Divide By Zero

by kiwipixel77

Summary

The Sole Survivor is kind of a dick. And addicted to chems. But he's got the greatest plan this side of the Commonwealth: put a bullet in every last drug kingpin, raider overlord, and mafia boss in Boston. Hancock thinks it's brilliant. Cait knows they're all going to die. And MacCready still has no idea why he hangs out with these guys. M!SS/Cait. M!SS/MacCready Bromance.
A/N: Well folks, here's a story for you. There's a criminally low amount of M!SS/Cait fics out there, so here. You're welcome.

So a little backstory: I am having a shamefully good time playing the biggest chem-addicted asshole in Fallout 4 right now, which is so strange - normally I can't help but be a sarcastic goody-two-shoes in RPG's. Weird. Also, I love raiders and their twisted, insane ways, and I wanted to make a story that included them in more detail.

Also, I love Cait. And Hancock. And MacCready. And Deacon. All of the shady assholes that the Commonwealth has to offer.

So, like the description suggests, this story does have a plot that is separate from the game plot. However, the main quest line and some side ones will be looked at. This story will be told through Cait's perspective. I might switch it up and tell it through Hancock's, too, and maybe MacCready's, but we'll see. Expect some pretty crazy adventures from our favourite shady Fallout 4 characters.

Rated T for excessive swearing, drug use, blood, gore, all that fun stuff. No overly descriptive sex, though. Might change it to M depending on what people think. But hey, this is Fallout, guys. You have been warned.

Chapter One: Daye One

All stories have their beginnings.

No shit. This isn't one of them.

This is about the ending.

This is a story about the most ruthless bitch and the craziest bastard in the Commonwealth.

This story has some pretty fucked-up shit in it. There's raiders and drug deals and broken bones and way too much swearing. There's some sex and drugs and bad choices. There's an asshole ghoul, a mercenary prick, an annoying synth, and some other people who are apparently less important.

This story doesn't have a happy ending. Also the guy dies at the end. Spoiler alert.

In a world as fucked-up as this, crazy will keep you grounded.

Part One - In Which Cait Loses Her Shitty Job and Meets a Crazy Asshole

The sound of shotgun blasts and screaming wasn't all that out of place in the Combat Zone. Not since those raiders chased everyone else off, at least. Though the raiders didn't scrap too often amongst themselves anymore, they were still brutal motherfuckers and it wasn't uncommon for Lonegan to drag one or two out the back door, blood and brain matter trailing on the floor behind. That was fine with Cait – she rather enjoyed watching the fat bastard huffing and puffing, bent over like some cheap whore.
But today was different. After smashing in the skull of her latest opponent, one of them absolutely demolished the entire gang of them. Kicked the front doors in – literally kicked them in – and started shooting off a shotgun and roaring at the top of their lungs "Die motherfuckers! Fucking KIIILLLLL!"

Every single raider in the place now had his head blown off and smeared across the wall like some sort of sick twisted art project. Cait had seen her fair share of morbid things in this shitehole of a fight club – and done more than a good deal herself – though she could honestly say that this was the goriest, most fucked-up bloodbath since the Great War itself, probably.

"What the fuck?!

Tommy Lonegan squealed like a pig, cowering behind the rusty sheet metal in the pit cage.

Tommy never swore. Said he had to balance out all the messed up stuff with some old world class. How the Combat Zone qualified as anything but was one of the greatest mysteries of the world. Shit must be bad.

"Fuckin' tearin' em to shreds!" Cait breathed, heart thumping madly against her chest. Yeah, sure, this raider might be clinically insane and probably too hopped up on whatever the fuck they'd jammed in their arm, but dammit if she wasn't impressed. No one even looked funny at anyone else here without getting a shiv to the throat. This guy – or girl, you never know – shattered the last few years of that in about twelve seconds.

So yeah. Colour her wowed, sirs.

A bullet from a raider's ramshackle rifle whizzed by her head and pinged off the sheet metal near her ear, and she ducked back down again beside Tommy.

Hey, she wasn't one to run from a fight, but she wasn't stupid, either. You couldn't fight another day if you were dead. Rule number one of being a pit fighter – fight like you were dying. But don't actually die. Better than Tommy's stupid rules. And it wasn't too often she got to watch someone else fight it out.

Fuck it. She had to look.

"Woo!" she laughed, watching a pissed-off raider with a blue Mohawk – that must've been Roach, the bastard, he always cheated at cards – from the balcony lob a grenade down below. The lone raider swan dove behind the bar and the explosion blew at least half a dozen theatre seats soaring into the air, bits of cushion fluff and plastic raining down like snow.

"What's happening? What's going on?" Tommy growled. "He fuckin' my theatre up?!

Cait didn't hear him. She was pretty good at ignoring the prick anyways.

Roach shouted something not too nice but was cut off by the wide spray of the dude's shotgun throwing bits of bullets into his face. Ouch.

What the fuck was this guy's problem? Cait was no stranger to the violent ways of raiders, and she'd heard a story once about how one of them flew off the handle after taking too many chems and mixing them with hubflowers and brutally slaughtering his entire gang. It would be her shit luck to be caught in the middle of something like that.

Another raider – Tags, Cait thought, by his gangly little arms and baseball bat – rounded the corner of the bar, attempting to be sneaky, and ended up getting his brains painted across the counter he loved getting hammered at. Poor Tags. Cait probably hated him the least.

Some more yelling behind the bar, a couple more shots went off, and some glass shattered from
above, causing Cait and Tommy to duck and cover their heads.

And then the shooting stopped. A few groans from half-dead raiders could be heard, and the reloading of a shotgun. Travis was blubbery on the radio near the exit. Something about a blue guy. It was quieter in here than Cait could ever remember – no raiders threatening or jiving or harassing her to shag. It was peaceful, almost, if one could ignore the mass of bodies littered around the place and the metallic stench of blood and gunsmoke.

"D'ya think they're done out there?" Cait whispered, peeking out at Tommy. The ghoul shrugged.

"WOO!" a voice thundered out, rough and male and pumped full of adrenaline, echoing up high into the vaulted ceiling. "YES! YES! FUCKING AWESOME!"

"He's still alive, dammit," Tommy grumbled.

"Seems so."

"Listen," the ghoul pleaded, and the voice stopped again. "We don't want any trouble. Whoever's out there, we were rooting for you the whole time!"

"Oh, just peek yer head up, ya damn coward," Cait growled, legs already aching from crouching.

"No way, little bird. Guy's a raving lunatic."

"He's got a shotgun, fatass. Ain't no way he can reach ya from down there."

"To heck with that. I'm too pretty to go out like this."

Pampered little fuck.

She shot the ghoul her customary hostile glare, earning Tommy's customary disappointed frown.

Well, if the raider guy hadn't killed them yet, then maybe he wouldn't. Wishful thinking, though. Worst that could happen was getting her own head blown off. At least that way it would be quick. Cait sighed before peeking her head just above the metal and out into the seats below.

It looked like a herd of rabid brahmin had stampeded through the place after a séance with a deathclaw. Blood and gore and dead raider parts were scattered and splayed across the old theatre, and not a single chair or table stood upright. Roach's bullet-riddled body hung over the balcony, teetering over the edge. One gush of air and he'd fall, probably. And Tommy's stage and mic setup were splinters now. He was gonna be pissed.

In the centre of the carnage stood a man.

One man did all this?

Cait's first thought of raider wasn't too far off the mark, just maybe upgraded and crossed with some sort of fucked-up mercenary. His tattered road leathers were dusty and sprayed red with blood and black with grime. Filthy wraps looped round his hands and arms – and shoulders and legs – really, wherever a tear in his leathers would have shown skin. His once-black boots were dusty grey and patched up with duct tape, and a brown leather belt round his middle and chest looked like the only thing that held the shambling mess together. A sniper rifle hung off his shoulder and the shotgun was still in his hands, pointed directly at her.

"Who the fuck are you?" he growled from under his gas mask, voice tinny and muffled only a little.
Cait stood up, hands in the air. The baseball cap and hood covered the glass so she couldn't see his eyes. How many layers did this guy need?

"Hey!" Tommy called out, peeking up above the metal now. The intruder shifted the muzzle of his shotgun onto the ghoul, who tried his damnest to look like he wasn't about to piss his checkered pantsuit. "Why don't you come over here and show us you don't mean us no harm?"

Was Tommy fucking crazy? Did this asshole not just reduce the Combat Zone to shrapnel and blood? She was gonna kill him if they made it out of this alive.

The man didn't move.

Cait had been prepared to die so many times in her life before now, but she suddenly found herself torn between afraid to – at least, not until she found out who this guy was – and a strange peace that if anyone in the entire Commonwealth was going to blow her head off, it might as well be this guy.

"So…" Tommy continued carefully. "You wanna talk or not? Or you not done tearing my theatre to shreds?"

The intruder held up his shotgun for a moment longer, hesitating almost, before shrugging and lowering the weapon.

Tommy sighed in relief and Cait let out a breath she didn't know she was holding. Damn that Tommy Lonegan. He could talk his way out of a mute symposium.

"Well, that could've gone worse," the ghoul said, hobbling up (Cait refused to help the bastard) and dusting off his suit as the intruder skipped the three steps up to the stage and entered the arena.

"Ha! I dunno," Cait smirked, eyeing up their new guest. "Seemed like quite the performance from where I was standin'."

This guy was even more terrifying and weird up close. Looked as if he'd been on the road all his life. Grenades and knives and Molotov's strapped to his belts. Shotgun modded and almost unrecognisable as a shotgun. Gas mask crusted with dirt, face obscured. His fingers – the only skin showing – bruised and scarred and brown with grime.


She knew he was intimidating, and Cait wasn't intimidated easily.

"What are you, fucking high or something? What am I saying, of course you are."

She frowned at her employer. "Still won the fight, didn't I?"

"You're strung out and getting sloppy is what you are."

"Oh, not this again, Lonegan," she growled. "I told ya it was nothin' to worry about. Just need a quick breather and I'll be ready to go."

"Doesn't work like that, little bird."

"I told ya to quit callin' me that!"

"You wanna stop arguing and tell me who the fuck you both are?" the raider guy hissed, voice coming out sort of metallic from behind the gas mask.
Tommy frowned at the shotgun aimed at his ugly face. "The name's Tommy Lonegan. Owner and operator of this fine establishment you just smashed to bits."

"Looks like a shithole to me."

Cait smirked. She could almost see Tommy's hackles raising.

"Hey, asshole! This is the Combat Zone. Finest pit-fighting arena in the Commonwealth. Or was until you blew it all to hell. And all my patrons."

"You looked fucked sideways from where I was standing."

That was true. Cait knew it, Tommy knew it, all the raiders knew it – as soon as they'd grow bored of them, they'd kill 'em and take everything they owned. Part of the reason Cait fought so hard, maybe.

"Yeah, well…" Tommy sighed, rubbing the back of his neck tiredly. "To be honest, you're right. We used to serve a more legit clientele, but about two years ago a gang of raiders rolled in and we became a more… exclusive establishment."

"Well then, I accept your apology," the guy said, lowering the shotgun.

"Apology? Listen here Joe Schmoe, they weren't the friendliest bunch but keeping those idiots entertained at least kept the lights on. Forgive me if I don't rush to embrace our saviour. I'm not sure if I should kiss you or have my little bird here feed you your own entrails."

"Dammit Tommy, quit callin' me that!"

The guy nodded over to Cait. "Who's the broad?"

She rounded on the stranger, bristling. "Broad?"

"Cait here's the headliner. Hundred plus matches undefeated."

"That so?" The drifter raider stranger guy looked her up and down, from her tatty boots to her mess of red hair. The raiders used to call out lewd things to her after fights, and more than once she'd given them a bloody nose for staring at her a little too long. She couldn't even see his face, but he still sent the shivers up her spine.

"Yer damn right," she snapped. "Never lost a fight."

"Doesn't matter much though," Tommy grumbled. "Seems our new friend here just put us out of business."

Cait blinked. "What?"

"Come on," the guy said. "It's not that bad."

"Are you fuckin' high? Look around, pal! You trashed the place! You took my entire client base out of the gene pool and smeared their brains on the walls!"

"I don't know," he shrugged. "Gives it a splash of colour."

Tommy pinched the bridge of his nose. "Jesus Christ. You sick fuck."

Again, Cait couldn't help but smile. This guy didn't have to say more than a dozen words and he'd
already ruffled Tommy's feathers right good. She'd never heard the ghoul swear as much in the whole three years she'd known him.

Maybe this guy wasn't so bad, you know, under that layer of fucking weird.

"What, you think this is funny?" her boss hissed, rotting face twisted with rage and only making Cait's grin wider. "You think he's so fuckin' funny?"

"A little, yeah."

"You know, little bird, if you weren't so fuckin' coked I'd get less insane Mel Gibson here to blow your fuckin' head off. Right after he paid me for the mess he made."

"Mel Gibson? Really?" the stranger mused, resting the shotgun on his shoulder. "Mm, I like to think I'm more of a morally-grey John Wayne sort of guy."

Cait had no idea what the fuck they were talking about.

"Whatever. Doesn't matter. Point is, you're crazy, she's out of a job, and I'm out a whole pit club! I doubt you can afford the recompense. Ain't no way I can support both me an' Cait here."

The guy shrugged. "Maybe I should've let the raiders fuck you over then."

Tommy let out a livid whoosh of air through thinned lips. Cait was almost sure his head was going to explode. That would've been funny. "No. No. No, you know what, I got a better idea. I think this was a blessing in disguise."

"Jesus Tommy, always somethin'!" Cait carped. "What're ya –"

"Shut up. You saw the end of that bout, didn't ya?" the ghoul asked the drifter. "What'd ya think of Cait's work?"

"Why?"

"Consider it professional curiosity. Now answer the damn question."

"I don't know. It was alright. I've seen better."

"Ha! Like hell ya have!" Cait hissed.

Fuckin' asshole.

"And while she's still armed and in closing distance?" Tommy chuckled darkly. "You're a brave one, ain't ya?"

"More like fuckin' blind, ya dunce."

"I'm sorry," the guy snapped, whipping up his shotgun and aiming it at Cait in half the blink of an eye. "Sounded like you said dunce."

"I might've."

There was a reason Cait had won all those matches. She wasn't slow. The pistol on her belt was out and in the guy's face just as quick.

"Jesus fuckin' Christ, it's like an episode of Laurel and Hardy!" Tommy howled, throwing his hands
up in defeat.
"I don't like people calling me names, bitch."

"I don't like people talkin' shit about my fightin' skills. Asshole."

Cait glared at the stranger on the receiving end of her pistol. Somewhere behind that wind-blown glass mask was another set of eyes belonging to the biggest asshat Cait ever had the displeasure of meeting. And that's saying something.

"Cait, put the gun down before you piss off Tony Montana. And you… guy," Tommy hesitated, eyeing the shotgun warily. "Come on, pal. Just listen to me."

Cait scowled at the man a moment longer. No fuckin' way was she putting her gun down first.

The guy paused a moment, too, then lifted his gun. "Fine. I'll listen. Then I'll blow her head off."

Cait smirked, holstering her pistol.

"She's going with ya."

Tommy could've thrown a brick at her head and it would've shocked her less.

"What?"

"You're fucking joking," the stranger huffed. "She's not coming with me."

"Just listen –"

"No," he said, aiming the gun at Cait again, cocking it loudly. "I think I'll kill her now."

Fuckin' Tommy. Again. This time she really was going to kill him if she lived through this. Too stunned to draw her gun, she stood there like a useless sack of shit at the party end of this asshole's shotgun.

"She's got a contract," Tommy interjected. "Five years. I bought it from her three years ago. She works for me. Anything I tell her to, she does it. Well, supposed to do it. I'll give it to you."

The stranger paused, and Cait waited for her death. It wasn't coming fast enough.

"Shit or get off the pot," she hissed.

The man snorted, cocking his head in amusement, almost studying her a moment. Well, probably. Hard to tell with that stupid mask on.

"Alright," he said again, laxly strapping the shotgun to his back before crossing his arms. "I'm listening."

With the gun out of her face and a few seconds to think, Cait regained her composure. Bad for Tommy.

"What the fuck, Tommy?" she screeched, making the ghoul flinch a little. "Ya can't be serious!"

"Hey! What did I say about swearing at me?"

"The fuck with that! Why the hell ya tryin' ta get rid of me?"
"I got no audience, little bird. Our new friend here managed to put us out of business in a matter of four whole minutes. No audience means no caps comin' in. And if you ain't bringin' in no caps, you ain't an asset. You're a liability."

Cait could almost actually feel her blood boil, her anger rolling in like thunder and stewing overhead like old shit in a broken toilet.

The thought of leaving – of actually leaving the Combat Zone – was so foreign to her now. She'd had a pretty shitty life – unloved, sold into slavery by her own parents, exacting cold revenge that never really satisfied her, and selling herself back into slavery just to earn a few caps and have a place to crash at night – something like that could really fuck a person up. It did. Cait was a fighter, a ruthless bitch, and she'd live and die fighting, probably under some raider's crusty boot in the arena.

She was a pit fighter. She always would be. Tommy, the rotten bastard, was probably the closest she'd ever come to actually liking anyone in her sad, short, miserable twenty-six-year existence on this dead space rock. The motherfucker.

"I can't fuckin' believe this. Just what are ya gonna do without me here?"

Tommy shrugged. "Fix the place up. Make contacts. Who knows. It'll be a whole lot easier if you ain't here."

"Three years, Tommy! Three fuckin' years I've been here with ya, makin' your fat ass rich off the bets! And now yer just gonna toss me to the curb like some two-cap whore?"

"Yeah, I am."

Wrong answer.

Cait's fist snapped out and caught the ghoul square in his ugly face, right where his nose should have been.

Tommy clutched at his sunken nose hole, shock and anger hilariously spun together on his putrid, pocked features. The new guy roared with laughter. Cait let out an unholy string of both pre-war and post-apocalyptic curse words that would sure as fuck bar her from the pearly gates for the next eight lifetimes.

"Jesus Christ, you crazy bitch!" Lonegan cried, though Cait could hardly hear him over the blood roaring in her ears and the stranger's tinny cackling. The ghoul looked down at his hands. "You made me bleed!"

"And I ain't sorry for it, Tommy Lonegan. Fuck you."

She spit on the floor by his feet and spun round to face the stranger. "Alright," she growled, fists clenched in hot fury. "I'm comin' with ya."

"Alright," he chuckled. "Well, I'm not gonna say no. Hate to see you real pissed off. Get your things, then. Meet me out front when you're done. And be quick."

Positively fuming, she stormed out of the arena and into the side room where she slept on the soiled mattress in the corner. Grabbing her old travelling pack, she jammed what little valuables she owned inside – a few water bottles, some cram and mac n' cheese, an extra pair of pants, her old bloodstained baseball bat, a rusty blue lunchbox with all her chems, and her small bag of caps. Nothing else.
About to storm back out, she paused a moment and looked around the room. Small, dark, damp, cold, with nothing but that old mattress and a door on two milk crates for a table – but it had been her home for the last three years. More of a home than her parents ever gave her, may they burn in Hell, and more than what she'd had those years as a slave.

Still, she wouldn't miss it.

Rule number two of being a pit fighter – don't get attached to anything, because one day you might have to bash its skull in. Or it'll leave you, or hurt you, or break you. She'd added that last part. Still better than Tommy's stupid rules.

She slung her trusty double-barrel shotgun over her shoulder and left.

The stranger had gone outside, apparently, but Lonegan managed to catch her on her way up the aisle between the splintered seats and raider corpses.

"Hey, Cait –"

"Fuck off, Lonegan."

"Just listen –"

"No."

"Cait." He grabbed her arm and she whipped round, ready to clock him again, but the look in his eye – dare she say concerned? – gave her pause.

"This guy looks like a real hard-ass. Looks trouble. I don't think he'll try anything, but just in case – here," he said, handing her a small, wickedly-accurate and expensive-looking pistol.

She turned it over in her hands, frowning. "The fuck's this gonna do?"

"I don't know, I thought –"

"The guy has a shotgun."

"I know. But just in case. And here," he added, handing her a decently-sized caps purse. Cait's eyes widened as he set it in her palm. "For food and ammo. And those tight spots, you know? And for god's sake, get some decent armour. I expect you here alive and well when this place is back up and running. Can't have my headliner out rotting in some ditch. Gotta pay for the renovations somehow."

Cait hesitated, looking Tommy in the eye, at his bloody face hole. She suddenly felt a little… Bad?

No. Not really. Whatever it was, something pinged inside her chest. This was probably the nicest thing anyone had ever done for her. How pathetic.

"You're a real son of a bitch, you know that, Tommy?"

"Yeah, yeah, I know," he smirked, wiping the blood from his face. "Now get the hell out of my theatre."

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Part Two - Well, Not Really Part Two, Because This Part Happens Immediately After Part One, But Anyway - In Which Cait Realises This Crazy Asshole Is Crazier Than She Thought, and Also Addicted to Chems

The sun almost blinded Cait when she stepped outside the old theatre doors. It was orange and red
and all mixed together, going down slowly off over the hills in the distance. It was hot and dusty and the shadows of buildings cut strange shapes across the cracked pavement. And out east, sticking out against the landscape like a giant piece of floating shit, was that strange ship that had flown over Boston almost a month ago, hovering over the old airport.

She didn't get out much – the raiders never really let her walk the streets – but it didn't smell like old wood and raider piss. So that was an improvement.

"Hey," a voice said behind her, making her jump a little. "You ready then?"

She turned round to find the voice. It was the drifter, leaning against the brick wall, his gas mask pulled off his face and resting on his forehead, and he was smoking a cigarette.

Jesus Christ but Cait had not been expecting that.

The guy was… strange. Different. She didn't really know why or how, but something about him just seemed a bit off. Not really in a bad way, even, just not what she was used to. Sort of like a splinter, or like day-old brahmin steak.

In all honesty she expected some reedy little raider with a bad Mohawk. But this guy's face was… fuller? Stronger jaw, rounder chin, wider cheeks. His time out here had done him no favours, however long he'd been on the road – but he hadn't always been, that much was certain. She'd seen people who had travelled all their lives. He wasn't one of them. His eyes might have sunken, cheeks might be more gaunt since then, but there were no sharp edges of the malnutritioned scavvers.

His white face was smudged with old dirt, a week or two's worth of unshaved stubble there, brown hair short and uneven, almost like he'd tried to hack it off with a blunt knife. A yellowing bruise lined his jaw, and an old burn scar took up almost half of the entire right side of his face. Puckered and splotchy, it went from his temple, across his cheek, pulling the corner of his mouth up into a sort of unwilling half-sneer, and down his neck below the collar of his road leathers. His right eyelid was fucked up, too, that eye not quite opening as wide as the other, and his nose had been broken more than once.

But it was his eyes that really made her stop. Cait had seen a postcard one of the raiders left behind once – an old pre-war one with a lake and trees and shit. It was stained and torn and curse words were scribbled on it, but all the colours made her keep it and pin it up on her wall for a while. She couldn't even imagine a world like that, so clean and bright and free from radiation. This guy's eyes were the same vibrant green of those trees. Red-rimmed and bloodshot with dark tired bags beneath, but still.

All in all, this guy looked rough. Cait could tell he'd been through some shit. But despite everything, there still lingered something there – something normal, even, or maybe more. The ghost of a handsome man still lingered.

"You got a staring problem?"

Cait blinked, realising she had, indeed, been caught doing just that.

"No."

"Something on my face?"

"No."

He took a long drag of his cigarette, waited a moment, then blew it out slowly, the smoke twisting in
the dry, dusty air.

"Listen..."

"Cait."

"Whatever. I'm hungover and coming off a high, so I'll be straight with you – I'm not really into the whole slavery thing so, yeah. Do whatever the fuck you want. I don't really want you here but I kind of need someone with me for a while. After that you can leave – come back to this shithole or make your way out in the wasteland, doesn't matter to me. You're free to go when I'm done with you. Until then, I'm in charge. Watch my back and I'll watch yours."

He took a quick look at his cigarette then flicked it on the pavement. "I only got three rules, so listen carefully: Sell me out to anyone and I'll shoot you. Steal any of my shit and I'll shoot you. Try to shoot me and I'll shoot you. Got it?"

A straight dealer. Fair enough. Cait could appreciate that, at least.

"Yeah. You'll shoot me and I'm free to go, whatever. Got it." Cait watched him pull the gas mask back down and push off the wall heading past her, leathered arm brushing against her travel pack.

And the guy was tall.  

She turned round, frowning. "But don't go thinkin' even for a second that I'll let ya stick yer dick in me. I'll rip it off before ya touch me."

"Fine by me. Don't like redheads anyway."

Nine days later they had sex.

But we'll get to that.

"So," she asked a few minutes later, trailing a good six steps behind the guy. "Ya got a name or what?"

"Yeah. It's Daye."

She could barely hear him through the stupid mask.

"Day? As in, the sun?"

"Yeah. With an e on the end."

"The fuck kinda name is Daye?"

"My kinda name."

"Maybe ya should call me Night."

"Maybe you should shut your face hole."

Cait smirked. If there was one thing she was good at, it was pissin' people off. There was this one time in the arena some exceptionally short raider asshole went psycho with a pool cue when she mentioned he was almost the perfect height to suck his buddy's dick if the other guy stood on a chair. That had been one of the more entertaining fights in recent memory. She'd really enjoyed smashing his head in with her bat.
Daye's boots crunched on the gravel before her, the only other sound the wind whistling off the crumbling buildings.

"It's Nate," he said after a long moment. Cait almost forgot what he was going on about. "Nathaniel Daye. Daye's my last name, and the only one I go by. I ever hear you call me Nathaniel I'll shoot you in the fucking throat."

Cait smiled. There was no fucking with this guy. "Alright, boss."

"Daye. None of this boss shit, either. Or Mr. Daye. Mr. Daye was my father, and he was an asshole. Just Daye."

"Fine, Just Daye. So, where we off to?"

He stopped suddenly and Cait almost ran into him. He turned round, dirty gas mask glinting in the setting sun. "No idea. Where's the nearest raider hole?" he asked, looking up at the ruined buildings and down the broken streets.

"'Bout two miles west of here."

"There, then," he said, twirling left and taking off again.

Cait blinked and stood there a moment in the empty street. "What?" she cried, following after him. "Ya can't be serious!"

He didn't turn around. "Why?"

"You just – you just murdered an entire building of 'em!"

"So?"

So? So what, Cait? She didn't really have an answer.

"I dunno," she admitted.

"Didn't think so."

Asshole.

"I have a bone to pick with raiders," he continued. "They shot my partner a few days ago, and now he's sitting on his ass back in Goodneighbor high on Med-X and bitching about the fucking air. Stimpaks don't pay for themselves. One of has to make some caps."

Cait frowned. She was pretty sure this guy was the lone wolf type. The type of lone wolf that ate everyone else. "Partner?"


"Can't say I have."

"No?" he asked, glancing back over his shoulder for a moment. "Daye and MacCready? Mercenary duo extraordinaire?"

"No."
"Really?"

She had, yeah. Some of the raiders had mentioned a couple of mercs raising Hell for some of their groups closer to the downtown area. And being a general pain in the ass to the Gunners, too. Now that she thought about it, she'd heard the name somewhere. But she wasn't about to let him know that.

"MacCready and Daye sounds better."

"That's what Mac always says."

"Mac?"

"MacCready. Jesus, keep up."

"Yeah. Right," Cait said, shaking her head. Everything was growing prickly and hot in there, a low dull throbbing working its way inside her brain. She was slipping, forgetting. The sun was too bright. The air was too hot.

Oh, fuck.

She realised then she hadn't taken any Psycho after the last fight. Normally, when it was all over, she'd crawl back to her tiny room, bruised and battered and beaten, and jam a tube of the shit in her arm. It kept the pain away, and helped her forget, and even though it kept her awake for hours on end, it was better than hurting and remembering.

"…and took out that entire band of Super Mutants up near the satellites? Hey, you listening?"

"What?" No. She hadn't been.

"You really never heard of us?"

Cait shook her head again, sneering. "This is botherin' ya way too much."

"A little," he admitted. "Honestly, though. You live under a rock or something?"

"Kinda, yeah."

"You need to get out more."

"I'm out now."

"Touché."

"So your plan is to go round Boston shooting up every raider dive ya come across? Just because they pissed ya off?"

"I don't really have a plan. But yeah," he shrugged. "I guess you could say that."

Cait smiled to herself. A man after her own heart. You know, maybe this whole arrangement might not be such a shitshow after all.

"How many?"

"Today? Four. This'll be the fifth."
"Jesus Christ," she whistled, eyeing him only a little warily. "Not sure whether to be impressed or scared by ya."

"You wouldn't be the first to say that."

Cait watched him from behind as he walked on ahead, his duct-taped boots kicking up dust in the dry choking air. A hot wind blew through the city, twisting between the buildings and making the loose parts of Daye's ratty outfit whip around him. His modded shotgun strapped to his back, the sniper rifle hanging off his shoulder.

It was kind of badass, in a terrifying way.

Cait smirked. "So what's yer stor –"

A whiplash crack split the air and a spray of bullets tore across the pavement, and before Cait could even register what the fuck had happened, a sharp pain ripped through her left leg.

"Fuck!" she screamed, her leg giving out on her. She crashed into the pavement hard, skinning her knees and elbows, smacking her chin.

Bullet fire shredded the quiet air of the street, popping and snapping against the asphalt and brick and metal all around them, and she could hear screeching and screaming and laughing, and someone swearing – oh fuck, that was her.

Her head swam and her throat was suddenly way too dry and goddammit but she would be so lucky as to die right fucking now, not even half an hour after she'd left the fucking Combat Zone.

Someone grabbed her arm way too hard and was dragging her somewhere, tugging her across the gravel and hot pavement. No fuckin' way was she being taken by anyone. Not again. She clawed at the hand, swearing and growling and scratching with everything she had.

"Stop – fucking stop!" someone hissed, and through her watery eyes she saw the stupid dirty gas mask. She let go – hands bloody, but whether it was his or hers, she had no idea. "Stop – stay here. Don't move." She felt cold concrete against her back, and she hissed as Daye jabbed something in her leg – a stimpak, she knew, because hot relief flooded her veins, numbing her searing pain.

He'd dragged her to safety. The bastard.

They were crouched behind something concrete – a road block, maybe, because it was crumbling and the iron supports were sticking out, twisting beside her head. Blood was everywhere – soaking through her pants, all over her hands, in a gruesome line across the street from where Daye had dragged her out of the firefight. It wasn't stopping, it was pooling around her legs in a dark shiny puddle from two – no, three different spots.

"Raiders?" she rasped over the roaring gunfire, throat so dry.

"Yeah."

"How many?"

"Dunno. Few up top, more behind the bus. Maybe a dozen."

Goddammit. If only she had taken some Psycho… she wouldn't be sitting here like a lump on a useless piece of shit.
Daye must have read her mind. She leaned her head back against the concrete, watching as he fished one of the chems out of his gross old travel pack – and jab it in his own arm, right through his clothing.

"What the fuck?"

She hadn't really meant to say it out loud, but it made him laugh.

"A quick pick-me-up," he said, misinterpreting why she'd said it – she wanted it for herself. "Helps me a little."

A little? More like way too much.

"Give me some," she growled, leaning towards his bag, and recoiling as some asshole from a window laid his finger on his assault rifle, letting his bullets come way too close. Fucking pinned.

"No. They're mine. You can't help me either," he said, slapping the part of his arm where he'd stuck himself. It helped the shit get flowing good. She did it sometimes too. "You can't even walk."

"I'll be fine!"

He ripped the gas mask from his face, hair matted from sweat and dirt, green eyes too wide and darting from the Psycho. She knew that look real well.

"No. Stay here. Throw these if you need to," he said, pulling two or three grenades from his belt and pushing them into her bloody hand. "I'm gonna go back behind the bus there, get that fucker up in the window. Then I'll get the rest."

Daye didn't move, though. Shotgun in hand, he peeked his head round the road block out toward the bus, pulled back, then looked again.

"Holy shit, I know him."

"What?"

"Holy shit – Chuckles, is that you, man?"

The fire barrage slowed then stopped. A heavy pause, one so suddenly quiet it almost hurt Cait's ears.

"Nate, you greasy motherfucking son of a whore!"

Daye sighed. "I told him not to call me – I told you not to call me that!"

"You goddamn good-for-nothing lying sack of molerat shit! Where's my fucking money?"


"The fuck is this?" Cait whispered angrily.

"Just – shh. Don't say anything. I'll deal with this."

"Nate!"

"I don't have your fucking money!"
Yeah. Dealing.

"Well you better get it right fucking now or I'll blow your fucking head off!"

"Nice friends ya got there," Cait smirked, because she was dying and they were pinned and surrounded now, and the sudden lancing pain in her leg was so totally worth the nasty glare Daye threw her way.

"Look, Chuckles," he called out, not daring to poke his head over the road block yet. "You're a decent guy. You know I'll get you the money. You just –"

"That's what you said last time, asshole!"

"You just caught me at a bad time. Mac got shot and he –"

"Ohhh, no, Nate," the raider laughed, "I'm not falling for that tripe again! You give me my money now or I'll kill you and stick your ugly head on a pole!"

Cait knew this Chuckles guy wasn't lying. It seemed a favourite pastime of raiders.

"Do you have his money?" she hissed, pressing a hand to her wound, blood seeping between her fingers.

"Yeah… no. I did, but I spent it."

Cait closed her eyes. "Fucking perfect."

"Nate!"

Daye growled. "What?"

"I'll give you ten seconds to come out of there and give me my fucking money or I'm sending my guys in to take it off your dead body!"

Daye sighed again, and Cait saw his hands twitching from the Psycho. Setting his shotgun against the concrete block, he reached into his travelling pack and pulled out a jar of Buffout, and then a puffer of Jet.

"It's a real shame, Chuckles," he called out, shaking a couple of tabs of Buffout into his hand. "I sort of liked you, you know."

"Fuck off, Nate!"

"It's true! Remember the time you punched me back at Corvega? And then Mac punched you back? Good times."

"No, what I remember is catching you and your boyfriend in my hideout red-handed tryin' to steal back my half of the bargain!"

Daye tossed the tabs back, swallowing them whole. "Come on, now, Chuckles. Would I ever do such a thing to you?"

"Yes, you slimy motherfucker! That wasn't the first time!"

"I think you're blowing this whole thing way out of proportion, man."
"Nate, give me the fucking caps right fucking now or I'm going to blow you off the face of the fucking earth!"

"I think he's angry," Daye smirked to Cait, pulling the safety cap off the Jet. "Oh well. I really did kind of like the guy."

"You goin' in, then?" She asked kinda sloppily, suddenly very tired and heavy. Dying wasn't too fun after all.

"Yeah. Guess so."

"Good luck then, Cap'n," she sniggered, saluting weakly.

"It's Daye. Daye."

"Real shit cover, by the way."

He smirked, the nasty burn scar twisting a smile that might have once been charming. "Hey. It's better than bleeding all over the fucking street. Want to go back?"

Cait grimaced – well, tried to smile, but her fucking leg hurt. Everything hurt.

"I think I'm good."

"Good," he grinned, "because you're heavy as fuck."

Before Cait could muster up the last of her strength to punch him, he huffed the Jet, tossed it to the side, and then darted off, a spray of bullets and maniacal raider laughter right on his ass.

Holy shit.

Peeking round the corner lazily, Cait had never seen someone so fucking insane in her entire life. Again, that was saying something – she had been the undefeated headliner for a raider-exclusive pit fight club. For three years.

He taunted them, laughed at them, called them names, and blew their heads off with his shotgun. Every single one. Must've been at least eight, maybe ten. Didn't matter. Splat. Heads gone. Except one – Daye's shotgun blew a hole in his chest so big a molerat could've crawled through.

The shooting stopped, eventually, and Cait dragged her sorry ass up high enough over the road block to see Daye clutching his side, leaning painfully against the rusted bus in the middle of corpses littered all over the street. She glanced up to the window and saw the raider's headless body hanging out over the ledge, blood and gore sprayed over the shattered glass.

She shook her head, though out of pain or withdrawal or slight horror or respect she couldn't say.

"Fuck, that was fun," he wheezed, grinning. He wiped the blood from his face and hobbled over her way, through the mess smeared and scattered over the pavement. "Here," he said, nudging a headless raider with the tip of his boot. "Taker her armour. You're not gonna break any hearts in it but I won't have to drag you out next time."

Cait didn't know what to say. Not only once, but twice – in the same day – some asshole absolutely massacred an entire group of people right in front of her without getting a fuckin' scratch. It wasn't often Cait didn't have something bitchy or snarky to say. But here she was.

He came back over to the road block and nearly fell over, still clutching at his side. Cait, as best she
could, helped him sit down against the concrete.

"You alright?" she asked, eyeing him. "Bullet get ya?"

He collapsed against the road block, leaning his head back against it, his eyes closed. "Naw. I'm fucking crashing. Too many chems in one day."

Cait fell down beside him, her leg aching and hurting like a motherfucker and her head swimming and her vision sort of fuzzy but hey, at least she wasn't bleeding anymore.

"Want some water?" she asked, vaguely aware that her pack was nearby somewhere, and she had a few cans of clean water in there.

"No. I'll just puke it up. But thanks."

As if on cue, Daye turned to the side and heaved onto the cracked pavement, his retching sounds making Cait's stomach a little queasy. As if watching heads explode wasn't worse.

When he was done, he sat back up beside her, leaning against her shoulder. Wiped his mouth. Closed his eyes again.

"Fuck. That sucked."

She looked at him – at his sweaty, dirty skin, his ruffled mess of hacked hair, his ugly burn scar, and all the blood and grime soaking his road leathers and hair and spattered on his cheeks, and in the low light of the setting sun, behind a crumbling road block on some intersection in downtown Boston, after she'd lost her job and punched her employer and decided to follow this drifter into God-knows-where – she smiled. A real one.

"You got a staring problem?" he grunted.

Cait shook her head, still smiling. "You're one mad son of a bitch, you know that?"

"Yeah," he smiled, eyes still closed. "I know."

This insane first day would go down in history – well, as an inside joke between Cait and Daye and maybe a few of their friends – as Daye One, Cait's raging admittance into the life of the craziest bastard in the Commonwealth.

A/N: Thanks for reading this far! If you liked it, let me know. If you hated it, let me know too. I am also not above taking story ideas/advice from people - if you want to see a certain quest or anything, let me know. I might work it in.

Also for readers of Oblivious - I have not stopped writing. Just met massive writers block. Working on tackling that beast. Hold tight.
A/N: Hello again everybody! Here is chapter two! Holy shit, I am having so much fun writing these two. Hope you enjoy reading it as much as I did writing it!

Let me know what you think! Thanks so much for all the lovely reviews so far - they are always very much appreciated. It really means so much that people take the time out of their busy lives to not only read this, but let me know what they thought as well. Lets me know my writing isn't half bad. And it helps me improve, of course.

Enjoy!

Chapter Two - Rough Daye

Part One: In Which Cait Makes a Deal with the Crazy Asshole and Actually Doesn't End Up Murdering Him

Cait woke up on the asphalt, curled in a ball against the cold concrete road block, her old travelling pack under her head as a makeshift pillow.

When the hell did she fall asleep?

"Fuck," she groaned, sitting up, wiping off bits of gravel that had embedded themselves in her cheek.

What a rough night. She stretched, every muscle in her goddamn body aching, her whole fucking left leg stiff as a board, her back sore, her ass sore, her neck sore.

Jesus, she hadn't woken up so sore since she'd lost her virginity.

She squinted at the cold grey light of dawn that sliced its way between two buildings, blinking away the pain and the fatigue. She had never been a morning person. Or a people person. Or a decent person, if she was gonna get brutally honest with herself.

If she was anywhere in the world but there, in the middle of the fucking road, she would have gone back to sleep.

Still, this wasn't the strangest place she'd woken up. There was this one time – ah. Never mind. Too early for this shit.

"Goddammit," she hissed, poking at her wounded leg. Her jeans were crusted black and brown with dried blood and dirt and they were chaffing against her skin. She tried to bend it, and it did – a little, and it hurt a lot less than it had yesterday, but it still ached like a motherfucker. How in God's green earth – well, shit-brown now, she supposed – did people survive before Med-X and Stimpaks she'd never know.

"Good job, Cait," she muttered under her breath. "Ya fuckin' crippled yerself."

She would be pretty useless to Daye now.

Speaking of – where was the asshole?
She glanced around tiredly, and he wasn't there. Not beside her, not by the bus, not down any of the streets. His things were gone too.

Had she dreamed the whole thing?

Nah. She wasn't *that* lucky.

Maybe one of Chuckles’ pals took him in his sleep. Maybe he simply up and left her there. Wouldn't be the first time that happened to her. Or maybe he'd offed himself in the night after he spewed chunks in front of her –

Ah. Right. His nasty chem-packed puke sat in a withering pile near her travel pack, and her stomach lurched at the realisation that she'd slept with it not two feet from her head all night.

Okay, yeah, there were a dozen headless, rotting raider corpses around her too, but – *vomit*. Ugh.

She hobbled pathetically to her feet, using the road block to pull herself up, and took a good look around.

Nothing to see. The same dead raiders, the same rusty bus, the same dying world as yesterday.

Wait.

There was a figure on top of a building – a tall figure, and the same building where the asshole with the assault rifle hung headless out the window. About three stories up, near the ledge. It was kinda hard to see in the mounting sunrise, but someone was definitely there.

Growing up in this fucked-up world had made her cautious of others. People lied and cheated and stole and raped and murdered for nothing less than boredom. Yesterday she would have crouched low, took out her double-barrel, and blasted the fucker into the next state over, because they would do the same to her in a heartbeat. And if by some slim chance they were decent – well, then. They shouldn't be skulking around downtown anyway. One less stupid cunt in the gene pool.

But yesterday she'd met Daye. He was the tallest dude she'd ever met. It was him, alright. Being all weird up on the building.

She almost left. Really, she could just leave and he wouldn't even know or care, probably. Just get up and walk away. Take Lonegan's caps and start new somewhere, maybe Goodneighbor or Diamond City. Her leg hurt way too fucking much and she would only drag him down. He was a prick anyway. She didn't really like him.

So why didn't she?

Where would she go? Back to Tommy? The fatass would never let her live that down. She could just hear him now: *Jiminy Cricket, Cait! He got you good! Half a day and you come crawling back in here – maybe I should hire him to be my pit fighter.*

What the fuck was a Jiminy Cricket anyway?

