

# The Knife

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*It seems that blood soaked chapter of the invasion on Demonic's organization is ready to be forgotten. However, one refuses to forget, much less, to forgive.*

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# 1 - When the Shark Bites

## Author's Notes:

-Ha! And you thought we were done. WRONG! xD Brian and I have already begun the sequel to our story, featuring some fun new characters, old favorites, and who knows what else.

-I wrote this first chapter, since he got to start off the first chapter of the original story arch.

-Oh, and just so you don't get confused an' all, italics = thoughts/flashbacks

-Read on and enjoy! :)

A girl of feline features stood before an unmarked grave. The rare breeze would ruffle fur and hair now and then, but for the most part, the night was still, yet somehow anxious. It was a girl in school, tapping her foot, waiting as the seconds drag by until the bell. It was arriving early at the meeting place for a first date. It was the moment just before the curtain rises on opening night.

Yet, Kitty and her bird companion did not know this through any comprehensible train of thought. They simply felt it.

She turned her blue eyed gaze to the grave beside the naked stone in front of her. Kitty shivered slightly, though the summer had begun to make itself known and the night was quite warm. She must have read the name and epitaph a thousand times before she spoke, and when she did, her voice was quiet, but firm and comfortable,

"Y'know, Feebus? I used to have so much fun." The girl half smiled. Raising a hand, she gently smoothed the seagull's feathers as he sat atop her shoulder, "I had friends... and a home... remember how much fun it was?" Feebus nestled against her neck and said,

"I remember, Kitty. We both lost a lot."

*She's so innocent, Feebus thought musingly, so simple for having killed so many and witnessed so much more than others.*

Quite suddenly, Kitty was on her knees before the grave stone whose inscriptions she knew so well by now. Small, feminine hands clenched in her lap, she said definitively,

"They didn't lose enough! Why did we lose so much, Feebus? They don't hurt like I do right now. But they should! They should hurt!"

"Kitty..." Feebus murmured, at a loss for words.

"I'm going to make them hurt. They deserve it for all that they did to me. To us!" she offered the bird a hand, which he acceptingly perched upon. Holding him aloft in front of her, the simple girl looked to her last friend for an answer. Feebus sighed.

"I think you should sleep on this one," he said in an almost fatherly tone. He had developed quite a soft spot for the girl since the attack on Demonic's organization. "this just isn't the kind of thing you should rush into. You could be killed!"

"I don't care!" Kitty nearly shouted at him. Only a little more calmly, she said, "I've slept on these thoughts for two years. All it's done is allow them into my nightmares. This isn't just a passing thought, Feebus. I am going to do this. All that's left to decide is whether you do it with me or not."

The seagull sighed and was silent for a long while. She really meant it. If Feebus knew one thing about Kitty, it was that she was stubborn. But if she did this alone, she was sure to be killed. He had lost Cinta already—he would not lose Kitty, too. She would need as much assistance as possible against Demonic and her men.

“Well...” the bird began, more conversationally now, “you—we are going to need some backup.” Smiling affectionately, Kitty rose to her feet and allowed Feebus to walk off of her hand and onto the air, where he waddled along beside her. They made their way to the metal gate of the cemetery.

“We’ll have to go back.” Feebus said.

“Back?” Kitty questioned, one furry cat ear twitching curiously.

“Back to Mai... the mansion.” The bird finished lamely, stealing a glance at his companion. Her lips tightened, her brow furrowed. She was quite obviously uncomfortable with the idea. Eventually, however, she nodded.

“Okay. What’s there?” they reached the gate as they spoke and the next words Feebus uttered seemed hesitant and almost regretful.

“Someone who can help.”

Her face fixed in grim resignation, Kitty followed his lead, recalling her experiences at the place, yet not knowing what to expect on her return. As the two walked side by side, unified in apprehension, her mind read the epitaph to her over and over,

Cinta

"Down The Hole It Glides  
The Ribbon Of Your Soul"

From one gate to another. Kitty’s tail flicked anxiously behind her as she stared blankly at her old home. She watched as Feebus walked across the air, through the bars of the locked gate and picked the lock with the tip of his beak. With a metallic squeal, amplified by the empty area around them, the gate yielded, and Kitty passed through.

The exterior of the mansion had kept well enough. In two years, the structure had remained empty, yet sound and sturdy. The lawn was overgrown, the gardens wild and unkempt, and it was obvious that these two years had found the place generally lonely.

Somberly, reverently even, the odd pair made their way to the grand entrance. Luckily, they found it unlocked—it seemed no one cared to take the precaution. The two slipped inside to behold the once glorious ballroom stretching out before them. A small grin crept along Kitty’s lips.

“Home sweet home, eh, Feebus?”

The bird was silent.

*“Cinta, really, I don’t understand your hang up over this—”*

*“Oh, c’mon! It’ll be fun! Besides,” the blonde said, tugging her cat-eared friend into the ballroom,*

*“Maion’s having a big fancy ball, so we have to dance with handsome men!”*

*Kitty grinned wryly and rolled her eyes. Their voices echoed in the vast hall, amplifying Cinta’s exuberance and Kitty’s sarcastic tone as she spoke,*

*“You know, Maion will probably have us working.”*

*Cinta waved her hand dismissively at this,*

*“Psh! I don’t care. I’m going to find the handsomest man there and we’ll dance the night away. Maybe we’ll have an affair! Doesn’t that sound romantic?” she sighed wistfully, and Kitty finally conceded defeat. Her hands on her hips, she said,*

*“Alright, I don’t know about an affair, but if you’ve got your mind set on this dancing thing...”*

*“Oh, yay!” Cinta squealed, “thank you, Kitty! Here, you be the man.”*

*Again, her friend rolled her feline eyes. However, she could not hide the smile which touched her lips. Soon enough the room echoed with the girls’ laughter as they stumbled clumsily through steps.*

Bare feet padded softly down the main staircase into the dance floor, leaving scarcely visible prints in a thin layer of dust. Kitty's tail hung limp behind her, a single blue ribbon adorning it and fluttering lifelessly as she walked. Feebus waddled along as well, however, he did not see all that the girl did. His old, tired mind saw a shadow of a blonde girl. A faint outline of his dearest friend played clumsily before him. Kitty's mind, a swirling tempest of memories and emotions, showed much more.

Figures danced around her, skirts twirling, folding and unfurling with a flourish as women spun gracefully in the arms of their partners. Each body moved in unison, giving the impression that the entire room was pulsating in time with the band. Kitty hummed along, a little off tune, but familiar with the piece. She had practiced her waltz with Cinta to this song. Yet, though it had started as beautiful, dignified, it now seemed somehow off. Had a clarinet reed split? A violin string snapped?

A solitary figure stood out from across the room. Nothing seemed to have changed, but somehow, everything was different to Kitty. The band still played, the couples still danced, but all that existed was the being across the room.

Cinta. Ribbons cut, her skin pale, the sword of her demise piercing her through. She smiled.

"Kitty! Kitty! Seriously, it's not funny, cut it out! Wake up!" Feebus pecked mercilessly at the cat-girl's black hair. Finally, she regained her senses and swatted a hand at him, "Ow, ow, ow! That hurt, get off!" she exclaimed, rubbing a sore spot on her head. The seagull adjusted a few feathers, grumbled something about worrying, then shook himself and turned to an inconspicuous door resting in the shadows of the staircase.

"He's this way."

Through the door, Kitty followed her air-walking friend along various halls and corridors, decorated in the avant-guard style one would expect of a woman such as Maion. It was a tedious, disorienting route, yet she felt that she could probably find her way again if need be. It seemed that the confounding spells on the place had died with their master, making the colossal mansion significantly easier to navigate.

Easier to navigate, however, did not mean easier to trek for the cat girl. She soon found herself in all too familiar places. These were the places which had framed the pictures of vengeance in her nightmares these past two years. Kitty shivered at the thought, but was soon distracted by her observations. She stopped short to avoid stepping on the shattered pieces of a bust of Lewis Carol. Her brow furrowed as she took a good look around.

In a room branching from the hall, the door of which had long been broken away, was a pit. Blue eyes stared lifelessly at this for some time.

*Four people in the room. Damn it. She was supposed to be guarding that place. Maion would be pissed. No worries though, she would just have to remedy the situation. Two boys, two girls.*

*Two girls? Not good. They had retrieved Crimson.*

*The blond and her bird at Kitty's side, the three stepped silently into the room. Muscles tensed, blood rushing, hearts pounding, bodies ready for battle...*

*"I've missed you so much," Kitty's sister murmured to her unconscious friend. Cat ears twitched, her tail swished irritably, and Kitty spoke snidely,*

*"Aww, I've missed you too, sister."*

"Almost there," Feebus said. Kitty nodded. This was good. She did not want to spend more time than was necessary in this graveyard of her past.

As they resumed their walk, she caught sight of a curtain, half torn from its supports. What seized her attention further was a small tear in the center of the curtain, surrounded by a dark stain. On the floor

beneath it was a crimson smudge across the tile, surrounded by various limbs and joints of two grotesque marionettes.

Here, Kitty saw the shadow of a silver haired boy who had been both puppet and puppeteer.

Down a tightly spiraling staircase, they proceeded and continued through an eerily empty hall, leading to a single elevator. The pair approached, and Kitty raised her eyebrows. There was only a down button, though they had descended so far. Feebus pecked it and the doors opened with alarming urgency. They entered, and the bird pecked the bottom floor button.

"how do you know about this place, Feebus?" the girl asked as they shot down the elevator shaft, "I've never seen anything like this in the mansion."

"I've been around longer than you might think, Kitty," he said, "I've seen a lot, including Maion's finest capture."

"Who is-"

"You'll see." he said with a note of finality. The elevator stopped with a jolt and the doors shot open. Kitty made to step out, but Feebus nipped her ear and said sternly, "wait, still a few levels left."

Pecking the bottom floor button once again, the doors slammed shut and they descended several more floors.

"Years ago, this trip would have been much trickier," Feebus muttered as they reached a halting stop and the doors shot open, "but what with Maion gone, her spells... here we are." Feebus picked up the lead once more as Kitty followed behind obediently.

"Ugh..." she groaned and flung her hands up over her eyes. The spotless white walls now towering up around her contrasted the dusty grays of her journey so that her eyes stung in protest. Blinking until her eyes adjusted, Kitty observed the new area. She currently stood in a cavernous white room. All she saw was white and empty. About two hundred feet away was a spacious doorway.

"He's being held in there." Feebus nearly whispered, his voice echoing eerily regardless.

"In an open room?" Kitty responded in disbelief, "there's not even a door."

"Maion's never had much use for doors and locks." Feebus said with what could be considered a bird's attempt at a shrug.

Their voices hushed, they approached the doorway to the next room. Though barefoot, the cat girl took care to step lightly and silently. Soon, the room came fully into view.

