

# Dolosus

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*Dolosus, a skilled assassin, has already failed once in the murder of a particularly annoying enemy. When given another chance, its clear that another failure wont be tolerated. Are bloodlust and determination enough to succeed?*

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# 1 - Fight Alone

Author's notes:

-Hey there, D.A.-chan here. Welcome to the first chapter of a lovely story inspired by a comic that I began quite a while ago, involving characters all inspired by my friends. Needless to say, I never finished it. This being the case, however, Brian, a friend on whom the main character, Dolosus, is based, was free to do what he pleased with the characters and story line. There will be a few references to my art work, which may be viewed in my gallery, but nothing important enough to confuse those who haven't seen the pictures.

That being said, I leave you for now. Enjoy :D

"Dolosus, awaken," Demonic commanded.

Dolosus opened his eyes. He was having such a weird dream, something to do with being trapped in a painting. This was the fifth time this month he had it. It worried him a little, but he would have to ponder it later. His master was calling.

"Dolosus?"

"I'm coming," he said, irritated. He didn't like being woken up for missions. It wasn't like he was the only assassin at Demonic's disposal, but he was the best. He figured it had to be pretty vital since she only called him for the important and toughest tasks.

He got out of bed, dressed and left his room. It was a short walk from his room to hers. The doors along the walls led to the rooms of the other assassins. At the end of the hallway there was a pair of heavy oaken doors. He went through them into Demonic's room. Her walls were completely covered with paintings and drawings of various things, from people to scenery to the elements. She was quite the artist. The colors and textures seemed to make them leap off the canvases.

Demonic sat in a throne like chair, draped in her green velvet robe. This month her hair color was light brown with a purple streak in front. At her side was the giant paint brush she worked with. If she ever had to do battle, which was very rare, she'd use the magic brush to draw something and make it come to life. She could even draw in space, creating art out of nothingness. He knelt before her and awaited her orders.

"I have a new assignment for you," she said.

*Well, obviously,* he thought. He looked up and saw her smile, menacingly. *What is she planning?*

She took out an envelope from her robes and threw it to him. He opened it and nearly dropped it once he saw the picture.

The face that stared back at him was of a pretty girl, slightly younger than himself. Her hair was blonde with red streaks. She had a fierce look on her face, like she was about to kill someone. She was holding a katana and around her neck was a necklace with a red "C."

"Crimson?" he said, completely astounded.

"Yes," Demonic nodded. "That ingenue is beginning to annoy me and pry into things that are none of her business. I want her taken out, and I thought it most fitting that you be the one to do it."

Dolosus bit his bottom lip and a bead of sweat trailed down his face.

"What's the matter? I would have thought that you'd be happy for a second chance. Especially since

you failed me last time.”

“It wasn’t my fault. It was three against one!” Dolosus yelled.

“A loss is a loss. Now go, and don’t fail me this time. You’ll find pictures and descriptions of suitable transport spots in the area she was last seen in that envelope, courtesy of the Crows.”

The Crows were personal spies of Demonic. Not nearly as powerful as Dolosus, but just as important. He picked up the envelope and left the room. Back in his room he splashed water on his face as memories of his previous battle with Crimson flashed in his mind. Everything was going so perfectly. He had separated Crimson from the people she was with. She had no special powers, except for being an expert swordsman and an even better pest. Demonic only wanted her dead because she was asking too many questions about their above ground cover organization.

Dolosus toyed with her. She put up one hell of a fight, but he was stronger. Then, without realizing what had happened, he got attacked from behind. Crimson didn’t have powers, but her friends did. The man with the scarf around his eyes, Altojo, had fire conjuring and manipulation abilities. He was also a lot more muscular than Dolosus, and harder to cut. Dolosus thought he was blind and underestimated him, but Altojo somehow always knew where he was. Then there was another girl. What was her name, Hart? She had some kind of giant leaf that she used as a fan to literally blow Dolosus away. The three of them teamed up on him. He had no choice but to flee.

He shook his head and came back to the present. After calming down, he put his glasses back on and grabbed some warmer clothing. The picture the Crows gave him suggested it would be cold. After putting on his favorite jacket, he took his scythe down from the wall. Closing his eyes, he focused his power, swung his weapon and tore a hole in the universe. One of his favorite features of the scythe, besides its ease in taking people’s heads off, was its ability to create wormholes in space. He took a breath and jumped in.

Almost instantly he came out of the exit. The hole closed behind him. He took a look around and saw that he was behind a tree in a park next to a playground. The air was so crisp and clean and cool. The sun was setting but the sky was covered by gray clouds. There were no sunset colors. Dolosus walked about. He saw about a quarter of a mile away, a bridge fording a river. Crossing the bridge was Crimson. She had on regular blue jeans, red boots with a matching top, and black gloves. She must have been planning on battling with someone because she had her katana with her.

*Perfect*, Dolosus thought. He could have easily cut a hole behind her head and took her head off, but he had a score to settle. He wanted to beat her. He slashed another hole that opened exactly eight feet from her on the bridge.

“Well, well, what a lovely surprise,” he said. Crimson stopped dead in her tracks. “Crimson, how nice to see you. How have you been these days? Better than last time we met, I trust?”

“Enough. Last time was a fluke,” she said, turning around, “This time, we settle it.”

“Okay then, I’ll get serious.”

He got a tighter grip on his scythe. She placed her hand on the pommel of her katana. They stood staring each other down.

Dolosus sighed, “How long are you just going to stand around for?”

“I was seeing what I faced,” she retorted, “sizing up one’s opponent is part of basic combat. However, I look at you and I don’t see much worth sizing up.”

“Now, Crimson,” He smirked, “You shouldn’t judge anyone by appearance.”

“Well,” she said pulling on her blade, “I suppose I’ll make the first MOVE!”

She ripped the sword from its sheath in such a fast manner that Dolosus almost didn’t react. He stepped back and received only a tear in his sweater.

“I’m impressed. You’re faster than you were last time!” he said.

“You flatter me,” she replied.

“Now it’s my turn!”

He swung his scythe at her head. She ducked and thrust her sword at him. He jumped. The blade pierced only air, and balancing on it on one hand was Dolosus.

He stuck his tongue out at her and hopped off the blade. When he landed he started swinging his scythe wildly and charged at Crimson. She backed up and dodged all his slashes. Finally, when she found an opening, she lashed at him. Rather than dodge, he swung the scythe and blocked her katana with the staff. They were in a deadlock and stared fiercely into each other’s eyes.

“Why do you insist on trying to kill me?” she growled.

“Let’s just say I can’t bear not to be around you,” he snarled.

“I’d like to shove this blade in your mouth.”

He smirked. Then he shifted his weight and pushed on the staff so it smacked her upside the head and she went down. He held his scythe over his head and sliced downward. She rolled to the side and the blade plowed into the ground. She got up and slugged him in the face. He staggered back, a little confused. When his wits came back to him, he saw her charge at him, katana at the ready. He swung. The two blades met and clashed again and again, their metal sound ringing in the air. At one point Dolosus side-stepped on one of her lunges and backhanded her across the face. Then he swung his scythe, missed her torso, but tore a long gash in her arm.

She staggered back, out of breath, and grabbed her arm. It had been a while since someone had cut her that badly. He gave her another smirk. He got ready for another assault, but felt something poke him in the back. When he looked behind him he saw a young girl prodding him with a dagger. She had on a white oversized t-shirt and black capri’s with no shoes. She also wore a baseball cap and a belt.

“Can I help you?” Dolosus asked.

“No, I’m fine,” she replied and went back to jabbing him. He grabbed her hand and tried to throw her to the ground, but she maneuvered out of it, did a back flip, and kicked him in the face. He staggered back, completely shocked.

Rubbing his cheek, he asked, “Who are you?”

She smiled, did another flip, and landed gracefully on the rail of the bridge. She took off her cap and brushed away her long, dark hair. Two furry triangular ears poked through. She undid her belt and a long tail came out. A ribbon, as shockingly blue as her eyes, was tied to the end.

“My name is Kitty,” she announced, “and I don’t like the way you’ve been beating her up. It’s not nice.”

Dolosus glared at Crimson. “So this is how it’s going to be? Every time we fight, you’re going to wait for someone to come to your rescue?”

“I never met her before in my life,” Crimson yelled. “Look, just get out of here. This guy is dangerous.”

“I can take care of myself,” Kitty grinned.

“Enough!” Dolosus shouted. He looked at Kitty, “I’ll take care of you later. Right now I have some unfinished business.” He darted towards Crimson, scythe at the ready. She got ready to parry him, but Kitty jumped in between them with amazing speed and launched a double kick at Dolosus. He dodged the first, but caught the second full in the chest and flew backwards and landed on his back. When he opened his eyes he saw Kitty up in the air, about to land on him, He rolled out of the way and narrowly avoided being hit by her tail.

She grinned at him, then she looked over at Crimson and said, “You know, while I’m distracting him, you could be sneaking up behind him and stabbing him in the back.”

Crimson shook herself and ran towards Dolosus, ready to kill him. Kitty did the same. He watched the two of them come from both sides.

He sighed, “How bothersome.” Then he focused his power, cut another hole and escaped. The two girls collided with each other.

“Oh yeah, I almost forgot. His scythe can create wormholes in the universe that teleport him anywhere he wants,” Crimson groaned, rubbing her head.

Kitty’s ears perked up. “Look out!” she screamed and pushed Crimson aside. His scythe came down right where she had been. The hole above them sealed itself. Kitty ran towards him and thrust her dagger. He sidestepped out of the way and turned to parry a blow from Crimson. The battle raged on like this for sometime. One person attacked, one defended, and the other prepared to attack next. At one point, Crimson got close enough that the tip of her blade made contact with him, he swung the scythe behind him and literally fell into the hold he made. He appeared at the other end of the bridge. Kitty popped the dagger between her teeth, got on all fours, and ran after him. She launched a fist at his face, a leg at his chest, and a tail at his feet. He knew he could not dodge all three, so he let the tail side sweep him. He fell down on the ground, kicked his legs up and launched Kitty into the air. She landed on her feet some distance away.

“I’ve had enough of this,” Dolosus said. He focused all the power he had left and cut open another hole. Immediately the air around them started to get sucked in. He, Crimson and Kitty all grabbed onto the railing of the bridge to avoid being sucked in.

“What did you do?” Kitty screamed.

“I cut a hole that is directly linked to a black hole in the universe. It’ll suck the two of you in and crush you to a mere molecule.”

“I’m getting annoyed at these holes.” Her tail shot out and wrapped around the scythe, “Give me that scythe.”

“No, it’s mine!”

“I said give it to me!”

“No!”

Crimson, struck with inspiration, threw her katana at the hand Dolosus was using to hold onto his weapon. He had a choice now to either lose his arm or lose his scythe.

He let go of the scythe and pulled his arm back as Crimson’s sword went by. Kitty then threw it at the hole. Together, their weapons were sucked up. As the hole sealed itself, they all fell onto the ground and tried to catch their breath. Dolosus recovered faster, but knew that without his weapon he could never hope to win against both of them. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a smoke bomb. Giving them one last glare, he smashed it on the ground and disappeared into the smokescreen.

Dolosus finally made it as far from the bridge as he could. He was in a graveyard when he collapsed on the ground from sheer exhaustion. The battle played over and over again in his head. *What did I do wrong? No, I didn’t do anything, it was Kitty. Damn her. If she hadn’t shown up I would have killed Crimson. This is just like the last time. How come every time the two of us fight, someone comes to her aid? Where does she get all this help?*

He pondered his question deeply. He decided to sit, leaning his back against a tombstone. It looked neglected, as if it marked the spot of someone forgotten. It was covered by weeds and vines and moss. However, some kind soul must have stopped to remember the name of the person who lay there because there were flowers. Dolosus picked up the bouquet and smelled the sweet scent.

*The people who help*, he thought, *they’re more than just allies. They’re her friends. So how come none of my friends help me when I’m in trouble? Where are they?* He looked around, half expecting one of the other assassins to pop out from behind a tombstone and offer him a ride home. Nobody came. It was the first time he ever felt this way. The feeling was like sadness combined with weakness. It was terribly upsetting, almost enough to make him cry.

*I’m alone.*

The night wore on. Dolosus came to when he heard a gate slam shut. Someone was entering the graveyard. One of the first rules of being Demonic's assassin was to not let civilians see you. He crept over to the fence and climbed out.

He felt naked without his scythe. He had no way of getting home. His only choice was to find a phone and call somebody for a ride. As he walked down the sidewalk of an empty road, it began to snow. He stopped and looked up at the sky. The snow seemed to fall like stars all around him.

Dolosus liked the snow. It embodied a sense of purity and cleanliness. He took off his glasses and held out his hand. A flake landed on his skin and melted. He stared at his empty hand while the other flurries drifted past his eyes. He turned back to look at the dirt he had trodden through. Already the snow was packing and covering his footsteps. He smiled, put his glasses back on, and continued on his way.

After a while the snow stopped and the sun began to rise. Dolosus heard voices coming from beyond a corner. He peeked around the wall and saw a tree growing half-way down the sidewalk. Sitting in its branches were two evil looking creatures. Humanoid in shape, except for small black wings growing from their shoulders, pointed ears, and tiny fangs in their mouths. The girl had black hair with red-pink highlights, a red-pink plaid skirt, big black boots, a white and black striped sock on her left leg, and a painted slash on her left eye. The boy had black hair with blue highlights, faded blue jeans, no shoes, a white and black striped sock on his right leg, and a painted slash on his right eye. They both wore a black shirt with an upside down cross. Dolosus didn't know if running into the Crows was a bad thing or a good thing, yet he had to get home somehow, so he approached with caution.

"It's flipping cold out," the boy said, "I hate Demonic for sending us here."

"Yeah, but who are we to tell her we're to send us?" the girl said.

"I'm hungry."

"You wanna go kill a worm so we can eat?"

"Well, well, imagine meeting you two here," Dolosus announced as he got closer.

They were startled by him. So much so that the boy almost fell out of the tree. The girl stood up on the branch and got ready to attack. When she saw it was him, she smiled.

"What a pleasure it is to see you again, Dolo-kun."

"You know I hate being called that."

"Yeah, but what are you going to do about it?" the boy taunted as he climbed back onto the branch,

"Dolo-kun, Dolo-kun!"

"So did you kill Crimson like Demonic ordered?" The girl asked. He didn't answer here. Instead he just looked down at the ground. She inspected him more closely and finally asked, "Where's your scythe?"

"Yeah, you never go anywhere without it," the boy chimed in.

Dolosus remained silent. He didn't know what to say.

"Dolosus, where is your scythe?" she asked him, more sternly this time.

"Forget him, let's go eat." The boy whined.

"You did kill her, right?"

"Of course he did. Dolosus always gets his target. Come on, I'm hungry."

Dolosus sighed, "I lost my scythe during the battle. Whether I killed her or not is not for the two of you to know. That is between me and Demonic."

The boy looked at him curiously. The girl narrowed her eyes.

"She's not going to be happy about you losing your scythe," the boy said.

"Especially if you failed to kill her this time," the girl added on.

"I know," Dolosus answered.

The Crows looked at each other, "Alright, wait here," the boy said, "We'll see if we can get you a

transport back to headquarters.”

“I hope for your sake that you got her,” the girl said. The two of them jumped off of their branches and flew into the night sky. When they were out of earshot of him, they began whispering to each other.

“He doesn’t seem to worried about what Demonic will do to him,” the boy assumed.

“what do you think she’ll do to him? Erase him like she did the other failures?” the girl wondered.

“It all depends on whether or not he killed her. And what about his scythe?”

“That’s okay. She can always make another one. After all, she did create him.”

Owari.

## 2 - Aftermath

Author's notes:

- Unfortunately enough, my computer lacks spell check for one reason or another, and so, any spelling and grammar errors in this chapter are my fault.
- I tend to focus a lot on character development and the emotional aspects of a story, and so often times the storyline itself is lacking. Again, this is entirely my fault.
- While the last chapter of this story was written by my friend, Brian (Dolosus), this one was written by me (Demonic). The next chapter will be written by him, and then I'll write the one after that, and so on and so forth until we can't think of anything else to write. That may take a while haha.
- The crows are not going to be named, apparently. They are simply, The Crows. A boy and a girl.
- “You wretch” is one of the most entertaining insults I've ever had the pleasure of including in my writing.

Failure is a fate worse than death. That was common knowledge among those who worked for Demonic. The horrors experienced by those who dared to let their own wretched life continue long enough for her to learn of their failure were often whispered in hushed and fearful tones. Nobody really knew exactly what Demonic's tortures entailed, however. In most cases, the poor soul would take their own life first, rather than let the dark mistress have it instead, and so there were no survivors. There never would be. This being the case, the organization's hideout was in a state of unrest when news of Dolosus' last mission managed to circulate. In the case of Dolosus, any news regarding his missions and battles tended to "circulate" as more of a wave among the organization, rather than being a slow leak of information. It was no secret that he was Demonic's favorite. His frighteningly superior abilities were also well known, and so jealousy of him ran deep in many other organization members. Thus, when news got out that he had failed twice, the whispering began accordingly.

“It's about time he slipped up,” one would mutter, “I was getting sick of that attitude.”

“I don't know...” another replied, hesitantly, “the master does take a liking to him. He might even be spared.”

“He's already been spared once. There's no way Demonic will accept two mistakes in a row. No way in hell.”

And so on and so forth, until not a single member could wait for Dolosus' return and to hear screams of agony echoing from their master's chambers. They always did when a failed mission was reported. Often, the tortured song of their lament would keep up the other members all night. They didn't mind, though. One more rival out of the way. They were closer to earning their master's favor with fewer people to compete with.

“He's here!!” a shout sounded down the hallway which was lined on either side with the rooms of the other members. Immediately, doors began to open, and heads peeked out of rooms to watch the doomed man, as he walked his lonesome funeral procession to the large oak doors at the end of the hallway.

His walk was silent but for a few nervous whispers and the soft rustling of the others trying to position



themselves to get a good look at his face. Some managed to do so, and the expression he wore puzzled them. His head was hung, his hands were shoved into his pockets, and his entire countenance gave off an air of grim resolution. His face, however, gave the look of one lost in thought. He seemed confused, frustrated, helpless, as if fighting a battle in which both sides lost.

All of this did, of course, spark the curiosity of nearly everyone present, but no one dared approach him. There were two reasons for this. For one, Demonic's voice rang out, calling for Dolosus impatiently, and none dared to cause any further delay. Secondly, one fool had begun to make a snide remark to him, thus exemplifying exactly why they should not do so. Dolosus had promptly slammed the poor fool's head into a wall, without so much as a twitch of the eye.

"Ah, Dolosus, there you are." A cheshire cat grin played on Demonic's lips at the sight of her most skilled assassin, kneeling prostrate before her.

"Yes, master." Was his only response. Her grin widened, but anger was prickling inside of her, ready to burst out at the slightest provocation. A long pause ensued, during which Dolosus knelt in silence, hanging his head, and Demonic considered her words carefully. Finally, she got to her feet, leaving the throne-like chair from which she usually addressed her subordinates.

"So... you've failed me once again."

"...yes, master."

"Have you anything to say in your defense?"

"No, master."

"Really, now..." a hint of that prickling anger began to show itself in her voice. Another long silence. Demonic now stood directly in front of Dolosus, looking down at him condescendingly (though she couldn't look down at him too much due to his height even when kneeling). He stared solemnly at her feet and the hem of her robe.

"Look at me, Dolosus." He did so obediently, and was met with a swift backhand across the face. The force of the blow nearly sent him falling to the floor, but he quickly flung out a hand to steady himself. He wiped a smudge of blood from his lip and gazed up at his master, his eye unintentionally betraying a hint of disdain. A spark of rebellion. This furthered Demonic's amusement, but was also a cause for curiosity. She must know what it meant.

"Dolo-kun..." she said sweetly, her voice kind and flowly gently like a calm river, "How is it that you've failed me twice?" she took his chin in her hand and forced him to look at her as she spoke, "I've asked you twice for a simple favor. All I want from you is the death of that one silly little girl. Why can't you do that for me, Dolo-kun?"

"Sh-she... has help. It was never a one-on-one battle... someone always helps her..." he muttered back, faltering only slightly under her gaze.

"Tell me, Dolo-kun," she cooed sweetly, "who is it? Who continues to stand in our way?"

"...Her name was Kitty..."

"Kitty?" she repeated, "Who is she?"

"She's... Crimson's f-friend..." his brow furrowed as if he were struggling with some unknown concept, "They all are. Everyone who has come to her aid. They're her friends..." once again, Demonic saw a startling show of emotion in his eyes. What had caused this change? What had affected her creation so dramatically?

"Her friends...?"

Dolosus was silent. His master regarded him with mirror-like eyes which betrayed not a single flicker of emotion. Dolosus too had possessed these eyes before, but now, the mirrors had cracked, and a flood of thoughts and feelings were revealed in them.

"You are upset." She stated plainly. He looked up at her curiously, then, slowly, he nodded and hung

his head once more.

“something has changed in me, master.”

“I know.”

“...I’m confused. I don’t know why I feel these things... I doubt, now. I question.” Again, she only said, “I know.”

Rage flared up in Dolosus’ mind as soon as the words left her lips. He looked directly at her, his teeth clenched, his eyes burning,

“Stop it! Shut up! You don’t know at all!” he shouted at her, giving her a start, “I have no purpose! No family, no friends- nothing to fight for or protect! I’m an assassin, I kill for you, I end lives for you... but why? I have nothing, master, nothing to live for. How can you say that you know how that feels?!”

Dolosus looked like a madman. Sweat beaded his forehead, his eyes were wide, and his complexion was flushed a deep red. If he had looked mad, however, then Demonic was the portrait of fury. She opened her mouth as if to speak, then closed it. Then opened it again and closed it again. It seemed her rage was too strong for words to express, and so she instead summoned her weapon, a three foot long paintbrush, to her side.

“Stupid fool!!!” she roared, and in an instant, Dolosus was pinned to the floor, the shaft of the paintbrush forced against his neck, just below his chin, “How dare you speak to me in such a way!! You should be worshipping me, begging me for mercy and forgiveness! Have you managed to forget that I have already forgiven you once?” she knelt over him, one knee on either side of his stomach, pushing the brush harder against his neck and bringing her face close to his. She whispered menacingly, her voice like the hiss of a snake, “I am your master, and you shall speak to me with the respect that I deserve, understand, Dolo-kun?”

“Don’t call me... Dolo... kun...” he gasped out defiantly, and Demonic pressed down even harder on the brush. Now, every breath Dolosus took was laborous. He fought against dizziness, and blotches of color began to stain his vision as he struggled to maintain his consciousness.

“I said: do you understand?” she persisted. Dolosus tried to speak, or even to fight back, but he could not harm his master. He was not physically capable of raising his hand to strike her, and even speaking against her was a psychological battle in and of itself. After this long pause during which Demonic got no reply but a small groan of pain, she smiled in satisfaction.

“Good. I’m glad you’ve learned where you stand.” She said, and stood up, releasing Dolosus from her chokehold. He took in a gasp of air and rubbed his neck. He began to get up as well, but a swift kick to the stomach sent him sprawling on the floor, clutching his sides in pain. Demonic smiled again and turned away from him. She returned to her throne and seated herself comfortably.

“Come to me, Dolosus.” She ordered, her voice a careful monotone. Dolosus slowly got to his feet and glared at her, his attractive features contorted in rage.

“Yes... master...”

“Kneel before me, Dolosus.”

“Yes, master.” He did as told and knelt before his master, glaring at the floor and still struggling slightly to breathe. Demonic leaned forward and reached out a hand to touch the side of his face. He instinctively flinched at her touch, and found himself longing to pull away. Doing so would undoubtedly anger her, however, and so he remained still.

“You poor fool...” she murmured, “my pathetic little pet...” her hand caressed his cheek gently, brushing a few stray strands of dark brown hair from his face, “Such a beautiful pet, you are. It is truly a shame that you have become so useless to me.” Dolosus was silent. He would not provoke her temper again. Surely, obedience was the only way to get the answers he sought. “Do you really wish to know? I have the answers to all of your hearts desires. Indeed, I know more about you than you do. Shall I tell you?”

“Please, master.” He bowed his head and regarded her with a nauseating show of respect, “I beg of

you..." she gave a short laugh, then crossed her legs, folded her hands on her lap, and began in an oddly conversational tone,

"I created you. Two years ago, not long after I inherited this branch of the organization and began creating my own fighters and assassins to replace the idiots who had previously occupied those jobs. I created you to be my star pupil, so to speak." Dolosus' expression became more troubled as she spoke, and after a short pause, she continued, "A strong sense of duty and responsibility, peerless fighting abilities, striking intelligence, and stunning good looks," she laughed, "yes, you were to be my perfect creation. You may have even noticed that that body of yours does not age. You will always be the perfect being that you are now, until death." He flinched at the last words.

"I... I see..." he responded. His mind was in a state of more panic and confusion than before. He was just a creation? Just another of Demonic's works of art? His will was not his own. All he could do, all he had ever known was murder. Was he doomed to this path forever? It all seemed so pointless now, so empty. His entire existence was pointless. Others had been born out of love. He had been created to serve.

"But you see," Demonic continued, tearing Dolosus from his thoughts, "you... you are different from the others. You have something that the others lack."

"Master..."

"These emotions and longing which you feel so deeply are most likely a result of my own carelessness."

"Master," he repeated, frowning slightly, "I don't understand. What caused this? Why am I so different?"

Demonic scowled as if being forced to eat something particularly unpleasant. After a long silence that seemed to Dolosus to drag on forever, she answered,

"I let my own emotions interfere with your creation."

"I... don't understand..."

"These feelings that have stirred inside of you as of late," she explained with a sigh, "are the feelings that I harbored during your creation." She paused, closing her eyes and pondering the situation carefully, "as a work of art, you naturally express a part of me in a way. When I painted you, my own longings and feelings of emptiness... they entered you because of my carelessness. They have been dormant for the last two years. My guess is that your encounters with Crimson have triggered those dormant emotions, and now..." realization dawned on her, and she touched Dolosus' cheek once more. This time, he did not flinch. He closed his eyes, and when she spoke again, he swore he could hear some hint of genuine, human emotion in her voice,

"Now, you long for acceptance from others. You long for someone to call a friend... I know, because I experienced it all before."

"But... how could you...?"

"...I am also, like you, just a creation."

Dolosus felt his heart stop. Demonic seemed about to say more, but at that moment, the large oak doors of her room flew open with a resounding slam.

"Master!" the man who entered cried out breathlessly, running towards the two of them and dropping to his knees before Demonic, "A thousand apologies for the interruption, master, but there's an intruder!"

"Well, what are you all doing, then?!" she replied, her voice once more wrathful and authoritative, "Get rid of the filth! Kill it and wear the skin as a coat, for all I care!"

"Master, she has already destroyed our defenses- she's on her way right n-"

"It's rude to talk about people behind their backs, you know." Said a voice from the still open doorway. It was a girl, seemingly no older than sixteen. Her hair was cut short, and was a shocking shade of pink. She wore a skimpy kimono style outfit, with just bandages on her feet, and in her hands she carried a huge leaf. Her golden eyes glinted with a playful yet homicidal excitement.

“You!” Dolosus gasped when he saw her, but he didn’t move. In an instant, the girl stood behind the man who had reported her arrival,

“Thanks for the introduction,” she told him, “but I’ll take care of the formalities from here.”

She put a foot on his back, and a hand on his head, and with one quick motion, she lurched his head back and snapped his neck. He was dead in seconds. She smiled in satisfaction and tossed his body to the side. Demonic raised her eyebrows, but remained emotionless for the most part. Dolosus, however, got to his feet and faced the intruder,

“You!” he repeated, “What are you doing here? What business do you have with my master? Speak now, or fall by my hand.” The girl simply giggled, smiling like a small child with a new toy.

“My, my, you’re even cuter when you’re mad.” She said innocently. Dolosus scowled and opened his mouth to speak, but Demonic interrupted him, speaking in a complete monotone,

“Dolosus, who is this? A friend of yours?”

“Hardly, master.” He responded through clenched teeth, “this is one of Crimson’s friends. She fought against me in my first battle with her.” He now addressed the girl, “But why are you here? And without Altojo, as well. Without him, your attack strength must be nearly cut in half. That’s quite a gamble.”

“Altojo?” Demonic questioned.

“Another pest. He and this girl combine their attacks. He possesses fire manipulation abilities, and this one has wind manipulation.”

“I see...”

A heavy silence. The three simply stood there, in front of the throne, willing for one of the other two to speak first. Demonic shifted her gaze between the others, the intruder did likewise, and Dolosus’ eye swere fixed on the girl, as if sizing her up. It was she who finally broke the silence. She cleared her throat,

“Sooo... uhm... call me Kat!” she said cheerfully, “I’m no enemy of yours—not anymore at least. I’d like to join you. Afterall,” she continued with a laugh, “I’m sure that you could use the help, since I basically massacred the others.” She offered her hand to Dolosus in a gesture of politeness. He took it hesitantly, still unsure of whether she could be trusted. She also offered her hand to Demonic, who gazed at it as if it were diseased, then spoke coldly,

“State your reasons. I want a full story. Don’t try lying to me. I’ll know if a single falsehood passes your lips.” Demonic’s gaze was penetrating. She made eye contact with Kat, and Kat could not look away. She gave a cute, nervous laugh and shrugged,

“I guess I don’t have much of a choice, do I?”

“No, you don’t.” Demonic replied, and her eyes narrowed.

“Well,” Kat began, shifting uncomfortably under Demonic’s leering eyes, “As he said before, I’m a friend of Crimson’s, and I helped her out once in battle, but it sounds like you already know all about that. Anyway, I was going to meet Crimson at the park, and when I saw this handsome fella pickin’ a fight with her, I was going to help her, but I figured I’d sit back and see if Crimson could handle it herself.” Dolosus gave a snorting laugh and rolled his eyes.

“Your restraint nearly sent your friend to her grave.”

“But it didn’t, did it, Dolo-kun?” Demonic returned with a mocking sneer, “Keep your stupid comments to yourself. This entire day has put me in a foul mood. Continue.” She demanded of Kat.

“...Right, well,” Kat went on, “Crimson was in bad shape, and I was about to go help her, but my sister, Kitty, showed up and took care of that instead.”

“Your sister...” Dolosus frowned.

“Yeah, but we’re not really... close. Anyway, to make a long story short, they fought, and I guess you could say that it was a tie. But that surprised me, because, you see, my sister isn’t exactly a pushover. This guy is the only one of her opponents to walk away without at least a few broken bones or misplaced

internal organs.

Naturally, I was curious, so I tailed him back here. Once I saw that he worked for an organization of sorts, I made up my mind that I wanted to join, too.” She acted as if she had nothing left to say, but it was obvious to both Demonic and Dolosus that there had to be more.

“Curiosity?” Dolosus questioned, “You’re just joining out of curiosity?”

“Keep your stupid comments to yourself!” Kat said importantly, thrusting out her chest and deepening her voice dramatically.

“You dare to immitate my master...?” Dolosus grabbed a fist full of her shirt and lifted her up off the floor, glaring at her, his teeth bared like a vicious dog. Kat maintained a smug smile.

“I don’t know, do I dare?”

“You will learn to hold your tongue, you wretch. One more witty remark, and I may wash my hands in your blood.”

“Let’s see you try! You’ve got no weapons!”

“I’ll need none.”

“Oooh, tough guy.”

Just as Dolosus lost control, and was about to plow his fist into Kat’s face, Demonic interceded. She got to her feet quickly and took a hold of his wrist, holding him back. He seemed to slowly come to his senses. Slowly, he set Kat back on her feet, and he sighed.

“Both of you will shut up this instant.” Demonic commanded, “Your antics are giving me a headache.”

“...Yes, master. My apologies.” Dolosus said quietly, ashamed. Kat said nothing. Demonic turned to Kat.

“My foolish servant is right in one matter: you clearly have further reasons for wishing to join us. One does not simply walk into my room and request a position in my organization. You will be sent to murder, betray, spy, and every day could lead to your death. They say that curiosity killed the cat, but not in this case. Something else drives you. An alterior motive.”

Kat hung her head, and after a short silence, she said, “To find someone that I care about. Your organization could have some knowledge of his whereabouts, and for that information, I will readily kill whoever you need me to. You’ve seen my abilities—I promise that I can be useful to you.” She pleaded, clutching her hands together at her breast, “Please, I must find him. He’s like a brother to me, and he needs me, I just know it!” Dolosus noted that long silences seemed frequent as of late. Demonic sighed heavily and seated herself once more in her throne, crossing her legs and closing her eyes.

“Dolosus.” She said at last.

“Master?”

“Find the crows and send them to me. You need not return to me after you’ve done this task. Oh, and tell them that their food for the week is laying out in the hallway, and that they may do with it as they please.”

“It will be done, master.” Dolosus bowed to her and turned to leave. Once he reached the doorway, however, he stopped. Without turning back to look at her, he said, “Kat... I may have been wrong about you. Do not mistake me, your blood will spill if you show disrespect to my master... but, I think I like you enough to at least kill you quickly and somewhat painlessly.” That being said, he left the room in search of the crows. He should be able to find them in their living quarters. He made his way to their room, and all the way, Kat’s words echoed in his mind,

“To find someone that I care about.”

“Nice guy, that Dolosus.” Kat said once he had gone, “So charitable, willing to kill me quickly an’ all.”

“Mhm...” Demonic replied absentmindedly.

It was not long before the crows arrived, garbed in their usual blacks and reds, and chatting back and forth like a pair of chirping birds.

“Ah! You must be Kat.” said the girl when they reached where Demonic and Kat waited.  
“Must be.” the boy confirmed, “Thanks for all the food out there. Man, I was starving.”  
Demonic sighed, “Enough. I have a job for you two, so shut up and heed me closely.” The crows were silent, and she continued, “First, I want you to arrange a room for this one,” she gestured to Kat, “and when that’s settled, have her describe a man by the name of Altojo. Get as much information as you need, and then begin searching for him immediately. Do not engage him, and do not make yourselves known to him. Report back to me, and then Kat will give your orders on how you are to deal with him.”  
Kat gazed at her in surprise, stuttering slightly, “H-How did you know it was-“  
“That IS who you’re looking for, right?” Kat smiled and nodded vigorously.  
“Yes. Thank you, master.”  
“Whatever.” She muttered, “now, get out. I’ll have an assignment for you in the morning.” Kat nodded once more, and bowed deeply, her hair nearly brushing her knees. The three then left, picking up on their previous conversation where they had left off. Demonic let out a long, heavy sigh and sank into her chair, massaging her temples in an attempt to alleviate a particularly irritating headache.  
“So, Dolosus now knows what he is...Pah. Troublesome. That man is turning me soft. I’m too nice to these idiots...”

Owari.

### 3 - For His Sake

Author's notes:

- This chapter is written as a switch back and forth between the current events, and a flashback to the first encounter between Dolosus and Crimson and her friends. The flashbacks are in italics.
- Pictures of all of the characters can be found in my gallery.
- This chapter was actually written by my dear friend, Brian, as was the first chapter. I wrote the second, and I'll be writing the next one as well. It's a whole back and forth type pattern. And now, enjoy :D

*"Are you sure this is a good idea," Kat asked.*

*"Of course. Look, the plan is simple. We go in, locate the file, grab it, and go," Crimson replied.*

*"We'll be in radio contact the entire time," Altojo added.*

*Kat sighed and got out of the car. The three of them checked the mics in their ears to make sure everything was running smoothly. Then they walked into the office building. There were security guards in the lobby, but they weren't worried. They were dressed up in business suites and dark glasses, and Kat had concealed her weapon in her briefcase. Crimson had been forced to leave her katana behind because she couldn't risk setting off the metal detectors.*

*They traveled up the elevator to the thirtieth floor. Once there, they followed the corridors until they reached a door that was labeled "Archives." Crimson looked around to make sure nobody else was there. Then, she took out the card key she had stolen and swiped it through the lock. The door swung open and they found themselves in a gigantic room. It was filled from floor to ceiling with wooden bookcases and file cabinets.*

*"That was easier than I thought," Kat said once the door was closed.*

*"Alright," Crimson sighed. "You guys know the plan. Altojo, stay here and guard the door. Kat, you take the western half of the room and I'll search the eastern half. We have to find that file."*

*They nodded and separated. Kat walked down a row of cabinets, scanning the labels for names she might recognize.*

*"Why can't they go in alphabetical order? It would make things so much easier."*

*"Excuse me?"*

Kat opened her eyes. "What?"

"You said something about alphabetical order. We're going in the order Demonic gave us," the female crow said.

"Right, whatever," Kat said.

She and a couple of other assassins were in a gymnasium that was decorated with targets and dummies and other obstacles. It was Demonic's training hall. The assassins would train in here daily, each trying to best the others. Kat was sitting on the bench, waiting for her turn, in between two female assassins. One had red horns and a dragon-like tail with a flame on the end. The other had big yellow ears and a yellow tail with a black stripe. The female crow was standing on the sidelines with a clipboard, taking notes on each one's technique.

"Lucky you," she said smiling at her Kat. "You're up."

Kat was barely off the bench when the whispering started. Her presence and sudden enrollment as an

assassin spread like wildfire. She was the first one ever to actually break in and survive. There had been other attempts before, but they all died, usually at the hand of Dolosus. Rumors and gossip spread about her like rabbits during mating season.

Once she took her spot on the starting point, a hush fell over the spectators. The crowd got her pen ready. She nodded up to her brother in the booth. He pressed a button on the control panel and the starting bell rang. She bolted forward, jumped into the air and kicked off the head of the first dummy.

*One down, nineteen to go.*

She started toward the next one but stopped. The second dummy was surrounded by copies of itself. *Holograms*, she chuckled.

She reached behind her, grabbed the stem of the gigantic leaf on her back, and swung. A blast of wind blew through the holograms and carried the real one away. It hit the wall and shattered to pieces. Secret panels opened on the wall and hundreds of shuriken, kunai, arrows, and so many other weapons shot out aimed right at her. She stood her ground and smiled again.

*Too easy.*

She spun around and became enveloped in a gale of wind. Then she swung the leaf and launched the gale at the weapons. They all flew in every direction possible, except toward Kat. She remained unscathed, but the target on the wall ended up with six kunai in it.