Could she strike out on her own in the wastes? Not likely, now that she thought about it, with her fucked-up leg and all. She had enough caps for food and a weeks' worth of rent, but she was a gimp now, and couldn't do shit to make any more before it ran out.

Fucking *fuck*. She hated being useless. *Hated* it.
She could, you know… kill him and steal his shit. If she were still being honest, she’d done it before. No regrets. No hard feelings, either. She needed the shit and so she’d took it. That’s how it worked. Cait had lived a pretty shitty life and she’d had to learn most of what she knew from hard experience, but she liked to think she was smarter than most. She knew how the world worked, how stuff got done. She could spot a liar in a crowd, an honest man in a theatre full of pickled and sky-high raiders. Could tease out every weakness of her opponents, see the flash of fear in their eyes, turn that against them.

Daye, though. He was a mystery. He gave no fucks. He had no fears. And she was pretty fucking sure he wouldn’t take too kindly of her tryin’ to kill him.

She scowled but figured following this asshole might just be in her best interest. For a little while, at least. Only until she found something better to do. Or until she could walk like a normal person again.

So Cait shouldered her pack and hobbled like an old lady away from the road block. She gave a wide berth to Daye’s chunks, around crusty, smelling raider corpses, over twisted metal and crumbling stone. Through the splintered door of the apartment building, up the stairs, past the headless asshole, and out onto the roof.

Holy fuck.

Cait squinted in the sun that was breaking over the harbour to the east, its rays bathing all of downtown Boston in a soft orange glow. It looked like one of the paintings Tommy had put up in the shitters back at the Combat Zone – the city spread before her, almost peaceful in the quiet, the sun sparkling off the water. She kind of wished she’d been alive to see it back before the War, before all the colour and life had died along with everything else. And it smelled… clean up here. Not stale like down in the streets, in the filth and rubble of the wastes. And not mouldy piss like the arena. She breathed deep, letting the cool air fill her lungs, shivering a little in the breeze that blew.

"Morning, sunshine. You look like shit."

Daye smirked over his shoulder, his mask off for once – and then turned back around, staring out over the city, looking through the scope of his sniper rifle as if searching for something.

Cait hobbled up beside him, scowling.

"I cuddled with yer puke all night so shut the fuck up."

He huffed in amusement, eyes still against the scope. "You're lucky I don't get the shits when I'm coming down from a high."

"Right. Lucky me."

"There's some Mentats in my bag there," he said, nodding his head to the pack resting against the old air duct.

Cait glanced from him to the bag and back again. "So?"

"So take a few."

She frowned. "I don't like 'em. Taste like rubber and ass."

"These ones are grape."
"So?"

"Just take the fucking Mentats."

Cait scowled at him. "Why? Far as I know ya poisoned 'em."

"Lady, if I wanted to kill you I'd have done it before now."

"It's Cait."

"Whatever."

Daye peered out at the city a few moments longer then sighed, lowering the sniper rifle. Flexed his fingers, blinked a few times. Looked at her.

Cait hadn't been this close to him yet – well she had, but she'd been bleeding out on the street and he'd been juiced up on Psycho – but he really wasn't all that bad looking. He had nice eyes and his hair was ok, sort of hacked-at, though. He could do with a shave and a wash and yeah, maybe some reconstructive facial surgery – she'd heard of a guy in Diamond City who did it for a decent price – to smooth out the ugly burn scar across his face.

Though now she thought about it, it was kind of badass. Made him like a sort of good guy, bad guy character – one half smooth, the other totally fucked up.

But yeah. He was better-looking than the pool of raiders she'd been forced to knock heads with the last few years. Although that wasn't sayin' much.

"I take them every morning," he said, fiddling with the sights on his rifle. "They'll clear your head, wake you up. Closest thing I've come across to coffee in this fucking place."

"Coffee?"

Daye glanced up at her. "You haven't heard of coffee?"

"No."

"Jesus Christ. You poor soul."

Cait's hackles raised a bit. She didn't like being pitied.

He raised the rifle and peered through the scope again. "Take a few Mentats. And a Stimpak. Then come sit. Have something to eat."

"Yes, mum," she sneered, hobbling over to his pack. She would've flipped him the bird or told him to fuck his own mother had her stomach not growled viciously. She hadn't eaten in over a day. Maybe two. Fuck if she knew.

Rummaging around in his pack proved frustrating and somewhat interesting – it was stuffed full of useless junk, from broken desk fans to empty Nuka Cola bottles to tattered wads of old world cash.

"In the front," he called out, still scanning the city.

Maybe she should've put a bullet in his skull. She hit the fucking motherlode to end all motherlodes.

Cait hadn't seen such a wide variety of chems and junk guaranteed to rot your teeth in all her shitty days on this earth. Buffout, Jet, Psycho, Med-X, RadAway, Day Tripper, Daddy-O, cartons of three
– no, four – types of cigarettes, and jars and boxes of shit she'd never even seen before. There were a few inhalers that looked like Jet on steroids that were particularly interesting. Could probably get her a pretty penny. Whatever the hell a penny was.

She grabbed the tin of grape Mentats and downed a few. Took a Stimpak and jabbed her leg – fucking ouch – and a box of Fancy Lad Snack Cakes.

"Grab the Luckies," he said when she was already halfway back. She growled but did it anyways. Asshole.

He took the box of Lucky Strikes from her without so much as a thank-you. He set his rifle against the ledge, hopped up, and sat down, feet dangling over the edge like an idiot. Pulled a cigarette out, lit it, inhaled it.

"Fuck," he breathed, blowing the smoke out into the crisp morning air. "I needed that."

She could push him off the ledge and take his shit. If he was stupid enough to sit there, dumb enough to turn his back on her, he deserved to get splattered on the pavement. But watching him – and she had, pretty closely – you know, to spot a weakness – she just couldn't. She'd noticed the slight twitch of his hands, his eyes blinking just a little too much – all signs of an addict. She knew, because she did the exact same fucking things. She hated to admit it, but she saw a lot of herself in this weird dude. She just couldn't force herself to do it.

What a pussy.

She sat down on the low ledge beside him, the concrete cold on her ass, tearing open the box of snack cakes.

"A little early for a lung dart, don't ya think?"

He didn't even flinch. "Who says it's early?"

"The fuckin' sun."

"Maybe it's late for me. Maybe I didn't sleep."

Cait munched on her shitty breakfast, her eyebrows raised. "Did ya?"

Daye inhaled again, blew out again, glanced sideways at her. Smirked. "Yeah. Fucking died after that fight."

Cait smirked back. "Thought so."

"Toss me one."

She did. He took a bite.

"Now these," he stressed, holding up the cake, "these taste like rubber and ass."

Cait laughed. The sound was loud and clear in the quiet morning over the city, before the sun burned away all the mist on the water, making the air hot and dusty and choking.

It had been a long time since Cait had laughed at a joke. She didn't think laughing from an adrenaline high in the pit, covered in the blood and brain matter of her opponent, counted. It felt… fucking weird. Too normal.
He smiled at that, the burn on his face making it look almost like a sneer, his right eye just a little more shut than his left. He offered her a cigarette. She took it. Lit it from his little gold lighter. Inhaled. Blew out.

"Ya do that often?" she asked.

"Hm?"

"Charge into a fight like a deathclaw on steroids? Explodin' heads like that?"

He shrugged. "Sometimes. When I feel like it. Mac's my deadeye, I'm his vanguard. He stays back, I go in close. It works."

"No shit it works. Never seen someone so fuckin' insane in all me life. And that's sayin' somethin'."

"I'll take that as a compliment."

"Fuckin' eh."

"So. How's the leg?"

Cait shrugged. "I dunno. It's still there, so I guess that's somethin'."

"Guess so. Bullets gone?"

"Probably. Hope so. Didn't really check." She blew out on her cigarette, watching the smoke twist in the air before her. "Only got one other pair of jeans in me bag. First hour on the job and I fuckin' ruin half me clothes."

He huffed. "Yeah. I would've changed your pants but I didn't want you waking up halfway through and gutting me like a fucking fish."

Cait raised her eyebrows at him. "Change my pants?"

He shrugged, eyes distant. "Yeah. I've left clothes on too long over a wound before. Starts smelling and gets real fucking gross."

Cait turned her nose up. "Spare me the details."

He took another bite of his snack cake. "Well excuse me for trying to prevent gangrene."

"The fuck's gangrene?"

Daye sighed, closing his eyes. "Never mind."

Cait stared at her cake for a second, thinking about what the fuck gangrene was. It sounded pretty nasty, and she wasn't so hungry any more. She tossed her cake, watching it fall to the alleyway below.

"Hey, I know I said they taste like shit, but I don't have a lot else. That just cost you lunch."

Cait shrugged. "I'm sure I'll get over it."

He didn't answer her. He was fiddling with something on his wrist – some electronic thing.

Cait leaned closer. "That a Pip-Boy?"
"Yeah."

She whistled. Those things were pretty rare. She'd seen one in Diamond City once, a long time ago, but it was broken and that stupid robot tried to sell it to her. She almost caved his metal head in for being such an annoying prick.

"Where'd ya get it?"

"From a dead guy."

"You kill him for it?"

"No."

"You from a Vault, then?"

"Does it look like I'm from a Vault?"

Cait scowled. What a dick.

"Where ya from then?"

Daye frowned, tapping away at the screen. "Look, Firecrotch, you and I are on a need-to-know-basis, and right now you don't need to know anything. Alright?"

Cait bristled. "Firecrotch?"

He looked up from the screen. "Got a problem?"

"That's not me fuckin' name."

"Well Kat is just too boring. I refuse to call you that."

"It's Cait," she seethed.

"See?"

"It's really not that hard to remember, ya know."

"Yeah, but it's boring."

"So's Day. Could you get a more bland word?"

"Daye with an e on the end, Firecrotch. Remember that."

Cait clenched her teeth. "Me name's fuckin' Cait! And no one can see the fuckin' e on yer name when ya say it!"

Daye smirked, sucking on the last little bit of his cigarette. "See? Firecrotch fits you perfect."

She almost shoved the stupid fucker off the building. For real this time.

"Asshole," she growled.

He just smirked wider. "Dickhead."

"Cocksucker."
"Motherfucker."

"Jackass."

"Douche Canoe."

Cait frowned. "The fuck's a douche canoe?"

"You are. You're a douche canoe."

"Yer a fuckin' idiot."

Daye smirked again, clearly enjoying himself – and Cait wanted to punch him in his stupid fucking face. "You're gonna have to do better than that, Firecrotch. Been called a lot worse."

"Wanker."

"Fucktard. I can do this all day."

Cait smirked, the wheels turning in her brain. "So can I. Nate."

There it was. The flash behind his eyes – the one that let her know something bothered him.

His fucking name? That was all? What a prick.

It was gone just as quick though. "You drive a hard bargain," he said, flicking his cigarette down into the alleyway below. "Fine. I'll call you Red."

"You'll call me Cait."

"I'll call you Red."

Well. It was better than Firecrotch.

She looked out over the city again, at all the brown and black and decay.

They lapsed into a – well, not comfortable silence, but maybe an easy one, there on the ledge of the old building. Daye had turned on the radio of his Pip-Boy, and a song was playing softly. An upbeat one, the only sound in the quiet morning as the sun rose over the dead city.

*Oh well I roam from town to town*

*I go through life without a care*

*Till I'm as happy as a clown*

*With my two fists of iron and I'm going nowhere*

*They call me The Wanderer, yeah The Wanderer*

*I roam around around around around…*

"So where we goin'?"

Daye opened another snack cake, shoving half of the thing in his mouth at once. "Dunno. Don't really need to be anywhere right now. Figure we should get out of the city for a while, at least. Chuckles had a lot of friends. Some big guys, control a lot of people. They won't be too happy he's
dead. Let things cool down for a bit."

"How many 'big guys' you owin' money to?"

He paused. Only a second. But Cait saw it. "Don't really see how that concerns you."

"I just don't wanna be worryin' I ain't gonna lose me head every time I turn a corner."

"Listen Red, I'll tell you now: I'm not really that popular in a lot of places round here."

"Figured as much. I ain't got too many friends either."

He shoved the other half of the cake into his mouth and eyed her for a long moment, chewing slowly. Thinking.

"Alright," he said, swallowing loudly. "I'll make you a deal. I can tell you're a fighter. I saw it myself. You're decent hand-to-hand. Haven't seen you with a gun yet, but I'm betting you're okay – when I'm not dragging your ass out of the firefight."

"That was a fuckin' ambush."

"So I'll tell you the same thing I told Mac. You can go if you want. I won't blame you. It's probably best, really, cause you'll get shot at and beaten up and in a lot of trouble with a lot of people."

"Ya sure are sellin' yerself there, bud."

"But you can come and work with me – for a bit. If we see some real action soon, and I like how you fight. Like I said, just until Mac gets off his ass. Help me out, do what you're told, don't ask questions. My rules still apply though. If you break them you're out. If you end up being shit at shooting you're out. If we run into any problems you're out."

"Jesus Christ. Am I allowed ta take a piss?"

He smirked. "We'll see. I'll split the profits with you 80/20."

"Fuck that! I'll be gettin' 50/50."

His grin widened. "You're in, then?"

"50/50 or I walk."

"70/30 and I'll toss in some armour that doesn't smell like raider piss."

She eyed him a moment. A long moment. Tryin' to see what his gig was. What the fuck he was really about. There must be a game he was playing. She'd been played before. She knew the fucking way it worked. She knew.

Nope. Still a mystery. Fuckin' asshole.

But you know, maybe she could roll with this. Earn a bit of cash on the side. 70/30 wasn't much, but she had a feeling this guy could get his hands on some dirty money. And improve her fighting skills – not like she wasn't the best already but, still. See the world beyond the Combat Zone. She'd never been further than the trailer park she'd been born in and the downtown area. Maybe he was right – she should get out more. Sample the local man-meat if she had time. It had been a while, after all. A girl has needs too, ya know.
"Fuck it. I'm in."

"Nice." He smirked again, holding out his hand. She took it. Shook it. "Get your shit. We're out."

"Never had a partner before."

Daye got up from the ledge, hopping down and shouldering his pack, his sniper rifle. "Mac's my partner. You're more of a… temporary employee. Until he's back. But don't let that get you down. You'll probably be dead by then."

He checked his shotgun quick. Cocked it loudly. Put the stupid bloody gas mask back over his face.

"Saddle up, Red. You're in for one hell of a ride."

Looking back, maybe she should've just pushed the fucker off the ledge.

Part Two - This Part Actually Happens a While Later So Yeah, But Anyways: In Which Cait is Already Tired of This Shit and Wants to Murder a Certain Crazy Asshole Right About Now

"Goddammit ya bloody fuckin' motherfuckin' son of a fucker!" Cait screeched, clutching her left shoulder as the blood leached out faster than a horny teenager's load. "I'm gonna kill ya Daye! I'm gonna fuckin' kill ya!"

She was cowering in the aisle behind one of the shelves in the Super Duper Mart, and so was he, and had she any strength left she would've ripped his dick off and shoved it so far down his throat his ancestors would've tasted it.

They hadn't even made it to noon and they'd been caught – again – by a band of seriously cheesed raiders. And – again – Daye managed to dodge their wild bullets like some sort of juiced-up Jesus man while Cait took the brunt of the heat before they dove into the grocery store.

And here they were – AGAIN – cowering like Lonegan back in the pit, Cait bleeding out, Daye jamming tubes of Psycho into his arms and Buffout down his throat.

"Shut the fuck up," he hissed, pocketing a few inhalers of Jet. "Or I'll leave you behind this time."

"Fuckin' do it! I swear to Christ I'll come back as a ghost and haunt yer ass for all eternity, ya smarmy son of a bitch!"

He just growled, recoiling as a particularly loud burst of submachine gun rounds tore through the cheap wood of the shelving.

"Come on out, ya assholes!" one of the raiders by the door laughed, and Cait could tell, just by his voice, that he was way too high to even be walking right now. "Promise we'll just kill ya real quick-like! No torture or nothin'!"

"There's a bitch in there with him though!" another one hissed.

A pause. "Oh. Never mind! We'll fuck her in front of ya then kill ya. Sound like a plan?"

They all laughed again, and Cait very nearly rushed out and ripped all their fucking dicks off.

"Ah, no, I don't think so," Daye called out, reloading his shotgun. "I mean yeah, sure, go ahead and fuck the bitch, but come on guys," he laughed. "You could just let me walk away. No hard feelings."
Cait practically frothed at the mouth. "You fuckin' –"

"No can do, asshole. Boss says ya gotta go, so ya gotta go. No prisoners, no survivors. Sure ya understand."

Daye smirked. "Yeah, well. Man's gotta make a living."

"Fuckin' right. So make this easy on all of us and just shoot yourself, okay? Please and thank-you and all that shit."

"Manners. I'm impressed, good sirs."

"Enough chit-chat, asshole. Ya dead yet?"

"Sorry. Only got enough bullets for all of you. I'll be short for myself."

The raiders did not fucking like that joke. They screeched and swore and laid their fingers too heavily on their triggers, making bits of wood and plastic and two-hundred-year-old dust fly through the air like some sort of fucked-up Fourth of July rocket show. Not that Cait had ever actually seen fireworks. Or celebrated the holiday. Or her birthday. How fucking sad.


Cait blinked and wow, her eyes really did not want to stay open. She was tired again, just like yesterday – it hadn't even been twenty-fucking-four hours yet – and all she really wanted to do was just sleep.

"I'm fine," she grunted, shuffling her shoulder to prove a point and ouch-motherfucking-ouch that was so not worth it. He shoulder was numb, and she could feel the bullet deep in there, grinding against something – a bone probably – and her leg was still sore and she had a cramp from limping all day and to top it all off she was so fucking hungry. She should've eaten that nasty-ass snack cake.

"No you're not," he pressed, inching closer. He smelled like leather and sweat and gunsmoke and something she couldn't quite place. Maybe it was just Essence of Daye. Eau de Asshole. "You're bleeding way too much. You're gonna pass out."

"No I ain't," she growled, annoyed he thought Cait, Undefeated Headliner Pit-Fighting Champion, would faint from a little bullet wound. "I been through worse. Hell, I have ta suffer you."

He smirked at that, the smirk that twisted his probably once-handsome smile into a sneer, his eyes bloodshot and darting.

"Whatever. I don't care. Just stay here and try not to die. Or get shot. Again."

"Fuckin' wanker."

Like yesterday – Jesus, this felt like one big déjà vu nightmare from Hell – he huffed some Jet, tossed it aside, and darted out from cover.

Cait was much too tired to watch him slaughter them all again, but she was content to listen as she leaned against the grocery shelf, feeling the blood warm and sticky and not fucking stopping on her hands and all down her arm. And onto the only other pair of pants she had. Goddammit.

Boom. Shotgun. Bambambam – submachine gun spitting out bullets but stopping mid-clip as the

She chuckled a bit despite it all. Her mind was swimming and fuzzy from losing all that blood and from starving and from going on her second day of no Psycho lubing up her veins. She knew right then that, if she stuck with this guy (and made it out of this shitshow alive) he would absolutely be the death of her. And she was sort of okay with that.

*Boom.*

*Boom.*

*Boom.*

Time wore on.

Glass shattered and blood gurgled and cries were cut short. Mostly silence now.

A scuffling sound, cloth against the ground, a grunt, a whimper.

"…fuckin' just let me go, man! I'm good as dead anyways!"

"No can do, asshole." It was Daye. "No prisoners, no survivors."

"Wait!"

"I'm sure you understand."

*Boom.*

Cait's body decided that would be the perfect moment to pass the fuck out.

"You owe me two cartons of shotgun shells and a tube of Med-X."

Cait's head pounded hard as two Brahmin goin' at it. She knew. She'd been unfortunate enough to see it before.

"What in bloody fuck?" she groaned, opening her eyes.

It was dark and there was a small fire in front of her. Her pack and double-barrel beside her. Daye across the fire, leaning against something old and broken. An ice machine, maybe. Or a water cooler. Smoking a Lucky Strike and munching on a blue tin can of Cram.

The dumbshit didn't even have the decency to put her on a fucking bedroll. Just tossed her there on the cold concrete.

Cait sat up. Painfully. "We still in the damn grocery store?"

He blew out. "Yeah. You're heavy as fuck. I told you that before. I wasn't dragging your ass away for nothing."

"What a fuckin' hero."

"Hey," he said, pointing his cig at her. "That's the second time in less than a day I saved your ass,
Red. You could be grateful, you know."

Cait rubbed at her eyes, groaning again.

The fucker was right. Did she ever feel like a useless piece of shit.

"Yeah. Whatever. Sure. Thanks, I guess."

Daye munched away, watching her. "Well. You're welcome."

An awkward silence settled on them, one punctuated only by the occasional spitting of the fire and the spoon scraping against the inside of the can as Daye ate.

Cait stomach growled viciously as she watched him. He must've heard it, because he smirked the tiniest bit, glancing up at her.

"I'm guessing you're hungry."

"No shit, Sherlock."

"You know, you could always ask for something instead of being a total bitch about it."

"I could, yeah."

He rummaged around in his pack before tossing her another box of Fancy Lads Snack Cakes.

"Rubber and ass for dinner again. Sorry."

Cait scowled but tore the box open like a ravenous molerat. She was too fucking hungry to give a shit. "You ain't sorry."

"Not really, no."

Cait ripped open the plastic packaging and shoved an entire cake into her mouth, ignoring the looks Daye kept throwing her way.

"Thought I lost me lunch privilege today."

"You did. You slept through it. This is supper."

"Right."

Whatever.

She ate four cakes in less than two minutes, and was working on her fifth when she thought she should probably slow down before she puked. *Ugh.*

She glanced sideways at him across the fire, being careful he didn't notice. He'd lit another cigarette and was sucking it back, eyes glossy, distant. Thinking.

He'd had the same look a lot, she was beginning to realise.

Earlier in the day, as they'd travelled in silence fluffed with the Pip-Boy radio and Cait's wheezing as she dragged her leg like a pirate, he'd stopped once at a broken intersection and gazed out at the city with a sort of disappointed look. Sort of like he had been searching for something out there and never found it. Or nothin' was good enough, maybe. Cait knew the feeling well.
Cait gave no fucks about anyone and now she thought about it, she never really had. She thought she loved her parents as a child, but she realised later she'd been duped. And so she told herself *never fucking again.*

People sucked. She was pretty damn sure she knew that better than anyone. And she'd never gotten close again. Hated her slavers. Didn't care about the drifers that came through the Combat Zone. The raiders could all go die in a fucking hole – well, Daye had taken care of them, she supposed. Each and every human being she'd ever met had been worse than the last one. They were all selfish motherfuckers. All fucking animals.

But something was bothering Cait. It had been burning inside her since last night, and as she sat on the roof over the city munching on a two-hundred-year-old shit cake and sucking in shitty cigarette smoke for breakfast. And even now. *Especially* now.

"Why'd ya save me back there?"

Daye's eyes lost their glaze, blinking as he was dragged back to the here and now. He took one last long drag of his cigarette before putting it out on the concrete beside him.

"Listen Red, we're not having a moment here."

"Never said we were."

"Should I have left you to die in the street? In the aisle?"

"Well…"

He nodded. "There you go."

"Ya didn't owe me nothin'. I'm just some bitch nobody ya picked up not an hour before. Ya could've left me there an' taken all me shit. Ya still could."

"Is that what you would've done?"

"I'll be honest. Probably."

"Would you do it now?"

She thought about it.

Maybe this morning. Maybe not now though.

"No."

He smirked. "There you go."

Cait was suddenly angry. "What is this, fuckin' wisdom? Ya think ya need ta earn me loyalty like I'm some fuckin' dog?"

"I'll be honest. Yeah."

Cait's blood was boiling at his stupid smirk, his way of rewording shit, how he made *so much fucking sense.*

*Fuck.*
She worked to calm her thrashing heart, see the bright side of this stupid fucking situation. There was one, really – other than the fact she was alive – even though she would've rather shagged a Mutie than ever let anyone know.

No one had ever saved her life before. No one had ever given her a second chance.

"Whatever," she growled. "At least yer honest."

He chuckled a little. "Now that is a fucking lie if I ever heard one."

Cait couldn't help but smile back. Only a little fucking bit. Honestly.

Jesus Christ, Cait has no luck.

Let me know what you think!

Go forth and multiply!

Huzzah!
Daye-Um Son!

A/N: Hello readers! Here is chapter 3!

Also, this is a PSA of sorts. When I started this story, I only intended it to be a Cait/SS romance fic where both are fucked-up but fix each other in the end. However, I changed that plan a bit. This is still going to be a romance fic, but it's not purely romance. I have my own plot, now, which I'm sure you'll love. It's separate from the main storyline, but the main quests and some side ones will be looked at.

I tweaked a few things from the first two chapters because of that, but not really anything big enough to warrant you rereading it. I mean yeah, go ahead if you want, but it's not totally necessary.

This is a huge chapter but I just couldn't find a good spot to stop it. Hope you like it!

Chapter 3: Daye-um Son!


"This is where ya live?"

"You got a problem, Red?"

"No, it's just –"

"What?"

Fucking messy as shit.

Cait never really had a place she could call home – the trailer park was boring and cramped, and the slavers drilled it into her head that you own nothing – we own you and really, that little side room with the nasty-ass mattress back at the Combat Zone was the closest she'd ever come to owning her own space – but she was pretty damn sure a house wasn't supposed to be this… chaotic.

A fuck-ton (which isn't an exact measurement but let's just say way too many for one person) of peeling crates and splintering barrels and flaking suitcases and rusty chests were stacked right to the sloping ceiling of the cramped, dark, dingy little house, all slanted and teetering dangerously and almost comically in a way. There were heaps of trash and random shit pushed off into corners – tires and old bottles and scraps of metal and clothing and pylons and cinder blocks and Jesus, was that a picnic bench under all that junk?

It was cluttered as fuck.

Daye seemed to pick up what she was laying down. "It's a little… crowded, yeah. But hey," he shrugged, and he pulled the crusty gas mask off his face to see better, tossing it aside. "It's supposed to be like this. It hides all my important stuff."

"Important stuff?"
"Think of it as a layer of dust over a – treasure chest? Yeah, lets go with that."

Cait gave him a what the fuck look. "Unless this treasure chest is owned by Captain Fuckwad of Cape Junky-Shit, I ain't seein' no Important Stuff."

"Maybe you should check your eyes then, Red." He left her there by the door, knee deep in rubbish, and began rummaging through the piles, shoving shit in his ratty travelling pack.


You know, Cait had never really liked Diamond City. Too big, too noisy, too full of stuck-up pricks turning their manicured noses up at everyone who was different, who didn't belong.

Yeah, she knew you couldn't manicure a nose, but she wouldn't be surprised if some greased-up tweedle-knob here figured out a way to do it.

Anyways, she didn't like Diamond City. Didn't like the well-dressed people, the decent shops, the actually good food that wasn't two-hundred years old or some sort of Mystery Meat shit Tommy cooked up sometimes. Didn't like the open air, or the guards keeping watch, or the sense of utter normalcy the place reeked of.

Because Cait wasn't normal. She didn't deserve any of those things. And she hated the glares and stares people threw her way because of it.

Which she told Daye. Repeatedly.

Just going to one of my safehouses to grab a few things, he'd said before. Then we're getting the fuck out of Downtown. Lay low for awhile.

Daye knew how to lay low, alright. They'd skirted the main roads coming into the city, keeping to the alleyways and shadowy corners and dark places no one but Daye, probably, and the seediest motherfuckers knew. Then the asshole made her clamber up a rusty metal twenty-foot wall and then crawl like a fucking molerat through a hole in some wickedly sharp barbwire fencing just to end up behind the public shitters near the Science! Centre. Tore a good, jagged hole in her last pair of pants, too, which were already soaked with crusty dried blood from the fight in the Super Duper Mart, but hey, at least they were wearable before. You could basically see her asscheeks now.

The guy didn't know how to use front doors, apparently. That, or he just enjoyed watching her struggle with her gimp-ass arm and gimp-ass leg. Wouldn't put it past him.

Home Plate, he'd called this place. She didn't know if he'd given it the name or it was forced upon him by one of the fat bigwigs up in the stands in an attempt to keep the old-world baseball atmosphere alive! or some shit like that.

God damn. Did she mention she hated the place?

"So…” she drawled, eyeing what looked to be a rusty old Nuka Cola machine against the far wall and vaguely wondering how he’d fit it through the door. And if there were anything inside it. "This is one of yer safehouses, ya say?"

He picked something old up, turned it over, tossed it aside. "Yeah."

"Where's the rest?"
"If I told you they wouldn't really be safehouses, now, would they?"

She rolled her eyes. "Whatever. Don't really care. Was just makin' conversation."

She spotted an old couch across the room, faded blue pinstripe with yellowing fluff sticking out, sort of near where the Nuka-Cola machine was. Shuffling over to it, she tossed her bag aside, swiped an armful of junk from the cushions onto the floor and collapsed onto it.

"Jesus fuck I'm beat," she wheezed, stretching out like she owned the place. She shuffled a little, something digging into her hip. Tommy's pistol. She unholstered it and took a good look at it. A sharp, heavily-modded little .44 revolver, dull blue-grey in colour with a nice polished wooden grip. She wondered where Tommy might've gotten it, who he'd killed. Pfft. The lardass probably never even looked weird at someone else, let alone kill 'em. The little gun looked expensive, too. She could probably pawn it off for a good few caps if need be.

Cait turned it over in her hands lazily, looking at it in the low light. Tommy had told her to keep it close, just in case this Daye guy tried anything. She glanced over to him, still rummaging around the piles of shit like any of it was actually useful. He hadn't tried anything, not yet. But she was pretty sure he could've by now if he really wanted to. She sighed, tossing the pistol on top of her bag.

Then she scrunched up her nose, frowning. "This couch smells like shit."

"There's probably shit on it."

"Gross." But she didn't move. She hadn't rested in a good long while – not since the Combat Zone, probably. Actually, yeah. Since then. "I need me some food and a good shag. Where's the nearest bar?"

Some alcohol and a good-looking local could warm her up real good. Cait forgot how fucking freezing it was outside at night, having spent the last three years sweating in her dingy little side room off the arena. And Jesus fuck if she wasn't tired of those nasty snack cakes she'd been shoving down her throat. It'd been all she'd eaten since – well, since leaving the Combat Zone. Fuck, when was that? Two days ago? Goddammit, she couldn't remember. She needed some Psycho real fucking quick. It was making her antsy, going so long without it, and she couldn't shake the headache that clung to her skull like shit to a brahmin's asshairs.

She rolled up her crusty pant leg to inspect the bullet wound she'd got at the intersection literally twenty minutes after leaving Tommy's employment. It was a nasty yellow colour and still ached like no tomorrow, but it didn't smell and was well on it's way to healing. Still made her limp like a grandma, though.

"Ah, no," Daye said, inspecting a rusty old can or something. "Bad idea. Gonna have to pass on that."

Cait frowned at him. "What?"

"Leaving. Bad idea. I know how stoked you are to fuck some guy you'll never see again, but you're just gonna have to wait. Cross your legs or something."

"What? Why not?"

"Think about it."

She scowled. "Quit playin' games and just fuckin' tell me."
"Think about it."

Cait's red-hot temper flared. "I'll tell ya what I'm fuckin' thinkin'!" she growled, sitting up sharply on the boxy, springy old couch, wincing a little at the dash of pain through her leg. "Ya blow me boss's place all ta hell, murder all our customers, get me shot twelve fuckin' minutes after I leave the fuckin' place – and then shot again just a couple hours later – and feed me shit cakes and shit smokes and make me drag me fuckin' gimp leg and crippled arm halfway across the entire fuckin' Downtown, shove me through a hole in the wall, bring me to this shithole, and then not even let me get some fuckin' real food!"

Daye just watched her during her entire outburst with mild interest and slight humour.

He chewed his fingernails to hide his smile. "You done?"

"I'm fuckin' hungry!"

Not even ten minutes in Diamond City and she already wanted to strangle the guy and hang him up in the rafters by his toes. Sport for crows.

He turned, silent, and opened up a peeling yellow crate with a faded, crude red fish stamped on the side, rummaging around inside it like nothing had happened. Cait seethed, breathing in and out, in and out, deep of the smell of shitty couch and old dust and whatever the fuck was rotting under all the piles of trash.

"Once upon a time there was this guy. Tall, handsome as fuck, with a badass scar on his face. Don't remember his name though. But I'm sure it was badass too. Anyways, this guy was a pretty logical guy, Red. He did things because things made sense. He was hungry – he ate. He was tired – he slept." He pulled out a few boxes of cigarettes and pocketed them in his ratty jacket. "He was laying low after blowing the head off a raider gang leader – he didn't wander around the city buying noodles and flashing his cooch for Christ's sake." He slammed the lid of the crate a little too hard, maybe, an exasperated look on his face that pretty much oozed Jesus fucking Christ, this isn't rocket science.

Cait crossed her arms. "Yer a fuckin' idiot."

"You know, I think you said that before. I'm not sure, really. Mind telling me one more time?"

"I appreciate sarcasm, ya know, I really do, but how in fuck has yer tongue not rotted out with all the shit ya keep spewin'?"

Daye smirked again, his old burn scar making it look more like a sneer, really, and he pulled out a bottle of Buffout from seemingly nowhere – how many pockets did his nasty jacket have? – and shook it a little, the pills inside rattling around against the glass. "Because the shit going in is worse."

Well. Couldn't argue with that, she supposed.

"Seriously though," he continued, pocketing the chems. "Don't go out there. We're just grabbing a few things here – some supplies and stuff – and then we'll be gone. North, I think. Less people. And deathclaws."

Cait's head positively throbbed – at him, at the lights, at the lack of Psycho juicing her up. "What? We ain't even stayin' the night?"

He shoved some more random shit into his pack. "Nah."
"But it's – fuck, it must be almost ten by now. The streets are dangerous this time o'night."

"Not as dangerous as if we stay here. Like I said – Chuckles had a lot of friends. A lot of guys who may or may not know where this place is."

Cait shook her head. This was all happening way too fucking fast.

"What the fuck, Daye? I need some food, some sleep. Me fuckin' arm hurts, me leg hurts. We should restock. Chill out. And what about the armour ya promised?"

He waved her off. "Yeah, yeah. Eventually."

She scowled at him again. "Eh – no, Daye. Look what happens without it!" She pulled down the half-sleeve of her stained old shirt to showcase the nasty bruise and pink, puffy skin where the raider bullet bit her in the Super Duper Mart, right in the clavicle. Well, Daye had said *clavicle*. He probably was just making shit up. "I'm a fuckin' one-armed gimp-ass pirate. Naked as a fuckin' baby. I need me some armour."

"Hey, I said I'd get you some that doesn't smell like piss. Never said it had to be new. Or worth a damn."

Cait ground her teeth. "You cheap son of a bitch."

"That's *Mr.* Cheap Son-Of-A-Bitch to you, Red. Remember that."

A heavy, tinny thump on the metal door made the both of them jump. Daye spun around, frozen, and Cait's hand automatically went for her pack and her shotgun.

"Wait," he hissed, holding out a hand. Her own hand froze round the strap of her bag, nails digging into the fabric in anticipation. Not fear. What, you think Cait was afraid? She watched Daye slide a short knife out of his many-pocketed jacket and hold it ready, still frozen.

The door banged again. *Bam bam bam*. The doorknob rattled impatiently. *Schttkklll*. Or whatever the fuck noise a doorknob makes when it rattles.

"Blue, it's me. I know you're in there! Open up!"

It was a woman's voice. Young and impatient and pushy. Not dangerous, maybe, but she still didn't trust it. Cait was good at telling a lot about a person without even talkin' to them. Or seeing them before. Had to be. She'd be rotting in the raider dump behind the arena right now if she wasn't.

Daye was too, it seemed. He tiptoed cautiously toward the doorway, over and around the piles of shit laying about, careful not to touch anything, make anything fall and make a noise.

Cait was sort of impressed with how agile he kind of was. He was a big dude, after all, tall and broad-shouldered, still in his duct-taped boots, too, and she knew he still had some junk in his veins from yesterday. She would've been wobbling all over the place, knocking shit over left, right, and centre like a distempered molerat. She'd seen one of those before. Quivering and bobbing its head all spastic-like, teeth gnashing at anything that came too close. It was fucking creepy, let me tell you.

When he reached the far side he peered through the grimy circle glass window in the door, back against the peeling blue metal, knife at the ready.

The door knocked again. "*Blue!*"
Daye relaxed, sighing, and pocketed the knife.

"Blue, if you don't open up this door I'm gonna get Valentine to break –"

He twisted the lock and swung the heavy door open, revealing a small, tidy-looking young woman in a press cap and long red trench coat. Her face was framed by her black hair and it was in a frown, hardly visible in the weak light of the streetlight outside. She squinted as the light from Home Plate spilled on her, and then Cait could see her face. She was pretty. The picture of eager youth, her face clean and free of bruises or scars that meant she'd known a tough life.

Cait instantly hated her.

"Hey, look who it is!" Daye laughed, a real laugh, not one soaked with chems or raider blood. The sound was strange to Cait. "Piperoni! Pipesqueak! How you doing, Pipes? Any new stories lately? You figure out if the mayor is boning his secretary yet?"

The woman half-frowned, half-smiled as she crossed her arms. "Don't try playing all hey Piper, how's it going? with me, Blue. It doesn't work."

"Because I totally think McDonough is boning that Gina bitch."

Cait relaxed her grip on the bag, settled back a bit. Daye seemed friendly enough with this glorified crayon. Because of her waxy overcoat. It was waxy, like a crayon. And red. Like a crayon. It made sense to her.

The woman – Piper – what a stupid fucking name – smirked and rolled her eyes. "It's Geneva. And, if you must know, that story went cold a week ago. McDonough caught wind of that and threatened me. Again."

"Again?"

"Yeah. Lies and scandalous assumptions," she air-quoted, snorting. "Don't get me started."

"What an asshole."

"Yeah."

Daye rubbed at his nose awkwardly after a moment, watching this Piper bitch watch him in silence. "Um… Is there anything I can get you, Piper?"


"Wow, Ms. Wright. I didn't know you could count that high. Good for you."

"Har har."

"How'd you even know I was in town?" Daye asked, leaning against the doorframe casually. "I came in the back way. You wouldn't have even seen me."

She smirked, mirroring him. "I have my ways."

"It was Deacon, wasn't it?"

"…No."
He grinned wide, a crooked sort of smirk, the ghost of a charming smile on his marred face. "You're a terrible liar, Pipes."

Piper melted. Like a fucking crayon. Cait could actually see her shoulders slump, the reluctant smile breaking across her face. She couldn't believe it. What a fucking smooth-talker. "Alright, fine. It was Deacon."

Daye growled. "That sneaky son of a bitch."

"Just be glad he's on our side, Blue," Piper said, still smiling at him. "And not one of the Institute's little lackey's."

Daye frowned, rubbing the back of his neck. "Still, it's annoying as fuck. Knowing he's there, watching me all the goddamn time."

Her smile faded a little. "And that's why I'm here. Listen – Deacon told me about your little… argument with that raider."

"That asshole saw the whole thing and didn't bother to help?"

Piper put her hand on his arm. "Blue –"

"And if by argument you mean I shot a hole in the guy's head then, yeah. Argument."

"Blue, you can't keep getting caught up in stuff like this," she frowned, giving his arm a little squeeze. "You're going to get hurt one day. Really hurt. Dead."

"Thanks for the explanation."

"I mean it."

He sighed, shaking off her arm. "It's fine, Pipes. Just gonna lay low for a while. Leave town for a bit. We can't stay here, not while things are hot."

"We?"

"Oh. Right." Daye thumbed behind him toward where Cait sat on the couch, watching the whole exchange silently. The woman leaned around him to see. "This is Cait. Picked her up in the Combat Zone. She's helping me out for a bit till Mac gets off his ass."

Cait saluted half-assedly, keeping her own smirk at bay. Piper's eyes shot back to Daye. "The Combat Zone? Jesus Blue, this is what I'm talking about!"

Cait frowned. "Nice to meet ya too." What a bitch. Just like all the rest of the douchebags in this fuckin' city.

"She's not that bad. Really. I mean, I already saved her life twice and she's yet to shoot her gun off, but," he shrugged. "I guess we'll see."

"But the Combat Zone?" Piper frowned. "Really? No finer place to get murdered in all the Commonwealth." She eyed Cait on the couch again with heavy suspicion. "You sure you can trust her? She looks kind of hard-assed."

Cait bristled. "Oi, I ain't some blockheaded gombeen, ye bleedin' tick!" she screeched. "I'm standin' right here!"
Daye turned round, frowning at Cait. Turned back to Piper. "Did you understand a fucking word of that?"

"What a charmer."

"Fuck you both," Cait growled.

Piper smirked again, turning back to Daye. "You can come crash on my couch if you want. Both of you. Until this blows over."

"Thanks for the offer, Pipes, but I'm gonna have to pass. Heading north for a bit. Maybe Medford or Lexington."

Piper sighed. "I'm not gonna change your mind, am I?"

"Have you ever?"

"Nah."

"You know, I'd invite you in, but the place is a bit messy," he smirked. "And we're leaving soon."

"That's okay. I gotta get back home soon anyways. Nat's been in a nasty mood all day. Some kid was picking on her at school, apparently. She's gonna be a nightmare to get to bed."

"Kids can be so mean, you know."

"Tell me about it."

"Want me to find the little prick and rough him up a little?"

"Don't you dare!" she gasped, and then she punched his shoulder when he laughed at her. "I mean it, Blue! You'll get me kicked out of the city. Again."

"Fine, Piper, whatever you say," he grinned, rubbing at his shoulder. "The offer's still open though."

Piper rolled her eyes again, then crossed her arms. Sighed.

"What?"

"I missed you, Blue. Been too quiet 'round here without you around. Nobody causing trouble, giving me something to write about."

He shrugged. "Yeah, well. Been busy lately."

She smiled. "You still owe me those forty caps from game night."

"Valentine owes me sixty."

"I'm never going to see those caps, am I?"

"You know me so well."

She smiled again, biting her lip as she eyed him. Then she frowned.

"What?"

"You should go see Valentine, Blue. He won't say it, but I can read him like a newspaper. He's
worried about you. He wants to apologise."

