

the day that was

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the day that was

by [Macellarius](#)

Summary

Nothing about today is making any sense, but surprisingly it's not the zombies that are the weird part.

It's just Dieter.

Or, Dieter experiences the days that aren't, and Vanderohé experiences the day that was.

Notes

Anyone still here?

Time loop fic with a twist, baby!

Hope you enjoy! :)

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

Chapter 1

Something is up with Dieter.

Vanderohe can't help but notice the tension in Dieter's stance while they're reviewing the plans for the heist the morning of, the way that he's staring down Martin with pure fury. The Dieter he's seeing today is not the Dieter he encountered for the first time yesterday. The one from 24 hours ago was lively, and ignorant in a begrudgingly endearing way, but the one in front of Vanderohe today looks... absolutely exhausted to the core, more rugged and detached. There is no light behind his eyes when he interacts with any of the crew, there is none of his enthusiasm for the Götterdämmerung that he had before. Every time he talks to Vanderohe it's like he's just going through the motions, an actor in a play reciting his lines, which bothers him a lot more than he cares to admit. Not knowing what's going on with Dieter is driving Vanderohe up the fucking wall, because this is *not* a job that anyone can be sloppy on.

He tells Scott and Maria as much in private, wondering about the safecracker, but they're both preoccupied with too many other things, Kate, their obliviousness to each other's feelings, and the fear of imminent death included.

It's up to me, Vanderohe decides.

He pulls Dieter aside to teach him basic combat, how to shoot, hoping to give him a fighting chance, but Dieter surprises him with the ease in which he takes out the makeshift targets. Vanderohe can't help but comment, "Not bad for your first time," hoping to encourage Dieter, but instead, his face crumbles, and he looks entirely defeated. Dieter flicks the safety on and returns the gun to Vanderohe, says under his breath, "Let's call it beginner's luck," then leaves him behind.

Vanderohe is absolutely baffled, but he lets Dieter go anyway, figuring that the full gravity of the situation is starting to hit him. He'll let him sort his own shit out for now, unless it becomes a problem. Either way, Dieter is ready for the bus when it arrives, and that's what matters.

Dieter boards the bus after him, and he can't figure out why it stings when he chooses to sit alone at the front, with his back to Vanderohe.

When they get to the Quarantine zone and the Coyote is introduced by Kate, Vanderohe notices Dieter walk right up to her while everyone else is distracted with suiting up. Vanderohe should honestly be making sure Dieter is equipped too, since he's pretty sure Dieter is about to become his responsibility when they make it through the walls, but he watches from afar instead. The Coyote is obviously on the defensive, but Dieter must say something that gets her to listen, because her eyes widen in alarm. He wishes he was close enough to hear, because he's so intrigued by how her face shifts from surprise, to anger, to confusion, then careful resignation at Dieter's words.

What the fuck is he saying to her?

Either way, once Dieter's done with his spiel, she nods her head skeptically.

And honestly, Vanderohé's pretty fucking pissed off, because he already doesn't trust Martin, but now he's not sure what Dieter has up his sleeve either, and that makes him uneasy, considering that Dieter is the most important member of their team, and they're *all* betting their fucking lives on him succeeding in his role.

When Dieter gets up to him and Chambers, Vanderohé decides to call him out.

"What are you plotting, Dieter?"

"No plotting, Mr. Vanderohé. I would like us all to survive today in one piece, that is all."

That answer doesn't reassure him in the slightest, so he gives Dieter a look that says, *I have my eye on you*, and Scott interjects, "Dieter, try not to piss Van off," Chambers smirking in response.

Dieter doesn't get a chance to respond though, because Vanderohé hears a loud commotion a moment later. The Coyote successfully dodges the punch Kate comes right out of the gate with, Scott pulling Kate back a moment later before she can go in for more. They fight verbally, something about the Coyote smuggling in Kate's friend that had children, then Scott and Kate get into it when she insists on joining the heist. Vanderohé doesn't really care honestly, he already has one person to look out for, but that person is currently being stared down by the Coyote with the most *bewildered* look Vanderohé has ever seen on another person's face. She looks like she's actually seen a fucking ghost, and Dieter is looking back at her with a look that Vanderohé can't decipher. Vanderohé notices that the Coyote shifts her eyes over to a nearby quarantine zone officer heckling some poor people, but Dieter shakes his head *no*, and she nods tersely.

What the fuck is going on?

Dieter turns to Vanderohé with his hand outstretched. Vanderohé stares at his hand for a moment, confused at everything that's happened in the last few minutes, until Dieter fucking reaches into a compartment on Vanderohé's belt containing his favorite knife, because *how the fuck did he know that was there?* He's too shocked to even react to Dieter's close proximity, doesn't make any move to stop him, because Dieter says, "*Auf Wiedersehen*, Mr. Vanderohé, I am dead without this," and then he turns and walks away with his knife.

And Vanderohé feels a rush of déjà vu come over him at Dieter's choice of words.

"He's certainly a character, isn't he," he hears Chambers mutter under her breath, and Vanderohé can't help but agree.

They make it into the storage containers, ready to open the doors, and Vanderohé is about to tell Dieter to get behind him, but Dieter is already moving before the words even leave his mouth, and his brain only hurts worse when Dieter whispers, "Sorry, I almost forgot," like they've done this before.

Nothing about today is making any sense, but surprisingly it's *not* the zombies that are the weird part.

It's just Dieter.

Dieter seems completely unfazed by the fucking *zombie tiger* they see, by the shamblers stuck in a mass of horrifying melted remains, doesn't ask nearly enough questions for someone who's never been in zombie infested Las Vegas before. Vanderohe knows he doesn't actually know Dieter at all, but he feels like the Dieter he met yesterday would be showing *something* on his face other than impassiveness, because this Dieter lacks every bit of charisma that Vanderohe feels like he *should* have.

And then Vanderohe sees the fucking weirdest, most unexplainable thing he's ever witnessed, between Dieter and the alpha female, when she emerges.

When she crouches on the roof of the car, Dieter doesn't even attempt to hide from the zombies, still standing strong. The alpha shrieks, looks at each and every one of them, until finally landing her sights on Dieter. Vanderohe feels his protective side kicking in, and he puts his hand on Dieter's middle to push him back and shield him from her gaze, but Dieter doesn't stand down.

The alpha jumps off the car and stands up straight. It's undeniable that she's looking right into Dieter's fucking *soul* at this point, and everyone else is starting to notice it too. Vanderohe is shocked at how absolutely batshit insane Dieter sounds when he addresses the alpha directly,

"Do we have an understanding?"

But then she *nods*.

What. The. Fuck.

She and the other alpha leave, heading back towards the Olympus. Vanderohe only just manages to hold himself back from knocking some fucking sense into Dieter himself when Martin has attempted to beat him to it, a sucker punch flying through the air towards Dieter's face, but Dieter fucking *dodges it* before Vanderohe realizes what's happening.

Vanderohe may be unsure of Dieter, but he still does *not* trust Martin, and Dieter is *his* fucking responsibility, so he and Scott pull Martin away from Dieter quickly, holding him back while he yells. Vanderohe only just barely catches Dieter whispering to himself, "This hasn't happened this early before," before Martin drowns him out by screaming, "What the fuck are you up to!? What the fuck was that!?"

And Dieter looks capable, in every sense of the word, in a way that Vanderohe has never seen in another person before. It chills him to the bone, to see the contempt and fury behind Dieter's eyes. He stands tall and unwavering when he replies calmly,

"*That* was me securing our futures, Martin. You would be wise to leave me alone, unless you'd like me to expose you for your despicable plan and how quickly you're willing to

dispose of us.”

Martin isn't struggling in their hold as much anymore, shocked by Dieter's words.

“Excuse me? You little-”

“I fucking knew it!” Chambers interrupts, “That fucker is up to something. I don't trust him,” Chambers raises her gun to Martin, Guzman pulling his up too to have her back.

“Don't waste your bullets on him. His time will come.” Dieter says firmly.

“What the fuck are you on about kid? You gonna prophesize the impending flood waters next?” Peters asks sarcastically.

“According to triage, I am the most important, with you in second Peters, but Martin is valuable in his own way. I need him alive,” and Vandrohe swears he sees a flash of something on Peters face when Dieter speaks to her, some form of *déjà vu* or recognition or *something* that Vandrohe has to remember to ask her about later, because he *knows* he's not the only one wondering what the fuck happened to Dieter between yesterday and today.

The Coyote cuts through any opportunities to question Dieter, explains that they need to go inside the buildings now that they've been granted safe passage, and Dieter is the first to start walking. Chambers, Guzman, Lilly, Kate, and Peters follow Dieter, but Vandrohe turns to Scott and Maria still standing still in disbelief, asks them, “*Now* do you fucking believe me that something's up with him?” and they both nod.

“You're really going to listen to that fucking nutcase over me? He's a liability, he'll get you all killed.” Martin sneers at them. Scott and Vandrohe release his arms, and he rotates his shoulders in annoyance.

“You don't touch him. You don't talk to him. Matter of fact, don't even *think* about thinking about him,” Vandrohe grinds out.

And then he punches Martin in the face, because seriously, fuck this guy.

Vandrohe really doesn't get why he feels so protective of Dieter, doesn't understand why he's trusting his words so much, but he knows that everyone else can feel it too, their guts saying to *believe* Dieter, to do what he says. That perhaps Dieter has been privy to some unseen storm about to rain hell upon them, that he's keeping them safe, a proverbial prophet guiding them to salvation, even if Vandrohe doesn't understand it.

Dieter understands it, and that is enough.

The group moves on, Guzman and Chambers pointing out the hibernating shamblers inside first with exclamations of glee. Vandrohe tries to get Dieter to go ahead of him, but he insists that Vandrohe go first. He relents, but before he gets too far, he can hear Dieter saying to Martin behind him, “You go last, *arschloch*,” Chambers snickering too.

When they get to the casino Scott instructs them to split up. Dieter looks towards Martin, and Martin mocks, “What? Your crystal ball didn't tell you what to do next?”

Vanderohe wants to put Martin in his place, but then Dieter pulls out a keycard from his pocket, and judging by Martin's dumbfounded expression and frantic hands grasping at his chest, it must be his own.

Dieter asks him in return, "This should get me inside, yes?" with a smirk on his face.

Vanderohe goes to make his way to the basement with Dieter, Guzman, and Chambers, while the others split up to complete their own tasks, but before they do, Vanderohe sees Dieter pull the Coyote off to the side, whispering in her ear again and her nod in answer.

During the elevator ride Vanderohe gently pushes Dieter behind him on instinct, Guzman taking up the spot next to him, forming a defensive wall upon whatever waits beyond the door. Chambers leans against the opposite side wall, openly eyeing Dieter until Vanderohe sees Dieter turn to stare back at her out of the corner of his eye.

Guzman teases, "Like what you see, Chambers?" motioning his head towards Dieter, and Chambers scoffs at him in response, says, "Haven't decided yet."

"Catching on, aren't you?" Dieter asks wittingly, but Vanderohe doesn't have time to unpack what that comment could possibly mean, because the elevator *dings!*

When the doors open, they make quick work of the zombies inside the basement. Dieter turns and expertly takes out the shambler they all missed on their way in off to his left, then nails the bride directly in the eye, taking her out with one shot.

"Am I zombie-killing material yet, Mr. Vanderohe?"

Dieter looks so confident when he locks eyes with Vanderohe, and he doesn't know how he could be any more surprised at anything Dieter does today, but he keeps adding to this mountain of evidence that there is a lot more than meets the eye to their safecracker.

Vanderohe feels like he's gaining a new understanding into Dieter at this moment, understands his passion, wants to unravel the mystery behind this man, what happened to him, crack him open and see the secrets locked inside.

The moment ends when Dieter steps towards the safe and mutters under his breath, "Ah, Götterdämmerung, always a pleasure seeing you, my old friend," then he looks to the side at the other skeletons laying around, and Vanderohe sees a flash of bone deep sadness in Dieter's face, before he turns around and says, "We need to blow up this door. The key reader is broken."

Vanderohe starts setting the charges, and Chambers is willing to voice her theory about what's going on, turns to Dieter and asks, "Why take the keycard from Martin at all?"

Dieter shrugs, says passively, "I enjoy messing with him. I once watched you feed him to Valentine. That was fun," then he turns to Vanderohe, continues, "Do you still believe that the skeletons are us in another life, Mr. Vanderohe?"

He doesn't know what to say in response, but Dieter doesn't let him anyway, because he goes on, "The skeletons were here already, the first time. I don't know how they got here; one mystery I've yet to unravel. But your theory about the time loop is correct, except Tanaka is not the puppet master. It isn't God or the Devil, either."

Vanderohe's breath leaves him suddenly, because he *knows* he's said those words before, that they should've left *his* lips, and had they been in another timeline with a more easy-going Dieter, he might've said them again, but this Dieter is completely different from the man he met yesterday.

"Am I the only one who doesn't understand what the fuck is going on?" Guzman interrupts.

"Don't feel bad, I only somewhat understand," Chambers reassures.

Vanderohe's fucking head hurts.

Blowing the charges doesn't help that in the slightest.

Dieter lets Vanderohe act out his plan of using a zombie as bait to trip the traps, but he tells him to use the warmed-up hand first. Guzman wants to go upstairs, and Chambers follows him, but Vanderohe stays behind to watch over Dieter while he works.

He's pretty sure Dieter doesn't *need* protecting, but it makes Vanderohe feel better to have a designated task while on a job, and he's decided Dieter is his, so he stays.

Vanderohe can't stop staring at Dieter's back and wondering about the events leading up to this moment. He has an *idea* of what is going on, but what he's imagining is impossible, right? There's no way that Vanderohe's tall tale is actually real, and that it's happening to Dieter of all people. Everything about Dieter's behavior should be setting off alarm bells in his head, telling him to *run for the hills*, but he feels inexplicably drawn to him like a moth to a flame.

"I can feel you staring, Mr. Vanderohe."

Vanderohe sighs, runs a hand over his face in frustration, because *Dieter fucking knows every single little thing about him, doesn't he?*

He must have said some part of that out loud, hopefully with a lot less anger than he was feeling in his inner mantra, because Dieter turns around and levels him with a stare.

"I don't know how you take your coffee."

"What?"

"How do you take your coffee?" Dieter says slowly, like Vanderohe is fucking dense, which he's *not*, there's just a lot going on right now, and he's a little overwhelmed trying to unravel the truth. Dieter continues anyway, "The coffee is a peace offering, to prove that I do not know everything about you, Van. How do you take it?"

