

EMPIRE FALL

PROLOGUE

[VOLUME 0]



01. What Now_1

BANDIT

Bandit wakes up. He doesn't know it yet, but it's 6 PM. The usual. Nauseous, he's pretty sure he's about to puke. Flux has a way of doing that to you. Empty cartridges of it litter his poorly furnished shack. He runs to the bathroom. The commotion wakes up the girl who was sleeping in his bed. She quickly puts her clothes on and runs out the door without saying a word.

Bandit hears the front door close behind her, then proceeds to vomit for a couple of minutes.

Sweaty but relieved, he lies down naked on his bathroom floor, a smirk on his face. *I better check my phone.* He stands up, then starts walking towards his nightstand.

One unread message:

"Vera EF

Don't forget rehearsal today at 5:30. Mads and I will be coming straight from work."

"FUCK!" he yells.

I forgot it was Monday. My voice is shot. I'm gonna be so late, too. Mads is gonna give me shit again. And he's gonna be fucking right.

Bandit gets dressed, grabs a can of diet soda, and a stash of cartridges he's gonna try to sell after band practice. He jumps on his old, rusty bike and starts to haul ass. He's gonna be an hour late. Oops.

VERA

Vera wakes up at dawn. She likes to run early in the morning. The pollution in the Slums of Elderise is slightly more bearable then, making it easier to exercise outside. The early morning Slums crowd is also less sketchy than the evening one. The smell is hard to deal with (a distinct mix of piss, shit, rotting trash, and the occasional unclaimed decomposing human body), but she's used to it. After a nice 45-minute circuit, she does her usual Monday weights routine: pull day. Pull-ups, face pulls, rows, and bicep curls. Quick stretch. Shower time.

8.00 AM.

Time to walk to work.

Vera grabs her guitar, her lunch, and leaves. Mads is already waiting for her outside her place. They like to walk to work together.

"-Yo, V! I love this chord progression you sent me on Friday. I worked on it a bunch. I think I made a pretty cool track around it. Wanna hear?"

He texts her the track.

Vera puts her wired headphones in. The music for what would become "*What Now*" starts playing. She nods.

"-Fuck yeah, dude. I love this! That synth line is so catchy. And you read my mind about the post-chorus. That halftime groove is tough."

Mads is legit relieved.

"-Yeah? You dig it? I thought we could start almost like, bedroom pop, then build towards that big breakdown. Seemed pretty cool to me. I'm so glad you like it."

Vera laughs. Mads is always so insecure; he doesn't really know how talented he is.

"-Dude, you crushed it."

He smiles and looks away.

Their morning walks to work remind them of school. A very rare thing in the Slums, being able to go to school. These two did. But now they're here, on their way to a job they don't like while they try to get their band off the ground. They think they've finally found their singer... if he gets his shit together.

As her shift at the factory nears its end, Vera decides to text Bandit to remind him that they're rehearsing

tonight. She and Mads found this abandoned warehouse really close to work, where Empire Fall and a couple of other bands built a makeshift rehearsal space that also serves as a studio. They take turns using it. The gear they keep in there is pretty cheap, but it gets the job done: a drum set, an old guitar cabinet, a microphone, and a small PA system. The most expensive thing they got is probably the monster lock they put on the steel front door to try and deter anyone from breaking in.

3:55 PM. She texts Bandit. No response.

MADS

7.30 AM.

After breakfast, Mads kisses his mom, dad, and sister on the cheek, grabs his worn-out duffle bag with his laptop and drumsticks, then heads out the door. He keeps obsessively replaying the track he's been working on all weekend. Vera sent him a riff he liked, and he worked on it pretty much continuously.

I really hope she likes this.

These days, Mads is trying to stay cool, but inside, he's excited. He knows Bandit might be just the singer they need. He's already driving Mads crazy with his antics, though. If only he could take the intensity down like... 20%.

MEETING BANDIT

Vera and Mads met Bandit about a month ago, after work. B was trying to sell Flux to the workers leaving the factory after their shift, barely trying to hide it. It's okay. Cops rarely come to the Slums anyway. Vera found him amusing.

"-You really don't give a fuck, huh?"

"-What? Or yeah... no... never had any problems, haha. You want some?"

"-Nah, I don't touch that stuff. You shouldn't either. Shit's dangerous."

"-Is it??? Oh no! What am I gonna do!?! I had no idea." While his douche-y sarcasm should have irked her, something about Bandit's demeanor made him quite endearing. He seemed like a kid trying to play the part of a badass. Didn't fool her.

That's when Mads walked out.

"Hey, V, ready to go?"

"-Mads, have you met our new local drug dealer?"

She points toward Bandit. He waves.

"Hey, Mads. I'm Bandit."

"Hi."

"Bandit? What are you, a dog? Hahaha. Sorry, I'm Vera."

"Maybe I am. God knows I ate lots of shit in my time." She laughs out loud. Mads smirks, then quickly gets

worried:

"Damn, man, you really shouldn't be selling this stuff here. The security guards will beat you up if they catch you."

"It's fiiine. Gotta make a living, right?"

"You're telling us. Working here sucks."

The three of them ended up talking for a while. Music came up. Bandit admits he's always wanted to sing; he's been writing tons and tons of stuff on his own. The connection between the three of them felt very natural.

"You should come jam with us," says Vera.

Mads is not sure he approves. But before he can get a word out, Bandit answers.

"Really? I'd love to!"

He came by a couple of days later. Vera and Mads played him some early demos of songs like "*Victim*" and "*Everybody Sucks*."

Bandit started writing on the spot, right there in the rehearsal room, and the chemistry was obvious. Here's a guy who has stuff to say, they thought. He took the tracks home, and came back the next day with all the lyrics finished, asking Mads if they could track them asap. They did that night. Vera and Mads were impressed. They got together every day after that to work on more tunes. A couple of weeks later, the band was officially born. Bandit suggested the

name "*Empire Falls*." Because living in the Slums long enough will definitely turn you into an anarchist.

"I dig it. Maybe it's a tad generic?" says Mads.

Vera has an idea:

"Empire Fall. Drop the S."

Bandit's eyes widen.

"Oh, I like that! It's cleaner. Rolls off the tongue."

"Boom!" goes Mads.

"We have a name. Bandit, you sure you're gonna stay committed? I mean, I love your voice, your lyrics and your drive... I'm just not sure this is something you're gonna be serious about, you know?"

"Dude, I'm telling you, this is my favorite thing to do already. I got so much I wanna say. I'm barely scratching the surface. I'm gonna take it seriously, you'll see."

"Okay." Mads wants to believe him. He's not totally convinced.

BACK TO TODAY

6.30 PM.

At the rehearsal space. Mads is pissed.

"-What's up with this dude, seriously? Already an hour late, no text, no nothing?"

"-I know, M. I agree. Something must have happened. He'll show up."

"-I'm not so sure. I think he inhales too much Flux. What if we get a gig? Is he gonna show up an hour late there too? He's been with us for a month, and he's already pulling that shit. This is not good."

Mads knows he's a little rigid, but that's because he's so driven. He wants to make it out of the Slums at pretty much any cost. And he knows Vera wants it just as bad as him. Now Bandit? It remains to be seen. And what's happening today is definitely a red flag. Another band is showing up to use the room at 10 pm. Every minute counts.

The door cracks open. An out of breath, smiling, acting-like-nothing-is-wrong Bandit.

"Hey, guys! Sorry I'm late. What are we doing today?"
Not even an apology. Mads wants to fucking slap him. Good thing Vera beats him to it.