on the bed. He urged 2D from the blankets with rough hands.

Downstairs Noodle was casually working on some concoction, of which passed as food. With months under their belts surviving on whatever scraps were available, anything edible was good. Murdoc came stomping down the stairs, 2D in tow. Kraken, displeased at the disruptive noises, skittered away from the stairs and hid in the living room.

“What’re you storming around for?”

“We need to leave,” Murdoc blurted, “today. Possibly tomorrow, but that’s a stretch.”

With a light pull of his arm, 2D stumbled forward, sagging where he stood. Both Russel and Noodle glanced at the ex-singer, instantly aware of his far-off look.

“Damnit,” Russel muttered.

Noodle set a utensil aside, dusting her hands off on jeans. The sutures on her face, somewhat crooked given Murdoc’s unsteady hands, were stark on her skin. The flesh had mended well enough and in a couple days the dissolvable thread would be gone, leaving Noodle with a horrendous scar. Every time he looked at her his eyes diverted to her chin or hair, anywhere that didn’t make guilt bubble up in his chest; despite it not being his fault in the least.

“Where are we going?” Noodle rested a hand on one hip while her other rested palm up in the air. “We have no where to go.”

“Europe,” 2D mumbled.

Brief silence passed until Russel jumped into action. Said man retrieved a weathered map from a bundle of items shoved neatly in a corner on the counter. He began unfolding it upon the kitchen table. The creases had caused fade marks all along the paper, but for the intended purposes it worked. Noodle moved and pinned the corners with metal forks and knives. Then, as though drawn in, the four of them hovered about the map. Russel poked a spot on the map, an approximation to where they were.

“We’re here. Roughly. We want to what? Get a boat? A plane?”

“Do any of us even know how to operate those?” 2D gave his head a shake, forcing his haze away, if only for a minute.

“I can sort of muddle my way through a boat,” Murdoc supplied. He added in a weak voice, “what with Stylo and all.”

Murdoc avoided catching 2D’s eyes, forgoing a potential cold stare. He was pleasantly dissuaded from the thought by a hand cupping his lower back. He peered at 2D to find no malice, just an open acceptance. It made his chest ache in a strangely giddy way, like swinging much too high without care. He wasn’t sure if 2D had forgiven him, but it appeared the other man was ready to set it aside. It was something he knew they really had to discuss, but now wasn’t appropriate; he briefly wondered if they ever would.

“I know how to fly planes. Some.”

They all looked to Noodle. She awkwardly stared at the map.

“During my formative years in the program, I underwent training. Among things, piloting was one
“Regular G.I. Jane you are,” Murdoc complimented. Noodle spared an appreciative smile. “Right, here’s the plan.”

Murdoc parted from 2D’s side to grab a marker out of a cup on the counter beside the pantry. He took his position next to the tall man again and hunched over the map. Circling the spot Russel had pointed out he drew a semi-straight line towards where the airport sat. Tapping the second circle with the opposite side of the marker he leaned up.

“We’re currently here and we need to get here.”

Murdoc slid the closed writing utensil along the map, back and forth between the two spots. He gauged their reactions to the information. As if to answer them he sighed, “a boat isn’t an option. We’re into November now. It’s getting cold and the Atlantic is too harsh for four untrained people.” Begrudgingly he coughed and added, “we’re going by plane.”

Nodding her agreement, Noodle brought her hands together to rest against her chin.

“I can find a plane, surely there are some collecting dust. However, we may come in contact with military resistance.”

“We’ll cover that once we’re on the move.” Murdoc rubbed his knuckles, eyes scanning the map. “My math isn’t perfect, but given the distance we traveled before, it shouldn’t take more than a couple days to reach the airport.”

Russel gave his jaw an itch, listening on. Noodle peered at the map. Once satisfied with what she saw she gave one curt nod.

“The quickest route would be a direct one. No side streets or detours. If 2D is going to succumb to his infection induced coma, we need to be hasty.”

“Agreed.”

“We need two vehicles, weapons and supplies,” Russel said. “If there is resistance at the airport, we’ll want to be prepared to fight.”

“Excellent idea, Russ.”

2D rocked on his feet, momentarily functioning on his usual level. “So Noodle flies, what’re we suppose to do?”

“Our jobs will be making sure it isn’t a fucking nightmare. Any opposition is dealt with upon entry and then we commandeer a plane.”

Once clarified what they needed to do, they rapidly split from the table. Each of them took on the task of preparing the essential items for a short road trip and subsequent assault possibly waiting for them. The green Ford was packed and Kraken was placed comfortably in the back seat. Murdoc intended to make good on his words and sure enough by late afternoon they were pulling out of the driveway. He made towards the suburbs from which they had fled from so long ago.

It was a simple plan, find another viable vehicle, gather some light camping gear and let the road lead them. What Noodle said about detours became moot when their direct path was found to be too cluttered with abandoned vehicles. This is where trouble began.
The second day on the go had Russel taking side streets through desolate suburban areas. Zombies meandered, attracted to the noise the truck made as it rumbled past. By no means a serious threat with how worn the bodies looked, they ignored the growing crowd. Noodle dictated directions from a map book, leading them to a cluster of stores. Abandoned and in disrepair, a sporting goods place lay in wait. There wasn't much time to dawdle so upon parking they each slipped out and dashed through jammed automatic doors.

Parting, each of them hastily stalked up and down aisles for items. The telltale gurgling of nearby undead had them hurrying. 2D grabbed up a truck tent while Murdoc grabbed sleeping bags. Noodle did much the same with Russel, pausing to grab a multi-tool before exiting with them.

“We need a second truck,” 2D commented. Although not entirely zombie proof, the other three gathered closer to 2D.

“How 'bout that one.”

Noodle shrugged, eyes darting around at the gathering zombies. “Good enough,” she said.

The young woman made a beeline towards an offensively bright yellow Chevy, doors ajar and keys still in the ignition. Russel fell in step with her and they both deposited their goods. Noodle saluted Murdoc while cranking the key, silently thankful to whoever when the vehicle started up.

“Here, catch!” Murdoc tossed a walkie-talkie to Russel, who barely managed to catch it while halfway into the truck. “We’ll keep in contact this way.”

Noodle pressed the brake and set them into drive, waiting for Russel to properly seat himself. She hollered over Russel, “we need fuel, let us stop somewhere without corpses.”

“There’s a gas station back the way we came, it’s backtracking, but at this point we haven’t much day left.” Murdoc hopped into the green truck with 2D, door still open.

“Lead the way,” Noodle shouted back.

Doors were closed and both vehicles pulled out of the parking lot, driving back the way they came. Murdoc shot a look at 2D, quick to watch the road again.

“How you doing?”

“Oh uh— good, yeah. Mostly aware.”

“Feeling a bit peckish yet?”

“Always,” 2D sighed, a long suffering noise. “I don’t think it’ll ever go away, it just gets easier to ignore.”

He patted 2D’s thigh, resting the hand there. The ex-vocalist’s cold hand covered his; it was all the assurance he needed.

“How did you two manage to find us?”

“We backtracked to the facility after I fled,” 2D answered. “We extrapolated from what we saw and heard along the way that you two were hurt and on foot. We ran into those…men.” 2D practically spat the word out, shoulders tensing.

Murdoc side eyed him perplexed. 2D gnawed at his lower lip. Unsure, Murdoc cautiously gave the
thigh under his palm a gentle squeeze.

“They were hunting you two like animals,” 2D gesticulated. “Noodle ran them off the road and it escalated from there.”

“Good. Assholes deserved it.”

2D picked at his jeans, plucking a frayed part near his knee. Indiscernible to the normal person, Murdoc could tell the taller man was watching him from the corner of his dark eyes. It was slow, but 2D let a fond smile fill his face, replacing the taut expression.

“What?”

“I’m happy you’re safe.” 2D angled himself and leaned over the compartment between their seats. Cool lips met his warm cheek and trailed to his ear where 2D whispered, “I’ll kill anyone who tries to lay a finger on you.”

2D laid a feathery kiss to his ear and retreated. Murdoc found himself somehow charmed by the overly, almost unhealthy, level of possessiveness. He swallowed inaudibly as his mind supplied him with inappropriate ideas involving… he shook his head and focused on driving.

Everything passed in a busy blur as he had the truck pull up next to the furthest pump, Noodle stopping next to him. Staring out at the darkened gas station store, Murdoc contemplated whether it was worth searching.

In a matter of minutes Russel was grabbing two empty canisters and setting up next to a pump. As he began siphoning, 2D stepped by him, motioning Murdoc to follow. Noodle came to stand next Russel, shooting a knowing look at the two older men. 2D ducked his head and grabbed Murdoc’s hand. They wandered to the store, pausing at the door.

Noodle sat on the hood of a truck watching her companion do his task. Russel was attempting to siphon gas only he kept spitting when he accidentally did it wrong. By the entry to the gas station she spotted Murdoc slapping the singer’s backside causing said man to jolt and laugh. 2D whipped around on the satanist whispering heatedly to the man, a blatant grin on his face. She snorted softly.

“What? Something wrong?"

Russel looked up from what he was doing to peer at Noodle.

“Say Europe is okay. Do you think Murdoc will dissolve back into old habits? 2D can never be himself again, but I wonder if things would change.”

Russel cast a look towards the two men in question, both of them now inside the store.

“It’s been a blessing in disguise, this whole world-ending business. Expedited the mending on their relationship somehow.” He tilted his head to peer up at her. “Kinda hard to be at odds when shits falling apart around us. We need each other, Murdoc needs us and ‘D, whether he admits that or not. Can’t fight alone forever.”

“True.” Noodle uncurled her legs, letting them dangle from the hood.

“‘Sides, I can’t see Muds sliding back into his vices. Europe being good or not, he’s been clean a while now.”
Noodle exhaled like a balloon losing air and slid from the hood onto her feet. A startlingly strong desire to scratch her wounds took her and she started itching around the spots. Russel tsked from his position and abruptly she stopped.

“I need a shower,” she whined. “I look and smell like a feral animal.”

Russel gave a deep laugh, a noise that warmed her. She fought off a smile, to avoid hurting her scarring face, and snickered instead.

“Don’t know how you’re doing it baby-girl, but keep being optimistic.”

“Someone has to do it.”

Noodle stood near, enjoying the comfort Russel brought by just being there, existing.

“How much longer will that take?” She gestured to the canister and pump.

“I have this container full, let me work on number two and we should be good.”

“I will alert the other two.”

“Gonna get an eyeful.”

“I have survived much worse,” Noodle chuckled. Giving Russel the finger guns she trotted off to the glass door.

Stopping short of entering, Noodle peered through the glass in an attempt to spare herself more than she needed to see. However, eyes roving this way and that, she couldn’t see either man in the darkened space. Frowning, mild concern consuming her, Noodle tugged the door open. Part of her worried they had been attacked by undead, another part direly hoped they weren’t in the throes of sex.

“Murdoc? 2D?”

She strained to hear anything, breathing, moans, or even abnormal zombie noises. She heard nothing. Striding through a disheveled candy section, Noodle glanced around the dim store.

“Guys?”

Abruptly, a door set in a narrow hall near the washrooms, slammed open. Noodle jumped and covered her chest. 2D and Murdoc haltingly shoved up against the metal door. She stared at them in utter bewilderment, uncertain what could cause such disruptive behavior.

“What happened?”

Murdoc’s eyes caught hers and he pulled off the door. 2D grunted when the door rattled scarily, as though something inhuman and large was behind it. Murdoc grabbed her by her forearms, frantic as he guided her back to the front entry. She noticed his black sweater was missing, as was 2D’s pull over.

“What is going on?” She huffed. Murdoc nearly kicked the glass door and pushed her outwards.

“Get the truck going,” he snapped. Noodle stood two feet from the door, confusion written on her face. Murdoc spared her an alarmed look before barking at 2D. “Let’s go! Leave it Stuart.”

Without waiting for either her or 2D, Murdoc hastily walked through the gas pumps towards
Russel and the trucks. 2D met up with her at the doorway, panting softly.

“What is it? What happened 2D?”

2D forced the glass door shut. “Big—really big thing—monster.” 2D jerked at the clatter and muffled noises from within.

Noodle and him backed from the store. She made to go around the pumps, halting when 2D yelped.

Rotating at a steady pace, Noodle felt her heart in her throat when a large brown bear lumbered around the store. Clearly having figured out how to reach them it sniffed the air while stopping. Nearest to the monstrous animal, 2D plastered himself to a pump. Noodle stared, transfixed, like watching the ensuing destructive force but unable to flee. The bear tilted its head, fur and flesh sagging off a visible jaw. Muscles were blackened with the virus and the scent was horrendous.

She was barely past the first row of pumps. The second set sat between her and the other two. Eerily they all remained frozen to the spot, waiting with bated breath for something. Russel rose to his feet, anxiously sweating as his eyes trained on Noodle. Murdoc backed up towards the green truck, far removed from immediate danger to move a little more freely.

“Noodle…” Russel kept himself calm sounding, “step backwards slowly.”

“It will reach me before I reach you,” Noodle whispered.

The bear cocked its head, sinewy jiggling as it hung from the neck of the animal. 2D inched around the pump, keeping his movement restrained. A guttural rumble came from the bear as it honed in on Noodle’s scent.

Whipping around, Noodle bolted. She smacked into a pump in her attempt to leap through them. Just as the animal came at her, Russel yanked her through and held her close. The bear thumped into the pumps and gave a gurgling roar, swiping at them. Both of them stumbled aside to avoid the claws. Quicker than expected the bear was rounding the pumps. In a desperate endeavor to keep Noodle from harms reach, Russel swung them around. He shielded her body as the animal stood up on hind legs.

Cold terror ran through him as he saw the claws coming down. In the last second, 2D jumped between them, enduring the full force of claws digging into his flesh, shredding his shirt. Screaming in distress at the searing pain blossoming from his torso, 2D tumbled back into Russel. Unable to smell anything other than infected blood the bear dropped down on all fours. It made confused sounds, growling and snuffing as if agitated by the smell. Russel was unable to catch 2D before he collapsed to the ground hard, panting in agony.

“Everyone down,” Murdoc shouted.

Russel caught sight of a gun and wasted no time dropping with Noodle. Reaching out, Russel grasped at one of 2D’s twitching hands.