Vanderohe is taken aback, because Dieter *used his nickname*, but he figures if Dieter has experienced this day a hundred times over, he must have asked a few questions to pass the time. He wonders if him and Dieter have had this exact conversation before, if he asks Vanderohe different questions every time, or if this whole scene is new, for both of them.

Vanderohe was at his limit for weird shit the moment he saw the alpha queen fucking *nod* at Dieter, so who fucking cares at this point. He wants to know more about this anyway, so he's willing to do a little give and take.

"Most people assume I take it black, but I like a lot of sugar and cream. The sweeter, the better."

Dieter gives a small smile, and Vanderohe realizes this is the first time that any type of happiness has reached his eyes all day. He feels a bit guilty that he's about to ruin it with the questioning, but he *has* to know.

"Have we had this conversation before?"

"Does it feel like we have?"

Vanderohe considers the question. Some of the other phrases Dieter has said today have jogged very slight memories in his mind, hazy outlines of thoughts and sensations and Dieter's words clouding his brain, but others haven't done anything at all, these included.

"No, it doesn't. This feels... new."

Dieter nods, "The more cycles I go through, the more you all seem to remember from the previous ones. Getting each of you to believe me though, to understand what those locked memories mean- that has been its own challenge."

Vanderohe figures that some of the crew members are a given to be difficult- the Coyote comes to mind- while others would be easier, depending on how much they remembered of Dieter from previous timelines, but Vanderohe's suddenly curious about the alternate versions of himself. Believing Dieter is not... difficult, per say, but the whole situation is still a lot to wrap his head around, and he knows that his willingness to believe Dieter now has no bearing on how his past selves have treated him.

But it's Dieter's turn.

"Do you know what is particularly frustrating, Mr. Vanderohe?"

"No."

Dieter turns around to the safe with his arms crossed, says, "The four locks indicate that the safe has a rotating randomization mechanism- do you know what that means?"

Vanderohe shakes his head *no* when Dieter glances over his shoulder, and then Dieter continues, "The code changes every time," turns around completely and punctuates each word with his hand, "Every. Single. Time."

“Good old Tanaka,” and what a sick twist of irony that Dieter has lived this day over and over, with the one task he was brought on to accomplish being the only thing that changes *every fucking day*.

“So how long does it take you to crack the safe?”

“The first time?” Dieter waves his hand, “Much too long. Scott interrupted me and I had to try again.”

“‘Too long’? We have all the time in the world, don’t we?”

Dieter gives a mirthless laugh, and if Vanderohe is following what’s happening correctly, he sees the irony in his question too. Dieter *does* have all the time in the world, and that’s kind of the problem, isn’t it?

“The bomb is going to move up 24 hours. I cracked it in time, but it didn’t matter. Martin sealed off our escape route. We didn’t stand a chance.”

Vanderohe lets Dieter’s words soak in for a second, then he reiterates his question, “How long does it take you to open the safe now?”

Dieter shrugs, “About 10 minutes. Guzman gets bored and comes back quicker if he’s alone, but if Chambers is alive it takes them longer to return,” he turns back around and continues working on the safe, then quietly asks, “Why did you accept this job, Van?”

Vanderohe considers his answer for a long moment, because it’s much more of a heavy hitter than their previous questions. He’s anxious about putting his truth out into the air, because the moment that the words leave his lips there’s no taking it back, but now, with Dieter’s back to turned to him, it’s easier, and if anyone has earned his confession, it’s him, because he deserves to know he’s not alone.

“If anyone else were asking... the money, that’s the big reason. But I think everyone on this team would agree that you have to be a little fucked in the head to accept a job like this. Maybe a part of me missed the nitty gritty of the glory days- wanted to get my hands dirty again. Maybe a part of me was... totally okay with losing here, not making it out at all. High risk, high reward,” Vanderohe takes a deep breath in, continues, “But honestly? If I really had to pin down why I’m here- I wanted a chance to get catharsis. A chance to finally... move on from Vegas, leave what happened here behind. A chance for rebirth. Do you know what I mean? “

Dieter’s back is still to Vanderohe, but he sees the hunch in his back, his head bowed, can easily imagine the far off, wistful look on Dieter’s face when he replies, “Yes, I understand that feeling, quite intimately.”

Vanderohe feels too vulnerable with this mysterious man he barely knows, so he returns with a heavy hitter as well, “What happens after this, Dieter? You get to tomorrow- and then?”

And he stills.

After what must be a minute of agonizing silence Vandrohe can't take it anymore, so he ventures *Dieter*?

His voice feels much too abrasive in the stillness of the air.

"I don't know, truthfully," Dieter straightens up, glances over his shoulder and makes eye contact for a moment before diverting his eyes.

"I might have gone a bit mad at the beginning thinking about tomorrow. The aftermath. The ever illusive 'after'. But I try not to concern myself with those questions of 'what if?' anymore. Focusing on solving one piece of the puzzle at a time- on one day at a time- has been my way to keep sane. It would be nice, to be in control again. But hope is cruel, Mr. Vandrohe."

Something about the way Dieter says it tears through Vandrohe's heart, but Dieter is already moving on, turning back towards the safe to continue working and asking, "Do you remember anything?"

"From- from the time loops?" and Dieter hums in confirmation.

"It's like... a dream. Some things have more clarity, like, I know I told you about the time loops first. But then other things, they're foggier, and it's just a feeling of déjà vu. I can't grasp it, entirely, but I know that they happened. It feels like it happened to someone else, though."

Vandrohe hears the click of the safe unlocking, impressed that Dieter seems to have beaten his own guesstimate, but when he turns around again Vandrohe says, "It all happened to you though, didn't it, Dieter."

And it's not a question, really, but Dieter nods anyway, whispers *I remember everything*, and Vandrohe feels his heart breaking for this man that he's only really known for two days now, but who probably knows *him* like the back of his hand, a hundred timelines, a million hours of trying everything under the sun to get this nightmare to just *end* under his belt.

Vandrohe is quiet for a long moment, and then he builds up the courage to ask, "Why are you telling me this?"

Dieter looks *exhausted*, tries to respond impersonally, "I am doomed to repeat my failures over and over again. This is either the last time, or it is not. You either remember, or you will not. It doesn't matter what I say or do, it will happen again, or it will not," but even still, Vandrohe knows when someone is putting on a brave face better than most.

But Dieter lets the façade drop a bit a second later, shrugs and says openly, "But I always feel better, either way, when you believe me," and then Dieter looks right into Van's eyes when he asks, "*Do* you believe me, Mr. Vandrohe?"

Somehow, the honest answer is yes, he *does* believe Dieter, even though he doesn't understand it, so he nods, continues their game and takes his turn.

“Who’s the puppet master, Dieter?”

“Previously it was Zeus, the king. But this time, perhaps foolishly, I hope it is me.”

Dieter gives Vanderohe a rueful smile that doesn’t meet his eyes at all, continues, “Do you like to read, Van?” to which Vanderohe nods in response.

“Nietzsche said ‘Hope, in reality, is the worst of all evils, because it prolongs the torments of man.’ Those words, when I was younger, did not make sense to me- not in any way that truly mattered. Perhaps they still would not have made sense to the version of me that you met yesterday, Mr. Vanderohe. But me? The one who stands before you now? I understand those words.”

Vanderohe can’t possibly fathom allowing Dieter to believe that all is lost, and even though he realistically knows it’s up to Dieter alone to get out of this twisted game, he helps in the only way he knows how.

“Fate is a cruel mistress, but what do we have left if not hope, Dieter?”

And Vanderohe can actually see the wash of *something* gracing Dieter’s features.

It looks an awful lot like hope.

But the elevator doors *ding*, and Scott’s voice carries across the hall, “Hey, Dieter. How’s that safe coming?” interrupting the moment between them, and Vanderohe witnesses Dieter’s walls going back up, his other persona coming to the forefront, the one in charge, the one acting out his lines perfectly, slowly building up his numbers of allies who believe him.

“The only thing left is to turn the wheel,” then he gestures to the safe, “Mr. Vanderohe, would you do me the honor?”

The déjà vu feeling returns, but Vanderohe wants to make this time different for Dieter, so he asks, “Do I always open it?”

“Sometimes you don’t make it this far. Those times, I opened it myself.”

Oh.

Vanderohe didn’t think too hard about the fact that Dieter has *definitely* watched him die before. He knows, logically, that Dieter must be haunted by a lot more than just repeating the same day over and over, has probably witnessed unspeakable tragedies befall them, but hearing it out loud, said so matter-of-factly, is different. It sends a chill down his spine, but he shakes it off, that feeling *and* Scott’s perplexed stare at their conversation.

“We open it together then.”

Dieter *actually* smiles this time. It’s tiny, and closed lipped, like he’s too afraid to put it out into the world, but Vanderohe catches it nonetheless.

“Mr. Ward, please call the rest of your team down. The bomb was just moved up 24 hours, yes? Let’s make haste.”

Scott keeps staring at Dieter with an air of distrust around him. Everyone else joins them in the basement minus the Coyote and Martin, which makes Vanderohé uneasy, but Dieter is unbothered by this, so he tries to let it go. Dieter and Vanderohé make a show of opening the safe, and they all have a moment of respite at the sight of the money, the confirmation that it’s *real*, and that everything might actually be worth it, after all. They begin packing it up in the duffel bags they brought, laughing and reveling in their loot.

“Hey, Vanny, where’s your head at now, bud?”

“It’s in a good place, Scott.”

Vanderohé glances over at Dieter, but he’s already pulled Maria to the side, addressing her privately.

“Maria, I know what you want to confess. Believe me when I say I understand how you are feeling, but you will have another opportunity. There will be more time for you, but I am running out of it, for today. I do not want to repeat this for an eternity,” and Vanderohé sees this look that Maria gives Dieter, like she’s at a complete loss for words, but he knows Dieter is about to get her completely on his side when he stares her down and continues, “Forever is a long time.”

“*What the fuck*,” Maria whispers under her breath.

“Join the club,” Vanderohé tells her.

No one else has been paying attention to Dieter, preoccupied with the money, but then Dieter turns to Scott instead, probably the only person he hasn’t fully convinced yet, says plainly, “By now you have noticed that Kate is gone, but I know where she is. We’ll take the helicopter to the Olympus to get her back,” then he faces Maria again, “There is an armored military vehicle about 50 feet from the front doors of the casino. We won’t all fit in the helicopter with the money. You can get it started.”

Maria nods wearily, makes to leave the room, but Vanderohé doesn’t get a chance to stop Scott before he grabs Dieter by the shirt and shoves him up against the vault wall.

“What did you do with Kate, Dieter!?”

“Scott, calm down man, he’s trying to help us!” Vanderohé puts a hand on Scott’s shoulder and tries to pull him back, Maria assisting, but Scott pushes them off easily, moving Dieter away from the wall and slamming him into it again, a scapegoat for his anger. Chambers, Guzman, Peters, Maria, and Vanderohé look on, but Dieter isn’t even attempting to defend himself from Scott’s strength in the slightest, his hands are limp at his side, and he instead calmly says,

“Scott Ward, you are always the hardest to convince. I didn’t do anything to Kate; it is her own stubbornness and loyalty to her friend that compels her. I have never been successful in

getting her to stay behind at the quarantine zone, nor can I stop her from going to the Olympus. She is like you, in that way, convinced by your own world view that you are correct, unable to see reality right in front of your nose. You are wrong about Kate and Maria, please consider that you are wrong about me.”

Scott’s hands loosen on Dieter, and Vanderohé doesn’t think he’ll *ever* get tired of seeing the moment that the others start to believe him passing over their features. Van pulls Scott’s hands off of Dieter, successful this time, and they continue packing up the money, Vanderohé keeping an eye on Scott for any more outbursts. Maria leaves via a side ladder that Dieter directs her to, then backs the truck into the building, smashing the glass doors, making it easier when taking trips to and fro with the bags. They’re in the basement for a final time, about to take the last trip with the only two left, then the elevator doors ding.

Vanderohé is surprised to see that the Coyote has a gun pointed at Martin’s head, and she kicks him to the ground when they come in through the elevator. He grunts in pain, curses at her. The Coyote speaks up, “This fucker told me his plan. He told me he’d let everyone out of the camps if I helped him.”

Chambers asks, “I fucking knew it! What did he tell you?”

But the Coyote looks at Dieter instead of answering herself, demands, “Tell them.”

“Lilly, was he successful?” Dieter questions.

“No. I stopped him; let her go. *Tell them.*”

“Okay seriously, what the fuck is going on!? Chambers was trying to tell me about fucking-time travel or some shit? Come on, I know *you* understand what’s happening,” Guzman yells, brings his gun up and points it at Dieter’s chest.

Vanderohé pulls out his own gun, then it becomes a full-on standoff, Scott, Maria, and Chambers pulling out their weapons and swinging wildly between the two sides, while Peters and the Coyote watch the scene unfold.

“Mikey, put it down! Cut this shit out,” Chambers pleads.

“What, you’re on his fucking side now too? I’m supposed to believe that he’s the main bitch in *Happy Death Day*!? Seriously Chambers, what is going on!?”

“Put the gun down, Guzman!” Vanderohé demands.

“Not until he tells us what the fuck is happening!”

“Tell them!” the Coyote calls out.

And Vanderohé watches as Dieter steps closer to Guzman, until the muzzle of his gun is pressing up against the center of his chest, effectively scaring the shit out of Vanderohé, but Guzman still doesn’t pull the trigger, freaked out by Dieter’s complete lack of self-preservation, and then Dieter states, “By the way, Mikey Guzman, I love your hair.”

The tension in Guzman's entire body peaks, then releases all at once on an exhale, he lowers his weapon, and grits out in a horrified whisper, "You've said that before, haven't you?"

And Dieter nods, then finally, *finally*, addresses the entire group.

"I am stuck in a time loop. I have re-lived this day more times than I can count. I have watched each and every one of you die in more and more cruel and sadistic ways, at the hands of each other, Martin, the shamblers, or Zeus, the king himself. I have rarely been successful in getting us this far, because Martin cuts off the head of the queen in almost every timeline. Tanaka sent Martin to collect the head, figuring himself some kind of God capable of raising an army of the dead, and Martin condemns us to death, every time, without mercy."

