Panacea for the Poison

by Lassroyale

Summary

There’s darkness in Charles, poison in his veins that will consume him entirely…but what can soothe the ache is exactly what Charles won’t allow himself to have.

’In my mind I hold the passion, panacea for the poison

My bruised and battered body washes up upon the shore

Send fleas from leaking wounds like rats from sinking ships
As I float off to forever with these words upon my lips.

No I never asked for nothing and that’s just what I got
As my pride does before I do as I follow muscle code
I wasted many days chasing brightly gleaming streams
As I fold into your presence, do I now know what it means.’

- Flobots

-VVV-
The feeling comes like a tug on the hand, gentle at first; just a small nudge of intuition that skips over his palm and skims the delicate skin of his inner wrist. The feeling doesn’t stay gentle for long; it quickly intensifies, branching through his system like miasma. It makes Charles feverish with adrenaline, the muscles in his shoulders pulling taut as a frissure of warning races down his spine.

He feels something uncoil itself from the tightly woven knot of his control, the edges fraying imperceptibly as it slips through the empty spaces that pull heavily within him.

Nothing changes in his expression, though when Charles quickly lifts his head the Klokateers nearest to him are suddenly on alert. Next to him, his assistant stands a little straighter and Charles imagines that the man is looking intently at him from beneath the hood, searching his face for any indication of what’s wrong. Charles gives him nothing, his features schooled into an expression of the absolute sang-froid that makes him, the Dethklok CFO, infamous – and terrifying.

Inwardly, he seethes. Something is wrong with the boys; with his boys.

“Something’s wrong,” he says sharply. “Give me a headcount on the band.”

A Klokateer hastens to comply and less than a minute later, Charles has his answer. “They are all on the premises, m’lord. Not one of them has left Mordhaus.”

Charles allows a frown to touch his features, the corners of his mouth briefly pulling downwards. He stands abruptly and heads to the door, steps brisk. “Stay here,” he orders his assistant, without turning. “Notify me if, ah, if anything drastic happens.”

His assistant snaps out an immediate affirmation and Charles is out the door a second later. The feeling of something wrong, of something unbalanced, becomes an ache in his chest with clearly defined, sharp edges.

-PVVV-

Pickles comes staggering around a corner so quickly as Charles is on his way to the rec room, that had the drummer not appeared to be so utterly drunk and high, Charles might have guessed that he’d been waiting for him. Even so, Charles maintains a healthy dose of suspicion; for all of his inebriated babble, there’s a kind of slippery cunning to Pickles that most people miss. Even when his eyes are fever-bright in drugged induced madness, there’s a certain intelligence in them that Charles learned early on not to underestimate.

“Hey dere, Ahffdensen!” slurs Pickles in greeting. Charles stops short as Pickles careens into the nearest wall and sort of lets himself slide down it until the drummer’s looking up at him with an almost surprised expression on his face. “Dood, how’d ya get so tall?” Pickles bursts into a fit of giggles; Charles withholds a sigh.

He studies Pickle’s face for a moment and notes that aside from the faint sheen of sweat on his forehead, his color is good. Nonetheless, he makes a mental note to have one of the medical Klokateers check in on him, later. “Hello Pickles,” replies Charles in greeting, once the drummer’s giggles die down a bit. “I see that you’re ah, well, partying pretty hard there.”

To that, Pickles grins toothily and holds up his bottle of vodka in confirmation. “Yeah, sahrry,” he
“Well that’s really all relative now,” says Charles matter-of-factly, taking a small step to the right as Pickles makes a wide, drunken gesture with the bottle and spills a good deal of vodka onto the floor near his feet. “You were supposed to quit all together, but as that doesn’t seem to be happening – nor had I really counted on it, anyway – as long as you refrain from ah, from vomiting into anything electrical, I think we’ll be okay.” At Pickles’ bleary look Charles clarifies, adding, “We lost about four Klokateers last time we had to clean your vomit from out of the hot water heater.”

“Oh,” says Pickles. “Well hey, dood, since yer here ya wanna drink with me?” He pats a wet spot of carpet next to him in invitation. Charles shakes his head. Pickles shrugs. “More fer me!” exclaims the drummer with a slack-mouthed smile.