Also towering and stark white, this room held hundreds of pens, stacks upon stacks of paper, an enormous pantry of canned soups, and a man. At this final observation, her blue eyes lingered.

A huddled mass in the corner, the being gave the impression of being so removed as to forsake his humanity. Curled up, the empty room seemed to consume him, but as he caught sight of the two visitors, he got to his feet and immediately conquered his surroundings. Kitty swallowed hard as he approached, ruffling locks of startlingly red hair which reached to his shoulders. he stopped uncomfortably close to Kitty and looked her up and down with blazing eyes. She scowled. He laughed. The noise reverberated in the great emptiness, surrounding them with his laughter.

"What's so funny?" Kitty asked indignantly. He stopped laughing immediately.

"Why--you," he said pointedly.

The girl stood shocked into silence. He grinned and adjusted the thick tube sprouting from his chest into his back, more out of habit than necessity. It was then that he turned his wide-eyed gaze to Feebus. He arched an eyebrow and laughed shortly,

"The talking pigeon!"

"Seagull."

"Seagull, yes! Regis!"

"Feebus."

"Of course you are," he waved a hand dismissively and went on, "now, now, I haven't seen you in six years, two months and twenty one days."

"I'm sure." Feebus responded curtly.

"Feebus," Kitty chimed in, having now regained her composure, "Who is this? You said he could help us. I'm not so sure..."

"Why don't you try asking the man himself, eh?" he cut in, his nose nearly touching hers, he had drawn so close. Kitty scowled at his grin which showed on his lips, but never touched his eyes. She soon noticed that this held true for all of his expressions.

"Alright..." she said, "Who are you?"

"Name's Mac-heath. Or Mac, if you prefer. Or if you took to reading the papers seven years ago--Mac the Knife."

Kitty nodded, though she had never been much for newspapers and had never heard of this Mac the Knife.

"My name is Kitty. I've come here to seek your help. In return, I'll set you free."

"Hmmm..." Mac turned on his heels and began to pace as he spoke, "six years, two months and twenty one days ago..." his restless hands found a red amulet on a thin chain around his neck, "Maion managed to slip this noose about my throat. You want to remove it? Set me free, you say?"

Kitty nodded again, "Yes. If you help me."

Mac paused, frozen to the spot for some time, then said, "If you're here to free me on any kind of conditions, then Maion must be dead, yes? So... four now..." the man made his way to the stacks of papers, muttering to himself as he went, "four, four, four, fo--do you know what I've been doing down here?"

Kitty shook her head.

"Agonizing. That's what," he said, though he seemed to feel none of the words which he spoke. He began to fuss restlessly with tubes and wires in his chest and peeking out from his hair, "My chemical balance is always off, I subsist on watered down and expired meals, I write... and I plan. I've got a little something in the works, you see--"

"I don't care."

"Excuse you?"

"I don't care about your plans," Kitty said, arms crossed over her chest, tail whipping impatiently, "I've come to make a deal. You know my conditions. Give me a yes or a no."

Mac raised an eyebrow. He smiled his meaningless grin, displaying a set of perfectly white, straight teeth. Laughing abruptly, he then said,

"Alright, Kitten. Let's make a deal. What kind of assistance would I be lending?"

Kitty opened her mouth, but Feebus cut in. He spoke with the most dignified business manners. Kitty was almost impressed.

"Murder, Mac, something you're quite adept in," he began. Mac smiled and nodded graciously, as if utterly flattered by the comment, "if you recall, Maion had a business rival by the name of Demonic."

"The painter. I recall." Mac responded, grin still in place. Feebus continued,

"She is our main target. In addition, a female sword wielder, a wind manipulator," Mac's eyes lit up noticeably at this, "and Demonic's former top assassin."

"The puppet boy?"

"No. A newer model. Wields a scythe."

"I see..." Mac again resumed the muttering of the number four, pacing like an anxious beast. He would pick up pieces of paper, then set them down, straighten the stacks and arrange his pens in straight lines. Suddenly, he looked up at the two, his visage transformed into a wild grin,

"Alright! I want this wind user. Free me!"

Kitty's breath caught in her throat and her heart leapt uncomfortably. Why was this man so interested in her sister? Or, more importantly, her sister's power? Feebus, on the other hand, sighed in relief and turned to his feline companion.

"Remove the talisman he wears. But exercise the utmost caution."

"Got ya." Kitty said and approached the red haired man slowly. He knelt down in front of her, once again causing himself to look meek and small in his environment. Kitty removed the necklace slowly and carefully, as if afraid of breaking it. As Mac's hair fell from the chain around him, time froze for an instant, suspended around two people.

Mac's hands shot out at Kitty's throat.

As if anticipating just this, she flipped backwards and landed herself at the opposite end of the room from the murderer. He snarled and slid across to where she stood, thrusting his foot out in front of him to knock her to the floor. Leaping into the air, she forced the chain back around his neck and launched herself over his shoulders to land behind him, her feet padding gently onto the floor. She turned towards him, muscles still tensed.

Panting, she stared him down, fists clenched, heart racing. Slowly, a laugh welled up from his chest, finally exploding from him so that the echo caused Kitty's sensitive ears to ring. Mac swung around to face her, his eyes mad, the red amulet clutched tightly in one hand.

"I think I might be in love!" he said mockingly, laughter still springing up in short bursts. Kitty's brow furrowed deeply as she grimaced in disgust, her face a deep crimson.

"Oh, now, don't be like that, Kitten!" he said, tossing the brilliantly red hair from his face, "I think this is the start of a beautiful partnership."

Owari

## 2 - Call to Action

### Author's Notes:

-And here we have chapter two of volume two of Brian's and my story. Brian wrote this one, as I'm sure is evident.

-I've been pretty damn slow to post these chapters lately >.<

-Starting to introduce many interesting new characters here :3

Enjoy! :D

In the heart of the Brazilian rain forest, deep beneath the canopy in the thick of the lush vegetation, Nemestrinus was running as fast as he could. His long, brown hair was littered with twigs and leaves after running through the brush for so long. Dodging behind a tree he leaned against it to try and catch his breath. Tiny ants crawled from the bark onto his slightly tan skin. He didn't disturb them.

Nemestrinus knew more than anyone about the careful ecological layout of the earth.

He reclaimed his breath and calmed himself down. Above his head a blade split the bark of the tree. He looked up in time to see the blade slice down the trunk. Before it could split him in two he threw himself out of the way. The blade withdrew back into the tree; then suddenly the trunk was smashed out of the way in an explosion of splinters and wood chips. Nemestrinus could see a dark figure standing there where the tree once was. The dark shadows cast by the canopy above blocked out the figure's face, but Nemestrinus had encountered him many times before and that weapon he was carrying was unmistakable. It was a long pole that had an enormous blade on one end and a huge spiked ball on the other.

The figure ran forward and swung the spiked ball part of the weapon. Nemestrinus ran out of the way as the ball thudded in the dirt. As he raised his hands, a giant root from a nearby tree suddenly came out of the ground and loomed over the figure. Nemestrinus brought his hands down and the root went to smash down on the guy. However, before it got close, the figure swung the spiked end of his weapon and smashed right through the root. He looked smugly at the plant manipulator.

Nemestrinus turned and ran, but the figure chased after him. He waved his hands at a couple of vines which sprang to life and began to wrap around the figure, who proceeded to use the blade to slice them up.

The figure threw the weapon, spiked ball end first. As it soared straight for him, Nemestrinus reached up and let a vine wrap around his wrist. The vine pulled him up as the weapon soared an inch under his feet. The spiked ball hit the trunk of the tree and smashed it to bits, toppling the canopy from which the vine came from. The vine heaved Nemestrinus through the air. He let go, directed a tree branch to move into his path, and managed to safely land on it.

He looked down at the figure on the ground. As he was looking he noticed a shadow growing right where he was standing. He took a step to the right and just missed getting hit by a big wooden paddle. He jumped off the branch as the wooden paddle slid along the wood and smashed into the trunk. Another branch moved aside to allow him to land on it and take a look at the new assailant. The figure was also cloaked in shadows, only this one was quite obviously feminine and held a paddle as weapon of choice. Nemestrinus had encountered her before as well.

He jumped off the branch he was on in the opposite direction. The female figure hoisted her paddle and followed him through the canopy. The figure on the ground picked up his weapon and followed the two



of them.

Don't let her touch you! Nemestrinus thought to himself.

It had turned into a game of tag that only ended when the figure on the ground threw his weapon again and destroyed the branch Nemestrinus was about to land on. He fell through the air. Reaching into his pocket he pulled out a handful of flower petals and threw them into the wind. The air suddenly began to rain flower petals, obscuring the vision of the two that were chasing him. When the storm ended, he was gone.

The two figures looked at each other and nodded their heads. They grabbed their weapons and fled the scene.

A flower of abnormally large size opened its petals and let Nemestrinus crawl out.

They're getting closer, he thought. I have to find the others.

Demonic was pissed. She had a stack of papers to go through waiting on her desk, training sessions were deplorable, and no one contacted the organization for a contract for a while. It had been 2 years since Maion's invasion on the organization and things weren't getting any better. She lost a lot of assassins in that mess, and creativity for some reason was eluding her so drawing more had become increasingly difficult. She tried to cover up the invasion as much as possible, but naturally information leaked out and the cover up turned into saving as much face as possible. Money had become a huge issue as well. She had to spend most of her funds on rebuilding and refurbishing the place.

To top it all she wasn't eating or sleeping very well. Most nights she would close her eyes and the faces of Dolosus, Kat, and Crimson would float into her mind. She partially blamed them for all the bad things that were happening to her beloved organization. If Dolosus was still around, he could persuade more customers and help get more money coming their way by taking on all the contracts while the others trained up. If Kat had told her that she had the document this entire time she wouldn't have had to kill Altojo and Dolosus wouldn't have left. If Crimson had died like she had planned none of this would have happened. They all took their toll on her and left her behind to pick up the pieces.

"Master?"

Demonic turned around. She had been walking down the hallway toward her office to face the mountain of papers that awaited her. It was the female crow who shook her out of her head.

"What is it?" she snapped.

"Excuse me, but he's here. We showed him into your...throne room."

The crow hesitated to call it her throne room. The damage her fights with Maion and Dolosus had done to her room made it one that desperately needed to be rebuilt.

Demonic nodded and rushed past her. She strode down the hallway to meet her appointment. Normally she would never agree to meet with someone face to face unless she actually knew the person, but this person paid a lot of money just to meet with her. It was money she couldn't turn down.

She went into her room and swept past the male crow and the stranger. The man had long brown hair pulled back into a pony tail, a little bit of a tan, and was wearing a buttoned down white shirt and blue jeans. It looked as if he tried to dress nice but it wasn't a main priority. She ascended her throne and waved to the crows to leave the two of them. As they left, she clutched her paintbrush at her side. She was more cautious now and knew to watch herself when left alone with a stranger.