Dieter turns his head away from the group at large, glares at Martin as he speaks, the fury in his voice unmistakable, "*You* are the reason this is happening. Providence has brought you to me, and today, I am your executioner. Zeus unleashed Pandora's Box upon us because of your transgressions, and I will offer you to him as penance."

Dieter motions his head towards Chambers when he addresses Guzman, "Zeus will be here soon. You two and Maria will drive the truck out with the money."

Guzman is still staring at Dieter with an awestruck expression, which Vanderohé relates to, because *holy fuck, Dieter is a force to be reckoned with when he wants to be.*

"Oh man, you've got balls, kid. I like you," Peters interrupts the tension, pokes the center of Dieter's chest as she speaks, walks past the Coyote holding Martin hostage and presses the *up* arrow to the elevator, "I'll be waiting on the roof for you guys to wise up and join me in getting the fuck out of here."

Vanderohé thinks he might see a *hint* of a smirk from Dieter directed towards Peters.

But then Dieter gets right back to business, faces Guzman again, "You need to leave now," and Chambers grabs Guzman's shoulder, drags him towards the side ladder. They pick up the last two duffel bags on their way out, Maria following closely behind, calling out, "We are discussing this later, Dieter!" as she climbs.

"*Goddamn* kid, you're more than just the crystal ball, you're the whole fucking nuthouse, aren't you?" Martin says in scorn. The Coyote is obviously tired of dealing with Martin's shit, hits him hard on the back of the head, successfully knocking him out.

Dieter ignores the scene, turns to Vanderohé instead, "Get to the roof, tell Peters to be prepared to leave at a moment's notice."

Vanderohé is about to leave the basement, after the Coyote and Scott have started climbing already, but he realizes that Dieter isn't making any moves to follow them up the ladder.

"Dieter, come on."

"Please go. I'll meet you on the roof."

Vanderohe scoffs, jumps back down, “I’m not leaving you down here alone.”

But he stands firm, “I do not want you to see what must be done, Mr. Vanderohe.”

“What? Come on, this is our out, let’s go.”

“No, not for me, not unless I do this. I have to fulfill my end of the bargain,” and Vanderohe can see that Dieter is starting to close off again, so he grabs Dieter’s upper arm, getting in his personal space and forcing him to meet his eyes and listen.

“What are the terms, Dieter?”

Dieter hesitates, looks away, and Vanderohe thinks he might have an idea of what it could be, pushes him, “I’m not letting you die here. If this is some self-sacrificing, bullshit scheme to keep the rest of us alive, it’s not fucking happening. We’ll try again, we’ll let the timer reset, there *has* to be another way.”

Dieter shakes his head as he responds, “It is not my life that Zeus wants. A loss of humanity, yes, but my reward is the chance to live.”

“Then what is it, Dieter? Is it not as simple as Martin for the queen?” he lowers his tone, gives Dieter a searching look, asks quietly, “An eye for an eye?”

Dieter is silent for a long moment, tears spring to his eyes, and then he shakily whispers, “A head for a head, if you will.”

A wave of understanding hits Vanderohe, and he is suddenly so upset for Dieter, that this is what must be done, because it isn’t *fair*. He doesn’t know why Zeus chose him, doesn’t understand why it has to be *Dieter*. And he doesn’t understand why Dieter, protective to a fault, with absolutely no sense of self-preservation, accepted the deal, is more worried about Vanderohe watching the act unfold than the fact that he has to do it at *all*, a horrifying, unspeakable, necessary evil to grant them escape.

“You look at me with such sadness, Mr. Vanderohe, it wounds me,” Dieter places a hand on Vanderohe’s cheek, softly cradling his face, and he has that wave crash over him again, that feeling that *this has happened before*, then Dieter continues, “It’s alright, I have had a lot of time to come to terms with what must be done.”

“Dieter, *nothing* about this is alright,” Vanderohe whispers, places his other hand on top of Dieter’s in return.

“I know. Please do not watch. For me, Van,” and Vanderohe nods his head, because what else can he do but listen to a desperate man’s plea.

“I wish you could have gotten to know the original me,” Dieter says quietly, and it’s like he’s looking right through Vanderohe, eyes far off and distant, and that won’t do, so Vanderohe does the only thing he can think of to bring him back, making up his mind all at once.

He leans in to kiss him.

There is a particular type of sadness that hits his heart when he gets the feeling of déjà vu again the moment that his lips press against Dieter's, the feeling of *this isn't our first time* hitting him, and fate is a cruel mistress indeed, because he will never *truly* remember the first time, will he?

But he's determined to not let this be their last time either, so he pulls back from the kiss to press his forehead against Dieter's and say with conviction, "I am going to get to know you, Dieter, *this* version of you, because you're gonna meet me on the roof in a few minutes, alright?"

He releases his hold on his bicep to cradle Dieter's face in his hands instead, continues, "You're gonna do what has to be done, and I won't watch- only because you don't want me to, *not* because I don't want to be here with you- and we'll figure it out, *together*, after, okay? Because there *will* be an after."

Vanderohe feels the emotion rising in his throat, because fucking *everything* about this situation is fucked to hell and back, and he practically begs Dieter in a whisper *please come back to me*. Dieter nods with tears in his eyes, and Vanderohe leaves him in the basement, alone. And even though he *knows*, believes with all his heart, that Dieter will make it out of this, that he finally unraveled the mystery of how to escape his cherry-picked version of hell, the finality of the *click* of the rooftop door behind him doesn't hurt any less.

"Where's the kid?" Peters asks Vanderohe, and he can't even muster up an answer, clears his throat and wipes at his eyes when he tells her to have the chopper running so they can leave as soon as Dieter reaches the roof.

Eventually, Dieter emerges.

No one comments on his shell-shocked expression, the tremble of Vanderohe's bloodied knife in his grasp, his gore covered shirt and pants, or the contrasting wash of bright blue smeared across his face.

They make it to the Olympus hotel in silence.

Dieter leads them to Kate and Geeta with ease, winding through the hallways like a man on a mission, the clock ticking against them. Scott is absolutely overjoyed when they find Kate, before he scolds her for leaving his sight, and they make their way back to the helicopter. They take out some rogue shamblers as they go, Vanderohe watching over Dieter, because Dieter doesn't have that same air of confidence around him that he was subliminally boasting earlier, doesn't know exactly where the zombies are going to come out of next.

This is new for him.

Vanderohe is suddenly curious, asks, "When does the timer reset, Dieter?"

But Dieter shakes his head, "This is it."

And the pressure is on.

The next few minutes are a blur of Dieter retracing their steps, Vanderohe leaning far into his protective side when some of the shamblers get too close to Dieter, even though he's holding his own well enough, the Coyote and Scott taking up the rear and watching over Kate and Geeta, until they finally make it to the roof, Peters waiting for them. She's signaling them on, and they make a mad dash for the open doors, because the horde is catching up to them, and Scott only just manages to jump on before Peters has to pull them away, overzealous zombies flying through the air after him, just barely missing him.

Vanderohe can hear Dieter muttering to himself in German under his breath, even though it's nearly impossible to hear him over the roar of the helicopter blades. He wraps an arm around Dieter's shoulders, trying to offer support, because Dieter is shaking, staring out the open doors in disbelief. Vanderohe turns his head to see what has Dieter so spooked.

In the distance, he sees Zeus on the rooftop.

He's never *seen* Zeus before, not in this timeline, but he instantly recognizes who he is, the presence he commands unmistakable. Terrifying and proud, towering above his people, his kingdom, with the queen at his side. He's looking right at them. He's looking at Dieter.

And Zeus *nods*.

The bomb drops, well after they've left Las Vegas, but they're still able to feel the shockwave far off, now that they're on solid ground. As far as Vanderohe can tell, nothing has reset.

Dieter is still here.

Well, his body is, at least. His charisma, his drive, his passionate eyes, they are all gone. He looks completely traumatized, honestly. Vanderohe imagines it'll take a long time for things to ever be normal again, for all of them really, but for Dieter the most.

They had anticipated that they'd all be on the helicopter, which in hindsight was stupid, because it was barely big enough to fit the ones who made it on in the end, so Scott calls Maria on his satellite phone to confirm a rendezvous point, in the middle of fucking *nowhere* Nevada, when they run out of gas. She arrives soon enough, picks them up. Vanderohe doesn't miss the looks of shock and questions the others desperately want to ask when they catch sight of Dieter. He's sure the glare that he gives Chambers and Guzman, when he can actually *feel* that they want to ask, is anything but subtle, but he doesn't care at this point. He just wants to get Dieter to a safe location so he can shower, rest, and talk about everything, preferably in that order.

On the ride to their undetermined destination, they decide to split the money much more evenly, because *fuck* Tanaka and his share of the millions, they deserve it all. Geeta wants to meet up with her kids, so they compromise by stopping in the nearest city, dropping the

majority of them off at the fanciest hotel there, then Kate and Geeta bid them farewell, head off to wherever Kate directs them in search of Geeta's children.

Vanderohe has absolutely no shame when he places stacks upon stacks of money on the concierge's desk, even while she's gawking at the group's disheveled appearances, staring particularly hard at a blood-soaked Dieter, asks for the nicest rooms she has available, *please and thank you*.

Dieter follows him obediently, doesn't say a word. Vanderohe says goodbye to the others for them both, then heads towards their rooms. In fear of being too presumptuous with Dieter he gets him his own, making sure they are next to each other at least, but when Vanderohe leaves Dieter in front of his hotel door, he keeps staring at the keycard in his hands with his head down.

It honestly feels like someone is carving out Vanderohe's fucking heart with a spoon, watching Dieter look so lost and beaten down.

Dieter won, technically, but nothing about this feels like a triumph.

Vanderohe halts in front of his own door, taking a *long* look at Dieter, soaking up the moment, because he still doesn't know what the right thing is to do here. He's known *this* Dieter for one day, the other for just two hours, but he still feels this overwhelming force pulling on his hollow chest, dragging him towards Dieter's presence. There's this urge to *protect him*, but he doesn't understand where this is coming from, if these are truly his own feelings, or simply remnants of some other version of him; *perhaps the one withholding the memory of kissing Dieter*, spilling over and consuming him. Even so, he doesn't say anything, just keeps staring in reverence and pity at this man he doesn't really know, even if it feels like he does, for an undeterminable amount of time.

And neither of them moves to open their doors.

Finally, Vanderohe's feelings and exhaustion overrule his apprehension, and he ventures quietly,

"Dieter?"

Dieter physically startles, knocked out of whatever trance he's been in since the timer didn't reset, since the whole ordeal ended for him, starting an entirely new one of dealing with *the ever-allusive after*, and he looks up at Vanderohe, actually *looks* at him.

"Are you going to be okay tonight, alone in your room?"

Dieter shakes his head, looks back at his hands and whispers, "No, I don't think I will."

Vanderohe puts his keycard in the door, gestures for Dieter to come inside, says, "Come on, I've got you."

He tells Dieter not to worry about the duffel bag, grabs it himself, then rummages through Dieter's backpack for him in search of clean clothes. Vanderohe clasps his hand around

Dieter's wrist and leads him into the bathroom, asks *tub or shower?* and Dieter whispers, *tub, please.*

The tub is huge, fitting for the luxury hotel room they're in, which Vanderohé is thankful for. Even though Dieter seems meek now, hunched in on himself, he's still tall and broad and much too big for normal sized tubs; he deserves even this small comfort. Vanderohé starts the water for him, adds soap and lays out a towel and the set of clothes, but when he turns around, Dieter is bracing his hands on the countertop, staring at himself in the mirror.

The blue of Zeus's blood on his face brings out his eyes.

"Dieter," he looks up and turns around, shocked out of his trance again, "You'll feel much better once you're clean."

"I don't think this washes off," Dieter looks forlorn down at himself, and Vanderohé sadly responds, "I know. The memories won't, but the blood will. One step at a time."

Dieter nods. Vanderohé leaves the bathroom, takes Dieter's keycard and his own set of clothes, heads to Dieter's room to shower at the same time. He doesn't say anything when he's searching for his things, overhearing the hitching breaths and muffled cries coming from the bathroom.

Dieter deserves the privacy to fall apart and pull himself back together on his own time.

Vanderohé is tired to his core, mentally, physically, emotionally, in every conceivable way, but he still enjoys the longest, most scalding hot shower of his entire life, actually *fucking groans* when the water hits his skin. He washes away the dirt and grime and blood and stress of the day, wonders how on earth they're going to fix this mess, thinks about how fucked up this whole situation is. Dieter is going to need therapy, *lots of it.*

When he returns, he's ready to pass out for the next twelve hours, but Dieter is still in the bathroom, and he's somewhat worried that he may fall asleep in there, with how exhausted he must be, so he vows to stay awake until Dieter comes to bed. The bed is king sized; there's definitely enough room for both of them to be comfortable. He doesn't stress about the sleeping arrangement, instead bundles himself up in the luxuriously plush and soft comforter, turns on the TV to some random infomercial in a last-ditch effort to fend off sleep.

When Dieter gets out of the bathroom, he doesn't look better, per say, but he's clean, washed of Martin's blood, of Zeus's blood, the evidence of his loss of humanity erased, no more dirt from Las Vegas stuck to his once tacky skin, and that's one step in the right direction.

Vanderohé can actually *feel* Dieter's trepidation as he looks at the bed, so he pulls back the covers to encourage Dieter to join him. He finally gets in, cautiously and slowly, and *fucking hell*, this Dieter is a new one to figure out too, completely different from the one that commanded the room throughout the day. Vanderohé turns off the TV, cloaking them in darkness, lays on his side facing Dieter and closes his eyes.

And Vanderohé is so fucking tired, he wants to sleep desperately, but the nagging feeling that he needs to say something to Dieter is too strong to ignore, so after a few minutes, he's

unable to take the oppressive weight of the silence anymore, tells Dieter, "I know you're awake, and you shouldn't be. Go to sleep."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Vanderohé."

He hopes that's the end of it, but he never feels Dieter's breaths slowing, never sees the release of tension through his adjusted eyesight; Dieter's wound up tight, like a bowstring, ready to snap.

"Dieter. Sleep."

"*I can't*," he whispers.

"Talk to me, what's wrong? It's over, you're free."

"What if I was wrong? What if Zeus lied about the deal? I thought it was over many times before this," he confesses.

Vanderohé tries a different approach, "When does the timer usually reset?"

"When I die, or when the bomb drops, whichever happens first."

"Well, one of those already happened, and as long as I'm around, the other one isn't going to, okay?" Vanderohé tries to reassure, but Dieter seems so downtrodden, murmurs, "You can't guarantee that either," somehow curling in on himself even further.