Daye grunted. "Yeah. Sure."

"Really."

"I'll get right on that."

Piper looked as if she wanted to protest, or push him maybe, but thought the better of it. She sighed again, then smiled tiredly. "Okay. Just watch yourself out there, Blue. Lots of nasties prowling the Wasteland."

"Not as nasty as me."

"Of course not." She leaned over his shoulder to Cait again. "Nice to meet you, Cait."

"Sure, sure."

"Well, seeya, Blue," she smiled, hesitating a moment longer in the doorway, in the light of Home Plate, before turning away down the street and disappearing into the night.

"Bye, Pipes."

Daye shut the door, locked it tight again. Turned around.

And Cait let out a roaring laugh.

"What?" he frowned, clearly not as thrilled as she was.

"Jesus fuck but I haven't seen somebody so hard for a guy in all me life," she wheezed.

"What?" he hissed again, making his way through the piles of junk to the couch.

"That bitch has a lady-boner for ya, Daye. A real stiff one."

"What, Piper? No she doesn't. She's just a friend."

"Yeah she does. You really that blind?"

He collapsed on the couch beside her, a cloud of old dust and flakes of two-hundred-year-old crusties puffing into the air around them.

"I guess so."

"The lip-bitin' thing? The doe-eyes? Touchin' yer arm?"

"So? That's just Piper."

"Blue?"

"So?"

"Ya got yerself a pet name there, bud."

"She gives everyone a nickname."

"Fuck, Daye, she'd pretty much have ta strip down to her skivvies to be any more obvious."
Daye grunted, pulling out a Lucky Strike from one of his pockets. He lit it with his little gold lighter. And didn't offer her one, she noticed. Asshole.

"You some sort of expert on romance there, Red?" He blew out, sending smoke from his mouth and way too close to Cait's face. Didn't give a fuck.

"I've fucked a few fellows in me time, yeah," she said, waving the smoke away. "Same thing."

"Sure."

"Ya know, if ya weren't such an asshole and I was tanked beyond the fuckin' moon, I'd shag ya."

Cait loved pissin' people off. Thought for sure that'd get a rise out of him. He just smirked. "If you weren't such a cunt and I had a thing for firecrotch's, I'd fuck you."

She scowled. "You and yer fuckin' firecrotch."

He shrugged carelessly.

"So. Ya gonna go for it?"

"What?"

"That Piper bitch. Ya gonna fuck her?"

"Jesus Christ, no. She's just a friend. Already said that."

"Don't mean nothin'."

"Means everything."

"Sure, sure. Ya got someone else yer bonin' then?"

"No."

"Just askin'. Cause if ya don't wanna shag that Pipe lady, and ya have no one else yer shaggin' then that either means yer dick is so fucked-up ya can't put it in straight, or yer queer as Tommy is fat."

Daye blew out again, rolling his eyes. But there was a smile there, she could see. A tiny little one. "Why am I talking about this with you?"

"What else we gonna talk about? Interior decorating?"

Daye shrugged. "Where'd you learn to swear like you do?"

Cait shrugged back, rubbing at her sore shoulder. "Lots o' places, I guess. Me parents. Me slavers. Raiders in the pit."

"Slavers?"

Cait looked at him. He was frowning at her, his eyebrows creased, his cigarette smouldering, and she could smell it on his breath he was so close. Could see the dirt on his face, the stubble on his jaw.

She frowned back. "Yeah. You got me contract, remember?"

"Well, yeah. Thought it was just a merc paper or something. Some sort of working deed."
"Ya didn't read it?"

"No."

"Don't have to, I guess. Just a load of brahmin shit, really. Nothin' too interestin'."

"Hm." He leaned back into the couch, sucking in his cigarette again. "So. You were a slave?"

"Yeah."

"How long?"

"Dunno. Four or five years."

"Must've been tough."

"Yeah. I guess."

An awkward silence settled on them. Cait could tell – because she was good at reading people, remember – that he wanted to ask more. He was curious, and that was weird to her. Cait was sure he gave no fucks about anyone, not even himself, and least of all her. But it didn't really matter, anyway. She wasn't in the mood to talk about her slave years. Not too many fond memories there.

Daye coughed, glancing at his cigarette, then flicked it on the floor, grinding it under the heel of his boot. "Well. It's too late to go anywhere now, I guess. Piper held us up. Get some shut eye, then, Red," he said, pulling himself up from the couch. "You can sleep here. I'll be in my room upstairs. If one of Chuckles' friends comes knocking during the night, let me know."

"What am I, yer fuckin' guard dog?"

"Yeah."

"Whatever."

Cait stretched out on the couch again, trying to ignore the smell of shit on the cushions and the springs sticking in her back. She kicked off her boots and shuffled off her jacket, shoving it under her head as a pillow. She grumbled, watching him slip out of his jacket and hang it on a rusty magazine rack. "The middle of the fuckin' street one night, the floor of the grocery store the next, and now this piece o' shit couch that smells like cat shit and has more holes than a cheap whore."

"I would offer you my bed, but I'm not that nice."

Daye tossed her a snack cake from his travelling pack, and Cait frowned. "I swear to fuck, Daye –"

"Yeah, yeah. I'll get us some real food in the morning. Quit your bitching."

"Asshole."

"Goodnight, princess," he smirked, flicking off the lights and plunging the entire house in darkness. "Sleep tight. Oh. And if you have to piss during the night, don't. Just hold it. Toilet's broken."

"Fuckin' perfect."

"Meant to get it fixed, but I didn't."

"Of course."
He chuckled, and she heard his footsteps creaking on the splintery floorboards and up the steps, upstairs to his room. How in fuck he didn't trip over all the shit in the dark was a miracle in itself.

Cait unwrapped the cake and ate it in the dark, on the nasty old couch in some asshole's squatty little shack in a city she hated, her leg aching and her shoulder sore as fuck, positive she was gonna turn to mush from Psycho withdrawal, alone.

But she wasn't alone. Not any more. Daye was upstairs, just above her head. And whatever she might say to the asshat, it still didn't change the fact that he'd saved her life. Twice. And given her food, and a place to sleep, and some smokes, however shitty all those things were. That was more than anyone else had ever done for her.

Fuck. She owed him, now. Shit.

She was gonna get herself killed by this asshole, she just knew it.

Part Two: In Which Cait Realises That Yeah, This Crazy Asshole Definitely Has a Death Wish And Is Going To Get Her Killed For Fucking Sure

Cait had that weird dream again – the one where she was back in the trailer park throwing rocks at all the old shit she found lying around. Used to do that a lot as a kid for shits and giggles, you know, before her parents sold her into slavery and all.

Anyways, the same thing happened every time she dreamed it. Throw a rock at a rusty barrel. Ping! Throw one at some burned-out husk of a tree. Thunk! But as soon as the glass shattered through the window of the upended trailer down the road from her own, her parents came.

Screeching and hollering with feral eyes and wicked claws and Cait turned and ran as hard and as fast as she could, away from them, away from everything, but it was never fast enough. They were right there on her heels, snapping and clawing and tearing, and they were deathclaws, now, and then they were those weird hairless bear-things, and then mirelurks, and super mutants, and rabid dogs, and every horror she'd ever seen out in the dusty wastelands, all teeth and claws and blood and snarls.

"Cait…" they wailed, pounding in the dry earth behind her.

She ran and ran and ran, but her legs were so heavy, too slow, like wading through thick mud.

"Cait!"

They were right on her now, biting at her ankles, slashing at her clothes. They would get her, eat her, tear her apart. The snarling, wicked jaws of the great beasts were right there, right on her, biting through her –

"Cait!"

"Fuck!" she gasped, eyes shooting wide open.

She saw Daye before her, his face pale green in the glowing light of his Pip-Boy, his head floating in the darkness around them.

He pulled back a bit, smirking down at her. "Jesus, you're hard to wake up."

"The fuck…?" she groaned, rubbing at her eyes, trying to pretend like her heart wasn't about to burst
through her chest.

"Get your shit. We're leaving."

"What?" she grumbled, sitting up a bit on the couch. "Chuckles? He find us?"

"No," he said somewhere in the dark. "Something came up."

"What?"

"Got a tip from an informant. There's a drug deal going down by the docks right now. Not a small one, either. Mostly Jet and Psycho." She could hear him rummaging around in the rubbish again, could see his Pip-Boy light bobbing around in the complete and utter dark. "Three crates at least, maybe four. That's more than twice what it was last time, eh, Lennon?"

"Mhm," came a scratchy voice behind her, and Cait nearly soared right out of her fucking clothes. She whipped her head around and saw some lanky dude leaning against the staircase, smoking one of Daye's Lucky Strikes and looking bored out of his mind. She could just barely see him in the flickering light of an old pre-war lamp resting dangerously close to the edge of one of the many yellow crates stacked high. He was almost as tall as Daye himself, wearing a stained shirt and dusty jeans and combat boots, and had wild hair and a pair of circle sunglasses on, despite it being darker than – well, fucking dark enough to not be wearing sunglasses, that was for sure.

"Lennon?" she croaked, trying to calm her still-thrashing heart, make sense of all this weird shit.

"My informant. Good guy. Good tips. Looks like John Lennon, hence the name."

"It's actually Gary, you know," the guy said, flicking his cigarette a bit.

"I know. But you just look like John Lennon so fucking much, man. Couldn't resist."

Cait had no idea who the fuck John Lennon was and quite frankly she didn't give a shit. "The fuck is happening?" she growled, swinging her feet off the couch.

"I told you. Lennon says there's a chem deal down by the docks. So we're gonna bust it."

"Bust it?"

"Just a quick in-out thing. One-two."

"One-two, eh."

"Yeah. In and out. We'll be back before sunrise."

Cait grit her teeth, rubbing her tired eyes. "What time is it?"

"According to my RobCo Pip-Boy 3000, it is currently 3:47 am. It's also 42° if you're wondering. Cooler by the harbour, of course. That's 6° Celsius for you metric folk."

Cait peered over at Lennon again. The guy just shrugged.

She shook her head, pinched the bridge of her nose, blew out a long, tired breath. "Daye. It's four in the fuckin' mornin'. I'm tired as fuck."

"Take some Mentats, then."
"What about Chuckles? What about 'layin' low'?

"Plans change. A man in the desert takes water from whoever offers it."

"And a man in need of money takes chems from whoever's dealing it," Lennon's raspy voice scratched out behind her.

Daye smirked. "See? Told you the man was great. He's like fucking Aristotle."

Cait groaned. "He comin' with us?" she asked, jerking her head back to where Daye's informant lounged lazily against the stairs.

"Nah. Lennon's more of the sit-back-and-watch-the-fucking-firework-show kinda guy. Likes to keep his hands clean. Well, cleaner than mine. Unless you want to come this time?"

The informant sucked on his cigarette. Blew it out. Looked utterly nonchalant. "No way. Not after what I heard happened to Jamaica Plain."

Cait frowned, her head still way too fuddled for her liking. "What happened to Jamaica Plain?"

Lennon smirked a little, showing his crooked, yellow-stained teeth. "This crazy bastard blew it up."

Daye chuckled to himself, and Lennon's smirk widened behind his ugly-ass sunglasses, and Cait's mouth hung open stupidly.

"You. Blew up. The town. Of Jamaica Plain?"

"Yeah."

"Not so much blew it up as created a crater the size of greater Boston," Lennon rasped.

Cait snorted. "Yer pullin' me fuckin' leg. Both you."

"No I'm not. I really did blow it up."

"Fuck off."

"Seriously, Red. I'm not lying. I'm not lying, am I, Lennon?"

Lennon shrugged again. "Never saw it for myself. But heard it from enough people. And you're mad enough to actually believe it."

"There you go."

"How can someone blow up a whole fuckin' town?"

"With hard work and dedication. And a fuck-ton of explosives."

Cait rolled her eyes. "Still don't believe ya."

"Whatever. Don't. I don't care. But if we're ever headed that way, I'll be sure to stop by and show you and say I fucking told you so."

"Lookin' forward to it."

"Right then," he said, clapping his hands together. "That's settled. Lennon, man, thanks for the tip."
"Anytime."

Daye thumped his hand on one of the peeling yellow crates with a red fish stamp. "Take whatever you want from this box. Not everything. Maybe a few things. If your tip's good enough I'll give you a little more next time."

"Have they ever been bad?" he said, stomping on the cigarette and making his way over to the crate. Daye smirked. "Nope. Well, maybe that one time. The stash at the hospital, remember?"

"Yeah, yeah," Lennon groaned, brushing past him.

Daye slipped on his ratty, dusty jacket, checked his shotgun quick, and then strapped it to his back. "Alright. Red, get your shit. We're out."

"Whoa, whoa, hold on a second," Cait hissed. "Nothin's settled, dipshit. Who says I even wanna go?"

"Me."

"What about me?"

"You don't get a say, Red," he said. He pulled out a roll of medical tape from his jacket and began looping new wraps around his hands, his wrists. "This isn't a democracy. Now get your shit."

"I thought we were partners, Daye."

"Mac's my partner. You're not. Thought I made that clear." He ripped off the tape with his teeth, shoving the roll back into his jacket. Flexed his hands, tested it out. "This is your chance to prove you're worth a damn, Red."

Fuckin' asshole. "Do ya ever stop?" she hissed. "Like, d'ya ever just sit and not do somethin' stupid?"

"Where's the fun in that?"

She frowned. "I ain't goin' without juicin' up first."

Daye frowned back at her a long moment. Too long. Cait didn't like it – he was thinkin' too much. Nothin' good ever came of thinkin' too much. Just kill or be killed. No thinkin'. "Fine," he said at last, and Cait smirked. "Jet? Daddy-O?"

"Psycho."

He frowned. "Alright," he said, pulling one out of his pack and tossing it to her. "Hurry up. Stick it in. Then get the fuck outside. Don't want you tearing this place apart."

"Yeah," she huffed, pulling the needle from its crease and snapping it into place almost automatically. "Like that'll make a fuckin' difference."

She stuck it in her arm. And her whole world exploded.

The hazy, throbbing tinge of everything plaguing her vision the last few days burned away, leaving a raw, red, angry glow to the world. The colours dulled, the lights seared her eyes, and she could smell nothing but the cloying metallic stench that burned in her nose and would stick until she came off her high. It was familiar, and comforting, and she smiled as she felt her heart began to hammer, her eyes
widen and pin, the hair on her arms raise. The throb in her shoulder and leg sizzled out, and a surge of pure energy, of mad havoc ripped through her veins, pumping through her body by the heart thrashing erratically against her ribs like a pissed-off deathclaw in a cage.

Cait was back. Cait was fucking back! Whooooooaaaaaaaaahhh! Pew pew pew!

It was fucking beautiful.

"Fuck," she growled, voice high and rough at once, and she smacked her arm where she stuck herself, making the shit flow and stick. "Fuckin' fuck. Let's do this."

Daye smirked, tossing her travel pack to her. She caught it with one hand, swung it round her shoulder, put Tommy's pistol in her pocket without thinking.

"Alright. Let's do this."

Graaaaaahhhh!

Cait honestly could not remember much about the trek to the docks.

It wasn't a long one, that was for sure, and it would've taken even less time had Daye not dragged her through the shadows and creepy dark places again. No more than an hour, but Cait's Psycho high did not quell.

The slow groaning of centuries-old metal from the highway above sounded like the roar of a deathclaw, beckoning her to fight it. The wind whistling off the twisted, splintered wood of long-forgotten houses was akin to the mad jeering of a raider. The half-moon above gave just enough light to make the heaps of rubble and concrete look like feral dogs laying in wait, just ready to pounce on her, tear out her throat.

So yeah, more than once Daye might've had to stop Cait from blasting her sawed-off into nothing.

"Alright Red, listen here a sec," Daye whispered suddenly, grabbing her arm sort of tightly, swinging her back behind the brick wall, back into the shadows.

"What?" she hissed. She didn't like being still. She shook out her hands, hopped in place, shivered in anticipation. Blinked way too much. Spit out the excess saliva in her mouth. It splatted on the wood – the wood? Oh. Right. The docks. They must be there, then. Finally.

Daye peered behind the corner a moment, his hand still on her arm. It was rough from who the fuck knows, and the wraps round his hands scratched at her skin. His fingernails were filthy. Crusted with dirt, bitten low, grubby with grease and grime. Well, hers were no better, probably.

He pulled back from the corner, his face close to hers. Too close, maybe. Her pinning eyes darted over his face, taking in his unshaved stubble, his swirling, puckered burn scar, his bright green eyes bloodshot from lack of sleep. He smelled… okay. Not like dirt and sweat. He must've cleaned up a little. Didn't look like it, though. Should've shaved. His jacket – the ratty old thing with way too many pockets – was once a light brown colour, she could tell, but it had been worn and handled and abused so much it was almost black now. And it had too many bullet-holes for her liking.

All this she took in with surprising clarity. Well, not really surprising. One side-effect of Psycho was the inability to shut your fucking brain off and go to sleep. Bringing in too much info, processing too much data for anything else.
"Okay," he whispered, his breath reeking of Lucky Strikes. "There's five of them there. Three body guards for the one in the white suit. All ghouls, I think. Not sure, can't really see from here. And there's some black kid who looks like he's got a jar of pickles up his ass. The kid's buying. The ghouls are selling."

"How can ya be so sure?"

"This isn't my fist rodeo, kid."

Cait growled. "I ain't no kid, asshole."

"I ain't no asshole, kid."

She grit her teeth, but she couldn't stop a smirk anyways. Hey, she could appreciate a good comeback when it was thrown her way.

"Fine. So who's the dealers?"

"Not sure."

"Who's buyin'?"

"Don't know."

"The fuck? Didn't yer Lemon guy tell ya any of this shit?"

"Lennon. And no. It was a last-minute thing. Just the time and place. Too good to pass up, though. Look at all the shit they got," he said, and Cait peeked round the crumbling brick corner.

There was indeed five people there, all just barely visible under the dying light of the old streetlamp – three in black suits with submachine guns at the ready, one in a white suit and fedora lounging against the railing looking out over the black water, a woman, Cait thought, and a young man in a pair of spotless suspenders and slacks who did indeed look like someone had shoved a jar of pickles up his ass. He looked nervous, like a virgin chem dealer, pacing up and down the boardwalk, in and out of the pale light, glancing up from time to time at the suited bodyguards around him.

And there behind them all, beside the woman in the white suit, were six or seven big crates stacked together, all yellow and peeling and wooden with a crude red fish stamped on the sides, and all looking just like the ones in Daye's safehouse.

Jesus fuck. This was n't his first chem-bust rodeo.

She pulled back from the corner. "So what's yer plan?"

Daye chewed his lip a second, thinking. "Hm. Didn't get this far."

Cait frowned. "Ya bust a shady chem deal at night by the old docks with dealers ya aren't even sure ya know and a buyer who looks like they just crawled out the womb and ya have no idea what the fuck yer doin'?"

"Well, when you put it that way, it sounds kind of bad, Red."

"That's because it is!" she hissed. "Yer gonna get me killed, ya know."

"Probably."
"What do ya normally do at these busts of yours?"

He thought a minute. "Well. Mac would take them out from here. Confuse them, make them scatter. I'd get in closer and pick off the runners, the stragglers, the ones he didn't kill. That's about as far as our plans go."

Cait peeked round the corner again. "Let's just fuckin' charge in there," she breathed, the prospect of impending gunfights revving up the Psycho in her veins. "Take 'em all out. Boom. Splat. Dead," she chuckled. "I'll get the bitch in the suit, and the guard on the left. You get the rest. The kid'll probably run, so whoever's closest can just pick him off."

Daye frowned. "You know, if Mac was here, he'd –"

"But he ain't. I am."

He seemed to ponder that a moment, chewing on his dirty fingernails in thought. His eyes flicked from Cait to the docks, and back again. He sighed. "Alright. Fine. Let's just fuckin' charge in. Take them all out."

Cait grinned. Yesssss!

She pulled her shotgun from her back, cocked it quietly (as quietly as she could with her trembling fingers) and crouched low beside the wall, breathing it all in – the old wet wood, the dusty crumbling buildings, the salty water, the oily barrels of two-hundred year old salted fish and crab and other sea life long since dead and forgotten.

She turned round to Daye, and frowned. "The fuck you doin'?"

He slipped on a pair of black-rimmed sunglasses, slick cold metal glinting in the light of the streetlamp beyond. "These are my douchebag shades. I wear them during busts. Keeps them from knowing who I am."

"It's fuckin' dark as tits out here, Daye! You'll end up shootin' me."

"No I won't. Trust me."

"I trust ya about as much as I trust the shitters back at the Combat Zone. That's not very much."

Daye smirked. "You hurt me, Red. I don't know how I'll go on."

"I'm sure you'll live."

"Oh. One more thing," he said, touching her arm lightly. She frowned down at it. He'd touched her before – dragging her sorry ass out of the firefight back at the intersection, and when he dumped her on the concrete in the Super Duper Mart – but never casually, never inadvertently. It weirded her out. Men just wanted to kill her or fuck her whenever they touched her. Daye wanted neither, she thought. She hoped. "The safeword is Richard Parker."

"Safeword?" she growled, shaking off his hand.

"Yeah. In case anything goes wrong."

"Jesus Daye, we're gonna kill 'em, not fuck 'em."

His face scrunched up in confusion. "What?"
"Safeword. Ya know, durin' sex."

"That's not what I meant –"

"It's alright," she leered, earning a harsh glare from the man beneath the stupid fucking sunglasses. "Everyone has their kinks. Yers is just young dudes and ghouls, I guess."

"Fuck you," he growled. "You know what I mean. If something happens – someone else shows up, or there's someone hiding in a building or something – use the safeword. Let's me know something is up first without letting anyone else know."

"Fine. Whatever. Richard Parker."

He smiled. "Richard Parker."

And she crept out from behind the wall, Daye right behind her.

"Where the hell is Cooke?" the woman in the white suit rasped out once the busters were close enough to actually hear them. Her voice was gravelly like sandpaper through a woodchipper and Cait knew for sure she was a ghoul now. "We can't sit here all night. Fucking fish in a barrel."

"Relax. I'm sure he'll be here." It was the young kid, no more than twenty or so, and he should've listened to his own advice. Looked like he was about to shit his pants. Cait could almost smell the fear wafting about him, see the sweat on his dark skin glistening under the lamplight even from here, crouched low in the dark behind some old fish barrels or something.

The ghoul woman didn't seem impressed. She picked at her non-existent nails on her nasty rotting hands absentmindedly. "Yeah, well, he better be. This is bullshit."

"Who the fuck is Cooke?" Cait whispered, and Daye shrugged.

"No idea."

_Click-kk!

The cold metal barrel of the black submachine gun pressed up against her cheek.

"Fuck me."

"Jesus Christ, you two aren't very quiet," the ghoul bodyguard rasped – a different one, a big guy. She hadn't seen him before. Fuck. Must've been behind the corner or something. That was embarrassing. "Hey, Trish! Got a couple live ones here."

"For Christ's sake – bring them out here, Mickey! This better not be a trick you shitless little punk."

The guard grabbed onto Cait's arm and dragged her up from behind the barrels, yanking her double-barrel from her hands, the muzzle of his gun still cold on her skin. Hey, she knew when she was bested. Remember the first rule of being a pit fighter: fight like you were dying. But don't actually die. Actually, that first part could go fuck itself.

Another guard, a smaller ghoul with an ugly black fedora, yanked Daye up, too, confiscating his modded shotgun, but not before the man elbowed the ghoul in the chest, threw some nasty curses, and got a swift punch in the gut right back.

"Holy shit," Daye moaned, clutching his stomach painfully. "You got a good fist there, man. Jesus fuck."
Cait groaned. What a fuckin' hero. "You half blind, asshole? Didn't see this guy?"

"Your eyes work too, don't they?"

"Guess it's too late ta say Richard Parker, then."

Daye hissed through his teeth, throwing a nasty glare her way. "Fuck off."

The both of them were dragged from their dark hiding spots and into the pool of light by the docks. She scowled darkly as Mickey ripped her and Daye's travelling packs from their shoulders and tossed them by the streetlight carelessly, nearly dumping them into the cold, polluted water. It was quiet here, nothing but the gentle lap of water against the wooden wharf, the distant clinging and creaking of old boats in the harbour. Utterly quiet, and utterly alone. No one to help, no one to hear their cries.

Fuck.

"It's not a trick, Ms. Trish, I swear! I wasn't –"

"Can it, dipshit," the woman growled, and the young man shut right the fuck up. She squinted at the two perpetrators as they were dragged forward, brushing at her impeccably clean suit, and then her pocked, rotted face twisted into something like a sneer. "Well, bend me over and fuck me backwards," she laughed, "if it isn't my good friend Nathaniel fucking Daye!"

"It's Daye," he wheezed, and despite it all, Cait smirked at that.

"It's whatever the hell I say it is. What the fuck are you doing here, Nate? Thought I made it pretty damn clear the last time you tried this schtick I'd gut you like a fucking fish."

Daye rubbed the back of his neck and sighed. "Didn't know it was your deal, Trish."

"That's some brahmin shit if I ever did hear any."

"Honestly. My informant fucked up. Big time. Did you know I was coming?"

"If I knew you were within twenty miles of me I'd have smoked you out of your fox hole yesterday." She frowned, nodding over to Cait. "What's this? Found yourself a new piece of ass, dragged her along with ya?"

Cait growled, clenching her fists. "Oi! Listen 'ere, ya lump of rotten dog-meat, I ain't –"

"No, you listen, you fucking paddy smoothskin," Trish growled back, making Cait blink. "Running with this asshole was the worst mistake of your life. I'd get out as soon as I could if I were you, but I guess it doesn't really matter now."

Cait frowned. No, this wasn't the worst mistake of her life. Well, yeah, it was pretty bad, but if she were being honest, it was sort of... thrilling. Exhilarating. She felt on the edge, awake. Alive. She couldn't remember the last time she'd felt something like that. Not in the vicious fights in the arena, not on the brink of death in the pit. Not even when she'd murdered her parents with her own hands. No. Before, she'd only ever felt empty, hollow, like each time she took a life it also sapped at her own just a bit. Like she was slowly dying. But now – now, she felt full. Like she was doing something that mattered, even if that something was getting shot at, roughed up, caught red-handed and embarrassingly early during a chem bust. Like she was living. It was different. It was new. It was fun.
"Where's your boyfriend?" Trish asked, turning back to Daye. "MacDonald or some shit?"

"MacCready. He's fine. Resting up after a gunshot wound but, yeah, he'll live. I'll tell him you said hi."


Daye smirked. "My rugged good looks. Obviously."

"You're one smug asshole, Nate."

"Daye."

"What's with the sunglasses?"

Daye smirked as he took them off his face, his twisted burn scar pale and shining in the streetlight. "You like them? They're my douchebag shades. Supposed to keep you from guessing who I am."

"Jesus Nate, there's only one son of a bitch in this entire Wasteland with a mug uglier than yours, and that's mine."

"Oh, come on, Trish. You're not that ugly. I mean, this guy's pretty fucking hideous, so maybe you're the second – oof!"

The ghoul guard – Mickey, it was, the big guy – in question growled and delivered a swift elbow to Daye's stomach again, making him drop his shades and stagger like a drunkard, wheezing in loss of air and pain. He swayed into one of the old oil barrels, sending it off into the cold water, and Cait watched as the black, slick oil spilled and pooled on the surface of the already polluted water.

"Thanks for the compliment, toots. But I still gotta kill you."

Trish's guards cocked their submachines and pointed them at Daye and Cait, smirks on their ugly faces, and Cait sighed.

God fucking dammit. How many times had she almost died in Daye's company? Who fucking knew any more. But this would probably be the shittiest way to go.

"What?" Daye wheezed, coughing painfully. "You're gonna kill us?"

"Yeah. Sorry, friend." Trish pulled out a fat cigar from her suit pocket and lit it causally. Sucked on it. Looked up to her captives. Blew out. "Nate and I go back a ways. Kill 'em cleanly, boys."

"Wait! Trish," Daye coughed, holding out his hand to her. The guards froze, eyeing up their boss. "If you're going to kill me anyways, can you at least let me know why?"

The woman hesitated a moment, flicking her cigar. "Do I need a reason? You're a right pain in the ass, son."

"This can't be over this shoddy drug bust, can it?" he said, running a hand through his greasy hair. "Is it The Boss-Man? He making you do this?"

"Marowski ain't making me do anything, asshole. But yeah, he's pissed."

"Marowski?" Cait asked under her breath, not expecting an answer.
"The Boss," Mickey growled next to her.

Cait wasn’t stupid. Well, she wasn’t smart, but she wasn't a lead-head. She could put one and two together. One – the yellow crates packed with chems. Two – the deal her and Daye had so miraculously failed to bust. This Marowski, The Boss, was a chem dealer. Maybe a producer, even.

Daye was still blabbering on beside her. "He mad about the dead drop at Echo? The raid at Park Street Station?"

"Raid? What raid?" Trish hissed. "Did you raid my fucking chem stash, Nate?"

"...No?"

The guard gave Daye a third punch to the gut at the flick of Trish's hand, making him wheeze and splutter and spit onto the dock. He fell down on one knee, simply unable to stand any longer. Cait winced. He was gonna start coughing blood soon.

"You slimy dickweed," Trish growled. "I don't know why I ever told you a fucking thing."

"Hey," he coughed, wiping the spit and drool from his mouth. "Mac's idea, that. Don't shoot the messenger."

"Oh, I'm gonna shoot you, Nate. Right in the fucking dick. Just to hear you squeal."

"If it's any consolation, those chems were shit. Barely got half of what I wanted. Was doing you a favour, really."

Trish shook her head. "Jesus Christ. You are the most senseless bastard I've ever come across, and I've been walking this godforsaken Wasteland since the bombs dropped. And you're the worst merc I've ever heard of."

Daye smirked, his wild eyes flashing up at her as he spit a wad onto the docks. "But you have heard of me."

Trish couldn't help but smirk back, just a tiny bit, Cait could tell, and she tried to hide it behind her cigar. She sucked on it again, and blew it out again, the smoke twisting pale white in the light of the lone streetlamp.

"Yeah. It's Marowski," she said at long last. "The Boss ain't too happy with you. Blowing Eddy's head off like you did. Took me and my guys a good few hours to find enough chunks of his face you splattered around to make sure it was him."

Cait frowned. "Eddy?"

"Chuckles," Daye clarified, finally standing up again.

Cait's heart dropped like a brick through the docks and into the icy water below. There was only one Eddy she knew of. "Eddy? Eddy Hart?"

"That's the one," Trish rasped. "Good man. Straight dealer. And one of Marowski's biggest customers in the entire Downtown area."

Well, fuck.

"Chuckles was fuckin' Eddy Hart?" Cait breathed, rounding on Daye now.
"Yeah. What, you know him?"

Of course she fucking knew who Eddy fucking Hart was. He only owned half of Downtown Boston – including the raiders squatting in the Combat Zone – and had the monopoly on chem sales there. Pretty much had the raiders eating out of his hands – including herself, she supposed. She'd poured half her earnings into lining his pockets for Psycho and Jet. An ugly motherfucker, and one cruel son of a bitch, too. Liked to smash people's faces in with that spiked bat of his.

Now no one was selling to the Downtown raiders. No one was making money for Marowski.

They were in deep shit. Real deep shit.

Cait blew out a rush of air through her nostrils. "Chuckles?"

Daye shrugged. "They guy needed to lighten up a bit. And seriously – Edgar Hart? Sounds like a knob from an old Harlequin romance."

"Goddammit Nate, I don't wanna kill ya, but you're such a pain in my ass," Trish wheezed out, the flick of her hands signalling the guards to push Cait and Daye roughly down onto their knees, the slick wood of the slimy dock wet and cool against the skin showing through the holes in her jeans, and the wrinkled, rotted hands of the ghouls rough on her shoulders. Something dug into her hip, and she winced.

Her gun. Tommy's gun. She'd shoved it in her pocket back at Home Plate. A fleeting stab of hope pierced her, her heart thrashing wildly. Maybe there was a chance. Maybe there had been. Probably not now.

Goddammit Cait, always fucking shit up. Even your own death.

"We all gotta do shit we don't want to do sometimes," Daye shrugged, utterly nonchalant as Mickey pressed his submachine barrel to the side of his head.

"You're fucking right," Trish growled.

"I think I know that better than anyone," he sighed, and Cait winced as she too felt the cold barrel of a gun against her cheek once more.

Cait closed her eyes, ready for her death. She'd heard that your life flashed before your eyes right when you died, before God took you to heaven or some shit like that. Cait tried to look back on her own life, think about all that had happened, all that she did, everything that led her right up to being murdered by a ghoul on the docks late at night. It wasn't very interesting.

How shitty.

"I don't blame you, Trish. It was a dick move, offing Chuckles like that."

"Just shut up, Nate. Don't make this any tougher than it needs to be."

"Alright. Yeah, sorry. I always did talk too much."

"Nate."

"Just tell me one thing, Trish."

"What?"
"You ever heard of Richard Parker?"

Cait's eyes flew open.

"Who –?"

It was as if the both of them had the same mind, then, were a puppet attached to the same wires, same strings. Cait just knew what to do, and so did he, and together they rose up from the wet docks, Cait reaching into her pocket to pull out Tommy's wicked little pistol. Daye drew a gun, too, a blue revolver from the inside of his many-pocketed jacket, and before the ghoul could even blink, Daye had pointed the muzzle at Mickey's chest and let a bullet rip right through the middle of it, blood showering out under the streetlight like a mist.

It happened in slow motion, it seemed, Mickey's body falling through the air, suspended under the old streetlight, falling, falling, his gun spinning through the salty, oily mist of the wharfs, his fedora flying off his rotten head, one last look of shock etched upon his pitted face.

"What the fuck?" Cait's guard screeched, but Cait's pistol fired off with a crack that split the night and his ugly face, spattering blood on her cheeks, in her eyes, in her mouth, and she grinned, his blood staining her teeth pink.

"Fuck!" Trish screamed, diving for cover behind the yellow chem crates, and the young buyer shrieked like a little girl, frozen to the spot, watching the spectacle unfold before him.

And then everything sped back up, raced into motion.

The remaining two guards roared in rage and opened fire, their submachine guns spraying bullets out into the little opening on the dock, sending bits of mouldy wood soaring into the air and Cait and Daye dashing for cover.

Cait ran, faster than she could ever remember, boots skidding on the wet wood, and she almost slipped rounding some crates. She crouched low behind some fish barrels, Daye right on her ass.

"You bastard!" Cait could hear Trish scream over the blasting roar of gunfire, over the pathetic keening of the young man. "You fucking bastard, Nate! I knew you'd fucking do this!"

"You should have killed me when you had the chance!" he cried back, a grim smile on his grim face. "This is your fault, really, if you think about it."

"Oh my fucking god!"

Daye chuckled to himself, and Cait edged a little closer, chest heaving with a heart about to positively burst right through her fucking shirt, thrumming in time with the livid screaming of ghouls, and water on the docks, and bullets shredding wood just by her face. She smiled, despite it all. She felt alive. "So what's the plan?"

"Shouldn't you know by now I don't really do plans?"

She rolled her eyes. "Right. Well, not dyin' sounds like a good place to start."

"Yeah," he breathed, "yeah. We're kind of outgunned."

"Yeah."

"And outnumbered."
"Mhm."

"Well. I didn't really think this through all the way."

"No ye fuckin' didn't." She smirked, though, and put her hand on his shoulder. He glanced her way, the light dancing in his weird green eyes, shining off his weird old scar. "But we ain't dead. That's somethin'."

He smiled back. "That's something."

She let him go.

"Okay," he said, not daring to peek above the barrels just yet. "Right. So. Ah. I'm gonna toss a Molotov. Yeah. I'm gonna do that."

"Yeah?"

"You go left," he nodded, "get the dude by the chems while he's distracted by the fire."

"What if he ain't?"

"What?"

"What if he ain't distracted, Daye? Sees me comin'?"

He shrugged. "Just wing it, I guess."

"Right."

"Listen – if things go south –"

"More'n they already are?" she smirked, much to his chagrin.

"Just jump in the water. Swim out, get away. Meet me by Back Street Apparel, just up the road."

"Yeah. Fine. Got it."

"Ready?"

"I'm always ready."

"Alright," he said, holding out his closed fist to her. She frowned down at it.

"What?"

"Fist bump."

"The fuck's a fist bump?"

"It's like a high-five, but your fingers aren't – you know what, fuck it," he growled, dropping his hand. "Let's just go."

"You're too weird, Daye," she mumbled, shaking her head. She gripped Tommy's pistol tight, her finger quivering over the trigger, and deftly slipped away over to the left, creeping behind some barrels.

"Hey! You ugly fuckers!"
Cait nearly face-palmed at Daye's distraction. She heard the angry growls of the guards as they rounded to where he was crouched low, and then, peeking round an old oil barrel, she saw the Molotov as it arced high into the air, over the fish barrels, the fire a spinning speck of light in the dark – and explode off the neck of the streetlight with a metallic clang and a gasping whoosh, the fire ripping up into the air, over the side of the dock, and into the water, catching the spilled oil on fire. Another loud whoosh roared into the night as the fire tore across the surface of the water, devouring the oil, illuminating the entire wharf a bright, flickering orange.

"Goddammit," she hissed, gritting her teeth as she watched the flames lick and bite into the night, cutting off their escape route.

"Fuck," she heard Daye growl.

"You dumb fuck," one of the guards snarled, his bullets popping and snapping as they bit into the wooden barrels Daye was cowering behind, and off the crumbling brick wall, and through some old windows on the building, shattering it and spraying flecks of wood and dust and glass into the air, on top of Daye.

He was fucked.

Cait sighed, checking her pistol. Tommy's sharp, heavily-modded little .44 revolver, similar to Daye's blue one, with a shorter barrel, maybe. Three bullets left. Four enemies left. Ammo was in her pack, resting by the yellow chem crates.

She was fucked.

But she wasn't just gonna sit here and wait to be killed. She peeked her head above the crate, taking in the scene. Trish was still cowering behind the chem crates, cursing every deity that was ever worshipped, the young kid a blubbering mess right beside her, and the remaining two guards pissed as fuck and not letting up on Daye.

This was it – time to prove she was worth a damn, as Daye had so eloquently put. Cait fired her pistol off twice, the first time missing but the second one hitting the closest guy right in the gut. He wheezed, all the air punched right from his lungs, and collapsed onto his side, clutching his stomach and groaning pathetically as dark shiny blood pooled around him.

His buddy roared in anger and turned his machine gun onto Cait, and she crouched low again.

"Fuck this shit, I'm outta here!"

Cait peeked round the corner again just in time to see Trish scramble away from the crates, making a break for it off the west end of the docks.

"No you fuckin' don't," Cait seethed, rolling lamely out from the barrel and putting splinters in her palms (she hoped to fuck Daye didn't see this) and firing off at the fleeing ghoul, managing to catch her right in the leg, and sending her tumbling head over heals onto the wet docks.

"Woo! I got her! Daye, I got her!" she laughed, cursing as the last guard sprayed his bullets at her once again. She cowered back behind the crates (this wasn't turning out to be such a heroic fight after all, but hey, she was still alive, right?) and only came back up once she heard Daye's pistol crack, and another airy moan of pain, and the submachine gun clatter to the wood.

Swallowing thickly, she stood up.

Everyone was dead. Even the young guy, slumped carelessly against the yellow crates. Must've
caught a few stray bullets. She would say it was a shame, but in all honesty, she didn't care.

There were bullet holes in the wood, blood spattered on the docks, on the yellow crates, on the steam-pressed suits of the bodyguards, on everything. Daye's douchebag sunglasses were twisted, stepped on, the lens of one eye shattered. The fire still roared on the water, nearly four feet tall, such a strange sight, too, illuminating everything, and everyone, close by.

Daye had his pistol to Trish's head.

"Don't move."

"Where the fuck am I gonna go?" she wheezed, clutching her profusely bleeding leg, blood oozing out dark between her wrinkled fingers and glinting oddly in the fire. "I ain't moving."

"You dumbass," Daye said, not even looking up as Cait stepped out from cover. "Did you really think I didn't have another weapon on me?"

"Nate, Nate, Nate," Trish chided, almost laughing despite her predicament. "You always were a bag of dicks and tricks."

"It's Daye."

"Whatever."

"You broke my shades, Trish. And you made me use Penance," he said, waving his blue pistol in front of her face. "You know how much I hate using her."

"Fuck you and your stupid fucking gun. You killed all my guys."

"Yeah," he said, pressing the muzzle against her temple hard enough to make her sway. "And I'm going to kill you too."

Trish's eyes widened, and she swallowed. "You don't have to kill me. I won't talk, I swear."

"Give us a reason not ta kill ya," Cait said, aiming her (empty) pistol down at the woman.

Daye frowned. "I don't need a better reason than to shut her up."

"I'll tell Marowski it was gunners, okay?" the ghoul pleaded, something like hysteria beginning to tinge her raspy voice. "You can trust me!"

Daye raised an eyebrow as if to say that all? You can do better.

Trish could see it too, Cait guessed. "And, and... and I'll give up Marowski's chem lab! This here," she said, nodding over to the stack of chem crates, "this is nothing compared to what he's got stashed there!"

Daye raised his eyebrow even higher. "Chem lab, eh? I like what I'm hearing. Keep talking."

"Where do you think these chems come from? We've got a lab, right here in the Commonwealth. Make all sorts of shit – Jet, Buffout, Psycho, you name it. But you'll never find it on your own. Not without my help."

Daye thought about that for a sec. So did Cait. Psycho? Literally all the Psycho in the Commonwealth? Her veins pretty much quivered at the thought of the junk runnin' through 'em. Non-fucking-stop. Yes please.
"Why do I need your help?"

"Because first," Trish said, "you don't know where it is. Second, even if you did know where it is, it's heavily protected. Third, even if you can get past security, you won't be able to get in without the password. I'll tell you everything you need to know if you promise to let me go."

Daye smirked a little. "Marowski wouldn't be too happy about this, would he, Trish?"

"Shut up, Nate. Do you want what I got or no?"

"Fine."

She sighed, wincing at her wound. "The lab is in the old Four Leaf Fishpacking Plant, on the waterfront in South Boston."

"Fishpacking plant?" Cait frowned. "That sounds like a dumb spot for a top-secret chem lab."