"You are Nemestrinus?" she asked.

He gave a bow, "Yes, ma'am, I am."

"So what did you wish to discuss with me?"

"It's very important, ma'am. You are in charge among a group of people with various...abilities, correct?"

Demonic nodded.

"Well, I am here to inquire if any of them are a wind and/or fire user."

"That's classified."

"Please, I must know. You may be in danger if you are harboring people like that."

Demonic's hand tightened its grip around her brush as her thoughts flashed to Kat and Altojo.

"Listen," Nemestrinus sighed, "I'm paying you a lot of money. The least you could do is tell me honest information. A while ago there was a fire that broke out in a city called Otakon in Japan. Just before the city was burned to the ground, witnesses reported seeing a tornado in the vicinity. The wind was feeding the flames; quite obviously man-made."

"And how did my name get dragged up?"

"That's not important. Now tell me what you know."

"If you're looking for Kat, you're too late. She's gone."

"Where did she go?"

"First, tell me why you are looking for her."

Nemestrinus gave her an irritated look, yet he knew he wouldn't get anything out of her without giving something in return.

"She is in danger, this Kat girl. There is a man out there. No, not a man...a monster. He's after a few certain people. People with marks on them that give them certain abilities."

As he said this, he began to unbutton his shirt. Demonic wanted to tell him to stop, but she found it amusing. It wasn't every day that a man willingly undressed for her. She had to admit he had a nice chest, but something drew her eyes directly to his left pectoral muscle. Where bare flesh once was, a strange mark began to sear its way onto his skin, as if an invisible pen were drawing it.

"I am one of those people," he said.

"That's an interesting tattoo," Demonic said. She had only seen a mark appear like that on a person once before. It was during Kat's first training session at the organization. A mark had appeared on her ankles, along with some translucent wings that seemed to excel her speed, agility, and jumping prowess.

"This isn't a tattoo. It's a mark of power. A mark given to four people in the world, one for each elemental force in nature. I have the mark of Earth. This monster has been searching for these four people for some time now. He desires these marks for his own power, and he plans on killing anyone who has one or gets in his way of obtaining one. I was nearly caught a few months ago."

"What will he do if he gets his hands on these marks?"

"I have answered your first question. I know you know where to find the people with the fire and wind marks. Now tell me!"

Demonic paused for a second. She detested being talked to like this, but something big was going on. Whoever this monster was, something was happening and she needed to know if this was going to affect her at all, for good or bad.

"I don't know where Kat is. She left a while ago and basically disappeared off the face of the earth. I do believe she may be the one you are looking for, though. I have seen a mark appear on her in that same fashion."

Nemestrinus heaved a heavy sigh. He was so close to finding her, but Demonic truly did not know where Kat, or the others for that matter, ran off too.

"What about the other one? One controlled the tornado and the other one set the fire," he asked.

"The one who set the fire is not the person you seek. She is someone who has been working for me her whole life. I know every inch of her and there is no such mark on her body."

He face twisted into frustration.

"However," she went on, "there was someone else who had fire conjuring abilities. His name was Altojo, but I'm afraid you are too late."

“Too late? What do you mean?”

“He’s dead. He...passed away,” she said as she remembered assassinating him.

“Where is his body?”

“Why?”

“I need to check to see if he has the mark. If he doesn’t then I must move on and find the right fire user. If he does have the mark...” his voice trailed off.

“There is a cemetery not too far from here. Look for a tombstone that has no name or epitaph on it. Look to the tombstone to the right of it. His friends buried him there.”

“Thank you,” he bowed and turned to go.

“Wait,” Demonic ordered. “Before you go, tell me something. You said you have the Earth mark. Kat obviously has the Wind mark, and Altojo may have the Fire mark. What about water?”

Nemestrinus paused. He turned to look at her.

“Have you ever heard of a man named Geldan?” he asked.

“The serial killer?”

Far away in the frigid country of Russia, in the city of Moscow, a wild rave was happening in an old warehouse, with flashing strobe lights, pounding music, and a mosh pit of people grinding to the music. The heat was rising in the room and clothes were making their way off as alcohol was making its way in. But the real action was going on outside. A door opened from the warehouse, leading to an alley. A guy and a girl stumbled out, both laughing hysterically and desperately trying to keep their balance. They stumbled a few steps down the alley. Then, without warning, the girl jumped the guy and pushed him up against the wall, pressing her lips against his. In a wild passion they kissed with their tongues ripping into each other’s mouths. Her hands stayed on his shoulders whereas his began to explore her body, starting from rubbing her back to making their way down her hips and finally onto her legs. He began to push her skirt back and up her leg, squeezing her thigh, until she slapped his hand. That didn’t stop him, though. His hands kept moving further and further into unseen territory.

“Stop,” she half whispered, half gasped as she pulled his hands away from her legs and put them back on her waist; then went back to kissing. “Mmm...mmm...mmm? Mmm. Mmm! MMM!”

A sudden chill came over her lips. It was freezing and she wanted to pull away, yet when she tried to pull away she found she couldn’t. She tried to scream, but couldn’t. Her lips were stuck. They were literally frozen to the guy’s lips. Her eyes flew open and her gaze was met by a cold, hard stare that was emanating from his grey eyes.

He squeezed tighter on her waist to try to stop her moving around. Her skin was getting colder as her core temperature severely dropped. Tears weld up in her eyes, yet they quickly turned to ice before they had a chance to roll down her face. Her movement became slower and slower as her blood slowly froze solid. Her organs shut down one by one. Her skin turned blue. Her eyes lost the light of life. Finally, she stopped moving and became still.

The ice between their lips melted and Geldan pulled away. He admired his work with the frozen statue. How often did a corpse stand on its own? It was just like all the others.

“You shouldn’t have been such a tease,” he coldly said, and turned to leave.

The gate to the graveyard clanged shut. The noise died in the eerie silence that accompanies all graveyards. Nemestrinus walked along the tombstones, reading the names silently to himself, until he came across one that had neither name nor epitaph. It was covered in weeds, vines, and moss, the grass around it was growing out of control. It looked like no one had been to that grave in a long time. Nemestrinus kept walking toward the tombstone directly to the right of the unmarked grave. On the stone read the epitaph:

RIP  
Altojo

A skilled fighter  
A wonderful musician  
A beloved friend

He looked down at the ground. In front of the stone was a huge hole. In the bottom lay a coffin, its lid propped open, and its contents gone. A whisper escaped Nemestrinus's lips.  
"Altojo..."

Demonic burst into the room. The crows screamed and popcorn went flying through the air. She waited for them to gather their wits about them. The male crow grabbed the remote control and turned off the horror movie they had been watching, and then joined his sister in bowing.

"I have an assignment," she said, "for each of you."

They looked up at her with both shock and surprise etched on their faces.

"For each of us?" the female asked.

"You mean we won't be together?" the male asked.

"No, you won't," Demonic sighed. "I know you two never separate. You always stick together in your missions, which is good. I mean, that's how I made you. Unfortunately, these particular missions must be completed post-haste and so require you two to be in different places. We can't wait around for you to get back from one before you start the other. There just isn't that much time."

The crow exchanged glances. Usually Demonic was very clear, short, and concise with her directions. She often preferred to give her assignments out in writing just so there wasn't any confusion. This time, however, she was circumventing her words. They both knew there was something particularly special about these two missions and, whatever they are, they had better complete them. She looked at the female first.

"You were the closest here to Kat than anyone else, correct?" she asked.

The female crow nodded her head.

"Your mission is to go find Kat and bring her back here."

"Kat?" the crow protested. "But I thought we let her go? Why do you-"

"Because she is in danger and my heart bleeds for her," she responded, over emphasizing the sarcasm on the last part.

"How am I supposed to find her? When we tracked her when she left with the others, all traces and trails led to dead ends. That was when they were fresh, two years ago. Any lead on her whereabouts now will be long cold."

"Then get some new leads," Demonic said and turned to the male crow. "Your mission is to track down a certain man. Have you ever heard of someone named Geldan?"

He shook his head.

"Of course you haven't. You should really pay attention to the news more often. Geldan is someone very important right now, and I need you to bring him here."

"Ok..." the crow said, thinking there had to be more.

"Geldan's last known whereabouts are Moscow, Russia. The problem with finding him is that many people, the police included don't know what he looks like, or if Geldan is even his real name. He's been eluding them for so long."

"What? But the police records are the first thing we usually check when we try to locate someone. If

they don't know-"

"Silence!" Demonic said, raising her voice for the first time in what seemed like ages. The crows closed their mouths and bowed their heads.

"What is wrong with you two?" she asked. "Normally when I give you two an assignment you happily execute it immediately and without problem. Now what is with all these questions? Have you lost your touch? Your nerve? Your edge? Stop me when I guess it."

"It's not that," the female crow started, "it's just..."

"We usually don't get missions this difficult," her brother continued. "You're not giving us any leads or clues on how to find these people."

"And it's a little unnerving that we have to be separated and complete these at the same time," his sister finished.

Demonic rubbed the sides of her head.

"This is your job. This is why you two were made. There are no better people than you when it comes to locating targets. Figure it out," she said and folded her arms. It was quite obvious the conversation, as well as the movie, was over. The two got up and went to leave their room. As the male crow passed Demonic, she grabbed his arm and held it with a strength that did not match her body. In his ear she whispered, "Not you." His sister looked back as she reached the hallway. Somberly, she closed the door and walked down the hallway to go pack her bags. Demonic stood the male crow in front of her and stared him straight in the eye.

"I said I wanted your sister to find Kat because she was close to her. That's not completely true."

The male crow's face betrayed his confusion and curiosity.

"I specifically wanted you to track down Geldan...because he is a serial killer; a serial killer whose victim pool is predominately female. I couldn't risk losing her, so I chose you for the task simply because you are a boy and he wouldn't take much interest in you. He has some form of water power, and from what I heard about the way his victims have been found, a power over ice as well. Be careful."

It was the first time she had ever said "be careful" to someone. It was the first time she showed any sign of concern for the safety of her creations. Was it because she had so few creations left? Or was this Geldan guy really that dangerous? The male crow couldn't figure it out, but he knew the answer would come to him eventually once he reached Moscow and met the man. How he would do that, he still had no idea. But at the moment, his primary concern was getting out of the room and away from this new and unfamiliar side of Demonic.

She let go of the grip she had on him and he quickly left for his room. He and his sister pack their bags in silence. It was obvious what Demonic told him was in confidence, and he didn't want to worry his sister. Once he was done he hugged his sister, perhaps for the last time, and left for the airport.