She grabbed a dagger off the ground and ran to the other targets. As she did, panels in the ceiling opened up and giant metal blocks came falling around her. She tried to blow them away like she did the weapons, but the blocks were too heavy. All she could do was run and dodge them. Twice she was almost crushed. All of sudden, walls erupted around her in a maze like fashion. She had to run through the labyrinth while trying not to be crushed.

A block landed in front of her. She turned around and ran in the other direction, but another block bared her path. She was trapped. When she looked up she saw another falling right above her. Instead of panicking like so many other assassins, she closed her eyes and focused her power and energy to her feet. Tiny, translucent wings erupted from her heels. At an amazing speed she jumped and launched herself into the air so high she could almost touch the ceiling. When she looked down, she saw the block had landed right where she had been standing.

At the peak of her height, she swung her leaf and blasted the five targets on the ceiling. When she landed, the ground beneath her crumbled away and she fell into a chasm. She placed the leaf under her and used it to hold herself aloft. As she flew over the chasm, she spotted a target on the bottom. She threw the dagger she had taken. It stuck in the center. She glided out of the chasm and landed on top of a dummy, crushing it. Then she turned and smacked another one with the leaf.

*Eleven.*

She began to run to the next dummy, but tripped and fell. A rope had tied itself around her feet and was slowly pulling her back towards a jumble of buzz-saws. She launched a gust at the saws, but it didn't do anything. It pulled her closer and closer. She closed her eyes and thought of what to do. The sound of the saws got closer and closer. She could imagine them ripping her to shreds. Inspiration struck her. She swung the leaf again, but instead of creating a gust, she made a small twister that flew towards the weapons on the ground. A sword, picked up by the wind, was led back to the rope. The rope was severed and sucked up by the saws.

She sprinted to the dummy and socked it in the face. Holding the leaf out behind her, she ran. A small whirlwind began forming in the concave of the leaf. When it had grown to its biggest, she stopped and swung. A bigger tornado burst forth, only this time it was still attached. Like a fishing rod, she controlled it and used it to tear up the rest of the dummies and targets in the room.

*Nineteen.*

There was one left. When she looked around, however, she couldn't find it. Then, a panel in the floor



opened. An enormous mecha rose out of the hole. Its left arm was a long sword, its right arm, a gun. On its back was the final target. It pointed the gun at her and fired. She held the leaf in front of her and used it as a shield until she could duck behind one of the blocks. The mech advanced.

She looked down at her heels. The wings were still there. She picked up a couple of kunai. Then, she swung the leaf again. Ribbons of pure wind flew out and started circling her foe. She jumped and cleared the block. Once in the air, it aimed its gun at her again. She quickly threw one of the kunai at it. The robot put away the gun and blocked the dagger with its sword arm.

Kat used this as a distraction. She hopped onto the leaf again and glided toward the wind ribbons. They had completely encircled the mecha and formed a dome of wind over it. Her leaf landed on one of the ribbons and she began riding it like a skateboard. It tried to shoot her down, but she was moving too fast. It became defensive, trying desperately hard not to let her see its back, but she had the advantage of being able to soar over it and glide in any direction she wanted. She skated all across the dome, throwing the kunai at it. Finally, one struck the target on the mech's back. It stopped moving. A bell sounded and the now defeated contraption fell forward. She had cleared all twenty targets.

"Time!" the female crow yelled.

"6 minutes and 37 seconds," her brother called.

"Well, well," she said as she wrote it down. "Not bad for a beginner."

The wind dome dissipated and Kat hopped off of the leaf. As she walked back, the others began chatting fiercely.

"Can I go now?" Kat asked.

"Don't you want to stay and watch the others?" the crow asked. "Fine, go ahead. Pikari, you're up!"

The girl with the yellow tail got up and stood on the starting point. She rubbed her gloves together and then separated them. As she did, a spark of electricity jumped between them.

Kat left the gym and walked back to her room. Once inside, she collapsed onto her bed and began gasping for air. She quickly unwrapped the tape and gauze from her legs. The mark was still showing on her ankles. The more she used the wings, the longer it took for the mark to disappear, and the more exhausted she became as it sucked her energy. She reached in her dresser and pulled out a bottle. She rubbed the special lotion on her ankles and wrapped them again. Then she fell into a deep sleep.

*She was back in the room surrounded by file cabinets and bookcases. It had been almost four hours since the mission had begun. Finally she was getting somewhere. In front of her was the file they were looking for.*

*"I have located the document," she said into the mic. Only static answered her. She called again, "Repeat, I have the file." Still, no answer. That's odd, she thought.*

*Suddenly, a scream pierced the air. It was Crimson. Kat grabbed the file and ran. On the run, she opened her briefcase and took out her leaf, then stuffed the file inside.*

*She found Crimson lying on the ground down a hallway between bookcases. A tall, thin man was standing over her, holding a scythe, getting ready to deliver one last decisive blow. Kat swung her leaf and sent him flying.*

*He landed some yards away. When he got back to his feet, he looked at Kat with utter shock and surprise. She sent another gust attack at him, but he swung his scythe and it left a streak behind it of unusual color and energy, almost like a dark emptiness. It was like he had cut a hole in the very space itself. When the streak had disappeared, so had he.*

*"Look out behind you!" Crimson screamed.*

*Kat turned around and saw him standing directly behind her. He was already in mid-swing. The blade of the scythe was en route to her neck. There was no way she could dodge it.*

Kat woke up. How long had she been asleep? Without a clock it was hard to tell. She was starving and needed food. She looked under her ankle wraps. The mark was gone. Breathing a sigh of relief, she

wrapped them up again. She knew it was dangerous and berated herself for using it during a training session, yet she had to make an impression if she was going to get in Demonic's good favor. She left her room and headed for the cafeteria. The hallway was empty. The assassins spent most of their time in their rooms since they were not allowed to leave or go outside. As she turned a corner, she saw Dolosus walking in the opposite direction. He already had another scythe with him. From what she heard his old one had been thrown into one of his own wormholes by her sister a few weeks prior. It surprised her to hear this. Kitty wasn't a fighter. She was more of a juvenile, immature, free spirit. How she got entangled with Dolosus and Crimson, Kat would never know. Eventually, Dolosus saw her. He became tense, narrowed his eyes, and continued at a stern pace. When they passed, Kat felt her pulse quicken. She tried to avoid his gaze. They passed and a chill went down her spine. When she reached the cafeteria door, she brushed away her pink hair and quickly went in.

"Do like my present?" Demonic asked, with a grin.

"Yes, it was very thoughtful," Dolosus answered. "I was told you wanted to see me?"

"Don't get snippy with me," she ordered, her tone instantly more stern, "and yes, I did want to speak with you. It has been a few weeks since your little 'incident.' I trust you have stopped licking your wounds and are ready to resume work?"

He gave a curt nod.

"Good, because I have another assignment for you."

"That was fast."

She smiled and threw an envelope at him. He picked it up and began rifling through its contents.

"It's a bit different than what you are used to. You won't be an assassin, you'll be a spy."

"A spy? But that's the crows' job."

"I know, but I need them for something else, and your skills are best suited for this."

"Who am I going to spy on?"

"Kat."

"What?"

"She will be getting an assignment soon, her first one since she has been here. I need you to go and make sure she doesn't screw it up."

"So if she fails to kill the target you want me to get him."

"Exactly, but don't let her see you. That is imperative."

"Understood."

*The scythe was about to slice her head off. Suddenly, a muscular man with a bandana around his eyes stopped it. He had grabbed a hold of the staff and was struggling to stop it from killing Kat. He let go with one of his hands and open palmed Dolosus in the chest. A ring of fire shot out and Dolosus went flying. He crashed against the top of a bookcase. Before he could fall off, he grabbed the shelf and volleyed himself on top of the case. He was surprised. Nobody hit him. There was even a single mark in the shape of a hand on his shirt. He stood up and yelled down to them.*

*"Who the hell are you?"*

*"I am Altojo," the man called back.*

*Then he summoned a fireball into his hand and threw it at Dolosus. He dodged and the flame hit the shelf instead in an explosion. The whole bookcase wobbled a little bit. That gave Dolosus an idea. He looked down at Kat and yelled, "Ugly dog!"*

*Her face grew redder than Altojo's fire. She growled and swung the leaf, releasing a gigantic blast of wind. Dolosus smiled and cut another hole. The gust attack got sucked up. The exit to the hole appeared*

*on the other side of the bookcase and the gale blew the whole case over.*

*Dolosus escaped through another hole. Altojo, Crimson, and Kat fled down the aisle as the case began to fall. The case hit the bookcase next to it and started a chain reaction that spread throughout the entire room. Bookcases and file cabinets fell left and right. Even Dolosus, who had appeared on top of another bookcase, had to jump to the next one over as it fell.*

*As the three on the ground below ran, Kat focused her power to her ankle and tiny translucent wings sprouted on her feet. She jumped and bounded from shelf to shelf until she landed next to Dolosus and launched another gust attack at him. He dodged it and jumped to the next case over. She followed him and kept throwing gusts at him. She chased him across the room, jumping from case to case to cabinet to cabinet, all of them falling as soon as they set foot on them. They reached to last file cabinet standing. It too got hit and began falling over. Kat used another gust attack and knew Dolosus had nowhere to go. He jumped from the cabinet and plummeted toward the ground. He swung his scythe and fell into the hole he had created.*

*He reappeared and found himself in front of Altojo. He thought he was going to hit him again, but all Altojo did was stand there. Dolosus stood completely still. Then he stuck out his tongue and flipped him off. Altojo didn't do anything. It was like he didn't even see Dolosus. That's when it hit him.*

*He can't see me. He's got that bandana around his eyes. He's blind.*

*Dolosus focused his energy and silently cut open another hole, small enough for the blade of his scythe to fit through. An exit hole appeared next to Altojo's neck. He stuck the blade through positioned it in front of his neck.*

*Just because Crimson was my target doesn't mean I can't kill him too.*

*He got ready to slice his head off. Suddenly, a fist came through the air and punched Dolosus in the back of his head. He fell forward and his scythe blade fell out of the hole.*

*"Damn!" he swore.*

*Altojo looked up and sent two streams of fire that encircled and trapped Dolosus. He then clapped his hands and the ring of fire exploded.*

*When the smoke cleared, they could see there was nothing left. Altojo smiled. All of a sudden Dolosus appeared, aiming a kick at his face. Altojo staggered back and spat out a little blood. He made another fireball and threw it at Dolosus who escaped through another hole. As soon as he reappeared, Altojo threw another fireball at him. Dolosus disappeared again and reappeared, only to dodge another fireball. Fire soared through the air, leaving a blazing trail behind them. At last Dolosus reappeared behind Crimson and swung his scythe. She tried to duck.*

*"Too slow," he yelled.*

*A gust of wind knocked him off his feet. He landed on top of another file cabinet. He glared at all three of them.*

*"Sir, we'll be landing soon."*

*Dolosus woke up. He had fallen asleep on the plane. He waved the stewardess away and wiped the sleep from his eyes. Out the window of the plane he could see a massive city below. It was the city of Otakon, Japan. Apparently, Kat's target would be at a festival the city held every year. Dolosus had been to Japan many times, but never in this area. He couldn't create a loophole to Otakon because he could not visualize where he would end up. The only option was to go by plane. Luckily, Demonic got him first class tickets.*

*He got off the plane and took a taxi to the hotel. He had been sent a day before Kat to get ready. That meant he could spend the rest of the day relaxing. He checked in under his alias, "Ian Brite", and went up to the room to unpack and watch a movie.*

*Kat got off the plane. She grabbed her luggage and took a taxi to the hotel Demonic had made a*

reservation for. She checked in under her usual alias, "Katelyn Hart." Then she went up a couple of floors and went into her room to unpack. As she did so, the envelope with the mission Dolosus had given her fell out of her suitcase. She looked at the picture of the man she would have to kill the next day. It would be tough. Killing a bad guy in the heat of battle while he was trying to kill you was one thing. However, taking out someone she had never met before, who hadn't done anything to her, who could have been the most innocent man in the world, was different. She felt a little guilty inside. It wasn't something a little sightseeing and shopping couldn't solve.

The next day, no taxis were running in the city. The streets were all packed with people dressed in the most unusual and outrageous outfits. The women dressed in slutty dresses, the men dressed in slutty dresses, the androgynous people dressed in sexy outfits. It was an entire festival celebrating manga and anime. A girl with pink hair holding a giant leaf fit in perfectly. Kat left the hotel. Dolosus left a few seconds later. He hid in shadows, behind dark glasses. He followed her through the crowd of people until he reached a park in the center of the city. The entire park was decorated with booths and tents that held weapons and comics and so many other souvenirs.

Kat walked by all of the booths. She wasn't there to shop. She was there to kill. It was difficult, though, to find her target since everyone around her kept stopping her to admire the leaf. Several times she was asked what she was supposed to be. Several times she answered, "an assassin."

Dolosus was having a similar problem. His scythe drew so much attention, but his cold, stern disposition usually kept them away. One guy, however, had the nerve to walk up to him and challenge to a battle. Dolosus was tempted to kill him, but he had to keep undercover.

Sometime around lunch Kat had made her way to the center stage. A man was standing on it, giving an overly passionate talk. He was her target. She turned from the stage and swiftly walked to the other end of the field. She made sure no one was watching, and then climbed one of the trees until she reached the topmost bough. The stage was far away, but she could still see her target.

Her heart began pounding. Her head began reeling. An image of Altojo flashed into her mind. She swallowed the lump in her throat, focused her energy, and swung the leaf.

Dolosus had lost sight of her. He kept cursing to himself. He decided to stay within sight of the target. If Kat did not kill him, he would have to do it himself.

All of a sudden, a gust of wind ripped through the tents and booths. People began screaming. Dolosus turned around and saw a twister coming toward the booths. It smashed into a weapons booth and sped toward the stage as a cyclone of sharp metal.

*Looks like she didn't chicken out. A little bit theatrical, though.*

He looked to the stage to make sure the target had not gotten out of the way. There, standing in between the target and the twister, was a little girl. She had big, blonde hair tied up in pigtails with huge, blue ribbons. She was yelling at him. Dolosus got worried. Her back was to the cyclone so she didn't see it coming. If she didn't move, it would hit and kill her instead. Unnecessary casualties would be problematic. He ran toward her. He wasn't sure if he would make it in time. The sound of scratching and clanging metal grew deafening as it approached. He jumped and grabbed her. The twister soared inches above them. One of the shuriken nicked his shoulders. There was a crash, another scream, and the sound of wood breaking. Before the ceiling could cave in, he cut a hole and threw himself and the girl into it.

They came out behind one of the tents. Dolosus stood the girl up and looked her in the eye.

"What the heck is wrong with you? Are you trying to get yourself killed?"

She slapped him across the face. "Thanks a lot! Now, because of you, I'll never kill him. Crap!"

She turned and ran. He was dumbstruck. Why would she want to kill Kat's target? She was so young,

so naive looking. Before he could chase after her, the tent next to him burst into flames. Out came running a girl with red horns and a tail with a flame on the end. Dolosus recognized her as Derenard, one of the other assassins. She was more like Demonic's private arsonist. He chased her until he caught her by the collar and stared her in the eye.

"What are you doing here?" he snarled.

There was fear in her eyes. "I-I was sent by D-Demonic."

"What? Why? Did she tell you to spy on me?"

"No! She only told me to wait for a gust of wind and then set fire to the booths and tents. Please don't tell her I told you. She said it was imperative that you didn't see me."

*She told her to wait for the wind?*

*Dolosus was getting annoyed. Killing somebody usually didn't take this long. He would have to stop messing around and finish them. Kat whispered something to Altojo. He nodded and clapped his hands together. A wall of fire stretched the width of the room. Kat stood behind it and swung her leaf again. The windstorm carried the flames across the room, destroying everything in its path.*

Dolosus looked around him. The tents and booths were going up in flames just like the bookcases and the file cabinets had. The wind was carrying the flame towards the city.

*So that's why Derenard's here. Demonic wants her to burn down the place. And wind spreads fire.*

*That's why Kat was sent here. Their powers were working together without the two of them even realizing it. Demonic had played them like pawns. But why?*

*There was a huge explosion as the wall of fire hit the back wall. The entire room was up in flames. Before they could see if Dolosus had been caught in the blaze, another explosion was heard from the opposite wall. Guards came pouring through the hole, shooting at them. The three of them ran to the hole in the wall Altojo's blast had made. They got onto Kat's leaf and soared from the thirtieth floor to safety.*

Kat shook the daydream from her head. She needed her mind to stop wandering so she could finish the paperwork she had to fill out about her mission. She couldn't remember how many weapons were sticking out of the guy's chest when they found him. She made a guess and put down her pencil. She walked over to her dresser and pulled out the bottom drawer. She pushed aside the clothes. There, lying next to the bottle of lotion was a picture of Altojo. She stared at it and sighed.

*Soon I'll find out where you are, and I will save you.*

She took out the picture. Underneath was the file she had found that fateful day in Demonic's archives. It was a shame she never got a chance to show Altojo. The trio had agreed to all look through it together.

"Enter," Demonic said. The two crows came into her room and closed the door behind them. "Ah! How did it go?"

"Very well," the male said as he handed her some papers and pictures.

"You were right. He's in Guatemala," the female said.

"Of course I was right. The question is *why* he is there?" Demonic said. She looked down at the stack of papers. There was a picture lying on top of them. It was a side shot of Altojo.

Owari

## 4 - Ignorance

Author's notes:

-Hey there, D.A.-chan back for more. I wrote this chapter, btw, as the last one was written by Brian. You can tell this one's mine because of all the random conversation and overabundance of character development \*le sigh\*

-Again, I would like to remind everyone that my computer has no spell check, and so any errors are credited to that unfortunate circumstance.

Enjoy! :D

The flames had succeeded in bringing most of the city of Otakon to the ground by the time they had been put out. The fire department had arrived eventually, but it was difficult, what with the traffic for the festival. Dolosus had left long before then, however. He had far more pressing matters to attend to. This being the case, he had hurried back to his hotel room and rapidly repacked his belongings, half hazardly launching articles of clothing into his suit case without even looking at what he was doing. Once finished, he swung his scythe through the air and created a wormhole, which he used to arrive immediately in his room back at the organization.

"Alright, that's everythi-" he stopped short on his way to the door. He scowled and slapped his forehead, sighing. Another wormhole, and he was gone. Moments later, he reappeared in the same spot, the same expression on his face. As he made his way out of his room and down the hallway to Demonic's room, he muttered to himself irritably,

"Actually in a hurry to get back for once, and I forget to check out of the hotel. Figures."

Soon, he stood in front of the large oak doors to his master's room. He took a deep breath and raised a fist to knock.

"Dolosuuus!" a girl's voice sounded from behind him. He sighed, not even bothering to lower his hand or turn around to face the crows.

"What is it? I don't have time for you two today."

"Oooh, that's not very nice. Looks like little Dolo-kun's PMSing again, huh, brother."

"I'll say. Really, Dolosus, I'm hurt."

Dolosus let out another heavy sigh. He lowered his fist to his side, slowly, as if making a great effort to restrain himself. His muscles tensed, and the crows exchanged a glance. The male crow cleared his throat and spoke up,

"Anyway... you wont find our master in there, if that's why you're here."

"Really." He muttered, secretly very grateful that they had caught on to his mood, and had the common sense not to push his temper, "Well, where is she then? There are no training sessions for her to oversee today—she specifically instructed that none be scheduled, so I don't see why she wouldn't be—"

"Ugh, you really can be dense sometimes, you know that?" the female commented, grabbing him by the arm and pulling him away from the door and back down the hallway.

"Get off! Where are you—"

"Honestly, you'd think he'd have noticed by now, what with all of the preparations and everything that's been going on." The male went on, taking hold of Dolosus' free arm and pulling him along with

such force that he had difficulty keeping his balance—which seemed to amuse and delight both crow siblings.

Dolosus soon realized that he was being led to the dining hall. This room was very rarely used, as all those who worked for Demonic had their own rooms, and so they would usually eat there, in solitude. That anyone would be in the dining hall, let alone Demonic, seemed unlikely.

“What are you trying to pull?” he demanded. The crows gave no answer, but opened the doors to the dining hall and flung Dolosus inside.

“If this is some kind of joke, I swear, I’ll rip off your wings and shove...” he drifted off. The eyes of every member of the organization stared unblinkingly at him. On a moment’s observation, he also saw that Demonic was indeed in this room, and also stared at him with eyes which could probably burn holes through his body.

The dining room was decorated lavishly. The ceiling high windows were framed by artistically draped black curtains, and each was adorned with a wreath bearing a red bow and a candle in the center. An enormous chandelier hung above the long oak table at which sat Demonic, at the head, of course, and every other member of her little freak show. Dolosus also noticed that the “higher up” members had the honor and privilege of sitting closer to their master.

“Dolosus.” She said in mock surprise, “how lovely that you’ve decided to join us. Come. Sit.” Clearly, this was a command, not an invitation. He took a step towards the empty seat on Demonic’s right. “One moment. Stand still.” He obeyed, puzzled. In just a few fast movements, she seemed to trace an image in the air between herself and Dolosus with her index finger.

“There. We can’t have you dressed like a slob for such an occasion.” With a flash of green light, he now stood, clothed in a perfectly fitted proper black tux. He observed his new attire, eyebrows raised, then frowned and looked back up at Demonic,

“Master, what is all of this? Why is this all happening? Tell me what’s going on.” Dolosus hadn’t even seen the slice of cheese until it hit him square in the face, causing an amusing smacking noise. He was effectively silenced.

“You show up late and then complain and demand answers.” Demonic said, “Sit down and shut up. Honestly, the things you put me through...” she added in an undertone. Then, clearing her throat, she went on to say, “And now, without any further ado, let the feast commence.” As soon as the words had left her lips, the room became crowded with waiters and waitresses bringing in the most delicious and exotic dishes to the table on large silver plates, each nearly big enough to be its own table. As soon as the food was set, the conversation and laughter began.

Dolosus seated himself at Demonic’s right, directly across from Kat, who watched him curiously, then laughed as he looked down the front of his shirt to find that he was indeed completely re-dressed. He had thought briefly that perhaps he was still wearing his usual attire underneath his new formal wear. Demonic also grinned in mild amusement at this.

“It’s a neat little trick.” She said conversationally, “that outfit had already been designed, and so I didn’t need my paintbrush to create it. I simply trace it onto your body with my finger, and with a little extra effort, I can even replace the clothes you’re already wearing with what I envision.”

“Isn’t it cool?” Kat gushed, “she even made me this dress. It’s so beautiful, don’t you think, Dolo-kun?”

“Y-yeah... it’s... it’s nice.” He muttered, picking up his fork and pushing his food around on his plate. In all honesty, Kat’s dress was gorgeous on her. It was strapless, form fitting, white with red lace and an abundance of frills. At the waist, it flared out, fluttering about her and hanging down to just above her knees. The overall look bordered on a lolita style.

Dolosus hardly took the time to look, however. The current situation completely disoriented him. He had never dined with his master, in fact, he often doubted whether she actually ate anything at all. Yet here

he was, sitting right next to her, having a pleasant chat over dinner, and she too, looked oddly stunning. She wore a black choker necklace and a long, low cut black gown with sleeves that fit her arms tightly, then fanned out at the elbows. It was simple, but the effect was disturbingly beautiful.

“So, Dolosus, as I am willing to excuse your tardy as being fashionably late, let us move on to a more relevant matter.” She said, “how was your most recent mission?”

“Successful.” He responded curtly. Demonic seemed to expect more, but he took a mouthfull of turkey, signalling that he had said all that he pleased to say.

“...Good.” She said. A long silence followed. They both ate quietly, listening on other’s conversations and occupying themselves with their own thoughts.

“That trick of yours is... disturbing.” Dolosus finally said. Demonic looked up at him. He went on, “May I be so bold as to request that you refrain from undressing me in the future?”

“You may not.” She responded in all seriousness, taking a sip of a particularly dry red wine, “I will undress you when and where I please, as is my right as your master.” This last comment earned a number of curious looks, which then advanced to crude jokes. Demonic hardly seemed to notice. She poured some gravy onto a modest mound of potatoes on her plate and picked up her spoon to eat, but Dolosus spoke again,

“What is the meaning of all this?” he asked for a second time, looking around the room and taking in every detail, “Why did you choose to dine with us tonight? And why such a feast?”

She sighed impatiently and placed her spoon back on the table.

“Really, Dolosus, you have the intellectual capabilities of a squashed kumquat.” He opened his mouth to speak, but Kat cut in,

“It’s Christmas! You mean you didn’t know? How could you not know it’s Christmas?” she stared at him as though he had just announced that he was pregnant with Demonic’s child, and in her surprise, she had completely forgotten the fork full of turkey she still held, suspended between her mouth and her plate.

“I... suppose I forgot...” he muttered, shrugging. He had only experienced Christmas twice before, as far as he could remember (which made much more sense, now that he knew that Demonic had created him just two years before). Both previous Christmases had passed by with little notice. Once, he had been on a mission in a primarily Hindu area, where December 25th didn’t quite hold the same meaning, and the next year he had spent the day in his room, reading, and generally keeping to himself. He had expected this year to be no different.

“Have you... always dined with us on Christmas?” he asked, feeling somewhat awkward.

“No, don’t worry, you’re not that clueless. I figured I’d start up a tradition.” Demonic answered, as she took another sip of wine, smiling to herself as if at some inside joke.

“Dolo-kun, does this mean that you’ve never celebrated Christmas before?” Kat questioned, her voice full of sympathy, and her mouth full of ham.

“I haven’t.” he said, “and kindly refrain from calling me ‘Dolo-kun’. Despite what the crows have no doubt already told you, I do not enjoy being called by that little nickname of theirs.” He punctuated this sentence with a glare at the crow siblings, who sat a couple seats down. Their response was an innocent smile and a giggle.

“Oh, sorry, I thought it was cute.”

“Nevermind.” Dolosus looked back at Kat across the table and made it a point to change the subject,

“How was your first mission? Were you successful?”

Kat quickly shoved a forkfull of turkey into her mouth to avoid answering immediately. She chewed slowly and deliberately. She really didn’t want to talk about it, but Dolosus waited patiently for her to respond. Clearly, he would not just let this go.

“Do tell us, Kat.” Demonic chimed in, “I am quite eager to hear how it went, as well.”



“Well...” Kat finally said, “I got the guy.”

“Good to hear.” Demonic said. Dolosus nodded in approval. Kat hesitated, then went on, “It was pretty easy. No one even suspected that I was up to anything.” She laughed awkwardly, “I actually fit right in. The target was exactly where you said he would be at the appointed time, and just one tornado took out him and a few nearby tents and booths.” Kat paused for a moment to pour herself a glass of wine and gather her thoughts, “But, there was one small mishap...”

“...Oh?” Demonic raised an eyebrow.

“The city sort of... went up in flames.”

Demonic chuckled pleasantly and finished off her wine, setting the glass back down on the table with a small “clink”.

“Did it now? Well, no use crying over spilled milk—or burned cities for that matter.” Another cheerful laugh. Anger began to prickle inside of Dolosus, but he restrained himself. Seeing Kat hang her head, avoiding eye contact with him and their master, however, intensified his aggravation. Surely, she knew that her wind had spread the fire, that the destruction of a city, the death of innocent people was partially her fault.

“That’s all there is to it?” he said quietly.

“Pardon?”

“No use crying over it’. That’s all? It’s of absolutely no consequence to you—as long as you get what you want.”

“Dolosus, I warn you, I will not have this.”

“I don’t care.” He got to his feet, his pulse racing, his fists clenched. By now, everyone in the room was watching with interest, “I want an explanation, now!”

“You seem to be of the opinion, Dolosus.” She retorted, also getting to her feet and raising her voice, “that because I have agreed to help Kat to find her friend, I have somehow turned into Mother Teresa. I assure you that this is not the case. I still have my goals, my ambitions, and I will do what is needed to achieve them.”

“So, for your stupid ‘ambitions’, you’re willing to—“

“Yes. I am.” She cut in, a note of finality in her voice. She slowly sat down once more and gestured to Dolosus’ chair, “Now, sit down, and finish your dinner.”

It was impossible to tell how long the two stared at each other, challenging each other, each daring the other to break the oppressive silence which dominated the room. It seemed to go on for hours, though it may have been a minute at most. Dolosus did not sit down, and Demonic did not repeat her command. In the end, something in her eyes must have affected him. Without a word, without looking back, he turned and walked out of the dining hall, slamming the doors shut behind him.

Demonic cleared her throat and signalled for the waiters to bring dessert.

Unlike Dolosus, Kat had stayed for the entire meal, mostly in an effort to be polite. She even managed to cheer herself up a little bit by engaging in conversation with the other organization members. She listened intently as they told of the places they had been and the people they had seen (and killed), and she found it all rather fascinating. By the time their goodnights were said, and Kat was on her way to her room, she actually found herself looking forward to her next mission and making a mental note to ask Dolosus of his travels when she saw him next.

“Though... I don’t think he likes me very much...” she said to herself a little sadly as she plopped herself down on her bed. She sighed and stared up at the ceiling, “Oh well. It won’t matter once I find Altojo. Then, once Crimson’s done with her training, we can all be together again.” She drew comfort from these thoughts. She could get away from this place and all of the bizarre drama that came with it. She’d get away from the training sessions, from Demonic’s schemes and Dolosus’ attitude.

But then, she thought, the crows aren't so bad—even if their pranks aren't always harmless and their diet is somewhat disturbing. And she didn't really know Dolosus. What if she talked to him and he turned out to be alright? The idea of traveling all around the world on her missions was also tempting. What if, after she found her friends, she stayed with the organization? What if...?

"Kaaat!" the sister crow's voice sounded musically through her room as she made a dramatic and overly excited entrance. Kat smiled and sat up on her bed, then noticed that the crow was alone.

"Hey, where's your brother? I've never seen you without him."

"Most people haven't." she admitted with a laugh, "He's being an immature dick and hogging the shower in our room, so I figured I'd chill here for a little while until he's done." She made herself at home, jumping onto Kat's bed without even taking off her boots. Kat rolled her eyes, smiling wryly.

"So, funny stuff back there at dinner, huh."

"Funny' wasn't the first word that came to mind." She sighed, "Doesn't matter. It won't be my problem once I'm out of here."

"It's a shame you're leaving." The crow said, "I kinda like you." Kat gave a short laugh.

"Yeah? What about Dolosus?"

"Oh, I like him too, but mostly just because he's fun to mess with."

"No, I mean I don't think he likes me."

The crow shrugged,

"Who knows? I don't think he really likes anyone."

"Why's that? Superiority complex?"

"Not likely. He just keeps to himself, I guess. But the fact that he was willing to speak to you during dinner says something, at least."

"Hmmm..."

A short silence.

"What's he like? This Altojo guy you're looking for, I mean." The crow said for a change of subject.

"He's... well... he's the strong and silent type." The two girls laughed together, and to Kat, it felt like jumping into a pool on a humid summer day. When they had finished, she went on, "He's really like a brother to me, you know? But he's just so difficult sometimes. One day he started acting weird all of a sudden, and he just got up and left without telling me or Crimson where, why, or for how long. I mean, can you believe that? The jerk." Kat crossed her arms and pouted childishly.

"Y'know, he'll be the same even after you find him. That's just how brothers are. Trust me, I would know."

"I know..." Kat said, and a small smile touched her lips.

"And speaking of brothers," the crow said as she got up off of the bed and started towards the door, "Mine should be done wasting the hot water by now. Why don't you go try to bother Dolosus? I think he's outside right now. Oh, and also..." she added, now already half way out the door, "word on the street is that we're leaving to find Mr. Altojo pretty soon. We've got a general idea of where he is."

"And I'm coming with you."

"Of course."

"So I can give him a good smack across the face when we find him."

"Naturally."

"Good night!"

"G'night."

Snow had begun to fall outside, but Dolosus had no thoughts of going back in. He took off his glasses, which had fogged up in his time out in the cold, and turned his face up to the cloudy night sky. A deep sigh escaped his lips. Dolosus watched the fog from his warm breath rise and swirl in the air above him,

then dissolve into the night.

“Hey. Aren’t you cold out here?”

“No, Kat. Go back inside.” He said, without even looking at her.

“I don’t want to.” She responded. She came to stand next to him, looking up into the sky, then at Dolosus. He slid his hands into his pockets and gave her an unreadable sideways glance.

“Fine. Suite yourself.” He looked away.

“I intend to.” Kat returned with a smile. He did not respond. Seeing that he apparently wasn’t feeling very talkative, she decided to initiate conversation herself.

“Sooo... the crows and I were thinking of catching a movie sometime soon.”

He still said nothing, but watched her out of the corner of his eye.

“...You should come with us.” She offered cheerfully, “It’d be fun.”

“Why?”

“Why not?”

“People who carry that philosophy don’t live long.” He scoffed. Kat laughed, her voice shaking noticeably from the cold,

“Maybe.” She shrugged, “But anyway, that’s not the point. Will you come to the movie with us? We may even go have dinner afterward and hang out for a while.” Dolosus seemed lost in thought. Kat took it as a good sign that he was considering it at all.

“...What do you do when you hang out?”

“I dunno, we could just... chill... and... talk, I guess.”

“Talk?”

“Yup.”

“About what?”

“I dunno, whatever comes to mind.”

“You have conversations based on random thoughts?”

“What’s your favorite color?”

“What?”

“What’s your favorite color?”

“Blue.”

“That was a random thought, and we’re having a conversation. See?”

“That’s... odd.”

“You’re odd.”

“You’re one to talk.”

“You still haven’t answered my first question.”

He closed his eyes and heaved a sigh. It would be difficult to plan, what with all of them going on missions at different times. He would have to deal with people outside of the organization—something which he detested, and endeavored to do as infrequently as possible. He wouldn’t be able to bring his scythe with him, which made him nervous in and of itself. And yet...

“I’ll go.” He said, “but on one condition.”

“Name it.” Kat complied immediately, clapping her hands together in excitement.

“I’m going out for a walk now. I refuse to say where I’m going, so don’t ask. I will go to this movie with you and the crows on the condition that you absolutely will not follow me, or instruct the crows to do so.”

“I promise, but Dolosus-“

“Swear it on Altojo’s life.”

“I-I swear.”

“Good. I’m leaving now.”

He replaced his glasses high on the bridge of his nose, then took a few steps forward. His feet crunched

in the snow, his hands still rested deep in his pockets, and he had set an expression of careful indifference on his face.

“G-Goodnight, Dolosus!” she called out to him, her voice echoing eerily around them. He stopped and half turned towards her. He observed her silently for a moment, then simply nodded to her, and continued on his way. Kat watched his back as he disappeared into the night. She went back inside, shivering terribly.

He arrived at his destination just as the doors of a nearby church opened for midnight mass. A steady flow of people started into the building, greeting each other with warm hearts and open arms, and all wishing each other a Merry Christmas. Dolosus watched them from his vantage point in the graveyard. The same graveyard to which he had fled after his last encounter with Crimson. He sought a certain grave. It would not doubt be more difficult to find in the blanket of snow now covering the ground, but he would find it eventually.

For about twenty minutes, he searched until he finally found the grave. A single unmarked grave, nearly covered by the snow. It was old, neglected, and most likely had not been visited for quite a while. This was why he had come here. This was what he needed to see.

“Not even a name...” he whispered to no one in particular. He frowned and crouched down to examine the stone more closely, but was careful not to kneel and get his pants wet in the snow. It was suddenly brought to the attention of his distracted mind that he was still wearing a tux. He sighed softly. He’d have to ask Demonic to put him in his old clothes again.

After this thought, his mind went blank. His eyes became unfocused and glazed over, and he simply stood in front of the grave, watching it as if expecting it to get up and move. Needless to say, it did not move, and neither did Dolosus.

He was brought back to earth when he heard someone approaching from the distance, the crunching snow bearing testimony to their presence. Dolosus strained his eyes to see who it was, but all that he could see was a vague outline and a head of startlingly blonde hair. He assumed from its length that this was a woman. She also appeared to be heading towards the graveyard where he now stood. His entire body tensed, and, without another glance at the approaching woman, he bolted for the church and hid himself around the corner of the building. From his current location, he could continue to watch her without being seen.

He worried for a moment that she may have seen him, but on closer observation, he saw that her head was hung, and she stared fixatedly at the snow covered ground. In her hands, she held a wreath, adorned with a single, modest, red bow.

Dolosus had to smother a gasp.

It was Crimson.

He struggled to calm his racing heart and silence his rapid breathing. He watched her kneel down and place the wreath in front of the very same grave which he had come here to see. She closed her eyes and folded her hands in prayer.

Dolosus nearly laughed. This was almost too perfect. He was almost glad that neither of them had their weapons with them—it would be so boring other wise—so very typical. No, he wanted this to be different. He wanted Crimson’s death to be special.

Seeing that she was completely asorbed in her prayers, he prepared himself. He stripped off his formal jacket to allow for freedom of movement and tossed it to the ground. Then, he removed his tie and pulled it tightly, testing the strength of the fabric. Finding it satisfactory, he turned towards her once more. She was getting to her feet. He would miss his chance. He had to act.

In an instant, he was behind her. She hadn’t even had time to turn around before the tie was wrapped tightly around her neck, with Dolosus holding either end.

“Good evening, Crimson,” he whispered into her ear, his voice like the purr of a cat, “fancy seeing you here at this hour.”

“W-who are you?” her voice cracked, and he could feel her trembling. These only added to the euphoria of his impending victory.

“You don’t recognize my voice?” he laughed, pulling her so that her back pressed against his chest, “well, I can’t say I’m surprised. Our encounters never were very... friendly.”

“Let me go!” she thrust her elbow out behind her, hoping to force him off. Because their bodies were so close, however, all that she accomplished was rubbing her arm against his stomach. He laughed, and the sound was almost sadistic.

“Now, Crimson, that’s not very nice.” He pulled on the tie, squeezing her neck just a little tighter, “my name is Dolosus. You and your little friends have brought me to hell and back. But then—you’ll be able to see what that’s like pretty soon. After a little fun for me, of course.” He pulled the tie tighter and she let out a little whimper. “Death by suffocation is quite interesting,” he went on, ignoring her struggling, “so messy though! The carcass spills out saliva and waste... it’s not very pretty, needless to say.” He laughed in childish delight, “you’ve got two or three minutes, at most...”