“Oi! Over here you fucking beast,” Murdoc tossed a can of food at the bear to draw its attention. When the animal caught sight of him he planted a foot on the ledge of the truck bed and took aim.

Firing, Murdoc grit his teeth at the kickback on his mangled shoulder. The animal barely stuttered as it ambled towards him. He fired again and again; each time clipping or skimming fur off. It only enraged the bear and suddenly it was coming faster. Scrambling to toss the rifle and grab the
shotgun laying behind him, Murdoc spun around at the last viable second and shot the creature in the head. A spectacular spray of rotting brain matter and skull fragments sprinkled the ground, truck and him. The carcass slumped heavily into the truck, mere inches from killing him had he been an instant longer. Momentarily Murdoc stared at it, breathing ragged as his adrenaline tapered off.

At the moan of pain, Murdoc tossed the gun and leapt from the truck.

“Stuart you utter fucking idiot!”

Running over and dropping to his knees beside 2D, Murdoc shoved his arms aside to inspect the damage. Both Russel and Noodle were on 2D’s other side.

“Oh oh it burns!”

Murdock halted and covered his mouth. Russel stared at the black mess of infected organs, eyes watering at the smell.

“2D you—” Noodle mumbled in a horrified realization.

“It’s stinging,” 2D cried deliriously. He looked down at himself and gave a sharp exhale. “My o-organs! They— Oh god oh god!”

“Okay,” Murdoc clutched at his hair, voice wavering, “okay Stuart, it’s okay. We’re gonna fix you up.”

Noodle wobbled to her feet and blindly jogged to the truck. She dug around for the medical kit they had stolen, tears stinging in her eyes. She drew the case to herself and brought it back. Russel held 2D’s hands back, his own trembling.

Noodle and Murdoc pulled on gloves. Neither of them were sure how to replace the blackened organs. 2D whimpered and squirmed in Russel’s hold, mumbling over and over how bad it burned.

“Just— we… push them back in,” Murdoc stumbled.

And so they did. Murdoc gagged while pushing intestines between the jagged flesh. Noodle closed her eyes while assisting as well as she could. Russel kept his face turned while holding 2D’s arms. After a long, uncomfortable moment of squishy viscera and whines of pain, Murdoc grabbed gauze, medical tape and sewing materials. The stench was overpowering, so much so Noodle had to breath through clenched teeth. Forging on, not even remotely sure 2D’s organs were properly in place, Murdoc and Noodle sewed him up haphazardly.

No one stopped to worry over the horrifying knowledge that 2D was essentially rotten.

2D began to settle, breathing more evenly as they covered the gaping wounds. Murdoc ripped the gloves off and threw them. He leaned over the ex-vocalist, face twisting into a devastated snarl. He fought off tears while grabbing 2D’s face in a vice.

“You ever— ever do something so stupid again I’ll… I’ll— I don’t know! You fucking idiot.”

“It made sense to do it,” 2D murmured, face still sweaty from pain.

“2D you idiot.” Noodle threw her gloves as well, hugging 2D’s shoulders and head. “Please be careful next time.”
Russel relaxed and ruffled 2D’s hair carefully. He had a moment of contention within himself, but it passed and his face smoothed out. “Could we please make it to the airport in one piece, maybe?”

“That depends.”

“On what?” 2D rested back against the ground when his wounds started to clot enough between sutures to ebb away the pain. He could breathe easier.

“On whether you insist on playing hero every time something goes tits up.”

“I’ll behave. Sorry.”

Murdoc ran a hand down his own face sighing. It took him a long minute to recover. It took a long time for all of them to finally feel calm enough to function. By then the sky was a deep grey color as the sun sunk beyond the buildings.

“We need to get outta here. Would hate to find out if this fucker had friends.”

———

The following couple days of travel lead them through suburbs. They spoke over the walkie-talkies, chatter mostly light-hearted. Often times there were spurts of radio silence. By the third night, the airport could be seen in the distance. They camped on a back road, far removed from any threats, animal or otherwise.

2D and Murdoc struggled through setting up their truck tent. Russel and Noodle watched on in mild amusement.

“Do you two need help?” Russel stifled a chuckle when 2D got thwacked in the face by a thin rod. Murdoc coughed to cover his own laugh.

“Please.” 2D rubbed his cheek with a pout.

With Noodle’s aid, they both easily propped up the tent for Murdoc and 2D. Once finished Russel set out a mini stove unit for cooking. They gathered around as a pot of water was brought to a boil. Noodle dug out some clean clothes and handed them to each man.

“Time for a bath,” she chirped.

“More like sponge bath.”

“Same difference.” Noodle dipped hers into the hot water. “Afterwards we can start on dinner. Maybe tea for you 2D?”

“Sounds nice, yeah.”

Everyone was on edge since the incident with the bear and subsequent moment with 2D; despite this, nobody prodded the ex-singer about his body’s condition. With 2D’s injuries covered they could continue pretending nothing was off about him.

They followed Noodle’s example and took to wetting the clothes down for cleaning their faces and such; without full on stripping in front of one another. Russel finished first and set the pot aside to get going on dinner. Noodle propped a camping chair out, dropping heavily into it, sighing in content. Mere seconds after relaxing, Kraken joined her from one of the tents. Noodle smiled gently and began petting the black cat.
2D disappeared around the green Ford to clean himself more thoroughly, or as much as one can with a wet cloth. Murdoc joined the taller man a moment later, holding a roll of fresh bandages.

“Mind if I give you a hand.”

“Could do more than that.”

Murdoc was pleasantly surprised by the offer. 2D winked at him, smiling charmingly despite having a wet cloth down the front of his trousers.

“You perv.” Murdoc gestured at 2D’s torso. “I need to check those bandages.” Murdoc sidled up next to 2D, hand finding its way to the man’s backside. “But after…”

“Give me a moment, yeah?”

“Don’t stop on my behalf.”

All suave confidence dissipated and 2D flustered, hand and cloth coming out of his jeans.

“Now whose a pervert?”

Murdoc leered and murmured heatedly, “well you seemed to be offering a show.”

Past interactions had been fleeting between them. Years spanned the gaps where they weren’t with one another. This was probably the longest either of them had been with anyone, ignoring the current world crisis. To Noodle or Russel it probably seemed as though they were constantly at each other, falling into bed.

It never was that easy. Things were far better now, they communicated… mostly. Their earlier years fooling around had been unhealthy.

2D wondered how Murdoc was still eager given the incident with the bear; he couldn’t imagine it attractive to be with a walking corpse.

“What’s wrong? You were all bark a moment ago,” Murdoc teased.

2D angled his body and walked Murdoc into the side of the truck, hands planted on either side of the shorter man. Murdoc looked up at him, expectation in his eyes. 2D chewed on his bottom lip, pensive.

“I’m worried,” 2D admitted. “Worried about hurting you. I’ve wanted to, but I’m— I’m not exactly well and… and I might hurt you.” He let his hands, one grasping the cloth, slide down until they fell to his sides.

“I don’t care about that,” Murdoc started. “Hasn’t been an issue before, shouldn’t be one now.”

“But I could hurt you or worse. I’m at the edge of my ability to keep from slipping off into a state.”

“I like it rough.” Murdoc grabbed his hips and forcefully pulled them together.

He gave a small grunt at the impact on his recently healed torso.

“It’s no fun if it isn’t rough.” To accentuate the claim, Murdoc cupped his backside hard, grinding into him and missing his crotch due to their differing heights.

Despite himself, 2D snickered and pressed his face into Murdoc’s shoulders. “Was that a Lady
“Gaga reference?”

“Maybe,” Murdoc gave his neck a bite, not hard enough to break the skin. His heart pounded, whether with fear or excitement he was unsure.

Dropping the cooling wash cloth, 2D settled his large hands over Murdoc’s waist and squeezed firmly. The full body shudder he received was sign enough how eager Murdoc was.

“You need to be quiet,” he whispered, breath tickling Murdoc’s ear. “The others don’t need to hear.”

Murdoc groped at the backdoor to their truck, seeking out the handle. 2D chuckled and opened the door when Murdoc struggled due to their position. The building desire was palpable and while anxious, 2D urged Murdoc to climb up into the back seat. He followed the other closely, quickly shutting the door behind them.

Rapidly Murdoc bracketed him between legs and gripped his shirt. Murdoc yanked him into a heated kiss, their bodies flush once more. If his breath stunk, Murdoc didn’t seem to care, as soon the serpentine tongue was forcing past his lips. He moaned around the ridiculously long appendage.

His hands scrabbled to shove Murdoc’s shirt up and undo his jeans, a little shaky with his excitement. When he was unable to pop the button fast enough, Murdoc broke their kiss, a trail of saliva following. Warm hands batted his aside and took up the task easily. Murdoc caught his jeans and undid them as well, pushing them down eagerly. It was a fight to shove off the jeans in the confined space, but somehow 2D managed.

They quickly fell back into place, bodies intimately pressed together. Murdoc wrapped a leg around his waist to dig a heel into his backside, urging movement. A breathless laugh escaped him at the enthusiasm.

“Shut up,” Murdoc grunted.

2D thanked whoever previously owned the Ford; the illegal tinting on the back windows shrouded them well. Granted he knew Russel and Noodle were all too aware what they were up too. He quickly put it out of mind, at least for now. Carefully slipping a hand between them he awkwardly grasped himself and Murdoc, arching his hips some to make more room. The feel of warmth where their flesh lay bare spurred him on, much like the soft breathing near his ear.

Although cautious to avoid outright injuring Murdoc, 2D made sure he was every bit as rough as the other desired. Not an easy feat given how little room they had to maneuver themselves. Murdoc didn’t seem to mind though.

———

The night sky was littered with billions of little twinkling dots. Some more bright than others, all equally clear as the air no longer suffered from light pollution. A curl of smoke filled the immediate space and Noodle huffed, waving a hand to clear it.

“S’nice seeing the stars so clear,” 2D commented around his lit cigarette. The tip was dangerously close to spilling ash down on his face.

“It is,” Noodle replied.

Murdoc huffed and plucked the precarious smoke from 2D’s slack lips. He shifted to the side and
dabbed the fag out. Before moving back he took a quick drag from his own, adding it to the other. He lay beside 2D once more, exhaling the remains of his cigarette. He started at cold lips pressing to his cheek only to settle upon realizing it was just 2D. He turned to catch the cool mouth before the other retreated.

Early Winter air was encasing them with a subtle chill. Noodle shifted herself further under the huge comforter draped over all of them. She tuck in closer to Russel, stealing his warmth.

“Remember when 2D made me that horrid cake? Too much salt in it.”

2D glanced to Noodle at the corner of his eyes. He couldn’t quite recall the cake in question.

“What about baby-girl?”

“What happened to it after we had a piece?”

“Tossed it,” Murdoc muttered.

“I probably worked hard on that.”

An abrupt giggle escaped Noodle. “It was a nice gesture, but it was disgusting.”

For a minute there were a couple snickers passed between them. Something streaked across the sky, bright for an instant before dwindling. Everyone quieted down until it was silent.

“Suppose Europe is stable. What are we planning to do?”

“Recuperate and make music again?” Noodle picked at the blanket over them.

“Get therapy,” Russel added. “Get ‘D checked by scientists?”

Unconsciously, Murdoc slid himself closer to 2D. He grabbed at 2D’s large hand, anxiously squeezing it. The idea of some scientist, or group of, poking and prodding the ex-vocalist terrified him. He wouldn’t stand for it, nobody was taking the man away. 2D gave him a soothing smile, eyes half lidded. The reassuring look did little to remove the pounding of his heart at the very mention of losing 2D. It took cold fingers rubbing little circles into his scarred palm for him to loosen up and breathe easier. Neither Russel or Noodle seemed aware of his minor episode.

“I don’t think what I have can be reversed Russel.”

Russel gave nothing in the way of a response, his face pensive as he stared unblinkingly at the stars.

“Probably not,” Noodle sighed. “However, it might be pertinent to discover if this condition will worsen.”

2D continued to stroke Murdoc’s palm, sighing.

“Or we could leave it be. It’s not like he’s obvious.” Murdoc tried to resume a meditative state or at least set his focus on the cool touch.

Noodle seemed to consider her next words, quiet save for her muffled breathing. When she spoke her voice was thoughtful.

“Murdoc, you’re not infected.” She posed it like a question, but left out the inquiring tone.
Murdoc examined the stars as though looking for an appropriate way to answer.

Noodle continued on without regard to his confusion. “None of us are infected, other than 2D. As far as we are aware this virus has not traveled beyond North America. Assuming is dangerous, but I think given our minor evidence we can make the assumption.”

“What’s your point Noodle?”

Temporarily the silence fell in the space, falling on them like the blanket they rested under and upon. Noodle inhaled audibly and moved, sitting up to address them.

“Given our current information, this virus is transferable via bodily fluids. Blood and saliva through biting or unfortunate contact. So how are we not sick too?”

The silence was replaced with an uneasy consideration.

“Maybe,” Noodle began, “maybe we have not succumbed because 2D is not infectious. Maybe it is not the zombies passing this virus around, but in fact, something in the environment.”

“This speculation is riveting, but what does it mean?”

“I examined 2D’s blood against those of infected individuals and found differences. For one, his blood reacted to the tests I ran in a curious way. Unlike the other infected, his DNA reacted to drugs by breaking down key components to create a suitable environment for the virus to thrive. Of course none of it explains how he is as he is or whether he’s contagious or a carrier.”

Murdoc bit his tongue on giving a snide comment on the antiviral vaccinations she had given the man so long ago. He had desperately wanted it to be the answer to the issue and despite his reservations hadn’t actually tried all too hard to stop Noodle.

“I could be contagious?”

“In theory yes, but I have no way of knowing. None of us do, which is why you should not be kissing or having sex with Murdoc.”

“Excuse me?” Murdoc sat up to give her a heated glare. “I would be sick if he was infectious, but clearly I’m not. What we do isn’t having any effect so mind your own.”

“It could be a dormant thing though, I would not know. You need to be careful.”

2D glanced between them, laying trapped with Murdoc at his left and Noodle on his right.

“Don’t treat him like a rabid dog, he’s not clambering to bite me.”

“Please don’t fight,” 2D bemoaned. Russel made a noise of agreement.

Noodle rubbed her face. “I am only concerned, why must you turn this into a personal attack? You and 2D are… Close.”

