Play It Loud

by Valkyrien

Summary

Dag doesn't know what she wants in life, but she knows what soundtrack it should have, and her sisters know two lovely Boys with similar tastes in sound and fury who know someone who just might be able to provide both.

In which Fate turns it up to 11.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Dag is restless. She always is these days, an itch under her skin and a niggle at the back of her mind, an irritable sense of restricted motion and unrealised potential that can only be alleviated by sinking into sound.

It's why she's here tonight, an accessory to the fact of Capable and Toast's Boys knowing of a good time to be had somewhere just past the town line where turning it up to eleven won't end in neighbours calling the police and there's no risk of overpriced drinks.

She's restless - wants the screech of strings and the crash of drums, but all she can hear are her sisters' voices raised in mild complaint.

“This really isn't my kind of thing,” Toast grumbles, and Dag rolls her eyes because they all know that any evening Toast can get to spend all hot and sticky with Slit is exactly her kind of thing.

“Well the Boys are certainly excited,” Capable says wryly,

“I've got forty-seven texts from Nux.”

“What exactly is this band?” Toast demands,
“Slit just said the guitarist's an old friend.”

“No idea,” Capable admits,

“But I'm sure they're good.”

“It'll be Dag's sort of music, that's all they listen to,” Toast mutters, and Dag wants to say something about how the Boys certainly don't share her love of Dead Can Dance or Android Lust so claiming they only listen to things Dag does is extremely incorrect, but she hears people and music in the distance, so it's easy to ignore her sisters and carry on one boot in front of the other.

The venue for lack of a better term is a scrap yard, and Dag's been to garage gigs and basements gigs and grotty bar gigs, but never a scrap yard gig, and although this'll never pass muster with Health & Safety she's rather surprised to see that whoever arranged this thought to post an actual doorman at the gate - whom Slit and Nux are chatting to.

More than a few of the people she passes look envious of the way the Boys are calling to Toast and Capable - well, Nux is, Slit is as always a little less exuberant, although bless him that's not difficult when the comparison is to Nux - and when they edge past the large chap on the gate to pull her sisters and she in there are aggravated cries from the assembled crowd.

“They didn't pay!” someone yells at close hand, aggrieved, and the doorman shrugs huge shoulders and grunts,

“Family discount.”
Whatever he calls it, this seems to mean that as well as getting in free Toast is entitled to reach up and pull Slit down for an aggressive kiss and then a bitten-off,

“If I hate it, you're taking me home,” or at least, that's what she does.

It is however mitigated by the way she slides her arms around his waist under his jacket and cuddles into his side, and he neither protests nor agrees with her, simply smiles sharply and exchanges a look with Dag over Toast's head that says she won't want to so it's moot.

Being a candidate for family discounts also appears to mean that Capable is so attached to Nux that it could be argued that they have meshed entirely into one being, and it takes a moment for her to release him enough to be peeled off the fence and take her hand and tell them all,

“This way - 's starting soon!”

Whatever will be starting is surely going to begin upon a stage, and Dag is glad of her height because it means that she has a clear view of the wonderfully mad one that will be the setting of this show.

So mad is it - a gloriously bonkers confection of amps and speakers and drums upon which rests a butchered car frame, back end facing out and crowned in lights - that Dag can't help but feel there's no way this can disappoint.

She can hear Capable making a similar observation to her right and Nux mentioning having helped with some welding and wiring, and then Slit has pushed his way to what serves as a barrier and pulled them all with him so they're front and centre as drummers - and there's more than one - settle
in on their perches and start up.

A vision in red that is more like some fever dream appears atop the artfully mangled backdrop of car parts and amplifiers, suspended from bungee cords, beautiful hands cradling a double-necked guitar, and Dag could go home now having seen nothing but this and still be more satisfied than she has yet been by any professional art installation or cobbled-together home-brewed wish-we-were performance.

There's no introduction, just a long wail of sound wrung from strings and then a lick of flame curls into the night from between the prongs of the guitar, and Dag can't tell whether she's close enough for the sudden heat to sear through her or if it's the way this unbelievable individual begins to play, but within minutes she is soaked through and burning.