“Right. Well if you could, please try to pass out in your own room. It makes the Klokateers uncomfortable when they find you unconscious in the hallways. The last Gear who found you like that committed seppuku because he thought you’d overdosed on his watch.”

“Seppu- huh?” repeats Pickles, his face scrunching up as he tries to wrap his tongue around the word. Eventually, he just takes a long pull off of the bottle and somehow manages to push himself to his feet. “Dunno what seppuke-oo is, but ah’ll do my best dere Chief.”

“That’d be great, Pickles.” Charles watches the redhead carefully as he staggers down the hall, more or less in the direction of his room. He starts to turn away when Pickles pauses and leans back towards him, lowering his voice and speaking in the loud tones of a drunk who thinks they’re whispering.

“Oh hey, Ahffdensen,” Pickles all but shouts, in the poorest example of en sotto voce that Charles has ever heard. “I almost forgot ta tell ya - I think Nat’an was lookin’ fer ya earlier.”

That gives Charles pause, for loathe as he is to admit it, he can’t help but feel a tightening in his chest whenever he thinks about Dethklok’s lead singer. His fingers twitch just once; the need to touch is sometimes overwhelming. And Charles never touches – he doesn’t allow himself.

The feeling of something off, of something implicitly wrong, grows sharper as he forces aside his emotions and snaps his logical mind into place. “Thank you Pickles,” says Charles, with more formality than is necessary.

“Oh an’ Chief?”

“Yes?”

”We all, well, yahnnnow, we all missed ya, but Nat’an…he really missed ya...” Pickles trails off, and for a moment Charles thinks he's dropped the thread of conversation, when he says, “And somethin', somethin' just changed in 'im, when we thought ya were, yahnnnow, hamburger time.”

If Charles had to choose an adjective to accurately describe the expression that spreads across Pickles’ face, he’d choose: “decidedly forlorn”. (He ignores the fact that ‘decidedly forlorn’ is two words, with ‘decidedly’ being an adverb, at that.) The Dethklok CFO successfully manages keep his brow from creasing too deeply, though he tries somewhat less successfully to keep the flicker of concern from crossing his features. He eventually falls back into a comfortable look of grave contemplation that comes easily enough. “I’ll ah, I’ll keep that in mind,” says Charles guardedly,
voice carefully pitched to reflect bland, general interest.

Charles ignores Pickles' fever-bright stare as he takes off brusquely down the hallway, his steps echoing in quick countermeasure to the rabbit-thump of his pulse.

-VVV-

There are many secret niches in Mordhaus, hidden behind panels and bookcases and totally brutal looking suits of armor. There are other places too, secluded areas that the band members can go to escape for a while; places where even the Klokateers are expressly forbidden, unless it's in the case of an extreme emergency.

They are not forbidden to him; Charles goes everywhere. There’s nothing hidden to him, no secrets he doesn’t know about - no secrets that he didn’t have a hand in crafting himself.

He presses a hidden catch beside the statue of a Norse God holding a sharp-looking, bloodstained guitar and steps forward as part of the wall slides open to reveal a dimly corridor. The panel snicks shut as soon as he’s across the threshold and he pauses to let his eyes adjust to the half-light. For a moment, Charles takes comfort in the partial darkness, takes comfort in the familiarity of it – takes comfort in the anonymity of it.

The darkness, after all, is where Charles lives day in and day out. It’s what he knows. It’s where he functions best.

The passageway leads to a medium-sized, circular garden of stone and black roses, dominated in the center by a twisted metal gazebo that rests on an obsidian dais. The inside is furnished simply – a black leather couch situated atop a blood red throw rug – and the roof is open, just a cross hatching of metal beams that twist up to grasp at the air like bony fingers. It’s not to Charles’ taste in the least, but then again, he isn’t the one who designed the area – Nathan is.

And Nathan is standing in the center of the gazebo, back to him, and from what he can tell is just staring down at his feet or maybe something particularly interesting on the ground.

