### Broken Reel

**by Lucky_Moon_rabbit**

#### Summary

Between sessions of the seemingly endless loops through the workshop an unexpected thing happens. Two strangers find their way into the abandoned Joey Drew Studios, and are caught in the middle of a the ever repeating tale of Henry and the studio as the reel begins to turn anew - but this snag of unexpected circumstances has damaged Joey’s carefully crafted web, fraying his control over the story he has weaved, and leaving it open to so many new possibilities. Now the story is starting to expand and change in unexpected ways, giving Henry a glimpse of real hope for the first time in years. Unfortunately, they all have to juggle the unexpected consequences of throwing in multiple people into a one man show.
Chapter 1

The ancient wooden door squeaked terribly as it was roughly shoved open, a second complaint escaping it as it was shoved closed with the same degree of force. The short brunette who had forced her way into the abandoned building paid it no heed, tears burning in her amber eyes and blurring her vision. She just needed to get away, and get away now. The sound of the door had likely alerted her pursuer, and she did not want to put up with him. Not now. Not after everything that had happened so recently on top of his usual shtick.

With this in mind the short woman moved with purpose down the entry hall, scarcely glancing to the shredded posters hanging on the walls. They were long torn and withered away by time and what forces of nature had leeched into the building. What little remained visible on the yellowed poster paper showed black inky imagery and titles, though they were too obscured by the damage of time to make out. The hall itself was dusty and thick with cobwebs, but none stretched down far enough to obscure her path, so she moved forward.

Pippen paused as she came to the first room, eyes drawn to the weak flicker of an old projector. It's bulb was nearly burnt out, but it continued to truck on, a soft clicking coming from the device's inner workings. As she stared at the screen the weak light poured out onto, she saw nothing but yellow light, suggesting that either there was no reel in the machine, or whatever had been there had been burned away. It was hard to say standing so far away from it, and given she only had a minimal understanding of Projectors. She didn't use them that often, preferring the more common day tools available.

She shook her head, short brown hair dancing around her. The bunny head shaped barrette in her hair bobbed with her motion, though it stayed secure, reliable as ever. She didn't have time to be distracted. Glancing to her sides, she realized she had two paths before her, one to the left, one to the right.

A creak from behind made her act, choosing the right path and darting down it. It was a short path, which lead immediately to another turning point, which she took instead of walking into the short dead end. This turn took her to the right, coming to a wide area in the hall with some dilapidated shelving and something illegibly scrawled on the wall, the years having smeared it into obscurity. Something about dreams maybe? She curved to the left this time, not staying to ponder the abstract art that was once some form of a message, making her way down a long hall. The first two doors she came to were locked, though a faint light poured out from under the left hand door, as well as faint music. Was.. Was someone else in here?

Good thing she didn't shake the doors then, instead trying to turn the knobs silently. If someone else was lurking in this abandoned building, than she didn't want to deal with them either. It was bad enough she was trying to outrun her brother.

"Pi---n?" Pippen jumped at the distant voice calling her name, unconsciously bristling with renewed anger. Why couldn't Perci just leave her alone?! Fortunately it sounded like he was still near the front of the building, giving her a chance to sneak away and find a spot to hide out in until he gave up. With that in mind she continued down the hall, pausing at a three way turn. The front most path lead to another bend, though there was an odd white erase board with numbers on it, faded like everything else in the building. The pipes along this path made her immediately discount it, not wanting to risk tripping over or tapping one of the pipes, certain the noise would give her away.

To her right was a door, but given how noisy the first door had been, and the fact Perci was
definitely in the building, made her decide against risking it. Which left her with the left path. This lead to yet another crossroads, with a door immediately in front of her and a path to the right and left. Going by her gut, she went right, walking through an oddly shaped room. An ancient cardboard cutout leaned against the far wall, but it was so deteriorated she couldn't really say what it had once been. The room was partly split by a divider wall, the cut out on the side that lead nowhere, while the other half continued the hall. It didn't seem like normal architecture to her, but what did she care.

She continued down the hall, taking a quick right as she came to a final intersection, not lingering on her options. What she came across made her pause however, staring in confusion at the strange sight before her. The room was lined with six pedestals, a faded picture behind each one. On the right side the pictures were of a gear, a wrench, a book, and the left were an inkwell, a music note, and a doll of sorts, all painted up in simple black and white. Well, what was once white, given the faded state of things. Each pedestal had an object on it, the same variety as the one illustrated in the image behind each pedestal, save for the music note, which had an old school record on it. Pippen eyed the ancient tech in fascination, having not seen a record in a while.

Every pedestal had an item... except one. She only noticed it now as she looked closer, realizing the doll pedestal was empty. A quick glance around the base of the object revealed it's missing offering, a small black and white plush doll lying on the ground. Pippen's eyes widened with recognition as she crouched beside the pedestal, sliding to hide her form behind the pedestal as she eyed the toy. Just in case.

The doll squeaked lightly as she picked up the toy, a small grin coming to her face despite the stinging still plaguing her eyes. She sat down with her back to the pedestal, mimicking the cheerful smile on the little plush dolls face. It was a little worse for wear, stitched up here and there, but she would recognize the darling little devil anywhere. After all, she owned a bendy plushy herself, one her grandfather had meticulously hunted down for her so many years ago. She had so many good memories of watching the old black and white cartoons with him, listening to him explain how they used to make the old cartoons and how incredible it was to them when the simple toons first rolled out.

Bendy, like most characters of the rubber hose age of animation, was a fairly simple character. A round little body, noodle limbs with dark little tap shoes and thick white gloves. His head was mostly round, save for a cut out at the top, making two little 'horns' to accent his devilish nature. He had a large white facial feature, and dark pie cut eyes, a large grin beneath the eyes. A small spade tipped tail dangled lazily from the little toy, Pippen carefully picking it up, aware of how fragile it could be on some of the earlier toy models. Or at least, on hers it was. Eventually they had been forced to pin it on the old toy to ensure it would stay put.

"Looks like you've had a rough time too, huh?" Pippen asked softly, not expecting an answer. The doll squeaked a bit in her hands as she set to work on scrubbing it clean, licking her thumb and scrubbing the dirt off the small white face. "Seems we're in the same boat little buddy.."

A distant call of her name made her stiffen, before shifting to hide her body behind the pillar. She was slowly becoming aware of footsteps nearing her, Perci once more calling her name. Pippen didn't answer, forcing herself to breath calmly and softly. His footsteps moved away, having stopped at the intersection Pippen hadn't stopped to analyze. His steps were slowly beginning to fade away, but not enough for her to feel confident that she could sneak past him.

"Oh god-" Perci's voice drifted back to her, the tonal shift confusing Pippen. He sounded truly distressed now, and Perci was not that good of an actor. The sound convinced her to stand, still clutching the doll to herself, mouth opening to speak.
Before any sound could escape however, a strange sensation overtook her. She stumbled, vaguely aware of a gasp and confused groan coming from Perci as well. That was all she heard before an overwhelming ringing began to beat away at her ears, the girl stumbling in pain as her vision blurred. She stumbled into the nearest wall, sliding down slowly and curling up as the pain overwhelmed her. Distantly she was aware of the chatter of a loaded projector starting up, the sound of a reel threading through the machine-

And then the sound of a tear, and everything went dark.

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Perci woke up slowly, groaning in pain. His entire body ached, feeling as if it had been compressed and stretched like putty before being dropped back where he was. The young adult stood up, blinking slowly. There was more light now, that much he noticed, though it was odd, seeming to only surround him in a vague circle, as if a light bulb was above his head. He reached up, fingers brushing something warm and solid floating above his head. His eyes widened in confusion as he pulled it down, the glow growing as he brought it to eye level.

It was a halo. A whitish-yellow, glowing ring of warm metal, light glittering between his fingers that were wrapped around it. His. Three. Fingers. Well four if he counted the thumb but- HIS FINGERS! No, not just his fingers, his entire hand, his arm! They were all wrong! His hands were covered in thick white gloves, and his arm was covered in a slightly loose dark black sleeve, instead of the nice dark blue shirt he had worn to his parents funeral..

He paused, momentarily blindsided once more by the fact his parents, or rather his mother and step father, were dead, taking a moment to shake himself out of his stupor. He sat up, looking around in confusion, realizing he was back in the main room with the running projector. Now, however, there was considerably less dust and the projector's noise stronger as it trundled along endlessly, the machine seemingly renewed. But it wasn't just the projector that had changed. In fact, the entire building looked.. different.

Everything was coated in tones of sepia, black, and white, though it was primarily the first color. The boards, the walls, everything looked as if it had been hand drawn like an old cartoon, even the projector looked less realistic and more cartoonish. What had happened?!What manner of science could explain this?! He looked like a cartoon, or at least what of him he could see...

Maybe it was a prank- It had to be a prank! Someone had knocked him out and dressed him up so what was visible reflected the impossible. That had to be it!..

Than why did the halo feel like it was part of him? Why did his large gloved hands feel like they were still his, and not wrapped in some disguise-

A mirror! He needed a mirror! There had been one in the art department to the left of the entrance, an old tattered thing he had seen when looking around for Pippen.. But if it was anything like the rest of the building it would likely be in better condition now. Perci turned and ran out of the main room, not noticing the front door begin to open as he ran to the art department. The room had several light boxes, little familiar cartoon devil drawings on each one. A small mirror sat on the light box furthest from the main group, Perci nearly tripping down the stairs to the lower floor of the area as he scrambled to the light desk.
The Bendy drawing, as he knew what cartoon character it was on that light box screen having seen plenty of it while visiting his grandfather, was sitting down with a confused look on it's face, a finger to his chin as he looked at some unseen thing. Perci barely paid the static image any mind as he picked up the compact mirror, likely some long forgotten workers property, scrubbing the dust off the mirror and paling at what greeted him as he looked into it.

His amber eyes were now pie cut eyes, his messy white-blonde hair now white and cartoon-y in appearance. His head floated just a bit above his body, no neck in sight, though it obeyed his bodily commands as if his neck were still there. His skin was a tine of darkish sepia, with a slight gray flush to his cheeks, which were a bit chubbier than he remembered them being. His halo, which he had released in his haste to reach the art department, was back on top of his head, floating peacefully, though it seemed to brighten in response to his alarm. His clothing, a nice blue long sleeved shirt and grey vest, were now a grey-black long sleeved shirt and a white vest, a pair of ornate silver scissors poking out of the pocket of his vest. He didn't remember having those-

"H-H-H-Hooow-?" Perci slowly breathed, shaking uncontrollably. He glanced around himself, jumping slightly as his eyes landed on the lightbox bendy. It was now standing up, hand held up as if he were introducing himself, a proud look on the little toons face. Surely that was not the pose it had been holding before- right? "Oh god, oh god, what is this? What is happening to me?!"

"Oh good God, Pippen what did you get us into-" Perci whispered, palm coming up to hesitantly investigate his new face. He could feel what his hand felt, and his face being touched, an slightly unhinged chuckle escaping him as he stared at his changed self. This was impossible, physically impossible, he had to be dreaming or hallucinating or-

"Hello?" A voice called from behind him, Perci jumping around to eye the man that had appeared behind him. At least, Perci was fairly sure he was a man. He looked like someone form a popeye cartoon, light sepia skin with pie cut eyes like his own, and thick, brawny forearms. Three lines were present on the forarms, likely to represent arm hair, and his upper arms were a bit thinner than the lower but not ridiculously so. He was broad chested, with a nice shirt that was partly unbuttoned, and a pair of overalls on. His hair was slightly messy and white, his chin stubbled, and dark circles under his eye. His chin was rounder than Perci's, but it gave the stranger more of a strong look compared to Perci's softer face. He also had a thick neck, something Perci felt a small pinch of jealous over, hyper aware of his weird floating head.

"H-H-H-Hellooo-?" Perci echoed nervously, shaking with fear and confusion. The stranger took a step towards him, Perci noticing the fact the brawny stranger was a full head taller than him as he did. The angel toon responded immediately, jumping back and half scaling the light box behind him, unaware of the now annoyed pose of the figure on the paper beneath him. "W-Who are you?! What's going on?! H-How did I get here?!"

The man held up his hands in a placating manner, his own hands gloveless but still cartoon-y. He didn't try approaching again, seeing the terror in the boys eyes. "Easy kid. Easy. Ain't here to hurt you. I want to know how you got here too. This is the first time I've seen someone new in.. I don't know how long." He paused, momentarily lost in thought, before continuing to speak. "My name is Henry Stein. Do you remember your name?"

"P-Perci. I-I mean m-my name is Percival Clarke." Perci answered. "B-But I prefer Perci." He paused, dread creeping into his voice. "W-Why wouldn't I remember my name?"

"It's.. a common issue in this place." Henry answered quietly, eyes sad. "Things are easily lost in this place. How long have you been here?"
"W-What is this place?" Perci asked hesitantly. "I-I just woke up here. I mean. I just woke up here like this. I was at the other building, the version of this one that looked.. normal and old.. for like ten minutes maybe? I was looking for my sister..."

Henry paused, shaking his head. "Well, I haven't seen her... But if her situation is the same as yours, she couldn't have gotten far. This place follows a pattern, no matter how many times this nightmare repeats."

Perci slowly slid off of the light box, eyeing Henry nervously. "Th-Then I'll just find her and leave-"

"I don't think it will be that simple anymore." Henry cut in, his voice firm and unhappy. His eyes held a quiet sadness for the boy and his sibling, who had unwittingly become entangled in hell on earth. "I've been trying to leave for.." He paused. "What year is it?"

"2017..?" Perci answered. His eyes widened as Henry's eyes shrank in shock, the older man paling. "M-Mr. Stein h-how long have you been here?" No answer. "M-Mr. Stein-!"

"Y-You can call me Henry." Henry answered weakly, almost as an afterthought. He slowly leaned into the nearest wall, a hand covering his face. "I-I. I was invited here.. no I was trapped here in 1969 by my so called friend, Joey Drew. I've been trying to find my way out since. But.. no matter what I've done, nothing changes." His fist slammed into the wall, shaking it.

"I-I-I don't-" Perci paled, eyes going wide with realization. Over 40 years of doing the same thing over and over.. And to what end? If he had been here this long, how in the hell were they going to escape?! "W-Wh-"

He was cut off as the building shook a bit, most of the lights dimming save for a few emergency lights. Henry's eyes widened, his expression morphing to one of alarm. He looked back towards the opposite end of the building in confusion.

"I haven't- How is it-?" He started to run towards the other end of the building, Perci following him closely. He needed answers, and Henry seemed to be the best source of them in this strange place.

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Pippen woke up slowly, blinking heavy eyes as she slowly sat up. The Bendy doll was still in her hands, and she appeared to still be in the pedestal room, though everything was.. different. It looked as if it had been drawn by hand, all sepia tones and dark lines, and for a moment Pippen questioned how hard she had hit her head. At least, she must have hit her head on the way down, to see things this way. As she looked around more however, she realized the changes were not restricted to the room, realizing she had been changed as well.

Her hands were covered in white gloves, three digits plus a thumb, with sepia button sewn on the back of each glove. Most of her clothing was gone, though she didn't feel naked, her skin black-grey along her arms, legs, and body. Her head felt.. detached almost, and a quick check confirmed she had no neck, which was weird because it felt like she still had one and could still perform the functions one would if they had a neck.

The changed human slowly stood, feeling two sets of changes immediately, turning her head to look behind her. Springing from her backside was a long devil tail, the tip a sliver fountain pen nib,
and a pair of small detached imp wings idly floated near her back and slightly to the side. Could.. Could she fly?! The thought brought a rush of excitement, despite the mild unease she felt in response to her changed body. Maybe this was just a very lucid dream? Did people in lucid dreams even realize they were dreaming?

After a moment of consideration, she pinched herself, hard, squeaking in pain. Pain. She couldn't be dreaming. She never felt pain in dreams, and anytime something was going to do severe harm to her in a dream she always woke up. So this wasn't a dream.. at least by her logic. Which meant they were in the middle of some sort of strange magic or science experiment.

There had to be some sort of explanation to this. Maybe it was all some really clever illusion with some fancy tech she had never heard of- But in an abandoned building? OK, than magic. That was.. technically always a possibility. There were always things science couldn't explain, and while it felt a bit silly to jump to magic, she couldn't think of anything else. Right. So now she was thinking less on the impossibility of this matter and more on the *how* it was happening. The only way she'd get an answer is if she stopped sitting around and started looking for answers.

Pippen glanced around, holding the doll to herself as she walked over to the pedestal the record lay on. If she angled it right, she was sure she could see her reflection in the shiny disc. As she picked it up, the pedestal raised, a soft 'chunk' coming from some unseen machinery. Pippen paid it no mind, angling the disk in the light just right so she could see her reflection.

"Oh." Her head was indeed floating, as she had suspected, though it was far different from before. Her head was rounder, with slightly chubby cheeks, a pair of curvy horns coming out of her head, one on each side. They weren't too obtrusive or annoying, but they stood there proudly, a ribbon with the head of her bunny barrette attached tied onto her left horn, the bunny now silver in color. On her face was a vaguely heart shaped white mark, her eyes pie cut with a hint of silver in their depths when the light hit it just right, a toothy frown of surprise on her face. She blinked, opening her mouth, revealing sharp slightly elongated canines, and a black interior, a dark forked tongue flicking around. "Wow.."

After a moment she returned the record to it's spot, the pedestal sinking down with a hearty 'thunk'. She turned to eye the only empty pedestal, walking over and gently sitting down the plushie, watching the pedestal sink. The lights in the room abruptly turned off, save for six spotlights above the pedestals. She shrank back, jumping as loud footfalls echoed through the building, making their way towards her.

Pippen bolted out of the room, darting out of sight into the room Perci had walked into before they had both blacked out, the toon imp darting to hide under a table. She could vaguely hear voices coming nearer, but the one speaking was unfamiliar, and given her appearance.. was it safe to come out? She had no idea what had happened to cause all this strangeness... and her appearance would likely catch her some flak.

As she considered her options, her eyes drifted to the center of the room, her blood, (or ink?), running cold. There, in the center of the room, was a figure tied to an inclined table, thick grey straps holding his limbs still. Or rather, would have held the large wolf like toon still when he was alive, his eyes now permanently affixed in the shape of an *X*. The overall clad figure was a familiar one to her, as it was to most black and white cartoon enthusiasts. Spatters of dark ink covered the back wall and the ground beneath him, likely from the hole meticulously cut into his chest, revealing split open white ribs in a sea of inky grey-black flesh.

Pippen slowly crawled out, eyes wide as she regard the dead toon, her vision drifting to a side wall where an advertisement poster seemed hung there to mock the dead wolf. The picture showed
a drawn version of the wolf, a happy Boris the wolf holding his clarinet, white face tinted sepia by the old paper, his bulbous nose intact and cheeks holding a merry flush. His ears were perked up in the photo, and no Y shaped incision marred this version's chest. The title read 'Bendy in "SHEEP SONGS!" and below, near the wolf, were the words 'With BORIS the WOLF!'

She slowly backed away, back down the hallway she had come from, and away from the cruel confirmation that one of her favorite cartoon characters had somehow been brought to life and brutally murdered. Or maybe she had somehow been made into a cartoon, slated to face the same fate as the loyal canine! Whichever was true, she could not tear her eyes away from the broken figure on the table, inky tears bubbling in her eyes. This could not be happening, it could not-!

She jumped as she abruptly backed into something, the sound of falling wood greeting her ears. The imp turned quickly, eyeing a fallen wooden cut out of Bendy, her stomach churning with anxious confusion. That hadn't been there before, it hadn't-!

"Hey!" A rough voice made her jump, head snapping up towards the pedestal room entrance. A brawny male toon was peering out, eyeing her with glaring pie cut eyes. He took a step towards her, opening his mouth to speak, but didn't get the chance as she bolted away, back to the horrible table with poor Boris strapped down onto it. She turned left forcing open the door and pressing on into the room beyond, slamming the door shut behind her once more.

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"Who put these here?!" Henry questioned, eyeing the six pedestals, each with their respective items stacked on top of them already. "It never starts like this-"

"Wh-What do you mean?!" Perci cut in, desperate for answers. He was panting lightly, winded from having to keep up with the other toon man, whose legs were longer than his own.

"I told you, I've been doing this for years. The same loop, time after time, unable to escape- Like a written book or carto-" He hesitated at the word. "It... It's never gone off the rails, no matter how hard I've tried. There's been small variations, but I've never seen something big change. Maybe the order of how things were done, how quick or slow, but never like this."

"M-Maybe Pippen did it..?" Perci offered. "Sometimes she'll tidy up around her when she's upset or nervous."

"It couldn't have been her." Henry declared confidently. "The Inkwell is always in the Art Department, and the only people who were there were us. There's no way someone could have snuck past us both, not with how that part of the building is shaped."

"Do you think us being here.. b-broke things?" Perci offered after a moment. Henry stopped, staring at him for a long moment.

"I think.. Yeah.. Maybe.. Maybe it has. Maybe things can finally change.." Henry began to mutter, before breaking off at the sound of something falling over, as well as several skittish footsteps following the sound. He knew that when he walked out of here a Bendy cutout would be waiting, or at least when he was still in the loops it would be, but it didn't fall over on it's own-

"Hey!" Henry called as he turned the corner, spotting a small figure. It was vaguely similar to Bendy, or rather the Bendy Henry had designed. She sported a similar small dark form as the original Bendy, though her horns were a bit more complex and her figure more feminine. And the
tail tip.. a silver pen head. He opened his mouth to call the name Perci had been repeating, but didn't get the chance as the figure took one terrified look at him and bolted back in the direction she had been facing, back into-

"Oh dammit!" Henry growled, springing into action a little too slow. If she had been in the Boris room, than it explained why she was so freaked out. There were things to be wary of, but usually not on this level- Except the pattern of Joey's twisted game seem to be damaged, and now anything was on the table! "Wait, please!"

"What is it?!" Perci called, running after him. "Pippen? Pips!"

"Maybe-" Henry rumbled. "I'm not sure, but she's definitely someone new." Henry ran up to the door the imp had run through, opening it to find the usual cluttered room. A desk, a wardrobe, some chairs, shelves.. Everything looked in place. He checked the drawers none the less, grumbling under his breath. A quick glance to his left confirmed she had run them for a loop, the opposite door now unlocked and partially cracked open. "Dammit."

"Why are you so upset? You mentioned this place is basically a closed circuit and the first level is always safe-" Perci began, his approach bringing more light to Henry's general area. "We can just let her run herself out- It's what we used to do when we were younger."

"It is usually safe.. when everything is going the way it always has." He looked to Perci with a heavy eye, the younger male's eyes widening with realization.

"But- But we've broken everything." Perci murmured, though neither of them needed it stated out loud. Henry nodded none the less, expression dark with concern.

"You, stay with me, and keep calling for your sister. She's more likely to come to someone she knows." Henry instructed. As Perci opened his mouth, Henry cut him off, preempting his suggestion. "And we are not splitting up. Last thing I need is for you to get lost or hurt as well." Or accidentally setting things into motion even further than Pippen already had..
Chapter 2

Pippen kept running, darting out of the cluttered room silently, closing the door quickly but quietly behind her. She started back towards the exit, only to be stopped by several bendy cutouts in the hall leading towards the entrance. The imp slid to a stop, falling on her rear, the noise soft but liable to give her away. She was still running blind in fear, her mind filled with the imagery of that poor wolf strapped to a table, and she turned quickly, running down the hall towards the white erase board. It was cleaner in this version of the workshop, with various numbers illustrating 'ink output', though she had no idea what that meant. It didn't matter, she just needed to hide!

She turned to the right, nearly tripping over a massive pipe, scoffing at the 'watch your step' sign set up in front of it. The girl continued to scramble forward, darting to the left as she came to the end of the hall, pausing uncertainly. She was in a massive room, one with a large hole in the center, framed on the sides by wood, chains disappearing into the shadows below. She stood on a balcony of sorts, a small generator chugging away beside her on the balcony. To her left was a closet, but other than some empty power cells there was nothing of use. She eyed the room uncertainly, glancing behind her and bristling with fear as she spotted another Bendy cutout.

Pippen jumped onto the generator, accidentally catching the switch with her boot as she used the height of the machine to vault over the balcony, landing on the level below. It was a short drop of a couple feet so she took it easily, though she didn't stay put long. The room was shaking lightly, though she failed to notice it at first given she was still shaking pretty hard. What helped her realize it was the fact the chains going into the shadows were beginning to move, pulling something up. She didn't stop long to watch them, a quick look around led her to a spot where some extra unattached chains were piled up, the imp hiding behind the metal links nervously. Her tail began to flick with unease, but she caught ahold of it, pressing it down with her hand. It didn't stop it from twitching, but it kept it from going beyond her hiding spot. With her tail pinned, she started focusing on her breathing, trying to get it to even out, terrified her panting would give her away. She was in this situation, whether she liked it or not, and panicking would just lead to her death. She needed to keep a cool head, instead of freaking out blindly.

Her hiding spot didn't obscure the strange, boxy machine that appeared from the shadows, the chains pulling it up. It was bizarre, and massive, a mess of pipes, gears, pistons and other attachments she couldn't name visible on the outside, seemingly put together in a meaningful way. A sloshing noise came from the rear of the machine were a metal barrel was connected by pipes to the machine, some of them leading to the large nozzle that made up the front of the device. A grate of sorts waited beneath the nozzle, likely to catch solid portions of whatever came out, though what it was meant to make was beyond Pippen. Peering down she could see even more pipes connected to the bottom of the machine, vanishing into the shadows below.

While she eyed the machine, she failed to notice the ink that began to seep into the room, trickling in the corners of the room and along the eaves. The clinking and clanking of the machine managed to mask the ink's bubbling. There wasn't enough ink on this level yet to do much without the ink pressure being turned on, but there was enough to start manipulating the area. One such manipulation was the appearance of several inky boards over the doorway to the Ink Machine, which solidified and turned into proper sepia toned wooden boards.

The sound of thumping on the boards caught her attention however, the impish toon looking up in confusion at the now blockaded door. When had those gone up? Her tail began to flick wildly with uncertainty. While it was true she wanted the strange figure to stay away from her, given she
didn't know if he had a connection to what she had seen, the fact she was suddenly trapped in the room didn't sit well with her. The banging on the wood stopped after several moments, the silence hanging heavy.

"Pippen?! Pippen! Are you in there?!" A familiar voice cut in. It was a bit squeakier than she remembered, but she would recognize her brother's voice anywhere. In spite of their shaky relationship, the sound of his familiar voice was a calming anchor for her in that moment. She momentarily forgot their argument, sitting up to answer.

"Perci?" She called back nervously. The banging returned, the sound of someone pulling on the boards and then slamming into them, trying to break them loose.

"Pippen! Pippen come here! Please, we're in danger!" He called back as he tried to brute force the boards. He stopped after a moment, as uncertain pie-cut eyes peered through at him from a gap in the boards.

"Behind you!" She yelped, eyes widening and vanished however after she spotted Henry, her tail flicking with nervous energy. Perci glanced behind himself in confusion, eyeing Henry questioningly. The man sighed, quickly pleading his case.

"Pippen, my name is Henry." Henry announced. "I'm not here to hurt you, or your brother. Please. Give me a chance." He crouched a bit to be closer to her level as she peered through the boards, eyeing him uncertainly.

"I know you saw Bor-" His voice caught on the name, eyes flashing with pain. "I know you saw him. I didn't do that to Boris. I would never.."

"He couldn't have." Perci added. "He was with me when this whole thing started."

"What.. What is this?" Pippen questioned after a moment, suppressing a shiver of anxiety. "What is going on?"

"This.. This will be hard for you to believe, but were trapped in a cartoon world. I know this for certain. I've been trapped here.. for years," He shook his head. "But now everything is happening out of order- The pattern of this place is breaking, and we might be able to escape because of it."

"I guess that explains why we're like this.." Pippen muttered to herself in thought. She looked over herself again, tail twitching with uncertainty as she eyed Henry. "So now what?"

"You're taking this a lot better than your brother," Henry mused.

"I'm more adaptable than him," Pippen stated proudly, deciding it was better to not mention the fact she had been utterly panicking moments before. The panic was in the past, she decided, and she was going to stay calm.

"And more likely to do things you aren't supposed to and make a bad situation even worse." Perci muttered, feeling a familiar ire begin to churn in his chest.

"If you had left me alone we wouldn't be here!" Pippen snapped back, sharp fangs momentarily showing. "If you had just shut up and left me be-!

"You were being unreasonable!" Perci snapped back. "All I wanted was to talk about mom's will-

"On the day of their friggin' funeral, so you could leave and be done and go back to pretending I
don't exist and how perfect you're life is." The younger sibling hissed. "You aren't an angel, Percival-"

"It's common place to do this quickly-!"

"ENOUGH!" Henry snapped, breaking between the argument. The pair shied away in surprise, looking up with big eyes. Henry hadn't raised his voice like this the entire time either knew him, and the abrupt change was enough to settle things. They wouldn't meet the other's eyes as they settled down, both turning towards Henry for leadership. "Listen, I don't know what happened between you two, but that's outside of this place. You need to focus on the present or this place will hurt you."

"How so." Pippen asked in a quiet voice. She had to admit that Henry was right in one way at least, that their argument would have to go on pause.. and hopefully stay on pause permanently. Having these discussion without an intermediary who was in the know was a fruitless endeavor.

"There are beings that will harm you if they catch you. Malformed Ink creatures, the toon.. experiments Joey created." Henry paused. "And Bendy.."

"Bendy?" Pippen echoed. "The 'darling devil' Bendy? Mischievous short stack from the sillyvision cartoons?"

"I thought you said it was 2017.." Henry questioned as he turned towards Perci. That was far from the cartoons hey-day.

"It is. Doesn't mean I can't like old school cartoons." Pippen quipped. "Besides, he's pretty popular among enthusiast.. and Japan for some reason."

"It's true." Perci offered. "They're aired on a special channel with a bunch of other old cartoons. Pippen and I used to watch them all the time with our grandfather."

"I watched them, Perci complained." Pippen sniped, earning a glare from Perci. She grinned a bit, but left it at that, not wanting to upset Henry more. She opened her mouth to talk more on what she knew of the cartoon, but was cut off, Henry not allowing them to start arguing again.

"Anyway, my answer is Yes and No. Technically it is Bendy but.. he's.. not like he was in the cartoons." Henry looked away a bit. "If you see a lot of ink start to gather in the area, you need to hide. He's more aggressive than I- than his cartoon version was meant to be. I think it has something to do with the Ink Machine. That thing behind you. Yeah. I'm not entirely sure what it was meant for, but it seems Joey was trying to bring the cartoons to life with.. mixed results."

Pippen glanced back towards the machine, tail twitching with intrigue. A machine that could bring cartoons to life? How interesting! But.. judging from what Henry told her, it wasn't operating that well. Not if it brought someone like the Bendy from the cartoons and made them as aggressive as Henry alluded.

"Listen. I need you to just stay calm, stay quiet, and stay put. Things are out of order here ever since the two of you arrived, and that means there's a chance of escaping this nightmare.. maybe even getting help for the others.." Henry began.

"There are others?" Pippen questioned.

"But for now, I need to get you two out of here. You don't deserve to be a part of this nightmare." Henry continued. "Perci and I are going to see if we can find something to bring these boards down with. Just stay quiet, and you'll be safe, OK?"
"I don't have much choice here.." Pippen pointed out, tugging on a board. Too bad the space between the boards was too thin for her to squeeze through. "So I'll be here. Just.. try not to take too long.."

"We won't." Henry reassured. Pippen gave him a weak smile of gratitude. She was starting to take a liking to Henry. His deep, rumbly voice reminded her of her late grandfather, and in spite of his brief yell, he had a calm, friendly demeanor. It made her feel a bit safer despite what she had seen.

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"Is there anything we can use to take off those boards that you know of?" Perci asked several moments after they had walked away.

"On this level? No. Not normally. But like I said, things are out of wack thanks to you two. I don't think Joey's game is devised for more people than myself. The pedestal pieces were out of place when things started, so maybe other things are out of place." Henry explained.

He led the boy back towards the intersection once more, turning away from the hall that would take them to pedestal wing and the adjacent hall they had yet to travel. They wouldn't be going down that hall unless they absolutely had to. Instead he hung a left, smiling a bit as the break room door was currently unlocked, allowing the pair to walk downstairs in the sizable room. Two tables with books and ancient papers stacked on them were present, as well as some chairs and a dart board with some darts. Henry tried the break room closet, but outside of the usual soup cans he found nothing.

"Maybe we could slowly pick away at the wood with the darts." Perci weakly mused as he eyed the old board. It was pockmarked with numerous holes from years of use, three darts hanging from the center. He wondered if they were put there purposely, or if someone who had worked here had such good aim they could nail the bullseye like that.

"If it comes to it, maybe we could get creative." Henry offered with a shrug, though they both knew it was low on the list of options.

"So.. How are you connected to this place?" Perci questioned as they walked back upstairs. They turned left, the light under the hall door, which had been on even in the real world, abruptly shutting off. The door creaked open, Perci stiffening with alarm and fear, though Henry was still at ease, walking slowly towards the small room. The sound of feedback rang out, and then music, Perci walking up to see a desk crammed into a tiny room, a small old radio playing a tiny tune.

"This place will pull stunts like that a lot." Henry warned. "But it seems, so far, that it's mostly following the original rules." He continued down the hall towards the art department, eyes peeled for anything he could use to brute force the boards down. He didn't dare try the front door yet, in case it did open, but at the cost of Pippen.

"I used to work here." Henry began after several moments. "Back when the company first began. Joey and I.. We had been friends for years, and when Joey came forward with the idea of starting this company I was.. a bit hesitant. But he insisted we could make it work. That it would be a partnership." He paused. "Instead, I gave, and Joey took. And that was it. I barely got to see my wife, barely got to go home most weeks.. and then he stole my work and put it under his name alone.. That broke things."
"I left, though Joey convinced me to take a break and not quit outright. He swore up and down that it was a clerical error, that the copyright had made a mistake.. I can't believe I bought those lies at the time, but.. I wanted to believe he didn't do that on purpose." He bowed his head a bit. "But then, while I was on my.. 'break', I find out through some of the other workers that it was not an accident, that they had proof he had purposely stolen my work. Before I could confront him, the next thing I knew I had received a letter in the mail, informing me that I had been drafted."

They paused to look around the entry way, though there wasn't much to look around at, and the only door they had yet to venture through in the area was thoroughly locked. Pippen may have been able to pick the lock, if she were loose. Perci had never learned how to pick a lock. He didn't bother mentioning it. He didn't want to turn the conversation onto him.

"I.. I penned my resignation before I was shipped out. Made my problems with his behavior and his theft clear and delivered the note. Joey was furious, and told me that once my tour was through not to contact him or come back to the building. Told me to not speak of my time here either, or he would wring me through the courts and leave me in the poorhouse. Joey had connections.. I didn't doubt his ability to drum up something." Henry continued after several moments, walking towards the art department.

He paused as the hallway curved, glancing to his left, his eyes distant as he walked to the lonely desk, setting a hand on it. There was a bendy cut out on the rough hewn desk, and an old concept picture of Bendy with a cute toothless mouth, and a post it note that read 'NO' attached to it. "This is my old desk. I wasted so much time here.."

Perci glanced to the desk, and then to the drawing of Bendy. He hesitated, before asking the elder male a question "Mr. Stein.. Did you create Bendy?"

Henry took a deep breath, before nodding. "I did. This was one of the first concept pieces I did of him. Joey didn't like it, so I drew him again, changing him a little bit here and there.. Until Joey finally relented." He smiled weakly. "I knew people would like the little devil. I just wish.."

The angel toon stayed silent as he stared up at Henry, waiting for him to continue, but Henry shook his head, turning his back on the desk and making his way to the Art department proper. Perci didn't push for more, feeling he had pried enough.

The art department left them empty handed as well, though the drawing of Bendy moved several more times while they were there. Henry took it in stride, so Perci tried to as well. It still unnerved him though.

"So how did you two end up here?" Henry asked, glancing back to the younger male. Perci hesitated mid step, but caught himself, swallowing a bit. Well, Henry had shared his story, so he might as well reciprocate the gesture.

"We.. Just got out of my parents funeral." Perci answered quietly. "I hadn't seen Pippen in a couple years, not since I went to college. She goes to college in this town, there's a pretty popular art college in this town now, actually. I don't know if it was here before you." He trailed off. "We've always had a rocky relationship. I just wanted to talk to her, try to mend bridges, but.. she didn't want to talk."

He paused, eyes darting away with guilt. That wasn't entirely true. She had been willing to talk, but only if their cousin, Oliver, was their to be intermediary. Perci hadn't agreed, because Oliver always took Pippen's side, or so it felt. Oliver was.. fairly even handed, but he took her side a lot. Maybe it was because he was actually related to her by blood..
"I'm sorry for your loss." Henry murmured. Perci nodded weakly.

"Well.. I mean.. I still have my dad, at least.." Perci offered. "Pippen doesn't have either of her parents. My mom.. and her dad.. It's why I tried to talk to her. But.. it just never works out. When I tried after the funeral, she walked away and I followed her. When it was clear I wasn't giving up she started running through the abandoned part of town. Bad things happen to girls who go into this part of town Mr. Stein. I couldn't- I couldn't just leave her. So I kept following her. She got ahead of me and ran into an abandoned building. Someone saw her and was nice enough to tell me she had gone in here.. or there."

"I tried to find her, but I didn't get to search much of the building before I passed out, and woke up like this, back in the front of the building." He finished. Henry eyed him quietly, nodding. It felt like some things had been left out, but than again he had left out small details in his story as well. "And now we're here. Trying to get her out and hopefully not start another fight."

"Mmm. Woman can be tricky. They tend to remember the worst things you say, and expect you to remember them too." Henry offered. Perci flinched with discomfort, swallowing hard. His advice was uncomfortably close to the advise Oliver would give him whenever they spoke to each other about Pippen. That is, on those rare occasions he did see the other male. "I should know. I made the mistake of saying one thing in anger to my wife.. Something I didn't even mean.. But it stuck with her for years. I felt horrible when I realized how long it had been bothering her, long after I had forgotten it and thought the fight had passed."

Henry's eyes grew distant as he thought of his late wife, sighing softly. She had died a year prior to Joey's letter, which may have been part of why Henry had leapt on the offer so eagerly. A possibility of rekindling a long, lost friendship. Like the saying went, distance makes the heart grow fonder. Though in this case it would have been better if it had not. Otherwise he wouldn't have been caught in this web of lies and manipulation.

"Ah... I-I'm sorry Mr- I mean Henry." Perci murmured. "I didn't realize you were married."

"It's OK." Henry offered in turn. He paused as they reached the intersection of hallways between the ink machine, break room, and .. other rooms. "Linda had passed before Joey reached out to me.. So fortunately I didn't leave anyone behind to worry about me. Just.. My drawings and the cartoons I helped make."

"They really are popular, Henry." Perci offered in an honest tone. "Pips wasn't lying. I know that in there time they were only mildly popular, but as people started looking back on the older cartoons, people feel in love with Bendy in particular. A lot of people are sad there's only so many Bendy cartoons. But I know a lot of artist have made fan art and even fan episodes. I saw them when Pippen and I were younger, she would watch them like crazy."

Henry paused, smiling weakly. "I always hoped... people would love Bendy as much as I did..." He turned down to explore the only area they hadn't searched yet. The projection room. "Now.. there's one more room we can search, but you need to be careful. There is a switch in this room we can not turn on. Not without endangering Pippen."

"Understood." Perci nodded, focusing on the present once more. The situation may be sour, but talking to Henry had helped him a bit. The man had a calming presence to himself, and it did make Perci feel a bit better to see Henry walk a little taller at the news that his creation had become a well loved character. even if he could not enjoy that fame as well. Not that he seemed to desire it as much. He seemed to just want the recognition he deserved for creating Bendy, as any artist would desire for their work..
Perci jumped as they started down the new hallway, a Bendy cut out peered around the corner at the end of the hall. Henry didn't jump, but he smirked a bit at Perci's response. It had been a while since the cutouts' mischief had actually startled him, but seeing someone else jump was... actually a bit funny. He hid the smirk however, letting Perci collect himself and try to save his pride, the angel flushing as he straightened up his vest.

"They do that occasionally." Henry chuckled. "But the cutouts are harmless."

"Right. Like the one Pippen knocked over.." Perci mumbled.

"Yeah. They tend to show up where they can startle you. I'm not sure what moves them.. but whatever is hasn't attacked me.. at least that I know of. " Henry reassured, walking around the corner and gesturing to the cutout that lay innocently against the wall. He tapped it, nothing happening in response. "See? Harmless."

"Ah. OK. Yeah." Perci muttered nervously. He looked up into the new room, one that was unusually dark thanks to the fact it was the room meant to test the projection reels. A couple chairs sat in the room, and the projector proper was in a small square space in the back of the room. There was also a lever with the word 'INK PRESSURE' written above it, several lines of pipes leading in and out of the switch. And seated on the chair nearest the switch was an ax!

"Finally, some good luck!" Perci chirped, walking towards the ax. It was a simple thing, toonish in appearance like everything else, sporting a dark handle and silver ax head. The angel toon trotted into the darkened room confidently, reaching out to grab the ax once he was close to it. As he neared, the light of his halo glinted off of a thin thread, though Perci was so fixated on the ax that he failed to notice it.

"Perci, wait!" Henry shouted, bristling in alarm as he saw the string, and the direction it vanished into through the shadows. One end was tied around the Ax and the other-

As Perci grabbed the Ax, he tugged the string, the Ink Pressure lever swinging down as the pressure from the ax end of the string pulled on the end attached to the lever. It went down with a noisy 'ca-chunk', both men stopping dead at the sound. Their ears were greeted by the sound of ink flowing through the pipes, through the walls, the ink free once more-

"No, no, no, no!" Henry chanted in alarm, running forward and grabbing the ax, yanking hard enough to snap the string. "We need to get back to the Ink machine, NOW!" He turned on his heel, beginning to run so quickly that a puffy cloud of dust was kicked up as he began. Perci was close behind, stumbling as he tried to keep up.

"Wh-What did that do?!" Perci shouted, more so out of alarm than out of the need to speak up to be heard over the ink machine.

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Pippen sighed as she lazily swung her legs over the balcony edge, waiting for her brother and Henry. She only now had thought to ask for Henry's last name. He seemed to know a lot about Bendy.. and she knew quite a bit of gossip in the animation/cartoon circles. It was hard not to hear it, going to a college in the same town the mysterious Bendy cartoons had been made in.. Add to that the abrupt shutdown of the studio, disappearance of the owner, and the fact so few of the former workers could be tracked down, and there was plenty of fuel for rumors and scandal.
'Maybe another time.' Pippen thought to herself, sighing a bit. It probably wasn't time to be chewing the fat as it were. Not with how nervous Henry had been. He was controlling it well, but his nervous glances and serious warnings were enough to put her on edge as well. Henry did not seem to be a man who scared easily.

A soft buzzing sensation on her left hip brought her back to the present, the imp blinking in confusion as she glanced to her hip. It was.. vibrating and slightly distended, like one would expect of their pocket.. but she didn't have pockets, right? The buzzing stopped, and the distention vanished, Pippen staring at her hip with an uncertain expression.

After a moment, she reached down. Out of nowhere, a pocket appeared on her hip, allowing her to reach in and pull out her cell phone. Was.. Was she reaching into hammer space? Had she gained the ability to reach into the mystery cartoon storage with her transformation? That was.. handy. Albeit it odd to experience. Maybe the world they were in was less rigid with it's rules than the world they had come from.

Her phone had gained a more cartoon-y look, and had a spotty connection, but seemed to be working for the moment. She slid a gloved finger across the touch screen, sighing a bit in relief as the phone unlocked. All of her games and her doodle pad program appeared in tact, at least from a cursory glance over the home page. The internet wasn't connecting, and neither would YouTube, but she had several concerned text messages from her cousin, Oliver.

He had seen her running away from Perci, knew she hadn't returned to her apartment, and was concerned. She tapped out a quick message to him, explaining simply that they were locked in an abandoned building and trying to get out, hoping the short message would make it through. She sent that first, before sending a lengthier, full explanation. The short explanation made it through, but the longer message did not. Typical. She had said they were OK in the first message, so hopefully Oliver would wait for her.

That did leave her with the question of what would happen once they escaped. Would they revert back to their proper forms? Or would they stay in their toonified selves? What would they do then? That is assuming they got out as quickly and smoothly as Henry hoped.

As she glanced down towards her phone once more, the sound of liquid churning through pipes caught her attention. She unconsciously shoved her phone back into Hammer space, looking up towards the ceiling, and then the walls. She could hear pipes creaking and groaning as they once more were filled with liquid, though with what she wasn't sure. Then again, given this machine was called 'The Ink Machine', so it was likely ink..

Once she looked back down she stiffened a bit, realizing the room was beginning to fill with ink. Not like a natural flood, with a rising level of liquid, but instead in strange puddles and inky webs along the edges of the walls. Some of the pulsing ink forming on the walls looked similar to veins, the walls steadily darkening, going from shades of grey to overlapping shades of black as the ink thickened.

A dark, clawed hand abruptly appeared over the edge of the square hole the Ink machine had been lifted out of, scraping noisily at the edge. The sound spurred Pippen into motion, the girl leaping down from the banister and darting behind the generator, the first place she could think to hide. She peered nervously around the edge closest to the end of the balcony, hoping it would help obscure her horns.. not that she would be easy to spot against the inky black background that had formed around the room.

The figure that pulled itself up from the hole was foreign and familiar in equal parts to her, the being moving with some difficulty, seemingly in pain. He looked like the darling devil himself
except... stretched out, and warped. His left hand was large and cartoonish like it was meant to be, with a sepia tinted white glove, but his right was smaller, like a human's, only ending in sharp claws. His chest was warped and misshapen as if someone had taken hot wax cylinder and pulled it outwards and shoved it inwards repeatedly before vaguely shaping it into a chest and midsection and used it for his body. A sepia tinted white bow limply hung from his chest, sad and disheveled, nothing like his cartoon self.

As he pulled himself up, he revealed his left foot was thick and club like, almost like it had started to form a proper leg and tap shoe, before an extra bucket of ink had been added, leaving the limb misshapen and oversized. His right was smaller, and looked like a normal foot mixed with a goats hoof, though he seemed to have trouble balancing on the thinner limb. He sported a long tail, which whipped irritably behind him, working furiously to help him maintain his balance, the spade tip and thin length dripping ink.

The worse part however was his face. A massive, painful looking grin ate up the bottom half of his face, which was tinted sepias like the other white parts of his body. What of his face wasn't eaten up by the twitching smile was covered in an excess of ink. His horns were further apart that normal for him, given his upper head more of a crescent moon shape. She couldn't see any eyes, though she could she thin gray scribbling under the ink that looked almost like sketch marks. But that smile.. It made a cold shiver dart up her spine. Despite it's happy shape, to her it radiated pain and distress, like a trapped animal.

"Get a good look, toots?"

An echoey voice questioned in a snippy tone. It was familiar, a slightly high pitched but male voice, though it was deeper than his cartoon version. The voice undoubtedly echoed from the warped Bendy, and she jumped with alarm as she realized she had been spotted so easily. Life had been easier when she didn't have horns to hide. She flushed at his next statement, puffing up a butt "Like what you see?"

"Gohhf-" Pippen sputtered inelegantly, flushing harder as he chuckled. So much for a smart come back. She had been so preoccupied in comparing this form to what she knew of the cartoon form that she hadn't the wit to spare on a smart response. "Shut up!"

He laughed again, beginning to walk towards the balcony, though it didn't seem an easy action for him. He moved at a fairly reasonable pace, but his gait was troubled and his smile was even more strained as he moved. Now that she thought about it, she hadn't seen his mouth move even when he spoke. Could he move it?

"Make me, toots." He quipped, mischief in his tone as he challenged her. It had been a long time since he had some fun, and he couldn't really have fun when around Henry.. being around that man only made him see red. As he neared, Pippen noted he was tall, nearly twice her height, and despite his pained gait he moved with purpose. His tail still whipped around, working to keep him balanced and constantly whipping off excess ink that seemed to drip relentlessly from him. "Unless you're scared."

"Don't call me toots." Pippen snapped back, tail whipping like an angry cat's. She scarcely noticed it's actions, the motion automatic in response to her emotions. "You don't know me, punk. I ain't afraid of you."

"Oh really?" He sniped back. "That's why you're bristling like a scared little kitty cat up there."

He was getting closer to the balcony, and after a moment she took a step back, her wariness winning out. She had nothing to fight with, and the inky being had height and possibly strength on her. The imp would have to play this fight with care if she did engage. Her reaction only garnered another laugh from the devil, his smile feeling a bit more genuine as he called out her bluff.
Bendy started to climb up the balcony, not moving his gaze from the shivering imp. His eyesight wasn't the greatest thanks to the ink deformation, but the longer he kept focus on something the more details he could make out.. and the easier he could keep a lock on them if they moved. She looked like a pretty standard demon class toon from where he came from, though he sensed she was slightly.. off. Joey hadn't made more toons, hadn't in years, that much he knew. So she had to be in the same boat as Henry, only coming out more unique.

She abruptly bolted away, moving faster and with more certainty that he expected from someone who was utterly quaking in their boots moment before. Maybe she really wasn't as afraid as he thought. Or maybe she was just good in stressful situations. Didn't matter either way to him. There were few ways out of this room, and even if she found one he would be able to track her down.

What did catch his attention was the sound of hasty footsteps approaching the boards, the ink being crouching out of sight quickly. What followed was the solid 'thunk' of an ax biting into wood. His vision tinted red along the edges as he spotted Henry, the man lifting an ax overhead once more. How had he gotten ahold of that? No matter, he was putting himself closer to the barrier of wood than he ever had in the past, and all Bendy needed was the right timing-

As the ax 'thunked' into the wood once more, the ink demon darted forward, clawed hand closing around Henry's wind pipe. Bendy's twitching grin widened as his grasp on Henry tightened, the man scrabbling helplessly against the twisted toons hold. Just as Henry began to gasp and gag, two things happened in conjunction that forced Bendy to let go.

The first was the feeling of something colliding with his back, a small form wrapping an arm around his own throat and squeezing, sharp teeth biting into the back of his head as boot covered feet kicked into his spine back. The second was the collision of something hot and round into his wrist, his vision obscured by the light of a halo before it made contact with his wrist, burning his flesh with the terror and fury of it's owner.

Bendy unleashed a ghastly screech as he released Henry, stumbling back from the doorway and falling over the balcony. The fall crushed his first attacker beneath him, the ink demon taking a bit of pleasure in hearing the wheezing gasp of pain that escaped the small imp. She started to scramble furiously to get out from underneath him, biting his hand as he reached up to try and pin her down. He had wanted to take care of Henry first, but it seemed they'd be doing the usual song and dance again-.

The first floor of the workshop began to flood with ink, pipes having burst at the demonic screech. The ink made it a bit easier for Pippen to escape Bendy's grasp, though she struggled and panicked as the flood of ink overtook her. She vanished down the square hole in the center of the room, leaving behind a furious Bendy. All three were still loose, even after one had been trapped in a room with him! He would be catching Hell for this, that was sure.

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"Henry? Henry!" Perci shouted desperately, tugging the injured man away from the boards. The angel's eyes were wide with terror, still shaking from their close encounter with 'Bendy'. A metal hatch had slid down and shut off the hall leading to the pedestal room and other halls, though ink was beginning to spew out from behind it as well. The door to the break room was locked shut, though Perci wouldn't have gone downwards even if he could. He dragged Henry away from the
Ink Machine room, the former animator rapidly recovering and standing up to begin wading through the ink.

"I'm OK-" Henry coughed weakly, struggling against the furious current of ink. "I'm OK-"

A low groan came from beneath them, Henry lurching forward, grabbing Perci's hand. The angel toon's ink slicked hand slid out of his, the younger male abruptly vanishing from sight as he fell into the hole that had formed beneath him. A loud scream echoed up from the hole, the last sound Perci managed to make before landing far below, body dropping into a lake of ink. His body was caught on the jagged refuge beneath the ink, cutting him up quite a bit and leaving him to struggle in the inky liquid in a blind, pained panic. He was too far gone for Henry to reach or help, leaving the young man to depend on himself.

"P-Perci-!" Henry called weakly. He clutched the wall, not letting the flow of ink take him down the hole. It wasn't the usual way he went to the lower levels, and he wasn't sure what would happen to the siblings if he were to fall.. permanently. As he debated over his options, the sound of crunching wood caught his attention, the former animator looking up in alarm.

"HENRY!" Bendy shrieked in fury, able to break through the boards for the first time thanks to Henry's earlier attempts to cut through them. The warped cartoon snarled as he tried to catch up to Henry, wading against the furious ink current. Henry began to wade away from him, knowing there was nothing he could say that would stop the ink demon. Nothing he said ever seemed to get through to him, his words always falling on deaf ears.

The chase was painfully slow thanks to the ink, but Bendy seemed to be struggling as well, gasping and panting as he fought the current. He usually didn't have such a hard time with his pursuits.. unless his invulnerability was hampered by the intrusion as well. Or the siblings attacks had been more effective than Henry had initially thought. Especially Perci's halo. Bendy had reacted harshly to contact with the halo.

He had nowhere to run but his usual route, every other route closed off. He could still possibly escape through the front door, though the thought of abandoning the siblings left his stomach twisting with guilt. He could always send help though, or come back more prepared, and him dying wouldn't help either of them.

"There's nowhere to run, Henry! I'm going to get you, you filthy traitor!" Bendy rasped behind him. He was uncomfortably close, but Henry was just keeping ahead of him. The man rounded the bend to the front door, reaching desperately for it. The door was rattling and thumping oddly, but he paid it no heed, not expecting to reach it. He braced himself, expecting the floor to give out just short of the door, as usual... but it did not. Instead, he walked over it, the floor creaking threateningly but remaining in place.

The door was still shaking and trembling as he approached, and abruptly slammed open, an unfamiliar figure slamming into him. The light outside was warped and skewed, as if seen through a kaleidoscope, the unfamiliar male figure that slammed into him very human. He was lightly tanned, with pale blonde hair spiked in a Mohawk and dark brown eyes. That was all Henry saw before the young male slammed into him, stumbling in from the force of his assault on the front door, which snapped shut behind him as the pair of men fell into the ink.

The floor gave out beneath their combined weight, Henry momentarily seeing Bendy snarling down the hole as they fell, before they both fell into a pool of ink. The stranger was struggling against the inky substance, the current nearly dragged them apart, but Henry held onto the newcomer, managing to get above the current. He was blinded by the ink in the moment, but he
still had the other male in his grasp as they were swept away from the immediate danger of Bendy. and the safety of outside...
Pippen clawed at the side of the wall as she fell, wings splayed helplessly. The cascading ink battered her small wings and made gliding nearly impossible, let alone flight, that us if she was even capable of proper flight. This was hardly the time to find out, her fingers scrabbling wildly at the wall she was closest to. Her fingers caught and slipped several times, before finally catching an edge, the imp clinging desperately to the ledge with her finger tips.

She slowly pried herself upwards, defying the flow of ink and dragging herself into an open air vent. For several moments she lay on her side just inside the vent catching her breath. Once she had recovered, she began to slowly crawl into the vent, sensing she needed to get further from Bendy before he caught up to her. After all, he had come from the same hole she had fallen down, and would likely be able to catch up to her easily.

It was slow going, Pippen having to crouch as she crawled through the vent. She moved as quietly as she could, ears pricked for any hint of trouble, her heart beating wildly in her chest. That is, if she still had a heart as a toon. Either way, she could feel the trepidation beating away in her chest in a parody of what her human heart had once done. She only hoped that it wasn’t as loud to everyone else as it was to her.

For a while, she moved onwards undisturbed. That is, until the atmosphere in the vents changed. Pippen paused, chest heavy with fear, learning what it felt like to be a mouse in a maze with a hungry cat.

"Where are you toots?" Bendy's voice called from somewhere far away, the echo of his voice accented by the winding tunnels of ventilation. "Cooome ooooon oooouwut!~ I ain't gonna hurt ya, toots! I just wanna talk!"

He had certainly been talkative before.. and he hadn't outright attacked her.. But he had attacked Henry without much provocation. And he was likely not too happy about her retaliation. She decided then that it would definitely not be a good idea to be caught by the ink demon. Especially not while they were in the vents, where he had all the advantages and she had none.

"Why you gotta make this hard on a guy, toots?" Bendy's voice called, sounding unnervingly close. The proximity made her legs tremble with terror, hampering her ability to move for several seconds. When she continued, she wasn't as quiet as before, though she hoped his movements would mask the sound of her own. He was larger than her, and definitely heavier.

It took all of her self control to bite back a screech of alarm as she slid down an abrupt incline, coming to a loud stop at the end. Bendy's taunting halted, though the thumps and thuds that had been steadily nearing her did not. Pippen bit back the urge to cry our in frustration and fear, forcing herself to move forward quickly but quietly, tail pressed into her back as the thumps and thuds grew nearer to her. She managed several desperate blind turns, before abruptly coming to a stop, realizing she was at a dead end. There was a vent, but it was firmly screwed on. She could possibly work her tail through the slats, and the tip was pretty solid..

"Nowhere to run, Toots." Bendy's sing song voice echoed from somewhere within the web of vents, dangerously close. "All the vents in this section lead to dead ends. Let's cut to the end of this
chase already. I already told ya's I ain't gonna hurt ya, but if you keep making this difficult I can't promise you won't get banged around some. Lotta mean things outside these vents, girly. Not many will treat you as nice as I will~

Pippen paused, but continued to thread her tail through the vent, maneuvering it slowly towards the first screw. It wasn't easy, but she managed to start unscrewing the first corner with the edge of her tail tip, heart pounding uncontrollably. She could hear Bendy slowly thumping closer, muttering to himself as he systematically checked each dead end. She managed to get the first screw loose, pulling her tail back in and threading it through a lower slat to start working on the first bottom screw. This one was a bit faster, given it hadn't been screwed in properly, but the screw fell out of it's slot entirely, clinking down to the ground below.

"I think I hear a little mouse." Bendy snickered, the sound of his movements resounding through the vents once more, now making a beeline for her. There was no slow, meticulous searching in his motions now, the single soft sound having been enough to give her away.

Pippen worked furiously on the other bottom screw, heart beating wildly in her chest as the thumps and thuds got closer and closer, the screw only half undone as a hand latched onto her shoulder.

"Got ya~" Bendy snickered behind her. The look of terror on her face partly made things funnier, though deep down he suspected most of the fear came from how he looked, and not how well he had gotten one over on her.

Pippen twisted with a scream, a boot aimed at Bendy's head, the wild kick grazing one of his horns. The male yelped in surprise, having expected her to just give up at this point, Pippen struggling wildly against his hold, her terrified eyes now lit with wild defiance. She slammed her body into the vent, the first time loosening it, a second slam breaking the third screw out of place, the vent slipping to the side as it hung loosely from its single screw.

"You ain't got nothing!" Pippen shouted at him, slamming through the gap, though she hadn't gotten free of his hand. The large white glove easily encompassed most of her back, the male devil stubbornly holding onto her. She struggled against his grip, not hesitating to bite his hand, though the thick glove protected his digits.

"D*** girl, calm down!" Bendy shouted at her, the curse word censored by an odd squeak sound.

"F*** you, you calm down!" Pippen snapped back, her curse censored by a duck quack. Toon logic. Of course.

"I'm as cool as a cucumber, dollface." He chirped back mischievously, leaning out of the vent. He was going about escaping the vent slowly, careful not to lose his grasp on his prize. Pippen struggled furiously, though the fear that had been running rampant through her while in the vents had eaten through a great deal of her strength.

"You're the one acting so wild you'd make a Tasmanian devil blush." He chortled, enjoying himself. Once he was partly out of the vent, he reached towards a pool of ink with his ungloved hand, keeping the unprotected digits away from the angry imp. He had already learned she wasn't afraid to use her teeth, and her fangs were pretty sharp. The ink responded to his silent command, slinking up towards him like a snake, before latching onto Pippen. It wrapped around her, tying up her limbs with thick globs of ink, rendering her helpless as she struggled to free herself.
With Pippen secure, he dropped her, the imp falling with a solid thump onto the ground. A small squeak escaped her as she was winded, eyes shutting in pain. As she recovered, Bendy finished pulling himself out of the vent, landing next to her on all fours, his grin the first thing that greeted her as she opened her eyes again.

"I told you, you'd get dinged up some if you didn't just cooperate." He nonchalantly declared, picking the girl up and holding her like one would carry a briefcase. She was even swung a bit as he began to walk, though that could have been due to his awkward gait, and not a purposeful move to add insult to injury.

"Why would I cooperate!? You tried to strangle Henry for no reason!" Pippen spat up at him, bristling angrily. She gasped as he stopped, lifting her up so they were face to face. His smile was twitching again, anger resonating from it.

"What I do to Henry is my business, dollface. Me and him? We got history. He ain't as innocent and nice as you think." With that he dropped his arm, leaving Pippen to dangle once more as he began to walk again. "But my business with him ain't the same as my business with you."

"W-What's your business with me then?" She demanded, trying to hide the fear slipping into her tone.

"You? You's going to have a nice chat with my Mr. Drew." He chuckled, raising a hand mockingly. "You've hit the big time kid. Caught the bosses eye the moment you showed up in here. You're certainly going places." He laughed, shaking his head a bit. As if Mr. Drew would have any use for someone so wild and unreasonable. He probably just wanted to get the girl and her brother out of the way so they could wrap up things with Henry.

"Drew-" Pippen paused, eyes widening a bit. "As in Joey Drew?" He nodded, ever present grin twitching.

"Yeah. It'd be smart of you to play nicer with him than you have with me. He ain't as forgivin' as me." There was something new to his tone as he spoke of the man, a note of fear. It gave Pippen pause, wriggling unhappily against her bindings. What kind of monster had Joey Drew become if he invoked fear in the warped devil? She may have been able to do Bendy mild harm here and there, but he had inevitably shaken off the damage like a dog shaking off water. What could Mr. Drew do that could scare or harm someone like Bendy? "Good to see you can actually listen."

"Shut up." Pippen snapped, tail twitching against it's bindings in anger. "If you hadn't cheated I would have kicked your a**.

That made him burst out laughing, the male stopping to wipe away non existent tears from where his eyes would have been. "Oh my, you are a riot, toots. You? Beat me up? Look at yourself! You're shakin' like a leaf and running like a scaredy cat!"

"It's called strategy." Pippen defiantly declared, head falling a bit as he burst into laughter once more.

"I didn't know cowardice was a strategy!" He laughed. "I didn't realize a mouse running away from a cat was part of it's strategy!"

"You've obviously never seen Tom and Jerry." Pippen muttered, though Bendy either didn't hear
her, or didn't care about what she said, too busy laughing at her and cracking jokes at her expense. Pippen fumed quietly, continuously testing her bindings to try and find some weakness. After a while, she managed to get her tail loose, the metal of her tail tip slicing through the ink.

Bendy was too busy laughing to notice her tail was loose, or how she was putting it to use in the moment. Pippen moved with care now, slowly slicing away the ink around her wrists and ankles with her tail tip, weakening but not fully breaking the inky bindings. Once both bindings were thoroughly cut up, she initiated her plan, slicing first through her ankle bindings, and then her wrist bindings. She hit the ground running, Bendy shouting in confusion and then anger as he realized what had happened.

"Would you just stop running!" He shouted after her, his heavy footfalls never far behind her. The imp didn't waste her breath responding, running down halls at random. Eventually she managed to find a path that would let her keep circling around without hitting a dead end. Bendy stubbornly stayed on her tail, unwillingly to risk losing sight of her and letting her hide out of sight. It had been hard enough to track her down while she was in the vents, and those were pretty straight forward.

"Stop chasing me than!" Pippen shouted back at him, not daring to look back at him as she ran. "Kinda makes sense-!"

"I 'kinda' can't!" Bendy snapped back at her. "I told you, you've got a date set up with Mr. Drew, and he ain't the type to accept being skipped out on!"

"Sorry, I don't date strangers!" Pippen yelled back. "I'd sooner go on a date with you than a dude with a track record like Joey Drew!"

Pippen made her move then, turning quickly down a narrow, cluttered hall. She was small enough to dart around the clutter of shelves, cleaning supplies, and miscellaneous items, but it was too cluttered for Bendy to maneuver through easily. She could hear him near the beginning of the hall, cursing and muttering as he initially tried brute forcing his way through.

Eventually the imp had put a good distance between herself and the devil, and was able to find a spot to hide, curling up in a strange booth she found. It was a simple wooden construct, with a wooden slat on the upper portion of the door to peer out through if she climbed up far enough. For the moment however, she nervously curled up on the floor of the booth, breathing as softly as she could. The booth had a strange, tingly feel to it, but it wasn't outright harming her, so she ignored it.

Eventually the grumbling, muttering devil's voice greeted her ears, long after her breathing had evened out. He was muttering grudgingly to himself, and irritably shoved the booth Pippen was hiding in as he passed. He hissed softly in pain as the energy within the booth bit back at his hand, the devil mumbling something about 'stupid angels'. Pippen didn't dare to make a sound, staying still as the booth slowly settled back into place. After a moment, she closed her eyes, taking this brief respite to recover her energy.

Henry sputtered as he and his new companion finally reached the end of the line, the pair landing on a thick grate. The ink continued to flow around them, but the grate slats were too thin for them to fall through. The older man dragged the other out of the ink, panting weakly as they
were freed of the thick substance. He turned to eye the third person to join him in the workshop.

The young adult was still coated in the ink, which bubbled around him for several moments, before abruptly popping and slipping away. White feathers appeared as the ink parted, a black beak now replacing the boy's mouth. His body was a blend of human shape and bird features, primarily looking like a proper cartoon cockatoo, sporting a sizeable crest resting atop his head. His eyes slowly opened, dark brown eyes looking up to Henry in confusion.

"Percii?" The male turned cockatoo drawled slowly. He blinked weakly, slowly standing up. His legs were feathery at his calves, before giving away to scaly bird legs and talons. He looked like a full on bird, though with the added anthropomorphism common to cartoon animals. Five of his feathers at the end of his wings acted similarly to hands for him, something they discovered as the male rubbed his head, wincing lightly. "Oooh.. that's going to smart."

"I'm not Perci.. but he was with me earlier." Henry offered. "Who-

"Who are you?" The bird cut in, standing unsteadily. "Where are my cousins, Punk? My little cousin texted me that she was stuck in this building, and I come to this building and the world outside goes all weirdy-smeary, and now I'm a friggin' bird! What the h*** is going on in this place?! And what the h*** was that? It did it again, d*****!"

"If you quiet down, and give me a chance, I will explain what I know." Henry muttered. "How did you even know to come here-

"I got a text on my phone from her. Really short, didn't explain much other than her being stuck in an abandoned building. Me n' some friends worked out how to track her phone, and bingo bango, here I am." The bird pulled his phone from his non existent pocket on instinct, realizing what he had done moments later. "Wait- Holy s*** did you see that? Did you see that? Dude I pulled that outta nowhere-"

"Yeah- Toons can do that-" Henry answered uncertainly, eyeing the phone curiously. He hadnt seen anything like it. Then again a good number of years had passed according to the siblings.

"Toons? You're saying we're toons?" The bird squawked. He paused, looking over himself, feathers puffing up a bit testingly. He looked like he was going to freak out for a moment, before taking a deep breath, forcing a calm look. He looked back up to Henry, breathing deeply. "Yeah, I guess that makes sense but like- How? Also, Name. You haven't given it. Here, I'll give you mine. My name is Oliver Green. I'm here looking for my cousins, you'll recognize them best by the fact they fight like a cat and dog stuck in a water bucket together."

Henry laughed weakly in spite of himself, Oliver proving to be an animated talker, his wings and 'hands' waving around and gesturing as he spoke. His face was surprisingly apt at delivering all manner of looks and expressions as well despite it's odd shape, and simple pie cut eyes, the male's behavior making it seem like he had always meant to be a toon. Henry let the other settle down a bit before answering him.

"My name is Henry..." He began, quickly explaining the situation to the bird. To his credit, Oliver managed to stay quiet long enough to listen to his full explanation. By the end of it, Oliver sighed, rubbing a wing over his crest.

"Aw geeze. They really got themselves in over their head." He sighed. "Man, if Perci had just listened to me and left her alone we wouldn't have this problem. But we're here now.. might as well
make the best of it." He started trotting towards the hall, glancing to Henry. "So you say you've
done this a bunch of times? That means you know what's coming up. Or at least, have an idea of
what's supposed to happen since we started breaking things.. Care to give a fella a heads up?"

"Well, I know this path leads into the music department-" Henry began, following Oliver.

"Musice department? Nice! I'll be in my element." Oliver commented, forcing himself to be
cheerful in spite of how bizarre this situation was. That was his plan at least, nervous panic
nibbling at the edge of his mind.

"And we'll need to clear out some ink along the way.. and possibly run into Sammy Lawrence.
Most likely we'll run into him. I get the feeling this broken loop won't be so kind as to leave him
out." Henry continued unperturbed.

"You mean like that ink?" Oliver questioned, pointing further down the stairs. Sure enough the
rest of the stairs were flooded with inky liquid, the cockatoo glancing to him. "So.. Who's going for
a swim? I mean, I'm nearly half your size now, and I'm not sure birds are good swimmers." He
eyed the ink, than Henry, than the ink, raising his brows.

"I'll get it." Henry answered easily. "It won't be the first time I get my feet wet. Just stay close
once the ink is drained, alright?"

"Roger doger!" Oliver declared, saluting the older male. "Your sacrifice will not be forgotten
Henry. One day, we will get you some dry, ink-less shoes."

Henry chuckled a bit, shaking his head at the younger's words. It was refreshing just to meet
new people after so long, and new people who
didn't want him dead
at that. Oliver's chipper mood
was actually lifting his spirits a bit. A darker part of him wondered how long his sunny mood
would last in this place, but he pushed it down. There was no point in being the force that crushed
the spirit of the newcomer.

After a bit of wading, he found the first release valve, twisting it so the ink would flow away.
Once it had receded, the tip-tap of Oliver's talons on wood greeted his ears, the Cockatoo rapidly
making his way to Henry's side. He grinned, crest wagging with pride. "Right behind you bud. I've
got your back, so long as I'm not drownin'."

They continued like this for a bit, with Oliver following him closely, stopping whenever the ink
level was too high. Then Henry would walk ahead, find the drain pipe and empty the stairs further,
allowing the chatty bird to catch up. Eventually they reached the bottom floor, the bird shaking ink
off of his dark feet as he walked out of the stairwell with Henry.

"You know, this is kinda an occupational hazard having something that can literally flood part
of your building. Do you guys get hazard pay? Or rather did you? Because if not I think your due
some." Oliver squawked on, trotting downwards. He paused as he glanced to the left, blinking in
surprise. Written on the wall in thick ink were the words 'THE CREATOR LIED TO US' "Hey, uh,
Henry? What does that mean?"

"If I'm honest.. I'm not entirely sure. I'm not sure who they are referring too.. and what was told
to them." Henry muttered once he had caught up. "I think it might refer to Joey but honestly, that's
just a guess."

"Ah. Well. I hope that ain't a bad sign." Oliver muttered, rubbing his chin nervously.
"Well it's usually there, if that puts you more at ease." Henry offered as he continued walking. They followed the hall out to it's end, where it deposited them in a small room with several coffins and a strange pentagram on the ground. "Try not to touch that. It always hurts me when I do."

"Hey, uh, I thought you said we were going to the music department, not the black magic department." Oliver squawked after a moment of gawking uneasily at the symbol. He slowly edged around it, sticking close to Henry as they maneuvered around the large symbol. As they neared the coffins, Henry noticed an Ax peeking out from behind the nearest one and quickly picked it up.

"We are. It's just beyond this area." Henry calmly reassured.

"If you say so. But if I don't see some music stuff soon and instead more weird voodoo magic s***, I'm outta here." Oliver muttered. Henry paused, almost laughing out loud at the phrase. What were the chances he would use the catch phrase of the studio's infamous janitor? He snorted despite himself, earning a confused look from Oliver, but he didn't press it. He just figured Henry had gone a bit weird after all this loop business.

"So, have you tried like, talking to any of these people? You said you used to work with some, and that Bendy.. ain't he supposed to be a nice guy? I mean in the cartoons he was kinda mischievous, but he usually defaulted to nice." Oliver continued, trotting downstairs as he pushed the next door open. He paused at the sight of a broken shelving unit, which had been decorated to resemble a strange alter of sorts. He glanced nervously between the candles and bowl set up, as if to take offering, as well as the words in center of the set up. 'HE WILL SET US FREE', a small friendly looking Bendy cutout hanging on the wall next to the words.

"I have." Henry answered, walking past the 'altar' without a second thought. "But most either don't listen, or are too far gone to understand."

"Have you tried yelling?" Oliver questioned only half jokingly. He walked away from the altar as well, their footfalls the only sounds as they explored the room. Henry searched for any changes that could be put to their advantage, while Oliver took notice of an old recorder of sorts. Out of curiosity, he approached and tapped the play button, cocking his head as a new, calmer voice was added to the room, a bit tinny from it's playback on the machine.

'He appears from the shadows to rain his sweet blessings upon me. The figure of ink that shines in the darkness. I see you, my savior. I pray you hear me.'

'Those old songs, yes, I still sting them. For I know you are coming to save me. And I will be swept into your final loving embrace.'

'But, Love requires sacrifice. Can i get an amen?'

"The h*** does that-" Oliver began.

"I said: Can I get an amen?" The voice rang out once more, though no longer the tinny playback of the recorder. Oliver jumped, spinning around wildly to try and locate the voice, though Henry stayed fairly calm.

"Depends on what you're doing with it." Oliver weakly answered, crouching a bit with unease, feathers ruffled. He looked up to Henry for answers, the man sighing.
"That was Sammy Lawrence." Henry intoned.

"Hate to break it to you, but your buddy sounds a bit loopy." Oliver mumbled, stalking closer to Henry, shaking his tail feathers irrationally. "I think this'll take a lot of shouting to knock him off of whatever delusion of grandeur he's riding."

"I don't know if he can be helped at all." Henry weakly admitted, turning towards the next hallway. Out of all the loops he had been in, nothing he ever said broke through to the man. Oliver muttered to himself as they walked the turns of the hallway, stopping in repulsion as they came across a flooded section. The floor was lower here, allowing the ink to pool up quite a bit.

After a great deal of cross muttering, and the revelation that Henry did not know how to drain this hall, Oliver jumped in, feathers puffing up as the cold liquid lapped at his lower body. He gave a full body shiver, puffing up to twice his size as he began to slog through the ink as quickly as possible, muttering about poor building management the entire way. Henry slogged in after him moments later, trying to stay close to the smaller, lighter toon.

Once Oliver reached the midsection of the dilapidated hall, a humanoid ink figure walked past the opposing doorway, muttering to themselves. Oliver let out a loud call of surprise, shouting at the figure but getting no response. His wings churned until they took him out of the ink, the man turned bird flying after the stranger. "Oi, You! Hold your-"

He fell silent as he found a dead end, with only the Bendy cutout the figure had been carrying left behind. After a clumsy landing, the cockatoo man started to tap his talons on the ground irritably, muttering to himself in annoyance. "I just wanted to talk.."

"Oliver- You can fly?" Henry questioned as managed to get out of the ink as well, looking down at the cockatoo.

"Ah? What? Oh- Oh I did! Holy snap I did!" Oliver squawked, turning to face him once more. "I was just so irritated with all that ink, and then that dude comes trotting along, ignoring us, and I just wanted to catch up. And so I did."

"Can you do it again?" Henry asked.

"I.. I think so? I mean I'm a bird! How hard can it be?" Oliver's tone changed from hesitance to determined certainty, his chest puffing up with pride. "So, let me guess, Mr. Overalls is the recorder guy?"

"The one and the same. Though I don't think he'll appreciate the nickname." Henry muttered, remembering how touchy Sammy Lawrence had been back when he was human.

"Well he gets a nice name when he comes to parley. You said me and my cousins being here has smashed things up, so who's to say we can't make a change here? Sides... That name sounded sorta familiar." Oliver hummed, trotting down the hall once more. He stopped as they came to a metal gate blocking the path, though it was only partly closed, about a foot of space between the ground and the gate.

"Oh right.. I don't think I saw any of the buttons to activate this on the way here.." Henry mumbled, brow furrowing with concern. Than again, the position changed almost every loop.. but he still hadn't seen any. He wasn't looking forward to wading through the ink again to try and find them.
"Well there's gotta be a release on the other side, right? Ain't no point in a gate that can only be opened on one side. I think I can shimmy through 'ere.." Oliver crouched, slowly waddling under the gate. "Yup! You stay put Henry, I'll get this open in a jiffy."

The bird waddled around slowly, eyeing the walls, finding the lever nearby. He jumped up, grabbing the lever and pulling it down. The gate began to slowly rise, Oliver hopping down and puffing up with pride. He scarcely noticed the shadow that fell over him as he waited for the slow gate to open, only noticing a moment too late, a squawk of alarm escaping him as he felt something slam into the back of his head.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

I went back and edited a bit in the first three chapters, though it's really minor stuff someone pointed out to me I had left out. I don't plan on going back and doing stuff like this again, but I felt I needed to fix the first three since they are the first impression readers get :Sweat:

With a sputter and gasp, Perci made one final lurch above the inky river, his hand finding purchase. He groaned and gasped as he pulled himself out of the ink, wincing in pain. His body pulsed with pain, though his left leg ached the worst, his ink covered fingers clawing at the wood he had pulled himself onto. It seemed to be some artifical river bank, the flow of ink he had escaped continuing to pass him by at the same rapid pace it had carried him with.

He wasn't sure which part had been the worst about the experience, the damage his body had suffered when catching on the hidden debris within the ink, or the voices. At first, he hadn't noticed them, blinded by pain as he was, but the more time he spent submerged in the ink, the faster he became aware of them. Pitiful, miserable voices, pleading for help, for mercy, to go home, for forgiveness, for an explanation, for anything. There had been so many the cacophany had nearly overwhelmed his mind and added his misery and fear to it's collective.

Perci coughed up a glob of thick ink, pushing himself upwards. His body was still coated in the ink that he had escaped, his mind a jumble of emotions that were his and not his, the young angel having trouble sorting out which was which. At the moment, he looked more like a black slug than his toon form, though as he collected himself, more ink slowly peeled away. It wasn't a fast process, and he wasn't sure how long he was there, collecting his scattered thoughts.

Eventually however, part of him had reformed properly, dark stains of ink marring his hair, face, and halo. He was shaking hard, gloppy arms wrapped around himself as he tried to recover from the experience, all of the fear and stress he had tried to stifle bubbling up to the surface. As his breathing became more labored, he began to look around, hoping that observing his surroundings would help anchor himself in the present.

He was sitting on wood, the platform wide and seemingly fairly solid and secure. Behind him, a massive river of ink flowed to wherever it was going, splitting off into smaller currents further down the line where concrete divisions had been put up to do so. It seemed he was in a matienence area for the river, given there were several metal poles present, some with nets, possibly meant to clean out blockages from the river when there were still people present. There was a machine nearby with all manner of guages on it, but he hadn't the slightest idea what any of it meant, even after his halo helped to illuminate it.

Slowly, he stood, feeling more ink shed away. His body felt more intact now, less proan to fall apart and slip back into that inky hell, though his leg.. His left leg still ached terribly, and when he looked down he saw why. It was twisted slightly, his boot and ankle fused. Perci's eyes went wide at the realization, mind ablaze with fear now. Was this permanent? Didn't cartoon characters usually recover from injury ridiculously quickly?
Had the ink done this?

He turned back towards the rushing river, a chill going up his spine. When he had become aware of the voices, he, and many of the other voices, had fixated on the pain in his leg, the area that had taken the most damage in the fall. Had that stopped it from healing? In cartoons, characters never seemed to pay heed to their injuries for more than a moment, and would subsequently heal pretty quickly.. but than again in some cartoons, even following those rules, they did not. This whole place made no sense, and he hadn't the slightest idea of how to tend to his wounds.

_Do you even deserve to heal?_

Perci paled a bit at the dark voice nibbling at the back of his mind, shaking his head. He couldn't think like that, that was crazy-

_After all the harm you've done?_ It challenged

Perci grasped his head, hissing in annoyance and shaking his head. He may have done or said harmful things in the past, but those were in the past! It wasn't his job to make people accept what had happened and get over it, that was their job! He had done nothing!

_You're sister would say otherwise._ The dark voice hissed. _You're not a good person._

'I hate you! Go away! It's your fault he's gone!' Perci shivered at the distant memory of his own voice, a far younger, softer, but still vicious voice. He bowed his head, shaking it hard. There was no way she remembered that. They had been just kids! He had just been upset with his mom, and Pippen had been there at the wrong time! Pippen was a smart girl, she understood-

_She understands your a terrible person. Why don't you just accept it? You only followed her because your family was watching you two. You didn't follow her out of concern._ The voice taunted, relishing in his self inflicted torment.

"Shut up!" Perci hissed, grasping his head and shaking it. He had done nothing wrong! The fault was with Pippen! "Shut up!"

"But my dear, I haven't even had a chance to speak." A new, female voice declared above him, soft but with an edge of danger. "Is that really a way to speak to a lady?"

Perci looked up in confusion, greeted by two silhouettes. One was a tall, thin female with a crooked halo and small horns pressing out of her head, and long dark hair. The other was a massive, wideset figure, with a head similar to Boris the wolf's, though his swollen body was far from the lanky toon's physique. It's hands were massive, and despite it's X shaped eyes, he could feel it glaring down at him.

"You seem a bit troubled. Tell you what, I'll give you a second chance." The female spoke again. Her skin was pale, and her face beautiful.. on the right side at least. The left was malformed and warped, though he didn't dare to stare at it for long. The left side was bumpy and odd, her lips drawn back to show all her teeth, and her eye dark. On the right side, it was more human in appearance, with normal human eyes, smooth skin, and black lipstick.

"What do you say, honey? How about a date with an angel." She reached down with a black-grey hand, Perci uncertain if it was solidified ink or ink stains, the dark mark coating both arms. She wore a dark spaghetti strapped dress with a faded white bow on the chest, and another larger one on her midback. Her legs were stained the same grey-black as her arms, and her feet bare, though vaguely dress shoe shaped at the bottom. Her horns were sepia toned and at least an inch
long, curving slightly. In the center of her head was a crooked halo which, now that she was closer, he could see was literally embedded in her head.

"A-Ah, s-sure!" He answered quickly, sensing the tension thicken as he remained silent, taking her hand. He stood shakily, trying to hide his damaged limb. "I've n-never had a date with an angel m-miss-?"

"Alice. Call me Alice." The 'angel' declared with a false grin. "You and I have quite a lot to talk about." She purred, eyes momentarily going to his halo, and the portions of his body that were formed perfectly. She knew that either she would find out how he did this, or she would tear him apart and use him to perfect herself. That would be the end game, and the boy had no other options, whether he realized this now or not.

"And this-" She gestured to the swollen wolf. "Is Brutis. He's wonderful help down here. There are so many dangerous beings down here. If you aren't careful, they will snap up an angel like you and tear you apart." She seemed to enjoy making that final statement, especially as the male paled a bit. With her more human form, she had some height on him, though it was just a head in height, but she put every inch of that extra height to use towering over him the best she could.

"A-Ah.. Yeah.. S-Someone e-else m-mentioned that." Perci muttered nervously, eyeing Brutis uncertainly. The massive wolf stared down at him with an unreadable gaze, the closer proximity letting him get a better look at him. He had pipes sticking out of one shoulder, metal binds wrapped around his wrists, and a makeshift collar of metal and thick rope fabric. It helped to hold up a false halo around his head, the wolf's overalls and gloaves stitched up in a multitude of places, as well as splattered with faded ink. His body seemed more inky than anything else Perci had seen so far, rippling over a barely closed hole in his chest.

"Oh? You have another friend in here? Maybe.. another angel?" Alice pried in a sweet tone.

"N-No.. He was a human. human toon I mean. He, uh.. I only saw him for a little bit, before I fell. I didn't get his name or anything." His chest stung a bit at the lie, but a suspicious voice inside told him it wouldn't be wise to mention Henry. He just.. didn't get a good feeling about this woman, and not because of her deformity. There was something to that sickly sweet tone she kept applying that made him cringe with discomfort.

"Oh. That's a shame. Maybe we'll see him again. After all, almost everyone ends up passing through my territory at one point or another." She hummed, beginning to lead him away from the docks. Brutis stomped after them, though he stopped to pick up a metal box filled with black objects that Perci didn't get a good look at. It sloshed as the wolf moved, so it was likely ink based but.. it only made him more uncomfortable.

"M-Maybe." Perci stuttered, biting his tongue in annoyance. He needed to stop cowering without reason! "D-Do you know this place well? I need help finding a way out. I dont think this place is good for me..

"It's no good for anyone here, sweet heart." Alice laughed coldly. "But maybe.. I might be able to work something out.. if you help me a bit as well."

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Pippen slowly woke up, fingers rubbing the wooden interior of the booth. She felt numb and uncomfortable, but that might have been due to her awkward sleeping position. Either way, she
would feel better once she got moving. At least she hoped she would.

It took a good deal of time to orient herself to the situation at hand once more, a near manic chuckle escaping her. She was really a cartoon. She was a cartoon, trapped in some abandoned studio, being chased by a warped version of one of her favorite cartoon characters. How in the hell had she gone from her parents funeral, to this. Sure, she had always suspected to some degree magic was real, but she never expected it to slam her in the face quite like this.

Pippen covered her mouth to hold back more manic laughter, or sobs. She had barely even processed the fact her parents were gone, and had been running on near autopilot ever since they woke up in this place, repressing her fear the best she could. But now she was still, no action to distract her, and reality was really setting in. She could die here. Or end up enslaved here forever. She would never see her cousin again, never finish school, never animate or draw anything of any real note or acclaim. This was where her story was going to end.

No, NO! This was NOT where it would end! She was not going down a sobbing, giggling mess. She had some pride left in her. She would either escape, or die choking on her pride. With that decided, she slowly began to calm down, deciding it was time to leave the booth.

After several moments of careful listening, she slid out of the booth, finding the hall empty but in tatters. Most of the clutter had been smashed or removed, something she was surprised she had slept through. Which brought to question, why hadn't he moved the booth? She glanced to it, raising a brow. It looked pretty simple, and it wasn't nailed down. A simple black loop, or halo, was drawn on the door, and there was a sign on the top that read 'Little Miracle Station'. She wasn't sure what that meant, but at least it had offered some protection.

No time to ponder that, or much actually. She needed to find a path back up so she could get out of this place. She didn't want to find out what the infamous 'Joey Drew' wanted with her.. especially if it was the same Joey Drew she suspected it was. There was only one famous Drew that was involved with the Bendy franchise, and the rumors about him were... less than pleasant. Those few that existed actually. Many came from some of the earliest workers in the studio, and a good portion of those people were actually missing.. Just like a lot of his other workers.

In that time and age, it had caused only a small stir, thanks to how disconnected things were back then, but with advent of the internet.. all it took was one curious person sharing the words of a grandparent who had worked for the studio on an online forum, and suddenly things had snowballed. The strange and secretive manner of the business came to light with time, though most of the secrets the business had kept remained undiscovered by most estimations.

All that was known for certain about the owner was that Joey Drew was reported as being very manipulative, unconcerned with his workers safety.. and possibly a thief if one rumor thread was to be believed. The only problem was their were so few collaborators to these reports, which would have usually tanked the scandal for most people, and it had.. until someone discovered how many people connected to the studios had gone missing, mostly in clumps around the same time, though some were over the years. They all vanished seemingly out of the blue, their only connection to one another being employment at one 'Joey Drew Studios'.

The whole thing stank to high heavens, and while Pippen had never thought nosing through drama and mystery in the cartoon/art world would do much for her outside of minor entertainment, she was grateful it had caught her attention at the time. It didn't explain the literally living cartoons, but it did give her enough forewarning to recognize the fact that Joey Drew probably wasn't the safest person to be around.

As she pondered what little she did know, she slowly explored the nearby halls carefully,
moving quietly and analyzing everything. There were many posters of old Bendy cartoons hung on the walls, a bit worse for ware, as well as some odd statements written down in ink. The ones that stood out most to her were near each other, the first reading 'He is lost', one of the few statements with proper capitulation, and a blocky bold one that simply read 'AN INKY HIDE, A HEART OF GOLD'. Oddly poetic. Was there something about being trapped in a building that drew out these kinds of statements?