2D hastily sat up between them and smiled awkwardly. Murdoc grunted, retort dying as the ex-vocalist blocked his line of sight.

“We’re careful Noodle, promise. How about a new topic, yeah?”

When no one was rushing to give an idea, 2D wet his lips and cleared his throat.
“Okay, uh— I think we should talk about what we can hypothetically do once in Europe. Me personally, I’d like to have a tea and play with some keyboards. Really miss that.” 2D laid back when Noodle and Murdoc seemingly took the hint. “What about you Russ?”

“Man I miss having a bowl of cheap ramen and chilling on the couch. Feet propped up, music channel going, no cares.”

“Yeah,” 2D said, “yeah that’s good Russ. What ‘bout you Noodle?”

Somehow that eased the tension. Noodle hummed in thought.

“A shower, a proper, scalding hot shower with shaving gear. I direly need it.”

Everyone dissolved into snickers, amicable atmosphere returning fast. When the question was given to Murdoc, he simply stated he wanted to go home; something they all agreed to with small noises.

Shortly after the conversation tapered off each of them retired to one or the other tent. Murdoc insistently tugged 2D towards the green truck, climbing into the tent with the taller man. Although incapable of proper sleep, 2D snuggled down next to Murdoc and wrapped him up in cool limbs.

Over the soft lull of what sounded like wind or any number of mysterious sounds, Noodle mumbled loud enough for them to hear.

“Do not be noisy if you two so decide to fuck around.”

“Shaddup,” Murdoc huffed. He buried his face into 2D’s neck.

It was a testament to how tired he felt, within moments of cold fingers massaging into his mussed hair he was drifting off. 2D hummed to him, low and so soft it felt like a dream.

———

Come morning 2D was jostling him lightly. With a weary groan he and the other three were leaving the tents and packing up. It was a quick interlude before they were on the road again, gaining on the airport. It gleamed in the distance like a beacon of hope only it brought dread to each of them.

The road they decided to stop on sat adjacent to the location, a safe distance where they could spy for activity before approach. Afternoon sun beat down on Russel as he peered through binoculars, squinting as he scanned over the airport. Noodle fed Kraken, petting at the thick black fur. She leaned out to glance at Russel.

“What can you see Russel?”

“A lot of big planes. We need a big one, right?”

“Yes.”

“What about activity?” Murdoc asked from the opposite truck.

“Seems pretty quiet actually.” Russel lowered the binoculars and looked from Noodle to Murdoc. “I think it’s safe to approach. We’ve been watching for an hour and nothing seems to be going on.”

“Guess we may as well.”
Nobody was enthused at the prospect of returning to the horrid airport, but with a plan in motion and so little time left it was now or never. Russel tucked the binoculars away and in minutes him and Noodle were situated in the yellow truck. Murdoc buckled in and started up the green truck. Each driver shared a look before they were off.

At first it seemed benign, both trucks driving beside one another. Noodle sped ahead and Murdoc narrowed his eyes. 2D seemed none-the-wiser while he watched scenery pass, expression hazy. Grinning he pressed on the gas pedal, speeding to catch up to Noodle. He had no idea how Russel was faring, but he could just imagine the other man laughing along with Noodle.

Their little race continued all the way to a destroyed portion of military barricade, which each truck smashed through. They came to a halt near the entry of the main building, tires leaving mild skid marks. This brought 2D out of his stupor. Across from them Noodle hopped down and pumped a fist, smug look on her face. Murdoc snorted and exited his truck.

“Clearly I won so wipe that smirk off your face.”

“Actually I definitely won,” Noodle replied delightfully. Russel joined her, Kraken tucked into his large arms.

“Gonna agree with Noodle on this man, she had you beat by a foot.”

“A foot!”

Noodle cackled, cheeks turning rosy with her merriment. 2D finally decided to slip out of the truck, stepping to Murdoc’s side; he looked groggy.

“Looked more like a tie to me,” 2D mumbled as he rubbed at his eye.

“‘D you’re suppose to be on my side here, supporting each other and all that shite.”

Russel stifled a grin when 2D stumbled over his words.

“Oh— uh, yeah. Muds was the winner. H—Had it by a long shot he did.”

Murdoc rolled his eyes skyward and shook his head. Noodle whistled while turning on the spot to scan the surroundings.

“This place is dead”

The varying stares of irritation made Noodle cover her mouth to muffle another amused sound.

Around them the military encampment, once standing tall and proud, was nothing more than rubble. Fencing lay in mangled heaps around the perimeter with bodies of long dead and rotted corpses spotting the metal. Military vehicles were parked in haphazard places and the entry point they had destroyed months ago lay in shambles, seemingly never repaired. Noodle hugged herself while examining the property.

“Do you think it was our fault?”

“If it was, it’s too late to feel sorry about it,” Murdoc muttered. “Everyone either fled or are dead.”

They all turned towards one another and unanimously agreed in silence to head into the airport. Russel pushed a door open with one hand, heedful of making too much noise lest there be zombies in wait. One by one they filed into the airport, each of them surveying the inner space of the
Stagnant air fell over them the further they traveled, filling them with a stench of rot and death. Nothing stirred at their continued exploration, despite the echo of their footfalls, so it seemed deserted.

Upon turning around to a seating area for some of the gates they were greeted with a horrendous scene straight from a horror film. Military bodies lay, still and sagging with putrefaction, in odd places around seats and by doors. Dried blood along with bullet holes littered the area painting a dire picture for them of what conspired. Bypassing the unfortunate imagery of dead bodies, they proceeded towards the upper levels, mostly looking for anything resembling life; maybe it was desperation to know they hadn’t caused unnecessary casualties in their escape. No matter where they looked, they only discovered more mangled bodies draped in awkward places, terror etched in the faces of those that died fighting for their lives.

Noodle cleared her throat and motioned them back to the space by the stairs, away from any obvious signs of destruction. Each of them took a deep breath, only succeeding in inhaling the musty air of those who had perished. All mirth from earlier activities was washed away with the potential knowledge they brought death upon everyone left behind. It was a gloomy thought.

“We need to focus on finding a functioning plane and tools for repair,” Noodle spoke hesitantly. She swallowed and cupped her elbows. “These planes have been idle for almost a year and I cannot fathom if any are working by looking so we will need to find a decent one, open it and find our way through making repairs in preparation for flight.”

“What else is needed?” Russel stroked Kraken while speaking.

“I need a flight manual for whatever plane we pick. It has to be for the same plane we pick or it is a pointless endeavor. We will need to refuel too, I can imagine sitting as they have, the fuel lines are probably in need of a flush.”

There was a minute where Noodle seemed lost in her mind. Murdoc tucked his hands into jean pockets and shuffled his foot.

“So we gather that stuff and then what? Sit here for how long working on it? Why not find a smaller plane?”

Noodle snapped her head up and exhaled calmly. “No. A smaller plane would not survive the journey. Weight and distance are key factors for smaller craft. There are four of us and a cat, plus fuel. More weight could have us expending fuel faster than strictly necessary. Since we’re flying over the Atlantic, a straight shot, we need something big and capable of making the long trip without stopping.”

“But how long Noodle?” Murdoc asked insistently. “How long is this going to take?”

“I do not know,” she snapped. “Hours, days, weeks. I just do not know. I am eager to leave too, but we cannot rush this.”

Murdoc nodded to 2D subtly and Noodle groaned in frustration when she remembered his condition. Squeezing and relaxing her fists she dipped her head.

“A week. If we find a plane, then we should have things wrapped up in a week, maybe less. The best I can offer.”

“What do we gotta do baby-girl? Tell us and we’ll start working on it.”
“I need you and Murdoc to find repair tools and some manuals. Find as many as you can. 2D and me will go outside and check the planes.” Noodle held her arms out. “Kraken can come with us.”

Handing the feline companion over, Russel bobbed his head in agreement. Nobody wanted to split off, at the risk of something happening, but now time was further constricted. With a short parting affirmation on their tasks, Noodle and 2D left with Kraken.

With daylight serving as a remedy to the lack of lighting from military grade equipment, Russel and Murdoc traversed the airport. They quietly wandered the foul mess of remains in search of a maintenance closet or room, making that their top priority. Murdoc picked at his nails or jacket sleeve anxiously, thoughts whirring into dangerously dark what ifs as they slipped deeper into the airport. Russel at his side helped, but if he was honest he would rather 2D be walking about with him. Russel forwent talking and the silence between them made the atmosphere seem surreal, as though he was just floating along not really there.

They meandered through lower levels and then upper levels, eyes not seeing anything worth while. The hours were ticking by the more they searched. Merchandise from shops and restaurants lay askew throughout the main paths, dust collecting on each and every item. It was a familiar sight by now. Russel drew Murdoc from his nervous thinking to point at a door marked in bold lettering.

“Looks like our luck is changing.”

“Yeah.”

Approaching, Russel tried the door. The ex-drummer dropped his head in annoyance.

“Locked?”

“Locked,” Russel answered in exasperation.

“Lets keep poking around, if we don’t find anything else we’ll smash it open. I’m not hasty to make noise unless we absolutely have too.”

Russel joined him once more and they resumed. The large windows overhead showed that afternoon had passed so they attempted to hurry. Returning to the main floor again, Murdoc nudged the other and motioned to the mock-triage room.

“Y’think there’s anymore of that antiviral crap Noodle gave ‘D?”

“May as well check, we have a little time.”

Apprehensively Murdoc ambled towards the doors, pushing them open. The room was utterly devastated. Stretchers and bodies covered most of the floor, blood pooled around corpses and decorating walls. The miasma of departed souls had him stumbling back, eyes stinging over the strength emanating within. Russel waved his hand to clear the air that managed to escape, coughing to rid his body of the fetid odor.

“Whatever happened here must have been horrific.”

“Forget the antiviral shit,” Murdoc gagged. “Lets just find what we need and vacate. I’m sick of breathing death.”

Hurriedly they found themselves seeking out flight manuals or tools in every nook the place offered. Russel triumphantly pulled a book from a pile of pilfered luggage, but it was one book and thus the victory was short lived. They moved on and sought out tools, not delaying at the sight of
bodies. Every room or space seemed to have either parts or intact, mutilated bodies; it wasn’t an easy image to ignore, but they aspired to do just that.

“There has to be another maintenance closet. It’s an airport, they would’ve needed more tools for stuff other than planes, right?”

“Sure.” Murdoc tensed when something moved in his peripheral.

Halting he whipped around to look for whatever he thought he saw, fear coursing through him. Russel paused beside him also trying to see whatever set Murdoc off.

“Did you see that? Something moved over there,” Murdoc said fearfully, waving his hand towards the darkened gift shop.

Russel examined Murdoc before treading forward, eyeing the darkness for anything out of place. Prior he would have played it off as Murdoc being paranoid; he knew better now. After everything they had seen and suffered he took it as gospel. Murdoc said he saw something, then he believed the man. He set the manual on the ground before going closer.

“Careful Russ, it could be a zombie.”

Russel ran his eyes over items on the floor for a suitable weapon, settling with a small wooden chair from the nearby cafe. Scooping the furniture up he advanced on the shop, teeth gritting.

“Whatvers in there, human or zombie, you better not mess with me man. I’m at wits end here. I’ll start trashing shit, yeah dig?”

Breathing harshly, Russel stopped at the entry to the gift store, chair lifted at the ready. His eyes darted around, adjusting to the dimness. There was nothing. Lowering the chair he let a shaky sigh slip out of him. Turning around he laughed, a tight sound, and rubbed half his face while looking at Murdoc. He gently settled the chair back to the floor.

“Christ man.”

Murdoc grinned weakly. “Real pair we make, fuck.”

“No more jump scares,” Russel mumbled as he approached Murdoc. “Don’t think I could handle anymore.”

“You and me both.”

Russel shook his head a tired smile tugging at his mouth. He stooped to grab the forgotten manual, which revealed a pale figure behind him. Ratty blonde hair concealed her face and a stained, limp lab coat drooped from her frame. Murdoc felt blood drain from his face as Russel righted himself, hiding the woman. In a fraction of a second the woman had Russel in a choke hold, forcing his body to arch painfully. The manual dropped to the floor with a loud thud.

Struggling, Russel frantically tried to free himself from the clutches of whoever or whatever the thing was. Murdoc jumped into action and grabbed up the manual. Clutching it tight he swung the hefty book into the woman’s face, beating her back until she let go of Russel. Jolting away, both of them eyed her warily. When she tilted her head and fixed her dislodged mandible they cringed. She growled and cocked her head further, hair falling from her face to reveal dark, inky eyes with neon bright irises floating in black.

Momentary shock filled their systems as they stared at her strange eyes. She cracked her neck and
jerked towards them with startling speed. Not interested in being food they pivoted and legged it.

“She— She moves like ‘D!” Russel gasped.

Glancing over his shoulder, Murdoc yelped and pushed himself faster.

“That’s impossible!”

She gave an inhuman screech which had them skittering as they tried to cover their ears. There was another shriek and suddenly there were items clattering to the ground from counters and more banshee screams. Terror propelled them to the exits.

Slamming through the doors they flopped into them, breathing erratically.

“What do we do? We’ve stumbled across something new,” Murdoc’s voice cracked. He had a short harsh laugh, eyes wide with panic.

“We get in the truck and get ‘D and Noodle then— Flee? I don’t know. I just don’t know anymore man.”

Glass shattered from a window nearby, which put them in motion.

———

The Boeing had been left wide open and they figured it was worth a check. Searching the cabin proved it was thankfully empty. Noodle set Kraken upon a first class seat before sliding into the cockpit. She peered into the small sleep quarters, used by captains and co-captains, for anything useful; there was nothing it seemed. 2D made past her and snooped about the cockpit. He glanced at the screens and knobs, overwhelmed by how many panels there were.

“You know all this stuff?”

“Most of it. I learned on smaller craft like helicopters. That’s why I need a manual, to brush up.”

“It’s a lot of little bobs and bits to know. Is all this even used for flight?”

“Of course.” Noodle smiled as she discovered a pre-flight check list. “I plan to use the manual to teach one of you some rudimentary skills seeing as I need a co-pilot.”

2D shot her a slightly unnerved look.

“A co-pilot?”

Noodle nodded. 2D looked at the co-pilot seat and felt a smile form on his face. Plopping himself in the seat he began to grin, grabbing the device for announcements.

“Attention passengers this is your captain speaking.”