Owari

### 3 - Persuasion

Author's Notes:

-The chapter dump continues, with the third chapter written by myself. I'm rather fond of this one, so... Enjoy! :D

Standard procedure was useless here. During the first few weeks after the invasion on Demonic's organization, the Crows had exhausted all of the usual resources. No form of government had any records of Kat's residency or whereabouts. None of Demonic's personal contacts or connections had any leads, and every group's archives had come up dry. At that point, they had given up.

Now, the task had fallen upon the shoulders of the sister crow alone. Of course she had rechecked the usuals- a tedious process which put her search on hold for over a month. Needless to say, this second attempt produced much the same results. The crow was at a loss.

She sat on her bed in her room, staring hazily at the screen of the laptop in front of her. Typing dexterously with one hand, she rested her chin on her other, thinking only distantly of her current predicament. It was hopeless. No clues, no leads, and no brother to help her. She logged on to her blog site with a heavy sigh.

The blog existed solely for amusement purposes. The Crows—or any in Demonic's employment, really—had very little resembling a personal life. Perhaps because of this, some liked to entertain the idea of a normal life, and the internet was a perfect world to start a fake life in. The female Crow, for instance, had begun a blog under an alias containing entirely falsified information about her and her life. Reading over a few comments on her latest entry, the crow glanced at the names and photos of those on the site; images of girls with their boyfriends, or in a group at a mall, or posing in front of a mirror. So many profiles from all over the world...

"That's it!" she whispered to the empty room, "Maybe it's simpler than it seems..." and with that, the search began. Following links, looking into every social networking site she could find, the crow searched for her old friend with Kat's common alias, Katelyn Hart. Pouring over pages upon pages of blogs and profiles, scouring lists of website member, she finally seemed to stumble upon something promising. The sister crow clicked into the profile of a girl with very familiar pink hair—it could be dyed, but it was worth a look. The girl wore cute, stylish clothes, a sharp contrast to the fighting garb which Kat had worn during nearly all of her time at the organization. The photo featured on her page also only showed part of her face and her eyes were obscured by large sunglasses. Frowning slightly, the crow began hacking through the site's security systems to view the entire profile without creating an account or contacting this mysterious girl directly. She grunted in frustration.

"Nothing about her location... not even a country..." she grumbled to herself with a frown. Well, for now she could at least search through her posted photos to see if this was indeed Kat. With a few clicks, she was in her photo gallery, perusing the results for a clear shot of the girl's face. The crow's brow creased in a deep frown. Several partial shots, a lot with sunglasses obscuring the eyes. It was so suspicious that it nearly confirmed her identity as the missing Kat. She had to be sure, however, as the organization had not the money nor time for useless travel, and so she quickly selected a group of pictures to send to the tech lab for facial recognition scans. This done, she took another look through the photos, and this time, something caught her eye. There was a napkin in one particular photo bearing what was presumably the name of a restaurant of sorts.

"Oh-ho-hooo, what's this now?" the crow said quietly and zoomed in to see the napkin better, "The Bread and Roses Cafe..." a quick online search of the name revealed it to be a small cafe in London. With a triumphant laugh, the crow punched the air in victory and slammed the laptop shut.

The afternoon was a scene of dull melancholy, painted in grays and neutrals. Rain pattered on the roof of the café like a hundred finger nails tapping on a table. The storefront rested comfortably on a quaint little street, nestled between a barber shop and a florist's, with a welcome mat and wind chimes by the door. Water was gathering in puddles between the cobblestones along the street, splashing up around the feet of passersby, eager to escape the sudden rain. So formed the white noise that filled Kat's ears as she sat at her usual table, engrossed in her latest romance novel.

Annabella could feel Jason's warm breath on her skin as he drew closer to her. Her heart pounded as he wrapped his arms around her, whispering softly into her ear,

"I never thought I'd see you again."

"I could never leave you," she responded breathlessly, her body warmed by his as he held her close. Hearts pounding, the two leaned into one another and their lips touched softly and tenderly...

Kat paused for a moment, folding the corner of the page to keep her place. When she looked up, she gave a start on seeing a waiter whom she couldn't recall approaching, but who now stood, staring at her from across the table. The girl frowned curiously at an odd bulge on his chest, beneath shirt and apron (only slightly more remarkable than his startlingly red hair). She hastily pulled her attention from it, but she could tell that her waiter had noticed the glance. Laughing awkwardly, she began to say,

"I'm so sorry, sir, I didn't mean to be rude—"

"Oh, no, no, not at all," he quickly interjected, "it was rude of me to stare! You just seemed so absorbed in your book—I didn't want to interrupt. Regardless—" he said, his words oddly paced and disorienting, "I digress! What may I serve you on this delightful afternoon?"

"I, uh, just a lemon tea, i-if that's alright." Kat stuttered out, completely taken aback by the man's presence. With a smile which displayed perfectly straight, white teeth, he bowed deeply and hurried off to retrieve her drink.

She exhaled softly and rested her chin on her palm, her elbow on the table. Absently, she began to drum her fingernails on the cover of her book, which featured a tan, muscular man with his shirt open and blowing in a staged wind. Kat smiled dryly. These cover models were always the same, and she had a different kind of man in mind. Sighing wistfully, she let her mind wander to now bittersweet memories of a tall, slender man with misty hazel eyes.

"Here you are, miss!"

"Wagh!" Kat jumped, crying out in surprise. The waiter had returned with her tea in hand and a cheerful smile on his face. Chuckling good-naturedly, he set the drink down on the table for her, saying,

"I'm so sorry, miss, I didn't mean to frighten you."

"Oh, no, not at all," she responded, "I sort of spaced out, I suppose..."

"That so?" the waiter said with a laugh, "You should be more alert—you never know when someone could catch you off guard." That said, he bowed courteously and excused himself.

"Hmmm..." Kat sighed softly and took a long sip of her tea. Golden eyes half lidded, she allowed herself one more brief thought of romance, then shook her head of it and returned to a reality of rainy English afternoons and a lonely apartment with her only remaining friend. Tea passed her lips and tongue, warming her throat and chest as she sipped quietly. As she warmed up, she dreaded the rain more and more, but knew that Crimson would have a fit if she was late getting home. They were planning to move again soon, which meant packing and covering their tracks.

As she finished the last of her tea, Kat got to her feet to leave. She scanned the café, but could find no

sight of the peculiar waiter. Frowning, she shrugged and left her pay on the table, grabbed her umbrella and departed.

Rainwater splashed up around Kat's feet as she ran, struggling to control her unwieldy umbrella. Her breath swirled in a thin fog before her, expelled in quick bursts as she ran. Puddles had formed along the streets and sidewalks, so that Kat's shoes were quickly soaked through. In her hurry, she vaguely noticed that the water seemed to reach up from the pavement like grabbing hands as she splashed through, but quickly returned her attention to speeding on her way back to Crimson, who was no doubt awaiting her return anxiously.

"Crap..." she muttered, glancing down at her watch, "I'm already late. Well, just one more block." A puddle splashed up around her leg. She lost her footing for a moment, but quickly regained her bearings. Shaking her head to clear a bout of momentary dizziness, she paused to catch her breath. "Already late..." she said to herself, "so no harm in taking a break to..." she drifted off. The dizziness was returning and wouldn't go this time. Water splashed up over her feet. That was odd—she was pretty sure she had stopped running. But now she could swear that she felt like she was moving. Buildings shifted slowly, like a clock's minute hand, and colors slowly began to melt into one another; Big Ben chimed deafeningly as the face melted down like a Dali nightmare, and the Parliament building seemed to fold and collapse in on itself. Kat could see people around her, but they were only vague shapes and swirling colors. She tried to focus on a face, but to no avail, until one figure stood out, completely clear. "Al... Altojo...?" Kat whispered. He approached her slowly, a gentle smile on his lips. Her mind went numb, and tears began to form in Kat's eyes, then fall down her face, warm against her cold skin. Her chest hurt as her heart thudded painfully behind her ribs no matter how she begged it to stop. All at once, he was directly in front of her, although he had appeared to walk in slow-motion. The red bandana covered his eyes as always, but he seemed to see Kat as he smiled warmly down at her.

"Altojo..." she repeated, "Wait, but... you're... you're... this isn't right..." he made no response, but only remained before her, smiling as he had in life. Slowly, as though forced to move against her will, Kat reached up and pulled the bandana from his face. His eyes opened, and he stared unblinkingly down at her. Hazel. They were eerie, familiar hazel eyes.

"You're dead..." Kat said weakly. The words now echoed around her deafeningly, like a teasing chant. Voices joined in the horrifying mantra, and Kat tried to cover her ears to block it out, but to no success. The sound was in her head. All at once, as the chorus reached their crescendo, a scythe's blade ripped through Altojo's body, spraying blood over Kat like the afternoon rain. She screamed, and she felt her lungs and throat ache with the strain, but could not hear her own voice. She was horribly cold. The world spun around her as scarlet rain fell from a dark sky.

"Ka... K... you... ay?"

"Hm...? Who...?" Kat had fallen, though she couldn't recall when or how. Someone was holding her up from the soaked pavement. She heard a vaguely familiar voice calling to her, but the sound was muffled as if she were under water.

"Kat... can y... me?"

With all of her strength and willpower, Kat pushed through the clouded fog of her mind to reach reality. She saw faces surrounding her, but soon focused on the person holding her.

"You!!" Kat choked out on seeing the narrow eyes and wicked features of the sister crow above her, staring down with less concern and more utter confusion. The small crowd around her stirred with whispers and awkward looks, but Kat took no notice. She struggled to get free from the crow, but what unsuccessful in her weakened state.

"What are you doing here?! I'm not going back—I never wanted to see any of you again!! I—"



“Kat, shut up!” the crow hissed back at her, “Kat, you skipped your medication this morning, didn’t you?” she said more loudly, “I told you these fits of yours are getting worse and worse. Come now, let’s get you home and take your pill.”

“Wha-?” Kat began to protest, but then simply let the crow pull her to her feet and drag her away from the now dispersing crowd. She did her best to keep up, and soon enough, they were at the apartment she shared with Crimson. Making a note to ask her unexpected guest exactly how she just happened to know where she lived, Kat stopped to catch their breath on the steps leading to the entrance of the complex.

“Where... where are your wings?” Kat said a little breathlessly, staring over at the sister crow, sans her typical enormous black wings. The crow laughed and shook her head, saying,

“That’s your first question? Really?” Kat rolled eyes at this, so the crow simply said, “It’s a spell. No big deal. Just something my brother and I picked up. Makes blending in considerably easier, no?”

“I see...” Kat muttered, then was silent for a time. She watched passersby cross in front of them, strolling along more easily now that the rain had stopped for the moment. Spell or no spell, Kat noticed that the crow’s black attire and odd disposition still earned her plenty of stares. The crow sighed heavily and said,

“You’re a pretty terrible conversationalist if you can’t come up with something to say at a time like this.”