The ache in Vanderohé's chest compels him to be vulnerable with this man that he doesn't actually know, and Vanderohé decides, *fuck it*, because he's already kissed him, is lying in bed with Dieter, *what's the harm in giving a little more?*

"When the fall of Vegas happened, it took a while for everything to hit me. But when it did, the aftermath was... fucking brutal. I could see their faces every time I closed my eyes, the ones who didn't make it. I put a lot of people out of their misery that day. I just felt so lost. I was desperate to gain some insight, make sense of what happened. I read something that helped me then, it was a quote by Joseph Campbell that said 'It is by going down into the abyss where we recover the treasures of life. Where you stumble, there lies your treasure.' It meant a lot to me, helped me make the most of a fucked-up situation, knowing that even the worst the world has to offer- it could still offer me something."

He reaches his hand out to Dieter, bridging the gap between them, and Dieter takes it eagerly, interlocking their fingers, a lifeline to hold on to.

And Vanderohé gets a bizarre sense of satisfaction when there is no wave of *déjà vu*.

"We'll take it one step at a time, right? Tomorrow is a new day," he squeezes Dieter's hand in reassurance, then he can't take not knowing for sure, so he whispers, "This hasn't happened before, has it?"

Vanderohé sees Dieter shake his head *no* in the darkness, and he's spurred on by the fact that this is *new*, for both him and Dieter, that they get to experience this for the first time *together*.

Dieter seems calmed, for now, as much as Vanderohé can make out, and he speaks up one last time, “Thank you, Van. Here and now, this is enough,” then finally closes his eyes.

Vanderohé doesn’t last much long after, but he still watches Dieter’s breaths slow until he’s peaceful in rest; no more exhaustion overtaking his features, no fear and stress clouding his eyes.

And Vanderohé is content to take on tomorrow, *one step at a time*, together, as he falls asleep.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

The ever allusive aftermath.

Chapter Notes

Actually cracking up at myself for thinking I wouldn't finish this. Turns out re-reading my first part was all I needed to find inspiration to edit and finish the second, woo! For those of you still here, thank you so much, from the bottom of my heart :)

I hope you enjoy!

TW: This chapter very briefly mentions suicide.

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

When Vandrohe wakes up the next morning, it's to Dieter sprawled out on his stomach across the entire bed, taking up the majority of the comforter, his hand resting on Vandrohe's chest, clutching his shirt. He watches Dieter for a while, enjoying the domesticity of waking up together, but his mind wanders into *what happens now?*

Now that Dieter is free, now that they're multi-millionaires, now that he thinks Tanaka might send people after them for killing his right-hand man and fucking up the mission, now that the rest of the crew needs to be properly debriefed on what's happened, now that Vandrohe couldn't control himself and fucking *kissed Dieter* without thinking of the consequences.

One step at a time.

He lets Dieter sleep for now, because he could surely use the rest. He gently peels Dieter's hand off of his chest, leaves the bed as quietly as he can. He decides to take another shower just for the hell of it, goes down to the hotel lobby to grab himself a coffee while he waits. Vandrohe is making his coffee as sickly sweet as he can, pours Dieter a cup too, when he feels someone's presence behind him, turns his head to see the Coyote standing close behind.

"Where is he?"

Vandrohe holds back a sigh, *why am I not surprised?*

He turns around and addresses the Coyote head on, "Good morning to you too, Coyote. You and Dieter seem to be on a first name basis though. You prefer Lilly instead?"

“Have you talked to him at all?”

“Okay, you and me are *not* on a first name basis, I get it,” Vanderohé holds his hand up in surrender, but Lilly, *if Dieter gets to call her Lilly, then I will too*, keeps pushing.

“Tell me that you’ve spoken to him.”

“I haven’t. He’s still asleep, and God knows he needs the rest. Can’t this wait until later?” he scrubs a hand over his face.

“We need to talk about this *now*, while it’s fresh on his mind. He knows so much more than he’s letting on. This could change everything- what we know about the zombies, what happened to Vegas-”

“Does it matter? The bomb dropped, they’re dead and gone,” Vanderohé’s frustration is seeping in now.

“You really think they were the only ones? Where do you think Zeus came from? Who’s to say there aren’t more like him out there somewhere? You don’t think it’s at least worth asking him about what happened to him, what he learned?” and Lilly sounds frustrated too now, “I spent *years* watching them, taking people in and out of Vegas, and I’ve never seen anything like what he’s experienced.”

“He needs *time*, Lilly.”

“He’s had all the time in the world,” she says hotly.

“Listen to me,” Vanderohé demands calmly, but his rage is bubbling just beneath the surface, “I know damn well that you and I both have been through hell on Earth, but he’s seen *far worse* than we have. Things we can’t even begin to understand. We don’t remember it, but he does.”

She’s quiet for a long moment, and Vanderohé turns back around to put lids on his and Dieter’s coffees so he can take them with him, but he hears her murmur, “I remember some of it. Bits and pieces, more of the feelings than the actions themselves, but I do remember.”

Vanderohé freezes for just a fraction of a second, because he understands what she means, but she’s just as perceptive as he is, and she notices his tiny slip up, sounds pleased when she asks, “You remember it too, don’t you?”

“Can we talk about this somewhere where we don’t look like complete fucking lunatics?” because they’re still in the middle of the hotel breakfast bar, and other patrons are starting to fucking stare at them, and Vanderohé doesn’t need any more public attention, considering that Tanaka is going to figure out what they’ve done soon enough.

Just as he’s about to leave, he hears Guzman’s voice call out from behind him, “Hey, you guys are awake!”

“We need to talk,” Maria states.

And just like that, Vanderohe's headache is back.

He grabs the coffees, intending to leave the group, faces them and grits out, "Not. Now."

"Where's the boy genius?" Peters asks.

"Dieter-" because *seriously, why does everyone think this middle-aged man is a child?* "-is still sleeping, which he needs to do if you guys are going to fucking interrogate him as soon as he gets up." Vanderohe says, exasperated.

"*Oh, so you did share a hotel room,*" Chambers grins, knocking her elbow with Guzman's, and *good god, get me away from here.*

Vanderohe is still trying to move out of the circle of the group, but as he squeezes through, Scott stops him with a hand on his shoulder, "Van, we just want answers here, let us talk to him."

"You and me both, Scott," Vanderohe sighs, and he turns around to address the group one last time, "I know about as much as you all do. Give him a few hours, at least. No one leave the hotel until we figure this out, alright?"

"Tanaka will be pissed about what we did," Scott points out, "He's not one to let go of debts."

"We bought ourselves some time though, right? He'll think we all got killed in the blast. We lay low for a few days, keep paying for everything in cash for- well, probably the rest of our lives," Maria shrugs, "Talk to Dieter, figure this out, then go our separate ways."

They all agree, and Vanderohe is finally free to head back up to his hotel room. About halfway up the elevator ride he realizes that he didn't put any cream or sugar into Dieter's coffee, but he doesn't want to risk running into any of the others again. Worst case, they dilute Dieter's cup with Van's.

Vanderohe opens the hotel door, fear momentarily overcoming him when he sees that the bed is empty, but then he hears music coming from the bathroom and- *is that fucking opera?*

"You listen to opera music?" Vanderohe can't help but ask loudly, and Dieter responds, "*It's poetic, Mr. Vanderohe!*"

Van laughs at Dieter, hears him finishing up in the bathroom, then Dieter emerges, and he looks so much more *alive* than he did before, so Van says, "You look good, Dieter," earning a pleased expression and a, "I could say the same, Mr. Vanderohe."

He feels guilty knowing that the others are about to ruin Dieter's good mood with their questioning, but he has questions of his own, too. He hands Dieter his coffee.

"This one is for you, we can mix some of mine into yours, I didn't get a chance to add any cream or sugar," Vanderohe says apologetically, but Dieter gives a small grin, "Don't worry, I prefer it black anyway."

“Do you actually, or are you just saying that to make me feel better?” Van teases.

“I *do* actually,” Dieter goes to the sitting room of their hotel room, sits down and pulls his feet up to sit comfortably on the couch, “Even after all these years in the states I haven’t fully adjusted to how sweet everything is here.”

Vanderohe decides to join Dieter, sits across from him on the couch, back against the side arm and leg closest to the back bent so he can face Dieter fully.

“Have you heard that piece before?” Dieter asks earnestly.

“No, I haven’t.”

“May I tell you about it?”

And Dieter’s enthusiasm is absolutely *infectious*, so Van can do nothing but nod in response, a grin on his face.

“It’s part of Richard Wagner’s epic opera, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, which is where the creator of the safe, Hans Wagner, derived the name *der Götterdämmerung*. It is the final chapter of the epic, it’s quite powerful, inspirational- based off of Ragnarök, a mythological tale of when gods fought in combat until the world was burned, immersed in water, and faced renewal. Of course, though, Richard Wagner put his own spin on it.”

“That’s heavy, Dieter, but I dig it,” Vanderohe gives him a genuine smile, but he feels the déjà vu come over when he says it, realizing that Dieter has probably heard him say that before, and the moment is instantly tainted by that thought.

A harsh reminder of the reality they’re facing has Vanderohe deciding it’s as good of a time as any to discuss the elephant in the room.

“I ran into everyone else in the lobby,” he starts.

“Ah, I’m sure that went well,” Dieter says knowingly.

“Oh yeah. The Coyote especially is a real treat. How on earth did you get to be on a first name basis?” Vanderohe chuckles.

“Time, honestly. Many an unsuccessful attempt to get her on my side. She shot me once, about ten or twelve cycles in, but she was oddly... more willing to believe me, after, so I suppose it was a necessary evil,” Dieter shrugs, and Vanderohe tries to hold back his expression of shock, “The deal we made also helped. Of course, she most likely does not remember it, but I will follow through. I’m a man of my word.”

He thinks it might be best to just move right along rather than focusing on the fact that Lilly *killed Dieter* in one of the timelines, even though his interest is piqued, so Vanderohe asks instead, “What’d you two agree on?”

“Her help on my journey in exchange for the address of a quarantine officer so she may kill him.”

“Oh,” Vanderohe mutters, his attempt at moving the conversation *away* from murder thwarted, “Well I’m sure he deserves it,” he settles on replying with. Lord knows Vanderohe has killed far too many to be judging Dieter, even though the passive way he says it is a *little* jarring.

“He most certainly does,” Dieter agrees, “You hated him especially.”

Aren’t we just two peas in a pod?

“Regardless, I told the others to give you some time to settle, maybe a few hours, if you’re lucky. But I can’t guarantee they won’t try to ambush you in the lobby.”

“Thank you, Van,” Dieter sips at his coffee, enjoying the moment of silence. Vanderohe feels oddly comfortable, despite not actually knowing Dieter all that well. He thinks the lingering silence would be awkward were they any other pair, but Dieter’s presence soothes his soul, and eventually a laugh bubbles its way up in Dieter’s chest, interrupting the silence anyway.

“Sorry, sorry,” Dieter giggles, “It’s not funny at all, actually,” he sighs, laying his head back against the couch, exposing the *long* line of his neck and jaw, and Vanderohe tries not to stare openly, but it’s *difficult*.

“I simply cannot believe this is real. I woke up, and before I could even open my eyes, I had a lapse of security, when panic took hold of me. I thought for sure I had failed again, that it would be yesterday, and I would be greeted by my apartment. But then I realized I wasn’t in my bed, our duffel bags were in the corner. Even then, it wasn’t until I saw my clothes tossed in the trash that reality hit me,” he clarifies.

“How does it feel?” Vanderohe asks quietly.

“Like I’m dreaming,” he says wistfully, “But a good dream, as opposed to the nightmare I found myself in,” he sighs, whispers, “What a year yesterday had been.”

What Vanderohe wants to ask is *was it really a year?* but what comes out instead is, “What do you wanna do with your first day of freedom?” as he bumps his knee with Dieter’s.

Dieter thinks it over, becomes bashful momentarily when he states, “Nothing, quite honestly. Nothing but lay in bed and watch movies, if that’s alright with you?”

And the wide smile he gives Dieter in return is genuine when he answers, “That sounds like a lovely way to spend the day.”

They end up ordering almost the entire room service menu because Vanderohe is ravenous, plus Dieter confesses that he hasn’t had a real meal since before the time loops started, *I couldn’t stomach it*, and Vanderohe is displeased, has no shame in ordering anything on the menu that Dieter even so much as *mentions* having an interest in while he peruses, to Dieter’s exasperation.

They move to the bed, Vanderohe lets Dieter pick the first movie, and he’s secretly very content with Dieter’s choice of *Forrest Gump*, as it’s one of Vanderohe’s favorites, but a

vague memory comes to the surface, that déjà vu of a conversation they had once, and he blurts out, “Did you pick this for me or for you?”

Dieter tries to keep his cool at being caught, but Vanderohe is perceptive enough to notice when he froze for a fraction of a second. He shrugs, says “It’s one of the most popular movies showing a man’s life in America, and I have never seen it.”

Vanderohe sighs, “Dieter-”

“I picked it for both of us, Van. Maybe I wanted to see it too, when you told me it was one of your favorites,” Dieter interrupts, frustrated and snarky.

Vanderohe decides to let it go, responds *okay*, and they start watching the movie in silence, but this one is much less comfortable than the one they shared earlier. The room service arrives shortly after, and Vanderohe is the one to grab it for them, spreading their feast across the bed.

Eventually, Van can see that Dieter’s fully calmed down, becoming immersed in the movie, and from the way Vanderohe is laying back against the headboard, and Dieter is leaning forward, he can peek at Dieter out of the corner of his eye and mull over his thoughts.

He thought he had him pegged from the moment he met him, had doubted Scott’s judgment when he saw those dumb suede boots, when he realized Dieter had never fought *anything* before, but now he knows he doesn’t have this Dieter figured out at all. It takes a particular type of person to accept a suicidal job like the heist, *I would know*, and there’s so much about the time loops that Dieter hasn’t shared. Vanderohe finds himself wondering about how this Dieter came to be, wishes that he could have watched the progression from the man he met two days ago to the one before him now, even if it would mean being witness to all the other grim fates the crew experienced.

Dieter leans back against the headboard instead of sitting forward, and Vanderohe uses Dieter’s change in posture to glance over at his face. The small glance turns into an open stare the more he’s realizing that Dieter’s eyes have that faraway look to them again. Dieter hasn’t really been here since Forrest went to war, now that he thinks about it. He pauses the movie, waits to see if Dieter even notices, but makes no moves to indicate that he’s aware.