Snorting, Noodle slid down into the captains seat. 2D jiggled the yoke, attempting to simulate turbulence.

“It would seem we’re hitting turbulence,” he continued. “Fear not civilians, captain Pot is on the job.”

“Civilians?” Noodle bit her lip, fighting off an amused smirk.
“Yeah, ‘cause they’re not as educated as us pilots, they’re peons right, gotta make sure they understand the power dynamic.”

She gave him a delighted snigger. He reached out and began flicking switches, nothing capable of turning the plane on or disrupting their fun. Noodle watched on in moderate entertainment.

“Oh no,” 2D said as he jostled the yoke. “We’re going down.”

Laughing at his ridiculous act, Noodle started the plane up; she had no expectation of the air-faring vehicle actually rumbling to life. When the systems booted up and the screens came alive both of them stared in awe. Noodle and 2D exchanged an elated look.

“We’re in business,” 2D exclaimed.

“We cannot get ahead of ourselves. There is so much work still.”

Noodle tapped a gauge and hummed thoughtfully while glancing at a screen near it.

“There is a fair amount of fuel, but I think we should still check the systems. Full check.”

“This is fantastic though,” 2D said.

“It is, let us check over the systems and see what needs work.” Noodle held up the pre-trip inspection sheet. “We can start outside, if you do not mind monitoring things from out there, we can use our walkie-talkies.”

“Sure thing.”

2D rose from the seat and ducked out. He carefully made his way down the narrow steps to ground and stepped towards the yellow truck. Fetching their walkie-talkies he was quick to deposit one to Noodle before returning outside. He hummed happily to himself as he went about figuring out how to position himself outside the plane, since he had no idea what to look for. Noodle crackled over the device and asked him to look at the landing gear, which she described as the wheels. He rolled his eyes and replied sarcastically that he knew that much.

She walked him through a few other minor things, checking the underside to see if anything stuck out that wasn’t meant too. 2D went along, pretending he knew what was being asked of him. During the course of his exploration of the plane, the green truck came hurdling over. 2D stood and watched baffled as the truck stopped roughly, skidding a little in front of him. With alarming speed, Russel got out first, grabbed some stuff from the back and rushed up into the plane. Murdoc hopped out second and made straight for 2D.

“What’s going on Muds?”

“No time, up you go.” Murdoc began manhandling him towards the rolling staircase.

Faint and strangely inhuman screeches echoed off tarmac from the distance. 2D went along, pretending he knew what was being asked of him. During the course of his exploration of the plane, the green truck came hurdling over. 2D stood and watched baffled as the truck stopped roughly, skidding a little in front of him. With alarming speed, Russel got out first, grabbed some stuff from the back and rushed up into the plane. Murdoc hopped out second and made straight for 2D.

“What’s going on Muds?”

“No time, up you go.” Murdoc began manhandling him towards the rolling staircase.

Faint and strangely inhuman screeches echoed off tarmac from the distance. 2D decided then and there it was probably better not to fight Murdoc and they both ascended the stairs. Once inside, Murdoc turned and shoved the massive steps with his legs, grunting when he managed to push them away.

“Noodle we need to leave,” Russel stated.

“Was I absent at our group meeting earlier?” She scoffed. “I told everyone why we cannot just take off. We need to do some diagnostic checks and possible repairs,” Noodle shouted from the
With a resounding clanking noise the cabin was sealed. Murdoc dusted his hands off.

“Well we have a minor issue, so we’re taking off now.”

From the narrow passage to the cockpit the three of them watched as Noodle stood and peered out the window. She glanced back towards them, expression horrified.

“What are those?” She asked incredulously.

“Remnants of whatever happened after we left,” Murdoc answered. “Far too dangerous to engage, which is why we need to leave now. So work your magic Noodle and get us airborne.”

Russel stepped through to her and held out the manual he surprisingly managed to hold onto. Noodle took it gently, as though it were made of glass, and stared silently at the cover. The former drummer awkwardly swallowed when she gave no immediate response.

“What’s wrong?”

“This is for an Airbus a380, it says so right on the cover.”

Murdoc leaned in, 2D stood next to him at the opposite end of the walk way. “What does that matter?”

“This is a Boeing 747, so it matters a lot actually. You two honestly found no other books?”

“No,” Russel supplied embarrassed. “We searched high and low but there wasn’t nothing to find. Sorry baby-girl.”

“Why does it matter? These planes all look the same.”

“No they— Forget it.” Noodle scrubbed a hand through her matted hair.

“You said you knew how to fly one of these.” Murdoc keep his voice steady even though he was beginning to look anxious.

“I do,” Noodle affirmed. “Which one of you is the quickest learner?”

For the briefest of moments none of the men spoke up. Noodle gave a frustrated sigh, which had Russel gesturing to Murdoc.

“He is.”

“What?”

“Yeah,” 2D said thoughtfully. “He’s rather quick with things. Built an island and a robot.”

Everyone peered at Murdoc.

“I refuse.”

“You do not know what you are refusing too,” Noodle remarked.

“I know damn well what you’re asking. I won’t do it. Get ‘D or Russ to because I’m out.” Murdoc shook his head vehemently as if to further get his distaste across with physical response.
“I need a co-pilot and whether you like it or not Murdoc, you are it. So shut up and sit down, you have a piloting lesson lined up.”

Delaying the inevitable was pointless and with the urgency of the zombies outside he groaned. Shoving past Russel, Murdoc flopped into the co-pilot seat and hunched his shoulders.

“Let’s go,” he ground out.

Noodle motioned Russel out. “Go sit, both of you.”

Pivoting she held out the manual only to have it snatched from her grasp. She let slide the volatile behavior and slid down into the captain's seat. She heard the book being flipped through as she starting running a systems check. She grabbed for the headset, pausing to glance at Murdoc.

“I must warn you…” Murdoc tilted his head to catch her eyes. “We may die.”

“Fantastic.”

“Indeed.”

She resumed the task of commencing movement and rather soon the plane was moving, if only at a few MPH. Beside her the older man frantically buckled in and hastily read through pages, not appearing any less anxious.

“I know the basic information necessary to get us into the air, but that does not include potential errors or malfunctions. For the flight portion I need your help so I will try my best to teach you what you need.”

“Fuck.” Murdoc flipped through the book trying to learn things in the span of however long he had.

Noodle muttered to herself as she got the plane moving. She anxiously kept rechecking things, making sure everything was in order. Murdoc fretted next to her, browsing through chapters with haste. Without proper direction from tower control Noodle constantly leaned up to peer out the window, not really seeing much of anything. The strange zombies were missing from sight, which worried her.

Repositioning the plane along the runway took a small amount of time given there were no directions. Thankfully no other aircraft vehicles blocked the way. Murdoc ran a hand through his thick hair, eyes scanning words, not fully grasping the concepts. Both of them looked up at the faint twang from underneath them. Noodle bit her lip and sat properly.

“Here we go.”

Slipping her fingers over the notches on the handle between them she started to press it forward. The plane gathered speed and the numbers climbed as they made down the runway. Clutching the manual, Murdoc watched in disbelief as the aircraft surprisingly managed to take off; his stomach churned. Noodle kept an eye on monitors and leaned around to turn a dial or flick a switch.

“Put your headset on,” she said, all the while putting her own on.

Eyeing the headset, Murdoc warily put it on, adjusting the mouth piece. Noodle pointed to the navigational display screen, then to another screen showing other garble. It looked important, but Murdoc honestly didn’t understand what he was looking at.

“That is fuel and this is altitude,” she explained, her finger jabbing at the numbers on the screen.
“This is our compass, we want to stay on this heading to reach Europe okay? If I deviate you have to let me know because I’m going to be busy watching everything else. If for some horrid reason I lose consciousness, hopefully not, you have to know this stuff to take over.”

“Please don’t do that,” Murdoc wheezed.

Noodle buzzed over his words. “This lets you know how level the plane is. Obviously we want to remain as steady as possible.”

Murdoc sighed as his body tensed even more, it made the mess of scar tissue at his shoulder twinge.

“Obviously. What’s that?” Murdoc pointed to a small flashing light among other steady ones.

“Oh, crap. That— Uh… Landing gear is malfunctioning.”

Noodle fiddled around only to receive an alert about the landing gear; it wasn’t properly away. They hadn’t even made it to proper altitude and already there was an issue. Groaning indignanty, Noodle pressed back into the seat and she focused on correcting the plane as it ascended. The drag would expend fuel much faster yet she decided not to mention it lest she scare Murdoc more than he was.

“Murphy’s Law,” Murdoc muttered.

“Murphy’s Law,” Noodle parroted.

She steadied them when they reached the correct altitude and relaxed. With imminent doom far way, for now, Murdoc resumed looking through the book. He tried to ascertain details for their disquieting flight home, hopefully enough to make a feeble attempt at piloting. It would be a long trip and there was such high chance of disaster.

Chapter End Notes

Stay tuned...

As a side note:

I know absolutely fuck all about planes other than bare minimum details. If you're a aviation enthusiast, I'm so sorry for the bastardization of your passion! I tried hard to keep it simple enough to make sense, but threw in some details to keep it realistic-ish. I did watch videos on take off, landing, and the cockpit. Also writing this chapter made me insanely anxious...

(Probably because I'm gonna be boarding a plane in a week)

EDIT 04-11-19: I still know nothing about planes.
Despite the rocky start, the remainder of the flight passed in relative ease; no other issues cropped up other than their malfunctioning landing gear. Noodle commented off and on, pointing out different functions for Murdoc to monitor. He made every attempt not to be his usual snarky self and set to memorize things. It was all necessary information after all. Noodle dreaded the moment they would have to attempt landing.

Closer they came to land the more dark clouds surrounded them. Turbulence picked up and Murdoc jerked when the plane shook. Noodle flicked off autopilot, thankful that it even worked, and adjusted her headset. She redid her buckle and took the yoke between slightly trembling hands. No matter how prepared she thought they were, there was a lingering fear, fear they wouldn’t walk away. She caught Murdoc moving around beside her, also adjusting his headset and looking every bit as sickly as she felt.

Breaking the tension, Noodle smiled at him softly. “Why not make an announcement to our
passengers.”
“What for?”
“I can see you sweating from here, Murdoc. Try to relax, play along. Please?”

Murdoc gave her a small grunt while reaching for the small device nearby. He glanced it over before finding the right button to press. Clearing his throat he spoke into the receiver.

“Attention shitwit and no-eyes, we’re currently experiencing turbulence, which if either of you have half a brain, will know already. The time is— Hm, time is 20:00, that’s 10p.m. military time if you’re not aware.” Noodle choked and stifled a laugh as Murdoc continued. “We’re having a real deal today, pound off baggies of peanuts. Usually £69.99, now £68.99. Get ‘em now while supplies last.”

Just as Murdoc went to put the device back a muffled holler came from 2D. Grinning he brought the item back to his lips while casting a sidelong look at Noodle. She tried to muffle a giggle bubbling up.

“Oh Stuart, you should put on a stewardess outfit, come up here and have a seat with your captain. You have the perfect ass for it.”

After that Murdoc put the hand-held item back, grinning like a mad man. Noodle let her laugh fall out when 2D shouted, specifically at Murdoc, clearly embarrassed. She tapered off and gave Murdoc a warm smile.

“That’s the spirit.”

“This isn’t so horrid,” Murdoc mumbled. He stretched his legs slightly and unbuckled himself to rearrange in the seat. “A little too cramped for my liking.”

“Could be worse,” Noodle chirped.

“Augh, don’t jinx it Noodle, I’m starting to relax here.”

A voice crackled through on the radio asking them to identify themselves. Eyes widening comically Noodle rushed to respond. She explained in hasty words what they were planning. Murdoc listened on intrigued and silently elated.

At first there was confusion, mostly due to no other planes making it out of North America, and then there was excitement. The radio became a conduit of chatter between tower control and Noodle. She elaborated about their situation, how landing gear was malfunctioning and that she and Murdoc were not official pilots. Noodle further described her level of understanding about infection in North America and who was aboard the plane without delving into who they truly were; they didn’t need the publicity when they arrived.

Noodle cut off Gregory, whose name she learned through their conversation, to inform him they were heading in and needed somewhere to land. While Gregory walked her through landing procedures and telling her they were clearing a path, Noodle smiled widely at Murdoc.

“Tell them we are going to be home soon.”

More eager than anxious, Murdoc snatched up the announcement device, finger poised to press on the button. He was halted from such announcement when a horrific booming sound reverberated along the plane. Suddenly everything tilted to the right and an alarm beeped. Noodle hissed and
hastily reached about her to flick switches. Murdoc dropped the item and gripped at his seat, knuckles white.

“It’s okay Murdoc, these planes can handle losing one engine. I have compensated.” As Noodle spoke the plane began leveling out, though their altitude had dropped some.

Murdoc blanched incredulously, “lost an engine?”

“It’s known to happen and we did not service the plane before take off. I’m surprised it took so long for something to occur. We will be fine.”

He wasn’t convinced as he stared at her skeptically, body tense. Noodle gave him a benign smile and pressed a button to speak.

“Gregory we have lost our right side engine, I have compensated but we lost altitude and are coming in a bit fast.”

“Copy. What’s your altitude and speed?”

Murdoc tried to settle, wetting his lips and loosening his hold over his seat. Noodle hummed as she examined the dials and screens, eyes darting over everything. She radioed in the changes and was rewarded with directions to fix trajectory.

“Things work out for us Murdoc. They have so far, despite everything. Nothing says it will not continue this way.”

The moment she finished both their yokes dove forward and the plane angled, nose first. Murdoc yelled and grabbed for his while Noodle grabbed at hers. They tried to pull back. The force behind the yokes was exuberant and near impossible to fight against. Just when they thought there was no chance they were able to bring the plane partly up from its nose dive. The entire craft wobbled until it seemingly settled. Murdoc refused to let go for fear they would go straight into the ocean and because he could feel the tug still. When Noodle let her yoke go Murdoc grunted as his nearly pulled him forward in his seat. She panicked and hurriedly pressed things to alleviate them.

Murdoc had no clue what she was doing. His shoulder protested the amount of strain he was placing on it. He grit his teeth and dug his heels into the floor, fighting against the motion the yoke wanted. As the seconds passed it seemed whatever Noodle was doing began to lessen the weight behind the yoke and he was able to relax his muscles. His heart was pounding painfully fast.