*“Oh, holy night*

*The stars are brightly shining*

*It is the night of the dear Saviors birth...”*

Inside the church, a choir began to sing a slow, soothing melody. They sang Oh, Holy Night, and their beautiful refrains echoed around the two in the graveyard, hunter and prey. But Dolosus did not loosen his hold and Crimson was not calmed. She lashed out at him, flailing her limbs, hoping that in her blind struggle, a blow would connect and he would release her.

“It’s no use,” he said, grinning madly. Crimson jerked her head back with all the force she could muster. In a sort of backwards head-butt maneuver, she slammed the back of her head into his face. He cried out and let go for the shortest of instants, which was more than enough time for Crimson to pull free at last.

“Ugh... troublesome brat...” Dolosus grunted, whipping blood from his nose. She made no reply, but stood in place, bent over slightly, one hand clutching her neck, and the other on her knee to support her. She coughed up spit and a little blood, gasping for air. She looked about to throw up. He had to take this opportunity before she got away.

*“Long lay the world in sin and error pining*

*‘Till he appear’d and the soul felt its worth...”*

He ran at her, aiming a punch to her stomach. She recovered just in time and sidestepped him at the last second, then threw a punch which connected with his shoulder. His mind barely registered the blow. He swung around and backhanded her across the face, splitting her lip and dazing her temporarily. She shook her head and blocked a second punch, then threw a series of blows which were all blocked effortlessly. The next time she threw a punch, Dolosus caught it and held her fist, expecting to catch another blow from her free hand. It never came.

“Get away!” she roared, moving to the side and pulling him along with her. He lost his footing and fell onto his back in the snow. Crimson advanced quickly, but at exactly the right moment, he kicked up at her with both feet. He connected with her stomach, and she was sent flying, then skidding through the snow until she hit a gravestone. She groaned and slouched against the stone, hanging her head.

*“A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices  
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn...”*

In an instant, Dolosus stood before her. She tried to get up, but he knelt down over her, one knee resting on each of her wrists on either side of her so she couldn't escape.

“What do you want from me?” she spat, rage etched into her every feature, “you've taken Kat, probably killed Altojo... what more can you take from me?”

“My revenge.” He replied simply. He took her by the neck, squeezing her as tightly as he could, his nails digging into her flesh. No playing around this time. She would die for escaping him twice. She would pay for his humiliation.

Time went by, and Dolosus watched somewhat impatiently as Crimson's face turned from red, to purple, and began towards white. He knew she wouldn't last much longer. Just a little bit more...

“Dolosus, you are a complete dolt.”

Something hard slammed into the back of his head. Stars exploded in his vision. He loosened his grip on Crimson once more. He swayed a bit, then fell back into the cold snow. He saw Demonic standing above him, her expression stern and her paintbrush in hand. Then, everything went black.

“Ma... master...”

Demonic looked down at her unconscious assassin, then at Crimson, gasping for air and struggling to get to her feet. Demonic took her hand and pulled her up.

“Are you alright? I apologize for my friend's lack of manners. He can get carried away.” Crimson rubbed her eyes, blinked them a few times, then looked at the other woman curiously.

“Who... are you?” she asked, her voice still a little hoarse.

“Call me Demonic. I'm in charge of the organization that's trying to kill you.” She said with a cute smile, “And I hope we will soon, but for tonight...” she picked up Dolosus by his arm, slinging him over her back like a rag doll, his feet still dragging in the snow, “I think I'll let you go.”

“Oh... well... thank you.” Crimson muttered, unsure of what to say. With one last cheerful grin, Demonic left, dragging Dolosus along with her. Crimson watched them until they faded out of sight, then also left, feeling her wrists gingerly.

“Damn... I think he broke my wrist...” she sighed, then glanced back at the grave one last time before it was out of sight entirely.

“Dolosus... I wonder if he's the one who did it...” she considered this, then decided that she couldn't find out who had killed him with a broken wrist. If she was right, and it had been someone in the organization, then she would have to wait and heal. That was alright though. She could wait. She would avenge eventually.

And so, with these thoughts of vengeance in her mind, she left the graveyard, the church, and the fading choir behind.

*“Oh, night divine...”*

When Dolosus woke, he was back in his room at the organization. He didn't get up, he didn't look around, but he could tell that he was back in the only place that he was somewhat welcome. He sighed and closed his eyes.

He thought of that grave. Death was an everyday matter for all of the organization members. It didn't bother him at all at this point. What bothered him was the state of the grave—old, uncared for, forgotten.

Was he himself destined for such a death? Who would mourn at his passing? He pondered this, but could think of no one. That realization was like a slap in the face.

*But then, that person wasn't entirely forgotten, he thought, Crimson had come for them. That poor soul was more fortunate than I. I've never bothered with friendships or relationships, or people in general. I push people away, I never let them even close to knowing me. Could that mean that I'm... missing something?* Now that was a thought and a half. He had never even considered such things before.

"Are you going to get up or what?"

Dolosus' eyes shot open and he sat bolt upright. Demonic stood by his door, leaning against the wall, her arms crossed, her eyes cold. He rubbed his eyes and shook his head, then slid his feet over the edge of the bed so that he sat facing her. She took a few steps towards him, uncrossing her arms and placing a hand on her hip.

"Dolosus, I can honestly say that you have just done one of the dumbest things that I have ever witnessed."

"Master, I don't understand, I was getting rid of Crimson. I was obeying your orders, I-"

"What you did," she interrupted, her voice carrying an overwhelming sense of authority, "was attack an unexpected and unarmed victim on Christmas. That is something that I cannot accept. Why do you think I made it a point to ensure that no training or missions be scheduled for today?" Dolosus opened his mouth to speak, but she went on, "no bloodshed shall come from my organization on a sacred day. In addition, you don't know of my plans, and in taking matters into your own hands, you nearly jeopardized them. I need those three in my sights and alive." He hung his head, speaking to Demonic's feet.

"Master, I wasn't aware..."

"Ignorance does not excuse idiocy."

"I... yes, master."

"Tomorrow, you will be confined to your room. You will not leave for anything, including meals. After then, your meals are limited, and your training is doubled. In a week and a half, you will leave for Guatemala. The crow's information is that Altojo is there. You will receive further details on the day of your departure. Understood?"

"Yes, master."

"Good. I'll take my leave of you, then."

Dolosus got to his feet and bowed to her, and she turned and left, shutting the door behind her with a little more force than was needed. He sighed and fell back onto his bed.

"Master!"

"What the hell do you want now?" was Demonic's response to the crows who had appeared in front of her on her way back to her room.

"We brought a gift for you." The boy said, undaunted by her cold greeting.

"We thought you might like this." The girl handed her a plain looking box, wrapped in green with shimmering silver ribbon. Demonic took it and stared at it in silence.

"No need to thank us now."

"Just be sure to tell us what you think later."

"Gotta go!"

"Ta-ta!"

She watched them go, one eyebrow raised slightly, her cold green eyes narrowed, then turned her gaze back to the gift in her hands.

"...I may have to kill them for whatever awaits me in this box." She muttered, and began unwrapping. She opened the box and pulled out a small plushie. It was a boy, with brown hair, glasses and a scythe. It was Dolosus.

Her expression blank, she pulled a string on the back. A high pitched imitation of Dolosus' voice sounded from the plushie.

"I love you!"

Demonic glared at it as if it were really the man whom it represented. For a few moments, she simply stood there in the hallway, glaring at the doll. Then, she placed it in a pocket in her robe and continued on to her room.

"Those two have cleaning duty this week."

Owari.



## 5 - Alliances

Author's notes:

-This chapter was written by Brian, as will the next chapter. This is because this chapter is more of a subchapter. It's purpose is mostly to explain a few plot points that were somewhat vague.

-Pictures all of these characters are posted in my gallery, with the exception of one, who will be there soon. Enjoy! :D

"Damn it," Kitty swore. "He got away."

She got up and stared across the bridge as the smoke began to lift. Then she walked over to Crimson to help her up.

"Are you alright?" she asked.

"Yeah, I'm fine," Crimson replied.

"You don't look fine. That cut on your arm is pretty deep. He almost sliced it off. Why were the two of you fighting anyway?"

"I don't know. This is his second attempt at my life in the past four months. I never met him before, and for some reason he wants me dead."

"Well, you better get somewhere safe. Anyway, it was nice meeting you...uh?"

"Crimson."

Kitty's eyes widened. Suddenly she started jumping up and down, yelling "oh yay!"

"What are you doing?" Crimson asked, a little freaked out.

"I'm so happy I found you, and I got to save your life. Yay!"

She ran across the bridge to where the dagger was stuck in the ground. She pulled it out and pressed a button on the hilt. The blade went inside and out popped a tiny antenna. Then she opened the hilt.

Crimson could see it doubled as a cell phone. Kitty dialed a number and held it to her ear.

"Hello? It's Kitty... yeah... yeah... Well guess what? I... yeah?...really?... no... he didn't... he didn't... he did?... he didn't! Oh my God, I swear I am going to kill him... really?... that much?... Oh yeah, I would totally do that... dude if I had eyes that looked like trees, I'd be so happy. I'd sell my mother for those eyes... \*laughs\*... I know, really?... \*laughs\*... \*gasps\*... no!... he's gay?!... \*gasps\*... but what about the cinnamon pretzel sticks?... \*glances at Crimson\*... oh! wait, wait, wait, shut up! Look I found Crimson... I said I found Crimson... yeah, can you believe it?... So do you want me to bring her in?... Well I was just asking, gosh... \*laughs\* ha-ha, doors... okay, bye!"

She hung up and walked over to Crimson.

"So, somebody back home would really like to meet you. Want to come?"

Crimson was taken back by the sudden invitation. "Well, I, uh..."

"Of course you do," Kitty said and she grabbed Crimson's unwounded arm and walked her across the bridge and out of the park. Once they reached the street, she stopped and waited.

"Our ride will be here soon," she said.

"So where are-"

"Shh! Not here."

It felt like an hour had passed. The sun was almost set. Kitty had wrapped her blue ribbon around Crimson's arm so the bleeding would stop, but it became soggy and needed a new bandage. Suddenly, headlights shown from down the road. A stretch limo pulled up in front of them. The driver got out and held the door open. They climbed in, Kitty almost pushing Crimson. The inside had comfortable white leather seats on one side and a mini-bar on the other. The ceiling had a light display that resembled the night sky, except the stars kept changing colors. As soon as the door closed, Kitty turned to Crimson and spoke.

"Alright, I am part of an organization that is here to help. I was sent to find you by Maion, that's the name of our leader. She said she needs the help of three people by the names of Crimson, Altojo, and Kat." She gave a little wince as she said the last name. "Now I found you, but I don't suppose you know where the others are?"

"I don't, but I wish I did. Kat and Altojo are my best friends. They disappeared a couple of months ago and I've been searching for them ever since."

"Really? Well that makes two of us."

"So who is Maion and why does she need my help?"

"She didn't exactly say why she needs you. That doesn't at all surprise me. She can be very mysterious sometimes, but don't worry. She is very nice and very rich. Her place is well stocked with training facilities and infirmaries and indoor pools. You'll be happy there."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, well you're staying with us, right? We can't let you go wandering around with that killer on the loose."

"I guess you're right."

They drove around for a while. The sky grew darker as it grew later. One point Crimson looked out the window and saw they were driving by a church and a graveyard.

"Wait! Can we stop?" she shouted up front.

"What are you doing?" Kitty asked.

"I have to see something."

The limo pulled to a halt. Crimson got out and read the name on the church. She opened the gate to the cemetery. It let out a squeak and clang that rang through silent night. She walked forward among the tombstones, reading the names on them all, until she finally reached one that had nothing written on it. Vines and ivy were growing all over it. Crimson knelt down in front of it. She brushed the hard, cold surface and heaved a sigh as Kitty came up behind her.

"It's been years since I've been here," she whispered. "

"Do you know this person?"

"Yes. He was someone very precious to me."

"Oh. How did he die?"

"He was sick, real sick. He was in and out of the hospital all the time. He had just undergone a surgery that we thought would save his heart, but an abnormal blood clot had formed and we found him dead the next morning."

"I'm sorry."

"We couldn't afford to have his tombstone engraved so he's remained nameless all this time. I was afraid when I moved I'd forget him. It seems like I'm the only one who still remembers him."

"I wouldn't say that. Look at the grass around the grave. See how it's padded down? It looks like someone was here not to long ago."

Crimson just remained silent. She cleared some vines from the stone and kissed it. Then she stood and walked out of the cemetery. As they left, it began to snow.

The limo pulled up to a giant mansion that had a mile long driveway and a front yard with hedges and fountains scattered about. The building was the size of a grand cathedral. Crimson's jaw dropped when she saw it.

When the limo stopped in front of the front doors, the driver got out and held the car door open. Kitty and Crimson hopped out and watched it drive away. Suddenly, a sound like a horn blasted behind Crimson. She screamed and spun around, only to find herself face to face with an enormous African elephant.

"Watch out for them," Kitty said, smiling. "Maion lets them roam around on their own in the yard. This one here is Deedee." She walked over and pat it on the trunk. "Watch this. Deedee! Ugala!"

The elephant picked up Kitty with its trunk and set her on its back.

"Come on, you try."

"I'd rather not," Crimson said apprehensively.

Just then the door to the mansion burst open. A man with white hair, a gray shirt, and a lilac blue vest came out and ran to the elephant.

"Deedee! Magumbo!" he yelled.

The elephant put Kitty back down on the ground in front of him.

"How many times have I told you to stop playing with the master's elephants?"

"Oh come on," Kitty whined.

"And another thing," he began, but stopped once he caught sight of Crimson. "Who is that?"

"That is my good friend, Crimson," she whispered in his ear. His eyes widened as he looked between the two. "We'll show ourselves in."

Crimson followed Kitty up the front steps and into the mansion. The inside was huge. In fact, if Crimson didn't know better, she'd say the inside was larger than the exterior. Kitty led her through room after room after hallway after kitchen (where they stopped to catch their breath and have a quick snack) until finally they reached what appeared to be a billiard room. The walls were lined with different knick-knacks and the room held four large pool tables. The place was empty except for the table furthest from the door. The stained glass light above shone down on two people. One was a man with a mohawk died in black with cream colored stripes. The other was a girl with bleach blonde hair. They were both heavily tattooed and seemed to dress in the manner that best show off their artwork. As Kitty approached, the two of them looked up from their game.

"Ah, Kitty," the girl said. "You are just in time to watch me sweep the floor with this guy."

She lined her stick behind the white ball and sent it knocking into the red one, which fell into the corner pocket. Next went the blue, green, and purple balls until all that was left was the black eight ball.

"Ah, a perfect shot," she said and knocked it across the table into the pocket. "Good game, Mohajon. You've gotten better."

"Yes, but I still can't beat you," he replied.

"Maion," Kitty said.

Maion looked over and saw Crimson. She gave Kitty a nod of approval. Then she set down her pool stick and walked over to the bar.

"Mohajon, it's getting late. You should go to bed."

"Yes, ma'am," he said and left the room.

Maion went behind the counter and started pulling out bottles. She set down a large martini glass. Then she poured some of the bottles into a mixer.

"Can I make you anything? Manhattan, mojito, martini?" she asked while doing this. Kitty looked at Crimson to let her know the question was directed at her.

"Uh, no thanks. I don't drink," she responded.

"Alright then," Maion said and shook up the mixer. "At least have a seat."

Crimson thought it best to do what she said. She pulled a stool out from the bar and perched atop it. She

watched Maion pour herself a drink and drop an olive into it. She took a sip and gazed intently at Crimson.

“So, Crimson, how much has Kitty told you about me?”

“Not much, honestly.”

“Good. Then let me fill in the holes. My name is Maion. I may be an alcoholic, but who the hell cares. I absolutely love elephants and tattoos, and a good game of pool. Do you play pool? No? Oh, no matter. You’ll learn. Oh! And I run this little corporation.” She gestured around them as if to impress them.

“What exactly is this corporation?” Crimson asked.

“It’s just a little business I started from home. Nothing fancy. The important thing is you’re here now. You see, I need your help.”

“With what?”

Maion took another sip from her drink.

“As in every business, there is always competition. Well, my leading competition is a woman by the name of Demonic. Have you ever heard of her?” she asked with a curiously odd look on her face. Crimson shook her head.

“Well, just know we are in the same field. Anyway, I have recently found out that you have come across a very special document. A document that you stole with the assistance of your friends.”

As she said this, she reached behind the bar and drew out what looked like photos. In the pictures, Crimson saw herself, Kat, and Altojo walking among bookcases and file cabinets. She slapped her hand to her forehead and whispered, “Security cameras.”

“That’s right,” Maion said. “There are some that depict the three of you fleeing with a document in your hands. That document could be very important to me.” Crimson noticed her expression turned from cheerfulness to hunger. “Crimson, I need that document.”

“I’m sorry, but I don’t have it. I think Kat has it.”

“Kat?” Kitty asked.

Maion looked at her. Kitty swallowed and looked away.

“So, Kat has the document?” Maion asked.

“That’s right,” Crimson said. “The day after we got the file, Altojo disappeared. Kat and I locked the document in a safe and then split up to look for him. When I came back, all of Kat’s things were gone, and so was the file. I managed to track her down to this region, but no sign of Altojo.”

Maion put down the now empty martini glass. She stared at the pool table for some time. Then she heaved a sigh and gave Crimson a wide smile.

“Kitty, please take Crimson to the infirmary, and then show her to her room,” she ordered.

“Yes, ma’am,” Kitty said.

She bowed and took a hold of Crimson’s hand and led her to the door. Crimson stopped and turned back to Maion.

“If you don’t mind me asking, how did you know our names?”

“I’m sure Kitty can tell you.”

“Yes...ma’am,” Crimson said and left the room.

Maion stashed the pictures away except one. She re-filled her glass and drank. She stared at the image of Kat as she sipped it.

Crimson sat on a table as the nurse wrapped a clean bandage around her arm. Then the nurse applied some anti-biotic ointment to the other cuts and scrapes. Kitty sat in the corner, watching.

“So, how does Maion know my name,” Crimson asked.

“I told her,” Kitty responded heavily. “I know because Kat is my sister.”

This news shocked Crimson. Kat had never told her she had a sister. In fact, she never talked about her

family.

“Your sister? Really?”

“Yes. I know, amazing, right?”

“Yeah, Kat never mentioned you before.”

“That doesn’t surprise me. We didn’t exactly part on good terms. Way back when, the two of us got into a huge fight. She left home and basically became dead to me. We haven’t seen nor spoken to each other since. Then one day Maion shows me some security pictures and I blurt out that I know her. I had to tell her everything. I knew about you and Altojo because years ago she sent me a letter. It stated that she had made some friends and she was happier than she had ever been at home. She also asked me to tell our parents to call off the search for her. They did. The letter described you two in detail so I recognized you from the pictures. After that, it was easy finding you.”

“Wow. I never knew sibling rivalry could be so tough. What was the fight about?”

“I don’t remember. It was so long ago.”

“You two should make up. Once we- ow!”

“Sorry about that,” the nurse said.

Crimson rolled her eyes. “Once we find her, the two of you can talk it over and everything will be all right.”

“Not likely. She probably doesn’t want to talk to me. She’s very stubborn.”

“What about you? Do you want to see her?”

Kitty paused. “I don’t know.”

Once they were done, they left the infirmary. Kitty led her through another hallway. They turned the corner and Crimson found herself face to face with a seagull.

“Who the hell are you?” it said.

Crimson screamed and knocked him against the wall.

“Shh, do you want to wake up the whole place? It’s only Feebus,” Kitty whispered. “And where there is Feebus, there is...”

“Me!” a girl shouted as she jumped from behind the corner. She had long blond hair tied in ribbons. Her wrists and legs were wrapped in ribbons. There were ribbons almost all over her. She was just gushing with frills and cuteness.

“I was wondering when you were going to get back. Aww, Feebus, what happened to you?” She rushed over and started petting the seagull.

“Don’t pet me. I’m not your dog.”

“Oh Feebus, you’re so funny.”

“Crimson, I’d like to introduce you to my good friend Cinta,” Kitty said. “And this little guy here is her pet seagull, Feebus.”

“How many times do I have to tell you? I’m not her pet.”

“Then why do you always follow her around,” Kitty said.

Feebus glared at her. Then he turned and started walking away, in mid-air. Crimson’s mouth gaped open as he left.

“That’s right. Feebus doesn’t fly,” Kitty said. “He walks on air.”

“I caught that. It’s not every day I see a mid-air walking, talking seagull,” Crimson said.

“So, you’re Crimson?” Cinta asked. She had a dopey smile on her face.

“Yeah, nice to meet you.”

“So how’d that ribbon that I gave you work out?” Cinta asked Kitty, almost ignoring Crimson.

“Yeah, about that,” Kitty began. “It looked very nice, but it got a little ruined. There was some trouble.”

“No problem. I can just give you another one. I hate it when ribbons get ruined, don’t you?” she asked Crimson.

“Oh, uh, yes. If I had a dime for every ribbon I ruined,” Crimson tried to joke.

“Yeah? What if you had a dime for every ribbon you ruined?”

Crimson got the feeling Cinta wasn't joking. She was seriously asking a question.

“Hey! Where's Feedbus? Feebus!” Cinta just walked away, in the wrong direction, calling out the seagull's name.

Crimson turned to Kitty and asked quietly, “Is she alright?”

“Who? Cinta? Yeah, she's always like that. I don't want to say she's a bimbo, but you get the idea. Come on. Your room is this way.”

Owari

## 6 - Lost And Found

Author's notes:

-Hi again! D.A. back again, this time with another chapter written by Brian, mostly because I was too intimidated by my lack of cultural knowledge regarding Guatemala. I think that it's safe to assume that his knowledge on this topic isn't too much better, but hey, that little difference is good enough for me.

-Pictures of all of the characters can be found in my profile.

-There are no such places as the Roullette airport, or Bifess, Guatemala. Don't bother looking, really, they were made up.

-....I can't think of anything else to say. \*Epic fail\* Right, well, enjoy :D

On December 30th, two airplanes arrived at the Roullette airport in Bifess, Guatemala. The first one touched down around 11:00 a.m. The passengers got off and went to gather their belongings. A few people stared as a girl with bright pink hair lifted two suitcases off of the conveyor belt. The man she was with waited until he found an oblong package and picked it up before it could get away from him. The two then got into a cab and drove away.

The next plane arrived at 11:30 a.m. The passengers that got off included two rather peculiar girls. One had her hair tied up with a big blue ribbon, and was carrying a bird cage with a seagull in it. The other had a belt tied around her waist and wore a baseball cap tightly on her head. They grabbed their suitcases and hailed a cab. After hitting herself with the car door, the girl with the ribbon and birdcage told the driver where to go. Coincidentally, they drove in the same direction as the other two.

"We shouldn't be wasting time," Kat said, "We made it to Guatemala. We should be out there, searching for Altojo."

"Shh," Dolosus hushed her. He was trying to listen to the phone.

Kat got frustrated and sat herself down right in front of him. For the first time since she had joined the organization, she looked him square in the face, staring right into his eyes.

"Why are we still here in this hotel room?"

Dolosus looked at her, then turned away as he heard someone on the other end pick up.

"Hello? This is Dolosus. Who is this...? Very well. Tell Demonic that Kat and I have landed safely and are beginning our search."

He hung up the phone and walked to his suitcase. They had just checked into their hotel and now Dolosus began unpacking. Kat hadn't even touched her own suitcase. She paced up and down the room, wanting very much to leave, but slightly afraid to, since Dolosus was calling the shots.

"Dolosus, please. You called home, alright? Now let's go."

"Kat. You need to calm down. I don't think Altojo is going anywhere soon, okay? Besides, we could be here for a couple of days. It's best to unpack and get at least a little comfortable."

"How can you be so calm?"

"This is just another mission. True, I've never done a recovery before, but it shouldn't be that much different."

"You mean except for the fact that you don't kill the person you're looking for."

"Was that your attempt at humor?" he asked.

Kat just looked at him. She heaved a sigh and grabbed her suitcase. She opened the bottom drawer of the dresser and dumped all of her clothes.

"There, happy now?" she asked.

Dolosus looked at her. He rolled his eyes and opened the oblong package they brought with them.

Inside were his scythe and her leaf. He passed her the weapon and tied his to his back.

"Let's get started."

Cinta and Kitty checked into their hotel. They unpacked and began sprucing up in front of the mirror as they talked over their mission.

"Alright, let's go over this again," Kitty said with trying patience, "We are here to find Altojo and bring him back with us."

"Right. Why, again?" Cinta asked.

"We bring him back because he is the only one who might possibly know where Kat is, and we need Kat because she knows where the file is, and we need the file because... well, actually, Maion needs the file, but that's not the point."

"Ohh, that's right. Why does Maion think he's in Guatemala?"

"That's not for us to know," Feebus said from his cage, "We're just here to find and retrieve, not to ask questions."

"Well, then let the finding begin." Kitty said.

She picked up the cage and brought it to the window. She opened the window and the cage, then gave Feebus a copy of a photograph of Altojo.

"Remember: find him and then come back to us with a location," Kitty told him.

Feebus nodded, too the photo, and walked out the window.

Dolosus and Kat spent the entire day in Guatemala, searching the city for any trace of Altojo. They visited countless stores and kiosks, showing Kat's picture of him to numerous people. Most of the people they encountered did not speak English, but a simple shake of the head was easy enough to understand. No one seemed to have seen Altojo at all. Dolosus began wondering if they were on a wild goose chase. He and Kat spent their entire day watching people shake their heads at the photo. In defeat, they returned to their hotel and hoped for better results the next day.

In the morning, Dolosus woke up and found himself alone in the room. He dressed and walked down the stairs to the dining room of the hotel. A buffet style breakfast was being served. He grabbed a plate and filled it with pancakes and bacon, then looked around the room and spotted Kat talking with a man he did not recognize. He walked over and sat down next to the two.

"Who is this?" he asked.

"My name es Pedro," He said in broken English.

"Pedro says he saw a man with a bandana around his eyes a couple of days ago. he said he can take us to where Altojo was last seen," Kat said.

"Really? That's terrific. That means we wont have to go to the police."

They finished their breakfast and left the hotel. After a short taxi ride, they found themselves in a part of town that was basically one giant market place.

"He was here a few dias ago," Pedro said.

"What was he doing?" Dolsosus asked.

"The same as everyone else: buying y selling."

"What do you think the chances of him coming back here are?" Kat whispered to Dolosus.

"It depends. If he was getting food, then that means this could be his regular grocery store. If so, then he'll probably be back soon."



They walked throughout the market place, braked mid-day for lunch, and then bid farewell to Pedro. After dinner, they happened to walk down an alley which was lined on either side with birdcages. Colorful birds lined the walls, some squawking, others sleeping, some singing to their friends in nearby cages.

Dolosus and Kat stopped a couple of times to admire the wonderful and amazing plumages. Dolosus was looking at a particular bird that had mostly black feathers, except for a sky blue train that ran from a crown on its head, down the back, and ended in a marvelously long tail. It stared at him and walked back and forth on the bar with silver colored talons.

Dolosus was about to reach out and pet the bird, when he heard Kat scream. He whirled around and saw her running down the alley.

"Kat!" He yelled and chased after her.

"It's him! It's Altojo! I just saw him!"

"You did? Where?"

"This way!"

They ran through the maze of wooden cages. Dolosus soon caught up to Kat. He looked ahead and, sure enough, saw Altojo at the end of the alley. He looked at the two of them and ran.

"Altojo! Wait! It's me, Kat!"

He didn't stop. He kept running away from them. The birds around them started shrieking and calling. The maze of cages and flashing colors of feathers eventually broke as the two of them made their way out of the alley. Now, they were in a street filled with people. Altojo was pushing people out of the way, looking over his shoulder every once and a while.

Dolosus and Kat followed suit. They weaved their way through the crowd, careful not to get run over by the maniacs on bicycles, determined to get to Altojo no matter what.

There was a tap at the window. Kitty got up and went over to open it.

They had let Feebus out after checking into their hotel, and then spent the rest of the day shopping for souvenirs. They spent the morning of the next day lounging by the hotel pool, and now they were in their hotel room watching a movie.

Kitty opened the window and Feebus walked into the room. He saw Cinta sitting on the bed and walked over to her.

"Ow!" she exclaimed as he pecked her on the head.

"What are you two doing?"

"We're watching a movie. Look," she said and pointed to the TV.

*'Spanish gibberish spoken really quickly, Who's That Girl, more Spanish gibberish said quickly.'*

"There aren't even any subtitles." he said.

"I know," Kitty replied, "It's more fun when you make up your own lines."

"Well, turn it off. I found Altojo."

"I don't understand," Kat said, "Why is he running from us?"

"Maybe he doesn't want to be your friend anymore," Dolosus suggested helpfully.

"That's crazy. Who wouldn't want to be my friend?"

Dolosus rolled his eyes.

They followed Altojo through the crowd of people, literally through a fruit stand, past a few speeding bikers, and into another crowd.

"Why do these kinds of countries always have so many people?" Dolosus said with a scowl, "There should be some kind of population control."

"You can decapitate the natives after we catch up with Altojo," Kat answered.

They turned a corner and both ran into someone. All four of them fell on the ground. All four of them rubbed their heads as they got up. All four of them realized that they knew each other.

"You," Dolosus said, "You're that girl who's life I saved in Otakon! And you, I fought you on the bridge with Crimson!"

"You," Cinta said, "You're that guy who ruined my mission in Otakon! And you, you're that girl from the security photo!"

"You," Kitty said, "You're that guy who was trying to kill Crimson! And you, Kat!"

"You," Kat said, "You're the last person I ever wanted to see again. And you! Actually, I've never seen you before."

"Oh, my name is Cinta. How do you do?" she greeted politely as she extended her hand.

"Cinta, don't touch them. They're the enemy," Kitty snarled.

"What do you mean," Dolosus retorted, "You guys are the enemy."

"Yeah, that's right," Kat joined in, "Now what are you guys doing here?"

"I just lost sight of Altojo," Cinta said sadly, "Looks like he got away."

"Altojo?!" Dolosus and Kat yelled at the same time.

"Not that it's any concern of yours, sister dear," Kitty said to Kat, "but Cinta and I are here on a mission to take Altojo back with us."

"What? Oh, no you don't. He's my friend. He's coming with us," Kat said.

"What about you?" Cinta asked Dolosus, "I haven't seen you since Otakon."

"Wait, what?" Kat turned to him, "Dolosus, you were in Otakon?"

"Oh, so your name is Dolosus." Cinta smiled.

"Kat, look, I was only there because Demonic wanted to make sure you got the job done."

"Demonic?" Kitty repeated, "Oh, now I get it. So, Kat, it looks like you joined an assassination organization too, and the wrong one at that. Maion is going to take Demonic down. Once we find Altojo, that is."

"Look, sister *dear*. I don't need any back talk from the likes of you."

The four of them all stood in silence. Kat had her hand on the stem of her leaf. Kitty had her hand wrapped around her phone in her pocket. Dolosus had his hand on the staff of his scythe. Cinta was staring at a cloud that looked an awfully lot like a bull. Finally, Dolosus swung his scythe in a lightening fast stroke, cut a hole in the universe, pushed Kat in, and then jumped in after her before it disappeared.

Dolosus and Kat went back to their hotel room. Kat threw her leaf into the closet and then sat down on her bed in a huffy mood. Dolosus carefully laid down his scythe and opened a bottle of water. He offered a bottle to Kat, but she ignored it.

"Look," he said, "It's very late. We'll just look for him tomorrow."

"It's New Year's Eve! There is no late," she fired back.

Dolosus sighed, "You're right. I'm just using that as an excuse. You can't function properly in your current mood. Especially with those two out there." He sat down and faced her. "Kitty is your sister. What happened between you two?"

"Several years ago, we had a huge fight, and I took off and never saw her or my parents again."

"What was the fight about?"

"Something personal. But it doesn't matter now. The sooner we find Alojo, the sooner we can get out of Guatemala and away from her."

"We're not continuing our search until tomorrow. Like I said: You can't function in your present state."

Kat wanted to fight back, but she knew Dolosus was in charge and thought better of it. Instead, she just stared at the wall. Dolosus made one final attempt to get her to drink something, but gave in and went into the bathroom.

"You lost him? Do you have any idea how long it took me to find him?" Feebus yelled, pecking Cinta on her head. Kitty had gone into the bathroom and was staring at herself in the mirror. She splashed some water on her face in an attempt to calm herself.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry," Cinta pleaded, covering her head.

"Not as sorry as I'm going to be tomorrow. It's exhausting walking around, searching the thousands of people in this city for one man. The only good thing is that we're not home, or I'd be frozen solid."

"I'm sorry!"

"How'd I ever get stuck with someone like you? What happened anyway?"

"I don't know. It all happened so quickly. One minute, we're chasing him down the street, the next, we run into those two and lose sight of him."

Feebus stopped pecking. "What two?"

"Some guy named Dolosus and Kitty's sister. They were also after him." Cinta rubbed her scalp.

"Kitty's sister was there? Kat was there?"

"That's what I said."

If seagulls could smile, Feebus would have had the biggest smile ever.

"This is perfect," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"You imbecile. Don't you remember the whole reason why we wanted to find Altojo? We needed him because we thought he would know where Kat is, because she has the file that Maion needs. But if we already know where Kat is, we don't need him."

"So we can stop looking for him! Feebus, you're brilliant!"

"We better call Maion and let her know."

"Right! Hey, Kitty! Kitty?"

Cinta bounced to the bathroom door and banged on it. There was no answer. She tried again. Then she tried the door knob and found it open. When she entered the bathroom, it was empty, and the window was wide open.

Dolosus came out of the bathroom. He had been thinking that maybe he had been too hard on Kat. It was New Year's Eve. Altojo might be out on the town this late. Plus, it would be dangerous to wait until the next day in case he decided to skip town. When he was ready to tell her, however, he found the hotel room empty. He rushed to the closet and saw that the leaf was gone.

"Oh, Kat."

Kat ran through the streets. All of the shops and stores were closed and the lights had all been turned off. Even with the full moon, it was still very dark. Kat knew that she wouldn't find Altojo like this. Finally, she ran down an alley and climbed an emergency fire escape. Once she was on top of the building, she looked around. A glow emanated from a couple of blocks away. She climbed back down and headed in that direction. As she got closer, the roar of laughter, singing, cheering, and music met her, as did a few people dressed in colorful outfits. They were all crowded and moving in the same direction.

Kat climbed to the top of another building. This time, when she looked down, she realized she had reached the center square of the city. The entire square was packed with people. They were all conversing, passing around champagne, and listening to a live band. Across the courtyard, over the rooftops of the other buildings, Kat could see an enormous clock tower. It was about half an hour until midnight. There were only thirty minutes left until the end of the year.

She turned her gaze from the clock tower to the vast sea of people. She scanned for a tall, blonde man with a bandana around his eyes. Unfortunately, there were so many people and colors that she could

barely make out individual characteristics. She was so concentrated on her search, she didn't hear someone creeping up behind her.

"Well, well, look what the *Kat* dragged in."

Kat whirled around and found herself face to face with her sister.

Dolosus browbeat himself for being so stupid. He left an emotional woman with a weapon alone in their room. That wasn't exactly the brightest idea he'd had. Now he was running through the dark streets of the city, trying to find her. He wondered if this Altojo guy was really worth all this trouble. As he turned a corner, he saw Cinta running towards him. She was him and came to a halt.

"Where is Kitty?" she demanded.

"Kitty? I don't know. I was looking for Kat," he replied.

"Liar!" she shouted.

She threw her arm forward. The ribbon that was wrapped around it suddenly came to life. It unwrapped itself and flew towards Dolosus. He was surprised, but curious about her technique. He never knew anyone to fight with a ribbon before. He did know, however, that a ribbon was no match for his scythe. He ducked out of the way and cut it. The pieces fell, lifeless to the ground. Cinta looked as if she had just been slapped across the face.

"I don't really feel like fighting anyone right now," he said and cut himself a hole that exited down the street behind Cinta. He started running again, but tripped and fell as something wrapped around his leg. He looked and saw the ribbon on her other arm had tied itself around his ankles.

"Tell me where Kitty is," she demanded again.

"Hey loser, listen to me," he called back as he cut the ribbon and stood up,

"I-Don't-Know-Where-She-Is."

This time, Cinta unwrapped the ribbons on her wrists manually. Then, while twirling like a ballet dancer, she started using them like whips. He jumped back and forth to dodge their strikes. Although they were just ribbons, he saw them smash the crates and barrels they hit when she missed him. When he finished jumping, he spun around and cut both of the ribbons at the same time. He gave Cinta a sneer as the pieces fell.

"I'm not done yet!" she yelled.

She ran and jumped into the air. At the pinnacle of the jump, she began to spin in circles. Rather than fall back down to the ground, she hovered there. As she spun faster and faster, the remaining ribbons on her body unfurled themselves and completely covered her in a blur of color. Then, one giant ribbon, that seemed to be made up of all the others, shot out of the blur and circled around Dolosus, giving him a good three feet of room. Then, just as quickly as it came, the giant ribbon contracted and constricted around itself until there was nothing left but a sphere made of ribbons.

Cinta finally landed. She knew she had him trapped. She extended her hand towards the sphere and gradually closed them. As she did so, the sphere began to collapse in on itself. Suddenly, the blade of the scythe ripped through the ribbon. Like a shark fin tearing through water, it dragged across the full surface of the sphere in a lightening fast movement, until there was nothing left but little pieces fluttering to the ground.

Dolosus glared at her. Cinta gasped.

"I see," she said, "Guess I'll have to get serious on you."

She reached up and untied the two ribbons in her hair. She firmly grasped both of them and stared him down. Dolosus wasn't sure if he was amused that such a little girl was fighting him, curious to see what her "serious" move was, or bored because he knew she couldn't beat him. He never got to see it, though. At that moment, Feebus came running on the air towards them.

"You guys! You guys!"

"What is it, Feebus? Can't you see we are fighting?" Cinta asked, annoyed.

"You'll want to put your fight on hold. I found Kitty... and Kat."

"You found Kat?" Dolosus asked.

"Yes, I did. The two of them are on top of a three story building near the town square. It looks like they're about to have a fight!"

Kat and Kitty stared at each other. The noises of the party below rose around them as the crowd grew more excited. Midnight was approaching.

"What do you want?" Kat spat.

"Listen closely, because this is the only time you will ever hear me say this: I want you."

"Excuse me?"

"I want you to come with me."

"Why?"

"You have something I want. A file taken from Demonic is in your possession. I need it."

"A file? What's it to you? Why do you want it?"

"That's none of your business."

