



NIL RIVER

Sensation begins to creep back into your limbs.

You can feel your surroundings before you see them. The weight of your body presses reassuringly into the solid ground beneath you. It is cold. A sharp ringing, that you previously did not notice, cuts through your ears. It is shrill and whining, but when it subsides, you realize you can hear. You hear another heartbeat. Not your own- you can tell- this is not from inside your body.

Your eyes open but your gaze is obscured by white fur.
River, you will see a faint blur, an abstraction of form, before focusing in on a familiar face.

Nil, you will see fluttery wings and shimmering scales on a body you'd tried saving just moments before.

Both will realize they are back where they started.

The Absense-Abscess.

The main room, where the cubicle once stood.

A note is placed neatly beside the both of you.

It reads,

"You humans. I knew at least one of you would tempt fate. Hang out, throw a party, work on your Imaginars- I don't care. Be back soon.

All the best, P."

Welcome back creators! You have not only unlocked body death, but also your *room*. Each character has their own room. It is the very same room they began this journey in. Although, it no longer sports a mirror or a fly. It is simply blank and barren, but it doesn't have to stay that way.

A character's room is a reflection of their mind. Paul may refer to them as your "Imaginar", a space that bends entirely and completely to the character's will. You may find, in time, they may not be limited to a single room. They can only be utilized during interim periods, when players die during a chapter, or creators need to step away from the chapter.

This roleplay doc is optional!

Imaginar Rules:

1. At this time, it is one singular room (12ft x 12ft).
2. Any sensory data can be manipulated in this room (i.e. anything you imagine, you can make "real")
3. These will be unmoderated and up to you to upkeep!
4. Feel free to conduct private roleplays in your Imaginar, I won't be making any docs for them.
5. Only your character has control over their own Imaginar. Anyone who enters is at *their* mercy.
6. All Imaginars are located down the long corridor and sit side-by-side to each other.
7. You cannot enter another character's Imaginar without their consent.
8. You may receive "vitors"- keep an eye out during interims for individual random events.

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RIVER . . . they/them. the MUSE. HP 35. UB 35. post 07. 505 words.
art by burntunn . CW: drowning

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A tingling sense in their arms turned into the tired cry of an exhausted body, spent and torn apart despite its wholeness. Their body ached. They could not hear, until they could. Something was wrong. Was it? There was a raft. There was unending water. There was a patron. There was nothing.

It took a moment for much of it to come back. The sensation of a cold floor at their paws. A ringing noise that subsided to nothing. River blinked their eyes open with a sharp breath, white fur flooding into their vision. It was a soft yelp that left them as they reeled back, paws spasming and ears folding back and wings fluttering and— wait, what? Wings? Their own gaze turned on what they could see of themselves, soft golden wings flapping with a strange, delicate sensation attached to the sight.

“Oh, fuck,” they breathed out, caught by a feeling they could not describe. Their tail lashed to the side, but it felt heavier. Sleeker. River turned to see scales and a big fin-like thing at the end of their tail, and they let out a strangled groan. *What the hell? Why am I... Why.... Why?*

This is not how I was before.

Something about it, though, something strange and unspeakable, felt— felt like it was...was meant to be. Like, upon seeing it, that they ingrained it into themselves.

Their eyes turned back to the stranger that had saved them, back when they had fallen in the devastatingly damaging water for the first time. A figure that seemed to have changed in ways that they could not describe if one asked them to— looking at him through different lenses, and a different viewpoint. As if echoing their thoughts, their fluttering wings subsided to fold up gently against the sides and back of their head.

“So,” they said, scanning the only other person there with blinking eyes. **“We were— there. And now we’re...here. Something’s different about. You. About me.”** They looked for anything else and found...a note. *Imaginars. Be back soon. All the best, P.* **“And nobody else is here to see it.”** River let out a soft sigh, tail curling around their form but finding no easy way to slip between their front paws like it had been before. It was a more unwieldy appendage, in a way, so wide at its end. Perhaps it would be easy to smack someone with it.

Well, they were in here with one other person, and they might as well make the best of it. Waves lapped over in their mind. They sank down into the depths and offered their stranger-friend with a slow, idle blink.

“...I don’t think I ever asked for your name before, actually. It’d...be nice to have a name for the person that dove with me.”

[end.]

Summary: River...wakes up. Things are strange. They finally partake in common decency with Nil.

AND FOR ONLY A MOMENT, THERE WAS PEACE . . .

