

mixed media: flesh, electricity, bone

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by Anonymous

Summary

“Do you think we’re friends in other universes too?”

Notes

experimental fic inspired by [this web weave](#). (and hello to the other six people archiving that post on wayback machine)

shoutout to tumblr user casinoquartet (users? still not sure if its run by one person or multiple people lol) im kissing you directly on the mouth

list of referenced fics in the end notes!

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

In a wooden shack of dubious origins in the middle of nowhere:

You’re hugging your best friend, pressed together close enough that you can feel his heartbeat next to yours. Honesty has left you scraped raw and vulnerable, bleeding out on the dirty, worn down floor and Ash holds you closer, still, like if he squeezes you tight enough he can put back together all the jagged pieces of yourself.

From outside - a rattle and a groan that has you instinctively tensing, breathing shallow until enough time passes and the risk of being jumpscared by a zombie goes back to a level that isn’t

quite zero, because you both know that there's no real escape from them.

You're going to die in your best friend's arms. You know this with the same certainty that you'll never escape the maze in your head.

“*Do you think we're friends in other universes too?*” you mutter into the hollow of his throat. He shifts, nose brushing against your cheek—

and he's close, just a hair's breadth away from your face and you're not sure if he's gonna kiss you or leave you behind again. Maybe those two things aren't mutually exclusive. Maybe you can never have one without the other, because it was always like this with Ash, always pulling and tugging on something that you can't have for yourself.

“I'll see you around,” you breathe out, and the smoke dissipates into the air with it.

He doesn't say anything, still staring at you with dark eyes and a dazed look. Something bitter twists in your stomach, because you thought you'd known him, as familiar as the taste of his mouth or bone crunching beneath your hands, but you still don't *understand*.

He doesn't look back at you. And you—

don't say anything as he rattles the chains wrapped around his arms half-heartedly. There's a foregone conclusion to this trial but you still can't quite picture it. Too many things that could go wrong, too many things that you're leaving up to luck and chance and at the feet of this man, broken and tired and still filled with something that toes the line between arrogance and confidence. You're not sure where he's pulling that up from either.

“I'm gonna go out on a limb here and assume this is about the war crimes,” he mumbles, a grin forming on his face that you can't help but mirror back, half-hysterical, half-resigned.

Maybe the poets were onto something when they talked of cannibalism; is there anything more intimate than swallowing the essence of someone. Neither of you are particularly gentle with each other but you'd crawl right up into the veins of his heart if he'd let you, be the cause and and reason of heart failure as much as you'd want to keep him with you forever. Up until the abyss gives up her dead.

It's second nature to press back into the chill of Ash's hands on your face, first to trust him. His hand drops from your skin—

onto the counter of the bar with a disgruntled glare. You beam at him in return, just to watch him roll his eyes and tilt the lighter above your arm in an unspoken threat. Branky giggles from where he's slumped against Clown, and you're pretty sure he's drunk already or halfway to it.

“Every moment I have to interact with you guys just drives me further to drink,” Ash sighs, pulling out a bottle from under the counter and popping the cap open. He looks you dead in the eye and takes a swig from the bottle.

“That's methanol,” you tell him, still trying not to visibly grimace at the taste of spinach in your mouth.

Clown mildly remarks, “ I think he knows that,” and you laugh when Ash flips him off, a reluctant smile pulling at his face—

as he looks up at you, disbelief and hope and something painfully vulnerable in his eyes. Your knees hurt and your neck aches in a way you know is going to be utter hell in the next few days but you can't bring yourself to regret it for a second.

I'd do so many things for you, you think, and your knees make a clicking noise when you stand up but you still reach forward to help him get out of bed anyway. Ash winces when moving pulls at the healing wound on his shoulder but still doesn't lose the *look* in his eyes, and everything you could say in this moment shrivels up and dies at the face of it.

When you settle back down in front of him with the medical supplies to clean and replace the bandages, he leans forward and presses his fingers to your face. This close, you could easily slide a blade through his ribs and take another life. If you weren't this close, you wouldn't have been able to tell that he was shaking minutely.

You close your eyes and let him trace paths between the freckles on your face, like he's mapping out invisible constellations or lines of attacks on a map. His fingers press down on your cheekbone —

and you bite your lip, tasting blood and dirt and doing your best not to flinch. Ash notices anyway, because of course he does. You'd be surprised if you had any secrets left between the two of you after all this is gone and done with.

He doesn't apologize. You're not expecting him to, but the light tug on your hair feels like apology enough. You press your face into his thigh and pretend you're not relieved, despite everything.

Then he starts speaking to you lowly, with just enough fluctuations in tone that you can't mistake it for the rumbling of static, about how Jaron keeps bringing over new plants for his collection even though he really didn't have the space for anymore and how tedious it was to plaster newspaper on the windows, *I'm never going to get back that fucking deposit, Redd*, and you breathe in time with his pulse. You lift a hand to tangle it together with one of his—

and you can feel the lingering warmth of it even long after he lets go of you. Boosfer takes a long moment to build up the suspense before peering down at the capsules in your hands, and it's the kind of dramatics you can't help but make fun of, wiggling your eyebrows at Ash just to watch him fail at stifling nervous laughter.

You *should* be worried, you think. For a moment you're absurdly glad that you can't speak, because you're not sure what you would've said anyway. Something dumb about whether he likes the jacket you picked out today probably.

(and how do you even tell him this: he's got your heart in his hands. Please keep it safe. Please be careful while swallowing it.)

Congratulations, Boosfer says. A slight glimpse of the surprise on his face is all you can catch before purple takes up your vision and Ash pulls you into a hug, gleeful as anything. You can feel his nails digging into the back of your suit jacket, clinging—

to each other, in a wooden shack in the middle of nowhere, because neither of you had anywhere else to go. In a kinder universe, you'd brew a cup of coffee for Ash, just because you could, because you love him and you don't know how else to say it, because Ash will take it and sit with you without another word, and written into every action was love too.

In this universe you hold onto each other like the world is ending, because it is.

"Well," he mumbles into your skin, tracing patterns at the base of your neck. Constellations, maybe.

You think you've been here before, standing just like this.

"It doesn't seem likely."

End Notes

in order:

[take your time, we've got all night](#) by Anonymous

[hold up just a minute, don't burn me down](#) by Felix_J

[I've got four more hours till my life runs out](#) by Scared_Rodent

[after closing time](#) by cherubium

[if you were a waiting room i would never see the doctor\[...\]](#) by treacherouna

[bleeding out in your bathtub](#) by Anonymous

[hand grips hand](#) by Felix_J and [game theory](#) by Anonymous

(ending segment same as the beginning)

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