"Exactly," she smirked. "No one would think to look there. Plus, it's overrun by feral ghouls. Don't even look twice at my all-ghoul crew. My idea, by the way."

"Feral ghouls? That all?" Daye scoffed. "Pfft."

"The ferals are just for cover, dumbass. You think anyone would venture near an old Fishpacking plant swarming with ferals?"

He frowned, thinking.

"Exactly. But the real security is a system of tripwires that have to be triggered in exactly the right order to open the door. You'd never even know the lab was there when the door is closed."

"You sound awfully proud of this lab, Trish."

"I am! Marowski's entire operation wouldn't be nothin' without me!"

"I bet. You sell him out to everyone that puts a gun to your head?"

The ghoul looked as if she was about to lunge forward and rip Daye's throat out with her teeth, but she didn't say nothin'.

"There's a terminal that will bypass the tripwires and open the door. And I have the password. So… I have your promise, right? I give you the password, you let me walk."

Daye smiled. "I'll definitely kill you if you don't tell me."


"I can. But you can't."

And he pulled the trigger, splattering bits of Trish's skull and brains across the wet docks.

Cait jumped as if he'd shot her himself, the deafening crack of his blue pistol echoing loud off the water still burning bright with fire.

"The fuck was that for?" Cait gawped, watching the ghoul's body slump sideways onto the wood.
Daye tucked the pistol back inside his jacket and shrugged. "She would've spilled. Eventually."

Cait stood there, frozen on the docks, watching the fire reflecting off Trish's blood as it pooled darkly around her head. Daye was one cold motherfucker.

She groaned as everything caught up with her, hit her like a fuckin' brick wall – her shoulder ached, her leg killed her, her knees and palms all skidded up and splintered and bloody. Comin' off her Psycho high. Everything didn't seem so fun, all of a sudden. She was just really tired now.

"This Marowski guy," she said slowly, tearing her eyes away to watch him shoulder his pack, peak inside the yellow chem crates. "He's gonna be real pissed at ya now."

"Yeah."

"Killin' his guys and raidin' his lab n' all."

"Yeah. Not for long, though."

She frowned, rubbing her aching shoulder. "What makes ya say that?"

Daye turned to her, a handful of chems in his trembling, grubby paws, a mad smile on his scarred, fucked-up face, the fire on the water glinting in his wild eyes.

"Because after we steal his chems and blow up his lab, we're going to kill him."

She guessed that meant she was worth a damn, after all.

A/N: The plot thickens! Dum-dum-DUUUMMM!

As you can see, I love taking quests and twisting them into my own little thing. This is that side-quest Diamond City Blues. I loved that quest.

Anyways, let me know what you think! Thanks for reading!
A/N: Hey again! Sorry this chapter is shorter than the previous ones, but seriously, I had to stop it or the thing would have been monstrous, even more so than the last one. The second part (of which was supposed to be after Part One) was way too enormous and so I apologise if this seems a little small and… cut off? Oh well. That part will be next chapter!

Hey, look! A new character! Everyone's favourite ghoul!

I think this story is becoming a little confusing with names and stuff. So:

Skinny Malone – leader of the Triggermen. Not skinny at all.


Eddy Hart, aka Chuckles – raider gang leader who had the monopoly on chem sales to the downtown raiders, selling them for Marowski. Daye blew his head off.

Both Skinny and The Boss and Chuckles and Hancock and Daye have ties, of course. All the seedy fuckers do.

Enjoy! Let me know what you think!

Part One: In Which This Chapter is a Little Shorter, Sorry, But a New Main Character Gets Introduced and Is, Unfortunately, Having a Really Shitty Day

John Hancock, extremely good-looking and deadly ghoul mayor of the upstanding town of Goodneighbor, was having a really shitty day.

But it was about to get much shittier.

The dull sounds of scuffling outside his office door pierced his thoughts. Boots on hardwood and flesh against cloth, and mumbled fucks and shits and open the goddamn door –

"Open the goddamn door you fuckin' zombie prick!"

Hancock grumbled. Always the same shit. Shit in the morning, shit after lunch, shit every fucking afternoon. Hell, he couldn't even take a shit without shit getting in the way.

Granted, most of his days were shit lately. Hard to go back to filing papers and pencil-pushing behind a desk after running with the boys –

Hm. He smiled a little at that.

Ha.

Boys.
Nah, Daye wasn't that much younger than him. Mac, maybe. Still wet behind the ears in everything but sniping. The guy was a fucking deadeye.

Hancock had seen him shoot the nuke out of the hands of a mutant suicider from a whole click away, once. In one try. He was shitting his pants, in all honesty, and was pretty sure Daye already had. The fucking brute was charging headlong at them, right out in an open field, and sure, they had a good mile or so between them, but you've never seen a mutie book it when he's real pissed at you. Scary shit. But the kid just pulls out his sniper rifle, aims it, and casually shoots the fucking nuke right out of his fucking giant green hands. Vapourised the poor bastard into a cloud of red mist. It was beautiful. Made the cold lump in his chest he called heart beat wilder than it ever had before.

Hancock sighed, the sound scratchy and ragged in his rotted throat, ignoring the ruckus outside the door. He shuffled through the endless stack of yellowed papers and crinkled folders before him. Complaints and suggestions and some rather – ahem – personal shit, if you must know.

A request to upgrade the slums behind the Rexford. Irma bitching about rowdy guests again. Some drifter named Craig looking to sell his –

_Fuck._ Hancock hissed as the edge of a paper slid along his fingers, slicing a fingertip and spattering a few drops of sparkling blood onto the papers.

You'd think his wrinkly, decaying hands would've been too tough and leathery for that shit anymore. Nah. If anything, his fraying flesh just managed to catch the edges of things even more.

He pressed his fingers together to stop the bleeding and took his hat off with a sigh, leaning back in his chair to wait. No sense in continuing if he was just going to bloody up the place.

_The place._ The Old State House. His home, his office. A poor excuse of one, if he was being honest.

The old books on the shelves were for show – he'd never even cracked one open. The old filing cabinets were jammed shut, always had been. Also for show. The old hardwood floors were clean and the old dust was gone but it still smelled like… _old_. Like everything in the New World did. And Hancock didn't give two shits about the Old World, but he'd hung up ratty flags and fading maps and flaking paintings of long-dead presidents just so it _looked_ like he did.

_A lot of shit in my life is like that_, he thought. _All show…_

The door hammered again. "Open this fuckin' door!"

Hancock ignored that.

…

…and it was bearable before, this mundane stuff. His mayoral possessions. His _mayoral duties_. He did it – he _hated_ it, mind you – but he did it for the little guys. Because it all made a difference. _Somehow_. Those drifters down in the streets had a home. Well, a place to run to from wherever they'd run from. Somewhere to crash and eat something and walk down the street without having to constantly watch their backs. A place to shoot up without the risk of being offed or raped by some greasy gang of raiders. That _had_ to be better than before.

Right?

But now – _now_ all he could think about was getting back out there in the wastes. Walking the dusty roads, not knowing where he was going to sleep that night, or what he was going to eat, or if he'd even be alive the next hour. Shooting and drinking and fucking, really _living_. Not putting on a show.
For a guy who's pretty much a corpse anyway.

A jolting thump against the door. "You zombie bastard!"

See?

All this… organisation – it just ate away at him. Like a lot of things, really. Guess that's why he shot up all the time, just like the drifters.

To get away. To find himself. Or lose himself.

Always running from something.

To forget. Or remember, maybe.

Fuck if he knew any more.

But Mac and Daye… they knew.

Well, Daye did. Mac was too big a pussy to try anything harder than Jet. But Daye. He'd been through some tough shit. Same as himself. He supposed that's why they got along so well, had some pretty fucking awesome times.

John Hancock would be the first guy to tell you he was a Grade-A Piece of Shit, but you know, he'd learned a lot from everything that happened. And this is one little nugget of his infinite wisdom, so shut the fuck up and listen closely:

You can run from a whole lot of shit in your life, but you can't run from it all.

Hancock knew he had to go back to Goodneighbor one day.

And here I am.

They'd huffed six stalks of Jet and stuck four tubes of Psycho between the three of them the night Mac blasted the mutie into oblivion. Then they had the brilliant idea to go swimming in the harbour. Daye vomited from the rads for two whole days after that.

He smirked at the memory. Then he squinted.

Fuck. He had a really bad headache.

Nothing like a migraine and a hearty dose of self-pity to put you in a fucking cheery mood.

So, yeah, you could say John Hancock's day was shit.

"Open this fuckin' door you rotting sack of molerat shit!"

He sighed again and ran his hands over his face, feeling the pocks and grooves and leathery strips beneath his tattered fingertips. "Sack of molerat shit?" he mumbled, peeking between his fingers at the woman by the doorway.

Fahrenheit shrugged as she leant against the wall, smoking a cigarette casually in the shadows by the hole he'd punched through the lath and plaster during one of his real bad chem trips. He could've sworn on his shrivelled ghoul cock there'd been a Vertibird about to crash through the fucking windows.
She was completely and utterly and kind of annoyingly unperturbed by it all. "What do you expect?"

"Who is it?"

"One of Skinny's little toadies."


He reclined in his chair again, rubbing his temples. "The hell that fatass want with me now?"

"Dunno. Want to find out?"

"Not really."

"He's a stubborn ass, I'll give him that."

"How'd he get in here? Weren't you making sure the guys were on the lookout for Skinny's sneaks?"

"Like I said. Stubborn."

"Right."

"He keeps threatening to burn the place down if we don't let him talk to you."

Hancock snorted. "That all?"

"Among other less subtle means of getting your attention."

Hancock really did not have time for this shit today. And he had less patience for dumbfucks than usual – which is saying a lot, considering he normally just shanked said dumbfucks before they spewed their verbal diarrhea all over his streets.

"Get rid of him," he growled. "However you want, I don't care. But do it quietly. I don't want people seeing."

Fahrenheit didn't move. She just stood there in the dim light as if she hadn't heard him. Weird. Normally his bodyguard was off doing his bidding before he even got it out of his mouth. That's why he liked her so much. She understood him. Didn't question things. Never mentioned specifics.

*Hard to find people like that.*

She wasn't a very beautiful person by any means – well, not that Hancock could judge shit like that – and the scars and burns on her face worked wonders disguising her emotions and true intentions with the poor bastards they sometimes – ahem – interrogated, but he'd known her for far too long to be fooled by her anymore.

"What?"

She glanced down at her cigarette – Grey Tortoise, it was, though Hancock preferred Lucky Strikes, same as Daye – and then put it back in her mouth. "He keeps saying something about a drug bust down by the docks."

"And?"

"And Trish. She's dead."
Hancock's heart – well, that rotten lump of flesh dangling in his shrivelled body he'd mentioned before – dropped heavily like a brahmin bull's balls during rutting season.

_Eugh. Maybe that was too specific._

"Trish?" he croaked. "Dead?"

"That's what he says."

FUCK. Trish. Marowski's right-hand bitch. Tough as nails, dangerous as a broody deathclaw on Psycho. If she was dead…

Hancock rubbed at his temples again, his headache magnifying tenfold.

There was only one informant good enough to catch a lead like that – and only one scarred, mad sonofabitch who could afford his tips.

"Fine, fine," he grumbled, motioning his bodyguard to the door. "Yeah. Let him in."

Fahrenheit, in no apparent rush, sucked the last little bit of her cigarette and put it out in the ugly gold ashtray on the side table before unlocking the four bolts on the door – hey, you can never be too cautious, alright? – and with a grinding metallic _thud_, swung the heavy wooden door open.

"You _fuckin'_ shuffler!" some young guy screeched as he barrelled through the doorway, nearly colliding with Fahrenheit. He seemed a real Mr. Prick type with a clean tan suit and fedora, someone Hancock had never seen before but instantly knew as a Triggerman.

Fahrenheit was right, as always. One of Skinny's little toadies. The kid struggled and kicked to get out of the iron grips of Hancock's two door guards, one of which was sporting a mean scowl and a bloody nose, bright blood staining his teeth pink and dripping onto the hardwood floors _that just got cleaned._

_This fucking kid already signed his death warrant._

"Boys, boys," Fahrenheit crooned, looking uninterested as always. "Let him go. Boss's orders. Wants to –"

"You fuckin' bitch! You're the one who tossed my SMG to that fuckin' assaultron!" Mr. Asshole hissed, teeth bared and hurling daggers with his eyes.

Hancock forced back a smile. _Good old Fahrenheit. Disarming thugs and supporting local business owners._ He couldn't wait to watch her rip this guy a new asshole.

"– interrogate the bastard personally," was all she said, a nod of her head loosen their grip on Mr. FancyFuck and taking sentry, one on each side of the doorway. Big bastards, and mean-looking, too. Exactly why Hancock chose them.

The kid ripped his arms from them, looking pissed and about ready to murder someone. Hancock's doorguard with the fucked-up nose wiped at his face angrily, practically planning the kid's quiet murder, staining the sleeve of his suit a dark wet.

"You!" the Triggerman pointed at the ghoul behind the desk, thick Bostonian accent making it hard to take him seriously. "You're Hancock, right? You know how _long_ I've been trynna talk to you? Malone's gonna have your ass for this!"
Hancock could play the game, too. *I practically invented it.*

"Me! *I am* Mayor John Hancock of Goodneighbor, *correct,*" he said with sarcasm so thick you could have spread it on toast and eaten it. "I don't give a *fuck* how long you've been wanting to see me, and I couldn't give less shits about what Fatass Malone thinks of this whole situation. Have a seat."

Clearly this guy was new at the whole mobster shtick cause the surprise on his face was clear as Bobrov's moonshine. He stared at Hancock's outstretched hand, wrinkly and brown and peeling, and sat down only a little hesitantly in the chair across the ghoul, the one opposite his desk.

The kid was decently good-looking. For a smoothskin, anyway. Clean pressed suit, sharp fedora, blue eyes set in a young face round and bare as a baby's asscheeks.

*Oh yeah. I could have some fun with this guy.*

One quick glance up to Fahrenheit was all he needed. She motioned the guards outside again, then shut the door loudly, moving the entirety of her rusty-armoured, grim-faced bulk to stand in front of it. A clear message to this kid if ever there was one.

He put his hat back on his head.

Alright. *Show-time.*

Hancock winced as his head throbbed viciously but he covered it up as a smirk, reaching into his desk drawer to pull out a pack of Lucky Strikes.

"Listen here, Mr. Upitty-Fuck," he began, relishing the way the kid flinched at his rough, wheezy voice. "I'm a ghoul. You know, *zombie. Shuffler.* Whatever the hell you kids call it these days. I'm sure you can tell by my devishly good looks. Smoke?" he offered, holding out the carton. The kid just frowned at it. Hancock shrugged, pulling himself one, then putting the pack back in the drawer. "I've been around a while. I have a good memory. *I know things.*" He tapped the side of his head to stress the point. "And I can tell you're fresh out the pressed suit and tommygun school of thuggery. Itchy trigger-finger and all."

He flicked his lighter on, igniting his cigarette. Sucked it in. Held it for a second, the bitter, stale smoke burning his raw throat. Blew it out into the man's face, making him blink. "So I'll give you a piece of advice from the Mayor of Goodneighbor himself: *don't cross the lines.* This," he said, putting a rotted finger on the wood near the ashtray at the end of his desk, "is where you were coming into my town. This," he said, moving his finger over a foot or so to the left, "is where the line is. And *this,*" he said, stretching his hand all the way to the other side of his desk, "is where ya are now."

Hancock almost laughed at the look of shock on this guy's face. Instead, he leaned back in his creaky chair, blowing out another mouthful of smoke.

"So. I welcome you into Goodneighbor. I let you into my office. Give you a nice comfortable chair to sit in, even offer you a smoke. All out of the goodness of my mummified, cold dead heart. And *all you can do* is call me *zombie* and *shuffler* and give my guy out there a bloody face? *Tsk tsk tsk,*" he tutted like an old lady. "Not very appreciative of you, Mr...?"

"Snail," the guy squeaked.

"Jesus, is that a nickname or the real deal?"
"The fuck's it matter to you?"

"That's the worse name I've ever heard, friend. You should really think about changing it."

"I ain't your friend, asshole."

"Again with the name-calling. You know what I do to people who're disrespectful?"

Snail's eyes narrowed. "Is that a threat?"

Hancock smiled sharply. "I'm gonna give you another pointer here, kid. Two things count in Goodneighbor – style and bodycount. I'm already the handsomest motherfucker you can find within fifty clicks of here. And I've probably killed more people than you've ever even met. But I can always do better." Hancock's eyes flitted up to gauge the kid's reaction. Scared shitless, with a little defiance and a dash of stupidity.

Good. Getting there, then.

"So," he continued, eyeing his cigarette casually. "Take it as you will. Now tell me why the fuck you broke my door down and demanded to see me and threatened to raze the State House to the ground and gave my guard a bloody nose. It better be real good, pal, because I have a fuckload of shit to do and a pounding headache and I really, really would rather be literally anywhere in the world right now than entertaining your sad, pathetic excuse for a mobster, you sycophantic fuck."

Now the kid was 100% petrified. Wide eyes, gaping mouth, the beginnings of that sheen on the forehead bred of terror and dark imaginings.

Almost makes my cold dead heart warm at the sight.

He reclined even further and – goddamn him, he hated cleaning this up afterward – put his boots on the desk, one over the other, his hands behind his head, smoke dangling from his lipless mouth. The right picture of asshole but hey, who was he kidding? "Well? I don't got all day. Spit it out, Slug."

"Yeah. Ah," Snail swallowed, cleared his throat. "Yeah. Right. So. A few days ago The Boss asked Skinny to send some of our guys on a chem deal with his right-hand. Trish. She –"

"C'mon, kid, you can do better," Hancock grumbled, blowing smoke up to the ceiling. "Already told me this shit."

"Yeah. Ah," Snail swallowed, cleared his throat. "Yeah. Right. So. A few days ago The Boss asked Skinny to send some of our guys on a chem deal with his right-hand. Trish. She –"

"C'mon, kid, you can do better," Hancock grumbled, blowing smoke up to the ceiling. "Already told me this shit."

He frowned a little but went on. "The Boss and Trish had a new buyer, didn't trust the kid yet. He wanted a fuckload of chems, though. Six or seven crates. Enough to kill a brahmin. Figure Trish and our boys might scare him into spilling who he was, why he wanted so much junk. So they go. But they don't come back."

"So?" Hancock grunted.

"So we send someone to find out why. What we found ain't good. Four of our best guys are dead and all the chems are gone. So's Trish. The buyer's dead, too, but that ain't our business – it's Marowski's. But Skinny ain't too impressed he lost some men and the money from that job. And The Boss ain't happy all his chems and right-hand are gone."

Right. Yeah. Good reasons to be pissed, I suppose.

"So? What's this got to do with me?"
"Skinny and The Boss been wonderin' who's gonna pay for that. And he's wondering if you know anythin' about it all."

Hancock rolled his eyes. Again, always the same shit. A chem deal goes wrong, someone dies, something comes up, and the lardass sends someone charging into his office, throwing blame around. But he was quick enough to be all buddy-buddy when he needed something. "I don't know anything."

"Bullshit you don't."

"I've got more important things to do than take candy from you goons."

"Nah. Skinny ain't thinkin' you did it. He's thinkin' you know the fuckers who did. And are keepin' them safe here."

Hancock sucked the last little bit from his cigarette. He took his boots of the table, slowly, just slow enough to let the kid remember he was in charge here, and then leaned forward to butt it out in his ashtray. "That's a pretty big accusation there, friend."

"I ain't your friend."

"No, you're not. We've never met. And because you're new to the club, kid, I'm gonna give you another tip. Listen real close now." He leaned forward even more, up out of his chair and hands splayed on the desk, so close to the kid he almost pulled back from the ghoul's ghastly, raw face. "Don't ever threaten. Blame. Accuse. Or blackmail. Me. Got that?"

"Eddy's dead too."

Hancock nearly choked on the goddamn air at that curveball.

"Hart?" he coughed. "Eddy Hart?"

"Yeah."

"Shit."

That was what he said.

What he thought was more along the lines of: Sweet Jesus Daye. What the hell were you thinking?

And he could almost see the smug bastard's scarred face smirking at him. I wasn't.

Well then. That's always been your problem.

Hancock sat back in his chair. "Listen to yourself," he said, quickly regaining composure. "Do you even know me? Who buys pretty much all the Mentats and Jet in Goodneighbor from Marowski? Who lets you suit-fucks into my town? Why the hell would I want to screw with him? Or Skinny? Kill The Boss's right-hand ghoul? Skinny's minions? Fucking Eddy Hart?"

"Again – he don't think it's you. You ain't stupid enough to fuck with us. But you know plenty of sleazy fuckers who are."

"Sleazy fuckers?" he smirked. "Fahr, you hearing this? Snail here just called you a sleazy fucker."

His bodyguard picked at her nails without concern. "Yeah. I heard alright."
"Watch your tongue, kid, or I'll get Fahrenheit here to cut it out."


"Again – pretty big accusations there."

Snail eyed him a moment. "It's those two mercs you buddy around with, right? Nate and that MacCarthy guy."

 Fuck. Hancock covered his surprised squeak with a raspy clearing of his throat. This kid really loved catching him off-guard. Keeping him on his toes. Maybe he was a worthy adversary after all.

More reason to kill the fucker.

"MacCready and Daye," he coughed, giving his chest a little thump. "Don't let Daye hear you call him that, friend. He'll shoot you in the fucking throat. Seriously. I saw him do it once."

"I said I ain't your friend, ghoul!"

Hancock grimaced at the word. "Well. We're getting somewhere, at least."

Yeah. Too fucking close to the truth. Time to end this.

"It's been a grand ole time chatting with you, Slug."

"Snail."

"But I think we're done here. Get out."

Snail rose from the chair without hesitation, making a beeline for the door. Hancock rubbed his temples again, breathing out a heavy sigh.

Fucking Daye.

He had to tell Mac, of course. The poor kid probably had no idea. He'd have to send a few guys down to the Third Rail to watch out for him. No telling what The Boss or Fatass Malone would do to the guy if they got their greasy fingers on him.

Before the Triggerman got to the door, he paused, turned around. Forced a grim smirk.

"If Skinny or The Boss find out you know something, ghoul..." he sneered, voice surprisingly even-toned despite the fear practically dripping off him. "Well. Bad day for you."

It was Hancock's turn to narrow his eyes. "Is that a threat?"

Snail shrugged, a smug smile creeping its way up his face. "It's like you said, Mayor Hancock. Two things count in Goodneighbor – style and bodycount. Skinny and The Boss have nicer suits than you. And they've probably killed more people than what's in your entire town, each. But they can always do better. Take that as you will."

Hancock just about stood up and shanked the fucker right there. Seriously. He'd done it before. Too many times, probably, but hey. Grade-A Piece of Shit, remember? Though honestly his headache was too violent and really, he didn't want to get blood all over his desk and papers again. He hated cleaning it up afterward.
"Alright. We're done here. Now get the _fuck_ out of my office _and_ my town," he growled dangerously low, standing up again and thrusting a finger at the door. "Don't _ever_ come within a hundred clicks of this place again. Tell Skinny to keep his enormous nose out of my business from now on. If I find out you ignored _any_ of that, I'll personally gut you and hang your head from the railing of my balcony for the whole town to see. _Bad day for you._"

Snail glared at Hancock for a moment longer before straightening his fedora, sneering at Fahrenheit as she heaved open the door, and strutting out the door past the guards, his clicking footsteps echoing off the old crumbling halls before disappearing down the staircase.

Fahrenheit shut the door with a resounding finality.

"Once he leaves town, kill him."

"Not a good idea, boss."

"What?" Hancock growled, barely believing his – well, holes in his head where his ears _used_ to be.

"I ain't just gonna let him call me names and threaten me and let him walk out this town alive! That's not my style, Fahr."

"The only thing that's _not your style_ is losing, Hancock. Trust me. You could lose a lot if you fuck with Skinny or The Boss."

Hancock blew out a rush of air through his nose holes, rubbing his face, trying to ignore his thrashing headache and the smell of old and the thought of letting that twiggy little _fuck_ just walk out the gates alive.

And what that twiggy little _fuck_ really meant.

Being a Grade-A Piece of Shit, alright, he could just sell out Daye and Mac to either Skinny or The Boss.

Yeah.

_Wouldn't be the first time I let someone down like that._

Fucking with those two would really be asking for it. Hancock enjoyed getting his hands dirty – it was a hobby, really – but Skinny? The Boss? _Fuck._

Could save himself a whole world of trouble. Because _trouble_ was all Daye ever gave him.

He glanced sideways at the old globe on his desk, over by the ashtray. Brown and stained and blue metal base all rusted out – trash, really – but it had been a gift from Daye. By _gift_ he meant, of course, that the guy had found it while rummaging through the corpses of some Gunners holed up in the library and tossed it to him.

"Here," he'd said, his strange green eyes darting from his Psycho high. "That's the world."

"The world?"

"Yeah. The whole fucking thing."

Hancock's mind had been blown. The world was way too big. So he'd kept the thing.

Daye gave him a shit-load of trouble, alright. But he also gave him some good times. Some things to really think about. Some place to go, when he ran away from it all again, from everything he built
here. If he was gonna get sappy, okay, he could say he'd given him the world. Literally.

He sighed deep. Long. Right down to the bottom of his shrivelled-up lungs.

_Time to stop running._

"Yeah," he groaned, tearing his eyes away from the globe. "Yeah, you're probably right, Fahr. What did I ever do before you?" he smirked. A little bit.

She shrugged. "Doing drugs so hard they turned you into a ghoul?"

"Ouch."

"So. You know who did it?"

"There's no doubt in my mind it was Daye. No other bastard would've been crazy enough to try that. Kill them, get away with it."

Fahrenheit lit herself another Grey Tortoise. "You stick your neck out too often for that asshole, you know. One of these days someone's gonna come stomp on it real good and break it."

He smiled. "Yeah, well. I'll let you know when that—"

A rapid wrenching, tearing, enormously violent explosion shook everything in Hancock's office—the old globe, the burned-out books, the lampshades, _everything_. The ground beneath his feet swayed violently, back and forth, and crumbling plaster sprinkled from the ceiling in white dribbles onto his desk and shelves and papers and floors. The grimy windows behind him throbbed and clattered against the stress, and mingled with the deafening uproar of the blast he could discern people's frenzied cries and whoops of alarm in the streets below.

"What the fuck?!" he hissed, clutching his desk for support. Fahrenheit had her hands gripped around the doorknob, nearly failing to keep her heavily armoured bulk upright.

The centuries-old wood and brick of the Old State House groaned and creaked around him and beneath him and _through_ him, the tremors vibrating in his chest, the place threatening to fall in on its enormous bulk, and then just as suddenly as it began, everything ceased.

Silence, except for the crumbling sounds of cement and brick deep within the bones of the old building.

"What just happened?" he growled, straightening up slowly and brushing plaster dust from his coat.

"I don't fucking know." Fahrenheit hissed, releasing her iron grip on the door.

Hancock made his way over to the window, legs a little shaky still, and peeked past the yellowing curtains and out over his town, over the people scurrying and gawping at the fucking gigantic burst of black smoke and fire in the distance, off away to the south by the waterfront.

"Holy shit," he groaned, a lump the size of the globe dropping deep in the pit of his withered stomach.

Hancock's day just got a whole lot shittier.

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_A/N: Sorry for the lack of Daye and Cait and action and blowing people's heads off, but Hancock! Who doesn't love Hancock! And Fahrenheit! And threats! And blackmail! Yay!_
Are All the Chapters Plays on 'Daye'? 

A/N: Hey there! Holy shit, I hadn't realised that nine months has gone by since I last updated the story. Cheesus Crust. Sorry about that. Life is a bitch and kept getting in the way.

Anyways, here's chapter 5. Not too much action, but EXPLOSIONS. DRUGS. WEAK-ASS PUNCHES THROWN. Hopefully you enjoy it. I thought about skipping the explosion scene altogether after the last chapter but nah.

I think there are a few spelling errors in this, so if you find them, PLEASE let me know! I am a grammar Nazi and won't be able to sleep at night until this thing is perfect. This goes for all future chapters as well.

Review if you liked it! Or didn't like it. Just let me know what you think!

Enjoy!

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Part One: In Which The Story Goes Back To Cait's POV and Daye's Being an Asshole But Really, What Else is New?

Cait was fuckin' bored.

Life in the Combat Zone wasn't exciting, really – actually, it was the same shit almost every day – but at least there was always something to do. If she wasn't bashing in the ugly face of some raider in the Pit, then she could usually be found playing cards with Roach, even though the bastard always cheated, or arm wrestling some fuckin' knob for a few caps, or coming up with new and colourful curse words and ways to make fun of Tommy's fat ass. Sometimes she'd try her hand in the kitchen, maybe make something that at least looked edible and actually contained meat from an animal she'd heard of before, or she might make her way up onto the roof, and talk and get drunk and watch the sun set over the dead city with Tags, the little scrawny raider kid. Sometimes she'd fuck him up there, on the roof, or it might be someone else passing through town, a drifter with a shifty look and few words, on his way to some other place.

Even if all that failed to interest her, she'd slink away to her dingy little side room and jam a tube of Psycho in her arm and forget. Forget her parents, what they did to her. Forget her slavers, what they did to her. Forget what she did to all them. Forget her shitty life and her shitty job and every little shitty thing about it all. Riding on a high was always better that remembering that shit.

They were all dead now though. Her parents. Her slavers. Roach. Tags. All of them. Honestly she didn't care.

But anyway. Enough pity. Cait always hated pity.

But she hated being bored even more.

"Fuck! Fucking fuck fuck!"

She smirked, chewing at her filthy fingernails absentmindedly, leaning back in the rusted old desk chair like she owned the fucking place. "What's got yer panties all in a wad, buttercup?"

Had Cait only just met the guy, or come across him in some creepy back alleyway, she would've
been dead fucking certain he'd blow some buckshot in her face and send her skull scattering to the four winds in a red, chunky mist. As it was, she hadn't just met him. She knew he was more bite than bark, really. Not much more, though. Only a little. And it was a dangerous line to walk, betting on whether he'd actually do it. But Cait liked danger. She was a pit fighter, after all. Risk came with the job.

"Shut the fuck up," Daye growled dangerously low, squinting at the cracked old computer screen, at the fuzzy black and green text. He tapped away at the keyboard, the two-hundred year old piece of junk so crusted over with dust and shit that only half the keys must have worked, probably, and every time he tapped them they clicked angrily, sticking. "Gah! Piece of shit," he snarled, slapping the side of the monitor a few times, causing the screen to flicker angrily.

"Ya know, you should try sweet-talkin' it. Take it out to dinner, maybe. I know from experience ya don't get any closer to shaggin' by givin' a lady a shiner."

"You're so fucking funny, Red. Seriously. I think my funny bone just jizzed itself." He sighed, leaning back in his own desk chair, the old thing squeaking and groaning in protest. He wasn't fat by a long shot, not like Tommy anyway, but still, he was tall and well-built and even industrial-strength office chairs have a shelf life. Ended maybe two-hundred years ago.

He swivelled his chair round to face her, rubbing at his eyes tiredly, angrily. "Find anything?"

"Nothin'."

"Did you check the labs again?"

"Yeah."

"The barracks?"

"Yeah, I did."

"How about –"

"I checked out everythin' again, Daye. Twice."

He set his jaw and blew out a rush of frustrated air through his nostrils. "There's nothing. Nothing. Not a note or a letter or a file or a recording. Not one goddamn lead. Nothing's encrypted, or protected, or hidden away. There's fucking nothing!" he growled, slamming his fist on the keyboard, making Cait jump a little. "Not a single fucking shred of anything suggesting that the asshole even exists. Nothing!"

"Ya sure he does?"

Daye couldn't have thrown knives wrapped in barbed wire laced with cyanide shot out of a rocket launcher sharper than the daggers he was hurling with his eyes. "Yes, Red. I am sure Marowski exists."

"Well, have ya ever actually seen him?"

He didn't even answer her. Just kept tossing blades her way.

She shrugged. "I'm just tryin' ta help. Fuck. Maybe you should take a breather before ya pass out, old man."
"Alright," he growled, taking off his baseball cap and running a hand through his sweaty hair in an irritated sort of way. "There's a fucking ton of shit wrong with what you just said. First – I'm not an old man. I'm thirty-one, thank you very fucking much, not that much older than you. Second – I don't need a breather. I'm healthy as a fucking horse. Three – "

"The fuck's a horse?"

He frowned. "It's an animal. Like a cow, but bigger. And you can ride it."

"The fuck's a cow?"

Cait thought his head was going to burst. That would've been fuckin' funny.

"It's a brahmin," he seethed.

"Alright, alright, Jesus fuck me. Was only askin'."

"Well, don't. It's annoying."

"Whatever. Three?"

"Yeah, and three – you're not helping. At all."

Cait bristled. "Excuse me? I just ravaged this entire fuckin' fishpacking place for ya – twice – and you have the fuckin' gall to tell me I ain't helpin'?"

"Well, not right now you aren't. You're just sitting there saying stupid shit and irritating the fuck out of me."

"Well, I'm fuckin' bored Daye! I thought this was gonna be fun!"

"Who told you it was going to be fun?"

"You did!"

"Really. No shit."

"You were all like oh hehe, looky here Red, let's kill Trish and raid The Boss's chem lab and steal all his shit and guess what? Just for shits and giggles let's blow it all up! Woohoo!"

Daye tried – and failed pretty spectacularly – not to smirk. He put the baseball cap back on his head and leaned back even further in his chair. "That's the worst fucking impression of me I've ever had the grand misfortune to witness."

Cait growled. "All I've done is sit here for twelve fuckin' hours and watch ya beat that fuckin' computer to death. I didn't even get ta kill anybody."

"I'm pretty sure it's been, what, maybe forty-five minutes? Tops? And yeah you did. The scientists – well, chem-makers, I guess. Remember?"

"You killed 'em, ya fuckin' asshole!"

He blinked, eyes skittering across the room where a headless dude in a white (well, red and white, now) lab coat lay slumped against the wall, greyish brain matter and chunks of skull and blood smeared across it like some sicko five-year-old's finger painting. "Oh. Right. Yeah, I guess I did."
"Who woulda thought blowin' up a chem lab would be so goddamned boring. This whole trip's been a fuckin' shitshow."

"You know what's being a fucking shitshow? You. Right now."

Cait's eyes narrowed. "The fuck's that mean?"

"It means get off my back and go do something useful, Red," he said, swivelling back around to face the computer. "Go move the crates outside or something. Just get out. Away from me. I've got shit to do."

She should've just grabbed the crusty old keyboard and smacked him over his stupid fucking head. Save herself a lot of trouble.

Her eyes narrowed even further. "Yer bein' a right dick, ya know that?"

"Tell me something I don't know."

Honestly, Cait didn't give a fuck. Not even one. Definitely not enough to come up with a snarky little retort or anything.

It smelled weird in here. Like antiseptic, and beach water, and burning hair. The low lighting was fucking with her eyes, too. She wanted to leave, but she wasn't moving for nothin'. Fuck him. If he wanted the crates moved so badly, he could do it his fucking self.

She glared at his back a few moments longer, wishing she had the power to spontaneously combust people with her mind.

Daye sighed. Pinched the bridge of his nose. Sighed again. Then, without warning, he stood up, growled like a pissed-off yao guai, picked up the computer monitor and threw it against the wall, over by the headless scientist.

Cait hardly flinched. She expected that, honestly.

"Motherfucking waste of my goddamned time," he hissed, rummaging around in the endless pockets of his ratty old jacket. Cait watched him pull not one, not two, not even fucking three, but four sticks of dynamite from that nasty-ass jacket, and then a little radio with a bent antenna, and some wires or something, setting them down by the homeless keyboard. Honestly, it was like that jacket was the entrance to an infinite portal of never-ending useless shit.

"The fuck you doin' with all that?"

He unwrapped the bundle of wire carefully. "You'll see. Now. I've got shit to. So go."

"Fine, fine, I'm goin'," she grumbled, pushing herself up from the desk chair and out past the fucked-up monitor and Headless McFuckFace, PhD.

"Hey, listen," Daye said, making her pause in the doorway. "Get the crates at least half a click away from here. Up on that hill, maybe. I'll meet you there when I'm done."

"All the crates?"

"All of them."

"Daye, there's gotta be, like, a hundred of the fuckers. They look heavy."
"You'll manage."

"How long you gonna be?"

"Jesus Christ, I don't know. A little while."

"That's helpful."

Daye put some wire between his teeth, jamming one end into the back of the radio someplace. "The fuck you standing around for?" he growled, voice muffled by the wire. "Get those crates outside. They're not going to move themselves."

"Yes, mum," she grumbled, leaving him to the cramped little office and that old piece of shit tech and his weird little bomb secrets that she didn't give a flying fuck about.

Honestly, though, she wasn't even that miffed. He'd been a right dick the last couple of hours, ever since they'd cleared the fishpacking plant, every room, right down to the cellar, and had found no sign of Marowski. Which wasn't a big deal – you couldn’t expect the guy to hang around the old factory for long. He probably only made token visits to the place, really.

But what was a big deal was the complete and total lack of evidence. There was nothing. Not a single lead on The Boss. Not a note, or a file, or a recording. No papers. No journals. Not a single fucking shred of nothing that the asshole even exists, as Daye had put it. Hours of searching filing cabinets, of scanning computers, of flipping through desks and books and the pockets of dead chem-makers.

Nothing.

Really, she didn't even care that much. At all. Actually, she thought it best to just take whatever chems they could grab and haul ass. Something seemed fishy about it all – and not just the fact it smelled like two-hundred-year-old crusty ghoul vag in here. Marowski wasn't here. And there was nothin' about him here, either. Which either meant he knew about Daye coming (seemed unlikely, though, but hey, anything's possible) or… something.

Fuck, she wasn't no private eye, alright?

But I am going to gouge Daye's fuckin' eyes right out his fucked-up face, alright, she thought, hauling the first of many crates to the top of the hill Daye mentioned.

Part Two: Where The Story Really Begins and Daye Blows Up Half the Commonwealth

Fourteen. Fourteen big yellow peeling crates with a red fish stamped on the side. Eighteen smaller metal crates with padlocks on them, all riddled with holes from Daye's shotgun blasting the damn things off. Eleven gross-ass yellow sacks jammed full with all the random chems not in a box – and where the hell did those bags come from? Actually, she'd rather not know. Half a dozen ammo crates because hey, you can never have too much ammo (actually you can, after you've already hauled up enough drugs to kill a behemoth, bring it back to life, and then kill it again). Cait had no idea where the fuck they were going to put all this shit, or even more importantly, how the fuck they were going to move it again.

She sighed, legs and arms aching, and leaned against a yellow crate, squinting against the bright midday sun. She lit a Lucky Strike and blew it out, shivering a bit in the cool salty breeze blowing in off the water.
All in all, a decent catch for half a day's work.

Alright, she wasn't gonna lie – it was a pretty fuckin' spectacular catch. Even splitting everything 70/30 with Daye, she'd have enough caps from this raid to eat fresh brahmin steaks until she got twice as fat as Tommy. She'd never go hungry again. No more goddamned Fancy Lads shit-cakes. She could buy some new pants, seeing as she only had the two pairs and they were both crusty with blood and full of bullet holes. Buy a whole new outfit, actually, and get a new jacket, and new boots, ones that actually fit and didn't have holes worn through them. Get a good gunsmith to fix up her trusty double-barrel. And maybe finally, finally get some goddamn decent armour on her ass, even though the scarred bastard inside the fishpacking plant promised her some. She was gonna need it, being around Daye.

But… did she need to be around him anymore? With this haul, she could survive on her own now. For a long time. She could leave him, slip away after they pawned off the last of these chems. Go someplace, start new. Forget everything in the past – it was all behind her now. Daye had told her she can leave whenever she wanted – said he didn't care about slavery, didn't care where she went. The possibilities were endless, and it was almost exhilarating to have a choice, and a means to do it – things she'd never had before.

Get out of downtown, leave the dusty crumbling streets behind. Leave Boston and all its buildings, all its statues, its monuments to a past hard-fought but long forgotten. Maybe she'd even leave the Commonwealth, the whole east coast. She'd heard from a drifter in the Combat Zone that way out west somewhere was safe, now, out at the other side of the ocean. California, she thought it was called. Government runnin' things and all. A decent society, almost like the one that blew up when the world died. It would be a long walk across nothing but sand and waste, but at the end would be a new life. A fresh start. She could do that. She could leave everything here behind. Wouldn't hurt her none. Nothing and no one was holding her back.

…so why don't I?

Wasn't the first time she asked herself that. Probably wouldn't be the last.

She liked to think it was because she was lazy and would never muster up the gumption to actually leave the goddamn Commonwealth. She told herself she was bad at navigation and would probably end up at the north pole or something. Or she'd run out of food and die all alone out in the desert, utterly forgotten, food for vultures and wolves. But that wasn't it.

…it's Daye.

Dude was a right fucking asshole, no doubt about that. Known him for a full five days. Hated him for a full five days. He got her shot, almost dead, starving, no armour, in deep shit with Chuckles and Trish and Marowski and who the fuck else knows in such a short amount of time. But…

But.

Alright, you better keep your ears wide open and your fucking mouth shut because Cait will say this once and you'll never ever hear her say it again, dipshit.

She actually sort of liked him.

Eugh. Like was a dangerous word. Meant you knew the person, relied on them, trusted them even. And Cait trusted no one. Always got her hurt, in the end. Her. Not the other person.

He was infuriating, and an asshole, and way too high to function half the time, and he needed,
needed to take a goddamn bath soon, and she really hated his gross infinity-jacket, but he had given her a chance. Saved her life. Trusted her enough not to shoot him in the back, or push him off the ledge of a really high building. More than anyone had ever done for her. Ever.

He was bold. He was sleazy. He was fucking insane. He gave no shits. He had no one else. He wasn't lost – not yet, but he was always walking, and always searching. For someone, or something, or someplace. And he hadn't found it yet.

As much as she hated to admit it, she saw a lot of herself in him.

Fuck, what was with all the bullshit reflections lately?

Cait chewed the side of her mouth, Lucky Strike dangling between her fingers, thinking.