Pippen slowly circled back to the Miracle Station, one of the few solid landmarks she had in the tangle of halls. They felt odd, almost unnatural in places, as if the halls had just sprung up on their own, repeats of posters and ink splatters marring the walls. It was almost as if some had formed on their own, out of thin air, with no grand architectural design behind them. Most would just.. abruptly dead end, or lead to a door that opened to a wall. The Miracle Station was the only spot that felt purposefully made.

So she returned, feeling no less oriented as she sat down next to the booth, trying to come up with a mental map. She gave up after several moments, groaning in frustration, her tail whipping with irritation. That caught her attention, as the scant lighting flickered off of her pen nib tail tip, the imp catching her tail and staring at it. She idly wondered if she could do anything with the nib, watching as a drop of ink appeared on the tip, as if summoned by the thought. Her eyes widened a bit, potential tingling at the edge of her mind.

Spurred on by the development, she pressed the nib to the booth outside wall, scribbling a quick, simple image as a test. It was a rabbit with a little halo around one of it's upraised ears, two small detatched angel wings above it's back. It's neck fluff was thick and puffy, as was it's tail, the design suggesting thick fur.

Feeling a bit better from drawing, and still inspired, she smiled a bit, turning so she scribble on the hall wall, since she had no room left on this side of the Miracle Station. She drew a second rabbit, this one with limp ears and two small horns, a spade tail protruding from it's rear. Two little imp wings were placed above it's back to finish them, Pippen smirking with pride as she stepped back to admire her work. Both were simple, with some minor cartoon-y details to them, roughly the same size.

"The duality of rabbits." She hummed with a chuckle, smiling fondly as the drawings summoned memories of her beloved childhood rabbit, Patty, a chubby but mischevious black and white lop. She remembered her as being equal parts mean and nice, able to go from sitting down and licking her leg to tearing apart Pippen's drawings in a heartbeat.

The pair of rabbit drawings began to glow, Pippen bristling in confused alarm as she backed away, looking around quickly. The halls were empty, save for her, so at least this wasn't going to get her caught. Still, she needed to stop the glowing, realizing now how stupid it was to leave a pair of drawings on the wall, as if to announce to everyone 'Here I am!' The glowing stopped on it's own, the drawings peeling away from the walls and falling to the ground in a pair of inky heaps. The Miracle station rabbit's ink melted away, revealing a white and sepia tinted rabbit, while the wall rabbit's seemed to simply solidify around it, leaving a dark black rabbit with glittering bead eyes. They both looked up to her, bobbing their heads curiously as they stretched out towards her, acting just like normal rabbits despite clearly not being normal.

"Oh, wooow.." Pippen murmured softly, slowly crouching and extending her hand, making no sudden movements. She didn't want to startle them.

The imp rabbit hopped forward first, snuffling her hand before beginning to lick it in a sign of friendly acceptance, a real smile gracing Pippen's face. The angel followed moments later, sniffing
all along her arm, 'chinning' what of the imp rabbit and imp toon she could reach, marking them both as being with her. This was the fastest Pippen had ever won over a rabbit's trust, though it probably had something to do with her having made them.

"I- I drew you.. To life. I drew you. And you came to life. I-" Pippen murmured after a moment, dizzy with realization. The pair looked up to her with calm, glittering eyes, Pippen taking a moment to recover. "I-I- I didn't mean to- But you-" She looked at her tail, eyes wide. "Am I magic? Or is it this place?"

The rabbits didn't answer, though the dark one looked to her twitching tail.

"I drew you-" She laughed again, a bit manic, but quickly simmered down. Maybe being a toon helped her process her emotions so quickly, or maybe she was just doing a very good job of surpressing things. She'd probably find out one day, if she lived beyond this place. She stared at the pair of rabbits, and the pair stared at her, silence conquering the hall as Pippen tried to move past what had just happened.

"Well.. I can't just call you rabbits." Pippen murmured. "And I can't leave you here. So we're going to sort this out right here. You-" She pointed to the small dark rabbit. "-Are Impsy. And you-" This time she pointed to the sepia rabbit. "Are Angie. And we're getting out of here together."

Pippen reached out, gently petting the pair once, before slowly standing up. Both of them stood more to attention as she stood, ears pricked and eyes scanning the area silently. Outside of their odd features, they really looked and acted like normal rabbits. But there was something to their eyes, something subtle to their presence, that felt totally unworldly.

"Maybe you two will be able to help me find a way out." Pippen muttered hopefully. "My sense of direction is all out of whack.. And now I'm not sure about drawing markers on the wall to keep track of where I've been..."

The pair looked up at her for several moments, before abruptly beginning down the hall. They paused, waiting for her to follow, before continuing to hop on. They led her to a familiar hall, the one with the two statements that stood out to her. Angie stopped beneath the phrase 'He is lost', staring up at it unwaveringly, while Impsy hopped to the block letters that read 'AN INKY HIDE, A HEART OF GOLD'.

"Yeah, Uh... I've seen these." Pippen offered, glancing between her silent companions. They didn't move, staring at her with their small dark eyes. Really, why was she following around a pair of rabbits? If she hadn't literally just watched them come to life from drawings, she would have chalked this up to weird rabbit behavior. However, since that was the case.. she had to wonder if she was missing something.

The first statement was one of the few times she had seen writing on the wall that was so neat, and properly capitilized as well. Most of the writing around here seemed to have been written in a state of mania or panic, but this one was more deliberate, calm and purposeful. The other, despite being full caps like most of the writing, had the same air of purposefulness to it, the blocky lettering unlike the writing she had seen everywhere else. They were too neat to have been done in haste, and the height at which it was written suggested someone as tall, if not taller, than Bendy had written it.

"Are these.. Important?" She asked after a moment of taking note of how unusual they were. The rabbits looked to her, before looking away, seeming to stare into empty space. Not unusual for rabbits, especially when they were listening to something, but the pair were staring at the exact same spot, as if they could see something she couldn't. It was kind of starting to freak her out,
despite the fact they were technically her creations. "I'm not even sure why I'm asking you questions, I don't thing you can talk."

Pippen stared at them for several more moments, before looking up, jumping as she realized the halls had changed. A new message was present, though it was faded and weak, as if whoever had written it barely had any ink to work with. "Help him, and he will help you."

"What the h***" Pippen squawked, bristling with fear now. Ink Bendy was one thing. He was a solid, visible, and very noisy presence that she could deal with (by running away). But ghosts? Or ink ghosts? How the hell was she supposed to deal with that? And who even was she supposed to help? 'He' could refer to Bendy, who didn't seem to want help or to talk, Henry, who she had no idea where he was, her brother, who she wasn't in the mood to talk to even now, or even Impsy! 'He' could even refer to Joey Drew, and if the wall ghosts thought she was going to make a deal with a man like that, they had another thing coming!

"This is insane." Pippen muttered, finally letting the weight of the situation catch up to her as she shook her head. "What in the world is all of this."

She didn't get an answer, the rabbits abruptly sitting up on their haunches. A soft thump came from Impsy's foot moments before the walls began to darken with veins of ink.

"Run!" Pippen hissed to the pair, hoping they were smart enough to understand the command. They didn't need encouragement, the duo taking off with a soft scrabble of claws, Pippen following close behind. She only realized now how much light Angie's halo let off, stomach twisting a bit with the realization. How were they going to hide that? Sure, Bendy might not be interested in her new companions, but if he were, Angie was a sitting duck.. That is, if he could even catch a rabbit.

"I thought I heard you, toots!" A familiar voice called from behind, slightly irrate and very determined to put an end to this game of cat and mouse. "I knew you couldn't have gotten far--"

"Hey, here's a wild idea! How about you stop chasing me and we like.. I don't know, talk or something?!" Pippen yelled back, still following the rabbits. So far they hadn't lead her into a dead end, but she feared their luck would run out sooner than later.

"So you's can run off again? I ain't that simple, sweet heart." He mocked, not relenting in the chase. "I'm already catching flak because of you and your brother, so if you're really feeling so sympathetic you'd stop running!"

"I feel for you, I really do, but I don't want to go where your offering!" Pippen called back, skidding to a stop as they hit a dead end. The rabbits scrabbled at the nearest door, but when Pippen opened it, it only lead to a wall.

"Well, ain't much choice now, is there?" Bendy declared as he cornered the trio. He paused, cocking his head a bit as he spotted the rabbits, his tone confused. "Where the heck did you get those things- Wait. No. Focus. I ain't letting you go again." He started towards her, the rabbits stiffening with alarm, both prepared to flee. In the end, they were still rabbits, even if they were unusually intuitive.

"They're attack rabbits I drew! Stay back or they'll tear you apart!" Pippen bluffed, standing tall with defiance. He paused, seeming to eye her for a moment, before he continued walking.
"Drew to life you say..?" He sounded legitimately curious, not relenting in his approach.

"Th-That's right, and they don't l-like tall jerks! They're just acting scared so you'll let your guard down!" Pippen stated.

"Sure they are. You know, you are an awful liar. You get all puffy and huffy when you try to lie." He chuckled, Pippen flushing. She considered her options, before noticing an empty can of 'Bacon soup' nearby. At least she could buy the other two their freedom. She didn't hesitate, picking it up and flinging it at Bendy, stalling the ink demon. The rabbits ran, though not in the way Pippen expected. Instead of fleeing outright, the pair slammed into his legs, taking him down.

Pippen didn't waste her chance, moving to run past him, tearing up a bit in pride. She hadn't expected the pair to actually help her, but they had! The two of them had run ahead, likely to hide, but they had bought her a chance to escape as well-

Or so she thought at first, before a hand latched around her leg. The imp squeaked as she fell, twisting quickly to face the furious Bendy. He had partly dragged himself upright, twisting around to grab her and hold tight, the male's tail snapping around wildly. He pulled her closer with an irritated grunt, Pippen squeaking in alarm, her own tail whipping up in response to her emotions-

Her tail! She lurched forward, grabbing the appendage and holding it like one would hold a pen, just as she had earlier. There had to be something she could do to break free, or to convince him to not drag her to Joey Drew. She had a terrible feeling deep in the pit of her stomach that a confrontation with that man would not end well, and she did not want to test that gut feeling.

Her tail tip was dripping ink, Bendy cursing and muttering as he tried to catch ahold of the struggling imp with his other hand, though he balked a bit as she lurched towards him. She scribbled furiously at his face, fast but with purpose, overlapping expressions drawn over his mouth. It was the first thing she could think of, the one issue that stood out the most that was in immediate reach, the ink sinking into his flesh.

They both stopped, Pippen feeling abruptly dizzy and Bendy.. For a moment his face felt hot, before fading to a pleasant warmth. It tingled, like a numb limb beginning to regain feeling, his lips twitching wildly. And then his smile turned downwards into a frown of confusion, one of his hands coming up to touch his face. Both of them were still, staring at this change in awe.

"I-" Bendy's mouth actually opened, his teeth retreating to show a black forked tongue and black interior, his lips moving to form the syllables. He shivered, staring at the girl, one hand still firmly latched around her leg, the other touching his face. "My face- You- How?"

"I- I don't know." Pippen admitted, shaking beneath his grasp. She was still in a terribly vulnerable position, Bendy's grasp was too strong to break out of and his body was so close he could easily lurch forward and pin her. "I-I-I just- I just wanted to help, to convince you to st-stop chasing me and... it.. happened."

He stared at her, or rather it felt like he was, his tail whipping wildly with thought. He didn't let go of her, not risking her running away after this development, his mind awhirl with possibilities. Could she fix the rest of him? That would be so much more than Joey had been able to do. He had promised so much, but delivered so little, always blaming Henry, or even Bendy, for his failures.

His grasp suddenly tightened, Pippen squeaking with alarm. He couldn't let this opportunity slip through his fingers.. and he couldn't take her to Joey either. Even though the pair were 'working together', Joey had a habit of putting himself first, and leaving Bendy with the scraps.. Something he couldn't really complain about either, given the control the old man had over this place... even
though he claimed it was of Henry's making.

"You's.. You are coming with me." He stated calmly, both of them beginning to sink downwards as a pool of ink formed beneath them. She struggled, eyes wild with fear once more, eyeing the ink with uncertainty.

"I-I don't want-" Pippen squeaked, before Bendy cut her off.

"We ain't going to Joey." He rumbled, which was only half reassuring. She hadn't wanted a confrontation with someone with so many terrible rumors swirling around them but.. she wasn't too sure about a trip to where ever with Bendy either. "In fact, we're going somewhere.. special."

She didn't get a chance to question him further as the ink overtook him, the pair vanishing from the hall without a trace.
Chapter 5

Henry flinched at the sound of metal colliding with flesh, crouching under the rising gate to reach the bird faster. He spotted the bird, stars and other symbols spinning around his head as he stumbled. The former animator feared for the younger, though his alarm was soon proven unnecessary.

Oliver recovered rapidly, turning on his attacker and beginning to shriek in fury at them even as they nervously stumbled away from him. His attacker was a vaguely humanoid ink being, it's form slightly rounded and swollen with ink. It was wielding a later metal valve, what it had hit the bird with, and a sepia tinted bowler hat atop it's head. It cringed away from the cockatoo, who was steadily raising the volume.

"Who the H*** do YOU THINK YOU ARE?! YOU CHEEKY F***?! DID YOU THINK THAT WAS FUNNY? WHAT THE HELL DID YOU GAIN FROM THAT?" Oliver shouted, venting his fury and fear on the unfortunate being. Henry was shouting for him to quiet down, glancing around in alarm, expecting more ink beasts, though for the moment they were alone.

Oliver didn't relent, turning on Henry as well. "Henry I am a friggin BIRD. A BIRD, HENRY. I'm NOT A BIRD HENRY. I'm supposed to be human, I was born HUMAN, and now I'm a bird, Henry. Am I even friggin Human anymore?! I don't know Henry! And while I'm in the middle of trying to contain this existential crisis and put on a brave face, some chuckle f*** runs up on me and thinks it's the height of hilarity to bash me in the head with a f****** Valve!"

Henry held up his hands, understanding the other male's frustration, though he hadn't expected this outburst. Oliver had been doing a very good job of pretending he was fine, and Henry had been so eager for a sane companion that he had completely glazed over how disorienting the change must have been. He vaguely remembered that he hadn't taken it that well when he realized he had been changed, back during his first loop so long ago.

"And where the h*** do you think you're going?" Oliver had turned back on the Bowler hat beast, who was trying to sneak towards an ink puddle. The bird got between him and his escape, the swollen ink being raising the valve threateningly. He dropped his arm however as Oliver half jumped, half flew over him, grabbing his hat off of his head. That got it's attention, the swollen monster reaching desperately towards him. Oliver flew up and grasped onto a unlit light fixture out of the swollen being's reach, hanging upside down as he held the hat in one wing hand. "Nu-uh, You ain't getting this back you punk!"

"Oliver, wait!" Henry cut in, desperate to deescalate the matter. He recognized the beast, and it's behavior was already outside the usual parameters for the loops. "I know this one- They're out of place, but i think this is Jack Fain."

The beast seemed to pause at the name, pausing before lurching upwards again, desperately reaching for his hat, his anchor. Oliver pressed closer to the ceiling, hissing at the ink monster as he fruitlessly tried to retrieve his item. "And? That doesn't change the fact he bashed me in the head!"

"H-He's just a bit skittish." Henry argued. "He's always run from me in the past." He took a step closer to the ink being, who shied away from him, still staring up at the bird and his hat.

"Well that's super nice for him!" Oliver spat, still holding the hat. "I feel so proud of him for exploring beyond his comfort zone and assaulting's random bird people he finds!"
Henry cracked a small smile at Oliver despite his anger, shaking his head. He glanced around, noticing another recorder, one he knew was of Sammy, an idea suddenly coming to him. What if they were to confront Jack with his own voice? It was the one thing he had never thought to try, because the swollen one had never responded to his voice, only his approach. He looked up to Oliver, who had returned to berating Fain and bemoaning the situation, releasing his stress in his own way, and didn't seem eager to come down anything soon.

"Oliver- Oliver!" Henry managed to cut into the middle of Oliver's ranting, the bird glaring at him but falling silent. "I have an idea. Keep Jack here, OK? I'll be right back-"

"What happened to not splitting up?" Oliver asked, still fuming, but trying to keep his temper in check while speaking to Henry. It wasn't Henry's fault he was here, or sporting two lumps on the back of his head now.

"You seem pretty safe up there." Henry offered. "And I have an idea. One that might win us an ally."

"I mean.. That doesn't sound too bad an idea." Oliver muttered, rubbing his chin in thought. The hat dangled a little closer to Jack, who lunged for it, falling short but earning him more scolding from Oliver. The bird was off again, once more fuming over the situation, and over his aching head in particular, Henry deciding that had been enough of an agreement for him to move ahead.

He carefully moved around Jack, not wanting to startle the man turned ink beast into fleeing, and failing their plot before he could even get anywhere. He moved to the nearest hall heading downwards, another hall flooded with ink, though he didn't bother with the stairs. Instead he flipped the switch on located in that hall, turning on the lights and power for the music department.

"Oh s*** that's hot!" Oliver squawked behind him, quickly flying off of the light he was holding, instead landing on one of the wall speakers. Jack followed, stretching up towards him, but his reach just fell sort, Oliver backing up further onto a nearby ledge, line with musical print on the wall and wires, to deny him. He held up the hat high, calling down to the swollen one in defiance. "I ain't comin' down without an apology! I've got the hat hostage and I ain't afraid to hurt it!"

Henry watched the pair, pausing as he noticed the swollen one had dropped the valve he was carrying when he had reached for the bird. The animator slowly crept up behind him, grabbing the valve and retreating before the other could react. He eyed the nearby puddles of ink, expecting the usual barrage of attackers, but none came. Perhaps Jack's presence deterred them, or maybe they belonged only to him. After all, he had always been alone when Henry found him, and had always hidden when approached.

He took the change in stride, moving on to the next series of halls, ignoring the recording area and upstairs projection space for now. He didn't need to be there yet, so instead he went to check the infirmary, finding the floor was flooded, as usual. A further check down the hall showed Sammy's office blocked by a powerful gout of ink, stopping him from draining the hall with the power switch. The nearby closet, which held the ever changing clue on how to reach the other ink pump inside of Sammy's 'sanctuary' was locked as well, leaving Henry with some footwork.

With a sigh, Henry turned on his heel, but not before collecting a voice recording from Wally Franks. As usual, the recorded janitor bemoaned the loss of his keys, mentioning how they had likely fallen into one of the garbage cans while he was making his rounds. He finished with his usual catch phrase 'I'm outta here!', making Henry smirk a bit. He had missed Wally after he quit working here. He had missed a lot of people actually. But Young Wally had always been a good friend, all be it a bit scatter brained about his keys.
He kept the voice recording on him, just in case, the man making the rounds around what of the music department were available to him. The first trash can was in a room he hadn't gone into, one in the same hall that lead to Sammy's office, a couple desks seated in the room. As he checked the garbage can, he couldn't help but notice a small change, pausing to look at a drawing on one of the desks.

In all the previous loops it had shown Bendy, proper toon bendy, a full drawing of him, along with four drawings of his head. Each head had been labeled with an emotion, the top two being Happy and Sad, the bottom two Disgust and Anger. What had always bothered him was that all four had been exactly the same, a simple smiling Bendy, though Henry hadn't understood the point in it's creation. There was always a post it note attached to it warning whoever had the page not to let Joey see it, which was understandable given how much Joey abhorred wastefulness in the studio.

But now they were different. The expression heads actually showed proper examples of the emotions they were meant to illustrate, each unique and different from the other. Even the post it note had changed, no longer warning against Joey finding the page. Instead, a new statement was written. 'I just wanted to help.' It was certainly an improvement over the old reference at least. If Henry had been able to find a pen at some point, he would have corrected it himself a long time ago. It didn't feel right to mock his creation, even if it was acting hostile towards him.

He shook his head, returning to his search, not allowing himself to muse over matters for too long. He wasn't sure how long Oliver would be able to keep Jack's attention, and if the urge to hide would win over his desire to have his hat back. The toon man moved to the next room over, the organ room, though he dare not touch the device. He wasn't sure if what the groans he had heard from it before was just an old machine falling apart, or something else. He checked the garbage can quickly, finding nothing, and left the room, shutting the door quietly.

Henry made his way back out to the entrance hall, where Oliver and Jack were still present. Jack had moved closer to the wall, but still couldn't reach Oliver, who had calmed down by now. He was muttering about how nice a hat the bowler was, now wearing it himself, and occasionally breaking out into song to keep himself entertained. He had noticed lyric heavy songs seemed to attract Jack's attention, at least those with clear and defined lyrics. It was a bit of a hit and a miss, but the songs seemed to be keeping his attention even better than the loss of his hat, the being barely flinching as Henry entered the hall. Oliver didn't stop singing, waddling along the ledge he was perched on as he did, posing and gesturing as he sang.

The older man made his way around the pair, Henry finding another trash at the crossroads of a pair of halls. One went around a bend to a break room, and the other led up a set of stairs, to a projection booth. Henry knew it would project a cartoon into the orchestra room, allowing the band and conductor to see the cartoon they were adding music too in the moment. It helped them sync up the recording with the timing of the cartoon, or so Henry had been told.

Checking the trash can revealed the missing keys, the man grinning a bit and walking back past the one man show that was Oliver, who was now really into his singing. He barely acknowledged Henry as the man walked past him and his audience of one, the bird several stanzas into the 'Bohemian rhapsody'. He was even more animated now, though he never let the bowler hat near enough for Jack Fain to retrieve.

Henry left them be, walking back to the space outside Sammy's office and popping open the closet, finding another audio recording from Sammy. He pressed the button, listening closely to the tiny voice that escaped the device.
Every artistic person needs a sanctuary. Joey Drew has his and I have mine. To enter, you need only know my favorite song:

The piano delicately calls
The violin shudders with a piercing voice
The violin again screams
The piano returns in graceful harmony.

Sing my song, and my sanctuary will open to you.

Well that was simple enough. Piano, violin, violin, piano. One of the easier patterns the loop had given him. With his clue on mind, he returned to the front room once more, watching Oliver for a moment as he fluctuated between pitches as he sang the different parts, before moving on. He made his way up to the projection booth, pausing as he eyed the projector aimed at a screen in the recording room, and then at a recording on a nearby desk. It couldn't hurt to make sure the recording was the same, he figured, as he pressed the button. The projectionist, Norman Polk, voice soon filled the air, competing with Oliver to be heard, his voice raspy and a bit on the deep side.

Every day, the same strange thing happens. I'll be up here in my booth, the band will be swinging, and suddenly Sammy Lawrence just comes marching in and shuts the whole thing down. Tells us all to wait in the hall.

Then I hear him. He starts up my projector, and he dashes from the projector booth and down to the recording studio like the little devil himself was chasing behind.

Few seconds later, the projector turns off. But Sammy, he come out for a looooong time. This man is weird. Crazy weird.

I have half a mind to talk to Mr. Drew about all this. But then again, I have to admit.. Mr. Drew has his own peculiarities.

It checked out as the same as usual, Henry sighing softly in relief. He quickly turned on the projector, running down the stairs and through the main room, Oliver shouting after him in concerned confusion as he raced past both Jack and the bird. They glanced to each other in confusion as Henry vanished, the sound of a Piano, then two sour notes on a violin, followed by a final piano note, there only answer. Somewhere a machine hummed, a similar sound to the one that had open the gate to the music room, the pair confused, but unwilling to end their stalemate to investigate.

Henry watched as the door to Sammy's 'sanctuary' opened, a hallway of cobwebs and three bases in various states of repair greeting Henry. He walked down the hall slowly, eyeing the large ventilation grate at the end of the hall, not liking the ink stains around the bottom of it. Sammy was always a bit of an unpredictable character, and while he had mostly followed his patterns during the loops, he was unnerving enough to keep Henry on his toes.

Further in the room was a desk, a stool, Sammy's favorite Banjo, and a toilet of all things. There was a scattering of papers on the floor, some with plans for songs drawn on them, some splattered in ink, a circle with odd symbols and a bendy head shape dominating the floor. On one wall were three pipes, one of which had a valve on it and a sign with the word 'Flow' above it. Written on the wall over his desk was the phrase:

Sing A Happy Song
Whistle A Merry Tune
Henry shivered with discomfort, eyeing the phrase. It always unnerved him to see Sammy's talent put towards this weird quasi-religious view his corrupted self had developed towards Bendy. It would have been funny, given how much Sammy had initially disliked the character, if he hadn't seen the deadly lengths the new Sammy was willing to go to try and please 'his lord'.

He made his way to the flow controls, twisting it and listening to the glug of ink somewhere in the distant mess of pipes, assured the infirmary would be drained now. Which put him one step closer to Jack Fain's hiding spot, and his recording. Hopefully all this work wouldn't be for naught..

Thinking on possibly snapping people back to their senses, Henry paused to eye the desk once more, seeing several copies of completed songs stacked neatly on one corner. He collected these, neatly folding them into his shirt pocket. Maybe Oliver could do something with these. The other male certainly seemed musically inclined.

There was also the matter of Sammy's banjo, the item in surprisingly good repair compared to everything else in the Music department. Possibly a perk of being hidden away.. and also something Sammy still coveted. He picked it up, strapping it over his back, though he had to remove the ax he had been carrying there to let it sit safely. It would probably be best to keep the ax in hand either way, even if it slowed him down a bit.

With his business completed, he turned to leave the room, making his way out of the sanctuary confidently. He was so distracted that when a Bendy cutout abruptly appeared at the end of the hall, he jumped, cursing himself for growing overconfident. As he finally left Sammy's sanctuary, a hiss from the projector room made him look up, spotting Sammy Lawrence.

The man was tall, a lanky ink humanoid sporting a dingy bendy cutout head as a mask. He wore a pare of overalls, but no shirt, the bottom of which were splattered with ink. He gaze was on Henry, but seemed to be fixated just behind the man, on the item he now carried, the figure vibrating lightly with anger.

"What do you think you're doing in there, little sheep? Things like that are not for silly sheep to play with." He hissed in a tense voice, grasping the edge of the projection booth angrily.

"Sammy, I-" Henry began, before a snap of Sammy's fingers stopped him. Half a dozen ink monsters appeared out of the ground, leaving a bubbling puddle of ink beneath each. The Searchers weren't as bulky as Jack, but they were no less dangerous, the half formed humanoids beginning to half crawl half drag themselves towards him, groaning in disapproval. They were formed from the hip up, there arms long and rubbery, having a proper five fingers like a human, but no defining features. They were all identical, oval heads with vague gaping mouths.

Henry readied his ax, grimacing as he swung at the nearest searcher. "Forgive me-

He didn't speak much as he fought, the searchers going down fairly easily. They never survived much damage, but he still felt terrible destroying them. They were pitiful creatures, their hits weak, but still a danger. But they had once been human, like most of the monsters that roamed these halls. He didn't know the majority of them, but it didn't change what they had once been.

"They fell with practiced ease, the fuming Sammy Lawrence having vanished in the midst of the fight, though Henry couldn't shake the feeling he was still near. He never spoke before after catching Henry in his sanctuary. He had always just stared him down unresponsively.
"Henry? Henrrrry?" Oliver called from the main room, his tone concerned. He didn't want to screw up the plan by scaring Jack off, but those sounds coming from the recording studio were concerning. They sounded sort of like jack, only multiplied several times

"I'm fine." Henry called back. "Just had a bit of trouble. Is Jack still there?"

"Yeah, he's still here. You sure you're OK? I thought I heard someone else." As Oliver spoke, Henry made his way out to the entryway, finding both Oliver and Jack crouched nervously at the other end of the room. Oliver was still on his banister, though Jack had moved closer, pressed nervously to the wall. He seemed to stare at Henry's ax, now tipped with ink, the figure leaning away. Henry took a step back, hiding the ax from sight.

"Just had a run in with some searchers.. They're creatures sort of like Jack, except thinner." Henry answered. "By the way.. did you see anyone come through here? Or at least, up to the projector room."

"I take it those weren't as hesitant as Jack.." Oliver muttered uneasily. He shook his head after a moment, making sure the bowler hat didn't come off. "No, I haven't seen or heard anyone around here, save for you. I've just been sitting here talking to Jack about, you know, stuff. Why?"

"Just wondering. I was hoping we might have found out where Sammy has been hiding. I've never worked out how he gets around so fast.." Henry answered. "Any way, just keep Jack here a little longer. I'll be right back."

"Just try not to get into more fights..." Oliver muttered in concern, watching the other man walk away, before looking back down at Jack. "Now, how about some Elvis Presley?"

Henry made his way to the infirmary now that the ink had been drained away, trotting down into the small room. Fortunately no searchers appeared from the puddles left behind from the drainage, allowing Henry free passage for once. There were several chairs near the door, a desk against one wall with an ink stained trash can next to it. Further into the oddly shaped room was a single infirmary bed and stool, a sign reminding people that if they were caught faking illness their pay would be docked. Joey had certainly become more strict after Henry had left.

He walked in, seeing the second ink release pipe, though he didn't put in the valve he had retrieved from Jack yet. Every time he had in the past had lead to Sammy attacking him, and he wasn't quite ready for that confrontation yet. Instead, he flipped the switch that opened the utility access, turning to face the opposite wall and make his way downstairs, where a pair of metal doors were slowly creaking open.

The first thing that greeted him was a sluggish river of ink, the flow only reaching about a couple inches in height, providing no danger to him. On the wall immediately visible from the door was the message 'DOWN HERE, WE'RE ALL SINNERS'. So uplifting, just like everything else in the building. Henry continued down the path, chopping down some planks in his path, ignoring another message on the wall about sheep coming to the slaughter. The music department always had these strange quasi-religious messages written on the walls, and he suspected most of them had come from Sammy at one point or another, though it never made it any less unnerving.

A quick jog and he soon found the hidden alcove that had been Jack Fain's work station, a desk, chair, and violin crammed into the alcove. Sheets upon sheets of music were scattered around the space, Henry careful not to track too much ink onto them. He picked up an audio recorder, one he knew would have Jack Fain's voice on it, before eyeing the violin. It wasn't as in good repair as the banjo he carried, and had clearly gone untouched for years, so he didn't bother collecting it, instead collecting some of the sheet music along with the recorder.
With his prizes in tow, he quickly retreated back the way he came, keeping his eyes and ears peeled for Sammy, dreading the former Music Department lead ruining his plan. He managed to get back to the entry way unhampered, though he couldn't shake the feeling of being watched as he made his way back.
Voices surrounded them as they moved through the ink, Pippen bristling with alarm. Her entire body felt like it could come apart at any second, as inconsistent as ink, held together by the thin barrier of her consciousness. That, and another, stronger presence, one she could vaguely identify as Bendy. It was hard to say however, her mind attacked from all sides by voices, pleading, confused, desperate voices. They threatened to overwhelm her mind and drown her being, absorbing bits and pieces but disintegrating her being.

The voices were pressed away as Bendy drew her closer, protecting his prize from the corrupting effects of the ink. He remembered that it hadn't always been like this. There ink hadn't always given him access to the entire building.. and it hadn't always been filled with so many lost souls. Joey swore they were Henry's fault as well, but.. Bendy wasn't sure how Henry could have done this. He hadn't had access to the ink machine after making and abandoning Bendy for Joey to find..

After an amount of time, they breached the ink and surfaced, bubbling out of the floor boards in a puddle of ink. Pippen dropped to her knees once Bendy let go of her, shaking all over and holding her limbs close to herself. Bendy looked down, less effected as her, having long since gone numb to the reality of the ink. She couldn't flee now either way, so their was no harm in permitting her this moment.

He glanced around his room, humming in thought to himself. The room was long barricaded, the hall leading to it crumpled thanks to ink leaks and poor building management. Except this room of course. By some combination of factors, the room had remained standing. A perfect sanctuary of sorts, one no one could reach, save those who could travel through the ink. And while there were many beings who could travel through the ink, to varying degrees of safety, none dared encroach on an area the ink demon had lay claim to.

Bendy had happily taken over the room once he discovered it, hiding it's existence even from Joey. Sure they were partners in this mess, but Bendy liked having his secrets. It helped him hide away any goodies he found and wanted to keep. These prizes included a record that had cracked into the shape of his head, some of the nicer posters and paper he had found, numerous ink pens and inkwells, and a couple dozen plushies he would sleep on. Most of them were plushies of him, but he did have one of Alice and Boris, the pair set off to one side.  The walls were painted with ink, painted to resemble the home he had lost..

Pippin recovered after several minutes, still shaking as she stood, glancing around the room. It was strange, a clutter of various items Bendy had brought there, along with odd ink paintings on the wall. There were several sloppy fake window, though their scenes were hard to decipher, a flat drawing of a bed, some fake plants, a fake kitchen area... Some areas were drawn fairly well, while other parts bordered on childish. She didn't comment on it however, sensing this place was important to the ink being. She clutched her tail close to herself as she looked around slowly.

"Like the digs, toots?" Bendy teased, putting on a mocking smile as he trotted a bit closer, vibrating with eagerness. She fixed his face. He could still move his mouth, even after being submerged in ink. The change was permanent. She could help him, even more than Joey had! Sure, Joey had helped him develop more a of a body from the inky blob and head he had started out as.. but that body he had given him had was one that was in constant pain, and barely felt like an improvement to his initial blobby form. But.. being more mobile was nice.
"It's.. unique." Pippen answered, shuffling away from him to look around the room more. There was a scattering of candles around, glowing with a dark flame that did not eat through the wick or wax. They looked more like globs of ink with light caught in them, roughly shaped into a candle, but whatever they may be, they provided some light at least. They flickered and wobbled like a dribble of suspended ink, though they defied gravity in the direction they went.

"It's my 'sanctuary'. Sammy gotta sanctuary, and Joey got a sanctuary, So I went ahead and made myself a sanctuary." He hummed proudly, walking over towards the pile of toys and kicking them into a better pile. There was some consistency to his hoarding, the bed of toys stacked up near the bed drawing on the wall, most of the items set around in places that would have made sense if the house were real.

"Makes sense.." She answered neutrally, very aware of how helpless she was now. She hadn't the slightest idea how to travel back through the ink, and honestly didn't want to after the barrage of voices they had been met with. Her body wouldn't stop trembling, though she had mostly swallowed her fear, fingers nervously toying around her tail. No more ink came from it, her body feeling exhausted and weak.

Bendy gave her a closer look, not quite liking the change in her attitude. She had been entertaining even when she smarted off at him during their chases. She was pale, her dark flesh having turned grey in places. It suggested she had used her own ink to create the rabbits and fix his face.. which would explain why she was so weak now. Seems she was bound to the same rules as he was, needing ink for power and survival. If he wanted her to fix more of him, he'd have to get ahold of more ink.

"Hey." He called, making her jump, the imp twisting quickly to face him. Despite being trapped in the room, she once more took a defensive stance, looking ready to try and fight him. Well, at least she hadn't fully lost that spark. "I gotta deal to offer ya, doll face."

Her tail lashed at the nickname, her cheeks puffing up a bit with disapproval, a silver flush of embarrassment spreading across her face as he laughed at her response. She eyed him for a long moment, before finally speaking up. "Yeah?"

"You seem to have a bit of a phobia of Mr. Drew. Now, I don't blame you, he isn't the easiest person to get along with, but he is my.. business partners of sorts while we're trapped here." He paused, tail lashing with discomfort, not wanting to go into the complicated details of his dealings with Joey Drew. "And as such I'm supposed to be bringing interlopers and the like to him. But yous? You're special. You fixed my face."

Pippen was quiet, listening intently to him, though her tail twitched with anxiety at that. She wasn't entirely sure how she had completed the feat, and she was left feeling so exhausted. She waited for him to continue, trying to mask her anxiety as she watched him.

"And Mr. Drew? Well, he tries to deliver but.. Well.. You see the quality of his work." The warped devil gestured to his form, Pippen's neutral expression breaking to one of uncertain concern as she hesitantly raised a brow. If that was Joey's work.. What was Bendy like before he 'helped'? Bendy continued to speak after a moment. "And Mr. Drew has a habit of taking a lot for himself, and leaving me with the scraps. And I'm pretty fed up with that, you know? So I sees an opportunity today and well.. I'm taking it for myself first."

"And what does that mean for me?" Pippen finally asked, finding her voice once more. His phrasing felt ominous to her, but that could have been her anxiety speaking, along with the fact she was trapped in the room. He shifted slowly, stretching his aching limbs before he continued speaking.
"I won't take you to Mr. Drew if you help me out. Fix this.. Poor excuse for a body. That's all I want. Nothin' will hurt you, I'll bring you all the ink you need, so long as you help me." Bendy finished, staring at her intently, tail swishing with excitement. It was the only physical sign he gave of how much hope he was pinning on her, a small smile on his face.

"..I- I can try.." Pippen answered after a moment, his smile broadening. "On one condition." His smile fell into a frown, though he relished the fact he could do something so simple. "Don't hurt my idiot brother, or my rabbits."

"I can.. work around that. Mr. Drew still wants you and your brother, but you aren't as high on the list as Henry-" He paused, tail lashing at the name, red flashing beneath the ink that covered where his eyes would be. Pippen stiffened a bit, the response feeling.. unnatural. She had seen anger before, even rage, but there was something to automatic, too mechanical to his response to just the old man's name. "I'll see to it no harm comes to them."

The imp considered this for several moments, debating over her options. It was honestly the best she felt she would get, given she was really in no position to make demands.. there was no point in pushing her luck, instead choosing the short end of the stick instead of no end of the stick. She sighed, eyeing the warped devil. "Alright.. I. I'll try to help you. I just.. need a break first.."

"You need ink." Bendy huffed. "I can see it with how pale and faded you've gotten all over. You need it to live, just like me. Just like most everything down here." He shuffled through the clutter, pitching a cap towards the imp. She managed to catch it, eyeing the large soup can uncertainly. A faded label informed her it was 'Briar Label: Bacon Soup', something she had never heard of. Than again, she had never strayed far from the specific types of soup brands she had been raised on, preferring to stick to what she knew and would be able to eat, instead of trying something new and end up with something she couldn't stand the taste of and couldn't eat.

"It resembles the soup brand they used my image to advertise years ago, but it's honestly just concentrated ink. Don't know why it's soup flavored, but it is, and it is unattached from that-" He glanced back towards the bubbling puddle they had entered the room through. "So there's no chance of ending up with a stray voice or two in your head."

"Oh." Pippen muttered, looking down at the can. There was no pull tab, and she wasn't certain she could cut it open with her tail. Bendy watched her for several moments before sighing, walking up to her, Pippen stiffening with anxiety as he neared. He crouched near her, her tail flicking with uncertainty at his proximity, before reaching out with his clawed hand and cutting open the top. It was rough work, but it was passable, the ink devil moving away once he was done.

".... Thank you.." Pippen thanked softly, tail still twitching with uncertain emotions. He paused, glancing back to her. He hadn't been thanked in a long while.. not even Mr. Drew would thank him when he did a task properly for him. It felt nice to be treated like something other than a wretched monster.

"Your welcome." He rumbled after a moment. He opened his mouth to say something else, before stopping, back going stiff. He could feel the familiar sensation of Mr. Drew pulling his strings, sending demands. He held up a hand as Pippen began to speak, not wanting to risk Mr.Drew hearing her through him.

*Go to the music department, now. Henry is getting out of hand. Mr. Drew's voice hissed through*
his mind, tugging more strings, stirring a familiar rage in him. What had that jerk gotten up to now? Just as he had found something to make this nightmare a little more bearable. Than again, Pippen needed time to recover, so it wouldn't hurt to leave her be for some time.

He waited until he felt the presence leave, slowly relaxing once more, though the anger didn't fully leave him. Bendy slowly turned to regard Pippen, his frown twitching with unhappiness and anger. A sharp turn from how was moments ago. "I've got some work to deal with. Eat your soup. We'll work on this matter later."

He turned sharply, leaving through the ink a couple moments later, leaving Pippen with her roughly cut open soup can. She hesitantly began to eat the soup, sipping the bacon flavored ink nervously as she eyed the area around her.

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As Henry returned to the main room, he discovered Oliver and Jack had seemingly come to a truce. The bloated searcher was standing in what appeared to be a fairly calm position, his body language less tense than before. Oliver was idly chattering about anything and everything, from family issue to famous musicians, the bird man leaning into the wall behind him. At the moment, he seemed to have gravitated back to family in particular.

"-And I says to him, 'Perci, you need to stop saying those things to her, it really messes people up when you says things like that' but Perci, oh he didn't care. He can be awfully selfish when he wants to, always focusing on how he's hurt but not on how he's hurting others. He tries to be good because that's what his mum wanted, but deep down he's got one hell of a chip on his shoulder. Than again, that was when we were younger, so maybe he really has gotten better but.. I don't know. Maybe he can lapse back. I just wish he would stop feigning innocence around Pippen. He knows it drives her mad, and I'm so tired of the fights. She's no saint herself, and I love them both dearly, but retreading the same ground over and over is maddening, you know?" Oliver rambled, shrugging at the end of his speech. Jack almost seemed to nod, though it was so slight a motion it could have been Henry's imagination. "Heh, you're a pretty good listener Fain. Sorry to chat your ear off with boring s*** like this, but I ran out of musicians I could think of off the top of my head to talk about."

"Hey." Henry called, trying to pass it off like he had just arrived, and hadn't stopped out of sight to listen to Oliver speak. It seemed the three he were working with now had something of dysfunctional relationship, or at least the siblings did. Nothing like childhood grudges to really throw a wrench in the works. Not that he would really know, being an only child.. but he had been friends with Joey Drew for a long time.. and probably should have held more grudges over his behavior..

"Oh hey! Please tell me you got the things you were looking for because now I'm getting all sappy and boring and I'm probably going to make Jack drop dead of boredom if we don't hurry up." Oliver greeted, waving a wing.

"I did. I'm not sure if this will do anything but.. he's being unusually responsive." Henry slowly approached, leaving the ax against the wall so as to keep Jack comfortable. The inky being shifted with uncertainty, but again his head turned towards Oliver, possibly for comfort or because he still had the bowler hat. It was hard to say. Henry stopped with a couple feet between them, turning on the recording, the tinny voice of Jack Fain coming through. It was slightly nasally, as if he was holding his nose, and the contents of the recording seemed to confirm that.
I love the quiet, and that's hard to come by these busy times.

And yeah, sure it may stink to high heaven down here. But it's just perfect for an old lyricist like me. Sammy's songs always got some bounce. But if I didn't get away once a while, they'd never have any words to go with them.

So I'll keep my mind a-singing' and my nose closed.

The swollen one had stopped moving the moment the recording began playing, staring at Henry now, the hat forgotten. The being that had once been Jack Fain slowly approached, reaching for the recorder, before shying away. Henry played it again, Jack leaning closer once more, reaching for the papers he could see Henry was holding beneath the recorder. Most of them were half completed, the music done with varying degrees of lyrics here and there, but that didn't bother him.

Jack stared at the papers for several moments, before an odd, muted sound started coming from him. It took both of the other two males several moments to realize he was humming, the sound resonating through his inky body as he looked over the papers. He continued this for several moments, eventually looking up, glancing to a nearby record set up on the wall for decoration. He stared at his dim reflection in the disk, staring intently at it for several long moments, before turning his gaze back to the other two.

"Jack?" Henry questioned hesitantly. The being nodded, no hesitance in it's actions. "Do you remember who you were?" Another nod.

"How much do you remember?" Oliver asked on impulse, before cringing a bit. That wasn't a yes or no answer, and Fain, despite having hummed, did not appear to be able to speak. The swollen one paused, seemingly thinking, before leaning over and dragging his finger across the ground.

BiTs anD pEIces. He wrote. My NAme, wORk, SAMmy, CArtoon.. HOme, somEWHere. Memories.. ScraMBled, but tHEre.

"Well, I don't want to jinx this, but I think you successfully rehabilitated someone Henry." Oliver offered, glancing between the swollen one and the former animator. He sighed, taking off the Bowler hat off reluctantly, before pitching it to Jack, landing it on his head.

SOrrY fOR hiTTing. Jack scribbled on the floor, Oliver nodding a bit.

"Just, try not to do it again." The bird sighed, flying down and landing on Henry's shoulder. He was a bit awkward, due to his size, but Oliver wanted to get a closer look at the banjo on his back, plucking one of the strings with his beak. "I didn't take you for a banjo kind of person, Henry."

"It's not mine." Henry answered, struggling to balance the bird on his shoulder. Oliver was a bit bigger than the common real world cockatoo, and while he was fairly light his bulk made the experience awkward. Oliver eventually jumped down, picking up on Henry's discomfort. He kept his brow raised however, gesturing for the man to continue speaking. "It's Sammy's. I'm hoping seeing it will help draw him back to sanity, like Jack."

They glanced to Jack as the sound of a slick finger against wood greeted their ears. SAmmY doesNT liKE pEOpLE TouCHinG ThAt BAnJo. He wrote.

"Oh he don't, huh?" Oliver hummed, jumping on Henry's shoulder again. The man stumbled, but maintained his balance, grimacing at the bird's behavior. He felt the banjo strap slide off his body, Oliver jumping down with it in hand. Henry straightened up, grimacing as he put a hand against his
sore back, pulling out the folded music sheets and handing them off to the bird.

"This is some of his work, or at least some of the complete pages I found on his desk." Henry informed as the bird took it, eyeing it curiously. "Are you a musician?"

"Me? Sorta. I mean I'm a construction worker by trade, surprising I know, but I know a lot of music history and stuff. Know my way around some instruments too. Dad loved sitting around and listening to music while he put together his model planes, and I ended up listening to it with him. He taught me a lot of things, me pop." Oliver explained. "And, you know, I was like, in band during middle school and high school. Played the trombone, but picked up some string instruments on the side. Went through that 'mysterious teen' phase where I ran around with a guitar all the time trying to woo the ladies. I also do a lot of Karaoke, because getting hammered with the lads and singing terribly is a good way to spend the weekend, you know?"

He started fiddling with the instrument, purposely turning it out of tune before beginning to run his fingers across the banjo, producing a cacophony of terrible notes. "But if there's one thing I know that will get under a professionals skin, it's messing with their stuff."

Oliver paused, eyeing the sheet music before sitting it against the wall, Henry retrieving his ax while the bird prepared. He picked up a nearby recording as well, one he hadn't bothered playing yet, but knew usually had a recording of sane Sammy on it. "Well than, might as well get him out here to play! If we could get Jack sane, I bet we can get another on the sane train."

With that Oliver proceeded to sing one of the songs in front of him, strumming the out of tune Banjo as he did. The sound was simply awful, Oliver purposely going off key to make it even worse. As he neared the end of the song, a furious yell echoed from somewhere in the department.

"Cut out that horrific racket this instant!" It was the voice of Sammy Lawrence, but it was no longer the soft, creepy tone he would use when speaking of sheep and sacrifices. No, this sounded closer to the original, short tempered Sammy of the past, who was liable to bite of a band mates head for being even slightly out of tune.

"Come and make me, coward!" Oliver shouted back, beginning to bang away on the banjo again. He was careful not to actually damage the instrument, since that would probably hamper their goal, but he did not let up on how the terrible notes.

Moments later, the splatter of inks around the entryway began to bubble, searchers lurching out of them. Jack quickly vanished into a puddle of his own, not wanting to be caught in the middle of the mellee when he had just regained his sanity. Henry began to swing, taking out searchers while Oliver ran from them, managing to somehow keep up the terrible renditions of Sammy's songs going even as he ran. They went through at least seven songs, and several waves of seekers, before they finally had a new development.

"That is enough!" Sammy shouted, appearing from the hall that lead to his office. Henry had no idea where he could have been hiding back there, but he came out brandishing a metal dust pan, going straight for the cockatoo. "Unhand that instrument you feathered wretch! I will pluck every feather from your hide for what you've done to my-urk!"

Oliver had the good sense to start running when Sammy appeared, though it wasn't any action he took that cut the music director off. No, it was the reappearance of Jack Fain, the swollen one reaching out and catching his former work partners leg and taking him down before he could hurt anyone. Sammy fumed as Jack pinned his limbs, shaking from the stress of a confrontation, but determined to do something. Not only had he appeared to stop the mad director, but he had brought something back with him, a trophy of sorts, a gold record on a black plaque base, which he slid to
Oliver. Oliver stopped playing the banjo, slinging it over his back as he turned back to Sammy.

"Yeah, this is yours, aint it? How long have you had it Sammy? Does your new religion even let you play it?" Oliver challenged.

"I play the old songs upon it for our dark lord!" Sammy snapped back, struggling against Jack. His worn down Bendy mask had somehow survived the fall, though it was sliding around a bit with his struggles. "He will free me for my servitude!"

"Free you to what?" Oliver demanded. "Can you even remember who you are?"

"I am the ink demon's prophet-!"

"Noooo, you're Sammy Lawrence." Oliver cut in, looking to Henry. The animator turned on the recorder as Oliver started leafing through the sheet music. "You've made this here song ah-"

So first, Joey installs this ink machine over our heads. Then it begins to leak. Three times last month, we couldn't even get out of our department because the ink had flooded the stairwell. Past Sammy droned in an annoyed tone. Present Sammy struggled a bit harder, grunting and groaning a bit in pain, his head dipping.

"And what about this one here? Says Tombstone panic 19- ehh 19 something, theres an ink splat." Oliver continued, shoving the sheet music into Sammy's face as the recording droned on.

Joey's solution? An ink pump to drain it periodically. Now I have this ugly pump switch right in my office. People in and out all day.

"And this trophy Jack brought! Say's here it was for the 'impressive musical expertise exemplified in the sillyvision cartoons by.. Joey Drew?'" Oliver paused, confused as he glanced up to Jack, raising a questioning brow.

Thanks, Joey. Just what I needed. More distractions. These stupid cartoon songs don't write themselves, you know.

"Wretched thief." Sammy hissed, shaking Jack Fain with his fury. "That wretched, pompous Joey Drew! To have the nerve to claim MY work as his! That idiot- He doesn't know the first thing about the intricacies of the orchestra, even for this insipid cartoon songs-!"

"Oh wow, that is foul." Oliver muttered.

"All of my hard work! And for what? To inflate Joey's ego." Sammy spat, Jack glancing up to Henry with what felt like a knowing look. Sammy really wasn't one to talk about egos, but neither of them could, or would, interrupt as he collected himself. Sammy was currently staring at his hands, muttering about Joe and ink, freeing one of his hands to place it against his aching temple.

"Say, who are you?" Oliver asked abruptly, eyeing the trophy. "I know a fella who could probably redo this plaque and put your name down on it, if you cooperate with us."

"I am Sammy Lawrence, the rightful owner of that reward." Sammy growled. He seemed to be back in his right mind to a degree, but he kept lapsing into muttering, mostly about Joey and his poor planning, and occasionally sheep. Henry and Jack once more shared a look, uncertain if this could be counted as a success. There was still an air of danger to the man, though for the moment he seemed contained. Jack fully released him, slowly sliding away, though he was ready to throw his weight around again if needed, as adverse to confrontation he may be.
Henry slowly walked over to Oliver, who stalked closer to him as well, all three watching Sammy mutter as he flicked through his ink stained sheet music. He was clearly upset by the damage to his work, so much so that it momentarily blocked out anything else. But it was concerning. He had only seemed to partly grasp who he once was, and reflect some of the behaviors Henry remembered, but.. it felt hollow.

"Hey, uh.. I don't think this guy is completely back with us." Oliver muttered once they were close, watching Sammy warily. When he finished with his sheet music, Oliver slid the banjo over to him, instantly distracting him as the man turned ink humanoid went to work fixing his precious instrument. "He hasn't really.. confronted the present if you get my drift?"

"I noticed." Henry muttered back. "But this is better than I've ever seen him. He isn't trying to summon Bendy to 'sacrifice' us to him, and he's acting a bit like himself.. except he hasn't really mentioned anything about his body.." He paused before continuing. "Of all people, I would expect Sammy to be the most upset by the change once he came fully back to himself."

"Well.. now that he ain't hostile, what we gonna do?" Oliver questioned.

"Well.. There's always been something I wanted to try.. But Sammy's interruption always made it impossible." He glanced back towards one of the halls, the one with the power switch and flooded stairs. "There's supposed to be an exit down that way. I don't know if it will work but if it does.. We could get out of this mess and bring back more help."

"Ach, that sounds like a good idea. I got some lads who owe me some favors and won't think twice about helping me clear out some sorta ghost studio. It's actually up a couple of their alleys now that I think about it. I just hope my cousins will be OK.." Oliver paused, shuffling his feet. "But, I mean.. It's better than going in further unprepared. I could probably even borrow a gun off a friend of mine for when we come back.."

"I'm not sure if the exit will lead out.." Henry warned. "But it's worth a shot."

"Definately. I'll come with you while you do what's gotta be done to try this." Oliver declared. He turned to Sammy, who had fine tuned his banjo once more, his crest waggling as he regarded him. "Oi, you. Come on, get up. If we're gonna get this trophy fixed, I need you to come with me to tell my bud how to do it right."

Sammy slowly stood, muttering about the trophy and corrections, and 'sticking it to Joey'. He circled that primarily, though he occasionally slipped back into muttering about sheep and sleep. Sammy slowly slipped his Banjo onto his back, securing the strap with care. While he did this, Jack slid behind the ink man, making a 'I'll watch him' gesture with his fingers, Oliver nodding with appreciation.

"I just need to stop the flow in front of Sammy's office so I can reach the drain pump." Henry explained. "I just need to go to the infirmary first."

"Let's go than." Oliver hummed, trotting after Henry once he began walking. It was bizzarre, having a train of people following him, but Henry kept moving, feeling a bit better for it. It was nice having someone watching his back.

Sammy and Jack waited at the top of the stairs as Oliver and Henry descended down into the infirmary. The puddles of ink bubbled ominously, but nothing came of them, Henry quickly putting in the valve to the control and turning it. The pair quickly made their way back upstairs, finding a slightly more focused Sammy.
"What are you doing?" He demanded in an even tone. He didn't sound angry, but his neutral tone wasn't very friendly in and of itself.

"Stopping the flow of ink so we can go into your office." Henry answered.

"Blasted ink.. constantly flooding everything. I've lost so much of my work to Joey's blasted 'project.'" Sammy muttered darkly.

Oliver glanced to Henry, before the pair continued to move on, heading down the hall to Sammy's office. The flood of ink had stopped, leaving the door accessible, and the window pane clear in places of ink. Sammy came to a stop as he spotted his reflection, slowly walking up to the window. He put a hand to it, staring at it hard.

"Is.. Is that me?" Sammy muttered, slowly sliding the mask off of his face. He palmed his featureless face, than his bald head. Where were the curly locks he had all his life? His face was smooth, as he usually kept it, but it was blank and empty, his eyes sockets of ink. How had he reached this point? His mind was a whirl of memories, both young and old, slowly rising from the murky lake of his mind and bombarding his consciousness.

Jack watched him in concern, knowing how hard it had been for him to come to terms with what he currently was. While Sammy had more of his original self in tact than Jack, he was also more sensitive than him in ways, though Jack would never say that to his face. And he remembered Sammy had started going off the wheels, so to speak, earlier than anyone else had.

Henry and Oliver eyed Sammy uncertainly, before Henry moved on, walking into Sammy's office. Oliver nervously approached Sammy while Henry moved things forward, reaching up with the hand that held the trophy, opening his mouth to speak. Henry walked over to the drain pump, reaching out to activate it. He stopped short however, a loud thump making him jump and turn quickly.

Sammy stood over Oliver, the ink man breathing hard, his trophy in hand. The mask was no longer on his face, laying discarded where it had fallen after he had thrown it at Jack. Jack was cringing against the wall in terror, the familiar fear of confrontation freezing him in place. Oliver was semi conscious, squawking incoherently up to Sammy, trying to get him to stop, the bird half submerged in the ink that had puddled in front of Sammy's office due to the leak.

The music director raised the trophy again to strike, grunting as Henry barrelled into his side, stopping him short. Sammy turned on him, swinging the trophy wildly, his voice wild and high pitched. "I can hear him! My dark lord! I hear him! These false memories will not stop me from serving him-!"

"What about tombstone panic?" Oliver weakly asked, still laying in the ink, struggling to recover from the blow. "And all your other songs? Your banjo.."

Sammy took several more wild swings, his jerking body swinging the banjo around so it rested in front of him. He stopped for a moment, hearing the sounds that came from the jostled instrument, memories flooding him once more. Memories of resting on his grandfathers lap, the seemingly massive banjo held in his tiny hands as his old man taught him how to strum the notes. His first few compositions, all created with the banjo in mind. The pride in his mother's eyes as whenever he played, his stoic father's encouragement. The innumerable songs he had learned to play on this one, simple instument, partly to impress others but partly for himself and his love of the instrument.

Henry watched him uncertainly, the music director frozen in an odd position. Henry had backed up out of the ink, never one for wading in the substance if he could avoid it, and now stood closer
to Jack, who was nervously thumbing the edge of his bowler. There were so many things he wanted to try and say to Sammy, so many tidbits he knew about the other man from their off and on conversations, but the best sound he could produce was a hum or a moan.

So he hummed. It was a simple tune, but one he had heard Sammy play frequently on his Banjo when he was trying to calm down from a stressful day. A tune that clearly meant a lot to him despite how simple it was, one he had never opened up about but always turned to help him calm down. Sammy's body language shifted to uncertainty once more, a hand reaching up towards his banjo.

"OK, enough of that." Bendy's voice cut in, the ink demon appearing from the pool of ink Oliver and Sammy were still in. Sammy didn't even get the chance to turn around before he was plunged into the ink with Oliver, Bendy turning on Henry.

"NO!" Henry shouted, reaching for Sammy, for Oliver, watching in horror as the ink, which had only been a few inches in height, swallowed them both with ease. Jack caught him however, quickly shoving him out of the way of a lunge from Bendy before ducking down out of the way himself, rapidly sinking into the ground with lightning speed. His puddle form zipped towards the infirmary.

Henry started towards the main hall, only to stumble to a stop as a geyser of ink erupted in the middle of the hall, cutting him off. He turned, never one to just give up, and ran down the infirmary stairs, Bendy uncomfortably close behind. The animator quickly turned into the next stairwell to the utility shaft, though he wasn't sure what he was going to do from there. He could go to the room he had confronted Jack in during previous loops, but even if he looped around Bendy, where would he go?

As he reached the bottom of the stairs, his eyes darted to the left, widening a bit as he noticed the bars that usually blocked that path were gone. He could see Jack as well, the swollen one gesturing for him to take this new route, the figure dropping into a puddle once more as Henry caught up, the pair starting down the alternative sewer path.

"Stop runnin' ya rat!" Bendy shouted after him as the demon made it to the bottom of the stairs, chasing furiously after the pair. Henry didn't bother answering, instead focusing on making his way down the curving path, throwing down the odd plank of wood he came across, hoping it would trip up the demon. He shoved a couple of boxes into the main path as well, hearing Bendy grunt and snarl with frustration. It was one of the few times the man was grateful for Bendy's current deformities. If Bendy had been in the condition he had been designed to be in, Henry likely wouldn't have been able to outrun him.

They continued on like this, the path getting more and more narrow, until they came up to a door. Henry slammed through it, Jack's puddle zipping through seconds later. The animator slammed the door shut, quickly rolling a nearby barrel of ink in front of the door to slow Bendy down even more. He didn't dare stop, pushing himself to keep running, Jack keeping pace with him in his puddle form, the pair dashing through the room and into a maze of utility halls.
Pippen had long since finished the can of soup, feeling oddly refreshed. It was vaguely bacon flavored, as the name would suggest, though the broth itself was inky and dark. She tried to not pay attention to the disconnect, instead closing her eyes as she quickly chugged it down. Once she was done, she had felt considerably better, and when she tested her tail a drip of ink escaped the nib of her tail.

With her energy returned, she started to explore the odd room, trying not to disturb the clutter too much. She found a couple more cans of bacon soup, moving them to a corner of the room she had decided to lay claim to her as her own. If she was going to be trapped here, than she as going to have some small degree of space for herself. Otherwise she left most of the things alone, not wanting to set Bendy off if he was sensitive about his things being touched.

But now that she had time to think, anxiety began to nibble away at her, her tail flicking wildly. What if she couldn't do more to help him? What if she made things worse? She had only done this new ability of hers twice, thrice if you count the rabbits as separate occurrences, and one had been in a haze of blind desperation. It could have easily gone south, with her making the situation even worse. She just.. had such a little grasp on how this worked.

The imp glanced around again, eyeing the wall that had a bed scribbled on it. It was a bit odd, given the angles it had been drawn in, but it gave her a good feel for the details it was meant to portray. Maybe a little practice was in order. She had more soup to recharge afterwards, and she was doing this for a good reason.

She slowly approached, reaching up and beginning to sketch, first in the air, holding her tail as she got the feel for the shapes, before actually putting her pen nib to the wall. She focused on the details of the bed, how it would look it 3-d, how the covers would interact with the mattress and the bed frame.. how everything would measure out, how soft the pillows would be, and most any other details she could think of that went into a bed's existence.

Pippen stepped back, tail flicking nervously as she eyed the drawing, uncertainty permeating her being. She had drawn over the 'bed' Bendy had drawn on the wall, and if this fell through he probably wouldn't be particularly happy.. and she still didn't have a feel for this new, real life Bendy. She had seen plenty of his cartoons, but his cartoons had never featured him as enraged as he became at the mention of Henry, or as hostile. Sure he had been a stubborn and mischievous force in the show, but he never seemed an outright danger.

After a couple moments, her drawing began to glow, ink slowly sinking out of the wall. It slid out in a blob, before shaping itself up into the proper shapes she had though of. After several minutes, a cartoon-y bed had formed, with a thick grey comforter and white sheets, several pillows seated on top. After a test, she found it was completely solid, and rather comfy, her tail wagging lightly with joy at her success. She snagged one of the pillows before returning to her corner, considering her options further.

That was one success with an inanimate object but.. Bendy was alive, mobile, and could feel. Would her attempts only hurt him more? Would he lash out at her for causing him pain? She didn't want to hurt him, he hadn't exactly hurt her yet despite chasing her around. And she kind of wanted to get on his good side, to have at least one person in her corner in this strange place. The sounds she had heard and the strange, eerie writings she had seen on the walls of the building so far left her uneasy, as well as he dip in the ink. She felt like she had scarcely seen the tip of the iceberg for what this place had in store, and the thought only fueled her anxiety.
She was so distracted by her own questions that she didn't realize how much time had passed while she was drawing and exploring, the ink bubbling once more. A very tired and irrate Bendy appeared, nursing a number of bruises across his form, his mouth in a deep frown. He stopped in confusion as he spotted the bed however, staring at the new object, scanning the room for the imp. Once he found her, seated on a pillow with her legs to her chest, a pensive look on her face, he started speaking.

"Where- Did you draw that?" He questioned, pointing to the bed. A nod. "Why? Why are you wasting ink on that."

"It was practice." Pippen cut in.

"You only have so much ink, and you agreed to help me." He pointed out in a dry tone.

"I wanted to practice." Pippen reiterated. He opened his mouth, tensing with irritation, but she cut him off, her voice tense. "I've only done this three times, Bendy. I don't want to blindly rush into this and hurt you further because of how little experience I have."

He paused, frowning, though she had a point. There was the possibility of her making things worse, just like Joey's attempts had, though he had more faith in her than Joey. Unlike Joey, she showed some competent drawing ability... And passion for her work, and not the glory it could bring her. His tail lashed with annoyance, before he trotted to the bed and dropped onto it. He was shocked by how soft it was, how similar it felt to his old, long forgotten bed, a soft shudder escaping him as he slowly relaxed.

They were both silent for several long moments, Bendy slyly sliding further onto the bed, quietly enjoying the new item. It was far more comfortable than his bed of stolen plushies, though the furniture was reviving bitter sweet memories. Pippen began to pad around the room slowly after several moments, analyzing the room once more, slowly building up her courage to speak. She could probably talk to him.. He was Bendy, and while he was different in some ways that could be chalked up to environmental factors. He couldn't be bad to the core..

"So.. Why did you draw all of this?" She asked in a slightly shaking voice, forcing herself to sound more confident. "I mean were you bored or were you trying to make stuff or-"

"Because I miss my home." Bendy answered, cutting her off bluntly. He didn't want to talk about this, not while he was under assault by his memories of a happier time.. but at the same time, a small part of him wanted to rekindle those memories, keep them alive and renew that struggling hope that he would one day be free..

"Your home..?" Pippen asked hesitantly. "I- I thought you were born from the ink machine. At least that's what He- what was alluded to me."

He twitched at the near mention of that name, but managed to keep his cool, tail flicking like an annoyed cats. "I was.. dragged into this world by that wretched machine that Henry made. I came out wrong and he abandoned me before I was even fully aware of what had been done.. He left Joey to pick the pieces. And that stupid machine just kept making more.. trying to drag my friends here too but.." He paused for a long time. "Ain't none of them my friends. None I saw.. But all them copies came out as bad as me or worse, all because of Him."

Pippen listened to him silently, tail flicking with uncertainty. Henry had claimed that the Ink Machine was Joey's creation, the ink beings were Joey's doing. And yet Bendy claimed otherwise, and had clearly gained his hatred for the old man because of what he had been told. 'Abandoned before I was fully aware'. Had Joey thrown Henry under the bus to protect his own hide? It
sounded in line with what Henry had said, and what the rumors about the former studio owner would suggest. The success was always his, but the failures were someone else's..

Her stomach twisted with concern, staring up at Bendy's back. Something felt terribly wrong about this story but. Confronting him now didn't feel like a good idea. They were barely on good terms as it was, and she needed more time to earn his trust. She had her doubts about his story, but he also had years of repetition behind his beliefs. Even if they were flawed. But she could start small..

"How long were you unaware?" She asked hesitantly. His back twitched, the devil rumbling lowly.

"What?" He demanded slowly, giving her a chance to back down. She didn't sound fully committed to prying further.

"When you came here, to our world. You said you were initially unaware of what had been done. How long? How much did you notice?" She asked gently.

He was silent for a long time, Pippen's tail beginning to twitch every which way with anxiety. When he spoke, it was soft, the imp straining to listen to him. "I came into this world.. mostly blind, confused, and in pain. I remember yelling.. The words wrong, failure.. and then I moved. I managed to sit up, and there was Joey staring at me with another man.." He trailed off, his frown deepening as his mind drifted back to the incident.

"I.. It had just been a normal day. I was going to a picnic with my friends. They were right there, just a couple yards away." He spoke softly. "But then there was this sound, like gears grinding and a straining engine.. and then everything went dark. I remember pain.. so much pain, my body felt like it was pulled in on itself and then shoved and twisted around in so many directions. It was nothing like any of the gags I had experienced at home. Those always felt odd, and maybe stung if the person doing it was feeling aggression but.. never so much pain. There was so much hate and pain.."

".. I'm sorry." Pippen murmured softly, tail curling around herself. He twitched slightly, but didn't face her, emotions running rampant through him now. "You don't deserve what's happened to you. But.. Is doing the same things over and over fixing anything? You say you've been working with Joey all this time, but you're still here. Maybe it's time you worked for yourself, like you are now.. I mean sort of." She shrugged, referring to their deal.

He was quiet for a long time, something about that first memory of this world bothering him. It was his very first one and yet.. only now did he realize that it did not fully line up with the story Joey had told him.. or rather the story as it had evolved over time. His mind buzzed softly with concern, Pippen's gentle questions beginning to nibble deep into his mind, though he pushed most of it to the back of his mind for now.

"..Practice your drawings toots. We'll try fixing more later." He ordered, his tone making it clear he didn't want to speak further. Pippen quietly relented, though her worried eyes remained on him for a time.

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Perci settled nervously into a chair, hands resting on the table that was between him and Alice. She had taken him to a room that appeared to be an actors room of sorts, deep within the labyrinth of this part of studio, which she claimed was known as the 'Heavenly toys' manufacturing and
shop. The studio was proving far more complex than a normal animation studio, though Perci hadn't had a lot of time to look around at the pace Alice had walked, and with Brutis trailing behind them. The swollen wolf had come dangerously close to crushing him underfoot, and he couldn't shake the feeling that those close calls weren't accidental.

Now, however, the massive wolf was standing outside the room door like a bouncer of sorts. And Perci was inside, nervously tapping his fingers against the wood of the table, eyeing Alice uncertainly. Alice herself was sitting up properly, good eye half lidded in a confident and slightly mysterious manner. She smiled a bit, enjoying how uneasy she had the other angel, before beginning to speak.

"So, Perci was it?" Alice hummed. "How did you come to be in our.. lovely little studio?"

"Oh- Uh. Well I chased- er, followed my sister into the upper level, while things were still normal. Then I passed out, or was knocked out, I'm not sure which. And then I woke up like this. I.. tried to find my sister, but we got separated when we were attacked by this.." He paused, paling a bit. "This thing. It was tall and dark and it's body was all crumpled up and strange. The floor gave out under me while I was running away from it and I .. fell into a river of ink..."

He trailed off, Alice giving him a look of sympathy that was only half false. "An awful place it is, in the ink. All of those voices, bouncing around in your head, tearing you apart." Her voice pitched up a bit as she spoke on it, fear leaking into her voice. She paused, regaining control of herself and the situation, reasserting her confident tone. Perci was still pale, nodding weakly at her description.

"I- I don't know how I found my way back out. But I did. And then I met you." Perci finished softly, tapping his fingers nervously. "I.. Uh.. You said you knew a way out, right?"

"I do." Alice hummed. Perci perked up a bit, though he slumped a bit as she continued. "Though that knowledge will not come cheap. You see, this place.. It's a very dangerous one. I've fought hard for what I have here. You come out a formless, miserable slug, dangling on the edge of collapsing back into that nightmare you escaped." She looked over his damaged form with interest.

He didn't know how he had come to be so perfect.. So she would have to take that perfection. But she needed time and materials. She was running so low on the tools she needed for her work, and Perci.. a specimen as special as him would require time and effort to properly extract his essence without damaging or wasting it. Besides, she needed to get a better feel for this stranger so she could ensure that when she made her move he would not escape.. And the best way she could think of that would be keeping him busy working for her. And if he just so happened to end up a bit more roughed up and dependent on her.. well.. there was no harm in that. Besides, she needed someone who was more sensible than the dumbed down Brutis to get the materials she needed. The franken-wolf kept failing some of the tasks that required more finesse.

"Oh." Perci murmured, staring down at the table now, unconsciously shifting his damaged leg. It had slowed him down quiet a bit on the walk over, but he could still manage getting around. His pant legs were also dark with ink, something he only noticed once they were in an area with better lighting then the ink river maintenance area. Now his dark slacks were grey with a combination of black waves and droplets just a bit beneath his knee. He wondered if Alice would help him repair his leg. She seemed to know how to manipulate the ink according to what she had said.. but would that cost him more work?

"It's a lot of hard work, maintaining perfection." She gestured to herself as she spoke. "And I- I am so close to achieving absolute perfection. Which comes to the crux of our little chat, my fellow
angel.” She looked down on him slyly. "You help me and I will help you. I'm running terribly low on supplies, and Brutis is only so good when it comes to gathering things. Those hands of his are really better when it comes to fighting than picking things up, you know?"

"Y-Yeah." The other angel offered, glancing back towards the door nervously. "W-What exactly do you need..?"

"Oh, this and that. Don't you worry your little head now. Your angel won't send you in blind." She hummed with a crooked smile. She stood, gesturing for him to follow, Perci sliding out of his chair. There were two doors in this room, the first blockaded, and the second being the one she lead him out of the room through to a back room of sorts. Brutis moved out of Alice's way immediately, moving to stand at the side of the room near the one of the other doors, the one the group had entered through, ensuring no one would get inside.

"Now, I need some gears." She sauntered over to one of the many boxes in the back room, picking up a gear that had been busted in half. "Three like this, but whole. You'll find some gearboxes on Level K, Brutis will show you the way, where you can scavenge some new ones from." She lifted a pipe wrench from within the box as well, throwing it at Perci, who caught it. "This will help you get them out. And help you beat back any searchers who come after you."

"Searchers?" Perci questioned nervously, glancing back towards Brutis uneasily. He didn't particularly want to be out and about with the canine on how own.

"You'll know them when you see them. Wretched ink beasts that look only half human. They're easy to take care of, and someone like you-" Alice glanced over him. "Do not need to fear their touch as much as I do. They will not drag you down into the inky abyss so easily. No. Not at all.."

"O-OH.. Well. I-I am not much of a fighter nowadays ma'am, I'm more of a healer.. I- I'm in school to be a doctor." Perci offered nervously.

"Than you better learn if you want to get out of here." Alice answered callously. "These beasts will show you little mercy, and Brutis can only do so much. He will protect you when he is guiding you through the halls, but you will have to go places he can not if you want to succeed at these tasks. You wouldn't want to let me down, now, would you?"

"I.. Not in particular." He mumbled.

"Than you better revive your fighting skills. Those who don't work here don't get paid." Alice finished. "I'll be waiting for you in my parlor. Do not try to enter through this door. I will have it locked, and the last thing I need is someone jamming the door again. When you're done, just put the gears in that tube over there. There is another tube in the lower levels but, well, that one won't exactly leave you in the safest of places. Here at least you can access my room, which you have permission to rest in. So long as you behave."

Perci glanced over towards the large, round tube she spoke of, seeing that it had what appeared to be a sliding door on it. It would be a simple matter of opening it up once he had the goods. And then he would be able to rest in relative safety. Seemed to be a good deal, though the way she spoke of her parlor made him feel uneasy. Why would she choose that place over waiting in her own room? Unless the parlor was better secured, which was his best guess.

"OK. I can.. I can do that. And then you'll tell me how to leave?" Perci agreed, swallowing nervously.

"In time, my little errand boy. In time. You have to pay the fee if you want a ride to the top.
Directing power to the elevator that still goes to top requires a lot of work, and it draws a lot of attention to my little corner of this nightmare." Alice chuckled coldly.


"Brutis, be a dear and show him to the stairs. Keep an eye on him too. Make sure that wretched Ink Demon doesn't get there hands on him." Alice ordered coolly, turning to walk through the door she had indicated before, dissappearing into the darkness without another word, only sound of a lock click a the door shut.

Brutis grunted as he turned, opening the opposite door. He reached with a long arm, shoving Perci towards it, giving a low growl. Perci quickly hobbled out the door, moving out of the way as Brutis squeezed through behind him. The beast began walking, though he forced Perci to stay even with him, grunting and shoving him when ever the hobbling angel started lagging behind.

Perci did his best to keep up with the pace Brutis set up, though his leg made it difficult. He held onto the pipe wrench closely, grimacing as Brutis lead them to a set of stairs. A low groan escaped him as he started down, yelping as Brutis caught him, shoving him to the set that lead up. He tripped, nearly falling over but instead falling into part of the stair banister, feeling something solid and metal in his vest pocket. That's right, he had a pair of scissors now- He had been so busy with everything he had never even looked at them.

He quickly paced up the stairs, eyeing Brutis warily, trying to keep a steady pace going as he made his way up the stairs. As he walked up the stairs, he pulled out the scissors, eyeing it curiously. They were ornate, the silver metal glittering in the dim light of the stairwell. He held them close, gasping as he was shoved again. He turned towards Brutis, clutching the scissors and the pipe close. He was going to say something to him, but his voice fell short. He could see strange threads coming from the weird halo/collar Brutis wore, half of them connecting to his body, and another portion trailing back in the direction they came from.. towards Alice.

Brutis growled, gesturing for him to move, jerking him to his feet as the angel failed to respond. Perci quickly got back to climbing up the stairs, though he was still stunned by what he had seen. What was that? He glanced back down at the scissors in his hand, pausing in thought. He put them back in his pocket, fully removing his hand before casting a quick glance back at Brutis.

No threads. Just a passive aggressive wolf.

Perci quickly turned forward, not wanting to upset the wolf further, mind a whirl. It had to be the scissors, or at least that was what his evidence suggested. though now was not the time to experiment. He'd have to wait until he wasn't under as much pressure to move quickly.

As they reached the next level, Brutis caught the collar of his shirt, jerking Perci to a stop. He only noticed now that the rest of the stairs were inaccessible, levels above having collapsed downwards. No escape this way.. Brutis still didn't let go however, and drew a yelp from the angel, whose legs scrabbled against open air as he was lifted up and set in front of a door. He shot a sour look at Brutis, but continued forward none the less.

The room he walked into seemed to have once been some offices, the small toon looking around curiously. The rooms were divided up in several places by walls and glass windows, making it something of a maze to traverse. There were several metal boxes on the wall, the nearest one already opened, revealing a series of gears inside, including one of the type he was supposed to be retrieving. He walked over and grabbed the gear, understanding what needed to be done.
Brutis remained outside of the room, and let the door close as Perci walked in deeper, leaving the smaller male to fend for himself. That was fine by Perci. At least it was, until he ran into his first searcher, the inky being abruptly appearing from a puddle of ink he had failed to notice. It reached out towards him, batting him with a heavy hand, smearing ink over him in the process. His body stung where he was hit, and the smear of ink brought with it invading whispers, just like he had heard in the ink, though it was weak.

Perci slammed the pipe iron into the creature, his mind reeling at the memory of the ink. He lashed out wildly, slamming the pipe into the searcher again, watching it burst apart into ink once more. The angel was left panting in the subsequent silence, staring at the puddle. He hadn't actually fought anyone, or anything, since he was a pre-teen, and yet the instincts had come back the moment he had felt in danger. Maybe it was like riding a bike. You never truly forgot.. especially when you needed it the most.

It didn't make him feel any better though, staring guiltily at the puddle for a long moment. What was that? It had looked.. partially human, at least a sort of blobby human from the waste up, but it was so clearly not human. It's not human. It was fine.. wasn't it?

He moved onto the next metal box he could find, using his pipe wrench to open it and retrieve the gear. Two down, one to go.

Was it really OK that he had killed that ink creature so quickly? He hadn't even tried to speak and reason with it.. but it had gone straight into the attack. Alice had said they would drag him back into the ink if he was not careful. And he desperately did not want to go back to that. But.. did that make it OK?

Perci sighed, pacing through the offices, trying to find the final gear. The two he had were already making things tricky. If he could fit in in his pocket this would be easier. Maybe he could hang it off of the lip of his pant. He paused to try it, muttering as he looked at his small pockets with irritation, slipping a finger in to see if they were as small as his real world counterpart had been.

The pocket expanded far beyond what it had once been able to before, his eyes widening as they did. As a test, he stretched it out further, blinking in surprise as it expanded far to be more than wide enough for him to fit the gear in it. It was.. Like a cartoon. Which he had been told he was by several people. Why hadn't he thought of this sooner?

He bit back his embarrassment as he sat the gears into his pocket. They had heft to them, extending and weighing the pocket down a bit before they vanished into where ever items went when out in a pocket or the like. He checked if he could get it out, which he could, sighing in relief. That made life a bit easier. He dropped the other gear into his pocket as well, returning his attention to searching the room.

Eventually he pulled out his scissors again, setting his pipe into his pocket for safe keeping, eyeing the silver item. It was so simple, and yet they felt full of potential. And not just for paper crafts and the like. It had shown him some.. interesting things, which he hoped were not a hallucinating.

Probably a hallucination The dark voice whispered mockingly. Someone like you would never have any 'special' abilities.

Perci grimaced, shaking his head hard. Ever since he had pulled himself out of the ink, he had been constantly assaulted by the dark voice, constantly nibbling at the back of his mind. It made
him doubt his perceptions, constantly nibbling away at him. It was unlike anything he had ever
experienced before, always being someone to make a decision and stick to it, believing in his
perceptions. Every time it spoke, he felt a little less stable, like he was going to come apart at
the seams and sink back into the ink he had barely escaped.

A low groan made his head snap up, realizing another Searcher had appeared. It must have been
while he was distracted. Instead of his wrench pipe, his hand were still occupied by his scissors.
The angel rapidly began to back up, not wanting to risk contact with the searcher again, though his
eyes were locked onto the being for far more reasons than just fear.

There were threads, hundreds of snagging, tangled threads all around it, sinking back into the
floor, into the ink puddle it had come from. They were all dark and thick, the majority seeming to
be wrapped around it's neck and chest. All but one that is, a golden thread that wrapped around it's
entire being, mostly blotted out by the other threads. One end of it returned to the ink as well,
splintering as it neared the ink and darkening to the same shade as the choking threads.

The searcher was slow, just like the first one, but it was not so slow as to not be a danger. The
scissors trembled in his hands, vibrating as he stared at the tangled threads, the overwhelming urge
to cut away the confusing tangle hitting him hard. He fought with against the urge, seeing as it was
a crazy and nonsensical idea. Perci soon found himself backed into a corner however, the searcher
reaching for him. The scissors slid into his hands properly on instinct, the blades spreading apart as
he lunged forward. He slammed them shut, dozens of threads breaking away as he did.

The searcher lurched to a stop, groaning lowly, a hand going to it's head. Perci used this as a
chance to go around the being, but it raised another hand to catch him. He lunged again with the
scissors on impulse, slicing more of the threads. It stopped again, more of the golden thread visible
as the others fell away. Seeing the pattern, Perci turned, taking the scissors and slicing the blades
parallel to the back of the beings neck, cutting through the overwhelming majority of the threads,
as well as the golden thread stretching from the core of it's being to the ink.

A strange screech escaped the being, the ends of the thread still connected to the ink rapidly
slinking away, vanishing into the inky depths and leaving the two alone. The golden thread still
remained, glowing brighter now that the other threads were no longer blocking it from view. Perci
realized now that the golden thread was intertwined within the being, though it too was tangled
and knotted. It didn't feel like a good idea to try and cut through into the being and cut that thread.

The seeker slid away from him, hands on it's hands as it struggled wildly, splattering ink all over
the place. Perci quickly ran behind one of the divider walls, peering around it fearfully as the being
groaned and spasmed. Slowly, the ink sloughed away, revealing a more humanoid form, though it
was thin and drippy in places, still made of ink. It looked up to Perci after a moment, it's eyes
glowing gold in the depths of it's inky sockets. The being slowly walked closer, Perci going stiff
with unease, but it's appearance and body language was so sad and passive he couldn't bring
himself to try and attack.

It reached into some of the excess ink that had fallen off it's body, dredging something out of it
and holding it out towards the angel toon. It took a couple moments for the liquid to drip away,
revealing a gear, just like the ones he had been searching for. He hesitantly took it, softly thanking
the being, who released the gear into his hand without any trouble. It continued to stare down at
him, expression distraught and uncertain, taking a couple squishy steps towards him.

"W-Wait, I can't take you with me- I can't.. " He paused, eyeing the pitiful being, before sighing.
Could he really leave them now? They looked so human now, and those glowing eyes were so
desperate and pleading. It didn't seem to have any degree of hostility left in it now. He couldn't just
Perci hesitantly turned his back on the being, beginning to walk back towards the door out of the office. The room only had one door that wasn't blocked off, so it wasn't like he could go anywhere else. The sad being followed him, trembling lightly as it looked over the office, never straying far from the angel. Perci had helped him, had freed him of all the excess voices and emotions that had constantly bombarded him both in and outside of the ink.

Brutis eyed both of them as they walked out, Perci quickly pulling out the gears to show him. "Look, I have the gears-" He grunted as Brutis took them, glaring at the wolf. The wolf turned away from him, beginning down the stairs once more. The goal had been achieved and now it was time to leave, the extra hanger on of no matter unless Alice made it an issue. He recognized a Lost One when he saw it, and knew they had a low chance of becoming violent. If it turned on them, it would be easy to deal with.

The angel toon watched him for a moment, before quickly hobbling after him, hand returning to his scissors. As he forced himself to keep pace with the wolf, he analyzed the threads around the beast, trying to make sense of what the scissors showed him. There were dozens of threads between the halo and his body, just like before, though now that he was closer he could see that the threads that connected to his body from the halo were wrapped around the halo, and came from the threads the stretched away from the wolf. There was a golden thread inside of the wolf as well, but it was tangled in the halo threads, Perci eyeing them in thought.

If he broke those threads, would the wolf change? His best guess was that the golden threads were supposed to be an visible allegory for the soul or a persons consciousness.. And the black threads were.. something else. Outside influences? He wasn't sure. He needed more evidence, and if Alice came back out.. maybe the scissors would show him something useful.

He set the scissors back into his pocket, following the wolf quietly for now, the lost one trailing him quietly. Perci glanced back to the being, met with sad, uncertain eyes once more, quickly turning to face forward once more. Maybe Alice would be able to tell him more about what this thing was.. though he was hesitant to tell her how it came to be. He was hesitant to tell anyone, fearing they would think he was insane, or see it as something they could take advantage of. He did not want to end up someone else's tool, especially when he was still so in the dark of what it was he had done.

The trio returned to the backroom fairly quickly, taking a path over an area Perci assumed was the shop area, or part of it. For the moment it was clear, save for some splatters of ink here and there, and some large toys of the cartoon characters from the Bendy franchise. It was such a large space.. Was it even necessary? Surely they could have saved more money and time just making a small workshop, and selling the products elsewhere, somewhere more normal.

Once they reached the room, they were greeted by Alice's voice. He realized that there were several speakers set up in the room, allowing her voice to ring out around them. How she saw them was beyond him though, since he saw no cameras.. and as far as he understood, most of the tech in this building was up to 1940's-ish standards.

"Well, what have we here..?" She questioned, voice crooning around them. "A Lost One? How rare.."

"Lost One? Is that what it's called?" Perci asked. She didn't answer, so he continued. "I- I found it. In the office space. It helped me find on of the gears."

"How sweet of it." She answered, though she didn't sound like she meant it. "Put the gears
through the transport.. and leave your little friend by the door for me."

Perci did the first task easily, though the second request gave him pause. ". Why? I mean, is there a way we can help them? They're aren't like those other things, the searchers I think you called them. It isn't as aggressive. I think it can be he-"

"Yes, Yes, I know about the Lost ones." Alice's voice intoned. "As for helping him.. maybe. I have some tricks up my sleeve but the Lost Ones are notoriously.. unstable. They're ink is purer than most beasts down here.. but that seems to work against them." The last part was hastily tacked on, though Perci didn't initially notice this. He was more fixed on the 'pure' part.

"What do you mean?" He questioned, though cringed at her response.

"I don't have the time to explain it. Listen. Do you want some help for your little pet or not? Every moment counts here, errand boy." Alice answered, voice harsher now.

"I-I want to help him." Perci answered.

"Than leave him by the door. As for you, I think you've earned a rest. Take a break in my room and recover your strength.. and wipe off some of that excess ink. I'll have your next job ready for you soon." Alice finished, the crackle of the speakers suggesting they had been turned off.

Perci paused, turning to the Lost One, taking it's gooey hand with care. "Here. I need you to stand here, OK? A friend of mine is going to come pick you up, and she's going to try and help you, OK?" The gooey being walked to where he indicated, though it was reluctant to release his hand, staring at him quietly. Perci took a couple steps back, feeling terrible for leaving the pitiful being like this. It felt like he was trying to abandon an innocent puppy on the side of the road, his heart aching a bit. "You'll be OK."

He turned, quickly walking into the actor room, finding a comfy chair and sitting down, groaning a bit. His fused leg was beginning to ache as the anxiety and fear of his task wore off, allowing the pain to intrude on his mind. He pulled his leg up, rubbing it tiredly as he rested, closing his eyes and trying to process everything that had happened, feeling utterly mentally exhausted. Before he knew it, he was out like a light, passing out into a mercifully dreamless sleep.
Eventually the pair came to a stop, Henry panting as he leaned into a wall, glancing around the tunnel. It was like the sewer tunnel he had fled into when Bendy began his pursuit, and had remained the same with every twist and turn he had taken to escape the impatient devil. Pale sepia concrete walls, cracked in some places, a ditch in the center of the tunnel for the ink to lazily trail along, raised concrete sides to act as walkways. The only variety was the occasional writing on the wall, ink splatters, cracks, or the presence of wooden boards, barrels, and crates.

Jack slowly popped out of his ink puddle, the figure looking around them uncertainly, carefully righting his bowler. The sound of Bendy's pursuit had long since faded, but the pair of them had not stopped even then. It was only now, as Henry's toon enhanced stamina started to give out, that they stopped. The swollen one eyed him with concern, reaching a hand towards him as Henry leaned a bit more into the wall, panting hard.

"I'm OK." Henry reassured, slowly righting himself. "I'm OK. Thank you Jack. I don't know if I would have gotten away without your help." Which was true. Jack in his puddle form was surprisingly fast, and the former employee had started zipping ahead of Henry, trailing back and popping up to direct him away from dead ends. It was odd watching the ink puddle leap over the ink veins in the sewer, though Henry assumed it was for Jack's own safety. Exposure to the collective Ink never seemed safe, even for him. He had noticed a heightened chance of being attacked whenever he did make contact with the ink, and his mind felt less stable afterwards. He was usually good with re-balancing himself, but it felt like the ink exposure put a target on his back..

