

Dolosus

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Submitted: November 5, 2007

Updated: February 3, 2008

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 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's 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's 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 force 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's 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's 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's 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 glistened 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? Have you been making love to strangers again?"

"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's eyes were 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. After all," 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 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 and 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 a 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, "Brian Tighe", 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 Demonic 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. It held some vital, yet disturbing, information.

"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 hazarding 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 won't 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's 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 lead 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 adue, 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'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's 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's 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.

"Yeah, 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!"

"Good 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. Suit 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&rd 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 devine..."

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's 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 Christmas." 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's 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, 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 vrrunk 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 file, 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.