It was past noon by now, the hot sun glinting off the ocean and all the bits of trash floating in it. The fishpacking plant, an old grey metal thing maybe three or four stories tall, sat right on the edge of the water, the shoreline eroded after hundreds of years, down the hill a ways, at least half a click away, like Daye had told her. The rusted fence twisted around it, tufts of high yellow grass hiding chunks of metal and rubbish scattered around the building. A few wrinkled ghouls, all missing their heads (bastard, wouldn't even let Cait take one out) added a lovely finishing touch to the scene.

Despite the decay and rust, the scene was sort of… pretty. Peaceful. Not very assuming. All alone and quiet, except for the sound of the wind rushing through the tall grass below, and off the old freeway towering above. Smelled better out here, too, like ocean salt and seeweed. Cait wondered what it was like here two hundred years ago, before the world died and everyone died along with it. The sounds of industry, of cars speeding along a highway, of boats in the harbour, of bells and steam on the docks… she'd never heard them before. Never would. And yet she almost could, sitting here now.

Some time later, Daye walked out the front door of the fishpacking plant casually, a dark little pinprick that slowly gained clarity as he made his way up the hill, huffing and puffing sort of embarrassingly.

Cait grinned wickedly at him, flicking her cigarette into the grass. "Took yer sweet-ass time, asshole. Finished with your super-secret bomb project?"

"Yeah," he wheezed, clutching at his side, using a crate for support. "Yeah. Done. Place is rigged. Ready to blow."

"Lord Louise, Daye, you sound like Tommy back at the Pit. Bastard couldn't take a shit without passing out."

Daye shrugged, and Cait felt a little sad her jab had no effect on him.

"What do you want from me? I'm high as a fucking kite right now, and I haven't eaten anything since Home Plate. Even then it was just rubber and ass," he smirked.

Right. Her stomach growled viciously in agreement.

"High on what?" she asked.

"High on life, Cait. High on fucking life."

He laughed – cackled more like – at his own stupid joke, the sound sort of… nice, to Cait's ears. It was a real laugh. Not one infused with adrenaline in the heat of combat. Sure, it might be tainted
with whatever the fuck he'd gotten high with, but still…

It made her smile. A tiny little bit.

Well, at least he wasn't in a computer-tossing mood anymore. That was always a good thing.

"Yer an idiot, ya know that?"

"Thanks. Feel so loved. Knew I could count on you."

"Yeah, I got yer fuckin' back. Right. So what's yer plan? We blowin' this place up, then?"

Daye's wheezing died down to low chuckles, and he wiped a hand across his face as if to clear his mind. "Right, yeah. Fuck. Blowing this place up. Right out the fucking water, I think."

"K."

"Yeah. Even though… it's not technically in the water…"

"Yeah. Sure. Whatever."

He paused a moment, frowning at the building down below. Then he turned to her, all serious-like, his eyes red and puffy from his high. "Should we wait? I think we should wait. I mean, the place is pretty much teetering on the edge now anyway, and I think if we give it a bit more time it might actually fall into the water. Then we can really blow it out of the water. Doesn't that sound cool? So much better? We blew that fishpacking plant right out the fucking water! Fuck you, Trish! And you too, Marowski! Fucking asshole, wasn't even here. Well, guess what? Neither is your fucking chem lab 'cause me and my friend here blew it out the fucking water! Haha! Hey! What do you think? Hey? Cait?"

"Fuck this," she groaned, rummaging around one of the sacks for the first drug she grabbed hold of. "I can't deal with you. I'm gettin' high too." She pulled out some Jet and yanked the cap off and sucked it in, the taste sort of chemical-like but cool, crisp, like mint. But stronger.

Anyway, it did the job. The world slowed down and everything became so fucking bright and loud. The sun on the water looked like a million little pieces of glass on fire, tiny blazing pinpricks of light. The wind roared through the grasses now, and Cait would swear to fuck she could make out every fucking pore on the rotted-out skin of the headless ghouls down by the plant, baking in the blistering sun.

Jet speeds up your mind. Feels like it's slowing down the world. The high only lasts a few minutes but it feels like years.

Daye turned slowly and smirked at her, his green eyes sparkling in mirth from his own high, his short hair ruffling in the wind, his face half an angry red blemish that would never go away mixed with the sort of plastic-like glossiness you get from old scars, and the other half… Wow. She could see it now. See past the ugly, the deformed, the nasty old burn wound. See the man he was before whatever did that to him happened, before the fire melted away almost half his face and turned him into what he was.

Daye was fucking hot.

His scarred smile was a bizarre blend of badass fucked-upperry and really good-looking. A bad guy sort of good-looking. Like a roguish smuggler hitman swashbuckling bandit. Or something.
Which Cait fucking loved.

Sent a sharp jolt of... *something* through her, looking at him with new eyes.

"Daye?" she breathed, unable to stop her stupid fucking mouth from motoring on without her goddamned permission.

"Yeah?"

*Oh fuck.*

"This is only because I'm high as fuck right now, and I'm delirious 'cause I'm starvin' and probably still haven't gained back all me blood from the Super Duper Mart, but anyways, yer a right prick and yer face is twelve different sorts of fucked, but yer sort of sexy. For an asshole."

His smirk was the utter definition of smug, and it pulled at the burn scar, puckering it in weird places, making his one eye not quite open all the way. "Red," he tutted. "Only *sort of* sexy? I think I'm downright gorgeous."

Good job, motor-mouth. Ya done dug yourself a deep hole now.

"Hey, watch yerself, bud. Yer head gets any bigger you might have trouble keepin' it up."

"Cait, I don't have trouble keeping *anything* up, let me tell you. I'll have to show you sometime."

Cait punched his arm pretty goddamned hard but not hard enough.

"Ow! What the fuck, Red?"

"You over-confident son of a bitch."

"Works, though," he grinned, rubbing where she punched him.

"Does it?"

"I don't know. *Is* it?"

Cait blinked. His voice had gone low, deep, *sultry* even, like he was talkin' up some goddamned whore at the Third Rail hoping to get a handie in between jobs.

Was he...?

"Are – are you *flirtin'* with me, Mr. Daye?" she gawped, not even bothering to hide her disbelief.

"*Daye.* Just Daye. And no. Yes. No," he floundered, clearly at a loss for words. "Uh... wait – which would make you less angry?"

Cait's eyes narrowed. "What do you think?"

"Hey," he said, crossing his arms defensively. "*You* were the one who called me sexy first. *You* flirted with *me*. This is all on you."

"I was simply makin' an astute observation."

That was something Tommy had said once back in the arena to some pickled raider bent on getting' his money back from betting on the wrong fighter in the Pit. Cait had no idea what the fuck it meant.
but she thought it fit the current conversation. She *hoped* it fucking fit.

"I'm a guy, Red," he went on. "You can't do something like that and then just –" he paused, snapping his fingers in front of her, " – *expect* me to forget about it. Just like that."

Cait's eyes narrowed even more till she could barely see the bastard. He was lookin' her up and down – pretty subtly, especially for how incredibly high he was flying – but she could tell. Raiders used to do it all the fuckin' time back at the Combat Zone. Eyes skimming over her face, across her chest, down to her ass. Flitting over her, lingering in places.

"Yer picturin' me naked right now, aren't ya?"

"No," he snapped, blinking at her. "Hm. I'm getting the idea that *no* would make you less angry, right?"

"Nate."

"Alright, fine, yeah," he admitted, not ashamed even a fucking ounce. "I was picturing you naked. Don't tell me you haven't done the same to me."

Cait swallowed.

"I haven't."

Oh, she fucking *had*.

"Mhm, right, sure. I've seen you sneaking glances at me, don't lie."

"When in bloody fuck am I gonna sneak a glance at ya? You've been wearin' that horrid fuckin' jacket since ya stepped into the Combat Zone," she hissed, pinching a corner of said fabric for clarification, as if he had more than one ratty-ass overcoat. "Doesn't exactly leave room for the imagination. For all I know yer a goddamned synth down there with a robot dick and human-like face."

"A *sexy* face, according to you."

Cait sighed, too fucking stoned to deal with him and his smug-ass attitude anymore. The sun was beating down on her and she was gonna be burnt to a crisp if she didn't find some shade real soon. And she was pretty sure her stomach might start eating itself if she didn't put some food in it to shut it up. "Fine," she huffed. "If it'll shut ya the fuck up then yeah. I said it. Yer kinda sexy. But yer also an asshole. One minus one is still zero."

"And one divided by zero is undefined."

"Divide by – the fuck you on about?"

"Never mind. Point still stands. I'm sexy."

"And an asshole."

"A sexy motherfucker."

"A goddamned asshole."

Daye's smile was downright predatory. "That too. Since we're being so honest with each other, I have something to tell you. You're a bitch."
"Ouch."

"And still a firecrotch, so still not sexy. Passable, maybe. Sexy, no."

"Double ouch."

"You'll live."

"I don't think I will. You've killed all me confidence."

"Like you had any to begin with."

"Three ouches."

"It's triple ouch."

"Fuck you."

"You sure, Cait? I mean, we hardly know each other, sweetie, but –"

"Just blow this fuckin' place up already, dipshit," she growled.

Daye smirked dangerously, playing around with his Pip-Boy, flicking through radio channels.

Ohhh, I'm mighty mighty fine, and I'm young and I'm in my prime!

"Fine, fine, alright. Whatever you say, darling."

Click. A radio station change.

Maybe... you'll think of me...

"You call me darlin' or sweetie one more time and I'll blow yer fuckin' –"

Click.

I don't want to set the world on fire...

What happened next was always difficult for Cait to explain to people, in the years following this insane fucked-up adventure she and Daye had at the fishpacking plant in the beginning of their time together. The way it was told always differed – sometimes there'd be more focus on the shitshow of a spectacle itself, or perhaps she'd tell it in a way that showcased just how unquestionably mad Daye actually was. From time to time she liked to mention the stupid banter and flirting they did, the first little inklings of what would grow between them. Other times it was left out. The best way, Cait thought, of explaining what the actual fuck happened that day went something like this:

One time a man came into the Combat Zone from down south somewhere. Nice enough fellow, clean cut, smelled better than half the rabble in the place. Cait fucked him on the roof one night, and afterward they lay looking up at the stars – something that didn't happen too often, from all the radiation still plaguing the world – right before dawn. The pinkish light was just beginning to crest out over the harbour, cold, new, not even reflecting off the water yet and the stars were still there, and in that exact moment it seemed like the world held its breath, waiting on edge, frozen, hesitant, caught between two happenings: the ending of night and the coming of day. Cait lost track of time, staring out at the world, at the stars and galaxies above, and for just a moment nothing in her life mattered except those stars and the man beside her. She forgot his name, of course, but she never forgot his face and the way it looked in the dusty pink light of the impending dawn.
Whichever way she told it, the kernel of the story always stayed the same: Daye blew up the fishpacking plant and it's really what launched them into everything that happened afterward.

Like the dawn on the roof of the Combat Zone, the Jet in Cait's veins made everything last longer, feel frozen in place, and as the fishpacking plant exploded in front of her eyes, she was rewarded (or cursed, never really figured that one out) with the entirety of the brilliant unbelievably fantastical performance in ultra-slow motion.

There was an infinitesimal moment, a tiny sliver of time between the blast itself and the indescribable sound where everything was very bright and almost peacefully silent, and Cait could do nothing but stare, wide-eyed and opened-mouthed like some sort of retarded kid, at the plant as it seemed to suck all the air inside through its broken windows, and then punch it back out to violently shatter like brittle ice.

The windows were first, and the metal came next.

The walls of the plant simply bloomed outward and onward like a fucking gigantic flower would in the spring, except this flower was pissed as hell and would chew you up and spit you back out and not even realise you were there in the first place.

After the metal came the sound.

*The sound.* The noise itself was simply inexpressible, indescribable, beyond any sort of depiction. It was as if the earth itself had opened up, the rock splitting and tearing and groaning under unfathomable weight and stress, collapsing in on itself, roiling and churning over and over and over in profound piercing agony. Groaning metal, shattering glass, ripping stone.

"Fuckin' – oh fuck! Fuck me!" Cait wailed, hands clamped over her ears as the sound finally registered itself in her utterly dumbstruck brain.

The windows, and the metal, and the sound, and now the colossal chunks of steel machinery and industrial doors and splintering beams of wood and shingles and slabs of concrete the size of cars were simply too much, too loud, too bright, but yet so unbelievably impossible to turn away from. She stood there, staring, afraid to move, afraid to even breathe, wanting to run away and yet wanting to stay and watch – caught between two happenings.

*Then an honest-to-fucking-goodness fucking giant-ass mushroom cloud bloomed.*

Black, sooty smoke mixed violently with blazing red flames and they ate away at each other, fuel for the other, growing, climbing, expanding ever upward into the sky in a brilliant display of badassery and a hard punch of sweltering air and an absolutely terrifying realisation: that this is the last thing so many people saw before the world ended all that time ago.

Cait was never, in all the rest of her shitty days on this fuckin' dead-ass planet whizzing through space a million miles an hour, going to take Jet ever ever again. Never.

The blast shook everything round them; the crates, the dirt, even the very air trembled violently, vibrating her lungs with each breath she sucked in through her nostrils. She could hear and see and feel small bits and larger blocks of brick and metal and rock and glass and debris as they pinged off the crates, thudded into the earth, sloshed into the filthy harbour below.

*I just want to start… a flame in your heart…*

"HAHAHA!"
Cait turned and looked at Daye.

The tinny trumpet and slow singing from his Pip-Boy radio was both wildly out of place and oddly complimentary to the mad smile on his scarred face, absurdly free of fear but full of frenzied glee. The flux of baking air rustled his hair and clothes, and a fine layer of red dirt and soot was already clinging to his sweaty face.

_In my heart I have but one desire…_

"WOOO! Oh my fucking god! Can you believe it? Fucking beautiful!" he howled over the roar of the fire, the explosion, pure unaltered delight etched deep into the lines on his face, and Cait could not resist the small smile that wormed its way onto her own.

Her partner (well, _temporary employer_ or fuckin' whatever) was one mad sonofabitch. Cait liked to think she was pretty fucked-up herself, and anything she hadn't been through, said, or done, she'd seen someone else do it. In the Pit, maybe, or during her slave years. But Daye. Fucking Daye. This Daye guy just kept blowin' everything right out the fuckin' water. _Fucking literally._

"Cait, look!" he shrieked, eyes bright with livid elation, and it was so hard to turn away from him, from his infectious exhilaration, because she almost enjoyed watching him more than the explosion itself.

But she managed to tear her eyes from his face and back to the fishpacking pl-

Oh.

"Jesus fuckin' H.C. Christ," she breathed, almost unable to believe her eyes.

_It was fuckin' gone._

Where the rusty metal factory used to be, there was now a massive black, hissing crater, all smouldering wood and liquefied rock. Piles of scorched brick and twisted metal lay burning, melting, charred beyond recognition. The yellowed grass tufts were burning like little beacons all around, and nearly half the building seemed to have been ripped off and slammed into the harbour, making unpleasant hisses and pops as great swelling pillars of salty steam billowed into the dry air. The mushroom had eaten away at itself completely, leaving massive black plumes of foul-smelling smoke curling up into the sky, and out flat across the water, and southward over the dusty plains. Every soul within a hundred clicks of this place that had a set of eyes and ears would know about this.

"It's something, eh, Red?" he smirked, still high on blowing shit up and whatever he had gotten actually high on before.

Cait blinked, rubbing the soot and ash from her eyes, from her sweat-slicked skin. "It's… somethin' all right. How –?

"Ham radio. Linked it with my Pip-Boy. Wired the dynamite up to the shortwave radio I had and calibrated it to the same frequency. Tuned into the same station. Ka-fucking-boom."

"Ka-fuckin'-boom is right."

_And that one is you… no other will do…_

Cait laughed. A wild, free laugh, one that carried out over the hissing crater, and past the waterfront, and out onto the ocean, and maybe even beyond that. And Daye laughed with her.
Maybe it was the Jet. Maybe it was the loss of blood, or the hunger, or the Psycho withdrawal. Maybe it was the fucking factory she just watched explode right in front of her eyes. Maybe it was all of those, and maybe it wasn't. Maybe it was Daye.

She looked at him again, still chuckling to herself, delirious and giddy and exhausted all wrapped up in one package that was Cait. "Daye."

"Yeah."

"Yer gonna get me fuckin' killed one of these days."

"Probably."

"And you know what? I'm so okay with that."

He smiled back.
A/N: Hey guys! Back again with chapter 6! Had a lot of fun writing this one - actually, I'm having a grand ole time writing this whole goddamned thing.

Anyways. MORE ACTION! MORE DEATH! MORE INJURIES TO POOR CAIT!

Enjoy! And leave a review! They give me ideas of what you guys like, and lets me know how well I'm doing. Also, they make me all warm and fuzzy inside.

Part One: In Which Cait Is So Not Okay With That, And Meets Some More of Daye's... Friends? Well, Mostly People He Knows and Who Know Him But Sort of Hate Him Because He's a Dick

"I take it back! Take it all fuckin' back! I am so not okay with that!"

Cait cowered pathetically like a mangy beaten dog behind one of the yellow crates as the lasers and bullets spat and snapped into the wood just inches from her fucking face, showering her with chips of old paint and splinters of old wood and puffs of old dust and fucking gods almighty, this was getting so old. "What the motherfuckin' fuck were ya thinkin' Daye?"

"What?" he howled over the thunderous din, crouched not four feet from her, clutching at his ugly modded shotgun.

"I can't hear you!" he shrieked, not daring to peek above the crates just yet. "But if you're bitching at me then you're gonna have to shove it up your ass, Red! We got more important shit going on right now!"

Cait snarled at him wordlessly and reloaded her double-barrel.

About fourteen and a half seconds after Cait told Daye she'd be okay with him getting her killed – literally right after the last chapter ended – the fucking Commonwealth Asshole Militia marched in, guns and curses ablaze. Gunners – at least a good dozen of the fuckers – in their spiffy green combat armour and high-tech laser rifles, all with a douchebag pedigree and foul attitude just bent on doin' them a-murderin' this fine fucking Thursday. They must've been within earshot of the fishpacking plant and the motherfucking explosion to end all explosions, probably roughing up some poor settlers or something, and so trucked it across the plains or up from the waterfront, keen on finding out exactly what the fuck happened to the plant and why the fuck it wasn't there anymore. Oh, yeah. The giant-ass pillars of smoke curling up from the crater might've got their attention, too. Not to mention the mass of obviously stolen crates and containers sitting pretty up on the hill like a fucking offering to the gods. All guarded by only two clearly stoned idiots.

It was a recipe for utter disaster.

"Why in bloody Hell are we just sittin' on our asses out here like fuckin' retarded ducks without a goddamned ounce of decent cover?" Cait seethed, more to herself, really, considering Daye couldn't hear her and probably wouldn't care, anyways. "Never thinks things through, he does. Just fuckin' does shit. 'Oh, I wanna blow up a goddamned factory' he says. Why? 'Just for shits and giggles'. For bloody shits and giggles. Must have a death wish or somethin'. You have a fuckin' death wish, dipshit?!"
"What?"

"That's what I fuckin' thought," she growled, putting a nice hole in the front of some Gunner prick who got way too close for comfort. Also, she might've blasted a corner off the crate she was hiding behind, launching shards of wood and buckshot into the Gunners' stomach. The guy keeled over in the grass, writhing and screaming in agony as he tried and failed spectacularly to keep his insides on the inside. Cait smirked.

"Hey! Be careful, Red! Don't fuck up the crates!" It was Daye, being an asshole, and caring more about his motherfucking drugs than keeping Cait's head on her shoulders and her blood the exact same quantity as she had right now (inside her body, of course, not like Mr. Intestines there).

"Fuck off," she grumbled, reloading her double-barrel again.

If Daye ever asked about this later, Cait would say _of fuckin' course I set up the crates like a goddamned fortified maze 'cause I knew you didn't think about the fuckin' attention you'd draw by exploding a fuckin' factory just outside the city. Dipshit._ Or something like that. Because honestly, Cait didn't think about the attention, either, but hey, you gotta take it easy on her – she didn't have too much experience blowing shit up. Blame the ugly asshole with the shotgun for that.

Anyways, yeah, the crates were haphazardly thrown around in the grass because Cait hadn't given two shits about stacking them properly, and so they were laying about sort of maze-like, with little cracks and hidey-holes and corners perfect for cover and cowering, and some tall walls and window-like gaps. It sort of reminded her of something she'd seen in a history museum once, on a trip downtown before the raiders moved into the Combat Zone and didn't let her do thing like that. There had been an old painting on the wall, faded and torn, from a time long before even the bombs dropped. Blue soldiers up on a hill, hunkering down behind the wooden blockades of a fort, defending against the red guys down below. Except she didn't think they had laser rifles way back then. Or Jet. And she was pretty fucking sure there was more than just a couple of stupid Yanks on the hill.

She popped off another few Gunners, trying to keep her sweaty, grimy hands steady despite the penetrating heat from the baking sun above and the spitting roar of combat rifles and the tingly zapping of laser weapons and livid shouting and the overwhelming, nauseating stench of charred earth and melted metal and soot and rusty blood and she was tryin' to come down off her Jet high at the same fucking time and –

_Thunk._

"Ow – what the bloody fuck?"

The sizeable goose egg on her forehead throbbed painfully and her eyes watered for a moment, and when they cleared, they managed to focus on the fucking live grenade at her feet.

"Oh, _fuck me!_"

Cait wasn't dumb – not like some of the raiders she knew – but yeah, she wasn't no honour student either. Any other person might've gotten right the fuck outta there and let the grenade send Daye's chems straight to the pearly gates of the great Holy Buffout in the sky. As it was, she picked up the grenade with her bare hands, almost without thinking, and tossed it back over the walls of Fort Day Tripper, as she decided right then to call it, in any direction that wasn't _right fucking here._

It exploded in much the same way live grenades do, and some people screamed in much the same way people do when a live grenade is exploded in their face.
Clods of dirt and stones sprinkled down on Cait and she rubbed at her swollen forehead angrily. "Remind me again why I signed up for this shit," she seethed, blinking back tears.

Oh, right. She didn't. Tommy made her go. If she ever saw the fat bastard again she was gonna rip his shrivelled ghoul dick off and shove it up his ass.

Cait glanced sideways, hoping to flying fuck Daye didn't see her get clobbered in the face with a grenade.

No such luck.

He was practically pissing his pants laughing, whether in sick joy from their dire predicament or still flying from his mystery high she didn't quite know, and it probably didn't matter. The asshat motioned with his hand the grenade falling and smacking her right in the face, and he laughed again, the sound almost drowned out by the fire barrage. Cait growled and flipped him the middle finger. He just chuckled to himself as he sent a round of buckshot tearing open the face of another Gunner.

"Asshole. I just saved all yer fuckin' drugs. Yer welcome."

He shrugged because he couldn't hear her or he didn't care or he was agreeing with her for once. Whatever. Didn't matter. Probably not that last one though.

The fucked-up pre-war fort re-enactment continued, with muskets exchanged for lasers and buckshot, and cries of patriotic victory bullshit exchanged for some rather colourful curse words and ways the Gunners could go take themselves, and fuck themselves, with themselves.

In time, the crate Daye had been using as cover splintered and shattered under the intense laser fire barrage. Cursing not quite so under his breath, he scootched over a bit so he was right beside Cait.

"Hey, this is my hidey-spot, asshole."

"We can share."

"No we can't. Find somewhere else to do yer murderin'."

"Boy," Daye whistled, entirely ignoring Cait. "Mac is not going to be happy he missed this."

"Why's that?"

"Because," he said, just narrowly avoiding a sizzling beam of laser ammo shredding his ear off. "He always jumps at the chance to take these assholes out. Used to run with these guys."

"These guys?"

"Well, not these exact guys, but the Gunners, yeah."

"Well, can't ya talk 'em outta this? Maybe?"

"Talk? With the Gunners? You clearly haven't had many run-ins with the pricks."

"That how you two met?"

Daye's jaw twiched the tiniest, smallest amount. Cait smirked. She knew he hated talking about himself. Why? No fucking clue. "Mac? No. He'd already left by the time I found him."

"How'd ya meet then?"
"Do you really care about all that?" he asked, more of a rhetorical thing than pure interest. "Or are you just talking for the sake of it?"

She shrugged. "The fuck else we gonna do?"

"Concentrate on shooting the bastards who are shooting at us? Maybe? I don't know, just a thought."

"Yeah, yeah, whatever. Don't really care, even."

She did care. A little bit. Daye was still a complete and total mystery to her. He knew she was a slave. Knew she was a pit fighter. Hell, the guy even knew what sort of foods she liked, the size of clothes she wore, the kind of dudes she liked to fuck (yeah so alright, maybe she sometimes did tend to talk just for the sake of it).

All she knew about him was that he had a Pip-Boy from god knows where and that he liked blowing things up. Oh, and he hated people calling him Nate.

Felt as if she knew this Mac guy better than her temporary employer or whatever, sometimes. Mac would love this, or Mac said this thing one time, or Mac took out a whole hive of super mutants with just his sniper rifle once. So badass. It was always Mac and me, me and Mac. Mac Mac Mac. Fuck. Chuckles and Trish joked about it, before they got their heads blown off, of course, but Cait was starting to wonder if this Mac guy really was sucking Daye's dick, and vice versa. Though she couldn't really see Daye sucking anything other than Mentats.

Cait swallowed, throat parched from the boiling heat and the lack of a good drink in god-fuckin-knows how long. She wiped the black soot from her face, the grime mixing like sludge with her sweat, and she blew the legs out from another Gunner, sending him reeling head over ass end back down the hill, and he took out a buddy of his, the both of them rolling around like a couple of horny teens might for fun. Except for the guns and blood and oh, yeah, the guy had mangled fleshy stumps where his kneecaps should've been. She wasn't gonna peek over the crate for nothing but she sure as fuck did to watch that spectacle.

Terrible fucking mistake.

"Ah! Blimey fuckin' fuck!" she screeched, reeling back hard on her own ass as a shot of red laser seared sharp across her cheekbone. Wide-eyed and breathless, she instinctively threw her hand up to her face and hissed and – her face was fucking melting!

The world slowed and sped up at once and her heart began to thrash in her chest and her mind seized up and oh fucking Christ above and all that was motherfucking holy, she was gonna be all melted and ugly and fucked-up like Daye now, and there was blood everywhere, all over her hands and shirt and mixing with the soot and sweat and clinging her clothes to her skin, and she could smell burning flesh and hair and fuck fuck fuck –

"Hey, Red, calm the fuck down," Daye hissed, and he grabbed her arm way too hard, dirty nails digging sharply into her flesh. He dragged her back from where she sat with not an ounce of care, skinning her knees and palms in the gravel, and he yanked her between a wedge in some crates.

"Your face isn't melting, for fuck's sake," he said, pulling out an old rag or something from his stupid fucking jacket and pressing it tight against her cheek.

Cait sat there stupidly, eyes wide, mind utterly blank, unmoving, entirely oblivious to the sounds of bullets and lasers and assholes shouting asshole-like things, and she stared at Daye's face and focused on that – at him, and at his sweaty hair plastered to his head, his eyes more red than green now, his bent nose, his soot-smudged skin, his burn scar crawling across his flesh like some sort of disease.
He smiled at her, his trademark asshole smirk, but she was beginning to like it. Sort of. His hand was warm through the cloth, and despite it being hotter than Hell's kitchen in the sun, she placed her hand over it. Dirty and scarred and scratchy from the medical tape looped round it, but it was warm. A different sort of warm.

And… there was something else. There… the concern… the care there, in his eyes, hidden as it was by his layer of asshole and his high, and in the almost gentle way he held his hand to her… it was real, not fake, not a sham. Cait knew fake care and worry more than anyone, she supposed, but this… wasn't. Simple as that. It was so foreign and weird and she wasn't quite sure if she liked it or not.

It was like those goddamned cheesy romance novels Tommy kept in the back sometimes. Cait couldn't read to save her life but the ghoul used to tell her about them when she got really, really bored. About that moment when the girl realises she's in love with the guy and the world stops movin'. Except the world stopped two hundred years ago, and she hated Daye probably more than anyone she'd ever met, and Cait had never loved anyone in her whole entire life.

So, really, it wasn't like those romances at all.

But still. She felt she should say something, at least, despite probably barely being able to register on the brain activity scale. If such a thing even existed.

"Daye, I –"

"You'll be fine. Might bleed for a while, so keep the cloth on it. You'll probably have a badass scar on your cheek but you won't be all melted and ugly and fucked-up like me."

Her heart both dropped through the ground and hammered against her bruised ribs from the Jet fall at the same time – a weird sensation, to be sure, but not as gut wrenching as realising she'd said all that shit aloud.

"Oh, I – I didn't mean – I'm sorry," she murmured, almost sad and lonely when Daye let her go to peek out behind the crates, and then recoil as some Gunner asshole sent more red laser beams ping ing off the metal and wood around them.

"Whatever. Just – let me focus."

For some stupid reason it was so utterly important to Cait in that moment for Daye to understand she really didn't think he was ugly and fucked-up (alright, maybe a little fucked-up, but definitely not ugly). "No, Daye, really – I'm sorry."

"Yeah. I heard."

"No, listen: I'm sorry."

He did a weird thing then, sort of like a sigh and a growl at the same time, and cocked his shotgun. "Okay, fuck. I get it. You're sorry. But you already said I was sexy, so I'm just going to blame it on the adrenaline and shock." Then he grinned down at her, a lopsided sort of smirk, and yeah, okay, his face was all melted and ugly and fucked-up, but damn if that smile didn't make something inside her squirm. In a good way, she thought, although she was still kinda high on Jet and just about had her face blown up and then liquefied, so her brain probably didn't know what the fuck it was thinking anymore.

"How many left?" she asked, not yet daring to move the rag for fear her face might fall apart at the slightest rustle. "They all dead yet?"
"No," he said, pulling the pin from a grenade and lobbing it over the crates and down the hill. It exploded, sending more bits of dirt and wood down like a shitty fucked-up rain storm. "Still eight or nine left, I think. Can't be sure. Might be some hiding behind the hill down there." He looked down at her again, a pathetic little ball of blood and quivering muscle, and frowned. "Think I might need your help here, yeah?"

Daye needed help killing things? Fuck, that wasn't good. "Yeah. Yeah, sure, fine," she mumbled, head absolutely throbbing from the grenade and the high, her body trembling uncontrollably from the Jet fall cooling everything down. She crawled toward her double-barrel with one hand (the other still holding her face together with the rag) and nabbed it, not quite sure how she was gonna shoot things with one hand like a gimp-ass retarded baby.

And that's when the party really started.

That's when the ghouls showed up.

A whole fuckin' pack of the feral zombies, emerging from god knows where, some sewer or hole in the ground, maybe, because there was nothin' but grass and waste far as the eye could see – out that way, at least. They tore across the dusty plains, headed for the other side of the hill, limbs flailing, rotted, pitted faces screeching out unrecognisable things, things that were drowned out by the zapping of the Gunner's laser rifles –

"Daye!" Cait screeched, doing a stupid thing and dropping her double-barrel to smack his back pathetically. "Daye! Fuckin' ferals! Behind!"

"What?" he hissed, probably pissed that Cait felt like using him as a punching bag rather than helping him defend Fort Day Tripper. He twisted round, ready to ream her the fuck out, then noticed the mob of undead assholes sprinting up the hill, still a ways away, yet way too close for anyone's comfort. He spat some curse words that even Cait hadn't heard of before (a fuckin' miracle in and of itself, she reckoned), then began rummaging around his ratty jacket pockets.


He lit the rag of a molotov cocktail with his little gold lighter and tossed it down at the foot of the hill right in the path of the sprinting ferals, who gave exactly zero fucks and tore right through the blaze and on up the hill.

"Hm," he pondered, giving the blazing ghouls a moment of his undivided time. "I really thought that would do more."

"Great job, ya fuckin' twat!" Cait screeched, eyes popping wide at the fantastical performance of Ferals on Fire. "Zombies! Flamin' zombies! Comin' right fuckin' at us!"

"Yeah, I see that," he spat, ducking from another few bursts of laser fire from the Gunners on the other side.

"Ya got a Plan C then?" she groaned, ducking down as well, and eyeballing up the charred, scorching ferals hotfooting it closer and closer and closer to Fort Day Tripper.

"Um… yeah, uh…"

"Daye!"

"Hold on!" he snarled, rummaging around his pockets again. "Uh… let's see…"
The ferals were closing in on them from behind, and so were the Gunners in front, now that the defenders had been sideblinded, and Cait was really, really not in the mood to be eaten alive by a flaming corpse. Not today, anyway.

"Daye!"

"I know! *Fuck. Is this a Thursday? You know, I could never quite get the hang of Thursdays."

"*Daye!"

"It *is* a Thursday," he said, glancing up from his Pip-Boy screen. "Shit."

Cait's Jet-addled mind refused to see the logic in letting the rag go and using both hands to shoot their assailants with her double-barrel. Instead, she pulled Tommy's little pistol from its makeshift holster on her belt and pinged off a few .44 calibres into the unfeeling torsos of the ferals, now barely a good stone's throw away from them. She could see their pitted skin melting in the flames, their stringy hair, their gaunt faces, their gnashing, rotted teeth that were about *eleven fucking seconds from tearing her flesh off.*

"Daye! *Daye! We're gonna fuckin' die!*

"Cait, *fuck, I know! Here!" he cried, pulling out another stick of dynamite like the ones he used to blow up the fishpacking plant. "Plan C! The 'C' standing for Cunts are Going to Get –"

"Stupid humans!" a voice roared out from Cait and Daye's left, and then in the span of maybe four and a quarter seconds a lot of things happened very quickly.

One: the soft whir turned to a savage roar as the minigun spun to life.

Two: the enormous super mutant behind the minigun laid his fat green finger on the trigger and sent a sensational shower of bullets spitting out into the heart of the pack of flaming ferals.

Three: the two other super mutants pulled out a super sledge and a flamer, and proceeded to use said weapons against the flaming ferals (why the *fuck* you would use a flamer against already flaming ghouls was anyone's guess but hey, no one said muties were smart).

Four: the Gunners took notice of their unexpected guests and promptly attempted to evict them from their dinner party.

Four and a Half: the majority of the flaming ferals proceeded to have their limbs ripped from their sockets, their torsos shredded down to the bloody, spongy innards, and their heads popped like watermelons. Gory, and really quite revolting, but it was like a train wreck and Cait could not look the fuck away.

Five: Cait looked the fuck away. Her and Daye squirmed even further into Fort Day Tripper, deep into the maze of crates and sacks, not very keen on getting involved in this shitty fucked-up family reunion of the Wasteland's dumbest and biggest pricks.

"This doesn't look too good, Red," Daye breathed hard, chest heaving, wedged between a yellow crate and a metal one, face not six inches from Cait's.

Cait could smell his breath – sour and sort of gritty, kind of like salt and asphalt. Daddy-O. Mystery High solved. "No fuckin' shit," she panted, and okay, she'd left her double-barrel and .44 pistol out there but the rag was successfully stopping the bleeding. She might become ghoul food but at least she'd look pretty dying.
"I thought I had them with the dynamite. Where the *fuck* did the super mutants come from?"

"No clue. Who d'ya think'll win?"

He shifted a bit to make room for his ugly shotgun, resting it on his lap, the polished metal stock pressed up against Cait's thigh. "Jesus, I'm actually sort of rooting for the ferals. Right scary bastards but at least they don't have any weapons."

"But they'll eat yer flesh like it's fuckin' cotton candy."

"Hm. Yeah."

"Muties?"

He shook his head. "Even worse. They bring you back to their camps and cut little pieces off of you. Keep you fresh."

Cait squirmed. "Gunners, then."

"*Fuck* no. They'll probably spare us and make us work for them."

"So? Better'n dyin', ain't it?"

"I don't like taking orders."

Cait shook her head. "All we needs is some robots and a deathclaw and this'll be the fuckin' asshole orgy of the century."

Daye just stared at her, and then blinked. Blinked again. Cait thought he was either gonna puke on her or kiss her. Neither was preferable – at least, not right now.

She frowned. "Daye?"

"Robots," he murmured, and then a wide grin split his face like how the sun rises over the old harbour. "Robots!" he screeched louder, making Cait wince. "Red, you're a fucking genius!"

"Well, no shit," she smirked, watching him rummage through his pockets for one time too many that day. "What you got up yer sleeve this time, ace?"

"Plan D," he smiled, yanking out what looked to be a blue stick of dynamite, but a little smaller. "The 'D' standing for Danse Party."

And then he hurled the stick out far as he could, over the heads of the Gunners, out back towards the crater of the former fishpacking plant.

Blue smoke. A shit-ton of blue smoke. It rose, slowly at first, high into the air over the heads of the Gunners, the super mutants, the flaming ferals, who all ignored it in favour of pursuing their passion of murdering. Rose even higher than the freeway above, crumbling and old and situated in just the right spot so of course it failed to shade Fort Day Tripper. Rose so high into the sky Cait couldn't see the end of it anymore.

She frowned at Daye. "Danse Party?"

"Yeah, I know. Not my best work but, hey. Don't mention it to the guy, alright? He *hates* when I say shit like that."
"What guy?"

"Danse. You deaf? Ah. Here he comes now."

Cait had seen those giant flying metal bird-things before. Far away, out east, over by the big weird oval ship hovering above the old airport. Loud bastards, fast little things. The raiders thought she'd gone mental first time she'd told them about it. She'd set them straight with a fist to the face real quick. Then the bastards very well fucking believed her. Tommy had told her later that they were called vertibirds. Flying marvels, pre-war military remnants of an age when people fought each other over stupid shit that no one could remember or care about now. Said some secret organisation flew them around now, piloted by big metal human-like robots who talked of nothing but honour and valour and a bunch of other bullshit that didn't matter anymore.

In turn, Cait thought Tommy had gone mental.

The flying metal vertibird thing started off as a pinprick in the far distance to the north, a little insect in the blazing blue sky, and as it came closer the soft hum moulded into a roar and the turbulence from the spinning blades grew so earsplittingly loud it completely drowned out the laser rifles and the minigun and the screaming, flaming ghouls.

Now thefuckers were paying attention.

Daye reloaded his shotgun and took advantage of their guest's momentary shock, sending a wide spray of buckshot into the ugly face of the super mutant with the flamer, making the monster shriek in pain and fury and lob his weapon over at them, missing by a wide margin and exploding the gas tank into the dry grass over by the Gunners.

"Shit," Daye growled, ducking back down. Cait could barely hear him now over the earth-shattering roar of the vertibird, thumping madly in her chest. "I'm having awfully shit luck with fire today."

"Well, it is a Thursday, you said," she bellowed, just so Daye could hear her.

"It is."

"But I don't know about that. Yer explosion was pretty fuckin' spectacular."

He smiled.

The vertibird thingy was so close now Cait could see it properly – a bulbous metal machine with two sets of rotors and six blades, hovering like those fucking creepy bloodbugs down by the reed-choked waterfront. Its blades blasted the air around, skittering the blue smoke and the black smoke and the fire from the ghouls and the fire in the grass, and it smelled like shit here now – like blue smoke and black smoke and burning ghoul flesh and burning grass.

The Gunners and the mutants were screaming things Cait couldn't quite hear, and they started shooting at the vertibird thing. Red lasers pinged off the rusted hull, and 5mm minigun rounds ricocheted off it and out into the baking air. A Gunner lost his footing from the intense winds and even the mutants had to shield their eyes from all the smoke and gravel being flung through the air. Cait coughed, dust and smoke burning her lungs and throat, and Daye's baseball cap flew off his head and over the walls of Fort Day Tripper.

"Shit," he hissed again, running a hand through his hatless, vertibird-whipped hair. "That was the only goddamned Red Sox hat I ever found out here."

Cait had no idea why the fuck his stupid ugly hat had anything to do with socks but she didn't really
care. She hated that thing more than his crusty gas mask but not quite as much as his ratty old infinity-jacket.

Anyway.

The side door of the vertibird screeched opened. A fucking robot like the ones Tommy said appeared. It grabbed hold of a mounted minigun at the side and –

"Red, get down!"

And all fucking hell broke loose.

Cait didn't really watch what happened. She's not afraid to admit that she cowered like a little fucking schoolgirl again and huddled real close to Daye, the pair of them like a couple of siblings who'd stolen their dad's smokes and were hidin' out back 'cause they knew the bastard was looking for 'em and would tear them three new assholes once he found the little buggers.

The vertibird-thing and the robot and the minigun tore savagely into the Gunners and mutants and ghouls. She could hear absolutely nothing but the keening drone of the wind and the vicious roar of weaponry as it shredded through the armour of the Gunners and the thick skin of the mutants, popping sickeningly and cracking grossly. Cait didn't have a weak stomach but just the fucking sound of flesh being sliced to ribbons and bones being snapped almost made her fucking hurl right in Daye's fucking fucked-up face.

Fuck.

And then, as swift and violently as it began, it was all over. Just like that.

Cait opened her eyes to Daye's bloodshot green ones, and then they both peeked out over the crate.

A bloody massacre for the history books, ladies and gents. Burnt grass and flaming ghoul limbs and shredded Gunner armour and chunky blood and lumps of skull with some hair attached and a threadbare green thing that sort of looked like the fucked-up remains of a super mutant's arm or something.

Cait shielded her eyes from the blasting wind as the vertibird came in even closer. It hung in the sky in much the same way bricks don't, and then it landed gently despite its bulk. Its blades died down slowly with a low chopping thud-thud-thud. Daye smiled beside her, easily hopping over the crate like the last three minutes never even existed.

Cait was still trying to figure out what the fuck actually happened in the last three minutes and why the fuck a robot in a strange flying machine had saved them from an inevitable gruesome cannibalistic death by flaming zombies.

"Danse!" he called out, arms open and inviting as he paced toward the massive robot. Daye was a pretty tall dude but the metal machine guy was a good three or four feet taller than him. It stepped away from the minigun and thunked off the flying vertibird machine-thingy, hydraulics in the legs hissing gently. "Paladin Danse! You saw my signal, eh? I wasn't sure you'd get here in time! Thanks for saving our asses, man!"

The robot took a few heavy steps forward, metal feet crunching over charred wood and singed grass and then lifted its arms to its head and pulled it off and –

Oh, fuck. It wasn't a robot. It was the most handsomest motherfucker Cait ever had the pleasure of laying eyes upon.
The man held the helmet under his arms, and the severe frown on his face didn't make Cait want to ravage him right here and now any less than it probably ever would. The guy looked goddamned heroic, like the soldiers in those old pre-war posters, standing in the snow with the Old World flag behind them. His short hair was jet black and soft-looking and it ruffled easily in the dying wind, and his scruff was a bit shorter than Daye's and darker, and trimmed neat at the sides, not left wild, and his eyes were brown and his jaw was strong and he was probably pretty-well built under all that armour and holy fuck did Cait ever want his dick.