.
. .
.

NIL: [AND REPEAT]

A sharp pained gasp abruptly escapes the feline. Entire body jerking upwards in an attempt to stand before wobbling and tumbling right back down to the solid white floor.

His heart thrums rapidly in his chest. He can't breathe. *He can't breathe. He shouldn't be able to breathe.*

And yet he can.

It takes everything in his being to fight down the choked sob that wants to build in his throat.

He's back.

*But I mean, what else did you expect?
Seems Paul really does keep his promises.*

He wants to scream.

His maw opens, but before a sound can actually escape it snaps shut abruptly. Instead using what little energy he has to stare dumbfoundedly at where River now stood.

“You-” There's a lot of things he could say, really. What with how they carelessly dove in alongside him, or even the new appendages that adorned their form.

Instead though, he only supplies a simple whisper.

“...You're back too?”

He's silent once more for a solid few seconds. Simply staring with an unreadable expression as his form shifts and wobbles ever so slightly.

You were asked a question, weren't you?

“My name...?”

Answer it.

“I don't...”

You do.

“...”

...

“Nil.”

Of course.

“I am Nil.”

Always the same with you, isn't it?

There's silence then for another few moments before he seems to blink with surprise and realize he should probably return the formality as well. Flashing a sheepish sort of smile in their direction.

“... and you are?”

HE/HIM | HP: 35 | UB: 35 | IW: RIVER | M: N/A

NIL finally offers his name.

[POST 9]



RIVER . . . they/them. the MUSE. HP 35. UB 35. post 08. 430 words.
art by burntbunns . CW: x

You— ...You're back too?

One of River's wings flicked at the same time as their ear, curious gaze settling securely on their...friend, they supposed. It would be nice to call someone a friend here. Friends who jumped into water together stayed together, they figured. They listened to his words- to Nil's words— with a strange expression on their face. They leaned in to sniff at him— something was strange, something they couldn't place...but perhaps it was not all that different from their own new...features.

“**Nil**,” they said, letting the word roll around and settle in their mouth. *Nil*. A nice, short name. Simple. They had absolutely no clue what it meant. *Nil*. They reached out with their front paws to take a hold of one of Nil’s, even though their form wavered perilously with a lack of full balance. They let a paw ghost over the top of his and examined it.

Yes, something was different. But...hm.

Ah, he had asked a question, hadn’t he? And they had left him waiting for an answer for a good minute, now. “**I’m, ah...**” A pause. Their paws holding his go frightfully still as their face shifts slightly, a grimace while thinking. *I am...I am, ah...no, that’s my brother’s name...Ava’s my sister’s...what is mine? What...* But they had been calling themselves something. They’d been sure they’d given others their name the previous time they were in here. Eventually, something bubbled up from the surface of their mind’s sea, unsure but feeling— right.

Come on, [RIVER]!

“**My name...ah, it’s River. Good to meet you properly, yeah?**” They tried for an easygoing smile, and even let their tail slowly slide from side to side, unwieldy and too-large but still a part of them. “**We’re...back, it seems. Even though that cat tree isn’t. As well as...anyone else.**”

They stood, then, dropping Nil’s paw to poke their nose around the area. A good sniff didn’t seem to identify much, but their gaze slowly swept across to the hall that they had all come from. “**The hall’s still there,**” River murmured, and glanced back at Nil with something like a smile on their face. “**...How about poking around this-a-ways while nobody else is here? You can’t say that you’re uninterested in it, I bet.**” Their tail, one that made them walk slower, flopped up a bit to beckon Nil along. That brought with it a spluttering as River fell down to the ground, however, scrambling back up with flapping wings and their tail moving every which way.

“**This’ll— this’ll take some getting used to, though. And it’s still...sore.**”

[end.]

Summary: River considers Nil’s name before giving their own, and suggests that they go investigate the area while nobody else is there.

NIL: [CHIT-CHAT]

“**River.**” He repeats the name back in a hushed voice. Attention more so focused on the way they gently take one of his paws in their own and examine it.

Taking this as his own form of permission his own gaze moves up to observe the new gilded features that adorn his companion. Watching the subtle ways their wings seem to shift and twitch alongside their ears; or how the ever present light of the room seems to catch and reflect off of each scale that pokes out from their pelt.

“I guess no one else was crazy enough to try dying again.”

“That, or we’re just quicker to the draw than the rest.”

“Either way, I think it’s quite the achievement, no?” He hums light-heartedly, a self-satisfied smirk gracing his expression at the thought.