“Dieter?” Vanderohe whispers, but Dieter doesn’t acknowledge him.

He reaches a hand out and nudges Dieter’s shoulder, calling his name again as he does so, and that’s when Dieter comes back to the present, lightly hums, *hmm?*

“You okay?”

Dieter nods, but he’s not very convincing. Van pushes, “Thought I lost you for a moment.”

“I’m here now,” Dieter shrugs, rubs his eyes.

“Do you- we can watch something else,” Vanderohe offers.

“I just need a moment.”

“Okay.”

Vanderohe thinks about the situation, about the absurdity. Stealing a kiss, sharing a bed, eating together, watching one of Vanderohe’s favorite movies because some other version of him told Dieter, this man he doesn’t even know, that he adored it. He defended Dieter from everyone else on the crew earlier, from Martin the day before, and for what? The pity that he felt for Dieter last night is gone, now replaced with genuine concern, but even then, *why? Why for him?*

What am I doing here?

“You told me that you watched this movie when it came out in theaters,” Dieter startles Van right out of his thoughts. He turns his head to see that Dieter is staring at his clasped hands again.

“I did,” he cautiously responds.

Dieter nods his head, continues, “I wanted to understand, that was all. When you said it was one of your favorites, I wanted to see it, too. That’s why I picked it.”

Vanderohe is silent for a long moment, choosing his next words carefully.

“It meant a lot more to me after I joined the military,” he says, and Dieter snaps his head up in response, hanging onto his words.

This is new.

Spurred on, Vanderohe elaborates, “Bubba, Lieutenant Dan, they remind me of buddies I had back then. It’s different, after war like that, after fighting. You come home and you’re desperate to get back to normal life, but it’s like- your hometown is in a twilight zone. Everyone’s older, some of your friends have moved out of state- others, they died alongside you. And then one day, you realize it’s not the place that’s different, it’s you. Your skin feels... wrong- too tight, suffocating. Your comforting small town is now overwhelmingly claustrophobic. It’s hard to explain,” Vanderohe sighs.

“Everyone else expects you to just- move on, like it’s easy, but it’s not. They want you to be who you were before you left, but you end up leaving a piece of yourself behind in the field- who you were when you went in. Some people think that war makes you a man, but it doesn’t,” Vanderohe gives a mirthless laugh, “I came back as more of a scared little kid than I was before I left. And then- Vegas happened, and I had to start all over, *again.*”

As soon as the words are out into the air, Vanderohe worries he’s said too much, been too cynical for Dieter, when he’s most likely looking for hope, not honesty, but he glances over to see him nodding in understanding.

Dieter quietly asks, “How do you move on, when it’s that difficult?”

“Time. Nothing but time. Sometimes there’s something you can do to get closure, but it’s not always black and white like that. You take it day by day, until one day, you wake up, and

it's... easier."

"For you- it was going back to Las Vegas," Dieter affirms, and Vanderohé nods.

A beat of silence passes, and Dieter asks his final question, "Do you feel like you found your closure, Mr. Vanderohé?"

Van whispers, "Yeah Dieter, I did."

I think I found a lot more than closure.

Dieter nods, "I appreciate your honesty," then he looks down at his hands again. Vanderohé doesn't know what more he could possibly say to make Dieter feel better, other than *I'm so sorry*, and Dieter says in return *it's alright*, but Vanderohé thinks, in a sickening repeat of yesterday, that the situation is anything but.

The hotel phone ringing cuts right through his train of thought, however, causing Dieter to flinch visibly, and since it's on his nightstand, Vanderohé answers it.

"Hello?"

Chambers voice comes through the receiver, "*Is Dieter there?*"

Vanderohé looks over at Dieter to see him looking quizzically, and he mouths *who is it?*

It's Chambers Van responds, and Dieter shakes his head *no* as his answer, so Van comes back to the phone to say, "Yeah sorry, he's not here right now, try again later."

"Did you seriously go quiet for ten seconds and expect me not to realize he told you not to give him the phone?"

Vanderohé sighs, handing the phone to Dieter in defeat, and Dieter leans into Vanderohé's personal space to answer it. He tries to avert his eyes from the patch of skin that reveals itself when Dieter's shirt lifts, but *sue him*, it's right there.

"What?" Dieter barks.

"Someone's grumpy," Vanderohé can just barely hear Chambers voice, "*I wanted to call ahead and give a heads up that everyone's planning on hijacking your room soon. They have a lot of questions. Unfortunately for you I'll be joining too; I want the full story.*"

Dieter runs a hand over his face in frustration, "Thank you for the warning."

"Of course," she says earnestly, and Dieter leans even further over him to slam the phone on the receiver.

He stays where he is though, arm thrown across Vanderohé's midsection and pressing into his side, slumping his full body weight onto him. His face is just to the right of Van's, laying on his upper chest, and it's mildly overwhelming, having Dieter so close.

When it's clear that Dieter is planning on staying in his position for at least a little while longer, Vanderohé commits to his impulsive streak from the past two days, decides *fuck it*, and unfurls his right arm from behind his head. He resituates it around Dieter's back, gently pulling him in. Incrementally, the anxiety that Vanderohé didn't even realize Dieter was holding in his body releases, eased by Van's fingers lightly running along his back. Van can feel himself getting comfortable with each minute that passes too, but he also knows they're running out of time before the others show up.

"What are you gonna do after this?" Vanderohé ponders aloud.

"I cannot fathom waking up in my apartment ever again, so I will be selling it, along with my belongings," Dieter immediately replies, then he huffs out a laugh, "I would much rather wake up in a different place every day until it sinks in that this is real."

A memory comes up, of either Maria telling Vanderohé where she found Dieter, or of Dieter telling him himself, of a locksmithing shop that Dieter owns: *Gwendoline's*.

"What about your shop?"

"You remember that?" Dieter blurts out, excited yet cautiously optimistic.

"Somewhat. I don't- I'm not sure who told me, but it's there."

He can imagine it now, the image of the first Dieter, the bubbly one, the one determined to crack the Götterdämmerung, *I am here to open what cannot be opened*, the one Vanderohé underestimated from the beginning, sitting in his shop and eagerly accepting Maria and Scott's proposal, completely unaware of what exactly he was signing up for.

Dieter hums, says, "I know someone who could take care of my shop for me until I return, an old friend."

Vanderohé's heart pangs a bit at the thought of Dieter leaving Nevada for an extended period of time, that he has virtually nothing tying him here at all, but he pushes it aside to encourage him.

"Travelling endlessly- that's the life."

"Do you have any obligations to stay here?"

"Not really," Van's heart skips a beat at Dieter's... *hopeful?* tone, "The ladies at the nursing home would miss me, but I'll make sure they're taken care of. As long as I come back eventually, they shouldn't be *too* mad at me."

"Very noble of you," Dieter teases, "I certainly don't have anyone waiting for me in Nevada."

Vanderohé suddenly understands himself in a new intimate way, at the urgency of the thought that bursts to the forefront of his mind, *I could be waiting for you*, that there isn't much else he'd rather be doing with his time than waking up in different hotel rooms every day, Dieter at his side, one day returning *home* together.

At his revelation, he decides to ease his racing heart by poking fun at Dieter, “I can’t believe you have Lilly *and* Chambers in your back pocket.”

Dieter exhales a small laugh, “What can I say? The ladies love me.”

A beat passes, Dieter’s hand on his chest clenches his shirt nearly imperceptibly, “Sometimes the men do too, if I’m lucky,” and Vanderohe’s hollow chest yearns to prove to Dieter that he *is* lucky, if Dieter will have him.

But then the moment is over as quickly as it started, because Dieter removes himself from Van’s side, and Van instantly misses the flutter of his heartbeat that barely calmed while Dieter was touching him. Dieter climbs off the bed, gathering their plates and starting to clean up the room before the others can barge in, pressing play on his phone so his opera can continue, filling up the silence.

Dieter halts his movements suddenly, quietly confesses, “I don’t want to face the music,” so somberly that Vanderohe understands what he’s truly saying.

“We don’t have to open the door,” he offers, only half joking, sitting up in bed.

Dieter shakes his head, “No, no, they deserve closure too. I can’t run from this forever.”

When Dieter doesn’t make any more movements, frozen in place, his words not in tune with his actions, Vanderohe decides to be brave for one last time today, for the both of them, swallows past the lump in his throat and his nerves, lightly touches Dieter’s shoulder first so as not to startle him. He slowly loops his arms around Dieter’s neck, pulling him in for a hug that he hopes is comforting, not suffocating, and Dieter hunches over, making their heights even, burying his face in Van’s neck and wrapping his arms around his waist in return. He can feel a slight wetness in the crook of his neck, moves one hand to lightly draw lines on Dieter’s spine. And even though these acts should be far too intimate for near strangers to partake in, it feels right, having Dieter close again.

Eventually the tremble in Dieter’s form calms, and he dislodges his face from Vanderohe’s neck to rest his forehead against his collar bone instead, freeing up his mouth so he can whisper, “You know, you are very different from all the other versions of yourself, Mr. Vanderohe.”

Van chuckles, “I hope that’s a good thing, I’m the one you’re stuck with,” and Dieter’s opera comes to a slower, somber portion, so he sways back and forth lightly, dancing in time with the music, Dieter’s arm’s tightening around him in response.

Dieter mumbles under his breath, *I don’t consider myself stuck with you at all, actually*, so quietly that Vanderohe doubts it was meant to be heard.

In the end Dieter shakes his head slightly, pulls back from the embrace, “If you’ll excuse me, I’m going to collect myself,” taking his phone with him when Van lets him go, waves him off while he shuts the door behind him, leaving him alone in the silence.

Van compiles the last of their dishes and half eaten meals onto the main table in the half kitchen, then rearranges their duffel bags, makes the bed to give his hands something to do, the anticipation of the arrival of the others eating him up inside.

Eventually, he can faintly hear footsteps in the hall, followed by a *knock knock knock* on the door, and he knows it's time. Dieter steps out of the bathroom as Vanderohé makes for door, looking a bit worse for wear, but putting on a brave face nonetheless.

The first thing Vanderohé hears when he opens the door is Peters voice saying, "Okay kid, you got your time to rest, now you have a *lot* of fucking explaining to do," then her small frame pushes through the door, the others close behind.

"Always a pleasure to see you, Peters," Dieter says earnestly, and she responds, "You're already my favorite, no need for flattery."

Dieter looks far too pleased with Peters statement, ponders, "Is it simply flattery if it's true?"

"How did you sleep, Dieter? You look much better today," Maria asks, diverting the attention back to him again.

Afterglow maybe, Chambers and Guzman snicker to each other, and Dieter glares at them.

The group moves into the sitting room, Scott and Maria taking up one half of the main couch, sitting far closer than is strictly necessary, Chambers sitting to their left. Peters had previously chosen the armchair, Guzman settles down on the floor in-between Chamber's feet, and Lilly stands separated from the group, her arms crossed. Dieter and Vanderohé are still loitering by the door, so Van moves first, goes to sit at the loveseat across from the others in hopes that Dieter will join him.

"I slept well, thank you Maria," Dieter answers politely, ignoring the troublemakers, and sure enough, he follows Vanderohé.

Lilly scoffs, "I hope so, because it's time for you to talk."

"Straight to the point then?"

"You didn't hesitate in getting straight to the point when you approached me yesterday," Lilly states.

The answering look that Dieter gives her is cold, if a bit agitated, "Out of necessity only; would you have heard me out had I not said my piece immediately?" a beat of silence passes, and Dieter says roughly, "No, I didn't think so."

"Okay so- time loops. That's what happened, right? But how? What happened?" Guzman refocuses the energy, trying to calm things down, "I'm assuming we all- didn't make it? Why did we get another chance?"

Dieter shakes his head, sighs, and Vanderohé knocks his knee against Dieter's, "No, we didn't make it, you're right about that."

“You said- Zeus- was his name? The king? He gave us a second chance? I don’t buy that,” Scott questions.

“It’s much more complicated than that,” Dieter sighs, “It’s quite a long-winded explanation, if I’m being honest, it would be hard to understand without all of the context.”

“Context that you’ll give us,” Maria pushes.

“This is- it’s much more than just context, this is *everything*, you understand? It’s not easy to talk about, or to hear.”

“Well, luckily we have you to explain it for us, don’t we?” Chambers encourages him.

Dieter gives a resigned nod, accepting his fate, hunches over until he can lean on his knees, clasping his hands together. He stares at them for a moment too long, that thousand-yard stare coming to the forefront again, and Vanderohé moves his foot until its touching Dieter’s, hidden behind the coffee table, giving him silent support that can’t be scrutinized by the others. He takes a deep breath, comes back to the present.

Then he tells his story.

Everyone listens intently, catching every word that leaves his mouth, because everything about it sounds *fucked up* in every sense. Dieter never shies away from detailing the brutality of what he witnessed and experienced, mentions the numerous deaths that befell them- his own and theirs- with chilling imagery. He explains everything he had to figure out on his own- how Dieter struggled to prevent the deaths of the ones who died after him, which didn’t occur to Van before, that *Dieter was one of the first to die*, in the original timeline.

Dieter details his process in discovering what Martin’s plan was, what phrases mattered to the rest of crew to get them on his side, casually mentioning intimate details about their lives that, had things gone the way they did the first time, he never would’ve known. He describes so many days that Vanderohé can’t even *fathom* how Dieter found the will to keep pushing every single time the loop reset. But brutally honest Peters beats him to it, jokes morbidly, *I’m surprised you didn’t put a bullet in your head after a while*, and Dieter, colder than expected, responds, *oh believe me, I did, it didn’t work either*, which breaks Vanderohé’s heart all the more.

Vanderohé listens as Dieter expresses how much Lilly helped him in the end, how her participation helped his credibility more than anything else, sees Lilly’s body language gradually open up as Dieter says *it cannot be overstated how vital you were to my success, Lilly*. He details how frustrating it was to deal with Kate, as she was the one wildcard he couldn’t quite predict, finally deciding that letting her go on her own in the end was the best solution. Guzman gazes up towards Chambers every time Dieter laments her staggeringly high number of deaths, and Chambers gets upset at the implication that Guzman’s death was guaranteed every time he didn’t have her guarding him. Scott shoots a wide-eyed expression at Maria when Dieter offhandedly mentions that Maria’s key words were always *forever is a long time*.