“Well excuse me!” Kat responded, rolling her eyes and throwing her hands up dramatically, “I’m trying to decide what to ask first. I mean... Well, why are you here? I have a feeling that I really won’t like the answer, but I suppose I have to ask.”

“Hey, it’s somewhere to start at least. You’d think after years of missing my delightful presence, you’d have more to say.” The crow said with a grin. Seeing Kat unresponsive to jokes, however, she sighed and said, “Well, I’m not sure how to say this, but your life is in danger. Again. Seems to be a bit of a thing with you, huh?” Kat gave her a look and she continued, “Anyway, as it so happens, there’s someone on the loose who’s after you to get your power, which puts you and anyone you may be associated with at the moment in danger.”

“My... power?” Kat questioned.

“Over wind.” The crow clarified, then continued in a more serious tone, “Look, I don’t know if you know this, but there are three other marks like the ones on your ankles that appear when you invoke a greater control over wind. The others are of fire, water and earth. A reliable source of ours tells us that there is now someone after the bearers of all four, and pardon me for being presumptuous, but I’m willing to bet that whatever had you tripping back there was caused by that person.”

“So... you want me to come back to the Organization. For... protection?” Kat said skeptically, as though the very concept were laughable.

“I don’t know Demonic’s motives, Kat,” the crow admitted with a sigh, “But part of why I have to bring you back is for information purposes. Our source can tell you more about that mark, and hopefully you can tell us a bit of what you know as well. See? A win-win situ-”

“I don’t have any information.” Kat interrupted, scowling, “This is completely pointless. I don’t know anything that would be of any use to your little group.”

“You may know more than you think you know.” The crow returned.

“Now you’re just being ridiculous.” Kat said. She got to her feet and brushed off her bottom, turning towards the door to the apartment building.

“Kat, wait,” the crow grabbed her old friend’s wrist and said to her almost pleadingly, “you could at least hear me out. Or... or let me stick around a bit while you give it some thought. Just some consideration?”

The pink haired girl was silent for some time. Her first impulse was to flat-out refuse and send the crow

back immediately. Kat had no proof that any of her information was indeed true. Still, she had gone through all the effort of tracking her down and coming to get her. Perhaps a little thought on the matter was warranted. Besides which, if it was true that her own and, more importantly, Crimson's safety were at stake, it deserved at least some attention.

"Ugh..." Kat grunted, rubbing her temples in frustration, "Fine. You can stay for a few days, tops. I'll think about it, but I give no guarantees."

"Fantastic!" the crow cried out, clapping her hands together in delight. The pair entered the building and began ascending the stairs as she babbled on about something or another. Kat more or less tuned this out, however, as her mind was already screaming at her for allowing this to happen. Rolling her eyes with a disgruntled sigh, she fished around in her pocket for her key, then shoved it into the doorknob with deliberate force.

"Sorry. Damned thing won't unlock unless you practically break the key in half... anyway, here we are." Kat said, gesturing around the inside of the apartment rather unceremoniously.

It consisted of a bedroom, a small kitchen attached to a common room of sorts, and a bathroom, tucked away in a corner. The bedroom had only one bed, but it was clear that the couch in the common room was also in use as a makeshift bed as well. A few dirty dishes sat in the kitchen sink, but not enough to imply neglect. Conspicuously new curtains hung around a window looking out towards the neighboring apartment complex, and a small bottle holding a handful of flowers sat on the sill. Overall, the place was not much to look at, but it was clean and it was apparent that some effort had been put into its appearance.

Crimson, unnoticed by the other two girls thus far, had been seated at a small table in the kitchen, pretending to check her e-mail. She never got much since she and Kat had gone into hiding, but she liked to think she was more interested in that than waiting impatiently for Kat to get home. At the unmistakable sound of the key being jammed into the door, she gave a start and shot up to her feet. She advanced on the door, lecture already prepared and on her lips, when she caught sight of the sister crow.

"You!" Crimson roared, and began groping around blindly for something—anything—with which to strike her. Knocking a pile of mail off the table to spill across the floor and nearly tripping over the leg of a chair, her flying hands finally found the handle of something. She swung her weapon up at the crow, furious and breathless. The crow, finding herself now held at umbrella-point, raised her hands in surrender and backed up against the door.

"Uhm, I've been living with Crimson, by the way." Kat muttered awkwardly.

"I... I can see that!" the crow responded with as much charm and joviality as she could muster in her situation.

"Kat, get away from her!" Crimson growled, never taking her eyes from her target, "You. Why are you here? Isn't your little freak group done with us?"

"Crimson, please, hold on," Kat pleaded, placing a hand on her friend's umbrella-wielding arm, "She actually helped me out earlier, and we've been talking, and it sounds like there might be something going on, so if you could just p-put, down... the... umbrella... ah!" she grunted as she pried it out of Crimson's hand, "and hear her story, maybe we can figure something out."

The corner of the blonde's mouth twitched in a snarl. Her muscles tensed still, fists clenched to strike at the slightest provocation, she turned and sat huffily at the kitchen table. The other two shared a glance for a moment which was long enough to test Crimson's patience.

"Well, come on, let's hear it." She barked at the crow, "I'll throw you out on the street if you don't start convincing me otherwise soon."

The crow came to sit across from Crimson with a sigh, while Kat remained standing against the wall behind her friend (mostly due to a lack of further seating). Running her hands down her face, she

paused, then said,  
“I suppose I should start at the beginning.”

The stores weren't overly crowded the next day when Kat agreed to go shopping with the sister crow, as it happened to be a weekday. She'd initially wondered at how much she had been letting the crow drag her into since they'd reunited, but on arriving, she actually began to enjoy herself, and didn't mind it much at all. Needless to say, she had decided against even attempting to bring Crimson with them, but she found herself enjoying the crow's company regardless, now that the pressure of their initial meeting had lifted. Kat recalled some good times with the two crow siblings back at the organization, and they were nice to think of, but far from enough to convince her to return.

“Hey, hey, Kat! How about this one?”

Kat turned to see what the crow had picked out off the rack of clothes she had been sifting through, and only had to see that it was leather—again—before turning back and calling over her shoulder, “You know what the answer is on that one.”

“Oh, come on,” the crow insisted, hands on her hips, “It's not even really leather. It's this sort of weird... organic...”

“Look, you don't even know what it is so don't bother. Whatever you want me to try on, if it's something that you would wear, just assume that the answer is ‘no’,” grabbing a few cheap t-shirts from a shelf, Kat gestured for the crow to follow and headed towards the nearest dressing room.

Inside, she began struggling to get out of her own clothes and into unfamiliar ones while the crow waited on the other side of the door. After some silence, the latter asked, innocent as anything,

“Still have your fight clothes laying around somewhere?”

Grunting slightly as she pulled a sundress over her head and onto her body, Kat paused for a moment to consider her response. In all honesty, she did. The clothes she'd worn on missions with the Organization were still tucked away in the bottom of her suitcase, and she knew for a fact that Crimson still kept her katana nearby no matter where they traveled. However, she wasn't going to fall into this path of conversation.

“Why? I don't need them or anything.” She said, quite casually. She could just picture the pouting look on the crow's face on the other side of the dressing room door, and nearly laughed out loud at the thought. Straightening the dress in the mirror, Kat opened the door for the crow to see, saying conversationally, “Hmmm... maybe some boots with this, even. I know I have an old pair. I'd add a hat or something but I don't want to overdo it... What do you think?”

The crow put on an exaggeratedly thoughtful expression as she looked Kat up and down in the adorable sundress. She shrugged and said, so friendly that it bordered on annoying,

“I think Dolosus would really like it on you.”

Kat was silent. She narrowed her eyes at the crow, folding her arms over her chest. Her heart thudded painfully against her ribs, but she could find no words for the moment. Finally, looking away, she muttered,

“You had to go and throw him into this, huh.”

“Well don't you want to see him again? There's no way you can just walk away from everything now. Things like that don't just vanish, Kat.” The crow said.

“This is all rather deep for you, isn't it?” she replied sarcastically, eyes still averted.

“Oh, come onnnn!” the female crow said rather childishly, “Do you want to see Dolosus again or not? Far as I can tell, it's a pretty simple question. Well?”

“Well...” Kat whispered, staring at the floor. Yes, she wanted to see him. More than anything, she wanted to see him. She had not gone a day since leaving the organization without dwelling on her

memories of him, and she had imagined their reunion in at least a thousand different ways, all of them breath taking. At this point, it was no longer even a question of whether it was worth it or not, but whether she could justify it.

“Come on,” the crow said with a smile, pushing her back into the dressing room and closing the door behind her, “change back into your clothes. We’ll get the t-shirts, the dress, and if you see a pair of boots you like, hey, it’s on me.”

“I, uh, okay...” Kat stuttered out, obeying out of a lack of any preferable option. Now back in her own clothes, she gathered her purchases in her arms and joined the crow once more. They paid for the things and headed out, Kat now in quite a state as the crow hummed happily to herself.

“We’ll head back to your place and talk to Crimson about our departure. She’s welcome to come along, of course, soon as we’ve got her okay.” The crow paused for a moment, “Er... Maybe you should do the talking this time. I’d rather not see what other household objects she could menace me with”

Owari.

## 4 - Cold as Ice

### Author's Notes:

-YOU'RE AS COOOLD AS ICE! YOU'RE WILLIN' TO SAAACRIFICE OUR LOOVE!

-\*cough\* anyway, chapter four, ladies and gentlemen, as presented by the lovely Brian.

Enjoy! :D

The crow stomped into his tiny, one room apartment he had rented for his stay. It had been about four days since he had come to Moscow to search for Geldan. He had looked in every police station in the city, stolen every file about every serial killer the city had since the 1980s, and did nightly searches from the sky desperately hoping for some strange activity to go by. So far, no luck.

"It's almost like he doesn't exist," he told himself as he plopped onto the bed. The sun was rising which meant it was time for him to sleep. He hoped maybe some dreams would give him ideas of where to search.

There was only one file in the entire city that was even remotely connected to him, but it didn't list him by name. Rather it was more of a list of all the people that had been murdered in Moscow in the past four years. The numbers seemed normal. The crow had been on enough investigations through his life to know what the normal murder rate was of cities this size. However, in the past year and a half, the count jumped to above average, not to mention that the victim ratio switched to about 90% women. Demonic's words rang in his ears: he is a serial killer; a serial killer whose victim pool is predominately female.

Female. That was the only connection the victims all had.

No, it isn't. They had to have something else. There was always a connection.

Their killings didn't happen until the past year and a half. That meant that Geldan may not have been in Moscow until then.

So does he just move about the country?

That explains why there wasn't a file about him in Moscow. Serial killers that hit spots around the country usually had their file in some centralized location, for national security purposes and all that.

That still doesn't make my search any easier.

All the victims were young and attractive. He saw the pictures.

So he was probably looking for sex.

But there were no signs of rape.