His gaze then lifts to follow their own, glancing around the unfortunately familiar space. A small frown pulls at the corners of his muzzle at the realization the cat tree is sadly no more. **“Aw, boo... I was quite fond of that ratty ol’ thing. Even *if* it smelled like a black mold growth waiting to happen.”**

Nil stands then. Slowly, of course, but still surely. Gentle pawsteps one after the other as he shakes out each leg and the odd tingling numbness that lingers. Not quite pain at this point, just... discomfort.

At the very least though he seemed to be faring better than River was, considering the way he watched them abruptly trip over their new tail. He moves in slightly towards their side to offer a shoulder to balance on if needed as they padded along.

“Bit of an odd reward for drowning, isn’t it? Ironical for sure... maybe even cruel, perhaps.” His head cocks to the side as he speaks, a paw lifting to gently prod at the appendages atop his head curiously. **“I don’t got fins for ears now, do I?”** He looks at them expectantly. After all, it’s not like there’s any mirrors around anymore.

HE/HIM | HP: 35 | UB: 35 | IW: RIVER | M: N/A

NIL attempts the ancient art of small talk; asking **RIVER** if he too, has any new features that they can see.

[POST 10]



RIVER . . . they/them. the MUSE. HP 35. UB 35. post 09. 510 words.

art by burntbunns . CW: mentions of drowning

River paid a somewhat bemused amount of attention to Nil as they started to meander their way to the hall together, a mind half focused on the sensation the water had given them and half spent on paying attention to his words. Their only response to his wry comment on dying was a short bark of laughter, stopping so that they could put a paw over their mouth— but a wing covered their mouth before their paw could, whole body shaking with the amusement bubbling up in them. **“I’m not sure dying is something to be proud of,”** they said with a glint of something unspoken shining through, wing retracting so that their mouth was uncovered again. **“But...mm.”**

They stopped as they entered the hallway, gratefully leaning on Nil as they came to a stop. *Bit of an odd reward for drowning, isn’t it?* Something in his words made their mind halt before beginning again, halting, beginning, halting. A strange look came to their face as they twisted to consider the smattering of scales before their tail, the appendage waving slightly as if to answer an unasked question.

[REDACTED]

Something caught in River’s chest, and they coughed lightly as if remembering the abyss, remembering its...its...

[REDACTED] **[RIVER]**

“I’ve always liked the ocean,” they said out of nowhere, voice constricted and limited as if it were hard to breathe. **“It was...a shock to me that it hurt when I...touched it, there. Even then, I...I couldn’t breathe.”** A pause. **“I couldn’t breathe. And it overwhelmed me.”** Their eyes did not move away from their tail, letting Nil’s earlier comment about his ears going unnoticed for now. A strange look, a heaviness came to their eyes. **“I don’t think I expected that diving in it would...” ...kill me... “...even though it hurt before.”**

River let the silence stretch until it became unbearable before turning back to Nil, an uneasiness without cause shown in the way their wings folded tight, how their eyes became darker, darker, darker. Hungrier. And then it all vanished as they smiled at Nil, raking their eyes over his head.

“Something’s different about you, but I don’t know what it is,” they said with a small amount of cheer. **“No fins, no wings, no...anything. Not sure why I got the brunt of it, but that’s how it is.”** A paw took a step forward. Another. They took in a breath and found their lungs blessedly clear.

I’ve always liked the ocean, they had said just then. It was true. Had always been true.

They wondered: *if I'd known the outcome beforehand, would I have done the same thing?*

[REDACTED.]

Perhaps it was a question best left for another day.

[end.]

Summary: River continues on with the small talk, despite a few hiccups, and assures Nil that he has no extra appendages.

NIL: [EBB & FLOW]

Whatever next off color joke he was about to make about death quickly died on his tongue at River's sudden pause and cough. A small crease of concern set itself into his brow as he observed them abruptly speak once more. Eerily silent as he took in their expression and how it morphed and shifted as they stared down at their tail.

There wasn't even a peep when they suddenly perked up once more and answered his earlier question. He only stood with a heavy yet unreadable look in his eyes as he contemplated their words. Tail tip flicking back and forth as he sorted through the countless thoughts that ran about his mind. The words are familiar in some ways yet distant in others as he turns them over and examines them. Like one would observe a crystal in the sun, twisting and turning it to see how each and every facet catches and reflects the light in its own unique way.