Although their altitude was beyond low, Noodle appeared optimistic as she lead the plane towards the airport. Murdoc could see it, the strips of lighting and blackness of the ground between. It was dark out and beyond lights from the buildings and the asphalt, he couldn’t see anything. His stomach sunk, something felt very wrong. A minute or two passed and everything seemingly worked itself out. Somehow they were on route to the proper landing path and turbulence faded. Murdoc took a calming breath to push his pessimism aside. Even with their altitude drop, systems seemed to function within normal parameters even after the little mishap.

“I can see the runway,” Noodle chimed. “I cannot wait to greet civilization with open arms.”

Murdoc had nothing to add, too frightened to speak lest something horrible occur. Noodle ignored the unease and tried again at being cheery. If she didn’t force it she was sure to break down.

“Think of it, I could add piloting to my future resume,” she chuckled. “Plus once back we can
finally shower, we all direly need one.” Noodle snorted humorously at her own comment.

In an instant whatever proverbial straw broke the aircraft's back chose that very second to snap. The secondary engine blew out and thick black plumes of smoke spewed from the left side. Rather unpleasantly the plane started to coast towards their destination, descending dangerously fast. The asphalt was laid out with lights, emergency vehicles at either side. In the far distance the millions of lights twinkled, a beautiful sight after so long.

Murdoc felt an eerie calm wash over him as the plane glided towards tarmac. It felt like being trapped in zero-gravity, floating and never falling. He could hear his heart battering in his chest like faint drums in his ears. It blotted out almost everything else making alarms become fuzzy. The feeling was distinct and he remembered experiencing it once before.

“Shit,” Noodle whispered weakly. She jiggled the yoke, directing the plane with soft gestures.

When she peered at Murdoc. He was frozen in terror, eyes almost unseeing as land came up too fast. Her eyes drifted to the undone buckle and a numbing buzz filled her. Terrified she undid herself and scrambled across into his lap. Hands shaking violently she attempted to snap his buckle in. Strangely audible over the horrendous blaring, Noodle looked down at the belt clicking into place. A mere second before impact arms encircled her and squeezed tight. She felt a hand at her head, tucking her face into a shoulder as everything abruptly slammed into the ground.

Fuselage broke off from the wings as the plane skid to its side, bouncing on the jammed landing gear. Breaking into parts the cabin scattered along the tarmac, leaving a trail of mangled metal hunks, chairs and other foreign debris. The cockpit, snubbed from the initial landing, tumbled to the side only to stop once it collided with part of a wing. When the screeching finally ended the emergency crews swarmed the space, rushing to put out potential fires and holler for survivors.

Onlookers from the indoor portion of the airport watched on in abject horror as crews scrambled to garner control of the situation. Many people filmed from smartphones, murmuring heatedly among themselves, pressed to the glass like it was a zoo with animals on display. Nobody could look away from the utter destruction.

Maybe it was luck or maybe it was the heavy weight almost laying against her, but Noodle found herself mostly unharmed despite all of it. Carefully dislodging herself from under whatever it was she held her head and groaned. Looking at her hand she winced seeing a little too much blood.

“I will not be putting that on my resume,” she coughed. She gasped at the sharp pain in her ribs. “Broken ribs. Great.”

Laying herself against some smooth metal she blearily frowned, wondering where Murdoc could have gone. With the cockpit completely dislodged from the rest of the plane there was cool evening air rushing in, settling over her. Briefly her mind supplied her with an alarming image of the ex-bassist smeared across the black runway.

“Murdoc?” Fear made her voice tremble while calling for the man.

Noodle propped her head up to glance around. At first it looked like a jumble of cords, panels and other confusing objects. It was moderately dark due to night blanketing the UK. Squinting in the dark she spotted it, a boot, sticking out from behind the copilot seat. Holding her side, Noodle wiggled her way over to have a proper peak. She wish she hadn’t. Murdoc was slumped over the console, back angled entirely wrong, blood covering the buttons and dials around his face. It appeared the seat belt had snapped in the torrent of movement.
“Murdoc.” Noodle dragged herself closer, hand shaking as it reached out to prod the man as gently as she could. “This is not funny Murdoc. Please.”

Just when she started to think the man was dead he sucked in a feeble breath and made a small noise, free arm moving. His dark hair covered the one eye visible at this angle. It opened, half lidded, clouded over with pain. His hand twitched and his fingers gave a spasm.

“How not move!” Noodle cried in alarm, “you are hurt badly, but you can move your arm… That—Must be a good sign right?”

She gave a pathetic huff as she grasped at his twitching hand, eyes watering. “You cannot scare me like that Murdoc. You already died once, please—” Her voice grew desperate, “please not again. Just hold on… Hold on dad, please stay with me.”

Noodle squeezed at his hand like it was her life line. Her eyes blurred rapidly and she shook with restraint to not cry outright.

“Don’t you dare die. Stuart and— and Russ would be sad… I would be sad.”

Fleetingly Murdoc tightened his hold over her palm before his hand slackened. As the seconds became minutes his labored breathing became stuttered and watery. Noodle huddled closer, eyes incapable of seeing through tears. She pressed her head to Murdoc’s hand, held tightly between hers. The rush of sheer panic in her chest had her bawling in despair. She couldn’t lose him. He was family, her family.

A short while after emergency crew members stumbled upon them. The personnel were quick to bring her out, away from Murdoc, which had her reaching out and crying in distress. A mask was placed over her face at a point to calm her; it only made her frantic. She fought with every breath to stay awake, to see them bring him from the wreckage. Resigned to the feathery sensation of drifting off, Noodle blinked tiredly, just barely conscious when Murdoc was brought out to a stretcher near her.

———

Noodle stared at the ruddy tiled floor beneath her. Her tired eyes traced patterns in the ground while she waited. Her systems were still reeling, coming to terms at being back in civilization where people were not trying to kill her at every turn. It had been hours since she woke, dazed and disorientated in a hospital bed. At the time her first instinct was to rip her IVs out and flee, but she forced herself to remain calm. Not long after that some doctor had come to visit her.

One broken rib and a slight concussion. That’s all.

Noodle glared at the tiles. It wasn’t fair that she walked away with barely a scratch. Running the butt of her palm over one eye she rubbed the sleep away. They had discouraged it until she complained very loudly. So after haltingly discharging her and she had sat there, anxiously awaiting news. Russel and Murdoc were in surgery and 2D was dead, supposedly. She shook her head. Sure he looked that way some days, but he couldn’t be dead. Her eyes welled up and she angrily wiped at them.

She looked up when a stretcher was rushed by her, followed by multiple hospital staff and three military officials. She had barely caught sight of bright blue before she was on her feet, running to catch up. She ignored the pain in her chest.

“What are you people doing? Where are you taking him?”
One soldier broke off from the small crowd around 2D’s stretcher. While the others moved on he halted Noodle. She tried to shift around the man only for her attempts to be stopped.

“I can’t have you following.”

“What are you doing with him?” She could feel trembles throughout her body. A fear was building in her the further the stretcher got.

“He’s infected.”

Noodle ducked under his arms and bolted after the group. Maybe it was instinct or a learned response after so long on the move, but she knew nothing good could come from this situation. She reached out to grab at the closest doctor when the soldier behind her grasped her other arm, yanking.

“Let me go!” Noodle tried to free her arm. “You cannot take him!”

“Miss, he’s infected, we can't let him roam about.”

He moved to loop an arm around her waist to physically hold her back. 2D was getting further down the hallway, strapped down and unconscious. Noodle pivoted and kicked up into the man’s crotch, ripping away from him when she could. She dashed full speed down the hallway after the retreating group.

She was on the nearest doctor before anyone knew what had happened. They both toppled to the floor as she slammed their head to the tiles. Although her chest protested the abuse she leapt up before a second military person could grab at her. In a desperate attempt to reach 2D she caught her hand on the IV in the man’s arm, which had her stop for an instant. He wasn’t dead, clearly, which meant…

“You need to back away from—”

Noodle yelled as she tore the IV out, shoving the IV drip away when two medical personnel made a grab for it. Abruptly she was hefted off her feet, an arm digging into the broken rib. She yelled in shock and pain, flailing to escape.

“Get off me! Put me down,” she shouted.

She didn’t care how hysterical she sounded, these people were taking 2D away. The man holding her grunted with effort to restrain her.

“Christ, someone sedate her!”

Different medical staff, clearly alerted to a scuffle, approached from down the hall with a sedative in hand. Noodle felt panic swarm her chest as she vigorously struggled, her rib be damned. When the nurse approached, someone else grabbed her leg to hold it still.

“No! NO!”

With a fierce kick of her free leg she caught the nurse holding the needle in the face, surprisingly knocking them out cold. For a brief instant everything seemed to freeze as the nurse holding her leg let go, rushing to the aid of the fallen one. In one fell swoop everything resumed as 2D sat up and was up on his feet in seconds, feral look in his eyes. Noodle kicked about harder, continued pain creating a burn through her side.
“2D!”

For a desperate moment she was in the meat packing facility, they were going to lock her away. She caught the other military official taking their gun up to fire on 2D and she screamed.

“Kill them! Kill them 2D!”

Frenzied by the overwhelming panic, Noodle jerked around so much she was finally dropped. Gasping sharply she lay in a disorientated heap until hands were helping her up. 2D practically dragged her up and held her close. Guns were pointed on them.

“Where are Russ and Muds? Are you hurt?”

“It talks,” one of the doctors hissed in confusion.

“Doesn’t matter if it talks.” The soldier speaking raised his gun a slightly. “We have strict orders to eliminate any and all threats.”

Everyone stood at a stand still, bewildered and unsure. Noodle didn’t have a chance to answer 2D before he was pushing her behind himself. He shifted and with sudden ferocity moved, kicking the stretcher over and into the group of doctors, nurses and three soldiers. The large bed tipped in the movement and slammed into the unsuspecting people. Noodle’s surprise only lasted a couple seconds before 2D had her running the opposite direction. She gripped her torso at the continued abuse she was putting herself through.

“Where are Russ and Muds, Noodle?”

“I— Surgery… 2D slow down, I cannot breath right.”

He paused around a corner and gave her a bigger shock by picking her up. Gripping at his narrow shoulders, Noodle clung to the disheveled shirt he was still clothed in from the flight. 2D hurried on down the hallway, unsure where to go.

“Surgery? So they’re hurt?”

“Russel had internal bleeding and punctured lungs,” Noodle supplied, voice wobbly with the movement. “Murdoc had a broken back and other complications— They might not make it 2D.”

“They will,” he stated firmly.

“We cannot bust in guns blazing and take them out of surgery.”

2D shifted her in his arms and jogged up to an elevator. He awkwardly jabbed the button and stood there waiting, antsy.

Noodle added, “what are we to do 2D? They know about you and now we are running.”

“We need to leave,” 2D sighed. “This instant my only priority is getting you and me to safety. Muds and Russel will have to stay here until they’re stable. We can try coming back tomorrow.”

The metal door slid open with a whine and 2D slipped inside. He quickly prodded at a button with an M beside it. Beyond the open elevator they heard some shouts and feet pounding. With nowhere to turn, 2D pressed to the wall of the carriage, shifting Noodle to press desperately at the main floor button. As the doors slowly began sliding shut they both sighed in relief; they were more thankful when it closed fully without issue. With a shudder the elevator descended.
Upon stepping out into the first floor of the hospital 2D set Noodle onto her feet and grabbed her hand. He directed her towards a room, peeking in before moving to another one. When he saw whatever he wanted they disappeared inside. The space was dark other than a few machines beeping, lights glowing in the darkness.

“Stay by the door and keep an eye out for anyone,” 2D said softly.

Noodle hovered at the door while he moved deeper into the room. She could hear the man opening cupboards and shifting things around, but could not see him. Peeking out the door she watched the elevator; it had gone back up. Had she let them, they probably meant to head to the morgue. Quietly get rid of 2D and leave her with no answers. She squinted while trying to read the numbers at a distance, heart pounding. 2D appeared at her side once more and held up some clothing.

“Get properly dressed.”

Not needing to be told twice, Noodle took the stolen clothes and with rushed motions her and 2D divested their respective outfits. Backs to each other they quickly slid on clothing. Noodle grabbed up the soiled articles and shoved them under a hospital bed. Poised at the door, 2D gestured her over and with one final deep breath they exited. Surprisingly, or maybe by sheer luck, nobody noticed them having gone in and come out with different clothing. Plus with a hat over his tucked back bright hair nobody gave them a second look.

They politely asked for directions out, acting as an ever cordial pair of visitors. As they left the hospital, passing two military personnel, Noodle glanced back.

“We will return,” she mumbled. “Please hold on.”

2D snatched her palm and sped walked her further from the building.

Neither were prepared for the onslaught of people going about their day like half the world hadn’t fallen. No one batted an eye at their ridiculous clothing that clearly belonged on older people. Noodle was thankful her hair covered the gash on her head. Though she received the odd look for the scar along her face, which had her ducking her face more often than not. 2D kept his head slightly tilted to avoid direct eye contact lest they be recognized solely for his memorable appearance.

Despite the normalcy both of them were skittish and stayed far from human interaction at all costs while making their way through the city. They had no money, no shelter and no transportation. It was like surviving on the move all over again, except this time they couldn’t just steal a car or break into a home.

———

An indeterminate amount of time later he felt his mind coming up from the inky darkness of unconsciousness. Blinking wearily, vision muggy in one eye, he stared at the ceiling. There was a faint aching in his jaw but he had no will to move his mouth or alleviate the discomfort. He drew his eyes down to peer around him, not comprehending the environment.

Equipment beeped and whirred softly. There was a machine near him that kept a steady rate of motion, pumping up and down. Momentarily he was mesmerized by the device. His eyes caught the tubing running from the machine towards him. Trailing it his sight came to his own chest which he watched rise and fall rhythmically. Perplexed he stared, mildly concerned; he wasn’t breathing in and out on his own. Struggling to work his stiff jaw he faintly felt the firm plastic of a tube in his mouth. His heart jumped when a bio-hazard uniform came into view.
He attempted to move his arms as though to defend himself from potential harm, but a light jingle of metal on metal caught his ear; his hands were trapped. As his mind and vision, at least in one eye, cleared more he became acutely conscious of the heavy plastic case the space was sealed in. People dressed in bio-hazard uniforms moved beyond his bed, watching monitors and chatting.