Charles pauses halfway to the gazebo and studies Nathan’s broad back, allowing himself a moment to admire the darkness of the other man’s hair as it spills down his shoulders, as thick and black as tar. Nathan is hunched over, brooding no doubt, and Charles can verily taste the singer’s discontentment in the air. His heart beats a bit faster, a little harder, and he reminds himself why he’s there: to find out what’s wrong and fix it. – Like always. He couldn’t afford to ignore the boys anymore, not after what’d happened last time.

And a part of him he’d worked very hard to kill and bury, knew that he couldn’t afford to ignore Nathan anymore, above all else.

Nathan turns to him just as he mounts the top step of the gazebo, and Charles instantly stills, pinned by the intensity of the glare the giant man sends his way. He rests one hand delicately on the banister and forces his features into a practiced veneer of nonchalance.

“Ah, hello Nathan,” he says in his usual bland, if slightly business-like tone. “Pickles tells me you were looking for me?” Nathan doesn’t respond immediately, which Charles is used to, but the other man does grunt out something a moment later that he can’t understand. “Pardon me?” he
begins to ask, and suddenly there’s an explosion of movement and unexpected pain radiating from the left side of his jaw.

It takes Charles a moment to realize he’s staring up at the stars from on his back. The inside of his mouth feels warm and tastes coppery. Nathan hit him – and hard. The knowledge that the singer was both able to take him by surprise and take him off his feet with a single, powerful punch makes Charles equal parts irritated and proud.

He tenses his stomach muscles and kicks his legs up in one smooth movement, springing to his feet. Charles wipes the back of his hand across his mouth and realizes that in addition to what will likely be a decent bruise in the morning, he has a split bottom lip. He adjusts his glasses and looks coolly at Nathan, who has come down the gazebo steps and is staring at him from a few feet away. “Did you get that out of your system?” he asks. His voice is low, brushed with deadly calm – dangerous.

Nathan is breathing heavily, his chest rising and falling with each noisy inhalation. His shoulders are shaking and the look he gives Charles is a complicated construct of unresolved confusion, anger, and a sort of passion that Charles can feel tear beneath his skin and burn him from the inside out. Nathan’s scowl intensifies, deepening the lines of his face into a craggy mask. His green eyes blaze. For a moment, it seems like he’s not going to answer Charles’ question.

“NO!” Nathan finally yells, his voice like a thunderclap that echoes against the stone. He sounds petulant. He sounds hurt. Charles can hear the waver in Nathan’s tone, the anger fueled by all that’s unresolved between them; the tension that’s spawned by all of the questions that Charles has purposefully left unanswered. He moves closer to the hulking singer, hands spread wide before him in a placating gesture.

“Listen Nathan,” he says, “I know there’s a lot of questions that you probably have for me, and they’re questions that I do intend to answer.” The falsehood lies against Charles’ tongue with terrible ease; his face betrays none of what he’s truly thinking. “I just can’t explain it all right now.” Or ever.

“That’s fucking bullshit,” Nathan grumbles out, and then, without wasting any time, tries to hit Charles again.

This time Charles is ready. He steps nimbly to the side and directs Nathan’s punch away from him, letting the bigger man’s momentum carry him past him. He deals a swift, precise blow between Nathan’s shoulder blades – not hard enough to damage, but it’s enough to get the singer’s attention. He doesn’t want to actually hurt Nathan, after all. “Stop this,” he demands, harshly.

Nathan recovers with more swiftness than Charles would have expected, stumbling forward for a few steps before wheeling around and jabbing a thick finger in his direction. “You always fucking say that!” he mutters darkly. “But you, uh, you like never fucking do it.”

Charles pinches the bridge of his nose and indulges in a deep sigh. “Look, I’m sorry Nathan. But there are things that I can’t tell you boys. It’s for your own safety.”

“Not even me?”

Charles looks up sharply, squinting at giant singer who’s looking back at him with an unguarded, almost pleading expression on his face. He steels his resolve. “No Nathan. Not even you.” Charles lets the words fall from his lips like they’re fragments of broken glass. The pain of his split lip is nothing compared to the vicious, vital ache that winds in his chest. He needs that pain, that gnawing ache that’s grown more profound ever since he returned from the dead.
He needs it to keep him sharp, focused. He needs it to remind him that he can’t ever fuck up again. He needs it because lately, Charles can’t imagine living without the feeling of it sliding through him, a tangible ache that hurts so fucking good. He needs it to keep the darkness inside of him close, contained - poison in his veins to balance the deadness inside.