Maybe that's why he killed them. The ones that slept with him may still be alive. Okay, so where do beautiful women congregate where men can pick them up?

Nightclubs.

That was the answer. Every girl, at least in the victims' range, loves going out dancing and drinking and hanging out with friends. Plus, going by the stereotype, most didn't pay attention to the news to even know other women like them were being killed. That's where the crow knew he would find Geldan.

The first two nights after he came to this conclusion both turned into failure as he went to the first two most popular nightclubs in the city and sat at the bar eyeing every guy, careful to watch for any new couples just hooking up. So far he had gotten seven phone numbers, two questionings from a police

officer, and a punch in the face by a jealous boyfriend.

The third night, he decided to go to one lower on the list that didn't have police watching it. Colored lights were flashing, music was pounding, drinks were being passed out, and the crowd was sitting at the bar watching the crowd grind with each other. His eyes moved from guy to guy, and then finally settled on one sitting further down the bar from the crowd. He had short cut hair except for the long bangs in front. His skin was light, but not pale. He wore an orange coat on top of a black shirt with black pants that had a studded belt going around them. Around his neck were some dog tags. A glow stick bracelet hung around his ankle, and there was a nice stud in his ear. Over all, typical club attire.

The man had his eye on a couple who were currently in a heated argument. The girl slapped the guy, who just walked away muttering to himself. Once he was out of sight, the girl took a seat at the bar and the man the crowd was watching went to go sit next to her. The music was much too loud to hear their conversation, but it was quite obvious that the man was trying to put the moves on her. It must have been obvious to the girl's boyfriend because before long he came back and started yelling at the guy. The boyfriend pushed him and laid a big one on his woman. The guy just sauntered back over to his spot on the bar. Amusingly, the boyfriend smiled and yelled to the bar keep for a drink. The bar tender nodded, put a bottle on the bar and, like a pro, slid it down the bar, past the stranger, and to the happily reunited couple. The boyfriend made to take a gulp, and then started yelling at the bar tender. The crowd couldn't tell what he was yelling about until the boyfriend revealed the inside of his glass for all the world to see. The drink inside was frozen solid.

...a power over ice as well...

Demonic's words echoed in the crowd's mind.

The man at the bar!

The crowd turned back to where the stranger had been sitting, but he was gone. He frantically looked around until he caught a flash of orange across the room. The man was now hitting on someone else. He moves fast.

The crowd made his way through the dancers and reached the flirts. He put his arm around the guy and smiled.

"So the doctor got back to me. He says I have crabs, but don't worry. He gave me a special shampoo for us to use," he said.

The girl lifted her eyebrows, looked from the crowd to the guy and back to the crowd, then left with a very doggy sigh. The guy took the crowd's arm off and stared at him square in the eyes. The crowd noticed how icy grey his eyes were.

"You better have a death wish," the man said.

"I just needed to get you alone," the crowd pleaded. "I need to talk with you."

"Beat it, freak."

The stranger turned and made a beeline for the door. The crowd tried to follow him, but the dancers made it nigh impossible. Finally, he managed to get outside just in time to see the man turn a corner.

It was very late. There were no people on the sidewalks and hardly any cars. By the light of the full moon the crowd easily tracked down the stranger.

"Wait!" he yelled.

"Leave me alone!" he replied.

"I have to talk to you!"

"I said leave me alone!"

"GELDAN!"

The man stopped dead in his tracks as his name echoed in the night. He waited for the crowd to catch up to him, then turned around very slowly.

"It is you, isn't it," the crowd said. "Turning the drink to ice as it passed right by you; not exactly a smart

thing to do to hide your identity.”

“What do you want?”

“I just want to talk.”

Geldan didn't respond.

“My master's name is Demonic. She sent me here to bring you back with me to the United States.”

“The states? Why?”

“I don't know. I'm just following orders.”

“I have no interest in going to America. For all I know, you may be a spy, sent here to take me. Once I step off the plane, there'll be a hundred FBI and CIA agents with their guns pointing at me.”

“What?”

“Or are you in cahoots with the local police? Get me to go with you right to a jail cell?”

“I'm not in cahoots with anyone...except my master.”

“I don't even know this Demonic. Why should I trust you?”

“I... don't know,” the crow admitted sheepishly.

“See ya” Geldan turned to leave.

“Aw, come on! Don't go. Can't you just trust me?”

Geldan stared him down carefully.

“No,” he said.

“Why not?”

“Do you know anything about me?”

“Just what my master told me: your name is Geldan, you have an ice type power, and you're a serial killer,” the brother crow explained.

“Exactly! A serial killer who has never been caught,” Geldan responded pointedly, “And I wouldn't have gotten that reputation if I did stupid stuff like putting my trust in freaks like you. You haven't even told me why your master wants me!”

“How should I know?” he replied, exasperated, “One day that Nemestrinus guy comes and makes an appointment to see my master, the next I'm here in Russia.”

“Did you say Nemestrinus?”

“That's right.”

Geldan smiled.

“Alright, I know exactly what's going on here.”

“You... You do?” the crow replied with a dumbfounded look.

“Yes, both you and your master are being fooled. About two years ago, that Nemestrinus guy came to see me. He told me my life was in danger. Somebody named Mike or Mick or something was supposedly hunting me down. Well, it's been two years and I'm still alive.”

“My master is not one to be easily tricked-”

“Trust me. Nemestrinus is a big, fat liar. Nobody is going to try and kill me. Just go home and tell your boss to be more careful with whom she trusts.”

“Can't you tell her yourself?”

“I'm not going with you.”

At that moment, a geyser shot out of a manhole near the crow.

“Now listen to me, you freak. If you follow me...I'll kill you,” Geldan glared. He turned to go. The further he got from the crow, the smaller the geyser shrank. Finally, he disappeared into the night and the geyser faded away.

“Great,” the crow thought to himself. “Now what do I do?”

The streets were still empty. Geldan popped his collar both as a habit for hiding his face and as a barrier

from the wind. Moscow got very cold at night.

He passed by a large store window. Like everyone else in the world, he couldn't resist looking at his reflection. It was a nice reflection, very cool and sexy. Unfortunately these thoughts were interrupted by the words of that freak he ran into at the club.

"This is the second time someone has come to me claiming my life was in danger," he said quietly. "Perhaps I've stayed in this country for too long. Tomorrow I'll get a plane ticket and passport and high tail it out of here."

As he visualized himself leaving, he saw something move in the reflection of the glass. Whatever it was, it was coming at him fast. He jumped out of the way as the object plowed into the window, shattering the glass and raining it everywhere. Geldan moved the arm he had used to shield his face from the glass. He looked across the street from the direction the object had come from. Perched on top of a street lamp was a man in black pants and a heavy overcoat. He wore a strange looking hat over his obviously long, purple hair. He wasn't exactly a figure who would blend into a crowd.

The man smiled and jumped off the pole. He landed on the ground in a way that would normally shatter a person's knees, but he seemed completely unharmed. He stood up, brushed himself off, and started walking over to Geldan.

"Who the hell are you?" Geldan yelled as he got up.

"The name is Pike. I shall be your killer so keep my name in your head if you ever decide to come back from the dead and seek revenge."

"Kill me? Oh my God, what is with all you freaks? Can't you just leave me alone? And you mixed up your line. You were supposed to say you're here to save my life and warn me about danger."

"But I'm not."

The man charged forward and jumped into the air, aiming a kick at Geldan's face. Geldan ran out of the way and let the man fly into the store. Quickly, Geldan concentrated on the water pipes he knew were running through the walls. As the man landed on the floor in the back of the store, the walls all began to crack. The cracks grew bigger and bigger until chunks of the plaster fell off and water came pouring forth. It only took a minute for the water to fill the entire room from floor to ceiling, with Geldan using his power to stop it at the window. He walked over to the wall of water in front of him and put his hand against it. A mark appeared on the back of his hand. Instantly, the water froze solid.

"See?" he gloated, "no one can kill me."

He took his hand off the ice and walked away from the store.

It's definitely not safe for me in Russia anymore. Everyone seems to know I'm here, he thought. First things first, I'll have to acquire a passport. The one I used to get here I destroyed after arriving, but it shouldn't be too hard to get a new one. First I'll-

His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of a wall coming. He spun around and looked at the store again. From this new angle he could see into the alley next to the building. There was a large hole in the side and the man, Pike, was walking out of it. He had a weapon this time. It appeared to be a long pole with a blade at one end and a spiked ball at the other.

"How did you...the ice...you should have..." Geldan was so shocked he couldn't form a sentence.

Pike sneered, "It'll take more than that to kill me."

He picked up the weapon and charged straight for Geldan. Geldan jumped out of the way as the spiked ball end came crashing down and blew a small crater where he was standing. Geldan tried to run away, but the man was fast and chased after him through the streets, swinging his weapon with precise strokes, knocking over and breaking street lights, paper dispensers, and even a car. Geldan knew the noise would attract people, and people would call the cops, and the cops would question him. He couldn't have that. He had to stop this mad man.

He turned and faced the attacker head-on. Pike thrust the blade of his weapon as Geldan focused his



power into the water from a nearby fire hydrant. The hydrant burst and a stream of water flew in between them. Just as the blade touched the water, meaning to go through it and stab Geldan, the water froze solid and became a wall of ice. Pike was surprised his attack was stopped so easily. Geldan took that moment to send another jet into Pike's torso, sending him several feet away.

Pike got back to his feet. He smiled menacingly. Geldan contorted his hands and formed the water into a cone. Then he propelled the cone toward his enemy. En route, the cone froze and became a giant icicle. Pike's smile widened.

"I see you have some fight in you!" he said as he spun and swung the spiked ball into the icicle, knocking it into a phone booth, away from him. "Good!"

He ran forward, weapon at the ready. Geldan gritted his teeth and held his hand in the air. A stream of water soared over the street. The stream broke apart into individual globules. The blobs all then lengthened into long, sharp needles. One by one, the needles froze and fell to the ground, and one by one, Pike managed to avoid being hit by all of them. He came within striking distance of Geldan. A wave splashed in between them, flinging them both back in different directions.

Geldan stood up and coughed some water out of his lungs. The wave hit him too, but it was better than being hit by that spiked ball. Pike stood up and wiped off his face. He gave Geldan another sneer.

"You've got to do better than that," he gloated.

Geldan glared at him. Then he noticed something interesting. That wave had knocked Pike next to a sewer drain. It was sludge, but it was still mostly water. Geldan pointed his hand at Pike. Instantly, water roared out of the drain and began to envelope Pike. He tried to fight it off by swinging his weapon madly, but every wave of water that he destroyed just rebuilt itself almost instantly. Geldan learned a long time ago that the best part of water is its reforming abilities. Once Pike was completely encased, Geldan focused his power again and the water froze solid into a pillar of ice.