Murdoc was growing more unsettled by their appearance. A repeated jangle from the cuff on his wrist had someone turning towards him. His mind screamed that everything was wrong, he wasn’t infected. He kept tugging weakly at his wrist.

Voice muffled by the bulky helmet, a woman spoke to him standing at his bedside.

“Welcome to the world of the living Mr. Niccals. You gave us all quite the scare, weren’t sure you would last through all you did, but here you are.” She paused to tilt herself, her face coming into view behind the plastic screen.

“I hope you’re mostly comfortable, the cocktail of medications you’re on should alleviate pain.”

Unable to verbally respond, Murdoc laid there, chest rising and falling continually. He scanned her face, squinting, trying to discern if she was friend or foe.

“I’m sure you’re very confused, which I can assure you will pass in time. You’re in a hospital, in London. You were rushed here approximately two months ago,” she explained.

Gesturing with a placating hand, she continued, “you’ve been in a medicated coma for most of that time, thus the confusion. You sustained major trauma to your head, spine and numerous internal organs, it’s honestly a miracle you survived at all.”

Jangling the handcuff, Murdoc narrowed his eyes at her.

“Ah, yes. Well you see, that was in case you turned out like your friend.”

He didn’t understand what she meant. It clearly showed on his face so she resumed talking.

“Your friend, Mr. Pot, bloke with the blue hair, he’s infected— He’s rather unique.” She paused a moment to gather herself to avoid gushing.

“We couldn’t chance you escaping too.”

Murdoc frowned, still very lost. He felt a sharp pang of fear knowing 2D had been discovered, but it smoothed out with the knowledge he had escaped.

“He breaks all conventional rules pertaining to this virus. We’ve never met an individual capable of holding their sense of self once the infection claims the body.”

He’d heard that enough times. It didn’t explain his situation though so he shook the cuff yet again. She came back to herself and cleared her throat.

“Apologies. How to break this gently?” He could barely make out her popping her lips behind plastic. “Mr. Niccals you’re infected, but not under the normal manner. It’s difficult to explain so bear with me.”

She moved and grabbed something, lowering onto it. He could only assume it was a stool or chair. His mind was ignoring the mention of his own infection, something he could dwell on at a later time once out.
“Your infection is both similar and dissimilar to Mr. Pot. Both of you have the same strain of mutated virus, but yours is uniquely coded to your body. It doesn’t seem to effect you negatively, but it’s potentially contagious, thus quarantine. Once you’re more stable, I would love to discuss this more thoroughly with you, but as it stands we have to run some diagnostic scans on your brain waves and test other vitals to be assured you don’t slip into your own coma or die.”

She gave him the most benign smile she could muster with a bio-hazard helmet on. Murdoc was barely assuaged by the gesture. He followed her hand when it reached out and touched at his right brow.

“You’re infection has begun mending damaged portions of your body at an accelerated rate so the next time you’ll probably be walking.”

She moved the hand over and pressed something near his bedside. Sitting back she watched him, posture relaxed.

“I’m Harriet by the way, I was the one who put you back together.”

Everything was becoming blurry again. Murdoc blinked rapidly only to find it hard to keep his eyes open each time. Harriet made a shushing sound as she patted at his hand. He wanted to stay aware, but found in a matter of seconds he was drifting again.

Harriet moved from Murdoc and turned to the other two persons in the enclosed space.

“How are his vitals?”

One of the people gave Harriet a thumbs up. He pointed to the screen a second later and Harriet hurried over to check it. Unbeknownst to Murdoc, or really anyone, Harriet used the satanist as a basis for building a cure. The uniqueness of his infection allowed her and the team to work tirelessly towards fixing the mess brewing outside their continent. It was coming along swimmingly.

———

Noodle groaned when she roused from her cat nap. Peering at the digital alarm clock across from her a loud sigh escaped. They had scrounged together a life beyond the city limits, bought a place using her no longer frozen funds. Granted the moment she had drained her accounts they were fleeing out from under detection. With access to a decent amount of money and many lonely people for 2D’s hunger, they had managed.

It had been months though. Months where Russel and Murdoc were trapped in a hospital, possibly recovering or dead. The information they had was stale and already a month old. All the sitting around was agitating Noodle; she needed action.

The front door downstairs opened and closed, which had her leaping from the bed to inspect. Coming down narrow stairs, where the second to last one waned, she spotted 2D putting a hat aside. In one large hand he held a plastic bag, store logo printed on the side. Despite seeing it she crossed her arms.

“Where have you been?”

“Shops,” 2D answered plainly.

Noodle tilted her head, eyeing the bag intently. 2D caught the stare and brought it forth, holding it open. She leaned forward and looked at the contents. Shifting, Noodle glanced up at 2D perplexed.
“Scissors, bleach and dye?”

“I have a plan see,” 2D started, “we’re gonna need disguises. Usually they cut and dye their hair in movies so I figured…”

“Oh.”

“It’ll work Noodle, trust me.”

It turned into a nightmare of brown dye and bleach spilled on clothing. But after a couple hours of bleaching dark hair repeatedly and dying blue hair, they were finished. 2D dug something else out of the bag that Noodle had missed. She watched him lean towards the mirror. He moved and thoroughly blocked her view. While she combed her fingers through bright orange hair, 2D fiddled around with his face, she couldn’t be sure what he was doing though. Her curiosity was peaked but she waited patiently.

“Bugger,” 2D hissed. “I forgot how frustrating these things are.”

“What is?”

2D finally turned himself, blinking and wincing a few times before opening his eyes. Normal blue eyes greeted her.

“Oh my.”

Noodle stood from the tub edge and rushed into 2D’s personal space. The ex-singer stepped away in surprise.

“Your eyes are normal,” she stated in shock.

“Contacts. Had them custom made.”

A beat passed before they glanced to their reflections. Two strangers stared back. 2D narrowed one eye and opened his mouth to touch at his gums where two teeth should be. Noodle trailed her eyes to him in the mirror. The shorter brown hair and bright blue eyes made the man she had known for years look foreign. 2D could almost pass for a younger version of himself had age lines not given him away. Noodle spared a scrutinizing look to herself. Her hair was fried after repeated bleaching, but somehow the bright orange was growing on her.

“If I had my teeth, it’d be complete,” he commented.

“You look strange enough, do not over do it.”

2D lowered his palm and sighed. They made a weird pair. He had insisted she cut back the longer portions of his hair, it sat longer in the front than the back now. Observing quietly, she tracked his hands moving to muss his own hair. He finger combed the brown hair around until half his bangs obscured one eye. When he finished his task he smiled at Noodle via the mirror.

“So, ‘bout my plan.”
Barely a week later they were casually strolling down the sidewalk, opposite to two military foot patrols across the road. They were able to hide in plain sight, looking no different than the average pair. Noodle had piled on makeup to disguise her scars and 2D bought himself a prim suit to match the hair. Although they could avoid being found there was a nervous energy about them being so open with military sweeps going on.

Noodle tugged her toque down slightly, bright orange hair poking out from under the black material. The weather was pleasant even with the cool air of spring lingering at the end of April. Both of them hovered near a parking meter, watching military officials walk down the street adjacent. 2D could see the small papers in their hands, mostly likely old images of him and Noodle from before all this. Noodle tugged at her bright pink coat awkwardly.

“Keep picking at your clothes and it’ll look suspicious.”

2D flicked his smoke away then blew at his brown hair to get it out of his face. The former singer grunted and pushed the hair back some only to have it sweep back into his face. He gave it up as a lost cause and nudged his fake glasses up his nose.

“Do you think they are okay?”

2D shrugged slightly before he grabbed Noodle’s hand and tugged her the opposing way to the military crossing to their side of the road.

“I hope so, I have to or I’ll— I don’t know Noodle. We can’t keep hiding. They’s noticing squatters going missing.”

He lead her by hand through a throng of people, both of them appearing no different from anyone else in weather appropriate clothing. Most people barely batted an eye at them.

“You remember what to do?”

Noodle gave him a firm nod. Planning had been meticulous, or as such with the type of plan they had in mind. They were late leaving after some issues cropped up with military inspecting their neighborhood. Thankfully they were back on schedule.

They came to a stop just before the large intersection with crosswalks. Beyond the area the hospital sat, bustling with early morning activity. 2D took a deep breath which Noodle copied before he let her hand go gently. Wetting her dry lips Noodle nodded quietly to herself, mentally preparing. The medical facility sat innocuously and she was dreading what would follow next.

“I’ll come for you later.” He gave her a small smile, trying to reassure her. She nodded slightly and faced forward.

Noodle steeled her nerves and began crossing the street alone while traffic was moving. Someone shouted behind 2D, but she kept walking. A car tried to stop when she suddenly popped up in the crosswalk. Flung to the ground, she barely had the chance to make more than a loud yelp before pain radiated throughout her body. It had the desired effect when people halted and swarmed the area in a panicked frenzy.

2D winced and restrained himself from rushing over. He hated the idea of Noodle in harms way. He knew the woman was able to look after herself and thus began moving away. People were in and around, the sirens of an ambulance coming from the hospital made him leave quicker.

Within minutes of the incident, Noodle was rushed into the hospital. 2D would have to wait for her signal outside and hope she didn’t get caught.
Her smartphone beeped softly at twelve am sharp, bringing her into the waking world. Blinking groggily she caught the gentle glow over her screen. Reaching out she shut the alarm off, momentarily reminded of a week ago. The situation was entirely different this time though.

Noodle sat up from the hospital bed, shoving the blanket off and hopping down onto bare feet. She removed anything hooked up and quickly silenced the monitors so nobody inspected. Rolling her shoulders and cracking her back she grimaced at the tightness in her pelvic region. 2D had explained what it would feel like so she had no surprises and thus ignored the lingering sensation. No worse for wear she hastily redressed and ripped her hospital tag off.

Poking her head out she glanced this way and that, noting the quiet atmosphere of the hall she was in. Stealthily Noodle crept her way through the hospital, dodging staff and hiding in small areas. She approached the nurse station where a lone nurse sat typing on a desktop computer. Noodle looked around for some sort of distraction and opted for ducking into a room. Searching for an ailed person in darkness, she disconnected their devices, waiting for it to beep loudly. She quickly vacated and slipped behind some hospital equipment, hiding in the hall. Waiting, Noodle watched for the nurse to notice. A minute passed and the guitarist rolled her eyes. Forgoing stealth, Noodle stalked over and stopped at the desk.

“Hi, morning.” Noodle spoke low so not to startle the woman. “There’s a man down the hallway convulsing. Isn’t that serious?”

The nurse looked alarmed and abruptly stood up, seemingly noticing the loud noise. She spared no questions to why Noodle was there, instead rushing off to tend to the sound.

The instant she left Noodle came around and sat at the computer. She honestly had no idea how to search people, but she would take her chances. Typing fast and clicking on things, Noodle glanced through lists, looking for a room number and name. Ears acutely tuned to any sound, she leapt from the station when footfalls could be heard. Disappearing before the nurse returned, Noodle caught the elevator down a floor, heart rate increased with her close call.

Stepping off she hurried through hallways looking for the appropriate section. Nobody really seemed to pay her mind, which she attested to not wearing the pink coat. When the opportunity presented itself Noodle snatched up some medical personnel’s clothing and used it to avoid confrontation. Palms sweaty, she kept wiping them on her slacks while wandering through a particular area, eyes reading labels urgently. When she caught sight of the correct one she looked back and forth, cautiously, then proceeded.

Momentarily it felt like being in the airport, slinking around under the guise of suspicion. Shaking her head, Noodle pushed those memories away, she had a plan to keep in motion. Walking past areas she gave pause at noticing a clipboard hanging from a door with one word in bold letters.

“Cat?”

Hesitating in the vacant hallway, Noodle contemplated inspecting. She wasn’t sure how much time she had but the chance may pass her by. Trying the handle she grunted when it didn’t open. Again she glanced around. Once assured Noodle squeezed tighter and forced the handle, breaking the lock so she could push the door ajar to look in. She was awestruck seeing none other than Kraken,
sleeping on a hospital bed curled up in a black ball. Striding over Noodle scooped her up and held the animal close, face nuzzling into the soft fur. Kraken mewed in confusion.

“You are one insanely lucky cat, Kraken. I cannot believe you survived.” She grinned and kissed the furry head between perked ears, much to Kraken’s displeasure. She tucked the animal close and commented lightly, “you come with me. You seem to have luck associated with you.”

Noodle left the room and continued her search.

“Very lucky, I swear. 2D will be pleased to see you. Hopefully it’s a good omen.”

Noodle halted further down the hallway at another door. Setting Kraken down, Noodle fiddled the handle, thankful to see it was unlocked. Slipping into the room with the cat she was semi-surprised to find a large plastic encased section with a bed and machines within its confines. Anxiously, Noodle moved around the sealed area, looking in at the single occupant laid on their side.

Whispering, Noodle pressed to the plastic, “Russel?”

The man didn’t stir so she tried again. “Russel? It’s Noodle. Please respond.”

The form didn’t rouse so Noodle moved over to the entry and undid it, stepping into the small space between where another thick vinyl door sat. Throwing concern aside she unsealed that as well and fully stepped into the space, moving around to Russel. Nudging the man she jolted when Russel turned over fast, grabbing her wrist tight.

“Russel it’s me,” Noodle’s voice wavered.

Blank eyes fixed on her. Russel relaxed his grip and sat up properly. He looked bewildered yet elated, eyes lighting up at seeing her. Noodle sighed and rubbed her wrist, a smile tugged at her lips.

“Noodle, baby-girl damn I’m sorry, thought you was another damn doctor.”

Opening his arms he nodded her close. “C’mere. I haven’t seen you for, eh— too long, missed you. Though I don’t remember you having orange hair.”

A excited laugh bubbled up and Noodle leaned into him, hugging tight to the bigger man. She buried her face into Russel’s chest, trying to refrain from crying. It was overjoying to know the man was safe and sound. Russel petted at her hair while holding her close. He noticed Kraken sitting on the floor and leaned back to point.

“You’re kidding me, she survived?”

Noodle gave a wet laugh, wiping at her face as she moved from Russel. She scooped up the feline and held her out.

“She did. We should rename her Lucky for how damn lucky she seems to be.”