Kat thought for a moment. Realization dawned on her.

"You were searching for Altojo to use him to get to me," she said.

Kitty nodded. "Are you going to give up the file or not?"

"You can have it over my dead body."

"Fine," Kitty said. She took her cell phone out of her pocket, clicked the trigger and a blade popped out of the top. She dashed forward. Kat took her leaf from behind her and blew a gust attack. Kitty was blown away and landed across the rooftop. She got up and shook the dizziness from her head. It had been a long time since the two sisters had seen each other fight. Neither of them really knew the other's fighting style.

*So, she uses that leaf to blow wind, Kitty thought, Fine.*

She stuck dagger between her teeth, got down on all fours and ran forward. Kat launched another gust at her, but she jumped out of the way. Kitty leaped from side to side as Kat threw gust after gust.

Finally, Kitty got close enough to attempt to stab Kat. Kat held the leaf between them. The dagger went through the leaf and stuck. The sisters pulled back and forth like a tug of war. Kitty used her tail to knock Kat's feet out from under her. She wrenched the dagger out of the leaf and jumped into the air. As she came down, dagger at the ready, Kat swung the leaf and propelled her away.

Kat got up and watched her sister land on her feet. Kitty did a pirouette and let two concealed daggers shoot out from her foot. Kat activated her windshield and knocked them away. When the shield dissipated another dagger came into view, heading right for her face. She ducked and felt it whiz through her hair. She looked up and glowered at her sister. Kitty smiled.

"You're quick, but I'm quicker," Kitty said and got down on all fours again. She was faster this time.

*She's tougher than I thought, Kat thought, I know I made a rule for myself, but it looks like I may have to break it. Besides, she is family and deserves my best.*

Kat focused her energy to her feet. Tiny, translucent wings appeared on her ankles. She jumped into the air as Kitty made to stab her in the chest. She soared over the rooftop. At the peak of her height, she blasted more gusts.

The attacks rained down around Kitty. She jumped around and dodged all of the attacks, except one. It came behind her and propelled her forward. Kat landed in her path and smacked Kitty with the leaf. Kitty landed and had the wind knocked out of her.

"I left home because I never wanted to see you again," Kat said as she walked over to Kitty, "Now I go to Guatemala so I can find my friend, and who do I find instead? You. Now you're telling me you want a file

and you'll kill me to get it. Well guess what? I have no problem-

Kitty's tail whipped up and slapped Kat across the face. Kat staggered back. Her sister got up and coughed a little.

"You talk too much," Kitty said.

She dashed and tried to stab Kat. Kat swung the leaf again, but Kitty caught it. This time, her dagger made contact with Kat and sliced her in the side. Kat let one of her hands go and elbowed Kitty in the nose. The two stumbled back from each other, both wiping away blood.

"I see you found out that spell," Kitty said.

Kat nodded. The two faced each other, not moving for a while. Suddenly, they both ran at each other. Kat swung her leaf and tried to hit Kitty. Kitty ducked under and tried to stab her again. Kat pulled back and kicked the dagger out of Kitty's hand, then spun and aimed a kick at Kitty's head. Kitty blocked her leg with one fist and began punching Kat with the other. Several of Kitty's punches hit hard in Kat's chest and stomach. Then Kitty kicked her full in the chest and launched her back a couple of feet. Kat got up, gathered wind in her leaf and blasted a tornado at Kitty. The twister lifted her up and kept her suspended in the air. Kat kept swinging, trying to build up enough air to suck the breath out of Kitty's lungs. All of a sudden, the leaf was torn from Kat's hands. The tornado vanished and Kitty fell to the ground, this time on her butt. They both looked across the rooftop. Cinta stood next to Dolosus and Feebus. She unwrapped the ribbon from the leaf.

"What is going on here?" she yelled.

Feebus rolled his eyes, "You really are dense," he muttered to himself. He walked over to Kitty, "You thought you could get the file all by yourself?"

"Why don't you guys just buzz off. This is between me and my sister." Kitty said.

"Kat, I thought you were going to look for Altojo," Dolosus said.

"Well, I was, but then this dog came out of nowhere and attacked me," Kat replied.

"Dont' call me a dog, you whore!"

"Dont' call me a whore! dog!"

"Whore!"

"Slut!"

"Tramp!"

"Enough!" Feebus screamed, "Look at the two of you. You're both completely exhausted, out of breath, and bleeding."

"That's right," Cinta added, "Now what is this fight you two are having really about?"

Kitty and Kat stared at each other. It was true, they were both tired and breathing heavily. Kitty sighed. "This fight, right here," she said, "is strictly about getting that file. If Crimson had it, we wouldn't even be in Guatemala."

"Crimson? Wait, what does she have to do with anything?" Kat asked.

"I brought her back to Maion's mansion. We asked her if she had the file and she told us that you had it."

"Wait a minute! So Crimson was with you guys this entire time?"

"Well, most of the time. She left once to go visit some guy in a cemetery."

"A cemetery?" Dolosus asked.

"Yeah, that's right," Kitty said, "Anyway, after that, she stormed into the mansion and told Maion that she had met Demonic. It turns out that she put two and two together and found out that Maion was really the head of an assassin agency. She threatened to go to the police, but we took care of her. I pushed her down a pit."

They were all silent. Kat shook herself and then walked over to Dolosus.

"You know, Kitty, first I was just fighting you in self-defense because you attacked me. Then I continued just for the hell of it. But now," she paused. She elbowed Dolosus in the ribs, he lost his grip on his

scythe, and she grabbed it, "You hurt my friend. I'm going to kill you."

She ran forward, aiming the blade at Kitty's neck. Kitty ducked and ran. She sprinted across the rooftop and jumped to the next one over. Kat ran after and jumped to the next roof. They kept going without looking back.

"Kitty!" Cinta yelled.

"Kat!" Feebus yelled.

"My scythe!" Dolosus yelled.

They ran to the edge of the roof. Kitty made it across because of her cat-like agility and Kat easily cleared it because of the wings on her feet, but it was too far for the others. They watched Kitty and Kat jump across the rooftops.

Kitty looked behind her. Kat was still chasing her with the scythe. She reached the end of the roofs and jumped off to the street below. Kat followed her down the alley.

They arrived at the gates of the clock tower. Kitty jumped over the gate. She landed on her feet and paused to catch her breath. When she looked, she saw Kat above her, about to slice her down the middle. Kitty lunged herself forward and fell to the ground as the scythe dug into the ground. Kitty got up and ran to the door. She knocked it down and went inside. Kat ripped the scythe out of the ground and followed her sister into the tower.

They ran up several flights of stairs. Higher and higher they climbed until, eventually, they reached a trapdoor. Kitty went through and found herself in the mechanical room at the top of the tower. Giant metal gears and pendulums and many more different kinds of mechanical instruments filled the room. The *clank* and *vrunk* sounds rang out around her. In front of her was the giant glowing face of the clock. The hands were almost on twelve.

She turned around. Kat was standing behind her, scythe at the ready.

"Oh, please, you aren't really going to kill me?"

Kat glared at her. She attacked. Kitty dodged the slashes. They bounded across the room, jumping from gear to gear, and then leaping off before another gear came down to crush them.

"Dolosus couldn't stop me when *he* had the scythe. What makes you think you can beat me?" Kitty taunted.

"You talk too much!" Kat yelled as she pushed Kitty off a gear. Kitty went rolling across the floor and into a small door on the VI of the clock face. The door swung open and Kitty fell out, screaming.

"Kitty?" Kat said quietly as she slowly walked over to the door. She peeked out and found a wide ledge two feet below. Kitty was on the ledge, crawling away. Kat climbed out onto the ledge. The huge party of people below was all looking up at the clock tower. They were passing out champagne and crab cakes and yelling some Spanish cheers.

Kat turned and stalked toward her sister. The wings on her feet helped her keep her balance. Kitty reached the edge of the ledge. She looked up at her sister.

"I have just one more thing to ask you. Why do you need the file?" Kat asked.

"I don't need it. Maion does. She said there's something in there that could help her bring Demonic down. She didn't say why she wanted Demonic overthrown, though. But it's not just about business. There's something more connecting the two of them."

"She told you all of this?"

"Actually, she told Crimson just before I killed her."

*Diez!*

Kat's eyes lost all traces of mercy they had left.

*Nueve!*

*Ocho!*

She walked closer to Kitty.

*Siete!*

*Seis!*

She raised the scythe above her head.

*Cinco!*

*Cuatro!*

Kitty closed her eyes and held her breath.

*Tres!*

*Dos!*

*UNO!*

*FELIZ ANO NUEVO!!*

Kitty opened her eyes. Kat had stopped moving. The scythe dropped from her hands and clattered on the ledge. The tiny translucent wings on her feet disappeared and were replaced with a bizarre mark. Kat swooned and leaned on her side. She fell off of the ledge and plummeted to the ground below.

Dolosus let go of the guard he had killed. He picked the keys from the man's pocket and unlocked the gate. He ran through the courtyard and approached the door. Before he made it there, however, he happened to look up and see something fall off the tower. A flash of pink hair told him it was Kat.

"Kat!"

He began to run, but stopped when he realized she was falling too fast. There was no way he could catch her safely.

All of a sudden, something rushed by him. A man carrying Kat's leaf ran to the spot where she would fall. He swung the leaf and a small tornado appeared. It rose up and met Kat when she was three quarters of the way down. The strong wind slowed down her descent. She glided down on the twister. The man caught her in his arms.

Dolosus breathed a sigh of relief. He approached the man.

"Hello, Altojo."

*Debe el viejo conocido ser se olvido  
y nunca trajo a la mente*

Kitty listened as the people below started singing. She watched as a tornado appeared below her sister and somebody caught her. She didn't know if she felt relief for her own life or for Kat's. Either way, they were both alive.

Kitty looked over. Lying next to her was the scythe. She smiled and picked it up. She may have lost the leaf, but she gained something else. As the song continued, she got up and walked back into the tower. She'd find some other way to escape.

*Debe el viejo conocido ser se olvido  
y Auld Lang Syne*

Owari.



## 7 - Deception

### Author's Notes:

-So, FINALLY another chapter up. This one, written by yours truly. I must have made Brian wait for this chapter for nearly a year. I'm such a bum :( But it's finally done!!

-Basically: return, news flash, deception, battle, realization, infiltration, and affection. :) Enjoy!

Dolosus stared at the man who had caught Kat. Altojo, the one they had been searching for all this time, had finally come to them. Dolosus' eyes narrowed. He watched every move he made, stepping towards him slowly, cautiously. He knew that this man had power. Like most things in life, he was not all he seemed.

Altojo turned towards Dolosus when he had come to stand right beside him. Were he able to see and the red bandana not covering his eyes, he would have been met by a cold, calculating stare. The two faced each other in a moment of silence, and it seemed that no one existed but the two of them and Kat, laying like a rag doll in Altojo's arms.

"Take her." He said, and he held Kat out to Dolosus, holding her effortlessly in strong arms as if she weighed nothing.

"Why?" The taller man responded, never moving his gaze from the other's face.

"You are her friend. You can take care of her."

"I am neither her friend, nor her caretaker," he responded, a pink flush tinting his complexion, "but as her supervisor, it is my duty to teach and protect her." He took the sleeping girl from Altojo and held her with a care that he was not used to applying when dealing with other people. Altojo turned to walk away.

"I see now," Dolosus said to the man's back, "That what I offer out of duty is more than you can offer out of friendship." Altojo stopped walking. Dolosus couldn't help showing a hint of a grin. He knew how to get to Altojo. This would be simple...

"I didn't want to see her again."

Dolosus faught to supress a, "not that you could ever 'see' her to begin with," and instead, simply said,

"Why not?"

"My reasons are not your concern."

"You would abandon this girl for those reasons? This girl who searched for you so desperately? Who killed for you? Who was nearly killed herself?"

"...I-"

"I don't think you've given this enough thought, Altojo." He was silent. Dolosus' grin widened. He had had his suspicions lately that Demonic had other reasons for assisting Kat in her search for this man, and if he played this right, he could get Altojo back to the organization's headquarters. Demonic could decide on what to do with him from there. But first, how to lure him in. The obvious method would be to drag his unconscious body there. Just as this thought crossed Dolosus' mind, Altojo muttered, "I'll be going now." And took a step away from the other two. Dolosus' mind raced. He didn't have his scythe, so taking him by force would be nighe impossible. Could he use Kat as bait? No, not if Altojo's objective had been to avoid her. But why had he been avoiding her to begin with? Dolosus had a strong feeling that Altojo still cared very much for her. The most likely case was that he wanted to keep her out

of something. Something was going on that she couldn't know about or be involved in...

*He's getting away! Damn it, say something!*

"Altojo, wait!" his voice cracked. He shook his head and cleared his throat, "My master can help you!" he stopped, about fifty feet away. Dolosus held in a sigh of relief. He slowly regained his composure and walked towards the other man once more.

"I can sense that you are a man in search of something," he said, making it up as he went along and praying that it made sense, "My master goes by the name of Demonic and leads an organization of sorts, if you will. We are a group of individuals skilled in the matters of the soul and spirit. I sense a longing in you, and I believe that my master can help you."

"...Your master, who supposedly is a spiritual leader and helps those in need of guidance... goes by a name such as Demonic?" Altojo returned in dry tones, with a wry smile at Dolosus over his shoulder. Damn it. Dolosus mentally kicked himself. He should have used an alias for her.

"Particularly cruel parents," He answered with a shrug and a sigh, "But let us not digress, my friend." Dolosus was nearly sickened by his own corny act. But he was confident. This could really work. Altojo turned and came to stand directly in front of Dolosus, as if to stare into his eyes until he found the truth. He stood with confidence, but Dolosus noticed his hands fussing restlessly in his pockets.

"What is your name, you who claim to be a spiritual, yet give such a aura of bloodlust?"

"My name is Dolosus."

"Dolosus?"

"Exactly as you say, sir."

"Latin, I believe," Altojo observed. Dolosus nodded, "Clever. Tricky. Sly. That's... about right, if I'm not much mistaken."

"You are an intelligent man. And you are correct. Though I myself do not know how I was given such a name, as I never knew my parents. But that is neither here nor there." Dolosus knew he couldn't sidetrack too much or become too involved in lies, or he could slip up.

"Altojo, would you see my master? She can grant you what you seek! This girl, Kat, who risked so much for you... you can be happy with her, and you wont have to run any longer. And Crimson! We know where she is currently, and my master can take you to her! Please, Altojo... for your sake and for their's..."

A stunning performance, in Dolosus' humble opinion. He waited patiently for Altojo's answer, but hoped that this would not go on for long enough for Kat to wake up and ruin the whole façade.

"I will consider this offer of yours, Sly One," he finally said, "May I assume that Kat will be at this organization with you and your master?"

"Yes."

"Good. I will find you. Farewell. I trust that whether I take up this offer or not, our paths will cross again."

"I agree. Farewell."

Dolosus nearly laughed.

When Kat awakened, she found herself on her back on her bed in the hotel that she and Dolosus had been staying in. She blinked a couple times to clear her vision. Her eyes focused, she glanced around the room to see everything packed. She sat up slowly, noticing in the process that she had a throbbing headache. She looked to her left to see Dolosus sitting on his bed, wearing only his jeans and drying off his dripping wet hair with a towel.

Kat's brain worked on the situation slowly. First, she noted that Dolosus was nice to look at, all things considered. Then, she got to wondering why everything was packed. After that, things got a little confused. Had they ever found Altojo? Where was Kitty? Who was that Cinta girl? Was Crimson safe or had they really...?

"You're awake. About time."

"Y-yeah..." Kat muttered. So much had happened. Her mind was in a haze.

"Go shower," Dolosus said, pointing to the bathroom door, "and whatever else you girls do. But make it fast. We're leaving soon."

"What? Wait, Dolosus, what happen-?"

"Shower. You smell. We'll talk after."

Kat frowned childishly at him. He didn't seem to notice. Kat stood up and made her way to the bathroom, stepping over suitcases and her giant leaf. She noticed that Dolosus' scythe was nowhere to be seen. So, Kitty had made off with it. Demonic wouldn't be happy.

"What happened to your-?" she started to ask, but was interrupted yet again.

"Kat." He said, in the tone a parent uses when they've just begun to lose patience with a defiant child. He got to his feet and stood in front of her. Bending down to bring his face closer to hers (which caused her to blush noticeably), he spoke slowly,

"I refuse to answer a single question. Take a shower and change your clothes. After that, we leave. We are to return to headquarters. You will act quickly and only speak to me when absolutely necessary. These are my orders to you, as your superior, understand?"

Slowly, she nodded, entered the bathroom and shut the door behind her.

Dolosus stared at the closed door for a few long moments. He sighed and went back to his bed, where he plopped down on his back and closed his eyes, listening to the sound of the water hitting tile in the shower. He was certain that Kat would obey her orders and not speak to him for the majority of their trip back.

"Well... that's for the best..." he muttered to himself. He couldn't speak to her. Not given what he was planning. Who knew how she would react? Normally, he wouldn't care. People endure pain in life, and it makes them stronger, and if it doesn't make them stronger, it breaks them, and so they had been too weak to begin with. Dolosus had no use for weaklings. And yet, this was different. He thought about it, and quickly ruled out the possibility of affection for Kat. Eventually, he decided that to not feel a touch of guilt over deceiving and probably killing the close friend of one whom you've been working with as partners for so long would be simply inhuman.

But then... was he human? He now knew that Demonic had created him by using the powers of her brush. He had not actually been born, but did that make him less human? Dolosus was at a loss. He had never questioned his own humanity before.

The door of the bathroom opened, hot air wafting into the room. Kat was already dressed again. A quick glance at Dolosus, then she immediately averted her gaze and busied herself with packing a few stray items. Dolosus stood up, pulled his shirt on over his head and mumbled,

"Hurry up."

Mid April. Four months plus since the encounter between Dolosus and Altojo. Trees and flowers bloomed in firework blasts of color and aroma. The spring that year was mild for the most part. Temperatures were warm but not hot, and a cool breeze blew almost consistently. Rain came in brief showers and beautiful clear skies followed closely after them. All of these pleasantries of the season, of course, went virtually unnoticed by the organization members. They spent their time training, eating, lazing about in the privacy of their rooms, or on missions.

Dolosus had been sent on only a couple here and there since Guatemala. This was not because of a lessening of his value, but rather because few missions ever required his strength. Over all, Demonic was pleased with him these days. She had listened with interest to his report of the Guatemala mission and as he described his deception of Altojo, she smiled to herself and nodded. Before Dolosus could request yet another replacement scythe, however, the crows bursted into the master's room, and without

even bowing as was expected of them, they whispered urgently to her, something that seemed to disturb her greatly. She muttered to them, her hand over her lips. They replied curtly. She closed her eyes and rubbed her temples, a habit of hers when she was stressed. Finally, she got to her feet and the action seemed authoritative- powerful. With a careless wave of her hand, she called the crows after her as she headed towards the door, walking briskly.

"Ah- Master!" Dolosus called after her, just as her hand grasped the doorknob. She glared over her shoulder at him,

"Yes, what, what is it? You've finished your report, haven't you? Get out of my sight!"

"My scythe-"

"Yes, what about it?"

"I'll, uh, be needing another one..."

Demonic displayed a series of facial expressions. First surprise, then great irritation, and finally, utter exasperation. She sighed and rolled her eyes,

"You've got to be kidding me. Another one. This is, what, your third now? Ugh, I don't have time for this crap." A green light flashed in her hand and the over sized paintbrush appeared. In just three strokes, she had painted a new scythe in the air. Another flash of light, and the new weapon materialized from the ink.

"Think you can actually hold on to this one for any length of time?" she spat at him, tossing the scythe to him by the staff. He caught it and began to examine and weigh it in his hands. Demonic went on, "No one but you and I can touch this one. Anyone else would be overcome by a fit of madness, the duration of which depends on how long they had been in contact with the scythe. Happy now? Good, I'm leaving."

"Th-thank you, master." Dolosus just managed to get out before the door slammed in his face. He looked back down at his new scythe. It was simple in appearance, but he could feel that it was an excellent weapon.

He gave the room one last glance and left, carefully closing the gigantic oak doors behind him as he went.

On one particularly lovely April afternoon, Dolosus had just finished supervising training sessions for the day, and was making his way back to his room, when the crow siblings appeared in the main hallway out of which all of the members' rooms branched. They swooped down from the skylight that had been installed in the roof in order for them to come and go quickly for their important spying missions. They chattered excitedly amongst themselves for a few moments until they noticed Dolosus about to enter his room.

"Dolosus! There's the man of the hour- hey, wait up!" the male shouted down the hall to him. He had tried to ignore them at first, but it seemed they were determined. He looked at them sourly and waited for them to come to him.

"Altojo!" the female said a little breathlessly. Dolosus quirked an eyebrow. Now he was interested.

"Go on."

"He's coming- heading this way. Demonic will be mighty pissed if you don't get 'im this time. Thought you'd like to know."

"I see..." he responded curtly. Finally, he had come. The Crows had expected a more interesting reaction to this news, and so they stood and waited patiently for one that would suit their fancy. Dolosus took his time in evaluating and deciding how to react to the situation, however, nearly forgetting the Crows' presence. Eventually, he looked up at them as if he were somewhat surprised to see them there. He thought over the plan one last time, and, finding it satisfactory, he said to the eagerly waiting siblings,

“Kat had a training session this morning, did she not?”

They looked at each other and nodded.

“Tell her...” he said slowly, “tell her that we’re going to that movie I promised her.” He looked to the female crow, “I entrust this task to you, as a woman. Talk to her. Insist that she shower, find a nice outfit, do her hair and makeup and whatever else you women do before you’re ready to go out in public. I need time when I know she’ll be in her room, busy, and unable to get in my way. If she had training this morning, she should need some extra time to get ready, but nonetheless, I want you to ensure that she remains occupied for at least an hour.”

“Roger.” She responded with a smirk.

“And you,” Dolosus went on, now addressing the brother, “are to be my backup. If Kat runs off and your sister can’t stop her, which is entirely possible, seeing as how excitable Kat can be... you are to restrain her- with physical force, if necessary.”

“Gotcha!” he replied, delighted by this assignment.

“Hold it,” his sister said, “what’s in this for us?”

Dolosus simply smiled at first, turning to make his way to the headquarters’ main entrance. He had taken but a couple steps when he stopped, and, looking over his shoulder at them, said,

“You can have the corpse.”

At last, Altojo stood at the doors of the group that had spent so much time and effort pursuing him, and that he had been in turn pursuing for nearly three months now. He smiled slightly. He had always appreciated irony.

Altojo had gone through quite a bit of effort to find this organization’s headquarters. He had chased source after source, lead after lead, extracting information from shady characters, often by force. Of those he had... conversed with, many would laugh or smirk when Altojo told what he knew about this group, as if he had missed out on some inside joke. Many others, however, would take in his story, add further details, and seemed to understand exactly what he was saying. If this story turned out to be a ruse, Altojo guessed that he would not have been the first fool to fall for it.

The sound of someone taking a step towards him from behind brought Altojo back to awareness.

“So... you’ve finally come.”

“Ah, Dolosus... the sly one.” Altojo did not turn to face him. He listened carefully to the other man’s voice. It was calm, and measured. Each syllable considered carefully before it was spoken. This was seeming more and more like a trap with each passing moment.

“My master eagerly awaits you, Altojo,” he took another two steps closer, “if you would kindly follow me...”

When Dolosus had come closer, Altojo turned so the two of them were face to face. Dolosus was now close enough for Altojo to listen to his body properly. He heard his weight shifting. Most likely to accommodate for some extra weight on one side. He heard his heart pounding rapidly, blood rushing...

“You are armed.” Altojo observed, “your body shifts to hold it properly. It is a rather heavy weapon.”

Dolosus was silent for a moment.

“Your hearing is superb.” Dolosus returned his own observation, “I carry a scythe. My weapon of choice. However, I’ve certainly no intention of raising my blade against you. You see, my scythe has a power. With it, I can open a path to take us to my master.”

“... I see.” Said Altojo, in a tone that clearly showed his distrust, “Well then, lead on.”

Dolosus swung his scythe. Altojo jumped, narrowly avoiding having his feet emancipated from his body. Rather than landing back on the ground, however, he fell. He tried to cry out, but he couldn’t hear his own voice, as if he were in a silent film. He fell in a great emptiness, having no sounds or scents or any other sensation than falling to tell him where he was. Then, suddenly, it stopped. He collapsed onto hard

concrete.

Dolosus had not been aiming to cut Altojo with that swing. He had forced him to enter a wormhole and take him to the roof of the organization building.

"...That bastard." Altojo mumbled, and was relieved to hear his own voice. He could feel that he was outside, and, judging by the strength of the spring breeze, fairly high up. Other than this, he couldn't say. He focused his hearing and eventually noticed someone breathing nearby. Immediately, he jumped up to his feet and faced the source of the sound.

Dolosus smirked.

"And now, we begin."

"He... he what?" Kat stared in disbelief at the crow.

"Yeah, weird, right? But that's what he said." She responded with a shrug, "here, I'll help you get ready." She welcomed herself into Kat's room, shut the door behind her, and dragged the befuddled girl along.

"I thought he had forgotten! But we're really- wait!" the two stopped, and Kat looked anxiously at the crow, "is this like a date? What should I wear? I don't know if I'm ready. I don't think I'm ready! Oh no, what should I do?!"

"I-I, don't, Kat! Calm down!" said a very flustered crow, "Here, listen," she sighed, and seeing the excitement on Kat's face, she felt a pang of guilt, "go shower and get yourself cleaned up. No offense, but that training session this morning was not kind to your personal hygiene." Kat giggled awkwardly.

"Go do that. I'll wait here, and once you're done, I'll help you pick out an outfit, okay?"

The pink haired girl was delighted. With a smile reaching from ear to ear, she embraced her friend,

"Thanks so much, you're the best."

"It's... it's nothing..."

Kat released the crow and practically danced towards her bathroom.

"Oooh, I'm so excited!"

The crow waited until she heard the water running, then let out a heavy sigh. She closed her eyes, crossed her arms and leaned against the wall. How would Kat react when she realized this was all a lie? That her friends had lied to her. That they had done so to get to Altojo. Not to mention she'd never get to go to that movie... but the thought of a delicious corpse overtook the crow's thoughts, and her misgivings vanished.

"Ah, well." She said to the empty room, "we've all got to eat, and there's no such thing as a free lunch."

Kat stepped into the shower, humming cheerfully to herself as she lathered up her hair with a sweet smelling shampoo. She wasn't sure why, but she knew that she wanted to look good for this movie. She thought of Dolosus and smiled cutely, wondering what had suddenly made him think to invite her. They hadn't even spoken much since they're mission in Guatemala. That was kind of strange. She never had really understood Dolosus. She shrugged and rinsed out the shampoo, now picking up the bottle of conditioner. But she stopped, frowning.

Why had he sent the crow to tell her? He didn't really seem that shy. Sure, he was kind of awkward, but shy? And where was he anyway? Something seemed a little strange about the situation. Something that she hadn't noticed due to her initial excitement, but now seemed very strange. Suspicious, even.

She put down the bottle and got out of the shower, turned off the water, and dried herself off quickly. She had to talk to Dolosus.

Flames sprung up around the two fighters, creating a wall of inferno about the perimeter of the roof

where they fought. Dolosus closed his eyes for a moment, letting the warmth seep over him. He could feel Altojo's power in the flames. He drank it in like a fine wine. But it was not enough.

"...Yet, this is not your full power..." he said.

"Shouldn't be necessary."

Dolosus laughed, readying his scythe,

"Arrogance has a tendency to bite the hand that feeds it, Altojo."

In an instant, the two closed to distance between them, and the battle began. Flames coated Altojo's hands and he threw punch after punch, but Dolosus was always just slightly faster, and so the flames only succeeded in charring Dolosus' clothes slightly. He soon found an opening and went on the offensive. He swung his scythe at Altojo's mid-section, but he dodged, and continued to avoid the blade, until, finally, he grabbed it by the staff. The result startled both of the fighters.

"Agh! Ayaaaaah!!" Altojo screamed and clutched his head with both hands. He fell to his knees, panting. Slowly, Dolosus' look of bewilderment transformed into a sadistic, lopsided grin.

"Yes, of course... thank you, my master..." he murmured to himself, watching as his opponent slowly regained his sanity. This was just a small taste of his weapon's new power, but he already felt he would enjoy it. But first, he had to maintain his slight advantage. Altojo was beginning to get back up to his feet, shakily, but Dolosus sent a kick to the side of his head and he fell back down, sprawled on the concrete. He blinked and shook his head, then rolled onto his side just as the scythe's wicked blade plowed into the floor, barely missing Altojo's arm. He saw his chance. Altojo flung up his leg and kicked the staff of the scythe out of Dolosus' hands as he tried to free it from the concrete. He stumbled back just slightly, but it gave his opponent time to get up on his feet again. Altojo positioned himself between Dolosus and the weapon.

"Up for a little game of keep-away?" Altojo betrayed the smallest hint of a smirk.

"Your witty banter needs work." Dolosus returned, and wasted no time in attacking. He lunged towards Altojo and began throwing punches. His opponent was slower than he, but also quite a bit more muscular, and so while the majority of the blows landed, they did little. Dolosus suddenly realized how much he needed his scythe against this opponent.

He tried to fake him out, using sudden movements, trying to find an opening to get to his weapon, all the while throwing punches. But every motion, every twitch of his eyes to every tensed muscle was easily detected and reacted to. To Altojo, Dolosus was just a jumble of sounds- muscle rubbing against bone, blood rushing through veins, air entering and exiting the lungs. Where Dolosus was fast and clever, Altojo was strong and skilled. They seemed evenly matched.

A fist connected with Altojo's face. And another on the other side. Up until then, Dolosus had aimed only for the chest and shoulders. Shock clouded his mind for the shortest of moments, but as another punch soared towards him, his body seemed to move on its own, and he flung out his hand and caught Dolosus by the neck. Hazel eyes flew open in shock. Altojo himself was surprised, but he knew he couldn't miss this chance. His grip tightened. Dolosus began to panic. There was no way he could overpower Altojo. His vision blurred, his lungs were burning, and in desperation, he flailed out his legs, praying that he'd connect. And suddenly, he was free. His foot had slammed into Altojo's stomach, winding him and causing him to drop his victim. An opening!

Dolosus bolted to his scythe, and all in one fluid motion, he liberated the blade from the concrete, spun the staff into Altojo's legs, knocking him to the ground, and spun the blade around to rest against Altojo's neck. A sneering, mocking smile danced across Dolosus' lips. His eyes burned with the thrill of the kill. He was so ready to see his blade sinking into flesh, the blood pouring, hear Altojo's final gasp of life leave his body...

"D...Dolosus...?" a soft, meek voice sounded behind him. His smile vanished. His body nearly went limp. He knew who it was, and, judging by Altojo's apparent shock, he also recognized the voice.

“Dolosus... Altojo...” she murmured in a shocked tone. It seemed to be all she could say. Dolosus closed his eyes, took a deep breath, opened them, and, keeping the blade of his scythe at Altojo’s neck for good measure, he turned to face Kat.

Her expression alone nearly brought Dolosus to his knees. She was deathly pale, her eyes bloodshot and shimmering with tears that wouldn’t fall. She stood completely frozen, feet rooted to the concrete, hands slowly clenching and unclenching. And for the first time in his life, Dolosus felt guilt. A horrible, wrenching feeling in his chest. A twisting, writhing parasite around his heart.

He lowered his scythe. Altojo stood up silently. Kat slowly began walking towards the two. Meanwhile, the brother crow soared up over the roof of the building, maintaining a safe distance from the scene below.

“I-I’m sorry, Dolosus, she got by me! I tried to stop her, really! But she...” he began nervously, but soon realized that no one was listening. His sister soon joined him, and the Crows simply watched from the sky.

“Kat, I-“ smack! Dolosus, stunned into silence, stared wide-eyed at Kat and gingerly touched his cheek where she had slapped him. His mouth opened, then closed. He sighed and closed his eyes.

“I have nothing else to say to you.” She turned to Altojo and went on, now addressing him, “And you! Why, you little-!”

“Kat, please, I had my reasons.”

“Reasons!” she laughed. A horrible, hysterical laugh. “He has REASONS, he says! Well now that just fixes everything, now, doesn’t it. I’ve killed people to find you, nearly got myself killed, Crimson could be DEAD for all we know, I’m stuck in this loony bin, working with HIM-“ she pointed an accusing finger at Dolosus, “but there’s a reason for it all. Now-isn’t-that-just-PEACHY!” she screamed so that a flock of birds took off from nearby trees and her throat ached from the strain. The two men were silent. A single tear slid down Kat’s girlish face. She turned and walked briskly to the edge of the building and jumped down, floating on a cushion of air around her. It was over.

“...I’m sorry.” Dolosus said, and nearly laughed at the very idea, “I’m sorry.” He repeated.

Silence.

“What now?” Altojo asked.

“I should be asking you that.” Dolosus said with a wry smile, “I’m stuck here. I don’t have a choice. I just follow orders. But you have options. And so does Kat.” And he found himself hoping that she would stay. He couldn’t say for sure, for he had never experienced such a thing, but he felt that he would... miss her.

God, what was she doing to him?

“Who do you take orders from?”

“My master.”

“So that part was true. This is an organization of sorts, you’re a member, and you have a powerful master.”

“Unless I’m still lying.” Dolosus shrugged, “But you’d hardly know. You and Kat and your friend, Crimson, you’re those ‘honest types,’” he spoke those words almost mockingly, “much unlike myself.” Altojo sighed and smiled somewhat awkwardly,

“Doesn’t really matter anymore, now that...” he trailed off, then began again. “I can’t go through with it now. I knew I wouldn’t be able to. I knew that if I saw her, it would all be over. And now... I don’t know...” Dolosus watched him for a long while, he brow furrowed in thought. What a heavy burden freedom could be.

“I wouldn’t know. The whole ‘meaning of life’ thing has never been one of my strong suits. I follow orders.”

“What would you do if you were free?”



"I..." Dolosus stopped and thought. If he were free? He had never even considered such a thing. But the first thing that came to mind was travel. Friends. Seeing what the world had to offer for himself. And the most ridiculous idea cross his mind for the shortest of moments of traveling with Kat and her friends. It was absurd.

"I don't want to tell you." He finally said in an almost child like manner. Altojo, caught between amusement and irritation, shrugged and said,

"Alright. So how about this master of yours? Think I could still talk to him?"

"...Her."

"Nice, man."

Dolosus rolled his eyes,

"Let's just go."

And all the while, as they talked of meaningless theories and worthless ideas, one thought lay in the back of each of their minds, nagging at them and demanding their constant attention no matter how they tried to distract themselves.

*'I hope she's okay.'*

The next few days were something of a blur to Dolosus. Altojo had spoken to Demonic, and it was arranged that he would stay at the organization's headquarters and work for her until it was determined for certain whether or not Crimson was still alive. The deal was that if she had died, Kat and Altojo would remain with the organization and if she still lived, the three could be reunited and go on their merry way. Altojo, being, as Dolosus had put it, the "honest type," accepted this deal with a little caution. But Dolosus knew better than to trust his master. He considered warning Altojo of this, but he figured that he would wait and see how things panned out. No need to hurry.

Days and weeks passed, and Altojo was sent on a number of minor missions, and Dolosus continued to supervise training sessions, and all the while, Kat never spoke to him, or even looked at him if she could help it. Altojo had managed to catch up to her and explain himself. He told her his story, and later repeated it to Dolosus.

"I wanted to see again," he had said quietly during a training session one day, as Dolosus marked down time and accuracy scores, "I found someone who had the power to heal me. An old fortune teller in the city. But like all things worth having in life, there was a price."

"Please don't tell me the hag wanted your soul," Dolosus muttered, checking off another score on his clip board, "Next up! Because really, that's just so cliché. I said next up! We haven't got all day!"

"Not my soul. My memories. My memories of all those closest to me. That basically meant Kat and Crimson. We traveled too much for me to be close to anyone else. Anyway, I knew that if I met either of them again, I wouldn't be able to go through with it. And I was right." He smiled bitterly.

"But think of the power you've gained in hearing, rather than seeing," Dolosus said.

"Ah, well," Altojo shrugged, "we always want what we can't have."

Dolosus watched him for a moment, then nodded, sighed softly and checked his stop watch. He marked down another score.

"Time, 3:55.33, accuracy, 73.2 percent. Work on that. Next!"

Altojo had gone on to explain that he and Kat were on speaking terms again. The story had satisfied her at least that much.

"She called me a selfish jerk," he admitted, "but at least she listened."

"Good. I won't have to deal with that drama," Dolosus said and scribbled down another time and accuracy score, noting that performance was up that week, "you people couldn't control your emotions long enough to- next! I said, next!"

"You really are an @\$\$, you know that?"

“Yes. But at least I don’t whine like a woman on her period.”

Altojo sighed and shook his head.

“You should talk to her.” He said.

“Why? So I can get slapped again? Next! No, thank you, I’d rather avoid that if at all possible.” Altojo sighed again, and decided that it wasn’t worth trying to convince him otherwise. What Altojo didn’t know was that Dolosus did want to talk to Kat. Very much so. But she was good about avoiding him, and soon, a mission of vast importance was in the works, which meant training, meetings, and no time to track down Kat.

Oh well. She’d probably just hit him anyway.

“Will you relax? They’ll think I shoved my paint brush up your @\$\$.”

“...Yes, master.” Dolosus muttered stiffly, and tried to calm his nerves and relax his posture. He was only somewhat successful. Staring at the ornately carved wooden doors of the four story mansion, he adjusted his tie and sighed, giving his master an awkward sidelong glance. Demonic had designed for herself a lovely dress for the occasion. A tight corset accentuated her waist and pushed up her bust in typical Victorian fashion. Her skirts poofed out from her waist, flowing out about her, dragging just slightly on the ground and covering her healed shoes. The dress was a dark green with black lace added anywhere possible. Long black gloves reached up past her elbows, and pearls adorned her neck. She truly was a sight to behold. But while others gazed at her with blatantly admiring eyes, Dolosus was confused.

“Master,” he said tentatively, “you have not quite explained this mission to me. You made it sound like infiltration, but... a party?”