Pike was clearly visible this time in a statue of green brown ice with floating debris and a rat scattered around him. He was petrified in a state of panic. Geldan breathed a sigh of relief. Just like all of his victims, freezing them was a sure way of death.

He stayed this time to make sure there wouldn't be any unexpected surprises. He was glad he did.

tink  
It was a small sound; minute, barely audible and insignificant to most people. But Geldan knew right away what it was.

tink

It was the sound of ice breaking.

tink...tink...tink...tink chink...tink chink chink tink-chink chink-chink-crack chink chink  
crack-chink-crack-crack chink-crack-crack-crack-crack

Geldan couldn't believe his ears. The night was filled with the sound of the pillar of ice coming apart. At first only small pieces of ice chipped off as hairline cracks began to run over the column. But then bigger pieces fell as the fractures became bigger, distorting the image of the man trapped inside.

Finally, the ice completely shattered.

"...how..." was Geldan could managed to say.

Pike shook himself.

"Brr, that was cold," he said as he brushed chips of ice off his shoulders.

"How...How did you do that? No one has ever broken the ice before?" Geldan yelled.

Pike looked over at him as if seeing him for the first time. He smiled, took off his coat, and held up his arm.

"This is my secret."

The skin on his arm expanded itself. Not still connected together as one would expect to skin to be, but in plates. Four long plates detached themselves from the rest of the arm and held themselves out by the

assistance of metal hinges. It wasn't skin at all. It wasn't a real arm.

"A prosthetic limb?" Geldan asked, dumfounded.

"That's right. You see, I've been around for a while, and as a result I've been in many fights. Well, as a result of those fights, I've lost...some things. You know, appendages, organs, etc. Anyway, long story short, it is fairly safe to assume that most of my body has been donated to the wonderful science of prosthetics. And I'm not talking cheap plastics, either. This here is state of the art, high endurance metal!"

At that, plates began to lift themselves off of all four of his limbs.

His arms and legs have all been replaced by prosthetic limbs!

"Ice is very strong, it really is. However, because of its composition and structure, if enough pressure is applied to the right areas, you can easily crack it. All I had to do was expand my limbs, an effortless task on my part, and I was able to obliterate your ice coffin from the inside out. Get it? Against someone like me, your powers are useless. Sure, it was easy for you to kill all those girls, there just regular humans. But that was murder not battle, and you, my good sir, are no fighter. You're panting, you're sweating, you're exhausted. It's easy to see you haven't been in many real fights, perhaps none at all. You can't beat me!"

With those words being said, Pike rushed forward. Geldan put up another ice wall, but this time Pike smashed right through it and kicked Geldan in the chest. Geldan went soaring and landed hard on the ground. He was barely able to move. A little bit of blood trickled from his lips. No one had ever punished his body like that before.

Pike was getting ready to come at him again. Geldan held up his hands and focused a great deal of his energy. More water sprung out of the drains and hydrants and surrounding puddles and formed cones again, this time as big as cars, that hung in the air in front of him. He fired one off. On its path to Pike it froze and formed another giant icicle.

Pike smiled. He jumped to the side and watched as the icicle flew down the street, eventually losing its momentum and landing on the pavement. Geldan growled another one. The exact same thing happened as before.

"I knew it," Pike uttered to himself.

Geldan sent out two this time. Pike jumped on top of the first one and used its height to jump over the second. When he landed he walked briskly toward Geldan. Geldan began to panic and started sending the icicles out in random numbers and intervals. Pike laughed as he ran through them, not even bothering to hit them with his weapon. He eventually got close enough to Geldan to swing at him with the blade end of his weapon. Geldan tried to move out of the way, but was too slow. The metal pierced and sliced through the flesh on his shoulder. It wasn't deep enough to sever anything, but it was deep enough to make him start bleeding. He fell to the ground and lay before Pike.

"I knew it," Pike scoffed at him. "You can't control the ice can you?"

Geldan glared. Pike raised the weapon above his head, ready to bring it down on his prey.

A jet of water as if from nowhere hit Pike in the side and blew him off his feet.

"I told you I wasn't going to die!" Geldan yelled as he got up and ran away down the street. Pike shook his head, got up, and chased after him.

It turned into a race. As they ran, Geldan held his hand over the wound on his shoulder. A steady trickle of water floated through the air and packed itself onto the wound, then froze over to stop any blood from coming out. He looked up. There, at the end of the road, was a bridge.

Yes!

There was a crash behind him and a force that propelled him several feet through the air. He landed hard on the ground. When he faced behind him, he could see Pike running to go pick up his weapon and try for another distance attack. Geldan picked himself up and ran for it.

Just a little further.

Pike saw where he was going. He knew he couldn't let Geldan reach the bridge but he also knew he wouldn't catch up to him. He readied his weapon for another throw. Geldan was out of breath. There was an immense pain in his chest. His sides were splitting. Pike threw the weapon. Geldan reached the end of the road. He bent over and vomited. The weapon skimmed across his back. One of the spikes on the ball caught his coat. It was going so fast, he was lifted from the ground and tailed it. The weapon stuck into the railing of the bridge. Geldan's momentum kept him going forward, over the edge and out onto the river. Pike swore. At the moment Geldan hit the water, the entire river turned to ice.

It was dark. Even after opening his eyes Geldan could tell that the only light in the room was a single candle on the bedside table.

"Wow, you're actually alive?" the crow said beside himself. "Oh, boy! For a minute there I thought I was in trouble!"

"Oh, not you again," Geldan groaned. His eyes flew open and he sat up in the bed. "Pike! Where is Pike!?"

"Pike? You mean that guy who was chasing you? I don't know. I was just searching the river for you. Was I supposed to find him, too?"

"By all means, no. Wait, how did you know I was in the river?"

"I was watching your fight."

"You followed me? After I specifically told you not to?"

"Good thing I did. Otherwise you would still be beneath that ice, probably drowned. It wasn't easy digging you out."

"If you saw the fight, than why did you bother asking if you were supposed to bring back a guy who was obviously trying to kill me?"

"When you work with the people I work with, you tend to learn things in fights aren't exactly about good vs. bad."

Geldan stared at him for a second, then rolled his eyes. "You're an idiot."

"I get that a lot. So, since you got your butt kicked, have you given anymore thought into coming back to the states with me? That threat doesn't seem so fake anymore."

"I don't know..."

"Why not?"

"Didn't we have this conversation before?"

"Yeah, but you never really answered it."

"Let me think about it, ok?"

"Alright."

There was a brief pause.

"So what happened back there, anyway?" the crow asked.

"You are really annoying, you know that?"

"Yeah, I get that a lot, too. After hearing about you killing so many people, I kind of expected you to pulverize that guy, but you lost. What happened?"

"It was different with the others. None of them ever fought back."

"So he was right. You are definitely not a fighter."

"Shut up!"

"That reminds me of something else he said. What did he mean when he said you couldn't control the ice?"

Geldan starred off into space for a few seconds.

"He meant just that," he replied. "I can't control the ice."

“What are you talking about? I saw you send those giant icicles his way-”

“No, you saw me send giant globs of water that froze in midair to form icicles.”

“Same thing.”

“It’s not.”

Geldan, his mood shadowed by a cloud of depression, held up his hand. On the bare skin on the back, a mark suddenly appeared.

“My original powers only allow me to control water. It was an ability I had ever since I was a child. Then one day this mark appears on my hand and I can suddenly freeze the water. Unfortunately, once the water goes from a liquid to a solid I completely lose all control over it. When I was fighting I froze the water as it flew through the air. That way it would stay on its course because of the momentum I built up in it when it was in liquid form.”

“That’s why he was able to dodge them so easily. Without your control, they were just flying on a straight path.”

“Exactly.”

“What about when you froze him?”

“He has prosthetic limbs that allow him to apply pressure on the ice when he was encased in it. That’s why it broke.”

“He was still alive inside the ice? But how come when the police found the bodies of those girls they were all dead?”

“That’s because I froze the water inside their body and blood, but I can only do that when I’m touching a person. I couldn’t get near enough to this guy to touch him.”

The crow was silent for a moment.

“That mark...” he trailed off.

“This mark is the only thing that allows me to freeze the water,” Geldan said.

“I’ve seen something like it before,” the crow murmured as his memory drifted off toward a pink haired girl with a mark on her ankle.

“Excuse me?”

“Nothing. I need to go make some calls. Rest up. We’ll leave tomorrow morning.”

The crow got up from his chair walked into the adjacent room. He flipped on the light switch and pulled the cell phone out of his pocket. He dialed the numbers and listened to the ring tone.

“Hello?” the voice on the other end asked.

“Hello? This is the crow. Connect me to Demonic.”

There was a short pause.

“Hello, crow,” Demonic greeted. Her voice was no different over the phone. “How is my errand in Russia going?”

“Everything is going well. I found him.”

“I’m not surprised. You always do.”

“What of my sister? Any news from her?”

“She believes Kat may have fled to London, but I have yet to hear word from her. Have you persuaded Geldan into coming back to the states?”

“It’s a little difficult. He’s just so stubborn. Even after that guy attacked him, he’s still saying he won’t go.”

“Attack? What happened?”

“A man named Pike attacked him. He nearly took Geldan’s life. Honestly, I was expecting more out of this guy. You made him sound so much more dangerous than he really is. He’s not powerful, just ill tempered.”

“Listen closely, you are not to leave his side, understand? No matter what it takes, get him on a plane

back here tomorrow. Got that?"

"Understood, Master."

She hung up.

The crow went back into the other room, planning on nagging poor Geldan until he agreed to go. Unfortunately, the empty bed said he had already left.

As Geldan walked the streets he wondered how long he had been out for. The sun was just peeking over the horizon so he guessed a couple of hours. He wasn't alone in the world either. During his walk he saw a few people either strolling to work or stumbling home. Dawn was approaching. Geldan was running out of time. He had to find Pike and kill him before the city became alive.

I was expecting more from this guy...He's not powerful...

The crow obviously didn't know Geldan could hear his phone conversation. What he said sparked a fire in him so ardent he wanted to kill the freak right on the spot. But it wasn't the crow's fault. Pike was the one who humiliated him. The only reason Geldan couldn't kill him was because he was caught off guard. Honestly, how many people run around with prosthetic limbs? This time, though, Geldan had a plan. A person could replace their limbs, but they couldn't replace their vital organs. The heart, the brain, the lungs; Geldan had his pick of these. All he had to do was stab one with an icicle. And so what if he couldn't control ice. He could control water and that was all he needed.

"Ow!" the girl yelled as she fell to the ground. Geldan had been so lost in his plans he didn't even see her come towards him. "Watch where you're going, you klutz."

She's pretty feisty.

"Sorry about that," he said as he extended a hand to help her up.

"Whatever," she said as she took his hand and got up.