"Daye," Mr. Fuck-Me-Please nodded tersely, ignoring Daye's smile and the friendly back-clap he received.

Mm. Even his voice was deep and smooth as a baby's asscheeks.

"Danse, man," Daye went on, clearly ass-kissing at least a little bit. "You really got us out of a tight fucking jam there. Seriously. Did you see all those Gunners? And the fucking flaming ferals? Honestly, I couldn't have done that if I tried."

Danse's stern frown only increased in severity and hotness. "Well, civilian, I'm glad you're safe now, but I –"

"Danse. Come on, it's Daye. I think we're past all the 'civilian' bullshit."

Hot Guy's eyes narrowed. "– but I can't say I'm glad at the circumstances."

"What do you mean?"

Danse Party in my Pants Party surveyed the vicinity with more than a little distaste, prompting Daye to do the same. All the corpses, all the blood and guts and ammo shells, all the crates and sacks, and all the hissing blue and black smoke wafting about them all like a creepy bruised mist.

"Ah. I see. Too short of notice?"

"Daye," Danse sighed, all his stern demeanour practically melting away as the irritation rolled off the dude in waves. If anything, he looked even more fuckable now. He rubbed at his eyes with his fingers, like a tired parent might at their misbehaving bastard of a son. "Daye. You can't keep doing this. You can't expect me to just rally my squad whenever the fancy strikes you and pull you out of all the tight corners you somehow manage to wedge yourself into."

"Why not?"

"Because we're not your personal on-call army, asshole," the pilot of the vertibird called out from the side window – a woman, sort of butch, with a real pissed-off look on her face.

"Fuck off, Hoss," Daye hissed at the pilot. "No one's asking you."

"Hey, watch your mouth, burnout," snapped another man in armour, previously seated up front but moving around the fuselage now, fiddling with the red-hot minigun. "Or I'll smack it off your ugly face."

"And shove it up my ass?"

"Sure. Sounds good to me."

"I think you're a little confused, Rhys. Aren't you the one who likes taking mouths to his ass?"
Rhys ripped off his helmet and jumped down from the vertibird in the span of an impressive one-fourteenth of a second. "For the last goddamned time," he growled, face a livid twist of disturbing detestation as he stalked toward Daye, "I am not gay, you deadbeat bastard—"

"Lancer Hoss, Knight Rhys, stand down," Danse ordered in a voice that demanded respect, stopping this Rhys guy dead in his tracks not three feet from Daye and his smug-ass smirk. Rhys's leg hydraulics hissed in protest then settled softly.

"Well. Isn't this just the sweetest family reunion. Reese Cups, how are you, brother?" Daye smiled sweetly – a little too sweet. Rhys almost fucking growled. "Look at us. All the Gladius boys back together again. And yes, I do mean boys. Hoss probably has a bigger dick than you do, Peanut Butter."

"You fucking —"

"Knight Rhys!" Danse hissed. "Control yourself, soldier. Remember your place. And Daye –"

"Technically it's Knight Daye, Danse. Or did your little girl scout club finally vote me off the island?"

"If only it worked that way, junkie."

"Knight Rhys!" Danse spat, the stern exterior slowly chipping away. Then he frowned down at Daye, a disappointed sort of look etched into the lines of his fine-ass face. Rhys continued to stare down Daye like he was a piece of shit stuck to his boot, and Cait could tell it took everything the guy had not to actually rip Daye's mouth off and shove it up his ass.

"No. My offer still stands, Daye," Danse said. "You're welcome back to Recon Squad Gladius whenever you decide that –"

"Yeah, yeah, I need to get my shit together, hang out with the good kids, eat my fucking vegetables," Daye waved off, leaning against one of the crates casually, entirely at odds with the men in the giant suits of armour and the fucking minigun still steaming and the massive bulk of the flying war-machine not six feet from the flaming, bloody massacre around them. He pulled out a Lucky Strike and lit it, blowing the smoke almost but not quite in Hottie's face. Hottie noticed.

"Rhys, back to the 'bird. Make sure the minigun's cooled down."

Rhys glared poison daggers at Daye a second longer, then turned and picked up his helmet from the burned grass before hauling himself back up into the vertibird.

Danse took half a step closer, the hydraulics in his armour whirring softly. "Are you high right now, Daye?"

Daye sucked in. Held it for a moment. Blew it out. "No."

"This is what I'm talking about," he said, voice lowered so that Hoss and Rhys couldn't hear him. "Brotherhood protocol clearly states the embargo on narcotics and stimulants. Decorum aside, you know my thoughts on your habit."

Daye flicked his dart without care, the embers falling softly to the ground. "Well, holy shit. Is this concern I hear coming from you? Haven't seen you this troubled in a long time. You on your period?"

"Daye, please. I'm being serious."
"So am I. I've got it all covered, big guy."

Danse frowned deeper. "I don't think you do."

"Well. That's your problem then, isn't it?"

"No, Daye, it's not. It's yours."

Daye shrugged him off carelessly. "Really Danse, I'm flattered, but I'm a big kid now. I can take care of myself."

Danse's eyes narrowed, clearly not done with the conversation quite yet. "May I remind you –"

"May I remind you that the only reason your mockery of a military is in the goddamned Commonwealth right now – actually, the only reason you're standing here and not rotting in some fucking ditch – is because of me."

Danse visibly stiffened, and his frown grew so intense Cait thought for sure the wind would change and his face was going to be stuck that way forever. Not that she minded. Intense Danse was superbly fuckable.

"You're going to go there?" Danse almost whispered, voice a mix of dangerous warning and careful apprehension.

"Hey. You went there first."

"I haven't forgotten all your help at Cambridge, Daye, I'm only saying –"

"What, Danse? That you wish you were out rotting in some ditch? So you wouldn't have to look at my fucked-up face with all that 'disappointment' and 'lost potential' you're so fond of flinging at me?"

Daye abandoned his cigarette, flicking it into the grass. "Or is it because you're too fucking embarrassed to bring me back to Maxson? Show him the broken relic, the useless piece of shit you picked up as a charity case?"

Danse's face burned red and Cait was just waiting for him to catch fire and melt. "Daye, please –"

"Let's just cut all the merry-go-round bullshit and get to the gist," he spat, standing up straight again. Despite being a good three feet shorter than the massive metal soldier, Daye put on an air that demanded his attention. Danse gave it, though Cait got the feeling it wasn't without more than a little grit. "I needed my ass saved from that tea party back there and you delivered. These crates need moving to a safe place far away, and I see a perfectly good vertibird sitting in front of me with a lot of excess cargo space." Daye shrugged, running a hand through his greasy hair. "Think you can help me out?"

Danse stayed silent a moment. A long moment. An almost awkwardly long moment. Cait just about slunk away and hightailed it outta there. Sure, flying robots were pretty cool and all, but she was not dealing with her Jet fall well and shit was just too intense right now. She needed a mattress and some Psycho. And maybe the dick attached to this Danse guy. Mm.

He eyed Daye up and down, and then Cait (which, honestly, she was a-o-fucking-kay with), and his gaze skimmed over the crates and sacks and then slithered down to the hissing crater and rubble where the fishpacking plant stood not ten minutes ago.

He nodded down to the ruins. "You pull that off?"
Daye crossed his arms and let out a huff of air. "What do you think?"

"I think you're mad."

"Well, you're not wrong."

"I think this is a grand misuse of Brotherhood resources and time."

"Probably."

"And I think you're the best goddamned EOD tech I've ever had."

Daye smirked. "Yeah. Your loss."

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Part Two: In Which Cait Slowly Begins to Realise Dave is an Even Bigger Asshole Than She Thought

"What's EOD?" Cait asked, though in all honesty, she didn't really care. She was just trying to distract herself from vomiting all over everyone and everything within a twelve-foot vicinity of her face-hole.

The vertibird ride from Marowski's (former) chem lab was turning out to be a real fucking shitshow. Not the exciting kind of shitshow either, like one where Daye and Rhys get into a fist-fight and throw each other out of the flying machine and tumble a thousand feet to their very splattery deaths. It was the boring, long-ass kind of shitshow, the kind where nobody talked and suspicious glares were constantly thrown and Cait was in an almost-constant state of nearly spewing chunks from the wobbly, erratic aircraft. Her stomach churned and her eyes hurt from how fast they were going and how far everything was, and how dizzyingly high up they were, zipping through the air in a boiling little metal tube above the skeletons of buildings baking in the dust.

"It means I like blowing shit up."

"It means he's qualified to arm and disarm explosives," Danse said, hands glued to the minigun at the wide open side door like he was prepared for some fucking flying deathclaw about to attack them or something. Which wouldn't really surprise Cait but fuck, the guy needed to relax a bit. Dude probably couldn't take a shit with how tight he was. "An explosive munitions expert, in the general sense."

Explosives? No shit. Cait could believe it.

"But what's it stand for?" she asked, hands curled round her woozy stomach. "Must stand fer somethin'. Right?"

"EOD. Explosive Ordnance Disposal."

"Hm. Explodin' Ornate Diuretic."

Daye smirked, and he leaned back lazily in the wide civilian seat they shared midway in the cabin. "Yes. That's exactly it."

"So, yer whole radio bomb thing at the fishpacking plant," she said. "That was yer EOD thing?"

"Yeah. I guess."

"Where'd ya learn ta do shit like that?"
Daye didn't answer her. Neither did Danse. But where Daye's face was a stupid mask of indifference, Cait saw Danse's eyes flicker over to the man briefly, then flicker back out to the dusty horizon before him.

Cait crossed her arms, ignoring a sharp churn of the gut as the vertibird veered sharply. "Alright, fuck, if ya don't wanna answer me then don't. I really don't give a shit about you or all your shitty secrets, Daye."

He just smirked.

"A real charmer you got there, son," Danse said in his sexified voice. "Where'd you pick her up?"

"Combat Zone. 'Bout five or six days ago now."

"The Combat Zone? I've heard of that place. A pit-fighting club, am I right?"

"Mhm."

Cait almost cringed at the awkward idle conversation.

"Pit-fighting is a hell of a sport, kid," Danse said to Cait, even though the guy was probably younger than her. "You've got to be a real tough player to win at that game."

"Yeah," she huffed. "I guess."

"Came across a few of those pits when I was younger. Horrible places. Full of... miscreants. It's illegal back in D.C."

"A lot of shit is illegal, Danse," Daye said. "Doesn't mean people won't do it."

"Doesn't mean they should do it, either," Rhys chimed in, up in the passenger seat beside the pilot. It was the first thing he'd said since he threatened to fuck Daye's face up even more than it already was. Well, apart from the constant grumbling when Danse made him load up all the crates into the back cargo hold. In which Daye did not lift a goddamned finger to help.

"Right, Peanut Butter. I forgot how fucking golden your sense of morality is. Warms the cockles of my heart."

Cait couldn't see his face but she sure as fuck could feel the dude's hatred for Daye even from back here.

"You're an asshole, you know that?"

"Bet you'd just love to stick your dick in me, then."

"Daye, please," Danse almost begged, cutting off Rhys before he could crawl in the back and throttle him. Cait saw the tiniest of smiles from Hoss, underneath all her weird helmet wires and shit.

She was pretty sure she saw steam come from Rhys's ears. After that he shut the fuck up and didn't say a goddamned thing.

"While I'm overall unimpressed with Knight Rhys's behaviour lately," Danse began gratingly, "and notwithstanding the fact he's forced me to write him up when we get back to the Prydwen, I'm inclined to agree with him, Daye. At this, he glanced behind them all, at the stacks of yellow crates jamming up the entire cargo hold. "Just because you can do something doesn't mean you should."
"Another piece of infinite wisdom from the Book of Danse, Volume Two: What the Hell, I've Heard This All Before. I'll have to write that one down."

Danse gave a little sigh. "Just… consider all I've said. Please."

"Sure thing, Paladin," he mock-saluted, and even Cait almost slapped him for his goddamned insolence.

She dared a peek out the door past Danse's hulking frame and out at the unending world around them. The earth whizzed by, the vertibird a tiny insignificant speck in the colossal infinity before her. Towering skyscrapers and stretching shorelines and endless empty, bone-dry plains sprawled out beneath and outward like a gigantic too-realistic playing board. Here and there some movement down below – a gang of vicious radiers or a pack of feral dogs, maybe, a shaky blob moving as one in the labyrinth of broken streets and commons, creeping through the buildings like spindly fingers. The sweltering sun sparkled brilliantly off the water in the harbour, and Cait could not even see the end of it. The earth curved slightly and the ocean swelled on out forever, fading far from view on the hazy, watery horizon.

It was all too fucking terrifying and yet so goddamned mesmerisingly beautiful all at once.

She leaned back in her seat. Daye's eyes were closed now, slanted back in the seat like he was napping right in the middle of the insanely loud and vibrating flying machine. Typical. Danse's iron grip on the minigun had not let up even a little. Rhys was stewing in his own shit, and Hoss was mostly silent, except for the occasional numerical gibberish she chatted into her headset, and the flicking of switches and dials.

Cait knew a little bit about the Brotherhood. From what little Daye had told her, watching Rhys and Hoss jam the crates and sacks into the ass end of the vertibird earlier, she knew they were sort of army-like. Like a wannabe pre-war military, obsessed with ethics and morals and old tech. Came from way out west years ago, in those weird giant hover-ships, intent on spreadin' their integrity to the poor sods of the wasteland like those missionary bastards before the war. Creeping through the world like some sort of cancer, she rather thought. Knew they had beef with the Railroad – those underground pricks bent on saving the synthas from the Institute. Cait knew very little about all that and she cared even less.

"Sooo," she began, if only to fill the gigantic awkward silence the vertibird was now stagnating in. "Daye."

"Hm."

"Yer friends here."

"Hm."

"Friends is a very loose term. Unwilling comrades is probably closer to the truth."

"Thanks Hoss," Daye bit. "You always know how to make me smile."

"How d'ya know 'em?"

He frowned. Sighed. Rubbed at his face tiredly, and then opened his eyes. They were green again, not a bloodshot, puffy red. Must've come down from his high. About fucking time.

"Did some work for them for a while."
"Sounds like yer more’n just workmates."

He frowned. "Uh. Yeah. Used to be part of this clusterfuck of a squad. Had a… sort of a falling out, I guess."

"Daye." Danse shifted at the minigun. Locked it into place, then turned around to face them, armour hissing again. The frown on his beautiful face was deep. "That's not true."

Daye didn't say anything. He clenched his jaw, staring at Danse. Danse stared back. Cait was almost convinced they were gonna hate-fuck each other on the floor of the vertibird cabin right then and there.

"He set up explosives for the Railroad and disarmed them for the Brotherhood. And vice versa," Hoss said from up front. "The guy double-crossed both sides of the table."

For a long moment the cabin was entirely silent, except for the constant buzzing drone of the vertibird engine, of course. Nobody moved. Danse and Daye still stared, straight-faced and serious as ever.

Then Cait let out a fucking *roaring* laugh.

"No way! No *fuckin*’ way! You were playin' *both* teams at the *same* *fuckin’* time?!” she howled, making Danse lose his concentration and blink with mild surprise. "Daye! You fuckin’ *asshole*, Daye! You blew shit up for the Railroad? And *these* knobs? At the *same* motherfucking time?! How in Jesus Fuck did ya ever pull that off?"

"I didn't," he said, losing his seriousness ever so slowly. "I got kicked out of both."

"No fuckin' *shit* they kicked ya out, ya swindlin’ con-artist! Ya sleazy motherfucker! So let me get this straight," she wheezed, eyes tearing up with insane enjoyment. "Ya planted bombs for these robo-knobs —"


"Whatever. For this Brotherhood, meant ta blast the Railroad pricks outta their *hidey-holes* – and then ya turn around and let them *know about it*?"

"…yeah. I guess."

"And *these* guys! You plant a stick o’ dynamite underneath their asses for the Railroad, do ya? And then ya dismantle the thing? *For these pricks*?"

Danse sighed. "The Brotherhood."

"Whatever, bub. What fuckin’ *for*, Daye?"

He shrugged, settling back down in his seat again. "Money, I guess."

"Money, eh. The shit you do for a few caps, you mad bastard!"

Cait could not fucking stop laughing. Her ribs ached, her throat was raw, her head was aflutter with glee.

It seemed there was no end to the list of asshole-like things this asshole was ticking off. What a greasy son of a whore.
"You like burnin' all yer goddamned bridges, don't ya?"

He shrugged again, a small smile worming its way up his marred face. "What can I say? I like to widen my sphere of influence and contacts."

"And enemies, it seems like."

Danse frowned even deeper, Hoss pointedly ignored them, and it seemed like Rhys had offed himself, he was so fucking quiet for once. Daye himself was smirking, now, and had closed his eyes again, head lolling back and forth softly with the motion of the vertibird.

"Yeah. Those too."

Cait chuckled lowly, wiping away her tears.

Wow. What a fucking day.

"So," she said, clearing her hoarse throat softly. "Where we goin' next?"

"Don't know. Try and get a lead on Marowski, I guess. The asshole's still out there, somewhere. No doubt he knows about the fishpacking plant already. It'll be a bitch, trying to wheedle him out of his burrow, wherever the fuck that is. But we have to drop these crates off at a safehouse of mine first."

"Fuck, not Home Plate again?"

"No. Well, not really a safehouse. More of a safe-settlement. Get to meet some more of my 'friends'. Hopefully they're not around, but luck hasn't really been on my side lately. And hope is a stupid thing."

"Where, then?"

Daye cracked his eyelids a tiny little bit, the dazzling sunlight slanting through the door of the vertibird and falling across his warped smile.

"Place I like to call The Castle."

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A/N: Rhys is pronounced 'Reese'. Like Reese Cups, those fucking delicious chocolate and peanut butter things in the orange package.

Also, a couple of snekky, snekky Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy references. 20 Internets to whomever catches them first.
A/N: Hey again! Back at you with chapter 7! I had a pretty hard time writing this thing, actually. It's mostly dialogue and try filling up 14,000 words full of people talking and shit. Tough. But hey, it needed to be done. This thing is pretty damn big, too. I actually intended there to be about two more parts but it would be a goddamed novel by then so I forced myself to cut it down.

Anyways. Lots of dialogue. No killing. No blood. No gore. Sort of a plot progression, but hey, after last chapter, I figure our protags need a rest. Jesus.

Enjoy, and leave a review!

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**Part One: In Which All of Cait's Expectations are Horribly Dashed and She Realises That, Despite How Much She Hates Him, She's Probably The Only Person on Earth That Can Stand to Be Around Daye for Any Extended Period of Time**

"This is yer Castle then, is it?"

"Yeah, this is it. What, were you expecting some massive stone fortress with a fucking moat and knights and shit?"

In all honesty, yeah.

With a name like 'The Castle', Cait sort of did expect something massive and grand and important and shiny.

But The Castle was… uh, not.

Not from up here, anyway. Looked sort of small and lame, really, just a mish-mash hodgepodge of wood and metal and brick, all closed in with a crumbling greyish stone wall, the entire thing teetering dangerously close to the water's edge. Reminded her of the fishpacking plant, you know, before Daye blew it to fucking Hell and back.

She should just learn to lower her expectations around this guy, really.

*Let's kill some raiders! Let's visit my super-secret hideout! Let's bust a chem deal! Let's blow up a factory! Let's ride in a pre-war flying machine with human-robot people!*

Sounds fucking awesome, right?

Nope. All shittier than they sound.

Cait's leg still hurt. Her shoulder still ached. She still had splinters in her palms. Ears were still ringing. Stomach still woozy – from the flight and from being starved like a goddamed hooker being forced into a tiny dress at The Third Rail or some equally scummy bar.

And also, her face had stopped bleeding, but she was gonna have a nasty-looking, fucked up laser-rifle scar there. Just like Daye.

She didn't know if she liked the idea of that or not.
"Hoss," the man in question groaned, hauling himself from the civilian seat to lean over the pilot's. "Listen: just land this thing. Don't bother calling in."

Hoss sighed, shaking her head slowly. "You know I can't do that, Daye."

"Seriously. Just land."

"I can't risk taking fire from those artillery guns. We're an unmarked vessel landing in the foreign property of a military establishment, and I don't know if they have radar or flight tracking. Might not even have ATC."

"Wow. Those are some big words, Hoss. You sure you know what they mean?"

"I do," she bit. "If you feel you can do a better job at piloting this 'bird, then by all means, come up here. Give it a shot."

Daye pondered that a moment, and Cait was almost certain he'd take Hoss up on her offer and plunge them all into the side of a skyscraper just to prove a point.

Luckily he didn't, thank fuck. If Cait was gonna die anywhere in this stupid post-apocalyptic shit- scape of a world, blowing up into the side of a building with this bunch of stuck-up assholes and Daye the Mad Martigan himself would be the absolute fucking last place on her list. Which was saying a lot.

"Daye, I need to call this in."

"Hoss –"

"Daye," Handsome Dansome said, *commanded* really, his hands still glued to the vertibird's minigun at the side door, apparently quite concerned about flying deathclaws or winged mirelurks or some shit. "She's right. Let her handle this."

"Fine," he huffed. "Fine. Alright, whatever. I can see I'm outgunned."

"Literally."

"Call it in, then. Be prepared for a shitstorm, though."

If there awaited a shitstorm at the end of this horribly long-ass, awkward-as-fuck, terribly boring flight, Cait would welcome it with open arms – throw it a fucking *bar mitzvah* – if it meant it was on solid, stable ground.

Hoss smirked a small triumphant smile, flipped some switches and dials on her dash, then put her headphones back on.

"Castle Command, this is VB-02 Gladius One requesting permission to land. Repeat, this is VB-02 Gladius One requesting permission to land, over."

A moment of silence, and some soft static, then –

"VB-02 Gladius One, this is Castle Command."

"Castle Command, VB-02 Gladius One reads you loud and clear."

"Gladius One, permission to land granted. Please set down on the LZ marked one hundred metres from the west gate, over."
"Roger that, Castle Command. Over and Out."

Hoss took off her headphones again, then turned round to flit another fucking smug-ass victorious smirk back at Daye. "See? That wasn't so painful now, was it?"

"Shitstorm, I tell you."

Daye sighed long and wistfully, rubbing his eyes tiredly, and then collapsed back into the seat next to Cait, which was sort of a shame, really, seeing as she'd been not-so-subtly checking out his ass. Kind of hard to do with all the layers he was wearing – especially that stupid fucking infinity-jacket – but she made do.

It was easy to tell he was decently built under there, better than the scrawny raiders and wastelanders, at least, who never ate well as kids and still probably didn't. So it wasn't too hard to imagine that he probably had a nice, full ass under his pants, with a matching set of dick-n-balls, despite Cait never seeing more of his skin than just his face and hands and his foot once. Not that she ever tried to sneak a glance when he was undressing or stopped to take a piss on the side of the road.

Okay. Maybe she had, once or twice. Or a little more.

Fuck, she was curious, alright? And it wasn't too often Cait hung around a guy who wasn't starved to death or almost shorter than she was. Plus, Mr. Danse Party marching onto the scene like some fucking Old World hero hadn't done any favours to her active imagination or libido.

Daye was dirty and greasy and still caked in soot and sweat and Gunner blood, and he desperately needed a haircut and a shave, but…

Shit. He had seen where her eyes had been, the fucker. He settled back into the seat and put his hands behind his head, the right picture of smug asshole. "Like what you see?"

Cait huffed, crossing her arms, entirely aware that his legs were resting about half a millimetre from her own, spread open, practically inviting the world to stare down at his crotch. It was distracting as fuck. "No, actually," she said, focussing on his weird green eyes instead. "Yer face looks like if Tommy fucked a deathclaw and they had a retarded lovechild. Who was also ugly."

"You weren't staring at my face."

"I wasn't starin' at nothin'."

Daye smiled an arrogant little smile, one that twisted his burn scar and made him look downright wicked. Cait thought he was gonna lean over real close, whisper something in her ear maybe, or even touch her shoulder or leg – all things the raiders used to do when they were hankering for a quick shag. And honestly… being totally honest here… Cait wasn't so sure she'd make Daye stop.

But he didn't.

"Alright," he breathed, in a tone that said he clearly knew she was lying. "Whatever you say."

Cait's stomach pitched, though she wasn't entirely sure it was because of the wobbly vertibird or the way Daye said that. She hoped it was the first one because honestly, she hated Daye more than anyone she'd ever met and if he made her squirm like that, then there was something seriously wrong with her. Maybe she had worms or something.

She seethed to herself, trying (and sort of failing) to keep her eyes from Daye's crotch, still wide open and just flappin' in the breeze. Metaphorically, of course. But hey, she wouldn't complain if it was
The vertibird wobbled and lurched and circled around a few times, hovering here and there for way too fucking long, before Hoss finally, finally spotted the landing zone exactly where the voice on the intercom said it would be – about a hundred metres before the west gate, on a relatively flat and barren patch of sand and scrub. The machine came in low and slow and so loud, a dull chopping thud-thud-thud, whipping around stones and twigs and hot, choking dust into the already hot, choking air.

Finally, fina-fucking-ly, this metal tube thrust from the black pits of Hell itself landed on solid earth. Cait launched herself from that thing faster than a wild mutant hound on Psycho hurtling headlong after a hyperactive radroach hopped up on Jet. That's pretty fucking fast, in case you're wondering.

"Jesus Christ, Red," Daye smirked, hopping down from the vertibird annoyingly easily. "You alright? You're not going to pass out or anything, are you? Because I'm not going to carry you if you do."

She leaned heavily against the crumbling remains of some twisted metal cement thing sticking up from the earth like some fucked-up tree, trying (and pretty much failing) to ease her churning, woozy stomach and straighten the world the fuck out. "Hm. If I was gonna vomit I'd have already spewed me chunks all over yer butt-ugly face, Daye. Make it a little prettier, maybe."

He smirked again, brushing the dust and soot from his old ratty jacket, the one Cait hated so much.

"Hey, for your first vertibird flight, you did okay, kid," Danse Romance said, finally letting go of the minigun and stepping down from the machine, metal armour hissing and whirring gently in the dust, black hair soft and shimmering in the sunlight like a gorgeous fucking model from heaven. "When I first flew in one of these, I passed out from the height not five minutes after takeoff."

Cait raised an eyebrow. "Really?"

"No. He's just trying to make you feel better for being a massive pussy, that's all." Daye squinted into the blazing sun, a wicked little smile playing at the corner of his mouth.

Danse threw Daye his trademark frown, and had Cait been a little less chicken-shit wobbly on her feet she'd have marched right over there and beat the living shit out of him for that.

"No, it's true. I couldn't handle the speed at first. Had terrible vertigo for a month."

"Yeah. Had to sit to take a piss, didn't you?"

Do-me-Danse's perfectly fuckable face flushed red as a rotten mutfruit at that. "Daye –"

Daye chewed at his filthy fingernails casually. "What? Oh. Was I not supposed to mention that part? My bad."

Mr. Fuckable graced them with a classic Disappointed Danse®, the frown so deep Cait thought his mouth might just fall off his face and land in the dirt. Which Cait would pick up and keep, of course. For… research purposes. "I don't know why I ever told you those things."

"Hey man, me neither. People just seem to dump their personal shit on me, and I don't even ask for it. Must have one of those faces people trust, you know?" he smirked, his burn scar twisting his smile into such a fucked-up sneer that even the highest and most smashed raider asshole this side of the post-apocalyptic US of A wouldn't trust if his worthless life depended on it.
Daye straightened his ugly jacket out and shielded his eyes from the intense sun, gazing out toward The Castle. Cait peered out that way too, and so did Danse. Nothing but dirt and rocks and parched little shrubs between them and the massive wooden doors, tall and old and set snugly into the towering grey stone around it. There was the crumbling remains of a small building – an old ice cream shack, maybe, and the rusted frame of an old Corvega between them and the building, and that was it.

At first Cait expected The Castle to be something outstandingly awesome, something grand and old and impressive and simply teeming with lights and people and movement. And then, from the air, she sorta expected a little less. Now – honestly, what the fuck? Fucking building looked boring and dead. Like a blank tombstone thrust up from the dusty earth, not even a tree or boulder around, only the choppy grey ocean beyond to break the desolate tan and brown landscape. Wouldn't be surprised if the only residents were rats and dusty bones.

Why did everything to do with Daye turn out to be less than what she was expecting?

It smelled liked dust and old and sour vertibird fuel, and Cait could taste the grains of sand on her parched tongue – but she could hear the sea crashing against the shore just beyond, and she could almost smell it, too – clear and cool and salty.

"So…" Cait began sort of awkwardly, her head beginning to throb from the sunlight and from the lack of Psycho juicing her up. "Is there supposed to be –?"

"Nathaniel fucking Daye!"

The voice was clear and shrill and female, and it carried swiftly across, and despite, the empty distance. A pinprick of a figure moved about the battlements, up beneath the wind-whipped blue flag on the outermost right wall, and then it disappeared.

Cait frowned. "Who the fuck was that?"

Daye sighed, running a hand through his slick hair. "The Shitstorm."

Oh. Shitstorm. Shitstorm was this scary old cunt? Maybe Cait wouldn't throw her a bar mitzvah, after all. Just send her a card or something.

The great wooden gates opened slowly and loudly, puncturing the sheer immense slate-like face of the stone, and out marched a few people in uniform – soldiers, Cait rather thought. All sported stained button-up shirts with a tattered tan jacket over it, and dusty jeans and boots. A couple had ragged slouched cowboy hats on their heads, and all held rusty laser muskets at the ready. Quite a ragtag militia, Cait thought, but hey, at least they matched. Points for coordination and giving a shit.

The craggy woman leading the soldiers simply fumed across the dust, her followers just about jogging to keep up.

"Nathaniel god-damned-fucking Daye!" she screeched as she stalked closer, voice harsh as her old, wrinkly face, and even Cait winced at her very presence. A presence that said, 'I will not hesitate to beat you down, chew you up, spit you out, and wear your hide as a motherfucking matching trophy scarf and shawl before I've taken my morning piss.'

"Nate!" the terrifying woman shrieked, storming right up to Daye and just about screaming in his face. She was a good head or two shorter than the man, but Cait had known Daye for a little while now, and she knew the little twitch of his eye there gave away the very amusing but somewhat worrying impression that he was not really enjoying this. "Nate! What in God's shit-stained earth do
you think you're doing, boy?"

Cait and Doable Danse peered over at Daye, who very clearly did not look up for this bullshit right now. "It's Daye," he seethed. "Daye."

"It's whatever the fucking Lord Almighty – that's me – says it is. And the Lord Almighty says it's Nate."

He clenched his jaw and swallowed. "Hey, Ronnie," he said in such a lame-ass voice that there was no mistaking the utter dread behind it. "Long time no talk. Good to hear your voice again – I was just about done with the night terrors and needed a fresh bout of your wonderful articulation to keep me up at night."

"Cut the hokum, you good-for-nothing piece of scavver shit," this Ronnie threw back at him, thrusting a finger into his chest. "What in God's missing testicle are you doing calling in an LZ request? You know goddamned well I ain't ever gonna let your hideously disfigured ass within a hundred clicks of this place, you greasy fucking charlatan."

Daye frowned a little, rubbing at the sore spot this Ronnie chick – well, scary fucking hag, Cait supposed – made on him. "Well, it's a little too late now, I guess."

"It's never too late to lace up my shitkickers and go up one side of you and down the other."

Daye chewed the side of his mouth. "You sound angry, Ronald," he smirked to himself. "Are you angry at me or something?"

"It's Ronnie, you insubordinate backstabbing good-for-shit-all freeloading –"

"Listen, Ron, it's been wonderful talking to you, and this has been such a stimulating, memorable conversation, but be a good gofer and fetch me Gravy, would you? I need to talk to him."

"Garvey's not here, assface, and even if he was, there's no way in good fiery Hell he'd have the time in his busy schedule of actually doing a goddamned decent thing to entertain your bloodsucking fucked-up excuse of a face."

"Thanks for the compliment."

"More where that came from, let me fucking tell you."

"I bet you have a whole book of personal insults made just for me."

"Damn straight. Keep it under my bed. I titled it 'One Thousand and One Insults, Put-Downs, and Comebacks for Every Occasion, but Mostly Just Telling Nate He's a Goddamned Useless Piece of Shit.'"

"Inventive. I like it."

Cait might be slightly (or more than slightly but you better not ever fucking mention it, alright?) terrified of this coarse old cunt before her, but goddammit if she wasn't impressed even a little by her quick-as-lightning comebacks. She'd have to take notes.

"Thought you would," Ronnie hissed. "I dedicated it to you and your pathetic excuse of a leader. It's a bestseller here."

"What about Diamond City?"
"Haven't had the funding to crack open that market yet. Give me time."

"I'm touched. Truly, Ronald, I am. So, where's Gravy, then?"

"Ha! Like I'd ever tell you a thing like that. Now get the Hell out of here before I order my guys to open fire and kill you by firing squad."

A metallic click to Cait's left signalled Danseless Pantsless Party pulling out his laser rifle and aiming it straight at Ronnie's chest. "I don't appreciate the threat, ma'am," he growled in his stern (and sexy) voice, prompting Ronnie's men to do the exact same, albeit a little slower and with a lot more fumbling. Not half a second later Cait whipped out her double-barrel and aimed it in the face of the nearest soldier, a pocked-face young dude who looked just about ready to shit himself and pass the fuck out. Simultaneously. Cait grinned madly. Shit was going to get exciting.

"And I don't appreciate your goddamned robot goon aiming his gun in my face," Ronnie snarled, the only one, other than Daye, to be weaponless.

"Fucking Jesus Christ," he groaned, throwing his hands up in defeat. "Seriously! Can't we just have a normal conversation for once? Danse, we don't have time for a dick-measuring contest, so put the gun away. Ronnie –"

"I ain't gonna listen to a thing you say, Nate."

Daye sighed, clearly not giving a fuck about the half dozen guns pointed all around him. "Listen, Ronnie," he began, rubbing at his eyes with his fingers tiredly. "Enough of this shit. I get it. You don't like me very much –"

"Understatement of the goddamned century."

"But I really don't give a fuck. I'm tired and hungry and fucking filthy as a whore. I've got a million and one things to do and some angry people on my ass. I'm not here to play army with you, and I sure as shit don't have to listen to the verbal diarrhea you're so keen on spewing all over the fucking place."

"I ain't –"

"No, listen," he snapped, making Cait blink, and even Ronnie Hagfish herself took half a step back. "I'm still your General and I can still do whatever the fuck I want, including coming and going without being harassed by my own men."

Cait blinked. "General?" she murmured to no one in particular, and not surprisingly getting no answer from anyone for clarification. Cockbites.

"General?" Ronnie hissed. "You ain't never been the General, son, not in my book! Not since you fucking backstabbed the entirety of the Minutemen and used us like some –"

"I. Am. Your General. Shaw."

"You're a fucking –"

"You're a fucking dusty old cunt that should've been put out of your misery years ago. You lost all your usefulness last fucking century, Shaw, so sit down and shut the fuck up before I throw you the fuck out of here!"

Shaw's eyes narrowed into such tiny little slits Cait thought they might've just fallen out and rolled
around in the dust.

"So here's the deal," Daye continued, a little less livid. "I've got some crates in the vertibird I need to store down in the armoury for a while, and I'm going to do that, Gravy or No Gravy."

"It's Garvey, you piece of shit."

"You'll let my goddamned robot goons here into The Castle without a word, you'll let them down there without a word, and you'll let them leave without a word. I know you have trouble keeping your mouth shut, Shaw, but if I hear you've been giving them trouble, I'm going to give you trouble. Got it?"

Cait's eyes nearly popped out her fucking head. Never in her whole entire life had she been so sure someone was going to throttle someone else with their bare hands and enjoy it so much. Ronnie looked like she was about to pounce on Daye and rip his fucking throat out with her teeth and not even bat a crusty eye. Cait's finger hovered over the trigger, aimed halfway between the ugly soldier in front of her and Ronnie herself, though she wasn't entirely certain the bullets wouldn't just bounce off the old woman and ricochet back.

Said old woman scowled. Spit a wad onto the dusty ground. Crossed her arms. Then, honest-to-fucking-goodness, Ronnie Shaw let out a laugh. More of a cackle, really, and Cait was sure she'd have nightmares about it later on. "Ha! You got daddy bags of steel, boy, I'll give you that. Fine. I won't say a fucking word."

"Good."

"But that don't mean I gotta like any of it."

"I don't care."

"I'll be keeping an eye on your robot friend till he leaves. And your red-head fuck-buddy here."

Cait glowered at that.

"Again, don't care. Just keep out of our way."

She scowled, hands on her hips. "Garvey'll be back tomorrow afternoon, if you're looking for him. Did a run to Hangman's Alley. Left yesterday. Just a broken generator, I think."

"Yeah. Okay. Thanks, Shaw."

"Hm." Ronnie sent all three of them one last nasty glare almost certainly meant to insert horrid nightmares into their subconscious, then she turned on her heel and stalked back to The Castle with almost as much piss and vinegar as when she came, her little party close behind, tagging along in her dust.

An awkward moment. Or two. Fucking way too many of those lately.

"Well," Danse sighed at last, lowering his laser rifle. "That was… fun."

"She's such a sweet old lady, isn't she?"

Cait lowered her gun too, glaring at Ronnie's retreating back, and she let out a constricting breath she didn't even know she was holding. "The fuck was that about?"

Daye shrugged, lighting himself a Lucky Strike, and offering Cait one for a change. She took it
gladly. Anything to calm her nerves after meeting the Devil reincarnate herself. "Nothing really."

"Nothin'? Daye, that bitch almost tore yer fuckin' head off yer shoulders with her rat-claws. And she's got a potty mouth ta rival me own."

"Actually, she was in a pretty good mood today, I thought."

"The fuck was she? Some sort of half-deathclaw, half-mutie bitch on her period or somethin'?"


Cait took a long drag of her dart, eyes narrowed. "We?"

Daye blinked. "…they?"

"Nope! Nuh-uh! I caught you red-handed, assbiscuit! This have anythin' ta do with bein' General or some shit? What, you the leader of some greasy raider gang? You gonna tell me yer Chuckles' second-in-command now?"

He just shrugged again, flicking his cig carelessly.

"Daye."

"I don't know," he groaned, sort of irritated-like. "It's not really a secret, I guess. Just... don't run around town shouting it to all the raiders and other wasteland assholes we come across, okay?"

"Shout what?" she frowned. "I swear to fuck, I've had it up to here with all yer shitty secrets, Daye..."

"Red, shut the fuck up for a sec. Jesus. These are the Minutemen."

"Kay, I've heard of 'em, yeah."

"This is their stronghold."

"Mhm."

"And I'm their General."

"Like Hell ya are. And I'm the bloody President of Canada."

He shrugged a third time, staring off into the distance with unseeing, careless eyes. "Whatever. Don't believe me. I don't care. I don't need to prove anything to you."

Cait looked to Dansealicious for confirmation, for help, for anything really (and not only just to look at his smoootooth face, honestly). He only pulled another Disappointed Danse® and shrugged.

"Well. This has been fun," Daye said. "Thanks again, Danse. Just put the crates down in the armoury for now, near the east entrance. You know where that is, right? The west tunnels are still blocked, I think. I'll have to ask."

"You're not helping, Daye?"
"Nah. You'll be fine, big guy. You and Hoss and Peanut Butter got this covered. I got some... shit to do. Things to look at. I'll be busy. If you want to stay a night I'm sure Shaw can find you a bunk or something. Just don't get too close. She might bite your fingers off."

Danse frowned. "No. We need to return to the Prydwen as soon as possible. Wasted enough time escorting you and your undesirables around."

"Undesirables?" Daye laughed. "Jesus Danse, you make it sound like I'm carting around dildos and crack."

"Might as well be."

"It's just some Jet and shit."

"It's still illegal."

"Hey man, this is the end of the world. Nothing's illegal anymore." He chuckled to himself, took one last long drag of his Lucky Strike, then flicked it on the dusty ground. "Well, it's been real. Until next time, Danse," he half-heartedly saluted.

Then Nathaniel Daye turned and just fucking walked away.

"Oi! Oi!" Cait screeched after him once she regained her composure. "Daye! The fuck I'm supposed to do, huh?"

Daye turned around but continued walking backwards. "Don't care," he shrugged. "Stick around for a few days, entertain yourself. You're good at that, right? I'll come find you when we're ready to head out."

"A few days? Fuck, I'll be dead and gone of boredom by then."

"I just need to wait till Gravy comes back. Tomorrow afternoon, Shaw-zilla said. I'm sure you'll survive."

"And right now?"

He shrugged, smiling a stupid, stupid smile that Cait wanted to smack off his ugly face. "Help with the crates?"

Cait hoped the fucker tripped backwards and smashed his stupid head on a rock.

No such luck.

"Fuck that. I need to get drunk. There a bar or somethin' round here?"

Daye either ignored her or didn't hear her. He was already out of earshot, making his leisurely way across the dust to the great wooden doors of The Castle. Cait watched him recede until he was a small blurry pinprick, wavering in the heat of the scrub, outlined black against the grey stone walls.

She sighed, crossing her arms.

Just like the smarmy bastard to drop her off and leave without a fucking explanation or reason.

Honestly Cait was too damned hungry and hot to give a fuck. She'd gone on less before. Her whole life seemed a whirlwind series of being left and abandoned and forgotten, no rhyme or reason to it. She just got swept up in the current, is all.
She swallowed, throat parched in the blazing heat, and stared up into Danse's hot-ass face. He frowned down at her.

"So."

"So."

Cait sucked in her cigarette. Held it. Studied Danse for a second or two, then blew it out in a long, tired breath.

"Danse, is it?"

"It is, yes. Paladin Danse."

"Okay, sure. So listen bud, I gotta ask you somethin'. I'll help if I can."

"Is Daye really the fucking General of the Minutemen or was he just playin' me like a goddamned fiddle?"

His frowned deepened. "Yes, I believe he is."

"God fucking dammit."

Danse chuckled a little. "I said almost the same thing when he told me. With a little less swearing, perhaps."

"How in tits did he pull that off?"