"The sea is always such a fickle thing... no?" He gives a small chuckle as he hums.

"To one it can represent peace and tranquility. A calm relaxing place to willingly lose oneself in and let your worries be consumed."

"And yet, to others, it can be a place of fear and terror. Of unknown outcomes and always changing tides. Never quite knowing whether or not a storm is just beyond the horizon."

White paws knead against the ground in what could be seen in an anxious manner.

"I think in that way our perceptions of it are quite fitting."

"I don't think I expected that diving in it would..."

“Despite their differences.”

With that the feline falls silent once more. Ears flicking to and fro as he seems to further contemplate his own words.

And then just as quickly as the ocean’s tides may change, so too does Nil’s demeanor. Switching right back to his earlier cheery self. **“Really?”** Eyes wide and curious as he turns back to observe himself once more. **“Perhaps I’m taller? Frankly, I wouldn’t mind a change like that.”**

“Nonetheless though,” He turns to look back at them with a smile. **“Brunt of it or not, I think it suits you well.”**

And thus, the quiet returns. The tom padding over to the first door to gently paw at it with curiosity.

He could kick himself for not memorizing just which one he had exited from that first day. Gaze turning to stare down the infinite hallway and picture all the pawprints that had painted its floor at the time. Paw lifting to gingerly poke at his forehead where the mirror had made its mark on him and brought him along with the rest.

That day...

“River.” He turns to them suddenly, expression distant and contemplative. As if he’s not quite fully there as he speaks.

“You were given a title, weren’t you?”

“Was there-”

“Was there a sort of... *promise* at the end of it?”

HE/HIM | HP: 35 | UB: 35 | IW: RIVER | M: N/A

NIL gives a small piece of his mind, before asking an important question.

[POST 11]



RIVER . . . they/them. the MUSE. HP 35. UB 35. post 10. 494 words.
art by burntunn . CW: x

A flash of a smile appeared on River's face as Nil talked, their gaze drinking in his movements, ears soaking in everything they had to say. They let him speak through whatever he had to say, padding forward slowly in link with him and only turning to eye the door for a split second. His was a nice voice; not too harsh, not too smooth. It was easy to latch onto the comfortable cadence and hum wordlessly at just the right places, something slowly sliding just into place as they thought of the chatter of their fellow artists, of the ways in which conversation rose and fell.

There was a duality to it that made them pause, almost imperceptible for just a moment. A foreign emotion ghosted over them, too quick for even River to think too long on, and it was then that Nil turned to them and captured their attention.

You were given a title, weren't you? Was there— was there a sort of...promise at the end of it?

It took a moment for River to even remember what he was speaking of. The remembrance beat a solemn drum in the back of their head, too quiet to be heard over the sea's promises, over the sea's murmurs and shouts and thr— well, it was never a threat. Always, always a promise.

[, , , , , , , , , ?]

[, , , , , , , , ,]

They licked their lips and tried to seek out the drumming, but it was silent, morphing into the ripples of waves on the sand. Somehow, that made it easier to hear.

[REDACTED]

[you are the muse.]

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[you can enact the—]

“The **Muse**,” they say, and barely think about it as they tread upon the waves escaping from the ocean’s maw. “**I am...the Muse. Fitting, I suppose.**” There was no humor in the laugh they gave, but there was a very real glint in their eyes as they stared at Nil. “**There was...no promise, by the...the voice.**” The waves. The beautiful, disgusting, poisonous waves. They spat upon the shore. “**I can...shed light upon a situation. But...mm. Isn’t there beauty in the unknown?**” River smiled with all of their sharp cat’s teeth and went to consider the doors in front of them.

They opened the closest one with a paw, the one that Nil had just inspected. There was nothing inside. *Beauty*. No mirror, no blood, no anything.

“I’m pretty sure I came out of this one,” they murmured. “...Perhaps. I was the first one out here when that being, Paul, was there. The first to investigate. Lucky me.” River’s strange, solemn mood started to fade away, but they eyed Nil curiously, looking for an answer to the unasked question lingering in the tilt of their speckled, bewinged head.

Why ask of a promise?

[end.]

Summary: River thinks of Nil's words, and gives a response. Waves crash and simmer and spit.

NIL: [. . .]

Silence.

That is all River will be greeted with for the longest time.

The white feline's face is still. Perhaps a twinge contemplative, but ultimately it does not flinch as they answer. The disappointment however, still rings true. Like a direct strike on hot metal—sharp as the blade being forged.