Demonic sighed heavily and grabbed him by the arm, dragging him down marble steps to the lush, verdant garden in front of the mansion. They passed between towering hedges, under a low arch covered in twisting vines and flowers, until they reached a pond and a stone bench nearby. Demonic seated herself on the bench, brushing off her skirt,

“God damned heels... and who said you could sit?” she spat when Dolosus had gone to sit next to her, “the nerve of you fools sometimes. Anyway, this mission. Things have been busy so I haven’t had time to properly inform you.” This was very true. Information wasn’t getting out as well as it usually did, and Demonic’s temper had been shorter.

“This event is being hosted by Maion, the woman who is... let us say that she and I are business rivals. The party is being held in honor of a new member, supposedly. Your mission is to mingle, socialize, eavesdrop, and if you hear anything even slightly suspicious, report it to myself or the crows- they’re here too. I’m particularly interested in any news regarding Crimson. If anyone asks, tell them you’re with me. Use a similar story to what you told Altojo about the organization. Don’t make a scene. Blend in. And for God’s sake, try to handle yourself with some amount of social grace.”

Dolosus couldn’t help feeling uncomfortable. He knew a little about Maion’s group. They were an assassination organization, like Demonic’s, and went by the guise of a military force specializing in stealth and undercover assignments. Even with all of this information and his instructions from Demonic, besides his own cunning and strength, he was still nervous.

Social events... ugh.

“Oh, and here, wear this.” Demonic summoned her brush to her hand in a flash of green light and in a matter of moments, created a mask to be placed over his eyes, where his glasses were. The brush vanished, and Demonic forced the mask into Dolosus’ hand, “you have contact lenses, right? This is a masquerade, after all.”

Dolosus sighed.

Social events...

Kat entered the mansion and was greeted by an impressive sight. A massive ballroom lay in front of her where she stood at the top of a staircase leading down to the dance floor. Kat guessed there had to be at least a few hundred people there, dancing, laughing, drinking and socializing. And every one of them was dressed to the nines. Men in full tuxedos, carrying canes and wearing top hats escorted women around the dance floor, and the women were truly breathtaking. Jewellery worth more than the women wearing it adorned every neck, every ear, wrist and finger. Frills, lace and corsets were in abundance. Many of the women wore their corsets so tight that they pushed up their chests and gave them the appearance of wearing their breasts as necklaces. Kat looked down at her own, somewhat less impressive bust and frowned in disappointment, but then got to wondering how those women managed to breathe like that. She herself was having some difficulty breathing in that straight-jacket of a dress, but she tried to ignore it and act natural.

She carefully descended the stairs, gazing in wonderment at her surroundings. The whole place was covered in gold, marble and diamonds. A humongous chandelier hung from the ceiling, casting a yellowish lighting over the room. An entire wall opposite from where Kat stood was taken up by a series of long tables covered with every type of food and drink imaginable. Well, every expensive type, at least. Kat set her sights on those tables and slowly made her way around the room, rather than across it, so as to avoid dancing couples bumping into her. When she finally made it, she smiled at the sight of two familiar faces.

"I swear, all this food and not a single piece of human meat."

"You were expecting human? Not everyone appreciates a delicacy like we do, y'know."

"But they could at least--"

"Hey there, you two." Kat said brightly to the crows. The two turned and stared at her for a moment, as if they didn't recognize her, then the sister smiled and said,

"Oh, hello, Kat! I almost didn't recognize you!"

"Kat? Oh, right!" the boy said, "wow, you sure look different."

Kat smiled shyly. It was very true. For one, she hardly ever wore dresses, much less something as lovely and extravagant as what Demonic had designed for her. Her dress was a pure white, with baby blue lace bordering every seam and added wherever detail was an option, without being tacky. Also, Demonic had used her brush to lengthen Kat's hair, and it now reached down past her shoulders, and curled gently, framing her face nicely. Besides these, it was a masquerade, and so Kat wore a mask over her eyes. It was the same baby blue of the lace on her dress, and two black feathers adorned the upper right border of the mask. She looked lovely, but she had never felt so awkward.

"I feel ridiculous," she said with a nervous laugh, "Do I look okay?"

"I think you look great," said the female crow.

"And incidentally, so does he." The male pointed to a man a little ways down the row of tables, who had been eying Kat, and making no huge effort to hide it. Kat glanced over at him. A mistake. The man made eye contact, which gave him an excuse to approach her.

"Crap..." Kat muttered. He certainly was not her type. He was as greasy and fake looking as any rich snob she had seen all night, and now she couldn't get away from him.

"Good evening, miss," he said, his voice all silk and honey, as he bowed and took her hand and kissed it, "I couldn't help noticing you were alone, and I was wondering if you would join me for a dance?"

"Alone'?" the male crow said incredulously, "What, do we not count now?" But the man ignored them and continued his attempts at charming Kat. She obviously wasn't buying it.

"I'm sorry, sir, I couldn't--"

"Oh, but I insist."

He took her hand and practically dragged her onto the dance floor, but not before an entire silent

conversation between the three friends. Kat looked desperately at the crows. They shrugged. Kat frowned.

*Do something, will you?!*

*What do you want us to do?*

*Anything!*

And suddenly, Kat felt an arm around her shoulders, and someone held on to her, so that the man pulling her hand stopped and looked back.

"I'm sorry I'm late, dear." Said a soft, but confident voice behind her, "I hope I didn't cause you any worry. Oh, excuse me," he said in mock surprise, "who is this? A friend of yours?"

Kat tried to hide her surprise and play along. Freeing her hand from the other man's grasp, she turned to her savior and tried her best to keep the act up. She took his arm and smiled warmly at him, saying, "No worry at all, darling, I'm just glad you came. But no, I only just met this man. When he saw that I was alone, he kindly offered to dance, but now that you're here, that won't be necessary."

"I see." He said, and stared right into the other man's eyes, "Thank you for entertaining her until my arrival. I apologize again for being late."

"...No trouble at all." He responded curtly through tight lips, and he turned and went off, most likely in search of some other girl to charm. Once he had gone, Kat let out a sigh of relief and laughed.

"Thank you so much." She said and looked up at the man who had saved her from an extremely uncomfortable and unwanted experience. He was very handsome. Tall, and imperially slim, but not skeletal. He was clothed in a black tuxedo and top hat, but did not carry a cane like many of the other men, and over his eyes was a plain black mask with silver stitching around the border. He had gorgeous hazel eyes, and Kat found herself quite fond of him already.

"It's nothing. I just can't stand guys like that." He smiled a little awkwardly, just raising one corner of his lips slightly. Kat laughed and nodded,

"Yeah, same here. Hey, would you like to dance?" the man appeared to give the matter more thought than was necessary, in Kat's opinion, but finally, he nodded,

"I would like that."

Kat smiled, and the two made their way to the dance floor. They clasped hands. She placed her free hand on his shoulder (which was a little difficult due to his height), and he wrapped his arm around her waist, and they began a slow, graceful waltz. It started out somewhat awkwardly, both of them trying to get into the rhythm and work together, but eventually, they both got the hang of it, and Kat's mystery man turned out to be an exceptional dance partner.

The song ended, and the two, a little worn, separated and joined in applauding the band. The man bowed, and Kat curtsied. He said something, but the words didn't really register in her mind. She was feeling light headed. Her breath came only with difficulty, and sweat began to show on her brow. She swayed a little, steadied herself, then closed her eyes, and felt herself begin to fall...

Dolosus caught her quickly as she fainted. He stared at her in shock, holding on to her tightly and trying not to make a scene. He wasn't entirely successful. People began to panic and ask questions as he tried to make his way to the door and get her outside, with one hand holding her waist, and the other holding her hand with her arm over his shoulders.

"Goodness, is she quite alright?!"

"Here, let me help you-"

"Out of the way!"

"Would you like some wine?"

"Oh my, what happened?!"

The noise was nearly enough to drive Dolosus insane. He generally ignored it, and finally reached the

door. His guess was that her corset was too tight, and she couldn't breathe probably. Not to mention, with all of those people crowding the ballroom, it was very warm. Some fresh air would help her. Maybe some water.

He carried her carefully to the spot where he and Demonic had been earlier, and laid her down on the stone bench. He imagined it wouldn't be too comfortable, but she had to lay down, and it was better than the ground. Kneeling down next to the pond near the bench, he first splashed some water on his own face to cool himself off and calm his nerves, then he wet his hands and approached the unconscious girl and dabbed the water on her forehead, neck and ears. He shook his hands dry, and watched her, and pretty soon he saw her eyes fluttering open under her mask. He smiled softly, "You're up. That's good. Uhm...." She sat up slowly, rubbing her head, "I think your corset is a little tight, if you don't mind my mentioning it..." she laughed very softly, as her chest probably still hurt. Dolosus had to admit that she had a cute laugh.

"Yeah, I think I'd have to agree with you on that."

Dolosus sat next to her and watched her for a few long moments. She was very pretty. She had strangely pink hair that reminded him of Kat, but hers was quite a bit longer than Kat's, and curled cutely around her face. She looked up at him and saw him staring back at her. They both laughed a little awkwardly. She cleared her throat and said,

"Thanks again, for, you know... before, with that guy."

"It was nothing, really. I'm glad I got to dance with you. You're quite the dancer."

"Really? I don't dance often. I don't even come to these parties often."

That sent up a sort of red flag in Dolosus' head. He could tell that she was different from the moment he saw her, and not just because she was beautiful. Something about her made her stand out, but he couldn't tell if it was in a good way or a bad way. And now she made herself seem even more of an oddity.

"...Neither do I, actually."

"Why not?"

"I'm... not really good with people."

She looked at him strangely, then smiled and placed her hand gently over his.

"I think you're just fine. I really enjoy your company."

Dolosus didn't quite know what to say to that. Part of his mind was searching for a way to casually find out who she was and what she was doing here. And another part, the dominant part for the time being, was searching for a way to have a normal conversation with a pretty girl. He turned to face her, and they stared at each other for a short moment that seemed to last a lifetime. Dolosus' heart was racing, and his body seemed to go numb.

But when their lips met, instinct took over. He placed a hand on her waste. She wrapped her arms around his neck. And though he had never been kissed before, it felt like the most natural thing in the world. But just as he began to slide his tongue past her lips,

"Kat! Big news, we found- Woah!! What the hell?!" the male crow had barged in on them, and seemed quite flustered and excited. He went completely silent, however, when he saw what was going on. His sister soon joined him, and had a similar initial reaction, but blinked her eyes, shook her head and said, "What do you two think you're doing? We found Crimson!"

"You what?!" Kat stood up, curtsied to Dolosus, saying, "I'm really sorry, it's an emergency- I have to go!"

The sister crow grabbed Kat's wrist and ran off, leaving an extremely perplexed Dolosus, standing by the pond. The brother crow stayed behind as the girls went, and was giving Dolosus a kind of sly grin.

"What?" Dolosus finally spat at him.

"Nothing, nothing!" he said, putting his hands up defensively.

“Well? Let’s go find Crimson.” He said, and the two followed the girls out of the garden and back into the mansion. But while Dolosus tried to focus on the mission, his mind was screaming at him,  
*I just kissed Kat!*

Owari.

## 8 - Dancing in The Dark

### Author's Notes:

- This one of three chapters written by Brian that I'll be posting. The next one was originally a part of this chapter, but we decided that since the word count was well over 11000 (thus, over 9000!!!), a division was in order.

- I wrote what we have entitled "the awkward moment," and Brian edited. Just so we're clear :)

- Ikonu is freakin' hardcore. As is Nabin. There's some awesome characters in these next couple chapters :)

- Enjoy!!

Maion looked out over the sea of people who had come to her party.

*A masquerade. Could there be anything more fun? Well, maybe if I had a drink. Where the heck is Mohajon?*

"Excuse me? May I have this dance?"

Maion turned to face the man who had asked her. He was wearing a mask, but that did not conceal him from being a greasy, fake, rich snob like so many other guests.

"No thank you," she said in a polite manor.

"Aw, please? I've already been turned down once tonight. Don't let it happen again. I must insist."

"And I must insist that you leave me now," Maion answered, now starting to lose her temper.

"Is there a problem, Maion?" Mohajon asked as he approached them.

"No, this man was just leaving," she replied. "This is my boyfriend, fyi," she whispered to the man. He gave a look of irritation and walked away.

"Damn, why does everyone have a boyfriend already?" he complained as he merged back into the crowd.

"Thank you for the rescue," Maion said to Mohajon as he handed her a drink. She had to lift her mask to take a sip. She had decided to be different from all the other ladies at the masquerade and wear one that covered her full face. It was plain white, with the exception of ruby red lips and sapphire blue eye shadow. It was more creepy than beautiful. If it wasn't for her hair and dress, one would have a hard time guessing she was a woman. Her dress was a lovely deep shade of purple, with peacock feathers adorning very smart places. The best word to describe it was "chic."

Mohajon's outfit was a direct counterpart to Maion's. First of all, his mohawk had red stripes this evening. His mask was the same deep purple as her dress, only his didn't cover his entire face. Like Maion, he wanted to be different from the others. So instead of wearing a mask that covered his eyes and left his mouth open, he wore one that covered his mouth and left his eyes open. Like her dress, the mask also had some peacock feather trimmings. His suit was also a plain white, with the exception of a ruby red tie and a sapphire blue pocket square.

"Would you like to dance?" he asked.

"I would love to," she answered, placing her hand in his. They went out onto the dance floor and, like a true couple, took up the rhythm immediately. They waltzed wonderfully and gracefully together, each never taking their eyes off of their partner. They never had to look down at their feet. They never ran into other couples. They moved as one.

Eventually, the song ended and they joined the rest of the crowd in applauding the band. Then, there

was a gasp from the crowd. The dancers parted to reveal a tall slender man holding a woman who had fainted. The woman had long, pink hair.

*Her corset was probably too tight.*

Maion had to be thankful that she was so thin. She never had to wear a corset.

“Should we do something?” Mohajon asked.

“What? There is nothing we can do,” Maion answered. Then she lifted her mask again and downed the rest of her drink. “Actually, there is something you can do. You can get me another drink.”

Mohajon took the glass and went back to the bar. Maion watched him go. She then put her mask back on and left the dance floor. She walked around the side of the great hall until she reached an entrance to a hallway that led to other parts of the mansion. Although the path looked clear, she had hired various forms of security to bar anyone from accessing her home. She stopped just beyond the hallway entrance and looked out the window. The elephants were all asleep except for Deedee. She was walking around, excited by the large amount of people that had come to the mansion. Maion’s view became obscured by the reflection of a woman in the glass.

“I was wondering when we would talk,” she said as she turned around. She faced a woman dressed in a dark green gown with black lace and long black gloves. “Demonic.”

“Maion, nice to see you, too,” Demonic replied.

“I was beginning to wonder if you were going to show up at all, but then I saw the woman with pink hair. Seriously, Demonic, if you are going to infiltrate someone’s home you should have at the very least insisted Kat dye her hair.”

“I gave her the choice of wearing a wig, but she wasn’t happy about that idea. And I would never miss a party thrown by you. If I remember correctly you always had the best gatherings. Staying up until four in the morning, trespassing on private property, setting off fireworks...would you like to stroll down memory lane with me?”

“I would rather not. Look if you’re going to try and break into my mansion let me save you the trouble by telling you it’s impossible. I have countless guards patrolling every corridor, every entrance, and every room. No one you send could make it in alive.”

“That was always your problem Maion. You focus so much on security that you forget your foe just may specialize in infiltration and spying. I have many people under me that can easily gain access anywhere.”

“Oh yeah? Ha! I’ve got even more working for me!”

“I can assure you that you don’t.”

“Oh, I do! My assassins could easily beat yours!”

“Your assassins couldn’t beat their way out of a paper bag.”

Maion seemed to take incredible offense to this.

“I will bury you!” she yelled. A couple passing by stopped to stare at them. “What are you looking at?!” They quickly walked away. “When I have that file in my possession, I will destroy you.”

“*When you have the file?*”

“That’s right.”

There was a pause. Demonic stared intently into Maion’s eyes. Then she hitched up her dress and turned to leave. As she went, she called over her shoulder, “Before this is over, I will kill you.”

*That’s what you think,* Maion thought. She turned back to the window, only this time she didn’t watch Deedee. Instead she looked up at the stars. Her mind drifted back a couple of months. It was a few days after the Guatemala fiasco. Kitty and Cinta had come back to confess that they had failed in not only capturing Altojo, but Kat as well. They did, however, manage to bring back a remarkable gift: the scythe of Demonic’s top assassin. According to Cinta and Kitty, both of whom had fought the man before, the scythe had the ability to cut holes in the very fabric of space, allowing one to teleport virtually anywhere.



Teleportation! That had caught Maion's attention. She took the scythe and grounded Kitty for allowing her sibling rivalry and past with Kat to get in the way of her mission. After a couple of days of brooding over what to do, she had finally come to a decision. There was no choice but to ask for *his* help. She grabbed the scythe and went out onto the balcony. She unbuttoned the top few buttons of her blouse and threw her head back. Closing her eyes in deep concentration, she could feel the power surge within her rush to her bosom. The tattoo of the bird on her chest began to writhe. The ink outline became clearer. The wings began flapping. The beak opened and a screech sounded out. Then, the creature sprang forth from her chest. She could feel the rush of euphoria as the bird pulled away from her skin. It launched into the air, circled around her as it increased in size, and then landed on the balcony right in front her. She buttoned her blouse and hopped into the saddle on its back. She pulled on the reins and soared into the air.

The bird took her higher and higher into the sky until they were above the clouds. The sky above the clouds looked quite different from the sky below the clouds. For one thing, it was much brighter since nothing was interfering with the sun's rays. And it wasn't blue. In fact, with the landscape of cumulus-o-nimbus, everything seemed white. That made it all the easier to find the one reddish orange producer of color in the surrounding area. It was a windmill, built upon a piece of land that floated in the sky. It was an island amongst a sea of clouds.

The bird floated down and landed upon the island. There wasn't much to see. Grass covered the land. There were some flowers, a few trees, and...pinwheels? That was new. She'd have to ask him about that.

She dismounted the bird and walked toward the windmill. In front of the door she could see a man doing what she could only guess to be some form of karate meditation. He was tan skinned with medium length brown hair. He wore a fishnet shirt, a white karate jacket with torn sleeves, olive green pants, and black hiking boots. Around his head he wore a red bandana and around his neck hung a sparkling red pendant that seemed to catch the sun's rays. The most obvious feature about him, however, was the weights. Around his wrists and ankles hung bland grey weights that didn't look like much, but Maion knew from experience that they were in fact immensely heavy.

He opened his eyes and looked as Maion approached.

"You added pinwheels, Ikonu?" she asked.

"I decided to learn some origami while I'm here. It helps to pass the time," he answered.

"So I guess that means you fixed your computer?"

He gave her a look that read "dog, please."

"You're right, dumb question," she said.

He got up from his stance and faced her.

"So what do you want? Are you here for a friendly visit?"

This time it was her turn to give the look.

"Come on in," he sighed.

They strolled toward the windmill. Ikonu opened the door and let her in. Inside, computers, wires, cooling tanks, monitors, and various other pieces of electrical equipment filled the room, wall to wall and floor to ceiling. It was truly impressive, especially since he had built all of it. She walked to the center of the room where a light shone down on a table. She took the scythe off of her back and set it upon the table, then stared at him.

"I was wondering why you were carrying that," he smirked. "So what do you want?"

"I want you to analyze this weapon," she answered. "Apparently, this weapon has the ability to open holes in space and allow the user to jump through them and teleport anywhere in the world. I want to know how."

"You can't."

“Excuse me?”

“You can’t simply cut open holes in space. It’s impossible. If you’re talking about wormholes, there’s still no proof that they actually exist. It all goes against the laws of physics.”

“You’re talking to me about physics? Someone with your abilities?” she smiled.

He rolled his eyes. “So what is this for, anyway?”

“This scythe belonged to Demonic’s top assassin.”

“Top assassin? How’d you get it away from him?”

“Apparently he has an innate ability to lose things. Anyway, I figured with the power of teleportation at my disposal, I could easily take Demonic down by teleporting some of my own assassins into her headquarters.”

“If this thing really does teleport, chances are the user needs to know where they are teleporting to. Otherwise if you didn’t, you might end up in a wall or inside a person or an object that happens to be there. You don’t know where the organization is, so even if I was able to extract the power from this you couldn’t use it for your plan. This thing is useless to you.”

“Don’t be so quick to dismiss it, Ikonu. I may not have been inside the organization, but the scythe has. Now that has to account for something. You’re smart. You can figure this out.”

He heaved a sigh. He knew it was pointless to argue with her. He put his hand to his chin and went into deep thought. Maion remained quiet. She knew better than to disturb him while he was thinking. After a few minutes his eyes flew open.

“Footprints! I can check for footprints!”

“Footprints?”

“Yes, it’s a term they use to explain [blah blah blah, etc],” here he started talking in technical babble, saying things that Maion, nor anyone else, could ever understand.

“Ikonu!” she yelled, startling him out of his rant. “In English, please.”

“Think of it like a cell phone. Whenever you make a call from your cell phone, everything about the call gets recorded in a call log...where the call went to, what time it was made, and so on. That’s a footprint. It may be possible that whenever this scythe teleports somewhere, that teleportation also gets recorded in a log. And if it does work by creating holes, I could use that log to link up the entrances and exits of those holes and trace it back to a single starting point. Areas where the entrances and exits are in close proximity to each other probably suggest that that area is a battle field. Other areas where there are one or two exits probably would suggest that there was an assassination target in that area. However, if I could find an area using the log that shows an overwhelming number of entrances that lead to several far away destinations...then that is probably the organization’s headquarters.”

“You see? I knew you could do it.”

“Yeah right. It’s not as easy as that. It would be simple if this was a piece of electrical equipment like a phone or a computer, but we’re talking about a simple tool here: a piece of wood with a metal blade coming out of it. I wouldn’t even know where to look to find a log. And without the log, I couldn’t possibly locate the entrance and exit holes. There’s no way it can be done, Maion. This here is magic, not technology. It’s not my area of expertise. You should get someone else to help you.”

“But Ikonu, there is no one else. I don’t have as much faith in any of my other subordinates as I have in you.”

It seemed her words were falling on deaf ears. Ikonu kept shaking his head. Finally, an idea struck her. She didn’t really want to, but she knew there was one thing that could motivate Ikonu to do anything.

“If you do this and get me that teleporting power and find the headquarters...I’ll let you go.”

Ikonu froze. His eyes darted up to meet Maion’s.

“What did you say?”

“You heard me. If you do this, I’ll grant you your freedom.”

Ikonu's eyes glazed over, as if he was seeing something from his past. He slowly walked over to one of the monitors.

"Get out," he said in calm, quiet voice.

She reached out to grab the scythe.

"Leave the scythe," he said. "I'll send you an e-mail when I find something."

She smiled. Quietly she strolled out of the windmill. Truth be told, she really did need Ikonu. The boy was a genius. However, she had absolutely no intention of letting him go free. She would find a way to make it up to him when this was all over.

"Maion?"

She was awoken from her day dream. She was no longer on the island, but rather back at the party nearly four months later. Mohajon was holding a drink out to her.

"Thank you," she said and took a sip from it.

"Are you alright?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm fine. Come on, let's dance some more."

Demonic pushed the shrimp around on her plate. To someone passing by it may have looked like she was contemplating whether or not to eat it. However, she was really lost in thought. Memories were starting to well up in her. Not her memories, of course, for she was merely a creation, but memories from her creator: the original Demonic, as she liked to think of it. She was a copy made in the imagination of another person, a person who poured her very essence into her work and thus from time to time recollections of the original Demonic's childhood would spring to life. Demonic tried all she could to suppress these, especially now that they were starting to involve Maion.

*Maion. Something she said was intriguing. What was it? Once she got the file she would take me down? That means then that she doesn't have it. But if she doesn't have the file, then who does?*

This was making her angry. That document contained valuable information. That's why she thought it would be safe hidden among the myriad of other documents in the archives, but apparently it wasn't. Someone had broken in months ago and burned the archive room to the ground. Dolosus had been sent once the silent alarm went off to kill the intruders. According to him it was Kat, Altojo, and Crimson, but that was only his word. All the security cameras had either been burned to crisp, or had their tapes removed...by someone. Someone else was there and knew who the intruders were. Could it have been Maion? Or one of her agents? Possibly, but she would never know for sure. The fact that that particular document had been reported as missing scared her. The only safe thing to do was to kill Kat, Altojo, and Crimson, yet Dolosus had already showed experience that the three of them were liked to rely on others as backup. That's why she had let Kat join the organization; she had no friends nor backup there. She kept Kat alive to convince Altojo to reveal his true location. And the crows were getting closer and closer to finding Crimson. Soon, all three of them would be dead, and she would be safe from, presumably, everyone who had come in contact with that file.

*I can't make my move, not yet. I control Kat. Maion controls Crimson. Altojo seems to be the swing vote in all of this. Whoever controls him will win. If I make the slightest attempt at either of their lives, he'll join up with Maion.*

It was a very delicate situation. Altojo already showed signs of interest in her side by coming to the organization, but that could easily change. The best thing to do would be to convince him she was the only way they could "rescue" Crimson.

"Demonic," the boy crow whispered as he approached her a little out of breath. "We found her. We found Crimson."

"You did?"

“Yes, it wasn’t easy though. This mansion has so much security.”

“That didn’t stop you though.”

He smiled, “No, it didn’t.”

“Where is your sister?”

“She’s with Kat. We told Dolosus as well. Man, you are never going to guess what we caught them do-”

“I really do not care. Stop blathering like an idiot and go get their weapons.”

“Yes, ma’am,” he bowed and went running off.

Demonic smiled.

*All according to plan.*

Somewhere high above the mansion, an island floated in the sky. On that island was a windmill. In that windmill was a boy. In that boy’s head was a bunch of facts and figures about a particular scythe.

“That’s it then,” he said to himself with a smile. “I cracked it!”

He ran to a computer and started typing madly on the keys, punching a multitude of codes and formulas. At last, a map of the world appeared on the monitor. There were numerous dots flashing on the map, half of them were green and half of them were red. Many of the dots seemed to centralize around focused areas in the United States, Guatemala, or Japan. He took a second to look over his work, pressed a key, and watched as several lines began to cross the map, as if it were a game of connect the dots. He laughed triumphantly. Smiling he turned and looked at the scythe on the table. It was hardly a scythe anymore. The blade had been removed from the pole and pieces had been cut out. The pole was cut open and dissected. Microscopes were looking at various pieces of the weapon. Wires were hanging down from ceiling connecting in several places with electrical currents passing through to the other machines. Dishes contained pieces of the weapon submerged in various liquids.

Ikonu had tested that thing in nearly every single element on the periodic table. He had used every method of spectrometry, spectroscopy, and spectrophotometry. He had even resorted to using a crude form of alchemy that combined both science and magic. It wasn’t easy, but after nearly four months of straight work he had finally cracked the code to the scythe. It was strange. The wood of the core of the pole seemed to have some kind of inky substance in it. It was the pole though that had led him to the answer. Teleportation brought on a sudden change in temperature and climate. There were parts where the wood showed the first signs of rot from rain, parts where the ink was frozen from cold weather, even pollen was found. It was all in the ink, like every time the scythe’s ability was activated, the ink would rise to the surface. While on the surface, it absorbed many things from the environment that could all be tracked.

“I got this. Alright, time to send that e-mail.”

He wrote a quick note to Maion and pressed the send button. Then he leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes for a well deserved nap.

Dolosus, left alone to deal with the situation and all of his muddled up thoughts, took just a moment to clear his mind before following after Kat and the sister crew. He walked quickly, trying to cover distance without attracting unwanted attention from the few party goers who had decided to leave early. Finally, he found the girls standing at the edge of the half-circle driveway, where stretch limos were entering and exiting in the typically hurried fashion in which the wealthy prefer to travel.

Dolosus approached the girls and opened his mouth to speak, but Kat interrupted, looking quite distressed at his presence.

"You! Why did you follow me? I told you I had to-"

"Kat, listen to me," he placed his hands on her shoulders, "There's been some sort of... misunderstanding."

"What are you talking about?"

Dolosus opened his mouth, closed it, glanced around nervously and sighed. They had to work together on this mission. He'd have to let her know it was him. Slowly, he raised a trembling hand to his mask and pulled it away from his face. Kat's eyes widened, and color drained from her face.

"Holy shoot..." she whispered, placing a hand over her rapidly beating heart. She swayed as if about to faint again. Dolosus held her shoulders once more to steady her.

"I-I kissed...My God..." she trailed off and took a moment to clear her mind and regain her wits. She was steady on her feet now, but Dolosus still held her. She took a deep breath, then, blushing heavily, said, "I'm so sorry, I didn't realize..."

"I'm back!"

The male crow came back with the weapons. He handed the scythe to Dolosus (using gloved hands so as not to go mad) and the leaf to Kat.

"Hey, you two, listen up," the female crow said. "Now it wasn't easy finding her. This mansion was constructed in such a weird way it's very easy to get lost."

"I think it's magic" her brother said.

"It's not magic you idiot."

"Then how do you explain that we wound up on the roof top when we went down a flight of stairs?"

"Just pay attention to where you are going," she continued, ignoring her brother's question. "We got a guide for you. He'll be able to take you there."

She nodded her head over to a statue near the staircase leading into the mansion of a tiger bearing a crossbow on its back. From behind the statue out stepped a boy around Kat's age. He had long, white hair pulled back in a pony tail. He wore blue jeans, a white t-shirt with the logo TP on it, and a backpack. He was certainly not dressed for the masquerade. As he approached, Dolosus noticed a shadow pass both of the crows' faces. He was intrigued by this reaction, but thought better to question it later and get business done now.

"This," the female crow introduced, "is Nabin."

Nabin didn't say anything. Instead he just bowed his head, which Dolosus and Kat returned.

"Nabin has certain skills that will allow you guys to maneuver through the mansion uninterrupted," the male crow explained. "Nabin?"

"One of them just relieved someone of their post," Nabin said, without any emotion. "The path from the garden entrance is clear now."

"Alright then, get going," the crows said at the same time and then ran off to meet Demonic at the limo. Kat extended a hand toward Nabin and smiled.

"Hi, I'm Kat. It's a pleasure to meet you."

Nabin stared blankly at her.

"We don't have time for formalities. Come on," he turned on the spot and headed into the garden.

Dolosus and Kat followed. The three of them crouched behind bushes and darted through the shadows of the trees. Several times they froze for minutes in the flora because a light would suddenly fly on in one of the mansion's windows and a face would appear to look out into the garden. When the coast was clear they continued on until they reached a giant glass door in the side of the building. There was a man dressed in black standing outside the door.

"Guards," Kat whispered.

"That's fine. I can easily kill them," Dolosus whispered back.

"Stay here," Nabin commanded. Dolosus froze in his spot. No one had ever given him a command

before, except of course for Demonic. Just who the hell was this Nabin guy anyway?

Nabin calmly walked across the lawn. He approached the guard. Dolosus put his hand on his scythe, ready to come to the boy's rescue. But amazingly, the guard just stood there. Nabin actually tapped him on the shoulder and the guard opened the glass door for him. He waved the others over.

"That was amazing!" Kat explained. "How did you do that?"

"Yes, just what is this special ability of yours?" Dolosus asked.

Rather than answer them straight on, Nabin stood on his toes, reached up, and grabbed the face right off of the guard. Underneath was a face made of some kind of wood with rolling eyes and two lines drawn down from the mouth to the chin.

"A puppet?" Dolosus wondered.

"That's right. I have infiltrated this mansion with several puppets disguised as guards. The crows can't lead you to Crimson, but my puppets can."

He replaced the face mask of the puppet and entered the building. The puppet guard led them down several hallways and across a couple of large halls. Dolosus could understand how the crows could get lost. The mansion was like a maze. There were staircases popping in and out of walls, balconies from floors above, pillars that seemed to serve no purpose at all. The whole place was decorated with paintings and busts that seemed to centralize around a strange wonderland theme. The floors were black and white checkerboard. There were pictures of card suites and improper fractions, and a clock that had no face. The entire place looked like it sprang from the mind of a disturbed child.

A few times they had to duck in the shadows while the puppet guard went to "relieve" some other guards of their duty. It was nice because no matter how hard they hit him, he never went down. At long last, he took them to a shelf and pulled on one of the books. The shelf swung open to reveal a long, narrow passage way. At the end of the passage lay a deep, dark pit, and at the bottom of the pit was...

"Crimson!" Kat yelled.

"Quiet!" Dolosus hushed. "Do you want us to get captured?"

He was being logical, there could easily have been secret security anywhere. However, he felt a strange sensation appear in his stomach at the sight of Crimson. Her hair was still blonde, her clothes hadn't changed much, and she still wore that necklace with the red C. The only thing different was that she much dirtier and unconscious.

*This is the woman Demonic wanted me to kill. Now she wants me to rescue her. Demonic, what are you planning?* Dolosus wondered.

"Don't just stand there," Kat said to him. "Go get her!"

Dolosus swung his scythe in the air while keeping the pit floor in sight, yet nothing happened. No hole appeared. No one teleported. His powers weren't working.

"What's wrong?" Kat asked.

"I don't know," Dolosus answered. "Usually something happens when I swing my scythe."

"Your teleportation powers won't work in this mansion. There is more than meets the eye in this building. The crows don't lose their way easily. It's some form of dimension shifting about the whole building," Nabin explained.

"And with the dimensions already warped..." Dolosus began.

"Your powers won't work," Kat finished. "Alright, lower me down," she ordered as she approached the edge of the pit.

Dolosus grabbed her around the ankles and lowered her into the pit. She grabbed onto Crimson and nodded them to pull her up. Nabin gripped Dolosus and together they pulled Kat and Crimson out of the pit. Kat cradled Crimson in her arms and began to tear up.

"Oh, I missed you so much," she whispered.

And a voice said from behind them.

“Aw, I missed you too, sister.”

Owari

## 9 - History Lesson

### Author's Notes:

- Part two of the massively ginormous chapter of doom has arrived! Though, since I split it, it's technically two chapters. Whatever lol.
- There's some heavy stuff in this chapter. Personally, I really enjoy it. I think it's some of Brian's best writing, as far as this story is concerned.
- Enjoy! :)

"Aw, I missed you too, sister."

Dolosus, Kat, and Nabin spun around. There, blocking their exit, were Kitty, Cinta, and Feebus. Kitty was smiling menacingly, Cinta was twirling her hair, and Feebus was glaring.

"It's you three, again!" Kat yelled, grabbing Crimson tighter.

"Honestly, did you think it would be this easy to rescue your friend?" Kitty sneered.

"For a second, I kind of did," Dolosus whispered to himself.

"So there are four of you and two of us," Cinta said holding up the wrong number of fingers, "which means we each get two of them. Oh yay!"

"Take a closer look, idiot," Feebus said. "That one over there isn't real. He's made out of wood."

"So then there are only three of them? Oh man, this is going to be so much harder now," Cinta whined.

"That's okay, Cinta, you can have the boys," Kitty said. "The only one I want to fight is my sister.

"I'm not fighting you again. I just want to get my friend out of here," Kat protested.

"No can do," Kitty scoffed. "I got in trouble last time I let you go. Taking you out is the only way I can redeem myself."

Dolosus inched closer to Kat and whispered, "I'll take her. You and Nabin just get Crimson out of here."

"But your powers don't work in this mansion," Kat whispered back. "Last time you fought her you nearly got your butt kicked."

"That was because I was fighting both her and Crimson. Now there is just one to worry about."

"But what about the other one? The girl with the ribbons"

"She's no threat. I fought back in Guatemala. I didn't even break a sweat. Now go."

"But I can't leave you here by yourself. Maybe I'll stay and fight."

"In that dress and in heels? You'd never make it."

"If you two stopped arguing, maybe you would realize there is another one of you here. I can take out this Kitty person while the two of you get away," Nabin said.

Dolosus and Kat exchanged looks that said *We really don't have the time to argue about this and there isn't really a better solution*. Finally, they nodded their heads to Nabin. In a flash he reached into his pocket and grabbed what looked like a cross piece to a marionette with several buttons on it. He pressed a button and the puppet guard jumped forward, catching Kitty and Cinta off guard and knocking them into the wall. Kat grabbed Crimson, threw her over her shoulder and ran for it. Dolosus followed her.

"They're getting away!" Feebus yelled.

"I'll get them!" Cinta yelled, almost giggling, and chased after them.

Kitty rubbed her head and began to follow Cinta, but the guard puppet threw himself and blocked her path. She jumped into the air and kicked its head off. Then, intrigued, she turned and faced Nabin.



"You're a new face," she said.

"My name is Nabin, and I am your opponent."

He pressed another button on the controller. The headless guard stood up and bear hugged Kitty from behind. She squirmed and wriggled but couldn't get free.

Cinta chased Dolosus and Kat through the mansion. Without Nabin to guide them, they had to rely on their own senses to try and find a way out. Every so often Cinta would shoot a ribbon at them, and Dolosus would easily slice through it.

"Don't let them escape!" Feebus yelled as he ran to catch up to Cinta.

Dolosus and Kat ran through a pair of large doors and found themselves in the hall where the masquerade was. The party was over and everyone had gone home so the hall was empty, but this meant they knew where they were.

"There's the exit!" Dolosus yelled, pointing to the doors at the top of the stairs at the other end. They ran across the dance floor. Dolosus didn't see the ribbons wrap around his and Kat's ankles. They fell to the floor. Crimson slid out of Kat's arms and across the floor.

"These damn ribbons!" Dolosus nearly screamed. He cut them up again and actually began to stomp on them. "I have had enough of these things!"

"Dolosus!" Kat screamed trying to calm him down.

"Is he making fun of my ribbons?" Cinta wondered as she entered the hall.

"They...finally...stopped...moving..." Feebus panted.

"Feebus you really need to start doing some more cardio," Cinta said.

"Don't start...with me...Look...just kill them...alright?"

"Kill them? How? Every time I send out a ribbon he just cuts it up."

"Use the ribbons in your hair!"

"Those ones? Alright," Cinta groaned and untied the ribbons holding back her long hair. She held them aloft in the air and they sprang to life, just like all the others. She let go and the two of them zipped across the room toward Dolosus and Kat. Dolosus swung his scythe again and expected to cut them up. Instead, one of the ribbons actually evaded his slash, wrapped themselves around the scythe and slithered up the pole, up his arm, across his shoulder, and wrapped itself around his throat. He grabbed at it and tried his hardest to rip it off, but the ribbon only tightened itself. He looked over and saw the second ribbon had itself around Kat's neck.