"You know, I'm not entirely sure myself. He… never went into much detail regarding himself. His past, his training, his experience and the like. Always changed the subject."

"Yer fuckin' tellin' me."

"He was already their General by the time he – by the time I asked him to join my squad. I thought being the leader of the Minutemen, he might prove a valuable asset to the Brotherhood and our expansion efforts here. Access to intel, weapons, soldiers at his command. Knowledge of the surrounding landscape." Danse shrugged, shifting a little uncomfortably. "I didn't realise at the time what the Minutemen were."

Cait smirked. Drama. Always fun.

"Oh. N' what are they?"

"Romantics," he bit. "Starry-eyed idealists. Complacent and oblivious to the perils of the Wasteland. To synths and mutants, among others. And Daye… isn't. I'm not sure how he became General of the Minutemen but what surprises me even more than that is why, despite everything he is and everything he's done, he still associates himself with them."

Cait frowned. "Not sure why he hangs out with you robot pricks either, to be totally honest. No offence."

"None taken. I guess."

"I've seen him do some pretty bad shit, ya know. Think he's got his hands in chems and guns and
raiders and some right back-alley shady shit, right up to the fuckin’ elbows."

So why the fuck he was even remotely associated with the Minutemen or the Brotherhood or anybody with a shred of morality in their irradiated body was entirely beyond her comprehension.

"If I’m correct," Danse went on, "he and Preston brought the Minutemen back from almost nothing."

"Preston?"

"Garvey. Preston Garvey. The man who tails him like a lost dog for reasons beyond my comprehension."

"Kay."

"They built this place up from the ruins of an old fort. Have settlements scattered all throughout the Commonwealth. Soldiers ready at a moment’s notice."

"You don’t sound too happy 'bout that."

"Well, I can’t say I am. The Brotherhood is few in number, but our strength lies in our skills and superior technology. The Minutemen have numbers and area to their advantage."

Cait smirked a little. "So yer scared these goody two-shoes’ll kick ya outta the schoolyard or somethin’?"

Danse shifted and grew even more serious than he normally was. "The Brotherhood has enough on our plates. We don’t need to deal with a sub-standard military façade type of organisation bullying their way onto the scene."

"From what I hear these prudes are tryin’ to help the people of the Commonwealth. Noble goal, don’tcha think?"

Mr. Fuck, PhD in Fuckology, frowned. Again. "The preservation of pre-war technology and information could very well save the human race. I’d say that’s the noblest of goals one could have."

Cait rolled her eyes. She’d heard this fucking tripe before. "So yer tellin’ me it’s tech and old shit over people?"

"I – well, no, I wouldn’t say that –"

"But yer sayin’ that if some poor sod of a wastelander had his paws over some junky computer or somethin’, and you really wanted it, you’d blast his head off and take it from him?"

"Well –"

"Even if he was only gonna sell it for a few caps to feed his family? Or just himself?"

"Well, it depends on the circumstances, of course. If –"

Cait frowned hard. "No circumstance. Just that."

Danse cleared his throat, clearly a little uncomfortable. "The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few. If that piece of technology meant unlocking the secrets of the past, meant we had a chance at saving the human race, then yes. I’d take the shot myself."

Cait crossed her arms. "Well, look around," she said, nodding out to the desolate sand and scrub and
ruins around them. "Maybe we ain't meant to be saved. Ever think of that?"

Danse blinked.

Cait went on. "Maybe it's gotta be like this, ya know. Maybe it's meant ta be. And maybe we fucked it all up an' ended the world 'cause we were stupid, selfish cunts, and this is what we get for it. I say fuck the Old World and all the bastards that killed it. I don't give a flying fuck about them but seems to me tech and robots and shit is what made them fight in the first place. Made them end the world. If you go lookin' for the things we fought over all that time ago, who's ta say it ain't gonna happen all over again? That we ain't gonna just keep killin' each other over bits of metal and plastic and lines of code on a screen? If you kill that wastelander over that old junk, who's ta say yer any better than the fuckups from two hundred years ago who ended the world? So maybe best we can do now is try an' survive in this one. I seen and done some fucked-up shit in me time so I ain't got a decent bone in me body, but I ain't gonna stop the ones who do from givin' a damn and makin' someone else's life a little less fucked-up." Cait shrugged, wiping the sweat beading on her forehead. "I haven't known Daye too long but maybe that's it, ya know. Maybe that's all it is."

Danse shifted again, looking at her sidelong, with new eyes, Cait rather thought. "That's… profoundly deep, Cait. I never really looked at it that way."

Cait wasn't too smart, honestly – not book-smart like Tommy or Piper or maybe even Daye, but she liked to think she had good common sense. Shit like this – like the Great War and the Old World and the End of it all – it was simple, really. Surprised her sometimes how 'smart' folk struggled to comprehend it.

Cait huffed at him. "What? Just cause I swear like a fuckin' sailor on acid don't mean I ain't got a brain, asswipe. I can use it when I wanna."

Danse laughed.

Intense Danse was insanely hot, but Laughing, Carefree Danse was like a port in a fucking radstorm.

His laugh, and his face, and his soft-looking hair was just so… damn. It made her forget all that stupid old shit about wars and the end of the world, and it made something inside Cait squirm a little. In a good way. A very, very good way. Like it did with Daye back at Fort Day Tripper, and even in the vertibird, but… fuck.


Cait smiled back, shifting her weight to her other foot, swaying her hips a little, aware that she smelled like a yao guai left to rot in the sun too long and probably didn't look much better either.

"So. Mr. Danse."

"Yes?"

"Wanna fuck?"

His sexy eyes just about popped out of his sexy head as he nearly choked on his own sexy spit. "I – excuse me?"

"I asked if ya wanna fuck."

"No, I – I heard you, I just –"

"…Cait, I –"

"Come on, throw me a fuckin' bone here," she whined. "I been walking with Nathaniel Tweedlefuck for almost a week now and I haven't gotten any. From him, from anyone. It's been a while. A girl has needs, ya know." She unabashedly checked him out, imagining his chest and his ass and his dick, if she was being totally honest here, and how sweaty they probably were under the metal armour and how that would feel against her own skin, also slicked in sweat but because of the epic fucking they were doing together, maybe at a nice hotel in Goodneighbor or even out in the Wasteland somewhere, acting out their raw carnal desires after that close call with the deathclaw back at the drive-in.

Well. People always did say Cait had an active imagination.

Her smile grew almost predatory as she took half a step closer. "You got a nice face and I bet ya got a pretty nice ass under all that armour. So. I wanna see it. You wanna show me?"

He coughed awkwardly, like a little virgin schoolboy. It was so goddamned hot Cait almost tore off his armour like a feral deathclaw right then and there. "I – I'm sorry, Cait," he choked out, eyeing the slim hand she'd placed on his chestplate. "I have to refuse."

Cait deflated. "Of fuckin' course."

"Brotherhood soldiers are discouraged from forming – relations with outsiders. Even if –"

"Alright, alright, fuck it, Tin Can, I get it," she waved him off. "I been turned down before, I can handle it." She sighed though, gazing at him longingly (and more than a little inappropriately). "Oh well. Thought I'd try, at least. Too bad fer you, though," she smirked, trailing her fingers down his metal chest. "I'm a pretty good fuck."

With that, she turned on her heels, marching off to The Castle.

"If ya change yer mind I'll be inside. Getting' drunk, probably. Come find me. Offer's still open, big guy."

"Uh… right."

"Oh. One more thing," she added, twisting back round to him.

"Yes?"

"Did Daye really blow up Jamaica Plain? Or is he fuckin' with me again?"

Danse looked quite relieved the conversation had been deflected off the subject of his dick. "We did a fly-by of the area about a month ago. As far as I can tell, the town is gone."

"Jesus Christ."

"But Daye is known to… extend the truth. It may be gone, but if he did it? I can only guess."

"Well," Cait practically purred, voice low and sultry. "Guessin' can be fun too, right?" She winked at him and turned round, putting some extra sway into her walk, and thinking she might need to work on her seduction skills a little more.

Nah, fuck it. She'd been bit by the Fuck Bug. She needed dick and she was gonna get it. Soon. Cait
was on a Quest for Cock and nothing was gonna stop her.

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**Part Two: Quest For Cock, Act I**

**And Also In Which Cait Wastes Away in The Most Boring Settlement Of All Time and Meets A New Friend of Daye's Who Actually Doesn't Hate His Guts (Well, Not All The Way, At Least)**

Cait's Quest for Cock went about as well as you'd expect.

Which was not at all.

Two days. Two days now. She'd been squatting in this godforsaken shithole for two fucking days, sick to her stomach with all the morality and goodwill being shoved down her gullet, not one dick or ass or even a fucking titty grab, for fuck's sake. No sign of Daye, either. Asshole might as well have poofed out of existence for all she knew. Not like anyone here would tell her where he was, mind you. 'Oh, he's busy,' or 'he's probably in his private quarters,' or 'I told you I don't care or know, now leave me the fuck alone, Christ.' That last one was Ronnie Shaw, standing guard atop the battlements by one of the artillery guns. Ronnie fucking Shaw. Shows you how desperate Cait was for... well, anything, to go to Shaw asking after Daye.

So remember when Cait said The Castle looked boring and dead?

Well, how fucking wrong she was.

She'd almost fainted from sheer shock when the two guards by the great wooden doors (who, yes, she'd tried to seduce with mixed and concerning results) thrust them open for her and she'd finally laid eyes on the interior.

Diamond City had come to mind at first. Diamond City on excellent fucking steroids, but smaller. Take everything from that fuck-uppity city and condense it down to a quarter of the size and add a dash of altruism and that was The Castle. It was bright, loud, and simply teeming with people from all walks of life. There were shops and stalls and garages and buildings, both ramshackle and new, crushed together, shaded over with wooden walkways linked between roofs and tarps hastily strapped to beams, rusty sheet metal and bricks and stone and planks all jumbled up together to form the most colourful, chaotic mass of structures Cait had ever seen. It gave her a headache just looking at it.

Minutemen soldiers, footmen and colonels and artillery-men and sharpshooters intermingled with shopkeepers and barkeeps and radio techs and scrappers and wastelanders and maybe a robot or two, all bartering and shouting and trading and buying and selling shit and food and armour and weapons, all slithering their way between the endless maze of narrow alleys and pathways. There was an opened-faced garage with six or seven suits of power armour, almost like Danse's but with a motley mix of helmets and body pieces and colourful paint jobs, a couple mechanics tinkering away at them. A great big green copper statue of some pre-war soldier stood at attention by the great gates, and a small, cleared training area peppered with some training dummies and jogging soldiers took up a good chunk of the side yard.

And in the centre of it all there soared over everything a massive wooden tower, at least six or seven stories tall, with a set of stairs wrapped around the outside leading to the top, housing the largest, most complicated radio beacon Cait ever had the misfortune of being massively confused by. It cast its shadow across the courtyard, looming over all, the only landmark visible from anywhere and everywhere inside the great stone walls of the military settlement, and constantly spewing out over
loudspeakers the most boring radio station ever conceived.

And there was a pen in the corner with a few smelly brahmin mooing their displeasure at it all, and Cait couldn't disagree with them. It smelled like smoke and plastic and cooking food and brahmin shit and damp wood, and it was hot as fuck, wedged in between the sweaty commoners and soldiers and two-headed cows.

And for two days Cait had wandered, hopelessly and aimlessly lost, through it all.

At least she'd found herself a chem dealer and a bar. Priorities, right? There was a few, actually: one down by the gates where all the goody-two-shoes soldiers seemed to congregate, one jammed up beside the brahmin pen, and another up top the battlements, at the back beside the gardens, overlooking the ocean from quite an impressive vantage point. Cait didn't feel like getting all chummy with soldiers (unless it was the *kinky* kind of chummy) or breathing in brahmin shit as she drank, so Battlement Pub it was.

It was small. Poorly decorated. Only inhabited by herself, a ghoul, and some shaggy beggar who clearly snuck in the back way and was permanently way too hopped up on Jet but always found a way to smuggle some Psycho in and keep Cait's headaches in check. But the barkeep was sort of decent-looking, the drinks were alright, and it was kind of out of the way, away from the chaotic hubbub below.

So, naturally, Cait instantly made it her base. Almost made her miss Fort Day Tripper, though she didn't miss the Gunners and super mutants and flaming ferals crashing the party.

Anyways. Carl the barkeep was married, Cait would never fuck a ghoul's wrinkly old dick, and even *she* had standards when it came to cleanliness and junkies. The soldiers were always 'on-duty'. The shopkeepers were too busy. The mechanics were too filthy. The settlers were either ugly, married, or filthy. Sometimes all three. Cait almost got one of those gate guards in her pants last night, but he chickened out like a pussy.

She honestly wasn't convinced she wasn't in some sort of dream or some shit. Seriously. She wasn't no whore but she was decent-looking, she thought, and she had a working vagina. Automatically made her way out of the league of half the assholes here. Fuck, she'd even lowered her standards and asked a caravaner, but he gave some half-assed excuse about having to move on soon. She even offered him a handie, which he accepted, but he ran off with the caravan master before he could return the favour.

Fuckin' seriously. What did a girl have to do around here to catch a decent fuck? She'd been hanging around the last two days just wasting time and getting high, waiting for Daye to spontaneously appear and take her away somewhere less mindfucking boring. And avoiding the pretentious stares and looks the soldiers and settlers kept throwing her way as she skulked through the alleys and over the boardwalks. She could almost feel Ronnie Shaw's bat-shit crazy gaze all prickly on the back of her neck wherever she went.

It was like being back in Diamond City except worse 'cause she couldn't do anything illegal for kicks, seeing as nearly everyone in here was part of the fucking biggest congregation of law enforcement in the entire Commonwealth.

She was furious. And horny. And sort of drunk. And out of caps, so she was also hungry as a ravenous deathclaw.

"Motherfuckin' Nathaniel motherfuckin' Daye," she hissed to herself, rummaging through the cupboards in the mess hall – the mess hall clearly meant for Minutemen soldiers, not settlers or
drifters or... whatever the fuck Cait was. Unwilling prisoner to Daye's stupid fucking top-secret plans he seemed to miraculously pull out of his ass? Yeah, that sounded about right.

"Just like that smug fuckin' cocksucker to drop me off in the middle of fuckin' Prude-Ville. Why couldn't it've been Goodneighbor or some shit? *Fuck*. Don't they have *anything* other than two-hundred-year-old canned shit?" she growled, tossing aside some bent cans and boxes of Cram and Salisbury Steak. "Really," she slurried, almost knocking over her stolen bottle of room-temperature Gwinnett, "how can fuckin' *meat* still be good after all this time? Like the fuck's it made of? Wet plastic? Fuckin' probably."

Didn't the Battlement Pub have some gardens beside it? Like where the fuck was all that shit? Mutfruit tasted like old Brahmin ass, but it was fresh, at least, and not some pink sludge with so many preservatives it would take your body half a million years to rot. The shaggy old cunt with the Psycho would probably harass her to buy some tubes, seeing as he kept forgetting Cait had no caps on her.

Whatever. It was better than munching on chalky old Yum-Yum eggs. Shit tasted like an old lady's crusty vag. Maybe she'd just go steal some mutated fruit or something. It was dark out by now, so no one would see her. Hopefully.

Good fucking plan, Cait. You smart son-of-a-bitch.

"Can I help you?"

"*Jesus fuckin' Christ!*" she screeched, just about soaring right out of her fucking skin. In one swift movement, she snatched hold of a frying pan in one hand and a can of Pork N' Beans in the other. She twisted round and lobbed the can at her intruder with all the strength a semi-inebriated person can, striking him square in the chest with a satisfying *tha-unk.*

"Ow, what the – hey, whoa, whoa!" the man said, raising his arms as she took a threatening step toward him holding the pan at the ready, completely prepared to smack this impostor into the fucking dust. "Hey, calm down! I'm not going to shoot you!"

Cait scowled at the gate-crasher like a feral dog, staring him down through narrowed eyes.

It was dark in the mess hall kitchen, being as it was located in the stone passageways of the fort, and there were no windows; the only light coming from the flickering pale yellow of a dying bulb above the sinks. It was dim and dingy and cold, and everything coated in a thin sheen of dampness, but it was enough to see the dude by. It looked like the guy just walked in off the roads after a long-ass journey. His windblown duster was spattered with mud and smudged with grease, and his cargo boots were nearly worn down to the soles. He carried a laser musket strapped to his back, and a small pistol at his side. Cait could see, under his slouched and tattered cowboy hat, a pretty handsome face beset with bright amber eyes and rich chocolate-coloured skin.

He looked like a hero. A good guy. So Cait naturally distrusted him.

"The fuck are you?" she growled.

"I could ask the same thing about you," he said calmly, arms still raised peacefully. His voice was smooth and friendly, not deep, but not feminine. Cait didn't recognise it. Or his face. She hadn't seen him around the settlement, to be sure. Because she'd eyed up every soldier in here. "I'm pretty sure you're not one of the Minutemen," he went on, "or I'd have met you before. And by the way you jumped when I came in, I could *also* take a guess and say you're not allowed in here, and you know that."
He paused a moment, frowning a little at the clutter of cans and boxes and utensils and trash scattered around the mess hall. "You must be Cait, then. Daye told me I might find you here. Well, in a bar, most likely, but when I checked them all and didn't find you, he assumed you'd be harassing the soldiers or raiding the kitchens." He smiled to himself. "Well, he wasn't wrong."

"Did he also tell ya I once killed a man who talked too much by pullin' his eyes out and shovin' them down his throat?"

The dude blinked. "I… uh, no, he didn't."

Cait lowered her guard a little, chewing her lip in half-clouded thought. "Yeah, well… I didn't, actually. I tried to once, but I got grossed out. Just gave the guy a red eye. Think I ended up smashin' his head in, maybe. He was an ass."

The guy clearly didn't know what to make of that. There was a heartbeat or two of silence punctuated only by the cold clicking of the faulty light, then he cleared his throat. "I… think we got off on the wrong foot," he smiled, lowering his arms and offering Cait a hand. "Preston Garvey, Commonwealth Minuteman. Second in Command, you could say, after Daye of course. But he's probably told you all that."

Garvey… the name rang a bell. Ronnie Shaw had said it moments after they'd arrived. Cait had heard it tossed amongst the soldiers in the courtyard, and Carl the barkeep only had good things to say about him.

Sounded like a boring prick, honestly.

"Garvey, eh? You the one Daye's been waitin' on, then? Good. We can fuckin' leave soon. And, by the way, no, he hasn't," she hissed, making this Garvey guy blink in surprise again. "In fact, the motherfucker hasn't so much as poked his ugly nose out the door the whole time I been here. Dropped me off at the gate like a fuckin' cheap whore and left me to fend fer meself. No one's been bothered to tell me where the fuck I am or what the fuck any of you have to do with Daye. I been wandering this fuckin' place in a drunken stupor fer two days now. Ran outta caps. Been sleeping in the fuckin' soldier's bunkhouse. Smells like old food and ass sweat in there. And I'm fuckin' hungry but I ain't gonna eat this fuckin' canned shit any more. Uh… sorry 'bout that, by the way," she murmured, nodding down to the can of Pork N' Beans on the floor. "Been jumped by raiders one too many times. Thought you were gonna try rape me or somethin'. Steal me caps at least."

"Uh… apology accepted," Preston said, still holding out his hand but with a little more reservation than before. "I… understand. I apologise for the treatment – or lack thereof. On behalf of Daye and the Minutemen, of course. I'd like to make up for it, if you'd let me. There's an inn by the gates, and they make a very good grilled radstag sandwich –"

"Do they serve booze?"

"Uh – yes, they do."

"Do you drink?"

"I… drink a little, yes."

"Well," Cait said tossing the frypan onto the stove and assortment of cans and shit with a loud clatter, "you n’ I are gonna get along fuckin' beautifully, Mr. Garvey. I could murder a pint." She reached out and practically tore Preston's arm off with the aggressive shake, and pretty much dragged him off to the inn.
Speaking of, the inn was the one down by the gates that was always swimming with Minutemen soldiers. But, to give credit where credit's due, it was pretty fucking nice in there. It was bright but not too bright, and big but not too big, and the food was hot and not two hundred years old. It was sorta stuffy with all the soldiers getting drunk and taking up oxygen, but hey, at least Cait had some pretty nice asses to stare at. And the hairy beggar wasn't here trying to sell her chems. So yay.

She sat at a shady booth in the back with her new best friend, away from the all the commotion by the bar, shoving a grilled radstag sandwich down her throat and ignoring Preston's semi-disgusted glances her way.

"Uh… Cait, is it?"

"Mhm."

"So. How do you know Daye?"

She shrugged. "Picked me up in the Combat Zone. Asshat came stormin' in with his ugly shotgun. Blasted the place to bits. Killed all the raiders. Fucked up Tommy's theatre. Fatass was not happy 'bout that, let me tell you. Makin' me go along with the guy till things get fixed up, I guess." Cait paused to swallow her mouthful loudly, and then slurp back a few swigs of the barely cold Dirty Wastelander she'd been cradling the last ten minutes. "Where is the dumbshit, anyway?" she pressed. "Daye, I mean. Not that I'm worried 'bout him or anythin'. I'm gonna beat the livin' shit right out of him when I find him."

Preston frowned. "Oh. Daye? He's… I just got finished talking with him. Before I came to find you, of course. He's in his private quarters. I… don't think it wise to disturb him right now. He's busy."

Cait's eyes narrowed as she wiped the beer from her mouth. "With what?"

Preston hesitated. "Well, he did say you knew about it…"

Cait tore off a large mouthful of her sandwich. "Come on man, spit it out," she muffled. "I ain't got all fuckin' night."

He frowned at that but went on. "He's currently looking into the whereabouts of a man named Marowski. He didn't really delve into why, but I agreed to assist him in any way I could. I've got Ronnie asking the rest of the Minutemen and I've made Colonel Marbury send out a broadcast on Radio Freedom to all our soldiers in the field."

Cait laughed. "Marowski, eh? It's because we stole his chems an' blew up his lab."

Preston, to Cait's utter disbelief, simply sighed tiredly. "Well… I can't say I'm surprised, really," he frowned, playing idly with his own Gwinnett stout. "I hoped he'd… I don't know. Got himself out of… that."

"Outta what?"

"Drugs," he shrugged. "Drugs and alcohol. I know he's got it in with raiders and the folks down at Goodneighbor and some… ah, questionable people. Not you, of course," he said, smiling timidly. Yeah fuckin' right.

"The fuck's up with that, anyway?" Cait asked. "I mean, yeah, dude's a right asshole, ain't he? Fuckin' high as a kite most of the time, and inta some real shady shit. So why the fuck is he yer General or fuckin' whatever and what the fuck's he doin' hangin' round with you guys for?"
Preston frowned. "Honestly? The General doesn't come around here much. He never really did. Says he doesn't like being near the ocean for long. Spent enough of his time near it."

"Ha! Well, Boston's the wrong fuckin' place for him, then."

He smiled a little. "That's what I told him."

Cait swallowed again. "And?"

"And, well… to be honest, a lot of the Minutemen don't want him around."

Oh. Well, *that* was totally and utterly unexpected. Not. "Why?"

"The same reasons you said. And he made a lot of people angry a while back."

"Jesus fuck," Cait snickered. "I scared the bejesus out of a soldier guy the other day in the market. Fucker was in my way. Pushed him down. He just shot right back up and guess what? Apologised to *me* for it. This place is right full of pussies. So whatever the fuck Daye did to 'em has to be pretty fuckin' good."

Preston frowned again, hesitating. "Listen," he said a little sadly, just about whispering. Cait had to lean in to hear him over the laughing soldiers at the bar. "One thing you have to know about Daye is that, despite what he does or says, he isn't a bad man. Just… a little misguided. A little lost. I'll be the first to admit he's made some bad choices and done some questionable things. But there's no one who fights harder and fiercer than him."

"Yeah. Seen it first hand. Don't know if that makes him crazy or brave, to be honest."

He smiled wistfully. "Maybe a little of both. He just… focusses that on the wrong things, sometimes. I mean, I've seen him do some incredible things."

"M'kay."

"But I've also seen him… do other things. Kill some people that maybe didn't deserve to die. Associate with less-than-desirables." He hesitated again. "Do you know what The Castle was before the Great War?"

"Does it *look* like I paid attention in history class?" she bit.

No, actually. She didn't. In fact, she never went to school. Most wasteland kids didn't, really. Not like her two-timing fuckwad parents cared enough anyway.

"It was a fort back in its day. Fort Independence. Used to protect the city of Boston from enemy naval attacks. It was also used to store weapons and ammunition. There's tunnels under the ground, running all under our feet," he said, making Cait glance at the wooden floor all around them, wondering if it could hold all this weight. "We call it the Armoury, and that's where we keep all our weapons hidden, just like they used to back when. We lost The Castle to a mirelurk attack years back, and then the Minutemen fell, and…" he shook his head. "Anyways. Daye helped us rebuild from almost nothing. It was only me, you know. Me and the Longs and Mama Murphy and Sturges. But he helped us. In his own way. He helped us take The Castle back, and all our munitions. He –"

"Woah, woah, hold the *fuck* up," Cait slurred, shaking her head. "We talkin' about the same guy?"

"I, uh… yes?"
"Daye? Nathaniel Daye?"
"Yeah…"

"The tall ugly bastard with the fucked-up eye? That Daye?"
"Is there something wrong?"

"Well fuckin' yeah there's somethin' wrong! I once saw him shoot a guy 'cause he looked at him funny. Yer tellin' me he fuckin' built this place?"

"Well, in a sense… yes. He did."

Cait shook her head more vigorously, the bright lights and the alcohol not helping her stay upright well at all. "Okay, hold on, back up. Let me get this straight. Daye. Nathaniel Daye. Did. Something. Not. Selfish?"

Preston frowned, and remained silent. For a second. Then two. Then a whole lot more.

"Or… did he?"

The man looked downright uncomfortable now. One of the soldiers from the bar staggered over and clapped him on the shoulder drunkenly, laughing and going on about something with training that day and something some guy named Matthews did to Jacoren and that was why he was in the can right now. Preston smiled and laughed, then sent the drunk cunt on his merry fucking way.

He turned back to Cait, who'd by now downed the rest of her beer. "It's common knowledge, really, so I don't see why I can't tell you, it's just…" He sighed. "The General… took weapons from the armoury. A lot of weapons, actually, and he sold them."

Big fuckin' surprise, really. Cait was actually sort of bummed. Thought he might've sold a squad of men to slavers or blew up a settlement or something. Not that she believed he could, mind you. Jamaica Plain still stood, goddammit.

"To who?"

Preston shrugged. "To the Railroad. To Goodneighbor. To the Brotherhood. To anyone with a few caps in their pocket. I wouldn't be surprised if there's some raiders and Gunners out there with laser muskets and rifles."

"Yeah, well," Cait shrugged, reaching over and taking a swig of Preston's Gwinnet. "Not surprised, really. He's an asshole. It was bound to happen at some point. You were just stupid enough to let things get there."

He sighed dejectedly, like a scolded little boy. "I know. I just… we all sort of looked up to him, you know? Idolised him even. There he was: a figure coming out of the gunsmoke in our time of need. Our final showdown. He helped us. Built us up. And then he just… just goes and turns on us like that. Arming our enemies, making it difficult for us to do what we do."

He took back his beer, playing with it carelessly, tracing the condensation ring on the table with his finger. "Hm. Almost like a joke, really. A funny joke that only he knew the punchline to. A lot of the Minutemen were furious when they found out. Ronnie almost shot him right then and there. Marbury and Foster wanted to impeach him, strip him of his title and weapons. Banish him. They wanted him out. Still do. But I didn't let them. I reminded them off all the help he'd given us in the past, however… ruthless and violent it was. I might not have agreed with his actions, but he got results."
"Things got done."

"No fuckin' shit, Garvey," Cait laughed, slapping him on the arm. "Things get done around that guy. Jesus, do they ever."

He smiled weakly at her. "That's why he tends to… linger in his quarters. I've seen the looks he gets from the other Minutemen. I know what they think of him. Of course, they thought he'd only joined because of the weapons. Think he helped just long enough to clear this place out and have access to the munitions stored here since it fell. Must've heard stories about all the stuff stockpiled underground."

Cait sobered up a little, staring Preston right in his pretty brown eyes. "And you?" she asked him. "What d'you think?"

"I… I don't know, honestly. Daye can be a very… ah, shady character. Enigmatic. Hard to figure out. I don't know if he only helped just to rob us in the end or if he ever really cared about the people we saved."

Cait held onto his arm again, squeezing it like she was a fucking shrink or something, working through his problems. If Sober Cait ever found out about this… well, Drunk Cait would have some explaining to do, let me tell you. "Honestly bub, probably not," she said. "I haven't known him too long meself, but I haven't really seen much to convince me otherwise. Oh, he's weird as fuck alright, I'll give him that. And…somethin' about him just seems… off, ya know? Like the things he says an' does. The shit he knows. The way he walks, too, and fuck – is it just me or is he one tall bastard?"

Preston laughed. "No, he is, I know. Towers over everyone here. Always has. Has he… told you about his past?"

Cait shrugged. "Not really. I just know he buddies around with that Mac fellow in Goodneighbor and he used to fool around with those Brotherhood pricks and Railroad guys. Before they kicked him out, o' course. And he knows somethin' about EOD or whatever the fuck. Explosives 'n shit."

"Ah. I see. Well, it's not really my place to say, then."

Cait reeled, nearly falling over in her chair. "Say what? Honest-to-fuckin'-goodness, what's with all the fucking secrets? This is like some fuckin' grade-A schoolgirl prattle, I swear. Getting' real tired of it."

Preston chuckled a little. "Well. All heroes have their secret tragic pasts, right?"

Cait actually slipped out of her chair a little at that one. "Ha! Hero? You off yer fuckin' rocker?" she wheezed, clambering back up into her seat. "Daye's no fuckin' hero, Minuteman. He's a swindlin' greasy highbinder if I ever did meet one. He's the bad guy in this story."

Preston's lips thinned. "This story? Let me tell you something about this story," he seethed, pointing an irritated finger down at the table, making Cait blink at his sudden seriousness. "It begins in Concord, maybe a year or so ago. Daye and I met each other at… difficult times in our lives. If it wasn't for him, I'd… I don't know where I'd be right now. Dead, probably. And Daye – I helped him, too, you know. I did what I could for him. I gave him a place to stay, food to eat, an ear to listen. I think we saved each other. I don't care where he came from or what he's done, I only know that if he didn't show up in my life, this place, these people," he said, gesturing to the soldiers and settlers around him "– they wouldn't be here. None of this would. I don't care what Ronnie or Marbury or Foster or anyone says, because they wouldn't be here either. Maybe he was being selfish, I don't know. Maybe he's got some real issues – I know he does, no matter what he says. But
I do know more people have been saved because of him and the things he's done, than the one's he's hurt or killed. A thousand times over."

Preston smiled a little, leaning in like he did before, almost whispering now. "That doesn't sound like a bad guy to me."

Cait shook her head.

Fuck. She had a real talent for getting people to spill their guts (both literally and otherwise).

Maybe she should seriously think about becoming a shrink.

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**Part Three: Quest For Cock, Act II**

In Which Cait Decides It's About High Time To Become A Lesbian

Cait staggered out of the inn, her eighth or ninth Dirty Wastelander clutched tight in her sweaty hands, leaning against the railing for support. She stopped there, a few soldiers brushing their way past her down the steps, all smelling like alcohol and greasy food as they wafted the cool night air around her.

She breathed it in, deep and long, and smiled a little. She always loved the smell of the ocean, the cool salty breeze that drifted in from the depths. Better than the stale, dusty stench still clumping to the aged rubble in the streets.

Daye was mad for hating the sea.

The settlement was nearly empty now, the shops and stalls all closed, and the garage's lights shut off. The radio still played horrible music softly all around, but even that had been left on low volume on repeat. An insect or two pinged off the hazy streetlights, and the near-constant crash of the sea against the shore lent a soft white noise that was almost comforting, in a way. The moon was slim and the stars above shimmered coldly in the vast night sky, only partially obscured by the radiation still clinging to the atmosphere. A few intoxicated soldiers teetered their way through the streets, and that was it. Everyone else was asleep.

She'd drunkenly asked Preston to fuck, just like she did with Danse. Though a little nicer, seeing as Cait felt she might actually break the man's spirit if she were to be so vulgar as before. And of course he'd said no. Took it quite well, actually, laughing it off and offering to escort her back to the barracks and fetch her a glass of water. She told him to fuck off. He laughed again. She punched him. In the arm, of course. Fragile, remember. He laughed (a little less sure of himself) and then took his leave, giving her a decent handful of caps to last until Daye came and got her.

He was a good man, really. Less annoying than Piper, and friendlier than Danse (but not quite as jaw-droppingly fuckable). A little boring, maybe, but hey. Guy was passionate about something other than stories and technology and murder, so he checked off a lot of boxes on her list. Wasn't too hard on the eyes, either.

She stood there in the chill night, alone, like always, and thought about what he'd said. About Daye. About what he did to the Minutemen. How he burned that bridge, just like he did with the Railroad and the Brotherhood of Steel. How he stole from them, lied to them, made them all hate his guts. She wondered why he did that. If it was intentional or not. Because if it was, Cait wasn't sure if he really was just the Commonwealth's biggest asshole or if there were some… underlying issues or something. Preston kinda hinted there might be.
Hey, Cait knew what it was like. Horrible shit happened out in the Wasteland. People died. Starved. Burned. Drowned. Fried up from rads. They were raped and tortured and murdered for nothing more than a flying fancy. Everyone had their own fucked-up childhoods, their own shitty stories and reasons why they were the way they were. Cait included. People burned their bridges and backstabbed all the time. Just…

There was something a little off about it all. Something different with Daye. Something that just… it was like running your hand over the scales of a lizard – all running the same way, smooth, and then – finding one facing the opposite direction. Catching.

A Minuteman still in uniform – an officer, maybe – waltzed by the inn, and Cait probably failed to look and act like she wasn't three sheets to the wind. He passed, and she let out a sigh, taking a clumsy swig of her beer.

She thought about what Preston had said Daye had done for them. How he'd come out of the gunsmoke at their direst hour, like some sort of fucking Grognak or Silver Shroud. How he'd helped them build from the ground up. Set up settlements. Clear out The Castle. Reclaim the Commonwealth for the people. And about what Danse had said – about how Daye was part of them, helping them find tech and shit in order to save humanity from itself. And the Railroad – only some mad motherfucker would join that cult, put themselves on the line for machines and androids like they did. Even if he did royally piss them all off in the end.

It… didn't sound like something a bad guy would do. And Cait was so sure Daye was a bad guy.

And then, as if he was walking right out of her thoughts, Daye himself strode out into the dark streets.

Her heart skipped a beat when she saw him. It was almost like she'd hidden away a few caps, forgotten where they were, and found them again after a time.

Cait knew it was him. It was dark and late and she was drunk as a rad-skunk, but she knew. He was tall and broad-shouldered and walked that certain way, almost with a small limp or some weird shuffle or something, but with a purposeful stride all his own. He didn't have his stupid jacket on, Cait could tell. Or his baseball cap or gas mask or ratty old scarf or medical tape or all the loads and loads of knives and grenades and ammunition and shit. Just plain Daye.

She'd never seen Just Plain Daye. Made her curious, to be honest.

His shadowy figure crossed from one narrow street to another, staying close to the shops, avoiding the few drunkards staggering along in the night. Cait watched him as he went.

Something about him had always been different. He'd always been bigger and taller and louder and smarter and… just more. Even now, his shadowy presence felt greater, felt deeper than the other men in the street, than the dark night air itself. It was mesmerising. Captivating, almost. Just his mere existence demanded a second glance wherever he went.

He stopped, waited for a few soldiers to pass, and then slipped away behind a stall.

He was going to pass right by the radio tower, Cait knew. She'd gotten used to the layout of this place the last couple days.

Cait thought about just leaving the bastard to his creepy skulking ways. Just tossing her beer and crawling on up to the barracks to crash into her smelly cot and get some zzz's before she had to nurse this hangover in the morning.
She thought about it, yeah. For a second. But she'd been thinking about... something else.

"Fuck it."

So, yeah, she tossed her beer to the ground (after downing the last of it for courage, of course), and nearly fell down the steps into the dusty street. She shuffled her way as quietly as she could to the radio tower, intending to cut Daye off before he got there.

The world lurched a little and the flickering streetlights hurt her eyes. She slipped between a couple decrepit shacks, crossed a narrow street, and finally emerged under the dim red safety light of the tower.

She swallowed, waiting, waiting for what felt like an eternity. Maybe... maybe this wasn't such a good idea. Maybe she shouldn't do this. She'd been involved with her contract holders before, and things never went well. Nothing was worse than jilted obsessive lovers in a firefight. It was never good to get too attached. To anyone.

Half a second later Daye appeared from a shady street not five feet from her, and he froze solid when he saw her.

"Cait?" he asked, squinting into the dark. "Cait, is that you?"

Something in Cait's lower stomach warped at the way he said her name, at the way his face, damaged and marked as it was, looked under the watery red light. Made the hair on her arms and the back of her neck tingle and stand on end in a way it hadn't for... much too long. Made her chest twinge with a greedy hunger she knew she had for Danse, but one she'd been pretending not to harbour for Daye.

Daye. The asshole. The ugly motherfucker. The bad guy. The hero.

She wanted him. Contract and logic and Sober Cait be damned.

She smiled a smile that was downright predatory and shuffled towards him.

"Well, hey there, handsome," she slurred, trying her damndest to sound charming and flirty.

He frowned. "Uh, hi, Cait."

"I been missin' you the last couple days," she said, unabashedly eying him up and down like he was a piece of brahmin meat she was buying at the market down the road.

"Have you, now?"

He had on a grey t-shirt, and a pair of dusty jeans, and for once she could see the skin of his arms. Large arms, compared to the other men. She wanted to touch him. So she did.

"Where you been?" she purred, running a coy hand up his arm, the right one, feeling the muscles and scars. A lot of scars. No, not a lot... just one. A big burn scar, twisting his flesh, puckering it in strange places, shiny oddly in the red light. She ran her hand along the length of it, up past his elbow, wanting to feel the end of it, then realising it had no end. It was all one scar, one monstrous marring of his face and his arm and wherever else she couldn't see.

He shivered under her touch. "I've been talking with Preston. Trying to find out where Marowski is holed up. So far I've —"
"You shaved," Cait murmured, staring up at his face now through half-lidded eyes focussing on nothing. "Looks good."

Cait went to touch his jaw, to feel the short, neat stubble there, to trace her fingers along his scar, but he grabbed her wrist before she could.

"Cait. You're drunk."

Her name, again. Sounded so… fucking hot on his lips, in his voice. She could almost imagine what it would sound like, over and over, panted out in breathless moans and groans and…

_Fuck._

"Yeah. A little."

"You smell like a bottle of moonshine, for God's sake."

She shrugged. "Preston's fault."

"Is it, now?"

"Mhmm." Cait trailed the fingers of her free hand down his chest, feeling the muscles beneath. "Hm. How far down d'yer scars go, Nate?"

He frowned at her. "Red, you should… go to bed. Come on. I'll take you back."

Her fingers went further, down the side of his waist, ghosting over his hips, and she hooked them round his belt, smiling lewdly. "How far down?"

"Cait, I –"

With a feral growl, Cait heaved the entirety of her small frame against Daye's much larger one, taking him by surprise, actually, and she swung him round by his belt, hurling him against the rough wood of the radio tower. He slammed his back against it with a dull thud, the impact nearly winding him.

This was taking too long, and not going the way she wanted it. So maybe she needed to be more… _direct._

"You talk too fuckin' much," she growled, fumbling with his belt buckle with one hand, and simultaneously bringing a knee up to press between his legs. Cait could feel him through his jeans against her thigh. It sent a red-hot flush of pure fucking desire through her. _Fuck, yer big,_ she breathed, all sorts of filthy images and scenarios rushing through her mind.

"Cait…" Daye said, and the sound of her name on his lips again nearly drove her off the motherfucking edge.

She forced her other hand free from his grasp and snaked it up into his hair, yanking his head down to her level, crushing her lips against his in a violent, bruising kiss.

He tasted like Lucky Strikes and whiskey and he smelled like leather and _Daye_ and she felt his short stubble rub against her cheek and mouth and it was so fucking intoxicating she nearly passed out. She sucked and pulled at his lips and their teeth crashed together, vicious and needy and then she moaned into it and _fucking fuck almighty_ she wasn't gonna last long when they did it.

"Cait…" he said again, "I… _no._"
It was only then, when Cait paused for a fraction of a second, did she realise that Daye was not kissing her back.

She ignored him. "I want you," she growled, slipping her tongue into his mouth, and pulling violently at the belt that wouldn't fucking unbuckle fast enough. Her boobs were pressed against his chest and she felt how strong he was, how big he was, and all she could picture in that moment was him, and her, just like this, but naked and horizontal. "I want you," she said against his lips again. "I want yer dick and yer ass and yer muscles and yer… whole fuckin' body. You want me too. You can have me."

Despite her viciously tight grip in his hair, he pulled back from her. "Cait, I can't. Just… not right now."

"Yeah you can," she pressed, giving up on the kiss and focussing on the belt with both clumsy hands. "It don't have to mean nothin'. Just fer fun. No strings."

"I… can't."

"Don't even have ta do it again. Just this once."

"Cait." The tone of his voice was demanding, and for the first time, she looked up at his face.

His lips were swollen and red and there was a little spot of blood there from her teeth, most likely, and his hair was messed up and he was breathing hard through his nose and his eyes…

Oh.

They were… sad, almost. Conflicted. She'd never… never seen his eyes like that before.

She paused in her debuckling and frowned up at him. "What?"

He frowned back at her. "I can't. I'm sorry."

Suddenly Cait felt very small and fragile, and it seemed the world was shrinking in around her.

She let go of his belt and staggered a step back. "Is… there somethin' the matter with me, then?" she almost whispered, crossing her arms in a hurt, broken, almost challenging way. "Or is somethin' the matter with you? Somethin' down there not workin' right?"

"Cait –"

"It's Mac, innit?" she hissed. "I fuckin' knew it. Yer gay for him, aren't ya?"

"No, he's – just a friend."

"Yer fuckin' lyin' through yer goddammed teeth, Nate."

"No, I'm not."