Whatever shine lingered in his eyes dulls; and if he were any other color one would swear he went monochrome.

O, cruel fate.

“I see.”

You really are alone, aren't you?

“Your honesty is appreciated.”

He had yet to move from where he sat by the door. Simply following River into the room with his gaze alone, before his head tilts upwards with a long sigh. Eyes slowly blinking closed as he thought. **“Truly, The Unknown is the only thing I’ve ever looked upon with something such as genuine awe.”**

“Without it, there would be no such thing like that of curiosity. The very basis of human instinct.”

“Without it, there is no such thing as humans.”

[illegible]

He lets out an amused huff before continuing on without missing a beat.

“The [REDACTED].”

“That is my role.”

“It is my job to see this story to its end. No matter the outcome.”

And yet, despite the question, an answer does not come.

“Truly, it is a pleasure to make your acquaintance, *Muse*.”

HE/HIM | HP: 35 | UB: 35 | IW: RIVER | M: N/A

For only a moment, the still water's surface is broken by a lone bubble from the depths.

NIL introduces himself once more.

[POST 12]



RIVER . . . they/them. the MUSE. HP 35. UB 35. post 11. 702 words.
art by burntbunns . CW: slight panic, anxiety

“We’re all humbled by the unknown,” they said with a soft sigh, almost a laugh, and looked back to smile despite Nil’s, the [REDACTED] seeming reluctance or...pause in his mood. It couldn’t be helped; they eyed him curiously as he looked around, as he thought, as he spoke. Their eyes blinked slowly, tan and gold and garnet, as he breathed. “Instinct,” they echoed him, and tasted the sound of the words on their tongue. It melted, soft and textured like fine silk on the air. It reminded him of the way in which they had pondered the world, sitting in their room and wondering when they had become an intruder. The blanket they had been grasping one of those days had been a familiar sort of fabric, just a little coarse and just as it had been since they were a child.

It hadn’t seemed right to keep it there. They had brought it to their apartment a long time ago, feeling guilty for neglecting it.

They breathed in, deeply with their nose, and was hit with the scent of *home*. Or, well. Hm. The saltiness of the sea. The earthiness that came just after it rained. The smell of a fresh catch of fish, brought in by Pa right off of the shore.

That was odd.

River sniffed again, and got the same scent, heady and intoxicating in its familiarity. They turned from where they were looking at Nil to see...their apartment shimmer into view, a simple room that echoed the tiny living room that they had so loved and hated, at times.

One blink. Two.

This shouldn't smell like...

A sharp inhale brought instead the deepness of coffee, of all its unique and subtle notes floating through the room. The wings on their head fluttered, confused, before folding back up against their head. Their ears flattened against their head, River offput and bewildered by...mm.

Their well-loved sofa, donated by Jen, the old blanket from Seatrout Point thrown over it. Deathly comfortable, and one by which they and Jen and Harper and all of the others had drank beer and shot the shit and tried not to kill each other over the simplest little things. The coffee table, startling by merit of its departure from the theme started by the sofa, a sculpture and table in one while the sofa was a ratty old thing, fake leather that nobody made anymore because the factories had never been in Houston.

The radio, crackling into sound as their eyes fell on it to play something hopelessly patriotic.

I don't want to hear that shit ever again.

As if called, the music switched to something wordless, timeless, familiar and yet not at all. River eyed it suspiciously, like it would combust, but it never did.

"How strange," they breathed, a sentimental notion choking up their chest and their throat until it felt almost hard to breathe. It was smaller than their living room, but...the essential bits were there. The drawers of art supplies. The unused canvases that made them sick with anxiety just by looking at them. A blink, and a dark cloth covered them all. **"...Ah. I don't...understand why this is here, but...welcome to my apartment...?"**

River padded further in. Their mind was quiet. Only the familiar-but-unmemorable music coming from the radio could be heard, besides the manner in which they leapt up onto the coffee table and kept looking around. Art pieces, familiar ones from friends, littered the walls. The rug on the floor was dark and moody, blues and tans rioting inside of it.

They couldn't speak, with the nameless emotions welling up inside of them. They turned to Nil as if to get confirmation that they weren't going crazy, that he could see and smell and hear it all too. It was a little silly, wasn't it? But— he was the only other thing there. He couldn't get it, but maybe he could understand that strange feeling, that helplessness that came with finding something you had never been prepared to see again.