Jack seemed a bit flustered by his statement, making a shy gesture. He paused, glancing to the walls around him, the ink being cocking his head. Henry looked up as well, grunting in confusion as well at what Jack had spotted.

"Is that.. a rabbit?" Henry questioned.

Further down the tunnel near a turn stood a white rabbit, a bright halo hovering around one long ear. It stared at them both with dark eyes, thick white fur haloing it's neck, two small wings resting against it's back. The being had to many cartoon aspects to it's appearance to be a normal rabbit, not taking into account the wings and halo, but.. why was it there? It wasn't a character from the Bendy cartoon, and it wasn't something Henry could imagine Joey making.

The rabbit slowly sat up as they stared at it, nose twitching defiantly as it stared at them. It's front legs stretched slowly, a yawn coming from it's buck toothed mouth before it settled down again. At least it didn't seem hostile.

Henry slowly approached, curiosity rising at this unusual being. He moved with care however, not wanting to startle the small being into fleeing, given normal rabbit behavior. The angel rabbit let him get quite close, a couple feet between them before Henry crouched, reaching out a hand. The rabbit stretched forward a bit, though it didn't fully stand up, nose twitching as it sniffed his rough hands.

"What are you doing down here?" Henry questioned softly, though he didn't expect it to answer.
Jack was nervously trailing Henry, more nervous than usual. Something about this rabbit felt strange to him, but he couldn't put a finger on it exactly, or catch Henry's attention to communicate this.

The rabbit licked the tip of Henry's finger, before abruptly retracting, standing up and shaking it's head. The light from it's halo jumped and bobbed as it did so, the rabbit leaning back onto it's haunches and thumping his foot on the ground. Then it turned, scrabbling down the tunnel several feet before stopping and turning to eye them again.

"Do you.. want us to follow you?" Henry questioned, the rabbit thumping a foot again. He took a step after it, the being facing forward once more and beginning to hop forward again. It stopped every couple of feet to make sure Henry was still trailing them, the being leading him down a dark side tunnel. Henry followed nervously, ready to flee if this was a trap, though he felt it wasn't.

They inevitably hit a dead end, the rabbit stopping near the wall, halo illuminating a message. The print was neat and purposeful, properly capitalized and free of any of the usual splatters and mistakes most of the messages had. 'The dungeon's expansion is the beginning of it's downfall'

What did that mean?

"Did you bring us here to show us that?" Henry questioned. The rabbit was sitting peacefully on the ground, paws underneath it's thick fur as it watched them with deep, unreadable eyes, the light of it's halo glittering in those depths. The former animator slowly walked closer, crouching next to the rabbit and petting it's head. The angel received the petting calmly, dark eyes never leaving him.

"What do you think, Jack?" Henry asked as he stood up again, turning to face the swollen one. He blinked in surprise as he realized the swollen one was back where they started, his body language indicating unease. The human toon didn't think the man was afraid of the dark, given where he had moved his work station to. Maybe it was the rabbit. He glanced back to the small mammal, who was still sitting down, it's halo lighting up the dead end. He met it's dark eyes before crouching, scooping the rabbit up. It didn't resist, resting in his arms as Henry began to walk back to the nervous swollen one.

Jack backed up a bit as Henry returned to the lit portion of tunnels, looking up to Jack in concern. "Is something wrong, Jack?"

The former lyricist stared at them for a long moment, before shaking his head. He gestured towards the dark tunnel, wordless asking about what the rabbit had led him too. For the moment, the strange being didn't seem a danger, especially as it sat so quietly in Henry's arms, providing extra light.

"It led me to an.. unusual message. It looked like someone had taken their time writing it, and were.. well. Mentally balanced. It said 'The dungeon's expansion is the beginning of it's downfall'. What do you think that means?" Henry answered, petting the rabbit idly. It felt better to be holding something, though he'd rather it be an ax. The one he had during the start of the chase had broken somewhere early on during it when Henry was forced to chop his way through a dozen wooden boards to escape Bendy. The head had come off after the last board broke, leaving Henry with a handle he had pitched into Bendy's legs before running away.

"The sewers are bigger than before."

Jack wrote on a nearby wall, offering something he had noticed. "Much bigger."

"Maybe that's what they mean by expansion.. Maybe this world is going off the rails more than I"
imagined it would when I found Perci.." Henry muttered. Jack cocked his head questioningly, so Henry quickly continued. "He's Oliver's cousin. Or, at least, one of them. The two of them ended up in this version of the workshop on accident, and ever since then things have been changing. Such as being able to help you. I lost track of his cousins before we found you, though.. I'm not sure where they are."

He paused, heart heavy with concern. They had yet to come across any signs of the pair, and Pippen had been trapped with Bendy on the first level before he started after Henry. That.. didn't bode well for her. And Perci.. he had fallen into a lake of ink from what Henry had briefly been able to see, and exposure to that much ink did not give the brother good odds either.

"They were turned into toons, like I was, when they ended up in here. Perci's an angel of sorts, or at least he has a halo, and Pippen, his sister and the other cousin, is some sort of imp. Sorta like how Bendy was originally designed." Henry paused again, before sighing. "I don't know if either of them are even still alive. I couldn't keep them safe for more than a half hour at most."

Jack put a hand on his shoulder to try and offer some small modicum of comfort, Henry looking to him miserably. They both knew that was simply the nature of this place, even before it descended into the inky hell Joey had created. Taking the unsuspecting and the innocent, chewing them up until there was nothing left. Some escaped, but never unscathed. And it had only gotten worse with the addition of the ink machine, and madness that had ensued.

"We should keep moving." Henry sighed, starting to walk, still carrying the strange rabbit. "If we stay put too long, there's a chance Bendy will find us again.. and I doubt he'll be in a merciful mood." Jack was quick to follow, the swollen one not eager to find out what Bendy would do to him when he caught up to them.

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"What.. are those..?" Henry muttered as he peered around an edge. He was still in the sewers, having yet to find any form of a way out, though he was no longer carrying the rabbit. At some point the small white being had jumped out of his arms, ears vibrating and twisting every which way. They had run down a tunnel and vanished into the cracks of some debris, leaving the pair of males on their own.

They had been walking down these tunnels for a long time, though he had no idea exactly how long. Time was hard to track in the studio to begin with, and in the sewers even more so. But now.. Now he was at the crossroads of another strange sight, though he was more hesitant to approach them than the rabbit.

The beings appeared to be searchers, or part searchers at least.. except.. These beings were more animalistic in ways, bordering on anthropomorphism. The human figures had gained animal traits, drippy ink fur, ears, muzzles, and clawed hands or paws, with some variety between them. They were.. half human and half cartoon animal in appearance, wandering around a bit more than was normal for searchers, though not much. They seemed to be in the same purposeless, confused state they would usually be in.. at least until something they could attack made itself known.

Henry decided against a confrontation, turning to back track. Jack watched the group of strange searchers for several moments, before following him, a bit slower than before. Whatever they were, they seemed to be an evolution of the common searchers.. and neither of them were sure if that was good or bad. The animator glanced back to him, considering discussing the matter with him, but decided against it. At least for now, while they were still near it and could be discovered
by the strange beings.

"Let's find a way out of here before things get stranger.." Henry offered, Jack nodding to him.

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Perci woke with a jerk, grunting lightly as he sat up. His body ached from sleeping in one position for so long, but he did feel mildly refreshed. It took several moments for him to work out where he was again, looking around the actor room. There was a vanity dresser with a broken mirror, a crumpled bed he didn't dare touch, the cushy chair he was seated in now, the table and two chair they had sat at the day(?) prior.

He slowly slid out of his chair, wincing lightly as his body twinged all over with aches and pains. The angel toon slowly walked out of the room, glancing outside the room. Brutis was there, resting against the wall, though the lost one was not. Alice had said she was going to take him into her parlor to try and stabilize him. The inky being hadn't seemed very stable, dripping ink constantly and directionless as it was.

Brutis grunted as Perci appeared, head jerking towards the transport tube. Perci reluctantly approached, opening the tub and retrieving.. a plunger. A plunger? What in the world did she expect him to do with-

"Oh good, your up." Alice's voice echoed around him, the speakers crackling as they turned on. "I need valve cores. Brutis will show you to a level where you can usually find them. All you need to do is take that plunger to any open valve box you find and suction out the core. It will take a bit of effort, but I'm sure you will manage. I need at least five of them and.. Keep in mind the process is a bit noisy. If you make to much noise at once you might draw the Ink demon's attention.. and neither of us would want that."

"Ink.. Demon?" Perci questioned, paling a bit. "Do you mean that.. thing from the upper levels?"

"You said it was tall, dark, and had a twisted body, so yes. There is only one being like that in this place, and that being is the wretched ink demon. His touch alone could drag you back into the ink.. so take care little errand boy. But know that this is one of the most important tasks I give you." Alice informed, tone darkening as she discussed the ink demon.

"I-I- I understand." Perci paled a bit, shivering at the memory of that strange being, it's unrelenting smile and sharp, dangerous claws. "Um.. How is the lost one I brought in earlier? Is he OK?"

A low moan came from the speaker, sounding suspiciously like the maker was in pain, before being overwhelmed by Alice's voice. "He's certainly hanging in there. I'm doing my best for him, but I'm not sure he will stay stable for much longer. A shame, really."

"Oh.." Perci's head fell a bit, before he looked back up towards a speaker. His heart was heavy, faced with the possibility he had made this beings existence even worse than it would have been if he had just destroyed it like the first seeker. "Can I.. Can I at least say goodbye?"

"He can hear you just fine from where you are." Alice dismissively replied. "Go get my valve cores. Maybe he'll still be around when you come back.. Though I doubt it." Perci sighed, bowing
his head as he clutched the plunger, turning to Brutis. The massive wolf sauntered out of the room, expecting Perci to keep pace with him as they made their way to a different staircase than the one they had used before.

This staircase only gave the option of going downwards, as the upper stairs were flooded with debris from the upper levels, rendering them unpassable. As Brutis walked ahead down the stairs, Perci's hand wandered to his scissor once more. The threads reappeared before his eyes, much closer now thanks to the angle he had on Brutis, the strings stretching from the wolf to where they had come from.

Despite what had happened with the lost one, he found himself drawing his scissors, cutting several of the threads. They jerked and twisted away, though several others remained entangled on the wolf, the change immediate. Brutis jerked to a stop, though he remained standing, quickly catching himself before he could fall. Perci quickly hid the scissors, nervously watching as the massive canine turned to eye him, the pair staring at one another. Than Brutis began to approach.

Perci cringed, taking a step back as the wolf neared, closing his eyes as a massive hand lifted. And stopped as he felt it gently pat his head. He opened his pie cut eyes again in confusion, staring up at the wolf, whose eyes seemed to be focused on him with curiosity. The wolf's body language had shifted notably, more relaxed and approachable, and as Perci watched, Brutis cocked his head curiously. The wolf's muzzle split into a grin, patting the angel's head again, squashing his halo into his head as he did. His tail was wagging and the wolf was clearly in a friendlier mood now, feeling less robotic and more like an actual living being.

"Y-Your welcome?" Perci offered nervously, Brutis nodding in affirmation. He was grateful to the angel, though neither of them were fully out of the woods. Brutis may be in more control of himself, but he could feel the twisted angel's influence still binding him, commanding him to obey. If Perci could repeat what he had done, the massive wolf would be fully freed, but they were still deep in Alice's territory, and she had a number of ways to punish dissent.

The small angel toon began to reach for his scissors again, but Brutis put a hand over them, shaking his head. He gestured for Perci to wait, glancing around nervously as he did, quickly standing up and resuming to walk downstairs. A dry hacking noise came from the canine as he attempted to speak, finding his vocal chords a useless wreck as he did. Of course she would destroy them. Alice loved to hear herself speak, and the only time she appreciated other voices was when they were praising her.

"O-OK. I-I can do it again but.. I'll wait until you say to do so." Perci offered as he followed Brutis. At least now the wolf wasn't setting as brutal a pace, mindful of Perci's bum leg as they walked. The angel's mind was abuzz as he followed the wolf down several levels, finally finding his voice as they neared a door. "Is.. Is this the true you Brutis?"

Brutis paused, glancing to Perci before holding up a hand. He held it parallel to the ground, waving it in a 'sorta' motion, indicating that Perci had helped to partially restore him. Though what he couldn't say was that the other male would not be able to fully restore him to what he once was, a slightly smaller, considerably thinner form.

"Oh. Well.. I'm glad I got to meet the true you. Or at least part of it.." Perci offered in a friendly tone. A smile split the wolf's muzzle again, his tail wagging as he nodded to the angel, opening the door for him. The door was too short for Brutis to squeeze through, almost as if it had been added as an after thought. Which meant Perci had to go through alone like before. Brutis looked up to him with a concerned gaze, but Perci managed a small smile. "I'll be OK. Just.. stay safe, OK?"
Brutis nodded, letting the angel pass, the massive wolf’s gaze turning to clean wall of the stairwell behind him. Nearby, some ink dipped down from an unseen place. Brutis knew the stairwells were one of the few places Alice did not have eyes on, the wolf slowly walking to the ink and dipping a finger into it, walking back to the clear wall to get to work.

Meanwhile, Perci was trotting around the tight confines of some form of maintenance area, grimacing as he did. It was unpleasant, with puddles of ink scattered about the pockmarked ground, and numerous pipes and the like crossing over the upper and lower portions of his path. There was some lighting, though they were infrequent, and Perci found himself depending more on his halo than before, grateful for it’s perpetual light.

After several minutes of wandering, he finally came across a dead end, finding an open pipe of sorts. It seemed the pipe was connected to some nearby machinery, which was chugging away at some unknown task. When he peered in, with his halo held close to offer some light, he could see some sort of rounded, vaguely battery like device. It was a closed tunnel, ending with the odd battery at the end, though the tube itself was just a bit too long for him to reach in with his arms and grab it.

Which explained the plunger. It took him a couple tries, but he eventually managed to get the plunger suctioned around the pipe entrance, beginning to clumsily pump at the tunnel. It was a long, tiresome process, and the metal tube the device was in clinked and creaked as the pressure grew, the nearby machine beeping with disapproval. When the device shut off, Perci removed the plunger, seeing the core was within arms reach, fishing it out with some minor difficulty.

He sat the rounded device into his pocket, sighing in annoyance as he realized how many more times he would have to do this. They seemed to be batteries of sort, and powerful ones at that, and Alice had said this was important.. and that power was hard to come by down here. Those two facts helped him keep moving, dragging himself through the maze of tunnels and tracking down more cores. He worked out a better means of doing this halfway through, searching for the machines they were powering instead of the core box, the new tactic helping him expedite the process of finding core boxes with a core still in it.

The time it took him between each core seemed to work in his favor, as he didn't encounter the ink demon. It seemed if the sounds were spaced out enough it would be safe to keep working.. Not that he was intended to keep testing this theory. Once he found the fifth core he started out of the maintenance area, sighing in relief as he spotted the door, feeling the ceiling move upwards as he closed in on it.

The door creaked softly as he opened it, falling out in exhaustion, wincing at the pain in his leg. He managed to shut the door behind him, using the plunger to push himself upright, at least until Brutis came to help him. He thanked the wolf as the other helped him stand up properly, though he noticed the ink on the wolf’s fingers. Once he had recovered, the wolf pointed to the wall he had been crouched by, Perci looking over slowly.

Drawings. The wall was coated in childish drawings, but what they depicted sent shivers down his spine. One was of Alice and her mutilated face, a hateful expression on it as she held up two odd tools over a smaller, slimmer wolf who was strapped to a table. There were pictures of dead bodies and dozens of tallies, their eyes X'ed out, and Alice laughing nearby. Pictures of the supplies Perci was gathering being used to power terrible machines that tortured other cartoon beings..

And then there was the drawing of himself, Alice stabbing him in the back. The next was of her
tearing him apart, seemingly shoving the pieces of himself onto her in some strange form of cannibalism. Perci paled, staring at the images, heart beating fast in his chest as he looked up to Brutis, who wore a tired, solemn look. These images were a warning as to what he was really getting into, and of Alice's terrible intentions.

"T-The lost one." Perci paled as he noticed another drawing, seeming to depict the lost one from the day before. It was strapped to a table, a terrifying Alice hovering over it. Brutis bowed his head, shaking it lightly. There would be no saving the lost one. Not when it was in Alice's grasp. Perci bowed his head in shame, Brutis whining softly in concern. He hadn't known better, he couldn't have known better.

".. Do you know a way out of here, Brutis?" Perci asked softly. Brutis stared at him, so he continued.. "Not even outside the studio, but out of Alice's reach?"

The wolf cocked it's head, giving the 'so-so' hand sign again to indicate a maybe, standing up and taking the lead. They walked back up several levels, before squeezing through a door. It seemed to put them on the Heavenly Toys workshop level, the wolf quietly leading him through the rooms of toys and products. He seemed confused, eyeing some of the rooms in uncertainty, having to stop several times and double back.

"What's that?" Perci asked, walking over to a work desk. He pushed Alice Angle dolls out of the way, revealing a recorder of sorts. He hopped onto a nearby stool and sat down as he turned it on, resting his leg as the recorder began to play. Alice's voice greeted them, though without the falsetto and edge of instability her present version's had. Her voice was distressed however, and the reason became clear soon.

\textit{Everything feels like it's coming apart.}

\textit{When I walked into the recording booth, Sammy was there with that... Allison.}

\textit{Apparently, I didn't get the mom. Alice Angel will now be voiced by Miss Allison Pendle.}

\textit{A part of me died when he said that.}

\textit{There's gotta be a way to fix this!}

Her tone struck a sympathetic chord in him, Perci eyeing the recorder for several moments. Brutis had sat down on the ground next to him, and was now watching him, cocking his head curiously at Perci's expression. After a moment, the angel took notice of him, smiling weakly.

"S-Sorry. It just.. reminded me of something." He looked away, pausing as he felt a massive hand on his shoulder. When he didn't budge, Brutis shoved a worried snout against him, whining in a low husky tone. He sighed, deciding to get the matter off his chest. "All right. This.. It probably won't make sense but.. I understand what she was feeling in that moment. And I feel bad for her, despite what she's done."

"When I was a kid, I had a mom and a dad, like any normal kid. I thought things were perfect and fine.. and then one day I came home and dad was gone. The house felt.. weird. All of his stuff was gone too. Mom said at first he was on a business trip, and then eventually told me that he left. It felt like the world was falling apart." He sighed, "I hoped so much he would come back, that we could go back to what we had, when things were normal. But they didn't. Suddenly I had a new dad, and a baby sister on the way and I was so angry and took it out on everyone constantly. Even
Pippen after she was born."

"I told you it would be weird. But hearing her say that. I just.. remember how I felt then. How angry I was. So angry that doing horrible things to other people who hadn't done anything to me felt justified. And I guess I can understand how she became what she is now but.. It doesn't excuse it." He shot a guilty look towards Brutis. "Sorry I just.. got caught on the parallels. I feel bad for her, but not as bad as I feel for the people she's hurt."

Brutis huffed in understanding, patting the boy's head again. The two angels had both come to a dark crossroads in their life, be it at different times, and both had chosen different paths. It was a small mercy for Brutis that Perci had changed, appearing to have chosen a less destructive path in life. Or at the very least, he was kinder to him than Alice had ever been.

After several moments, the wolf stood, glancing back towards the door they had come from. If they stayed there too long, they risked Alice getting curious and looking for them.. and discovering how far they had strayed from her task. She was likely very distracted by the Lost One Perci had unwittingly given to her, but it would only last for so long. The toy shop had expanded and was now unfamiliar, with many paths that would circle back into themselves. If they wanted to escape, they'd have to find a different path.

"I guess we have to go back, huh?" Perci questioned, sighing as the wolf nodded. He had seen how confused and lost the wolf had been, though he couldn't guess why. Then again, the drawings seemed to infer that Brutis had been one of Alice's experiments. Maybe that had left his memories muddled, or maybe he just wasn't familiar with this area.

The pair made their way back towards the twisted angel's lair, slowly slipping back into the roles they had been playing when they left. Brutis moved ahead of him, putting on an indifferent expression, while Perci wiped away the comfort with Brutis' presence from his body language and expression. Brutis returned to his usual spot against the wall while Perci turned in the cores and plunger.

"Good job, errand boy." Alice's voice rang out from the speakers, though it seemed airy and distracted. No doubt still coming down from whatever high cannibalizing the 'pure' ink of the Lost One.

Perci bit back a grimace, smiling a brightly. "Yeah. Say, have I 'paid my fee' yet?" he asked in a friendly way, though he wasn't surprised by his answer.

"Not quite yet." Alice answered. ". Did anything happen while you were out? Anything unusual?"

"Um, no? I mean, there were some more searchers, Brutis beat them up.. That was about it." Perci answered nervously, shifting quietly in place. The silence stretched on, before Alice finally responded

"Very well. Take your rest, errand Boy. I have one more task in mind, and then I think we'll be ready to send you to the top. Rest well." Alice hummed, both Brutis and Perci shivering a bit with relief as the speaker's crackled off.
Chapter 9

It was dark and it was cold, his limbs numb as he sank deeper and deeper. There seemed to be no bottom to this ocean of ink, and though he felt like he was sinking deeper, at the same time it felt like he was completely still. As if parts of him were breaking away and staying at different levels or drifting away, but he did not lose feeling in them. It was disconcerting to say the least.

The stinging pain in his head had faded, but that pain was replaced by the pressure of voices, hundreds of desperate, wild, confused voices. They pressed in all around him, whispering, murmuring, shouting, pleading, the cacophony so overwhelming he could make out almost nothing but the drone of voices. He could feel other's grabbing at him, tugging him, threatening to tear him apart as desperate minds sought a reprieve from the hell they had been trapped in.

He was very nearly overwhelmed, his memories threatening to unravel under the pressure, his very being at stake. First came fear and confusion, than came anger and defiance. Sure, he felt bad for all these other people, but it gave them no right to tear him apart! They would not tear apart Oliver Green without a fight!

Oliver churned his limbs, though they felt doughy and inconsistent, defying the pull of the ink and the denizens trapped within. He felt something solid, like wood, thin enough for a gummy set of talons to wrap around. The wood bent a bit, experiencing similar effects from the ink that Oliver was, but at a slower rate. It held however, catching on something else as Oliver began to move up. Whatever it was didn't stop him however, and his gummy talons were borderline unresponsive now, so there was no letting go of the object.

The cockatoo focused on how he had been, not is human form, which felt like a distant and blurry memory, but his cartoon form. He especially focused on his big, useful wings, his arms feeling a bit more solid as he fought the ink. The darkness and overwhelming miasma of sadness and helplessness were choking him, fighting his every defiant action, but he was slowly breaking out of the stale mate.

He half swam, half flew up through the ink, dragging the wooden thing and it's occupant with him, claws partially fused around the wood as he focused less on his lower limbs and more on his upper half. The lower half wasn't in danger of falling apart however, Oliver's defiance holding him strong. It did, however, ensure a firm grip on the mystery object he had impulsively grabbed onto.

In fact, it seemed his defiant spirit was infecting part of the ink, at least around him. He was met with less resistance, the voices whispering in fascination and curiosity as he dragged himself out of the ink. Whoever or whatever was attached to the wooden object he was holding was moving as well, Oliver feeling additional pressure from below, helping to push them upwards. Some of the ink conglomerate tried to overwhelm his defiance, but it was too late, the darkness steadily lightening from black to grey and then-

"ARGHHHHHHHHH!" Oliver screamed as he launched himself up from the ink, his form a dark, blooby mess that was vaguely bird shaped. He hadn't even realized he was screaming in defiance until he had breached the ink, and didn't stop until he landed. His wings, the only part of him that were really defined compared to the rest of him, though still inky and blooby in places, churned furiously, taking him quite a ways above the ink.

He managed to aim for a nearby dock, a rough wooden construct that partly reached out into the ink. Oliver glanced down, seeing the blooby form of someone else beneath him, clutching the ink.
stained banjo that Oliver had grabbed whilst in the ink. He wasn't sure at the moment who had
dredged out with him, but put it to the back of his mind. Instead he focused on aiming for the dock,
colliding with it with a heavy SPLAT, the banjo rider landing on the dock behind him with much
the same grace.

Both of them groaned, Oliver struggling weakly against the ink that was still clinging to his
form. It left him feeling numb and disoriented, a pair of feelings he did not appreciate. He flapped
his wings furiously, slowly dragging himself out of the pile of sticky ink he had collapsed into. It
was a long, arduous process, but eventually he managed to force it off, shaking globs back into the
river beneath him and wading out of the portion covering the bottom half of his body. Once he was
free of the largest portion it fell back into river, leaving Oliver to look over the damage.

He looked over himself, seeing that much of his form was the same as before, though his wings
were a bit larger and more robust. He was white with sepia tinting on his chest and crest, which
was similar to a sulphur crest cockatoo's. There were changes however, the mid length of his
feathers black with white speckles along his wing and his tail feathers. Despite these mild changes,
he was much like before, an anthropomorphic cockatoo standing in a bipedal stance. He felt
relieved, though mildly concerned by the changes.

A fresh groan made him turn around, spotting the banjo rider fairly quickly. The banjo itself had
recovered quickly, most likely thanks to it being an inanimate object with less complications to it's
existence than living beings. The rider however seemed to be in mixed condition. He was
humanoid, his limbs filled out properly, though he was still coated in ink in places. The worst was
his head, the figure clawing his inky hands against them. It looked like there was something solid
beneath the ink, though it was in question how long it would last without help.

"Hold on, big guy. Hold on." Oliver squawked, slowly approaching. The figure scrabbled
weakly against the dock, freeing his fingers from the ink, three fingers and a thumb. It lashed out at
Oliver weakly, clutching his shoulder with a desperate grip. Oliver winced, but pushed on, tearing
off slimy chunks of ink and throwing them back into the river below them. Slowly, a new form
became known to him, and he could take a guess at who it was, but he wasn't certain.

The figure was tall, as tall as Sammy had been, and had a similar body build to him, but.. Where
Sammy had been fully made of ink, this being had flesh, similar to Henry's toon flesh. It was pale,
paler than Henry's, his face the same rough shape as Sammy's head, but with actual details.
eyelids, a nose, a mouth, a smidgen of stubble on his oval chin. Curly locks of sepia-white hair
covered his head, two spiraling ram horns on each side of his head. They were simple and cartoon-
y, a pair of sheep ears atop his head near the horns.

His attire was a bit on the fancy side, a grey pinstriped vest and nice white long sleeved shirt
underneath, splattered with a bit of ink in places. His slacks were tan, stained with ink near the
bottom of them, and a set of dark shoes rested on feet. They were so coated in ink that Oliver
wasn't sure what kind they were, but they looked comfortable and functional. And to finish it all
was a thin tail, tipped with an ornate spade, similar to the being he had once worshiped, though the
shape of the tip was considerably different.

"Ooh.. My head.." The figure groaned in a suspiciously familiar voice. Oliver waddled back to
the front of the man, who was still laying on the ground, clutching his banjo.

"Sammy?" Oliver questioned. The figure groaned. "Sammy Lawrence?"

"That.. is me." Sammy answered tersely, slowly pushing himself up. A forked tongue lapped
across dry lips, the man pausing at the strange sensation, wobbling lightly. He stared at his toon
hands for several moments, his mind still scrambled from their time in the ink. He jumped a bit as
his tail began to twitch and shift with anxiety, staring at the new limb in shock. Oliver could see the other male struggling to handle so many abrupt changes, the bird taking a step closer.

"Oi, Sammy. Stay with me, will ya? Look at you. You're more human now, at least. You wanted that, right? You were muttering about being trapped in an inky body.." Oliver offered, hoping his words would offer an anchor to the other man. "You've got like, a tail now. So don't panic about that. It's weird, I know, but like, tail's aren't that bad. Kinda useful actually. At least you're mostly human. I mean you have the horns and ears, but your face is really human now. Rest of you is too, 'cept the tail, and the horns.. and the ears."

He trailed off, watching Sammy slowly sit up, taking stock of himself. The musician slowly looked over himself, his eyes slightly unnerved but his body language suggesting he was less unhinged than before. Oliver fell quiet, watching the man nervously as the other took stock. He wasn't sure if it was a good idea to speak or not, hoping the other man's mind was handling everything well.

The silence abruptly ended as Sammy slammed his fists into the wooden dock, the bird squawking and leaping in shock. Oliver skittered back a couple feet on instinct, not wanting to take another blow to the skull. However, Sammy did not move, his face one of utter fury. His voice was soft, difficult to hear at first, but slowly picked up volume. "Damn him. Damn him! Damn you to hell, Joey Drew!"

"Joey?" Oliver echoed, rubbing his beak. It took him a moment to remember the name on the trophy, shaking his ink fogged head. It would probably take him some time to fully recover cognitively, and if he was doing this bad, he couldn't imagine how Sammy was doing. They would have to help each other.. Oliver more so than Sammy in this case.

"That wretch is responsible for all of this! Him and his 'dreams'." The composer spat out a glob of ink, gritting his teeth. "More like nightmares. He's the conductor to this madness, the one to blame for all of this spiraling out of control."

"Sounds like he needs a good walloping." Oliver offered, tending to his feathers quietly. "That's what I'd do if I were in your shoes."

"Joey was overdue a 'walloping' long ago." Sammy coarsely answered, slowly dragging himself to his feet. He clutched his Banjo close, readjusting the strap so it was secured to his form. He wiped his clothing off of dust and loose ink, grumbling to himself. "At least I have some proper clothing now.."

"At least you have some." Oliver offered, laughing a bit. "I wouldn't have minded a pair of overalls like you had."

Sammy managed a wry grin, beginning to lead him up the dock. "Well, when you are nothing but an naked ink being, you make do with what you have available. Your feathers should suffice for now." He moved with confidence, and it slowly became clear he was familiar with this place.

"Sooo. Where we going?" Oliver asked after several minutes of walking along the makeshift dock. He trailed just a footstep behind Sammy, trying to show some confidence in the other man's sanity. The dock was wide enough in most places for the pair to walk next to each other, though there was the occasional spot where Oliver decided it was better to wait and walk behind Sammy.

"The Lost Harbor, a place I'm familiar with." Sammy answered. "And where we may find help.. They knew me in my other form, looked up to me even in my madness.."
"I think we're already on these harbor." Oliver offered, tapping his feet on the rough wooden path they walked along. "And who is 'They'?

"If we were there, I would not be leading you there. These are the dockways, but the harbor.. well you'll know it when you see it. It's where many of the Lost Ones have gathered together in hopes of safety in numbers.. And that someone or something would bring them salvation." Sammy's voice, which initially started out annoyed, softened near the end of his sentence, looking up towards the curving roof of the sewer like expanse.

"The heck is this place exactly?" Oliver questioned, a keen eye roaming over the expanse. It was far larger and wider than most simple sewer tunnels, a thick inky river trailing in the center. Rickety bridges and paths crisscrossed over the dangerous substance, the pair slowly traversing one. 'I mean, I know you said it's called 'the Lost Harbor', but what the heck was this built for? What in the world does an animation studio need with all of this?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. All I know is that one day, I found myself here, amongst the Lost Ones. Eventually my madness guided my back to the music department, but for a time, I was a.. preacher.. of sorts. For the Lost. It helped some of them not collapse in on themselves at least." Sammy answered, the edge of annoyance never fully leaving his tone. Or maybe that was just his natural tone, whether he was annoyed or not. Oliver wasn't about to let it bother him easily.

"This can not be up to code.." Oliver muttered as he eyed the construction. In places it was more like a rough hewn cave than proper cobbling and stone, the cockatoo grimacing in disapproval. Though that brought to question, just how deep had they gone? "You brought up these 'Lost Ones' twice now. What are they? I'm assuming they are the ones who looked up to you before."

"The Lost Ones are.. well.. Lost souls. They have fallen to the ink, and yet they have not fully lost themselves to the degree the searchers have. They still hold fragments of their memories.. of hopes and fears. The Lost Ones maintain a vaguely humanoid form, but it's entirely made of ink, and can fall apart if the Lost One becomes too emotionally unstable. It doesn't happen often, as it takes a good deal of will to hold yourself together to become a Lost One, from what I understand, but occasionally." Sammy began, shaking his head as he trailed off. He continued after a moment of looking to the talkative bird. "They're ability to communicate is extremely limited, however, and pressuring them to answer is not a good idea. Not unless you want to damn these beings to the same inky abyss we narrowly escaped."

"Ah.. Got it." Oliver muttered, rubbing his crest. "I swear, none of you people are good conversationalists. Except Jack.. sorta. I mean he was a good listener at least."

Sammy paused, blinking in thought, glancing to his new form, and then Oliver. "That's right.. You had Jack with you before.. And yet you did not change his form as you have done mine. Why?"

"What do you mean?" Oliver questioned, turning his head to the side and raising a brow. "I didn't do nothin'. Well, aside screaming and swimming out of that gunk." He glared at the ink as he finished, before looking back to Sammy.

"You.. Didn't? I could have sworn.." Sammy shook his head. He remembered the overwhelming defiance that had suddenly invaded his tired mind, beating back the clouds of ink induced insanity that muddled and confused him. The old fire in his breast being reignited as he metaphorically put his foot down and defied the will of the ink, defied the invading misery and entropy, instead aiding the thing that had been pushing him up. He had decided than that, like a stubborn ram, he would defy any master that was not himself. So he had mentally slammed his mind against the conglomerate in defiance, despite the alluring whispers of madness and the savior it had
constructed. The fight seemed as if it would be endless, but then they abruptly breached the surface.

Sammy had calmed down pretty quickly after they had slammed into the dock, a move that had knocked a lot out of him actually. It hadn't been enough to send him into full insanity again, though it had made fully escaping the encapsulating ink difficult. It was probably for the best that Oliver had helped, though Sammy would not say as such. He did not need to swell the bird's head.

"I guess we will never know what caused this." Sammy simply stated, continuing to walk. He shook his head as he felt the familiar temptation to fall into his ink addled mindset. It was easier than, when all he needed to think on was sheep and sacrifices to a false god that likely didn't even know who he was. He was sane enough to recognize that fact now, that he had never actually seen Bendy, except from afar, it was never Bendy who had taken his sacrifices, if they were taken at all. His addled state had always made excuses for it, but he could recognize reality for what it was now. Bendy had never been the savior his desperate mind had conjured, and the beings swift 'betrayal' of his loyalty had helped to crack that facade.

"This whole place is weird man. I came in a normal human, had one dunking, came out a friggin' bird. I mean, don't get me wrong, being a bird is kinda handy, once I figured out the whole flying business, but it's one h*** of a change to adapt too. And those random sounds replacing cuss words too. That s**** weird." Oliver offered, falling back into his usual chatty self as he followed Sammy.

Despite the occasional glare, and minimal grunting and grumbling responses Sammy would offer, the cockatoo kept chattering, to the ram's disappointment. It wasn't too bad, given Oliver kept most of the topics fairly clean and interesting, but Sammy was not and had not been the best conversationalist in Joey Drew's studios. Which seemed OK with Oliver, who took up the slack and somehow kept the conversation going despite the minimal interaction Sammy would willingly give him.

Eventually Oliver fell silent, though it became clear it was because he was listening, the bird's head cocking every which way. Distantly, the crashing of liquid could be heard, the telltale sign of the waterfall near the Lost Harbor. It was some distance away from the Harbor proper, but the sound traveled well in these massive tunnels. Sammy intervened before Oliver could continue speaking however, gauging how close they were to the Lost Harbor.

"Now, stay quiet. I understand that may be a difficult concept for you, but you will not die or explode from desire to speak. And no sudden movements. The Lost Ones may not be the most powerful beings down here, but they can still be a danger in a large group and when startled. They aren't openly aggressive but it's better not to test things." The ram demon instructed, Oliver giving him a sour look over his comment, but complying.

As they neared the end of the dock they walked on, they slowly became aware of the sound of soft squishy shuffling and soft low moans. They turned a corner, revealing the Lost Harbor to them, the pair pausing on the outskirts.

The Lost Harbor, much like the dockways, was a hodgepodge of wood, nails, glue, tape, and the occasional piece of stone or metal if a simple use could be worked out. The Harbor had a wide open lane at the entrance, large shanty houses lining the sides, the buildings haphazard and dangerous. Deeper in, the lane was splintered by more shanty buildings, each as unsafe as the last, all of the derelict and decrepit from years of wear and tear.

Then there were the lost ones. They were everywhere, unnaturally thin, gaunt humanoid figures with heads slightly to large for their bodies, and large sunken in glowing pits for eyes. Each of them
wore a look of misery and exhaustion, utterly down trodden by their meaningless existence, and the knowledge that the only other option they had in this 'world' was to rejoin the miserable miasma of the ink. Some had fallen into repetitive actions, patting the ground in a methodical manner, or walking a simple track, leaving inky footprints in an ever thickening line. Others simply stood around, limbs held close as they slowly looked up to the intrusion.

A coiling sense of tension invaded the air as more glowing eyes looked up to them, Oliver doing his best to not start babbling a panicked explanation. There were so many of them, they simply wouldn't stand a chance if the mob was incited. There was nowhere to really go, and if too many came onto the dockways at once Oliver didn't doubt for a moment the rickety paths would collapse.

Sammy held up his hands, slowly walking towards the group, speaking with a calm, firm voice. "It is I, Sammy Lawrence. I have fallen once more from the upper levels and seek refuge amongst the lost. I bring with me a stranger to this place, but one who is lost like us, seeking purpose, seeking safety, and seeking companionship." He had partially slipped back into the soft tone Oliver had first heard from him during the 'sermon' recording, though he didn't fully slip into it. There was a solid edge to the once dreamer like quality the tone had carried, the man steadily solidifying his reformation not only in body, but in mind.

The tension slowly lessened as Lost Ones looked away, returning to their pitiful shivering or the distraction of their repetitive motions. A couple slowly hobbled towards them, hands going to Sammy's new form, gently touching him. Their inky forms were cold, just as Sammy remembered his own had been, but gentle, the ink they left behind having only a very subdued effect. In a way, the Lost Ones were still a portion of the ink, but the will that had lead them out of the substance helped to dampen the effects, straining away most of the ink's poison, though not all.. Never all of it.

"I know, I have changed. It is strange, and I am not entirely sure how this came to be, but know that we seek out that knowledge, and once we have acquired it, intend to share it." Sammy intoned. He couldn't muster much disgust towards the pitiful beings before him, though he was never much of a people person. The Lost Ones.. they were different. They were his people. When he had first fallen to these levels, it had been them that had taken him in, their companionship that had helped him regain some semblance of humanity, as corrupted as it was. And in turn, he had given them hope. Terrible, false, insane hope, but hope none the less, something so short in supply down here.

"Seems to me when you started remembering yourself is when it started.." Oliver muttered, still subdued by Sammy's earlier comment, and the odd scene before him. "Started looking at your work, fixing your banjo, all that stuff that relates to who you were to some degree.. seems as good a catalyst as any."

"Perhaps.." Sammy murmured thoughtfully. There was some truth to the bird's words. He had never focused on his work or his past while in his zealot state of mind, he had always been focused on getting Bendy's attention, on being a good 'prophet'. A prophet of desperate lies. But once he had heard the same bird that stood next to him brutalize his music, and his beloved instrument, something had stirred within him. However.. "How would we even begin to try. I was not in the same state as the Lost Ones are when I changed."

"Well, we just start taking things and throwing it at them. OK, maybe not throwing but you get what I mean. This place is dull, boring, and an absolute hazard. I'm terrified some of these buildings will come down if we just look at them wrong.." Oliver offered, muttering the later half.

"And you would know how to do it better?" Sammy challenged in an annoyed tone. He had helped in the construction of some of these haphazard buildings in his early days. The sense of
community and hope had been stronger than, when they all had a goal and purpose to work towards.

"I'm a construction worker by trade, training to be an architect proper." Oliver stated proudly, a feathered hand going to his chest. "I know a thing or two about making stable buildings, even with odd supplies. We made it a game, back on the surface, of my buddies throwing random supplies at me, and I having to make a stable building of it. Ahh, good times. Shame we don't have any beer to make this interesting."

"Having a goal does help them. I remember that much from when much of the Harbor was being built. We may not have had your knowledge, but we had each other.. and a goal." Sammy offered reluctantly.

"When your as emptied out as these guys look, I'd imagine having anything other than nothin' really helps." Oliver mused. "Listen, you and me, we should have a look around. Now, I'm not suggestin' we walk into any of these places, but we should take a gander. Find the worst offenders and mark'em for fixing. You can rally the troops while we look, get the plan implanted in their minds so they can work themselves up to actually standin'. Then we're work out where to go to from there. Everyone gets safer buildings, the Lost Ones have a sense of purpose again, and I can breath a bit easier here."

"I suppose we could start working on the Harbor. It has been a while since any upkeep was done." Sammy muttered. It wasn't so much 'a while' as it was a case of upkeep never being done, but Oliver looked ready to keel over in horror at the state of things as it was.

"Alright! Let's go. You show me the worst offenders, and I'll try to work out what we can do about this. We may be stuck here, but d*** if we can't have some nice shanty houses to live in." Oliver chirped, following Sammy as he reluctantly took the lead. A couple of the Lost Ones trailed after them curiously, though most stuck what they were currently doing, or their state of inactivity.
"I have one more task for you, errand boy, and then the elevator will be ready to take you to the top." Alice's voice purred from a speaker as Perci walked out of her room. He wasn't sure how long he had been resting, but it had to be quiet a while given the subtle look of concern Brutis shot him. It was a small look, his ears perking up when he noticed Perci come out, then lower, eyes flashing briefly with emotion before he wiped it away. That and Alice's next comment tipped him off. "I hope you aren't too tired to complete it."

"I'm fine." Perci answered, though he felt far from it. He had barely been able to rest knowing the danger Alice posed now, and the guilt that plagued him over the Lost One he had unwittingly handed over to her. But.. Maybe there was a chance he was still alive. Occasionally he could have sworn he heard a low groan over the loud speaker whenever Alice was relaying orders to Brutis when he as supposed to be resting. He had assumed it would only take her a short time to destroy the Lost One, but what if that wasn't the case? What if they were still there? He set it aside for now, focusing on Alice.

"Good." Alice replied curtly. The transport tube rumbled as something was sent to them, Perci slowly walking up to it. He slid the door open, paling as he spotted the item, reluctantly reaching in and picking up the object. The needle he kept pointed away from him, the massive syringe not quite the common shape. The body of it was more rectangular than the standard cylindrical syringe like you would find in a hospital, and the needle was noticeably thicker as well. A dark plunger waited at the top, and a quick test showed the syringe was functional.

"I need some thick ink. Go and obtain some 'donations' from the disgusting swollen searchers. There's a horde of them wandering level 11 right now, actually. Brutis will show you the way. Fill the syringe, and return it to me then." Alice ordered.

"W-What do you mean by donate..?" Perci asked as she finished. "This needle- Does it have to be so thick? Won't it hurt them?"

"Does it matter?" The twisted angel demanded.

"Y-Yes! I'm not a monster, Alice! I can't just attack people for nothing!" Perci snapped back.

"They aren't people, Perci. Either you do what I say, or languish here with these things until you're inevitably dragged back into that inky abyss!" Alice snapped, her voice low and dangerous. She had completely dropped the false sweetness in her tone, now dead pan and icy. Perci simply bowed his head, not pushing his luck further. "Now go."

Perci turned, walking out of the room with Brutis in tow. The wolf whined a bit in concern as they hit an area he knew Alice did not have full cover over. The small angel glared at the syringe, resisting the urge to throw it down. Instead he put it in his expansive pockets, pulling out his scissors and turning to Brutis. The wolf eyed him uncertainly, tail wagging hopefully.

"We're cutting the leash Brutis. Both yours and mine." Perci announced, the wolf slowly kneeling and leaning towards Perci, trusting the smaller male. The angel smiled softly, before
reaching out with the scissors, snipping away the dark threads in one fell swoop. A sharp 'twang' rang out as he did, though it seemed only he heard it. Brutis gave a jerk, and then a sigh as the foreign influence was entirely removed.

Brutis gave Perci a grateful look before standing, hands going to the collar of metal and rope. His massive hands latched around it, tearing it apart, taking the faux halo with it, throwing it away from himself now that he was free. He rubbed his cut up neck, a glance at the removed collar revealing sharp edges of metal poking through the rope. Another small, cruel jab from the twisted angel.

"PERCI!" The enraged voice of said angel abruptly erupted over the speaker system, echoing through the halls. "What have you done to my Brutis, Perci? Bring him back here, Now!"

Brutis snarled, shaking his head and punching out the nearest speaker. He was not going back to her!

"I won't let her take you back." Perci promised, Brutis looking to him with big X eyes. Without Alice's influence, his body language was considerably less hostile, though he it appeared he may be prone to the occasional outburst, like just now. "We're both leaving. Do you know a way to confuse her? Make her think we're going one way when we're going another?"

Brutis paused, before nodding, pointing to the halo attached to his collar. Perci picked it up for him, grimacing a bit at the weight, turning to Brutis to lead. The canine seemed happy with what was coming up, momentarily forgetting Perci's bad leg. Not that Perci was going to complain, instead allowing the large wolf to lead him to a more damaged part of the building and enjoy his newfound freedom. He pointed towards a hall that sloped steadily downwards, leading to a drop at the end, holding onto Perci's shoulder so the smaller wouldn't fall.

His halo was one of the few light sources in this area, and it provided enough light for Brutis to aim. He took the collar from Perci with a look of disdain, taking a second to aim before throwing it down the hall. It slid down the incline, steadily making it's way towards the hole, and what Alice would assume was a desperate attempt to escape her territory. With that done, he picked up Perci, hastily making his way out of the area, walking along the dim halls. The wolf grabbed the other's halo as they walked, hiding the light with his massive hand, shooting him an apologetic look.

"It's OK, I understand." Perci whispered, leaning into the wolf. He could feel ink leaking from the wounds on the canines neck, which was worrying, but the wounds seemed small.. so hopefully they would heal on their own. A doctor in training he may be, but he wasn't sure if basic first aid would work on a being of ink. They would probably find out if the wounds didn't close on their own.. He owed Brutis that much at least.

They walked the darkened halls of 'Heavenly toys' manufacturing section, wading quietly through at least an inch of ink in places. It was deeper in others, but Brutis' size worked in their favor, and he kept the boy safe from the dreaded ink. Above, they could hear Alice raging over the speaker, alternating between faux sweet offers and promises too outright threats and vitriol. It was clear she could not handle the fact she was no longer in full control of them, her emotional rampage broadcasted to everyone and everything.

"I thought she said a lot of noise was bad.." Perci muttered as they waded through another inky hall. Brutis seemed to be slowly gaining a sense of where they were, as he was starting to wade with more confidence in certain directions. "I thought it draws in trouble.."

"SUSIEEEE!“ An unfamiliar voice screeched, veins of ink spreading across the walls near them. Brutis jumped and cowered at the voice, Perci grateful his halo's light was hidden. They could hear
someone hobbling quickly a level above them, snarling and panting with frustration. "Shut your wretched mouth, Susie! I'm so fed up with your psychotic babbling!"

"My name is ALICE!" Alice shrieked over the speaker, the machines cracking at the sound.

"You ain't Alice." The voice returned, though quieter than before. It seethed with anger, slowly picking up strength. "You ain't anywhere even near to half the angel she is! I know she isn't here, and seeing your s*** attempts to impersonate her makes me sick!" At this point the being was speaking loudly, though their voice was a thick snarl.

"You don't know anything, you wretched beast!" Alice snapped back. Her tone changed however as the ink tendrils faded from around Perci and Brutis. Whatever had been so near to them had left. Her bravado was gone when she next spoke, her voice being picked up distantly by the machine that was still on, her tone one of mortal fear. "No- No! Don't you dare come here! I'll- I'll!"

The speaker abruptly cut off with a crash, Perci's eyes widening a bit with realization. If Alice had been forced to abandon the speaker, than she wasn't in her parlor anymore. If she wasn't there anymore-

"We need to go to Alice's Parlor." Perci hissed. Brutis looked at him with wide eyes, gesturing in confusion. "We need to see if the Lost One is still-"

The wolf put a finger to Perci's mouth, shaking and bowing his head. Perci stared up at him for several moments, before bowing his head as well. If anyone knew what happened within the Parlor, it would be Brutis. The wolf knew the Lost One was gone, and he had no desire to let Perci see that place if it could be avoided. Instead he let his finger fall away, continuing to wade through the ink. Hopefully the Ink demon was too distracted by Alice to notice them.

"I.. I wish I hadn't.. I wish I had known.." Perci murmured after several moments. Brutis nodded in understanding, giving him a sympathetic look. "But if I hadn't.. I'd never have been able to help you.. So.. maybe it was for the best."

Brutis shrugged, one of the fingers covering Perci's halo slipping off. The light flickered out, glinting off of something deep with in a partially opened closet nearby. The wolf stopped as the angel put a hand to his chest, turning to face the direction Perci was looking. The closet itself was only opened a couple inches, enough to glimpse in, but not go in. But there was something in there, something shiny and interesting.

"Do you think you could.. open that?" Perci asked softly. "I think there's something useful in there."

Brutis paused, before slowly walking to the door. He shoved it, grunting at it's resistance. He paused, glaring at the door, before slamming into it, clutching Perci close. It took two goes, and then he was through, stumbling out of the ink and onto dry ground. The floor in this room higher than in the hall. Brutis managed to catch himself after tripping on the ledge, grumbling and glaring at the architectural choice.

"You OK?" Perci questioned. Brutis nodded, taking a moment to rub his foot. This released Perci's halo, the object automatically returning to it's position above his head. The angel jumped down from Brutis' hand, letting him take some time to deal with his aching foot, the angel hobbled in further.

The closet was crowded with items, but none of them glinted like the thing he had glimpsed, the
male slowly walking in deeper. Brooms, dull dustpans, ink stained rags and towels, some empty chemical bottles. There were shelving units a plenty, though they were all dull. They didn't glint like what he had glimpsed.

He held up his halo higher, eyes widening as the light glinted off metal, slowly moving a couple brooms out of the way. There, where the brooms had been, was a large scythe. The curved blade was black, attached to the wooden sepia colored handle. There was a small light on the on the blade itself, and four small lights on a small attachment hanging on a bit below the blade. A coil connected the blade to the attachment, a dark extension of metal helping to keep the blade and the strange lights attached to the handle.

"Wow.." Perci breathed, slowly reaching up to grasp the handle. It was smooth from use, the dark metal glinting in the light of his halo. He questioned why it was so well used in a place like this. Than again, did anything make sense here? Why would an animation studio have a toy shop and all of these office spaces beneath it? Why would a sensible studio have so much ink? It didn't matter. What did matter was the fact he had a means to defend them now.

"Brutis, look!" Perci breathed, turning back to the wolf, holding the scythe with care. Brutis eyed him uncertainly cocking his head. "Heh, don't be nervous. My Uncle, the one on my side of the family, he would invite me to his farm over the summer. Showed me how to handle one of these, though it was for harvesting wheat. Said it would put some hair on my chest, or something. Mom knew how important it was to me to still see him.. So i never told her the more dangerous stuff we'd do there."

The angel took several steps back, testing the weight of the scythe with a couple careful swipes, being extremely mindful of the wolf. The metal sang as it sliced through the air, the weapon still viable despite his stiff leg. Perci nodded, sliding his hand along the handle and running his finger along the blade. He looked up to Brutis with a small grin. "If we get into trouble, I can actually be of some help now, instead of making you do all the work."

The wolf nodded, smiling a bit before gesturing for Perci to put it behind him. No.. Not put it behind him, but on his back? Perci copied the motion, until he felt a shift, the scythe vanishing from his hands. He tested if he could draw the weapon, and succeeded, practicing a bit so he wouldn't catch it on himself when it was time to fight. After he finished testing, Brutis gestured for him to come back to him, picking him up once he had.

A new weapon acquired, the pair returned to the inky hall, the pair beginning to wade away once more. Brutis held him protectively, the wold putting his bulk between the studio and the first being to show him kindness in this place. Perci didn't trouble him over this, partly grateful for the protection Brutis offered, even if he fully intended to help when the time came to fight.

They traveled slowly and quietly, Brutis once more hiding his halo so they could move stealthily. In the levels above they could hear shouting, screaming, and the occasional moan and groan of a searcher. Occasionally the building shook, the ink bubbling dangerously beneath them, the duo picking up their pace. It seemed Alice and Bendy had collided, and neither of them were holding back. The two of them just needed to avoid getting caught in the middle of said battle.

Fortunately, Brutis definitely knew where they were now, the massive canine moving with far more confidence. After several minutes, they reached a point where they left the ink behind, Perci sighing in relief. Brutis paused to shake the substance off of his legs before continuing to walk, heading into the shadows once more. He paused as they came to a sliding metal door, the split between them uneven and jagged.

Perci jumped down, taking his halo back from Brutis. He began to look around, finding that a
nearby vent was loose. It was tall enough for him to crawl through... and could possibly lead to the other side. He glanced to Brutis, who was beginning to test his strength against the door. It was making a racket however, and knowing who could be set off by loud noises, Perci quickly made him stop.

"Listen. I can go through the vents. I'll look and see if there's a way for me to open the door on the other side. We have to avoid making loud noises as much as possible. Neither of us know how much we can get away with without setting off the Ink Demon." Perci whispered. He started towards the vent, but Brutis caught him on the shoulder.

"I'll be OK. I promise. I will be careful. I won't leave you alone for long." Perci murmured, turning to the large being. Brutis whimpered, ears falling low, his tail still. After several moments, he finally let go of the angel. The wolf gave him a trusting look, helping him move aside the vent. "I'll be back soon. Either I'll find a switch to open the door, or we go somewhere else."

With that he crouched into the vent, slowly crawling into the shadows. His halo at least illuminated the metal tunnel, the male slowly making through it. He managed to follow a path that seemed to go around the door, though it required him to crawl up a bit of an incline. He hoped it wouldn't take him too far from Brutis, the young male keeping careful track of how far he went. If he felt he went to far, than he would turn back, he would go back to Brutis-

At least, that was the plan, until he met an abrupt drop. It dropped him a couple feet, a grunt of pain escaping him as he barely managed to stop himself from face planting. That.. That would be a bit tricky to climb back up if he had to turn back. His leg was still a stiff mess, and even during better times he wasn't as flexible and agile as his sister, having more sedentary hobbies. Gaming, card collecting, Sudoku. Simple things.

"Better make the best of this." Perci muttered to himself. He needed to focus on getting Brutis through that door instead of complaining over what were his strengths and weaknesses. So, he pushed himself onward, the male crawling nervously through grey vents, seeking a way out. He wasn't too far off track if his mental measurements were correct. now it was just a matter of getting out.

It took him several minutes before he found a vent cover, leaving him a bit more off course than he would have liked. Despite that, an out was an out, and he very much wanted out of the vents. Fortunately the vent he found was loose, a couple well aimed kicks taking it off. He slid out of the vents and into a dark hall, sighing in relief as he was allowed to stand once more. His halo helpfully lit the hall, though it seemed to draw some attention to him.

A low groan was his only warning before a Searcher appeared from the shadows, taking a wild swipe at him. The angel managed to scuttle out of the way, hissing in alarm, hands automatically going to his back. In one swift movement, he 'unsheathed' the scythe, slipping into a fighting stance. It wasn't too different from harvesting wheat or fighting with sticks. It wasn't too different.

His first slash left much to be desired, coming short and missing the slow moving searcher entirely. The angel stumbled back to avoid the searcher's second swipe, taking another swing at the searcher. This time he landed the blow, slicing through the being cleanly. The searcher collapsed into a puddle of ink, Perci laughing a bit in relief.

The laughter was cut off however as more searchers appeared, Perci rapidly backing away. He took another swipe at the nearest one, managing to cut it down, before turning to run. He sprinted down the hall, ignoring the slosh of inky beings pursuing him, not stopping until he came to a familiar door, a switch mercifully present on this side. He flipped it quickly, before turning on the
searchers, ready to defend himself. He slashed through another one, taking it down, though a second caught him as he was still in the midst of recovering from the swing. Perci grimaced as he was slammed into wall, the searchers closing in.

Fortunately however, he wasn't alone, and Brutis wasn't above encouraging the door to open faster. He wedged his lands in between the slowly opening doors, forcing them open with a low screech. So much for doing this quietly. At least it wasn't as loud as fully forcing the door open. Brutis quickly forced his way in, making short work of the crowd of searchers, swiftly collecting Perci and moving onward. He was aware of how much sound they had made.

"T-Thank you-" Perci breathed, clutching his scythe close as the wolf quickly made his way through the halls. They were in more familiar territory now, his old stomping grounds before Alice had found him. He knew some safe nooks and corners to hid in around here, though they worked better when he was smaller. Though it could still be of use to Perci at least.

Brutis stopped abruptly in his walk, staring ahead of them in confusion, Percy looking up as well. Ahead of them sat two rabbits, one with thick white fur, the other with short black fur. One bore a halo around one upright ear, the other a pair of imp horns at the base of his limp ears. They were an odd pair, sitting idly in their path, the imp sitting up tall while the angel lay down. Near them, written on the wall in neat handwriting a message read 'A safe place is near' and on another wall, in blocky letters 'DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE'

"Rabbits?" Perci muttered. He was familiar with rabbits, though he was not as enamored with the small animals as she was. His eyes darted to the messages, confused by their messages. Usually the wall messages were ones of pain or confusion. "Why are there rabbits here?"

Brutis shrugged, uncertain. He had never encountered anything like them, though he did not trust the small halo baring one. It brought to his mind Alice. Even the way it sat with it's tiny nose in the air reminded him of her to a degree.

"They won't hurt you, Brutis." Perci reassured, feeling him tense slightly. "They're just rabbits. They aren't very violent, if at all. They're only hostile when you're trying to hurt them, and it's very minimal." Brutis relaxed a bit, though he still eyed them with uncertainty.

The imp rabbit sat up a bit taller, revealing he was not as tall as they initially thought, but standing on something. A closer look, and an application of Perci's halo, revealed it was a soup can, one 'Black Briar Bacon Soup' label showing. There was a little cartoon image of Bendy on it as well, proper cartoon Bendy and not the demon that lurked these halls. Brutis' ears perked at the can, tail wagging.

"What's that?" Perci questioned.

The rabbits didn't answer, the imp jumping off of the can, sending it rolling towards them. Brutis eagerly picked it up, watching the imp curiously now. The angel rabbit stood as well, trotting after the imp. The pair paused to watch Brutis, who took a step forward. This seemed to be what they wanted, as they began to hop forward, stopping every so often to check Brutis had continued to follow them.

Perci didn't see any reason to interfere, not sensing any threat from the pair. They were.. odd. In part they were displaying similar behavior to a common rabbit, there small movements and peculiarities, but.. On the other hand they showed behavior distinctively not typical of rabbits. Rabbits didn't lead people around, or watch them with as much purpose as these two did. And those messages.. so intentional and one specific to the small beings they now followed.
The pair lead them down dim halls, before walking into a better lit one through another set of metal doors. Brutis dutifully followed, a hobbled angel in one hand and a soup an in the other, ears pricked with curiosity. As they turned down this new hall, another can of soup was visible at the opposite end. The rabbits scampered past, stopping by a door at the end of the hall. Brutis eagerly walked up to and collected the second can, before turning to eye the pair,

"That's a heavy duty door." Perci muttered, slowly sliding out of Brutis' hold. The door was on the side of the forlorn hall, and was considerably thicker than any he had seen yet. It was reinforced with metal in places, and a testing hand found it was open. The rabbits scurried in, Perci peering in after them.

It.. looked like a bunk room of sorts, combined with a break room. There was a table, an old timey stove, a couple pots, pans, and bowls.. even a phonograph. There was a great deal of space, and though it took a bit of squeezing, once Brutis was in he found the space was comfortably large. The rabbits scurried to a corner where they had gathered scraps of fabric, paper, and doll stuffing, settling down contentedly.

Perci jumped as the door abruptly swung shut behind them and locked with a heavy 'Thunk', glancing to Brutis when the wolf grunted. The wolf revealed a switch, which Perci guessed was what had locked the door. When the wolf pushed it up, the heavy lock disengaged, revealing his guess was correct. Brutis quickly locked the door once more, beginning to explore their new safe house.

"This is nice.." Perci murmured as he walked around as well. He found a bathroom with two stalls, though the ground was coated in a layer of watered down ink. He still didn't dare touch it though. Further down the hall was a closet space, some machinery, and even a bed and a heavy chest. It was clear the rabbits had been here for a while, the bed and chest having been chewed on and little scratches peppering the safe house. "If we could get some candles together we could get the entire place lit up properly.. maybe even gather some stuff to make it a bit more homey. I mean.. It's not our permanent home, but it's good to have a place we can fall back on."

He turned to Brutis, who nodded in agreement, tail wagging lightly. He returned to the main room, settling down at the table and closing his eyes, taking this moment to rest. The lack of proper ink would make invading this place difficult for the Ink Demon to invade, and the heavy door would hamper any attempts on Alice's part. This was a good place to be.

"I think.. I think we'll be OK here." Peri murmured as he sat down at the table as well. He played with the phonograph, discovering it was loaded with a record, turning it on to a gentle tune. Brutis began to tap his fingers to the tune, Perci humming a bit. "Yeah. This isn't too bad. I think we should take a good, long rest and let things calm down outside. We can start scavenging and exploring once the two big mouths settle down."

Chapter End Notes

I just want to say thank you to everyone whos kudo'd, bookmarked, or even just read up to this point. Y'all are awesome U(„Ő x Ō„)U
Pippen set to work, trying her best to figure out how to deal with Bendy. Fixing his face had been a small thing, minimally invasive, and hadn't taken much energy from her. But Bendy's body.. that was more complicated. She intuitively knew that it wouldn't be as simple, and part of her feared doing more harm than good.

So she made sketches. Sketches of rabbits to calm down, sketches of Bendy in his current state, sketches of the way she could remold his ink to a more stable form, something that wouldn't require extra ink. The imp wasn't sure if she could add ink to him and have it be stable. She had no way to test that.. Or did she?

The woman had no desire to try and make more rabbits for the sake of testing, giving their capacity for pain and emotion, and most other animals/beings would be off the list for similar reasons. But what about plants? She could draw a flower stem, let it form, and then try to add a flower bulb and petals and see how it worked. Plants don't have emotions, they couldn't scream in pain, or suffer existential crises. Plants just existed. So long as she made sure she didn't draw one that could speak..

This lead to a dozen flower stems being made, sprouting from the ground. One row was just a stem, one row had a leaf, and the final had a leaf and a flower bulb. Plenty of test subjects. It would help her work out the feel of adding to something, though there was still the issue of dealing with things that were conscious. One step at a time however.

First she tried the flower stems. She could add a simple flower fairly well, though her first couple ended up crumpling as she accidentally drew on the ink in the stem and weakened it. A good thing she hadn't leapt straight into working on Bendy.. The next were a bit better, her focus on providing the ink from her tail. Bendy had dozens of soup cans, so she wasn't worried about running out. The next two came out fine with that focus, leaving two crumpled and two still standing.

The next row had a leaf, a minor change but a step up from the bare stem. Pippen focused on drawing ink from the leaf, and only the leaf, to draw the flower. It.. wasn't the best results with the first one, which had a small leaf. It shrank away and vanished, but she was left with only a third of a flower. The next stem had a larger leaf, and worked better but again she ran into the same problem, though she got more of the flower done.

The third she added more leaves to, getting a feel for how this worked and how to gauge how much ink she had available from her sources, though it was just the beginning of an understanding. So she practiced, adding more leaves to the fourth as well and managing to make a flower head for the third and forth.

The next row was a new experiment. Each bulb had been drawn with a certain amount of ink stored inside. This test would require her to both manipulate the shape of the bulb, and the ink inside without spilling it out.
Needless to say, it was tricky. The first one popped like a balloon and spilled ink everywhere, leaving her to try more carefully on the second one. It was... difficult to work with this much loose ink, but she was slowly managing. By the fourth she was doing fairly well, though she was nowhere near confident enough to approach Bendy. Not with how the other three in this row went.

With that done, she was out options for the moment. She needed a refill, which meant wrestling with a can of soup. The imp had managed to draw functioning can opener during her first day of tests, though she still struggled to use it. Maybe it was a reliance on the electronic counterparts she had known, maybe it was just because she always bought soup cans with lid pulls on them.

A bit of searching around and she found it, digging it out of a pile of Bendy's knick-knacks. After some wrestling, and censored curses, she managed the open the can. She grinned with pride, especially since it meant Bendy wouldn't catch her struggling to open another can. The first time had given him a good laugh, the larger devil having teased her over it for quite a while.

She eyed her latest test as she slurped her soup, staring at the flowers in disappointment. Not much had improved, though it was only her second day working at this. All drawing skills took practice... even magic based ones apparently. She didn't have another word for what she could do, other than the word magic. Where science failed, magic happily slid in to take its place. It didn't really bother her either way.

"I wish there were different flavors at least." She sighed into her half full can. Bacon soup was surprisingly OK, but after a while the flavor started to wear on her. Her eyes darted to an ink puddle, tail flicking in boredom. It would take a bit of time for her to recharge, and even then she wasn't sure what to do next.

Her eyes returned to the ink puddle, idly hoping for a familiar twisted form to appear. He may be a bit difficult, but once Bendy had settled down he was typically pretty friendly. A bit mischievous, and sometimes he ran his mouth, but he was generally someone she could get along with. That is, when he was in a good mood, and not hiding behind the walls he had built up around himself. Hopefully when he turned up today he wouldn't be in sour mood..

A familiar bubbling sound interrupted her thoughts, heralding the ink demons arrival, the being slowly pulling his way out of the substance. He was grumbling and muttering to himself, clearly favoring certain parts of his body. He seemed in more pain than usual, the darling devil dragging himself out of the ink and straight to the bed. It was moments like these that he was extremely grateful for this real bed.

"What happened to you?" Pippen questioned, pacing after him. She looked him over with worry, a hand reaching out to try and offer some help. His tail slapped her hand away, the male looking over his shoulder lazily. His invisible eyes drifted over her experiments, a sigh escaping him.

"Not much luck, aye toots?" He grumbled softly.

"N.. No." She admitted weakly. "I.. I've only had minimal success. It's.. Only my second day of practicing this power..

"Yeah." He muttered in a flat tone, turning his back to her again, sulking.

"Do you.. want to talk about what happened?" She offered, taking a step closer to the bed.
"No. But you aren't going to stop asking, are you?" He quipped, sighing a bit. He was quiet for several long moments, before finally speaking. "I- Joey wanted something sorted out. Some massive Searcher that started messing with things further down. It.. Didn't go too well. These things.. They're adapting. I used to be able to take care of these things with ease. Now.. Well.. Just.. Don't tell Joey."

"Like I'm going to willingly tell that con man anything." Pippen muttered, tail twitching in annoyance. Though that had her curious. "How are they adapting?"

"They're harder to kill." Bendy grumbled. "The ink. It used to be obey me. Used to be simple, back in the early days. When it was just me. Back when there was less competition... When there were no voices, no things in there."

He was quiet for a long moment, before continuing in a soft voice "I.. Joey says they were accidents. People who got exposed to the ink and got sick. And.. It made sense. At first. There were just a couple people. They were confused and scared, and I didn't know what to do. Nothing I did helped them. And then there were more, and more. There were always accidents, he said they were always accidents. But there were more and more.. and now we're here. With all this mess that just keeps shifting and changing."

"Now Pandora's box has really been unleashed upon this place." Pippen murmured, settling down with her back against the bed. "But perhaps there is still some hope here, as there was in the box."

"You know I don't like it when you talk in riddles, Dollface." Bendy rumbled from above her. His tail came down to jab her head, and she caught it, teasing and batting it around until he took it back. 

"Comes with the package. Don't like it, find another magic pen-tailed.. whatever I am." Pippen answered.

"Imp. You's an imp. I'd know an Imp when I see one. And yous an Imp." Bendy informed her.

"If you say so." Pippen murmured, leaning into the bed a bit more. She yawned, shaking as she did, arms wrapping around her legs as she closed her eyes. A squeak escaped her as she felt something wrap around her waist, picking her up and bringing her onto the bed. She opened her eyes to find Bendy's long tail curled around her waist. It remained loosely wrapped around her even after the lifting was done, a pillow colliding with her head moments later. Her head fortunately didn't fly away, the gravity of her body winning out over the force of the pillow.

"Take a nap, Dollface." Bendy ordered, silent for several moments before quickly adding, "You're no good to me without rest."

"...Thanks." Pippen murmured, laying down slowly. Bendy's tail didn't move away, the sensation making her feel oddly safe. After a couple moments, she managed to relax, pillow held under her head. Bendy had pulled his legs closer to himself before picking her up, which left her space to sleep. "Sleep well, Bendy"

"... You sleep well too, Pippen.." Bendy muttered several minutes after Pippen had spoken, partly hoping she was asleep already and wouldn't hear him. Just how his luck would turn out. Some stranger shows him a bit of kindness, and he starts going soft..
Another day(?), another round of tests. Pippen drew up another dozen flowers, though each had a flower bulb with varying amounts of ink each. She still had to get a sense of how to control the ink, including the loose ink left over when she was done her work. A couple of her previous attempts had led to successful flower petals, but the excess ink she didn’t use would sometimes leak out, leaving the flower to wither away. This wasn’t discovered until the day after her successful tests, when she woke up to two wilted flowers in the final row.

It.. Had been a bit crushing to see, if she was honest, though she didn't say anything about it. All she had said was that she would need to test more, hiding the guilt of her failure beneath a mask of optimism. She hid her fear, stuffing it down deep and forcing herself to look forward and work out how to overcome the issue. And then overcome any issues that cropped up after that.

Bendy had calmly accepted it, plucking the flowers to move them out of the way. He threw them into the ink to dissipate, leaving her to work on her projects one more. The ink devil had stated he had to patrol certain portions of the studio, on order of Joey Drew. He couldn't say why, given he didn't know why, but he knew that if he didn't he would be getting an earful from Joey. In all honesty, he was already getting enough gruff from Joey over the fact Pippen was still 'loose', as well as Henry and the others.

For her part, Pippen didn't trouble him over it. It was just how the situation was. Sure, there were points where she felt lonely, but she just focused on working. The more she worked, the better she would get, and the sooner she could heal Bendy and have him fully on her side. And from there things would fall into place and improve.

At least, that’s what she told herself. The truth was, the isolation was beginning to eat away at her. She had always been something of a recluse, preferring to spend her time with a select few people when she was in the mood. Even then, she could go out, she could go for a walk or out to a restaurant or.. anything really. She had choices then, so many options she didn't realize she had at the time, or that she would miss.

Pippen's head snapped towards the ink puddle, ears pricked with eagerness. She could have sworn she heard the familiar bubbling that came before Bendy came out of the ink.. After several moments she looked away, sighing sadly. She must have imagined it. Time was so hard to keep track of here, and whenever Bendy left it felt like an eternity would pass before he returned.

She returned to her work, eyes dim. What was Perci doing now? They.. They had never seen eye to eye, but deep down she couldn't bring herself to fully hate her brother. She understood that some of the things he had said had been said because he was hurting but.. the fact he never acknowledged how much he had hurt her in turn, and only ever spoke on his own hurt.. It nagged and bit at her every time she saw him, making any attempt to be around him feel like standing next to a powder keg with a lit flame during an earthquake. It was only a matter of time until that flame ended up near enough the powder..

Had anyone noticed they were gone? Pippen had a habit of falling off the grid, except with certain people. But Perci.. Perci always kept in contact with the family, or at least with an uncle on his side of the family, a couple cousins, their parents.. And a hodge-podge of acquaintances from school. There were plenty of people who would notice he hadn't returned from the funeral, and start to investigate. Chances were, some of them would probably try to pin the disappearance on her.. those from his father's side of the family at least, who blamed her mother fully for the split.
Her ink ran out, so Pippen numbly opened a can of soup. Was this current state of affairs really that different than what she had been living? Sure, there was a higher chance of death and she was now some form of cartoon imp, but... Here she was, hiding from the world at large, drawing and thinking. She didn't even have contact with the smattering of people she could confidently call her friends, or her cousin.

She hadn't been in contact with her parents either, before their deaths. Too many bitter fights over how Perci had behaved, or was behaving depending on the time, too much distance put between them. Her mother had always tried so hard to patch things up between her children, she had loved them both dearly, but pleaded with Pippen to understand that Perci was hurting... not for reasons she had caused, but he was hurting. Her father, her biological father, had always carefully walked a line of neutrality, trying not to appear like he was favoring his biological child.

In a sense, it had only made her feel more bitter, as selfish as it may be. He should have been looking out for her instead of letting Perci blame her for her father's continued marriage to his, no, their mother. Instead of letting him fill her head with the belief that her existence, and her dad, denied Perci any chance of happiness. Maybe that wasn't directly what Perci had said, but it was certainly what young Pippen had extrapolated. Either way, it hadn't stopped a younger Perci from trying to claim his step-father favored Pippen. It had been a situation with no way to win, something that hadn't been realized until they were teenagers.

There had been a lot of therapy. Mostly for Perci, to help him with his anger, to help him develop into a proper young man. And it had helped. She couldn't deny that. Perci had improved, he had stopped saying so many terrible things, and seemed to no longer be proud of what he said but... He had never apologized. He had never looked at her and told her what he had done was wrong. And that had irked her to no end, even though she told herself it was selfish and foolish of her to expect such a thing.

In the end, he had ended up with a tighter relationship with both of their parents, where Pippen had only drifted away. Maybe that was her fault. Most likely it was. She hadn't put much effort into reconnecting to them after she moved out, and she had never really kept track of them before. Part of her had known it had hurt them, but she hadn't cared at the time. At least, until she had gotten the news they were gone.

Than everything had hit her like a ton of bricks, all at once. The guilt, the longing, the pain. So many unresolved matters and words left unsaid. A small part of her had always hoped to work things out, but she had put it off, put it aside. There was always something else to work on, some new project that needed doing. Some new distraction to eat her attention.

Was she a good person? Pippen paused, staring at her soup silently. She tried to be a good person, though arguably she didn't try as hard as Perci did. But then, she didn't have the history of behavior Perci's younger self did. Though that didn't give her a reason to just be a bad person, and she hadn't take it as such. But she had abandoned her parents after years of raising her. It wasn't the best childhood, but it could always have been worse. Did it matter, in the long run? She was here now.

Pippen was so lost in her thoughts she didn't hear the bubbling ink behind her, the Ink demon slowly pulling himself out of the puddle. He paused, eyeing Pippen uncertainly, grin turning to a frown. She sat with her back hunched, staring into a soup can silently. Her tail was limp, laying listlessly on the ground. The imp didn't even respond to his appearance, like she usually would. She usually eagerly ran up to him when he returned, clearly desiring companionship and
friendship.

"Hey, Toots. I'm back." Bendy called to her. He watched her jump, turning to acknowledge him, tail snapping off of the ground. It put a bit of a smile on his face to see her smile at him, snapping out of whatever she had been in the midst of. "Something wrong with that soup?"

"Huh- Oh, No." Pippen glanced to her soup, finishing it swiftly with a couple swigs. "I was just.. thinking... About how to fix you and stuff." She hastily added the last part, tail dropping a bit with guilt at the lie.

"Seems to be the only thing you think about. Can't take your mind off me, can you, Toots?" He questioned, laughing as a flush spread across her cheeks. Her tail snapped up, snapping around like an annoyed cat's. "I'm all you can think about these days."

"I'm trying to figure out how to uphold my end of the deal!" She snapped, morose mood forgotten as her flush deepened.

"Oh really? Even the hardest worker thinks about other things while on the job. But every time I talks to you, your thinking about me!" He laughed, watching her fume. "It's flattering, really, I mean it Dollface. If it makes you feel any better, I think about you sometimes."

Her tail stopped flicking for a moment, eyes flashing with uncertainty mixed with something else, before it went back to angry cat mode. "Yeah, I'm sure you do." She muttered, turning back to her test flowers.

"I do." Bendy chuckled, leaning over her. He knew it drove her up a wall when he leaned over her like this, his taller form useful for once. The imp's tail was already snapping around wildly, her face dark with how hard she was blushing. She was so easy to unsettle. Not that he was lying.. "I thinks about you plenty, though not as much as you think about me."

"Think about what? Ways to punish me when I fail?" She snapped back, frustration and fear thick in her tone.

"Wha-?" His smile fell, the devil leaning back a bit so he didn't loom over her anymore. Did she still expect him to hurt her? "No, I-

They both fell silent, Pippen looking up to him. Gone was the blank mask of neutrality, or the small smile she would always wear. Now her expression was open and vulnerable, reflecting the fear, uncertainty and anxiety that plagued her. Suddenly this game was a lot less fun for him. She opened her mouth, trying to relieve the tension she had caused. "Than what do you think about?"

"S-Stuff." Bendy stuttered, crossing his arms and looking away. He had forgotten the boundaries between them, as captor and captive. Even if it didn't really feel that way to him. He didn't harbor any hostility towards her, even though she was still a smart mouth while being his 'prisoner'. They.. They were on the same side now, or at least, on their own side. She was going to help him, he protected her from Joey and the Studio. A simple set up, but not one that inherently meant they had to be hostile towards eachother. He already had so many enemies outside these walls..

"..I'm sorry." Pippen murmured, bowing her head, eyes heavy with guilt. "That was out of line for me to say, when you've given me no reason to believe what I said. I.. I took out my bad mood on you and I shouldn't have. I don't expect you to forgive me, but I want you to know I regret it."
The Ink Demon blinked, eyeing her for several moments. Her face was honest, no trickery or mischief in her tone or eyes, which always gave her away. It was odd how straightforward she was about it. "It's.. OK.. I think? Kinda a weird way to put things, Dollface. Laying it out there like a lawyer and stuff." He chuckled weakly.

She shrugged. "It's.. just how I do things. At least with apologies. I don't want to make more misunderstandings when I've already screwed up." Pippen still wouldn't look at him, tail low.

".. What was you really thinking about?" He asked, slowly sitting down. He could sneak breaks between patrolling areas, and while he usually took a nap during those breaks, he followed a different impulse today. She eyed him uncertainly, fiddling with one of the flowers she had made, testing it's resilience.

".. The past and stuff." She admitted. "Family stuff. Wasn't the best growing up. It sneaks up on me when I least expect it. Probably will for the rest of my life since a lot of it's unresolved and will remain unresolved, thanks to my parents death." She stated it in a detached, matter of fact way, trying not to dwell on it too long.

"Oh... Sorry Toots." Bendy muttered after several moments.

Pippen looked up to him with a wry look. "Why are you apologizing? You didn't cause it. Last I checked you weren't there encouraging none of it to happen."

"It's called empathy, toots. I may be a 'demon' now and all, but I ain't lost that." He answered dryly.

"Ah.. Sorry, I didn't mean to suggest.." She fell silent, guilty once more. Dammit. It seemed no matter how hard he tried they just kept circling back to that.

"I know, Toots, I know. You said one mean thing, so I get one. And now we even. Wipe the guilt off your face, Dollface. At least you give me more of a fair shake than most people in this place.." Bendy finished, giving her a small smile, offering to bury the hatchet. They could just put these small grievances behind them and move forward.

Pippen stared at him for several moments, before a smile quirked across her lips. "Alright. We're even. And It's.. It's over and done with now."

"Over and done with." Bendy agreed, yawning. "I'm going to take a nap before Joey yells at me to get back into the studio. You should take one too. You look absolutely exhausted." He was slowly standing, smile twitching with pain as the aches and pains echoed through his body.

"Do I?" Pippen wondered allowed, glancing to the bed. Another nap, like the one she had shared with him previously, wouldn't be too bad.. "Yeah.. Why not."

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"Hey Dollface." Bendy's voice made Pippen jump, looking up from her sketch. It was actually a practice sketch of Bendy, both of his original form and a possible new form she could fall back on if reshaping his ink into his original body wasn't feasible. She felt better doing these sketches, slowly reaching a point where she could draw both in her sleep. That way, when the big test came,
she would hopefully not choke.

"Yeah?" Pippen asked, sitting up a bit. She could have sworn he had been asleep, and he was laying down, his back to her.

"Can Henry speak?" He struggled when he said the name, but managed to keep his temper despite the fact it automatically made him see red just thinking about it. His tail lashed lightly with the flash of foreign rage, a deep breath helping him settle back down.

"He- Henry?" Pippen echoed, wincing as his tail lashed again. "He can. Quite clearly and coherently. Why do you ask?"

"Does he speak at a proper volume? Or just really softly?" Bendy continued.

"He speaks normally..? Maybe a bit on the quieter side, but it isn't a struggle to hear him." Pippen offered, confusion leaking into her tone.

"Than.. Why can't I hear him?" Bendy asked. "I've seen him facing me, I've seen his mouth moving.. but I can't hear anything. I can hear that ink thing he has running around with him moan and hum, I can hear Sammy Lawrence's ranting and ravings.. but not him. I can hear the quietest creak of footsteps on wood, but.."

"Not him." Pippen finished. "I.. I don't.." She paused. She did have an idea though. "Isn't.. Joey in your head? I've seen you look away from me and stiffen whenever he tells you to do something. Can he only message you.. or can he do more?"

Bendy didn't answer, tail flicking in a way that told her he was thinking. The silence stretched on endlessly, Pippen eventually returning to her drawing, leaving Bendy to mull over her question and review his memories. He questioned how much of the past was done by his volition.. and how much wasn't. It disturbed him to have to question this, feeling cold and uneasy as he slowly slipped into a nap to escape the pain.

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Bendy had brought her more pens and more paper, though she hadn't the slightest idea how he had gotten the paper through the ink without the ink staining it. He had long since begun to bring her paper to work on, especially after she filled a good portion of the floor and parts of the walls with doodles. He always claimed it was for her to work out how to fix him, though they both knew it was likely going to be used mostly for stress drawings, and only partly on planning things out.

Having long since given up on trying to keep track of time, Pippen just kept trucking forward. For the moment, she was idly set to work on another drawing, holding a pen in her white gloved hand. She took a sip of bacon soup every so often, slowly recharging her energy for more ink tests. The imp had finally figured out how to prevent the leakage of unused Ink, and was more confident in her ability to command the ink of a pre-existing object. So now she took a little break to draw as she sipped on soup. Her drawings weren't on par with her usual ability, but her mind was elsewhere, puzzling over Bendy, again. Bendy, and the mysterious world he claimed he had inhabited before being dragged here.

From what he had spoken of, though it was rare for him to speak on his homeland for long, she
understood it was equal parts similar and utterly different from their own. There was real, legit magic to his world, and those who knew how to use it. He claimed, back when he was still himself, that he was quite handy with a bit of fire magic himself, though his current form, and perhaps this world, made it impossible. A lot of things he used to be able to do were impossible for him now, and it was clearly a severely sore spot for him.

They also had all manners of locations and beings within his world, both those kinds she was familiar with, and those of fantasy or imagination. He even claimed traveling between 'worlds' was possible in places, though none of the others he had heard of were anything like this one.. or like her 'real' world.

The more he described, the more she had begun to wonder at the nature of his world, and it's connection to their own. Had it always existed, and artist's and writer's who worked with cartoons seeing into said world, or had it sprung into existence with the first cartoon? What parameters were there for creating a world that would exist and be accessible to those of the 'toon realm', or were the stories of those worlds, like the characters, represented in her 'real world' being tapped into and somehow channeled through the real world's creativity? And if that were the case, was there even such a thing as creativity?

Pippen shook her head, sighing. There was no real saying, at least not without asking Bendy more, and getting into deep philosophical questions like this would only leave her with a headache. So she stuck to what she did know. She was here and she was alive. Bendy was alive and in constant pain and misery, and just wanted some real help. Somewhere out there, Henry and Perci were still surviving the chaos of the studio, one she had only glimpsed during her brief time running loose and when Bendy talked about the outside. And if she could successfully help Bendy. He might be willing to help protect them.

Though, that brought to the forefront of her mind another problem. The big 'who dunnit' of the ink machine. Henry or Joey. Personally, Pippen was of the mind to blame Joey Drew, given the rumors of his behavior, and what Bendy's first memory told her. If Henry had been there and skipped out, why hadn't Bendy heard them fighting with Henry? Why couldn't he say for certain it was Henry saying the things he claimed to hear on his inky rebirth in this world? And if he were responsible for all of this, why would Henry have ever risked coming near this place again?

Bendy had never been able to answer her gentle pestering on the matter, and though he always changed the topic on her when it came up, she knew he wasn't ignoring her. He had become slower in his reprimands whenever she brought up the topic, clearly stopping to mull her words over, before snapping onto the defensive. Then there were those rare times he asked something out of the blue that felt.. very important. But, he had so many years of clutching desperately to the narrative Joey Drew had fed him.. and Pippen Knew that having that undermined was not an easy thing for him. Not when he was so out of his own depth, in a strange world that did not obey the rules of the one he had always known, and in a strange, crippled body.

She sighed, crumpling up the piece of paper she was drawing on, pitching the crumpled piece into a corner of the room. Pippen couldn't settle on a solution, fingers tapping the tablet of paper in thought. She could try and rearrange the ink, but she wasn't really sure how to do that, as she was unfamiliar with the density of his ink, and if it even would let itself be moved. He had already admitted he would be fine with being in a taller form, so long as the pain stopped.. Which brought to question why he was in pain. And then there was still the concern of what would happen when she interfered with a conscious being.

Pippen groaned, hands tugging on her horns in frustration. What was she going to do? The only
The imp paused, eyes darting to the corner of the room that Bendy would exit and enter through. There was always a puddle of ink there, the black substance resting there silently. Were there any Ink beings that were not comprised of the voices within that inky pool? Or was everything perfectly interconnected? Could she-

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The image of Boris strapped to a table on the top level of the studio flashed across her mind, her stomach flipping. She had to fight to keep her soup down, shaking her head. Pippen couldn't do that. She couldn't fall to that level. To torment another living being, and that's what they were, inky birth aside, they were living beings. They could feel, just like Bendy. She couldn't drop to that level.

Which left her at square one. She could only get so far, manipulating the ink of none living objects. They were far less complicated than living beings with emotions, fears and trust that could be shattered with a terrible accident. She had spent days(?!) practicing, and now felt confident in her ability to manipulate ink, but the idea of trying it on Bendy filled her with the utmost dread. The possibility of hurting him even more, of damaging him where she meant to help-

Hot tears were flowing down her cheeks, and she only noticed now, her breathing short. Her heart was hammering in her chest, the erratic gasping of her breath the only sound in the quiet little room. A hand covered her mouth, the imp desperately biting back her fear. She couldn't fail! She can not fail! That was not an option! She needed to figure out how to do this properly and succeed!

Pippen pulled her legs to herself, her jaws clenched to hold back sobs. She was scared. So terribly afraid. Her brother was out there, likely suffering or dead, Henry, a man she had scarcely had a chance to get to know, was likely suffering as well. And here she was, sitting pretty, scribbling doodles and sipping soup. Sure, she was honing her skills, but she felt no closer to repairing Bendy than when she started. Her tail wrapped around her legs as well, body trembling from all the emotions she had forced down and refused to face before.

"Toots?" Bendy's voice came from behind her, making the smaller being jump. She curled up tighter as he approached, uneven footsteps echoing through the room. "Pippen."

"Yeah?" Her voice was weak and she wouldn't look at him, hiding the tears that had found their way out, her lips wobbling as she vainly tried to fight them back. It was rare for him to use her name, always preferring the nicknames he had given her. She heard him grunt as he slowly crouched next to her, his limbs aching in complaint.

"What happened?" He questioned softly.

"N-Nothing. Just. Thinking.. Trying to.. work things out." She rubbed the heel of her hand into one of her eyes, smearing the tears away. "I-I'm fine."

"No, you aren't." He chided, tail lashing a bit at her blatant lie. He placed his hand on her shoulder, the softer gloved one. "Please, talk to me. Something happened, I can tell. Was it Joey? He shouldn't have been abl to find-

"It wasn't.. anyone else." Pippen cut in, cutting off his worrying. "I.. I was thinking and.."

"And..?"
"Just started crying.." She finished weakly, looking away in shame.

"Why- What were you thinking about?" He questioned, trying his best here, though he felt he wasn't always the best with dealing with emotional issues.