But as revealing as Dieter is about everyone else's dirty laundry: Peters late wife, Scott's misunderstanding of Kate's anger, Lilly sacrificing the officer Dieter promised her, Vanderohe can't help but notice that Dieter is frustratingly vague about Vanderohe's involvement in his success, and he doesn't know if it's better or worse that Dieter is keeping it a secret from the others.

In the end there is no triumphant conclusion to Dieter's tale, no grand score to indicate a hero's perilous journey being heard, there is simply Dieter's quiet, accented voice saying *that is all*, into the room, while everyone soaks it in.

Eventually, Peters leans back in her chair, fold her arms and whistles, "Jesus fucking Christ, kid, this is-"

"This is fucking insane!" Guzman interrupts.

"What he said," Peters waves her hand in his general direction.

"No seriously like, should we tell someone?"

"Who would we tell?" Maria questions.

"The authorities?" Scott throws out.

"No one would believe us," Lilly says, frustrated, holding her head in her hands.

"What about the Government? Isn't it their fault this all started?" Chambers asks.

Scott turns to Vanderohe now, "You had high clearance at one point, Vanny. Is she right?"

Guzman catches on, "Wait, no way, you were there when it started?"

Vanderohe sighs, shoots an exasperated look towards Maria, *fucking Scott*, whose face screams *good luck with this one*.

"Not like that- I wasn't there, not when it started. I heard- whispers, of what happened at the beginning of Vegas, from old military friends. I wasn't on duty at the time. I had clearance at one point yes, but I didn't know much more than the rest of you."

"What *did* you know?" Dieter asks.

"It doesn't matter, Zeus and the others are dead and gone."

"It matters to me," Dieter replies plainly.

Vanderohe scoffs, because Dieter understands that *he's his weak spot* and uses that against him every fucking time, clenches his jaw and answers, "Zeus was the first one; he created the others. Like Lilly said- he makes the alphas, if you're chosen. The whispers were about where he *came* from, they said that he was transported from Area 51. What I heard was that-"

“The zombies were aliens?!” Guzman asks incredulously, and Dieter mumbles, *well that makes a lot more sense*, and Vandrohe grunts in affirmation, “Zeus was an alien, the zombies were- just zombies, I guess.”

“The government knew then, what was happening from the beginning,” Lilly pieces together.

“Left us to fight off something we never understood,” Maria says in scorn, “Fucking assholes.”

“So, there's nothing we can do about this?” Chambers asks.

“At this point the information only helps *us*, it doesn't do anything for anyone else. Unless more of the ones like Zeus come here, it's over.” Scott responds.

“All of this- for nothing,” Lilly dejectedly answers.

Vandrohe notices Dieter's responding flinch, the resigned look on his face at accepting the truth in that statement.

Maria speaks up, “That's it then? We just- take this to the grave? Why did it happen at all?”

“Sometimes bad shit just happens. No point in finding a reason to explain all the chaos,” Peters shuts down her train of thought.

A beat passes, but then Lilly puts the spotlight on Dieter, challenges him, “Unless *you* know the reason for the chaos.”

And his silence is *deafening*.

“Dieter?” Vandrohe urges.

Dieter takes in a deep breath, starts by speaking quietly, “I have... a theory,” but he looks so uncomfortable, and he halts there.

“Come on, boy wonder, don't get cold feet now,” Peters jests when Dieter doesn't elaborate.

“You can tell us,” Maria reassures him.

He begins again, “Zeus was much more complicated than I originally anticipated. He was not a mindless zombie, he was- nuanced, complex, interesting... human, under it all. I understood that he was important, but I didn't understand that he was all powerful in *that* way- in a time altering, cosmic way. Him being from another world explains my confusion.”

He continues, “I believe that Zeus understood that he could not save all of his people, but- perhaps in an act of desperation, of humanity coming to the surface- he used his abilities to keep them for as long as he could, in a sort of frozen stasis. He took out his anger on us, acting on his revenge while cherishing his fleeting time with his loved ones. Until one day, he too, grew tired, and that is when we were at an impasse.”

“He wanted revenge for Martin killing the queen,” Vanderohe clarifies.

“Yes, I was able to give him closure,” Dieter’s eyes meet Van’s for a moment before looking at the group again, “I had to prove to him that I was not with Martin. In the original timeline, he beheaded the queen. Zeus was angry at us because he believed that we were in on it, that we intended for that happen. He was in denial that his queen, his people, their time had come to an end, so he didn’t allow time to progress any further. He wanted to live in his last day until he was ready to go. It wasn’t his fault that I got involved, even though he enjoyed torturing me,” he shrugs.

Dieter sounds *impressed* now, inexplicably praising the god who threw him into this mess to begin with, “Zeus was a noble judge, jury, and executioner. He was fearsome because- as powerful as he was, a being capable of altering reality- he knew his limits. Some things always happened- the way fate intended; I suppose- until I heavily interfered. Once I started meddling in things, I grew to respect him, oddly enough. I hold an appreciation for him in a way that I was not anticipating.”

“Awful lot of praise for a guy who froze you in time.” Peters states.

“Phenomenal cosmic power that I was granted the opportunity to change? A god who *chose* to let me live? Wouldn’t you grow to understand the appeal? We were on inverted paths, you must recognize. In the end- I believe I traded my humanity for his.”

The group is quiet for a moment, but the question still lingers in the back of Vanderohe’s head.

Why you?

“What caused the loops to start, Dieter?” he quietly asks.

Dieter laughs mirthlessly under his breath, shrugs and says, “I didn’t target the brain.”

Vanderohe remembers his own words from- two days ago, for him, not for Dieter, but Scott speaks up, “I don’t follow.”

“Zeus’s blood was the key. I was merely collateral, that’s all. Martin was the score, for Zeus, but I entangled my fate with his demise the moment that I interfered,” Dieter states bitterly.

“What do you mean by ‘interfered’?” Maria points out.

“Zeus’s *blue* blood.” Peters pieces together, Lilly and Scott's shocked faces presenting in understanding.

Chambers interrupts before Dieter can respond, figuring out the implications, “Wait- how on earth did his blood get on you the first time? There's no way we would've- you were the most important to the mission, why were you-”

“You were alone,” Guzman cuts her off, realizes at the time Vanderohe does.

Dieter hesitates for a long moment, staring at the table rather than meeting anyone's eyes, arms crossed and jaw clenched. He eventually speaks up, "Yes, I was alone."

And Vanderohe *knows* that something must have happened to him, in the original timeline, because Dieter has had no trouble answering everyone's questions, showed no remorse in recounting the brutality they all faced, but he isn't being forthright about this, hasn't shared any details about Vanderohe in any of the timelines, and Vanderohe knows there is no version of reality where he willingly left Dieter to die alone.

"How, Dieter? I would've-" Vanderohe cuts himself off, *I would've given my life to protect you* hanging on his lips, but he must have made good on that promise, if that's how things ended up.

"I couldn't let you die, Mr. Vanderohe," Dieter says so earnestly, and for a brief moment, it feels like it's just the two of them in the room, staring at each other, because Vanderohe understands now. He witnesses Dieter's confident, detached persona's walls building up again, right before he asks, "What did you do?" even though he *knows*.

Dieter sacrificed himself for me.

"In the original timeline, we were trapped in the basement. Martin sealed the side ladder; Zeus blocked the elevator doors. Zeus killed Maria," and Vanderohe is *horrified* at the thought of Scott watching that unfold, witnesses Maria's slight grasp at her shirt collar, either a reflex or a memory coming to the surface.

"The rest of you escaped. We were out of options; it was me and Mr. Vanderohe left there. You ran out of ammo, tried to fight Zeus in hand-to-hand combat, but he overpowered you," then Dieter averts his eyes from Vanderohe's, "I hit him over the back of the head, pushed you into the safe and sealed the doors, but Zeus pulled me back."

Dieter is content to die with Vanderohe's face being the last thing he sees, his mouth open in a wail of agony at watching Dieter be ripped away from the safe doors, Dieter holding the understanding that the doors must be shut from the outside.

It's alright.

To die for Vanderohe would be an honor.

The vault door closes like a clap of thunder behind him. Zeus clutches Dieter's neck, enraged at his interference, lifting him up with ease and shoving him against the door, the mechanisms roughly digging into his back. He claws at Zeus's hand and arm, but there is nothing he can do to halt such an all-powerful presence, and Dieter understands intimately that he is about to die, the same as Maria.

A surge of fight comes into him suddenly, a need for revenge for the cruel way Zeus forced Scott to watch Maria die, her loss of life after laying her heart bare, a parallel to Dieter sacrificing himself for a man he never met before, who inexplicably felt like home, someone worth dying for.

Dieter reaches into his belt, grabs the knife Vandrohe gave him.

And he stabs Zeus in the heart.

Auf Wiedersehen.

Zeus yowls, squeezes harder on Dieter's throat, and he can feel his life slipping away with each crushing moment, twists the knife and pulls it out, laughs in the face of death himself, and with the last breath in his lungs, taunts Zeus, "Not zombie-killing material, my ass."

The true last thing Dieter sees is Zeus's furious face over him, and the last thing he feels is the slip of blood on his hands as he keeps fruitlessly attempting to push Zeus away, as the darkness trickles in, because what is a mere mortal to a god?

And then he wakes up.

Dieter meets Van's eyes now, but they're cold, so unlike his usual gaze, challenging him, "Quite poetic, to behead Martin with your knife in the end, don't you think?"

Guzman asks in a horrified tone, "You *beheaded* Martin?"

Vandrohe feels suddenly sick to his stomach at the reminder of Dieter's *loss of humanity*, but Dieter isn't done yet, addresses the group, "Did you know that the unfortunate side effect of getting Zeus's blood on you is that you then remember every excruciating second of your windpipe being crushed? You remember that time Martin beat you to death, when Valentine peeled your skin off piece by piece and ate you alive, what it felt like to be ripped limb from limb by the shamblers, how torturously slow it is to bleed out after Zeus clawed out your intestines," Dieter pauses for a moment, "He watched, that time."

Dieter focuses his attention on Lilly only now, the anger in his voice creeping in, "All of those experiences- for nothing, isn't that right, Coyote?"

"I shouldn't have said it like that, I'm sorry, Dieter--"

"Do you remember shooting me in the back? Did you say sorry for that?" he accuses, and Lilly's grimace is all the answer Vandrohe needs. He can see the tension in Dieter's body building, the forthcoming version of him from earlier slowly receding.

"I remember some things," Chambers interrupts. Everyone's heads turn to her, while she's staring at the floor with her arms crossed, "I didn't make it, almost every time, right? I remember dying, sometimes. But it's like--"

"A bad dream," Maria finishes, and Chambers nods.

After a moment of silence, Lilly can't help but ask, "Why would you let me live?" and her comment is what pushes Dieter over the edge.

"Because I'm not a *monster*!"

"She's not saying that you are, Dieter," Scott tries to placate him.

“You’re all thinking it,” he says, accusatory, “Because I respect the being who did this to me? Because I was willing to do what had to be done in order to escape?” then he stands from his seat to command the room’s attention.

“Do you honestly believe that Zeus would let us walk out of Vegas with nothing in return? I did everything I possibly could to keep you alive. I tried *everything* before I made the deal! I watched you die, over and over again, for no reason other than dumb luck. *Nothing* I did truly mattered, I escaped because Zeus *chose* for me to be released, do you understand that? I bartered my humanity for our freedom, and for what? To now go about the rest of my life remembering the things that didn’t actually happen!?”

Vanderohe tries to reassure him, “They *did* happen, Dieter-”

“Not to you.” Dieter says coldly.

And the words are like a slap to the face.

“Yes, they fucking did, you dick.” Chambers grits out after a beat of silence.

“No, not the way they happened to me. That’s precisely the fucking problem!”

Vanderohe balks, taken aback by Dieter’s rising anger, and the situation escalates when Guzman stands up suddenly, screams, “Hey! Don’t fucking talk to her like that!”

“We just want to help you, but you’re too stuck in your fucking head to see that,” Chambers finishes sadly.

“*Help me!?* ” Dieter scoffs, “You don’t even know me. We are bound by circumstance, nothing more. I am nothing but a conduit of information for you. You have absolutely no consideration for how I feel!”

The tension in the room is thick, but Vanderohe cuts through it to ask calmly, “That’s what you really think?”

Dieter snaps his head in Vanderohe’s direction quickly, sees Dieter’s eyes turn regretful for a fraction of a second, a look of sorrow coming through in his features, before Maria’s next statement has his hackles rising again.

“Dieter- I’m *so* sorry I brought you onto the job, it’s my fault,” she says wetly, the emotion clogging her throat.

But all of Dieter’s rage comes to a head when he screams at Maria, “*Apologies mean nothing to me!*”

“*That’s enough, Dieter!*” Scott’s reprimanding voice yells out. He stands and physically blocks Maria from Dieter, but Dieter refuses to back down.

“If we are picking who is at fault- then fine, Maria, you win- but so does Scott! Or perhaps Lilly, for not warning us of Martin’s plan? Guzman- for abandoning me and Vanderohe in the basement? Fucking *Kate* even, for pushing her way into Vegas and getting the rest of you

killed? How about you-” Dieter points at Van, “For giving me nothing more than a knife to defend myself!?”

Vanderohe’s heart *shatters*, but Dieter scoffs, “You were right, Peters, sometimes bad shit just happens- there is no one to blame. Only myself and Zeus, the only one who gets it.”

“Do any of you *truly* understand what it is like to be that powerless? For your entire existence to be reduced to a god’s plaything? To be forced to watch the people you love be tortured over and over again, only for the day to reset- for you all to forget me- *everything* we’d been through-” Dieter locks eyes with Vanderohe, “What you mean to me?”

Dieter’s face crumbles at the same moment that all of the fight leaves his body, his face flushed and tears threatening to spill over.

“I *know* you. I took the time to learn about your hopes, your fears, your lives. I saved you because I *wanted* to. Zeus allowed me one thing- to control your fates. And even still, I am nothing but a stranger to you.”

Dieter wipes at his eyes, grabs the keycard off the coffee table to his original room, slips through the group while they’re still frozen in place. “I wish I could be that person that you met two days ago; I truly do. But that Dieter is dead, a hundred times over. You are stuck with me, and I am done for today,” and the door *clicks* shut behind him.

It’s been hours and Dieter still hasn’t returned.

Vanderohe lays in bed after everyone else has left his room, thinking over the events that occurred today, brooding in his loneliness.