[██████████, ██████████, ██████████ ... ██████████ ... ██████████]

Music covered the voice until nothing remained. River held their breath and prayed for Nil to help them breathe again.

[end.]

Summary: River considers Nil, and then meets an old kind of territory.

NIL: [TRY VERY HARD TO BE A NICE GUEST]

So focused on observing River themselves, it takes up until the room visually shifts for him to realize something was amiss. Only catching the barest hint of the sea before it was swiftly drowned out instead by the tell-tale earthy warmth of coffee permeating through the air... *How long again had it been since he had a proper cup?*

His gaze roams the room silently. Captivated as he watches it shift in real time alongside what he can only assume is his companions' thoughts—especially so when the blank canvases are abruptly covered. He makes a small note of that detail.

The white tom is yet to move or even speak up until the hybrid finally turns to look at him with disbelief. It's a look he knows well. One that he had worn countless of times before. A classic sort of ask for confirmation that they are in fact *not* crazy and that he too is, as they say, '*seeing this shit.*'

It is with that sense of understanding that leads him into flashing them a soft and reassuring smile. Adding a small nod of his head as he slowly stands and, with a gentle step, crosses the threshold into the room.

“Quite the lovely place you’ve got here... I sure hope you weren’t holding out on us when we had to deal with that silly ol’ cat tree.” He jests lightly, tail swaying gingerly as it follows behind him. Moving to pause and stare up at the radio with something of fondness. **“Oh, how lovely it is to hear music again. I hadn’t realized how much I’ve missed it.”**

With that, his attention then moves over towards the couch. His paws itch impatiently with the need to jump up onto it with pure reckless abandon; but he does his best to tamp the urge down. Instead just moving ever so slightly closer before looking back towards River. **“Ah- uhm, may I?”**

HE/HIM | HP: 35 | UB: 35 | IW: RIVER | M: N/A

NIL enters and reassures **RIVER**, before immediately attempting to head to the couch.

[POST 13]



RIVER . . . they/them. the MUSE. HP 35. UB 35. post 12. 505 words.

art by burntbums . CW: x

The breath that left River was desperately relieved, a laugh escaping a half-beat later as they watched Nil step in and observe the room. They weren't going mad. They weren't going crazy. Their wildly flapping wings held a neutral position as Nil looked around, almost anticipating him to not like it— but the worry had already been answered. Their tail lowered, and they peered around to examine their heaven and their hell further.

Stains lingered on the rug, although it wasn't meant to be pristine. Some of the fake leather seemed like it was ready to keep flaking off of the couch. The music from the radio switched tracks to something more calming, something in a somber Spanish that they had never spoken. The Conglomerate had never much liked non-English languages, but...this flowed. It was nice. The melodies backing the singer ebbed and flowed in perfect sync.

“I don't know how this happened,” they admitted, and huffed softly when Nil asked for permission. **“I believe that there's some kind of saying in Spanish,”** River said, **“and...I don't know what the exact words are, but it's something about my home being open to others. It's a shitty old couch, do your worst.”** As if to demonstrate, they leapt over from the coffee table and nudged a few of the wildly varying cushions, kneading at the couch before curling up with their back to a cushion. (It said “Live, Laugh, Paint”. Jen had thought it was funny.)

It was a strange feeling, being...as close to home as you could get. They carefully didn't think too hard on it and instead inhaled deeply, finding the scents that laid underneath the coffee. Paint. Oils. Fresh canvas, untreated. Wood for carving.

Too bad I can't do art like...this, they thought, ears flicking back before going back to normal just as fast. *Maybe I'd start liking it again.*

“A friend of mine gave me this couch,” River said to Nil, thinking of Jen's calloused hands and crooked smile and the way that his strong grip had held their face to go in for a drunken, sloppy kiss, thinking of the way that they and Alice had laughed and wrestled each other in the room until they were gasping and laughing and leaning on the floor against the couch, neither having won.

The way that Raine had set them up on the couch so it was easier to check in on their delirious form, spoon feeding warm chicken soup that felt more normal than Ma's cooking.

The radio croons along with their thoughts, following the swell of their emotions. They clamp down on it and the music starts to fade away before being replaced with an instrumental.

“He had it for...for I don't know how many years, and I've had it for...eight or so? Give or take a year, I guess?” The corners of their mouth turned up. **“Or. I *had* had it, no matter how...real or anything that this is. Feels like it shouldn't be real, but...there's nothing proving it isn't.”**

[end.]

Summary: River treads old ground and gives Nil permission.