



07. On A Loop_1

VERA

She started sweating. She read the note again. Maybe this was a bunch of bullshit. Maybe some kid had just decided to play a prank on her. After all, they were all semi-celebrities in the Slums now...

That's when she heard a tap on her window.

It was Rentoth.

She froze for a second. Does he know? Did he write the note?

He tapped again. She gathered her thoughts and walked towards the window to open it.

"What do you want? It's late."

"I know, it's just... I can't really sleep and I don't know who to talk to about it. Wanna come outside and shoot the shit?"

"Sure, but like... Why didn't you just come knock on my door? You know... enter through the front where everyone could see you?"

Rentoth let out a shy grin.

"Yeah... I don't really want them to know what I'm

about to tell you. Also, if they see me knock on your door, they might get the wrong idea, and then..."

Vera shook her head in annoyance.

"Alright, alright, I get it... Coming out now, give me a sec."

She had no clue what he was about to tell her. Was she even safe?

The rest of the crew were still hanging out in the living room, Aksel and Mads cooking up some dumb song with Riker accompanying on acoustic guitar, all singing off key but happy as can be. Roman was passed out drunk on the couch, unbothered by the commotion.

Vera watched them for a second and mimed to Mads that she was going out. He told her to be safe and went back to his terrible singing. She put on Mads' raggedy old coat and stepped out. Rentoth was sitting on the pavement. He stood up to meet her, and they started walking the dingy, deserted streets of the neighborhood.

"Thanks for meeting me, V. I just... do you ever get the feeling that someone is spying on us down here? That maybe the Sworn and Zero are letting us live our lives while keeping an eye on us? And if that's the truth... then why? Why don't they kill us? Why don't they squash the Militia?"

Vera was guarded. Maybe Rentoth was testing her. But he was also making some good points.

"I've been wondering this myself. But to be honest, I've also been trying to focus on moving on with my life and our career, so I'm trying not to let it consume me."

She paused, her eyes wandering into the distance.

"But I do wonder sometimes... never mind."

"Where your brother is?"

She was freaking out inside but working really hard not to show it.

"Yeah, of course. I wonder if he's still alive."

"He is. I know it."

She stopped walking, cut him off, and got in his face.

"What do you mean you know it? Are you holding out on me? Are you still talking to Zero? What is this charade about?"

Rentoth was genuinely taken aback.

"What? No! I'm just trying to be nice, I guess. Sorry, it doesn't suit me! I'm just... someone told me something that genuinely fucked me up today.

Some dude walked up to me and said that my mother wasn't supposed to be killed during the raid on the Authority Council. This guy told me the Sworn agents who were charged with the mission fucked up and somehow ended up killing her.

And I can't shake this vision. But also... why would this guy tell me? How did he find me? Was he Sworn? SRF? Some other fucking faction I don't know about?"

Vera took a step back. It started clicking in her head. Someone was getting to them, one by one. Giving them pieces of a story, who knows if it was the story, but a story nonetheless. Bandit, Rentoth, her. Classic divide and conquer move.

Someone was trying to create dissension within the group. Who? And why?

She of course couldn't tell Rentoth any of this. She told him she was sorry, and that something was definitely going on, between Bandit having his real heritage revealed and now this, but that she really had no clue what specifically.

The truth is, she couldn't trust Rentoth fully just yet. Especially with what she saw on the note she got. There was only one person she trusted enough to tell everything to, and it would have to wait till the morning. It was Mads, and Mads was drunk.

Rentoth and Vera walked a little more, joked around, and after a little bit she went back home. Everyone was fast asleep by that point. She would not get any.

BANDIT

After Bandit and Sophie went home, they started hooking up. But before it got too carnal, Sophie stopped him.

"B... we gotta talk."

"Ugh... do we?"

"Yes. We do." They sat down on her bed.

"I love you, and I can't imagine what you're going through. But... you disappeared on me. And I know your demons are pretty powerful right now. I think maybe we should take a break."

"A break? Really? I thought you said you loved me..."

"You know I do. And I know you love me. But right now, I'm up all night wondering if you're overdosing somewhere or fucking some random girl pretty much every night! I can't live this!"

"But I'm not! I promise I'm not fucking anyone!"

"And the drugs?"

"I never hid my addiction from you or anyone else! What do you want me to say? I get fucked up so I don't crash out!"

"Oh really? Because in my book, you're gonna crash out BECAUSE of your out-of control, giant-sized Flux use! You're out of control, babe! I can't do this to myself."

“Oh so you’re giving up on me too, huh? After everything I just learned?”

“On the contrary. I love you and care about you. Which is why I’m doing this.”

“Fine.”

Bandit stood up and put his jacket on.

“I wish you the best then.”

He turned around and left before she could even say anything else. He walked like he wanted to fight the first person that was gonna look at him wrong. He didn’t have any Flux. He called up one of his new friends, asked him to come pick him up, he was ready to party it up tonight.

“Fuck her and fuck all this shit,” he thought. He felt mean. He wanted friction, action, anything that would let him release his pain. Because Bandit was never meaner than when he got his heart broken. And that had just happened to him twice in a row. His mom, now his girlfriend. He knew his bandmates barely tolerated him these days, too. In his mind, everyone was rejecting him.