"I really don't like to use these ribbons," Cinta explained. "They work so fast, they take all the fun out of the fight. These ribbons are made from a special material that will wrap itself around my enemy's neck and choke them to death. The harder you try and pull it off, the tighter it gets."

Dolosus was clawing at the ribbon so much that blood actually began to trickle down his fingers as his nails cut into his skin. Kat head began swimming. She couldn't stand anymore and fell to her knees. Cinta just watched while she played with her hair.

Kitty's tail wrapped around the puppet's legs and pulled it out from underneath it. The dummy went down and she was free. Before Nabin could press another button, she kicked the puppet into the pit.

"So, you're Nabin? My name is Kitty," she smiled. "So you control that thing with that gadget in your hand?"

"That's right. I'm a puppeteer."

"Well then, I guess I don't have much of a choice but to fight you."

"I hate to disappoint you, but I must confess I am not ready to fight. I'm really here to just act as a guide

for the other two, but we hadn't expected to run into anyone like you."

"So you're stalling me until the others can leave the mansion?"

"Pretty much, yes."

"Now I hate to disappoint you, but escaping Maion's mansion isn't easy. If they make through the maze of rooms and hallways, they still have to beat Cinta. She may be a ditz, but she can be tough...sometimes."

"I guess we won't know until one of us survives our conflict and goes to check on them."

"Sorry, but I have no interest in someone who can't fight," she said as she turned to go.

"I said I wasn't ready to fight. I never said I couldn't."

Kitty stopped. She turned and found Nabin sitting on the ground, cross-legged.

"If you'll give me just ten minutes, I will gladly battle you," he said.

"I don't know, I really should be going and kicking my sister's @\$\$, " Kitty pondered. Maion had grounded her before for letting her sibling rivalry get in the way of her duty. Her duty was to guard Crimson. So did she want to go after Kat because Kat had taken Crimson, or did she want to go after her because she wanted to fight her sister? She figured the safest route would be to stay and fight this guy. After all, he didn't look that strong. In fact, he looked a little worn and fragile. Plus, Cinta could take care of them until she got there. If all else failed, she had the ribbons in her hair that always killed her enemies.

"Alright, deal," she said as she sat down across from him on the floor.

Nabin took off his backpack. He unzipped it and dumped the contents out onto the floor in front of him. Out came several stick and ball pieces of the same wooden material as the dummy she had knocked into the pit. He opened a sheet of what appeared to be directions. Then, he took a screwdriver out of the backpack and began to assemble to pieces.

"What is all that?" Kitty asked him.

"They're the pieces to two puppets my master gave me. She told me to use them just in case I ran into a fight, but like I said I didn't expect to so I never bothered to assemble them."

Crimson chose this moment to awaken from her semi-coma. The first thing she noticed was her head banging and a throbbing pain from the bump on it. She had no idea where she was or how she got there. The last thing she could remember was Kitty and Cinta taking her down hallway in a hidden passage...then she leaned over a pit...then she started falling. Now she was lying on the floor of a giant hall that had walls lined with tables. True, her vision was incredibly blurry, but she could still make out the shapes of two people near her. One seemed to be tall and thin, and holding a stick of some sort. The other had long pink hair and was holding...a leaf?

*Kat? No way! Is it Kat? It has to be! With that hair and that leaf it has to be her!*

Crimson tried to sit, gritting her teeth through the pain in her head. As her vision got clearer she could make out that Kat was clutching at her neck. There was a blue strip of fabric running across it. It must have been on very tight because she looked like she was trying to get it off. In fact her face was turning blue. She had fallen to her knees. She was choking!

Crimson looked to the other person standing near her. It was the man from the bridge, the guy with the scythe who had tried to kill her three times already. What was he doing there? He also had a blue strip across his neck and seemed to be acting the same way as Kat.

Crimson looked around for some sort of explanation as to why her best friend and her worst enemy were both dressed very nicely and choking to death in a giant ballroom. Her roaming eyes landed on a pair of giant double doors. Standing in the doorway was Cinta, one of Kitty's friends and the one who pushed her down the pit. She was smiling and watching Kat and the man choke to death. She was the one doing

it. The things around their necks were ribbons. They weren't thinking straight because of the unexpected cut off from oxygen. Crimson had to do something, anything to save her best friend.

"How much longer are you going to be?" Kitty asked.

"Just a few more minutes," Nabin said as he tightened a screw.

They had been sitting in silence for what seemed like to Kitty forever. She was beginning to get bored. Nabin could see this as she let out a long sigh.

"So, Kat is your sister?" he asked.

"Hm? Oh, yes, she is."

"If she's your sister, why do you want to fight her so much?"

"We got into a fight a long time ago. We hate each other now."

"What was the fight about?"

"I barely even remember anymore. It seems like such a long time ago," her voice drifted off as her eyes searched the past. She shook herself. "Anyway, she ran away from home after it. She said she never wanted to see any of us again; mom, dad, and myself I mean. My parents got awful heartbroken about it. My mother cried for days while my dad just stopped paying attention to things, including where he was driving. He got into a car accident and died. My mom took herself shortly after that. They barely paid attention to me. Eventually, I set out on my own. Maion found me. She took me in, gave me food and shelter. In exchange, I gave her my services."

"Well, don't worry. I'm sure you two would have been good friends again."

"What makes you say that?"

"Your history. You were close once before. Once your history starts to repeat you'll be close again."

"Repeat?"

"History repeats itself. Everything that happens to everyone has already happened to someone else. There are only so many plot lines a life can take. The Earth is too old to keep coming up with new ones. The Aztecs, Alexander the Great, Atilla the Hun, Rome: all great empires that failed...that were destined to fail."

"I still don't-"

"Don't you get what I'm saying? I have never lost a fight before. I always kill my target. And when history repeats itself, it will repeat this battle too. You, as my enemy, are destined to lose and die in this fight."

"Target? Wait, just who are you anyway?"

"I was once Demonic's top assassin."

Dolosus and Kat were losing oxygen fast. Their faces were turning blue. Kat was on her hands and knees and even Dolosus was close to kneeling.

"You see?" Cinta whined to Feebus. "I told you that ribbon would kill them too quickly. It's too bad to. I've already fought the guy with the scythe, but I wanted to see how I would fare against that giant leaf thing-a-mabob."

"Duck!" Feebus yelled.

"Silly, you're not a-"

Cinta never finished that sentence. At that moment a saucer went soaring through the air and smashed into the side of her head. As she got hurt, the ribbon choking Dolosus and Kat loosened ever so slightly, just enough to let them catch a quick breath.

"What the hell was that!" Cinta yelled rubbing her temple.

"Look!" Feebus yelled, pointing with his wing. Cinta followed with her eyes, her gaze landing on Crimson. Crimson was standing tall, a fierce fire burning in her eyes.

"Nobody treats my best friend like that," she growled and pulled her katana from its sheath.

"Top assassin?" Kitty asked.

"Yes, this was back when the organization was first starting out. There were only a few members back then and, like I said, I always hit my mark," Nabin replied.

"So what happened?"

Nabin paused for a second to fasten the head to one of the puppets.

"How much do you know about Demonic's organization?" he asked.

"Not much," she replied.

"Do you know anything about the people who work for her?"

"I can guess they're evil people she hired to kill."

"Then you would guess wrong."

"Excuse me?"

"Demonic doesn't hire people...she creates them!"

"Wh-"

"That brush that she carries around has the power to create anything out of nothing. She paints things in the air and they come to life. One day I stumbled across this secret. My target was a little boy. Just before one of my puppets broke his neck he called out for his parents. For some reason that scream stayed with me for a while. It made me realize I couldn't remember my own mother and father. I had memories of growing up on a farm, of playing catch with my dad, kissing my mom good night. Yet, strangely when these memories came to mind, I could never see their faces. My parents were faceless phantoms in a sea of dreams. I wanted to find out exactly what was going on, so one day I snuck into Demonic's room and rummaged through some of her things. I found a sketch pad that had pictures drawn on a lot of pages. I thought that just meant she was an aspiring artist, but taking a closer look let me realize that all the sketches were of the current members of the organization. I even found a page with me on it. Well, as you can guess, I started putting two and two together and freaking out. I ran away from the organization. I followed all the memories I could muster to my 'original home.' Sadly, I found out the farm never existed. Demonic had made up all those memories when she made me. There was no farm, no mother, no father, no Nabin. I wasn't...I'm not real."

"Oh my God."

"That was pretty much my reaction. Eventually I started to act out. I wanted to find out who I really was. I wanted a real life. So, every opportunity I got I ran away from the organization. And every single time, she would send a pawn to go retrieve me. The farthest I ever got to getting away was when I was assigned to kill some guy in Japan. I sent a puppet disguised as myself in my place, sold my tickets, and was on the next flight to Egypt. I spent a year hiding, and building up a little puppet army for myself so I could fight back whenever Demonic found me. That was actually the reason why she created Dolosus. A man who is strong, agile, and teleportation ability? All the others she sent to bring me back from Egypt were defeated by my hand. So she made him, not to fight but to open a wormhole that I would fall into and get taken straight back to the organization. It was terrible. I spent so much time and money trying to get away, and in a split second I was right back where I started."

"So Dolosus took over your spot as Demonic's top assassin?"

"Exactly. Once he sent me back, Demonic put me in solitary confinement. Two years of being by myself have taught me some valuable life lessons. The most important is the lesson about destiny. I was created by Demonic to serve her. No matter how many times I tried to break out, I couldn't escape that

fate. I'm destined to be her servant until the day I die."

Nabin tightened one last screw and stood up.

"Okay, I'm ready."

The puppets he had built were only about half his size. Their bodies were so thin, they looked like they were made out of straws connected to balls at the joints. The heads were disproportional to the rest of the bodies. One of them had a single eyeball while the other eyesocket was empty. The other wore a purple bandana around its eyes and had long black hair. They were by far some of the creepiest things Kitty had ever seen.

Nabin waited for her to stand up. Then he reached in his pocket and took out the controller. He pressed a button and the two puppets started to twitch. Their limbs jerked into motion. Their heads reared up and looked ahead at Kitty. Then, without warning, the puppet with the bandana charged forward. Kitty countered the frontal assault by swinging her leg and kicking it clear across the room. She kept spinning and kicked a hidden dagger from her shoe at Nabin. He held up a hand to defend his face and jumped out of the way. He still got cut, but he bounced back and swung his controller, directing the one-eyed puppet to charge in. Kitty easily knocked this one away as well.

Nabin pressed some more buttons on his controller which directed the puppets to run in a circle around her. This time they both attacked from either side. Once again Kitty kicked them out of the way. She began to feel bad for Nabin. The fact of the matter was that the puppets were just too small and weak to do any actual fighting.

*I better end this before I embarrass him anymore.*

She ran right for Nabin. In such a tiny room, he couldn't really run away so he pressed a button and the blindfolded puppet jumped in front of Kitty to block her path. She socked it right in the face and sent it flying into the wall, again. Then, she kicked the controller out of Nabin's hand did a sort of cartwheel that resulted with him lying on his back on the ground and her pinning him down on top of his chest. She pulled her cell phone out of her pocket and pressed a button on the side. The antenna shrank inside the phone and out popped the blade of a dagger. She held the blade against his neck.

"Yield," she commanded.

"Never," he responded.

"I don't really want to kill you. In fact, I kind of feel sorry for you."

"You feel sorry me?"

"Yes! You believe in this history/destiny/fate crap and you don't even realize none of it exists. Nobody controls your fate. Not history, and certainly not Demonic. Look at us now! You said you would beat me, but I've beaten you."

"You think you've beaten me?"

Kitty suddenly felt very strong arms wrap around her and lift her off of Nabin. She tried to struggle, but the grip was too tight. She managed to turn her head slightly and saw it was the blindfolded puppet.

*But how?*

Nabin sat up and grinned at her. It was the first time he had smiled in a long time. It felt unfamiliar and alien, so much so that he stopped almost immediately.

"You think I need that controller to manipulate my dolls? Take a look at this," he said and indicated a mark on the ground he had been hiding under his hand. It was a circle with a strange symbol in the middle, drawn in Nabin's own blood. Kitty had a sudden flashback of the moment one of her knives cut his hand.

"You wanted me to cut you," she whispered.

"Well I wasn't going to cut myself," he said. "This symbol is a powerful, ancient enchantment that Demonic taught me. The enchantment gets activated when I draw the symbol in my own blood. It puts a part of my soul into whatever else has the symbol. The symbol is already drawn inside the heads of

these two puppets. Now we see as one. We speak as one. We fight as one.”

As he said all this, the one-eyed puppet picked up one of the daggers Kitty had thrown at him.

“You thought that was the real strength of my dolls. How cute. Anyway, like I said before: history shows that I am going to defeat you.”

The one-eyed puppet lifted its hand and threw the dagger right at Kitty’s face.

Crimson unsheathed her katana and ran for Cinta. Cinta screamed and ran away. She jumped on top of one of the tables and pointed her hand at Crimson. A band unwrapped itself from her arm and shot out. Crimson swung her sword and slashed the ribbon into pieces that fluttered to the ground. Cinta then had another ribbon wrap around the leg of a chair at the table and throw the chair at her foe. Crimson didn’t even stop running as she smashed the wooden chair. She jumped into the air, ready to cut into Cinta. The sword cut into the table as Cinta jumped to the next one. She jumped from table to table, using her ribbons to throw chairs at Crimson, who followed her across the table tops while smashing all the chairs to pieces.

Cinta jumped onto the hors d' oeuvre table, turned around, and shot two more ribbons. Rather than try to ensnare Crimson, the ribbons wrapped around the legs of the table she was on and flipped it. Crimson let out a scream as she fell to the floor amongst a myriad of silverware.

Cinta didn’t miss her opportunity. She threw out her hands and several ribbons wrapped around nearby tables. They lifted the tables up into the air and threw them all at Crimson. Crimson got up and darted back and forth, desperately trying to dodge the barrage of furniture. She missed a step and was flattened by one.

“I got her!” Cinta yelled joyously.

“Why were you frightened before? I thought you wanted to fight someone new,” Feebus wheedled.

“I did but...shut up!”

“I’m not beaten yet,” Crimson groaned as she lifted the table off of her. She stood up and held her sword at the ready.

*This girl’s strength is quite obviously long-ranged attacks, so I need to constantly get close to her,* Crimson thought.

She ran forward again. Cinta threw another table at her. This time Crimson summoned all her strength and slashed right through it, the two pieces falling to the ground at either side of her. She made it to the hors d' oeuvre table and made to cut right through Cinta’s feet. Cinta, however, had thrown a ribbon up to tie itself around a buttress. The ribbon pulled her up as Crimson’s sword slashed right through where her feet had been one second before. Cinta made it up to the buttress and held herself against it.

“You can’t get me up here!” she yelled, sticking her tongue out at Crimson.

*Damn it...*

Nabin looked down at the splash of blood on the ground.

“Clever girl,” he said.

Kitty stopped running and leaned against the pillar. She licked the fresh new wound on her tail.

*That was too close,* she thought.

The dagger had been maybe six inches from her face when her tail, which Nabin’s puppet had not restricted, shot up and knocked the dagger away, getting cut in the process. The blind-folded puppet had slackened its grip on her, and that was all she needed to wriggle free and run away. Now she was out in

the main hall outside the hidden passage, hiding behind a half-pillar that had a bust of Lewis Carol on it. *Okay, so the puppets are stronger and faster now. Big deal, I can still beat them.*

Her thoughts got interrupted by the sound of the bookcase opening. She peeked out from behind the pillar and saw the two puppets emerge from the passage. However, Nabin did not follow them. The two puppets split up and began to search the room.

*Where is he?*

She heard a thump above her head. When she looked up, she saw the one-eyed puppet crouched on top the bust. It looked left, then right, then down at her.

*Relax. Nabin isn't here. He can't see you, so there's no way...*

The one-eyed puppet held up its hand. A little slit opened and knife slid out.

"shoot!" Kitty yelled.

She darted out of the way as the doll leaped down from the bust. It landed and looked at her. It leaped at her as another knife popped out of the other hand. She tried to get away but the puppet was persistent. She dodged a couple of lunges from its knives until her back was pinned against a wall. The puppet made to cut through her head, but she moved and the knife stuck in the wall. She stumbled away from the doll, its head turning a full 360 degrees to follow, until she saw the second puppet land in front of her. It held up a fist which shot out at Kitty. She ducked and felt it go right over her head, and through the glass out the window. She ran and jumped into the air, a kick aimed right at the puppet. Even though it now had one hand, it was still deadly. It grabbed her foot and used her momentum to throw her into another statue, which toppled off its stand and shattered onto the ground.

"Haha!" Nabin's laughter echoed across the hall.

Kitty picked herself up from the rubble and pieces of the broken statue. She was pretty sure a bone was out of place somewhere.

*I don't understand. How could his puppets know where I am?*

She looked up and saw the two puppets staring at her. The one-eyed one had pulled its knife hand from the wall. The blindfolded one had its mouth open, and there was a speaker inside from which Nabin's voice was emanating.

"Are you confused? Did you really think you could beat me?"

"How are you controlling your puppets?" she yelled back.

"Remember what I said about the enchantment?"

"You said...you see as one, you speak as one..."

"We fight as one."

"That puppet with the eye...you can see everything that puppet sees. Its eye is connected to yours. Just like this one's voice and mouth are connected to yours!"

"Exactly."

Cinta stuck her tongue out at Crimson.

"I'm going to rip that tongue out of your mouth," Crimson snarled.

"Good luck reaching it!" Cinat yelled back.

Crimson looked around until she found a rather long piece of ribbon on the ground. She tied the end to the hilt of her katana. She then threw her katana at Cinta. The sword flew through the air and cut through the ribbon that was holding Cinta up. She screamed as she fell.

"Oh my butt!" she cried. "I think I landed on my butt!"

Seeing Cinta wimper almost extinguished the flame that had been burning inside of Crimson. She walked over to Cinta, who looked up at her with a tear rolling down her face.

"I hurt my butt," she sniveled.

"I know," Crimson said in a calm, soothing voice.

"Forget about your butt!" Feebus yelled. "Kill her!"

"What?" Cinta asked and looked over at him.

"She is your enemy! God, can't you do anything right?"

"Alright, that is it!" Crimson yelled at Feebus. "I have had enough of you! This poor girl is trying her hardest and all you can do is ridicule her!"

"Hey, nobody talks to my Feebus that way," Cinta whined and slapped Crimson across the face.

Crimson was shocked. Her instincts kicked in and she slapped Cinta back. Cinta was shocked as well. She slapped her again. And again. And again. The two had an all out slapping match. Finally Cinta screamed and grabbed Crimson's hair. Crimson screamed and kicked Cinta in the shin. The two squabbled about until they pushed themselves away from each other. They went right back to their fight of Cinta throwing ribbons and Crimson cutting them up.

"That sword of hers is the problem!" Feebus yelled. "Get rid of it!"

"Ok, seriously," Crimson whispered to herself as she ran to the wall and cut the rope that was holding up one of the chandeliers. "Shut up."

The chandelier fell right on top of Feebus. There was a short squawk, and then silence.

"Feebus!" Cinta screamed.

With renewed resolve for vengeance, Cinta jumped into the air and spun around so fast, almost all the ribbons came off of her and darted toward Crimson. They made a circle with a three foot radius. Before Cinta could constrict the circle, though, Crimson sliced through it with her sword.

Cinta landed. She took off her last two ribbons, held one in each and ran toward Crimson. Crimson ran towards her. Cinta used the ribbons as whips and tried to hit Crimson. Several times Crimson got slapped in the face and several times received many minor cuts. Crimson tried to cut up Cinta, but the girl was moving too fast. She started darting in between the pillars on the outside of the dance floor. Crimson cut down some of the pillars and tried her best to keep up. Finally, Cinta hid behind one of the pillars and sent the last ribbons out to tie around Crimson's hands. Crimson was trapped with each hand going in a different direction around the pillar. Cinta pulled hard and Crimson's face smashed into the beam.

Blood trickled down from Crimson's nose. She was starting to get tired. She wanted the fight to end. As she caught her breath, she happened to glance over at Kat and Dolosus. The two were sprawled out on the ground now, barely moving. Determination built up in her. Crimson pulled back as hard as she could and tried to force Cinta out from the other side. Cinta matched her in the tug of war. Then, Crimson let go. The built up tension flung Cinta around the other side. Crimson went to meet her. At the moment the two literally ran into each other, there came a sound. It was the sound of metal piercing through flesh and bone. The two of them looked down. Crimson was holding onto her katana. The blade was running into Cinta's body, her blood being spilled onto the ground. Cinta looked back up into Crimson's eyes.

"That was fun..." she said and fell backwards.

The one-eyed puppet opened its mouth and shot two daggers at Kitty. She dodged them, crouched on all fours, and ran as fast as she could down the hallway. The dolls may have had more strength, but she knew the layout of the mansion better than anyone. After a couple of minutes of being chased, she managed to out maneuver the two and get away. She snuck up a staircase and down another hallway that led her back to the hall with the secret passage. From up high, she could see what a mess they had made it. She made a note to apologize to Maion later for it.

The good thing about having a cat like muscular system was that she was amazing when it came to moving in stealth. She crawled up to the balcony and peeked over the edge. Just as she thought, the



blindfolded puppet was still in the hall. It was on guard patrol.

*He's using those puppets as himself; one for seeing and one for talking, both for fighting. That's what puppeteers do. They make their marionettes do all the hard and dirty work for them. Meanwhile, the puppeteer hides somewhere safe. That one puppet is guarding the passageway, so Nabin never actually left the hidden room. And while the one that can see is off chasing me somewhere else in the mansion...* She pulled herself over the railing and landed lightly on the floor. The blindfolded puppet didn't move. *Just as I thought.*

She walked over to the bookshelf and grabbed the book that opened the secret passage. Another good thing about having cat-like abilities was a heightened sense of sound. So when the blindfolded puppet stepped on a piece of the broken statue, Kitty instinctively knew to duck. The puppet's fist punched through some of the books. It then raised the arm without the hand and shot about five needles. Kitty managed to stumble out of the path of three, but took two to the arm. She stumbled away. Distracted by the pain of the needles, she didn't hear the second puppet appear behind her, punching her full in the side of her head. As she flew through the air, it opened its mouth and launched another dagger. Kitty contorted her body at the last minute and took the dagger to her side instead of her chest. She screamed in pain as she fell to the floor. When she looked up, she saw the one-eyed puppet running towards her again. Her tail rose up and made to strike the puppet, but it caught her tail in its hand. She threw a punch and it caught that as well. With her other hand, she grabbed her own dagger and stabbed the puppet through the eye. Without a free hand, the doll couldn't defend itself. It didn't scream. It was an inanimate object that felt no pain. But Kitty felt a sense of pride now that she had blinded her enemy.

"You think I'll go down that easily?" Nabin called.

The blindfolded puppet tackled Kitty and knocked her away from it partner. She slid a few feet on the floor. She was bleeding, she was bruised, and now she was surrounded. The blindfolded puppet opened its mouth again.

"Did you really think you could beat me? I told you history repeated itself."

*I don't get it. I took away its eye. How could he still see me?*

The puppets began to close in.

*Even before I took the eyeball. The blindfolded one knew I was here. How?*

They drew closer.

*Maybe...maybe it wasn't the puppet who saw me. Maybe it was the puppeteer! Maybe Nabin is in the room. That's it! He's hiding in the room somewhere, watching the battle from a safe hiding spot where he can see everything!*

She closed her eyes.

The puppets both withdrew a dagger, ready to kill.

"I told you, but you just didn't listen," Nabin gloated.

Kitty spun around 135 degrees and threw her dagger 50 degrees upwards. The weapon soared through the air and struck a mass behind a curtain.

"Ahh!" Nabin screamed.

The curtain moved and Nabin fell from behind it onto the floor, the dagger sticking out of his chest. The puppets started twitching and fidgeting. Then they fell lifeless to the floor. Kitty walked calmly over to Nabin.

"How," he whispered through a labored breath. "You found me. How?"

"These ears aren't for aesthetic purposes," Kitty said, pointing to the triangle ears on top of her head.

"Even though you were making your voice come from the puppet, you still needed to talk. All that thing was was a speaker for your microphone."

"But I don't understand," Nabin gasped. "What about history? I've never lost--"

“To hell with history!”

Nabin stared into her eyes. At that moment, his eyes seemed to get brighter, as if a shadow had moved away.

“You said before...that no one...controls...our fate...”

“That’s right. You weren’t destined to be Demonic’s slave, she just brainwashed and manipulated you. You’ve changed your history more times than you know. When you ran away and got caught, you eventually stopped. You’re history didn’t repeat itself then. And now...”

“Now I’m...dying. Ha...no way to repeat that. You were right. I only regret...not realizing the truth...a little earlier. Thank you.”

The last breath escaped his lips and spoke no more.

Owari.

## 10 - Falling

### Author's Notes:

-This is, what, the twentieth chapter in a row that I've had Brian doing? Yeesh, I'm such a bum. Well, the next chapter is going to be written by me, and it's going to be the final chapter!

-I absolutely love Kat and Dolosus. I squeal with fangirlish delight when they have their moments. And speaking of fangirlish delight, there's a line in here that I think would be an excellent jumping off point for some yaoi. Let's just say I might start shipping IkonuXDolosus pretty soon. What would that be called? IkoDolo? Like how there's NaruSasu and KuraHiei and those abbreviations...

-I'm ranting. Enjoy this chapter!

"Deedee, come!" Maion called.

The elephant strolled over to Maion and lifted her onto its back with its trunk. Maion patted the creature behind the ears as Mohajon approached.

"All of the guests are gone," he said.

"Very well. Call for the cleanup..." her voice trailed off. She was staring at the front door of the mansion. Mohajon turned and looked in the same direction. The front door of the mansion opened and out came the silhouettes of three people. Maion couldn't see who they were, but she did see them run down the driveway and hop into a limo.

"I thought you just said everyone was already gone?" she asked Mohajon.

"They are," he replied.

The limo sped away from the mansion, its tires screeching at the speed. Maion furrowed her eyebrows. She kicked the sides of the elephant and the beast lumbered toward the mansion. It set her down on the steps with its trunk. She ran up and threw open the doors.

"WHAT THE HELL!" she screamed at the top of her lungs.

She was met by the sight of her ballroom completely trashed. All of the tables were overturned, the chairs were smashed to pieces, the hors d'oeuvres, dishes, and cutlery were scattered about, a chandelier was in pieces on the ground. She walked down the stairs, drinking in the damage done by...something. Then a sight caught her eye. She quickly descended the rest of the way and sprinted over to one of the pillars. Lying on the ground was Cinta. Her skin was pale, there was a deep wound in her chest and blood was spilling forth. Her chest did not move up and down. Her eyes had lost all the luster of joyous, blissful youth. The only thing left was the haunting smile, permanently set on pale, frozen lips.

"She's dead," Maion whispered.

"Dead? How?" Mohajon asked.

"It was Demonic's people. No one else could have done this," she said emotionlessly.

They could hear footsteps slapping against the floor. They looked up and saw Kitty burst into the room.

"Crimson's gone!" she yelled.

Maion and Mohajon stared at her.

"Didn't you hear me? Maion, Crimson is-"

She cut herself off at the sight of Cinta. She staggered forward a couple of steps, and then screamed her lungs out as tears exploded from her eyes. Mohajon caught her as she was about to fall.

"CINTA!" she cried and heaved herself against Mohajon's chest. Mohajon looked at Maion for help, but

Maion avoided his gaze. Kitty's crying was almost more than she could bare. Luckily for her, before she could start weeping, they heard a rustle behind them. The chandelier shook just slightly, and it seemed something beneath it was struggling to get free. Feebus emerged from the smashed glass and twisted framework of the chandelier. His feathers were ruffled, and one wing appeared to be twisted at an unnatural angle.

"I'm too old for this," he grumbled, picking at a few crooked feathers with his beak, "I swear, the crap that bimbo puts me through. When I find her, I'll peck right through that thick skull of—Kitty! What's wrong?"

Kitty managed to stop bawling and went down to a mere sob. She bent down next to Cinta, refusing to look on the wound which had caused her death, and instead, took Cinta's hand in hers. There was one ribbon left, wrapped around her wrist. Kitty pulled it off and tied it near the end of her furry cat tail. Just where Cinta had always said it looked so pretty.

Feebus watched this. He opened his beak, no doubt for some other insult or complaint, but he closed it. He walked towards her slowly. When he finally reached her side, he knew. He knew that she was dead. She was gone. His only trusted friend, the laughter in an existence defined by death, had now been taken by that death. He came closer, and nestled himself in the crook of her neck, surrounded by her golden hair. Closing his eyes, a tear fell from his eye and sank into his feathers.

"You...idiot..."

Maion had never seen anyone react to a person's death the way Feebus and Kitty did. Her subordinates really cared about each other. For some reason she couldn't explain that notion lit a fire in her. She was determined now more than ever to take Demonic down. With rage spilling from her eyes, Maion turned on a heel and marched out of the ballroom.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"I'm going to my office," she spat.

"Why?"

"Demonic went too far this time. Infiltrating my mansion and killing my employee...during my party is unforgivable."

They had reached her office. She strode right to her desk and turned on her computer.

"Three months is long enough. If Ikonu hasn't figured out how to use the scythe by now..."

"You've got mail," the voice on the computer rang.

"He sent you a message," Mohajon pointed out.

Maion moved her mouse over to the mail icon on the screen and opened it. Her lips moved silently as she read the e-mail from Ikonu. Slowly, they began to form a smile. She finished reading and reclined back in her chair.

"What are you smiling about?" Mohajon asked.

It had been about a week since the masquerade at Maion's mansion. Crimson had made a full recovery from her injuries. She, Altojo, and Kat were happy being reunited with each other. Demonic had holed herself up in her room. The crows were cleaning out Nabin's old solitary room. Dolosus spent most of his time reading and trying to avoid Kat. The two of them had not talked to each other since the...incident. She wanted to talk to him about it, that much was clear. However, he just didn't know how to handle this situation. In the two years he had been alive on the planet, he had never kissed anyone. Now, because of a simple lip contact, all these feelings were exploding in him: uncertainty, fear, happiness, tension, nervousness. He hoped if maybe he never spoke with Kat about it that it would all go away. He was in his room when it all began.

He sat up in bed. He could have sworn he heard a boom from far off. The training sessions were done

for the day. He thought maybe he imagined it. As he began to lie back down, there was another boom. He sat still, not moving a muscle and straining his ears. A minute passed by and there was another boom, this time closer than the last two.

Curiosity got over him and he got off his bed and walked over to his door. When he opened, the hallway seemed empty. Then, a tiny white ball zipped down the hallway and stopped in front of his door. It hung suspended in midair for a few seconds. Dolosus extended his hand out to the ball to grab it. Once his finger touched it, the white color suddenly turned to an orange yellow and began to luminesce. He gasped and quickly closed the door as fast as he could. The explosion knocked the door off its hinges and threw him against the wall.

When he opened his eyes, smoke and dust were filling the hall. A shadow passed by. Then another one. The sounds of yells and screams started filling the hallway. A man appeared in Dolosus's doorway. It was someone he had never seen before. The guy, if it was a guy seeing as how the outfit was a bit androgynous, was wearing a blue and off-white tank top and rock climbing shorts with huge gloves that looked like giant bear paws. He roared and ran at Dolosus, swinging his paws. Dolosus leaped out of the way. When his paw made contact with the wall, there was rumble and blast of dust and a crater appeared.

Dolosus looked over to his scythe mounted on the wall. The enemy made another attempt to punch Dolosus. Dolosus ducked under him and ran to the wall. He grabbed his scythe, spun around, and slashed the guy's head off in a single movement. The head rolled across the floor and the body limply fell to the ground.

Dolosus ran out of the room. It seemed he had been plunged into chaos. Almost every single member of the organization was out fighting against some person Dolosus had never seen.

"What the hell is going on?" he wondered out loud.

A razor sharp disk flew past his face and almost took off his nose. He turned and saw another man throwing the disks at him. Dolosus swung his scythe and jumped through the hole. He appeared in Demonic's thrown room. Demonic wasn't sitting on her thrown. Instead was gazing in a mirror. Dolosus ran up to her.

"Master! We are under attack!"

Demonic didn't answer him.

"Did you hear me? We are under attack!"

"I know," she whispered. "It's Maion. I knew she would make a move, but I didn't think it would be this soon."

"How did she get in? How did all these people get past security?"

"I don't know, but she found a way."

There was a pause. Then, Demonic pulled out her paintbrush and started to draw something on the wall. It was like a fairy looking creature with tiny yellow horns and green hair, except its body looked like it was made out of a marshmallow. The creature immediately sprang to life and fluttered about. It landed on Demonic's shoulder.

"Go around to all of the members of the organization and tell them that we are under attack. Tell them to fight and kill anyone they do not recognize, and don't hold back," she told the marshmallow fairy. The creature nodded its head and fluttered over to Dolosus and began to speak to him in a high squeaky voice.

"Master Demonic says-"

"I heard her!" Dolosus snarled.

The fairy fluttered away. There was a brief moment of the sound of fighting and explosions as the door to her room opened. Then there was dead silence again. Demonic heaved a big sigh.

"Master, what can I do?" he asked.

“You’re job,” she replied.

Kat had to jump out of the way as a flaming yo-yo flew at her. She had been visiting Crimson with Altojo. The two of them were trying to decide what to do now that the three of them were together. Then, out of nowhere, the room seemingly exploded and all of these people came pouring in. They had no idea what was going on, until Crimson pointed out that she had seen some of them during her stay in Maion’s mansion. Now Crimson was fighting a very young, nun-like girl who was using a cross as a dagger, Altojo was up against a man with red claws and a woman who was throwing lemons, bottles, pieces of clothing and an assortment of other random items, and Kat was dodging flaming yo-yos being controlled by a shirtless man with light blue, almost white hair. She tried to blow him away, but every time she launched a gust his direction, he would just have a yo-yo wrap around something, like a support beam, and pull himself out of the way. Then he would throw the other yo-yo at Kat who would have to abandon her assault and get defensive. It was all so hectic.

She held her leaf behind her and focused her power to form a small whirlwind in the crux. The man pulled his yo-yos back and got ready for another round of attacks. Kat swung and launched a twister that was still connected to the leaf. He pulled himself out of the way, but the twister was still going. Crimson ducked and rolled away from the nun, and then threw her katana into the tornado. Altojo snapped his finger and a wall of fire sprang up around Crimson, keeping the nun at bay. Kat redirected the tornado back to her foe. He tried to pull himself out of the way again, but Crimson’s katana sliced right through the yo-yo string and he fell. Kat dispelled the twister. Then she swung the leaf as hard as she could. The man never even hit the floor. A giant gust hit him full in the chest and blew him all the way across the room and through the wall. Kat picked up the katana and threw it to Crimson who caught it, jumped through the fire, and stabbed the nun in the chest. The two of them turned to Altojo. The man with red claws was running toward him. Crimson jumped next to him and cut off one of his hands. Kat blew back all the lemons the woman was throwing at them. Altojo created two fire balls and threw them at his opponents, incinerating them.

The three of them paused for a second to catch their breath, and they smiled. It had felt like so long since they had fought together. Then, a tiny marshmallow like fairy unexpectedly came by and landed on Kat’s shoulders.

“Master Demonic says the organization is under attack,” it said in high, squeaky voice. “She says to fight and kill anybody you do not recognize. Do not hold back.”

Kat nodded her head in acknowledgment and the fairy flew away.

“So Maion is attacking the organization,” Kat said.

“Is this all because of me?” Crimson asked.

“Well, we won’t know until later,” Altojo said. “Here come some more!”

He was right. A couple more of Maion’s employees were running right toward them. They were led by the man in the gray and purple suit who greeted Crimson when she had first come to the mansion. The three of them stood their ground and got ready to fight. The man held out four fingers to them and arrows, red and blue, shot out and speedily came at them. Kat tried to blow them away, but the arrows just ripped right through the wind. Suddenly, a hole in space appeared in front of the arrows and swallowed them up. It closed, then re-opened behind the man and let all four stick into his back. He screamed out in pain and stopped running. A big mistake on his part, as another hole opened right beside his neck and the blade of a scythe popped out and beheaded him. The body fell to the floor and Dolosus appeared next to Kat and the others.

“I’ve been looking for you guys all over the place. I assume now you realize that we are under attack?” he asked.

"We realized, yes," Crimson said.

The tiny fairy flittered back to them. This time it landed on Dolosus's shoulder.

"My master has news for you," it squeaked.

"I know, we're under attack. I was there when she made you."

"Not that. She says she and the crows have found out how the enemy has broken in. She says a hole has been opened in the storage area. She wants you to go close it."

"Me? Why me?"

"She says you are the only one who can."

With that, the tiny fairy flittered away.

"I have to go," Dolosus said.

"I'll come with you," Kat said. "It might be a trap."

"No, you should stay here and help them," Dolosus tried to order.

"We can handle things here," Altojo said. "You two go, now."

Before he could say anything, Kat grabbed his hand and began to run with him, leaving Crimson and Altojo to face the onslaught.

As they ran, Kat suddenly realized she was holding onto his hand and abruptly let go of it. They both blushed, but did not stop.

"So, I haven't really talked to you in a while," Kat stated.

"I know," Dolosus responded. "I've been busy."

"Oh, busy, I see. Well, do you think we should talk about what happened at the masquerade? You know, between the two of us?"

"I really don't think there is anything to talk about. We were both wearing masks, we both thought we were with strangers, it was an honest mistake."

"What if it wasn't a mistake?"

Dolosus did not reply to this but kept his silence.

"What about the dancing? What about you saving me from that creep? What about the ki-"

She was unexpectedly cut off as Kitty appeared out of the blue and kicked her full in the chest. Kat went flying through a door into what used to be somebody's private quarters. Kitty clenched her dagger as she landed and went into the room. Dolosus stopped running.

"Kat!"

"Go, Dolosus, quickly," Kat coughed out as she tried to stand up. "You have to close their entrance. Besides, I can handle her."

Dolosus didn't want to leave Kat to deal with Kitty alone, but there was some truth in what she said. He had to stop Maion's people from getting into the mansion, or else there would be no end to the invasion. Plus, if Kat fought Kitty she would most likely forget what they were talking about, thus saving him from an awkward and possibly regrettable conversation. Without another word, he turned and ran.

"You killed my best friend," Kitty snarled.

"I did not, but I'll willingly fight you," Kat corrected and swung her leaf.