The conversations had between the crew after Dieter left the room were deeply unpleasant, but cathartic, in a way, expressions of their complex feelings towards the situation, towards Dieter, coming to terms with their fragile mortality. Each member of the crew left Vanderohe’s room, sometimes in pairs, sometimes with hugs, sometimes in tears, but always asking for updates on Dieter as Vanderohe learns them. He tries not to think too hard about the fact that he’s been unanimously delegated as Dieter’s keeper. At the end, he was left with Lilly, Dieter’s number one accomplice, even before Vanderohe himself, and he thinks back to their final conversation before they parted ways for the time being.

You were right, you know. I should’ve given him more time, Lilly had confessed.

The Coyote admitting that she was wrong? I must be dreaming, Vanderohe said sarcastically, and she glared at him, with less anger than he was anticipating.

Listen, if it wasn’t you pushing him it would’ve been someone else. I think it’s just easy for him to be mad at you, Vanderohe had tried to placate, but Lilly was quick, harsh, *wouldn’t*

you be? I shot him. I remember it.

Vanderohe had recounted the way Dieter called his own murder *a necessary evil*, explained the deal that had been struck between one version of her and Dieter, she had smiled in return, and Vanderohe sees what Dieter had, how alike they could be when backed into a corner, the understanding they had for each other.

He's been drinking a bit, having ordered room service, red wine paired with the steak he treats himself to in his lonely evening, watching stupid reruns of sitcoms. Eventually he grows restless, turns off the TV entirely to lean back and stare at the ceiling. *I could leave*, he considers, *nothing is keeping me here*, but a small voice in the back of his mind calls out *liar*, knows that he can't possibly move on without speaking to Dieter about what's been happening between them. Any other version of him from the past, a lesser one, would leave without hesitation, go when things get tough, but he's simply not that person anymore.

When speaking with Lilly he had lamented the fact that Dieter barely mentioned him in his story at all, and Lilly had scoffed at him, said *boys- you're so fucking dense*. Vanderohe stared at her until she elaborated, *he saved you, Vanderohe, not just the way he saved us all in the end- he saved you the first time, the only one where he didn't know he'd come back. If you don't think that said enough... I don't know what to tell you.*

So now Vanderohe mulls over every single interaction he's had with Dieter over the past three days, Lilly's exasperated tone permeating his thoughts, because he understands that she's right. He hadn't *missed* the way Dieter always followed him, that Dieter had given his life for Vanderohe, he simply didn't want to push more than he already felt like he had.

He thinks of the Dieter he first met: the original one, naïve and frustratingly adorable and *warm*, his stupid suede boots, evidence of his lack of preparedness for the unknown. Then the Dieter he encountered during the heist: the understated leader, the puppet master behind the scenes, undermining a god to suit his whims, earning his respect, beheading the one who sentenced him to death to guarantee the lives of those he loved. And finally, he thinks of the Dieter he shared a bed with: haunted, nuanced, complex, but *open and honest*, and brutally so, despite the horrors he's endured. The one who nearly refused to confess that the first Dieter had sacrificed himself for him, who had said *the men do too, if I'm lucky*, who danced with him to his favorite opera, who makes Vanderohe's heart race in a way that he hasn't experienced in *years*, whose eyes somehow *popped* against the blue blood smeared across his face, who brings a sense of peace to Vanderohe's soul.

This is the one he's not letting go of.

Vanderohe *gets it* now, that Dieter has been leaving hints for him to unravel, breadcrumbs to follow were he paying attention from the beginning: Dieter's disappointment when Van had not remembered him immediately, his fleeting hope until Vanderohe had instilled it in him again, when he had told him he *believed* Dieter, Dieter telling Maria that he understood what she wanted to confess, *I wish you could have gotten to know the original me*, telling Vanderohe that he was very different from all the other versions of himself, and a sensation suddenly springs forward, a thought of pure clarity.

Given enough time, he would have fallen in love with Dieter in every loop.

He had all the time in the world, Lilly's voice sings to Van.

He sits up in bed, unsure about what to do with his sudden revelation, until he notices a key card laying on the floor, shoved underneath his door. That at some point in his ruminating Dieter had quietly slipped his extra key card inside, another signal to come look for him, one that he's not going to let slip by.

Encouraged, Vanderohe makes his way down the hall to stand in front of Dieter's door, steels himself with a deep breath in, then unlocks it.

The room is empty and dark, save for the light coming from the bathroom door, which is slightly ajar, so he steps inside, knocks lightly on it, calls out, "Dieter?"

"You may come in, Mr. Vanderohe."

He pushes the door, creeping in, to be met with the sight of Dieter sitting in the bathtub naked, knees pulled to his chest and chin resting on them.

"*Oh* shit, I'm sorry, I didn't know you weren't decent-" and he averts his eyes, but catches Dieter's eye roll before he does.

"I said you could come in, it's hardly your fault," he grumbles, and then he demands, "Sit down."

Now that he has permission, Van sits crisscrossed on the floor next to the tub, leans his back against it, no longer peering in at Dieter, a much more comfortable shift in position. He bows his head, looks at his hands, and wonders, *where do we go from here?*

But Dieter breaks the silence first, asks gently, "You do understand that I don't blame you for what happened, yes, Mr. Vanderohe?"

"It doesn't make what you said sting any less," he sighs.

Dieter hums, "How do I make amends?" but Vanderohe doesn't answer that, gruffly replies, "It's my turn," instead, still a bit upset.

"Ah yes, my apologies," Dieter whispers.

Vanderohe starts by breathing deeply himself, "Why didn't you tell me that you saved me in the original timeline?"

"Because I know you. You would have blamed yourself for what happened to me- even though it is not your fault at all," and Dieter is completely right, because that's exactly the train of thought he had, "I chose to do it and I would do it again. I *did* do it again, in fact, many times. I shouldn't have said what I did- I know that was your greatest fear, and I exploited that. I'm sorry, Van. Hurting you was the last thing I wanted to accomplish."

He understands that Dieter is his own person, and even though he will always somewhat blame himself for Dieter's traumatic experience, there's nothing he can do about it now, and

Dieter seems genuinely remorseful about rubbing it in, but Vanderohé isn't done pushing him yet.

"Sometimes it feels like you're punishing me for not remembering, when all I want is to understand."

He can hear the sloshing of the water behind him, perhaps Dieter changing his position, "Do you prefer when I tell you about what happened in the loops? Or is it worse? I thought you would have preferred honesty, considering how upset you get when I lie," Dieter asks, if a bit harsh, but Vanderohé knows it's simply because he's being raw and genuinely asking for clarification.

"If I ask if something has happened before- then yes, please tell me, but your delivery- it's all brutality rather than the honesty. When you were telling us all what happened in the loops, you were just- gone. It wasn't you anymore."

He takes a moment to collect himself, looking down again, "It's like there's this other version of you that comes out, the one who's detached from it all and so matter-of-fact, like you're reading off the news rather than talking about things that you experienced firsthand. And if that's your coping mechanism, then *hey*, I get it- tell me, so I learn not to take it personally- but I- we all just want to understand, Dieter, to at least try to."

Vanderohé takes a deep breath to calm his nerves, leans his head back against the edge of the tub, continues, "And I know I won't ever *truly* understand what happened to you- I don't think anyone ever will, but a lot of us on the crew, me included- we've been through some fucked up shit. I know how much anger you have. I know this is all so fresh, and it'll take a long time for you to be okay again. I know you're scared, and you feel alone, and I know that you're lashing out because this is really fucking difficult- it's probably going to be the worst thing you've ever been through. But I'm willing to be here, if you'll have me. Because *I* want to, not because you feel like you've pushed yourself on me."

He momentarily panics when the only response is total silence, until Dieter says *okay*, so quietly that Vanderohé has to almost strain to hear it, but it's out there, nonetheless.

"Was that your question?" Vanderohé circles back, and Dieter clarifies, "I'm sorry?"

"How to make amends. Is that your question?"

"No" he says, laughs wetly, emotion in his throat, "I know what to do now- with the others. All that time to think and I still didn't consider the aftermath until it was upon me."

Curiosity instantly overtakes Vanderohé, "Do you really believe you traded your humanity for Zeus's?"

"That has... a complicated answer."

"We have time," Vanderohé encourages, and Dieter sighs.

"I don't believe that killing someone is enough to strip you of your humanity, if that's what you're asking. I do not think lesser of you, or anyone else for that matter, for what you've done out of necessity. I understand that I sound hypocritical putting it like that- because what I did was necessary too, to prove my loyalty against Martin, but I-" he cuts himself off, taking in a deep breath, then continues, "*I made the deal. I approached Zeus with the terms, and he accepted. I understood that ending our charade was imperative to his humanity, his closure, that he had to accept mortality one day, while I refused to. I stabbed him, even when I knew it was the end. I laughed in the face of death, and we grew to respect one another. Will I ever know for sure that I had to kill Martin, to do what I deemed necessary to prove myself? No, unfortunately not. Life is full of great unknowns. I simply could not risk Zeus denying my offer- it would have destroyed me. Everything I was and am demanded him to say yes, and so I offered it all.*"

Vanderohe sits in silence for a long while, basking in the absolute bombshell of *Dieter made the deal* repeating in his head over and over, until he whispers, "I don't think there's anything more human than giving up your entire being for the people you love, especially those you weren't sure would love you in return," he says delicately, "Is that not what being human means? To live for those uncertainties? Those rare, isolated moments of great significance. Many men, lesser men, are the intervals and intermissions, but you, Dieter, you're the symphony."

"So you *do* read Nietzsche," Dieter hums, reserved but pleased, some emotion in his voice, and Vanderohe laughs, "Of course I do, I have a masters in philosophy."

"You never cease to surprise me. Thank you, Van," Dieter says somberly, and he nods in response, hoping Dieter sees his movement.

"What did you mean when you said I was different than the other versions of myself?"

A *tsk* sound comes from behind him, Dieter chastising, "Mr. Vanderohe, I thought we established that we would be taking turns, that's two questions in a row," and Van smirks, understanding that *they'll be okay*, holds his hands up in surrender so Dieter can see them after chuckling, "You're right, sorry, it's your turn."

But Dieter sobers up, bringing tension back between them, whispering, "Why did you kiss me?"

"I wanted to," Vanderohe replies earnestly, his heart racing, "And because... I was scared. I wasn't sure if you'd come back to me; you were gone again- kissing you was the only thing I could think of to get you back."

"I'm here now," Dieter offers.

"I know," Vanderohe confirms, "But that- that wasn't our first kiss."

"No, it wasn't."

Suddenly, memories- sensations more like, spring forward in Vanderohe's mind.

A kiss on Dieter's forehead as he dies in Vanderohé's arms, salty tears running down his face.

A heated bite of Dieter's lip when they are left alone in the basement, his gasp into the air.

A press of lips goodbye while they held each other close in the vault, waiting for the bomb to hit.

Vanderohé takes a moment to collect his thoughts, "Did we ever do more than kiss?"

"No," Dieter answers, and Vanderohé feels a rush of relief he wasn't anticipating, "It would have been wrong of me to take that experience from you when I knew you wouldn't remember."

"Okay," Vanderohé nods, soaking in the information.

"Much to your dismay," and Dieter is *teasing him*, that provocative little shit.

"I can't believe I like you," Vanderohé jokes back, then reels it in, asking his final question for the time being, "What *did* you mean when you said I was different than the other versions of me?"

But Dieter doesn't answer, the silence is eating Vanderohé alive, he's suddenly terrified that his confession was ill timed, then he hears a hitch of a breath. He sits up in alarm, turns around to see if everything's alright, and Dieter has tears in his eyes, which he was not expecting, so he grips the edge of the tub, wanting to touch and comfort but not knowing if he can, until Dieter *laughs*.

He reassures, "They are tears of joy, Van, it's alright," and Vanderohé reaches out to grab the sides of Dieter's face, pulls him in and kisses his forehead without hesitation, "*God*, you just scared the shit out of me," hauling him into a proper hug.

"Not my intention," Dieter jests, then he clarifies, "In every single other timeline, I kissed you first. I would always initiate. *You* are the only one who has kissed me, but I told myself you were the *one* I would not overstep with. I was hoping this would be the loop that worked, and I didn't want to persuade you into- I couldn't live with myself, if I had put the burden of my feelings on you," and Vanderohé's heart *soars* at Dieter's admission, at his ultimate care for Vanderohé's wellbeing, "I didn't give the aftermath much thought, while I was in the thick of it... but I had meddled with fate far too much to take that choice from you."

They sit there holding each other for much too long, enough time passing that Vanderohé's knees are starting to hurt from the tile, and he's positive that the handles of the faucet are digging into Dieter's skin, so he pulls back, says "You should get out of the tub, you're gonna be all prune-y."

Vanderohé gets onto his knees in an attempt to get up, feeling their moment naturally come to its conclusion, but Dieter stops him dead in his tracks when he hums, "Or you could join me."

And Vanderohé freezes, staring down at him, unsure of what to do next, until Dieter questions, "Should I ask *nicely*, Mr. Vanderohé?" and *fucking hell*, that flirtatious tone goes straight to his fucking gut, but he *has* to be sure, asks, "Are you sure this is okay Dieter? We can wait-"

"I've waited long enough, don't you think?" he responds tersely, until he gets momentarily concerned, confirms in return, "As long as you want to."

"Yeah, Dieter, of course I want to. Ask nicely and you can have whatever you want."

His heartrate is through the fucking roof now, because Dieter *smiles*, the first real one he's seen all day, and he gets that rush of déjà vu again, at those endearing eyes looking right at him, curses the version of him that got to see this look the first time, because he doesn't understand how Dieter can look so innocent when he's acting downright *sinful*.

"Stand up, please, I want to look at you."

Vanderohé obeys, and it's at this moment that he remembers that Dieter is *completely* fucking naked, but Vanderohé still feels like the one exposed, like he's laying himself bare, that Dieter is very much in control of the situation, and he averts his eyes, unsure if he's allowed to look.

"Mr. Vanderohé, it's quite unfair to have on so many clothes, don't you think?"

He understands the cue, reaches for the hem of his shirt to take it off quickly, but Dieter chastises, "Slow, Van, we have time," and the heat of a blush rises to his features, his cock stirring in his jeans. He peels off his shirt agonizingly slow, maybe flexing his abs a bit to show off, and Dieter hums giddily.

"Would you please take off your trousers, too?"