This is what she's been waiting for - whether she knew it before or not is immaterial.

She does now.
Dag isn’t sure how long it lasts, only that while it does she soars, so when it ends she is surprised not because it doesn't come to a natural stopping point musically but because she had forgotten that it would.

It all ends much like it began - no words imparted, just a hand raised to throw the horns, and then he is gone and the drummers begin to dismount and disperse and Dag is trembling all over, wrung out and overheated, ears still pounding but with the beat of her elevated heart rather than the music, and her entire body aches in a way that is almost profound, her clothes plastered to her, and although there has been a press of people and they are still there and loudly expressing their appreciation for this experience they have all just shared, Dag still flinches when Capable takes her arm gently and says close to her ear,

“The Boys say it's over, come on,” and Dag follows as she's led, her sisters and their Boys detaching from the main crowd and its racket, and Dag hears Capable ask,

“Didn't you want to see your friend?”

“Nah,” Slit dismisses,

“Doof's no good after a show - we'll see him tomorrow at Ace's.”

“Ace's?” Toast asks from within the folds of Slit's jacket, and Nux happily informs her,
“Yeah - he's Ace's boy! Stayin' with him while he's in town!”

“No he's not,” Slit corrects with stern irritation,

“He's not Ace's kid - y' make it sound like he's Doof's dad or something. It's like us; Ace raised him.”

“Ace raised him because he loved Doof's mum,” Nux says stubbornly,

“An' he's just like Doof's dad - said as much.”

“Yeah, well, we don't talk about that,” Slit reminds him harshly, and Nux subsides but Toast demands,

“Why not?”

“Painful,” Slit growls shortly,

“She's dead.”
It kills that line of questioning easily, so instead Capable asks,

“Does he usually not like to see people after shows?”

“Never has,” Nux confirms,

“Too tiring. But he's good, right? Y' liked it?”

He seems so sincerely hopeful that this is the case, and Capable smiles warmly and says,

“It was very interesting - they weren't really songs, were they? It was like a sort of bare-bones metal symphony or something. Does he ever do anything with lyrics?”

“Sometimes,” Nux gushes, fuelled by her positivity,

“He does all kinds of stuff - proper prodigy - but tonight was classic Doof. Guitar's his favourite.”

“It must be a custom build,” Toast muses,
“And heavy too, no wonder it was suspended like that.”

“He can lift it, but yeah, it weighs about as much as one of you,” Slit informs her,

“And it's custom from scratch.”

“What did you think, Dag? It was great for dancing, wasn't it? I didn't expect that,” Capable asks brightly, and what is there to say except a slurred and sluggish murmur of, "Magnificent. I didn't know...” Dag's lips syrup-heavy with sensation and hot with blood beating through her furiously and washing away the itch.

“Said he was good,” Nux protests as if accused of leaving Dag out of the loop on that score, and Dag would argue that ‘good’ does not begin to describe, could not have prepared her for even a tenth of what she's felt tonight, but Capable is already soothing him with agreement and so Dag just mumbles,

“Powerful and singular,” but her correction doesn't seem to reach them and she finds she has no words left for any of them, just smiles and vague nods when they set her down at her door finally and hug her good night and then bugger off to be together as they all like best.

Dag’s clothes have partially dried to her like a clingy old skin that won't shed, and she reeks of hot metal and dust, other people and their collective excitement disruptive and boiling, so she peels it all off and steps into the bath, letting the water remove all trace of it except the beat in her bones pushing her blood hard through her veins and the burning that won't -
Her hands aren't at all like those lovely ones which made the sound her skin has swallowed and
now won't let go, which lives inside her now, and she can't imagine how they would move over her
so cannot begin to replicate it, but she can recall them and it almost makes up for the insufficiency of
her own, but it helps that although he was masked, she could see his mouth, and although he never
spoke, she saw him lick his lips as he played, and -

- the crescendo is at last enough to cool her a little, to leave her the air in her lungs at least, but once
she's dry and bare under her sheets she thinks of those hands and every inch of skin she saw, and she
falls asleep wanting, head full of sound and fury.
“Where's your head, girl?” Keeper asks her suddenly - or, it seems sudden, the way it penetrates the haze of her sound-flooded reminiscing, an unwelcome interruption of a passage among those Dag recalls best and to the fullest extent - and her voice does not sound as it often does when she asks this question, fond and somewhat exasperated, instead it is mystified, and so Dag looks for what could be the source of this tone, and finds that it is herself and the fact that she is simply standing directly in the path of the hose held loosely in her hand, boots now soaked through.