"Just.. Everything.." She whispered. He moved closer to her, pressing into her form slowly. Pippen jumped at first in response to the contact, before pressing into it, shivering lightly. Ever so slowly, as if he feared she would break at his touch, he wrapped his arms around her protectively, tail whipping as he did. The imp was soft and warm in his arms, though she shivered with unreleased sobs. He pulled her closer, fully hugging her now, the imp turning and curling into him.

After a moment she broke down sobbing, fingers grasping his arm and shoulder tightly as she sobbed. Slowly, bit by bit, things escaped her, from her fears of failing him to her fears of becoming a monster for the sake of increasing her abilities. The loneliness, the isolation, her fear of abandonment... It all came out in bursts and gasps, Bendy holding her tight, providing her a safe place to let everything out. Part of him felt guilty for not noticing her deteriorating mental state, but on the other hand she was so good at hiding it.

He listened, letting her get it out, hugging her close. His tail wrapped around her form as he held her, a mix of guilt and uncertainty drifting through him. Eventually she fell quiet, Bendy choosing his words carefully. "It's OK, Dollface. It's OK. Everything's OK." He held her close, shushing her until she had calmed down.

"I trust you, DollFace. I know this may hurt, that this may take a couple tries but.. I trust you. I know you ain't gonna hurt me on purpose." He nuzzled his head between her horns, holding her close. His cheeks felt hot as he did, but he followed his impulse, holding her close. "I'm not going to just leave you. You're the first person whose actually shown me an ounce of kindness in this h***."

Pippen laughed weakly at the squeaking noise that replaced the curse, a weak smile crossing his face as well. He held her tight, refusing to let her go despite the complaints of his ever aching body. His hold wasn't uncomfortable, though it was tight, most likely given how rigid his muscles were. The imp didn't resist, curling into his hold as she shook, slowly calming down. She felt worlds better just for getting the words out into the open air and out of her mind, where they could steadily gain a weight to them they did not deserve.

"I mean it. I ain't abandoning you easily, Dollface." He murmured, his voice vibrating through his chest and into her. It felt oddly soothing, the human turned toon curling into him a bit more. "It's going to be OK, OK? I trust you."

"OK." Pippen sniffled, pressing into him. He slowly stood, still holding her close, carrying her to the bed. He slowly lay down, wheezing weakly in relief as the soft bed eased his pain. He could feel her begin to shift, trying to move away, eyes guilty and concerned as she caught the sound. Bendy didn't move his arms, shaking his head.

"I'm fine Toots. Just.. Lay down, OK? You need to rest. You need a break. Tomorrow.. or whenever we wake up, we'll try something new. It will be better. I promise." Bendy murmured, tail curling a bit more securely around her. He hadn't realized until now how attached he had become of his impromptu partner in this crazy world, more so than he knew was normal. A familiar feeling drifted through him, and while a hurt part of him told him to put distance between them now, before he was hurt again, he couldn't bring himself to do it.
"I'm sorry..." Pippen murmured, slowly closing her eyes.

"It's OK, Dollface. Nothing to be sorry about." He let a hand rest against the back of her head, curled protectively around the smaller being. After a moment, she nodded, slowly calming the rest of the way down. He loosened his grip a bit, giving her space to work with, though she didn't take this chance to move away, but move closer, seeking a small degree of comfort.

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Bendy woke first, arms still wrapped around the imp, who had remained next to him the entire time they were asleep. His heart beat a bit faster, a hot flush spreading across his cheeks. She hadn't moved away, despite the fear she had previously expressed. Had she begun to trust him? The thought sent a rush of warmth through him. He felt almost normal again, despite the pain that consistently reminded him that he was not.

As he processed what he was experiencing, Pippen slowly woke up, moving lightly beneath his arm. Pippen slowly blinked awake, looking up to him slowly, eyes widening after a moment. A fresh blush spread across her face, tail twitching and whipping in response to the emotion. It took several moments for the night to come back to her, though it did little alleviate her blush.

"Last night was great, Toots." He grinned, unable to help himself.

"Wait- WAIT WHAT-!" Pippen started soft, before breaking into a yell, Bendy bursting into laughter. She scrabbled out of his arms as he laughed, glaring at him, though the corner of her mouth twitched into a smile.

"I'm sorry, it was too easy!" Bendy guffawed. "You were just there all blushing and innocent-!"
He had to put a hand on his stomach, which was beginning to ache from his laughter.

"Wooow, thanks Bendy." Pippen muttered, cheeks flushed hard as he laughed. To suggest such a thing! Why had she expected anything else from the 'darling devil'. She didn't feel particularly angry about it, though she was a bit embarrassed by the suggestion. She wasn't that easy! She had her pride!

"Ah ha, ha ha.. Ahh. You're too easy sometimes, Dollface." Bendy snickered. "So easy to get flustered."

"Only with you.." She muttered, puffing up her cheeks a bit in defiance.

"Aw, how sweet." He giggled, beaming at her now. His smile felt natural despite the pain that still lurked in his expression.

Pippen scoffed, lacking anything else to say or do, crossing her arms and flushing, tail flicking wildly. Eventually she finally looked at him, raising a brow. "So.. Now what. I.. I can't get much further with just flowers."

"We try it with me." Bendy stated confidently, swallowing his laughter. Her eyes widened as she looked up to him, his invisible eyes meeting her confidently.
"You-" Pippen squeaked.

"You said you can't get much further with inanimate objects.. And we can't really drag anything here without it wrecking the place.." Bendy paused, before shrugging. "We both knew it would come to this eventually."

"W-Well yeah, but.." Pippen trailed off, fear in her eyes. She jumped a bit as he sat his hand on her head.

"I trust you Pippen. I've lived with pain for years. A little extra won't kill me. I can bare it for the possibility of things improving.. not that I expect amazing results right away." He murmured softly. In all honesty, he wanted quick improvements, but he knew saying that would only make her more anxious and panicky. He didn't like seeing her like that..

"O-Ok." Pippen murmured, grabbing the end of her tail, holding it like she would a pen, the tip pointed towards him. "I-I think we could start with your left foot. It's.. the closest to what your form was in your world and all the pictures of you. It honestly just looks like there was too much ink added to that part, like it formed right and then the machine screwed it up and added more. I-If we move that, maybe we could give you a proper leg and shoe.. though that leaves the question of where to move the excess." She looked him over, seeing so many options.

"Either the other leg or my chest." Bendy offered. "If you think this 'excess' is enough to make a second proper shoe.. If not maybe use it to make my chest more normal?" He shrugged.

"I guess we'll just have to get into it and get a feel for it." Pippen murmured, raising her pen nib. She moved it closer, Bendy staying still as she did, trusting her as much as he claimed. Pippen didn't threaten and insult him constantly like Joey, didn't belittle him and mock him for his broken form. Pippen was kind and any pain this caused would not be on purpose..

As the pen nib touched his leg, he was met with a sense of cautious warmth spreading from the point of contact. There was actually a feeling of caution to it, slow and careful as it moved through his limb, feeling things out. It actually helped to numb the constant pain, a soft sigh escaping him as it faded.

"I think.. I.. maybe.." Pippen muttered, tracing the tip of her tail against his leg. It felt looser, more liquid, held within the flexible boundaries of his clubbed foot and leg, full of potential. Her brow was furrowed with thought, and furrowed deeper as she paused, head cocking slightly.

"That's weird-"

Pain and cold suddenly exploded through him, swamping his limb and burying the warmth, a sense of outrage behind it. His body tensed as he felt Joey Drew's attention shift to him, tugging on the restraints he had put on the devil. For their own safety, Joey had claimed. It wasn't like Bendy had ever had a choice in the matter. His head snapped up to lock his blurry sight on Pippen, the foreign feeling of rage growing in his chest.

'What do you think you are doing to MY property, you impertinent little brat!' Joey's voice hissed, reverberating through Bendy and into the imp. Pippen's face was twisted in pain, her arms stiff as she tried and failed to pull the nib off of Bendy's leg and sever the connection. She felt like her chest was going to split in two from the sheer amount of rage pounding through it, though she knew the emotions were not hers. And you, Bendy! I told you to bring this brat to me, and yet here you are, messing around with them! Can I count on you to do anything?!
"Jo- Jooey-" Bendy groaned, his own body stiff as his control was fully taken from him. "Stoo-"

'Stop? Why should I?! I gave you a simple task and you can't even do that! Instead you get distracted by the first cute face you see! I thought you were more competent than that!' Joey's reprimand was sharp and mercilessly mocking. Bendy grit his teeth, a sensation that drew Joey's attention. 'What is this? You can move your mouth now?! Since when have you been able too-'

Pippen abruptly succeeded in pulling her pen nib from the other's leg, panting and clutching her chest. The feeling of utter invasion that came from Joey Drew's abrupt intrusion, of another person's mind and presence overwhelming her own, had been chilling. She stared at Bendy, hand reaching out towards him in concern, only for his hand to slap hers away. The imp jumped in shock, staring at him and moving away.

He abruptly lunged towards her, expression unreadable. She narrowly dodged him, sliding off and under the bed, taking advantage of her small size. Bendy was even more clumsy than usual, snarling and hissing as he pursued her. His entire presence felt different, as if he were no longer the being she had spent so much time with.

"Bendy? Bendy?! What are you-" She called desperately, dodging away over clutter as he lunged for her again. "Ben- No. You're not Bendy. It's Joey, isn't it?" Pippen glared at the possessed devil, who turned around abruptly at the name of the one controlling him. "Get out of him, Joey Drew! This is wrong! You have no right-"

Pippen squeaked as Bendy's body lunged, catching ahold of her. He held her tight, a vicious, twitching grin spread across his face. Bendy spoke in a very voice very much unlike his usual voice, vicious and cruel. "No right? No right?! I created him! I own him! 'Bendy the darling devil' is my property! I have all the right in the world to do with him as I please!"

"No-" Pippen gasped, struggling beneath his hands. A hand went towards her throat, or where it would have been if she had one, the being momentarily frowning as he found no throat. "He's a sapient being- With thoughts and feelings. You have no right-"

'Stop it Joey!' Bendy hissed from the corner of his mind he had been shoved into. He struggled viciously against his restraints, wild desperation consuming him. This wasn't right! He had no right to do this! Bendy wasn't anyone's property! He felt the man shove his consciousness down once more.

'If I can't count on you to do a single, simple job properly, than I'll do it myself!' Joey snapped back in the shared mental space. 'I don't know what you think you've been doing, hiding her from me, but I'm getting to the bottom of this, whether you like it or not! You can't be trusted to take care of anything!'

'She fixed my face!' Bendy snapped back. 'She was going to fix even more of me! But you're ruining everything!' Pippen was still struggling in 'their' grasp, Bendy defiantly fighting Joey's command. He had begun to doubt Joey's lead bit by bit during his time with Pippen, but now he was really sold. Joey had never spoken to his face like this, and yet the moment he had begun speaking to someone else about him, he had called Bendy his property. He was always pushing Bendy around and forcing him to do things Joey's way. Either by manipulation or with his damn bindings!

'This idiot would only have made more of a mess of things-' Joey snapped back. His anger at Bendy's disobedience distracted him, allowing Pippen to slip out of his grasp. Bendy and Joey
struggled for control for a brief moment, before an explosion of pain lashed through Bendy's mind, leaving Joey to take the wheel. He turned on Pippen, who was scribbling desperately at the wall with her tail.

She turned to eye him for a moment, eyes wide and pained, tears dribbling from them. "I-I'll free you-" She squeaked as the portal she had drawn opened. It was lined with ink all around, but the core was open, allowing passage elsewhere. Pippen jumped through before 'Bendy' could catch her again, the portal collapsing behind her as she ran. She could hear echoing whispers from the ink, but didn't sink into it, heading for where ever the other end would take her. She didn't know enough about this strange place to choose a location, and had only wished for an escape, and the portal had provided a random one.

Chapter End Notes

I'm working on a ref sheet for a couple of the characters, I'm hoping to have it ready by the next chapter and will link it at the beginning of ch 12 ;w;

Thank you again for reading and thank you for the comment Tizri! I'm happy people enjoy the fic and I'm happy to provide more ;u;
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

As promised, a small character ref sheet:
https://www.deviantart.com/tuxedocatstuff/art/Broken-reel-lineup-822998858

Pippen jumped out of the strange portal once she reached the end, turning to continue running. If Joey had full command over Bendy now, than he would have no issue traveling through the ink and pursuing her. It didn't help that the portal she had made had leaked a copious amount of ink into the hallway it had deposited her into. From what she had seen, it might be enough for Bendy's abilities to work with.

The hallway blurred as she picked a direction and started running, wet heat pouring down her face. Pippen scrubbed furiously at her eyes, wiping the tears away as she ran, though her jaw remained grit tightly shut. Bendy needed her, and all she could do was run, like a useless coward! What good were her abilities if she could not find a use for them when the people she cared for needed her the most? What was the point in all that practice?

The imp shook her head, forcing the thoughts away. What could she realistically do? The moment Joey had interfered with her attempt to heal Bendy, she had been absolutely overwhelmed by a wave of hate and anger. There was so much darkness in the stranger, carefully grown and fed on years upon years of pain and anger until it matured to something darker. She could feel there was no talking to this man, not with where his mind was. It had been overwhelming to be flooded with so much negative energy at once and had left her completely helpless as Bendy and Joey had fought for control.

She should have spoken to Bendy more about Joey's influence over him, how many lines the man had crossed. The former studio director had been constantly demanding more work of the Darling Devil, despite his exhaustion and pain. Even after getting roughed up by some of the more powerful and less friendly denizens of the studio, Joey was right back demanding more. Bendy had always made her be silent and look away from her whenever he sensed Joey invading his mind, hiding her with a desperate fervor that Pippen fully understood now.

Should have, could have, would have. These words had no meaning now, that she knew. She couldn't go back into the past and brooding over the matter would only lead to mistakes that could hurt Bendy more. No. She needed to focus on finding a way to sever Joey's control so Bendy could be free to make his own decisions. No more of this shadow puppeteering and uncertainty.

Pippen forced herself to look up and watch where she was going, scrambling down hallways at random. She aimed for anywhere with very little loose ink, though it was a hit and a miss with this building. There would be halls of clear and empty space, only for the halls connecting to it to be flooded thanks to a burst pipe. The imp didn't dare to touch any of the ink at this time, remembering the disembodied voices within, and the fact Bendy had said he had a degree of control over the substance.

Eventually, after running down halls and back tracking over and over again, she finally had a
lucky streak of clear halls. The only trouble was the lighting in these halls was steadily becoming more and more spotty, some areas fully sinking into darkness. There was more noise too, the churn and chug of unknown machines all around her. What they powered was beyond her at this point.

Bendy couldn't even tell her, despite having spoken on how large the studio had been to begin with, before they had arrived and the building had begun to expand. Who was to even say these machines powered anything at this point?

A soft sniffle escaped her as she slowed down, shaking lightly. Despite the urgency that still nipped at her heels, she couldn't push herself to move any further. Pippen slowly wrapped her arms around herself, her body shaking beneath her grasp from a mix of exhaustion and emotions. She didn't have the slightest idea of how long she had been running, only that she couldn't afford to stop. Bendy hadn't bought her this chance to escape for her to waste it.

Despite this, her legs would barely move, the imp slowly moving closer to the wall. She slid down it once contact was made, drawing her legs up and wrapping her arms and tail around them. More tears escaped despite her desperate attempt to force them back, Pippen curling tightly into herself. Everything was falling apart, and it was her fault. Joey hadn't known she was there until she had interfered with Bendy's body. He didn't have a reason to fully seize control from Bendy until he knew she was there.

She forced herself to take a deep breath, staring at the ground, her eyes sore and hot. Her limbs ached from running for so long, though everything felt like an absolute blur. Other than the presence of ink, she hadn't taken in anything as she ran, trying to push down the mounting guilt and anger. There had to be something she could do to save Bendy, to break Joey's control and leave the hateful old man absolutely powerless.

Slowly, the area around her was growing lighter, Pippen blinking in confusion. A hand gently landed on her shoulder, Pippen's head snapping up at the touch. Concerned pie cut eyes stared down at her, messy white hair and a halo perched above them.

"P-Pippen?" He questioned hesitantly. She nodded weakly, Perci crouching a bit closer to her. "What happened?"

"I-" Pippen's voice was weak, head bowing. "I screwed everything up." She broke into tears once more, guilt and frustration overflowing from her.

"Hey, hold on-" Perci murmured, hesitantly trying to comfort her. Pippen never let him near her when she was struggling with her emotions. She always hid everything or fled his attempts to comfort her, but it seemed today was different. She let him move closer, hand gently rubbing her shoulder, waiting for her to settle down enough to talk.

"Pippen, what happened? Where have you been? We've been looking all over for you..." Perci murmured, glancing back to Brutis, who was standing a respectful distance away. He looked back to Pippen, hoping this unusual friendliness would remain. The imp slowly looked up to him, sniffling weakly. Slowly, piece by piece she began to explain.

"A-After everything started flooding, I was swept down the hole the ink machine came out of. Dunno where it goes because I managed to catch my fingers on an open ventilation shaft and climbed in. Tried to find a way out but I ended up getting caught by Bendy.. But we made a deal." Pippen slowly explained, tearing up as she mentioned Bendy.


"He doesn't like being called that. He's a devil, not a demon. There's a difference." Pippen
"I'm just going by what I've been told-" Perci put up his hands in a placating manner, expression twisting to concern. He didn't want this to dissolve into a fight when he had just found her. He wasn't even sure what the difference was supposed to be, but apparently there was a difference apparently.

".. Yeah." Pippen murmured, eyes falling away. "You couldn't have known.. He told me there's a difference where he comes from.. I'm sorry."

Perci blinked, shocked she had apologized. He tried to hide his surprise, though Pippen smirked a bit as she saw it. He flushed and looked away, muttering an apology himself. The silence stretched for several minutes, the awkwardness and pain between them looming heavily.

"Listen." Perci cut in before Pippen could continue talking. "We should go somewhere safer. Brutis and I have a safe house set up, no one can bust in and we can talk on the way back as well.."

"Brutis?" Pippen questioned, looking up to eye the wide set Boris. Only the head and the color palette was the same as the original Boris, Brutis' tail a good deal longer and thicker. His head looked mismatched from his body, and his X eyes filled her with unease at the implications. Where in the world had this strange being come from?

"It's.. a long story." Perci offered. "I can explain after you finish your part.." He held out her hand, and helped her stand. In doing so, he revealed his damaged leg, Pippen looking down in shock. "Yeah.. I-It looks worse than it actually is. C'mon. We really should get back to the safe house. Staying out for long is never a good idea.."

He turned, leading Pippen towards Brutis, the wolf politely stepping aside out of his way. The canine eyed her curiously as she approached, but outside of wagging his tail, made no other moves. Once they had passed, he started following them, keeping watch behind them as they moved.

"I.. This is going to be weird, Perci, but I need you to listen to me." Pippen began after several moments, looking to her brother. "I can draw things.. into existence. With my tail. That.. sounded better in my head, but I swear it's the truth. It's how I made my deal with Bendy. I fixed his mouth, I mean he made it so he could move it around properly. I've been practicing this .. power ever since then so I could fix his body. He was going to be on our side. I mean, he sort of already is, there's.. complications."

Perci listened to her, pausing mid walk. "I- I can believe that." She looked up to him in surprise. Perci, always the stickler for logic and science, believed her. "These scissors.. I'm not sure how they work, but they show me the connections between things when I hold them. They showed me that Alice was controlling Brutis, and helped me sever the connection and free him. Sometimes, when I focus hard enough, I can see the connections between machines, and more complicated things, like bonds between people. At least I think that's what the different threads are.."

"Scissors?" Pippen question, eyeing them curiously as Perci drew them. They were the same shiny silver of her tail tip, and seemed to have the same feeling of potential to it. "Whose Alice?"

"Ah, well.." Perci began to slowly explain what had happened to him, shaking as he described his time in the ink. He told her how they had come into contact with Alice and Brutis, his time as Alice's 'errand boy' and the dark reality of what her real motives were. "I- I couldn't take it anymore. I severed the rest of Alice's control and freed Brutis.. and then we ran for it. And the oddest thing happened.. we ran into rabbits of all things-"
"A black and white one? One with a halo and angel wings, and the other with imp wings and horns?" Pippen cut in, Perci looking up in surprise. "You found Angie and Impsy! I've been trying to find them forever! Or at least, Bendy promised he was looking for them."

"I should have guessed something rabbit related would be traced back to you.." Perci murmured thoughtfully, before turning to eye her. "Well, they were the ones who lead us to the safe house.. so I guess its in part thanks to you we've been safe for so long."

"I'm just glad they are safe." Pippen murmured.

"Yeah." The silence stretched on once more as they continued to walk through the shadowed halls. "Pippen -"

"I want to say something." Pippen cut in abruptly, looking up to him. "If we're going to survive, than we need to try and work out a truce of sorts. I need to get this off my chest. You.. The things you said in the past hurt, a lot, Perci. Maybe it wasn't fair that I've held it against you for so long... But I did. All I've ever wanted was a direct apology. But.. While I was with Bendy, I had a lot of time to think, and I realized it.. wasn't entirely fair that I was holding this over your head and expecting you to read my mind and give me exactly what I wanted without saying it. In part, I did you wrong as well."

"It.. wasn't fair what I said and did, either." Perci offered after several moments. "I.. I do regret what I said but.. I never said I was. I just expected you to accept the change and thought it didn't matter since I worked through my issues and decided to put everything behind me.. But it wasn't. I... had good deal of time to reflect while I was 'working' for Alice.. and found some things that helped me see things from another perspective."

He paused, smiling weakly. "I-I guess we both had a good deal of time to think while we were here. I.. I am sorry, Pippen. I know saying this won't automatically fix everything, but.. I.. I want to at least try and be a good brother. If.. If you're willing to let me try."

"I.. I would like that." Pippen murmured, rubbing her arm. "I.. as long as we both accept it won't be perfect.. We'll still probably fight and stuff."

"Well, yeah.. I mean we are siblings. They do that." Perci offered with a weak smile. "We can just.. try."

"Yeah. Just. Try." Pippen smiled weakly as well, her expression nervous but hopeful.

They continued to walk until they reached a closed door, Perci moving aside to let Brutis past him. Pippen followed his lead, watching as the wolf walked up to the doors, pulling them apart silently. It was clear the pair had set it up so that they could pull this stunt, neither of them bothering to shut it as they continued down the hall.

"We usually close them when both of us are out. That way no one can sneak in." Perci explained as he began to follow Brutis down the hall once more. "I mean, the place is really secure, but we'd like to keep it that way."

"Makes sense." Pippen mumbled, following them slowly. She was watching Perci limp along, her ail twitching lightly as they lead her through several more halls. Brutis opened a door at the end of a hall, the door a solid metal contraption. The imp didn't think even Bendy would be able to get through that easily. It made her feel a bit safer as she and Perci walked in.

"Angie! Impsy!" Pippen cheered, running up to the rabbit nest where the pair sat. They now had
a box, filled with the paper, fabric, and other goods they had stolen for their bedding. Perci and Brutis had provided the box, partly as thanks and partly to keep their mess under control. The duo sat up a bit as Pippen approached, stretching their necks towards her, noses twitching. They accepted her attention eagerly, settling down as Pippen kneeled to pet the pair. "Ohhh, I missed you! I'm glad you two stayed safe."

"They usually just hang out there." Perci offered as he walked in, Brutis walking to his usual seat by the table, hitting the security switch on his way past to lock the door.. Perci climbed up onto a chair to turn on the phonograph, the gentle tune pouring out once more. He slid to sit down, tapping his fingers on the table lightly.

"Nice place." Pippen murmured as she looked up, glancing around the safe house. The room she could she had a stove, several shelving units with a scattering of bacon soup cans resting on them. There were more odds and ends too, knick-knacks the pair had gathered, ranging from some of the nicer toys from the 'Heavenly angel toy' shop, fabric, paper, inkwells (firmly plugged shut), pens, and items left behind by the workers that had once filled these halls.

"Thanks. We've managed to make it more home-ey since we first found it." Perci chirped. "There's a restroom further back, but the toilets are filled with ink.. and actually the floor is covered in water downed ink. Brutis thinks it's too watered down to be a danger, and he's been here longer than both of us so I figure he knows what he says. Further back there's a room with a bed and a hammock. The bed is Brutis', since he's so large, but you can use the hammock if you need to sleep. We also gathered a bunch of stuff like gears and tools in one of the chests in the back room. Could be useful."

"Yeah." Pippen hummed, eyeing the backrooms, than Perci. He looked up, expression uncertain as she continued to stair at him.

"Uh.. Is something wrong?" Had he somehow messed up the truce already?

"No. I was just.. thinking." She paused, catching her tail near the end, holding it like a pen. "I.. You know my deal with Bendy was to try and heal him. I.. I didn't get to test it but.. You're leg looks like a really simple matter..."

"You think you can heal it?" Perci asked as realization dawned on him.

"M-Maybe. It's what I was training for. And you're leg doesn't look as complicated as Bendy's entire body but.. It.. Might hurt. I have no practice on sentient beings. Only flowers." Pippen quickly explained, eyeing him in concern.

"But it could work." Perci pointed out, sliding on his chair to face her. "I'm willing to try. I.. I know you won't hurt me on purpose."

Pippen paused, surprised by his faith in her. Of all the people she knew, she would expect Perci not to trust her. They had never gotten along that well, and this call for peace between them was literally only an hour old.

"I know we haven't gotten along, but I know you Pippen. You aren't cruel enough to offer help and instead purposely do harm." Perci continued. "I'm willing to give it a go if you are."

"O-OK." Pippen murmured, slowly walking to him. He held out his leg as she kneeled in front of him, letting it rest on her lap. It really did look like a simple matter, the joint twisted oddly and coated in slightly more ink than necessary. After a moment of hesitation, she set the nib of her tail tip to his leg, shivering at the sensation of warmth that echoed up her tail.
Perci shivered as well, feeling a tentative warmth spread from the point of contact, carefully working through his aching ankle, dulling the pain. Her hand moved, taking her tail with it, slowly sketching over his leg, occasionally dipping into his leg. The ink followed her gestures, obediently following the nib as it reshaped itself, his entire leg feeling eerily liquid like. It was unnerving, but he trusted her, and the pain was already fading.

It took her several minutes, but she finally released his leg, pulling the nib away as well. Some excess ink fell away to the ground, sinking into the ground, but it was a minimal amount. His leg was reformed perfectly, with a separation between his ankle and foot, as well as his paint leg. His dark slacks were stained with a bit of ink, but was otherwise perfect. Pippen slowly backed away, holding her breath as she watched him.

First, he tested the range of movement, finding it was fully returned once more. Perci slid out of his chair, finding he could put his full weight on his other limb once more, grinning wide. "Pips, you did it! My leg- It hasn't felt this good in days! Thank you!" He walked around to prove it, moving with ease.

"I- I did it?" Pippen echoed, blinking in surprise. He nodded, Pippen jumping with delight. "I-I did it! I can do it! Wait until I tell Be-" Her face fell as she cut herself off, eyes shrinking a bit with pain and sorrow.

"We can still help him, Pippen.." Perci murmured after a moment, Pippen looking to him in surprise. Perci would usually run from danger. "You said he isn't doing all of this stuff on purpose, right? You mentioned that 'Joey', Joey Drew?" She nodded, and he continued. "You said he is controlling Bendy, or at least he is now, and he's been commanding him the entire time."

"He is. Bendy.. Bendy confided in me that he didn't have a choice in the matter.. And.." Pippen paused. "He can't hear Henry. He's told me he's literally seen his mouth moving, and he can hear everything else, but he can't hear him. He can't even talk about him without automatically feeling angry, even when he's trying to be calm. And he tried to stay calm for me when we talked. He knew I wanted the best for him.."

Perci cocked his head curiously. The way Pippen spoke suggested she was closer friends with Bendy that he had initially thought. An interesting development, but Pippen always had a way of surprising him with who she would befriend. People he would expect her to develop a friendship with would often fall away or end up just acquaintances, where she would spend a lot of time with unusual candidates. None of them seemed a danger to her, though, so he never said anything. Not that he had much space to express concern over her prior to this time... well at least not directly. He could always use Oliver as a work around when he was severely concerned.

"That sounds like a wedge is purposely being driven between him and Henry. Maybe because Henry was his creator?" Perci offered after several moments.

"W-Wait, Henry was his creator?" Pippen questioned. He nodded. "But Bendy told me Joey was his creator. Or at least, that was what Joey had told him. And Joey called Bendy his 'property'."

"He is.. technically Joey's property. From a legal stand point, speaking on the non-sentient character of Bendy the Darling Devil. I don't think it would stand legally to say a sentient being on par with a human mentally is 'owned' by anyone..." He trailed off, Pippen waving her hand in a 'continue' motion. "Right. Anyway. Henry created Bendy. He was the original creator, and added some minor changes at Joey's behest, because at the time Henry still believed they were partners.. and then he found out that Joey had stolen the rights to Bendy and had the character registered under his name alone. That's what split him off from the company entirely years ago."
"I knew the rumors were true!" Pippen whispered, eyes wide. "Joey Drew is a dirty leech!"

"Leech. That sounds fitting, from what you've told me." Perci muttered, Brutis nodding in agreement behind Perci, still seated at his favorite spot. Perci turned to the massive wolf, opening his mouth to speak. "Hey. Is what Pippen describing sound similar to how it was for you when you were under Alice's sway?"

Brutis paused in bobbing his head to the music, cocking his head in thought. He put a finger to his chin, before nodding. Alice had been able to manipulate his emotions with a thought, twisting him into a constantly passive aggressive guard dog ready to snap someone's hand off. It sounded pretty similar to what Joey was doing with Bendy, at least to him.

"Than maybe I can sever Joey's control. Like I did with Alice's control over Brutis." Perci murmured, turning to Pippen. "And then you can heal him and we can talk him down entirely from any hostile motives towards Henry."

"There's only one problem. I'm not sure Joey will let go of him easily. I.. When I tried to heal him, Joey interfered and I was entirely overwhelmed in seconds. I could barely move or breath, there was just so much hate and rage coming from Joey." Pippen warned, nervously twisting her tail between her hands. "I'm not sure severing his control will be that easy.. and with Bendy's powers, he could separate us very easily so long as he's in contact with ink."

"Than we take him out of the ink." Perci declared, looking to Brutis hopefully. "That is, if Brutis is willing to help. I'm pretty sure if we get him behind Bendy he could pin his limbs and keep him still long enough for me to use the scissors."

They both looked to Brutis, who fell still once more. For several moments he was still, before nodding, his expression determined.

"Are you sure? It won't be safe-" Pippen warned, not wanting the wolf to run into this blindly. He nodded again, a hesitant smile crossing her face. "A-Alright. S-So how are we going to do this?"

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The trio walked as silently as they could manage through the shadowed halls beneath the 'Heavenly toys' area, listening to the groan and grumble of ink beings above them. Perci claimed that more and more had begun to invade the area since his and Brutis' escape, which was unusual. Alice had been extremely protective of her 'territory' and had frequently sent Brutis to exterminate any ink beings that wandered into it and stayed for too long.

"So what happened to Alice?" Pippen questioned.

"I'm not sure. After we escaped, she threw a fit. and it drew in Bendy. He sounded pretty upset, especially by the fact she insisted on being called Alice. Her real name is Susie, but she responds really aggressively to it. I'm not sure she's very stable mentally, if I'm honest. But we haven't heard from her since she shouted at him to stay away from her. Don't know if she's lying low or what. We haven't taken any chances." Perci explained.

Pippen was silent, tail whipping with concern. Bendy hadn't told her about this incident, but then again he was coming back to the room constantly banged up, so she had never thought to ask. Maybe it was just another normal day for them. It didn't make it entirely right, though..
"But if there's one thing we learned from that, and working with Susie, it's the fact Bendy can't stand loud noises. She warned me that if I was too loud while I was working for her he might come after me. I was really careful not to give him an excuse, of course, but it was nerve wracking." Perci continued.

"So why have we been wandering in circles? I though you said you had a plan?" Pippen muttered.

"Well first, we need to find an ink puddle large enough for Bendy to come from. Then we'll hide Brutis. From there we'll start making a lot of noise, maybe mess with a couple of the machines in the workshop. They get pretty loud when something is knocked out of place. We draw Bendy out, and then into Brutis' path so he can come up behind him and immobilize him." Perci elaborated.

"Ah.. And we need a good spot for that.." Pippen murmured.

"Yeah. I think I know of a couple places, but all of these ink monsters are making things trickier." Perci grumbled. He stopped as Brutis caught his shoulder, the silent wolf pointing down a different hall. Perci followed his lead, soon finding a clear path that lead to a pool of ink, plus a large closet the wolf could squeeze into. He turned to the wolf with a massive grin. "Good thing you remembered this!"

Brutis gave a small smile, squeezing into the hiding spot and shutting the door, leaving the pair to work on the next part. Pippen was on top of that, eyeing some metal machine parts protruding from a nearby wall. There was no telling what they were part of, but after a test kick she confirmed they were semi hollow. She looked to Perci with a mischievous smirk, before beginning to bang away furiously on the metal. A cacophony of noise echoed through the machine and into their hall, the noise spreading further than they initially expected. Perci kept watch on the ink and the other hall nervously, part of him fearing Bendy would come from the wrong side and drive them into the ink.

Pippen banged away for minutes, occasionally alternating patterns to try and maintain her stamina. They had a brief scare where it seemed an ink being sounded like it was coming after them, but soon realized the confused being couldn't figure out how to reach them. It was on the level above them, no stairwell in obvious sight to aid it in coming after them. Once it was clear it was stuck, Pippen resumed banging, Perci soon joining in to help her.

It took some doing, but they were eventually rewarded by a web of ink spreading across the wall, the pool behind them noisily splashing as it was disturbed. With success in their hearts, the pair turned, though they were met with a frightening sight. Bendy had escaped the ink far faster than Pippen had said he could, and to make matters worse, he was acting from his normal 'ink demon' self.

Bendy was on all fours, his spine more noticeable and prominent, the tips in the center ending in points. His face was once more trapped in a permanent smile, which was twitching so erratically it looked as if it would vibrate off his face. The fingers of his gloveless hand were noticeably sharper, and the hoof shape of his back foot was more prominent than before. His chest was noticeably more bony, ribs prominent against inky flesh, his stomach contracted inwards. The horns on his head were a bit longer, and twisted back slightly towards his back. The ink demons new stance was unnerving and feral, his back arched slightly due to his long legs, nothing of the darling devil apparent in him. He hissed as he spotted them, tail lashing wildly as his head turned to focus on Pippen in particular.

"B-Ben-" Pippen squeaked, staring at him in horror, eyes shrinking in fear. "What has he done to you?" She barely held back a sob. Bendy began to stalk towards them, the webs of ink darkening
with every step. They felt like a pair of trapped gazelles staring down a starving lion, which relished every second of their fear.

After a moment, Perci managed to move between the demon toons, sensing who Bendy was targeting. The demon did not frown, though he did bristle, his smile twitching even harder. A low hissing growl escaped the twisted devil as Perci refused to move, slowly bunching his thin limbs together to pounce. The angel couldn't find his voice, terror choking him as the truly feral being prepared to tear him apart.

At least, that was what would have happened if Brutis didn't explode out of the closet, catching the feral devil mid-leap. He moved with such force that he took the door off the wall, a wild growl escaping him as he latched his large hands around the feral. One on an arm, the other on his back. Bendy's response was immediate, the demon shrieking around his closed mouth, bucking wildly.

While Brutis had managed to pin him, the arm he had caught was the gloved one, leaving the ungloved clawed hand free. The ink demon quickly put them to work, slashing deep into the wolf's hide, flailing too wildly for either of the smaller toons to approach. Perci still took several steps forward, scissors held at the ready, but stopped as Brutis growled. The wolf held up his hand, releasing the gloved arm, pointing Perci away, for him to run.

The lines of control were coming from all direction, Perci unable to focus on any particular thread or draw them to him as he watched his friend be torn apart. He managed to snip several of the closest ones, but it only put a small dent into the swarm of threads all over Bendy's body, so tight they twisted his form into what he was now. A bark of pain from Brutis brought him back to reality, the canine looking to him with pleading eyes, pleading with him to go.

"I'm sorry." Perci whispered, putting his scissors away and turning quickly. He caught Pippen's hand, dragging her after him, his sister having frozen at the sight of what Bendy had become. She stumbled after him, the screeching from the ink demon reaching a fever pitch as he realized they were fleeing. Behind them, he intensified his attacks on Brutis, the massive wolf groaning in pain as inky flesh and blood was torn away in globs, but refusing to let go. He would hold on for as long as he could to buy them time to escape.

The screeching continued relentlessly behind them, though it was fading slightly as Perci led Pippen through the maze of hallways. He had a good enough grasp of the area to guide her away from areas with ink, having no desire to go near it even when the situation wasn't so dire. It helped, since it ensured they couldn't be ensnared if Bendy's abilities stretched beyond his immediate surroundings. They also wouldn't leave a trail of inky prints, which, given Bendy did not have the keen sense of smell of an actual feral beast, was crucial.

No ink beings crossed their path as they ran, the few they encountered either in the midst of fleeing themselves or cowering against the walls. The screaming softened, before abruptly cutting out, terror coursing up the pairs spines. Somehow, the lack of noise was even worse than the constant screaming. At least when he was making noise they could be certain he wasn't directly behind them.

Perci slid to a stop as he came to a dead end, his eyes widening in confusion. Had he taken a wrong turn? At a time like this?! The angel stalled for several moments, before realizing there was a stair well next to them. This wasn't a dead end, but it wasn't a path he knew either. A glance to Pippen was all she needed to realize this fact, silently tugging his hand towards the stairwell. Bendy had been adverse to stairs given his pained limbs, and she hoped this feral version Joey had created would be just as adverse. They couldn't risk staying put either way.

The door to the stair well was opened with the utmost care, and shut slowly to avoid making to
much noise. Once that unusually nerve wracking experience was completed, the turn to eye the stairwell. Like most stairwells, the upper floor was blocked by debris, though unlike most this was not building material but large objects such as desks and chairs. They could have possibly climbed over and squeezed past it, if not for the fact they couldn't risk the noise of the ancient wood, and the stacks and piles of furniture did not look very secure to begin with.

So their remaining option was to go downstairs, the pair taking their time to trot down the stairs quietly. Perci clutched his sister's hand tightly, his limbs still shaking with adrenaline and fear. He hadn't allowed himself to process anything that had just happened, his horror and guilt barely contained beneath a lid of self control. Brutis was gone, and it was his fault. He had included the wolf in the scheme, it had been his idea for Brutis to hold him down. And now..

Pippen squeezed his hand, the male looking up to his sister. She gave him a sympathetic look, murmuring softly to him. "Don't blame yourself. He choose to come with us. He choose to come out instead of remaining hidden. I don't even think he would have let you go alone on this job if you had tried."

"But.. I did. And he's-" Perci began in a soft voice.

"Stop." Pippen whispered. "We don't know that. Brutis is a tough wolf, and Bendy has told me he's had a harder time taking down most ink beings of late. He still has a chance." A bit of an exaggeration on her part, but it helped Perci settle down a bit. The thought that the wolf might have pulled through provided a small degree of relief, though it didn't fully relieve the guilt that ate away at him.

They continued down the stairs slowly, going down a couple flights before Perci stopped at the top of the final flight, bringing Pippen to a stop as well. She looked up, having not been focused on the surroundings, though she quickly realized why Perci had stopped. The floor below them was flooded with ink, with at least several feet of depth. Perci refused to go near the ink, terrified of being submerged once more, though Pippen had come in contact with it before without being lost to the ink.

The sound of a crash far above reminded her of the ink sensitive being that was still on their tail. Maybe they could risk it when he wasn't around, but Pippen had never found out the full extent of Bendy's abilities related to the ink specifically. If the touched it, would he know? Would he be able to capture them?

Perci looked to Pippen in terror, though she was managing to stay mildly calmer, which wasn't saying much. Her eyes were on what was ahead of them however, and landed on a large box in the ink. It was just beyond immediate view from the top flight, but she could tell the top was open. She pointed to it, before beginning to drag Perci down the stairs despite him shaking his head. There was no way they could reach that! It was several feet out into the ink!

Pippen proved him wrong, crouching low before jumping forward, wings spreading automatically. The instinctively propelled her upwards as she began to dip down, her fingers catching onto the edge of the box. The exhilaration of flight momentarily cut through her terror, though a crash further above quickly made her focus on the situation once more. She stretched her hand out to Perci, hooking her tail into the wood to allow her to lean out as far as possible.

Her brother eyed the gap, and then her, grateful for his healed leg, though he still had little hope here. He was not as athletic as his sister, and he certainly did not have any wings. With how far Pippen was leaning out he would not have to jump as far but.. if he screwed this up he would touch the ink, possibly alerting Bendy to their exact location. Faintly, he could hear the click of claws and a hoof against the ground, growing ever closer to the final level. He didn't have a choice.
He crouched, trying mimic the pose he had seen Pippen take, before flinging himself out over the ink. Pippen managed to catch his hand, tail jerking them the rest of the way, though his foot rubbed across the ink, splashing it lightly. Above them, a terrible hissing growl came as the sound of clicking footsteps picked up, rapidly approaching them. Pippen managed to drag him down into the box. There was a great deal of unused fabric bagged up inside the box, making it easy for them to squeeze down, sliding the lid quietly back into place. Perci hid his halo under a bag of black fabric to avoid the light giving them away.

They just managed to get settled before trouble arrived, the hall filling with a low growl. Pippen pressed into her brother, shaking with fear at this unfamiliar being, wearing the skin of her friend. The pair remained silent, staring up towards the top of box, dreading he would investigate the box.

They could hear the ink sloshing as the Ink Demon approached, moving slowly through the substance. He was slowly stalking closer and closer, growling and hissing relentlessly. They both jumped as the box was jostled, terror coursing through their veins. A claw was slowly dragged down the side of the box, neither angel no imp daring to make a noise. The box shifted as the demon leaned into it, beginning to push the lid.

Bendy stopped however as the hall was suddenly lit up, the light sinking into the box through the cracks. It was unwavering, the dull yellow of a light bulb, and was soon accompanied by the sound of a roar. It was strange sound which vaguely reminded Pippen of a tearing reel, only far higher in pitch and drawn out. Something large was sloshing through the ink further down the hall, slogging through the substance to charge at Bendy.

Pippen peered through one of the cracks, wincing against the light to try and see what was coming there way. It was certainly a strange being. It had a body of ink, though humanoid in shape, the legs thick and odd, as if they had been wearing boots that were coated in an extra thick layer of ink. There was a ring on one leg that brought to mind a rolled up pant leg. His chest was broad, with a strange speaker in the center of it's inky chest, the device sepia tone. His shoulders were broad, though his arms were thin, as well as the hands and finger. There was a distinction between the arm and sleeve, with it ending in rolled up cuffs on both sides.

For it's head was a projector, the ink staining the sepia machine and dripping from the light box, from which the pale light was pouring out of. It's light flickered like a projector with a loaded reel, though it projected no images. A number of thick ink wires came out of the back end of it's projector head, and a reel stuck in one of his shoulders. As he neared, she could see odd white stripes across his hand and fingers, the knuckles bearing a white circle mark each.

The strange scream came from the being again as it shifted to a fighting stance, still several yards away from them and the Ink Demon. Bendy shrieked around his teeth, back arching with fury at the challenge. The demon moved fast, slamming into the projectionist being, sending them both scrabbling down another hall. Screeching from both fighters filled the air, though it was slowly moving further away as The Projectionist was beaten back.

"Come on!" Pippen hissed, tugging her brother up. She shoved the top of the box out of the way, jumping for the stairs. She landed in the ink, momentarily cringing at the contact. There was no interruption to the sounds of battle several halls away, and Pippen turned to Perci, holding out her hands.

"Listen, jump to me. You don't have to touch the ink. You can use me to get to the stairs." She hissed, gesturing furiously for him to hold up. "That fight will only hold them so long! I can already hear B- The Ink Demon is getting the upper hand!"

That was true, given the screeching that dominated the halls were still loud and strong, but now
consisted more of just the demon's screams, the strange, echo-ey call of the projectionist being growing weaker. It was impressive that the newcomer had survived as long as he had, but it was clear he was rapidly loosing this battle.

"I won't let you fall! I promise!" Pippen pleaded, her brother staring into her eyes. He crouched nervously on the edge of the box. He pushed off, his jump clumsy, but Pippen darted forward, catching him. The angel clung to her, legs wrapped around her chest and hands around her head, his entire body trembling with terror. Given what he had told her he had experienced, and what she had briefly experienced, she understood his fear. Thankfully their toon forms were stronger than their human bodies, and Pippen could hold him confidently, quickly wading over to the stairs.

It was awkward business prying him off, the angel's limbs momentarily frozen by his terror. He snapped out of it as his foot came in contact with the stairs, carefully climbing out of her hold and to the stairs. A long, deep breath came from him as he forced himself to calm down, Pippen starting up the stairs next to him. He followed her, the pair quickly making their way up the stairs as the battle of beasts waged on behind them. The screeches were growing even further now, suggesting the Ink Demon was pursuing his prey, who had finally wisened up and turned tail. If it was too late for such tactic was hard to say, though guilt nibbled at Pippen for abandoning the stranger. It had inadvertently saved them, even if it didn't know that. The best they could do however was run, and not let this opportunity be in vain. Maybe it was left the area they could come back, and see if they could help the projectionist being.. that is if it was still alive.

The pair ran as silently as they could, both hearts heavy from the losses of the day, and what they had discovered. It was clear now that Joey had taken the gloves off, morphing his tool into a truly deadly weapon. The only question that remained was the question of if Bendy could be recovered.
Chapter 13

It was a long, tense trip back to the safe house, the pair giving even the slightest puddle of ink a wide berth. They had no way of knowing if the Ink Demon was still pursuing them, or had found their trail once more. Their hope was the fight had taken too much out of him to continue the hunt but they had no way to be sure. At least they had lured the Ink Demon out in an area far from their hideout.

As they neared the end of their journey, both couldn't help but notice an abnormal abundance of ink. It was in splatters and puddles randomly throughout the halls leading to their destination, as well as several smears along the wall, as if something had leaned against it for support. The siblings glanced to one another in concern, uncertain what to think. It could be left from some unfortunate spat between the ink beings, or even the Ink Demon coming near here.. Or a hope neither dared to speak on.

The duo picked up their pace as it became clear the splatters were leading to the safe house. As they neared it, they could hear a faint moaning of pain, Pippen running ahead despite Perci trying to catch her. She rounded the final corner and came to a halt, gasping in shock as she stared into the safe house. Perci quickly closed the distance, freezing at what they found.

It was Brutis, though the wolf had seen far better days. He was missing a chunk of his mass, his muzzle half melted to ink, his chest and stomach a lumpy mass of barely contained ink. He was missing an arm, and deep gouges littered his other limbs, the wolf moaning and wheezing lightly in pain. He hadn't noticed them, gooey mouth spread wide to allow him to breathe around his melting face.

"Oh dear god, Brutis.." Perci whispered, cautiously approaching the wolf. The large canine jerked, before relaxing once he realized who was approaching, a low whine escaping him. The angel set a hand on his shoulder, pulling it away to find ink staining his glove, the male turning to Pippen. "D-D-Do you think..?"

"I.. Maybe.." Pippen hesitantly approached, staring at Brutis. Perci's leg had been such a simple matter, but if she failed here they risked Brutis completely collapsing into ink. She wasn't sure if he could ever be revived from that state, not with how the ink worked. They didn't even know if Brutis was a former worker who had been experimented on, or a pure ink being.

She slowly walked closer to the wolf, stopping in front of him where he could see her. His chest inflated and deflated pitifully, an X shaped eye staring at her. If it weren't for the constant movement of the 'pupil', she would have thought for certain he was dead. A weak thump came from the mangled stump of his tail, the canine pressing his gooey muzzle into Pippen's side. Whatever came of her attempt, he was glad for the time they had all shared together.

"I'll do my best." Pippen murmured, crouching next to him, hesitantly pressing the nib of her tail into his shoulder. She was swamped with pain, dark sweat drops beginning to slide down her forehead. There was so much pain she momentarily could not think, her breathing uneven as she wobbled. A hand on her shoulder helped root her in the present, Pippen glancing up to see Perci, who had shut the door to the safe house before approaching her.

Slowly, Pippen began to move her tail, guiding the ink that was still present in Brutis' body. The pain Brutis was experiencing made it was sluggish to follow her command, both of them working together to keep it from falling away to nothingness. She could feel his the trust radiating over the pain, warmth radiating from her to try and numb the pain and make the experience easier for him.
Slowly, the ink began to drag itself into place, becoming easier with each moment.

Bit by bit, the ink reformed itself into a new form, the pain fading from Brutis as his body changed. Pippen took time to recreate him as a unique wolf, separating him from the many Boris clones that had once wandered these halls. Pippen donated more than a little bit of her own ink, Perci managing to spoon some extra bacon soup into her while she worked to help give her extra ink to work with.

Slowly, his new self came together. Brutis’ muzzle was a bit shorter than before, but still had a cartoonish look to it. Atop his head his ears were reshaped to proper pointed wolf ears. His body was still bulkier than the original wolf who blueprint he had been born from, but no longer a round, swollen form, but distributed into a more muscular appearance, though simplified by his cartoon nature. His tail was restored, and his neck was made a bit thicker, the fur along his neck, shins, and tail more pronounced. And to finish it all, a proper set of eyes, though they glowed with a faint otherworldly light that alluded to his time as an undead toon.

They finished the body of the wolf after a half hour, the wolf slowly standing up. He was naked, though his dark fur did a good job of covering him. He was a toon, so there was no concerns with his current state, the wolf standing up and slowly exploring his new body. It wasn't too different from what he had once known, a bulky form with power to spare, though it was more refined than what Alice had created, allowing him more flexibility and function than before.

"Does.. Does everything feel right?" Pippen asked hesitantly. She was sitting on the ground, panting lightly with exhaustion, her stomach slightly distended from the soup she was still processing. The imp yelped as she was picked up, the wolf hugging her tightly with delight. She smiled as he nodded, tail wagging happily. She could have sworn she had fixed his throat so he could speak.. Maybe he simply had no desire to speak. "I'll take that as a yes."

"You look good, big guy!" Perci offered, grinning a bit. He yelped as he was scooped up as well, the bulky wolf hugging both of them happily. Brutis rumbled happily, before setting them down, nose twitching as he was slowly drawn to the remnants of warmed up Bacon soup on the stove. He glanced back to them, Pippen gesturing for him to go ahead and have at it.

"You've earned it Brutis. Hopefully it will help make sure you fully recover your strength.." Pippen sighed, glancing to Perci. Her hands were still shaking from nerves, though her face was split into a small smile.

"You did great, sis. I knew you could do it." Perci offered, smiling to her. She beamed a bit wider, feeling odd to be accepting praise from her brother. It felt good none the less, and his tone was honest.

"I guess.. It's back to the drawing board now." Pippen murmured after a moment. "We can't risk an encounter like that again. At all.." She couldn't shake the thought of the strange Projector creature from her mind either. Maybe they could make another ally of him..?

"Yeah." Perci murmured, glancing up to Brutis, who was happily wolfing down the soup. "But there's no rush.. so long as we aren't found."

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With a heave and a grunt, Henry pushed the partly askew manhole cover the rest of the way off, panting lightly. He climbed the rest of the way up the ladder and out of the sewers, Jack sliding up
the ladder to join him. The animator let himself rest for a moment, looking around himself slowly. Finally, they were somewhere other than sewers! It looked like they were near the toy shop. The sheer amount of machines on the walls certainly confirmed his suspicions.

"I think we finally got out of there." Henry panted, Jack nodding in agreement. The pair had been trapped in the expanded sewers for longer then either could keep track of, and had encountered a number of odd ink beings along the trip. And dead ends. Numerous dead ends. Eventually they had worked out that moving away from the areas with higher concentrations of ink was leading them further into the maze and to the dead ends and mutant ink beings. Given Henry had no weapon, and Jack's aversion to fighting, they had avoided drawing the attention of these beings.

"Looks like we're near the toy shop." Henry muttered. "It's so weird Joey had a toy shop build under the studio. I don't understand why he made most of the decisions he's made if I'm honest.." He paused, eyes distant, before looking up to Jack, slowly standing again. "Anyway, we need to keep moving. Susie Campbell, or Alice as she prefers to be called, lurks around the toy shop, and encountering her won't end well for us. She's never been very stable during any of the loops."

He turned to begin walking, moving slowly and with care to avoid drawing attention to them. Jack followed him, quiet as a mouse, slithering across the ground. If Henry was honest, Alice had been one of the people he had put a lot of hope on during his earlier loops. Sure, the first one ended pretty badly, but she had seemed to have a glimmer of sanity somewhere within the Alice act. He had tried to talk to her a number of times, but eventually gave up once he realized that no matter what he said, she would circle back to her wants, her demands. Maybe it would be different with the broken loop but.. Given her record, he wasn't going to risk bringing Jack near her. He would risk his neck alone, if at all.

After several twists and turns, they came across a set of hallways that felt familiar to Henry, the former animator pausing. To their left was a familiar set of thick iron doors, already parted open and leading into a darkened hallway. He grinned a bit, turning to Jack. "I've got good news. I recognize this area. Assuming there hasn't been any expansion or changes to this area, I can lead us to a safe house. The door is so thick I don't think even Bendy could break it down."

Jack perked up at that, bobbing his head eagerly, eager to hide. Part of how they had found their way out of the sewers was by following the sound of unrelenting screaming that had erupted from the upper floors. They hadn't set out to find the source, but the noise, and it's echoing through the sewers, had helped them find the ladder that lead them upwards. They had chosen to wait for the sound to stop, and then waited even longer to make sure the source was gone, before finally risking going up to the top. Despite that wait, Jack was still anxious they would find the source, which had sounded extremely unpleasant.

It was with confidence Henry led them down the darkened halls, Jack placing a hand on the animator's shoulder to avoid getting lost. His other hand went up to protect his hat from the occasional burst of steam from the machinery around them, dreading the thought of losing it in the dark. Henry didn't mind it, indifferent to ending up with more ink staining his clothing.

Eventually they walked out of the darkened halls into a single lit hall, which initially appeared to be a dead end. As they walked up the hall, a heavy metal door came into sight, Henry's face splitting into a grin at the familiar sight. He tested the door handle, finding it was locked, his smile wiped away. So he knocked, turning to a nervous Jack as he did.

"Well.. usually there's a Boris clone living in here. Really friendly guy, always happy to share the spa." Henry's words came to a halt he turned towards the door, which he had heard the lock
disengage from. It was now open, a massive, bulky wolf in a simple plaid shirt and overalls staring down at them with slightly glowing eyes, a slight glare to them. Henry stared back, jaw dropped, uncertain what to do now. This was certainly not the Boris who lived here-

"Henry?" A familiar voice questioned from behind the wolf, Perci sliding around him to get a better look. A grin split his face as he confirmed his suspicions, the not-Boris moving aside. "It is you!"

"Perci? How did you get here? Where's Boris?" Henry questioned, peering into the room. Pippen had walked out of the back area as he spoke, eyes widening with surprise as she spotted him, tail waveriing with uncertainty. It was good he was alive, but.. she didn't look forward to filling him in on recent developments. That is, whatever he wasn't already aware of.

"Boris?" Perci echoed. "I don't know..? I mean, this place was empty when Brutis and I found it. Or at least, empty of other living beings. The table and some other stuff was already here..." He backed up, gesturing for Henry to follow, though he stiffened a bit as he noticed Jack. Brutis stiffened in response, fur bristling threateningly at the swollen ink being.

"It's OK, he's with me, I promise." Henry quickly cut in, the pair settling down slowly. He walked in, Jack sliding in after him, sticking close to the animator. Brutis huffed, before walking back to the lever and locking the room. With that taken care of, he walked back to his usual chair, watching Henry and Jack uncertainly.

"What's his story?" Pippen asked as she eyed Jack.

"I could ask you two the same thing." Henry offered in turn. "Last I saw of the two of you, Perci had fallen into a lake of ink, and you were trapped in a room with Bendy."

Pippen flinched at the name, rubbing her arm and looking away. Perci sighed, looking up to the taller man. "We'll have to all give our part."

"Agreed. Before we do that, however, have either of you seen Oliver or Sammy?" Henry asked hesitantly.

"Oliver? Oliver Green?!" Pippen echoed, alarm slipping into her tone. "I didn't tell him to come here! I told him we had things under control!"

"You told our cousin we were here and didn't have him call the police?!!" Perci asked in an exasperated tone, turning to her.

"It was at the very start of all this, d****! Don't look at me like that! I was able to text him once while I was trapped in the Ink Machine room. Only got the simple explanation out to him before the connection cut out. The one that prevented him from possibly calling the police on you, might I add." Pippen finished, tail lashing in annoyance.

Perci sighed, forcing himself to calm back down. "I guess that's more than I've done. I haven't even checked if my phone works here.."

"I mean, some of the games on mine still work. But I don't have any connection to the messenger service. I guess it was a one off deal. Figures Connect's coverage doesn't perfectly extend to a separate world."

"Yeah. OK. So that's another person to put on the list we need to find. So, who's Sammy? I guess we should add him to the list either way.." Perci muttered.
"I can explain while I explain what we've been going through." Henry murmured. He didn't waste any more time, quickly explaining what he had gone through after Pippen and Perci had been separated. He covered Oliver's change, there exploring the music department and managing to bring Jack back to his senses.. and partly succeeding with Sammy. He took a moment to explain who Sammy once was, as well as Jack, before continuing.

"Anyway, Sammy started to go off the deep end again and he attacked Oliver. He didn't knock him out, and we all tried to calm Sammy down again... even managed to a bit. And then Bendy appeared He dragged both Oliver and Sammy into the ink they were standing in, and we haven't seen them since." He paused as Pippen's expression twisted into one of pain, giving her a sympathetic look. It was her cousin after all. "Jack and I barely escaped, and we fled into the ink sewer system, Bendy cursing us the entire time. Eventually we lost him, but.. well.. we were lost as well. We found some strange messages down there, and a white rabbit."

"Like.. this one?" Pippen walked over to the rabbits box, picking up a grouchy Angie, who had been sleeping.

"Y-Yes! Where did you find.. them?" Henry trailed off as a second rabbit jumped out of the box.

"I guess it's my turn than." Pippen muttered. "I drew them to life. Just like how I drew Brutis to how he is now, though that comes later. He used to be a lot rounder and have X for eyes. But anyway. My part. After Bendy appeared and attacked you, the room started to flood." She outlined her harrowing escape from the Darling Devil, though Henry couldn't help but notice she was spoke of Bendy in a more positive manner than he would have expected. Oddly so. Understanding dawned as him as she slowly began to explain the birth of their deal, and how the devil had taken to his little sanctuary in this nightmare studio, a place where she had practiced her powers and spoken a great deal with him.

"It was drawn up like his home, like the one from his world." She paused, looking up to Henry. "He says he isn't from here. That he came from a world where he and all the other tunes lived, completely oblivious to our world. He was snatched up one day by Joey's machine and it did the damage you see now.. Except.." she paused again. "Henry, are you really his creator? That's what Perci said, but Bendy.."

Henry waited for her to continue, before answering when she did not. "I am. Joey stole the rights to his design out from under me. It was my mistake for trusting him."

"He doesn't know that, though. Bendy, that is. He doesn't know who his real creator is. Joey told him that he was his creator, and that you created the ink machine. That you were the one responsible for dragging him into this world, and fled when it was clear he was a failure." Pippen slowly explained, watching as Henry's hands tightened into fists. "There's another thing. He told me he can't hear you. He's never been able to hear anything you've said."

She stopped as Henry slammed a fist into the nearest wall, shocked by his outburst. Perci jumped as well, Brutis giving a warning growl but remaining seated. Jack watched him nervously, have skid a couple feet back in response to the usually calm man's reaction to the news. Henry covered his face with his other hand, shoulder shaking with fury.

"Every loop... every encounter.. everything I've said to him." Henry breathed, his voice thick with fury and pain. "All of it wasted because of Joey Drew!"

He was taking deep breaths to calm down, dragging his hand down his face. His eyes were alight with dozens of emotions, the man slowly beginning to speak. "It wasn't enough for him to steal Bendy from me.. but to put Bendy through this hell for his greed, and lie to him, like he lied to me,
to paint me as the villain!" He was panting a bit with anger, but he was trying his hardest to keep his cool. Pain entered his eyes as he continued. "No wonder he hates me. To be dragged from his happy life to this hell, into that twisted body.. would any of my words ever made a difference to him?"

"It would and it will!" Pippen cut in, Henry looking to her in surprise. "I know it will! Perci's scissors can cut away the control and manipulation others put on someone, and once they're gone he will be able to hear you! He was suspicious of Joey even when we began to talk, and I kept asking him if what he remembered was right.. And he started to tell me that some things didn't sit right with him in his memory. It bothered him a lot that he couldn't hear you, and I pointed out to him that it wouldn't make sense for you to come back if Joey's story was true! He never disagreed with my points, but.. he didn't have grounds to investigate them either. Not with the degree of control Joey has."

"It's true." Perci added, before quickly continuing. "The control part, at least. I.. When I met Brutis, he only had about a dozen strings on him that Alice was using to control him. When I cut them, Brutis was free to make his own decisions again." Brutis nodded in affirmation of this fact, watching the group silently. "We- We tried to catch Bendy not to long ago. I think it was the day before? Time is hard to keep track of. But that's not the point, we tried to catch him and Joey's had changed him even more. He.. When I looked at him he was coated in strings, all over him, so many they looked like they were warping him into the form he was in. And it was clear he wasn't in control anymore. Not with how he was acting."

Henry stared at them both for several long moments, breathing deeply to calm down. Once he had regained his cool, he turned to them, stance calm. "I think I need to hear what both of you experienced fully first, before we make any decisions." The eyed him uncertainly, before nodding and beginning to speak once more.

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The soup on the stove was bubbling by the time Henry took it off the heat, stirring it one final time. There was enough soup in the pot for everyone, and Henry had insisted on cooking it himself, a sense of nostalgia to the action. He smiled as the familiar scent of warm bacon soup greeted his nose, sighing a bit. Brutis was no Boris, but the wolf had as much as a love for food as the wolf he would meet in this place during the loop. The present wolf's tail was wagging with eagerness, and the first bowl of soup was given to the wolf. Best to get on his good side.

Next he passed a bowl to Perci, who quietly thanked him before beginning to eat, slow and polite in his manners. He was seated at the table with Brutis and Jack, who had found a pack of cards and slid to the far side of the table. He stood playing a game of solitaire, bobbing his head to the music of the phonograph. Henry offered him some soup, just a small amount in a bowl, encouraging him to try and absorb it into his ink. Pippen had said the soup was basically edible ink, which fortunately tasted better than real ink, so it wouldn't harm Jack.. and Henry wanted to keep him included.

Next he offered a bowl to Pippen, who was seated next to the rabbits' box. The pair of strange rabbits were shuffling around, biting at the edge of the cardboard and reshaping the nest. Pippen took it, giving him a small thanks before digging in with more gusto than Perci had. She noticed him smile a bit at that, an embarrassed smile on her own face, the girl offering a simple, "This stuff is a lot better when warm."
"I'd imagine. It helps the flavor of the bacon come out." Henry laughed, collecting a bowl for himself. He walked over and sat down next to Pippen, slowly sliding down the wall to rest next to her.

"O-Oh. Henry, I can move if you need a seat." Perci quickly offered, a stab of guilt darting through him as he watched his elder sit on the ground.

"I'm OK here." Henry answered, a rueful smile crossing his face. "I haven't grown that old."

"Ah- I didn't-" Perci stumbled to a stop, flushing a bit as Henry and Pippen laughed, nodding in understanding. It was just a joke.

Henry quietly ate his soup for a bit, watching the rabbits quietly. Pippen didn't mind his presence, as he didn't feel that threatening. That and he really did remind her of her late grandfather, something that brought an inherent sense of safety with it, even though he was not the old man himself. They ate their soup in peace before Henry finally spoke, his voice soft.

"They act like real rabbits." He mused, watching the pair.

Pippen paused, before smiling, a grey flush showing on her cheek. "I.. Yeah. I didn't even know about my powers. I just wanted to draw and I was thinking about my late pet rabbit while I did. I guess that's why they came out more like normal rabbits than toon rabbits."

"Interesting.. So you're power is partly based off of your thoughts.." Henry mused.

"Have you tried drawing?" Pippen asked after a moment. "I'm.. still a student in art school, but you're a legit animator. If I gained a power connected to art, than surely you have too. You have more experience than I do, and you've been here longer than both of us."

Henry paused, staring away for a moment, eyes distant. "I did draw a lot after I quit the studio.. though I didn't draw many cartoon related things. Mostly portraits and.. real life matters." His eyes grew distant, remembering the small, raggedy sketchbook that had helped him keep his sanity during his deployment. He wasn't sure where he had put it after he had returned, and he wasn't sure if he wanted to find it. "But I haven't drawn since I was lured here. Haven't found any paper or pens."

"Well.. I have some paper here." Pippen dredged up a sizeable piece from the rabbits' nest, the pair eyeing her but allowing this intrusion.. at least this time. "And my tail works like a pen. Maybe you can do something too!" She twisted her tail towards him, waggling it lightly.

"Are you.. sure?" Henry took the paper, though he eyed her tail curiously.

"Yeah! I mean, if it works, we can find you a proper a pen to work with afterwards. So you don't have to tug on my tail every time you want to draw." Pippen offered, smiling. Henry smiled as well, hesitantly taking her tail in his hand, holding it like a pen. The end was surprisingly responsive, stiffening to perfectly fit against his fingers like a pen. "OK, not goin' to lie, this feels kinda weird, but not so weird we need to quit the test."

"Sorry." Henry murmured, his fingers tingling with warmth as he held her tail. It tingled with potential, a feeling of limitless possibility overtaking him. "What should I draw? I don't want to drag someone else into this.."

"Draw a flower or a ball." Pippen offered. "I drew tons of non-sentient flowers while practicing. I think items are allowed."
"Well.. Here goes." He slowly began to sketch a ball, pausing once it was finished. "Nothing."

"Oh! I forgot to mention, but you need to have intention behind it. Like, when I fixed Perci's leg, my focus was on it being like his other leg, on him being able to properly move the joint, the separation of pants from limb. I didn't hyper focus on things, but sorta just glazed over it all and recognized it as the component of the thing I was trying to do. Try again!" Pippen encouraged, tail jerking a bit in Henry's hand as it tried to wag with eagerness.

"OK..." The least he could do was humour her. He followed her instructions, thinking about the ball as he drew it, how shiny and bouncy it would be, the way it's body would allow some compression before reforming itself into a proper sphere. The second sketch was as good as the first, but began to glow once he was finished. After a moment, it fell off the page, a simple white ball that bounced lightly against the ground, before rolling a bit.

"I.. I did it." Henry murmured, releasing Pippen's tail and reaching out towards the ball. It was a solid object in his hand, flexing lightly when he squeezed. He placed it in his pocket for safe keeping, smiling to himself.

"I knew it!" Pippen cheered, jumping up in excitement.

"But was it me.. or your tail?" Henry asked, trying to stay grounded despite the excitement burning in his chest. Something he had drawn become a real, physical object before his eyes.

"Than it's time for the next part of the test." Pippen declared. "Perci, you and everyone else hold down the fort! We're going out to find a pen for Henry."

"Wait- it's not safe out there!" Perci argued, sitting up straighter in his seat. "And Henry just got here an hour ago! Give the poor man a break."

"Why wait when we can do it now? Everything's been nice and quiet, and I bet finding a pen won't be that hard. Besides, Henry should know this area even better than you, since he's gone through this so many times. And the less people we have out at once, the better." Pippen argued in turn.

"Maybe.. but you and Henry are Bendy's prime targets." Perci muttered.

"Am not."

"Are too! You saw how he was staring at you! He was after you more than me!" Perci raised his voice a bit, but Brutis holding his hand parallel to the ground and lowering it reminded him the danger making too much noise presented.

"He was not! He was after both of us. I already explained to you he stares at things because of his bad vision." Pippen huffed, putting her hand on her hips. "Henry knows the area pretty well, so we'll be safe. All we're doing is finding a pen for Henry and we'll come straight back."

"I'm OK with going out, if it makes any difference." Henry offered, seeing Pippen was not going to back down. "It will give me a chance to see what has changed and what hasn't. We'll stay out of trouble."

"I.. I guess." Perci sighed, defeated. "Please.. Just be careful."

"We will." Henry promised, smiling a bit.

"We'll be fine." Pippen agreed, leading Henry out. "Lock the door behind us and don't take any
Once the door was shut, and the pair walked a small distance away, before Henry glanced down to her. "So, are we really just getting a pen?"

"Yeeees." Pippen answered, giving him an innocent look. "But if we happen to check on something on the way to finding that pen, than it's no trouble."

Henry raised his brows at her, and she held up her hands defensively. "Listen, we're going to play it careful, just like I promised. I- I don't want to have a run in with that.. Demon Joey's turned Bendy into." She paused, eyes falling towards the ground at his name. Guilt and sorrow danced in her eyes. "I just.. want to check on something. I feel like I should."

"Alright." Henry hummed. "Let's be careful, though."

"That's the plan. I- I don't want to run into that.. monster.. Joey's made. Not until we can help him." Pippen feel silent, looking away and wrapping her arms around herself.

"What was he like? Before Joey took over fully." Henry asked, the pair slowly making their way through the halls beneath the toy shop, checking the rooms they came across. The majority of the rooms were flooded with ink, or in tatters, the furniture upturned and torn apart in most rooms. Most of it looked like it had been done with a sharp set of claws.

"Bendy? He was a lot like in the cartoons, I guess. Mischievous, kind of a smart mouth, likes to joke around when he isn't hurting or Joey isn't in his head. He was really nice after the first day, honestly. He didn't like to talk about the world he came from that much, but when he got started he couldn't stop. Sometimes he would talk about how the situation got this point.. he was really frustrated that he couldn't hear you." Pippen offered. "But there were some details you wouldn't know from the show. He.. He felt like a real person, you know?" She cringed at her final words, realizing, no, he would not know.

"I wish I could get to know him." Henry murmured. "Heh. I never imagined I would even have the chance to meet my own character."

"You will get to meet him." Pippen stated confidently. "Properly, with talking and no murder attempts. We just have to find Joey and throw him off a cliff! And maybe have Perci do his scissor thing, but we really should throw Joey off a cliff."

Henry snickered, managing a small smile at her words. He had never thought about what he would do if he met Joey in an unrestrained situation. At the end of every loop, he would find himself back at Joey's house, the man mocking and deriding him for his 'abandonment' and his refusal to 'cooperate' with Joey properly. Whatever power Joey had over the loops kept Henry from being able to do anything but stand there and listen until he was finally sent back to the beginning.

"I certainly wouldn't mind giving him a piece of my mind.." Henry muttered.

"More like a piece of those fists! He certainly deserves it after everything he put you and Bendy through." Pippen declared. She stopped as they came to a hallway she recognized, making an abrupt turn. "Actually.. Now that I think about it, that thing I want to check on is this way..

"What exactly is it?" Henry questioned, though she gave him no answer. She quietly lead him to the stairwell, opening the door and listening.

"Do you hear anything? Anything dangerous sounding? Or like, moaning?" Pippen asked in a hushed voice. Henry approached, sticking his head through the door as well. He listened, cocking
his head slightly.

"I.. I only hear liquid, which is probably ink." Henry muttered. "Why are we here?

"When the Ink Demon was chasing us, we fled down this stair well." Pippen murmured. "We hid in a box but I think he was onto us. He was starting to take it apart until a strange being with a projector for a head distracted him. They got into a massive fight. If it wasn't for that, we wouldn't have gotten away. But.. I'm pretty sure the projector guy got really messed up from the fight, and it feels wrong to leave them there, possibly suffering, because we put it on a collision course with the Ink Demon."

"A projector..?" Henry paused in thought. "Did it have a human body? Wires coming out of the back of the projector? And it looks like it's wearing pants and a shirt."

"Yeah, that's it. You know'em?" Pippen questioned in turn.

"Their The Projectionist, or at least that is the name I was told. However, I suspect they may have once been Norman Polk, our projector technician. He always made sure everything was perfect so he reels wouldn't be damaged by the machines." Henry explained.

"Well, whoever he is, he saved our lives. The least I can do is extend an olive branch to him."
She walked into the stair well, Henry close behind. He didn't entirely agree with this trip, but given how hard headed Pippen had been while arguing with Perci.. Well, it could have been because they were siblings, but he didn't want to start an argument. And if Pippen could save Norman..

They made their way silently down the stairs, Pippen at the lead. She was slowly growing more hesitant and stiff with every step, though she forced herself to continue. When they reached the bottom, they were greeted by a shattered box, the fabric scattered through the ink. What wood survived showed signs of sharp claws having been employed to destroy the box, Pippen stiffening a bit more at the sight.

"He knew.." She muttered, tail twitching with anxiety.

"We could go-" Henry began, before a distant moan cut him off. It was low and slightly distorted, an edge of pain to it. The sound was lower and more drawn out than the roars produced before, but sounded distinctly similar to the roars from before. Pippen paused, eyeing the ink, and then Henry.

"We need to go." Pippen pleaded. "They need help."

"If you're sure about this." Henry murmured, hesitantly stepping into the ink. Nothing happened, and Pippen followed him moments later.

"I am. We can't keep using people. Not like Joey.." Pippen murmured. "We should at least try and help this Norman fella."

Henry considered her words, before nodding, beginning to wade through the ink towards the noise. They would do better than Joey, who took so many souls and blindly threw them into a yawning pit of ink. All for the sake of his own greed and glory. He nodded to her. They would do better.

The thought was nice, but it did little to calm their nerves as they waded through the ink. There was enough to slow them down significantly, and the ever looming possibility of the Ink Demon, or hiding hostiles of another variety, didn't help. They stayed close to one another, slowly
following the faint sounds of pain.

The noise was faint and irregular, requiring them to stop occasionally and wait for another moan or groan to help orient themselves. It was slow going, but neither of them had any intention of rushing up onto the being they were tracking, not wanting to spur another hostile action. Henry kept an eye out for any loose pipes or other objects he could use for a weapon as they walked, knowing he'd feel better with some degree of defense on hand.

They didn't find any weapons on the way, but they did find the source of the noise after several minutes of trekking through the ink. Their quarry was located in a small side room, collapsed on top of a fallen shelf. Reels of film floated around the Projector, his body leaking a thick ink from several gouges in his form. The claw marks wobbled as the ink tried to decide whether it wanted to stay in it's semi solid state, or fall away to ink, the fight for the former option bolstered by the being's will. The Projector and it's wires seemed undamaged, though the light coming from the machine portion was weak and flickering.

"Norman?" Henry asked hesitantly, a low growling groan coming from the half mechanical being. He tried to get up, to take a fighting stance, but there was no hope in him succeeding, given the damage to his legs. It didn't stop him from beginning to raise a ruckus, hissing and growling as they made their presence known.

"Hey, Hey, It's OK." Pippen murmured, walking closer to him slowly, holding her hands up. "We just want to help you."

The Projectionist lashed out, trying to hit her with his free arm, the figure snarling dangerously. Pippen backed up, though she tried to snake her tail towards him.

"Norman, are you in there?" Henry questioned softly. His voice made the being pause, before he kept trying to attack them. Eventually he tired out, coming to a wheezing stop, a fresh groan of pain escaping him.

"Please. Let us help you. We just want to undo the damage to your body Mr. Polk." Pippen murmured, moving closer once more. The Projectionist didn't move, chest rising and falling wildly. The imp nervously pressed the nib of her tail to his side, seizing up as she was hit with a wall of distrust and pain. Pippen stiffened, barely able to move, though she traced over the worst of his wounds, shutting them in hopes it would win him over.

It... didn't really work. The Projectionist could sense the ink of his body being manipulated, and wasn't entirely sure why Pippen was doing it. She looked so much like the beast that had done this damage, so why would she be healing him? It had to be a devious trick! He stiffened as her hand landed on him, tugging something out of his side. She was trying to dull the pain, but his refusal to cooperate left her unable to really do much.

"Hen-" Pippen choked on her words, wobbling as another wave of defiant emotions broad sided her mind. She couldn't even pull away now, frozen in a silent struggle against the Projectionist. Fortunately, Henry noticed something was wrong, quickly moving to separate the pair. As he did, the Projectionist lunged, the animator just scrambling out of the way with Pippen in tow to avoid the hit. A good portion of The Projectionist's wounds had been healed, but this fact did not seem to phase them in the slightest.

"Norman-!" Henry tried, Jumping back as another swipe was aimed at him, the other being hobbling to it's feet. Pippen had done too good of a job it seemed, the Projectionist able to stand once more, though she hung limply in Henry's grasp. Drips of ink were coming off of her left horn and her tail, but given what they were walking in it was impossible to tell if it was coming from her
or the ink being splashed around.

Henry stumbled away, the Projectionist shambling after them. Fortunately he wasn't fully healed, and as such couldn't keep up with them. Henry eventually managed to leave the Projectionist behind before making his way back to the stairs. Pippen had barely recovered by then, holding tight to Henry as he ran. Now that they were free of the ink it was clear that she was dripping ink from her own horn, having been slightly destabilized by her encounter with The Projectionist.

"Pippen?" Henry questioned hesitantly, stopping as they reached the top flight of the stairs.

"I-I'm OK. Honest." Pippen gasped, sliding out of his grasp. Her left horn was still drooping slightly, ink dripping from it, but she forced herself to stand. She was still wobbling slightly before him, clutching her tail nervously.

"That could have gone better.." Henry offered, watching her drooping horn with concern. It still wasn't healing. "Your horn..."

"It feels weird.." Pippen admitted, looking up to him nervously. "Does it look bad?"

"It looks like you're starting to fall apart.." Henry muttered in concern.

"I-I feel fine." She declared, standing up a bit taller. The imp held out her hand, showing him what she had retrieved from The Projectionist's side. "Here. A pen."

It was a fountain pen, and a rather nicely crafted one at that. The tip was a shiny gold, while the body was silver and black, engraved with delicate swirls. The cap to the pen was sitting on it's end, and perfectly intact. When he twisted it to point downward, ink came out, though it stopped at the tip and did not drip out, as if it was waiting for a command. It felt.. right in his hands.

"C'mere." Henry ordered, crouching in front of Pippen. "Maybe I can fix this, like you've down with the other."

"Well, I trust you, so we have that at least.." Pippen offered, walking closer to him. "I.. I don't think it will work well if the being you're trying to work with doesn't trust you. At least, that's how it felt with Norman.." She stood nervously, watching as he slowly made contact with her drooping horn. A feeling of warmth filled the part as he worked, Pippen doing her best to stay still as he did. It was a quick, easy fix, only taking him a minute to have her back to normal.

"Oh, that feels better.." Pippen murmured, rubbing her once more solid horn. "Hey, uh, can we not tell Perci about this? Please? I don't need him freaking out on me.. and we found you a Pen! It was practically destined that we go down there! It's a nice, fancy pen, and you deserve it." She held her hands up in a placating manner, hoping he would be on her side.

"I.. Guess we could keep quiet about it. For now." Henry sighed, setting the pen into his overall pocket. It did feel oddly nice to have it with him. He hadn't had a functioning pen since he had been locked into this place.

"Thank you!" Pippen sighed, leading him out of the stairwell. "I promise, I won't make a habit of dragging you into dangerous situations. I swear this was a one off thing.." She stopped abruptly, tail going still. "Do you feel that?"

"Feel wh-" Henry began to ask, stopping as the walls began to darken.

"We need to go!" Pippen hissed, leading Henry down a different path than the one they had
come to this area by. "We can't risk him seeing us!" Henry didn't argue, given what they had told him Bendy had 'evolved' too.
"This way, up the stairs." Henry hissed. The pair had been trying to lose the Ink Demon for several minutes now, but no matter how much they ran, they couldn't lose the inky webs. Pippen followed his instructions without hesitation, running up the stairs with him, stopping as they were greeted by a faded panting of Bendy's face. The proper, cartoon Bendy, before Joey got ahold of him. A light was positioned beneath it to highlight the smiling face, her heart aching a bit at the sight of it.

"We'll save him." Henry declared softly, putting a hand on her shoulder, pushing her to continue moving. The Ink Demon was still behind them, slowly trailing after them, the occasional sounds of objects being shoved or clawed greeting their ears. Pippen couldn't help but wonder if his eyesight had grown poorer when Joey had taken over and twisted him. He was certainly using his hands a lot more than his previous self had. At least, what she had seen of him without alerting him to their presence.

They pressed on, the hall splitting into two separate sides that led to the same room. What they walked out into was a massive room, with a high vaulted ceiling. There were several giant plush toys, Two Bendys and one Boris, a queue line set up for a non-existent crowd. At the far end of the room were a pair of staircases leading up to another room, a pillar in the middle with the words 'Heavenly Toys' Emblazoned on a sign, and a smaller 'Joey Drew Studios' sign. Ink poured out from behind it in a sticky, haphazard waterfall in a fountain area set below it. Judging by the stains it hadn't done its job well, as there was a massive splatter of ink going down the outer fountains and onto the floor.

"This is the manufacturing area.." Henry muttered, quickly guiding her up the right set of stairs. They both lead to the same place, but the right looked more secure. "If we're lucky, the machine won't be stuck again..and the toy line won't be in the way."

The next room was more crowded, massive machines on both sides of the room, several transportable shelves of toys hanging on the line, though they did not block the other path out of the room. The machines belts on both sides were stopped by various toys wedged into the machinery, leaving it completely still and silent.

"We're in luck." Henry muttered, leading her quickly to the next room. He stiffened as he realized where they were, staring at the glass window ahead of them. It was already cracked, and the lights showcasing Alice Angel cutouts were still on. The cutouts depicted a simple humanoid figure with a round face, dark pie cut eyes, long dark hair, and a simple black dress with a white bow at the top. Beneath her halo was a pair of cutey little horns, seemingly holding the halo up, and on her hands were the standard white gloves with a black circles drawn on each. The TV screens remained off, and the speakers were mercifully quiet.

The path to the next halls were unobscured, and Henry quickly guided them both down it, aware of the inky webs trailing closer and closer. They turned to the right at the end of this hall, through two openings that seemed to have been busted through the walls at some point. They were faced with a small problem as, once again, this hall split into two options, a cartoon-y sign post put up at the end of their path to point to both options. On the left was the 'The demon', written on a jagged arrow, and a pristine arrow with the words 'The angel'.
"We need to-" Henry started to say they had to take the same path, and that it would be best to take the Angel's path, before being cut off by a screech. The pair split apart just in time to avoid the Ink Demon as he slammed a clawed hand down where they had been standing, turning to face first her, than Henry, tail lashing with fury as he spotted the former animator. His hand had gone through the floor, and he began to furiously try to free it, screeching with rage.

"RUN!" Pippen shouted, starting down the 'Angel' path, while Henry was forced down the 'Demon' Path, unwilling to risk trying to run past the Ink Demon. Behind them the demon snarled and hissed in frustration, the sound hitting a new pitch as both paths were abruptly shut off by a pair of sliding walls. Whoever had set this up had intended the travelers to only be allowed to choose one path.

Pippen's path was fairly easy, leading to a messy room with flipped furniture and several Alice Angel dolls scattered about as well. She made it through hers pretty quickly, pausing to consider her options. It didn't sound like the Ink Demon was behind her, but she wasn't sure if she would be able to find Henry again.

Henry's path was more difficult, the man forced to wade through a room flooded with ink. He held his breath as he sloshed through, heart beating wildly in his chest as he moved quickly. A voice recorder idly floated in the ink he walked in, and he snatched it up. A low growl behind him spurred him ownwards, the man running into the wall at the end of his path. This wasn't right, it was supposed to be open-

"Henry?!" Pippen questioned as the sound of banging came from the wall opposite her exit, Henry's desperate voice coming through the thin wall. She ran up, quickly scribbling a hole into the wall, watching with anxious hope as it glowed. Seconds later, a round hole appeared, one large enough for Henry, who was on the other side, to squeeze through. He chuckled the voice recorder he was carrying to Pippen before clambering out, grabbing her shoulder and pushing her to keep running.

"He's right behind me!" Henry gasped, a low growl confirming his words. Pippen didn't hesitate to start running as well, scrabbling along the path before them. It came to an abrupt dead end, with a small alcove and door to the side near the end, the pair running through. From there came a hall crisscrossed with wires, two separate sets leading to an open door, something they both were extremely grateful for. They didn't have the time to track down the second lever or button needed to open this door if it was closed.

"Is he-?" Pippen glanced behind her, bristling as webs of ink came into view, confirming her question for her. She turned to face forward once more, the pair running through another set of busted holes. It seemed the elaborate door may have been put up after someone had made these holes. Either way, it lead them to another room, one with an elevator of all things, just down a stairwell.

"Come to me..." A voice weakly ordered over the speakers, the sound soft. Pippen nearly put it off to a fear induced hallucination, given how soft it was, but Henry's tense expression told her he had heard it too. "Level 9... Safety.. from the beast.."

It was certainly different from how Henry was usually addressed when he came to this area during a unbroken loop, and he wasn't sure how to feel about the change. He knew that voice well, the voice of Susie Campbell, but she was using her softer tone, the one she had used to lure him in through so many loops. Not the harsh one she would issue commands with. However, her voice was unusually soft, and held an edge of weakness to it that was unfamiliar to it.
"Henry?" Pippen questioned nervously. She knew there was a female in this area that Perci had encountered, and from what he had told her of this 'Alice', they weren't the safest being to be around. The veins of darkness were closing in however, leaving them trapped between a demon and an insane angel.

"We have no choice." Henry whispered, quickly guiding her to the elevator. He hesitantly pressed the button labelled '9', the elevator's metal cage closing with a noisy chatter. The Ink Demon leapt down from the upper level of the room, screaming at them. It lunged for the elevator, but the transport was already moving downwards at a steady clip. Seems Alice still had control over the elevators and was being merciful today. The Ink Demon just barely missed the transport, the being screeching far above them, though it dare not jump down. Not with how much pain it was already in.

"That was close." Henry muttered, barely daring to raise his voice, staring up towards the ceiling of the elevator, dreading the thump and thud of something landing on it.

"... Sorry Bendy..." Pippen whispered, the sound barely audible. She stared sadly up towards the ceiling as well, tail low.

As the elevator came to a stop, the voice came from the speakers once more. "Come.. to my parlor.. I have a.. deal.. for the imp."

"Me?" Pippen questioned, tail twitching with uncertainty. "Listen, I ain't no Demon, Miss. I don't do a lot of deals and the like.." Especially not with unstable people, she added to herself.

"It is the least you can do.." The voice was soft and whiskery, almost pleading, almost pitiful. Almost, except Henry knew what crimes the unbalanced Angel had committed, and it soured his softer emotions towards her. "After I saved you... He will not.. come down here."

Pippen looked up uncertainly to Henry, who shrugged. "During the loops he never came down here.. but I don't know what rules still stand and which don't. And I'm not certain if we want to meet her.. But.. we don't have much of a choice. She has control of all the elevators in this area that I know of, and she won't let us leave without getting her way first."

The imp sighed, glancing outside of the elevator. The path led out to a platform, followed by a set of stairs leading to a lower platform. The lower area was split in two by a river of ink, a solid bridge cutting through it, space cut open beneath it to allow the ink to flow. From there they were met with a wide set of stairs leading upwards, a transport tube on one side of the top level of the stairs. A 3-d model of Alice Angel's face and two of her hands held a scroll sideways, which read 'She's quite a gal!' on it in bold letters rested above a heavy metal door, like the one that lead to the Safe House.

Pippen was fairly certain that phrase was part of Alice Angel's original advertising pitch, or it was according to her grandfather. There were a couple posters of the episodes the angel had featured in around the figure, a pair of hidden speakers behind the figure. The doors began to slowly creak open, the pair eyeing it with uncertainty as it did. Fortunately there were no visible traps or ink beings waiting to attack them beyond the door.

Instead, they were met with a long, dimly lit hall, the walls lined with metal paneling. A small alcove held a desk and chair, but nothing really of interest to either of them. As they walked further down, they had to move around shelving units haphazardly sticking out from their position on the
wall, and evade moving machine parts on another. Nothing to complex, just a belt fixture and some pistons, but neither wanted to risk getting to close.

The hall took a small right turn before continuing forward, another Alice Angel cutout present in the corner of the turn. It was a full sized one, allowing them to see her dark shoes and the white stockings the character wore. It's expression was one of friendly benevolence, and perhaps a degree of naivety, though that thought was more on Pippen's part.

