The Dance

by I_am_Best

Summary

Death is inescapable, even if you'll never die.

Notes

hahah yes i am determined to make Mustard and Mayo a thing. This is #20, how Wander and Queen Entozoa know each other so well, of Wander's Campfire Stories because I do what I want. feedback is lovely, esp since I just powered through this one.
Only Wander came to the funeral. It was on a planetoid on the very edge of the galaxy, far enough from every star that the night sky -- the only sky this place ever knew -- was mostly void.

It was a quiet place.

The sandwich, for all his evil, felt he owed it to the queen's remains to see her off properly. A thousand years tended to make one sentimental. Wander seemed to feel the same way.

He watched as the little nomad knelt next to Entozoa's body, which the sandwich had had stuffed to better resemble her original shape than the flappy suit of skin he'd left her as. She was dressed in midnight blue velvet studded with gems to make up for the lack of stars. Wander was wearing the blue bow-tie he'd worn at her final party.

"I was expectin' more people," he said, not looking up from her still figure.

"She didn't have much in the way of friends or family, Wander."

Wander glanced up. He supposed he was one of the few people Entozoa might have considered either of those things. He'd been surprised at the first letter he'd received from her, decades after they drifted apart, shortly following his leap up the Galaxy's Most Wanted list. It had been nice, though. It was less nice and more confusing to be talking to the person formerly known as Entozoa with Entozoa's body laid out between them. Wander couldn't deny being a little hurt that, in all their time they knew each other, Entozoa had been some eldritch entity wearing a person and hadn't thought to tell him, but he knew immortality wasn't something you told just anyone about, even your closest friend. It was a private burden to bear.

"Was she lonely?" Wander asked. "Y'know, before the end. Or was it just you in there and she'd never been at all?"

"She wasn't lonely. She got to dance. And you know how she loved to dance."

They were both silent, eyes on Entozoa, before the sandwich spoke again, hesitantly. "I -- she -- we were so happy when you agreed to come to the party. And not just because we were thinking of possessing you. She knew it was going to be the last time she could talk to you--" The sandwich cut himself off, unwilling to reveal what might have been, then tried again. "Entozoa spent hours getting ready. She wanted to look perfect."

Wander smiled at the image that brought to mind. He could easily remember Entozoa's opulent dressing room, despite the years that had passed, where he'd drape across her vanity and watch her put on her make-up. Handing her small jars and applicators, picking out her jewelry for her and helping her put it on. His own fur always carried the faint mineral glimmer of powders and her musky perfume for the rest of the day.

The sandwich sighed. "Then she saw you, looking exactly the same while she was just some husk of a person painted up with shaky hands.... We felt so silly. But you were as pleased as ever to see us, like she hadn't aged a day or done any of those things you held against us."

"There ain't no point holdin' grudges," Wander said offhandedly. He suspected, hearing the sandwich talk of Entozoa, that not all of her had died the night of the party. He hoped not, at least. If he had known that had been the last night they'd ever have, he would have done things differently. "And I was real happy to see her. Even if we'd gone our separate ways, I still cared.
"You made her feel young again, my dear. Whatever you thought about us, you made an old lady happy. She appreciated it."

Wander nodded, accepting the reassurances. She'd told everyone but him that she was dying. She'd let him think it was just for fun, and he thought he'd been in on the joke, but there hadn't been a punchline. Just her death. In all the excitement that followed, Wander hadn't even realized, not until the message went out about the funeral. His small, soft hands came to rest on Entozoa's gnarled, twisted ones. "I know in my head you're not in there, Entozoa, and I don't know how much you ever were, but if you can hear me, you were beautiful as the day I met ya, and I was honored t' dance with you again."

The sandwich watched Wander pay further respects in silence, recognizing he was no longer a part of what was happening before him. Perhaps even Entozoa wasn't, either, and Wander was mourning something a creature like the sandwich could never understand.