“Oh,” she says vaguely, and steps out of the puddle with a squish of soil and wet socks under slick leather, and when she blinks up at Keeper the old woman is watching her carefully.

“Are you alright, petal?” Keeper asks shrewdly, squinting for the truth, and Dag shrugs.

“Need a break?” Keeper suggests, and Dag thinks of her phone and how it might even now be full of texts to the effect that there will be another opportunity for her to go off and immerse herself once more in audio-visual perfection, and so she breathes,

“Please,” and is off at a run even before Keeper has finished nodding and saying,

“Alright then - and get them boots off, missy!”

The last yell follows Dag into the house, and she heeds it by leaving her boots at the door and toeing off her socks next to them, but her feet leave damp marks on the tile behind her and when she
sits down in the pile of her jacket and takes out her phone she watches them fade into nothing for a moment.

She has five texts from Nux, one from Slit, and one each from her sisters.

Nux opens with, 'YOU LIKED IT HE'LL BE SO HAPPY', which Dag takes to mean as a reference to Nux' friend the architect of Dag's audiogenic bliss, and she is surprised at this for in her experience musicians are invariably convinced of the superiority of their output without needing confirmation from those who consume it, and certainly someone with the skill to do what he did last night with such ease of confidence would know that they've been brilliant beyond words, but then, she considers, he is firstly an artist, and so perhaps it makes sense after all.

Nux' next text reads, 'KNEW HE'D BE HAPPY YAY THANKS DAG', followed mere seconds later by, 'SLIT AND ACE SAY HI KISS KEEPER', and then, '3 SHOWS PLANNED DOOF SAYS', and finally, 'JUST YOU AND US GOING :(', which Dag can only assume is not an expression of disappointment in her own expected attendance but rather the result of her sisters begging off.

It's fine. If they can't appreciate it the way she does, their time would be better spent elsewhere at any rate.

Slit's text is a helpful list of dates, times, and places, neatly listed in his pragmatic way, with an ending comment of, '...C & T not coming didn't get it's all different Nux still crying talk to them please?'

Whether Nux actually cried or not is up in the air - Dag’s seen him burst into tears for much less than Capable not loving or understanding something he lives and breathes for that's also inextricably linked with family somehow - but he may well be sad about this, and so Dag resolves to do her bit to convince her sisters to give it another shot.
Toast's text reads, 'I'm not going so don't even try', but that means nothing in the grand scheme of things, and Capable's text says, 'hope you & TheBoys have fun without me & Toast sorry', which also means nothing.

To Nux Dag sends; '3 express kiss-a-grams for 3 shows acceptable this is your receipt. We 3'll have words.'

To Slit she sends; 'Eternally grateful will deny it in court. Moved by your account of his tears I will appeal to them.'

She doesn't bother replying to Toast and Capable well knowing that her arguments will be stronger delivered in person, but she does wait for Nux and Slit to respond, which they do within minutes.

'YOU'RE THE BEST' with two lines worth of heart and smile emojis, and, 'Thanks Dag', tick in at about the same time, and Dag sends them both a rainbow each and then puts her phone away and dances back through the nursery rows to where Keeper is still watering recently relocated plants.

“Feel better, petal?” she asks, and Dag nods and smiles and wiggles her toes in wet earth, the pleasure of it and the light on her skin warming her through.

“Now help an old woman with them trays,” Keeper instructs, and Dag bends to her work humming things only strings can truly express.
I can be reached for playlists, random imagery, and utter nonsense here:

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