Dolosus made it to the storage area. It was basically a giant warehouse, almost empty except for a couple of crates here and there. It was where the organization stored its goods. He had been expecting there to be some sort of hole in the wall with enemies marching in. However, the hole the fairy had talked about was a hole that looked almost identical to the ones he made in space with his scythe. It was a wormhole that connected Maion straight into the organization's headquarters. But how? The headquarters' location was supposed to be a secret. Even if she had figured out where they were located, she could have never copied his ability. It was a one of a kind power.

The place was empty, leaving him to believe that most of Maion's people were already there. This must have been set up since early in the morning. He darted over to the hole and stuck the head of his scythe into it. A short burst of power sprang from the hole. Slowly but surely it began to close. The space distorted itself as it tried to go back to what it used to look like. He pulled his scythe out and the portal was completely gone.

"Hey, did you close that?"

Dolosus whirled around. In the doorway stood a man with tanned skin, medium length brown hair, a red bandanna around his head, and a red necklace that glimmered in the light. He wore a mesh t-shirt with a karate jacket with torn sleeves and olive green pants. Dolosus also noticed he was wearing huge weights tied to his ankles and wrists. He would have been perplexed by this, but after working with Demonic's creations for so long, nothing perplexed him anymore.

"And you are?" he asked.

"My name is Ikonu. Say, are you Dolosus? Demonic's top assassin? I can tell because of that scythe you're carrying. Plus, you would be the only person who could close the hole I made."

"You made this hole?"

"That's right. Maion brought me a scythe she said you lost while you were in Guatemala. I analyzed it forever, but finally figured out how your power works."

"Well, then, I guess I have no choice but to kill you," he said and ran at Ikonu. As he got closer he started to notice a strange sensation welling up inside of him. His feet felt so much lighter. His hair began to stand on its ends. Blood was rushing to his head. He could literally feel all of his internal organs suddenly shift upwards. Then, in a strange phenomenon, Dolosus fell...up. He felt like he had just been dropped off a cliff, but he was going in the completely wrong direction. He looked up and saw the ceiling coming up to meet him. He twisted his body around and braced himself for impact.

He landed and rolled across the ceiling, finally stopping. Gritting his teeth, he tried to go against the pain and stand up. His eyes looked around. Everything seemed like it was normal except that he was now on the ceiling. It felt just like being back on the ground. He looked up...or down. Above...or below him was Ikonu, smiling and waving.

"I bet you're wondering how you got all the way up there, huh?" he yelled. "Well, let me save you from confusion. This is my power. Somehow, I have the ability to manipulate and change the gravitational pull on things, including humans. It's a power I discovered back in high school when I accidentally made a bully fly up into the sky and never come back. Maion found me and taught me how to control my power and use it at my own will. I haven't really been able to ever explain it. That's why I wear these weights, to help anchor me to the ground. Look, I'd love to stay and chat, but I've got a bone to pick with Maion."

"Wait! Maion is here?" Dolosus yelled.

"That's correct. She was one of the first people through the portal. She promised my freedom and I've got to go make sure she completes her promise."

"Freedom?"

"Yes, I'm kind of working for her against my own will. Once she taught me how to use my power I tried to leave but she wouldn't let me. She beat me into submission and kept me her prisoner." As he said this his hand clasped his necklace. "That's why I don't really want to kill you, because I have no animosity towards you. Once I'm free, I promise I'll come back and let you down."

He turned and headed back toward the door. Dolosus knew he couldn't let him get away. It was a direct order from Demonic to kill anyone who worked for Maion, and that meant this guy too. He thought maybe if he got his feet back on the ground he could get his gravity under control again.

Quickly, he swung the scythe and cut open another portal. He jumped through it. Usually when he went through the portals he felt fine. This time, however, because of the change in gravity, he felt immensely



sick and almost like his body was contorting itself. When he came out of the exit, he was out of breath. He had to stop and pant for a couple of seconds, but he was back on the ground. Ikonu was stopped in his tracks. He was wide eyed and in complete shock that somebody had made it back to the ground against his power.

Dolosus regained his composure and charged forward for an attack. Ikonu regained his wits and held his hands up for defense. Dolosus swung his scythe. Ikonu swung one of the weights. The two met each other. There was a huge clang as metal clashed against metal. The force coursed through their bodies, separating the two of them.

Ikonu swung another one of his weights. Dolosus ducked and made to slash right through Ikonu's ankles. At the last second, Ikonu changed his own gravitational pull and flew up towards the ceiling. He landed gracefully on it and threw his hand out to Dolosus. Dolosus felt the strange sensation come over his body again and felt his inside shift forward. He suddenly went flying, this time toward the wall. He swung the scythe in front of him and fell into another hole before he could hit the wall. Again he could feel his body contort. The first time it was a shock to his system, but this time he was prepared for it. The portal opened up at level with Ikonu. Dolosus couldn't walk on the ceiling, but the momentum he had from falling into the wall propelled him forward in great range for another attack. Ikonu jumped and changed his gravitational pull again, this time back to the floor. Dolosus missed, but cut another hole and appeared where Ikonu was about to land. Ikonu, seeing this, changed directions and landed on the wall. The two stared at each other.

"So is this how you fight? Just run away from your opponent?" Dolosus instigated.

"Well, it always worked before," Ikonu said. "No one has ever been able to get out of my power before."

"Huh, well there's a first time for everything."

He cut another hole that exited right above Ikonu's head. Dolosus came out and swung his scythe. The blade cut through one of the fastens that tied the weights to Ikonu's body. The weight fell to the floor as Ikonu fell to the opposite wall. Dolosus felt the sensation again as he fell back towards the ceiling. He cut another hole and jumped out onto the floor.

"It's your power!" Ikonu yelled. "That's how you've been able to get back to a regular gravitational pull! My power focuses on a singular object, but if that object disappears then there's no gravity to change. Furthermore, because of your ability to manipulate space, you can automatically get back your original gravity!"

"You're pretty quick when it comes to analyzing your opponent," Dolosus sneered.

"Well it helps to have such an interesting target to analyze. I don't suppose we could stop this fight and I could do some more research on you?"

"There's no way I would ever let anyone poke and prod me!"

"Too bad. There's probably a lot more to your power than you currently understand," Ikonu sighed.

"Alright then."

Dolosus felt a wave of energy suddenly hit him. It was coming from Ikonu. As the wave spread out in all directions, the windows in the room all began to shatter. The shards of glass fell to the floor, but they never landed. A few feet off the ground, the shards changed directions and all flew at Dolosus. He cut another hole to escape, but when he jumped out the other end, the shards all changed direction and followed him.

"Remember, I've mastered my power!" Ikonu called. "And that includes making objects be gravitationally pulled toward a single source...like a person."

So that means those shards are going to follow me no matter where I go, Dolosus thought. He teleported himself out of the way, but the glass just made a u-turn and headed right back to him. He turned and ran as fast as he could. As he looked over his shoulder he could see the shards were hitting

the floor as they approached him, closer and closer. He teleported himself on top of the crates and jumped from crate to crate to get some more distance. He had no idea what he was going to do. The shards turned around and followed him, sticking into the crates whenever they missed him. Dolosus swung his scythe again and jumped through the portal. He wasn't concentrating on any specific location, just as long as it wasn't in the storage area. Surprise dawned on him as he saw that he had teleported himself to the room where Kat and Kitty were fighting. The two stopped their clash for a second as the sight of Dolosus running by, chased by a couple hundred pieces of flying glass was not something either of them saw every day.

Dolosus didn't want to get caught in their fight, so almost immediately he cut another hole and ended up in the cafeteria. He thought moving away from Ikonu would stop the changed gravity of the glass, yet as he looked back at the hole that was still open the glass came flying through. Quickly, he overturned one of the tables and ducked behind it. The shards all struck the wooden table and wedged themselves deeply into the wood, so much so that the tips began to pop out on the other side. Dolosus cut another hole and went back to the storage area. He turned around and closed the hole as quickly as possible so the shards couldn't follow.

After the hole had closed he felt another blast of energy. Ikonu hadn't moved from his spot on the wall. This time, all the crates rose into the air and floated there, no longer bound to the earth. Ikonu pointed to one of the crates and it flew en route for Dolosus. Dolosus jumped out of the way as the crate smashed onto the floor, scattering hundreds of pieces of wood and a couple of tools of various shapes and sizes. Ikonu directed another crate to try to smash into Dolosus. He jumped out of the way again, but not before getting a couple of splinters.

It's pointless to try and dodge all of them, Dolosus thought. I have to focus on killing him.

He leaped out of the way as two crates collided into each other and teleported himself on top of one of the floating crates. Ikonu directed crate after crate to fly into him as Dolosus jumped from one to the next, all the while getting closer and closer to Ikonu. Ikonu noticed this and changed Dolosus's direction again. Dolosus had to grab onto the crate he was currently standing on to keep from falling. Now he was facing the floor as if it was a wall, and the wall that Ikonu was on became the ceiling. Dolosus climbed onto the right edge of the crate and looked up in time to see another one about to smash into him. Instead jumping out of the way he opened another portal which sucked the crate up and released it to hit Ikonu. Ikonu was able to move a little bit to the right, but the force of impact was still enough to blow him away a couple of feet. Dolosus saw this as an opportunity to cut another small that led to the place where Ikonu would land and stuck the blade of his scythe all the way through it. He would have been able to kill him, but the crate he was standing on suddenly lost its floating ability and fell back to the floor. The unexpected movement jerked the blade out of the hole and Ikonu safely landed on the wall. Dolosus teleported himself onto the final floating crate, this time standing upright with normal gravity.

That scythe is keeping me from stopping him, Ikonu thought. I can't let this drag out forever but I don't want to kill him either.

He looked down at the floor and scanned all the debris from the smashed up crates. A sword caught his eye. He smiled.

Dolosus steadied himself. Without anymore crates to jump on he would have to open another portal that would be pretty close to Ikonu. He gripped the staff and held the blade behind him, getting ready to swing. At that moment, Ikonu focused his power on the scythe itself. The weapon instantly grew immensely heavy. It was so heavy that Dolosus couldn't swing. Instead it dropped right down toward the ground. He held onto the staff to keep it from falling, but it was so heavy it felt like he was holding onto a couple hundred pounds of weight.

"Mastery over my power has led me to have a few tricks up my sleeve," Ikonu gloated. "If my enemy has a weapon, I can make that weapon's weight grow too heavy to hold. Right now that scythe feels like

it weighs about three hundred pounds. Let's see if you can hold onto four hundred."

The scythe suddenly got heavier. Dolosus gritted his teeth, but his arm felt like it would detach itself.

"Oh you are persistent," Ikonu said. "Well how about eight hundred pounds."

That was too much. The scythe tore from his hands and plummeted to the ground. There was a huge explosion and a cloud of smoke rose and covered everything. When the smokescreen cleared they could see the scythe lying in the center of a huge crater.

"That's a good scythe," Ikonu said, surprised. "It didn't break. Whoever made it should be proud of his or her work."

Dolosus glared at Ikonu.

"I've already lost two other scythes. I'm not about to lose a third!"

"Well, too bad!"

Ikonu held out another one of his hands. The sword that was lying on the ground, below Dolosus's crate, twitched and then fell upwards. Dolosus pulled his head back to avoid getting hit in the face with the sword. However, Ikonu had changed his gravitational pull as well and was now in the air behind Dolosus. He grabbed the sword as it flew by and swung it. Dolosus screamed as the blade slashed across his back. Before the blood could finish spraying out, Ikonu changed his gravitational pull again and flew up to the ceiling. He landed and looked up at Dolosus.

The wound wasn't nearly enough to kill him. It had been cut too fast and in a sloppy manner. Yet it still hurt and shocked him. It took a couple of seconds to recover. Over the past year he had been punched, kicked, burned, blown away, choked, slapped, poked with a dagger, and had his shirt torn with a sword, but it had been a long time since someone had cut his skin and made him bleed with a blade. It took a couple of seconds to recover. He looked up and glared at Ikonu.

"Are you ready to give up," Ikonu asked.

"Never!"

"Fine," he sighed. "But I'm not like the assassins that you work with. I'm just here to get free. Maybe I can make him pass out through blood loss," he mumbled to himself.

Ikonu jumped in the air and changed his gravity again. He fell toward Dolosus, sword ready to cut him again. Dolosus stepped back and tried to grab him but he was too fast. Ikonu hit the floor and, without stopping, fell again. Only this time he fell diagonally toward the wall. He hit the wall and flew straight at Dolosus again, spinning in the air to avoid getting caught. Dolosus wanted to grab him again, but he had to avoid getting hit by the weights. As he dodged the weight, Ikonu found his opening and sliced his arm. Again it wasn't deep, but it still hurt.

Ikonu jumped from wall to wall to floor to ceiling, always coming back to Dolosus and always giving him a new cut. Most were shallow and some didn't even bleed. But others were deeper and bled out awfully. The wood of the crate was showered with his blood. Dolosus tried to think of something but nothing came to mind. He was too high up to jump and even if he did Ikonu could have easily turned that against him. He felt powerless without his scythe.

Ikonu landed on the floor. He jumped up again and held his sword ready. As he flew by Dolosus he swung and left a long and deep gash going up Dolosus's front, showering blood about them. He kept going, but suddenly stopped. There was a tug at his leg. He looked down. Dolosus had grabbed onto the weight that was tied around his ankle. The two of them were nearly the same weight. The force of Ikonu's momentum had pulled Dolosus off the crate, but now two different gravities were keeping them suspended in midair. They could do nothing but struggle as they both felt like they were going to fall.

Dolosus tried to climb up Ikonu's leg. Ikonu kicked him, Dolosus grabbed Ikonu's foot and held it away.

"Get off!" Ikonu yelled, but Dolosus refused to let go. Ikonu tried to make Dolosus heavier. He slid down off Ikonu's leg but still held onto the weight. Ikonu slashed the sword through the tie and finally separated them. Dolosus fell a couple of feet back onto the crate, but Ikonu had a lot longer to fall and

the force of impact felt a lot harder. The wind got knocked out of him as he hit the ceiling.

"You...jerk..." he tried to gasp.

That's it, he thought. No more mister nice guy.

The funny feeling came over Dolosus again, but it was slightly different from before. Instead of his organs shifting in a direction, they felt lighter. His feet left the platform and slowly began to rise in the air. He was floating, weightless.

What's going on, he wondered.

He floated up until he was level with the windows. Then, in an instant, his body fell to the side and out of the window.

The sun was so bright out. It was a wonderful, cloudless, blue sky day. It took him a few seconds for his eyes to adjust to the outdoor lighting. It still felt like he was falling though. He looked below him to see where Ikonu was sending him. His heart nearly stopped. Below his feet was the sun. The yellow orb was shining brightly, and he was heading right for it. Above him he could see the building of the organization getting smaller and smaller.

Dolosus screamed. It wasn't a cry of anguish or rage like he was used too, but a cry of terror. For the first time in his life he was truly afraid. He was going to die. His scythe was gone, he had no way of getting back down, and he was getting closer and closer to the sun. Images began to loop in his mind. One was of him burning up in the Earth's atmosphere. Another was of him suffocating in space. There was nothing he could do, except continue to scream as he fell into the sky.

"Dolosus!"

He looked up. There was a tiny spot above him that was growing bigger.

"DOLOSUS!"

He recognized that voice. It was Kat! She was flying on her leaf. Air streams were shooting out before her and she was riding on them like a surfboard.

"Kat! Help me!" Dolosus screamed.

"Hang on! I'm coming!"

The air streams circled around him. She went as fast as she could and was finally able to catch up. He reached out and grabbed her hand. She pulled him onto the leaf, but she couldn't stop him from falling.

"What's going on?" she screamed

"It's this guy's power! He has a mastery over gravity!"

"Don't worry, I'll save you!"

She closed her eyes. Marks and tiny translucent wings appeared on her ankles. The wind around them grew stronger and she was able to stop his ascent. They hovered for a second as the wind below the leaf built up, and then they plunged back to the building. Kat held onto him the entire time.

"Listen," Dolosus yelled over the wind. "I'm sorry I was avoiding you before! I just didn't know what to think or do about that thing!"

"I'm not sure now is an appropriate time to discuss this!" Kat yelled back.

"Just know this: I'm not sorry it happened! I'm actually glad it did!"

Kat looked at him, blushing.

"We definitely need to talk about this some other time!" she yelled.

He nodded his head and looked back at the building. They were getting closer. He didn't know what he was going to do, but he knew he refused to lose.

Kat soared in through the window. The wind whipped around the place and blew all the shattered pieces of debris everywhere. Ikonu had come off the ceiling and was on his way out when he got caught up in the gale. Kat let go of Dolosus and he fell back onto the ceiling. She soared over to the corner and landed onto the floor, preparing to stay back and let Dolosus handle this but not if he needed her help

again. The wind died down and Ikonu stared at Dolosus.

"I'm glad you're still alive. I was afraid I had killed you."

"You can't kill me that easily," Dolosus growled. "This fight isn't over until I say it's over."

"Listen, I am getting tired of this. I just want to go see Maion so I can get the hell out of here."

He ran over to where Dolosus's scythe was still sunk into the ground.

"And I'll take this with me!"

"No! Don't!" Dolosus yelled, but it was too late. Ikonu had grabbed onto the handle of the scythe.

Images and hallucinations flashed in front of his eyes. Memories of people he knew like his friends and family. Yet the mirages were being twisted and distorted into monsters and horrors. Ikonu let go of the staff and screamed while clutching his head. Whatever power he had over Dolosus and the scythe was now gone. Dolosus fell off the ceiling, his fall broken by a gust from Kat. He quickly ran over and grabbed the scythe. Ikonu got over his momentary madness. He was just in time to see Dolosus get ready to cut his head off.

In a flash Dolosus swung as Ikonu leaned back. The blade soared just over his head. Ikonu jumped backward and landed on the wall again, afraid for almost losing his head.

"I said the fight isn't over until I say it's over," Dolosus said. "And I say it's over...now!"

In a huge motion he swung the scythe, leaving a giant tear in space. Instantly the air in the room started getting sucked into the hole like a vacuum. Dolosus stuck the blade into the ground and grabbed a hold of Kat before she could get sucked in. All the debris started flying in the room and into the hole.

"What's going on? What have you done?" Ikonu yelled.

"You wanted to send me into space, right? Well, fair is fair. This particular hole leads to a black hole somewhere in the universe. You can't escape it!"

Ikonu's feet began to lift off of the wall. He closed his eyes and focused as much of his power as he could to stop the gravitational pull of the black hole, but it was too strong. The ties around his ankle and wrist broke and the two remaining weights flew into the hole.

"NO!" he screamed. "I...WON'T...GO!"

He tried to fight it, but his struggling grew weaker and weaker, until finally he couldn't fight it anymore.

He got sucked into the wormhole and his screams became lost. The hole closed and everything went back to normal. Dolosus and Kat tried to catch their breaths. They were now standing alone in the nearly empty storage room.

Altojo grabbed his enemy's face and lit a fireball in the palm of his hand. The foe went down, no longer distinguishable. A tiny fluttering sound caught his attention. The fairy landed on his shoulder and whispered into his ear.

"My master needs to see you...in private," it squeaked

Owari.

## 11 - Artists

### Author's Notes:

-Hey there! D.A. here with the latest chapter, which actually did not take nearly as long as I thought it would. A few things to note:  
-I'm not very comfortable writing fight scenes. Brian's generally better at that, but I gave it my best shot, and apparently it came out alright.  
-I'll also be doing the next chapter, which features another epic fight, and which will be the final chapter!!  
Woo!!  
This all being said, enjoy :D

Kat wanted to put the world on pause. Finally, she had found an opportunity to speak with Dolosus alone—and he had even agreed to it. But Maion's invasion was still well underway. Each passing moment brought the organization closer to a glorious victory or a devastating fall. More importantly, Altojo and Crimson were still fighting, and their welfare weighed heavily on Kat's troubled mind. Why couldn't time just stop and wait for her to catch up?

She looked over at Dolosus. He seemed to be okay, save for being a little winded and a few cuts that still bled just a little. Most would close fairly soon, but the slash running up his torso worried Kat. She had no medical supplies on her, and anything in the storage room that could have helped had been lost in Dolosus' battle with Ikonu. She sighed.

"Stay still for a sec, I'm gonna see what I can do about that cut." She instructed, and began removing the bandages from around her feet and ankles.

"Kat, I can handle this, don't-"

"Men," Kat interrupted, sighing and rolling her eyes, "would you just shut up and let me help you for once?"

"You kind of just saved my life."

"...That doesn't count."

"Oh, okay." Now it was Dolosus' turn to roll his eyes. Kat laughed and went to work, first carefully peeling the blood-stained fabric of his shirt from his skin, then wrapping the bandages around his body to stanch the bleeding.

"Aren't you going to need those?" Dolosus asked.

"Not really. I mostly just use them to cover up these marks," Kat said, gesturing towards the tiny, wing-shaped marks on each of her ankles, "but everyone here already knows about them, so no biggie." Kat finished fixing up Dolosus' wound to the best of her ability, and for a moment, there was silence.

"...I meant what I said up there." Dolosus began, "you know, when you, uh... saved me."

Kat blushed, and butterflies swarmed in her stomach. Doubt, however, lurked in her mind. There was no way. He couldn't mean it. Why would he? Are you really that stupid? Why would he want to kiss you? As if he could feel anything for someone like you.

"Dolosus, you were in a life or death situation," she said, unable to look him in the eyes, "I don't know if you really realized..."

"I don't regret anything," he insisted, "I'm happy about what happened between us. It just, you know..."

took me a while. I'm not used to this. Emotions and... affection. I'm not good with things like that." But Kat still looked doubtful. He sighed, "What can I do to convince you?" She said nothing. Dolosus was at a loss. Finally, he put his hands firmly on her shoulders and looked her right in the eyes, hazel burning into gold.

"Kat, I mean it this time," he said. Then, he pressed his lips against Kat's and kissed her. Butterflies the size of hawks thrashed about in her stomach as if to break free. She wrapped her arms around his neck and opened her mouth to receive his tongue. She could not bring herself to believe what was happening. All this time with Dolosus, going on missions, living in the Organization, and she had never dared to think that they would be like this. Dolosus held her close, his arms now around her waist, and he felt as if he were falling into the sky once more.

Neither knew how long they spent thusly engaged. When they slowly separated, both reluctant to do so, they were silent for a long while.

"...We need to get back to the others." Kat said, at last.

"Yes..." Dolosus said quietly, "Demonic is calling me to fight. I feel her urgency."

Kat nodded, and Dolosus raised his scythe, then swung it down to create a wormhole leading back to the main hallway of the Organization's headquarters. No doubt, the others were still fighting there.

"I've got a bad feeling about this," Dolosus muttered, and the two stepped into the portal.

"Demonic wants to see me? Now? In the middle of all this?" Altojo wondered out loud. He listened closely and determined that the fighting had died down a little, but that could simply mean that Maion's force was taking time to re-group and prepare for a second assault. Then, he got to wondering why Demonic would want to see him alone. She probably had orders for him regarding the current situation. But then, she knew that he worked better with Crimson and Kat. Why was it just him?

"Crimson, which way to Demonic's room?" he asked, as he had no convenient way of determining this without sight. He heard her footsteps across the floor, then she stopped and called to him,

"In the direction of my voice."

"Thank you." Altojo turned, but as he was making his way to the throne room, he heard a familiar voice, "Crimson, Altojo!" Kat cried out to them as she and Dolosus stepped out of a wormhole in the main hallway. Kat sighed in relief, seeing that her two friends seemed virtually unharmed but for a few minor cuts and bruises.

"Seems like you've fared well here." Dolosus observed.

"Naturally," Crimson responded, facing the two, "But I highly doubt this is the end."

"Agreed," said Altojo. He walked towards their voices and joined the group. He faced where he figured Dolosus stood and said, "your master wishes to see me alone. Any ideas why?"

Dolosus shrugged,

"Does it matter? You don't exactly have a choice in the matter. You have to go."

"...I see." He said, and nodded. He paused briefly, then said, "Dolosus, I wanted to thank you for saving Kat from that man with the arrows earlier."

"It's... nothing, really," he said, shifting uncomfortably in this unfamiliar situation, "she's already made it up to me, to be honest."

"Regardless, I believe I now know for certain where your heart lies." Altojo offered his hand, and a small grin touched his lips, "I'd be proud to consider you a friend."

He hesitated a little, but then Dolosus took the offered hand, with a just a hint of an awkward smile.

"That's for me as well," Crimson said, and placed her hand over Dolosus and Altojo's, "you have been fighting quite a battle, Dolosus. But as long as you protect Kat... you have my trust."

Kat placed her own hand over Crimson's. She sniffed, trying desperately to hold back her tears. She seemed to struggle for quite some time to find the right words to express her gratitude, but then simply said,

"I frickin' love you guys."

It was at that moment that Demonic's messenger, the marshmellow fairy creature, returned. It landed on Altojo's shoulder and said in its squeaky, mouse-like voice,

"The master is getting impatient. Please report to the throne room—immediately!"

Kat, Dolosus and Crimson had stayed behind to stave off the second wave of Maion's cronies, which had arrived as expected. When Altojo had left them to meet with Demonic, they had been fairing well, and so he was not overly worried. Besides, he knew of Dolosus' skill and power first-hand, and he would be protecting Crimson and Kat. He figured there was no real cause for concern.

Altojo closed the oak doors behind himself and entered the throne room. He focused his hearing and heard a person's body nearby; Demonic, no doubt. She approached him hastily, rather than barking at him from her chair as was usual. Her footsteps were strong and deliberate. She stood before him and spoke,

"I trust you know why you've been called here."

"...No, actually... I don't." Altojo responded, frowning slightly.

"No? I instructed that blasted fairy to tell you." She sighed in aggravation, "No matter. I'm sure you are aware of what has happened here, at the very least?"

"I understand what anyone in my position would."

"You understand that this is over that file. A file which contains my downfall, supposedly. Even I am not entirely aware of its contents. Maion wishes to gain this file and take me down. Clearly, I cannot stand by and allow her to do so."

"And what does this all have to do with me?" Altojo was getting tired of this. Let Demonic and Maion settle their feud. He did not care. He wanted to be with his friends. That was all.

"This is all out war, Altojo. It concerns all in contact with either side," she said, sensing his impatience, "Maion has long been my rival, but I never foresaw an attack so soon—and on so many fronts. As we speak, my strongest face hers. Those gifted with marvelous and frightening abilities are pitted against each other. But, alas, in the end, is it all futile? Are their efforts, and mine, for nothing? Only bloodshed will show me the answer. The strong prevail, and the weak become their food. Then, when all is said and done, the strong shall write history and become the heroes. Such is the natural order of things."

"Impressive," Altojo said, "an entire monologue saying virtually nothing."

"Are words truly so useless to one with such hearing?" she said with a hint of amusement. Her voice was oddly calm and confident. Her words alone would imply worry and anxiousness, but her heart beat evenly, her muscles were relaxed, and her entire body sounded at ease. This was wrong. Altojo listened for anything else unusual, but the raging battle just beyond those wooden doors distracted him. A girl screamed distantly. Was it Kat? Crimson? He had to get back to them!

"Get to the point, already," he said impatiently, ignoring her previous comment, "Why did you send for me?"

"Altojo... Kat is in grave danger."

Panic struck him like lightning, sending a shock of fear through his veins.

"I knew it! I should never have left them—I have to get back there!"

But when he tried to run to the door, he couldn't. He tried once more to move his feet. They were stuck to the floor.



“What have you done?!” Altojo snarled, and his body temperature began to rise. As flames sprung from his hands, however, he heard Demonic move suddenly, and now his wrists were weighed down somehow. Next, he felt a liquid of some sort creeping down his wrists, to his hands, dousing the growing flames. It was sticky... her ink! She had smothered his flames with her ink! But this weight on his limbs... “You’re probably rather confused. Disorienting, isn’t it? Not accustomed to this helplessness, obviously.”

“Lying dog!”

Demonic laughed, and continued,

“I never lied. Kat is in danger. Grave danger. But now you can’t do anything about it. My ink has seeped through the cracks in the floor to encase your feet. I have painted chains on your arms connected to the floor, and smothered your flames. You have been defeated, Altojo,” he felt cold, sharp metal against his neck, “if you have any last words, I would hear them. Chose carefully, I don’t allow rough drafts.” A touch of amusement sounded in the last sentence. There was a pause.

She had tricked him... distracted him with meaningless words to prevent him from hearing the movement of her ink. And now he was going to die. He had expected the whole “life flashing before his eyes” experience, but his mind was blank. But as Demonic pressed the blade against his skin, obviously becoming impatient, Altojo thought of his friends. Kat and Crimson would be okay. Dolosus would protect them. But if something happened to him...

“If I see Dolosus again any time soon, I’ll kick his @\$@ right out of the afterlife.”

Demonic laughed,

“I’ll be sure to relay that to him.”

Maion’s scouts were not giving her much positive feedback on the invasion. Demonic’s fighters were truly powerful. It seemed that she had underestimated them. This was why she had decided to step in for herself. No use trying to wittle down the pawns. It was time to check-mate the king, and Maion knew that she herself was the only one capable of bringing her down.

As such, Maion had opted to make use of a passage to Demonic’s room that one of her spies had made her aware of during the course of the invasion. A system of passages ran through the walls of the building, which were made just wide enough to allow for a relatively thin person to move about in them. It took a little longer than expected, as the passage was difficult to navigate, with few hints as to where she was. It was necessary, however. Her target was the strongest she could hope for, and dealing with underlings may needlessly tire her, or cause her to lose her focus.

Finally, she reached what seemed to be a dead end. Maion pressed her ear to the brick wall and listened closely. She heard a man and a woman speaking. The man’s voice sounded only slightly familiar, but the woman’s, she recognized immediately as Demonic’s. Maion frowned. Then, quite suddenly came a noise. A piercing sound. The sound of metal in flesh. Maion knew it well. Demonic had eliminated another obstacle. Time was running out, and Maion knew she had to act.

Stepping back from the wall, she examined it closely, taking in and scrutinizing every brick. At first, it looked completely ordinary. Soon, however, she saw that one brick was loose and stuck out ever so slightly from the rest. Maion, perplexed and rather curious, removed the brick and watched the wall. Nothing happened.

*Of course... Maion thought, smiling, Demonic would never resort to such cliches. But how to get through...*

Demonic stood over Altojo's body, watching blood continue to spill from his neck onto the marble floor. She smiled vaguely.

"Good thing I opted for tile. It would take ages to clean that out of a carpet."

A sound. Demonic whirled around, searching for the source. She could see nothing unusual. No one was there but herself and Altojo's corpse. Then, it occurred to her. She knew the sound. It was the brick. Someone had entered the walls and had reached her room. They had removed the loose brick, alerting her to their presence, and now all that stood between Demonic and the intruder was the remainder of the brick, wood framework and plaster. Demonic readied her brush, muscles tensing slightly. She heard the rustling of clothes beyond the wall. Her foe was moving. A battle was near. All at once, the wall blew apart. Demonic grunted and raised her arms in front of her face to protect herself from the falling debris. Chunks of brick, wood and plaster fell, and a cloud of dust obscured Demonic's vision.

"Who is there? Show yourself!" she called out, her voice strong, not betraying a single hint of fear.

"You mean you don't know?" came the answer from the dust and debris. Demonic squinted and saw a dark form walking towards her as the air began to clear.

"Maion..." she said, "What took you?" her lips twisted into a sneer, and she regained her composure, "Don't you think we've played this game long enough?"

"My thoughts exactly," Maion responded. The dust had cleared from the air by now, leaving Maion and Demonic facing each other, and a massive creature looming some distance behind the former.

*So that's how she blasted through that wall...* Demonic thought as she gazed on it. It was an enormous spider. Its back nearly brushed the top of the cathedral ceiling of the throne room. The head was of a woman, with stringy locks of white hair hanging about her face, six gaping red eyes, and a wide, fanged grin. From the main body shot out eight hairy legs, with a pair of giant hands attached to the front two. *Impressive...* she thought, *and I'm sure she has even more up her sleeves. Even I don't know every tattoo at her disposal. This will be interesting.*

"So, my dearest friend," Demonic said as she walked towards Maion, "Ink versus ink, it seems. Your power is truly impressive. Such a shame for it to be lost to the—"

The spider's left hand slammed down where Demonic had been standing just seconds ago. The room shook and tile cracked from the impact.

"I have no interest in whatever you have to say to me. Just shut up and fight me."

The spider brought its face in close to devour Demonic, its fanged mouth open wide and ready to taste human flesh. Demonic reacted quickly and jabbed the wooden end of her brush into one of its fiendish eyes, then pulled it out and wiped the fluids off on her robe. The creature wailed in pain and drew back, and she saw her chance.

She readied her brush and began to paint in the air in front of her, ink rushing to the tip. The spider was slowly regaining its senses. A little more ink. A couple more strokes. It was getting closer.

Finally, it was done. A flash of green light, and a raven spread its wings and took flight. Maion frowned. Demonic grinned confidently. They both watched as the black-feathered creation soared around the flustered spider, its beak digging into its prey's flesh. Gashes appeared, one after the other, blood spilling and screeches of pain echoing through the room. Finally, the great arachnid seized the bird with one of its hands and slammed it down onto the floor. With one last strangled chirp, ink spilled, and all that was left of the raven was a black puddle on the floor.

"'Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore'.'" Maion said, a smirk on her lips, "That one is from Poe, by the way."

"I'm fully aware of the literary reference, thanks. You're not all that damn clever. And your beast is not

all that strong.”

Maion looked up at the spider. Demonic’s raven had managed to cripple two of its legs and cause it to lose quite a bit of blood. It swayed awkwardly, dizzy from its injuries, but not quite finished yet.

Demonic decided that would have to be remedied. She sent ink to the tip of her brush, but rather than painting any sort of beast or creation to do her will, she simply swung it in slightly curved lines through the air. Now, several thin, crescent-shaped ink strokes hung in the air. As the spider slowly regained its bearings, Demonic thrust her hand out in front of her, palm open, as if she were pushing the air. The ink soared towards the beast, and cut through three more legs, the head and main body. Blood sprayed everywhere, and the creature’s body collapsed onto the floor with a heavy “thud!”, tile cracking beneath it. Maion scowled and closed her eyes, and gradually, the spider and the blood it had lost seemed to dissolve into the air until it was gone, leaving no trace of its presence.

*One down*, Demonic began readying herself for a counterattack, *what will she try next?* Her brush danced in the air, and soon she had painted a new weapon for herself. She took hold of the spear with her right hand as soon as it had solidified, holding the paintbrush with her left. Thus armed, she charged at her foe, blade at the ready. Maion clenched her teeth into a snarl and prepared herself.

The first thrust of the spear missed. As Maion began to throw a punch, however, Demonic slammed the pole into her side, sending her sprawled onto the floor. Demonic stabbed downwards at her, but she rolled to the side and the spear glanced off the tile, putting Demonic off balance for a moment. This gave Maion her opportunity to get to her feet. She sent a punch that connected with Demonic’s stomach. She was stunned, and a few more blows landed before she thought to retaliate. She swung her spear blindly, not being able to aim or think properly under Maion’s assault. The tip of the spear made a thin cut just below Maion’s bust, and Demonic took the extra second she had gained to step back and put some distance between herself and Maion. She soon regretted having allowed that extra space.

Maion threw her hand out in front of her, and a tattoo of barbed wire running up her arm sprung from her skin. She swung her arm, using the wire as a whip of sorts, with one end still connected to her arm to allow her to control it. Demonic jumped back, but the barbs succeeded in tearing the front of her robes and cutting through the flesh of her chest. Demonic flinched from the new pain, but the wounds were not deep. Maion swung the whip again. The wire wrapped around Demonic’s spear, and with one strong tug, Maion pulled it from Demonic’s grasp and sent it flying across the room, where it liquified into the ink that had created it. Another swing of the whip. Demonic dodged this one, but Maion quickly used it’s momentum to aid a second swing, which sent barbs digging into Demonic’s arm. She grunted in pain, but continued to dodge and receive blows.

Maion smiled like a cruel child over an ant hill. How she enjoyed this—the sight of her rival prantzing about like a puppet on a string in her attempts to avoid the wire. Soon, Demonic was panting, sweat beaded her forehead, and blood trickled slowly down her arms and chest. Grinning madly, Maion swung the whip hard. This time, she aimed to do some major damage.

“Wha...What?!” Maion gave a start, disbelief overtaking her. Demonic had not dodged the whip. She had not even tried. Instead, she had raised her arm in front of her and let the wire wrap around it. The barbs sunk into her arm, but Demonic did not show her pain.

“You’re absolutely mad!” Maion cried out. She tugged slightly on the wire, but it was embedded in Demonic’s arm and would not move easily. With a look of grim resolution, Demonic suddenly pulled on the wire with all of her strength. Both women exclaimed in pain.

Demonic had literally ripped what had remained of the wire in Maions arm out of her body. The wire tore out of the lower layers of her skin, leaving a bloody gash where it had just been. Demonic, however, also paid for this maneuver. The barbs dug even deeper into her arm, and blood drenched her robes.

Gasping with shock and pain, Maion stared at her own bloody arm. Never had she experienced this kind of pain. Her mind went numb with it, which gave Demonic the time she needed to gingerly pull each barb

out of her body, flinching with each one she removed.

Finally, Demonic tossed the wire to the side, her arm dripping with blood still, though not as heavily. The two met eyes once again.

“You dog...” Maion snarled through her teeth, “I really liked that tatto.”

“My most heartfelt condolences.” Demonic readied her brush, wondering which tattoo Maion would resort to next.

“Oh, don’t beat yourself up over it,” Maion answered with a smirk, “Now you’ll get to see my favorite one.” She then spread her arms and closed her eyes. Demonic watched as an enormous bird emerged from Maion’s chest and soared into the air above them.

“Copy-cat...” Demonic muttered, thinking of her raven that had been squashed by Maion’s spider.

Maion glared fiercely at her and said,

“Don’t you dare! I had this tattoo before you even claimed that brush!”