Wander had moved on long before Entozoa had died, and come back with a name, a new friend, a new life. Entozoa had moved on, until she'd gotten nostalgic in her twilight hours. It was time for the sandwich to move on, now, too.

The sandwich turned away, heading back to his ship. He would leave Entozoa on this dark, cold planetoid. Her body would remain, untouched by weathering or starlight, as a memorial to her thousand year reign.

"Hey, uh! Entozoa!" Wander called out. The sandwich stopped moving, letting him catch up. Wander came to a stop in front of him and took his hat off to twist it nervously in his hands. He took a moment to compose his words. "I'm not sorry 'bout Hater, but I am sorry."

"You don't have to call me that anymore," the sandwich said instead of accepting or refusing the apology. What was done was done, and like Wander had said, there was no point holding grudges.

"What should I call ya, then?"

"You'll find out when you see me on the leaderboard. Goodbye, Wander."

"Oh," Wander said flatly at the blatant dismissal. "Goodbye."

The sandwich left Wander to his dead queen and silence.
Sourdough saw Wander's reflection first, walking toward him from the interior of the ship. The sandwich had been staring out across the starry expanses of space, contemplating a long, long, long life. None of the Beefeaters stationed made any move to attack Wander as he approached the window and laid a hand on it, wide eyes eerily reflective as he seemed to count the stars.

"It's so different," he said, finally.

"But you're not."

Wander turned to Sourdough, and he did look exactly the same, if a little sadder. Same hat, same fur, same shoes. Tellingly, the color of his socks had changed to black, red, and yellow. He managed a small smile as he said, "Same to you."

It was a lie, Sourdough knew. He was stale and had some spots of mold. Wander often lied without consideration of the consequences, but he never lied maliciously. Sourdough appreciated the effort.

Wander's gaze shifted back to the whorls of stars, as though drawn by a magnet, searching for something out in that twinkling blackness.

Without prompting, the Beefeater holding Sourdough approached and lowered him to Wander's height. "You're not with Hater."

"No. It's a big galaxy out there, but you know Hatey -- he's got a big personality. Bigger 'n this galaxy. 'nd when people started to forget..." Wander trailed off. "He didn't know that's how it works for the likes of us. That's what happens. People forget. People die."

Sourdough bit his rotted salami tongue on everything that wanted to pour out at that. Hater left the galaxy, but Wander hadn't left with him. Wander was here, now. With Sourdough.

"Do you remember when we first met, Wandie?"

The question drew Wander's attention from the window and thoughts of those who'd left him. "Folks call me Sunshine, now. And 'course I do. Your coronation as Queen Entozoa of Intestina III. I can't believe ya just decided t' coronate yourself, and folks went along with it. That planet didn't even have a monarchy," Sunshine said with a giggle.

Sourdough's crusts turned up into a smile at the sound. It made him feel... good, to see Sunshine happy. With a gesture, his Beefeater pulled up an old, degraded video of said coronation. A distinct green and orange blob was bouncing on their heels, practically on the steps to the throne.

"I was quite the rapscallion in the day," he agreed. "But nothing so bad as you, my nameless
space princess." The video advanced through several clips to settle on one with Sunshine in a
green dress and tiara on his hat on Entozoa's arm. Any excuse to dress up. They were dancing. They always danced, when they could.

"You were just so sparkly and fun, I couldn't help but ' wanna meet ya," Sunshine said, a fond
smile on his face as he touched the faint image of Entozoa's wrinkled face. "And I was thinkin'
since you'd already ruled for like nine hundred years, maybe you were like me."

"I'm sorry to have disappointed you," Sourdough said dryly. Entozoa had lasted a very, very long
time, and tenaciously held on even after Sourdough had left her body, but she hadn't lasted
forever. He was sure she was in part to blame for the deep, abiding fondness he felt for Sunshine, though they had never connected like Sunshine had hoped, even before her death. Though he would never admit to it, Sourdough had watched those clips often as Entozoa, and still revisited them on occasion as Sourdough. He never supposed he'd have a chance to try again, especially not compared to Hater, so had forced himself to move on as much as possible. But here Sunshine was. He'd come to Sourdough.