Alice Angel always gave Bendy another chance to do good in the cartoons, despite his mischievous nature and devilish origins. But that big heart often led to people trying to take advantage of her kindness. She wasn't entirely defenseless, having something of a sharp wit, but it hadn't been uncommon for Bendy and Boris to defend her in the cartoons either. Pippen never saw much of an issue with it. Alice was an angel, and those types were expected to be nice and sweet. At least in the later cartoons, few that there were, she seemed to be wising up to some of the nefarious tactics of ne'er do wells.

The kindly angel of the cartoon was a far cry from the one of this reality, if what Bendy, Perci, and Henry had told her held up. This Susie Campbell was more of a twisted, greedy version the real Angel would have been sickened to know carried her name. Maybe it was partly due to her time in the ink, and partly to other factors Pippen didn't know about, but Susie's current behavior didn't really sit right with her either way. It didn't sit right with Henry either.

Passing the curve they found themselves in a massive room once more, the majority of it flooded with a thick lake of ink. Planks of wood were balanced on boxes and barrels to make a bridge of sorts over the ink, with several paths available in case one gave out. The area they stood in was one of the few portions of the room not flooded. There was another corner, one with a desk and shelving unit, but it was across the treacherous trek of boards and boxes.

That wasn't what gave Pippen pause as they entered, her stomach churning with anxiety. Right before them, tied up to a table with several thick belts and ink spread out all beneath them, was another Boris, just like the one she had encountered at the start of this mess. It's body was more torn however, as if someone had used sharp claws to tear into the poor canines chest.

And there were more. Scattered on boxes in the ink, little patches of land or hung by thread, with a light positioned on each like a macabre art display. More Boris the wolf clones, and a pair of deformed cartoon ink beings she couldn't put a name too. They looked sort of like two of the antagonists from the show, but the damage and deformity to their bodies made her hesitant to put a name to either of them. They were so torn up and disfigured she didn't really want to look at them for long.

"Just as awful as always.." Henry muttered, not looking at the dead for long. His eyes were dull, but he seemed unfazed, as if used to seeing a field of dead, torn apart bodies. Pippen looked up to him, and he gave her a glassy eyed look of sympathy as he took a deep breath. "We best keep going."

"Y-Yeah.." Pippen murmured, staring at the bodies despite herself. They were all so viciously mangled, especially the Boris clones, who looked like perfect copies of Boris beneath the damage. If she remembered correctly, Perci had mentioned Alice having some sort of obsession with perfection.

They slowly made their way across the boards, Henry going first. He was used to traversing the boards after the innumerable loops he had been through, the slight wobble of the wood beneath
him not deterring him. Pippen followed him closely, only letting space build up between them when it came to the boards. She didn't want to risk tipping them both over.

When they came to a split in the path, she went to the right, to the only other patch of land. On the shelving units were two cans of soup, which she collected and put in her 'pocket'. The desk had a small Alice Angel doll on it, a recorder leaning against the doll. Pippen checked the desk drawers first, but found them empty. Looking at the recorder on the desk reminded her of the one Henry had thrown to her when he escaped the Demon path, though she didn't retrieve it from her pocket at the moment. She had a feeling it would be better to hold onto that until they were somewhere more secure, like the Safe House.

She pressed play on the recorder on the desk, heart heavy at the thought of the Safe House. Perci was no doubt worried sick, but fortunately she knew her brother was sensible enough to know better than to try and mount a rescue mission. Not if he saw signs of the Ink Demon being around. As much as inaction hurt, it was his only choice if he wanted to keep Jack and Brutis safe. And possibly keep Pippen and Henry safe.

A familiar voice poured from the device, shaking her from her thoughts. It was familiar, but sounded more stable and innocent than the Susie Campbell Perci had described to her, and that she had heard herself.

*Who would have thought? Me, having lunch with Joey Drew! Apparently times are tougher than I thought.*

*For a moment there, I thought I'd be stuck with the check. But I gotta say, he wasn't at all what I expected.*

*Quite the charmer.*

*He even called me Alice. I liked it.*

"Hey, grab that." Henry ordered once the recording shut off. "That recording, it's from when Susie was still stable. When Oliver and I helped Jack and Sammy, we used recordings from before things went to h*** to help them."

"Got it." Pippen hummed, quickly grabbing the device. She walked after Henry, who had already reached the other end of the board path. Pippen walked across the boards after him, both of them walking up to a pair of iron doors. Once more, they slowly slid open, leading them to a path lined with metal panels. It only went a short ways before turning left, a long path leading up to another Alice Cutout with a light shining down on it. The hall was lined with steaming machinery that slid and jolted in repetitive patterns, interspersed by metal panels.

At the end of that hall came another turn, this time to the right, leading them through a jagged 'doorway' of sorts. It looked like another wall that had been randomly taken down, boards added along the sides to try and redeem some of the lost structural integrity. The transition from metal panels to wood floor past this doorway was noticeable, the wood creaking beneath their feet. The only way to go was forward, into another room.

This one was dimly lit, a broken panel of glass on one end of the room. It was possibly for the purposes of overseeing the machinery beyond it, but the machinery was blocked off by a makeshift torture table, mercifully empty, and a control panel. The glass was broken in towards the wall of machines, ink staining the area within the glass, the trail leading off to the right down a thin path.
between the wall of various gauges and parts, and a normal wall.

"Weird. She's usually here." Henry muttered, eyeing the glass. The ink was mostly dried in places, suggesting the damage was not recent, though it worried him none the less.

"Maybe we're supposed to go further in?" Pippen offered. She glanced around, seeing that the only speaker that had been in this room was hanging by several wires, the body of it busted inwards. They would not be receiving further commands from their 'angel'.

"I guess.." Henry muttered, eyeing the glass. There was a wide enough space for them to go through, though climbing through it still held the risk of hidden glass getting caught in their hands and bodies. He could life Pippen through, and maybe give her a boast to jump beyond the glass.. A couple extra scratches wouldn't hurt him. He turned to her, gesturing for her to come closer. "Come here. I'm going to lift you through so you avoid the glass."

Pippen obeyed, squeaking as he abruptly picked her up. She was surprisingly light and warm, her skin smooth beneath his slightly rough hands. He managed a friendly smile, seeing how her tail twitched in uncertainty, walking up to the damaged glass. He could lift her through easily, but the angle made it impossible for him to swing his arms and boost her past the glass as he had hoped.

"Hold on, I got it." Pippen murmured, clutching his hands with her own. She slowly pushed herself up, climbing onto his arm and balancing there for a second before leaping past the glass. She stumbled, smacking her head into a metal piston, and fell back on her rear, though fortunately not on the glass.

"You OK?" Henry questioned.

"Y-Yeah. Just a bump." Pippen muttered, rubbing her head. She glanced around, noticing the path to the left ended in a dead end, a broom sitting idle in the shadows. "Hold on, I see something that can help." The imp darted over to the broom, quickly grabbing it, shaking with unease from the proximity to so many moving parts. She didn't want to think about what would happen if she got caught on any of that..

"Here, I can use this broom to get rid of the excess glass." The imp declared, first sweeping the glass on the ground off to a side. Then she started brushing the window sill, brushing it towards her so the glass wouldn't shower on Henry. After a couple moments she paused, eyeing the sill in the dim light. "I think it's clear. And we have a broom now! You can beat up people pretty good with a broom."

Henry clambered through the window himself, smiling a bit as she handed the broom to him. "Yeah. Anything counts down here. Hopefully we won't have to use it." He turned to eye the path ahead of them, frowning at the narrow space between machinery and the empty wall. Of course Alice's hideaway would not be easy to reach. A trail of mostly dried ink was splattered across the path, and partially on the machinery, showing the glass being broken was not the end of whatever had come through her.

"Thanks for helping me through.." Pippen offered after a moment. He turned to her with a small smile, nodding.

"It's the least I can do. Your brother and you.. You're still helping me, even though it's partly my fault you are trapped here," Henry murmured, beginning to slowly walk the path. It was dim, save for an irregular light along the floor here and there that wasn't covered in ink. The machines
loomed unnervingly close, both of them moving slowly.

"How so? It's.. It's my fault we came here to begin with." Pippen murmured, her voice thick with guilt. "And I somehow roped my cousin into this too."

"You didn't know going into an abandoned building would lead to this." Henry pointed out softly. "You didn't come into here on purpose..." He paused. "I.. I told you that this place loops, or it did before you came here. But I never told you how it ended."

He paused again, reorienting himself as they came to a turn. At least the wall on his right was still bare of machinery.

"How it ended?" Pippen murmured. "That.. We probably should have asked that.. I just figured you'd die at some point and be brought back to relieve this nightmare because Joey hates you."

"Yeah." Henry managed to huff a laugh. "Watch your step here. There's a pipe running between the machines and the wall. Yeah, right there. Anyway.. Well. It usually goes, I end up here, in the toy shop, running around doing errands for Alice. She always promises she'll send me to the top floor, and nothing I said ever really made her deviate from that. That's because she didn't want to send me to the top, she just wanted me dead.. or at least I think so. So I would do all these tasks for her, gathering things and upsetting Bendy by destroying some of his cutouts, and she would try to kill me by dropping the elevator."

"I.. I always had a friend with me at this point too. A Boris clone, like the ones out there but.. alive. He could never speak, but the Safe House was his each loop. I.. I wonder where he is now.." He paused, shaking his head. They left the machine room behind through another busted wall, finding themselves in a new area. The path was growing wider now, though they were walking across a wooden bridge. There was a river of ink sluggishly flowing beneath them, a maze of hallways ahead of them.

"Maybe he's OK?" Pippen offered weakly. They began to traverse the halls, though they quickly realized how convoluted the space was. Walls were busted down in seemingly random places, with faux walls put up in other abnormal spaces, creating a literal maze of the office space.

"Maybe." Henry murmured, continuing his story as they explored. "Anyway, she would try to kill me, and take Boris. From there I would be in a level even lower than this, which is some sort of amusement park Joey set up down there. Don't ask me why, I don't understand it either. Fortunately it's not very large, but.. once I worked through it I would have to fight Boris. Alice.. I don't know what she did to him, but every loop he would be a swollen monstrosity, with only his head recognizable.."

Pippen paused in thought, but decided to stay quiet, not wanting to foster false hope in the man. Whoever the Boris he had partnered with had been, she wasn't sure if he was the same one Brutis might have come from. They had more pressing concerns as well, such as the fact they were rapidly growing disoriented, though they pushed on. Eventually they decided to follow the trail of ink, doing their best to keep up with it, though it was lighter now, with sizeable gaps between where it was present.

"To cut a long story short, I end up in a final confrontation with Bendy, I play a reel that displays 'The end' sequence to him, lights flare, world blurs.. and then I'm in the real world. In Joey Drew's home." He paused as Pippen gasped a bit. "But his control is still on me. Otherwise I would have strangled him a hundred times over for all the h*** he has put me through, and every single soul in
this place. And he looks at me, and he mocks me. Mocks my attempts to change things, mocks how stubborn I am, how hard I try even though he holds the reins of control. He offers me a position as his partner again, says to give him full control and he'll end my suffering. I always say no."

"..Full control of what?" Pippen asked after several moments. They were backtracking again, having lost the ink trail.

"I'm not sure. He never elaborates. He just say's he needs me to say yes and mean it, or he'll send me through this h*** as many times as he needs to so he gets his yes. Joey was always such a stubborn man. Could never take a lose, could never accept not getting his way.." Henry sighed in relief as they found the trail once more. A couple more minutes, and it lead them to yet another busted down wall, though this one lead out of the maze.

"Oh.." Pippen murmured, covering her mouth with her hand as she stared ahead. There were more body's, or rather parts, strung up on a wall like tools, or tossed into various boxes. There were boxes of tools, parts, and even jars of thick ink, as well as several variety of tables to strap a hapless being too. One still had a long deceased Boris tied down, looking as if it had been recently clawed at by something. The room was splattered in semi-dry ink, tools and boxes strewn about as if a fight had occurred.

"A little.. further." Susie's voice drifted to them from a doorway across the room. A light buzzed inside the room, illuminating a disfigured shadow on the wall, framed by the doorway. Pippen glanced fearfully to Henry, who hefted his broom up, ready to fight. Alice was a tricky woman, and they were deep in her lair now. He slowly led Pippen across the Parlor of horrors, the imp staying so close she nearly tread on the back of his shoes a couple times.

As they neared the room, they became aware of a low humming, a sorrowful tune weakly escaping the being waiting for them in the room. Inside there was an array of machinery, labelled with tape and marker, coated in buttons and levers. On the far side of the room was a figure strewn across a desk, barely slouching into their chair. The lamp was on the far side from them, positioned by a chance fall to highlight the angel's shadow.

Alice, or Susie Campbell as she was once known, had definitely seen better days, even as an ink incarnation of Alice Angel. She was missing her left leg, which ended in an inky stub just beneath her dress. Her dress was in tatters, her halo split and bent into an odd shape, though still fused to her head. the 'angel's' hair dripped downwards in inky rivulets, barely holding together. One of her horns was missing, and a jagged cut scarred her face, starting from the deformed left side, cutting across her small nose and stopping just beneath her right eye.

"There.. you are." She stared at Pippen with greedy eyes despite her current state. She slowly pushed herself to stand on her single leg, her arms wobbling and squirming threateningly. The angel took a hobbled step towards them, leaning heavily into the desk as she stared Pippen down, the imp frozen in fear. She knew what had caused this damage, had suspected whose trail she was following after what Perci had told her, but part of her had wanted to pretend it hadn't been him..

"The little miracle imp." Alice chuckled, staring down at her hungrily. Henry took a step to move between them, glaring at Alice, who gave him a cold smile. "And my favorite coworker, Henry. It's been so terribly long, hasn't it? I know you've met my former Errand Boy. He was fairly handy, but so difficult, and prone to exaggeration. Always so many questions from him. A shame he left so soon."
"He left because you were going to kill him!" Pippen snapped, finding her voice. "Brutis warned him of your game!"

"Ah yes. My Brutis. The Brutis that wretch stole from me, leaving me with no defense against the wretched demon." She chuckled coldly. "That is, until I took the power I had placed into my 'Miracle Stations' and focused it on this room. Then he couldn't get out of here fast enough. Angelic energy tends to do that to a being of his, and your, type."

Alice was staring at Pippen once more, eyeing her like a starving wolf. "If I hadn't shut off my defenses, you wouldn't have been able to come in here. Right now that energy is surrounding this room, like a halo-" She chuckled at that. "Always keeping that pesky demon at bay. A pipsqueak like you would fry to nothing under the sheer amount of angelic energy I have waiting. Don't give me a reason to focus it back on this room."

Pippen paled, tail dropping to the ground with a dull metallic clink, fear in her eyes. She remembered the 'Little Miracle' station she had hid in so long ago, and how strange she had felt upon waking up. Had that been the 'angelic' energy? And if that was what a fragment of that energy did, what would the entirety of it do to her? Henry's jaw had stiffened at the angel's words as well, hands tightening around the broom handle.

"Ah, ah ah. Do you really want to test how fast you are? It would be a terrible shame for you to fail another companion, Henry." Alice hissed, watching them both closely. Henry flinched, glare deepening. She had never spoken on the loops before.. but than again, she had ears everywhere in her domain.

"What do you want?" Henry demanded, gritting his teeth.

"I want that Imp to fix me." Alice snarled. "I want her to make me perfect. I know she can do it. I heard you discuss it with that lovely brother of yours. Walking my halls, talking about 'fixing the ink demon like you fixed my leg'. How precious. Now he's just perfect, isn't he?" Her eyes seared with jealousy. "He takes my Brutis, and he gets rewarded for it!"

"Brutis choose to go with him. Perci didn't steal anything." Pippen hissed, fists tightening. Not to mention Brutis was far happier and safer with Perci than her. Pippen thought it best not to say as such. They were walking on eggshells as it was.

"It doesn't matter." Alice hissed, not caring for the wolf's choices. He was made to serve her, not feel things! "Now I have his little sister in return. Surely you can see my point of view? Your brother has committed a terrible crime, and now as his little sister, you can help him clean up his mess."

".. Only if you swear you won't go after him or Brutis." Pippen murmured. Henry glanced to her, expression conflicted. He personally did not want to give Alice anything she wanted, especially with the threat looming over Pippen's head. She could just as easily harm Pippen the moment the imp finished. Than again, he could try healing Alice. After all, he had a pen, and seemingly the same abilities as Pippen.

"Let Pippen go and I will do it." Henry stated calmly, the pair looking up to him in surprise. Pippen shook her head, not wanting the angel to know his power, though the cat was out of the bag.

"Oh? I'm sorry, but my talk was with the Imp, Henry. The one that can actually help me." Alice
snapped, glaring at him. Henry pulled out his pen, uncapping it, the object glittering in the light of
the fallen lamp. Alice eyed it curiously, sensing the power coursing through the object from Henry.
"So you weren't lying. But I'm not releasing the imp."

"Than neither of us will fix you." Henry stated calmly. "You can't force us to do it, and if you
harm Pippen I will have even more of a reason not to help you."

Alice glared at him, bristling as she realized they had a point. She tapped her fingers onto the
table, before turning looking to the pair once more.

"You." She directed this at Henry. "Come over here. On my other side. You will stay there
while your precious imp leaves. Do not cross me." She dug her claws into the desk to accent her
point.

"Here." Pippen murmured, handing Henry the recorder. "You might need this." It was clear she
was hesitant to leave him, but she didn't want to risk being utterly destroyed either. It didn't sound
like a good idea in the slightest, especially after surviving so much.

"Thanks." Henry muttered, passing the broom to Pippen in turn. He moved to the position Alice
had ordered him too, right within her reach.

"Now, go. Out of my parlor and to the hall. I will have no interruptions. You have two minutes
to reach the hall." Alice ordered in a sharp voice, glaring down at Pippen.

"She will reach it safely, regardless, and will shout to let you know when she makes it." Henry
snapped, the pair glaring at each other. Alice made a shooing motion with her hand, and Pippen
hesitantly walked out of the room. The only sound for several minutes was the sound of Pippen's
soft footfalls moving away from the room, slowly fading out of earshot. Another moment, and then
she hesitantly called back she was through.

"About time." Alice muttered. The air around them began to vibrate, the light of the lamp even
brighter now. Henry could make out a faint golden glow on the ground, the energy visible thanks
to how densely packed it was around this small space. Alice turned towards him, clawing the desk
for balance. "Now get to work."

"I'm going to need you to trust me Susie-" Henry began.

"Alice." Alice snapped.

"Alice" Henry continued. "This won't work if you refuse to trust me. We've already tried this
with someone who didn't fully trust Pippen, and the results were... less than perfect."

"Trust is a hard thing to come by down here, old man." Alice hissed, eyes half lidded with pain.

"You're going to feel me working, I just need you to not interfere. That's the trust part." Henry
explained. "And listen to this while I work. It will help keep me in the right frame of mind." He
held up the recorder, the one from so long ago, when Alice was Susie. The twisted angel regarded
it with uncertain distaste, but nodded after a moment.

"Fine. Whatever. As long as you make me perfect. Do any less and I will end you, and that
wretched imp of yours." Alice threatened, slowly sitting down once Henry gestured for her to do
so. She was wobbling so much on her single leg that Henry doubted he could work with her like
that. She sat impatiently before him, one arm resting on the desk as he slowly pressed the nib of his pen to it. Warmth spread through her arm, a feeling of solid confidence behind it, the twisted angel's eyes going wide. "Oh."

"Yeah. I'll do my best to dull any pain." Henry mumbled, already beginning to trace the arm and hand, pulling the ink into a more solid position. Dark blots of ink fell away as he worked, an aura of darkness to them. They sizzled and popped as the met the angelic energy, before vanishing, though Henry did not run out of ink to work with. Slowly, a lacy black glove appeared on a solid arm of sepia tinted white skin, Alice humming a bit.

"I said, perfect, old man." Alice murmured threateningly.

"Yeah, well I helped to create Alice, so what I draw here will be too model, even if the outfit is a bit different." He muttered. In all honesty, he wanted to slowly pry her away from being an exact copy of Alice, and try to rekindle the person she had once been. Not that he would dare say this to her, and risk her throwing a fit. Better to keep his plans to himself and quiet.

"Hmph. Fine." Alice muttered. The angel wasn't really in the position to threaten him. Not yet at least. She was still so close to collapse. Henry moved onto her other arm, but Alice shooed him away, directing him to her damaged body. She would be keeping at least one set of claws for the time being. Henry clicked his tongue but kept working.

He slowly worked on her body, healing the wounds shut and stitching the black dress back together. He added a bit of lace to the bottom, remembering how much Susie had liked lacy clothing. She had been so happy when she came in to record Alice's lines for her first cartoon, sporting a new lace edged dress her mother had given her. She had looked wonderful, and it was little wonder to Henry at the time that Sammy had gained a sharp interest in the voice actress. Back before he found out about Bendy being fully stolen our form under him..

"Could you turn on that tape for me?" Henry had set the tape down on the desk before beginning to work, on the side he had already repaired. "It helps me work if there's chatter in the background." He lied.

"Whatever." Alice huffed, humoring him. A pale finger tapped the play button, Alice's face paling at the voice that came through. Her memories darted back to the day she had recorded this message, for posterity she had believed, after all voice recorders were the future! And Susie was always trying to keep up with the times and new technology. What would the woman she had once been think of her, if she could see herself now? That strong willed, but naive young lady, eager to make her star shine in the animation business.

She flinched as Henry rose, beginning to work on her face. She had two legs now, ending in nice black high heels. The heel wasn't too high, big enough to be noticed but not so much it would hamper her movements, a simple functional thing. Her stockings were black, fading into white near the top, stopping at her mid-thigh. Now he was working on repairing her face, healing the jagged scare. He traced a new horn, slowly pulling the halo out of her head, the sensation making her twitch with unease.

She had done so much for perfection, had taken so much, and yet here she was. Being given the thing she desired so much. It had been so simple at the start of things. She had been unstable, and there had been another, weak ink being, a seeker. Desperation had driven her to tear it apart, to imbibe it's flesh and make it her own. But it only worked for so long. There was a will to the ink, and though she had torn it apart, she did not completely extinguish it.
So she had hunted again, losing bits and pieces as the battle of wills waged on. On and on, until
she had discovered the slack jawed, empty minded Boris clones. There minds had been so weak
that once imbibed their ink gave her no trouble. But only parts of it. The very core of the weak
minded beings had the strength to help hold her together. So she had needed more, and more, until
she had a galleries worth and then some.

At what point had she truly lost her mind? Somewhere before the first Boris, she thinks. If she
hadn't been so widely desperate, would she have been so quick to destroy him? He had been eyeing
her with an empty but friendly gaze, no hostility in any of them. Alice Angel, the one of the
cartoons, had always adored the slightly empty minded wolf, who was so kind to her despite his air
headed behavior.

The real Alice wouldn't have done that.

The recording begins to play again, but Alice doesn't hear it. She isn't Alice. She hasn't been
Alice since the start. In what world would Alice hunt down other beings for her own gain. In what
world would Alice torture the other unfortunate beings in this place, tormenting them for daring to
exist near them.

Henry had finished his work, the hair now short and in a stylish cut he remembered from a time
long past, a simple halo floating over her head. It wobbles, catching on the horns that help it stay
up, as reality breaks through for the first time in years. Her face is less rounded now, more oval,
eyes pie cut with a small beauty mark near her right eye. Her scars are gone, at least physically,
leaving her with flawless pale white skin, tinted sepia.

"Susie...?" Henry questioned. He hesitantly reached out towards her, only for his hand to be
slapped away.

"I am Alice!" She snapped, eyes wild, though her words feel as though she is trying to convince
herself. Henry stumbled away, back towards the door, watching as Alice stands, picking up the
recorder and throwing it into the wall, destroying it. He turned to flee the woman's wrath, aware
that the moment she saw her reflection it would only be worse. Pippen was waiting for him in the
hall, broom at the ready.

"HENRY!" Alice shrieked behind him, having looked in the mirror not to long after he departed.

"Run!" Henry ordered, the pair racing back into the maze.

"I take it the attempt to make her sane again didn't work?" Pippen gasped, the pair stiffening
with alarm at the sound of footsteps chasing after them. Heeled footsteps, tip tapping after them.

"Kind of- It looked like it was working for a moment." Henry answered, the pair twisting down
the various halls, desperately hoping they didn't run down a dead end.

"Maybe it's some sort of cognitive dissonance? Can't handle the truth of what she did?" Pippen
offered as they ran.

"I don't know-" Henry gasped, sliding to a stop. They had hit a dead end. The pair turned, only to
be greeted by a very upset angel. She wasn't quite Alice anymore, instead now her own individual
who bore some similarities to the original. She was holding a massive syringe, the body of it wide
and the needle long and thick. Pippen stiffened at the sight of it, bristling with fear.
"You had one job, Henry." Alice hissed, slowly approaching them. "One. Simple. Job."

"I couldn't do it, Susie. This isn't healthy. You need to recognize who you really were-" Henry argued, pressing his back to the wall.

"I was so close to perfection. So close." Her voice was growing more high pitched, an edge of mania to it. "And then I trusted you. I made such a simple mistake-"

"Stop!" Pippen shouted, pulling the first thing she could from her pocket and pitching it at Alice. It hit her square in the face, making her stumble back, the device beginning to playback as they dodged around her. Alice paused, listening to the familiar voice on the device. The voice was artificially peppy, and slightly high pitched for a male's voice, like a door to door salesman. At least, the first half carried this tone. The second was lower and more gravelly, more natural, and more irate.

_I believe there's something special in all of us. With true inner strength, you can conquer even your biggest challenges. You just have to believe in yourself and remain honest, motivated, and above all, who you really are._

_OK, let's stop it right there. I can only do so many takes of this trash a day. And the guys in the writing room I want more use of the word dreaming in every message. Keep railing on that, get it! Dreaming! Dreaming! Dreaming! People just eat up that kind of slop._

_Hmm, what? It's still on? Well, turn it off, dammit!_

"Joey.." Alice whispered, momentarily numb. Anger slowly took over however, her face twisting up in fury. "JOEY DREW!"

She brought her heel down onto the recorder, destroying it, stomping it again and again. "Where was that belief when you replaced me, Joey? Where was that all that slop when you became my biggest challenge, when you took an honest, motivated worker and used them for your wretched experiments, Joey?"

Alice continued to rant as she stomped every little piece of the accursed recorder, erasing Joey's voice in a most satisfying way. "If only we had all seen you for the snake you truly were! You speak of dreams, and deliver nightmares!" She shrieked as she gave one final stomp on the dozens of fragments, before collapsing to her knees.

"You made me into a mooonssteeerrr.." She sobbed, covering her eyes. "I just wanted to keep my job.. I just wanted to be Alice Angel.. Was it so wrong, to believe in a dream? That I could be more than some no name voice actress, like so many others.."

But she wasn't Alice. She was a monster that took and slaughtered beings first for survival, and than for her own corrupted amusement. So many small nibbling voices from her earliest victims, the weak essences of other beings that never fully left her, always nibbling away at her mind. Now they were gone, the only ink in her body being her own tired, abused mind. Even now she could feel herself tiptoeing on the edge of madness, the urge to hide behind her old charade biting at her will. It was so much easier, striving to be something else, to not be Susie Campbell, one time voice actress of Alice Angel, and literal nobody.

The angel slowly stood, following the sounds of panicked footsteps. She left the syringe behind,
rounding a corner to meet the pair, who skid to a halt as she appeared. The three of them stared at each other for a long time, before she spoke. "Three lefts, two rights, left, two rights, and you're out." She turned away, quietly beginning to pace away. "Leave. Don't come back. You can use the elevators to your hearts content, but know that none of them lead to the top. They haven't in a long time."

They watched her go, hesitance in their stance, before slowly following her instructions. It didn't feel safe to follow her, the woman too unpredictable to risk going near. So they left, the instructions holding true, leading them once more to the path that had lead them into this place.
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Perci nervously glanced around a corner before moving into the next hall, Brutis cautiously trotting after him. Jack was slinking nervously along the ground in a puddle of ink, which shivered and with unease. It had been almost two hours since Pippen and Henry had left, and they had all heard the screech of the Ink Demon somewhere within the labyrinth of halls. The being had initially stalked uncomfortably close to the Safe House, something Jack had sensed first, and scrawled out onto the table to warn them.

Then he had moved away, to their initial relief, until they remembered Pippen and Henry were still out and about. With a patrolling ink demon. The three of them had debated over the what to do for some time, caught between a rock and a hard place. On one had, there was the danger of coming across the Ink Demon. On the other hand there was the fact there was strength in numbers, and if Pippen and Henry were pinned, than a well time distraction could mean all the difference. It was a dilemma neither Perci and Jack could decide on initially. Brutis was just going to agree to whatever Perci decided.

After a point, it was decided that enough time had passed, and that they had to go out and search. They hadn't heard any hint of the Ink Demon.. or of Henry and Pippen either. They couldn't just sit here and do nothing forever! So they had left, everyone slowly trailing after Perci. Brutis wasn't keen to run into the Ink Demon again, not after the last fight, and had his hands occupied by a box with two rabbits in it. Jack trailed behind them, watching their backs and ready to bolt if the Demon appeared. He was, after all, the least complicated ink being present and thus the most easy for the demon to dispatch if he appeared.

"I see claw marks.." Perci muttered, eyeing the path ahead of them. The path split in two, a half broken fake wall on their right leading to a clear path, and a flooded path of ink to the right, littered with claw marks on the visible wood. A sign post lay on the ground, the arrows broken by the beast that had rampaged through the hall. Parts of two words could be seen, one 'De--n' and the other 'A-g--l'. There was no real telling what it had been for and which had been which, and it didn't matter to them. "This way."

Perci lead them down the clear path, avoiding the ink out of fear of attracting unwanted attention. That and he wasn't even sure if Jack could safely come in contact with any ink. It was clear Jack appreciated the thought, the trio making their way through the upturned room. There wasn't much to look at, and no sign of Henry or Pippen, so they forged onward. The halls met at the same place, though the opposite path was closed off by a damaged fake wall. It looked like a circle had been cut into it, before the edges were clawed and coated in ink by a pursuer.

"I hope they're OK.." Perci muttered, turning and walking down the hall both path lead to. This was littered with more claw marks, ink footprints revealing a club foot and a hoof foot, as well as a gloved hand and a clawed hand. There was no doubt in who had been the pursuer was now. The only question was, had the ones being chased escape? Perci didn't speculate on it, and Jack and Brutis were both mute.
The group moved on, the hall turning left, two sets of wire scattered across the ground. They were torn in places, but the heavy metal door was still mercifully open. A noise rumbled from somewhere ahead them, the sound of a machine and not a beast. The hum of an engine, the sound of an elevator. Perci's eyes widened, running ahead to the next room, stopping as he eyed the damage he was met with.

The banister of the stairway that curved around the upper portion of the room was utterly destroyed, frustrated claw marks littered the room. There was a large puddle of ink resting straight across from a metal lined hole in the ground. A hole through which an elevator sporting their missing members was rising through. It came to a stop on their level, the metal gate around the elevator slowly sliding open.

"Pippen! Henry!" Perci called softly, running down the stairs, stumbling a bit on the damaged steps here and there. Brutis and Jack stuck close to him, the group running onto the elevator, since the pair had yet to disembark. Jack darted to Henry, popping out of the ground and gesturing in a way that communicated his relief. Perci was close behind, and slid to a stop in front of them, sighing in relief as he saw they were whole and intact. Than his expression twisted to anger.

"I told you not to go out! It was only minutes after you two left that you know who started sniffing around near the Safe House." He hissed, glancing around nervously. As he spoke, Henry hit a button to close the gate around the group, taking advantage of the minor protection the gate would provide. He'd been attacked too many times in the past not to take advantage of any minor protection they had available to them.

"But we found a pen!" Pippen argued. "And it works perfectly! Henry can do the same things I can, and now we have two people who can help take care of the group. It was worth the risk, and we weren't caught."

"But you nearly were." Perci countered. "We saw the damage. We see the damage." He gestured around the room, the pair frowning. The ink puddle across the room began to bubble subtly, none of the group noticing this subtle shift as the focus was on Henry and Pippen.

"It wasn't this bad before the elevator went down.." Pippen muttered, shrugging a bit and not looking Perci in the eye.

"He must have been upset we escaped." Henry murmured. "He's been trying to catch us for a while. It must be getting pretty frustrating now.. which means he's likely to get more crafty and aggressive. I don't think we can go back to the safe house.." The group looked to him in surprise, and he continued. "It's a safe place, but.. It's a dead end, and it would be so easy for him to pin us there. And while we hide there, we aren't dealing with the matter at hand."

"We have to find Oliver and Sammy, and we have to find Joey and bring an end to this." Pippen pointed out.

"We don't even know if they are still alive..." Perci whispered, swallowing heavily and looking away. It didn't make him happy to think about what may have befallen his cousin, but they had to face the facts.

"We don't know that." Pippen snapped. "Besides.. we have to keep moving forward. There are more people who need help and between you, Henry, and myself we have the tools to help them. The more people we bring back to their right mind, the more people we will have to oppose Joey and help save Bendy."
Jack jumped, desperately shaking Henry's shoulder and pointing towards the ink. A clawed hand had silently appeared from the substance, and was being used to slowly pull out the rest of an Inky body. Just as he had warned, it appeared the demon was trying new approaches, trying to get the jump on them. The former animator grimaced, a sharp hand gesture silencing the group before he quietly walked over the control and pressed the button to the lowest level. At least, with the elevator in tact, they could come back if needed.

That was, until the ink demon lurched out of the ink far faster than before, screaming in fury as it's prey used the same tactic to escape. He lunged for the elevator, missing the sinking gate, but noticing the steel cables that helped the device operate. The being attacked those instead, destroying the cable and sending the elevator plummeting, ensuring it's prey would not be able to escape him so easily. Now they would only have one level to try and hide on.

A scream tore out of three of the elevator's occupants as they began to free fall, as one Swollen one dropped into a puddle and a wolf howled in terror. Brutis curled around his box of terrified rabbits while Perci and Pippen clung to each other in terror. The downward motion reminded Pippen *she* had wings, and so she tried to take off, grabbing Henry's hand as well. She managed to get them off the ground just before the elevator hit the bottom, only to be rewarded by for her cleverness by the roof slamming into her head, knocking her out cold.

Henry and Perci managed to catch her as they landed, though it was mostly Henry doing the catching as Perci nearly face planted once Pippen stopped flying. The former animator held the unconscious imp as he looked over the group, lines of concern running deep in his face. "Is.. Is everyone OK?"

Brutis slowly uncurled himself from the box, two wider than usual eyed rabbits peering out. The wolf gave a weak nod, though it was clear he was favoring his right leg, his tail low. He pressed his muzzle into the rabbit box, whining softly to his friends, the pair furiously licking what they could reach of him in exuberant gratitude. They may be a pair of simple rabbits, but they weren't so simple that they didn't recognize the danger they had been in, and the protection Brutis had so kindly offered.

Jack's ink puddle was a bit wider than usual, but the swollen one was slowly pulling himself back together, bit by bit. He was determined that this would not be his end, after everything they had survived.

"I-I think I am." Perci murmured, turning to Henry. "W-What about Pippen?"

A low groan came from the imp, who still hung limply in Henry's hands, the former animator looking her over. He answered in a confident tone, though he wasn't very confident in diagnosing injuries on a *toon*. Their physiology was just to *unpredictable*. "Just a bump, I think. She should recover soon."

"We should get out of this thing before it collapses.." Perci muttered, clumsily clambering out of the elevator. It was tilted to one side, one end having partly sunk into the floor, and he didn't want to find out if there was more space to fall through. Everyone else seemed in agreement, as they all quickly disembarked as well, doing their best to ignore the creeks and groans of the metal as they moved.

They found themselves in a small, non descript room, a poster for one of Boris's episodes in the Bendy franchise hung on the wall. Brutis slowly walked over to it, staring intently at the wolf on
the poster, cocking his head slightly. Once upon a time, he had looked like that, and he had felt fairly empty. But now he did not. He turned his head down to his small friends as they shuffled in their box, the pair peering outwards curiously, but choosing to remain in the safe presence of their large friend.

A hallway lead from the room, their only real option, one they could see held a scattering of pallets and strewn paper, as well as a couple wooden boxes.. and no ink. Given the length of the hallway, that was something of a rarity, since the overwhelming majority of the building had soon at least signs of the ever present ink. But not here. Just a well lit, sepia toned hallway.

"Does this look familiar to you, Henry?" Perci questioned softly, the former animator nodding.

"Yup. Leads to the amusement park. Please, don't ask me why Joey built it down here. I really don't know." Henry answered, walking to the side of the room and leaning into it, taking a moment to breath. No matter how many loops he went through, no matter how many drops he experienced, the terror it instilled in him never faded. Jack scooted closer in concern, but kept a respectful distance, not wanting to crowd the other man.

Henry looked up to Jack, eyes widening a bit in realization, gently setting Pippen onto the ground. He turned to the Ink being, gesturing for his attention. "Jack.. Do you.. Want me to try and draw you a body? Pippen wasn't lying, I have the same abilities as her. And I knew how you looked."

Jack jumped a bit at the suggestion, gesturing excitedly, though Perci was a bit uncertain. "Pippen had a lot of practice before she tried fixing Brutis though. I- I don't mean to underestimate your skills Henry, but she's told me that the 'magic drawing' business is.. odd."

"I repaired Alice's body. She as very nearly in the same state as Jack, just barely holding herself together." Henry offered. The three of them all turned to stare at him with confused wide eyes, Henry quickly relating how he and Pippen had escaped the Ink Demon.. only to leave themselves at the mercy of Alice. "I had to do it. I know she's done terrible things here, and she isn't the first person I would have thought of healing, I swear. But she had Pippen pinned and I wasn't willing to risk what Alice's abilities would do to her. So we cut a deal. She let Pippen out without harming her, and I would repair her body."

"I guess.. That makes sense." Perci muttered. Brutis grumbled unhappily, petting Impsy and Angie to settle back down. Jack rubbed an inky arm, humming softly in an understanding manner.

"I didn't.. give her exactly what she wanted." Henry continued, catching the groups interest once more. "She wanted to be a perfect Alice Angel. I didn't give her that. I.. I made her into the person she once was. A toon of herself. Of the woman she was. I.. It wouldn't have been right to feed into her delusion further. She needed a push to start healing, just like the rest of us. So hopefully she won't harm anyone else. Hopefully."

"Did it work?" Perci questioned hesitantly.

"Not.. Quite? Neither of us are really sure. Initially, she chased after Pippen and I, with the intent to either maim or kill given the weapon she had. But after Pippen distracted her by throwing a voice recorder in her face, we got out of the dead end she had cornered us in. We tried to get out of the maze she had set up between the rest of the studio and her 'Parlor' but.. We kept getting turned around. And then she appeared. No weapon, sort of calm. But she didn't seem entirely there either. She gave us the directions out of the maze, and then left. She.. also said none of the elevators lead
to the top level. They never had." He recounted, the group eyeing him in curiosity.

"That's... strange. Maybe she'll get better on her own..." Perci offered, looking away. "Maybe not though... I. I know she was really upset when she lost her job as Alice's voice actress, but... I don't see..."

"Susie was one of the earliest Ink experiments involving humans, I think." Henry murmured. "From what I've found in the past, it suggests that much. That and... well, Joey was always good when it came to manipulating people. Destroy a person, build them up... I've seen him do it before, but at the time I didn't recognize it for what it was. I just thought he was trying to be kind. But Joey doesn't act kind for no reason. Not unless there's something he can gain."

"How were you ever friends with him?" Perci asked, leaving Jack to scribble on the floor. He wrote a confirmation that he was very interested in Henry trying to recreate his body, having full faith in his former coworker. Henry smiled, standing up and walking up to Jack, pulling out his pen.

"Alright. I just need you to stay calm. It will feel weird, but you are safe." Henry reassured, pressing the nib of his pen into the swollen one's arm. He set to work, silent for several moments before answering Perci. "I was blind. Joey... He... Wasn't always that bad. When we were younger, he wasn't this bad. When we were younger, he wasn't this bad. Maybe a bit manipulative and eager to give ideas but put in no work, and still expect credit. But... I mean... Well, what teenager isn't something of a slacker? Eventually we graduated. We kept in contact some, and then one year, several years after high school, he comes forward with a grand idea. Our very own animation studio, two pals working together to make our dreams come true. Joey wanted fame. I just wanted to draw... to share my ideas and characters with the world."

Jack was starting to look more humanoid, head more defined, as well as his chest and arms. He was still coated in a thick sheen of black, his lower half bubbling in an unformed puddle. The lyricist was staying as still as he could, though his form shifted and bubbled lightly due to the nature of his body.

"And then... Well, I already told you. I found out the hard way that he hadn't grown out of those habits. I found out the hard way he had only grown more manipulative, that he had cultivated a silver tongue, and no other real skills. But he still thought Old Henry would carry his weight. Maybe I would have for far longer than I did, if I hadn't found out what he did with the rights to Bendy." Henry's eyes were sad but focused, pen sketching furiously over Jack now. He had a body, but he needed some details.

It took only a matter of minutes from there for him to finish, some excess ink falling away from the newly formed toon, revealing color and a more solid form. He had short mousey hair that was a dark shade of sepia, and glasses over his pie cut eyes. The male was a tad bit shorter than Henry, though not by much, with a thinner frame and softer chin. He wore a casual grey work shirt and a comfortable black trousers, a pair of suspenders supporting them. His skin tone was a bit lighter than Henry's, though not by much, suggesting he might have gotten some sunlight despite his busy work schedule. And, of course, he still had his sepia tinted bowler hat.

"D-Did it work?" Jack questioned, his voice not as nasally as the recorder they had heard so long ago, instead having a gentle tenor. "I-It worked!"

"Nice to hear your voice again, Jack." Henry offered, smiling. "I'm glad I could be of some help."
"Some' help? More like a lot of help!" Jack corrected. "Now I actually stand a chance if, or rather when, we encounter that... thing... again... and maybe I can even risk touching ink now. You... Toon types. They aren't reabsorbed as easily as pure ink. Not that I'm... going to dive into any puddles."

"Nng.." Pippen groaned, slowly opening her eyes, head pounding with pain. She slowly sat up, eyes landing on the new Jack, jumping in alarm. She stood quickly, wincing in regret as she bristled. "Who are you?! What are you doing with Jack's hat?!"

"I-It's me, Jack! Jack Fain?" Jack quickly answered, holding up his hands in a placating manner.

"It's Jack!" Perci answered at the same time, getting between Pippen and Jack. "Henry gave him a new body. And.. well he told us about Alice. Or Susie.. Whatever we should call her.." He ran a hand through his pale hair.

"Oh. Well, you look good, Jack." Pippen muttered in embarrassment, rubbing the back of her head, where it had collided with the elevator top. "Sorry for shouting at you. After the whole Alice encounter I'm still a bit on edge... Henry told you all of it, right?"

"I did." Henry confirmed. "I didn't see any reason in hiding the fact the Ink Demon cornered us after finding my pen in one of the rooms."

Pippen looked up to him, relaxing ever so slightly. So he hadn't told them everything. If possible, she'd like to keep their little incident with Norman under wraps. She didn't need to give Perci a reason to fall back into old habits and not trust her. Her intent had been good, she had just wanted to do the right thing.. But Perci would argue otherwise, and the last thing the group needed was a full on argument between them.

"Anyway, we should keep moving. There isn't any ink here, but there is ink further in, and there's no real space here to flee." Henry pointed out, the group agreeing to his assessment. The former animator took the lead, being the most familiar with the area, or at least what it had been originally. He lead them down the hall, a nice sign on the wall indicating they were on 'Level S'. A line beneath that informed them that this was the 'accounting & finance' area. The management office was under the name of one 'Grant Cohen', which the sign indicated was down the right path, and 'archives J-L' and 'R&D Access' was to the left.

"We.. Should probably check Grant's office." Jack murmured softly. "In case.. You know.. He's there..."

"I guess we should but.. It's.. never in good condition." Henry warned, hesitantly turning to the right. They had to check if the accountant was present in some form, they couldn't just leave him if he was.. But at the same time, he felt the accountant wouldn't be there. Something in his gut told him that Joey had a special hell set up for the accountant, who had been another 'roadblock' on Joey's path to his dream.

The hall they turned into was more dilapidated than the one they had come down, patches of dirt peering through areas where the wood floor boards had rotted or broken away. There were cobwebs and a couple wooden pallets on the walls, most of which were still dirt, with minimal wooden boarding to prevent it from collapsing into the hall. Only a single panel of the wall was fully covered with wooden boards, and even that was a sloppy, haphazard job.
It was a short walk before they turned left again, this time walking over a patch of earth that no one had bothered to put boards over. On the wall was a picture of Bendy, or at least his head and hands, holding a paper in front of his face that read 'WORK HARD WORK HAPPY' and had his trademark smile underneath the words. It was eerie and unnerving, Pippen and Perci both staring at the odd work poster. Both had worked retail at some point in their lives, so they were use to lame catch phrases and slogans the corporate big wigs would spit out, but something about the poster unease them. Maybe it was the passive aggressive tone they picked up from the poster, though both though they may be projecting.

From their was another patch of haphazard wood flooring, the wall directly ahead of them coated in faded white papers. What the messages were couldn't be discerned anymore, and part of it was blocked off by an intact Bendy cutout that stood and smiled at them in front of the paper plastered wall. A small sign to it's right had the word 'Management' running down it's length, the door shut but unlocked. Another door was present on the left, but could not be open, despite Jack's curious attempts.

Henry walked up to the door of Grant Cohen's office, knowing what he would find but still not eager to see it. He took a deep breath before opening the door, the group gasping and murmuring behind him as they peered around to see inside. The room was lit by a single flickering lamp in the far corner to their immediate right in the room, the floor coated in papers flooded with numbers. The walls themselves were covered in painted on ink, numbers "$48128" appearing over and over, the phrase 'Time is money' written like a manic mantra. Among the wall scribbling were desperate 'DOESN'T ADD UP' s written haphazardly among the mess, and the word 'TAXES' written over the other phrases in places, a looming, ever present warning and fear.

Two of the 'WORK HARD WORK HAPPY" posters were in the room on the ground, numbers and equations scribbled furiously over the words and in the margins. The only filing cabinet in the room was dented and bent, as if it had taken a mania fueled beating. The worst of the ink was gathered around the only desk and chair in the room, which also looked as if they had taken a beaten, the furniture knocked out of place. What papers had once lied on the desk were completely coated in ink, forever destroying whatever evidence they had once held.

"Oh my god.." Jack muttered, carefully walking into the room after Henry. "I-I knew Grant was under a lot of stress, we saw him everyday with a look like he was about to breakdown screaming but.." He shook his head, trailing off. He spotted a tape recorder on the desk, just outside of the ink, and hesitantly reached forward, pressing play. He wasn't sure what he was expecting but he immediately regretted his action.

A choking, gurgling scream came over the speaker, the sound of a struggle as wooden was pushed across the ground. The gurgling sounds of seekers, the sound of Grant choking and gasping, slowly fading as he was dragged away from the recorder. The sound of the door slamming was the second to last thing on the speaker, followed by manic screaming and pleading for release from a male voice familiar to the former employees, though it was higher pitched with panic than they had ever heard.

"Wh-What was that..." Perci murmured, staring with wide eyes into the room. It felt wrong to him to walk in there, the room feeling like a crypt of a person he had never known. A place he should not invade, not without disrespecting the man who had spent part of his life their, and had possibly lost his life and mind there as well..

"Sounded like seekers taking him away." Pippen muttered.
"But to where?" Perci asked.

"Do we want to know is the better question." Pippen answered, trotting into the room. She walked up to a more damaged part of the wall, noticing a turn wheel sitting among the rubble. It was in good repair, and didn't seem to belong to the thick pipe that occupied the space with it, so she picked it up and pocketed it. Better to collect something and not need it, than have to backtrack.

"We should go." Jack muttered, turning and leaving quickly. He nearly ran into Brutis, who was standing a couple feet behind Perci, the lyricist quickly apologizing before continuing down the hall. His eyes burned with guilt, heart heavy as he reflected on so many 'what ifs'. He and Grant had never been the closest of people, he had mostly known of the accountant since they took lunch at the same time. He had been a straight laced and somewhat serious man, but had been nice enough when engaging in small talk. And then one day he had just stopped appearing for lunch. Jack had figured he had finally gotten fed up with the way Joey ran things and left.

Could he have changed any of this? If he had listened a bit more closely to Grant's quiet complaints about Joey's leadership, how selective he was on sharing even vital information to his employees? Times had been rough for him as well, what with all the expansions, constant conflicts in the music department, usually started by Sammy, and all that noise that made it so hard for a single word to come to mind for his songs. He had fled to the reeking sewers for a moment of peace.. and it had been in the sewers, hiding from everything, that he had inevitably met his fate, consumed by the ink after slipping into it full bodied. Back when it had flowed with more vigor in his part of the sewers, before more building expansions had redirected a good portion of it. Either way, he had been easily forgotten.

"Hey." Perci's voice surprised him, the smaller male gently setting a hand on Grant's arm. "Are you OK? We can talk, if you want. The others agreed to wait.."

Jack looked back, seeing the hall he had turned into was indeed empty of everyone save him and Perci, the lyricist giving him a weak smile. "I'm OK. Just.. a little shook up is all. Grant and I.. we weren't the closest of friends, but I had assumed when he vanished that he left for greener pastures. Kind of a shock to see and hear what happened to him. He seemed like a normal guy, you know? A good, stable fella, with a good, stable career. It's a shame what happened to him."

"It's a shame what happened to all of you.." Perci murmured sympathetically. "None of you deserved what he did, no matter how small or 'unstable' your positions may have been. You all still deserve the dignity afforded to all human beings."

"Yeah.." Jack shrugged, shoving his hands into his pockets as he processed his emotions. "I just... wonder if there was anything I could do. We used to chat sometimes during our lunch break, and sometimes, very rarely he would complain about Joey and work. I didn't understand much of the complexities of accounting for a business, I only really know how to pay my own taxes and the like to keep the government from coming after me but.. I don't know, maybe if I had listened more.."

"Well.. There's only so much you can do. There's only so much you could have done at the time. What counts is you at least listened and gave him a friendly ear. I don't think you could have done more. You said yourself you weren't very close, but you still heard him out. At a point, it's up to the other person to reach out to someone." Perci offered, hoping he was saying the right thing. He spoke from experience, and from the advice he had received himself during his training to be a doctor. "You can't torment yourself on what could have been. Not unless you gain the ability to go
back in time. If anyone deserves any blame in this situation, it's Joey, for putting that man through a living hell."

"I guess." Jack murmured after a moment, looking up towards the ceiling, which was as haphazard as the rest of the hall. "Thanks, Perci. For hearing me out. You're a good kid."

"I'm glad I could help to some degree." Perci murmured, tapping his fingers before continuing. "Uh.. I'm like, twenty one..."

"That's still pretty young..!" Jack murmured, before looking up and grinning nervously in embarrassment. "I didn't know, or mean anything by it-"

"I-It's OK." Perci laughed, holding his hands up. "I'm not that upset, it.. comes with the look I guess." He rubbed the back of his hand, grinning weakly. "Just have to get used to it. Anyway.. if you're ready, I can go let the other's know."

"Yeah. Thanks again, Perci. I'm ready to keep going." Grant answered, running a hand through his hair before sitting his bowler back on his head.

"I'll get the others." The angle hummed, turning and retrieving the group. Nobody said anything about Jack's moment, giving him some respectful space. Jack was grateful they didn't try to pry, a bit embarrassed he had let his emotions get the better of him. He much preferred to remain cool and in control when these situations arose. He had his pride, after all.

The group continued forward, now heading down the left hall they had passed up. The ground as once more a square of uncovered dirt, followed by several solid slabs of sheet metal covering the walls and floor. A large, heavy iron door was waiting at the end of the hall, no handle to be seen, but a spot in the center for a turn wheel. Pippen pulled out the one she had collected with a grin, handing it off to Henry to test it out.

As fate would have it, the turn wheel fit, and after a bit of puffing and grunting, Henry and Jack managed to get the old thing to turn.

"Needs some oil on this.." Jack huffed, shaking his head.

"Like Joey would ever spend money on maintenance." Henry mumbled, the pair sharing a rueful smile.

Together, the shoved the door open, leading the group into a dark room. Once they got beyond the doorway, spotlights began to snap on around the room. In the center of the round room was a round concrete platform with a small concrete Bendy statue. It was perfectly proportioned to his cartoon self, and sported the trademark smile they were known for. Several of the spotlights pointed towards it, though the light was obscured by five inky humanoid figures, all in varying poses of either distress or.. worship. Above the statue was a sign shaped like a scroll, though whatever had been written there originally was long gone. Now, however, were the words 'HE WILL SET US FREE' in dripping ink.

The group paused, save for Henry, who continued into the room. The inky humanoids had never moved when he had come here before, and even now their surface was unnaturally still, indicating they were inanimate. Around the room were various shelves of books, plans, folders and reels, all carefully tucked away in the archive. Some had sliding doors pulled over them still to protect them, while others had their doors pulled aside, revealing the messy interior.
"That's.. eerie." Perci whispered, staring at the strange scene someone had so dutifully created before them. Brutis was busy keeping an eye out for danger, nose and ears twitching, while Jack tried not to focus on the centerpiece for too long. The phrasing, and the fervor displayed in the figures positions, reminded him of the unbalanced being Sammy Lawrence had become, guilt eating away at him. They had yet to see so much as a feather from the man turned cockatoo, or hear any of Sammy's mutterings or ramblings.

"I'm starting to understand why Bendy said he wouldn't try to befriend any of the other ink beings in here.." Pippen muttered, wringing her tail between her hands. She always did so when nervous, eyeing the message above the statues. To have so much pressure put on your shoulders, when you yourself do not have that much control of your situation. Perci hesitated, before putting a hand on Pippen's shoulders, trying to be supportive. While he, personally, was still extremely wary of Bendy, whether in his Ink Demon state like he is now or not, he knew that Pippen quite liked the darling devil.

"It was the first thing Sammy started clinging to after he lost his mind to the ink." Jack murmured, moving to continue to the next room, a simple square doorway between them and another round room. "And Sammy.. Well, he might not be the nicest person, but he had a fervor and strength behind his words that was intoxicating to everyone else. I remember, for a while, I went to his 'sermons'. Don't remember much of them, just how close knit everyone felt. Almost like we were humans again. Then I got.. Disoriented in the sewers, and didn't remember how to leave until a bit before I ran into Henry and Oliver."

"How.. was Oliver, anyway?" Pippen asked as they walked into the next room.

"He was holding it together surprisingly well." Jack offered. "I mean, except when I hit him. He kinda startled me, sneaking under a gate, all noisy and a white feathers. There aren't many things like that down here, and well.. I got a little nervous. But we patched things up, and he was pretty determined to find the two of you."

Pippen nodded, though her eyes were sad, concern leaking into her heart. Perci was partly to blame for ending up here, he had chased her after all, but if she had never told Oliver the bare basics of what had happened, would he have tried to find her so quickly? Would he have gotten sucked in with them? She shook her head. It was too late to ponder on these matters. For now, they needed to focus on finding him.

Like the previous, it was round though unlike the previous it had a circle of shelves surrounding the center of the room, two cuts in the circle of shelves allowing entry. There were also several locked safes on these walls, mixed in with the built in walls shelves. A fancy chandelier of all things lit the center of the room, hanging lights lighting the outer edges. In the center of the room was a table and chair, the same simple and cheap kind Joey preferred, and two desks, one with an ink pot and phonograph.

On the table sat a half cut can with an old candle in it, a book with an ominous symbol on the cover, and another one with a picture on bendy on it, though it was sealed shut by ink. Opposite those was a voice recorder, which Pippen instinctively pressed play on before anyone could give any input. Susie's voice poured out of the device, low and ominous, though still sane.

_They told me I was perfect for the role. Absolutely perfect. Now Joey's going around saying things behind closed doors. I can always tell._
Now he wants to meet again tomorrow, says he has an 'opportunity' for me. I'll hear him out. But if that smooth talker thinks he can double cross an angel and get away with it, well, oh he's got another thing coming.

Alice, oooh, she doesn't like liars.

Well, maybe partly sane. This recording seemed to highlight the point Susie started to go off the rails, blurring her identity with that of Alice Angel. After so much manipulation and backstabbing, it didn't really surprise anyone that she had gone off the deep end. Most just wished she hadn't turned so violent.

"Well." Pippen murmured, tail waving with uncertainty. "I guess that's evidence piece 2823 of why Joey Drew is a P.O.S."

"Yeah." Perci laughed a bit, albeit weakly, grateful for Pippen's small attempt to lighten the mood. She smiled a bit at him, surprised he hadn't been upset with her for interrupting something so serious. Than again, they were both changing while in this place. Hopefully for the better.

A soft click came from the shelves as Brutis pushed in one of the books, a light flaring at the end opposite the one they had entered through. Peering around the shelves revealed a hefty door with five lights above it. The sign below the lights read 'PRIVATE', a pair of double wooden doors with no handles blocking the path.

Given how it worked, the group set to work finding books that were sticking out, each of them finding a book around the room. Each time they pressed it in, a soft click would resound, and a light above the door would flair. Henry paused as he pushed in the third book, the chandelier swinging ominously above them, but nothing else happened, Pippen and Perci finding the last two books at the same time.

"You OK, Henry?" Pippen questioned as she walked to the spot he still stood in, eyes distant as if in a trance. The man shook his head, before quickly nodding, sighing softly. He affirmed he was fine, before taking the lead once more, pushing the double doors open. He didn't give them a chance to question what had happened, letting the next room distract them.

The next sections was a cavernous room carved out of dirt, a deep pit beneath them. A rickety wooden bridge ran perpendicular to the entrance, leading to a small stairwell on the right and another path to the left along the far wall. There were cages hanging by chains within the space, splatters of ink marring one edge of the path near them, and the stairs. A pair of boxes were the only thing in immediate reach of the path, one to their left and another closer to the stairs, though they were fortunately not in their path. Dark iron chains vanished deep into the pit, and ink dribbled out of several pipes, vanishing into the darkness.

"Come on." Henry muttered. "This is the only path we have. It will be safer once we get past this area." He started down the path, the wood creaking beneath him but staying firm. The path was wide enough for them to safely walk along it without being too close to the edge, though it did little to put Perci or Jack at ease. The pair eyed the wooden platform uncertainly, Pippen walking ahead of them, trotting along the wood. She shoved the far box to the side to make it easier when Jack and Perci finally did join them on the path, though the act put her uncomfortably close to the edge.

"Careful!" Perci hissed, leg jerking as he watched his little sister, quickly running out after her. Pippen simply shrugged and grinned, trotting along the path once more, Perci realizing he had
been baited out so easily. At least it had been for a good reason. He sighed, before following her, the sound of lumbering footsteps making it clear Jack and Brutis were close behind.

On the upper end of the path, they were met with a hallway, and an unfamiliar device. It was round at the top, a deposit slot meant to be pushed up to shut it and send whatever was meant to go inside into it's inner workings. Beneath that was a deposit box, with a cover to prevent whatever came out from bouncing out of the deposit area. On the side was a dial, currently set to a dark silhouette of a mug, and on the opposite side was a lever. A small, sepia tinted plant somehow grew next to the device, a simple stem with five leaves, but otherwise no other identifying features.

"We'll need some ink for this..." Henry muttered, turning the first dial. He twisted it to a silhouette of a gear, before starting to walk down the hall. They were lined with more safes, though some were cracked open, revealing an empty interior. Another bend to the right, and they found a room with a large white tube connecting to a large metal base. A nearby switch lifted the tube, revealing a pool of thick ink, thick enough for Henry to reach in and grab a large balls worth of. He took it back to the machine, Pippen trailing after him since the rest of the group had waited by the machine. They were busy eyeing the gondola system that would ferry them from this side of the room to the other, over the vast gorge beneath. It was simple contraption, a low walled rectangular box suspended by four wires, on at each corner, all of them meting at a metal hook at the top. The gondola was on the other side of the gorge, pressed up to a wooden 'docking' point, the switch to summon it to this side missing a gear. The switch was free standing, instead of built into the wall like most switches in the building, a power line vanishing into the darkness beneath the boards it rested on.

"I don't think it will fit all of us at once..." Jack muttered, Perci nodding.

"Maybe we could send Brutis and Perci over first, since Brutis is the heaviest, and Perci is light like me. Than the rest of us can go, since I think the two of you add up to about Brutis' weight, and I'm light like Perci." Pippen offered, watching as Henry deposited the ink glob into the top half of the strange machine. He turned the lever on the left, a soft ding coming from the device as it spat out a vibrating ball of ink. The top half of the deposit box was completely ineffective in preventing it from bouncing out, the ink shifting into a sepia colored gear before it hit the ground.

"Neat." Perci offered, tapping the gear testingly as he picked it up. It felt solid and metal, and like it wouldn't fail the task set before it. "What is that thing?"

"Not sure. I think it's a prototype ink machine, maybe, or a simplified version for making objects? Never found anyone who could tell me." Henry answered. Perci set the gear in place before moving out of the way. The former animator threw the switch, watching the simple gondola approach, turning to the group as it did. "We agreed to Pippen's plan?"

"I guess.." Perci muttered, eyeing the gondola as it closed in. There was a small dock of sorts to the right of the lever, stretched out to be past the device and make it easier to dock. The flooring of the gondola was simple but solid wood panels, Perci nervously clambering inside, falling on his face as he did. The transport swayed, and Perci cringed, taking a moment to recover before crawling towards the front of the gondola. At least it was secure enough that it didn't tilt forward due to his weight.

"I'll hold the wires so you can get on, Brutis." Henry offered, the wolf nodding as the man walked up and grabbed the closest wire to the back to hold it still.
"I'll get the other one." Jack informed, squeezing around the controls and grasping the wire. The path was thinner here, but he was determined to help despite his unease.

"And I'll hold Jack!" Pippen declared, firmly grasping the man's leg, feet positioned in a sturdier stance. The lyricist shot her a grateful look, feeling a bit better with her support, though he questioned if she would be able to stop him if he fell. Than again, while the elevator was falling she had managed to lift Henry off the ground for several moments, enough that if she could repeat that here Henry could get around the controls and help.

"Ready Brutis?" Henry questioned, the wolf nodding once more. He stepped with care onto the gondola, which tried to sway beneath him, but the group held true. The wolf grasped the box of rabbits tightly, scooting to be closer to the middle of the transport, a hand darting forward to tug Perci closer as well. If things went south, he could pitch the box and Perci to the other side, that he was sure of at least.

"Off you go." Pippen murmured, throwing the switch in the opposite direction. The gondola began to move, swaying lightly with the uneven weight of it's passangers, both Brutis and Perci sitting stiff in the device. After a minute, which felt like an eternity to all of them, it had crossed the gap, Perci the first one off. He had help from Brutis, who picked him up and set him on the other dock, before pressing the rabbit box into his hands, pointing him to the more secure patch of dirt, which was carved out of the side of the cave wall and extended deep into the shadows. Far more secure than the dock.

Once Perci had moved, Brutis clambered out on all fours, hands gripping the boards tightly as he disembarked. Once all four limbs were on the dock, he booked it Perci, tail wagging with relief as he took the rabbit box once more. The other three released a shared sigh of relief once the pair disembarked, throwing the switch to summon the gondola once more.

It stalled for a moment, before moving over to their side once more, the group doing their best not to dwell on that. Once it was next to them, they loaded in, with Jack going first to stand in the middle and try to keep things stable. Henry helped Pippen into her position in the front, before stepping in behind Jack. Once they were loaded in, Perci threw the switch on the other side, calling the gondola back.

It began to move, beginning to sway and wave lightly beneath the trio's weight. Pippen was pressed as close to the center as she could get, sharply aware of how little practice she had put in to seeing if she could actually fly. Mostly because she either didn't have the space to do so, or didn't want to slam into a wall in front of her brother, but still. Probably should have practiced that sooner.

Her regret sharpened as the gondola abruptly stopped midway, swaying lightly in midair. The group held their breath, eyes wide as a soft creak echoed form somewhere above. After a couple seconds, which felt like far longer to each of them than it actually was, the device continued forward, soon parking by the other dock. It took all of their self control not to all scramble out at once, the group making their way off the gondola slowly, before fleeing to Brutis and Perci.

"Oh , thank god, I thought you were done for." Perci panted, shaking with relief as the trio rejoined them.

"We thought so too." Jack gasped, hands shaking lightly. "But we're OK. We're all OK."

The group slowly walked towards the other doorway, pushing the raggedy wooden door
between them and the hall open. It was another haphazard hallway of thrown together wooden planks, though in the worst condition they had seen yet. There were gaps and spaces between the boards, plaster mostly broken away on the walls. A single light in the middle of the hall provided light, some wider boards of wood on the ground covering holes in the flooring.

"This is.. reassuring." Pippen muttered, eyeing the rickety flooring. She hoped the drop beneath them wasn't too extreme..

"It.. It gets better, right?" Perci asked, looking up to Henry, who nodded.

"Just a little further." He promised, beginning down the hall. The group began to follow him, though Henry tensed and hesitated a step part of the way through. For him, the light intensified, sharpened to an unnatural degree, arms reaching through the walls. Arms of ink, arms of bloody, dirty flesh, all reaching towards him pleadingly for help. His breathing picked up, but he could see the rest of the group wasn't seeing what he was seeing, that it wasn't real. He pushed forward, the vision passing after several moments, leaving him to slowly calm down.

Henry didn't share the visions with the other's, seeing no point in doing so. He had been suffering small flashbacks and moments of cognitive dissonance since he returned from the war, but he didn't have it as bad as some others. Or at least, he believed so. His never ending time in this place though.. It was beginning to wear on him, had begun to do so, and was starting to taint even his nightmares.

Chapter End Notes

Slowly, things get worse before they get better. Usually, that's how life works.

Thanks to everyone for the kudos, this is literally more than I thought this fic would ever get

Thanks again to Tizri for their continued support!
And thank you Natalie Marotzek as well!
If I'm honest I was very nervous about handling Susie, and ended up going through several different ideas of what to do with her before settling where we are now
Chapter 16

The hall deposited the group into another cavernous room, though this one was smaller and more uniform in shape. It was square, with a line wooden planks acting as bridges along the edges. At each end of the bridge was a stair of stairs. to the opposite side of the room, and a level higher, to another bridge and another set of stairs.

It appeared there might have been a path along the left wall, but all that was left now were boards embedded in the dirt, and a blocked doorway on the far end of the left hall. On the wall opposite of them, and on the same level, was another set of double wooden doors, firmly closed and missing any path too them, save for a small fragment of one to it’s immediate right, which was leaning precariously and occupied by two boxes. More chains vanished into the darkness from above, though what purpose they carried could not be ascertained.

The walls were mostly plastered, though in places it had chipped away to reveal dirt or metal supports. The odd cartoon poster covered the wall here and there, little advertisements of what the studio had once rightfully focused on, before spinning so wildly out of control. They were all poster the group was already familiar with. Even someone who had never seen the show would be familiar with these posters by now, after the number of repeated posters plastered everywhere. What it lacked in variety for wall art, Joey had tried to make up for with volume.

"This is the last part that has us above a chasm, I promise." Henry murmured to his ragtag team. He hoped the room this path lead to would be empty for once, though he dare not speak on it now. Not when the group was still shaken up over what they had heard in Grant's recording.

"If Oliver could see the construction work in this area, he'd have a fit.." Perci muttered, Pippen laughing a bit.

"It's not up to code!" She pantomimed in a slightly deeper voice than her usual one, trying to mimic her cousin. The siblings shared a laugh, the rest of the group managing to smile a bit.

"If there's one thing you can count on with Oliver, it's the fact he always makes sure things are done right." Perci mused as they began up the stairs.

"Just come out and say it. Oliver borders on being a perfectionist, painfully so sometimes." Pippen snicked. Her smile faltered as they reached the first set of stairs, realizing only half of it was intact. The other half of the gap was covered by a metal sheet that was haphazardly nailed at the ends to keep it still. She grimaced as the metal flexed a bit beneath them, but held true. "Oh, he would so be freaking out right not."

"Oh yeah, he would be." Perci agreed as they started down the second walkway.

"And with good reason." Pippen grumbled as they made their way up the second set of stairs, once more partially constructed with a sheet of metal. "Shame he wasn't here when Joey started cutting corners. If Oliver were involved he would have wrung the mans neck the moment it started.."

"Maybe." Perci offered, trying to be respectful to the pair of former workers they walked with,
concerned they would take the statement wrong. "It's hard to say how we would have acted, in another time and place, and for someone so.. slippery."

"Yeah. Than again, Oliver probably wouldn't have worked here. He's got a good feel for people, you know? He's partly the reason I still sent you Christmas cards and the like." Pippen mused, using the act of thinking about something else to distract from their rickety surroundings. The second staircase had led to a higher platform, same as the first, though this one had two large doors, blocked off by wooden boards. The group idly tested them, but given none of them wanted to try breaking them with their bare hands, and possibly falling into the pit for their efforts, they continued forward.

This level's platform was missing most of it's middle section, a long piece of plywood covering the gap. It was wide enough to walk across comfortably, but not as wide as the path it was connected to, the group taking their time going across to ensure the singular piece of wood did not give out. From there it was up another set of stairs, this set miraculously intact, though slanting ever so slightly.

"Maybe a second h*** raiser in the building would have helped.." Jack offered, cutting into the conversation for the first time. "Sammy raised a lot of h*** in our day, he was a bit of a handful ol' Sammy, but since he was just a musician Joey always put him down and ignored him. Probably half the reason he started loosing his mind, well between the ridiculous schedule Joey kept us all on."

The next level was fortunately intact, a pair of shelving units with a single can of bacon soup waiting for them. Jack picked it up, putting it into his extended pocket after several tries, grinning with pride. The group smiled back in approval, happy to see he could function on the same level as them.. and a little better than Henry, who still struggled to access cartoon 'hammer space'.

"Who knows." Henry hummed. "Anyway, its just two more stair ways and then we're at the top." He was at the front of the group, leading them along a path he had taken so many times before. At least this time he didn't have to deal with Alice taunting him.. or the knowledge of Boris, his buddy Boris, was being tortured. He still wondered what had come of that Boris, what this iteration of the loops had done to him, but put it aside. He needed to focus.

The second to last stair way was in good repair, making it an easy ascent for them all. The level it lead to had a plastered wall that looked as if it had been roughed up recently, dirt now peering through it, and a barrel as it's only interesting feature. That and another 'WORK HARD WORK HAPPY' poster by the last stair way, which was also intact.

Once they topped the last of the stairs, they were greeted by a Bendy cutout leaning against the wall, Perci's hands instinctively flying to his scissors. He had been mentally preparing himself for another encounter with the Ink Demon since they had found Pippen and Henry, and confirmed, at least in his mind, that the two of them were his top targets. His scissors may have special properties, but they were still scissors, and could cut quite well. Be it flesh, or the innumerable strings that bound the demon to Joey's will, would be decided by fate.

"What are you doing?" Pippen questioned as Perci began to approach the cut out with a determined look.

"Don't break that, Perci. I'm not sure if he's connected to them, but whenever I broke one, it would upset him. There's no point in adding fuel to the fire." Henry added.

"I'm just checking it." Perci answered in a calm tone, shoving it to make sure it was made of wood. "I know I didn't watch as many cartoons as you, Pips, but I know that cartoons can pull all
kinds of crazy tricks to get the jump on others. We've ticked him off a lot, and I wouldn't put it past him to get crafty."

"That's a good point, cartoon characters can do all kinds of things.." Jack agreed nervously, eyeing the cut out nervously.

"In their world they could but.. Ben- Bendy told me.." Pippen paused, swallowing. "He told me he couldn't do all the things he used to be able to do, back in his world. He said it was like something was blocking him. He could never say if it was the rules of this world or.. someone else." She looked away, frowning.

"Well.. at least it makes it easier to keep track of him." Perci muttered, walking ahead towards Henry, who was waiting by a doorway.

The next room had nice tiling, though dirt peered up through areas where it had broken and weathered away. A pair of very nice sofas were present, though haphazardly skewed, as if they had been shoved around. One partially faced the doorway, while the other was pressed against the opposite wall, it's end jutting out towards them slightly. A 'Little Miracles' station was present in the far left corner, though it's wood seemed dim and the halo symbol had faded.

"I have a feeling Susie hasn't returned any of her power to these things.." Henry muttered. "It could still be a useful hiding spot in a pinch if you duck down."

"Yeah, if you're alone maybe." Perci murmured. "But in the group? I don't think we can fit everyone in there. Not with restricted toon logic, if Pippen's account is anything to go by."

"Well if someone gets separated.. It can work in a pinch." Pippen shrugged. She glanced across the room, to a short hall that led to a plain door, much like the one's upstairs in the offices. It looked like the splurging on fancier construction had ended at the tiles. Oddly enough, the opposite wall was only a half wall, a path present on top, with wooden guard rails to prevent someone from falling off. Most of it was blocked by draping fabric, but the center was open, a wall visible just beyond that, at about the same depth the next hall went into the wall.

"Do you..?" Perci began to question, before falling silent. Henry held his hand up as soft, sticky steps approached them. It was coming from the level above the hallway, the halfway path, a thin, humanoid figure appearing. The Lost One was hunched over in a nervous posture, words spilling from it in a frantic voice.

"He always finds me, Oh no! Ah. . oh I just want to go home. I just want to go home. When do we go home?" The figure murmured, nervously rubbing his hands together. At least, he sounded male, though his figure did not suggest either gender, to basic and simple.

"-He always finds me, Oh no! Ah. . oh I just want to go home. I just want to go home. When do we go home?" The figure murmured, nervously rubbing his hands together. At least, he sounded male, though his figure did not suggest either gender, to basic and simple.

"H-Hello?" Perci called, the rest of the group eyeing the figure with uncertainty. Henry shook his head, but Perci didn't notice, trying to catch the figure's attention. "Do you need help?"

"Always finds me. Oh no.. Oh no. I just want to go home. Just want to go home." The figure repeated in the same, frightened voice. It sounded like he was on the edge of bursting into tears, that is, if he were even still capable of such a simple function. Maybe no longer having the ability to do something once so simple helped to keep him in this unstable state, no outlet for the fear and pain that consumed him. The figure began to walk away, muttering and murmuring the same phrases to himself as the group watched, Perci reaching towards the figure as he walked away.

"Should we.. follow him?" Pippen asked, looking to Henry as he placed a hand on Perci's shoulder.
"No. The Lost Ones. They don't do well with abrupt changes. If you move to fast or startle them, they can turn and attack. That path is a dead end, I've climbed up their once before. There's nothing he can hurt himself on." Henry murmured.

"But we can help him. You two can help him!" Perci argued.

"Can we?" Pippen muttered. "I could only heal you because I knew how your leg was supposed to look like, and Henry knew Jack and Susie personally. We don't know who that is. We could try to reshape him but.. would it be better for them if we just blindly guessed?" She paused, rubbing her tail as her mind darted back to the encounter with The Projectionist. "And if they don't understand.. if they aren't willing, they can turn the table on us. That's what Joey did to me.." That's what The Projectionist had also, partially, done during their encounter.

"So.. we just leave them?" Perci questioned, brow furrowing with uncertainty. It felt so wrong to abandon someone so vulnerable.

"We have no choice. We may do more harm than good if we try to force help onto them." Henry pointed out. "The best chance we have is getting as many stable allies together first, and then working out how to take this place apart. The more people we have in our corner, the better we can help the Lost Ones."

"I bet you once we rescue Bendy, he'll show us how to get ahold of Joey too." Pippen murmured. "And then we'll find out how Joey's been pulling the strings on Henry for so long. Maybe learn something about this place that let's us help everyone.."

"All in due time, I guess.." Jack offered, Brutis setting a reassuring hand onto Perci's shoulder.

"I.. I guess." Perci sighed. He wasn't really in a position to make demands of either of them to begin with. If they didn't feel safe trying to do so, he couldn't keep pressuring them. "Let's just.. move on." He could still hear the pitiful moans and mumbles of the figure above them, walking back and forth between two locked doors.

"Of course." Henry murmured, pausing as he placed a hand on the door, looking back to the group. "I think.. I don't think this room will have changed. Remember what I told you. Stay calm. No sudden movements. They aren't a danger to you if you don't frighten them."

"What do-" Jack began to ask, before falling silent as the door swung open. Over a dozen lost ones stood or sat in the room, huddled together in clumps. Some stood in nervous, defensive postures, though they did not look at the group, while others sat curled up into themselves. Others still stood, listlessly with defeated body language, or limply, shoulders sagging and heads low. All around them, pitiful golden eyes glittered out of thin inky heads, a overwhelming sense of hopelessness filling the room.

A splatter of ink marred the tiles in front of the group, some trails of the dark liquid still dripping downwards, the only sound in the quiet room. Henry walked in slowly, the group following him nervously. There were even more figures to their sides, bringing the tally of bodies even higher than they had initially thought. At first, barely any of them looked up, but slowly they began to home in on the group, or rather Perci. They stared unwaveringly at him, the angel toon beginning to sweat with anxiety.

Henry brought the young male closer to him, hiding his halo under the younger's vest, positioning himself in front of the angel so the light bleeding through would be blocked by his body. Brutis had already drawn the box of rabbits to himself, hiding Angie from sight, glaring dangerously at the crowd. Henry slowly threaded his group through the crowd of lost ones,
keeping Perci out of sight as much as possible. Only those on the front end of the room had seen Perci with his halo, and none impeded their path, watching him fearfully. There was just enough space between the clumps to weave through as they made their way to the back of the room, where an open air vent waited for them.

The walls were covered in desperate graffiti, claims 'HE WILL SET US FREE' and 'IT'S TIME TO BELIEVE' scribbled at random. These were slightly faded, as if they had been there for a while, and untended to for just as long. The odd barrel or table lined the wall occasionally, a single overhead light illuminating the room. Over the ventilation shaft, the cover of which sat to one side, was scribbled in large print "NO ANGELS!"

"Oh my god.. those are cages.." Jack whispered, eyeing the walls to their sides. Golden eyes peered out from the darkness within, the sides of the cages crafted with cobblestone. Brutis whined with unease, disliking the deep, dark shadows on both sides, just beyond those sepia tinted bars. Soft sobs echoed from one corner of the room, another rare Lost One that still had it's voice, or the capability to produce some sound.

"Go." Henry ordered simply, gesturing for the group to start through the vents. "It's a straight forward path. I want everyone else in first in case things get hairy when I try to get Perci in." He was still hiding the halo, the angel toon sandwiched uncomfortably close to Henry's back. The way they stood, Henry had himself between the angel and the rest of the room, the back wall against Perci's back. The group regarded them uncertainly, Brutis staring with concern at Perci, but the angel gestured for him to go ahead, shooting him a reassuring look. Besides, Brutis had to hide the angel rabbit he carried..

Brutis reluctantly turned to the vent, clambering in and sniffing the tunnel for signs of trouble, holding the box awkwardly in front of him. The new position he was required to take allowed Angie's light to flow out of the box once more, helpfully illuminating the path. Jack was close behind, trying not to tread on the wolf's tail in his nervous forward momentum. The pair moved fairly quickly, dreading what would happen if the crowd descended, and the pair could not escape because they were in the way.

"Go." Perci ordered, staring at Pippen, the imp hesitating. "I'll be right behind you."

Pippen eyed the hoard of Lost Ones around them, then the graffiti above the vent. Who had written that? She looked back to him, uncertain. "You promise?"

"I promise. The moment your in, I'll be right behind you, and Henry will be right in." Perci murmured, the males sliding closer to the vent, working in tandem to keep the halo hidden.

"All right." Pippen muttered, climbing into the vent. She only crawled forward a couple of feet, waiting for Perci, ready to grab him if need be.

Perci awkwardly slid in after her, sliding in backwards, Henry's body blocking the vent entrance. Pippen pulled him in deeper, giving Henry room to enter, the man grabbing the grate and sliding it over to partly cover the vent shaft, and hide the light of Perci's unveiled halo. The trio started forward, passing a couple turns that were covered with their own grates. The light of Perci's halo made the trip a bit easier, though it couldn't ease the claustrophobia.

Jack and Brutis were already well ahead of them, having taken the bend at the far end, the light of Angie's halo illuminating the curve as they waited on them. There was another ventilation cover at the very end of the path they were on, though this one was covered by a rickety, more damaged cover. As the trio neared, the could make out what appeared to be another Bendy cutout against the far wall, and a drawing desk, a single overhead light illuminating the room.
"Keep go-" Pippen began to whisper to the pair ahead of them, though she was cut off by a crashing thud against the ventilation cover. She was right next to it, having made the turn and begun down the next path, her brother just behind her. Her head snapped around in time to see the cover cave inward, clawed hands and arms bending the metal like paper, partially dissolving it and i the edges around it into ink. A familiar, twitching smile appeared before them, one hand lashing out towards her. It wrapped around the imp's tail, a squeal escaping Pippen as the other began to tug.

Two things happened at once than. Firstly, Jack grabbed Pippen's hands, stopping her from being swept out of the vents in one go. On the second attempt to jerk her out, the Ink Demon's arm met a pair of very sharp scissors, still shut as one very angry brother brought it down. A horrid screech escaped the being, who retracted his limb rapidly, taking Perci, who was trying to free his scissors, with him. The ground under the demon was coated with ink as a nearby pipe burst, the substance bubbling with his fury as he turned on the angel.

Perci had managed to free his scissors, and had jumped away from the demon, but could see he wasn't going back the way he came. The end of the ventilation shaft the demon had torn open was beginning to melt and drip downwards thanks to the loss of integrity it had suffered, slowly hardening into a gap too small for him to squeeze through. That and the bubbling lake of ink pouring into the room between him and the vent was enough to deter him.

"PERCI!" Pippen shouted, trying to reach through towards him, only to be yanked back by Henry. Just in time too, as the Ink Demon had turned at her voice, hands snatching towards the space her hand had previously occupied. He was momentarily distracted by the mess he had made of his only entrance to the vents, Perci taking advantage of this to figure a way out. There was a door cracked open on the far side of the room, his heart leaping in his throat. A simple message written in block-y letters rested on the door, reading 'ESCAPE'.

He didn't have to be told twice, the angel running for the door. The sound caught the demon's attention, but he managed to get through and slam the door shut just in time. He shouted through the door, before continuing to run, following block-y arrows drawn on the ground. "KEEP GOING! I'LL CATCH UP!"

"We can't-" Pippen began, but Henry pushed her forward, expression stoic despite the pain in his heart. He had just barely missed his chance to grab onto Perci before he was pulled out of the vents, guilt burning in his chest as he coerced the group forwards.

"We have to. If we're all caught, his efforts will be for nothing. I'm sorry. He'll be OK. Perci is smart." Henry reassured, slowly pushing them onward.

"He's book smart, not street smart! He can't outrun-!" Pippen argued, trying to push past Henry.

"He can if you give him the chance." Henry hissed softly, trying to be understanding. "He's not as helpless as you think, Pippen. Your brother may not be as athletic as you, but he is still capable. He has as good of a chance as any of us do in that situation. If we get ahead of them, than we'll be able to actually help."

"And if this leads us away?!" She snapped.

"We'll find him. We just need to get out of these vents first." Henry reassured. "The direction of his path leads in the same direction the vents will ultimately take us." They were slowly curving through the ventilation shaft as they spoke, Pippen reluctantly moving along. A distant, repetitive thud rang out, Jack and Brutis turning back to meet the pair, having taken a wrong turn.
"Don't.. go that way. Just a vent cover and a lost one.." Jack muttered softly, looking disturbed.

"What is it doing?" Pippen questioned, perturbed by the sound as well.

"It's.. bashing it's head on the wall." Jack answered reluctantly, staring down the only path they had left. It curved a bit to the right at one point, before finally releasing them into a large room. Going over it mentally, they hadn't gone that far from the room they had lost Perci in. In fact, they had circumvented the parameter of the room entirely, and than moved forward some, proving Henry's words to be true. Perci had a high chance of having been through here.

The room they stepped out into was large, with a high sealing far above them. To their left was a small wooden landing, a metal door firmly shut with no switch or button to be found to open it. The sign beside it read 'storage 9'. To their right was a massive statue of bendy, a white stone construction, framed by two large cartoon posters, though they were marred with ink as well, the farthest puddle having small, distinctive shoe prints leading away from the statue and towards the now closed metal doors. A blocky arrow pointed towards the shut doors, marred by the small inky footprints left by a pair of nice shoes.

The far end of the room was dominated by stairs, first a staircase running parallel to the far wall and up to a landing on the left, and than another to a smaller landing on the right side. This lead to a landing dominated by what looked like a metal 3d cutout of Bendy's head, minus the teeth, a wooden roof of a room just visible inside of it from the angle they were at. Ink coated the stairs, and splatters of it marred the walls, a constant flow of ink dripping form above. No claw marks to be seen.

"Wait here. I'll get the switch." Henry started up the stairs immediately, not taking the time to admire the fact this room was fairly well put together, the wood nice and solid, no patches or haphazard fixes visible. Large cartoon posters coated the walls, but not even the part of the group who waited on Henry bothered to look at them, to consumed by their own thoughts. There was a door on the opposite side of the statue, though it was battered down and torn apart now, the hall beyond flooded in ink.

Henry climbed up the stairs quickly, careful not to slip on the ink dribbling down the stairs. At the top, he was met by several boards coated in paper, designs for attractions and above ground sights plastered on the boards. Some of the paper had fallen away to the ground, and a table in the center of the room was covered in a map with several building and attraction figurines placed across it. A recording was resting atop the map, but Henry didn't bother to listen to it, grabbing the recorder and darting to the left wall, pulling down the lever to open Storage room 9. He started back down the stairs hastily, passing off the recorder to Jack to hold onto.

The group began to squeeze through into the next hall before the door was fully opened, moving with haste to try and catch up to the pair. They walked out onto a balcony covered in paper, ink soaking it in places. Lights began to rapidly flicker on, strings of fairy lights, and one around a curving boards that read 'BENDY LAND' though the 'land' had 'HELL' written over it. In between the words was the familiar smiling face of the cartoon devil, so vastly different from what the owner had shaped it's counterpart into. All manner of cages, bags of sand, barrels, booths, and props were visible, some of the booths even set up.

The path of ink lead down from the balcony, a splash at the top of the stairs suggesting Perci's path may have been cut off, given the next splash was out in front of the balcony. Splotches and claw marks lead away from that point, moving at jagged diagonals as if the being had been constantly trying to pounce on Perci. The trail disappeared into the far side of storage, and they couldn't hear any running or the sounds of a struggle, and hoped that meant the Ink Demon hadn't
caught up.

Immediately ahead of the bottom of the stairs was another metal door, though a set of wires curiously led from it to three of the set up game booths. Not that any of them were paying attention, instead trying to follow the path of inky destruction. They circled around a pallet of sandbags, passing a group of trash cans with Bendy head shaped lids, before reaching where the trail began. It more or less made a straight line away from the balcony, past sand bags, cartoon-y horse props, large shelves of boxed goods, and straight for a pair of tightly shut doors.

Written in front of the step up to the attraction was the phrase 'safety' in neat, properly capitalized letters. The attraction had appeared to be a haunted house, with fake gravestones set up in front of it, the overhanging roof having two pointed 'fangs' on each side. The wood of the banisters were purposely crooked looking, an illusion of plaster with a solid core actually holding things up. Like most haunted houses, it was an enclosed space, keeping the outside light and sounds out, as well as the group trying to pry apart the firmly shut doors. They even tried drawing a hole through it, but their ink wouldn't stay on the surface of the attraction for even a couple of seconds, making drawing impossible.

"It's no use." Henry finally grunted. Before Pippen could snap, he quickly continued. He gestured to a switch board beside the haunted house, four switches with wires coming out of each. "We need to throw the power switches so the lock will disengage. There's four of them. One's in a break room the guys down here rigged to open up when two of the game's high scores are met. Winning the strength room game will open up the research and design room, where another switch is."

"Um.. It.. Kinda feels wrong to be playing games when Perci is in danger.." Perci mumbled. She looked to the ground, eyes widening as she noticed something hidden under the step onto the attraction. She quickly darted forward, collecting a familiar pair of silver scissors from the ground, the ends coated in ink. The imp clutched them protectively, turning back to the group sadly.

"We can do it. Brutis can win the strength game, no problem." Jack offered. "I'm pretty handy with shooting games and the like. We'll have those doors opened in no time, I promise."