Demonic shrugged and tried not to become distracted by wondering how Maion would know that. She was about to make another comment when the bird swooped down to land in front of her. It chirped shrilly, flapping its giant wings so that feathers rained down around Demonic. She made no huge effort to avoid them, but soon, thin cuts began to appear on her body, though none of them particularly deep. Could it be the feathers? They seemed too soft and fragile. Then, with fast, precise movements, the bird snapped it’s beak at her and she did her best to dodge it, though she was slowed by her injuries. Left, right, right again, lower, then up again, moving almost too quickly for Demonic to react. Soon it managed to nip at her shoulder, drawing blood. Demonic scowled and slammed her brush into the bird’s head as hard as she could. While it was dazed, she sent ink rushing to the tip of her brush. The bird recovered too quickly though, and before Demonic could paint anything, it bent down and charged at her. It head-butted Demonic in the stomach, and she fell to the floor on her back. The monstrous bird opened it’s beak wide, drawing in close to her. She panicked for a moment, but at the last second, she took her paintbrush and shoved the ink filled end into the bird’s throat.

It chirped in alarm, rearing back and spitting up saliva and ink. Demonic had just managed to extract her brush from the bird’s mouth, and it thrashed about, flustered and confused, wings outstretched and feathers flying off. A giant feather brushed by Demonic and she flinched and looked at her arm where it had touched her. A thin cut dripped blood, and she frowned deeply. *Then it is the feathers... All the more reason to end this now.*

She moved her brush rapidly through the air and painted a dagger. It solidified and she took the hilt. She rushed towards the bird as it writhed and sputtered, avoiding stray feathers as she went, though still receiving another cut on her cheek. She readied her dagger to end it,

“No! Not that one!” Maion cried out, and the bird began to sink back into her skin, as if it were being sucked into a vacuum of sorts. The bird had been saved, but Maion, enraged, was not quite finished yet. Glaring murderously, she took a dagger of her own from a tattoo on her forearm and charged towards her foe.

Daggers met and metal clashed. The gloves were off. No more fancy tricks. The two women fought with steel, both thirsty for blood. Maion gained the upper hand quickly, backing Demonic further and further towards the wall. It was all Demonic could do to defend against Maion’s attack fueled by rage. And yet, she did not seem worried.

*What is she up to?* Maion wondered. She stabbed at Demonic, but was blocked. Demonic attempted a counter stab, which was dodged, *What does she have up her sleeve now?*

And that’s when it began. Maion felt dizzy. She shook her head to regain her focus, but it only worsened. She swayed on the spot, feeling herself growing pale. The room was swimming in her vision, and the dagger fell from her hand. Demonic laughed.

“I win.”

“F...frack you...!” Maion fell to her knees on the cold floor, “what have you done?!”

“I’ve poisoned you.” Demonic explained, and she took a seat on the floor next to her. She went on, her tone conversational and very matter-of-fact, “your bird got quite a helping of my ink when I shoved my brush in its mouth. When you returned it to your skin, my ink was mixed with that of the bird, allowing me to force my own ink into your skin, then your veins. Once in your blood stream, it was only a matter of time until you were brought to your death by—ironically—ink poisoning.”

Maion was becoming weaker by the second as Demonic spoke. She sat there on the floor, wondering why and how it had come to this. What had she done wrong? She had planned everything perfectly. She had never faltered in her efforts. If she hadn’t called back her bird... if she had let it go...

“You really should have let your bird die.”

“Shut up!” Maion shouted, despite her weakness, “that tattoo... means too much...”

Demonic rolled her eyes,

“The one fool who will die for a bird.”

Maion glared, but she could not find the strength to shout again. The ink’s effects were worsening. Very suddenly, she doubled over and vomited on the floor, coughing and sweating. Her body was trying to clean the ink out of her system, but it was no use.

“You know, Demonic...” she said in a near whisper, “you were in love once.”

Demonic’s grin instantly vanished, replaced by a blank stare of utter bewilderment. What was she talking about? How did she seem to know so much about her past? More than she herself did, in fact.

Demonic glared, and was about to speak, but Maion laughed and said,

“Damn... I could really go for a drink...” and collapsed onto the floor. She was dead, at last. Demonic let out a sigh of relief.

Meanwhile, Mohajon was getting pissed off. His assignment was to search for the file while the others were all distracted by the invasion. While battle raged in the main hallway, he searched every room, every drawer, every nook and cranny that he could get into. He picked locks and broke doors for how long, he couldn’t say, but he had had no luck. Finally, he found himself in what was quite obviously a girl’s room. Fashionable clothes, chic flic DVDs, books, bras and various other girly objects were strewn about the floor, making it difficult to get across.

At last, he reached a dresser at the other end of the room. Years of searching, spying and thieving had taught Mohajon that important things were often hidden among clothes. A file was also likely to be hidden among other, unimportant looking papers, but save for some empty mission report forms on a night stand, Mohajon could see nothing of the sort. So, opening a drawer of the dresser, he began tearing through the contents in search of his objective.

No luck in the first drawer. Likewise with the second. He opened the third and final drawer, expecting the same, and not feeling very hopeful after hours of fruitless searching. Beneath a couple kimonos, some bandages and ointment of some sort, he saw an envelope. Mohajon’s heart skipped and his hands trembled in excitement. He swallowed hard and took it gingerly in his hands.

“At last...”

It was absurd. Love. What use did Demonic have for such a hinderence? Why should she subject herself to something which had caused the downfall of so many before her? Yes, she had used lust to her advantage on a few occasions before. But love? Obviously, Maion was either lying or dilusional. But

Demonic would know for certain soon enough. Maion's forces had only to see her corpse and they would fall apart. It was over, and Demonic had won. She could have the file and her peace of mind. The doors of her room slammed open. She looked to the new arrival.

*What now?!* She thought, irritably.

"Maion! I have the file! You've done away with her by now, of course..." Mohajon trailed off as he laid his eyes on Demonic, standing several feet away and watching him curiously.

"You!" he clutched the file tightly.

"Indeed," Demonic said dully, "Mohajon, right? Her lover, if I'm not mistaken. Oh, and by the way, I am quite obviously not 'done away with,' as you so eloquently put it."

"But... I... Where is-?" but that was when he saw her. He finally caught sight of Maion's body, laying in the shadows a small distance behind Demonic. He looked like he had been slapped across the face. Stunned into silence, he approached her where she lay.

He stood over her, his brow sweating, his entire body trembling. Soon, with an animal-like groan of despair, his knees gave out, and he fell before her, kneeling over the corpse of his love. Tears began to fall, but he was wholly unaware of them. He reached to her, still shaking, and took her in his arms. He kissed her pale, cold face, his fingers tangled in her soft, golden hair. The file, meanwhile, sat on the floor next to him, all but forgotten.

Demonic came to stand behind him. She considered simply taking the file, but in his current state, Demonic had no idea how Mohajon might react. Instead, she gently caressed his head as he shook, still cradling Maion's body.

"That's the trouble, isn't it. Faith. Trust. Love. All simply lead to disappointment," she said softly, comfortingly even, though she smiled in triumph all the while, "fate is cruel, isn't it? And to think... you were so certain..."

Silence fell. For some time, no one moved, spoke, or perhaps even thought or felt. Finally, Mohajon let Maion's body to rest on the floor once more. Then, his face blank and his movements robotic, he pulled his shirt up over his head and dropped it to his side. On his chest, among several other tattoos, was one that was eerily familiar to Demonic. It was a bird, wings spread, seeming about to take off in flight.

"One more permanent bond, we will share," he whispered, and he took Maion's cold, stiff hand in his, placing it on the image of the bird, "...I will not live to see your beauty fade in death."

He then took her in his arms once more and got to his feet. He glanced down at the file.

"I'll... surrender this to you. We've lost. There's no point now."

Demonic picked it up, stared at it for a moment, then nodded,

"You have my gratitude. I won't have to kill you too now."

Mohajon simply smiled to himself at that comment. Then, carrying Maion's body, he walked out of the throne room and stood outside the massive oak doors.

The battle was still in progress. Demonic's fighters had now gained a significant advantage. More and more of Maion's group fell by the hands of the Organization, and the hallway was stained with blood. But still, both sides fought on. Mohajon watched them for some time, until one by one, they began to notice him. Then, one by one, they noticed Maion. Finally, all were still on both sides. Weapons were lowered and spells ceased. All eyes watched him.

"...We're done," he finally said, addressing Maion's fighters, "It's over. Time to clear out." He walked down the hallway, and as he went, his allies fell into a sort of procession behind him, and his enemies parted to allow him passage. Some seemed triumphant, some bewildered, some still craved blood and let them leave only reluctantly. All were silent on both sides. Following Mohajon, a few shed a tear. Some were indifferent. Some were simply annoyed.

It was over? Just like that?

Mohajon felt a hand on his arm. It took him a while to register this, but Kitty had come to walk beside

him. She looked to him, then at Maion, and spoke to her as if she were simply asleep.  
“...Not you, too...”

Owari.

## 12 - An Artist's Masterpiece

### Author's Notes:

- Final chapter! Wooh!!! xD And man, did it take me forever to write, or what? I'm sure Brian was ready to kill me at some point or another lol.
- HOWEVER. This is not truly the end! For we are already working on a sequel :) It'll be super cool. I'm pumped!
- Anyway, enjoy the final chapter :D

"...Now what?" Kat wondered outloud, looking to Crimson and Dolosus for suggestions. They looked at each other. Crimson shrugged. They all turned at the sound of the main door of the Organization building slamming shut behind Mohajon and Maion's group with a mighty, echoing boom. The Organization members relaxed with their departure. People began to talk and laugh and congratulate each other on a job well done. They had protected their master, and had brought victory to glorify their names. Wounds were tended to, casualties counted and cared for, and the few dead were removed from the area.

"I think..." Crimson said quietly, breaking the silence between the three, "we should go check up on Altojo. He went to see Demonic quite some time ago, and he didn't leave her room with Mohajon and..." She trailed off. Are dead people still counted?

Kat nodded in agreement, but Dolosus seemed unsure.

"Demonic won't be happy with us barging in if she still has business with Altojo. She wanted to speak with him alone, so it's none of our-" he stopped. She had wanted to speak with him alone. Dolosus' heart pounded against his ribs and his mouth went dry. The girls noticed his sudden change in demeanor and panic seized them as well.

"Let's go." Crimson said, and the three walked briskly towards the throne room, with Kat breaking into a jog here and there. Despite this quickened pace, however, the walk seemed to last forever. The hallway stretched in front of them, an expansive wasteland, scarred from the previous battle. As they proceeded, pulses quickened, hearts raced, and by the time they reached the towering doors to the throne room, not one of the three could conceal their anxiety.

The doors opened with the same amount of force applied as usual, yet it seemed to Dolosus to take extra effort. His body ached dully from physical and unacustomed emotional exertion, and he desired nothing more than to retire to his room and rest. For the time being, however, there were matters to be attended to. Rest would have to wait.

When the trio entered the crumbled remains of the throne room, Kat pushed ahead anxiously, while Crimson lingered behind for a moment to give the desamated hallway one last glance. Between the two, Dolosus scanned the throne room with narrowed eyes. The tile was cracked and shattered in several places, and blood splattered the floor, walls and ceiling. Demonic could be seen leaning against the wall opposite them. She stood next to her throne, rather than sitting in it as per usual.

She's still tense, Dolosus thought, noting her odd, restless composure, she expects something more. Demonic looked up and offered a quick glance to each of the three. She said nothing. No orders, no



questions, no declaration of victory. Kat had stopped to stare curiously at the master.

'What are you thinking?' her eyes silently inquired, 'What are you feeling, if anything, now that you've won?'

Dolosus and Crimson now stood on either side of Kat. They stood at attention as Demonic fussed with her hands, examining them like some fascinating specimen.

"Where is Altojo?" Crimson spoke boldly, though Dolosus noticed her hand hovering about her weapon. The warrior's security blanket.

Demonic let her hands fall to her sides, and turned her eyes to a dark mass in a shadowed corner several feet away, laying motionlessly on smashed tile. All three stared blankly, not quite comprehending for some time.

"No!!" the scream tore from Kat's throat and she made to run to Altojo's side. Dolosus seized her around the waist and held her back with one arm despite her struggles. She scratched his arm and kicked his shins, but he would not loosen his grip on her.

"Let go of me, Dolosus! That's Altojo! That's my best friend! Let GO!!"

"Kat, stop! Stay close to me, Kat!" Dolosus tightened his hold and tried to talk sense into the frantic girl. Slowly, her attempts to escape weakened, then ceased all together, though her breath came in labored gasps and her expression was wild and desperate.

"What have you done?" Crimson demanded of Demonic, her eyes narrowed to a fierce, blood thirsty glare. Demonic had tensed further. Her brush was held at the ready in her right hand, and she looked at the three as a predator on the hunt.

"Dolosus," she said, ignoring Crimson entirely, "kill these two. Kill them and we will have truly won." That confirmed it to all three. Altojo was dead. Demonic had murdered him, and Dolosus' orders were to kill Kat and Crimson. Finish the job. Serve his master well. He could feel her exerting her will over him, and his instinct and everything he had ever been screamed at him to obey. Slowly, he released Kat from his hold and gripped his scythe tightly.

He was silent, as if in a trance. The two girls watched him, Crimson poised and ready for battle, Kat standing in a state of shock and desperation. Silent tears descended her girlish face, and though she held her leaf still, it hung in her hand at her side, leaving her open to any sudden danger. Crimson saw the shift as Dolosus' muscles tensed, and she tightened her own stance. Finally, all at once, the blade soared.

"No! Dolosus!!" Kat shrieked in agony and sunk to the floor, her legs now too weak to support her. Immediately, ink sprung from the tile around her to chain her down in painted shackles. She was helpless.

Crimson, meanwhile, had barely managed to dodge the scythe with a quick dive to her left. She recovered and got to her feet, katana at the ready. Soon, however, she realized that her dodge had set up up with her back to Demonic and Dolosus in front of her, already preparing his next assault. Damn it! Her mind screamed at her, though she still managed to effectively perry Dolosus' next blow. Swing after swing she evaded or blocked, yet she was quickly losing her ground. He was backing her up to Demonic. Determined to stand her ground, she refused to back any further, bringing the fighters into close quarters. The tip of the blade came descending in a graceful arch over Crimson's head, and she locked her blade against the staff, the point of the scythe hovering a mere inch over her head. Locked in this temporary stalemate, the two glared at each other with the fierce intensity which only a warrior could know. Then, so quietly that Crimson could barely hear him, Dolosus snarled,

"Play along!" Crimson gaped at him in momentary confusion, then gave a look of grim understanding. Dolosus growled more loudly this time,

"I've been waiting for far too long for this moment! Today, I have my victory!"

"You'll have to take it from me!" Crimson retorted, taking a swing of her sword which was easily

blocked by the scythe's staff. A few more blows of scythe and sword, and Crimson had been backed to Demonic, a few small feet from her.

He's trying to get to Demonic, Crimson thought anxiously, I'm going to have to make a quick dodge... And it came soon enough. A horizontal slash carrying massive power came soaring towards Crimson. At least, that's how it would appear.

"Duck!" Dolosus shouted. Crimson sunk to the floor in an instant, and the blade curved further outward at Demonic, soaring close to Crimson's head so that red and blonde hair ruffled in the resulting breeze. Slowed by shock and sustained injuries, Demonic suffered a thin cut across her chest as she jumped back.

"Traitor!" she growled at her creation.

"No," Dolosus replied coolly, weapon at the ready, "I've finally found where my true alliance lies!"

He brought down the scythe in a slightly curved arch in front of him, which was easily dodged. Demonic scoffed, but then slowly began to see what he was doing. The blade circled back and he spun it to his other side like a windmill or a twirling baton. Swinging the weapon in this manner, Dolosus advanced towards his master. She carefully stepped aside the blade each time it came gliding down to meet her, but its momentum added to its speed. Dodging swings became more and more difficult, and Demonic knew that she would have to counter rather than simply jump around him like a frightened mouse. Brow furrowed in concentration, she studied the timing of Dolosus' swings until she finally brought up her brush to halt his scythe all at once, the wood of the brush locked against the staff, just below the blade. Then, her movements quick and precise, she turned the brush vertically and pushed his scythe to the side, putting Dolosus off balance. In an instant, she spun the brush in one hand and slammed it against Dolosus' head. Stars exploded in his vision and he stumbled to the floor. Demonic saw her chance and began to paint, her brush work quicker and more exact than ever as Dolosus recovered and got to his feet.

When he rose, Dolosus was faced with a nightmarish beast, the likes of which he had only ever seen in some of Demonic's older paintings. Shimmering red eyes glared from a pitch black feline face, followed by a long, snake-like tail of ink from the head down. The creature was several feet long, the head larger than that of a lion, and it hovered in the air above Dolosus, fanged mouth agape and salivating with predatory hunger.

Slowly, Dolosus backed away, subtly putting distance between himself and this hellish new creation. In an instant, the beast closed this distance, whipping its head forward and snapping at him. Dolosus stumbled somewhat at first, alarmed by the speed of such a large creature. He quickly regained his composure, however, and evaded several more attempts to devour him. From its position at his side, Dolosus swung the scythe upwards, slicing through the middle of the beast's black form. Proud of the kill, Dolosus grinned smugly at first, but then noticed something very wrong. The two halves of the supposedly vanquished beast hovered in the air for a moment, then, one tendril of ink at a time, they reached towards each other and began to rejoin.

"Oh, no..." Dolosus groaned.

"Oh, yes." Demonic said with a chuckle, "my darling pet had never truly solidified. I left him formed of liquid ink. That's not to say he's not as deadly as a solid form. If he consumes you... well, imagine being smothered and suffocated by ink."

By now the beast had completely reformed and had resumed its agile attacks. Dolosus narrowly avoided each one, and when he saw an opening at last, he instinctively went on the offensive. The scythe glided through the air, and in mere moments, Dolosus had created four clean cuts right through the beast's body. This only served to temporarily stall the creature as it repaired itself and Dolosus looked on it with anger and even fear.

Distance! He suddenly realized, I need distance! And he ran. To the observers it would appear he was

fleeing for his life, but he stopped very suddenly and swung his scythe in front of him, then spun around to face his adversary as it charged at him. Finally, with the beast barely an inch from him, its great jaws gaping open at their widest, Dolosus stepped to the side. Unable to stop itself, the damned creature flew into a wormhole behind Dolosus which he had been standing directly in front of. With another arch of the blade, Dolosus sealed the hole shut, and the beast was lost.

Demonic hardly seemed to react to this. The artist's creative mind began racing. Images, creatures and objects flew across her imagination. In moments, Dolosus' death had been foreseen in a hundred different ways. Meanwhile, her former servant clutched his weapon, panting in exhaustion, grasping desperately for a way to get to her. He'd have to be clever, try to outsmart her. How could he hope to destroy the very person who had created him?

As the two fighters considered their next moves, Crimson stood beside Kat, guarding her, as they had both given up on freeing her from her restraints. After much expended time and effort attempting to break or slide out of the chains that bound her to the floor, it was evident that Kat could not be freed until Demonic was brought down.

"Crimson..." Kat whispered to her friend in desperation, "can't you do something to help him? Anything?"

"I'd considered it," she responded, her voice even and calm, though her eyes burned and her fists were tightly clenched, "but you know Dolosus. He's proud and stubborn. Do you really think he'd accept my help?"

Kat thought back to his battle with Ikonu. It was the same. This was his fight. No, this was his even more so than that previous battle. This was his freedom. Kat nodded.

"I understand... but, Crimson..."

"I know," she said, and drew her katana, the blade glistening in the dull light of the throne room, "if he truly needs my help, he'll have it, whether he wants it or not."

But Demonic had noticed Crimson brandishing her weapon out of the corner of her eye.

Dolosus' fan club is getting fiesty... time to take action.

The brush moved, but this time, rather than launching into a series of complex strokes, she simply dashed the brush across the air three times, sending blots of ink splattering onto the walls and ceiling of the throne room. Dolosus immediately tightened his stance, glancing nervously around him. The ink was essentially an extension of Demonic herself. Dolosus knew that he was now surrounded. As he whipped his head back and forth, determined not to be caught off guard, he noticed something odd about the ink blots. One at a time, they would begin to ripple and bubble, as if from some disturbance just beneath the surface. This would occur for just a few short moments, then would cease, and the action would be resumed by another blot.

"What could it be, Dolo-kun?" Demonic teased, her lips curled into a sneer, "Some menace waiting below the surface, biding its time for the perfect opportunity to attack. Who does that remind me of, hm? Who waited for the perfect time to sneak up and attack like a slippery little coward?"

"Don't try to play the victim, Demonic. It's pathetic."

At this, she laughed, a roaring, mocking laugh which echoed about the cavernous room. She laughed and laughed, and soon, another seemed to join in her mirth. A euphoric screech sounded from every side of the room. Dolosus flinched at the sound and soon caught sight of the actual source. A pair of tiny white eyes, matched with two small fangs, emerged in a swelling bulb of ink from one of the blots. It seemed that this new being was wailing in rapture from its eyes, as they widened, staring intently at Dolosus.

"What the--?" but just as Dolosus thought to guard against the bizarre creature, it shot out from the wall at him, transforming quite suddenly. A gaping mouth of sharpened fangs came at him on an otherwise diminutive being, shocking Dolosus so that he barely escaped the thing with a minor cut on his arm

where one of the monstrous fangs had swept past him. He grunted in pain and irritation.

"That's like you, Demonic. Send your pets and creations to do your dirty work for you."

She grinned and shrugged,

"It's always worked so far."

Another shriek sounded, as if in reply to the comment. A cruel laugh at a witty joke. Then, the ink blots began to take turns rippling and bubbling once more, and soon enough, the creature emerged once again and shot out at Dolosus. He was ready this time, however, and positioned the blade of his scythe directly in the creature's path. This attempt went remarkably well, it seemed. It was essentially a blob of ink with teeth. Thus, like the previous beast, it could easily reform itself. This, Dolosus had expected. More interesting was the fact that it had not avoided the scythe. The creature traveled through the ink blots freely, but once outside of them, it ran fast, straight paths.

"A rather limited creation." he observed.

"It will suffice." said Demonic.

Not allowing conversation to distract him, Dolosus watched intently for where the screeching ink blob would attack from next. He caught the movement at the last moment and barely managed to side step the creature. He watched it dive back into its ink world and he began to mull over his options.

Meanwhile, he had to remain alert and aware of its assaults. Each time, he would barely escape, and he soon realized that each time, it came faster and closer.

If I could catch up to it... He thought desperately, If I could move as it does...

And soon enough, inspiration struck. He raised his scythe to form a portal, but lost sight of the creature.

In an instant, it came for him, and razor sharp teeth dug into his right leg.

"Ah-! Aagh!!" Dolosus cried out, his body weakened for a moment. He slowly looked down in horror at the thing latched onto his leg, his own blood soaking through his jeans and trickling down into his boots. For a time, he couldn't think or move. All there was was pain. Yet he managed to cut away the blood thirsty creature. It retreated to reform and enter the ink blots once more. It had lost momentum, but Dolosus still had little time.

With a grunt of effort, a portal was created in the floor, and Dolosus more or less let himself fall into it, just as the creature soared by in another attack. He soon emerged from another hole he created on the ceiling. He then retreated into it and emerged from a third hole in a wall, and repeated the process until there were as many portals as ink blots.

Stealing a glance at Demonic, Dolosus saw her perplexed and greatly disturbed. Perhaps, even worried. So she didn't know I could maintain several wormholes either. That makes two of us, He thought, pleased with his discovery.

The ink creature, meanwhile, did not seem quite sure what to do. Having lost its target, it traveled between blots rapidly, without ever emerging. Dolosus could just barely follow its movements by watching for the disturbances in the inky black puddles on the walls and ceiling. He frequently traveled between portals as well to ensure that it could never pin point his location, and eventually, he found the chance he had been awaiting.

He found himself, for a moment, at a portal near the ink blot underneath which the creature resided. In his allotted split second, Dolosus reacted, plunging his scythe into the bubbling pool of ink. He felt it meet the creature, and he tore through it entirely. It let out one last wail, this one of terrible agony, and was effectively silenced.

Dolosus withdrew his scythe quickly, relieved that the creature had been vulnerable in its traveling state. He brought himself back to the floor through his wormholes, then promptly released his psychological hold on them, closing each simultaneously.

A second creation destroyed by Dolosus' hand. Demonic was losing patience with the whole affair, and watched her ink blots drip down from the walls and ceiling with burning, wrathful eyes. Such a waste of

precious ink! Fueled by rage, she wasted no time. As the ink seemingly melted down to the floor, she took direct control of it. She sent it at Dolosus, seizing his limbs as he struggled to escape. He thrashed about and sliced through it, but it was like drowning in living water. It pushed him against the wall opposite Demonic. Then, with all the force of any especially strong fighter, it pinned his arms to the wall and immediately solidified into shackles, not unlike those which held Kat. His ankles were likewise bound, and Dolosus was left defenseless, scythe in hand, yet unable to be used. Splayed out like a specimen waiting to be dissected, he watched Demonic as she approached.

"Don't," Dolosus said to Crimson, as he caught her moving forward to assist him, "I'm not dead yet. Don't you dare try to take this from me," he went on, and as he spoke, his breath became sharp and his words fierce, "I will kill my former master. I will protect you two and avenge Altojo, and most of all, I and only I will take my freedom!" he was screaming, panting with the exertion. Crimson stopped, halted entirely by his resolution, though she frowned deeply, sweat beading her forehead.

"You fool..."

Demonic vaguely noted the convenience of not having to chain Crimson up as well, and soon came to stand directly in front of Dolosus. She flipped the brush around in her hand and jabbed the wooden end up beneath his chin, nearly choking him.

"Will you surrender?" she asked plainly. She was done with sarcasm and mockery. Anger and the thirst for blood had taken over.

He spat at her feet. The answer was clear.

"Very well, slave. You will die by the ink which created you." a punch landed on his stomach before he had time to register the blow. He gasped and coughed up blood and saliva. Soon, he saw her hand move again and prepared for another blow, but it never came. Instead, Demonic grabbed a fist full of his torn, bloodied shirt and ripped it away. Shredded pieces clung to his arms and open wounds, but his bare, blood soaked torso was left exposed. This done, Demonic raised her brush to his chest and began to paint on his very flesh. Soon, she had created a small black dagger of ink on his body. It dried in a matter of moments, and the artist raised her free hand and placed it gently, even tenderly on the mark. Dolosus felt her hand, cold and clammy against his chest, and for a moment, nothing else. Soon enough, however, he felt the mark's effects.

A blood curdling scream tore from his throat, his body twitched and spasmed with pain he'd never felt before. Tears of agony ran down his face from blood shot eyes. He struggled against his restraints, crying out in pain all the while, but it was in vain. After what felt like an eternity, Demonic lowered her hand, satisfied for the time being.

Kat had begun to sob terribly, her body weak with despair. She looked on through tear-filled eyes as Dolosus' body slumped over, held up only by the shackles on his wrists and ankles. Tiny trails of blood trickles down from Dolosus' torso, and Kat realized that the mark had actually dug into his body at Demonic's will. Kat grew pale. Demonic could dig right through him if she chose.

Demonic rose her hand once more. Kat had to do something. She had to help him. Her leaf was left useless in her hand due to her own bindings, so she focused her power and began to summon her wind. It was a more difficult task without the aid of her leaf, but, groaning with the effort, Kat summoned a gust of wind which circled around her, gaining force by the moment.

The artist froze, her hand suspended in front of her, and she watched Kat with a scowl. Dolosus turned to see her and choked out,

"D...Don't...Kat..." before the gust was released. In a split second, Demonic raised a wall of ink between herself and Kat from the tile beneath them. The wind howled at the wall and around it, but Demonic's will strengthened it, and Kat's attack was proved ineffectual. When the wind had ceased, she lowered the wall.

"Pathetic attempts from a pathetic little girl," she said, and pressed her hand to Dolosus' chest a little

more firmly than before, "Watch as your love suffers."

Dolosus screamed. His body arched away from the wall, his mouth and eyes gaping open. The corner of Demonic's mouth twitched, and she grinned with sadistic delight. She pressed her hand on him more firmly, and by this point, even screams failed him. He was silent, body still arched forward and shaking violently. When it seemed he was frozen as such, his mouth stretched wide in a silent cry, Demonic relented. Slowly, his jaws shut, and his body slackened, though his eyes remained in a wide, agonized stare.

We've lost... Kat thought with despair, she's going to kill us all. It's over.

At this moment, Demonic reached a hand, not to the bloody mark on his chest, but for his scythe. She grasped the weapon and pulled it from Dolosus' hand with little effort.

"I'll relieve you of this. You never could hold on to it for very long." she said. Yet, not a second after the words had left her lips, she halted. She stood utterly still for a long moment, her mouth slightly ajar, and her eyes slowly widened to a horrified stare. Her body began to tremble, and her fists clenched about the brush and scythe. She fell to her knees, unfocused green eyes directed ahead at Dolosus, but not truly seeing him anymore.

"The scythe..." he said weakly, "it's the scythe's power. But... why? It shouldn't..."

"Get off." Demonic whispered. Sweat beaded her forehead as she knelt, body now shaking violently.

"Get off of me. You'll never touch me again!"

The three others watched in stunned horror as her agitation increased. She would twitch and move at random, as if not sure what to do with herself. The face of cold indifference was now pale and twisted into a grimace of pain and fear, and she screamed,

"I'll kill you! I'll kill you and all the rest! I'll kill you and take what's mine!!" she began thrash about, hitting the floor and flailing and finally, she threw the scythe from her in blind desperation. With a great clatter, it scraped and spun across the floor until it hit the wall. Still, she knelt on the floor, her arms wrapped tightly about herself as she trembled.

Meanwhile, the chains binding Kat and Dolosus dissolved away into ink. Demonic had lost her focus, rendering it useless. Dolosus fell from the wall and collapsed into a heap on the floor with a grunt of pain. Shakily, he pushed himself up, hardly able to support his own weight.

"Dolosus!" he turned as Crimson tossed her katana to him. She knew she could not take this fight from him, but her conscience and her loyalty to Kat would not let her watch idly as Dolosus fought. He caught it by the hilt and gave the girls a weak smile and a nod. He turned to Demonic. She seemed to be slowly regaining her senses, though she was worn and barely clinging to sanity. Her hand fumbled for her brush and finally found it. Dolosus reacted quickly.

The katana soared towards her, and lacking all other options, she brought the brush up in front of her. It was a sloppy attack at best, yet with enough force behind it to cut through the wood like a knife through butter. Demonic was left with all but the bristles of her brush. She was defenseless.

He... He was on me... Dolosus is up now... he touched me... but... but I killed him... I killed him, all those years ago... and now Dolosus will kill me... I've used too much ink... my blood...

Eyes glazed over, Demonic gazed up at her masterpiece. She held the brush weakly, so that the next clumsy swing of the sword sent it flying from her hand. She shuffled away from him on the floor, but her drained body could not carry her fast enough. Dolosus stumbled and fell forwards atop her, now on all fours. With one knee on the floor on either side of her waist, he rested his entire upper body on a hand on Demonic's shoulder, pinning her to the floor. Shaking violently, Dolosus raised his arm and pointed the katana down at her, the point resting on her neck. He stared down at her silently, panting, his wound dripping blood down onto her chest.

And then, Demonic smiled. A blissful, eerily beautiful smile.

"I always new... that you would be the one to kill me..."

"Wha-What are you talking about?!" Dolosus growled, seeming to force the words out from his throat. She laughed softly, but the effort made her dizzy, so she was forced to take a moment to let the spinning and nausea stop. When she looked into Dolosus' eyes once more, he saw a spark, a giddy joy which he had never seen in them before.

"Kill me, Dolosus. I made you to be perfect. You are my masterpiece. Only one addition remains. One final stroke of the brush. As your master, I command you to kill me! Kill me and be perfected!" she had worked herself into a frenzy, grinning madly, exerting every last shred of her will over him. He could feel her pushing him. Bloodlust, rage, revenge, and even her orders urged him towards this slaughter. Yet, he hesitated. His head hurt. He couldn't think.

"What are you waiting for?!"

"I-I won't! I refuse! My perfection won't lie in murder!!" on the final word, he put his entire body into one movement. He slammed his forehead against Demonic's. Her head hit the tile, and she was out.

"Besides..." Dolosus said, shakily, "I don't like following orders..." he crumpled onto his side, rolled onto his back, and let himself drift away next to his fallen creator. The two lay in an oppressive silence, among shattered, blood and ink stained tile, a tiny puddle of blood over each of their hearts.

Dolosus opened his eyes up the smallest crack. There was a light. Was he dead?

This could be it... I see light... he thought groggily through the fog of his mind, It's... flickering. That's kind of annoying... with a great effort, he pried his eyes open all the way. He was on a bed in a small hotel room, the fluorescent light flickering above him, the sound of the TV reaching his ears as if from a distance. He was hungry.

"This... is not the afterlife." he murmured.

"Ah! Kat, the invalid had awakened."

"The who?"

"Kat, turn off the damned hair dryer and get over here. Dolosus is up!"

"He-! Really?!"

In an instant, Kat was at his side, her long pink hair thrown up in a hasty pony-tail. Dolosus rolled his head to the side to look at her. He smiled weakly at the teary eyed girl.

"Kat..." he said softly, "You're beautiful."

At this, she broke down into tears, sobbing pathetically. Dolosus mustered some strength to bring his hand to rest on hers. Then, he turned his head towards Crimson on the other side of the bed.

"What happened? I... I can't remember."

"You defeated Demonic. She's alive, though." Crimson began, getting to her feet to fetch him some water and saltines, "We brought you here to rest. The Crows helped, and brought your scythe- wrapped in a sheet, to be safe. It's been three days since then. I'll get you something to eat..." here, there was a pause, punctuated by sobs and hiccups from Kat.

"And... Altojo?" Dolosus asked. Crimson stood with her back to him and said,

"Kat and I saw about the burial... We didn't let the Crows help with that part. We found the file," she said, changing the subject abruptly, "We read it and left it for Demonic to reclaim when she comes to. We figured it best to avoid another confrontation. It's time we left her and her people alone." she said this in the way one addresses a topic they've thought through too many times, out of habit. Kat had collected herself by now, and the three sat in silence. Crimson handed the water and crackers to Dolosus, who nodded his gratitude and quickly devoured it all. He couldn't remember the last time he had a bite to eat for the life of him.

"So," he sighed, settling back on the bed and closing his eyes, "that's that."

"That's that." said Crimson with a nod. But Dolosus had already fallen asleep once more, though more peacefully now.

"When should we tell him about the file?" Kat asked absently, smoothing down his hair as he slept. Crimson frowned, "When he's better."

Days and weeks passed in a blur of indifference. The trio switched hotels every few days to avoid being tracked. Dolosus healed quickly all the while; that's how he had been designed. Finally, Dolosus and Kat discussed the contents of the file. One would think that this would be an urgent matter to be brought up at the first opportunity. For these three fighters, however, it was of little consequence when it was mentioned. It would be, sooner or later, but now that the fight was over, there was no rush. There was nothing to rush towards.

Dolosus sat on the roof of the current hotel, watching the last reds and oranges of the sun fade from the sky and sink into the shelter of the horizon. A breeze ruffled his hair, and Kat floated up on a cushion of the swirling air to meet him.

"Hey."

"Hey."

"What are you doing up here?"

"Thinking."

"About?"

"What to do next..." Dolosus frowned slightly, "I've never had this choice before."

"Oh..." Kat was at a loss for words. Finally, she said, "Crimson said I should tell you about the file. About what we read."

"Right!" Dolosus said, suddenly coming to attention. He had nearly forgotten what they had been fighting for this whole time, "What did it say?"

"Well..." she began, sitting next to Dolosus, "It was mostly Demonic's past. It was written by another creation under her master."

"Her master?" Dolosus repeated in awe.

"Yeah... But he's dead now. Demonic killed him. Anyway, it said that he created Demonic to be his magnum opus. He made her to be perfect." Dolosus flinched at the word.

"Apparently he spoke about her in the same way Demonic spoke about you, only... worse. Demonic fell in love with her master. He began abusing and mistreating her. It was horrifying... so she killed him. And all of his other creations, but one. We think that's who wrote the file." Dolosus gave a heavy sigh and rested his head on his hands. Kat went on,

"There was also a lot of information on the paintbrush that she wielded. It said that the ink is made from the blood of the user. That's its down-side, I suppose. If you overuse it, you run out of blood."

"A double-edged sword." Dolosus noted, "Demonic did seem to limit herself a lot for someone with the ability to spontaneously create." Kat nodded and continued,

"It also explained that the brush is only passed on when a master's perfect creation kills them and takes it from them. After this, their memory is altered, and they remember nothing before gaining the brush. Anyway, that's how Demonic got a hold of it."

"And how I would have gotten it..." Dolosus said quietly. He got to his feet, and so did Kat. It was dark out now. The street lights and buildings prevented them from seeing all but the brightest stars. The wind had become stiff and chilly.

"What's your favorite color?" Dolosus asked suddenly.

"What?"

"What's your favorite color?"

Kat smiled.

"Green." she said.



"Oh... And... And what about Altojo?" Dolosus said, looking up to the sky, "What was his favorite color?" Kat's smile did not fade, but there was an unmistakable sadness in it now.

"Blue. He liked blue."

"Oh... That's my favorite color as well..." Dolosus said. Kat nodded,

"I remember. You told me after the Christmas dinner that night."

Dolosus glanced over at her. She was fighting to be strong, he could tell. In the pale glow of the street lights, he saw her cheeks flushed and her eyes glistening. He went to her and wrapped his arms around her tightly.

"I'll have to leave you too, soon."

"I know," she said, her voice trembling, though she fought to hide it, "I knew since you started thinking all the time with that distant look on your face. I knew you would go."

"You know why I have to," he said, looking her in the eyes, his arms still about her waist, "It's freedom.

It's me. It's finding out what kind of person I am. And once I find out, I'll come back and... we can talk, and hang out, and..." he let his words trail off into silence. Kat nodded.

"I understand."

How Dolosus loathed what he was doing to her. His heart throbbed painfully in his chest, and through all his battles, he never imagined he would hurt someone so terribly. Gently, he lifted her chin up and kissed her lips. He lingered a moment, then turned, and headed off to pack his few possessions.

Kat stared off into the night sky, a lone tear traveling down her cheek. She closed her eyes, and a great wind picked up around her. Without the leaf to aid her, emotion and will itself fueled the gust. It tossed her hair and ruffled her clothes, roaring in her ears as it spun. Then, when she had let it dissipate, she looked out into that same darkened sky, though somehow, it looked different now. She looked on with the renewed knowledge that in a few patient hours, the sun would rise again.

Owari.