"No! Ya never disappointed me! Ya had a great evil empire."

"But not evil enough to keep your interest." Sourdough paused only a moment before his next
question. Now wasn't the time to be hesitant. Not with time running out. "Why didn't you ever let
me name you?"

The question silenced any more of Sunshine's kind lies. His hands curled over his heart, and he
gathered himself before he answered. "It just didn't feel proper. It wasn't the right time for me to
get one."

"And I wasn't the right person," Sourdough prompted. He needed Sunshine to confirm it.

"No. I'm sorry," Sunshine agreed, then was silent, disappearing again in his lonely, lonely
thoughts. Zbornaks didn't live forever; Sourdough imagined 'Wander' died when Sylvia did,
hundreds of years ago. It had been even longer since Sourdough and Sunshine had spoken. He wondered if that was the real reason Sunshine stayed in this galaxy, because he couldn't move on from her. She had meant so much to him, more than any sort of mortal creature should to someone like them.

And Sunshine was Hater's. Sourdough had gotten nothing but didn't hold it against Sunshine. It wasn't the time for grudges and resentments. Maybe it never was.

Sourdough just hated that he couldn't hug him in times like this. He missed being able to feel, to touch anyone or anything for the past millennium. But especially Sunshine. Another person who understood what it was like to be.... whatever they were. Immortal and old and lonely. Two beings cut from very different cloths, but both fighting against time until time inevitably, always, won.

The Beefeater set Sourdough on the ground and left silently alongside every other guard and
servant. The lights dimmed until only the ambient glow of space poured into the room.

"You should leave now, Sunshine."

Sunshine looked down at Sourdough for a long, long moment, then turned and disappeared into
the darkness of the ship.

Sourdough sighed as he was left entirely alone. The ship's noises gave way to absolute silence as
the Beefeaters powered everything down. They were just tools with the most rudimentary of
intelligence. They wouldn't last without him, out-dated antiques that they were.

From what he remembered of his origins, this was how he started, and it was only fitting this was how he ended. In a cold, empty silence. He was tired. He was a sandwich. There was a point where a person just had to admit defeat.

He could feel himself coming unglued from the matter holding him to this plane. Atom by atom Sourdough was slowly unstitching himself. And with nowhere else to go, he imagined he would crawl pathetically from his sandwichy carcass to simply fade away. The entity that was once Sourdough, once Entozoa, once a hundred other people, closed their barely corporeal eyes as they were forced inch by listless inch from the sandwich. This was it, an ignoble and pointless death, a worm escaping a dead host too late.

Someone gathered the entity into their arms. Warm and full of life that they instinctively hungered for. They wrapped around the body, felt blindly for an entrance.

No. No, wait. The entity forced their eyes open. Sunshine -- Wander -- their unnamed princess -- looked fondly at them. His hat was gone. He must have left to put it somewhere safe, lest there be another incident like the sandwich.

Now that Sunshine saw he had their attention, he cupped their long, serpentine face in his hands.

"What are you doing! If you stay --"

Sunshine bumped his head gently against the entity's. "Then you don't gotta die, and I don't gotta be alone."

"But this isn't just a few years or fifty -- this will be a thousand inescapable years."

"A thousand years together." The Zbornak dying, Hater leaving -- they must have hurt more than Sunshine dared let on. He didn't tell people about any pains, though, kept them bottled up like fireflies in a jar. Slowly suffocating. Even the entity only knew what they knew from indirect means, from the rash choices and stupid decisions caused by that silent hurt. From their own experiences which paled in comparison to Sunshine's. They just couldn't care like he did, except with this.

"I'll kill you when I leave."