"Yeah.." Pippen murmured, tail low. Now Perci was without his one means of defense, leaving him completely to the whims of fate. She looked up, trying to see the 'threads' Perci had always spoken of seeing when he held the silver cutting utensil, but the world seemed completely the same.

"Those two are the easiest." Henry warned. "The last two.. they're more complicated. There's one in the Attraction Storage but.. we won't be able to go near it without being attacked by Bertrum. Former amusement park tycoon. I'm.. Not sure what the story is behind him. I mean, how he is here. From what I've heard in recordings, it sounded like Joey kicked him out when most of the work was done instead of doing.. what he usually did with most of his workers."

"OK. But there's four of us." Jack offered, even though he wasn't much of a fighter. "Six if you count the fluffballs Brutis is totting around."

"Bertrum is in a carnival ride. One of those 'Octopus' rides with the arms and chairs. Yeah." Henry countered, the group staring in disbelief.

"What are the chances we can talk him down, like Sammy?" Jack questioned.

"Low." Henry answered. "He isn't in a very talkative mood. He's in a more 'crush you to death' mood. Maybe if we had something to get through to him that didn't remind him of Joey.."
"The recording?" Jack offered, reaching for his pocket.

Henry shook his head. "He speaks about Joey in it. And he speaks about Joey in the one in Attraction Storage. He and Joey really butted heads from what I've heard, and Joey really hurt Bertram's pride. I don't think we'll get through to him at all so long as he's blinded by anger.

"Something that large blinded by anger is a danger." Pippen muttered. "One that could probably use some disassembly."

"It's.. what I usually have to do. But I'd rather not. It's always a close call with Bertram, and if I can avoid a fight with him I'd prefer to." Henry answered. "Anyway, the last one is in maintenance, which is flooded with ink. Also, Norman is almost always there." He glanced to Pippen, who twitched with uncertainty.

"Normal? The Projectionist guy?" Jack questioned. "I didn't realize he was in the mess as well. Than again, he never did know when to stop digging into other people's business."

"He is, and he dug too deep unfortunately. To keep this short, his head is a projection machine now. I.. Let's not go over the implications of that, OK?" Henry stated, paling a bit at the thought of what Joey had possibly done to the man. Sure, Norman was a bit nosy, but he didn't do it out of ill will. At least Henry was fairly certain it wasn't ill will. It seemed to be born more of a distrust of Joey, something he couldn't blame the other for.

"Dear lord." Jack muttered.

"Maybe.. the two of you.. together.. could get through to him?" Pippen offered. "Or maybe he won't even be there! After all, you heard what happened to him from me and Perci!" She laughed nervously, regretting her attempt to heal The Projectionist. Now he stood between her and her brother.

"Perhaps but.. I don't know. Our attempts to help him before didn't end well." Henry sighed.

"What..?" Jack questioned.

"We.. We tried to heal him. Already. Sort of. I mean.." Pippen sighed, clasping the scissors closer to herself. "After he got into a fight with the Ink Demon.. and saved our hides from our first encounter with what Joey's done to Bendy. It didn't feel right to leave him to suffer after he saved us, indirectly or not. So.. when Henry and I went to find a pen, we.. made a pit stop by the last area we had seen him. He.. didn't take well to my attempts to help him."

"It's where we learned then how important cooperation from the other party is when healing them. If I hadn't been there, I don't know what would have happened to Pippen." Henry murmured. "Yeah. I.. He turned the tables on me. Just like my encounter with Joey. His will was overwhelming mine and .. I'm not sure where it would have gone if Henry hadn't pulled me away. After that, we had to run away. Or rather, Henry did. I was still trying to unscramble my head. We aren't invincible when we do the whole 'magic drawing thing'." Pippen finished.

"Ah.. I should have figured.. Henry was really intent on me staying calm before he started working on me.." Jack murmured thoughtfully.

"It's why we didn't want to work on the Lost Ones. We want to help them, but.. It's not safe to try to do anything with those who have unstable minds." Pippen offered, Henry nodding in agreement.

"I guess it couldn't be so simple to solve the loss of our bodies.. We have to meet you half way if
we want to heal." Jack mused.

"That's.. pretty fitting." Pippen murmured. She sighed, glancing around the storage room once more. "Well, we know what has to be done. Let's do it. Perci is depending on us."

"Right. Let's get the games out of the way." Henry agreed, leading them to the side of the room where a couple booths were set up. One was a shooting game, another one of those ball games where you try to knock down stacks of bottles. Wires led from these games to the first metal door they had seen when they made their way downstairs. The final game was one of those strength tester games, a wire leading away from it towards another metal door. Sitting in between the stands was a recording, Brutis curiously pressing play.

A voice new to Pippen and Brutis, but familiar to Henry and Jack came out of the device. The voice was a bit young, sporting a Brooklyn accent, and a slightly annoyed tone.

"These guys down in the warehouse get to play games all days, while I'm stuck cleaning up after'em!

They kept locking themselves out of their own back room. So I says to 'em, look guys, I says, you're smart right. Here's an idea! Why not rig these game up to knock open the door if ya win? It'll be fun for you guys, and it saves me the trip down here every day.

They went for it like a dog to pot roast. I tell ya! If these guys don't start realizing who the real genius is, I'm outta here!

"Heh. Good old Wally. I should have figured a set up like this would be his idea." Jack laughed, collecting the recording for safe keeping. Part of him hoped Wally had escaped but.. Joey had a way of collecting all his loose ends. He had managed to capture Henry after all, and Henry had been gone for years.

"He was a clever one, that Wally. Poor kid deserved better than working in this place." Henry agreed. "Though, he was our first employee, outside of myself and Joey. So maybe that's why he stuck around so long. The kid had a strong sense of loyalty, even if he was constantly threatening to leave."

"More like teasing the idea. I swear, he got one laugh out of that phrase and he just kept using-it ever since." Jack chuckled, walking to the shooting game. He picked up the toy gun, making sure it was filled with blanks before hitting a button on the back side of the counter to activate the game. Red and white targets popped up from behind fake walls. Some of them had red Xs painted over them, detracting points whenever one was hit. A little Bendy cutout was 'running' on a back wall bar, moving forwards with ever successful shot.

The lyricist proved to be a crack shot, successfully hitting the high score on one try, a squeaky horn sound playing from the booth in approval. He glanced to Henry uncertainly, the other man nodding in approval. "That means the score was high enough"

Brutis walked to the other booth, the knock down game, taking a single ball. Henry took the second, and Pippen reluctantly took the third. Brutis successfully knocked down the first of three stacks, grinning with pride as the bottles fell away. Henry took several moments to eye the middle stack, before pitching the ball and taking out the second stack. They turned to Pippen, who was morosely holding onto her ball, staring at the scissors in her hands.

"Pippen.." Henry murmured, crouching next to her. "I can do this for you, if you want." She had expressed discomfort in enjoying herself when her brother might be in danger. The imp nodded,
handing the ball off to him, though her expression turned to one of guilt. She wasn't supporting the group, instead dragging them down with her emotions. Henry gave her a sympathetic look, standing and knocking down the final stack. Another squeaky horn sound of approval coming from the booth. Followed by the buzz of a mechanical door slowly cracking open near the front edge of the storage room.

"I-I'll get the switch." Pippen declared, holding the scissors close as she made her way to the room that was opening up. The first thing to greet her when she entered was a work desk and chair. A shelving unit was set up directly behind the desk and chair, a couple metal pots with the word 'ink' scrawled on it resting on the shelves. She screeched as her eyes drifted to the right of the shelves, scrambling back away from the doorway.

"What is it?!" Henry called, hastily running to the room. No enemy or bodies greeted him, only three hanging bendy puppets costumes. They were large, and incomplete, only a shapeless torso and a misshapen head on each. It looked like their torsos were meant to be draped over someone's arm when in use. The bow tie was too low, and the heads felt squished in shape, the pie cut eyes round instead of ovals. The mouths were a half circle instead of their usual shape, a thick screen covering the inside of the mouths. A single arm and hand lay on the ground near the power supply switch, which was against the far wall.

"Pippen?" Henry questioned, turning to the pale imp, who's tail was jerking wildly with fear. "Pippen, there's nothing in there."

"What do you mean?!" She snapped. "You don't see those creepy disfigured.. things?!" Henry paused at her words, before turning to regard the costumes once more. He glanced to her again, a slightly confused but sympathetic look on his face.

"You're afraid of puppets?" He questioned, slowly standing and walking towards them. He flipped the switch, before shoving one of the costumes, showing they were inanimate. "See? Nothing."

"They're wrong, and creepy! Everything about them is wrong!" Pippen hissed, tail stiff with unease and embarrassment.

"Pippen. You've seen Bendy in two different forms that are different from his cartoon self. You had no issue with that. But puppets is where you draw the line?" Henry questioned, slightly amused.

"Bendy can talk! Bendy isn't all weird and limp and hanging there like a trio of corpses! " Pippen declared, Henry's brows only raising higher. The puppets were honestly pretty close to Bendy's proper form, if you didn't count the missing limbs and slightly misshapen heads. Pippen had some odd priorities, it seemed. "Can we please just go? Please? The switch was the only thing we needed here, right?"

"It's all we needed." Henry agreed, walking out of the room and guiding Pippen away.

Chapter End Notes

I have more written, but it started to stretch on so long that I had to cut it here (the hazards of cross posting is the different limitations on each site) And I wanted it to be cut in a semi reasonable place. Next chapter should be out pretty soon! ;w;
In other news, we broke 100000 words, which honestly makes this the longest fic I've consistently worked on ever lwl
Chapter 17

Pippen began to relax as they moved away from the felt creations, the pair making their way first to the switchboard next to the haunted house. Pippen happily flipped this lever, some of the lights on the front of the attraction flicking on. Next they moved to the 'strength test' game, where Brutis and Jack were waiting for them.

Brutis passed the rabbit box to Jack, two fluffy noses peaking out to sniff at the former lyricist's chin as the wolf cracked his knuckles. He rolled his shoulders, before picking up the mallet leaning against the game. Brutis held the mallet up, posing in a manner more befitting a cartoon than a proper attempt at swinging a mallet, before bringing it down with all his might. The weight went flying, slamming into the bell above with a noisy 'Ding!', Brutis removing the mallet to reveal a dent in the button he had hit. A door slowly creaked open somewhere to their right as the group eyed the game.

"Didn't know your own strength, huh?" Pippen questioned as Brutis set the mallet down gently, collecting his rabbits once more.

"I'm glad you're on our side." Jack added as he passed the pair off to Brutis. Two heads fully emerged, licking Brutis' hands in greeting, beady eyes staring down at the group from their box haven. It was clear they had developed a favorite, lavishing what of Brutis they could reach with friendly attention.

"Ditto." Henry murmured. His thoughts flew to the 'Brute Boris' Susie would make each loop, the battle he would be forced to partake in within the confines of the haunted house. It seemed Brutis carried the same strength that being had each loop, though fortunately his mind was intact. Maybe.. No. It wasn't time to wonder about that again. "Anyway, we need to be quiet in the next room. We might have company."

"Company?" Jack echoed nervously as the group slowly walked around several shelves to the research and development room, labelled as such by a large sign above it.

The room was large, longer than it was wide, with the area they were deposited into being an upper level. The upper level encompassed the room, a banister preventing anyone from falling to the lower level, which was only broken at the far end of the room to allow entry to a staircase. On the opposite side of the room, the wall jutted out towards them once more, though it did not fully reach their side, taking a right before terminating at a wall. The upper level was constructed of the usual haphazard construction of wooden boards they had grown used to, though the lower floor was left as dirt. Outside of some empty cans, there wasn't much to speak of on the upper level.

On the lower level, there was a scattering of plans and papers on the ground, a well of ink bubbling in the middle of the far lower wall. Unknown machinery parts chugged away, and a set of chains held a massive cartoon-y arm and hand above the lower section. Some attraction parts were scattered around, mostly pressed up against the wall, allowing free passage to the two paths available on the lower level, one leading into the wall ahead of them, and the other an uncovered path they could look over now.
It was the far side of the lower room that was of concern, a single barrel with a fire inside of it drawing their attention. It was against the wall that nearly reached their side of the room, before terminating into an uncovered hallway. Three strange figures surrounded the fire, staring into it for the moment.

They looked like The Butcher Gang, antagonists of the cartoon during it's run, though terribly warped and disfigured.

The furthest figure was tall and thin, with a vaguely tear dropped shaped body. His head was long, no longer the proper oval of his cartoon counterpart but more rectangular, though he still had a triangular nose that was vaguely animalistic in appearance. His right eye was large and slightly swollen, a scar running down from the center of it, the other eye a stitched shut 'X'. His mouth permanently hung open in a pained look, as if the jaw were broken and unable to be shut. Two humanoid ears perched on the side of his head, and despite the lack of hair atop his head, he sported black sideburns and a beard beneath his chin. He appeared to be wearing a tan vest and black tie, though it was difficult to tell through the dark, incomplete ink of his body.

His left leg looked to be properly formed, though there was no division between leg and shoe, but his right had been crudely replaced with a toilet plunger of all things. His left hand was missing, only a thin stub present at the end of a haphazardly formed sleeve that dropped towards the ground. In the middle of his arm was a bandage, tightly fastened around to hold his arm together. His right arm fared better, though the upper half appeared to have been formed of a metal pipe placed into the stub of ink where his ink elbow had ended. His sleeve was cut short, and in his single proper hand he held a pipe wrench.

The other next figure was bipedal, like the first, though he seemed an odd chimera of other parts. He had proper legs, similar to the first, and a vaguely pear shaped body, though the lower end bulged out as if this position wasn't one it was used to being in. A rectangular piece of metal was embedded into it's stomach, helping to stabilize the being's current stance. It sported three arms, two unnaturally thin arms ending in scuffed gloved hands on the right and one that actually appeared to have been a similar configuration as the right, though both left arms were cut off at the elbow. Instead, they were both fastened into a wooden contraption of sorts, a long wooden 'arm' with a fist at the end.

The head of the middle figure was the worse, a mouth splitting the top of it's skull, clacking occasionally. It's left eye was a proper toon pie cut eye, but it's right was uncomfortably human within an inky pit. It had thick lips, which were sewn shut, thick stitches holding the odd head together in places. A pair of low ears sloped on the sides of it's head, or at least what might have been ears, nearly unidentifiable with how oddly shaped they were.

The final figure was a wide set one, with a potbelly. His legs were better formed than the other two, more distinction apparent between leg and shoe. His shoulders broke off into large, odd circular metal pieces, two long thin arms sprouting form each, with two large, dirty gloves waiting at the end. Around it's stomach was a belt, where someone had crudely fastened a large sign that read 'LIAR' to it, though it was dirty and streaked with ink like the rest of the beings body.

While they're body was mostly intact, their head was not, a fishing pole sprouting from it's neck. On the opposite end of the simple pole, a cartoon-y fish hung from one thread, while a round head hung from a second thread. The left eye was a dark circle with a pale sepia toned iris and an 'X' over it, while the right was a wide oval. It's 'nose' was a protruding pipe someone had cruelly shoved into the beings head, ink occasionally leaking out. The side with a dark abyss for an eye was bubbled up with disfigurations, like warts, the thick lipped mouth on the head forcibly fused open by something that had dripped down from the upper lips. A pair of false teeth had been
shoved into the dark abyss between it's lips, though it only added to the uncanny look of the being and it's swinging head.

"Is.. Is that the butcher gang?" Pippen hissed, staring at the figures. The first was warped, but very closely resembled the ring leader of the gang, a leprechaun by the name of Charley, always sporting fine clothing, sideburns, and a vaguely tear dropped shaped body. The other two looked like a haphazard combination of the other two members, Barley the chubby, hot headed pirate, and Edgar the sweetheart of a spider, and youngest of the group.

"Yeah. Or, at least, the closest Joey ever produced to them." Henry answered sorrowfully. "I've always snuck past them during the loops. There are no weapons to put them out of their misery with.. and I don't know if I could bring myself to attack them. These three.. they always felt different from the other clones I'd see hanging around Alice's territory. And this is the only one of those-" He pointed to the fisher pole head being. 'I've seen with the 'Liar' sign.'

".. Maybe we can help them?" Pippen offered. She held up her hands as Henry looked to her, quickly continuing. "I don't mean to approach this like we did The Projectionist. I was thinking we'd involve more rope and restraint.. maybe work together to prevent the possibility of being overwhelmed by their will. It could help us later.. when we try to free Bendy. We might have to get through Joey's will to break him free.. so we should learn to work together."

Henry paused, considering the suggestion. They hadn't tried to work together yet, and Henry hadn't even thought of it. But he knew Pippen fairly well, and trusted her. They both wanted to help the other beings in this place too, so they shared a goal.

"I-I'm not sure if it will work, or how but.. I'll follow you're lead and back you up. That's what I'm thinking. After all, two minds will be stronger than one." Pippen offered nervously, hands twisting her tail.

"I'm willing to try." Henry answered, Pippen looking up in surprise. She wasn't expecting him to try again, not after how Norman had ended. He had to save her hide than, and it had been her idea that had endangered them. "We have one more person than them.. and Brutis is pretty strong. All we need is some rope and some care, and we can get the drop on them. We just need to be careful with the fisher pole head. He can swing it around like a wrecking ball, so even if we bind his limbs, we'll have to take care of that."

"Understood!" Pippen declared. "I think I saw some rope on the upper shelves outside. I'll be right back!" She turned, pacing out of the room, leaving the group to consider their options.

"Alright. Brutis, I need you to put the rabbits down. Jack, there's some empty cans around this upper area. I need you to gather those while Pippen gets the rope." Henry began to command. "Jack will stay up here with Pippen and use the cans to distract the three of them. Brutis and I will get the jump on them while they're distracted and start tying them up. You two will stay up here and offer support to distract them while we're getting things under control."

"OK." Jack murmured, though Brutis seemed reluctant to put the rabbits down. Jack turned to him, giving him a sympathetic look. "I'll watch over them for you, I promise."

Brutis sighed, setting the box down against the wall, patting the rabbits on the head. He turned to eye the trio while Jack crept around the upper level to collect the empty cans available to them. He came back with armful brimming with cans, the pair helping to quickly sit them down on the ground so they wouldn't fall down and draw their targets attention to them.

Pippen came back at this point, carrying three bundles of rope. Two of them looked like the ends
had recently been cut, Perci's scissors glinting prominently against the sepia of the ropes. Brutis took two of the bundles, wrapping one onto his shoulders and holding the other in his hands, while Henry took the third. They explained the plan, Henry's reasoning being he and Brutis had more bulk than Pippen, and Jack had such a good aim he should be in charge of the cans. She didn't seem entirely happy to be sending the pair down alone, but agreed to it, watching the pair approach the stairs.

Henry signaled Jack, who threw a can at the wall furthest from the trio, the noise drawing their attention. They shambled towards the can, the multi limbed one trailing the slowest. That was the one Henry and Brutis went for first, Henry catching up the figure and bringing the rope over him and beginning to wrap him up. The stitched lipped being grunted in alarm, Brutis helping Henry tie the being up, the other two gang members turning on them at the sound.

The pipe armed one growled angrily, pointing at them and beginning to hobble towards them, pipe wrench held up high. Henry and Brutis dragged the multi limbed figure away from the hobbling pair, getting more space between the free members and the bound one. Brutis passed the second bundle of rope to Henry once they had some space between them and their foes, fur bristling with aggression. From there, they both took on one of the figures each, Brutis approaching the fishing pole head being, and Henry going for the pipe wrench wielder.

The warped leader of the Butcher gang swung his wrench at Henry, the man dodging out of the way with practiced ease, trying to get the rope around him. It wasn't that easy, given the pipe armed being had caught onto his plan, and was keeping his arms away from his body, constantly swinging the limbs. Eventually Henry caught the arm that was missing a hand, pressing it into the being's body wrapping the rope around it's body and limb, partially pinning him.

The pair fell as they fought for control, the arm that was still free pinned under the being once they had fallen. A well aimed can plunked down onto his opponent's head, distracting it long enough to give Henry a fighting chance without immediately taking the wrench to his face, both growling and fighting desperately. He could hear Brutis snarling somewhere to their right, dodging the swinging head as he tried to get all of the fisher's limbs tied down, eventually managing to catch the swinging head and wrap it around the pole.

Around the same time, Henry managed to tie down the last arm. Somewhere during the fight the plunger leg had fallen off, leaving the piper without a leg to stand on. It also meant he couldn't really escape without both his legs. Henry slowly stood, panting with exhaustion as he kicked the pipe wrench against the wall. The leader of the gang snarled up at him with his loose jaw, hate burning in his eye as he weakly struggled.

"This is for the best, I swear." Henry promised. The figures paused at his voice, staring up at him with a transfixed look. He had never risked speaking around the trio, always fearing what would happen if they had heard him and began to attack. The stitched lip figure slowly stopped groaning, though the teeth on his head continued to chatter nervously. Both he and the fisher head figure looked to their pipe armed leader, who reluctantly stopped moving. They all stared up at Henry, silently waiting to see what would happen next.

"You did it!" Pippen called, jumping down from the upper level, wings fanning out to slow her fall. Her glide was clumsy, but she managed, Jack quickly walking to the top of the stairs. He was holding the box of rabbits, who were peering out at the source of all the chaotic noises they had heard. "So.. Who do we try first?"

"Charley," Henry answered, the tall figure jerking. He hadn't heard that name in so long. On one hand, it felt like it fit, but another part of him rebelled against it. He, no she, no he had always been
a he before that day. The day he and his group had been dragged to this place, the sound of gears filling their ears, and then the sensation of his body being twisted and pulled in all the wrong ways. The feeling of something infusing his being, something foreign and upset, that contradicted his thoughts and his memories, filling his head with a foreign presence.

Henry had crouched next to the figure while his thoughts whirled, Pippen having moved closer as well. There was something familiar about this man, though both parts were certain they had never physically met him. His voice was soft and sympathetic, his eyes gentle as he regarded the broken form before him. While he would have usually have rejected such sympathy from a stranger, in this moment it was like balm to a burn wound.

Someone cared. After being reborn into a room of hateful looks and disappointment, discarded into a dark cage with the twisted forms he and his crew had been trapped in, someone still cared. The pain and rage, the constant conflict inside between himself and some foreign thing they had injected into him only feeding into it! The emotions slowly abated, ever so slightly. He knew the others were struggling too, could see the signs of their upset as they struggled against foreign impulses all the time, even now.

"We're going to try and help you, Charley." Pippen murmured, Brutis watching over the other two gang members while Henry and Pippen had their back to them. Something of her form reminded him of something, but he couldn't quite place it, his mind always muddled by that other presence. He groaned, the only thing he could manage, limbs moving listlessly against the rope.

"Here goes." Henry muttered, pulling out his pen, uncapping it with care. He kneeled beside Charley, Pippen moving closer as well, her tail moving towards him. Charley flinched, growling at the shiny metal that approached, remembering needles piercing his form, stitching gaping holes shut as his malformed body tried to come apart. The pair paused, before Henry spoke again. "We aren't going to hurt you. We just need to touch you.

Charley paused, and they took advantage of this to place the nibs of their respective drawing tools to his side. He jumped as warmth flushed through his body, gently nudging the two presences occupying his damaged body. The warmth was distinctly two separate presences, though they were willingly bound together for the moment, working together. They weren't forced together like Charley and the other. The pair's brows furrowed, the two glancing to one another.

"Do you feel that?" Pippen questioned.

"There are two separate beings here.." Henry muttered. "I know Joey had suggested to use worker's souls to make the toons come out right. I never heard much more on it in the recordings, so I thought it was just him blustering and complaining like usual. I didn't think.. I didn't think he could actually do that. I thought the Lost Ones were the closest he had gotten to combining humans and ink."

"We need to separate them." Pippen pointed out. "You can feel them, can't you? They're constantly at odds with one another. There's no fixing this with them both there."

"Can we do that?" Henry questioned. The pair was slowly poking and testing things with care. They didn't try anything serious yet, trying to come up with a plan to make sure they would work in sync. They could feel both presences pushing back, uncertain and wary of them, but still fighting each other for control as well.

"We have to try." Pippen muttered. "The longer we hold out, the worse it will be, I think."

"We'll try." Henry agreed.
From there the pair began to focus on a two pronged approach, Pippen trying to see if the pair could be separated, while Henry worked on repairing Charley's body. He was familiar with the design, having helped design basically all of the characters in the franchise. He had just not been around to see the three implemented. He had made early sketches for a lot of characters, but only Bendy, his friends Alice and Boris, and the Butcher gang had ever survived Joey's overview. Many of the other side characters and tertiary characters and antagonists had been done by other artists, especially after he had left.

Pippen worked on separating the consciousnesses the best she could, drawing a mental wall between the pair to separate them. It was all metaphorical, but the pair seemed to take to this idea quickly, rapidly sorting out their minds on their 'sides' of the 'wall'. She couldn't figure out a way to separate them while they were mixed together, watching the situation warily.

Henry slowly drew a proper body for the morally grey antagonist, hoping this wouldn't backfire on them. Charley and his gang weren't exactly evil, but they weren't very good either, with the exception of Edgar, the youngest, who followed the older pair. They were capable of good acts, but it was usually begrudgingly, or at Edgar's behest, or because they thought they could profit from it.

Slowly, he watched the warped, pockmarked form recede, smoothing out into the proper shape. An Oval head, a triangle nose, two round ears beneath hair whisking out over them. A beard wrapping around his lower face. Dark, pie cut eyes, brows pulled down slightly over them to give an annoyed expression, lips forming a neat frown. A dark neck, leading to a tear drop shaped body. Two properly proportioned legs, covered in dark pants, the hem of which was hidden under a pale vest on his upper from. Dark dress shoes, neatly separated from his legs. A dark tie beneath the vest, and two trailing tail coats at the end of the jacket that covered his back and arms, which ended in proper white gloves.

Globs of ink were falling away from Charley as he was reformed, Pippen collecting the ink together, trailing it after her tail to gather it. An idea formed as Henry nearly completed repairing Charley's form, pressing her nib into the leprechaun's chest. He jerked, and Henry gave her a sharp look as she interfered with his work, pulling something out of the being that Henry had accidentally weaved into Charley while repairing him. He quickly set to work to patch up the wound, while Pippen guided the fallen ink away from the pair.

She began to draw quickly, her tail dripping extra ink to make up for the small amount they had to work with. Pippen could feel the second consciousness guiding her, showing her how to reshape the ink into a proper form for them to occupy. Brawny but leaning towards feminine, a triangular face, sharp pie cut eyes drawn into an unimpressed stare. Short but tightly curled hair, held back into a short, tight ponytail behind her head. A simple workers outfit, slacks and comfortable shoes, grease stains present on all of it from working with mechanical parts. The woman was taller than Pippen, but shorter than Henry, her skin a darker shade than both Henry and Jack.

"Hnng.." Charley groaned, slowly sliding out of the loosened roped, a hand going to his head. He stopped, staring at his hand in realization. His left hand was back, his arm no longer ending in a useless stub! "What- Where. I can talk!" He put his hand on his mouth, mind scrambling to put everything together. Everything was a blur of pain and anger, trying to work out where he was. Staying with his gang, who were as broken as he was.

"I- I can move." The woman murmured, looking over herself. "Finally, I can move. After so long."

"Wait.. that voice." Charley slowly looked up, locking eyes with the woman. Recognition flared in his eyes, followed by rage. "You're the braud that's been in my head trying to take over! You
"I didn't want to be there, you moron! If you had stopped for two seconds and listened to me you would have known! But no, you have to be mister macho man and try and crush my soul!" The woman spat.

"Whoa, whoooa, let's not-' Pippen tried to put her hands up, tone placating as she stumbled. Her form was noticeably paler than before, less black and bordering more on gray. She had used a great deal of ink to repair the stranger's form, and was starting to feel the effects of overextending her supply. She wobbled, before falling, momentarily distracting everyone.

"Pippen!" Henry called, the last sound she heard before she hit the ground. He ran to her, the Brutis moving to intervene between Charley and the woman, strong arms keeping them apart, though it didn't stop the insults being exchanged between them. Eventually Henry looked up, glaring and shouting at them. "ENOUGH!"

The two fell into silence, staring in surprise at the gentle voiced man as he turned on them. They stepped apart, away from Brutis, who watched them both but didn't try to interfere further.

"It's easy for you to say. You haven't been stuck with this twit trying strangle your soul for years." The woman hissed in irritation.

"Who are you?"Jack asked, still perched atop the stairs. He was regarding the situation nervously, never one for conflict.

"What happened to you? I mean, how did you end up with Charley." Henry questioned as well, Charley scoffing and glaring at the woman, earning a glare in turn.

"Lacie. Lacie Benton. Been working for Mr. Bertrum for years now. Or was.. Knew that Joey was a snake when I saw him, but Bertrum.. He didn't want to hear me. After Joey hurt his pride.. Bertrum had something to prove." Lacie answered, voice husky but feminine. She had a no nonsense sort of feel to her, eyes watching the group with distrust, though most of it was aimed at Charley. "I can't remember what Joey did. I just remember him and these ink things of his ganging up on me. Dragged me into a room, and tied me down..

She shook her head. "That smart alack janitor, Wally, was already in there when I was dragged in, though it looked like he had been roughed up something bad. Then Joey dragged in that twitchy accountant of his, screaming and raving the entire way. I remember something hitting my head.. and that's it. Well, until I 'woke up', stuck in a body with that moron, fighting with him not to be crushed."

"You were trying to take control of my body!" Charley snapped, arms fists balling.

"I was trying to survive!" Lacie snapped back, stepping around Brutis.

"Enough!" Henry called again, Brutis stepping between the pair once more, growling in disapproval. "Enough. Please. You shouldn't be attacking each other. Joey did this to you. To both of you. If you need to take your anger out on anyone, take it out on him."

"Joey.." Lacie grumbled. "Wretched snake of a man."

"He was the one who did that to Barley and Edgar, wasn't he?" Charley questioned, though this was aimed at Lacie, who had been there with him when they had been 'reborn'. They had both been so confused and in pain, their body feeling completely wrong and yet they had been able to observe their surroundings. They had been moved off the ink tray, thrown into a cage as a failure, and
"It was." Lacey answered. She remembered how the pair had come out, jumbled together in a tangle. Neither the pirate nor the spider's heads were on right, and there bodies had been trying to pull apart, leading to the hack kneed attempts by Joey to stitch them together. "That snake you saw brutalize them was Joey. And he put their heads on the wrong bodies."

"He's why you're here, Charley. Joey made a machine to try and bring cartoons to life. Instead, it seemed to have dragged you and the others from your world to here, damaging you along the way. Just like Bendy." Henry quickly added.

"Bendy? The devil? He vanished weeks ago.. before we ended up here that is.." Charley muttered, glaring once more, though he wasn't looking at Lacie now, anger redirected. He was glaring at the wall, hand on his chin, finger over his lip as he worked through the situation.

"Yeah. I don't think he realized what he was doing when he pulled Bendy over to our world.." Henry muttered. Behind him, the butcher gang members grunted, demanding attention. They wanted to be freed to! Charley turned to eye them, than to Henry, a demand on his lips.

"We'll help you in a moment, I promise." Henry answered. "I just need to wait for Pippen to wake up. Jack." He turned to the man on the upper level. "See if there's any soup around here. I think she over extended herself."

"I'll help." Lacie offered, expression shifting to one of slight guilt. "I didn't mean to hurt her. I didn't even realize she was running that ragged. All I could feel at the time was how optimistic and eager she was."

Henry nodded in understanding. "Thank you, Lacie. Just.. don't leave the room. Either of you. There's strength in numbers."

"I'd like an explanation as to what is going on, and how Bendy factors into this as well." Charley demanded, arms crossed and foot tapping the floor. He'd gotten into some sticky situations thanks to the mischievous devil before, partly the devil's own doing and partly when he and the gang tried to get one over on him, but it had never escalated to something of this level. Depending on Bendy's part.. well.. he'd decide how they would deal with the 'Darling Devil'.

"I can explain to Lacie while we look." Jack offered. He walked halfway down the stairs to meet Brutis, who had followed Lacie towards the stairs, passing off the rabbits. The dangerous pair had calmed down at the sight of their leader, and Charley didn't seem likely to outright attack without proper provocation. It was safe to hold his friends home again.

"Thanks, Jack. I'll explain everything to Charley and the other two.. or is it four?" He glanced to the others thoughtfully. One nodded, the chattering teeth stopping for a moment as he did. They all stared at him with large eyes, Henry nodding slowly.

"I.. I think I know who's in there with you two. But we'll sort that out when Pippen's awake again. I don't think I can handle this without her. Though we'll probably switch tasks.. I'm not dependent on the ink in my pen for my health.." He mused. He refocused, and began to explain everything to them.

============
"Nng.. nng?" Perci groaned softly, slowly blinking awake. His side burned, the Ink Demon having successfully landed a blow to his side. It wasn't too deep, but it stung like crazy, the pain refusing to let up. He had managed to cut more threads from the beast's form whenever it had gotten near, and had even gotten in a stab to it's hand as a reward for cutting his side. The angel wasn't sure if he had done a substantial amount of damage to either the demon's body or the threads that bound him. He hadn't been able to keep track of things, he had just been reacting and running.

His hands slowly slid to his vest pocket, freezing as he realized his scissors were gone. That was right, the demon had knocked them out of his hand after his last attack. In turn he had fled into the wide open double doors of some amusement park attraction. The demon had lunged in after him, and he had barely dodged it. Whatever it had hit, it had knocked out the power, leaving them both in darkness.

It hadn't been a fun experience, trying to sneak through the dark haunted house. Somewhere behind him, the beast had crept after him.. That is until one of the props had sprung up, startling the being. It had thrown the demon off of his track long enough for him to slip into a hidden maintenance tunnel. It was a fortune the door was cracked open, as he had found it thanks to the crack as he felt along the walls.

He hadn't expected the demon to be so skittish, the beast coming off confident and unstoppable.. but it seemed some of Bendy's true nature still shone through. All it had taken was a couple of well timed 'spooky props' to upset him. Or maybe he had cut enough of Joey's control for it to begin to bleed through. He couldn't say, not without his scissors. He had planned to circle back once the Ink Demon was gone.

Perci had snuck down the tunnel before hunkering down and waiting for the demon to pass, hiding his halo the best he could. He had been so busy watching the path he had come from that he hadn't watched the path behind him. Then something had bashed him in the head from behind, and his lights had gone out.

"Where am I?" Perci groaned, slowly sitting up. He was in a caged in room, diamond mesh fence between him and the rest of the room. The doorway between the small sub-room and the room proper was boarded up, a small window space left between two to allow him to look and reach through. It was set up just tight enough that he wouldn't be able to squeeze through. A drape of fabric blocked his vision , as well as shelving unit, both on the opposite side of the cage from him. He was lying on a bed, a surprising commodity in this place. On the other end of his small room was an bench, with a half cut can seating a candle on one end, and an inkwell on the other.

"Hello?" Perci called hesitantly, the light of his halo flaring in response to his anxiety. This didn't seem to be the kind of set up the Ink Demon would have put him in if he had come up behind the angel. It was more of a rip and tear sort of person from his understanding. Beyond his cage, he could hear someone moving around, the motion abruptly stopping at his voice. It picked up again after a moment, slowly approaching his cage.

Perci hesitantly slid off the bed, approaching the 'door', jumping up to grab the edge of the boards to peer through the 'window' purposefully left there. He immediately jumped back in alarm at the face that greeted him, yelping in fear. "ALICE!"

"I'm not her." The figure corrected calmly. Her face bore a strong resemblance to Alice's, or at least the original face she had before Henry changed it, only this one lacked any disfigurement, instead sporting a perfect heart shaped face. Her eyes were human, wide ovals with dark sepia irises and pupils. Dark hair was tied back into a ponytail, save for a few strands that dangled in her face and behind her ears. She had two horns pointing out behind her ears, small white and sepia
tinted things with dull ends.

Her Halo sat on her head like a headband, not glowing and helping to hold the shorter strands of hair back. Like many of the humans here, her skin was sepia tinted, dark ink marring her entire arm, just starting beneath her shoulders. The hands and limbs were still well formed however. She sported a black dress with straps, though they were wider than the spaghetti straps of Alice/Susie's dress. The top and ends of the dress were black, while the middle section was a dark sepia, a perfect white bow on the top of her dress. Beneath the dress she wore tights, a dark sepia tinted belt around her middle over the dress to make it look more like a top. Her feet were covered in boots instead of high heels, each with a belt buckle around the middle of it.

"W-Who are you?" Perci demanded, bristling with fear. "Why did you bring me here? Why did you attack me?! Where am I? I need to go back-!"

"Slow down. I'm not going to hurt you." She quickly cut in, holding up her hands, trying to get him to calm down. "My name is Allison. I didn't attack you.. Tom did." She paused, eyes flicking with guilt.

"Whose Tom ?! Where am I?" Perci demanded, still keeping back against the wall, bristling with distrust.

"Tom is my partner in this mess. He's out right now but he'll be back soon. He.. He said you were drawing too much attention. You were going to bring the Ink Demon to us if we didn't knock you out. He hid your halo and we moved you after that." Allison answered simply.

"Why didn't you just talk to me?!!" He demanded. "Why attack me?!"

"New things aren't the safest down here. New things get you killed." Allison murmured. "And we didn't have time to speak. The Ink Demon's ears are too sharp for us to risk speaking than. If he had followed you, he would have eventually found where we are now. We couldn't afford that. So Thomas.. acted."

Perci glared, processing what she said. Her voice as honest, and she didn't look very proud of attacking him. In fact she looked rather guilty, not quite meeting his eyes. He paused, before taking a more even tone, trying to sound less hostile. "OK. Well, he has to be gone by now. Let me out."

Allison looked away again, wincing with guilt. Perci bristled, processing what she said. Her voice as honest, and she didn't look very proud of attacking him. In fact she looked rather guilty, not quite meeting his eyes. He paused, before taking a more even tone, trying to sound less hostile. "OK. Well, he has to be gone by now. Let me out."

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"I- I'll have to ask Tom," Allison finally murmured, staring at the boards between them. "He'll be able to take down the boards. I.. I'm sure he'll agree to help you." She didn't sound certain, her eyes still watching him with a mix of fear and uncertainty. In particular she eyed his halo, a real, glowing, floating halo. A new, peculiar being who deviated even further from the 'norm' of this place. Just like the Lost Ones that were gathering around the Lost Harbor.

"But first.. Tell me who you got here. Change doesn't happen that often down here." Allison murmured in a soft voice, looking at him. "You said you have a sister?"

"I-I do." Perci hesitantly answered, eyeing her warily. He began to slowly explain what he knew, eyeing his surroundings for a possible escape as he spoke.
BR: Gotta collect all the allies
Just use your head
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

*Clapping* Christmas eve gift, Christmas eve gift!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"If I hadn't just been unfused from a complete stranger, I'd say that story was completely insane and you deserve to be in a looney bin." Charley finally declared several moments after Henry finished his explanation, sighing. "But I can't ignore the evidence. Looks like the devil has gotten in over his head. Maybe we should have listened to the angel when she said we needed to take precautionary measures."

"Precautionary measures?" Pippen weakly echoed. She had woken up halfway through the explanation, and three quarters of the way through Jack had arrived with a full can of soup.

"Some magic mumbo jumbo. They claimed Bendy vanished into thin air because of foul magic, and feared it could happen to anyone. Started wearing these gaudy protection bracelets and hanging out at some scientist's place. Me and the boys, we didn't buy into it. Figured it was some stupid prank Bendy had cooked up." Charley sighed again. "And now look at us." He shot an apologetic look towards the gang members, though they didn't appear very upset with him. They had been in agreement with him over the assumption it was a trick.

"Maybe that's why Bendy says none of the people he knows were never pulled through, in spite of all the Boris clones. Those two haven't been really pulled over to this place." Pippen mumbled.

"Excuse me, but he knows us, and we're here." Charley cut in, looking mildly offended.

"Well he said it was to his knowledge. There's a degree of fallibility there." Pippen countered. "Besides, Joey has him so thoroughly tied up under his control that he hardly knows what's going on all the time. It's only recently that he's found out how much Joey has been hiding from him."

"Typical Bendy..." Charley huffed, one of the other butcher gang members grunting in agreement. Pippen glared, tail lashing with disapproval, but didn't say anything for the moment. She had finished her soup at this point, and her dark coloration had returned to her body.

"Anyway." Henry cut in. "That's the meat of it. We're banding together to confront Joey, and we're gathering as many people who are still in their right minds that we can find. First to pin Bendy long enough to free him, and then confront Joey. I know of two more people who may be able to help us if we can convince them too. They're beyond this area, through the Haunted House. Perci might have already gone that way, since it's the only path out of the Haunted House other than the entrance, and the path is so narrow Bendy in his current state doesn't try to go down them without a visible reason to do so."

Charley glanced to his friends, still broken and twisted and in need of the abilities the pair carried, and then to the group. Lacie had already sidled up to join them, especially after it was made clear they were going after Joey, and they had the greatest numbers. As much as he wanted to put distance between himself and the stony faced woman, he had to admit the logic to joining up
with this crew.. for now. Once the chance rose for him and his gang to split off on their own again, preferably somewhere outside of this place, they would take it.

"..Fine. Fix my boys like you've repaired my body, and we will work with you." Charley stated simply, eyeing Henry, who seemed to be the leader. It was clear from the look in his eyes, the leprechaun really didn't want to join up with these people, especially when he had no leverage on any of them, or any real information on this place. It put him in a position of weakness, something he despised. He was meant to be on top of everything, ensuring he and his gang came out on top.

"Thank you. I know it's not easy to throw in your lots with people you barely know, but it's better than going alone. The more aggressive ink beings here are more reluctant to attack larger groups." Henry offered, having noticed the lack of attacks during their journey. During his loops, when he was alone, he was frequently swarmed by searchers and the like, furiously attacking him for existing.. but with the group, he had yet to see any appear, and the few he though he had glimpsed when entering a room had fled as their number became apparent.

"Hmph." Charley grunted, crossing his arms, uninterested in his sympathy. He just wanted his gang to be repaired and free, and find a way back to Silvi City. Then he and his gang could get back to their usual business, and put all this insanity and mad science experiments behind them. Put behind the strange familiarity Henry's voice carried..

Henry hadn't told him that he was in part Charley's, and the others', creator. He wasn't sure how Charley would respond to it, or if he would blame Henry in some way for all of this. There was certainly a lot of hatred aimed towards creators if the literal writing on the wall was anything to go by.

"Anyway, Pippen, I think we should switch jobs. The repair in itself requires less ink to be donated than creating a new form from the soul trapped inside." Henry began, turning to the imp, who listened intently. "And I think I know who's inside the other two. It will be easier for me to make their forms, like I did for Jack."

"OK." Pippen murmured, nodding quietly. She was aware that passing out had likely scared the entire group, or at least their group. The Butcher gang didn't entirely feel like they were part of the group, partly because she hadn't heard or interacted from the other two, and partly because Charley was clearly trying to not get to close to them. He wasn't very committal in his words, and knowing his character he was likely only going to be looking out for himself and his gang. "But there's still the trouble with their heads being on the wrong body."

"They seem to have adapted to it." Henry offered, glancing to the pair. The one that appeared most similar to Edgar, the six-legged spider and youngest member of the butch gang, nodded, glancing to his original head, which was tangled around the fishing pole. They had come out a dripping messes, but their personalities had been intact, mostly staying with their core body. After their 'new' heads had been attached they had adapted, as strange as it was to literally see through one another's disfigured eyes. "Which of you is Edgar? Are one of you completely him? Do you know?"

The one with Edgar's body nodded again, the teeth atop his head chattering furiously. It sounded and looked like one of those wind up toys people would give out as gags, though it's placement in Edgar's new head felt like the height of cruelty. A final, cruel mockery from their physical 'creator'. After all, the spirit entrapped in Edgar's twisted body had been known for running his mouth quite a bit, or so Joey had said. It was only fitting he be given some chattering teeth, since they couldn't be trusted with their actual mouth.

"Alright, and you are certain you are Barley." Henry turned to the fishing pole necked being,
who managed to nod his pole. The spirit in him was beginning to panic slightly, always so quick to begin to freak out. He had been stuck with the cowering, skittish spirit for years, and while it mostly stayed out of his way, it still gave him problems having it in his head. The primary problem was when it began to panic and act up, making it difficult for Barley to control himself or his anger. This could be triggered by the slightest thing, especially if Barley looked at sign fused to their belt. Something about the word 'Liar' or anything alluding to money, would set the spirit off in a fit, and leave Barley struggling to maintain control. It didn't help his new 'head' wasn't even properly attached to his body, making choosing what direction he was going to look in a bit difficult.

"We could reshape the heads into their proper shapes?" Pippen offered, eyeing Barley in concern. The fishing pole was going to make things more complicated than necessary. What would happen if the thread broke before they finished? If the head rolled away while they worked? Henry caught her unease, the older man turning to her.

"Sounds like a plan. We can try it with Edgar first. We'll figure out Barley when we get to it."

He murmured, Pippen nodding in understanding. The pair turned to walk closer the Edgar, whose single good eye stared at them nervously. The teeth chattered faster as they neared, the pair crouching in front of him to be closer to his level. Pippen began to slowly remove the rope, while Henry spoke softly to the youngest member of the group, hoping to put him a bit at ease. "Hey Edgar. We aren't going to hurt you. You saw how we helped Charley and Lacie. We want to help you too. We're going to try and redraw your body to how it used to be, and separate the person Joey shoved into you, alright?"

Edgar hesitantly nodded, the chattering teeth slowly falling still. He could feel the second spirit inside try to reassure him, the other always a surprisingly kind being. Edgar had kept him at a nervous arms length at first, especially after the confused scramble for control had finally settled a couple minutes after their 'rebirth'. The other only gave him trouble around certain beings, when his anger would infect Edgar and have him seeing red, betrayal and anger overwhelming conscious thought. It didn't happen often, and the other spirit was always apologetic afterwards. They recognized Edgar's ownership of his body, as uncomfortable as it was to just listlessly exist in a mind space.

"This will feel weird." Pippen warned, putting the nib of her pen to Edgar's body, Henry following her lead. A familiar warmth tingled against Pippen's mind, the sensation of Henry's calm, soothing presence in this strange, quasi-magical state of being they were working within. Another pair of presences, one firmly rooted in the body she was touching, and one that felt looser and less tangled than Lacie had been with Charley. They felt more at peace with one another, even if it was a shaky truce. Separating them wasn't that difficult, and she left it to Henry, who worked on keeping the two separated mentally while Pippen started to rework the body.

The first thing she did was do away with the metal band on the beings gut, relieving the pain plaguing their back. The arm combined into a weapon slowly turned black, the ink foremost limb reshaping into an arm, while the second became a leg. There wasn't much difference at the moment, given he could use all six limbs as legs as he wanted, but the front two were always used as arms. White gloves retreated from the ends of his limbs, the foremost replaced by a simple round black hand that was flexible enough to reshape itself in subtle ways to work like a normal hand. The secondary ends became a foot, roughly the same shape as the hand, but a bit longer and flatter towards the bottom.

Dribbles of ink fell away as she worked, Henry collecting the substance before it could sink into the ground, creating a small 'bridge' of ink between the body and the discarded portion. He slowly threaded the second consciousness to the unformed ink, the familiar mind trusting him implicitly.
After all, they had known each other since Henry's earliest days at 'Joey Drew's studios'.

Pippen's work was considerably easier given how simple Edgar's design was, the damage slowly healing as the stitches and threads were absorbed and converted to ink. Slowly, she reshaped his head, removing the chatter teeth toy and chucking them away with disgust. The head was reshaped to be more round, with a white marking on his face, dominating the center of his face and split near the middle, making two separate bumps of color. On the side's of his head were small dark ears, and his thick lips were unstitched, two sharp fangs appearing from under the upper lips. Both eyes were once more large, pie cut eyes, dark but cheerful.

His body slumped back to a quadrupedal stance, the shoes on his third set of limbs reshaped to match the first and the remaining middle limb gained a foot to match the first set of legs Pippen had repaired. The final arm was drawn to match the first, leaving the body a curving, slightly bean like shape. His body was primarily dark, with only his lips and the middle of his face having any white markings, sporting a sepia tinted coloration. Two big pie cut eyes looked up to her as she finished, Henry slowly shaping the excess ink into a humanoid form.

"Is it over..?" A squeaky male voice asked, the spider looking himself over. He grinned wide in excitement, jumping forwards and hugging Pippen with his front two limbs. "It is! You're a miracle worker lady! Thank you so much!"

Pippen stumbled a bit as the giddy spider hugged her tightly, hesitating before smiling, patting his back. The youngest member squeezed her giddily, delighted to be in his proper shape once more, before noticing Charley. He released Pippen, running to his 'boss' and hugging him as well, giddy with excitement. "Look boss! We're back to normal!"

"Yes, we are." Charley grunted, smiling ever so slightly. He patted the younger's back as he cheered, before Edgar finally released him, turning to watch Henry worked. Despite having been trapped with the other spirit with no warning, Edgar had never really resented the other. He actually quite liked them, since they had always been nice to him, and had tried to cheer him up a bit.

Henry was part of the way done, having drawn a male figure that was slightly shorter than him. Scruffy, messy hair sprouted out from under a newsboy cap, freckles appearing on pale skin as the ink solidified. A pair of mischievous pie cut eyes formed on the face, a small nose between them. His clothing was loose, and slightly messy, a pair of worn out slacks with streaks of discoloration caused by chemical spills, and bits of grease. His shirt was equally messy, the sleeves rolled up to his elbows and the bottom of his shirt tucked into his pants, a set of keys hanging from his belt. A pair of sturdy boots covered his feet, beaten up but still good. Overall he seemed young, younger than both Jack and Henry, trapped at the age he had been at when Joey had used him for his experiments.

"Wally?" Jack called hesitantly as the figure looked himself over, slowly finding his voice.

"Y-Yeah. Just give me a moment." Wally finally spoke, the familiar voice from the recordings they had heard previously spilling out from his lips, though it was without the tinny inflection of the machine. "It's been forever since I actually felt like myself. Let a man enjoy the feeling of having his own skin again. No offense Edgar."

"None taken." Edgar chirped as he walked up to Wally, not seeing a reason to be offended. He looked over his friends new body curiously, walking around him eagerly.

"I mean, it wasn't as bad as it could have been. Not as bad as Lacie and Edgar had it from how they carry on. Then again Lacie was never any good at getting along with people." He added the
last part in a conspiratorial tone towards Edgar, who snickered a bit.

"Charley doesn't like people being in his space for too long, so I'm not surprised he got upset with her after too long." Edgar stated cheerfully, happy to 'chew the fat' as it was.

"Hey!" Charley called, Edgar nervously crouching behind Wally, looking towards Charley guiltily.

"Sorry boss." Edgar called. Charley grunted, looking away from them and turning to eye Barley.

"It's good to see you again, Wally, though I wish the circumstances were different." Henry greeted, Wally looking up to him. The younger male grinned, spreading his arms wide and hugging the former animator.

"Henry, is that really you?" Wally questioned, walking closer to the former animator to get a good look at him. Henry nodded, and the younger male grinned. "Henry! I haven't seen you in a month of sundays, you old dog! Of all the places to finally meet up again-" He paused. "Actually, I should be thanking you, shouldn't I? It's because of you my pal Edgar over there is the way he's supposed to be, and I have my own body again!"

"It was a team effort between me and Pippen." Henry answered, smiling a bit. "I'm glad to see everything worked properly... Does everything feel right?"

"Other than the weird cartoon look I've gained? Yeah. Everything feels about right. I mean it feels a bit different, but it's not really noticeable after a bit. Everything's functioning the way it should be so far, doc." He laughed a bit. "Though if something stops acting right I'll talk to you and see about getting an appointment with those magic pens of yours."

"Nice to meet you, Wally. And Edgar, since we're now actually meeting the proper you." Pippen greeted.

"Hi." Edgar greeted, waving at the group.

"Nice to meet you. Name's Wally Franks. I used to work as a janitor round here. Well, not here per say, but the real building. The building this one seems to be based off of." Wally greeted, shaking her hand. "I don't think this is the same place. I mean, I don't remember everything being the same tone like it is now. Its like one of the cartoons the guys would make back when things actually got done around here, instead of everyone just running around looking like someone just fed them an entire lemon."

Pippen laughed a bit at that, smiling for the first time since they were separated from Perci.

"So, I get your tail is a pen, since you used it like one, but what's with the scissors?" Edgar asked, the smile vanishing from Pippen's face. She was still clutching the silver cutting utensils in her left hand, using her right hand to draw.

"Th-They're my brothers. I'm just holding onto them for now." She paused, eyeing them, before putting them into her 'pocket', Wally watching in amazement. It was clear she wasn't entirely happy to have them out of sight, even though they were safe in her law-of-space breaking pockets.

"That Perci kid Henry mentioned, right?" Wally asked, Pippen nodding. "Bad business, that. Well, we'll find him. After all, I knows all the ins and outs of this place. Even the ones Joey and the others forgot about. You take me to the maintenance room that's near here, or was in the real world version, and I can get you in anywhere."
"Can you get us into the Haunted House?" Pippen questioned. "We've already got two switches." She bobbed her head towards the room Brutis had found the soup in, the one with the upper level path over it. He had found a switch as well, and had thrown it, before stacking a couple shelving units between the rest of the world and an unnerving, half completed Bendy style animatronic in the corner of the room. It hadn't moved in the slightest while he was in there, but he didn't trust the unnerving metal contraption in the slightest.

"Switches, smitches. The ones all around here were a work around to keep the carni boys off the main electrical grid. That Haunted House had me down here all the time fixing it. Faulty wirin' and all that. Damn thing blew a fuse in the circuit breaker all the time. It was such a nuisance. We got it hooked up to a second power set instead of the main line so when the boys down here tested it out they wouldn't blow the power for the entire building if something went wrong. But I can jimmy it back onto the main line long enough to get the door open." Wally declared proudly.

"Really?" Pippen asked, eyes eager and tail whipping with excitement. "That would save us a lot of trouble! Henry mentioned one of the switches was in a room with a.. faulty octopus ride." She glanced to Henry, uncertain if they should mention Bertrum being inside of said ride in front of Lacie.

"I.. I think it might be possessed by Bertrum." Henry stated, Lacie jolting a bit at the name, eyes widening. "But he doesn't seem to be in his right mind. He's never responded to any attempts on my part to talk to him or calm him down, and he's always trapped me in the room and tried to kill me. I don't know how he will respond to the group.. And I'd rather not risk everyone's life right now. I don't even know if we can help him. He's literally fused with one of the rides, but he's just a giant head in the middle of the machinery."

".. Is he safe where he is?" Lacie asked after a long moment.

"Nothing goes in there. I think the beings on this level know not to go near him." Henry answered.

Lacie looked away for several moments, before sighing, arms falling to her side. "We'll deal with Joey first. He's the one behind all this and knows how all of this business works. Maybe we'll learn something from him that will let us help Bertrum. If he's in the state you claim, it's better to leave him be. You never go around the boss man when he's fuming. It's better to just let him sort himself out."

"We'll come back for him." Henry promised. "I'm not sure how, but we'll figure some way out to help him."

"Thank you." Lacie muttered, not looking at him. "Me and Bertrum weren't anything special, but Bertrum was a good boss. A pretty good man. It would feel wrong to leave him languishing as a head in a machine forever."

"You haven't finished our bargain, Henry." Charley pointed out, bobbing his head towards the still disfigured Barley. "I'm certain Barley would like to be free of whoever they trapped him with, like the rest of us."

"I mean, Wally wasn't that bad.." Edgar muttered. "Though I like it better with him out of my head."

"I like it better being out of your head too." Wally agreed, the pair laughing a bit.

"We weren't going to leave him." Pippen muttered. "We were just taking a moment to breath
before we tackled him. He's.. A complicated fix." She glanced to his dangling head nervously, than back to Henry.

"It is. We might have to tie his head down to the pole to be safe.." Henry muttered, the pair approaching the irritable Barley. He jerked his pole at them, the pair taking a step back as he growled incomprehensibly.

"Enough, Barley. They're working for me. They're going to patch you up and separate you from whoever has been shoved into your head." Charley cut in, walking around the pair. A long, whistling exhale came from the metal pipe nose, the disfigured sailor growling irritably, but finally falling still.

"More like we have a deal.." Pippen muttered. This was an even trade and less Charley actually hiring them and being in charge.

"Semantics." Charley scoffed, turning to her with uninterested eyes. "The point is, they are doing work for the Butch Gang, and we will be working with them for a time in turn."

"Yeah, Yeah, Yeah.." Pippen muttered, walking closer to Barley, holding her pen tail out towards him. "Let's do this. We've kept these two waiting long enough.."

"Defiantly." Henry agreed, the pair pressing their pens into the twitchy sailor. His mind was.. more difficult to work with. The bristly nature of Barley alone made him resistant to everything the pair tried, and the second consciousness panicked and slid away from Henry's attempt to contact it. After several moments the pair disengaged, frustration written on their faces.

"You have to cooperate, Barley." Pippen stated in a frustrated voice, tail lashing freely as she released her tail for the moment, crossing her arms. "I can't do anything if you keep second guessing and over ruling everything I try to do!"

"I can barely get ahold of the other person." Henry admitted. "They keep evading me and tangling themselves with Barley to avoid me. And it's only getting harder the more irate Barley gets with you." He turned to the others, at a loss for what to do.

"Barley, cooperate. That's an order." Charley demanded, crossing his arms.

"Don't you want to be back to normal, Barley?" Edgar asked. "Just let'em do their thing! Look at me and Boss! We let them do their thing and now we're back to normal! They ain't gonna pull any funny business on ya." He finished with a confident grin, walking up to his friend. His two sets of legs moved together, the two on the left side moving forward in sync, followed by the right pair moving forward. It was more comfortable to watch than a natural spider's gait, though it gave him a bit of an odd waddle.

Barley grumbled something around his fused open lips, but seemed to relax a bit more, forcing himself to be calm. He did want his body back to how it was meant to be, and he did want to be free of the second being in his head. It was just.. difficult trusting people he didn't know, doing things he didn't entirely understand, to his body. He pushed the other presence away, forcibly separating it from him despite the panic bubbling over from the other.

"I think he's ready now." Edgar declared, looking back to Henry and Pippen.

"I hope.." Pippen muttered, approaching him with Henry in tow.

They pressed their pens to him and go to work, finding it far easier. Barley's mind having stopped putting up a fight against Pippen's attempts to manipulate the ink of his body. It helped he
was holding the other presence at bay as well, Henry managing to isolate the other mind. As pieces fell away, Henry made another bridge, haphazardly dragging the skittish mind across into the unformed body. Unlike Wally, this consciousness didn't really trust him, or anyone, and only panicked more as it found itself in a formless puddle.

Pippen didn't pay attention to Henry's half of the work, focused on fixing Barley. Most of the material that made up the fishing pole melted away to join the puddle, slowly sinking downwards to bring the head closer and closer. Once it was nearly gone, Pippen pushed the head onto the gooey base, securing it with a couple quick swipes. The 'Liar' sign, thread, and fake fish also melted away to ink, adding to Henry's resources.

The large metal bands around Barley's shoulders were scaled back to their proper size, being just a bit wider than his actual arm. The excess was used to more evenly proportion his arms and white gloved hands, the belt around his chubby stomach repaired next. The chest was added to so as to make the bump of his stomach less prominent and unnatural looking, his back gaining a slouch. His shoes were given a proper division between his jump suit and the shoes themselves.

Finally Pippen tackled his head, reshaping it to be oval in shape, though the top was wider than the bottom half. The metal pipe was carefully removed and discarded, a large rectangular nose drawn in its place. Over his right eye she drew his eye patch, and his left was repaired so it was less of a deep pit in his face and an actual, proper pie cut eye. Along his slightly pointed chin she drew a sepia toned scruffy beard, before moving on to cover his head with short dark hair. To finish him off, she added his corn cob pip in his mouth, and a little white sailor's cap, sporting a very light sepia tone like most everything else in the building.

When she moved away, Barley immediately looked himself over, muttering and mumbling. Charley was taller than him, while Edgar almost a head shorter than him, Pippen and Barley being roughly the same height once the work was done. After a minute he seemed satisfied, taking a puff of his pipe before turning to Pippen. He crossed his arms, grumbling in a low, rumbling voice, "Don't be expecting no hug."

"Wasn't expecting it." Pippen answered simply, glancing to Henry.

He had gotten over the hump that was calming down the panicked spirit he was working with, and had managed to reshape the ink into a humanoid form. Short and a bit stout, with a noticeable nose and glasses, and short but slicked back hair atop his head. His skin was paler than Henry's, and his clothing finer, consisting of a suit jacket and slacks, and a plain nice shirt and tie. Once he had finished forming, the figure jumped back, shaking with alarm.

"NO MORE!" He shouted, panic lashing his usually deep and rumbling tone. "NO MORE JOEY! I didn't take your money, I didn't! I don't know where it is!"

"Whoa, Whoa! Calm down there big guy!" Wally called, grabbing Grant's shoulder as the man nearly tripped over his own two feet twisting towards the janitor. "Have you not realised anything going on at all? I mean, it's weird living in someone else's head, but even I still knew what was going on around me."

"I- No- What's- Where- How?!!" Grant was breathing hard even still, his eyes unsteady. It was clear he hadn't recovered from his breakdown all those years ago, and Barley hadn't been the best person to be fused with. Barley wasn't one for dealing with emotions with thoughts, he was more of an action person. "I.. Right. I heard.. It's just.. I need a moment."

He walked away from the group towards the other room, the one with the animatronic in it, muttering to himself as he tried to get his mind together.
"Grant wasn't doing that well when he was dragged into that room wit' us." Wally muttered, crossing his arms.

"That's an understatement. He was already screaming like a maniac before they tied him down." Lacie huffed. "I'd keep an eye on him. Man ain't right."

"He's a good person!" Jack argued, bristling a bit. "He won't do anything to hurt us. He's just.. been under a lot stress."

"We've all been under stress." Lacie scoffed. "But none of us are screaming."

"None of you had to deal with Joey as much as he did." Jack snapped, annoyed by Lacie's seemingly aloof mannerism.

"Well, while he sorts himself out, I vote Wally and I go ahead to Maintenance to sort out the Haunted House door." Pippen declared, wanting to move things forward. She didn't like how long they had gone without hearing from her brother, or the Ink Demon.

"You can't go there alone." Henry cut in. "The Maintenance room is flooded with ink. And there's still The Projectionist to deal with."

"The Projectionist?" Wally echoed, raising a brow. "You mean Norman? He's the only guy I knew who dealt with the projectors around here. I thought he quit."

"We think it's Norman." Pippen offered.

"I'm almost certain it's Norman. But he's strong. Almost as strong as Feral Bendy." Henry began.

"Ink Demon." Pippen cut in.

"The Ink Demon." Henry corrected himself. Pippen had been insistent on separating the real Bendy from the monster Joey had turned him into. She thought it would only help to harm Bendy further to hear his name applied to what other's would call 'monster' to his face. "I don't know if we'd be able to subdue him as easily as we subdued you three. He's taller than us, and stronger, and he's always ambling around areas thick with ink."

"You don't want to get dunked in that." Jack offered softly, tapping his fingers together nervously. "That's.. That's how I was lost. Not that anyone really noticed." He laughed weakly.

"I noticed." Wally countered, expression upset. "I asked Joey about you. He said you quit, like everyone else. I.. I don't know if I believed him, but I noticed. All your stuff was still where you left it.. I didn't.. move it. It didn't feel right. None of it felt right. You were always nicest to me out of everyone else in the music department."

"O-Oh." Jack murmured, rubbing the back of his neck in a mix of shame and embarrassment. He had been so busy feeling sorry for himself that he didn't even stop to think about the truth to his statement. Wally had always been friends, or at least on speaking terms, with everyone in the building. He had even stopped by to check on Jack in the sewers a couple times, when his workload had allowed.. "I'm sorry Wally."

"Ah, it ain't no trouble." Wally waved it off, not wanting bad blood between them. Not when the group cohesion was so vital to their survival. "You'll just owe ol' Wally somethin' good for an apology. I'm thinking cake. Somethin' nice and moist. I'll be expecting cake once we get out of here."
Jack grinned a bit, laughing at Wally's antics. "All right, Wally. I'll get you an apology cake if
we get out."

"Not if, when. You can't go thinking all negative like that all the time, Jack. You gotta have
some positivity in your life, else how you gonna enjoy life?" Wally corrected.

"Hard to be positive in this place." Charley deadpanned, glancing around at the dilapidated
storage room.

"This is where you especially need to stay positive." Wally argued. "If you start moping and
feeling bad, than how you gonna see any chance to make things better? Just keep your head up and
keep movin', that's what my pa always said. I mean, I get it. I'm not dumb. I know we've all gotten
screwed over by Joey. But if we start moping, than he wins, hands down. And I don't know about
you, but I ain't gonna let him win anymore."

"I guess that's one way of viewing things..." Jack muttered, shrugging a bit.

"We're gonna get out of here and home. Ain't nothing ever stopped the butcher gang before!"
Edgar cheered, looking to his companions. "Right guys?"

".. Right." Charley echoed, smiling ever so lightly. "This Joey has to contend with us now. We'll
show him what happens when you cross the butcher gang."

"Yeah!" Edgar cheered, glaring with determination. Barley grumbled and grinned, punching his
fist into his open hand. They would make Joey regret messing with them, that's for sure!

"You won't be alone in taking him on." Pippen declared, Brutis growling in agreement. "We all
have a bone to pick with Joey. Everyone in this building does. Once we figure out where he is, the
rat is gonna drown in his mistakes."

"Yeah." Henry agreed. He wasn't a particularly violent man, but at this point, after hundreds of
hopeless loops doing the same thing over and over.. It had a habit of driving even someone as calm
as Henry towards violence. All of the senseless suffering, the pain, the misery.. Everything he had
seen only fueled his desire to see Joey punished for his horrendous actions. He had harmed not only
the humans of their own world, but beings of another, dragging them over with a haphazard
process that he knew would likely disfigure and harm them.

"Anyway, we might as well try. Either he'll be done in Maintenance and we deal with him, or
he's not and we move on." Pippen stated, eager to get moving. "All we need do is bring the rope..
heck we could probably tie him up some with his own wires too."

"I don't want to risk finding out he has control over those.." Henry muttered, Pippen shrugging as
she collected one of the bundles of rope from the ground, untangling. Edgar grabbed another,
setting to work on untangling it as well, doing the job faster than Pippen. He was familiar with
working with rope after all, both for crime related purposes and when helping Barley on his boat.
Barley collected the third, and had it untangled in a couple seconds, his hands a whirlwind of
motion.

"We need to check on Grant-" Henry pointed out, only for the man to appear in the doorway.

"I'm here." His voice was deep and with a slight croak to it, no longer carrying the edge of high
pitched terror it had before. "I heard everything. I'm ready."

"Are you sure?" Wally questioned, eyeing Grant with uncertain eyes. "You weren't doing that
well bef-"
"I am aware." Grant answered dryly, unwilling to speak on the matter. "I am better now. I just needed a moment to sort myself out." He walked over to join the group, though he avoided being near Barley, who eyed him with an unfriendly glare. It seemed Edgar was the only one in the group who had been able to make a degree of peace with the spirit inside of him.

"Well, now we have a lot of people." Pippen murmured thoughtfully.

"Yeah. No reason to run everyone into the ink in the maintenance room. Most of you could stay up on the upper level and watch our backs." Henry muttered thoughtfully. "I say Wally, Brutis, and myself go down while everyone else watches for the Ink Demon or Norman."

"You just said you don't think you can take them on your own, but want to leave everyone on the upper level?" Pippen demanded, crossing her arms. "I say, the three of you go down first, and then I and a couple of the others follow you after a moment with the two extra bundles of rope. That way if something tries to get the jump on you, we'll have your back."

"Makes sense to me." Wally offered, not eager to be caught up in a fight without backup. Henry glanced to him, before sighing, turning to the rest of the group.

"Alright. Charley. Could you and the other two back Pippen up?" Henry questioned, the leader of the butcher gang eyeing him for several moments.

"I suppose. But you will owe us." Charley finally answered, rubbing his bearded chin. "Our only goal is to get ahold of this Joey fella and teach him what for. Extra work will cost you."

"Oh for crying out loud, I will back her up myself." Lacie scoffed in disgust, hands on her hips. "Getting Norman on our side will put us one step closer to beating up Joey, and ain't something that no one should have to 'owe' nobody over. It's as much a part of the job as finding Joey."

"Fine." Charley snapped, bristling as he glared back at Lacie. "We'll help you for free, but don't get used to it! And when we find this Joey fella, we're getting the first swing on him." He turned to his men, the pair looking to him. "Barley, you handle the rope. Edgar, be ready for a scuffle. Knock'em down and pin'em if you can."

"Understood." Barley rumbled.

"You got it boss!" Edgar cheered, holding his hand up to his head.

"Lacie, you've got more upper body strength than me. It stands to reason you get the third rope." Pippen offered reasonably, the woman nodding to the imp.

"Understood. You can count on me to pull through for you. Not so sure about them others though." She ended her words in a mutter, eyeing Charley with distaste. Of course the leprechaun himself was not going to get his hands dirty in the upcoming matter.

"Well, Maintenance ain't coming to us. Come on." Wally called, leading the group back up the stairs.

"That will leave Grant, Jack, and Charley on the upper level to watch our backs." Henry murmured, watching Brutis hand off his rabbits to Jack once more. Jack he knew and trusted, while Charley and Grant he was still uncertain about. Grant seemed stable now, but it felt more like he was putting up a front to protect what little pride he had left, as well as himself in general. Charley on the other hand felt too proud to actually help anyone for free, and Brutis wasn't going to hand off his friends to a conniving jerk like him.
Wally lead the group back out into the storage room proper, the newly revived toons eyeing the massive room of amusement park goods. Charley muttered irritably about Bendy being the star of the show, and how it should have been him and his boys at the lead, while Barley simply walked along. Edgar didn't seem to bothered, trotting up curiously to Bendy themed goods and laughing a bit at the Bendy head trashcans, chattering about how he was happy that wasn't his head. Lacie wore a mask of indifference to her former workspace, while Wally muttered to himself as he looked through his keys.

They hit the second switch at the power station for good luck either way, Pippen pulling it down as they walked near it. The maintenance room was on the right side of the room, unlike the other two rooms they had been in, which had been on the left, the metal door shut firmly when they approached. Wally muttered something to himself before walking a couple feet away from the door, pulling off one of the metal wall panels to reveal a circuit board. He fiddled around with it carefully, until a soft 'zzt' sounded off, the door finally opening.

"See. Easy peezy. All you need to do is fiddle with the right bits, and you can get around to anywhere in this place." Wally declared proudly, leading them into the now open doorway. The hall was short, leading out into a room of sorts, the words 'Choo choo' written on the wall directly ahead of them. Likely in reference to the 'Train trouble' cartoon posters on the wall nearby, featuring Bendy leaning out of a trains conductor room. The phrase was scattered around the room in uneven writing, always in pairs of two, a set even behind two of the workbenches that consumed much of the space to the rooms immediate left.

A bit of a curve, and they were back in a hallway, the walls fine boards of wood. A distant sign read something about a 'Buddy Boris Railway', likely an attraction meant to feature at the uncomplete amusement park. The short hall ended in another small room, a 'Little miracle' station immediately to their right. Next to that was a barrel of ink, and then some large, unidentifiable machinery parts. To their left, in the center of the wall, was a doorway leading to a short hall, the ground partly broken away, and then a set of stairs, which descended to a level flooded with ink. The walls were no longer lined with wood in the stair well, instead rough hewn walls of dirt with wires and the occasional support strung along them.

"All right. We're heading down first." Henry muttered, making sure Brutis was armed with a bundle of rope. He began down the stairs first, Wally close behind him, the young male scowling at the ink.

"Ah, sheesh, more ink! Just great. I swear, that stuff gets everywhere! I never understood why Joey needed so much dang ink, and I still don't understand it even with all this mad science cult stuff he's pulling. Why is there always so much ink?" Wally complained softly, Henry shooting him a sympathetic look.

"I wish I knew." Henry muttered. "But Joey was always one for 'doing things big'."

"More like overdoing things." Wally muttered as they reached the bottom. They stopped just short of the ink as a flickering light became visible before them, bobbing up and down as if it were being carried, Henry holding up his hand to silence the janitor. The tall form of The Projectionist crossed their path, fortunately not looking down the hall they were coming from, Wally staring at him with a gaped mouth.

"Was- Was that Norman?!" He hissed once the figure had passed, Henry nodding silently. "The H*** did Joey to do him?!"

"I don't know. Not for certain. But we can stand here all day making guesses or we can get this over with." Henry muttered, Brutis taking the rope between his hands behind them. He hoped it
wasn't too worn down from containing the Butcher gang not too long ago.

"You think we can get him to settle down and talk with a head like that?" Wally asked as they crept down further. He grimaced as they stepped into the cold ink, the group wading through the thigh high ink as quietly as they could. The hall lead out into a large room, one which Norman seemed to be patrolling in a circular fashion. Two large train parts cut the room into thirds, making the task of sneaking up on him a bit easier, though no less daunting.

A few lights bled through the dark ink here and there, providing minimal lighting on the lower level, though on the upper level, which consisted of a square flooring the encircled the same perimeter as the lower but did not have any flooring in the middle section, still had some functional lights that bled through. Some lights on the lower level were higher up on the wall, illuminating more unknown machine parts, boxes, and pallets, making traversing the level a bit unnerving but not impossible.

"We need to get up there. Second level. There's a circuit box up there that'll let me reroute the power to the Haunted House." Wally muttered, glancing towards the staircase on the left side of the room. It was mostly blocked by a pallet of sandbags, not impossible for the young man to squeeze by but it would be unpleasant. Besides the stairs ran a fence meant to prevent people from falling off the stairs to the lower level, making going around the sandbags his only path to the upper level.

"Think you can go up there after we get Norman under control?" Henry asked, the younger man nodding. Norman had begun to walk along the back wall, angled in a way that he did not see the three of them stalking after him. He ambled through the ink with some difficulty, the wires on the back of his head seeming to give him some trouble as they would catch on things hidden in the ink, or whip forward and get caught under foot. "Alright. Let's wait until he's near the stairs again. That way the others will be able to reach us faster if things go south."

"Got it, boss." Wally muttered, Brutis nodding in understanding. The three males stalked the fourth as he made his way past a wall of unknown machine parts, and the third switch for the current circuit board. Given they were about to use a work around, and that every time in the past Henry had so much as touched that lever it had set Norman off, they didn't touch it as they passed, watching the unwitting being circle back to the stairs.

They struck then, Henry and Wally grabbing an arm each, while Brutis brought the rope over the former man's head and around his chest. He didn't get the chance to secure it before The Projectionist was whipping into action, screeching in unholy fury as it threw Wally into a wall, the janitor landing on one of the forgotten boxes. Henry fared a little better, releasing the arm before he was whipped away as well, though he ended up skidding away several feet before he could release the flailing limb.

The Projectionist turned on Brutis then, catching the wolf with a mean right hook that sent him reeling back, the wolf snarling in fury. The being howled back in it's strange, mechanical tone, body slamming the wolf into the closest wall, holding up it's fists to begin wailing on him. He didn't hear or see anything else but his current target, the bulb in his flicking even faster with the rage pounding through his form.

Lacie slammed into his back before he could rain down any blows, catching one of it's arms and pinning it, leaving a good portion of her rope unwound. Pippen, who had been right behind her, grabbed an end of the rope and wrapped it around The Projectionist's legs, managing to tie it off tight enough to hamper his movements to a degree. She didn't get a chance to move away, a lucky swing of the feral being's free arm catching her in the chest, sending her flying into a banister.
Around this time, Edgar and Barley appeared, either finally finding their courage or deciding now was a good time to attack. It was hardly the time to question which option it was, as the pair did their best to help subdue the enraged being. Poor Edgar was sent flying moments after he closed in on The Projectionist, though he twisted in midair and caught a banister instead of flying past it to slam into a wall, eyeing the other being with an angry glare.

"G-Guys.." Pippen called weakly somewhere beyond the fray, struggling through the ink. She was clutching her head, the ink near her bubbling ominously, the noise having drawn quite a bit of attention. The imp didn't even have the chance to turn before a white gloved hand shot out of the ink, grasping her by the shoulder and dragging her down.

It happened so fast it would have been completely missed in the chaos, if not for Jack's panicked shouting the moment the ink began to boil. Henry had managed to retrieve Wally at this point and get him to the stairs, but he never had a chance of reaching Pippen before she was taken, eyes widening in horror as she vanished without a trace beneath the ink. They started to call for the other fighters to return, or at least withdraw from the ink, frightened by the potential of all of them being dragged under.

The fight continued, however, the fighter's thoroughly entrenched in battle. Barley was dodging The Projectionist's haphazard swings quite well, even managing to catch the other end of Lacie's rope and throw it back to her, successfully binding down one arm. A moment later, Barley took a blow to the nose, which made him stumble back, but quickly return, teeth grit and eyes sharpened into a defiant glare. The brawling pirate soon found he had backup, Brutis recovering from his fall into the ink and scrambling forwards to catch the being's free arm.

He succeeded, and while The Projectionist fought for control of his limbs, Barley moved down to tighten the rope around his legs, taking the screeching being down into the ink in the process. Lacie clung to him defiantly all the way, punching and kicking what she could reach to disable him as Brutis worked the final rope around his free limb. Once he was tied, the group began to drag him towards the stairs and out of the ink, wary of submerging him, or being submerged, for too long. That and the panicked commands of everyone else, who had made their way back upstairs at some point, lead them to go up there.

"Didn't you hear me?!!" Charley demanded as Barley neared the top, the squirming projectionist held between him, Lacie, and Brutis. "I told you to get out of there, not keep fighting! That d*** imp just got jacked by something in the ink, and you could have been next!"

"Pippen's gone?" Lacie questioned, shocked as she looked over the group, not seeing the small dark being. She glanced back downstairs, straining her ears for any sign of the imp, but heard nothing but the dark liquid lapping at the walls of the room.

"It was Ben- The Ink Demon." Henry gasped, still supporting a semi conscious Wally. "He's been getting craftier the more we dodged him. I should have realized the noise would draw him in." He had just been so distracted by Pippen's insistence they keep moving forward, and the lurking fear that was Perci's unknown fate. But he shouldn't have let himself be distracted so easily! He had been through the loops numerous times, and he knew what had attracted Bendy before, something his feral state had likely heightened.

"D*** devil is always a crafty one. Even when he's apparently out of his mind." Charley grumbled dismissively, though he couldn't entirely hide how uneasy he was. He had seen the clawed hand that had lurched out of the ink, had seen the sharp points they ended in and the emaciated limb it was attached to. Bendy had never, ever been like that, and something about just glimpsing the single limb made his stomach contort with unease.
"I should have known." Henry muttered.

"You couldn't have." Jack argued. "You told us yourself that things have only been getting more and more unpredictable."

"What's going to happen to her..?" Edgar asked nervously, eyeing the ink warily. He had started to like Pippen, given she had been outwardly friendly towards him from the get go, and had seemed fairly nice. It was a shame to see her gone so quickly, with an unknown fate before her.

"I.. I don't know." Henry answered.

"Perci did point out you and her were the Ink Demon's prime targets." Jack offered. "I can understand you, given the lies Joey fed him, but Pippen.. Pippen was his friend before Joey took full control."

"And Pippen was the one who began to undermine that control." Henry muttered thoughtfully.

"If that is the case, than Joey will want to deal with her personally." Grant offered confidently, surprising everyone as he spoke of his own volition. He had mostly been keeping to himself, distant from the group and seemingly not entirely there. Apparently he was more present than they had thought. "Anything that hampers Joey's control, he wants to deal with hands on. I should know."

"That's.. not a pleasant thought." Jack admitted, uncertain what his former boss was capable of anymore.

"But.. that means there's still hope." Henry pointed out. "Pippen is a fighter, and Joey is prone to overlooking little details. If there's a chance she can escape, she will, and she'll likely take Joey's teeth out while doing it. We have to keep moving. We need to find Perci, and the other two potential allies I mentioned earlier. From there, I know a way we can draw Bendy out on our terms, and bring him down and out of Joey's control." He just needed a way to do so without setting Bendy into his 'full beast' mode, the twisted, 'final form' he had discovered at the end of so many loops.

"Well than. Once Wally has recovered, he and I will go into the ink and deal with the power. We're small fry apparently, if this Perci's estimations about you and Pippen were correct, so we'll likely get by with no issue." Lacie declared, glancing to The Projectionist. "The rest of you, the former workers here that is, can work on Norman. Either get him back to his senses, or we leave him tied up in that 'miracle station' over there to deal with later, like Bertrum."

"Sounds good to me." Henry murmured, crouching next The Projectionist. He had jerked a bit at his name, a hissing growl coming out of the speaker on his chest, Henry reaching for his pen quietly. Maybe he could rework this to a degree that would allow Norman to actually speak.. As well as even out his limbs and the like. His arms were so thin compared to the brawny arms his human self had earned from years of hauling heavy machinery. A thicker neck/shoulder area would probably help too with balancing the projector..

"I need you to trust me, Norman." Henry murmured to the former human. "I just want to help. We all just want to help."

"That's right." Jack agreed, nervously peering around Henry. "It's me, Jack. Remember? I was the lyricist in the music department. We used to hang out sometimes during breaks and complain about Joey together." He laughed weakly, the being jerking at the other name, hissing angrily. Jack shied away, replaced by Grant.
"You aren't the only person hurt by him, Norman." The accountant stated in his deep, calm voice. "But the path you are on isn't going to lead you to what I know you desire. If you want make sure no further harm can come to you, or anyone else for that matter, you will let Henry help you. I know you are still in there Norman. That nosy but kind projectionist, Norman Polk."

The Projectionist paused, seeming to actually be considering their words. He couldn't do much else, thoroughly tied up as he was, and too physically exhausted to keep fighting. His mind wasn't exhausted however, and after getting over the initial hump of his wild, inflamed emotions, he had slowly begun to comprehend their words once more, instead of blindly following the rage and pain that had consumed him for so long.

Seeing this change, Henry carefully placed the tip of his pen to Norman's side, calm, caring warmth spreading from him into the battered projectionist. His presence was a familiar one to the being, they all were now that he was thinking on it, but the memories were buried under layers of ink, painful layers he was slowly peeling away to unblind himself, and to begin to understand reality as it was, and not just through the lense of betrayal and pain. Henry began to work, and he did not resist, preoccupied with working on the mental ends of things, his light flickering in a way that seemed to communicate thoughtfulness.

Chapter End Notes

Merry Christmas to everyone who celebrates it, and happy holidays to those who don't thank you for all the support, kudos, bookmarks and comments, I prize everyone of them like a little Christmas gift itself ;w;
Perci tapped his fingers against the wooden boards irritably, staring out at the room beyond. There were more shelving units, some with cans of soup stacked on them, as well as a workbench of sorts with a tool box and tools scattered atop it. A smattering of gears was gathered around it, a sort of 'just in case' collection. To the right was a doorway, currently sealed shut with a door similar to the one the safe house he and Brutis had found. In the far left corner was an open archway, leading to another area he couldn't see.

The tiled walls and plaster above it directly across form his cage was scrawled with diagrams, number and words that didn't quite make sense to him. He saw Allison work on it often, but never questioned her about it. He hadn't spoken to her since Thomas had returned, and shut down any chance of him leaving this cage. He wouldn't look her in her guilty eyes either, impotent anger and frustration bubbling through him.

_Tack. Tack. Tack._

Of course, there was the matter of the irritable Boris clone staring down its snout at him, the one who Allison called Thomas, or Tom. His left arm was a mechanical limb, almost like the inner workings of an animatronic like he had seen at a job once, there to replace a limb that had either been lost or never there. Otherwise, he was a perfect clone, a gangly, long snouted, perked eared, overall wearing wolf. In addition to the attire expected of Boris, he wore a belt across his torso, seemingly to help keep the arm attached and/or hang his axe from. The axe which he was currently tapping the handle of against his mechanical palm threateningly.

"Could you stop already?" Perci finally spoke, the wolf pausing for the briefest of seconds before continuing. "I get the point. You want to split my head open. Enough with it. There's no need to bluster around like this when you've already got me trapped." He sighed as he lay down, pretending to go to sleep. His halo dimmed on his command, something he had learned he could do given all the spare time he had. He had also been told it always dimmed when he went to sleep. His captors usually started to relax when they thought he was asleep.

If only he could have a moment where neither Allison or Tom were present. He had remembered the scythe he had found, all that time ago, and was willing to test it's wicked blade against the boards.. but he wasn't willing to fight the two of them. Even if they had kidnapped him, it was clear they had done it out of a desire to survive. Allison had said he was bringing the Ink Demon to close to their base. It made sense to knock him out at least. The fact they had brought him here instead of leaving him to his death was proof they weren't totally evil.

The tapping abruptly stopped as Tom turned his head towards the door, ears twitching as he picked up a noise. He stood from his chair, walking to the door and slowly opening it. Allison walking in moments later. She carried a number of odds and ends in her pack, things she had salvaged from another level.. And a guilty look. More guilty than usual when she returned, and was reminded of the younger angel she had trapped in their hideout. Perci was careful not to open his peering eye too wide, shutting it just before Allison glanced to him. After a moment, he opened it again, as he heard her begin walking.
"Tom." Allison called softly, speaking just loud enough that Perci could hear her, but in a way that suggested she did not want to wake him up. The wolf had taken the bag from her and was beginning to quietly sort things out, but stopped, turning to look at her, a weariness in his eyes. "I've been thinking."

Tom grunted, one ear forward and one ear falling back, an uncertain expression spreading across what of his face Perci could make out. This conversation felt like it was going somewhere new, or at least new to Perci, who had only ever heard them discuss him, and places to scavenge next. But it felt like they were approaching a topic the two had tread often.

"Maybe.. Maybe we should take Oliver and Sammy up on their offer." She finally intoned, both of the wolf's ears falling as he shook his head furiously. She sighed, before continuing. "I know, Tom, I know what he used to be but.. we can't deny that Sammy has changed. More than just physically. He isn't preaching to the Lost Ones to worship the Ink Demon anymore. He wouldn't have stopped doing that if he was still loyal to it.. And Oliver."

She paused, glancing to Perci, whose eyes were shut, his expression calm, though he seemed to not be sleeping well. The younger angel never did look fully at peace when he slept, occasionally shifting and mumbling with worry. He wouldn't share his nightmares with her, not even to get them off his chest, but she suspected his inactivity and the fact his family was still somewhere within the labyrinth of the studio had something to do with it. The studio, or rather the expansive labyrinth it had become, was far from safe.

"Perci says he knows Oliver. Before you get any ideas, I didn't tell him about Oliver. He told me about Oliver without prompting. He claims to be related to him, and says he is a good person.." Allison paused, letting Tom mull over this information. "He told me that Oliver would only want to help and protect people in this situation. And.. going by that.. he wouldn't be with Sammy if it ran counter to his goals. Perci described him as being too strong willed and stubborn for that."

Tom shook his head, ears low, gesturing to Allison. He didn't trust the new Sammy, or Oliver. He didn't trust Perci either. New things were dangerous things down here, and so far their pattern had kept them alive. They were.. subsisting, but alive. And they had each other. Allison opened her mouth to speak, before Tom began again. He made the shape of bird wings with his hands, before making a chopping motion, eyes darting away. Not his proudest moment but he had thought Allison was in danger.

"I.. I saw Oliver." Allison began, Tom's head snapping up in alarm. "He was across the ink from me. I didn't go near him. I know you wouldn't have wanted me too. He's upset about his wing but.. he just wants an apology. That's all he wants. He told me that his offer still stood but he just wants you to apologize and promise not to hurt any of the Lost One's in the harbor. He.. He said he'd chuck you in the ink himself if you started attacking the 'harborfolk'."

Tom huffed, shaking his head at the suggestion. He was over twice the cockatoos size, and likely weighed far more than the bird could carry. Not that facts seemed to stop Oliver. The bird had told him something similar during a past encounter while scavenging, though Oliver had kept his distance from Tom during the delivery, keeping his broken wing close to him. He had been leading more Lost Ones to the harbor, where he claimed they were trying to help them 'find themselves' again. To try and make them whole.. a seemingly altruistic goal, but who down here really had an altruistic bone left in there body?

"Please. We both know the harbor is better protected now after the renovations, and there's less scrap for us to work with because of it. We have to go further and further out for supplies and.." She paused, glancing to Perci. "There's strength in numbers..."
Tom looked to Perci as well, before pointing at him, gesturing furiously to Allison. How did they know he would not sell them up river for their actions? It had all been in the name of survival, but it was clear to him Perci was holding it against them, and was only growing more upset with time.