“Hey you,” Russel cooed. He held the animal close and smoothed fluffy black fur down. “You lucky ain’t you? Survived the apocalypse and a plane crash of all things.”

Soft purring escaped Kraken as she buried into her favorite human. Russel tilted his head to look at Noodle.

“How did you managed getting in?”
“Well…” Noodle trailed off with a grimace. “We planned for months, which I apologize for. We had no intention of extending how long you two remained here, it worked out that we had no choice.”

She didn’t allow Russel the chance to intervene as she barrelled on.

“2D has the get away vehicle. I’m here under the pretense of injury. Once I have you and Murdoc, we alert 2D and leave. He will pick us up.”

Russel blinked owlishly, slowly comprehending what was being explained. Noodle dug out her phone to see the time. She gave a low noise of worry and re-pocketed the item.

“Speaking of, we need to hurry on. I want you to wait here with Kraken okay?”

“But Noodle—”

She began to push through the heavy material of the plastic doors all the while waving for Russel to stay. The ex-drummer slumped partly and peered down at Kraken while petting her. Noodle re-did the plastic chamber that was the entrance and cautiously stood at the door, listening for people.

She inched the door open and quietly slid out. She closed the door with a click and tugged the white coat closer to herself as she took to the hallway. Reading the labels and clipboards as she went. She jolted rather suddenly when Russel spoke up from a few paces behind her. She wondered how the man moved so fast and without sound.

“Pretty sure this is the room Murdoc is in.”

turning slowly she hissed, “what did I just say? Why are you out of your room?”

“I’ve been in that room for months, cut me some slack.”

Noodle backtracked to the door to which he was referring and grabbed the clipboard to examine it. Nodding slowly she sighed as she returned the item to its slot.

“Fine.”

Turning the knob, Noodle pushed the door open to reveal a specialized plastic cage set in a large room. It took up nearly half the space with a chamber and bio-hazard suits. She had never seen anything remotely similar to this in hospitals ever, but then she never frequented them. Russel peered in at the hard plastic like case.

“Looks military grade.”

“Looks terrifying.”

Both stepped into the room nervously. The back portion of the enclosed space was darkened other than the occasional machine flashing tiny lights; not enough to brighten the practically blackened space. It had a similar feel to a room you rather not enter in a haunted home. Noodle let the hospital door slip closed quietly and then took a couple strides closer to the hard plastic to peer in. She couldn’t make out a person and momentarily worried Murdoc was elsewhere. Russel stood beside her, Kraken held in his large arms. He also squinted, staring into the darkness.

There was a noise of shifting. A bunch of tubes and cords from the machinery flopped to the ground, trailing two bare feet that were visible in the blackness of the space.
“Murdoc?”

The feet shifted and there was a hiss as an IV needle was dropped to the floor in range for them to see. Blood and clear fluid mixed on the tiles. Noodle brought her eyes to the IV before diverting back to the feet which slowly came forward. Legs, then torso and finally Murdoc’s face came into view.

“So nice of you two to drop in,” Murdoc muttered dryly. He nudged something aside with his foot.

Noodle and Russel gaped. Murdoc narrowed his eyes, one being a neon blue iris set in black. His hair was short, settling just above his eyebrows. Visible from his forehead over his right eye and down through it to his cheek was an angry grey-tinged scar. When he noticed them gawking he tilted his head to the side to hide the obvious discrepancy in his eyes. Sneering sharply, Murdoc paced from the plastic. Both Noodle and Russel watched on curious. It was Russel that finally broke the tension.

“Whys your eye like that? Looks like the zombie from the airport.”

Forgoing an answer, Murdoc rolled his shoulders and quickly vanished into the darkened portion of his cage. He grumbled and shuffled around like a trapped animal.

“Quit gawping and bust me out,” he snapped.

Russel and Noodle jolted and Kraken mewed startled by the aggression. Murdoc returned to the hard plastic wall and frowned at them. There was a filtration device pumping and recycling the air in the plastic cage. Noodle could see there was no in or out other than the small tunnel like chamber attached to the cage. Biohazard suits hung inside the little path and there was a large set of tubes hooked to vents to possible clean persons when entering or leaving.

Murdoc tapped the plastic suddenly and Noodle was drawn to his face once more.

“Could we push this little jail break along, I’ve been here months. I’d like to have a stretch and join the world.”

“Are you doing okay man? You sound a little antsy.”

“Yeah, I’m okay, Russel. Fucking peachy.”

Noodle bit at her lip and stepped from the hard plastic so dig her phone out. She hastily tapped out a text message to 2D while wandering towards the tunnel entrance. Pocketing the phone she examined the locking mechanism built into the clear hard plastic. She heard Russel move to her side and Murdoc resume pacing.

“You are infected,” Noodle stated without looking towards Murdoc. The satanist grunted and that was all the answer she needed.

“Should we do this?” Russel questioned, voice soft.

“Of course you should,” Murdoc growled and pressed to the opposite door of the small tunnel. He tacked on with a vicious huff, “otherwise what was the point in returning?”

Noodle inhaled audibly and she looked at her trembling palms. This more volatile version of Murdoc was reminiscent of the early days. It seemed as though the man were on speed, eyeing them with contempt and spitting vitriol. She knew that to be impossible and steeled herself.
“Is this how you plan to greet 2D?”

A switch in Murdoc flicked and suddenly his hands were flat to the plastic an anxious energy pouring off him. His body language went from angry to meek in a matter of seconds. Noodle nearly had whiplash.

“Stuarts alive?” He asked weakly.

“He is. He’s waiting for us.”

Murdoc collected himself and backed from the other door. Russel and Noodle watched him pluck at his hospital gown like a scolded child.

“It’s been a while. Haven’t much company other than them doctors. In and out of here, prodding me with needles and running tests. Been difficult.”

“I’m sorry,” Noodle whispered. She rested her hand over the locking device. “We will never let this happen again. Ever.”

Now the guilt was burning her insides, eating away at her from the inside. She needed to keep it together just a little longer, until they were safely out. Gripping the metal and plastic lock she grit her teeth. With a ferocious show of strength, Noodle broke the locking mechanism out of the door. A couple splinters of plastic flung off with the force which was followed by a thunk as she dropped it. Everything went deathly silent and Russel blinked, eyes wide. The other door hissed as it opened, no longer linked to the locking device.

As the plastic door opened, Murdoc stood there. Noodle rubbed her hands and dusted plastic bits off. Both knew she was strong, but not this strong.

Murdoc hesitated at the other end, voice wavering slightly, “what in the fuck was that?”

“You are not the only one.”

“What?” Russel blurted.

“I’m infected too,” Noodle replied. “2D and I figure that due to close quarters and cross contamination of food or drink in his presence transferred the virus— We do not have time to go into detail. I will explain when we are safe.”

With her insistence, Murdoc finally stepped out of the plastic cage. He was cautious and kept trying to avoid looking at them head on. Noodle felt a swell of too many emotions at finally having them both there, alive. Last she saw, Murdoc was half dead. Before she can stop herself she was hugging the satanist, face buried into his hospital gown. She fights it as long as possible, but the tears come near instantly and the material grows wet around her face.

“Thought we were in a hurry,” Murdoc commented. Despite it he wrapped his arms around her.

“It’s good to have you back,” Russel said. “Been a while.”

Patting at Noodle’s head he gave Russel a nod and awkwardly soothed the ex-guitarist. It took a fairly lengthy moment for Noodle to remove herself, all the while wiping at her face. She sniffled and cleared her throat.

“What do you got clothing?”
“Oh yes,” Murdoc commented sarcastically, “in the dresser next to my heart monitor. Of course I don’t have clothing.”

Noodle relaxed and even smile. That was definitely the old Murdoc talking. Stinging wit like usual.

“Glad to see your snarky attitude took no damage.”

When it became apparent Murdoc was antsy to leave, Noodle peeped a look out of the room. She gauged the hallway and decided it was safe to proceed. Single file they slid from the room and both men followed Noodle. The place reminded her too much of the meat packaging facility.

“Why does your eye look like that?”

An aggravated sigh met Noodle’s probing question so she dropped it momentarily. Noodle nabbed a couple sets of scrubs for the men to change into, which barely helped but was all they had. Russel also took to bundling Kraken up. Sneaking out of the now busy hospital was more complicated than escaping a meat packaging facility. They navigated patients and other staff, that thankfully left them alone. Part way through Noodle chucked her stolen lab coat and quietly led Russel and Murdoc back the way she came, direly hoping nobody stopped them.

Occasionally Murdoc cocked his head around or pretended to scrutinize stains on the scrubs to steer clear of others noticing his eye. When they rode the elevator to the main floor, for the road level exit, Noodle snagged Murdoc’s borrowed scrubs by the hem of the shirt. She squeezed the material tightly, a silent show of how happy she was the man was marginally okay. He give her palm a light squeeze, his own way of silently showing he appreciated it. When the metal doors slid open their hands pulled apart and they exited the carriage.

Making a straight path through people and staff, Noodle hoped they could reach outside without being stopped. The automatic doors made a soft hiss while sliding open. Walking through they bypassed Dr. Harriet, whom Murdoc recognized in mere milliseconds. Their eyes met and the recognition on her face and subsequent horror made him shove Russel and Noodle harshly.

“Go faster,” he snapped.

They sped walk out of the entry into the drop off zone. The area had a large stone cover with decorative pillars to support it. A nurse was talking to a patient in a wheelchair nearby, but she paused when they rushed by her. Beyond the second pillar was a military man talking to another staff member. Momentarily they were frozen though for different reasons. Noodle eyed the military personnel with distrust while Russel gave Murdoc a disgruntled stare at being shoved. From behind them a woman made a startled noise and the doors slid open for Dr. Harriet. She was a good couple meters from them but Murdoc glanced back in mild panic.

Noodle urgently pointed to a hunter green van pulling up to the drop off. Murdoc wasted no time in urging them towards it before 2D had even stopped. Dr. Harriet rushed towards where they were just standing a moment prior.

“Stop! You can’t do this, you’re all a threat!”

Yanking open the back door on the passenger side she motioned the men in.

“Please stop them!” Harriet caught the attention of the military official, gesturing desperately to their van.

Murdoc hesitated at the door and looking back to Harriet waving frantically at them. Noodle pushed the satanist into the automobile and shoved the door shut. She buckled into the front seat.
“Drive 2D, get us out of here.”

Not needing to be told twice, 2D pressed on the gas hard and the van sped through the drop off a bit jerkily. Both Harriet and the military man were hollering at them as he drove them out of the hospital parking lot. He watched the two practically chasing them at a distance before he turned and they were gone from sight. They would need to change the license plates again.

Noodle slumped into the seat and sighed heavily. “What a stressful night. Too many noises and people.”

She ruffled her own hair and shimmied up in the seat to peer over her shoulder at the other two men. Her eyes landed on Kraken in Russel’s lap, then she glanced to them.

“You two are okay? As okay as one can be after everything we have seen and been through.”

Russel shrugged and remained considerably quiet while petting Kraken. He waited until Noodle was facing forward to broach the elephant in the van.

“We gonna talk 'bout how you two are infected?”

“Maybe we should wait till we reach home?”

“Nah,” Russel spoke, “we should do this now.”

“Stuart got us infected,” Murdoc said. He crossed his arms and continued a bit quieter, “not intentionally. You’re probably infected as well Russ.”

“What? How?”

The drummer looked between 2D’s eyes in the rear-view mirror and Murdoc. Suddenly Murdoc was strangely uncomfortable, he cleared his throat.

“Er—”

“We was always kissing or having sex,” 2D blurted.

Murdoc rubbed his face exasperated. “Yeah, we did, but it was mostly from sharing fluids.” The satanist sighed as he continued, “Dr. Harriet, that bird gesturing at us, said I had a different strain. Apparently it mutates while bringing other trademarks of the original strain.”

“So your eye?”

“When Stu heals the area is black after. My eye got right mashed, thus the black sclera. You two probably got it from me. During our stay at the university we shared food and smokes on more than one occasion.”

Murdoc shrugged, nonchalant.

“I assumed 2D gave it to me.”

Noodle glanced at 2D and the ex-singer gave her an apologetic grimace.

“For all I know he did. I’m going on what what was explained to me.”

“Damnit,” Russel groused.
“This is my fault. If Muds had just let me die—”

Murdoc kicked the seat in front of him and hissed, “shut up. We aren’t having that on anymore Stuart.”

“Sorry,” 2D mumbled. He hunched his shoulders.

“None of the woe is me crap. We’re alive and in society. Somehow you two managed without causing a ruckus so clearly you’re not nearly as dangerous as you think.”

Murdoc sniffed and tried to lean back, allowing his indifference to fall over his face. Adding as an afterthought, Murdoc muttered softly, “plus what kinda person would I be letting you die?”

2D cocked his head so he could glance at Murdoc in the back, but all he spotted was the man’s dark hair. They would probably need to chat when they were at home.

“I don’t wanna be eating people.”

“You won’t,” Murdoc scoffed. “unless you feel the need too.”

“Not that I’ve noticed.” Russel sighed in relief. “How have you managed it, ‘D?”

“Uh— that is, I have control over myself now,” 2D rambled, “we’ve been tag teaming, usually squatters and single people with no family— oh god we sound like serial killers.”

“People should get big dogs or something,” Noodle added noncommitally.

A loud groan interrupted Noodle. Murdoc started to rant, “I thought we left this cannibalism behind us. I don’t want to eat people. It was only meant to be a bad eye.”

“What are you on about?”

“What?”

“I thought… Are you feeling something Muds?”

Everyone spoke nearly in conjunction with one another, their voices overlapping. Murdoc rubbed at his face.

“I’ve been feeling something lately. A gnawing sensation in my gut.”

“I’m sure we can make this work,” 2D said gently.

The ex-bassist seemed unconvinced but dropped the subject all together. A pensive silence fell over them until Russel commented, “Should change our name to Zombiez.”

Laughing near explosively and swerving slightly, 2D covered his mouth trying to muffle the noise. He fixed the van, tapering off. Murdoc squinted irritably at the former singer and then the ex-drummer. Noodle gave a burst of giggles a moment after.

“This isn’t fucking funny.”

“Well it kinda is,” Russel started, “live in the moment man. At this point we’re basically the walking dead, Gorillaz style. May as well enjoy this ride until the government or military catch up to us.”
“Satan, I cannot believe this shit is occurring right now.”