Sunshine laughed like that idea was patently absurd, then pressed a kiss to the entity's mouth. The entity couldn't deny the appeal was there -- a real body, a tough one that had been their top pick centuries ago before Sunshine had known what they were, which they had sometimes idly considered trying for again in the intervening years -- and their every nerve was screaming to survive. They would, even if they had to sacrifice Sunshine to do it. Even if they didn't want to. That was simply in their nature, vast and uncaring (they could lie at least half as well as Sunshine) as the universe. It was always about survival, in whatever way you got it. That was how they always found a host. There was always someone desperate to survive.

Unless you were like sad, stupid Sunshine, who didn't care about survival, just about not being alone, whatever the cost.

He gagged and convulsed as the entity slithered into his mouth. A litany of thoughts mingled with the entity’s -- screaming pain and loneliness mixed with happiness and relief. The entity had been so cramped in that sandwich that even Sunshine's small, spasming body felt spacious as they slid further in and coiled inside.

Normally the person they were possessing would pass out by now, overwhelmed by pain and the
entity's stronger mental presence, but Sunshine seemed unable to. His entire body was in revolt, clawing at the window, tears streaking his furry cheeks, spittle dripping as he heaved around the entity still forcing their way into him. Whatever he might want, intellectually, his instinct was just as strong as the entity’s, and nobody was there to save him like he'd saved Hater.

They wanted to knock him out, stop the pain and the fear of such an unnatural, violating thing, but it took time to settle into a new host and gain control of their faculties even when they weren't fighting tooth and nail. All they could do now was comfort Sunshine as he cried, curl around his hurting thoughts to try to quiet the screaming drowning out every happy notion at not being alone. It hurt to hurt him, and it was impossible to believe now they’d ever thought of doing this to Sunshine of their own volition, in their own bid for eternity. If the entity could stop it now, they would, but it was too late.

The agony couldn’t knock him out, but exhaustion did. Eventually. They’d never had a possession drag on to such agonizing lengths. It was a relief when Sunshine went limp and quiet in his own mind.

The ship hummed to life again, and the entity immediately took what control they could to get Sunshine comfortable.

When Sunshine came to, he was in a bed big enough for a dozen of him and had the taste of old lavender in his mouth. His hat sat beside him, looking a little sullen.

He pressed his hands to his head, which felt full of strange thoughts and a new sort of heaviness. All relationships came with pain, he knew, but this was definitely a new kind to Sunshine. There was an itch under his skin, as though something was plucking at his nerve endings like banjo strings.

"I hope you don't regret this," a thought that wasn't his own said.

Sunshine put on his hat then sank into the mound of pillows, eyes half-lidded, a smile on his face. It was hard to tell where he ended and the entity began, all blurred around the edges and intermingled. He thought of Sylvia, and the times they’d curl up around each other, sharing the same breath and space. He hadn't felt that close to anyone since, not even Hater, which brought a new wave of sadness at the reminder of his absence.

"He'll come back," the thought said. "He’s just young. And an idiot."

Sunshine laughed but said nothing. He didn't have to, now.

Gingerly he crawled from the bed and tried to get used to this strange sharing of his limbs. The thought, whatever he’d call the entity now, made no move to control him, only help a little with his coordination. He stumbled around the room until he came across an old hologramophone. There was no better way to learn to share than the give-and-take of a waltz.

A waltz.... He supposed it was time for a new name. A new person. He felt the entity coil, pleased, around the name that had come to mind. It had finally gotten to name him, like Hater had done. Like Sylvia. This was their name now.

Waltz put on a record and flipped the switch. Soon old, wordless music filtered into the room. It reminded both of them of ballrooms that centuries had worn to dust. He spun and dipped with an invisible partner.

They danced. Together.
hey, thanks for making it through my weirdo rarepair fic. Sorry I killed basically everyone and every ship, but I hope you enjoyed the somewhat strange turn this last chapter took. Feedback of all kinds is great.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!