"I- I don't think he would do that. Perci isn't that kind of person. Yes, he's.. He's upset with us, but.. He's reasonable. He's.. just frightened for his sister, and his friends." She paused, taking Tom's hand in her own, his flesh one. "Like you would be if you and I were separated. I think we should.. consider taking the chance. There's no signs this is going in the same direction the.. other Alice's plot with the Lost Ones did."

Tom stared at their intertwined hands, a long, heavy breath escaping him. He shrugged, indicating he would consider it, before walking into the other room, tired and weighed down by the decision before them. Not changing had kept them alive for so long but.. the studio was now rapidly evolving around them, and there was the ever lurking fear that at some point, it would evolve beyond anything the two of them alone could deal with. Could he really trust anyone beyond Allison to watch his back?

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Icy ink surrounded her on all sides, lapping at her aching head, Pippen struggling weakly. Whispering voices surrounded her, a cacophony of noise that only made her head hurt worse. Something had her by the shoulder, holding her close to something warm and solid, both of them moving swiftly through the ink. Minds in various states, whole but fragmented, pieces detached fully from their whole, drifting listlessly, and everything in between, reached towards them from the miasma that was the ink, only to be battered away by the presence holding her. It wasn't as effective as her first journey through the ink though, her own mind to weakened by pain to effectively bolster her protector's efforts.

Suddenly, the cold was gone, ink splattering around them as they left the substance behind. Her eyesight was still dark and spotty from the pain originating from the back of her head and left horn. She couldn't see it, but she could feel it drooping, the sensation of it sagging unnaturally sending jolts of pain through her head. It had hurt after she had hit the banister during The Projectionist fight, but it had still felt solid. Now, after a trip through the ink the injured horn felt loose and limp. The only way she could describe it was like holding an oddly shaped water balloon, with the water just barely staying contained within the thin elastic barrier of the balloon.

She looked around with her spotty vision, trying to ignore the drooping sensation atop her head. A couple seconds later there was a silent pop, and pain lanced through her head even worse than before as ink bled downwards, covering and congealing over her left eye as her being desperately tried to hold onto the substance that made up her body. A high pitch yelp escaped her when it happened, the imp struggling once more against whatever was holding her, dark tears bubbling into her good right eye.

The hand that was holding her had her pressed to something dark, but hastily held her at arms length to look at her. She could barely make out what was looking down at her through her single good eye, the spots receding as the pain dulled slightly with time, but her vision now blurred by her tears. The pain would not fully abate, and was worse whenever she moved her head, especially if she tipped it around, sloshing the still loose remnants of the base of her horn.

A worried whine escaped her holder, something atop the figure and on it's face twitching wildly.
She could sort of make out a moon white face, tinted sepia like everything in this strange world, covered by streaks of ink and lacking eyes. The figure was supporting her with both hands, one a clawed, vaguely humanoid hand, the other a more cartoon-y clawed hand, covered in a white glove. He was standing in an awkward crouch as he held her, trying to stand but no longer formed to do so as he once could.

"Be..ndy?" Pippen weakly squeaked, hoping to awaken some spark of the original being within the feral being her friend had been twisted in. Another whine came from the figure, before she felt herself being pressed to a bony rib cage, one arm secured around her while the other three limbs worked furiously.

They were zipping down halls, and she wouldn't have been able to keep track of them even if she wasn't as disoriented by pain as she currently was. It seemed purposeful, a precaution to prevent her from running away.. or to lose anyone trailing them, interest sparked by their brief time in the ink where her weakened state was so clearly exposed. She closed her eyes, the blur of halls only making her head hurt worse, the warmth and familiar feeling of being held giving her a small modicum of comfort despite the situation.

The beast abruptly stopped running, standing in a large archway that lead to a room. It was circular, with fine, solid metal walls. Various pipes ran in and out along the top of the room, hidden behind half a dozen projection screens, all of them sloshing with the ink they transported to who knows where. A single light shown down from the center of the ceiling, which was a primarily made up of a dark, metal lined hole. There were circular grates on the lower portion of the room, as well as on the ground, possibly to catch some run off liquid, though where it would come from Pippen couldn’t guess at the moment.

On the projector screens were cartoons, old Bendy cartoons in fact, various episodes played on constant loop, all silently going on at once. One showed Bendy in a train, another Bendy in a mine cart with Boris, while another showed him as a restaurant worker, watching a fight between Barley and Edgar as Charley tried to sweet talk him into something. Various episodes, all sharing one thing in common. A properly formed, cartoon Bendy was present, scenes where he was not present seeming to have been skipped in spite of the confusing continuity it presented.

In the center of the room, beneath the single proper light, was a chair, a large, cushy chair with two odd metal pipes poking at angles from the top corners. There were the remnants of chains hanging from them, though they were broken, Pippen swallowing with unease. A pair of cuffs were integrated into the armrest, also long broken, but a bitter reminder of the past. The chair itself was seated atop a mound of ink, several projectors shoved into the mound providing the cartoons that looped relentlessly all around them. A pair of large gear acted as stairs, shoved into the mound to lead up to the seat, the quasi throne of this strange and unnerving room.

A strange device leaned haphazardly among the ink, though what it was could not be told anymore, given it was broken, a portion thrown to the far side of the room. Wires hung listlessly out of the device, not even giving a passing spark. If the scattered ink clumps around it were anything to go by, it had once been right next to the chair, but at some point had been forcibly removed, claw marks coating the device.

"Wha.. What is this place..?" Pippen asked weakly. Her only answer was a soft growl, not hostile but not understandable either. She sighed quietly, letting her head rest on his chest as he crept towards the chair. The monster her friend had become slowly clambered into the chair, curling up like a cat with her held to him like a doll. He held her with more care than one would a common doll, the male demon curled around her protectively. She felt a bit safer despite the complicated circumstances.
She was aware of purring, the sound vibrating in his chest, oddly cat like for a devil. He was beyond pleased to have her back, his twisted memories having painted a story of his precious friend having been stolen away. Every time she had fled was because of **Henry**, it had been **Henry** who always took the kind imp away. Despite the attempts to completely blind him, he stubbornly clung to the memories of her kindness, the only kindness he had received in this horrendous place. Memories that his puppet master could not remove from him, no matter how hard he tried.

"Bendy." Pippen tried again, voice weak with pain. He purred louder, whining softly in concern at her tone. He didn't know what to do about her broken horn, which was now less a horn and more a horn base with ink bubbled down the sides. It was like a melted candle, only more painful, the majority of the ink that had once been her horn covering the left side of her face and head. If it wasn't for the pain she was clearly experiencing, he wouldn't have cared about the small change. He didn't like the idea of her being in pain, even if he constantly lived with it. There was no pleasure in this shared suffering, coming from someone who had only showed him kindness.

"Bendy." She called again, voice soft and gentle, her fingers caressing his stiff face. His smile twitched as he looked down at her, cocking his head, horns twitching wildly. There was no way for him to help her with the pain, though he had ensured she would not be hurt further. Henry didn't have his hands on her anymore, he couldn't control her anymore. They were safe. She looked up at him with such a gentle eye, despite the pain that lurked in their depths, a glimmer of amber somewhere deep in those pie cut eyes. "I'm sorry..

The ink demon paused before gently pressing his forehead to hers. For a moment, his smile stopped twitching, feeling sincere for once, his horns still. Her good eye watched him, closing for a moment, guilt written across her expression. It hadn't been her fault Henry had stolen her. The traitor had more tricks up his sleeves than anyone had realized. That was what Joey had said.

'What do you think you are doing to MY property, you impertinent little brat!' Joey's voice echoed through his head abruptly, a memory he did not remember. It felt like it had been aimed at Pippen, but that couldn't be correct. Joey liked Pippen, he had told Bendy that and had given him ideas on how to retrieve her from Henry's clutches. He had said Pippen was clever, but she needed Bendy to break her free of Henry's control. So why would he have said something like that?..?

The echo of a memory was nearly wiped away, but he clung to it, puzzling over it, before a new answer as given to him. It had been **Henry** who had said that, not Joey. He had shouted at Pippen because she touched something of his before he took her. That was what it was. There was no need for Bendy to pry deeper.

"Is he still there?" Pippen questioned softly. "Messing with your head? Do you.. even have a choice anymore?" Tears of guilt were bubbling into her good eye. "Maybe if I were stronger..

He looked down at her again, something buzzing in the back of his head, but he couldn't hear it. It was repressed, tied down and hidden by hundreds of black puppeteer stings. Despite this, it still struggled, trying to burst to the forefront of his mind once more, his head cocking as he whined at the strange sensation. She was holding her hand against his cheek, the warm appendage offering him some comfort as he leaned into her touch.

"I.. I know I'm not strong enough to beat him. Not like this. Not on my own." She murmured, half to herself, half to the real him that she hoped was still somewhere in there. Surely he was still there, given his current behavior towards her. Pippen was not going to let go of that hope easily. He rubbed his head against her cheek as she spoke, purring softly. But maybe there was something she could do. One small, wild chance.

"Maybe." She mumbled, letting her hand slip away slowly. He whined, before curling around her
once more, head resting on her shoulder. He couldn't see what she was doing, and didn't have any concern she would be doing anything. Pippen was kind, Pippen cared. She had never hurt him, not seriously. The few times he could vaguely remember it happened, he also remembered a real apology being attached to the incident. He clutched those memories to himself greedily, making it hard for any outside forces to pry it away. It was far easier to work around them, instead of tear them away and possibly upend the house of cards the control over him had become.

Pippen slowly pulled out Perci's scissors, clutching them tightly between her hands. She focused hard, straining against a feeling of wrongness as she opened the scissors, trying to enter the frame of mind her brother had described. This tool was not hers, this kind of tool had never been meant for her, and it felt wrong to be using them, like she was taking something that belonged to her brother's being and was toying with it but she needed his help. She needed her big brother's skills, his abilities, because no matter how much she tried, she couldn't do this alone.

'Perci, please.' Pippen's mind whispered, focusing on the scissors, on her brother, on all the things he could do that she could not. Everything about him, the bad and the good she had refused to see for so long, the guilt she had felt for cutting him off for so long and the pain that had fueled the decision. Her hopes for their relationship to improve, for the two of them to actually get to know one another, to be able to proudly recognize the other as their sibling. 'Please. I know this is strange, but I just need to do this once.'

She could almost swear she felt something, the warmth of a presence she instinctively recognized, one she had known for years. It felt like hands were covering her own, guiding her hands as the scissors slowly spread open, no resistance present. She could see threads, hundreds of dark threads bleeding in from all over the room to wrap around her beloved friend's form, trapping him as he was know. She could barely see a golden thread in the midst of it, knotted and bound by so many threads, constricting and choking the real being.

And they could see where the majority of the threads connected, a conjunction point where the overwhelming majority came together before moving to wrap around the demon's form. A critical weakness, so hard to see when he was in motion, when he was enraged. It wouldn't fully cut him free in one go, but it would break a hefty portion of the control over him in one go. They just needed to focus, and work together.

"We can do this." His voice whispered to her, their energies at odds with one another, but somehow managing to coexist. They could work together, despite their differences, despite the different ends of the spectrum their new type of beings existed on. It didn't matter. He was her brother, and she was his sister, and though they fought like cats and dogs and could drive one another absolutely up a wall at times, they loved each other. Even if it had taken them both this long to realize it.

A deep breath, and the scissors went forward, catching the conjunction point with the sharp edges. They sliced through the dark threads, which hissed as they were severed, snapping away back to where they had come from, the other end that was around him beginning to dissolve. They tore through threads, the scissors jerking in Pippen's hands as the dark energy from the threads tried to knock it from her physical hands. They both held on defiantly, severing a huge portion of the threads.

Bendy shrieked, though the scissors did not cut anything physical, the sound wild and feral, the demon leaping from her once the cut was complete. Pippen just barely managed to keep ahold of the scissors, flipping them back to hide them along her inner arm, holding it through one of the loops to keep it from falling away. She pulled the arm to herself, hiding the tool from Bendy,
finding it harder and harder to move. The dark threads that had been left on his end had turned to a physical dust after breaking, and had covered her when Bendy leapt away.

Her form burned as the dust's effects kicked in, pain beginning to tear through her as her body went stiff. Bendy was having a fit of some sorts, pawing wildly at his head, part of the way back to the form she had originally seen, and part of the way in his feral form. Before she could say or do anything, he scrabbled out of the room, vanishing too quickly for her to react. That is, if she could have.

She lost track of time as she struggled to move, the dust slowly absorbing into her inky form, making her body go stiff, and then limp. The scissors slipped out of her fingers at some point, sliding between her and the chair. Pippen could barely feel the cool metal as it slid down her form, good eye drooping and blurring. Her head tipped towards the doorway, unease boiling through her veins as she found her body was totally out of her command.

Slowly, she became aware of footsteps approaching her. They were too even in pace to be Bendy's, and they didn't sound heavy enough to be Henry's, or slow enough to be Jack's. Faintly, there was a soft tap echoing with each second step, a sound she recognized as a cane as it neared. No one she knew in here used a cane.

"Well, Well, Well." A cold voice rang out, unnervingly familiar, though she had never heard it spoken aloud. She had only ever heard it through Bendy. It was deeper than most who had met the man had heard, not high pitched with the false enthusiasm and friendliness he often injected into it. "Look what the demon dragged in. The source of so much trouble."

The figure that stood in the arching doorway as distinctly human, no signs of the inks 'cartoonifying' effects present on him. He was tall, somewhere in the five foot range. Toon Henry was only roughly in the four foot range, if Pippen's mental measurements were right. Dull blue eyes stared down at her with disdain and frustration, thin eyebrows curving down into a glare above them.

Joey Drew's hair was short and slicked back in typical business man fashion, a simple brown in shade. He sported a healthy peach tone to his skin despite everything he had done, no scars visible on his face. There were, however, many wrinkles, both from worry, stress, and age. He wore a nice Jacket with a green collared shirt underneath, and tan slacks. A pair of nice loafers rested on his feet, completing the business casual look.

"Now you've gone and really messed things up, imp." He intoned, voice croaking slightly with age. Without the effects of the ink, he was still at the mercy of time and the process of aging, changing his physical form and voice from that which the recordings all over the studio still replayed. "You don't think I know about you and your brother's little game? Sure, I was surprised. I didn't expect the two of you to be able to work together to this degree, to the point you could use a tool attuned to another being. I guess that's the advantage of being related by blood. Or, that is, at least half related."

He smirked a bit as she twitched, eye trying to form a glare as he purposely pressed a sore spot. If there was one thing Joey Drew knew, it was how to make people squirm. "But, back to my point. I know what you two can do. I've seen it. And I prepared. I thought I was going to catch an angel with this backup plan, but I guess an imp will do. Do you even know the full extent of what you've done?"

Joey laughed a bit as he paused, relishing the moment. "You just sent Bendy on a suicide mission. Either he will capture and maim Henry for me, killing everyone with him in the process, or Henry will put him down like the rabid dog that worthless devil really is. No matter which way
you cut it, I win. And it's all thanks to you. I couldn't cause that level of mental distress to him without risking him turning on me. We don't have the best of relationships after all. But you? You're special. The little devil likes you. I don't know why, but than again I don't understand anything to do with that train wreck. He couldn't turn on you, even after you threw him into utter turmoil by severing most of my control. But now he's out of control, and at his most powerful."

Pippen stared up at him with an eye wide with alarm, which only grew wider as he began to limp towards her. A clammy hand closed around her stomach, hands gnarled by age digging into her soft skin. She managed the slightest of grimaces, the most her limp facial muscles would allow, feeling herself be picked up like a toy. There was nothing she could do, the dusts paralytic effects still holding her tight in it's grasp.

"But that's OK. I can still make due with what I have here. You're going to help me. You and that interesting tail of yours." Joey stated, turning to walk away, cane in one hand, and Pippen dangling in the other, her head gravitated to her body still despite everything else being limp. "I can make things work. Heck, I could make it even better. All we need, is a little imagination.."

Chapter End Notes

When in doubt, blame Henry.

But now comes the bit I've been dying to do since the beginning

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"Hey Sammy! We found another one of them writing things." Oliver called, leaning out of one of the shacks. The Lost Harbor had seen a considerable upgrade with Oliver's supervision, the buildings now considerably safer and more secure. They were also more comfortable than the old, rickety shanties the Lost Ones had been using. There was, however, a shack near the back of the Harbor that had seen some interesting activity, ever since Oliver and Sammy had started improving things.

"What does it say this time?" Sammy called back. He was seated atop their shack, the one he had always used when he had lived among the Lost Ones before finding his way back to the Music Department. Oliver had quietly shuffled in, taking up a corner. He hadn't met any resistance, which he was relieved of because he didn't want to live alone in this strange place, even if the Lost Ones were being chill with him. It was more comforting to sleep to the sound of Sammy's Banjo than the distant moans and groans of any Lost One that wandered into the shack. Oliver had built a second level balcony to watch over the harbor from, something Sammy took advantage of as well.

"Uh.. Lessee. This one says, 'We're coming to help soon'. It's the neat handwriting this time, not the blocks. I watched it show up and everything, it was super weird." Oliver called back. It wasn't the first time he had seen the words write themselves onto a surface, though it had only been inside the special shack he had noticed this. "I don't get the feeling it's threatening, but maaaybe we should have a couple more of the searcher's watch this place. Just in case."

"I'll talk to them about it." Sammy answered, standing from his perch, setting his Banjo on his back. He shot another question towards Oliver as he climbed down, the thin wood allowing him to be heard. "How many messages does that make now?"

"Uh.. Like five? Let's see. There's 'HOPE' in block letters, 'Find the spark' in neat handwriting.. Uh.. 'We want to help', and 'WE SEEK A PATH'. Plus the new one, that makes five." Oliver answered, turning to Sammy as he walked out of the shack. He paced up to the taller male, Sammy gesturing for him to come along. Ever since Oliver had returned to the harbor with a broken wing, Sammy had been keeping a tight eye on him.

He had begrudgingly come to appreciate the bird, even if he was nosier than Sammy was used to, and more than happy to argue back when Sammy started a fight. Oliver never held a grudge for long however, and Sammy had never said anything that cutting to the bird, the pair arguing more like an old married couple than anything else. They argued for the sake of arguing and blow off steam. It seemed more a game to Oliver, and for some reason Sammy couldn't get as heated as he would in the past. Maybe his time as an ink monster had dulled his tongue, or made him more appreciative of the things around him. Maybe it was just Oliver's easy going nature rubbing off on him.

Sammy wasn't sure, but what he was sure of was that he wanted to strangle who had ever broken the bird's wing. Oliver had claimed he had found someone still sane enough to talk, and had been trying to convince them to join the safety of the harbor, before he was attacked by that person's companion. It had been totally unprovoked, but Oliver still wanted to extend an olive branch to the pair. It was baffling.
They walked through the reformed Harbor, nodding or trading small talk with the occasional Lost One who was in the mental condition to do so. They were all at various stages of 'finding themselves' as Oliver called it. Some had picked up hobbies, things that called to them from their previous lives. What was worrying was the pair had observed the Lost Ones who were starting to come into themselves spend more time around the ink, putting their limbs in and reaching around as if fishing for something. They always pulled away before long, since contact with that much ink when in such a vulnerable state of being was an unwise idea.

The pair of 'leaders' were uncertain how to feel about this development, and didn't know how to detour the Lost Ones from doing this. They both suspected that the Lost Ones were trying to find the missing parts of their minds, but given how dense the ink was with minds in various states, eager to pull down everything and everyone else as well.. It wasn't safe, but it didn't feel right to tell them to stop either. Oliver was hoping something good would come of it. Sammy expected it to backfire horribly.

For the most part, the harbor was quiet, partly due to the nature of the Lost Ones, and partly because they were so close to the ink machine. Or rather, the second ink machine, which Sammy could not explain. He only knew what he had seen before, and it was a larger version of the ink machine than what was present upstairs. It was so large it seemed to have multiple rooms and halls in it, though he couldn't investigate because of a moat of ink between the machine and the rest of the studio. Not that the beast which lurked within it had any worries when going through the ink.

"I saw Allison earlier." Oliver offered after a couple moments of walking. "I think I'm getting through to her. If we had her and Tom here, they'd be a lot safer, and we'd all be a lot safer too with their help."

"Or they'll break your other wing." Sammy deadpanned, not interested in adding to their numbers. Well, adding anyone who wasn't a Lost One. Lost Ones he could work with. Bumbling idiots who attack people just for discussing something with them? Not so much.

"Maybe. But I don't think it will happen. Allison looks pretty guilty over what happened. I don't think she'd let Tom do it again." Oliver offered thoughtfully. He had cussed up a storm after the limb had been broken, the volume of which had driven off both the Alice Angel clone and Boris Clone. However he kept running into them when they were scavenging, and he was trying to find clues as to Henry's and the others whereabouts. They were sane, even if they were a bit flighty, and they treated Lost Ones kindly, which was really all Oliver needed to convince him they could join the Lost Harbor. Maybe they'd be able to help the Lost Ones more than he had.

"What do you think of the writing?" Sammy questioned, changing the subject. "What do you think is coming?"

"Honestly? I don't know. Maybe it's some grand counsel of wizards who sensed all this black magic mumbo jumbo and decided to put a stop to it. Maybe it's scientist. I'm honestly not sure where this situation sits anymore. I mean, maybe this is scientifically possible and I'm just dumb, but this feels like it goes more into magic. Either way, if they didn't have good intentions, I don't think they'd tell us they were coming." Oliver offered, before continuing thoughtfully. "I wonder how long it will take. I mean, it took a couple days for those messages to show up. So maybe it will be a while before we get an answer."

"I'd rather not find out at all." Sammy muttered. There were too many variables in this mess to keep track of already, not adding any form of weird magic or science into the mix. They were in control now at least, but if they ended up with more people just inviting themselves in, he wasn't sure he could protect all of the Lost Ones. He wasn't sure if he could protect Oliver.
"Well, we can only hope it's something good, and beat the tar out of it if it's not." Oliver declared, Sammy smirking a bit at that. At least he could always count on Oliver being direct. There was no wishy-washy manipulation like he had to put up with from Drew for years.

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"Alright. I think we're done." Henry murmured, removing his pen.

"Are we?" A deep, raspy voice asked, echoing from a speaker on The Projectionist's chest. Norman was sitting upright now, his body reformed to be more evenly distributed, especially on his neck and arms. The projection machine atop is shoulders did not feel as heavy anymore, his light more flexible as well, allowing for more expression despite his lack of a normal face.

He had slowly come back into his right mind as Henry had worked, memories slowly trickling back to the forefront of his mind. Some of the hadn't helped with the anger burning through him, but he hadn't stopped pulling up memories, because there were good memories there. Despite being some what distant, he had good experiences with some of his former workers. He had memories of Henry, of Jack, of Wally and even Grant, though the accountant was more elusive than even him. He remembered worrying about Henry after his friend had been drafted, exchanging jokes and gossip with Wally, complaining about Sammy and Joey with Jack. Good times.

"Yeah. That is, unless something still feels uncomfortable?" Henry questioned, still crouching by his old friend. The projectionist was still taller than all of them, at least a head taller, nearly human sized. It seemed fitting, given he had always been taller than everyone else in the building. Despite the projector head, something Henry found he couldn't change because of unconscious resistance from Norman, he had been thoroughly humanized.

His skin was dark, darker than Lacies', like it had been when he was human. It wasn't as dark as the ink, but significantly darker than Henry's, Jack's, and Grant's. A nice plaid shirt with rolled up sleeves covered his broad chest and heavy set arms, muscle mass built up from years of dealing with heavy machinery. The speaker that had been set into his inky form's abdomen had been moved up to sit on his chest, his voice coming from it with only the faintest of crackles. He wore a pair of nice slacks, a couple grease stains present here and there from his habit of working with machines, a pair of solid boots beneath them.

The projection box that had become his head had been cleaned up and patched up, and the weight reduced without hampering it's performance, the light flickering from within with more strength. He could fluctuate the strength of the light, and it turned out he could project imagery as well, depending on how well he could remember them. The excess wires sprouting from the back of his machine head, was braided to make it easier on him, the braid keeping it from dragging against the ground or catching around his legs.

"Outside of my projector head and speaker chest? Everything feels good." Norman answered, a laugh escaping him as Henry gave him a sympathetic look.

"Sorry about that. I don't know why, but when I tried to change them, they wouldn't. It felt like I was pushing you beyond your limits.." Henry admitted.

"Maybe I'm just meant to have a projector with me all the time. Just like old times." The Projectionist laughed, trying to stay positive. He wasn't sure why he had resisted Henry. Maybe it was because he couldn't remember his own face, and feared what Henry would draw, in spite of the fact he knew Henry was too kind to do something cruel. It just felt like it was part of him now,
"Maybe. I have another friend who could try helping you too, if you want, once we find her again." Henry offered, holding his hand out to Norman. The former animator helped the projectionist up, the taller man slowly standing with his help. In part, it felt strange to be consciously aware of his projector head, given he had so many years of memories with a human head. At the same time it felt normal, since he had years of carrying this weight on his shoulders.

"The one that got taken." Norman's voice held a thread of guilt in it, though he recognized the fact there wasn't much he could have done about the situation. He hadn't been in his right mind during the fight, so it wasn't entirely his fault it had happened.. but it indirectly was.

"Yeah. But.. I have a feeling she's OK. Pippen is smart." Henry murmured reassuringly, hearing the slight guilt in his tone. "And I'm sure she won't hold what happened against you. It had been her idea to help you, after all."

"You tried before, didn't you? I remember.. there was a fight with that thing Joey made. I was messed up something bad. And then you were there, with the little Bendy look alike." Norman rumbled thoughtfully, his machine head chugging lightly with thought. "Everything before now is such a blur."

"We did." Henry agreed. Somewhere behind him, he heard Wally cheer from the other room, successfully rerouting the power. That meant Lacie and Wally would be returning soon. Jack and the other's had been watching the ink from the stairs, leaving Henry and Brutis on top of the stairs while Henry worked. The heavy set wolf was sniffing towards Norman curiously, tail giving a friendly wag.

"Thanks for giving me a second chance." Norman rumbled, giving a friendly nod towards Brutis.

"This is an interesting crew you're running around with now. Or rather we're running with. Are those three really the butcher gang? The three you ma-"

"Yes." Henry quickly cut him off, wary of Charley's proximity. The leprechaun appeared to be in the middle of discussing something with the other two, fighting plans from the sounds of things but.. Charley was a clever being, and was more than able to multi task. Henry wouldn't put it past him to listen in on them even while holding a conversation. He still hadn't broken the 'creator' news to them, partly out of fear of their response, and partly because he wasn't sure how to tell them. Had he created them? Or had he tapped into the universe somehow and been inspired by the beings of another world? How did cartoon beings existences work? There was writing everywhere about creators, but the beings of the studio were not the most reliable narrators..

"I don't know how it all works, but apparently they weren't made by the ink machine, not entirely. They existed in a separate world from our own before Joey's machine dragged them over here and.. mauled them." Henry paused, not worried that Norman wouldn't pick up on why he had stopped him from mentioning Henry's part in their creation. Norman was a smart man, and was more than capable of putting things together and then some.

"That raises some.. complex questions." Norman mused, Henry sighing a bit in relief. He knew he could count on Norman. "Questions we don't have the time to work out the answers to, even if we could ever fully answer it. I just have one question though. That thing Joey made... Is it..?"

"Bendy?" Henry prompted, the projectionist nodding. "Yes. He.. He was Joey's first attempt. He's been controlling Bendy for a while now, and not just through normal manipulation. At least, not anymore." He was going off of what Pippen had told him, and though she was possibly more biased given her sympathies leaned towards Bendy. He didn't doubt her, however, given Joey's
Norman shook his head in disappointment. "That's a d*** shame. Joey really can't help make things worse for everyone, can he?" His curse words were replaced with static instead of a funny noise like the others, which seemed fitting given his mode of talking. "We've tussled more times than just the one time you saw. I get the feeling Joey's been sending him after me. Never did like the fact I caught onto the more depraved things he was doing and nearly escaped."

"I'm sorry, Norman." Henry murmured after a moment, eyes dimming with sadness for his fellow worker. "I wish you had escaped. Maybe than Joey wouldn't have been able to do all of this."

"I wish so, too, Henry." Norman sighed. He glanced to the stairs, seeing Wally and Lacie were making their way up, following Grant. Wally approached Norman confidently, slapping a hand onto his back.

"Hey Polk. Good to see you're in your right mind again." He greeted cheerfully. Norman's light burned a little brighter, a chuckle escaping him.

"It's good to see you too, Wally. At least Joey didn't get ahold of you." Norman hummed.

"Oh no, he did. I spent the past who knows how long hanging out in poor Edgar's head." He gestured to the spider, who looked up at his name. "But Henry and Pippen sorted things out, and now I'm back, and I'm ready to punch Joey senseless."

"That is an idea I can get behind." Norman rumbled, cracking his knuckles. "I think Joey is overdue a bit of karmic retribution."

"Yeah, that's what I'm t'inking too." Wally agreed. "Anyways, I got that Haunted House opened up now, we best get over there before something short circuits and the door shuts again."

"Sounds like a plan." Henry turned to the rest of the group. The butcher gang was lumped together, with Brutis, Lacie and Grant off to the side from them. He caught their attention, gesturing back the way they had gone. "Let's go. Wally says the path is clear."

"One step closer to Joey.." Lacie growled, starting forward. Grant and Brutis followed her, with the Butch Gang taking up the rear. It wasn't a position Henry was happy with them being in, given they were prone to mischief and less than stellar activities, but he wasn't going to call them out and start a scene. He could only hope the inherent danger of the studio would keep them in line.

They made their way back out to the main storage room, the wide doors of the haunted house open now. Inside there was a cart, a simple two person thing made of sepia toned metal with a bendy smile and pie cut eyes painted on the front. The inside of the haunted house had a curving sealing, fake brickwork making up the walls. There was a splatter of ink on the wall directly in front of them, the words 'TURN BACK' written in sloppy letters.

The only lighting present were from lanterns hanging from the ceiling at odd intervals. A pair of heavy double wooden doors blocked the rest of the path from view, an elaborate skull painted in the middle to add to the 'spooky' effect. A fake deep laugh played as they walked into the structure, Edgar shuffling with unease while the other gang members rolled their eyes. There was a second splatter of ink, whatever had created it seeming to have knocked the other carts over in the process. It coated a fuse box, the part dented in, Wally clucking his tongue.

"We're lucky this still opened with that messed up like that. Anyway, those other doors ain't a
"Problem." Wally muttered, before switching to reassurance. "You can just push'em out of the way. I take it you know which of the maintenance tunnels you looking for in here, Henry?"

"Yeah." Henry murmured, pushing on the double doors. They opened with a slight creek, revealing more of the haunted house. Some of the fake bricks had been painted black to give the illusion of holes, 'scary' gold eyes glaring out from within the false depths. The curving path consisted of a track in the center, with decorations on the side. Barrels, cages, fake graves and the like lined the sides intermittently, with the occasional fake archways on the walls leading to scary scenes set up to unnerve riders.

Little spring loaded ghosts and ghouls would pop up from behind the graves when they walked by them, startling the group the first time, but rapidly losing their effect. Edgar was the most effected, forcing a brave face as they walked along the tracks, glaring at the simple effects after they made him jump. Speakers were carefully hidden along the support archways, currently playing ambient sounds meant for the ride.

The trail of ink, which had started at the fuse box and passed the double doors, stopped abruptly by the second jump scare grave. Then the trail became more wild, bounding in random directions as if the creator of it had been truly frightened, before vanishing into a puddle of ink they came across further down the path. Charley chuckled a bit, earning a look from the other's.

"And here I thought Bendy had become something to fear. But he's still the same scaredy cat as before." Charley muttered to the other butcher gang members. The rest of the group could hear him, but didn't speak up. There was no point in starting an argument to defend someone most of them were honestly relieved to see a sign of weakness in. The only concern was the newer members of the group underestimating Bendy to much, having not seen him in full yet. Only Brutis, Jack, and Henry had, and they knew better than to underestimate him. The others would learn soon enough..

The path twisted and curved, taking them pass empty archways with no scenes in them, just empty faux hallways. Gravestones grew more scarce as they curved this way and that along the path, eventually reaching a second set of wooden doors, just like the first. This led to a curve and a third set of doors. From there, it deposited them into a large room, better lit than the cramped halls they had previously traversed.

Barrels, boxes, and sandbags were stacked along the center area of the room, which was designed to appear similar to some form of old mansion, with fake boarded up windows and eerie paintings with flickering eyes. The fancy wallpaper was torn in places, revealing decrepit looking wood beneath it, and candles were present on the walls all over, though the most light came from a fancy chandelier in the center of the room. There were even extra carts for the ride taking up space that was clearly meant for a haunted scene, a single nice couch sitting among the clutter as the only set piece actually meant to be there.

"Alright, we can cut across here." Henry instructed, turning left to step off the tracks and onto the tiled flooring where a haunted scene was meant to be. "The maintenance tunnel we need is just beyond the next set of doors." He started pass another miniature ink machine, trying not to look at the rectangular box for too long. It brought back memories of desperately constructing pipes to beat back a feral, unreasonable Boris, who had been twisted into an undead, swollen nightmare in almost all of the loops he had undergone. Even in the ones where that was not his fate, the poor loyal canine never lasted for long.

As they cut across the room, Brutis paused, ears pricked, stopping dead in his tracks. Grant's grunt as he smacked into the wolf caught Henry's attention, the man wearily turning to eye the
wolf. He was staring at the room, eyes unreadable, but his ears were twitching wildly.

"Brutis?" Henry called softly. An ear flicked towards him, but Brutis seemed hesitant to look at him. "Buddy?"

Brutis looked at him, long and hard, a whine building in his throat. The only being Henry had ever called Buddy in this place was the Boris who had always accompanied him from the safe house, only to fall into Alice's clutches because Henry always failed to protect him. Henry hesitantly took a step towards him, hand reaching up to him. Brutis was so alike yet so different from the Buddy he had known, and had been forced to defeat so many times in this wretched attraction.

The wolf shoved his snout into Henry's hand, looking up at him with big, glowing eyes. He was undead, even now, as that was the state Pippen and Perci had found him in. But they had changed him, and in better ways that Alice had ever done. Perci had shown him kindness even after he had been transformed, and Pippen had given him greater bodily autonomy than he had before. Buddy was no longer Buddy, but Brutis, his own individual being who had grown into a unique wolf, no longer a clone among a hundred clones.

"I'm sorry." Henry murmured, Brutis nodding. The memories were faint and distant, but he remembered the safe house. He remembered Henry. He remembered doing so many things, so many iterations of the same path over and over, never understanding what drove Henry, never remembering the past iteration. He remembered dying here, so many times, unable to control himself as commands rained down from a furious, twisted angel to end Henry. Those miserable, guilty eyes that stared down at him every time. Henry had never wanted to hurt him, but the instinct to survive was such a powerful thing. Brutis knew it well. He didn't hold it against Henry.

"What the h*** are you two on about?" Charley cut in, staring at the pair with a raised brow. Barley's arms were crossed, as per usual, and he seemed to be paying more attention to their surroundings than the pairs odd behavior. Edgar was staring, head cocked in open confusion, sharing uncertain looks with Wally.

Henry began to open his mouth to explain, before Brutis abruptly stood up, ears pricked. He growled, a deep, warning sound that rumbled in his chest and set the rabbits to shuffling around uneasily in their box home. He shoved the box into Jack's hands, turning to face the path they had come from, fur bristling. Faintly, the sound of liquid could be heard, an eerie slow rumble, trickling surge that was slowly growing louder as it neared. Already, thin veins of ink were appearing on the walls and ground, originating from the path they had come from.

"What?-!" Henry gasped, horrified. "I don't understand, he never- He would never come in here before-!" He quickly wheeled around to the group, who were in varying states of panic and fear, except Charley and Barley, who were both putting on a tough face. He could see the unease lurking in their eyes however, all of them sensing the immense danger approaching them. They needed time.

"Wally." Henry called, the janitor jumping at his name. "I need you to take everyone ahead. Through the other doors, there's a maintenance tunnel, it was labeled 5B. The signs barely hanging but it's still there. Take them down that path. The Ink Demon is unlikely to follow you down the tunnel unless he see's you taking it, it's too narrow for his tastes from what I've been told. Look for the nearest break room. The door is heavier set than before, but it's still there. Look for a woman name Allison, and a Boris clone named Tom. They're the last two people I was hoping to get to join the group. It will take some convincing, but they're worthwhile allies. I don't think they will remember me, what with the loops, but they're worth trying for. Tom is difficult, but he's a good
"What about you?" Wally demanded.

"I'm going to hold the Ink Demon off as long as I can to buy you all time. You all keep saying I'm one of his top targets. And you're right. I'm not going to endanger your lives by keeping you in a position where you could be hurt while he's trying to get me." Henry answered. The gurgling, sloshing sound of ink was growing louder, the ink veins growing thicker as the Ink Demon rapidly closed in. He was moving fast, likely due to his feral form, which meant they did not have time to argue. "You need to go!"

"I- " Wally was hesitating, but Brutis was already moving, shoving Jack and Grant through the next doors. Norman was caught in between the pair as Brutis shoved them through, stumbling in after them and taking a moment to pick himself up again. Brutis then picked up Lacie, who was putting up a fight, as well as Wally, quickly turning to the door again. The wolf had no intention of leaving Henry behind, intending to force everyone out of the room first so there would be less people in Bendy's immediate path of destruction. He shoved through the double doors, dropping the humans and turning to force them open, only to find them immovable.

The inky veins had extended over the double doors, sealing it shut and making it impossible for the Butcher gang, who had been trailing behind Brutis, to go through, or Brutis to open the door. Charley pounded furiously at the door, not eager to join Henry's stupid mission, and he wasn't eager to put his boys between a demon and it's target either, but it seemed fate had made a different decision for them. He slowly stopped as the sound grew louder and louder, turning towards the other doors, the doors they had come from, raising his fists.

"Alright boys, looks like we're in the thick of this." He grunted, shifting to a fighting stance. Charley didn't particularly like getting his hands dirty, he preferred leaving that to others, but he was no pushover when it came to a fight. He would go down swinging long before he would go down cowering in fear.

Barley growled, shoving his sleeves up and cracking his knuckles, ready for a brawl. Edgar looked less certain, but put on a brave look, holding up his front limbs and waving them in a vaguely threatening manner. He wasn't the best when it came to fights, but he would give it his all!

"Just, try to stay back." Henry warned, turning towards the door they had come through. "Hide. If we can, we'll get the jump on him. I'll see if I can do something than.." Maybe, just maybe, if Henry made contact with his pen.. Pippen had not been able to overcome Joey, but Henry was used to butting heads with his former boss. Maybe he stood a chance of freeing the devil. It was just a matter of actually getting into contact with him without being torn apart.

The gang obeyed him, taking up hiding spots on the far side of the room opposite where the beast was approaching from. Barley hid behind a Barrel, fists tight and ready, while Edgar and Charley hid behind a box, the young spider's legs trembling fear. Charley's eyes were desperately scanning the room for a weapon, but found nothing other than a distant can of soup, too far away to risk running to at the moment.

Seconds later, the double doors slammed open, a half feral Bendy launching through. His ink was bubbling wildly over his face, constantly pouring down without running out, ink rapidly flicking off of his tail. One of his back legs had returned to the club foot his bipedal form sported, his chest and stomach slightly expanded back towards the original state they had been in. Slightly less unnerving than the feral state, but still unnerving. He appeared to be caught somewhere between feral and bipedal, alternating between standing on his legs, and on all fours, seemingly unable to settle on one idea. His movements were wild, rasping breaths escaping him as he began
to force his way around the room, aggressively shoving barrels and boxes.

The added height of the once short devil, as well as his feral, aggressive state was severely unnerving to the butcher gang, who had not fully taken the warnings to heart. They hadn't believed that Bendy, short, mischievous, scaredy-cat Bendy, could have become a real monster. But there he was, a tall, gangly being, all bone and angles beneath a hide of ink, acting with a wild aggression unlike anything they had ever seen from him, even at his maddest. There was no finesse, no careful cleverness to his choice of actions as there had been in the original Bendy, only a maddened beast.

The Ink Demon leapt onto the couch, bringing him unnervingly close to the gang, and taking him just past Henry. The demon missed him by seconds, Henry sliding to hide on the other side of the barrel he was hiding behind. It hissed and snarled, aware that he was not alone, knowing he was on the trail of something, but too unstable to focus on following a trail. He was still uncomfortably close to Barley, whose legs were trembling with horror, the defiant glare wiped from his face as the demon leaned dangerously close to the barrel he hid behind.

It was now or never, Henry decided. If he didn't act now, Barley would likely be discovered in mere moments, and he would not stand a chance against those claws. The former animator quickly rounded the barrel once more, running up to Bendy and leaping onto his back. It was an uncomfortable landing, thanks to the extended spines on the demons back, but Henry held on, Pen at the ready as he tried to press it into the demon.

The demon shrieked, bucking wildly beneath him, Henry struggling to hold on. The butcher gang abruptly erupted from their hiding spots, seeing their only chance of survival lie with Henry and his magic pen. If Henry was taken down, then they were on their own with a beast that knew no mercy.

Barley grabbed the demon's face, socking him in the jaw to try and stun him, only to be batted away by the gloved clawed hand. The cuts he received weren't as serious as the ones he would have gotten from the uncovered hand, but they still stung, his chest burning with pain.

Edgar grabbed Bendy's back leg, the stumpy one, trying to unbalance the beast and take him down, though his strength did little to sway the demon. Charley was there seconds later, a well aimed blow to the back of the knee helping see Edgar's goal come to fruition. The demon collapsed, partially pinning Henry beneath him, his legs lashing out and catching the other two gang members, sending them flying into a pile of sandbags. The stack of bags, destabilized, collapsed onto the pair, momentarily pinning them.

The ink demon was scrabbling furiously, equal parts in an attempt to get up, and maul Henry, who was narrowly dodging those wicked claws. It was a loosing battle however, Henry unable to keep the demon still for long, his pen constantly knocked away from by those lurching limbs. Finally, frustration got the better of him, and he yelled, despite knowing Bendy would never hear him. Joey would never allow it.

"STOP! JUST STOP!" He shouted, his voice wild and desperate. Not only was he going to be mauled by his own creation, but with the way things were going he was going to watch that creation destroy three more beings he had helped to create. The ink demon jerked at the sound, Henry not noticing at first. "PLEASE. JUST. Stop."

He stopped. Henry blinked in confusion, both of them panting in exhaustion. The demon's horns were twitching wildly, leaning back towards him as if trying to hear more, a feeling of shock surrounding the demon. Henry didn't hesitate, pressing the his pen into the being's chest, the only spot he could reach given his awkward position beneath the other.
Henry's mind was assaulted by pain and confusion the moment he made contact, the thoughts wild and frantic. His voice had triggered something, he had been heard, and something buried deep inside was forcing itself forward, the demon breathing hard in shock and confusion as he was assaulted by memories. They were blurry and old, like childhood memories, dim but cherished in spite of how easily they were forgotten, only to be brought back by the most unexpected things—

"I think I'll name you.. Bendy" It was the voice again, male, strong and friendly. It had been a constant companion ever since he had started to become aware of himself. First, he had been a nebulous concept, just floating in the ether, barely aware of himself or anything else, drifting in a dream like state. Then, he remembered hearing the scratch of a pen, awareness dawning more. He was more amorphous than, and had gone through many phases, until a sense of rightness hit them both.

He had a head now, a nice round head with a crescent dip at to top, two horns created from that dip. They were seamlessly part of his head, but he could move them around a bit in response to his emotions. Two perfect pie cut eyes and a cheerful grin atop a moon white face. It was so strange seeing things, even if he existed in a white void at the moment. His body was a nice shape, rounder near the bottom than the top, a sort of teardrop but not too dramatic, topped with a nice white bow.

On the upper portion of his body, he had two arms, ending in perfectly formed white gloves, and at the end were two legs with feet covered in shiny tap shoes. He tested the shoes, finding he quite liked the sound they made, and the feeling of dancing. His tail helped him balance, a nice tail that curved behind him and ended in a cute spade. And he liked it all. It felt right, it felt comfortable, and he felt surrounded by love, love of the being that had helped bring him find his form.

Then there was a house. He had been to busy experimenting with his new body to notice it being drawn, but once he noticed the concept art that materialized in his space, he instantly loved it. It was comfortable, and perfectly sized for him, with everything in reach, even if he had to extend his arms a bit here and there. He remembered that warm, friendly voice, musing on what kind of being he would be. Musing on what he would do, on his habits. It was always so warm and positive about him, a degree of joviality to it as they realized he would be a mischievous soul.

He knew he was Bendy. Bendy the Darling Devil. And he was loved.

And then one day, if it had even been a day (had time had a meaning then?), he wasn't in the white void anymore. He was near a grassy plain, his house nearby, and in the distance was a wolf playing on a clarinet to his herd of sheep. There was something about them that sparked his interest, so the devil went to investigate. The precious memories of the love he had been surrounded by as he came to be slipped to his subconscious, not forgotten but instead forming the basis for a healthy, happy devil, who had gone on to explore the world he had joined, make friends, make enemies, and just have fun.

That voice was his creator. A creator that had loved him, had wanted the best for him. Had given him the tools to survive, the wit to thrive, and unhesitating love. There was no requirements to it, he had been loved just for being himself, the darling devil who was given his form by Henry Stein. The man he had been convinced to kill had been the one who had only ever wanted the best
for him, right from the start. And this was how he had rewarded that love.

A hiccuping sound escaped the demon, his body still. Inky tears were pouring from his eyes, barely distinctive from the ink already pouring down his face. Henry could feel another sob bubbling out of the being, his pen still pressed to his chest. He had felt the memory explode to the forefront once more, no longer bound behind Joey's tricks, his voice the catalyst to reveal the truth. Joey had to have known. That's why he had hidden Henry's voice. He had to have known the connection between a creator and their creation.

Another choked sob escaped Bendy, who shook in Henry's arms, the strong limbs wrapped around him, stopping him from fleeing in shame. He was steadily tearing apart what little control Joey had left over the devil, tearing it apart and ensuring Joey would never confuse the little devil’s memories ever again, drawing mental wards to protect him.

Sobs were bubbling freely from Bendy now, who couldn't understand why Henry was helping him. Why was he trying to protect him? After everything he had done! He had been an absolute idiot to believe Joey, to believe the connections he had wanted to form between them were for his own safety and would never be abused. He had tried to murder Henry for years, all on blind belief from a man he had never fully trusted to begin with, but had seen no alternative to.

"Why?" He choked out around stiff lips. He could feel them loosening, a familiar sensation of warmth working through him. It was like his first memories, and the brief warmth he had felt when Pippen had made contact with him, before Joey had interfered. "After every't'ing I've done. Y-You created me but I tried to- Why are you trying to help-"

"Becuase I know that wasn't your fault. I know Joey's been playing you for a fool as much as everyone else in this building." Henry muttered, eyes tired but warm. He had managed to shift them around so he was sitting up more, pen darting over the shivering form. Tired, warm eyes looked down on the shivering demon, shimmering with a relief unlike any the devil had ever witnessed. And there was love, like a father looking down on their long lost child. "And because I love you, you silly devil. I always knew there was still good in you. I never stopped believing in that."

More tears burst from the devil, who was slowly shrinking as Henry worked. His chest lost it's bony appearance, his arms once more soft and flexible, both gloves neat and warm on his hands. He clutched Henry's lap, feeling the painful spines retreat into his body, the pain fading as his body returned to what it had once been, so long ago, before the hunger for fame and acclaim lead to him being dragged to this world. For the first time, his body did not ache, his body feeling right, proportioned correctly and even. Ink no longer dripped uncontrollably from him, his form solid and proper once more. He was Bendy, the Darling Devil, as he had always been.

"There." Henry murmured, wiping a tear from one of Bendy's eyes. He was always such an openly emotional character, but Henry had never imagined he would actually meet the little devil when he had created him. He had never even realized such a simple act in his world had such a major impact in another. He rested his hands on Bendy, warm and comforting, holding the crying devil close. He pet him between the horns, somehow intuitively knowing the gesture would comfort the devil. "All better. Now you're back to how you were meant to be. Does everything feel alright to you?"

"Y-Y-Yeah." Bendy's voice was considerably more high pitched than his taller form's voice, but it was still distinctly male. He sounded just like Henry had always imagined. The devil was clutching his shirt, still reeling from the shock of having everything he thought he knew upended. Henry pulled him close, letting the devil work through his emotions, feeling rubberhose arms wrap around his chest as the being curled into him.
This was already a distinct difference between Henry and Joey. Joey would have been disgusted by Bendy's display of emotions, would have berated him for being upset, for crying, for being distracted from the things Joey wanted him to focus on. Henry didn't. Henry was patient, waiting for him to calm at his own pace, and work through everything that had happened.

"What does he mean by, you're his 'creator'." Charley's voice cut in after several minutes of quiet, the only sound Bendy's slowly calming sobs. The devil was smaller than the former animator, but roughly the same height as Barley, when he stood, meaning Charley had always stood higher than him. The leprechaun had unburied himself and Edgar, the pair staring at the renewed devil. Barley had managed to drag himself back to the group, ignoring the gouges on his chest.

"I.. Well I guess I have more to explain, huh?" Henry muttered, laughing weakly. "I told you I worked her as an animator.. and I also designed several characters for the franchise. Bendy, Boris, Alice.. and you three. Or at least, I helped with your early designs." He paused, uncertain how they would respond. The ink veins were slowly retreating, now that their master was gone, but the other door had yet to be unblocked.

"That-" Edgar stared at him, mouth agape. He had though Henry's voice, his presence, had felt familiar, like he had encountered it at one point.. but it hadn't left as deep an impact on him as it had Bendy, who had been solely created by Henry.

"That's why I recognized your voice." Charley muttered. "You.. You are our creator. Or, as you said, you are partially our creator." He shifted away a bit, uncertain how to feel about having more than one creator. Did that make him any less cared for than Bendy, the simpleton of a devil?

"Yeah. I.. It was before I was drafted. I had the early drafts together for your designs but.. someone else finalized them for me." Henry admitted weakly. "They didn't change much, actually. I don't know if they wanted to keep all of my designs the way I had made them before I left, or what.."

"Does that make you my dad?" Edgar questioned, eyes big. He had always looked up to Charley as his father, given he was the closest to a father figure he had ever had, and Barley he had always seen as a big brother.

"I'm.. not sure?" Henry admitted. "I mean. If that's how you want to view me, I guess it fits. I won't force you too. I don't want to make you uncomfortable. I'm.. still really new to this whole concept as well. I don't think anyone of our world knows we have such an impact on yours."

"You can be dad #2!" Edgar declared after a moment of thought. "Charley is like Dad #1, and he was there first, and he likes to be #1, so he's number one."

"I can live with that." Henry chuckled, Charley standing up a bit taller with pride in response to Edgar's loyalty. The fact he preferred Charley to their 'creator' felt good, especially since they had a longer running history. "Really, I'd rather you four define it how you feel comfortable. I.. I don't want to force anything on you. You've all already been forced through so much."

The group fell silent, Charley and Barley appearing to be in thought, which was rare for Barley but common for Charley. They would need more time than Edgar to work through things, and if they would ever did decide if Henry would be something special to them, given his part in their existence. Henry wasn't going to push them either way. He only hoped they wouldn't loathe him for the circumstances beyond his control.

"Can.. I call you dad?" Bendy whispered softly, so soft only Henry could hear him. The man
looked down at him in surprise, before his face expression softened.

"If that's what you want." Henry murmured, petting him between the horns again, big pie eyes staring up at him. Vulnerable, nervous eyes, slowly growing comfortable with him. "Like I said, I love you. I love all the characters I've made, no matter what they are like." He added the last part a bit louder, wanting the other three to know they weren't a separate matter because they were 'bad guys'.

The second double doors abruptly swung open, Brutis having been pounding away and charging the door over and over throughout the entire situation. Now that the veins of ink had fully retreated, he made his way through easily, nearly running into the other wall before skidding to a stop. The rest of the group rapidly appeared, all of them peering out in shock at the reformed Bendy.

"Well. This ain't what I was expecting to see, if I was honest." Wally offered.

Chapter End Notes

I've legit been sitting on this part with Bendy for so long and im so happy we are finally hereeeeee / (⁎˃︿˂*) \
Chapter 21

At some point, during his sulking on the bed within his cage, Perci had discovered a message, written in a familiar neat print. It was written on the wall his bed was pressed against, low enough that it would be hidden unless you were right on the bed. 'Use your halo' it read, though Perci hadn't the slightest idea what that meant. He had already been toying with his ability to dim and brighten the object at will, but he had gleaned nothing of use from that. Why would the mystery message tell him this?

Perci grumbled as he fiddled with his halo, holding the glowing ring between his hands. He couldn't help but notice the difference between his and Allison's halo, which was a dull metal band that neither glowed nor floated. Instead, it simply rested on her head, helping to hold back longer strands of hair. It seemed as good a use as any for the ring, given Halos didn't really do much else other than glow and float, as far as he knew.

His halo was warm and solid, despite it's ethereal glow. He peered through the ring lazily, jumping as he saw stars through it. Not proper stars, but drawn stars, glowing lightly with the same color and shade as his halo. Where ever his halo was positioned, he could see the stars through the loop, but moving them away rendered them hidden once more. His scissors showed him the bonds between people, and, if he tried hard enough, the connections between machines, though to a far lesser degree than the detail he could glean about people. It seemed his halo could also show him secrets, but of another kind.

The young male tried to not make to much of a fuss over the matter, trying to keep Allison's attention off of him as he slowly moved his halo around to analyze the room. Over his head, in blocky letters, was the message 'FIND HER IN THE VAULT'. Beside his bed was another message, over the first. 'Be swift when time comes.' How would he know what time the message meant?

As he scanned the room, he found more drawings, mostly of stars. He missed the stars, he missed the sky, the wide open, endless blue. It made his heart ache with want, no longer certain how long he had been in this accursed mess of a studio. He just knew that it felt like he had been here forever, even though it was nowhere near as long as Henry had been here. How had the man kept going after the first year? The fifth? Was that to be their fate too? Spending years looping through countless iterations of the same terrifying circumstances?

'If Joey gains control, you are lost' Read a new message. It was on the wall beside the boarded doorway, seemingly an answer to his question. Joey had been the one perpetuating the loops. That was what Henry had told them each time. It was Joey who mocked Henry at the end of every loop, it was Joey who sent Henry back to the beginning. But now, because of his sister, himself, and his cousin, things were no longer in Joey's command. There was hope now, and they could fully wrest control from him and do what was right!

He slowly let go of his halo, the object bobbing back to it's usual orbit over his head. He wondered who it was who was writing these messages, and not for the first time. They were cryptic in some cases, and always short, but also always seemed geared towards helping Henry, himself, and Pippen when they needed guidance the most. Was it possible for them to have some form of guardian angel, trying to help them escape this wretched place? Could an angel even have an angel watching over them? The though made him huff a weak laugh, too soft to make Allison pay attention to him. Whoever they were, he hoped they knew what they were talking about.
"Perci? Perci?!" Allison called, leaning into the boards between their part of the room and his, staring at the shorter angel. His eyes were half open but glowing gold, his halo glowing brighter. He had been like this for several minutes, and it had confused Allison when it started, but now it was unnerving her. She had never seen anything like it, and it had just started out of nowhere.

Perci had been staring at a wall to avoid looking at her, given he was still upset with her keeping him trapped, justifiably in her opinion. Than his halo had started glowing brighter, a look of surprise crossing his face. It had intensified to a sharp focus seconds later, determination flaring in his eyes as they drifted half shut, his mind seemingly somewhere else. And then he had gone completely still.

His eyes snapped open, flaring gold for a moment, Allison taking an uneasy step back. She stared at him, watching as the gold faded, the other angel turning to her with a determined look. He spoke, though she was surprised by what he stated, expecting an explanation on what had just happened. "I need out of here, now. Either we do this peacefully, or I'm forcing my way out."

"What- Wait- What just happened?" Allison demanded, reeling with confusion. "Y-You know what Tom sai-

She fell silent as Perci pulled a scythe from behind him, her eyes widening as the tall item appeared. It was still in the same condition Perci had found it, the pocket dimension all cartoon items went into having protected it. She stepped back, shaking her head, jaw dropping as she struggled to find something to say. How long had he had that?!

"Move. I don't want to hurt you, Allison." He ordered, swiping his scythe forward. The boards split under the blow, easily breaking apart under the brunt force of the large weapon. Allison skittered back, pulling the short sword she used when out scavenging out from under her bed. Perci held his scythe in front of him, ready to block her if she attacked, finally stepping out of his cage.

He could see the space to the left of the immediate room was a small, rectangular space, two beds set up for the pair to sleep on, as well as more storage. Perci had guessed as much, after the amount of time he had spent here, and the way the sound had traveled in the room. There was no other door except the one he had watched the pair go in and out of so many times, leaving Allison cornered as Perci slowly slid towards the door, the woman moving in step with him to keep the same amount of space between them as they currently maintained. Too wide for either to strike without moving closer, even with the scythe's longer reach.

"I have to go. My sister needs me, and I know she's in danger, without a doubt." Perci stated as they slowly circled the room. "You two need to make up your minds. You aren't going to survive for long alone. Not with the rate the ink beasts are closing in on you. Not with how often Tom gets injured."

Allison blinked in surprise, staring at him. They had never spoken on any of this when Perci was awake, only when they thought he was asleep. How long had this angel been spying on them? How much had he heard? She struggled for answer, shaking her head. "You don't understand. Change down here is a bad thing, Perci. It's lead to more misery..

"Well never changing is just as bad!" Perci snapped, back to the door. "If you never change it only leads to the suffering of yourself, and those around you. You have to adapt, even when it feels unfair or frightening. That's life. It's painful and it sucks, but that's how it is. And this place is
changing, whether the two of you want to recognize it or not. You've reached a critical point, Allison. Either you two adapt, or risk being left behind."

He paused, softening his tone, sympathy bleeding through. He understood what it felt like to believe you could trust no one else, and how hard it was to get out of that line of thought once you entered it. "You have to depend on others. This place is becoming more challenging than what two people alone can take. Either join Oliver and the protection he can offer, or Henry and the others. Both groups will protect you, and you both will have so many more eyes watching your backs. You don't have to keep doing this alone."

Allison was silent, eyes thoughtful. She spoke as he took the risk and turned his back on her, opening the door. "Wait! Where are you going to go? You just said yourself there's safety in numbers..."

"I'm going to find my sister." Perci answered calmly. "And to start, I'm going too Oliver. I know for a fact he will help me." He paused. "I won't tell him about the cage, or about anything you or Tom have said. I won't say anything that will effect your chances of being accepted into either group. People who still have their minds down here need to ban together. If we don't, this place will consume us again."

Allison paused at his words. Again? Perci had claimed to come from above, but this statement would suggest he spent some time in the ink, just as she and Tom had. Than again, had she really expected him to tell her everything after she had held him prisoner? She wished things could have gone differently, that she could have convinced Tom to let the boy out..

Perci took off down the hallway outside the safe house. This hallway was a rough hewn tunnel of dirt, with wooden supports added here and there. There was a section or two where an attempt to put up proper walling was made, before eventually being abandoned. Barrels, sandbags, rope, and boxes lined the hall in clumps, pressed close to the sides. There was enough space to move, and just enough light coming from the room at the end of the hall for Perci to work with.

He kept running, not risking Allison trying to stop him, terrified of a confrontation. They had brought him here for fear he would bring the Ink Demon to them, and if they believed he still could that would be ample reason to strike him down. Thomas would likely do it, though fortunately the wolf was not here, and would hopefully not cross his path.

There was no resistance as he ran down the hall, the only sound the ink sloshing through several pipes that peeked through the dirt, only to twist back into it. There were always pipes, everywhere, like some twisted circulatory system filled with the liquefied souls of the damned. He ignored them, running into the other room at the end of the long hall.

The ground was still dirt, but the walls were a mix of tiling and plaster, a pair of ink pipes peering through the wall. There was more unidentifiable machinery in one corner of the room, and a box coated in dust and cobwebs. To his immediate right was an ink puddle, which bubbled dangerously as he entered the room.

His eyes were on the puddle when the searcher formed, the vaguely humanoid ink monster taking a swipe at him. Perci dodged it easily, given the blow was slow and he had seen it coming, before taking a swing at the beast, slicing it in half with his scythe. It was a critical blow, the being dissolving into ink before him as the sliced away portion splattered the wall. In a way, it felt good to finally strike out at something and vent some of his frustration, but knowing that all of the ink, save that in the soup cans for some reason, was a miasma of frightened, tortured souls took the pleasure out of the easy victory.
Perci turned right, continuing at a brisk jog down another tunnel, this one lined with wooden boards for the walling. Ahead of him the dirt floor gave way to an ink flooded room, the only path across being several boards of wood carefully balanced on objects just beneath the ink. He paused, eyes widening with fear as his skin crawled, heart beating hard. It would be so easy to fall into that ink, and be lost forever.

‘Be swift when time comes.’ That's what one of the helper's messages had said. He couldn't stand here thinking on the what ifs. He needed to act before he choked.

The short angel pushed on, heart beating wildly as he put one foot in front of the other. The boards were mercifully stable, but the proximity to the ink negated what comfort he took from that fact. The room itself was another dirt walled thing, though there were boards of wood haphazardly put up between the supports in places. If it were to keep dirt from falling into the room, or make the room look more complete was unknown to him.

As he walked along the board bridge of the flooded tunnel, he paused a metal bed frame in a corner room, a searcher lurching up from beside it. Perci didn't let himself think on the implications, instead just taking a well aimed swing at the being, taking it down with a well aimed slash. He turned to put it behind him and continue down the path, the walls now lined with wood proper, though the direction of the wood was inconsistent between panels. It seemed this area hadn't gotten as much love or attention as further above.

At least he wasn't playing this balancing act in the dark. It was unnerving to have to stretch his leg over the ink to reach another board, but the caged lights built into the ceiling, and the light of his halo, made it far easier to judge his movements. The only moment he did pause was when he was on the third to last board, staring at the next in line. There was at least a foot and a half between him and the next board, his heart pounding even harder at the thought of what would happen if he missed his jump.

‘Just don’t think about it. You gotta trust your bodies instincts.’ That was something Pippen had told him when they were in the safe house, right after their first encounter with the feral being her friend had become. He had questioned how she had known she could reach the box they had hidden in, and that was what she had told him. That their bodies knew what needed to be done, but their minds always got in the way. To him, it felt like an easy thing for her to say, but a nightmare to perform. His mind never stopped analyzing everything around him, and was always keenly aware of his strengths and weaknesses.

But it was just a foot and a half. It wasn't even a yard. Technically it was half a yard- But that didn't matter. Even children could jump that distance. And he was no child, in spite of his shorter height in toon form. If Pippen could do all the crazy stunts he had seen her pull before, than he could make this simple jump. Some of that athleticism had to come from their mother's side, after all.

Perci took a deep breath, taking a couple step back on his current board. Then he started forward, eyes focused on where he wanted to land, not taking a moment to think about any of it. His body measured the distance and needed strength for the jump, his instincts guiding him into making the leap.

He made it perfectly, though he leaned over to grasp the board once he landed, just to be safe. It shifted ever so slightly beneath him, but held firm, the angel breathing a long sigh of relief, before slowly finding his balance once more. There was only one more board, and then he would be on solid ground once more.
Reaching the final board was a simple matter, and soon he was back on solid ground, the dirt beneath him reassuring. To his right was a passage way that lead to a staircase upwards, a 'maintenance tunnel 5B' Label on it, while ahead of him was more ink, and what appeared to be a makeshift boat of sorts. He paused, uncertain which way to go, before remembering the advice in the room.

He pulled down his halo, paling a bit as an arrow pointed him towards the barge, away from the maintenance door. 'Brave your fears' was written beneath it in that familiar handwriting, Perci biting back a groan as he stared down at it. That was that, and he had no other choice if he wanted to reach his sister. Haste was of the essence, after all.

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Bendy nervously clutched Henry's chest as the group joined them, his eyes shrinking to nervous ovals with lines appearing above them act as brows to accent his unease. He stared up at Henry, his heart pounding in his chest as he waited to see how his creator would proceed. Henry's arms wrapped around him a bit more securely, looking up the group with a confident look as he slowly stood. Bendy turned his head ever so slightly, just enough that one nervous eye could be seen, the small devil shivering with nerves in Henry's arms. He was a far cry from what he had been mere minutes ago.

"I never said I was going to destroy him." Henry pointed out, Bendy flinching at the word 'destroy'. "We always made it a point whenever we discussed him that Bendy is as much a victim of Joey as everyone else."

"That thing helped Joey capture me!" Lacie snarled, bristling with anger. "It cut off my escape and let the searcher's grab me. If it wasn't for that thing, I would have gotten out!"

"You might have." Henry offered. "You might have not. We don't know that. What we do know was Bendy was being controlled. Everything he's done has been done at Joey's command, because he was holding the reins of control. Even when Bendy had issues with what was being demanded of him, he didn't have a choice. Isn't that right?" He looked down to Bendy gently.

"Y-Y-Yeah." Bendy answered weakly, looking down in shame. While Henry was exaggerating the degree of control Joey had to some degree, he wasn't entirely wrong. Joey's word was law, whether Bendy liked it or not, and even before Pippen and the others had been introduced, Joey would take the reins where he saw fit, if he thought Bendy was holding back too much. He couldn't remember the loops as well as Henry, only that they had been happening a lot. Even now, without Joey purposely with holding memories from him, a lot of parts were a murky blur..

"Hmph." Lacie grunted, glaring at Bendy and turning away a bit. She wasn't the leader of the group, and Henry had said they were going to try to retrieve Bendy.. that he would likely be a path to Joey. So she would abide him.. for now.

"Are you sure he's on the level? That Joey can't pull his strings anymore?" Grant questioned warily. He wasn't in much of a place to speak on other's mental state, given how he had been.. But Joey was a conniving weasel, and he always had numerous back up plans on hand.

"I'm sure." Henry answered, walking a bit closer to the group. Bendy's tail was twitching with nervous energy, hyper aware of how he had been used to harm the others, but uncertain what to say. This wasn't like a prank gone awry or a badly time joke. This was something far more severe, and Bendy had never even been good when it came to apologizing for smaller things.
At least the group didn't retreat from Henry's approach, the Butcher gang joining them. Wally checked on Edgar worriedly, seeing the lump the spider had on his head from the fight. The janitor was quickly reassured, before being regaled with the news that Edgar had two dads now, explaining how they discovered Henry was their creator.. and that apparently Bendy was so dumb he had been tricked into forgetting his creator. The spider didn't mention how he had technically forgotten Henry too, until the reasons he felt familiar was pointed out to him.

"I-" Members of the group stiffened at Bendy's voice, mostly the former humans who had encountered him. He paused as he turned his head to face the group, still clutching Henry tightly. He took a deep breath, before continuing to speak. "I-I'm sorry. I-. I don't expect you to forgive me right away but I want you to know.. I-I am sorry. I feel bad for what I was involved in.. for letting Joey fool me."

He looked away, hoping the Pippen approach would help him some, since just saying 'sorry' didn't feel very fitting. It was the honest truth, the devil did feel bad for what he had been used for.. and he really didn't expect any form of forgiveness from them any time soon.

"Alright." Jack was the first to speak, tone calm and voice soft. Bendy looked up in surprise, the lyricist tapping his fingers together nervously. He had technically had the least experience with Bendy, so maybe it wasn't his place to speak, but he at least believed the devil, and Henry. "I. I understand. I don't speak for everyone here, and won't try to, but I understand what happened, and I'm willing to give you a chance to prove yourself."

"There's no point in turning to in fighting. Not when we're all victims of Joey." Grant intoned, surprising the group. He had a similar experience to Lacie, with Bendy helping Joey catch him, though the devil never realized they were going to be tortured. He just figured they were being fired. Except Grant, who had been accused of robbery. Than he had understood why Joey wanted to be rough with him.

"Thank you.. For giving me a chance." Bendy murmured weakly, his normal manner very much repressed in the moment. He didn't feel it was right to try and regain some of his normality right now, while everyone was still so tense and wary. He jumped as he felt something heavy land on his head, relaxing a tiny bit as they rubbed between his horns in a friendly way. A quick look revealed Brutis, the being who had once been one of the clones of Boris he had loathed so much. Only now, he was so much more than a clone. He was his own being, and even he was willing to bury the hatchet despite Bendy nearly taking his life..

The rabbits poked their heads out of their box, which Brutis had retrieved from Jack. The pair of soft noses pressed into Bendy's back, a warm tongue flicking across his skin in a friendly way. The glow of Angie's halo made his eyes widen in realization, the devil nearly leaping out of Henry's arms as it hit him.

"Pippen!" He gasped, Brutis removing his hand and cocking his hand. "I left Pippen in the Ink Machine. She was hurt when I took her, and I thought she would be safe there! She could barely move, but.. she did.. Something. I. I'm not sure what. Everything is just a blur of pain and confusion afterwards, and Joey shouting at me that Henry did it and that I needed to get him and I-" He put his hand on his head as he talked, dark sweat beginning to pour down his head. He didn't like the idea of the friendly imp being alone, especially in the condition he had left her in.

"The giant one?" Henry questioned, Bendy nodding quickly. "We're on track for that area. We'll pick her up after-"

"Henry, you don't understand." Bendy cut in, his voice thick with desperation. "Joey is in there too. That's where he always showed up whenever he came into this world. He's got a hidden room
in there, and he wanted Pippen. And I delivered her to him." He sounded like he was going to be sick, guilt dripping from his words.

"Than we're going there." Lacie declared, eyes blazing with fury.

"That's right." Charley agreed, eyes bright with rage. "If that's where Joey is, than that's where we're going, and we're going to teach that punk what for." He punched his hand with his fist, cracking his knuckles.

"W-We need to go soon." Bendy pleaded, shrinking away as Lacie glared at him. Henry held him a bit more securely, staring back at Lacie quietly. She looked away after a moment, grunting in annoyance.

"Wally, can you lead us to the maintenance shaft?" Henry asked, the janitor nodding.

"Sure thing, boss. Everyone, back through them doors." Wally ordered, making his way towards the door. Henry followed closely behind him, allowing the Janitor to get a good look at the still nervous Bendy, who had returned to hiding his face in Henry's chest. Jack and Brutis may have given him a vote of confidence, but Lacie was still behind them, and Grant had as much reason as her to hate him. The Butcher gang were always an iffy matter, save Edgar who was pretty nice.. and then there was Norman.

He peered hesitantly around Henry for a moment, the projector head turning towards him. The devil ducked away again, tail whipping with anxiety. He and Norman had fought a number of times, always on Joey's demand when he was in a bad mood. It didn't change that fact it had been his claws that had cut into the Projectionist, his fists that had hit him. Norman hadn't said anything during the explanation, but Bendy couldn't shake the feeling of being watched by the man, even when the light of his projector was not on him.

The path through the double doors was much like the one through the other set prior to the large room. Painted on bricks, fake eyes, and spring loaded jump scares. Bendy jolted more than a couple times as the little cardboard ghosts popped up, holding Henry tighter. He was already a nervous wreck with everything that had happened, and now they were going through a place he absolutely hated. Haunted houses, sudden scares, spooky stories.. He tried to put on a brave face, but deep down he was a bit of a scaredy cat, and would much rather be the one doing the scare, and not being scared.

Fortunately for him, they only needed to traverse a short path before Wally kicked one of the fake walls, opening the maintenance door. He claimed it was necessary since it always got stuck, and digging around for the crack drove him nuts, though he still received some disapproving glares from the group members in the back, and a couple angry thumps form the rabbits. He shrugged it off, starting down a thin hallway that was barely lit by caged lights on the ceiling.

"Tight fit.." Henry muttered, shifting Bendy so he wouldn't run into the wall as they walked. He muttered about the poor lighting as they walked, Bendy helpfully keeping his tail up and out of the way, though he ended up poking Wally a couple times. The janitor shrugged it off after the first time, putting it down to either an accident, or Bendy's mischievous nature beginning to show through. As long as he didn't knock him down the stairs they were fast approaching, Wally wouldn't have any issues with the little devil.

Soon enough they reached the stairs, the narrow hall just barely opening up as they reached the stairs. There was enough room for them to walk down in pairs, Henry pulling up to walk beside Wally. The Janitor glanced over to Bendy again, eyeing the devil curiously, humming to himself. "Wow. You really look like the cartoons. Crazy that. How does that work?"
"Not sure." Henry admitted.

"I'm not sure either." Bendy murmured. "I just remember being formed.. and then I was in the
toon world. I met Boris, than Alice.. and just lived. I didn't even remember being made by
someone else. I mean.. some of us just appear sometimes, but that was normal. Some of were born
from families. It was just how it was. The king of the area I lived in had a program to help new
toons acclimate to evert'ing, so they wouldn't be taken advantage of."

"Interestin'." Wally hummed, rubbing his chin in thought. "That leaves a lot of questions
though.. Guess we don't have the time to work those out though, at least not now." He stopped as
they reached the bottom of the stair well, having taken a couple twists and turns. The janitor tested
the door, finding it jammed, grumbling in annoyance. He slammed into it, forcing it open and
stumbling out into a wider area, the thump of the door making him miss a yelp of surprise from the
other side.

"D*** doors always jamming." Wally muttered as he wiped his hand off on his pants. The
ground was uncovered, leaving it as plain dirt. There was an occasional archway to support the
mostly dirt walls, the path to their left flooded with ink, as was their right, though on the right a
small barge was returning from parts unknown along the river of ink. And, to their right, was a
woman with a halo headband, sporting a dress held down by a belt. Beside her was a Boris clone,
the pair ending their argument as they turned to regard the pair.

"W-Who are you-" She began to demand, holding her short blade at the ready, the Boris clone
holding an axe. She fell silent as more of the group appeared, rapidly realizing the were out
numbered.

"Allison?" Henry questioned, making the Alice Angel look alike jump with surprise. How had
he known her name? Had Perci told them? The group certainly matched what Perci had described,
at least to a degree. There were far more than Perci had described.

"How do you know my name?" She demanded, stepping back, though there wasn't much room
to step away. Right behind her was a tunnel flooded with ink, and the group was rapidly eating up
the space. Allison turned to look them over, stopping on Henry, her eyes widening as she spotted
the dark devil in his arms, who was peering nervously at them. She lifted her blade once more,
pointing it towards Henry. "What is that?!"

"Hey, watch the blade, lady!" Wally snapped, moving to push Henry behind him and the rest of
the group. Henry took a step back, recognizing the potential danger. He wasn't going to let anyone
harm his darling devil. He deserved as much of a chance as anyone else to redeem himself! Brutis
growled as the other wolf held his axe at the ready, fury burning in both of their eyes as the tension
grew.

"Please. We don't want any trouble." Henry quickly cut in. "We're trying to bring an end to this
nightmare, and save as many people as we can." Bendy's grip tightened on Henry at his words, still
unable to believe that he was worthy of a second chance.

"Are you Henry?" Allison questioned after a moment, the Boris clone giving her a sharp look.
"Perci told us about you. I didn't believe his claim that you could actually change things.." She was
staring at Bendy, who was looking back at her uncertainly, eyes no longer that of a dangerous
beast. He looked like as scared as them, no claws to threaten them or command over the ink.

"I am." Henry stated. "If he told you about me, than he must have mentioned the loops..

"He.. Might have." Allison hesitantly answered, Tom's hand on her shoulder. He shook his head,
glaring with distrust at the crowd in front of them. He didn't trust any of them, his short fur bristling with distrust. "But neither of us remember such a thing. But that is the point, isn't it? For us to not remember.."

"Unfortunately." Henry admitted, Tom glaring at him with distrust. This sounded like a dirty trick, so plain and simple to see!

"I-It's true." Bendy spoke up, his voice wavering with nerves but finding the strength to be heard. "Joey's been running this gig for years, trying to break Henry. I- I don't know why. He just said we had to."

"And you went along with it.." Allison pointed out, though her eyes were thoughtful. If the Ink Demon could be redeemed, turned from the monster it had become back to the small devil he was meant to be.. what else could Henry do?

"Y-Yeah. I.. I didn't kn-" Bendy admitted, flinching as Tom made a lunge for them at his words. Henry stepped back into the next room, a small amount of land available between the entrance and the barge seated in it's river of ink. He twisted his body to protect Bendy, a hand covering his head even as Brutis stepped between them, catching the axe and twisting it over the clone Boris' head. He was taller than the clone, something none of them had noticed yet, mostly because he stood with a slouch. Now however he stood at his full height, fangs bared in a snarl as he defended his friends.

"Tom!" Allison called, alarmed by his impulsive act, and his proximity to the other wolf. This could get ugly, fast, and this was not the time or place to fight. They were outnumbered, surrounded by ink, and essentially cornered given the path behind them lead to a dead end. They didn't even have their safe house anymore, not after a pipe had burst and started to flood the room, making this difficult decision for them.. She held up her free hand, pleading with the group.
"Please! Stop! We'll talk. Right Tom?"

Tom growled, trying to wrest the axe from Brutis, but found he could not, the taller wolf's grip like iron. After several moments it became clear he would be allowed to back out of this fight, but not with his axe. He had lost the privilege to hold it, in Brutis' mind, and the mind of the group in all honesty. He grumbled as he released his weapon reluctantly, quickly backing up to rejoin Allison.

"It doesn't look like you want to talk." Grant rumbled, eyeing the pair with distrust.

"You two don't seem worth the time or breath." Lacie added, fists clenched. Behind her, the Butcher gang was also bristling, ready to send this pair up the river if need be. Not all of the group had any loyalty towards Bendy, but they did have varying degrees of loyalty towards Henry, and seeing him attacked for no reason upset the lot of them.

"You best be getting to talking now, and hold that attack dog of your back, if you want to keep yourselves intact." Wally quipped. "You all are barking up the wrong tree, trying to pick a fight with the lot of us."

"Tom, please." Allison murmured, holding the wolf back. "We talked about this. We can't.. We can't stay on our own anymore." They both knew there was no going back.. and there were no other safe places to hide in. Except the harbor.. and a large group.

"You really can't." Henry murmured sadly. "Not with the rate things are going. The ink beasts are stirred up by all the changes, but they're deterred by large numbers. If you stay with us, you will be safe."
"And why should we take them in?" Lacie questioned. "They just tried to attack you!"

"They tried to attack Bendy." Henry pointed out, wincing as the devil cringed into his side. "Over a misunderstanding. You have to remember, it may have become normal to us, but to everyone else in this place seeing someone be freed from Joey and the ink's corruption is still new. I.. I don't blame them for attacking. I wish they had waited but.." He looked them over, seeing the desperation in their eyes. "I get the feeling they're in a bad situation as well."

"Our safe house is gone." Allison admitted, ignoring the sharp glare she received from Tom. "It flooded not to long ago. The ink in the pipes were acting strangely, and then they just burst..."

Henry winced, wondering if his conflict with the Ink Demon had anything to do with that. He had already seen in the past that it's emotions could effect the ink around it, including those in the pipes. The former animator wisely kept that tidbit to himself, instead giving them a sympathetic look.

"So we were going to throw our lot in with Oliver and Sammy at the Lost Harbor." Allison finished.

"Oliver and Sammy? They're alive?!” Henry questioned, relief bleeding into his face. "Thank goodness.. I.. we haven't seen or heard anything for them in so long."

"You know them? I guess it's a small world.." Allison paused, before continuing in her quiet voice. "They've been down here for a while. They fixed up the harbor to make it safer, and they've been bringing in more Lost Ones. Sammy.. Sammy isn't preaching to believe in the ink demon anymore, and Perci vouched for Oliver.. So we were going to give them a try."

"He isn't?" Jack murmured in surprise. Maybe Oliver had helped him come back to himself with the time they had down here.

"Ever since they reappeared he's been different." Allison admitted. "That is, as far as we've seen. We.. We were more use to sticking to ourselves."

"Makes sense." Norman mumured. "In this place, it's hard to tell what is what. Until someone sheds some light at least."

"Where is Perci?" Henry questioned,

"He.. He went ahead without us." Allison answered quickly. "He was staying with us for a while to get his bearings, but ran out not to long ago, claiming his sister was in danger. He had been acting oddly just before he ran out.. His eyes were glowing and his halo was brighter than I'd ever seen."

"Really..?" Henry muttered, thrown off by the last detail. He had a suspicion on what they meant by 'staying with us' really meant, but he didn't see a reason to start a fight with accusations. He understood why they did what they did, even if it was frustrating and annoying. Right now he just wanted to get them on board so they could keep moving forward. "I've never seen that before."

"Pippen did have his scissors. Maybe it was connected to that." Jack offered, Henry nodding in thought. The rest of the group just watched, unfamiliar with Perci and his oddities, outside of what they had been told.

"Anyway, if you're heading to the harbor, than you are heading to the same place we are." Henry stated, Bendy nervously eyeing the pair. Tom had seemed all to ready to split his head open,
something that was made even more unnerving given his physical similarities to his best friend Boris.. And Allison.. well she looked sort of like Alice, and sort of not, and her mannerisms were as wishy-washy as her looks. He wasn't sure she would keep Tom in line. He didn't interrupt Henry, burying his head in Henry's neck. "You should come with us. There is strength in numbers, and the barge can carry us all."

He turned towards the makeshift boat, eyeing the long contraption. It had clearly been designed to carry more than a couple workers at a time, once long ago when work was actually being done down here. It wasn't the sturdiest looking thing, but than again given Joey's budget habits it was better than it could have been. If they all stood with care, and kept an eye on the paddlewheel in the back for clogs, they would make it.

"It's better than waiting here for it to return.." Allison pointed out, Tom growling and huffing, giving in to her prodding. She turned to him, nodding. "We'll come with you. For now."

"For now." Henry agreed, though he felt they wouldn't be splitting from them soon. At least, he hoped they wouldn't. They had come off as fairly loyal in each loop, but when it came to crossing open sections of ink.. he had always been left on his own at the final stretch.

The group made their way down the stairs to the bottom of a ramp, where the barge was waiting. Henry wasn't sure how it had returned to the port, since Perci had allegedly gone ahead, but noticed splatters of ink on the throttle and controls. Beneath the controls proper, on the box that housed the inner workings, in neat handwriting were the words 'You're welcome'. Seemed the writers were moving into doing more active help.

As they neared the barge, Bendy abruptly sat up, horns twitching lightly. He started at the barge, and the neat handwriting, eyes wide as he muttered softly to himself. "...Alice?"

It was so soft only Henry heard him, the animator shooting him a curious look, but Bendy would not speak further, his expression pensive. So, instead, he turned his attention to the barge. It was a rectangular metal and wood contraption, with barrels attached by their sides at each corner to keep it afloat. A paddlewheel was attached to the back, with a lamp attached to the back of the barge pointing at the wheel to make it easier to see if it was clogged or not. On the front end was a simple set of controls, a throttle and steering wheel.

Henry and the others leaned over to pull the barge closer to the dock, the former animator depositing Bendy into it first. The devil scuttled nervously to the front of the boat, and away from the newcomers, eyeing the ink nervously over the two foot high wall that encased the edges of the makeshift barge. Henry was the next one in, clambering into the barge and walking to the front, intent on taking the controls and staying near Bendy. He pet the devil between the horns, his presence a balm to the burning anxiety that currently consumed the usually chipper devil.

As the rest of the group worked their way into the barge, Bendy found his voice once more, speaking softly to Henry. "D-Dad.." He flushed a bit as he used the phrase for the first time, but meeting no resistance continued, feeling a little better for it. "I.. I think it was Alice who sent this back to us. The real Alice. I'd know her handwriting anywhere and for a minute there.. it felt like she was with us."

Henry smiled a bit at his first words, warm and encouraging, before slipping to a look of curiosity. "The real Alice? How would she effect this world, though?"

"Well.. I mean we had magic back in toon world. And scientist. And Alice had a lot of friends. Maybe she's got help. Maybe that's why her and the real Boris never ended up here. Alice was always good about taking precautions.." The devil paused, eyes sad, Henry rubbing his head.
"We'll find a way to get you back to them, buddy." Henry promised softly. Bendy looked up to him with big, hopeful eyes, which wobbled lightly with emotions.

"R-Really?" He breathed.

"Even if it takes me thirty years to figure out how." Henry promised, laughing a bit. Bendy hesitantly laughed, but smiled, seeing there really was no hard feelings between them. Henry was so incredibly understanding and kind, which might explain why it was so easy for Joey to take advantage of him for so long.

"Where are you going to go?" Bendy asked, the question making Henry pause. "You've been here for so long. Is there anyone outside waiting for you?" The devil's question was hesitant, slowly looking back up to him. "M-Maybe you could come with me."

"I never though about that." Henry admitted, staring past Bendy for a moment. "Maybe I will. There is nothing waiting for me beyond the studio. It was part of the reason I came when Joey invited me..."

"I'm sorry, Henry." Bendy murmured, bowing his head.

"It's OK. It's not your fault. That's just how life goes sometimes." Henry murmured, slowly standing. The rest of the group had boarded while they talked, most of them leaning towards the center of the barge, Tom and Brutis taking up the rear. Brutis because he was the heaviest and still had the axe which he could use to ungum the paddlewheel, if he was careful, and Tom because he wanted to stay away from Bendy. Allison was somewhere near the middle, watching over the edge of the barge quietly, but listening to the pair at the front speak.

"All right. Here we go. Brutis, keep an eye on the paddlewheel. Sometimes thicker globs of ink will gum up the works. Watch your hands when you deal with it." Henry declared, turning to the controls. The taller wolf grunted in understanding, the group beginning down the river of ink, Bendy pressed close to his creator's leg. Henry pushed down the accelerator, the barge beginning forward, his other hand on the steering wheel.

The tunnel ahead of them was round in shape, with actual brick and concrete lining. Round archways acted as support ever couple of yards, holding the tunnel firm. No lights filled the initial tunnel, though the light on the back of the barge, and from the control panel, offered some minimal light, and there was enough for Henry to make out the walls on the side and avoid them. The path was straight, the group silent as they traversed over the inky black liquid.

Eventually the tunnel ended, releasing them into a wide open space, with several tall tunnel archways against the walls. Two of them were blocked, the one to their immediately left having collapsed inwards, while the one diagonally across from them was blocked by another barge, the dock it was by having another path that had collapsed in on itself. On the portion of the wall not consumed by the tunnel entrances, mystery machine parts chugged away, and chains hung in places, the walls not directly around the entrances uncovered dirt.

Halfway through the room, as Henry began to turn to the only available tunnel, the barge came to an abrupt stop, a low whine coming from the back. Brutis was on it immediately, using the end of his axe to jab thick globs of ink out of the works. The group would have watched him, if not for a splash from the second blocked tunnel, the one with the other barge. A large, cartoon like hand and arm appeared, a black rubber hose arm and a dirty, dingy white glove, appeared, the hand larger than even Norman. It whipped around slowly, before detecting the barge, catching on it and pulling it under the ink.
"Brutis, Hurry!" Jack hissed in terror, the arm vanishing beneath the ink with its prize. Brutis quickly cleared the paddlewheel, Henry pushing the throttle to full speed, which admittedly wasn't very fast. Bendy clutched his leg in terror, breathing hard as they passed the other tunnel, before starting down the fourth. It was much like the first, with curving walls of brick and concrete, but now they were sharply aware of the danger lurking beneath them, the group deadly silent except for Bendy's panicked breathing.

Halfway through the tunnel the barge stopped again, the wheel gummed up with more sticky ink. Several yards behind them, the hand and arm appeared again, fingers waving in the air as it began to feel around. The tips of the glove were black, and the hand, despite appearing to be in a white glove, was wrinkly, like a limb held under water for a long period of time. The members of the group did their best to stay quiet, even as it slowly neared, investigating the walls and area around it with care. It didn't seem to have much in the way of senses, outside of feeling, but it had already proven itself a danger.

The paddlewheel was cleared, and the barge began again, just as the arm ducked under the ink once more. It hadn't moved forward while above the ink, and it brought to question if it even could. If it couldn't, that was a mixed blessing for them, meaning it would have to go under the ink to move.. but it also meant while it was on the move it was out of sight.

They repeated this process an several more times, the arm and hand a little closer with every stop. The tunnel twisted and turned, Henry calmly guiding them down the tunnel even when the lighting was poor, hands steady and calm. This wasn't his first time on this river, and it certainly wasn't the first time he had been tasked with something that had numerous lives dependent on him. If there was one thing he was grateful for during his time on tour, it was for steeling his nerves for times like these.