Vanderohé reaches for his belt, overwhelmed at how someone who hasn't even *touched* him can have him so fucking whipped, but he's happy to do this for Dieter, anticipating what's to come.

"What about-" Vanderohé starts, but he cuts himself off until Dieter reassures, "You may speak, I want this to be about you, too."

He nods, "The boxers?" and Dieter says, "Those can go. You can look at me too, you know."

The laugh that bubbles up eases the nerves Vanderohé's feeling. He decides, *fuck it*, pulls off his pants and boxers in one fell swoop, stepping out of them and looking up at Dieter as he does so.

And Dieter is *already* staring, mouth turning into a fantastically wide grin when he croons, "Oh, Mr. Vanderohé, you are absolutely *lovely*," and Vanderohé admires him in return, because he's a *lot* more built than Vanderohé was anticipating.

“God, Dieter,” he groans, because Dieter is fucking *gorgeous*, lean muscle and perfect unblemished skin and all *his*.

“Could you get on your knees again? And close your eyes for me,” Dieter demands affectionately.

This time Vanderohé bundles up his clothes at the edge of the tub to kneel on, indulges Dieter and closes his eyes. He’s gripping the edge of the tub, unsure of Dieter’s next move. He can hear the water sloshing as Dieter readjusts his position, then he feels the feather light press of Dieter’s hands on his cheeks, cradling his face, and the intimacy of the act is burning him alive.

Dieter takes his sweet time, running his fingers along Van’s tattoos, his collar bones, his brows, touching him so delicately and intimately that he feels like he’s going to combust, and he just wants to *touch*, to move things along, but Dieter holding the reins is something he never knew he needed until now.

“You are *beautiful*,” Dieter murmurs, and Van can *feel* his breath on his face, Dieter’s *so close*, so he swallows and teases, “I’m wrapped around your fucking finger and you haven’t even kissed me yet,” in a much fonder tone than he was going for.

“That wasn’t a question,” Dieter’s small exhale of laughter hits Van, and he’s a bit lightheaded with giddiness in his chest when Dieter responds, “I’ll let it slide, though, because it’s you,” and then Dieter *finally* kisses him.

This time there is no pang of sadness in his heart, no sensation of déjà vu, just the pull on his chest easing the moment that Dieter’s lips meet his, because everything is as it should be.

Vanderohé brings his hands up, settling them low on Dieter’s hips, rubbing small circles into his hipbones. Dieter’s tongue presses against the seam of his lips, and he opens his mouth, letting him in, making a small noise of appreciation when Dieter doesn’t hesitate to deepen the kiss.

But then Dieter gets a bit frantic, and as much as Vanderohé finds Dieter getting worked up to be hot beyond belief, he doesn’t think it’s in the *right* way. He pulls back, “Hey, it’s alright, like you said, we have time Dieter, the rest of our lives, in fact.”

Dieter nods, coming back to the present, and Vanderohé leans in for more slow, languid kisses, taking his time to learn what Dieter likes. He alternates, *one, two, three* chaste kisses, then kisses deeper, pulling back and lightly nipping on Dieter’s bottom lip. Vanderohé runs his hands on Dieter’s sides, then pulls the hair on the back of his head until Dieter gasps and exposes the long line of his throat. And Vanderohé’s been *waiting* to do this, doesn’t hesitate before pressing hot kisses across Dieter’s neck, paying strong attention to leaving marks on his collarbone and around his pulse point, because Dieter actually *moans* when he does so, heat stirring in his gut.

“*Sheisse* Van,” Dieter whispers, and Vanderohé laughs softly in return, “What can I say? I’m a quick learner,” kissing him deeply.

“I thought you were going to join me in the tub,” Dieter pouts when he pulls back, and Vanderohe finds it fucking adorable, so he kisses Dieter’s nose in response, laughs at his look of surprise.

“You wanna do this here?” Van punctuates his question with a few more kisses, and Dieter states, “*What I want* is for you to join me so I can properly touch you. *Then* you can do whatever you want to me after, deal?”

Vanderohe wastes no time in getting to his feet, stepping into the tub, and Dieter leans back against the edge, asks *nicely*, “Please sit in my lap, Van,” and *how could he say no?*

He kneels, straddling Dieter’s thighs, and they start making out again. Vanderohe is honestly content to taste Dieter’s lips for the rest of his fucking life, exploring his mouth, enjoying his small noises, the lewd sounds of their lips smacking, he doesn’t even fucking care as long as Dieter is on him, under him, or touching him at all times. Dieter eventually shifts his legs upwards, causing Van to scoot further into his lap, the wetness making it easy to slide against him, their cocks brushing against each other, making them both groan, and Vanderohe clambers for Dieter’s shoulders to hold onto as he’s knocked off balance.

Dieter throws his head back and laughs, “Sorry, I overestimated the angle,” and Vanderohe huffs out a laugh, kisses his dumb mouth with a grin. Dieter cradles his face in his hands again, then gently pushes Vanderohe back until he’s using all of his quad strength to hold himself upward with the steep angle, putting him on full display, and Dieter, the unsuspecting *sadist*, hums contently, “I quite like you like this.”

He leans up, kisses across Vanderohe’s chest, tweaks one of his nipples, causing him to gasp slightly, and Dieter asks, “Can I blow you, Mr. Vanderohe?” and *god, yes, of course Dieter can, whatever he wants*, and Van tells him as much, which causes Dieter to surge upwards and capture his lips in a bruising kiss.

Dieter instructs him to sit at the edge of the tub against the wall, *for support while I blow your mind, get it, Van?* And he can’t believe this is *his* idiot. Dieter is in-between his legs, starts by nipping at his thighs, his abs, everywhere that isn’t his dick. He kisses, licks, runs his fingers where Van’s thighs meet his torso, and Dieter sings praises under his breath, *I want to make you feel good, you’re so handsome, Mr. Vanderohe, all mine*, until Van can’t take it anymore, says, “Dieter, come on, I’m dying of old age here,” and it sounds a *lot* more breathless than he intended.

“I thought you said we had time,” Dieter teases, and he *finally* wraps his hand around the base of Vanderohe’s dick, gets him to gasp and reach for Dieter’s curls.

And then Dieter swallows him down as far as he can go, and Van’s toes curl instantly at the wet heat, groaning *fuck, Dieter*, pulling at his hair slightly too hard by accident.

By accident, that is, until Dieter *hums* around him, and the vibration causes him to gasp. Dieter keeps moving back and forth, lightly jerking off whatever his mouth can’t reach, and Vanderohe is shortly reduced to a quivering *mess*. His back is arching against the tile wall, he spares a glance down at Dieter, who looks up and *hollows his cheeks*, which nearly does him

in. The heat is pooling in his gut; his orgasm building up quickly. Dieter pulls back, leaving Van's cock hanging in the air, and he tongues at the slit, licks along the underside vein.

"Dieter, *Jesus Christ*, I'm not gonna last long if you keep this up," he pants.

"Who said I'm trying to prolong this, Mr. Vanderohe?" Dieter purrs, and then he takes Vanderohe in his mouth again. He keeps up his ministrations with his hands and his *amazing* mouth, wringing gasps and moans and pants out that Vanderohe can't hold back, until he warns, *I'm gonna come*, pulls on Dieter's hair to try and get him off before it's too late. But Dieter *speeds up* in response, taking him down even *further*, makes eye contact for a quick second, and Vanderohe's orgasm hits him, spilling into Dieter's mouth.

Once he's calmed down enough, he heaves Dieter upwards until their lips meet, and tasting himself on Dieter's tongue is *hot*. He soothes over Dieter's scalp, runs his hands along his sides, pulls him into his lap in a reversal of their earlier position. He nips and laves over Dieter's neck, his chest, and Dieter responds *gorgeously*, panting and gasping.

"Are you always this sensitive?" Vanderohe jokes, and Dieter laughs into the air, "Bold question from the one who just came."

"*Ouch*, you know, if you ask nicely, I'll take care of you too."

"Why would I ask nicely when you're going to give me what I want regardless?" Dieter asks smartly, and *oh man, I'm gone on him, aren't I?*

Vanderohe grins at him, "Here or the bed?" kisses Dieter again.

Dieter answers *the bed*, and they pause to dry off, drain the tub. Vanderohe can't help himself, presses Dieter against the bathroom countertop, continuing their make out, grinding against his crotch, until Dieter sits on the edge, giving Vanderohe the perfect opportunity to pick him up. He yelps, and Vanderohe readjusts, bouncing him more than is strictly necessary, bringing him to the bed. He lays Dieter down on his back, climbing in the V of his legs, and Dieter sounds positively delighted when he states, "Mr. Vanderohe, we *must* take advantage of your strength in the future."

"Anything you want Dieter," he laughs, biting at Dieter's already pink lips, decides to indulge him with his strength *now*, unbeknownst to Dieter.

With Dieter drunk on the taste of his lips, Vanderohe interlaces their fingers, holding Dieter's hands until he pulls them up above his head, the kiss distracting Dieter long enough that he doesn't realize Van is holding both wrists in one hand. Vanderohe pulls back, letting Dieter become aware of his predicament, and he arches his back, putting on a show. Vanderohe reaches for his half hard dick, takes his sweet time working Dieter up again, licks his palm to help with the glide.

He lets go of Dieter's wrists once his dick is aching hard, tells him to *stay there*, then hooks his arms around Dieter's thighs to pull him into his lap. He leans over Dieter's body, bending him until he has a firm grip on Dieter's wrists again, his bodyweight keeping him pinned, then he continues jerking Dieter off, building his speed slowly.

The noises that he makes are *delicious*, the pants and moans as Vanderohé adjusts his grip, tries new things to see what Dieter likes. He rubs at the head, spreading his precum, causing Dieter to gasp in oversensitivity, runs a finger along the underside when his breaths get a little too frantic but he still wants to tease, grips at the base when he feels like Dieter is close to the edge, and all the while Dieter is pulling at his wrists, babbling every time he gets close and Van takes the relief away again.

“Van please, *please*,” Dieter whines, and Vanderohé lets go of his cock, leans down to tug at one of Dieter’s nipples with his teeth, then says, “All you have to do is ask nicely, Dieter, and you can have whatever you want.”

And if Vanderohé wasn’t pushing fifty, the way that Dieter asks *please, make me come, Mr. Vanderohé*, in that beautifully *vulgar* tone would have his dick springing to attention again, so he gives Dieter exactly what he wants to reward that, watching his face as he comes undone, spilling onto his own abs and come hitting Vanderohé’s stomach.

He lets go of Dieter’s wrists, gets onto his knees and forearms so he can properly lean over him, kissing him hotly, until the kisses turn languid, and calm, just presses of lips to one another.

Vanderohé half collapses on Dieter, but Dieter pretty much instantly retches, “Oh no, we are not laying in my semen, absolutely not,” pushes him off. Dieter gets up, grabbing a damp towel one of them had just dried off with to clean himself and Vanderohé, and Vanderohé laughs at his outrage when he comes back to see Van laying belly down, smearing cum into the comforter.

“What about the housekeepers? They have to deal with these sheets now!”

“Dieter, I’ll *buy* them new sheets if it makes you happy, okay?” Vanderohé chuckles, “Do you know how many people have had sex in this bed?”

“That doesn’t make me feel any better,” Dieter shudders, “Let’s go back to yours, is that not why we got two hotel rooms?”

“No, that is definitely *not* why I got two rooms.”

“Why then?” Dieter asks earnestly, while he’s rubbing himself down, and Vanderohé murmurs under his breath, “I didn’t want to assume we’d sleep together just because we kissed.”

When Vanderohé gets up he sees that Dieter has a shit eating grin on his face, and he says, “How chivalrous of you, Mr. Vanderohé,” and Van runs up to him, tickles his sides in retaliation for the teasing, “Innocently, Dieter, sleeping *innocently*!”

They gather their clothes, bundling up in the hotel robes rather than their old clothing, then head back to Vanderohé’s room. They prep for bed together, brushing their teeth, *really, you brought lotion but not another set of clothes?*

It's moisturizer, not lotion, you caveman, they're very different, Dieter had pointed out, then he gently worked it into Vanderohe's skin too, pushing him against the counter, Van's arms wrapped around his waist, stealing a kiss, or two, or three.

They lay in bed together, a repeat of this morning, of this afternoon, with Dieter laying on Vanderohe's chest, fingers along his spine soothing him, a hand resting on Vanderohe's ribcage, and then Dieter asks quietly, "Van, I'm not asking you to save me, because I believe that is deeply unhealthy, and I would like our relationship to be separate from everything that happened, as much as it can be- but I would like to ask you to run away with me- to travel endlessly, be on the run from Tanaka- if you'd like to."

And Vanderohe knows that there isn't anything else he'd rather be doing with his time, *all the time in the world*.

Plenty of time to fall in love.

Chapter End Notes

The end of this kind of turned into straight up porn, but come on, they've both earned it. And what can I say, I love when Dieter bosses Van around and Van is totally into it.

I didn't write it, because this is much too long already, but I picture Dieter's next steps as: apologizing to Maria (she loves him :c), the others apologizing and being there for him, helping Lilly kill Cummings (because fuck that guy), handing his shop over to that old friend (or old flame... army of thieves, anyone?) for the time being, then traveling the world with Vanderohe. They would be so happy. Dieter would definitely see a therapist too, at Vanderohe's insistence.

Fun Facts: "What A Year Today Has Been" is a GLORIOUS song by Hanna Bryanne that I had on repeat while writing. Perfect vibes. I took the logic of aliens-having-time-loop-causing-blood from Edge of Tomorrow, except in my universe Zeus is in control of this ability, he just wasn't anticipating Dieter getting involved. Canonically, Vanderohe and Zeus have a deep respect for one another, but I thought it would be interesting to have it be Dieter instead.

I hope you enjoyed, and thank you for reading! :) Much love~

End Notes

I thought it would be super fun to switch things up and write from the POV of the person NOT trapped in the time loop, and I was right, this was a blast! Well, from what I remember at least... I wrote this while absolutely fever delirious and stir crazy from COVID for two weeks at the end of July, then completely forgot about its existence until a few days ago, whoops!

I have another twenty (oh god) pages written, but it's not edited or fully fleshed out in the way that I feel this first half is, so I'm posting this for now. I honestly have no idea if I'll finish, so I tried to leave off on a hopeful pseudo ending. Maybe once Army of Thieves is out I'll be motivated to write for this universe again, because I love Dieter, can't you tell by how much I put him through?

As always, thank you for reading, and I hope you enjoyed! :)

Much love to you all~

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