“How about ‘The Undead’?”

“Noodle do **not** encourage this garbage!”

As though no time had passed from the crash till not, they all dissolved into friendly bickering. 2D took an exit towards a small town on the outskirts of London, adding his two cents when necessary. Coming in closer to the place the area was clumped together with row homes and run down flats. It was an hour or two from London, which is what made it viable for hiding.

2D pulled into a driveway of an unattractive row home. The less excitable the home the less attention they received. Exiting the van both Russel and Murdoc scrutinized the building from the poorly done stone path with cracks to the peeling paint on the wall of the home. The entry seemed mildly off center and both of them tilted their head to stare at it. Noodle paused beside the van while they eyed the house.

“It’s not that bad. Come in and see the rest, I think you two will like it.”

“I’ll take your word for it baby-girl.”

Russel stood next to her, Kraken still securely in his arms. She approached the beige colored door and unlocked it, pushing a bit roughly to get the door to dislodge from its frame. She motioned them over to come inside. Russel was the first to enter the home followed closely by Noodle.

Murdoc continued to look the place from top to bottom. He wasn’t sure if it was the terribly designed garden, mostly dead plants in it, or the brown paint chipping to reveal puke green beneath that made him uncomfortable with the place. 2D stopped next to him and also gave the row home a once over. Murdoc narrowed his eyes when he spied a couple shingles missing from the roof.

“What’s wrong Muds?”

Starting mildly when 2D spoke, Murdoc turns just enough to see 2D next to him, but not so 2D can see his whole face. He was given a strange look for the action. Glancing down Murdoc grabbed 2D’s hand and gave it a soft squeeze. 2D abruptly pulled him into a tight embrace that didn’t feel nearly as crushing. He hugged back, nuzzling into the vocalist’s shoulder.

“Shit taste in houses, sorely disappointed,” Murdoc mumbled into the dark material of 2D’s blazer. “I’ll let it slide for now.”


Struggling to fight off his delight at having the taller man in his arms, Murdoc opted for a nod instead of words. He didn’t trust his voice. 2D gripped tighter, which still didn’t hurt like it would have before.

“C’mon 2D, we shouldn’t hover outside, we *are* wanted bio-hazards after all.”

They pulled apart and Murdoc frowned at the short brown hair instead of blue. He brought a hand up and brushed it back from 2D’s face. It took him a long minute to realize two blue eyes were staring back.

“What the fuck?”

“Contacts,” 2D supplied.
“Weird looking, feel like I’ve stepped back in time or something.”

Two cold hands cupped his face and 2D gave him a soft kiss. The tenderness of the gesture left him feeling too much in one instant, it was also over far too soon. When 2D pulled back once more he smiled down at Murdoc. A disconcerted sensation filled the satanist at seeing a different Stuart instead of 2D, made him feel odd, but not in an entirely terrible way.

“I’ll take ‘em out soon, love.”

His cheeks became hot under 2D’s hands and he moved out of the hold. Embarrassment swarmed in his gut and his face burned.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing, absolutely nothing. Shall we go in then?”

Angling his face and jabbing a thumb towards the door, Murdoc waited for 2D to head in. Instead the other man approached him yet again and gave his red cheek a kiss.

“I like it, the eye. Look real badass.”

“Alright enough of that.”

As if to push a little more, 2D grinned. A suave demeanor overtook his posture and he leaned towards Murdoc.

“Gorgeous.”

“2D c’mon, I look like an eldritch horror in the making.”

Despite it his face remained flushed. 2D grasped his hand and pulled him towards the doorway. He peered back at Murdoc and the smarmy grin was replaced with an affectionate upturn of his lips.

“I love you.”

Abruptly shut up, the satanist felt heat filter over his ears and down his neck; everything felt hot. 2D closed the door when they stepped in and brushed a thumb along a reddened cheek. Surprisingly maintaining eye contact, Murdoc took 2D’s waist to bring the man in close once more.

“Love you too, idiot.” He kept his voice low, reveling at the way 2D’s face lit up. He hid his own in the finely made blazer.

———

Establishing a life among civilized people never took and soon the four of them discovered that keeping a low profile worked far better. On high alert for constant danger or potential threats around ever corner, most time was spent hiding in the safety of their home. They balanced a schedule for feeding and keeping out of the public eye with ease.

With the passage of time it became obvious Murdoc had a loosely similar problem. If he didn’t eat flesh it became increasingly hard to stay lucid. Something he envied Noodle and Russel for, since both had no issues with such trifles. Planning excursions around their moments usually meant a quick car ride into the city to a different place each time. They were still effectively at large.

Most times they frequented dirty little bars or pubs in dank locations, keeping appearances by coming off as good friends out for a drink. Nobody seemed to recognize them and their momentary
fame faded to old news. Although they weren’t out making music for the public anymore they kept up with practicing at home, finding a common place to bond. Sometimes discussions about the things they encountered were broached, but most often nobody wanted to talk about their nightmares.

Tonight in particular they were comfortably sat around a small booth table, hazy atmosphere surrounding the pub. Russel nursed a bottle of beer, glancing off and on at a television set sitting above the bar across from them. He was partially intrigued by current events, but mostly wanted a place to put his eyes without staring at someone. Noodle grinned while flicking some fruity beverage at 2D, content to rile the man up.

“Quit it,” 2D huffed and lightly tossed some ice flakes at the woman. “Brat.”

This earned the vocalist a snort from Noodle. She sipped on the brightly colored beverage, underwhelmed by 2D’s response.

Murdoc rolled his mismatched eyes hidden behind sunglasses. Miraculously nobody commented on the indoor usage of them, possibly assuming the man blind; it was the preferred assumption. He was seated beside the taller man with an arm securely around 2D’s thin waist.

The place was moderately full, people filling the background with chatter. Everything felt bland, almost menial yet safe. Things were normal if they ignored their oddly striking position, hiding in public areas while using flimsy disguises. If he was honest, Murdoc still vehemently hated 2D’s use of brown hair dye. He missed the natural azure color. However he also had to admit the lovely interactions they had in the bedroom made it almost worth while.

Russel looked to a man sitting alone at the bar rising and heading to the back hall where the washrooms sat. The drummer nodded his head minutely. 2D sighed, it was his turn tonight. He wasn’t feeling too hungry, however it was important to keep from going into a state. Kissing the satanist on the cheek he vacated their table.

2D mentally pep talked while trailing after the stranger.

With the singer gone Noodle leaned forward.

“You two were insanely loud last night.”

“Were we? I hardly noticed.” Murdoc ran his finger around the rim of his cup of water while talking.

Although the temptation to drink was still present, Murdoc found it comforting just having a glass of water nearby. Wasn’t the same by taste, but the sensation of drinking was fulfilled well enough.

“I could not sleep.”

“Noodle you barely sleep as it is.”

“Okay, well, I was meditating.”

“Since when?”

“All I’m asking for is some consideration, we live in a dinky house and the walls are thin. I do not want to hear you two getting freaky.”

“Buy some ear plugs?” Murdoc rested his face on a closed fist, lips threatening to slip into a grin.
Russel nudged the bassist.

“Is that us on the TV?”

Noodle continued to drink while Murdoc looked to the television set. The channel was on some news broadcast where dated photos of them were being displayed while some woman spoke lines of dialogue. Russel finished his beer and set it down, peering around. Nobody seemed to notice except for a couple looking at them intently through the smokey room. The two men were wearing well crafted suits and stood out now that Russel looked at them.

“Should we leave?”

“Stu isn’t back yet, we can’t skip out on him.”

“They’re talking to the bartender, Muds I think we need to leave.”

“Fuck,” Murdoc pushed his cup away and scooted out of the booth.

Noodle sucked back her drink before joining Russel and Murdoc. The drummer tossed a couple pounds on the table before hastily leaving the vicinity. The pair of people watched them leave while the bartender dialed up to give a tip. The three of them shuffled around to the alleyway, narrow and dark beside the bar. Murdoc removed the sunglasses to settle them on his head. Red and blue eyes squinted into the dimness and sighed.

“I guess I’m getting him then?”

Neither Russel or Noodle offered themselves and Murdoc grumbled. Zombie or not he hated blood and guts. The satanist headed down the space, getting closer to an all too familiar noise deep within.

“Oi Stuart, we need to take off. Quit munching on the poor sod.”

2D cocked his head over to Murdoc, who stopped a meter away cringing. Despite the low lighting, Murdoc could make out the scene clearly; he wished he couldn’t.

“I haven’t finished though.”

Murdoc grit his teeth, mildly grossed out as he came forward to reach down and grasp 2D by the upper arm. Tugging the ex-singer up from the semi eaten body Murdoc pulled 2D closer to wipe the man’s face down with a pocketed bundle of napkins. 2D batted the satanist away, annoyed.

“C’mon, we’re going right now.”

“But the body— Muds we can’t…”

2D gestured helplessly at the body of the lonely man.

Murdoc examined the corpse a second too long and felt his gag reflexes triggering. Coughing to clear his throat he looked away. Despite getting the craving himself now and then he still thought it disgusting. 2D hadn’t eaten much of the man but Murdoc pacified the singer by hugging him around the middle and planting a kiss on 2D.

“You practically ate the man clean, leave it,” Murdoc lied.

2D leaned into Murdoc, swayed into believing the shorter man. Coming out to the mouth of the alley the four of them quickly took off, missing the distant military vehicle approaching. Once in
their shoddy van they sunk into the seating, staying put in the slightly crowded parking lot nearby to the seedy joint they had previously been in.

“Where’s the mouthwash?” 2D looked over the back seat from the middle section.

Murdoc grabbed the singer’s trousers by a belt loop and brought 2D back onto the seat.

“For fuck sake, stay down. They’re driving by.”

A light shone through the parked vehicles, theirs included, and for a tense minute none of them spoke. They all held their breaths, terrified of being found out. The moment passed as did the truck. Sighing heavily Noodle relaxed into an upright position in the front seat.

“So we wait, then circle a few times before home?” Noodle questioned.

“Yeah.”

Noodle started the van up roughly ten minutes later and they cruised away under the radar. The night was creeping upon the sleepy city and while they circled the area, constantly just out of sight from scouting military personnel the body in the alleyway twitched.

Noodle took them home late into the evening, tunes pounding throughout the van while taking the highway out of the city.

In the wee hours of early twilight an employee of the neighboring building stepped out to rid the store of trash. He paused when he noticed a congealed puddle of blood under the flickering light. Tilting his head baffled he approached the blood. From behind him something knocked over random alleyway debris. When he whipped around the last thing he witnessed was neon blue rings floating in the darkness.

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Two Years Later…
Slamming the weaponized bat into a raging woman, Murdoc used his foot for leverage to yank the stuck nails from her pulverized head. She gurgled pitifully, her flailing weakening to nothing as blood drained from her blackened brain and fragmented skull. The satanist tugged the black bandana from his face, motioning to her corpse with the bat.

“Oi, pretty-boy, got you dinner.”
2D swung his fire axe with such force he cleaved a head clear off its body. When the headless zombie dropped heavily the singer looked over while he rested the axe against his shoulder. There were flecks of blood stuck to the handle and him. He seemed nonplussed by the stains.

“Romantic,” 2D deadpanned.

“I try.”

Murdock stepped over to the taller man, bumping hips with him. 2D glanced down at his cracked digital wrist watch.

“Noodle is late.”

“Could use the time to get familiar.” Murdoc winked while sliding his free hand into 2D’s back pocket, squeezing firmly.

“Well if you’re offering.”

2D grinned and tilted himself to lay a warm kiss on eager yet chapped lips. Murdoc dropped his bat to slip his other hand into the empty back pocket of 2D’s jeans. He pressed close to the ex-singer and smirked into the kiss. At the telltale noise of an engine rumbling closer they broke apart to see a rag top jeep rolling towards them. Gaudy, as well as poorly done, camouflage paint decorated the modified vehicle.

“Yo! Old men, get your asses in the car, we are going shopping,” Noodle hooted while pumping a fist out the driver side window.

Clearly her portion of the trip was more successful than theirs.

Russel was zoning out against a large machine gun mounted in the back of the jeep. He gave a loud yawn and rubbed his face. 2D bopped hips with Murdoc playfully before trotting over to the passenger side door. The satanist stepped up to the driver side and waved Noodle out of the seat.

“Awe come on.”

“In the back Sprog.”

“Rude.”

Noodle undid her belt and climbed into the back next to Russel and Kraken. Murdoc snorted while taking her place. Revving the jeep, Murdoc fixed his seat and the mirror, smirking back at the other two through said mirror.

“How about some classic tunes?”

“Classic how?”

Tapping a beat on his knee, Murdoc was surprised when 2D started to snap his fingers alongside him. Noodle elbowed Russel to rouse him from his stupor. Russel grunted and gave Noodle a gentle smile at her excitement. Snatching up her guitar packed between boxes of supplies she strummed on it. Murdoc put the jeep into drive and shoved his foot into the pedal, momentarily the tires spun before the vehicle took off.

2D shouted the lyrics over the whipping wind as he bopped his head, Noodle joining at her parts. They drove through the city-scape, occasionally ramming a neon eyed zombie through makeshift
spikes along the front. Russel shook his head amused. Maneuvering through totaled cars and debris, Murdoc genuinely found it was cathartic surviving with his friends. His family. Sure they essentially caused a second apocalypse but they were together and somehow this time it wasn’t nearly as terrifying.

“Muds join in! Even Russ is singing.” 2D’s eyes turned into black slits when he smiled at Murdoc.

Heart skipping a beat, Murdoc found it wasn’t a struggle joining them in their merriment. Not anymore. The four of them sang to the vast empty city, their only audience the undead creatures meandering through the streets or flinging across the hood. Though it looked bleak they would take what they were given and carve out a future worth living.

Chapter End Notes

When writing this story I had never intended it to be so long. Originally it was meant to be a shorter but I'm glad I did this. I realize this was a 2Doc story with very little couple-y stuff going on during all the zombie fun.

I had always intended for the fall of civilization in the end. Lets be honest, the virus would get out with how attached these four are to each other, nothing good could come from it. At the least they have each other in the end~

Anyways, thank you so much for your readership (is that a word?) and all the comments/kudos, etc. It's honestly so amazing to have people comment and support the story. It's been a thrill writing this and I look forward to putting my time and energy into my next story, Universal!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!