After what felt like an eternity, the tunnel opened up to another large cave, the hand and arm no longer appearing. They were fast approaching a dock, and passed a shanty house built up out of the ink, a fishing pole leaning against the window, its line and bobber in the ink. No one attended it however, and as they looked forward it became clear why. They disembarked none the less, having no desire to stay where the ink hand could reach them, even given what they would soon face.

The dock extended forward several feet, before meeting another walk that expanded to the left and right, and into small tunnels to the side of the main cavern. It was clear a lot of the dock had been recently renovated, the pieces of wood and metal used to make it solid and firm beneath their feet, barely swaying, unlike most of the construction work this far down.

Beyond the dock was an expansive cave room, with rough hewn dirt walls and dirt flooring. The shanty buildings Henry was used to were now in better repair, less haphazard and standing more securely. There even seemed to be some changes made, as some buildings seemed to have been designated gathering places for activities, with thread and fabric peeking from one building, paper and pens visible through the open window of another. It looked nicer than what Henry had ever seen..

Except for the fact it was in a total uproar, searchers, Lost Ones, and three familiar figures fighting back wave after wave of ink monsters unlike anything Henry or the others had ever seen. Sharp edges, bristling spines, fangs and claws.. the beasts were all a mise-mash of horrible aspects, designed to put fear into those who saw them and to be effective in a fight. The fight seemed to be at a stale mate for the moment, the Lost Harbor denizens falling at the same rate the monsters were falling, with the residents only advantage being the three who lead them. Perci, swinging his scythe through crowds of beasts, Oliver, directing the Lost ones and yelling with such power at points he could burst apart any beast he aimed at, and Sammy, swinging an axe with wild fervor,
slaughtering any beast that neared him.
Chapter 22

Pippen moaned weakly as she came back to consciousness once more, slowly becoming aware of the world around her once more. Her limbs were still bound down, her back aching from the board she was tied down to. Her bindings were tight, manacles that held them directly to the board, giving her no room to move outside some mild wiggle room for her midsection. Not enough to actually squirm out of the tight binds around her wrist, which cut into her flesh

She'd lost track of how much time she had spent here, falling in and out of consciousness so frequently. Her skin was pale, grey at best but fading to white in places, her personal supply of ink dangerously low. Thanks to this, she was starting to become more than a bit delirious. More than once she had thought she had seen a golden outline of Alice Angel, the figure encouraging her to hold on a little longer. A figure that told her they needed a door in the Lost Harbor shack. She wasn't even sure what a lost harbor was.

"Oh, you're finally awake." Joey rasped somewhere beside her, a pie cut eye slowly sliding over to look at him. The only limb on her still its natural shade of black was her tail, which Joey was holding the tip in a bucket of ink. Ink that was mercifully not from outside, not from the miasma of pain and suffering this greedy man had created. He needed her stable enough to work with, and long exposure to the main body of ink, and the miasma within, tended to cause beings to collapse and fall apart. He couldn't afford his newest tool breaking so quickly.

"You know, you are terrible inefficient." Joey mused, pulling out her tail. It dripped ink weakly, until he invoked his will to make it stop. The imp was too drained to fight, her head feeling like it was about to split in half. A lazy stream of ink was draining from her broken horn off and on, pooling around her head. "You require breaks so often. You'd never make it in this business on your own. You kids these days don't know how to work hard at all, do you?"

She groaned, glaring weakly at him as he talked. Pippen had quickly learned that Joey had nothing nice to say, not that she had expected as much. The imp hadn't expected any kind words from him, but she hadn't expected him to be constantly going after her as well. Than again, she had taken away his favorite punching bag. She knew from the sound of him cursing furiously at one point when he thought she was unconscious that something had happened. but the details were uncertain.

Deep down, she feared she had sent Bendy to his demise, and the thought helped to cripple her will. Joey did everything he could to encourage that weakness, constantly going at her for interfering with their work, for sending Bendy spiraling out of control. He wouldn't give her a straight answer as to what his fate had been. The former studio owner preferred to watch her squirm, watch her mind take the possibilities and spiral them into ever worse potentials.

Her tail was jerked, but she didn't resist, having long since learned there was no point. Joey would have what he wanted, one way or another. She could scarcely move as it was, after how much ink she had lost. Only her tail could move, and that was firmly in Joey's grasp, his will battering hers aside.

There was something unnatural to his will, too powerful to overcome. but it did not feel like any of the others' wills who she had come against in the pass. Not even Norman could compare. With them, with the other ink beings, she actually felt she had a chance in the fight, even if it was extremely difficult, but Joey. It was hard to describe. It felt almost like he was removed from the
toon being's reality, and he was working on a level totally separate from the one she and the other beings in this place operated on. Maybe that was because he was without a toon form.

She could feel her tail moving again, though she had no idea what he was working on. He was working on the side with the eye covered in ink, and she was too tired to turn her head. The imp was scarcely aware of what he was working on most of the time, given he hid everything from her, giving her nothing to possibly take advantage of. Not that she would have been able to do much at this point. Her consciousness kept fluttering on the edge of darkness, memories bleeding in and out of the present.

The scent of waffles drifted to her nose, Pippen smiling a bit. Her dad always made waffles on Saturdays. It was the one time of the week she could be certain Perci would play nice, because he loved the waffles too and was always too busy cramming them into his mouth to be mean. She tried to sit up from bed, blinking in confusion as her limbs wouldn't move. She was in such an odd position to, she never slept-

"Stop it." Joey snapped, bringing her back to the present. She blinked slowly to try and wade through the confusion that swamped her tired mind. It had been so real, the scent had been so prominent. Tears boiled in her good eye as she remembered there would never be another waffle Saturday. She had moved out, and her parents were gone. There was no chance of going to them, to show them how she and Perci had finally made amends as her mother had always wanted.

"Oh stop it." Joey growled. He hated it when people cried, no matter the gender. It was such a weak, pitiful move, only good for feeling sorry for ones self.. or manipulating others. And Joey was not going to be manipulated. It didn't help that the young adult he was dealing with now was as volatile as Susie had been. All sweet and nice, but unable to accept when their time was over, stubbornly hanging on when they should just leave and stop damaging his work.

Pippen mumbled something unintelligible, the studio head sighing in annoyance. He would likely have to give her another break soon, especially since the shade of her tail was turning pale again. Why her body wouldn't rapidly absorb the ink he offered her, beyond her tail, was beyond him, but it was hampering his work. He would have to find a way to force her to reabsorb more for him to work with faster. Maybe he could try force feeding her it. Straight ink did not taste that good, not like the odd ink within the soup cans, but he didn't have the time to hunt around for soup for someone who had barely worked hard enough to deserve one can.

He finished the latest ink beast, glaring at the smaller creation. The first ones had been large, vicious monstrosities of all possible shapes, always sporting a jagged sharp maw, claws, and limbs strong enough to propel them towards the targets he hated. Pippen was hardly a replacement for Henry, whose had so much untapped power thanks to his connection to the studio. He had been there since the beginning, he had been the heart of the studio, who had given the basis for so many ideas and the characters that made the studio what it was. When he had left, the company had begun to slowly go downhill, no matter how much Joey tried to support it. Henry was always a fool, following his emotions. Joey had been the brain, and had guided them successfully through everything.

Until Henry abandoned him. Abandoned everything they had strived to put together. Joey could have found a way to get him out of the draft, he had connections that could have marked Henry as unfit for war. But no. He had his duty to his country, he was tired of Joey's guidance, he was upset that Joey had claimed what was rightfully the studio owner's property. Henry didn't know the first thing about running a business, all he knew how to do was to draw and Joey had given him a way he could have made that into a legitimate job!
But nooooo. He missed Linda. He was tired. He wished Joey would listen more, when all Joey was doing was giving him much needed feedback! Henry worked too much, Henry wanted a family. Henry wanted Joey to either accept his designs or give 'actual' feedback on what he wanted changed, and not just a rejection. He was quitting because Joey didn't listen, when Joey heard all of his gruffing and complaints and had never held it against him!

Pippen squeaked in pain as Joey jerked her tail, the studio head stopping to breath. Henry had always been a stubborn, hard headed man once he set his mind to something. Once, Joey had admired that, until it was turned on him. All Henry had to do was agree to work for him again, to make their cartoon characters really real. Not these inky abominations the gent corporations machine had created. He wanted real, obedient and whole toons, not the difficult mess the machine had delivered.

Sure, he couldn't let Henry know ahead of time what was coming up. Henry was too small a thinker, like everyone else, but Joey was not. Joey was a big thinker, with many plans and great ambition. They may be in the hole right now, but with Henry obeying him again, he could have taken them to greater heights than any studio before them.

But instead he was stuck with a stubborn imp who had a limited supply of ink, and wouldn't absorb the raw ink Joey had carefully collected for her. Who had instead started acting insane, mumbling and muttering nonsensically to herself at points. He hadn't thought she had been exposed to the ink, at least not in a large enough concentration to do any harm.. And she couldn't have been breaking that fast. They had only made a couple hundred creatures so far! They would need far more than that to clean this place up!

They needed all of those Lost Ones taken care of for one, as well as that nuisance Sammy and his pet bird. They had been gathering more Lost Ones at the 'Harbor' the Lost Ones had created, limiting his supply of searchers to send after Henry and the others. And now with Bendy fully outside of his command, his options were terribly limited. At least, not without Pippen and her handy tail. He had pumped out a good number of beasts to serve him and start cleaning things up.. Now if only they would just die.

He glanced down to the limp tail, grey and useless beneath his fingers. He dropped it back into the ink pot. Ink was slowly pulled into the tail, though he already knew the pace would be miserably slow. Joey, being the impatient man he was, never really waited to see if the ink would go beyond her tail. Once it was full, he would work. They needed to maintain productivity.

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"We have to help them!" Henry called to the rest of the group, starting forward across the rest of the dock as quickly as he could. He picked up a loose board as he ran forward, slamming it into one of the monsters that had gotten past the crowd of fighters. He took it nail end to the beasts head, trying not to focus too much on it's uncomfortable appearance. It was nothing like the ink beasts he had encountered in the sewers, who had appeared on the edge of becoming proper toon animals.

These were all sharp edges and jagged ridges, monsters composed of ink spread across a sharp form. The one he was dealing with had three limbs propelling it, one clawed hand swiping at Henry. It missed as he ducked, coming back up and swinging the board into it. Blunt weapons
weren’t as effective as sharp weapons, but they would eventually do the necessary work. It was just a matter of getting it done.

As the beast took another swing at him, it was cut off as a massive hammer with the word 'ACME' emblazoned across the head of it. The oversized wooden mallet slammed into the beast, sending it flying into the ink. Henry caught Bendy before he could fly past him into the ink as well, shooting the devil a grateful look. The devil nervously grinned back to him, having reacted immediately the moment he had seen his friend in danger. It was only know that he realized he had managed to materialize the hammer from thin air, just like he had been able to do so long ago.

"Glad to see you've recovered in more ways than one, Bendy." Henry declared as he turned to face the harbor once more, a warm smile briefly crossing his face. Bendy's eyes sparkled a bit as he nodded, before narrowing into a defiant glare. The creatures were in even worse condition than he had been in before Henry had helped him, and that was saying something.

Bendy held onto Henry as he carried them the rest of the way to the harbor proper, away from the threat of the ink. The group was following him, picking up what weapons they could find, with Grant and Jack in the rear. Jack, who was still holding the rabbits for Brutis, was looking for things to throw as a distraction to the monsters, wanting to help to some degree despite his aversion to conflict. Grant was starting to panic, the sight of so many searchers and ink monsters in one place bringing back memories he would rather repress. They froze him on the dock, watching everyone else's backs retreat from him.

Brutis was the second one onto the dock after Henry and Bendy, who were fighting back to back, having been swarmed a couple feet onto the harbor platform. The massive wolf slammed his fists into any foe that neared him, either knocking them apart or into the ink, snarling with fury. Behind him was Barley, always eager for a brawl, and behind him was Charley and Edgar, the pair sticking close together to act as support in a similar manner Henry and Bendy were fighting.

Wally had found a pipe in one of his pockets, though he wasn't sure how it had gotten there. He vaguely remembered having a pipe dangling haphazardly from his pocket before being abducted by Joey's searchers.. had it really stayed with him this entire time? Now was not the time for questions, he decided, as he took a swing at the nearest monster. Now was time to kick butt, Wally doing his best to cover Brutis' back without accidentally ending up in his range.

Tom and Allison joined the fray, in spite of their hesitation. This was the only chance of safety they had left, and to leave when it felt like a moment of monumental importance was upon them was unthinkable. Something felt vital about this fight, as if the momentum of it's outcome would decide the fate of this place. If either of them were to have a say in it, it would be in their group's favor. The pair fought back to back as well, Tom having been armed with his axe once more after they had disembarked from the boat, and Alice with her blade.

Norman was the last off the boat, Lacie helping him off, and the slowest to the fight, mostly thanks to having to balance with his top heavy head across the docks more rickety areas. It may have been recently repaired, but the onslaught had damaged it, and he did not want to go under. Lacie was busy trying to find a weapon, but finding nothing immediately at hand balled her fists, ready to brawl.

Once they were on land, they both started swinging, having no weapon to their name other than their strength. Norman's light seemed to transfix the beasts that crossed it's path, momentarily dazzling them even though it was not that strong. Remembering he could change that, he pushed his light to the max, aiming it at swarms of the monsters and blinding them. While they were
stunned, he and the Lost Ones would begin to tear into them, this tactic helping them hold one of
the side tunnels the beasts kept appearing from.

"Their coming from the ink machine!" Bendy called to Henry after another swing of his heavy
hammer. He had never been so happy to see such a simple object, that was so standard and
common by toon standards. After being deprived of his 'pockets' for so long, it was a giddy rush
for him to have them returned, though he scarcely remembered what was in them. Aside the
hammer, of course, because no one in their right mind would leave their house without at least one
trustly item useful for hitting people with!

"Are you sure?" Henry questioned. His eyes were blurring from the heat of the moment, only
focused on the beasts as they closed in, ink stinging his eyes. He could almost hear the drum of
bullets biting into wood and soil, even though there were no-

Wait. That was the report of a gun. A machine gun.

Henry and Bendy turned, having a moment to breathe in the fray, looking down one of the other
tunnels that the beasts had been siphoning out of. It was a roundabout way, but Bendy knew there
was a path from the ink machine to that point as well. What neither of them could answer was the
source of the noise, and the sudden lack of beasts.

That is, until the bullets stopped, and they were greeted by the steady clack of high heels. A slim
figure with a black stockings fading to white at the top, a lace edged black dress, and a pare of lacy
black gloves clutching a machine gun in her hands. Her halo lit the tunnel as she walked down it,
Lost ones nervously following her, a handful of Searchers racing ahead to join the fray.

"Looks like you've been busy, Henry." Susie Campbell remarked, looking over the mess. The
reinforcements she had brought was really helping to turn the tide now, the scales having begun to
tip when Henry and the others had arrived. But now the added fighters for their side, as well as that
ridiculously effective gun, was getting work done. "I hope you have room for one more. I'd really
like to help rain on Joey's parade."

"There's always a second chance, Susie." Henry answered, watching with relief as his friends
began to reappear, no longer hidden behind a mass of enemy forms. They were all as winded as
him, splattered with ink and small wounds. Fortunately, no one seemed severely injured.. at least of
the main group. There were injured Lost Ones and searcher's by the dozens, but Henry wasn't sure
he would be able to heal them. He was hesitant to approach the group and start toying with any of
their ink, given how fickle and nervous the Lost Ones could be.

"I think I'm far beyond second chances, Henry." Susie replied in a soft voice, slowly
approaching him. She offered him the gun, but he didn't take it, eyes bright with discomfort at the
sight of the weapon. The angel didn't take offense, knowing where Henry had gone. No one came
back from war the same. "But I'm grateful for the thought."

"You were corrupted by the ink, just like everyone else." Henry murmured, trying to be
understanding. "It and Joey are the root cause for so much."

"But I can't blame it alone." Susie admitted, aware of the others watching them interact with
varying degrees of wariness. "I still had some of my self at the start, and the ability to make
decisions. I could have resisted the corruption."

"It's not that easy.." Bendy pointed out, shying behind Henry's leg as Susie looked at him. No
longer did she look like a cruel mockery of her friend, but an individual. Her own angel.

"You really are the catalyst for change here, aren't you, Henry?" She hummed thoughtfully. "Even after so much, you just keep trying to help."

"It was the better option than giving into what Joey wanted. It was better than leaving everyone to suffer." Henry offered.

He turned to survey the damage now, a hand going to Bendy's head protectively, the devil leaning into his touch. The shanty buildings of the harbor had mostly survived the attack, and those Lost Ones and Searchers who had not been severely harmed were beginning to slowly heal. They were beginning to disperse to the shadows, curling up and standing around, still at a lost as to what to do. They had survived the attack... this time.

"Oi! Henry! Am I happy to see you!" Oliver called from a couple yards away, quickly making his way towards Henry, bird waddle and everything. His wing was still in a sling, but it didn't slow him down, and neither did seeing Allison and Tom. "Oh good, you brought Tom and Allison. I was starting to worry they might be up the creek like we were until you guys showed up. Not entirely sure where those things are coming from, and didn't know if they were reaching up to their neck of the woods."

"Hello, Oliver." Allison greeted hesitantly. Tom nodded to the bird, though didn't make eye contact, ears tilting slightly with same at the sight of the sling. He really hadn't meant to break the cockatoos arm/wing. His bones were just so shockingly easy to break..

"Oi, you've really started gathering people." Oliver mused, looking over the group and counting them. "You've got over two dozen! Well, you don't hold a candle to how many Lost Ones me and Sammy are housing around here, but you ain't doin' too bad for yourself."

"It's good to see you are in high spirits, Oliver." Henry greeted, feeling Bendy peer out from around him. He eyed the bird with guilt, remembering how indifferent he had been when he had dunked him and Sammy into the depths of the ink. "How long have you been here?"

"I don't know. Time really has no meaning in this place. Been a while. Me and Sammy haven't figured out how long we were in the ink. We just remember getting out." Oliver answered.

"It wasn't long." Sammy cut in, walking up to the group, that looked him over in surprise. A good portion of them had known him when he was a human, and were surprised by the ears, horns, and tail he sported. He crossed his arms defiantly as he continued. "Oliver proved to difficult for the ink to swallow, and I managed to hang on when he flew out. From there, I woke up like this. No, I am not taking commentary on my looks."

"I got some new speckle feathers too." Oliver offered, holding out his black tipped wings. "Pretty nifty, huh? I wouldn't go back into that stuff if you paid me, but it's a small consolation prize for escaping that gunk."

"I don't know. Time really has no meaning in this place. Been a while. Me and Sammy haven't figured out how long we were in the ink. We just remember getting out." Oliver answered.

"Allison?" Perci squeaked as he approached the group, wiping ink from his face and scythe. He had spent the time immediately after the fight encouraging a Lost One to hold on, giving them the encouragement they needed to pull themselves back together. He had only managed to save the one, but it was something at least. He hadn't expected to see the other angel so soon. He nearly jumped out of his skin when he saw Susie, though it was delayed response as he put together who she was. "ALICE?!"
"It's Susie." Susie answered calmly, Sammie's eyes darting up to her in curiosity. "I was never Alice. I was.. never worthy to take that name." Her pie cut eyes dart away for a moment, before returning to the group, sharp with determination. "An interesting bit of writing on the wall told me it was now or never for dealing with Joey. I couldn't imagine leaving you all to deal with that snake alone. So I came down here, and I convinced some of these others to come" She gestured to the Lost Ones, some of which had wandered back to her side, uncertain what to do.

"Are we really going to trust her?" Allison demanded, eyeing Susie warily. "Do you have any idea what she's done?"

"Yes." Perci answered. "And yes."

"I know." Henry added. "But we've all done terrible things down here to survive." He paused, giving Allison a look that told her he knew what they had done with Perci. He was not injured permanently, but it didn't take away from the fact they had imprisoned him.. and would have possibly left him behind after the pipes burst. Tom had so quick to get the out.. "We all deserve a second chance, and we all have a bone to pick with Joey. None of this would be happening if not for him."

"That is true." Jack murmured, though he was wary of Susie. He had heard plenty from Perci and Henry about what she had done, but... Had any of them avoided doing something terrible in this place? He couldn't be sure. His memories as a swollen searcher were all a blue. He knew he had been pushed into more than a couple of fights, his inky state overriding his aversion to violence. He didn't think he had done anything on par with Susie though. "We should focus on Joey."

"I'm not expecting forgiveness. What I've done is unacceptable by any stretch of the imagination. " Susie stated, standing off to a side from the rest to the group. "But permit me this chance to do one thing right. I want to help see this nightmare come to an end. And the only way to do that is through ending Joey." She clutched her gun a bit closer, not looking at Brutis.

"I think we should." Perci murmured, looking to the rest of the group. "We.. We need as much help as we an get against Joey. I have the feeling this won't be an easy fight..." That and he honestly wanted to give her a chance to redeem herself. If they didn't forgive Susie, than who among them really were worthy of forgiveness after everything they had done? Susie had a lot of work ahead of her to make up for all the damage she had done but... They had to give her the chance.

Allison frowned, clearly not comfortable with the other woman's presence, tension hanging between them. There was an unspoken history between them, Tom moving between them silently. Susie didn't look at them, avoiding looking at most of the group, though she eyed the butcher gang and Bendy with curiosity. Never in her wildest dreams, even in her crazed state, had she thought it possible for them to be redeemed and returned to what they had once been.

"If she's here to beat Joey's face in, than she's fine with me." Lacie stated simply.

"Enough talking. It's time we get moving." Charley growled, tapping his foot impatiently. He didn't know what the newcomer had done, but he did know he wanted that gun. It had eaten through the other ink beings like fire through paper, taking them down one after another. That was all his mind was on.
"Pippen still needs us." Bendy whispered to Henry, shifting side to side anxiously. He wanted to run ahead to her, to find her, hoping beyond hope that she was still in the throne room. But deep down he knew she wasn't. Those beasts had a peculiar feel to them, one part Pippen's influence and one part Joey's influence having created them. He couldn't imagine Pippen having down this willingly. "I think Joey's using her to make these things."

"Pippen?" Henry questioned, uncertain. How would Joey use her? He remembered when she had lent her tail to him for their first 'test' on his possible abilities. Her will had moved aside to let him take command of the power in her tail, and if she had put up a fight he was fairly certain they would have at the least hit a stalemate, and nothing would have happened. But she had also described Joey overwhelming her when she had tried to help Bendy.

"What about Pipp-" Perci began to question, before noticing the dark horns behind Henry's legs. In the chaos of the fighting he hadn't even noticed Bendy, but now he did, and he was uncomfortable with him as he was Allison. The angel jolted back at the sight of him, clutching his scythe a bit tighter, though he looked more likely to run than attack. He pointed to Henry, stumbling over his words. "I- Uh- Who- Henry-?"

"This is Bendy." Henry stated simply, hand going to the back of the devil's head to reassure him. Bendy nervously stepped out from behind Henry a bit, nervously waving to the crowd now looking at him. "We finally managed to take him back from Joey."

"H-Hey. Uh.. No.. No hard feelings about a bit of chasing, right?" Bendy nervously asked, eyeing Sammy, Oliver, and Perci.

"I-If there's no hard feelings for stabbing you with my scissors..." Perci offered weakly.

"You-! Impudent Imp!" Sammy snapped, Bendy jolting in alarm and half darting back behind Henry. "I spent all my time trying to please you, and the first you do when you actually appear is send me into the ink-!"

"I-It wasn't my decision!" Bendy yelped. "That's what Joey wanted, he was tired of hearing you!"

"Tired of hearing me?! I was out of my mind! The least one of you could do was help me!" Sammy shouted back.

"Would you have listened?" Bendy questioned, feeling a bit bad he hadn't tried. It was just so creepy the way Sammy had gone on about him, literally worshiping him like a god. How was he supposed to approach anyone in this building when they thought he could change them back, and that he was cruelly withholding his god like powers?

"Probably not. He was pretty out of it when we found him." Oliver offered, almost nonchalant. As far as he cared, the dunking had been a partly good thing. It had given them a chance to recenter Sammy's sanity and had led to the Lost Harbor being fixed up, drawing in numerous lost souls to it's protection.

"You shut up, your not part of this!" Sammy snapped at the bird, who held up his good wing in a placating manner. The sheep man was breathing hard, still boiling with repressed anger over the entire situation. He had forced himself to remain calm for the sake of the Lost Harbor denizens, he had focused on just improving his surroundings, but now he was faced with a source of so much bitterness. And he had started to hate the little cartoon devil long before he had become a creature
of ink, driven to hatred thanks to Joey's constant abuse.

However.. Standing here, looking at the small, cowering being, he was hit by how senseless it was. Outside of ignoring him after his inky transformation, Bendy hadn't done anything to him. The only time he had stricken out at him had been when he had come after Henry, when he was at his least reasonable. The source of all his stress, of all the misery and pain was Joey, and to let even an ounce of that righteous fury pass on to an undeserving Bendy was to let Joey off the hook even the slightest bit.

"Whatever." Sammy finally hissed, earning him a couple raised brows from the former workers who knew him better. Usually Sammy would carry on for quite a while once his anger was roused. Maybe his time with the ink had cooled him off.. or maybe he was just saving that bitter anger he had always been known to be nursing to unleash it fully onto Joey.

"Well than, it's my turn to say. I have no hard feelings. I met the real Sammy after my dunking and I actually got a real feel for how screwed up things are around here. That and we brought the Lost Harbor more up to code, so now it's safer. That's a positive point in this h***hole, and d***** I'm going to enjoy it." Oliver declared.

"Where is Pippen?" Perci demanded, finding his courage now that it was clear Bendy was no longer the senseless, hyper aggressive monster he had been. "I know she has my scissors, I remember helping her do something to you.."

"She's in the ink machine." Bendy answered, though his curiousity was piqued. He hadn't been sure if his freak out had been becuase of Pippen or Joey.. All he remembered was a feeling of chaotic confusion and terror as he was suddenly left fully in command of himself, no longer constantly fighting another influence to do what he wanted. He remembered locking on Henry, the thing he had always blamed for everything that had gone wrong, and deciding to take care of him, egged on by the weakened influence of Joey.

"The ink machine?" Perci echoed. "How did she get all the way up-"

"It isn't the one in the studio." Henry cut in. "There's a second one. One far larger than that one. It's still a long trek from here..

"We don't have time for a long trek.." Perci pointed out. "We've been fighting off waves of those things for hours. There's always a pause between them, but more always came. If Pippen is being used to make these things, than they have a limit on how much they can do at once, but this peace won't last forever."

The group fell silent, weighing their options. They might have to split apart to help protect the harbor. Bendy jumped as an idea came to him, tugging on Henry's leg. "Why don't you draw a portal to it?"

"A portal..?" Henry questioned hesitantly.

"Yeah! Pippen's done it before! When.. When Joey took over. I managed to confuse him enough that she could get loose, and she drew an ink portal out of the room. I don't think she choose where to go, since she didn't know much of the building.." Bendy offered, still speaking softer than usual for him, hyper aware of the group around him. It wasn't fun recounting his mistakes and sins out loud for them to judge him.
"But I've been there." Henry finished for him, eyes widening with realization. "I've been there so many times.. Do you know how she did it?"

"Pippen told about that." Peri offered as Bendy shrugged. "She said she had just been thinking about getting out of there, about getting to another part of the studio. She told me the other end of her portal formed on another wall in the studio. If you focus on a wall near the second ink machine we might make it."

"That's all fine and dandy, but i need you guys to hold on for a moment." Oliver cut in before Henry could speak. "Me and Sammy ain't been down here just twiddling our thumbs, we've been having weird stuff developin' here to. We keep finding these weird messaged that appear in one of the shacks, and we're not sure what to think of it. I think it's help."

"I, being more pragmatic than my companion, do not think it is help." Sammy offered in a dry tone. "Nothing down here has been very helpful. And when you offer help, you end up with a broken limb." Tom shuffled his feet a bit at that, huffing softly as he glared defiantly at Sammy. It was clear someone in the pair was nursing a grudge over Tom's actions. "And, if we're throwing things out there, I'm less pleased to see those two than I am to see Bendy."

"What do they say?" Henry questioned, not giving the three of them a chance to descend into an argument. In some ways, Sammy had not changed, so it wasn't a radical departure from who he had once been. The man had always been a bit tart and sharp tongued, even when he first started with the studio. It had only gotten worse when the stress of Joey's haphazard schedule started to eat away at the man.

"Uh, weird stuff, like 'they're' coming to help, looking for a way here, Hope and 'find the spark'. I think it means we're getting some more help, and that we should be helping the Lost Ones and other less refined ink beasties find their lost humanity. Sammy thinks it's a trap, and maybe he's right since he knows this place better, but someone in this partnership needs to be positive." Oliver answered.

"Optimism is a dangerous thought process in a place like this." Sammy pointed out dryly, though he was noticeably less curt with Oliver. It seemed their time together had softened him towards the bird, even if it was slight. Jack and his partnership had developed in much the same way, before souring thanks to Joey's mismanagement driving the entire studio up a wall and then some. It made the lyricist feel good to know that Sammy still had it in him to be sort of nice, as he had once been able to do.

"Those are nicer messages than you find on most walls in this place." Allison offered, having seen her own fair degree of ranting and ravings splattered across the walls.

Sammy glared at her lightly, hissing softly. "Don't encourage him." He'd rather the bird not get his hopes up, only for them to come crashing down when this mystery help failed to appear.

"I don't need encouragement to make up my own mind." Oliver cheekily chirped. "Anyway, I figured you guys should know, since I've showed Perci and told him about it."

"It's like the writing you told me Angie lead you to." Perci offered, looking to Henry. "When you and Jack were still in the sewers."

"Maybe that's why the rabbits keep leaning towards that area?" Jack offered, still carrying the rabbits for Brutis, who was watching for trouble. He wasn't entirely happy with Alice's presence,
but so long as she did not try to pull anything, he would abide her presence. Henry was giving her a chance, and so would he, until the ‘angel’ decided to screw it up.

The rabbits were indeed leaning the box in one particular direction, soft noses pointing towards the far end of the Lost Harbor. They weren’t eager to leave the safety of the group, but they could sense something familiar and important in that direction. Dark eyes that could see more than the group they traveled with scanned the area, ears twitching every which way.

Brutis turned to eye them, before taking the box and setting it onto the ground. The rabbits leapt out, starting to hop towards the back end of the Lost Harbor, Brutis close behind, an ever present guardian. It gave the small beings the confidence to pursue the lead, the rest of the group slowly following after them as it became clear they were on to something. The rabbits had guided Perci and Brutis to safety once before, and had sort of helped Henry in the past. They had yet to lead them into danger.

As the group followed the rabbits, Susie found herself next to Sammy, an awkward tension growing between the pair. Neither of them would look at the other, the memories of their last days as humans going through their minds. Harsh words exchanged between them as Susie discovered she had been replaced by Allison as Alice's voice actress with no forewarning what so ever. Sammy, thrown under the bus by Joey as he was instructed to relay this information to Susie the day the change was made. Their relationship in tatters as betrayal and frustration overwhelmed them both.

"You're looking well." Susie finally murmured, looking over the ramshackle buildings of the Lost Harbor. They were less ramshackle than they had once been, but still ragged compared to proper buildings. The little city Sammy had built. So odd how their paths had diverged. Where once she had been the more social one, she had taken to solitude, and the solitary Sammy had turned to the masses, making himself into some form of spiritual leader. At least, for a while he had been. Now he was just a leader, no longer praising the ink demon she had loathed.

"You are too." Sammy offered awkwardly. While he had taken a disliking to Bendy, or at least the concept of him, while they were still human, Alice had developed her hatred afterwards. When Bendy was sent after her, time and time again by a vindictive Joey, who blamed her for coming out wrong. Susie had been the first experiment with the ink and humans, not combining souls but using a human as a base template to work the ink around. She had still come out wrong, warped by her tumultuous emotions.

They didn't speak further, to many unspoken matters between them, and too little time. This wasn't the time for a heart to heart, even if they could manage it without loosing their tempers. They needed privacy, and they needed time. For now they could manage, but the awkward tension would snap eventually.

The group stopped outside of a shack at the far end of the cavern, the rabbits pawing at the door. Brutis opened it, the pair hopping in, revealing the messages Oliver told them about. Wherever the light of Angie's halo touched the writing, it glowed gold, the pair running to the far back wall, which was clear of writing. Something glittered faintly under the light of Angie's halo, though there was no writing in this spot.

Perci stepped in, grabbing his halo and turning it so the ring was parallel with the wall. Through the golden ring, he could see the outline of a door, the word 'EXIT' embalzoned on it, light seeming to pour out from under it. The group, who had stopped to watch him as he stepped in, all peered through the halo, staring at the door in silence, uncertain what to think.
"It's.." Perci paused. "An exit?"

"An exit?" Oliver echoed, hopping behind his cousin to look through the ring. "An exit to where?"

"Somewhere there's a hope for peace.." Allison whispered, staring through the ring as well.

"Guess that's why they wrote 'HOPE' here." Oliver offered.

"How do we get to it?" Wally asked. The group began to murmur among themselves, though their eyes began to slowly drift to Henry and his pen.

"Wait- What about Pippen?! What about Joey?" Bendy quickly cut in.

"We can't leave that man alive," Charley agreed. "We've been dragged through to this place once before. What will stop him from doing it again, and to all of us."

"We're still going after him." Henry declared. "He still has Pippen. We can't abandon her. But.. If this is a way out, we can start siphoning people out to safety." He slowly walked up to where the door had been, pausing as he held up his pen. Perci paced forward, hesitantly handing the former animator his halo, the older male looking through it so he could trace the door outline. Perci nervously paced back as Henry worked, watching warily as the golden lines became visible to everyone.

Once Henry finished, he stepped back, releasing Perci's halo to return to him. The lines were glowing, a grey door slowly appearing, though it moved at a far slower pace than anything else had ever formed before. When Henry had made the ball all that time again in the safe house, the object had appeared immediately.. but that had been a simple object. An exit from a place so wildly complex.. surely that would take time.

"Looks like we have a wait ahead of ourselves." Henry murmured, turning to the group. "We should split up. Part of the group should stay here to watch over the door and defend the harbor, while the rest of us deal with Joey. If there's really help coming through that door, than someone should be here to greet them, and we shouldn't put all our eggs into one basket going after Joey."

That started some muttering and murmuring among the group, before they began to sort themselves out.

Among the group staying behind were Tom and Allison, the pair having no real desire to face Joey. There grudge did not outweigh their desire to escape, and survive. With them stood Wally, who had no real skills with which to fight, as well as Grant. The rabbits, of course, would be staying behind, and Brutis, after some encouragement from Perci, choose to stay. They needed at least one strong member there to fight off any danger that may come to this place. And of course, there were the hundred or so Lost Ones and Searchers milling about the Lost Harbor, but they would need guidance in the case of a fight.

"What do you mean I can't come?" Oliver's voice cut over the other's chattering as they debated over the situation.

"Oliver, your wing is broken!" Perci pointed out, shaking his head. "You can't fight like this."
"You'll just end up with more broken bones." Sammy added. "And we need someone here that the Lost Ones trust. If those monsters return, we need you to rally them together."

"I have much of a reason to want to pop Joey upside the head as anyone! That punk has my little cousin in there!" Oliver snapped, crossing his good arm.

"The Lost Ones need you." Sammy stated with finality. "They have more faith in you than they did me, even when I was still an ink monster praising Bendy. You will be the most efficient here. You helped rally these people together, now you need to take care of them."

"I.. I guess." Oliver sighed, lowering his head. I just.. don't let Pippen think I abandoned her, OK?"

"We would never let her think that." Perci answered.

"Besides, you were the one so eager to see what would come from the writing on the wall. Now you'll find out." Sammy finished. "Now, I head something about a portal to the ink machine earlier. Hopefully that will form faster than this door."

"It should. Pippen's portal took no time at all to form." Bendy offered, feeling more confident now. The group was becoming comfortable with his presence, and while Lacie still glared at him, the intensity had lessened now that she had Joey to focus on. There was something about the handwriting that looked familiar, though he didn't speak on it yet. He'd rather run it by Henry first than make a fool of himself to the group.

"We'll do it outside, just in case." Henry offered. "I don't want to send those monsters right into our 'help' when it arrives."

"Makes sense." Norman rumbled, cracking his fists in preparation. "Let's get this started." The group began to make their way out of the shack, looking for a flat wall for Henry to work with.
"Alright. Here goes." Henry muttered, having picked a wall down one of the tunnels heading towards the Ink Machine, and away from the harbor. Far enough that while the portal remained open it would give the guards watching the hall time to rally the troops for a defense. That is, if it stayed open. Bendy had told him that Pippen's had closed after she had gone through, but Pippen hadn't had any intention of returning to this point. Henry would prefer to return here, though he wouldn't leave it open if he could close it and it endangered the harbor.

"You can do it." Bendy murmured, the only person daring to stand close to Henry as he worked. Henry smiled warmly to the little devil, rubbing his head, hoping it would not be the last time he did so. That was a dark thought, but one he could not shake, heart beating rapidly in his chest. He was finally going to confront Joey, and see this nightmare to an end.

Making the portal was simple, a matter of focusing on one of the hallways closest to the Ink machine. From there, he drew a round hole, slowly adding swirling detail to it, focusing on the location. A round dark hole appeared, a tunnel of ink that was a straight line despite the distance it was covering. He was fairly certain the ink machine was further down than they were standing, but he didn't focus on it. He could see the familiar hallway that came just before the Ink Machine, one side lined with glass windows.

"This is it." He declared, turning to the rest of the group. "You guys should go through first." There was no disagreement with this, though the group eyed the portal uncertainly at first. Perci was the first to go through, putting his faith in Henry in spite of the wobbly, inky interior of the portal. He began through with no issues, and slowly, one by one, the others began to slip through.

"Are you ready for this?" Henry asked gently once it was just him and Bendy, the devil looking up nervously. His expression shifted to one of determination, standing up a bit taller despite his trepidation.

"Yes." Bendy answered, hopping into the tunnel and walking through it. Henry followed him soon after, walking across the wobbly 'flooring' of the portal, whispers echoing from the ink around him. They were mostly calm, the ink unable to harm them while it was being harnessed in this carefully controlled manner, though Henry and Bendy did not stay for long to test their luck. Once they walked through, the portal closed behind them, the pair not spending much time on the matter.

They walked out into a long hallway that curved away to a bend a couple yards ahead. The hallway was long enough for the entire group to remain present. To their left, hung along the wall evenly spaced out were awards and degrees, primarily in Joey's name or the studios name. On their right was a hall lined in glass windows, inky tracks present on the wall and ground of the hall on the opposite side. Judging from the few clear imprints in the ink, the mess had been created by the monsters that were being siphoned to the harbor.

"Looks like we've reached this during a calm moment. Let's hope we're not walking into another swarm of those creatures." Sammy muttered, eyeing the empty hall quietly.
"Yeah. Let's go. The less time we give Joey to work with, the better." Henry murmured, taking the lead for the group. He turned the corner, grimacing at the message written on the wall immediately in front of him. 'DEATH' in massive letters, an arrow point to the right, the only direction to go, and a massive ink stain splattered beneath the words. To the left was a set of gears and machines that powered who knows what.

He pushed on, not dwelling on the familiar message for long, though he knew it would upset the groups moral. He turned right, heading down a short length of hall towards a slanted doorway. The top sill looked as if it had nearly collapsed beneath the weight it was forced to support, but remained standing, likely thanks to the extra support of the banisters on each side. The hall gave away to a massive cavern, on larger than even the Lost Harbor cavern.

For several yard ahead of them was plain dirt, stalagmites present on the dirt and peeking out of the ink. The initial space was narrow, several yards wide, but once it reach the end of the dirt path the cavern widened open considerably. The only source of light were a pair of posts with lights tied to them. They barely lit the space before them, the lights scarcely reaching the dirt walls on each side of them.

Directly ahead of them, roughly a dozen yards away, was the ink machine's larger counterpart, the monolith taking up the cavern space. The visible wall was a line of large bricks are tall as Brutis, massive pipes darting in and out of the wall. Like the machine above, this one had a release nozzle, though there was no grate to catch it's product. The piping around it was vastly more complex as well, and beneath it was an entrance to the machine. Not a hole but an open hallway lined in metal and covered to prevent ink from splattering those who were walking in. Not that its presence did much.

Between them and the dirt path they stood on was a lake of ink, deep, and ominous. It stood between them and the structure, sluggishly flowing to parts unknown. None of the boulders within the ink were close enough to be used to get across, and no debris was present that could be used to make a raft across. The end of the dirt path was a rock lined lip, which lead to a short drop into the unknown depths of ink.

"It's always been as high as my hips whenever I came in the past." Henry offered, though he knew that was the least of their problems. While the inks effects had been slow to take to him, only becoming apparent after a couple loops, the ink still held a powerful sway over much of the group. So powerful that contact with the substance would have an unknown effect.

Henry walked to the edge of the landmass, fingers sliding across his pen as he tried to think of something to do. He could make a bridge.. but he could only draw what was in reach. He could try a boat or raft, but again he had never tried anything larger than what was in his reach, and even with all the flexing and stretching he could naturally do he wasn't sure he could put together a large enough boat. Not to mention that every moment they spent here was another moment Joey had to rebuild his army.

Bendy walked to the edge as well, crouching beside Henry, staring at the ink. It had been his long time companion, the ink, even before the other souls had begun to siphon in as people fell to the substance in all manners of ways. Once upon a time, it would all answer to him, every ounce of it in the building, a fact that Joey had not liked in the slightest. It was around the same time he discovered that fact that he started suggesting forming a connection to protect Bendy, to act as the cricket on his shoulder to guide him through a world he was unfamiliar with. Back when there had been a promise of leaving the studio, of his body being repaired..

Slowly he crouched lower, his fingers reaching the substance. A white gloved digit grazed the
substance, the devil sending a silent plea to it. Once upon a time, it had been under his control, before all the other souls had been added and everyone began to fight for control, their confusion, fear, and rage only pushing the ink into an even more volatile substance, wresting the majority of the ink from his control unless he was in the immediate vicinity. He had always been fighting the others for control, wresting every little bit he could take to have a little more leverage, to feel less like he was drowning like everyone else.

But now he approached it in a more diplomatic, gentle manner than he had adopted after the internal workings of the ink had become hectic, gently calling their attention. He couldn't help them, not immediately, but if they helped him they would be set on a path that would make it possible. They needed to wrest control from Joey, and to do so required them to cross to the Ink machine on clear ground.

He was initially met with a volatile whirlwind of emotions from all sides, the devil only distantly aware of Henry's hand on his shoulder, his concerned voice echoing in his ears. Slowly, however, things calmed as the possibility of freedom spread through the ink, a sense of purpose spreading across them all. Cooperate, and he would help them. Cooperate, and they would be a step closer to being free, to having their own bodies and mental space once more.

Slowly, the ink began to part, until it had split apart to create a dry path in the midst of the lake, leading up to the ink machine. It was at least a yard wide, the path completely dry as the ink rippled on each side, constantly pushing itself away from the path, leaving it clear for them. He looked up to them nervously, grinning nervously as Henry stared at him in amazement.

"I convinced the ink to cooperate, but I'm not sure how long it will last. It's difficult with how many souls are in there, and they're all so scrambled and mixed up that it's hard for them to focus on something. It's best we get across fast." Bendy explained, the group muttering behind him in amazement and uncertainty, the butcher gang eyeing him uncertainly. It was a show of power they didn't expect from Bendy of all beings.. but he had said that he had to get the ink to work for him. So it wasn't Bendy himself. He was still Bendy.

Henry was the first one to jump down onto the path, having faith in Bendy's words and abilities. The devil smiled ever so lightly, before jumping down himself, following Henry. The group quickly siphoned after him, sticking close to the devil despite any misgivings they may still harbor. At one point the group began to nervously squeeze past him, not wanting to be alone on the path once Bendy had passed. Perci was polite enough to explain the concern to him, the devil stepping aside into a cubby hole the ink formed beside the path so the others could pass. It made sense, though he wished some of the others had expressed this in words rather than shoving past him.

Henry was to first to reach the stairs to the covered walkway, watching ink splatter out of the tube above and onto the curved ceiling, before sliding away to the bottom. Where in the world was all this ink coming from? It seemed like everywhere he looked, there was always more ink.

The covering over the hallway wasn't perfect, having been worn down over the years by the inks corrupting effect. Trails of ink dripped down from above, though they were mostly at the sides of the path, forcing the group into a single file line down the middle. The hall itself was constructed of sturdy metal slabs, caged lights lining the hall. One would be on the left, until the next slab over where it would be on the right side of the hall, the pattern repeating itself for the length of it. The floor was primarily welded metal plates, though in places where the ink dripping through they could see it beginning to corrode away, or rather be transmuted into more ink.

Behind them, the path closed as Bendy stepped onto the stairs, no living beings left on the ink level. It was relief the miasma fell back into it's usual listless, chaotic existence, though the
memory of his promise was permanently seared through the miasma, slowly spreading to the ink further away. It would take time, but what was time to a blend of consciousness who did not have a sense of time? It would either feel immediate, or like an eternity, irregardless of how quickly the devil carried out his promise.. if he did at all.

As they walked deeper into the hall, the ink drippings became less prominent as they passed the point the nozzle outside was. Now they could spread out a bit, though the hall was only a couple feet across. Bendy took advantage of this to return to Henry's side at the front, being the most familiar with this place, even more so than Henry. He had spent far more time than he would like to speak on in this place, and a good portion of it hadn't been willingly.

At the end of the hall were two glass windows, allowing them to look into the small rectangular chamber beyond. Only the light in the right was still on, but they didn't need it to see the ink trapped inside the chambers, or the vague figures coalescing from that ink, a constant supply dripping from above. The ink didn't drain out very quickly, either by design or from lack of maintenance, a half foot of the substance wobbling within the rectangular confines as more ink was constantly added.

"It's still making things.." Perci muttered, unnerved by the constant work this machine was performing. Even with the nightmare the rest of the expansive studio had become, the machine continued to churn out new ink beings to add to the mess.

"Doesn't look like it's doing it's usual work." Norman pointed out, eyeing the monster slowly forming within. It was similar to the demented creations that had attacked the harbor, though they all only shared a vague outline in their formation. Limbs to move and attack with, sharp fangs and spines, maybe a head or chest if they were lucky. Empty, violent husks to do as Joey commanded.

"It isn't." Henry muttered, not liking the fact that Joey appeared to have developed a template for his monsters. From what he knew of the ink machine, it required a template, though even with one it did not always come out perfectly. Even now they could see the figure inside warping and twisting under the miasma's influence. This beast was being made with the ink from outside, unlike the ones who had been made with uncorrupted ink. There was no telling how this being would turn out with that additional influence. Henry wasn't going to stay around to find out. "Come on."

They turned to move away, Bendy in the lead now, beginning to guiltily pace faster and faster. He had brought Pippen here, he had put her in danger when she had been fairly safe with Henry. He had left her here, like he had been left so long ago, to face whatever fate decided to throw at her. She had been nothing but kind to him in spite of him testing her better nature, and this was her reward. To be trapped in the same hell he had been for so long.

The hall widened as they left the entryway, the new hall a couple yards in width now. It allowed the group to spread out further, most of them having a sense that it was better to do so rather than clump together. If they were together too closely, it would be too easy for them all to be wiped out at once.. but spreading out to far also held it's own dangers, something they each had to work to balance out on their own.

The walls were still metal plates, like the entryway, though they were larger to cover the added space. The walls were piece meal in places, as thick wires and pipes jockeyed for space throughout the construct, leaving them uncovered in spots. They passed four more of the ink chambers, trying not to linger to long upon the beings inside, which looked more like Lost Ones than any toon template. A couple had inky prints splattered on the interior walls from when their occupants still had the will to fight, though all stood still now, their wills gone.
At the end of the widened hall was an arching doorway, currently shut with two halves of a metal door. Bendy didn't hesitate to throw the switch on the wall beside the wide doors, his nervousness growing. These doors hadn't been shut in years, and they didn't shut on their own. Joey had to have come and closed it himself. He was the only other being who could reach this point.

The doors began to slowly slide open, Bendy's heart pitching down as the metal clinked and clanked. He could see the 'throne room' ahead of them, just at the end of the hall, and in the same condition he had left it in. A mound of ink, dozens of projected cartoons, a chair, but no Pippen. He still ran forward, hoping he was wrong, though he knew he was not.

The others followed him down the hall more hesitantly, save Henry, who familiar with this place. He was partly weary of this place, because this was where so many loops had ended before, sending him right back to the beginning of this nightmare so many times. But this time it was different. This time, he had Bendy back, and the little devil was free of Joey's influence. There would be no fight, no 'End' reel, no explosion of light and pain. It would be different, whether Joey liked it or not.

As they entered the room, Bendy began to scramble along the sides, running his hands over the wall for any hint of a secret passage. He never knew exactly where Joey was, other than in the ink machine, only ever actually going into his presence when he was summoned. He had always moved through the ink to approach Joey, and even then his sense of where the location was had always been some what skewed. Likely Joey's doing, not trusting even his slave with his precise location.

"This place is creepy.." Edgar murmured, looking up to the projectors. There were a couple projectors with images of the butcher gang present, the familiar scenes turned eerie by the change in perspective. They had all lived through many adventures and misadventures, that was simply the life of a tone, but it had always been from their perspective, and not the strange, omnipresent presence the cartoon imagery showed.

Perci was hesitantly approaching the chair, clambering up the gear steps towards the cushioned seat. It's fluff and comfort had long been worn out from years of use. Chains hung ominously from the metal bars attached to the top corners of the chair, dangling limply from the warped metal, twisted by years of it's occupant fighting against his bindings. They were disconcerting, but his mind was focused on the cushion, something calling him as he plunged his hand into the back of the chair.

His fingers wrapped around something cool and metallic, a surge of excitement darting through him. He could see the threads again, more threads than Pippen could see when she had borrowed his tool. Threads within the walls, a complex mess of knots and intertwine parts that if carefully studied could reveal how the machine worked. He could see the threads between the group, the strong, sturdy threads of loyalty that bound the Butcher gang together, the tattered red thread between Sammy and Susie. He could see a golden thread leading from Henry's core thread to Bendy's, a bond that could be hidden in shadows but never truly destroyed.

The scissors were in perfect condition as Perci pulled them out, a surge of relief washing over him. He hadn't realized how uncomfortable he had been without them, but now it felt like a piece of him had been returned, the angel slowly looking over the room.

Henry and Bendy were both testing the walls, knocking at them to listen for any sign of hollowness, or hidden switches or buttons. The butcher gang were still watching the looping cartoons, muttering with discomfort between themselves. Susie was watching him, her hands
grasping her gun tightly as she stood in tense preparedness, Sammy actively watching the hall behind them for trouble. They had passed a side hall on their way into the room, and the composer unwilling to let anything sneak up on them from there.

Lacie and Norman had approached the chair as well, Norman's light flickering slowly in a way Perci had learned meant he was thinking. They were both staring at the chains, at the inky marks embedded into the chair, Lacie's face twisted with disgust at the lengths Joey drew had gone to. It didn't take a far leap of the imagination to work out what had been the plan here. Chains to keep the mistake in place, projectors all around to show it what it was meant to be. Tormenting it with what he had once been.

"Here!" Bendy hissed, having finally reached the back wall. He was tapping one of the panels, the sound different from the rest, more hollow and echoed. Henry and the devil began to search for anyway to open the passage as Perci approached, still holding his scissors. They moved aside as the angel stepped up to the wall, staring at it intently.

The threads that made up the operation of the machine were complex, a twisting mess of connections and overlap that would have take him days to fully puzzle out. But there was one small section that stood separated from the rest, dividing into several different processes, but one lead here. It's purpose was to hold the door shut, until a switch or button sent an impulse through the wires that would change it's purpose, or until it was severed. Joey had set it up so the door would open if power was lost, not wanting to be trapped in there in the event of that happening.

He reached forward, scissors pressing through the wall as they spread, only going a couple inches before he shut them. There was a buzz, and the wall began to slide downward as the emergency function kicked in, Perci wobbling a bit as the rest of the group crowded around. He hadn't used his scissors in a while, and he had forgotten how overwhelming the sheer amount of information they could reveal would be if he didn't limit how much he was looking at.

"Good job." Henry murmured, setting his hand onto the boy's shoulder to support him as he wobbled, Perci smiling weakly.

"We should be careful." Sammy muttered, still watching their backs. "There's nothing more dangerous than a cornered rat."

"That's what the gun is for." Susie quipped simply, hoisting her weapon up. "Let's go before the rat bolts."

Henry took the lead, the group working their way down a tight hallway. The walls were rough hewn, metal slabs present only in places where it was necessary to provide support. It was so narrow they had no choice but to move in a single file, the group maintaining a close presence to avoid being parted. First Henry, than Bendy, Susie, Sammy, and all the rest.

Eventually the hall gave way to a wider room, the group siphoning out into a wooden room. It was styled to be similar to the offices above, though it was far more fancy than the majority of them. A nice carpet covered the middle of the room, a sizeable couch present on one side. There were more awards framed along the wall, as well as pictures of the cartoon characters the studio was known for.

It was well lit, but eerily quiet, two hallways presenting themselves to the group. One was directly ahead, a door with with frosted glass and dime lighting at that end. The other was closer to the midsection of room, the door wide open but the hall dark. Soft grunts and rumbles could be heard coming from the darkened passage, the group giving it a wide berth. Only Henry and Bendy got past it before the source of the noise made itself known.
Ink beasts exploded from the hall the moment Henry and Bendy past it, the group taking up fighting positions. Susie had been right behind them, and didn't hesitate to take aim with her gun, showering the approaching creatures in bullets. It barely held back the swarm, which were flooding out of the other hall, rapidly filling the room and pushing Henry and Bendy away from the main group and towards the door. It was their only option, take the door or be pinned in a corner by the monsters.

The rest of the group were forced to contend with the ever growing swarm, the tight quarters making it harder to fight. Lacie was armed with a pipe she had gotten off of Wally, and made good use of it, able to deal with the tight quarters. Perci was forced to punch and kick the beasts away, stabbing with his scissors when he could do so without losing them. There was only so much space, and he couldn't risk stopping to pull out his scythe. Even then, there was so little room he had a high chance of taking out an ally.

Sammy and Susie were at the forefront of the group, Susie's gun the only thing that stopped them from being utterly overwhelmed immediately. Sammy was a close second, however, swinging his axe like a mad man, no one daring to get nearer to him. Monster after monster fell under the composers fury, the few beasts that got past him easily taken care of by the rest of the group.

"Get Joey!" Perci shouted, doing his best to defend Barley's back, given he was the only person not currently paired up with anyone else. It was the most Perci could do, given the current state of their fighting space. It was better to defend those good with close quarter combat in this moment. But Henry and Bendy were ahead of the group, and split off from them. They could keep moving ahead. There was a chance the swarm would falter without it's master to guide them.

"That's far enough." Joey growled, his tone annoyed. He was holding a gun, keeping it pointed at Henry. Bendy didn't move, save for his tail, which was whipping in alarm. They were in what was designed to resemble an office space, though next to the drawing desk was a large table, which held Pippen bound down to it. She didn't even respond to their voices, pale and quiet, though she moved and twitched ever so slightly in her unconscious state.

"Pippen!" Bendy called, the gun momentarily pointed at him, the devil taking a step back. He glared, staying still as he stared at Joey, body shaking with anger. Why was Joey always destroying everything he held dear?! He pit him against his creator, he turned him against everyone else in the studio, and now he was attacking the friend that had helped him find his freedom! "What did you do?!"

"I put her to use." Joey answered, as if it was the most sensible thing in the world. "What point is there in letting her abilities go to waste? She couldn't be trusted to do anything herself, so I took over."

"You're killing her, Joey." Henry growled, eyeing the gun. Bendy was slowly moving closer to
Joey while he wasn't being watched, Joey's furious eyes locked on Henry whenever Bendy wasn't speaking. He needed to keep Joey's eyes on him. "This is ridiculous."

"This is. But we're only here because of you, Henry." Joey hissed, keeping the gun level with Henry's chest. "You are to blame for all of this. You left our dream to rot. And look where we are now."

"I left because of you." Henry snapped back, trying not to let Joey under his skin to much. This was a familiar argument, one that he was met with every time the loops ended, though Joey would end the argument once he got fed up with Henry by sending him back to the studio, starting another loop. Now, he didn't have that option, but he still had his temper. And a gun.

"You didn't have a reason to leave." Joey countered. "I was keeping this studio afloat. I was making sure that you could spend all day drawing."

"Drawings you took credit for." Henry hissed.

"I had rights to do so. It was me supplying you with the art supplies, the space, the paper and time. If you didn't have me you wouldn't have the time to have done any thing." He spat.

"That's not how that works-" Henry snapped, moments before Bendy sprang into action. He had managed to move close enough to Joey that he could jump him, the man pulling the trigger as the toon collided with him. Henry ducked as Bendy shoved Joey's arm up, sharp fangs biting into Joey's other arm as the man tried to push him away. Joey yelled, dropping the gun to punch the toon in the face, before pitching him off. His arm was bleeding now, the red liquid mixing with ink that had stained his sleeves.

Henry caught Joey in the jaw as Bendy went flying, the other man grunting in surprise. Despite the height advantage the still human Joey had, Henry didn't hesitate, bringing his heavy fists into the other, pent up fury finally released. He had been going through this nightmare time and time again, and finally he could teach Joey a lesson!

Joey wasn't going down easy, however, the man exchanging blows with his former friend and coworker. While the pair exchanged blows, Bendy was recovering from the blow to his face, the devil working at the restraints that held the imp. Pippen had taken notice of him, but didn't believe he was really there, certain he was another hallucination. Some color had started to bleed back into her form, her tail still dropped into a pot of ink where Joey had left it once the first door to this section of the machine had opened. It wasn't much, but some color had bled into her lightly. He picked her up once the bindings were off, a confused look passing over her face as she was moved.

Pippen stared in confusion at the perfect Bendy, letting her head rest against his shoulder. He looked exactly like the cartoons, but she knew that wasn't the real Bendy. She hadn't been able to help him, she had sent him to his death. She had meant to heal him, she had wanted to help him, she had promised him.. But in the end she had failed him. Bendy was gone. So this couldn't be real. Could it?

"It will be OK Pippen." Bendy whispered as he started to pick her up, concern crossing his face as she failed to respond. She kept trying to slip out of his arms, her face tired and confused. He managed to keep ahold of her, given she was too weak to actually leave his arms. "Dollface?"

She stopped at that, tearing up. She started crying, mumbling apologies, apologizing for sending him to his death, for screwing everything up, for breaking her promise to him. He stared at her in confusion, looking up to Henry and Joey, who were still going at it, the fight an even match for the moment. He looked back down to her, shaking his head.
"You got it all wrong, Dolface." Bendy whispered quickly, hugging her closer. "I'm alive as alive can be, and it's thanks to you. You sent me to Henry to get fixed up. You broke Joey's control. I wouldn't be free without your help." He looked up, bristling with uncertainty. This really wasn't the place to talk, and Pippen seemed dead set on the idea that he was dead, and it was her fault.

The former friends were still duking it out, though Henry was starting to come out on top, the fury of a betrayed friend and coworker behind his blows. Joey had severely underestimated the strength behind a toons blows, and from a man who had been tormented as long as Henry. Where he had thought he was breaking Henry, he was only building the mans anger, the strength of his conviction to stop Joey.

Joey finally stumbled back as a final blow collided with his nose, slamming into the wall behind him. Ink was splattered across Joey's form from the fight, ink bleeding out of Henry's nose and from several cuts that had opened up on his form. It was mingling with the cuts on his still human form, ink bleeding into his bloodstream and beginning to corrupt him. Parts of his flesh was already taking the sepia tone of a toon, though he was resisting the effect as much as possible.

Henry stepped back, panting hard, the sound of the distance fighting beginning to fade. Either they had finally reached the end of the swarm, or Joey was too beaten up to maintain his force anymore. Which ever option, Henry didn't care. He retrieved the gun, pointing it at Joey as they both panted. He was ready to shoot if need be, though he wasn't ready to kill Joey. He had killed dozens of men in his time overseas, and he could do so if need be. But was it his place to decide this alone? Joey had harmed so many people, not just himself. He was at least going to let the others air their grievances. Than they would decide his fate.

Bendy quickly ran to Henry's side, slipping behind his creator with Pippen in tow. He was mostly carrying hr, given she was barely in the present, mumbling apologies to him. He ended up picking her up, able to do so despite their similar size thanks to the natural strength inherent to toons. She was leaning heavily into him, swinging her limbs carefully, realizing she was free. It didn't feel like she could walk, her entire body felt to empty and weak for that, but she could feel warmth pressed against her, and under her, holding her up.

"This is the end, Joey." Henry rasped, panting. "This is where this all ends. All this madness.. All this pain. It's over Joey. You can't hurt anymore people."

"This is where it ends." Joey hissed, abruptly twisting towards something on the ground. It wasn't another gun, the shape was all wrong, too long and ending in a point. It was a syringe, a normal syringe like the kind you would find in a hospital. Instead of medicine however, there was ink, the volatile substance sloshing in the glass confines. It glowed lightly with power, a dark red glow none of them had ever seen surround the ink. Something Joey cooked up, no doubt, just in case.

He jammed the syringe into his arm before Joey could react, jamming the plunger down as quickly as possible. The ink flowed into his veins, his body beginning to jerk and wobble as it began to warp, maniacal laughter escaping him. Henry desperately shot him, but the bullets had no effect, absorbing into his warping form. He was rapidly gaining mass, his fingers sharpening into claws as his face expanded, jagged fangs exploding from his lips.

"GO!" Henry shouted, shoving Bendy ahead of him back down the hall. Maniacal laughter followed them down the hall, the pair running into the group. They were quick to order them back as Joey laughed, the sound steadily morphing into a haunting rumbling growl. What they could see of him down the hall was unpleasant, the former studio head now twice as wide as he had been, his skin inky black.
"We need to go, things are out of control!" Bendy shouted, the rest of the group beginning to flood out of the room, heading for the wider space of the Throne room. Behind them they could hear thumping and thuds as 'Joey' got back up, forcing his way through the narrow halls after them. By the time they had siphoned out to the throne room, the new Joey had caught up, slobbering and snarling threateningly as he exploded into the throne room.

His new form was taller than all of them, sporting a wide chest and shoulders, his back hunched and the spine jagged. He stood on his hands, massive clawed hands of ink, his arms muscular and powerful. Unlike his upper half, his lower half was the same size it had been in his human form, now sporting a coat of black ink and jagged tips to his toes. His head was thrice the size it once was, a massive grin splitting the lower portion, jagged sepias tinted fangs spilling from his gums. There was a light deep in the middle of his head, two long horns sprouting out of top of each side it was split into. A set of whipping tails sprouted from behind him, the spade tips sharp and jagged, stabbing at anything near him, though none of the group risked staying close.

It was a form Henry was painfully familiar with, the one Bendy was always twisted into at the end of the loops, but now the real monster had taken this form. Now it was the real monster of the studio standing before them, snarling and growling with hatred as he leered down at them all. He would destroy them all, and fix this broken reel. Than he would set things up properly once more to how it was meant to be, to how he wanted it.

The first being he targeted was Norman, the one unfortunate enough to be close to him, fists slamming into The Projectionist. It sent him flying, Lacie crying out his name as flew, before narrowly dodging being hit as well. The group was scrambling to get out of range of his raking claws, the monstrous studio head beginning to wildly charge around the room to try and crush them, loosing finesse to his rage.

Henry managed to make it to the hallway, the group still in the throne room, using the wider space to avoid the demon. He began to scrabble at the nearest wall quickly, drawing a hasty portal to the harbor. The other end opened on a wall closest to the mystery shack with its strange door, Henry not taking the time to focus on it. They just needed to get out now.

"EVERYONE! This way!" Henry called, pulling Joey's gun from his pocket once more, shooting his ex-friend to try and distract him. He ran back into the room while the others began to siphon out, Lacie and Sammy supporting Norman on the way out of the room. Susie and Sammy were working together to distract the enraged studio head. Susie raining bullets into his form before moving away when he turned his attention on her. When he did, Sammy would come up behind him, axe biting into the beasts hide before he would scramble out of the way, Susie using this chance to move to a new spot. The bullets and axe were barely putting a dent in the beast's hide, but worked to irritate and send him spiraling in new directions, as everyone else fled for the portal.

Henry added himself to the mix, working to keep 'Joey' distracted as the others fled, Bendy the first one through, still carrying a slightly more aware Pippen, the imp holding onto him for dear life. This event had lasted to long to be another hallucination, or at least longer than any of her other hallucinations, and the feeling of Bendy, alive, warm, talking and running Bendy, was so very real. He had to be real. It had to be real. Even though Joey had transformed into a monster, she wanted this to be real, because Bendy was alive.

Finally it was just Sammy, Susie, and Henry, the three running for it as Joey charged into a wall Sammy had been standing in front of moments ago. Sammy was the first to the portal, and he grabbed Susie's hand, helping her through as they ran across the wobbly ink ground for the familiar safety of the Harbor.
Henry leapt in as Joey began to pursue them, having recovered from his botched charge and realized that he hadn't been winning. He hadn't destroyed the others in the group, they had escaped in the confusion, and that fact only infuriated him further. His claws slashed the air, just missing Henry by seconds as the former animator started down the portal, willing it shut behind him as he ran. The ink began to collapse behind him, the whispers of the ink feverish with confusion and fear as the ink sensed change, sensed the tug of a new monstrous master.

It was collapsing, almost fast enough to catch up to Henry, maybe so fast it would have taken him. He would never know. The collapse abruptly stopped, tearing back open with an audible noise as Joey forced himself after his prey. The ink whispers reached a crescendo, the spirits trapped within clawing at the one responsible for all of this, slowing him down as the tunnel narrowed, but Joey would not be deterred, forcibly pushing his way forward.

Henry leapt out, trying to close the other end but finding his will defied as it slammed into Joey's. The wild frenzy the former studio head was in was giving him strength, even though he was now on the same level as the other ink beings. Henry shouted for everyone to move, to find cover, barely getting clear before Joey forced his way through.

The beast was ragged now, his body dripping and melting in places, arcs of ink connecting him to the still open portal. The whispers were no longer whispers, no full on shouts and screams, fury and hatred pouring from the ink, from every being Joey had damned for his own glory. From every life he had crushed in his blind pursuit. He only managed to get several feet away from the portal, his body beginning to fall apart as he was torn apart by a thousand cuts from those he had damned.

Slowly, the beast collapsed, leaving behind a smear of ink, Joey's disembodied consciousness not standing a chance against the hundreds of other consciousnesses trapped in the ink. He was utterly erased in moments, the basis of his being torn apart to the smallest possible pieces until it was unrecoverable, the fury of the ink ensuring he would never return. He may have made it, the one thing he could truly claim he had made, but it was the means to his end without hesitation.

"Is.. Is he gone?" Bendy asked, Pippen slouched into his side. They were pressed against the wall of the cavern, Bendy's body between the rest of the world and the imp. He would protect her this time, he really would, or die trying. His past attempts had failed miserably, but he wasn't accepting failure anymore.

"H-He's gone." Perci answered, a bit pale. He was holding his scissors still, and had seen the thread of Joey's essence be torn apart until it was no longer recognizable or recoverable. It had been unnerving, watching what he knew was the essence of another living being be utterly destroyed, but given what he had done.. If anyone deserved such a fate, it was Joey Drew.

"Pippen! Perci! You're back!" Oliver called, running out of the shack. He had been watching over the doors development. It was so close to finished now, but he needed to check on his cousins. He waddled to Pippen, Bendy bristling slightly as the bird came up behind them, before forcing himself to settle down. It was just Oliver.

"Olive Oil?" Pippen mumbled, leaning heavily into Bendy, still pale but regaining some of her color now that her ink wasn't constantly being dragged into her tail. Bendy had an arm around her to help her stand, the tired imp still trying to comprehend everything that had happened.

"Holy S***, you look like a wreck!" Olive squawked, pulling a can of soup from his pocket. He passed it to Pippen, who stared at it in confusion, before Oliver helped her open it and Bendy started coaxing her to eat. She had always recovered with the help of the inky soup, though it may take more than usual for her to recover fully. "Perci said this helped, doesn't it?"
"It does." Bendy answered, digging around in his pockets. He found a spoon, grinning as he proudly passed it to Pippen, uncertain why he had put it in his pocket so long ago but glad he had. She smiled, taking the spoon and beginning to eat the soup, a simple, familiar thing she had done dozens of times while in this place. She could manage this much, as tired and confused as she was.

"You're all better." Pippen murmured to Bendy, the devil nodding.

"Thanks to your help, Dollface." Bendy hummed.

"Really?" Pippen questioned, wobbling a bit. Oliver paced back to the shack, crest flicking up as he heard something odd.

"Yes." He answered simply, pushing the soup can closer to her. "You need to eat. I'll explain everything once you feel better, I promise."

"You mean it?" Pippen questioned, raising a brow. "No mischief this time?"

"Of course, Dollface." Bendy answered, smiling sweetly, though he didn't look entirely innocent. His mischievous nature was starting to show again, the stress of the situation finally beginning to lift. Joey was gone. Joey was gone, and things would work out from here.

"It's good to see you haven't changed too much, Bendy." An unfamiliar voice came from the confines of the shack. At least, one unfamiliar to everyone but the darling devil, who whipped around at the female voice, eyes wide. It was slightly high pitched and sweet, a voice Susie and Allison both had been used to mimic once long ago, though it was slightly unique from both of the renditions they would do so long ago.

"ALICE?!" Bendy squawked, staring at the figure who walked out of the shack, light glimmering behind her from the door that had finished forming. A female toon walked out of the shack, twice Bendy's height and sporting a slender frame. Her hips were wide but her hips small, her form covered in a black strapless dress, a white bow at the top. Her hair was as dark as her dress and lipstick, reaching a medium length just behind her shoulders. A pair of white stockings with a black lined top, and a pair of high heels. Atop her head was a halo, beneath which too small impish horns sprouted from the sides of her head, smaller than the cartoons usually depicted.

"You didn't think we had forgotten you, did you?" Alice questioned, holding up a white gloved hand. There was a halo shaped circle on each glove, the fabric pristine and soft to the touch. She frowned shaking her head. "I know you were always a silly devil, but really? We've been trying to help you since you ended up here!"

"Well, things only got really started after Professor Macadamia agreed to work with the Castle wizard. Then we could actually send messages and stuff." A deep, and slightly silly sounding, voice offered as a familiar figure walked out of the halls. It was Boris, the real Boris, not one of the hundreds of empty clones Joey had made. His eyes were alive and alert, his tail wagging at the sight of his friend.

"Boris!" Bendy greeted, dragging a more recovered Pippen with him as he ran up to his friends. It was clear from the look on his face he could barely believe this was happening, his taller friends smiling down at him. Bendy scrambled for words, unable to settle on a single sentence, faltering and cutting himself off in excitement. "You guys- I- I didn't know- I thought maybe Joey had hurt you- I was so scared."

"I know." Alice murmured, gently setting a hand on Bendy's head, her expression one of gentle empathy. "We've been trying so hard to find a way here, but Joey's world was so warped we
couldn't just break in."

"That's what the experts said at least." Boris rumbled.

"We needed help from the inside." Alice continued, smiling as she looked up to Henry, Perci, and Pippen. "And we were finally noticed." Henry raised his brows a bit while Pippen flushed a bit at the angel's gentle look, Perci grinning uncertainly. "The pattern Joey was using to keep this place stagnant finally broke."

"Does that mean- The door, it leads to..?" Bendy asked, staring up at his friends with hopeful eyes, not daring to finish the thought as if it would jinx them.

"It leads home." Boris confirmed. "Back to Silvi City and our world."

"What about our world? Our home?" Lacie demanded, cutting into the conversation. "What about all of us? Bertrum and everyone else we haven't helped yet?"

"We can still work at that, now that Joey is gone." Henry pointed out. "He can't interfere with any attempts to help the others anymore. We have all the time in the world now."

"We didn't come here intending to leave you here." Alice added, standing upright once more. "That would be horribly cruel, after everything you've been through. But.." She paused, expression shifting to discomfort.

"We can't return you to your world." Boris finished for her. "The experts say this pocket world is too close to ours to send you back.. and you don't really belong to it anymore. You aren't what you used to be."

Silence descended over the group as they absorbed this information, save for the grunts and groans of the Lost Ones, who had approached to investigate the development. The portion of the group that had been left behind were returning to the shack as well, leaving their watch quietly. Alice looked over them with a gentle look of sympathy, her eyes glittering with pain at the thought of how much suffering this place contained. Boris hung his head a bit, unhappy they could fully fulfill what some of the group wanted, given they had helped them retrieve their friend.

"That's OK! You can come with us!" Bendy declared, looking to the group nervously, holding his hands out. "Our world ain't that bad. It's really nice actually."

"We'll help you get settled in." Boris added.

"And we aren't abandoning the people still here." Alice added resolutely. "The holy council wants this place examined to understand how such a horrible place was made, and the council of hell wants it gone because it 'encroaches on their territory'. But we have time to recover everyone who was lost to the ink. There are so many experts waiting to help."

"I guess.. It won't be that bad." Perci offered, glancing to Pippen and Bendy, rubbing his arm. "I mean, if we have help, it can't be too different from home, right?"

"It's better than this place." Norman pointed out, the damage Joey had inflicted having been repaired by Henry after Joey had fallen apart. Lacie turned to him, than back to the group, pursing her lips in thought.

"I want to be kept up to date on what's happening here. I want to be here when Bertrum is approached." Lacie demanded, Alice nodding.
"We could work that out." Alice offered diplomatically.

"I imagine even toon worlds have taxes and banks." Grant offered, shrugging. And hopefully they had therapist as well.

"Why not? Like Norman said, it's better than this cold, drippy place. I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm outta here." Wally declared.

"We're going home, boys." Charley declared, finally allowing a grin to cross his face.

"Yeaaaah!" Edgar cheered, waving his arms. Barley actually smiled a bit, happy to be going home, and to be doing so with his group intact.

"Henry?" Bendy asked softly, turning to the animator. He knew what they had discussed on the boat but.. now it was real. It was here.

"So, will you show me around to your favorite spots in your world?" Henry asked him after a moment, grinning as a massive smile split the darling devil's face.

"Of course! I wouldn't leave you hanging like that, dad!" Bendy stated, jumping with excitement. They were really leaving! And Henry was coming with them!

"Just don't tell anyone about this creator business and us." Charley stated in a warning tone, though he was fairly certain it would be Edgar would be the one to let the cat out of the bag.

"I won't." Henry chuckled, a real, comfortable chuckle. It felt like a weight was lifted off his chest, excitement slowly bleeding into the group at the prospect of leaving the darkness of the studio behind. The prospect of seeing their coworkers again, and everyone that had been lost to the ink. He rubbed Bendy's head, the devil smiling up to him, still holding Pippen's hand tightly in his own.

"And I'll show you some special places too." Bendy added, winking at Pippen, who grinned as well.

"Well, it would be nice to spend some time with you without worrying about Joey cutting in." Pippen offered, tail twitching with nerves. He was alive, he was healed, this was all real. The color was starting to bleed back into her form as her body evened itself out, and with her came her grasp on reality. This was real.

They were escaping the studio, together. The prospect of a new world was equal parts exciting and anxiety inducing, but the group still had one another, and they had their guides. They could begin to heal, to reclaim their lives from the nightmare Joey had constructed. They were free.

Chapter End Notes

So, there may be an epilogue
Debating on leaving it like this or an epilogue
but its reached its end and for once I finished a story
I have more ideas, technically, but im not sure they would fit on AOO :shrug:

But seriously, in case I don't make an epilogue
Thank you to everyone who read this, who bookmarked, who kudoed and commented
Special thanks to Tizri for all their kind words and encouragement, every comment meant a lot!
thanks also to thatonenightmare, you may have slid in at the end with comments but it was still nice to get them!
and not to be forgotten, Natalie Marotzek, thank you as well for your comment and encouragement!
And the most special thanks to my mom and dad, who were a source of encouragement to continue posting (and mom helping with grammatical errors and the like) for the entirety of the story, even though neither of them know much about BATIM XD

Thank you to anyone who so much as just looked at this story partly, it really, really means a lot to me
U(*^◡^*)U
Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

A short, sweet epilogue to cover how everyones doing (short and more simple bc theres so many people to keep track of ;w;) minor edits for forgotten details hurray

Chapter Notes

See the end notes for a long ramble about possible future things, skip it if you don’t want to listen to nervous ramble :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first few days in a new world were a bit rocky for everyone, though fortunately they had plenty of support. The group, and many of the Lost Ones who were at a stage of rehabilitation where they could be left on there safely, found themselves occupying a nice apartment building on the edge of Silvi city. It was the closest to the lab they had walked out into, where an over exuberant squirrel in a lab coat had begin drilling them all with questions about their experiences and the mechanics of the ink.

Fortunately they had four major sources of support, two being the Holy Council, which could not turn their eyes away from beings in such desperate need, and the Council of Scientific Explorations, which were rabid with eagerness to explore this strange pocket dimension between worlds.

Then there was the Council of Magic, which was primarily concerned with the overwhelming degree of negative energy built up in the studio and ink, as well as the dark magics Joey had invoked in creating the place. The group wasn't getting much information about that, all of them getting a sense that this was some serious stuff Joey had toyed with. What they did know was that it could have been far worse according to the magi.

The last support was donations from the kingdom itself, the news of their plight having reached them. It was run by a mouse, who Bendy claimed was swell guy, even if he was a bit of a goody two shoes. Everyone spoke highly of him, and it was clear they were empathetic to what the former humans had gone through, given the constant monetary support, and teachers who were sent to help bring everyone up to speed on cartoon society.

Like Bendy had once mentioned, there was the event of toons randomly appearing, and occasionally even new lands or locations. It was simply the way of the world. Sometimes these new locations were connected by wormholes, seeming to be the universes solution to prevent to much expansion or overlap at once. There was plenty of work for adventurers in the further edges of the land and mapping out the new lands that appeared through wormholes.

They were treated like new toons, which they technically were, taught the ins and outs of the currency, current political climate, sources of jobs and how to recognize when you were taken
advantage of, and everything else a newcomer to the world would need. The teachers were very
good at their jobs, being the best among their occupation, and kept busy as more Lost Ones were
recovered.

The Lost Ones were an interesting situation. Some came out fully human, some as animals, some
as a mix, and some as totally unique beings that didn't fit neatly into any category. It seemed to be
something connected to their mental states, something so deep that not even the toons could fully
explain it, but other than learning some new biological needs and learning to maneuver new bodies,
most adapted pretty well. A good portion could remember bits and pieces of their past lives, though
some had lost everything, coming out into the world as a fresh new being.

There was also a lot of therapy, unsurprisingly. Those being recovered from the studio would
usually go through a screening session, and then they would be signed up with a therapist capable
of helping. Those struggling with their bodies, or the traumatic memories of their time in the studio,
and everything in between. Many of the Lost Ones had mandatory therapy until it was made certain
they were not a danger to themselves, and stable enough to function on their own, in which case
they would be transferred either out of therapy or into less frequent visitations.

Grant was the one of the members in the 'core group' who sought out therapy the most. At first,
had been stubborn and despondent, too proud to speak on what happened even though it still
haunted him. It had broken pretty quickly under the patient warmth of his therapist, and soon
enough the dam broke. He began to steadily improve after that point, surprised by how much
talking about his issues helped. He was still haunted by the studio in his worst nightmares, but so
was everyone else who had escaped that place.

Sammy, Oliver, and Lacie were the three at the forefront when it came to working with the Lost
Ones. Sammy and Oliver were a given, since they had a standing reputation with the Lost Ones,
but Lacie was present for those who would not feel comfortable with them. Those from her
division, who had come in with Piedmont to work on the amusement park. The GENT employees
who had been trapped in the studio when the machine they were hired to construct was turned on
them.

It was the second week into their new lives when Bertrum was recovered, though the apartment
heard it was not an easy matter. There had been a lot of yelling on Bertrum's part, until it was made
clear that Joey was gone and dead. Bertrum had 'won' their little grudge match, even if it was
indirect. He had become more reasonable from there, mostly speaking to Lacie to calm down. The
long time employee knew her boss well, and how to get him to settle down, and before long the
volunteers from the science and magic councils were working on removing him from the machine
he had fused himself with.

The amusement park creator had been an interesting addition to the already colorful blend of
beings occupying the apartments. He was reportedly taller than before, and wider, but what was
most prominent was the fact the man had more arms. It seemed it had carried over from his time as
an octopus ride, and he did not hesitate to put the stretchy appendages to use.

After a couple days of adapting to and learning the looser physics of the toon world, he had
already began to draw up plans for another amusement park, one that would top everything he had
done in the past, especially Bendy land. Oliver was hired pretty soon by Bertrum after they meet,
the man taking a liking to Oliver's can-do attitude, and strict eye for details.

Norman was adapting as well, soon finding he was not the only 'object head' toon in the
apartment, let alone the world. Turns out it was fairly common, and the strange looks he had
dreaded never came. He was one of the first of the group to find a job, working in a nice little
workshop repairing machines, primarily cameras and the like.

Tom and Allison were the first to leave the apartments, buying a small farm outside of the city. Allison claimed it was something they both dreamed of doing while trapped in the studio. Tom was still something of a sour apple, but he was slowly becoming a bit nicer. It helped when someone taught him Sign Language, and other ways around his damage induced muteness.

The second to leave was Brutis, who had developed a fast friendship with Boris. The pair regarded each other like brothers, though the circumstances by which they both came to life were far different. The undead wolf took up with Boris and started to help watch over the sheep and tend to them, finding the simple job soothing. He also learned sign language, though he preferred the simpler methods he had developed with Perci and the others.

He also kept the rabbits, since Pippen didn't have the heart to separate the happy trio. They were moved into their own hutches, though Angie surprised them all not too long later when she had a litter of angelic and impish children. Brutis was proud as a peacock when it was discovered, and was initially the only person Angie would allow near her children in the early stages.

Norman wasn't the only one who picked up a small job, most of the apartment denizens desiring to be self sufficient. Some even planned to move out when they were steady enough, not wanting to overtax the councils and the king's good will. Some planned to move to another house or apartment in the city, while others began to look beyond the city, having an entire world to sate their curiosity. There was so much more to see than there had been in the studio, and some of the more confident members of the recovered were eager to explore.

Sammy picked up a small side job teaching a music class at the local school, though he was still known for his occasional barbed tongue and sharp words. But he had mellowed some after his time as an ink creature, the pent up bitterness from his time in Joey Drew's studios slowly being release from him. It helped he had a familiar face also working in the school.

Susie Campbell had also picked up a job at the school, though she was only an assistant librarian at the moment. It was good, honest work however, and Susie liked the quiet, spacious library. She was slowly acclimating to large groups once more, her more social side returning with time and therapeutic help. Occasional, when he was on an off period, Sammy would visit her, and for a long time rumors abound over the pair.

It was finally put to rest one day as the pair went official, trying their relationship once more. There was still a mutual attraction between the pair, and Susie had always been good at soothing Sammy's temper. In turn, Susie was also always sure that what Sammy told her was the honest truth when he gave out a compliment or kind word, though he was steadily becoming softer when it came to her, as he had a long time ago. Only time would tell if the pair worked out. At some point they had taken up singing together, and Sammy had begun to write songs again on the side.

The butcher gang was the only beings to come from the studio who did not take up residence in the apartments, instead returning to their home on the other side of town. They returned to a life of petty crime and the like, trying to cheat the system for an easy life, as they had before their abduction to the studio. At the least, they did not try to scam the core group, who they had escaped with, and Edgar kept close contact with Wally, who had become good friends with him, and Henry, who tried to subtly push the group towards a better life with less crime.

Wally took up a side job as a handy man, and could often be found around the theater even when off work. He liked the theater, and all the cheerful people who came for the shows and games. The general upbeat atmosphere was good for him, and he was popular with the toons who came because of his good nature. When he went to the bank, he would go into Grant's line to see
his former coworker, even though they weren't the tightest of friends. Wally had always been a people person, and the toon world didn't change that.

As for Perci, he resumed his studies as a darker, though he had to adapt to the unique anatomy and possibilities of the toon worlds. There were also now curses and other magical diseases to content with and learn about, but he happily went back to work learning what he needed to know. He had also gained the three council's interest, though it was mostly because of his odd scissors, one of the two tools not weakened by the transfer to the toon world.

Henry's pen was the one weakened, no longer having a limitless supply of ink to work with, though it had a considerable amount. It was directly connected to his own strength now, like Pippen's was connected to her, but it took little time to adapt to. The most popular theory was Henry's pen had been limitless thanks to his connection to the studio, one that Pippen had lacked. Now that they were in a world where neither of them had any special connections, they were on even footing.

The old animator took up drawing again, finding it helped to release some of the emotions he had long repressed. It felt good to draw again, though he didn't use the magic pen except for special occasions, or where it was necessary. He always kept it on him, just in case. He lead a mostly calm life, though Bendy would visit him frequently, the pair slowly growing their bond with time together.

The bond with Henry wasn't the only thing Bendy worked on. He had taken quite a shine to Pippen while they were in the studio, though he could never fully explain why. He knew that initially he had just thought it was because she was the first one to try and help him, to befriend him, to hear his woes.. but it was also just something about her he liked. She was nice but not to much of a push over, and could be clever when she wanted to be. It helped she was cute.

Pippen ended up on a lot of adventures with Bendy, first there as support as he adapted to his home once more, having long gained negative habits meant for surviving in the studio. They had been supportive of one another as they worked through what had happened in the studio, though the devil clearly had the greater burden. He was grateful for her presence however, and her patience, even as his mischief began to shine through once more.

There was never a dull day with Bendy around, that was for certain. Be it with the addition of Brutis, Boris, and/or Alice, or just the two of them, the pair always had an interesting time. For the most part, Pippen didn't mind the small snags or trouble Bendy would brew, though she wouldn't hesitate to tell him when he was about to, or did, cross a line. Despite these few occasions, it didn't stop her from helping him, and she soon became known for being the devil's accomplice in his mischievous endeavors, and then something more. Didn't stop the mischief either way.

When it came down to it though, Henry was the glue that held the core group together. Everyone kept in contact with him, even after some of them moved out of the apartments or to other areas. He was a patient, friendly man, and he was always one of the first people the recovered studio workers would meet at the apartment. He helped to maintain the peace, and seemed happy with his current situation, where he was no longer alone with only memories of the past. Bendy visited often, and while he was a bit of a trouble maker, Henry loved him all the same.

It was slow, but the group integrated into the toon world, having their own adventures and misadventures as life carried on. Memories of the studio faded, but never truly left them, but they always had someone they could turn to. Henry wouldn't abandon anyone, and being a small time artist meant he had time on his hands to help support his fellow survivors. It was slow, happening in leaps and bounds over weeks and months, but they recovered, and reached a point where they
could look around themselves at the toon world and call it home.

Chapter End Notes

It's short, it's sweet, it's THE END
but not Joey's kind of end

Again, I can't say it enough, thank you all ;w;

I'm considering writing more, but I'm not sure how it will go
it would technically be BATIM but also a crossover, and feature more of my characters lmao
and is technically supremely Au
but would focus a lot more on magic/toon world with a minor mystery to kick it off
it would mean a lot more world building for this separate world however, and the toon world, but would most likely be in a similar fashion I did this piece, with chapters/parts primarily written from a specific characters focus (bc that was so much easier to do than when everyone came together lmfao)
There would also be more refs, since I technically have refs for a lot of these characters (but I don't think you can insert pics to AOO so I'd probably make a central hub for that..)

And more slow burn bendy/pippen
Bc I wanted to do more of that here but chickened out/didn't find time

But overall it would be larger, and possibly slower because I would have more elements that aren't premade like it was with this story and working with the studio and game

Idk, I'm shakey on it bc I'm always a nervous person, and there would be a lot more elements than just the BATIM elements, and I guess feedback would be nice to see if there's any interest/opinions
I just really like the concept of the toon world and wish I had gotten to work with it more (and healthy bendy more)

This was a long ramble and to summarize, I'm nervous, I have a Batim Au idea but it would likely be a lot slower going than Broken Reel was, and introduce a good portion of my own characters too, though the Batim mains would be prominent once they came into the story

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