‘Stay focused on what’s important,’ he thinks to himself.


Shit. Had he really said that aloud? Charles regards Nathan for a long moment, the silence between them so absolute that it’s loud. He considers what he’ll say: ‘Record sales’, ‘the safety of the band’, ‘the security of Mordhaus’, and a million other half-truths come immediately to mind. The real answer though, is complex in its simplicity. The real answer: “You.”

“Me?” asks Nathan. He sounds ridiculously hopeful and Charles wants to ball his hands into fists and berate himself for saying anything at all, mostly because he knows nothing can come of it. He’s not allowed to have what he wants – he can’t have what he wants. He’d resigned himself to that fact years ago. And even if he could…Charles shakes his head to dispel the thought before it even takes root.

He can’t. He just fucking can’t.

“Well, ah, you and the rest of the boys, of course,” he quickly says to cover his slip-up. He tries to ignore Nathan’s crestfallen look, his hope dashed in the space of a few words. He watches helplessly as the other man’s features contort back into hurt anger.

“Y’know, I fucking sometimes wish you’d never came back.”

The words hurt. Charles actually takes a step back before he can help himself, recoiling from Nathan’s cruel admission as if the singer’s words had physically struck him. He draws himself up a little straighter and squares his shoulders. He forces his voice to remain detached as he says, “Well I’m sorry you feel that way, Nathan.” He can hear the coolness in his tone - it’s nothing compared to the wrenching emptiness in his gut. He forces himself to hold Nathan’s gaze. “I’ll ah, I’ll leave you be now.”

Charles turns to walk away, every muscle tense and rigid as he wills his steps to remain calm and measured.

“Hey, wait!”

Charles ignores Nathan’s shout and walks a little quicker.

“I said wait!”

Charles curls his hands into fists. He keeps walking.

“CHARLES WAIT!”

The shout booms through the courtyard and echoes for a few seconds before fading into the shadows. Charles turns finally turns back and narrows his eyes as Nathan comes striding up to him. “What is it?” he asks lowly. His voice is precariously soft.

Nathan looks almost stricken, but Charles can still see the anger lingering in the corners of his
mouth when he opens it to speak. “Uh, I’m sorry,” says Nathan and hangs his head like a chastised schoolchild, hiding his face behind his hair. The gigantic singer takes a step forward into Charles’ personal space. Charles holds his ground. “It’s just, uh,” Nathan says, his voice little more than a gravelly rumble that Charles can feel in his chest, “don’t leave me again.”

Charles can feel a riot of emotion rise in him, something flaring to life despite the deadness inside of him. He dares not hope, but what if - what if? He reaches up towards Nathan, his hand hovering uncertainly in the air, before he awkwardly pats the other man on the shoulder. “I promise not to leave you boys again,” he reassures.

Nathan lifts his eyes and the expression within them is nothing short of well, brutal. “No,” he says severely. “I said: Promise not to leave me, again.”

As Charles looks up at Nathan’s intense face, he knows he can’t promise that. He knows that something could happen to him again – that something could (and likely would) come between them and keep them apart. And Charles knows as he stands there looking at the other man, that he wouldn’t lie to him. “I can’t promise that,” he says quietly. “But,” he curls his fingers tight around Nathan’s shoulder, his words imbued with passionate intensity, “there is nothing that I wouldn’t do for you, to keep you safe.”

Nathan’s eyes widen and Charles glimpses something in their depths that he immediately shuts out. He closes his eyes as Nathan curves a large hand around the back of his neck, his fingers too hot, too heavy, too significant on his skin. He feels the singer lean down towards him, feels his breath catch the moment Nathan presses his forehead gently against his own.

“Brutal,” Nathan breathes, and Charles doesn’t reply, just presses a little closer and sets to memorizing the feel of Nathan’s breath as it puffs warmly against his lips.

(The End.)