"Yeah you fuckin' are!" she just about screamed. "If ye ain't gay fer him then what's the fucking problem?"

Suddenly Daye himself looked very small. "I'm sorry."

And suddenly Cait grew very, very livid. "Fuck you!" she spat, punching him in the chest hard as her drunken self could manage. "Fuck you, Nathaniel Daye! Fuck you and fuck your fuckin' morals!
Where the fuck were they the last fuckin’ – forever?"

"Cait –"

"Yer a fuckin' pussy, ya know that? A fuckin' pussy! And an asshole! Here I am doin' somethin' nice fer ya, ya know, 'cause who the fuck would wanna shag a guy with a face like that? Why – the – fuck –" she raged, the words punctuated by a drunken punch to Daye's chest that he only half-heartedly tried to stop, "are you such – a fuckin' – asshole?!

"Cait!" he bellowed, managing to grab hold of both her wrists in his hands. "Fucking stop it, for fuck's sake!"

"Let go of me!" she shrieked, yanking herself free from his grasp. "Fuck! I thought… I thought…" she ran a hand through her hair and sighed angrily, chest heaving. "I thought you… I dunno. I thought we had somethin' there, Daye. I thought… you wanted me. Maybe. I thought… by the labs… and the vertibird… and I've seen you look at me – I thought – and I just…" she trailed off, not really sure where she was going with this.

He didn't say anything. Just let Cait sit and stagnate in her utterly unbearable drunken embarrassment. It became too much – the anger, and the hurt, and the confusion, and the lust – oh, yes, it was still there, just clouded out by everything else. It became too much.

Cait composed herself as best she could. "Fuck you, Daye. I'll go make someone else happy. I hope you fuckin' drown in your loneliness."

Still, he said nothing, and so she turned from his ugly fucking face and staggered away into the night.

She made sure she was far enough away before she stopped to lean against a shack and put a hand over her face to let out a shuddering, mortified breath.

"Fuckin' men," she seethed.

Things would be a Hell of a lot easier if she had a thing for tits and long hair.

Life wasn't fair.

A/N: So, yeah, I might've been a little obsessed with the settlement building feature in the game and made The Castle into the most seriously fucking awesome settlement of all time.
A/N: Hello again everybody! Long time no see! Only been like, what, a year and a half? Pshh, pocket change.

Anyway life is a bitch and got in the way but here's chapter 8. Hopefully y'all are still with me here.

I have the next chapter with Daye and Cait pretty much done already but I thought this might be the best time to finally introduce another main character - everyone's favourite mercenary! The second half of Team Douchebag (but maybe the slightly more realistic, more melancholy, less bat-shit crazy half).

I don't think this chapter progresses the plot much, or has as much humour, but hey, I can't keep pumping out wicked zingers for you guys, especially after so long.

Forgive me, my writing is probably a bit shit.

Enjoy!

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Part One: In Which the Author Returns from the Dead and Introduces Everyone's Favourite Merc - and Also in Which That Merc is So Fucking Bored and Feels Kinda Sorry for Himself

MacCready was bored.

No no no, not the tepid 'waiting for your food to cook' kind of bored, or the itinerant kind of bored where he'd lose his head in the clouds as he trekked behind Daye on one of his increasingly endless and progressively seedy 'errands'. Nah, it wasn't even the ruminating kind of bored where he'd look up big words like tepid and itinerant and ruminating just so he could write to Duncan in hopes that he'd maybe expand the kid's vocabulary a little.

No. This was the stagnant, immobile kind of bored you get from sitting on your ass – uh, butt too long.

Yeah, well, too long was last week. This was… something else.

Okay, alright, well, maybe it had only been eight days but Jesus – Crust. Jesus Crust it felt like years. Mac had never been a guy to stay in one place for long, always moving, always on the lookout for the next job, the next few caps, the next town over. Wasn't made for squatting down here in the Third Rail like Magnolia, relying on the twice-daily visits of a certain British wanker of a robot to bring him his food and the ever-stimulating conversation that Dogmeat provided. Wasn't meant for springy beds and itchy blankets and atrophied muscles, this sedentary kind of being, this – this – limp, lame existence.

Hm. Sedentary. Good one. He'd have to write that down. Save it for later.

He reached over to the side table to nab his pen, but it ended up slipping through his stiff fingers and skittering across the tiled floor, rolling away under the dresser across the room. And on instinct he stretched out, fumbling to catch it –
"Fu-shi-dammit," he hissed, gasping as a vicious slice of pain rippled through his backside, coiling up his spine and sliding down his thigh, his nerve ends searing through raw flesh as if a white-hot brand had been put to his skin. "Hey! Dogmeat!" he choked, strangled. "Charlie, send Dogmeat in, for Christ's sake!"

MacCready scowled in wicked agony as he struggled to haul himself further up the bed, white-knuckled grip on the bedframe making his thin arms quiver with the effort. Another spasm of pain, and then another, each one nearly worse than the last, a deplorable surge and crest of black-watered misery threatening to utterly drown him.

He paused, once upright enough, and panted, chest heaving with excruciating effort, and then dropped his sweat-slicked forehead against the cool metal bedframe, the anguish like cold hard steel on his tongue.

"Shit. Ah. Shite."

This was getting… out of hand. He should be better by now. He should be up and moving around, out of this room and this bar and this town, out there doing something, anything. With Daye. Probably robbing or conniving, hungover and high. Yet here he was – still – not even able to peel his ass – butt off this wiry bed.

Goddamn raider assho-pricks. Raider pricks.

So it was a somewhat long yet unequivocally embarrassing story that no one but Daye knew, and thank God Mac had some dirt on him too, lest the mad bastard shout it across the rooftops to all of Greater Boston.

Right. Well, those raider pricks on the corner of Binney and Third Street shot him right in the ass. Butt. Butt.

Two shots, two stray submachine shots was all it took, bam-bam, sprinkled across the broken pavement and right into the flesh of Mac's buttocks. Just minding his own business, he was, trying to loot a Nuka-Cola machine or mail bin or something, not even bothering no one. Daye had been there too, off to the side, taking a piss against the brick wall. Raiders just up and opened fire on 'em which, in retrospect, is kinda what raiders do, so that's why Daye had taken point. He was supposed to be watching out for stuff like raiders, but instead had chosen that exact moment to not take point and piss away all the Gwinnet brew he'd downed the night before in Bunker Hill. And also in which he refused to take even an ounce of blame but shifted it over to Mac instead for leaving his back exposed to that seedy fucking alleyway where it would be stupid for raiders not to squat and diddle themselves in.

Not that MacCready was bitter about it or anything.

"Charlie! White-fricking-Chapel Charlie! Let Dogmeat in, I need him!"

And at the time, it felt like the world was curling in on itself, the pain was so incredible. Thought his butt cheeks had been chewed off by a deathclaw. Not the countless concussions he'd earned, not the bloodbug bite that grew infected, not even breaking his arm that one time on the beach could compare to this.

He had screamed bloody murder, clenching his rear end, and fumbled spread-eagle to the ground, skinning his chin and palms, and then he fuck- uh, fricking cried. Yeah. Like a little girl.

The skinned chin was pretty much healed now but his pride and his butt were probably forever fu-
messed up. Daye said it looked like hamburger meat which really wasn't such a bad thing considering Mac never got laid much anymore so who would see? And also he had no idea what hamburger meat was anyway.

Why couldn't he have gotten a badass - hm, cool-looking scar on his arm or something, like Hancock? Or one on his face like Valentine, or even a burn scar like the one Daye had. Not the whole thing, though. Just a small one.

But nah, not poor MacCready. No, he'd be stuck with two little puckered dents on his ass-end for all eternity. No one to even see his struggles. Just his luck.

Ah. Sorry. Butt-end. God, it was so hard sometimes to curb his nasty swearing habit. Especially round Daye, who spat out more curses than normal words.

Hancock was no doctor by a long shot but the ghoul thought those bullets had probably hit a nerve or something, the way Mac's ass still hurt like it did, even with all the stimpaks and Med-X he kept pumping into his veins. Daye, being the right dick he was, rather thought Mac was just being a whiny little pussy. Told him to walk it off.

Hm. Right. Walk it off, like it was just a sprained ankle or headache. Walk it off, like he'd sat on his leg for too long and it had fallen asleep. Walk it off, like Daye very much hadn't after he came out of the Memory Den remembering a life that wasn't his – remembering the way a man with a scar had taken both his wife and his son and the world he knew in a single frozen heartbeat. Walk it off, Daye.

He could be a mean old bastard sometimes. Always dragging him into one predicament or another, meddling around places they shouldn't be with people they shouldn't know. Felt like the guy was constantly hauling him through thick mud, deeper and deeper, further in, wading around aimlessly, knee-deep in fly bites and rotten stench, just waiting for the day when the both of them simply – got too deep and drowned in the sludge. And did he even care?

MacCready had once thought so, for a while. Cared about his wife, about his son, maybe about the world he once fought to save. But time seemed to grind down upon his partner like stone upon glass, blowing sand to the wind, and maybe he cared less with each passing day, with each thing he lost. Or maybe he never did, and Mac just got better at knowing that.

But he could see it, he knew it, it was clear as anything, and everybody else saw it, too. Valentine, Piper, Garvey, Hancock, Deacon, Danse. All of them. One day he'd fail.

You know, Mac, one of these days that mad bastard is gonna wade in too deep and sink, right to the bottom, and he's got you tied by the leg. Are you ready for that?

Guess I'll have to be. But what about you, Hancock? You hold him in your hands like he's some sort of live grenade. You won't let him go. But he's going to blow you apart.

Yeah, well, guess I like the danger.

Worth the risk?

Fuck. I guess we'll see.

And MacCready, whiny little pussy, was too weak to stop him. To walk it off. To say no. To choose others over the caps. To turn around and leave.

To go back to Duncan.
Too weak to stand after eight fucking days of laying around on his ass after only two little bullet holes.

Too weak to save Lucy.

"Charlie! Charlie!" he screeched, jaw tight with mounting fury and shame. "Charlie! What's taking you so long? Open the door, let the dog in! Goddamned robot, malfunctioning piece of shit! Fucking junk, good for nothing – mm."

The tide of pain, like broken crystal, surged upon the shores once more and he bit back his words, hot fury blistering in the back of his throat like vomit, and he shuttered his eyes to the cold hurt inside him. But it was different, this ache that swelled below, an undercurrent of not right that never seemed to truly fade away, perhaps even before the raiders shot him.

He took a deep breath, held it a second, and then let it out through his nose slowly, slowly, eyes still closed. He did it again. And again.

*Breathe, RJ. Just stop and breathe. Like I taught you.*

*I'm – trying. You know, it – it ain't that easy.*

*Sure it is. It's the easiest thing in the world. Now living – that's the hardest.*

It was so… easy sometimes, to get swept back up in his rage. Anger had always followed MacCready like a dark cloud, low and ominous, looming just behind him. Anger at his parents, whoever they were. Anger at the other kids in the dark. Anger at the vault dweller he once knew, who might have taken him away someplace, anyplace. Anger at the Gunners. Anger at Lucy, for loving him, for letting him love her back. For dying. Anger at Duncan for taking so much of his soul. Anger at Daye for – well, for a lot of things, really. But it was mostly anger at himself, because he knew it was all his fault. All of it.

There was a time when he would let it in, let the anger wash over him like a vicious storm, an electrical, pulsating thing, and it was dangerous. Got him into a lot of trouble. Got him almost killed once or twice, too.

It was Lucy that taught him to take a deep breath. To just… stop and breathe, let the cool air into his lungs, and drive away the cloud, for a little while. It worked with his anger, and it worked with his pain. Sometimes the two were one and the same.

Lucy had taught him a lot of things.

He swallowed, shaking his head, and drove her face from his mind. For a little while.

Daye wouldn't – or couldn't – admit fault, even when it clearly rest on his shoulders. It was both his greatest strength and his downfall. Mac knew it would get him killed someday, it was only a matter of time. And him as well, probably.

*You and me, Mac – we're going to do great things.*

*Oh yeah? Like what?*

*Live. Fucking live, right until we can't.*

*You're high.*
Maybe. But I know that. Like two sides of the same coin, wasn't it you said?

Something like that.

Right. Me and you. We need each other. But we won't grow old. Nah, we're too legendary for that.

He knew the man inside out. He was a partner, a best friend, a brother. He was Daye's deadeye. Daye was his vanguard. Daye did the talking, Mac did the killing. Usually. Daye had saved him, picked him up by his duster, brushed him off, and gave him something to live for again. And he liked to think that maybe he'd saved him too, if just a little. They just... clicked. Like the sound his sniper rifle made a breath before he fired it. From the moment Daye quite literally stumbled into his life, he simply slid into place like he'd always been there, always belonged. It had been a long time since MacCready felt that way.

Like a rifle and a scope. Like beer and a hangover. Like Daye and his scars. They just... were.

He knew he'd never get an apology for not taking point when he should have, never hear an I'm sorry. I should've been keeping closer watch. Won't happen again.

But, in the end, he did get carried all the way here, and quite a few worried looks, and a lot of caps and Dogmeat to watch him for a time. And he wasn't too sure, but he thought all the fresh mutfruit and moonshine Whitechapel Charlie kept bringing him had been prepaid by a certain asshole he knew.

Sorry. Butthole.

He smiled. Only a little bit. Because Mac would just take what he could get, he supposed. Take it and move on. He'd always been good at that.

Daye might be a live grenade or a sinking ship or a mad bastard, or he might be the saviour of the New World or a monster from the Old one, yet it didn't really matter. Not to MacCready. He'd walk this earth beside the guy until the day he died. Because – well, it was obvious, wasn't it?

There was no MacCready without Daye.

He sucked in another lungful of air and blew it out. Let the anger go.

Breathe.

Just breathe.

And then someone knocked on the door.

Just a small, quiet rap rap rap, bony knuckles against smooth wood, and then it went quiet. Mac's ears pricked and he froze, utterly solid, heart somehow both stopped and thumping madly beneath his ribs.

The only people who visited him were the Mr. Handy bartender Whitechapel Charlie, Dogmeat, and Hancock, who all were incidentally the only people in the entire Commonwealth who knew where he was at the moment. Charlie only swore at him through the door, Dogmeat scratched it, and Hancock never bothered to knock, he just strode in on him the one time he visited, catching him in the act of struggling to change his trousers.

So who the fuck – frick could this be?
He found out exactly two seconds later.

The door creaked opened and in strode two Triggermen. Mac knew them right away, by their pressed black suits and their bowler hats and the fact that one of them had a tommygun poking out through his duster right at his face.

"Don't move," he said, and they were both remarkably quiet and professional as they stepped into his room and shut the door, palms flat against the wood by the lock in order to muffle the little click.

"Check him," Tommygun Guy almost whispered, and his partner tiptoed over to Mac's bedside.

Well… shit.

He didn't even try to fight. Mac knew when he was bested. He held up his hands as the sidekick frisked him over, checking in all his pockets and hidey-spots (which were very few, considering Mac was wearing goddamned pyjamas).

Check one on the Dumb Shit I Did Today list.

Both men were young, not much older than himself, really, although Sidekick Guy smelled like shampoo and sported a bushy, well-groomed moustache that Mac was (secretly) sort of envious of. He could never pull off facial hair like that. Damn.

"While I'll admit I've been craving a little human interaction lately, I have to say this is a bit much," Mac hissed, giving Tommygun Guy a hard frown.

"Quiet, you."

"What is it this time? What exactly do you guys want? Money? Chems?"

"I said quiet."

"Because I'm dead-ass broke," he said, lowering his voice a little, and hissing as Sidekick Guy pressed his hand a little too hard against his thigh. "It's always something with you Triggermen. Like common thugs you are. Bullies."

"He's clean, boss," the moustached sidekick said, retracting from Mac and his bed.

"Well, no gosh-darn shit I'm clean," he spat, massaging his aching thigh. "I'm in bed and I'm practically naked. Not to mention I'm alone."

"Are you alone?"

"Jesus, are you deaf? I just said I was alone. What, you don't think I'd be out getting pissed at the bar if I could? I got shot in the back-cheeks last week and can hardly sit up without pissing myself. Not the most amicable of company right now so yeah, I am alone."

Mac had been jumped by muggers and scavs before, even Gunners and Triggermen, he could admit, this was nothing new. Hanging around in places like Goodneighbor with people like Daye and Hancock had its pros and cons. Pros – good place to find work and lay low. Cons – this.

Far as he knew, these were a couple of rookies, drunk on beer and new power, sneaking around from room to room robbing people's underwear drawers. Annoying, but nothing he'd never dealt with before. Well, not naked and helpless as a baby, but still. No reason to believe they knew anything. Yet.
"Look pal, we ain't here to dicker around with ya, so just tell us what ya know and we'll be on our merry fuckin' way," Tommygun Guy growled in a thick Boston accent, face menacing in the low light of the small room, taking a soft step toward Mac, tommygun still aimed at his head.

"I already told you I don't have money or chems," Mac growled back, side-eyeing Sidekick Guy as he began to rummage through the drawers around the room. "Go rough up that guy in the Rexford if you're so keen on blue-balling some poor kid."

"Well, looky-here," Sidekick Guy sneered, pulling a knife from underneath Mac's scarce collection of clothes from one of the drawers. "Not so clean then, are we?" he mocked, waving the blade in Mac's face.

He growled, more internally than anything. "Fine. There's a 10mm in the closet and a pipe bolt under the bed and like, nine caps in my bag there, maybe a few stimpaks. Just take it. Then get lost. I don't have time for you second-hand thugs today."

Mac knew better than to piddle around with a guy with a knife and another one with a gun aimed at his face, but he'd had enough bullshit for today.

Bullcrap. Ugh.

"Nah, nah see here, it ain't money or drugs we're after," Tommygun Guy crooned, lighting himself a big fat cigar. "Although, you can bet we know all about your dirty dealings, MacCready."

Oh Hell.

They knew his name.

They were more than common stickups, then.

Fuck. Frick.

What did they know? Was it the dead drop at Echo? The relay tower raid? It couldn't have been Oberland, they'd sold the last of the Jet to one of the downtown raiders already.

Shit.

Tread lightly now, Mac.

"So? It ain't exactly a secret I deal in chems and stuff sometimes."

"Sometimes, eh."

"You're starting to sound like a broken record, you know."

"Watch it, kid, or —"

"So it's drugs, then? Look, you clearly don't know how chem dealing works, do you? You're an idiot if you think I have any chems on me now."

"The Boss might think otherwise."

A stuttered heartbeat passed.

Oh. Oh.
Well, this was bad.

Park Street Station, then. That was a big one.

"What the Hell does old Marowski want now?"

"Info."

"On what?"

"You know."

"Oh, now you're just being coy. Or stupid. Probably stupid."

"I'm startin' to get real impatient now, boy."

"Look, just tell me –"

Tommygun Guy was done chatting, apparently. With a feral growl that cut sharp shapes across his face in the dank light, he pulled back and cracked the butt of his tommygun sharp against Mac's head, sending the world reeling and blossoming stars across his eyes.

"Ow – what – ?"

"Listen here, you little shit," Tommygun Guy snarled, pressing the cold barrel of the gun into Mac's cheek, hard enough that his teeth nearly cut into his mouth. He could smell the gunpowder and soot and anger in the stuffy little room, oozing from the man like oil. "I've had enough of your dancin' around. You know exactly why we're here and you'll tell us exactly what we need to know or I won't hesitate to put a few more holes in ya."

Mac blinked away the daze and blood dripping down into his eyes and shook to rid himself of the absolutely penetrating headache consuming his entire skull like wildfire. Didn't help much.

"You – fucking lunatic," MacCready hissed, finding it more and more difficult to focus on his interrogator's face. "I don't know what the Hell you're talking about."

"You – fucking lunatic," MacCready hissed, finding it more and more difficult to focus on his interrogator's face. "I don't know what the Hell you're talking about."

"Oh yes, you fucking do. Where is he? Where are the chems?"

"Who? The what?"

"The fucking chems, you little jabroni. Seven crates full. From the docks. Where's he hiding them?"

Mac blinked. The docks?

"I don't know what the fuck –"

_Crack!_ Another sharp blow to the side of his head, and this time his teeth really did cut the inside of his mouth.

"Fuck!" he wheezed, clutching his face as he spat out a wet wad of blood onto the bedsheets. Charlie would be pissed. The man slipped out of focus and then back in again, making MacCready's stomach turn.

"Tell me! The crates from the docks. Five days ago. Where Storrow meets Bay Street. Seven fucking crates!"
"You mean," MacCready coughed, spitting out another wad of crimson blood. "You mean – Park Street? The uh – the station raid. Wasn't that much."

"Did I say Park Street? It was Storrow and Bay, by the docks!"

"I don't – know anything about the docks, fuck. I swear."

"I'm done fucking around, you slimy fucking merc. I won't ask again," Tommygun Guy snarled, shoving the barrel right into the crook of MacCready's neck so hard it hurt to swallow. "Where. Are. The motherfucking chems?"

It was then MacCready started to panic a bit. The docks? Seven crates? He didn't think anyone was capable of pulling that off. Unless –

Shit. Daye.

And of course, anything that son of a bitch did automatically meant Mac did, too.

See? The death of him.

Although there was some part of him mildly jealous that he did it all without him.

Mac ground his teeth. "I. Don't. Motherfucking know."

Snap! Blow number three, right to his temple, and the world went dark for a moment, then fizzled back into a hazy sort of half-focus, red with blood and blue with stars. The dresser and the lamp and the chair wavered dangerously to the left, yet the Triggermen leaned more to the right, causing Mac to tilt his head just to see them somewhat properly.

And he could taste blood now, hot on his tongue, and he could smell it, warm and coppery in his nose, and it clouded his vision, made him blink too much, stinging his eyes.

"Let me handle this, boss."

And then Sidekick Guy hauled MacCready up off the bed by the collar, the latter groaning in sharp protest as his ass-wound bloomed in red-hot agony, only vaguely aware or concerned about the knife pressed tight against his throat.

"Look here, kid," he seethed, hot breath damp and reeking in his face, his moustache nearly brushing against his cheek. "I don't wanna kill ya, I really don't – see, I just got this suit cleaned from the last guy I gutted and do you know how long it takes that robot to clean out bloodstains? Too fuckin' long. But I'm gettin' payed to spill your guts. Figuratively or otherwise. Now how far that goes," he flared, pressing the sharp edge of the blade a fraction into the flesh right below Mac's Adam's apple, "is entirely up to you."

"You guys are – fucking insane," MacCready gurgled, blood dripping from his head and his mouth and his neck. "I don't know what fucking chems you're on about."

"Maybe this will jog your memory."

He reached out and plucked Tommygun Guy's fat cigar and, without hesitation, pressed it against MacCready's collarbone.

Mac howled. Well, would have howled, had Tommygun Guy not slapped a hand over his face to keep Whitechapel Charlie or someone from barging in.
The pain was incredible. Mac had been in the way of a few too many laser shots in his time, the plasma almost melting his flesh clean through, but this was so very different and so very wrong. It was fire, in its most basic form. And fire didn't melt, it liquified.

"Trish's chems, you fuckin' dolt!" Sidekick Guy raged, shaking Mac till he rattled his bones. He tossed the cigar aside, all but spent. "Trish's chems on the dock that night! Where Storrow meets Bay! Seven fuckin' crates! Remember now?"

Mac gasped for air, the cigar burn smouldering in his skin. He didn't answer, he couldn't.

"You and that guy you're fuckin' swooped in and took 'em! Killed his client, killed his guys. Killed Trish. It's Nate, ain't it? The Boss ain't too happy with you's! Always was too soft on ya, let you get away with a sack or two here or there, but this time he's pissed. Seven crates. That's the last of the chems he sent out before his whole fuckin' lab blew – what?"

Despite everything, despite the cigar burn and the blows to the head and the knife at his throat, all the blood and burning flesh and threats, Mac bit back a smirk. "Hm. Nothing."

"The fuck's so funny, asshole?"

"Nothing. It's – it's just, why does everyone think me and Daye are sleeping together?"

"Because you are."

"Ha. I'm pretty sure we're not."

"Everyone knows ya are."

"Really? Well, can you tell my asshole that? Because I think it's in denial."

Ha. About to be gutted by his own knife and all he could do was laugh about petty little rumours. Not quite the way he thought he'd go out but hey, life was shit and stupid. And he was pretty sure his brain was bleeding through his nose or something, so what did it matter, really?

"Listen here," the guy seethed, pressing his blade in far enough to actually start hurting now. "Trish is dead. The lab is gone. Boss is pissed. So you best start talkin' or you'll be –"

"Swimming with the fishes?"

It was Hancock.

Glorious fucking Hancock.

Standing in the doorway like some sort of comic book hero from the Old World.

Well, not quite. But close enough.

"What –?"

Quick as silver, the ghoul pulled out a pistol from the inside of his famous red jacket and aimed it at Tommygun Guy, snapping a nice little bullet hole in his neck.

He dropped to the ground like a sack of wet tatos, clutching at his throat as he drowned in his owned blood.

And then shit got real intense and kind of fucked-up because Mac was half-conscious and Hancock
was involved.

But it went a little something like this.

"Fuck!" spat Sidekick Guy, dropping Mac to the floor like – yes, also like a sack of tatos, if you must know – and spun around to face the ghoul intruder. He was fast but Hancock was faster, and the snap! of the second bullet hit the man in the shoulder.

"Fuck!" he screeched again, yet before Hancock could even aim the third shot, the Triggerman slung his blade at the mayor, Mac's blade, a wicked grin spreading like cancer across his face as the dull whump! of the knife found it's mark in the ghoul's chest, almost right to the hilt.

"Ah, shit," Hancock groaned, almost like the blade was a minor inconvenience instead of a potentially life-threatening wound. All the same, it gave Sidekick Guy just enough time to reach out and slap away the gun from his wrinkled ghoul hands, skittering it across the floor and under the bed.

So then they violently leapt upon each other, snarling and swearing and clawing and gouging like a couple of molerats fighting over a scrap of trash. Mac did everything he could to try and stay out of the way, to focus on them, wiping the blood from his eyes and his mouth, and (not – okay fine, definitely) clutching his ass as the old bullet wounds sizzled through his flesh, making his leg spasm and stiffen in cold agony.

It was in one of his throes of anguish that MacCready spotted his pen underneath the dresser, the one he'd dropped there earlier. Biting through the pain and the blood, he stretched out under it and seized it, clutching it in his hands like it was Excalibur itself. He crawled over to the ghoul and the Triggerman, ducking beneath their vicious clawing and grunting, and stabbed down with all the might he could muster, right into the meaty part of Sidekick Guy's arm.

Hancock's arm.

Shit.

"Ouch! What the Hell are you doing, Mac?" the ghoul screamed, prying away the other man's claws from around his neck.

"Oh – sorry! Hancock, I meant it to –"

"I know what you fucking meant to do, you just fucked it up!"

Ouch.

Sidekick Guy throttled and punched and thrashed on the ground with Hancock, seeming to have the upper hand one moment, then giving way a little the next, and Mac just – sat there like a lump of shit on a shoe, trying not to vomit from the throbbing headache blooming across his skull.

But hey, could you really blame the guy? He pretty much suffered and lived through major head trauma. Probably. Maybe.

Damn, it was hard to think straight.

"I – fucking told you assholes not – to dick around – here – any more," Hancock snarled, sharp nails digging into the man's arm and side, making him hiss and curse in agony.

"You – just fucking wait!" he roared back, somehow managing to roll the ghoul over on his back and clamp his hands around his wrists. "When the Boss gets word of – this – he's going to march
right in here and burn your fucking town to the ground."

"Ha! I've half a mind to let you live and tell him he can suck his own dick!"

"Fuck you – ah!"

Hancock hooked up and bit the man's hand with his gnarly yellowed ghoul teeth, making him loosen his grip.

And then –right, now, MacCready would have this fucked-up image seared into his brain and take it right to the grave – the ghoul leaned even further up and bit Sidekick Guy's face off.

Okay, well, technically it wasn't his whole face. Mac had seen that before. He'd seen a jazzed-up super mutant literally pick up a raider in one hand and tear the entire front half of the poor bastard's head off with his front teeth, spitting it out on the sidewalk like it was a bad piece of mutfruit.

This really wasn't that bad. Hancock just tore the guy's nose off. Not even his whole nose, just, maybe three-quarters of it. But MacCready was dazed and half-alive and way too close to the whole ordeal that his brain might've maybe exaggerated the events. But still, Hancock bit the guy's face, and took a chunk of it off, and the guy fucking screamed.

And then suddenly Dogmeat was there, growling and snarling at the screeching, bloodied brawl, claws clicking off the tiled floor, hackles raised and teeth bared.

"What in bloody British accent is goin' on in – bangers 'n mash! Hancock!" It was Whitechapel Charlie, hovering in the doorway, rag and mug in one robotic claw, his shuttered eyes widening in hard disbelief.

"Fuck! Fuck!" Hancock roared.

"You fucking asshole!" Hancock roared.

"Hancock! MacCready! Hancock!" Charlie blubbered.

"Bark! Bark! Bark!" Dogmeat barked. Because he was a dog.

This was all too much for MacCready.

He blacked out hard, hitting his head against the cool tile slicked with blood.

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**Part Two: In Which I Can't Think Up a Good Enough Name for This Second Part, So Just Read the Damn Story, Okay? Fuck.**

MacCready didn't wake up safe in bed. He wasn't changed from his bloodied pyjamas, or wiped clean of his bloodied face, or even removed from the bloodied tile on which he lay.

No. As his piss-poor luck would have it, MacCready woke up eighteen seconds after he passed out.

"Hey. Hey, I think he's waking up."

Mac's eyes fluttered a moment, the usually dim light of the corner lamp too bright right then. He shielded his eyes a little, and Dogmeat whimpered to his side, then began licking his face in fervour.
"Hey, Dogmeat, give him some room. Dogmeat!" Hancock ordered, making the dog whimper again as he retracted. Mac didn't even bother to wipe the slobber from his face. It hurt too much.

Hancock and Charlie hovered over him, and Dogmeat too, just barely containing the urge to lick him again. All three haloed by the dingy light like some rather disappointing angels from Hell.

"Well, that was a goodie bag full to the tits of fun, wasn't it?"

"Eugh."

"Hey, kid. You alright?"

"Mm. No. It hurts," he managed.

"What hurts?"

"Everything."

The ghoul chuckled to himself. "Well, at least you're not a walking pincushion."

"Oh. Right. Sorry," Mac mumbled, glancing to the pen in his arm and the blade in his chest. He nodded toward the latter. "Doesn't that hurt?"

"Hm? Oh, nah. I'm a ghoul, remember?"

"How could I forget."

"In fact, it might've jump-started my heart a little."

"Well, take it out. It's grossing me out."

"Alright princess, if you insist." Hancock slid the blade from his chest with ease and handed it to Charlie. "Here," he said, ignoring the robot's glare of defiance. "Wash it up. Hide it. Same as the tommygun there. Can't have them making their way out there."

"Sure thing, boss," the robot said with only the slightest hint of insouciance tainting his British accent. "But what about the bodies?"

"Same thing."

Charlie's eyes narrowed. This wasn't the first time he'd washed them up and hid them. Wouldn't be the last. "Fine. I'll get right to it."

"Good. Do that, and then me and you are going to have a little chat about what happened here."

"Don't see how this is my fault, boss."

"Oh, you will Charlie, don't you worry."

The Mr. Handy narrowed his eyes even more, if that was possible, then collected the knife and gun and whirred back out the door, dragging the now-dead Sidekick Guy by the foot, a gruesome trail of blood streaking across the tile.

Hancock stood and shut the door.

"Ah, shit."
"What the Hell – heck just happened?"

Hancock helped ease MacCready up to a sitting position as gingerly as he could, Dogmeat not helping in the slightest. "I'm not too sure, Mac. Was sort of hoping you'd tell me."

"Ah, shoot," he hissed, clutching at his head again. The blood was drying and sort of crusty, but still sticky in spots, particularly around his neck. His still-dazed gaze managed to focus on the shiny pool of blood where Sidekick Guy lay only moments before. "Eugh. You bit that guy's face off."

"No, I bit his nose off. Kind of. Anyway who cares? It's done now, and I saved your ass doing it."

"I care. That was fucking gross."

Hancock chuckled a little, tittering at him. "MacCready, I don't think I've ever heard you swear so much in the entire time I've known you."

"Yeah, well, I think I'm dying, so it doesn't matter, does it?"

"You're not dying."

"Says who?"

"Says me. Now come on, let's get you up."

The ghoul eased MacCready to his feet, a little wobbly, a little dizzy still, and set him back down on the bed.

"Here. Just rest."

"I've been resting for a week, Hancock. I'm not getting any better."

"You will."

"You sound like my mom, if I had one."

"Ha! Well, I did, and she made me sit my ass down until I got better."

"I'm done sitting around."

"Look kid, if I have to go put on a dress and beat your ass with a switch, I will. Now sit your ass down."

MacCready gave Hancock a weak glare, but it didn't last long. Sighing, he leaned back against the pillows, pinching the bridge of his nose. Dogmeat leapt up and settled down at the foot of the bed, resting his head on Mac's feet, tail thumping contentedly.

"Damn dog. Where the heck were you when I was being lynched?"

"Outside taking a piss, Charlie told me."

"Where the heck was Charlie?"

It was Hancock's turn to sigh. He pulled up a chair from the corner and straddled it backwards, arms resting on the backrest. "Don't know. Damned robot was told to keep an eye out for Triggermen. Seems he's getting a bit rusty. Literally."
Mac cracked an eye at him sideways. "Why?"

"Hm?"

"Why Triggerman? Hancock, what the Hell – heck is going on?"

Hancock scrubbed his face tiredly. For a guy who just shot and wrestled his way out of a holy fuck-up of a mess and was stabbed – twice – and chewed a guy's face off not five minutes ago, he was remarkably unscathed. Probably his quick-healing ghoul flesh. Must've been.

"Trish is dead."

"Yeah, Sidekick Guy said that."

"Sidekick Guy?"

"Faceless Guy now, I reckon."

"Right. So is Eddy Hart."

Mac blinked. "Chuckles?"

"Yeah."

"Damn. Darn."

"And Marowski's lab is gone."

"Gone? What do you mean?"

"Daye blew it up."

Mac sighed again, deep into his bones. He picked at the dried blood on his neck tiredly, still sort of afraid to touch his cigar burn. "Was that the big rumble I heard a couple days ago? Charlie told me it was probably a super mutant suicider or something over by Beantown. Why? You sure it was him?"

"Yeah. Lab is trashed. Flattened. Got a big hole in the side, it's just a smoking pile of rocks. Now I'm not certain, but I can't see anyone else doing that. And no idea. Was hoping you could enlighten me."

Mac shrugged, the motion making him hiss in pain. "I don't even know where his lab is. Was."

"The old fishpacking plant south of here."

"Oh."

"You have any idea why Daye would blow it up? Did he ever say anything to you about it?"

For some reason even beyond him, a tiny shred of irritation flared inside Mac.

"Look, you don't even know it was him, okay? It could've been a raider or the Gunners or somebody."

"Deacon saw him land at The Castle in a vertibird two days ago."

"So?"
"Danse unloaded at least a dozen of those yellow crates and stuffed them underneath in the armoury."

"So? It could've been from any of our dead drops. We had almost half a dozen stashed away in the hospital."

"They flew in from the south, Mac, not the north."

"So?"

"Look, kid, I can tell you're keen on playing the plausible deniability card today for some reason but let me tell you this," the ghoul said, leaning closer. "Daye did this, I know it. I swear to Christ, next time I see that bastard, I'm punching him right in the goddamned face, you hear?"

"Why?"

"Look at you! You were already KO even before these assholes showed up today. Now your ass and your face is like a pile of hamburger meat."

"Thanks."

"Now I don't know why or how or what he plans on doing next, but I can tell you Marowski's got his fingers in deep enough to at least guess it was him, and by extension, you. Those Triggermen would've killed you today if I hadn't stepped in."

"Well shucks, you're my goddamned hero."

"You fucking know it."

"Hancock, look, I appreciate the concern, really, but I don't need you to keep an eye on me or whatever it is you think you're doing. I can handle myself."

The ghoul's eyes thinned. "Oh, really? Cause from where I was standing, it looked like those guys were balls deep in you already."

"I had it under control."

"Ha! You're funny, kid. Hilarious."

"Piss off."

"Alright, so I'll just let the bad guys cut you up next time, is that it? Come on Mac, don't be a little bitch. Admit when you need help. It's not hard."

MacCready seethed to himself, livid and exhausted and embarrassed at everything, but mostly at himself. What a pathetic little radroach he'd been today. Daye seemed to be rubbing off on him – no matter how hard he tried, he just simply couldn't admit it, that Hancock – he was right. He usually was.

"What were you doing here, anyway? Seems mighty convenient you walked in right when you did."

"Mac, Goodneighbor is my town. Built her from the ground up. I'm like Jesus, or Santa Clause. I know when shit's happening."

"Hm." Right. He'd believe that the day he could beat Valentine at poker.
"Why'd you tell Charlie to watch out for Triggermen?" he asked again, his first question still not answered.

The ghoul bit his wrinkly old lip, hesitating.

"Hancock."

"They… paid me a visit, the other day."

"Who?"

"The Triggerman. One. By the name of Snail. Told me about Trish and Chuckles and the chem deal gone wrong. I got the feeling then that Marowksi knew it might be you. Daye and you, I mean."

Mac's brow furrowed, understanding dawning on him slower than usual. "So… wait, you knew about all this? And you didn't bother to warn me?"

"I don't know," he shrugged, "I thought it might be safer for you, to keep you out of the loop."

"To keep me hidden down here like a fucking side-whore, you mean."

"Mac –"

"Dammit Hancock, I could've – I could've gone and found him, warned him Marowksi was on his trail. He probably has no idea! He's – he's probably fucking dead!"

"MacCready, he's not –"

"He's my partner, Hancock! Mine! Don't you dare keep shit like this hidden from me!" he seethed, poking a finger to Hancock's chest, ignoring the wicked headache mounting behind his skull again. "I need to know, and I can deal with it!"

"Look at you, kid!" the ghoul nearly laughed. "What the fuck were you going to do, huh? You can barely stand on your own. What, you thought you were going to march in and save the day like fucking Grognak? Like the Silver Shroud himself? Hate to break it to you, son, but you ain't no superhero."

It looked like the damned ghoul had at least five more arguments tucked away in that withered old head of his, but he never got to wield them.

Mac just – deflated.

"Huh. Yeah," he sighed, rubbing at his blood-crusted face. "Yeah. I know."

It was Hancock's turn to sigh. "Look. Mac. I know about you and your son and – and Lucy," he ventured, wary of what the merc might say.

Mac said nothing, only frowned.

"Daye told me. Only a little. I get it. You're scared of failing the people you love."

Now Mac ground his teeth at that. Not because Hancock was wrong – but because Hancock was right. So right it hurt.
The mayor of Goodneighbor stifled a small chuckle. "Ha. I have no idea why you include Nathaniel fucking Daye under that spectrum but hey, there it is. It's scary, really, how alike you are. Like two sides of the same coin."

"Like holding a live grenade?"

"Like staying on a sinking ship.

Mac smirked a tiny bit too, and Hancock placed a withered hand on his arm. "He'll be fine, Mac. He always is. And you will too."

"Yeah. I know."

Hancock smiled at MacCready in the sad way he so often did, and heaved himself from the chair.

"Well, guess I should be going then. I'll send Charlie back in with some water to clean that gore off your face, and something for the pain. And some food, if you're hungry."

"Okay, sure."

"You want Dogmeat here?"

"Yeah, just leave him," Mac said, patting the dog's now-snoring head. "He's probably dreaming about girl-dogs and chasing radstags."

"Ha, yeah. Probably. Oh. Here's your pen," he smirked, yanking it from his arm and handing it back to the man.

"Uh, thanks. Sorry about that."

"Hey, no worries, kid. Just, next time, maybe aim for the bad guys, alright?"

"Will try. No promises."

Hancock hovered in the doorway, half in, half out, like everything in his life, perhaps.

"Okay. See you around, kid."

_You alright?_

"Yeah, you too, Mr. Mayor."

_No. But I will be."

"Okay, then."

"Hm."

"What?"

"You bit a guy's face off."

..._Thanks. For everything._

Hancock smiled. "Yeah. I guess I did."

_Anytime._
And then he was gone.

Mac knew he wasn't the strongest guy out there. Or the smartest. But he had a good head on his shoulders, and he was trying to do good things. He believed that. And he believed Daye was trying to as well, in his own convoluted ways. He knew there'd come a day when their luck would run out – had to. And he knew there'd be a time where he couldn't save him. Not living their lives the way they did, not with the dangerous, reckless adventures they had. There would come a moment where all of Mac's skills and knowledge and fears would surmount to absolutely nothing in the end, and he would fail. Like he had before, like he had with Lucy.

But there was a... strange sort of peace in the knowing. In acknowledging. And he figured that maybe the challenge everyone had wasn't in the fighting and the failing and the dying – it was in the accepting. In embracing the anger that followed him, and using it for good.

And that wasn't something Lucy had taught him. It was something Daye had.

Hancock was right. He would be fine. Maybe not today. Maybe not tomorrow. But he would be. Someday.

MacCready sighed deep and long, bone-weary and defeated. He gave Dogmeat another pat before settling down into the pillows, fiddling with his pen absentmindedly.

By heck, he'd have one long story to tell Duncan. Should probably leave out the murder and face-eating parts, though. He smiled.

Ha. What was it he had said about being bored?

_A/N_: So, how was that? You guys like my version of MacCready? More of a darker, somber guy than the one in the game, though he still clicks fantastically with my bat-shit crazy player character that I based Daye off of. I mean, he _does_ kill people for a living. Still more moral and reserved that him, but also maybe more... allowing? Hope so. He's going to play a pretty big part later on, of course.

I always got the feeling that both Hancock and Mac were kinda surrounded by this hint of... sadness, almost. Hancock's sadness comes from his regret, and MacCready's from his fear of failure. Of course, Daye has a bit of regret and failure, so he gets along quite swimmingly with these two.

And I think Cait has some sadness about her as well. Maybe a sadness that comes from being so alone.

Anyways thanks for reading, hope you enjoyed it.

Oh also I will slowly get around to replying to reviews from the past year or so. Hang tight.

Peace out motherfuckers.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](http://www.archive.org) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!