Her touch had a warming sensation to it. She brushed her rich, orange hair away from her face, almost in a slow motion fashion. It wasn't sickly light orange or weirdo neon orange. For lack of a better description, it was a perfect orange, able to catch the light no matter how dim out it was. Of course that wasn't the only thing that caught Geldan's attention. She was wearing very revealing clothing. It was a bit of a strange sight, skimpy outfits in Russia. Her boobs were practically falling out of the black blouse. The plaid cloth excuse for a mini-skirt didn't leave much to the imagination, especially when she was down on the ground with her knees up. Her legs went all the way down to sexy high-heeled black boots. She was a slut, yet at the same time she seemed to give off a glow that made her seem classy and beautiful. Maybe it was the morning sun reflecting off of her butterfly bellybutton ring. Maybe it was the red plaid tie she dangled around her neck and over her bosom. Maybe it was the way she clasped his hand and rubbed him with her thumb. There was something about her that made Geldan want her more than any other woman he had ever met.

No, focus! First kill Pike. Then you can have sex.

"So, uh, what's your name?" she half said, half sighed with a seductive smile in her eyes.

"Geldan," he replied, his voice cracking.

"See ya around, Geldan," she smiled and batted her eyes, then turned around the corner.

The light seemed to get darker once she was gone.

"Was I doing something?"

A scream pierced his head. He darted around the corner and froze when he saw what was there. Pike had that girl pinned up against the wall, the staff of his weapon pressed to her throat. He was laughing maniacally.

"Come on, let's have some fun," he said.

Geldan growled. He didn't know why, but he suddenly became enraged. A ball of water formed above his head and shot right into Pike. The man flew back a couple of feet from the force of the hit. Geldan

ran to the girl who was now on her knees, clutching her throat.

“Are you okay?” he asked.

She nodded.

“Don’t worry. I won’t let him lay a finger on you.”

She looked deep into his eyes. For a few seconds, Geldan completely lost all train of thought. The reflection of himself in her eyes seemed so much more brighter than it should have. It was only her blink that brought him back.

He stood up and faced Pike. He had to defend her. There was no choice in the matter. Rather than give Pike the chance to approach the two of them, Geldan took the first sprint forward this time. He waved his hands and a cord of water broke out of a nearby pipe. It wrapped around his arm briefly, then made a beeline for Pike.

“Big deal!” Pike yelled. “I’ll just dodge it like your other ice attacks!”

He laughed as he jumped out of the way. Geldan smiled and turned his hand. The water made a u-turn. Pike met the full force of the torrent. He dug his weapon into the street to ground himself and waited for the water to stop.

He was soaked, and angry. He held his weapon up and dashed toward Geldan. Geldan made several more blobs of water come out of the pipes and fly at Pike. Pike would wait until the blob was really close, then jump out of the way as the water splashed into the ground. Water was spraying everywhere, covering nearly every inch of the street.

Perfect! Just what I wanted.

Pike was only a few feet away from Geldan now. He raised the spiked ball end of his weapon behind his head. Geldan bent down and touched the tips of his fingers to the road. At his touch the water covering street turned into slick, black ice. The ice formed under Pike’s feet. With no friction to hold him and his weight thrown off by the weapon, he slipped and fell on his @\$\$, skidded across the road, and hit the wall of a building. Geldan couldn’t help but smile.

Pike groaned and felt his head. There was a definite bump on it now. He got up. The field was icy, but he could manage. He glared at Geldan and pushed off against the wall. With no gravel or asphalt to stop him, he slid right for his target, blade end of his weapon outstretched.

Geldan closed his eyes in concentration. To avoid the cops over the years, he had come up with a few moves meant for moving fast. The ice around his feet began to melt and formed a film of water in between his feet and the ground. He stepped off and sped across the frozen road, away from the enemy. It was, in essence, hydroplaning.

Pike reached out with his hand, grabbed a lamppost, and swung himself around. Geldan would skate in one direction, Pike would follow. Geldan would change directions, Pike would bounce off of something and angle himself to follow again, getting bruised up in the process.

I guess I should stop him now.

Geldan bent down and slid his hand over the ice as he skated away. Wherever he touched, the ice melted back into water. He came to a halt and turned back to look at the melted spots. Giant tendrils of water rose from the ground. They whipped about in the air, their bases still connected to the street. One of them dove for Pike. Pike slid his weapon behind him and used it to stop. He spread his legs as the tendril hit the ground in between them. There was a strange sound like a mixture of water splashing and ice cracking. Pike’s eyes widened. The very tip of the tentacle of water was frozen solid. It had become a spear. Pike looked at Geldan and the other two water bodies.

“You were right,” Geldan said, “I can’t control ice. But as long as the ice is connected to the water, that doesn’t matter. I can control the body of these tentacles, and the ice tips can do the rest.”

As he said this, the tips of the other two vines of water froze over. The third one, in front of Pike, picked its tip up and held it over him. It looked reminiscent of a snake glaring at its prey. And just like a snake, it

lunged its head for the kill. Pike jumped back, slipped on the ice and fell. He spun around to avoid hitting his head on a nearby mailbox. The vines raced across the ice for Pike. One struck at him and landed inside the mail box. The other came around the side and stabbed through the metal, but not quick enough to catch Pike who lifted himself off the ground and out of the way. It almost seemed like they had minds of their own. They would chase him striking whenever the chance presented itself, every so often nicking him, tearing away a piece of clothing, or cutting him and spurting a little blood.

Pike tried his best to avoid them. If one of them missed him, he took the opportunity to smash through it with his weapon but, like always, the water would just reform itself. Pike swore under his breath.

"This has to stop," he grunted as he ducked underneath a tendril. He glanced over at Geldan. "He's got his concentration on these things."

He stepped up and threw his weapon at Geldan. Geldan scowled and swung his arm. The frozen points of the vines broke off and fell to the ground. The water then zipped past the flying weapon and wrapped around Geldan. It froze solid and made a shield. The weapon hit the ice and managed to break off a chunk before falling to the ground. The ice melted and sprayed out several more tentacles of water, all with frozen tips. They launched toward Pike as he ran for his weapon. He did his best to dodge them, but one of them speared right through his arm. He winced and tugged at it. The prosthetic limb tore away from his body and he was able to get out of the way of all the other tentacles. He made it to his weapon and pulled it out of the ground with his one arm. He held it over his head and yelled a fierce cry. That's when an icicle stuck through his chest. It was the tip of a tendril that had come around Pike and shanked him from behind.

Pike looked down at the icicle that was coming out of his chest. He looked up at Geldan. Then he keeled over and fell to the ground.

Geldan breathed a sigh of relief. As he exhaled, all the vines of water fell back to the ground in a giant splash. Silence fell back on the street.

Thank God that's over with, Geldan thought as he panted. Now time for some heroic "I just saved your life" sex.

He turned his attention to the girl. She had been on the sidewalk the whole time, watching the fight and not uttering a sound. Geldan approached her. She starred longingly into his eyes. He grabbed her arms as she placed her hands on his waist. The simple touch that they shared somehow felt better than any sexual experience Geldan had ever had. It was truly amazing how gorgeous and sexy this woman was. She hummed a bit as her eyes closed halfway. Even the sound off her voice was driving Geldan mad with desire. He had to have her, right then!

He closed his eyes and leaned in for the kiss. He stopped when a blade popped out of his chest. It was covered in blood, his blood. The pain was so gargantuan that that part of the brain just shut down. He didn't feel anything except his life slipping away. It was getting harder to breathe. His heart had all but stopped. Frankly, he was surprised. He turned his head to see who had stabbed him. It was Pike.

"Fair is fair," Pike murmured. "You stabbed me, now I've returned the favor."

How the hell did he survive?

Geldan thought he had spoken those words, but his mouth never actually moved. So this is what it's like to die? It's not so bad. Honestly, he didn't know what all those people were complaining about. An idea came to mind that he might get to see some of his victims again in the afterlife. Although, it would be more likely he'd be going to Hell with the other murderers and heathens. He turned back around. He wanted his last sight to be the goddess he was about to screw. She was smiling.

Geldan's body fell to the ground when Pike took the blade end of his weapon out of the chest. He looked across the pool of blood at his partner.

"Looks like you were getting your @\$@ handed to you out there," she said.

“Shut up, Tangy,” Pike fired back. “I got him in the end.”

“I could have handled it,” she pouted and stepped over Geldan’s body. She placed a hand on Pike’s one arm. “Just promise me I get the next one,” she whispered seductively.

Pike shook her hand off.

“You know that won’t work on me,” he said.

Tangy sighed and inappropriately patted his crotch. She walked across the road and picked up the arm. “I guess these things have their pros and cons,” she called. “Just check to make sure we got the right guy.”

“Oh, we did,” Pike smiled as he hoisted the body onto his shoulders. He held up Geldan’s hand for the world to see. The mark was still visible.

The crow cursed himself the entire flight. He didn’t care anymore if anyone saw him. How could he let Geldan out of his sight like that? Idiot!

His browbeating got interrupted by a glimmering light. He flew over to the street it was coming from. The entire street was soaking wet. The light was the reflection of the morning sun off of a few patches of ice. The crow scanned the street until he saw a small pool of blood. He flew down to examine. Geldan had been here, the water and ice told him that much. But who’s blood was this?

The crow’s heart sank as he pulled a pair of dog tags out of the pool.

Damn it.

Owari



## 5 - Connect the Dots

### Author's Notes:

-Hey there all! I present to you, chapter five! The Chapter of Absurd Volume! :D Don't really have too much to say about this one, other than that it was a lot of fun to write, so enjoy!

*I have been charged with an assignment from the Superior. Following the creation of this newest addition to our ranks, I am to document her progress. It was not made clear to me exactly why I was chosen for this assignment, however, in obedience to the Superior I will fulfill my duties unquestioningly. My orders were as follows:*

*Acting as our newest member's partner, observe her behavior day by day, watching for changes, trends, etc. Make particular note of her abilities and weaknesses. This daily record will not be read by the Superior—it will only be presented as proof that it is being written.*

*I obey.*

Demonic was going to need Dolosus. It irked her beyond words and reason, but such was the truth of the matter. That she was to seek the aid of that traitor, that scheming bastard... It made her chest ache with rage to even think of it. However, his presence and participation in this new conflict was necessary for a number of reasons. First and foremost, Demonic needed to keep Kat in sight. She and her friends had proved themselves somewhat... unpredictable. As such, the best way to make sure Kat stayed put was to have Dolosus on her side. In addition, she was in need of Dolosus' strength and ability if she was to succeed. Yet another ulterior motive lurked in the recesses of the artist's mind, however...

*He is the successor to the brush...* She thought bitterly as she walked briskly along the crowded sidewalks of New York City, avoiding all human eye contact in true city fashion, *only he can take it from me. He MUST take it...!*

Mentally blocking out the noise and—even worse—the smell of the city, Demonic pushed on to her destination. She'd dressed to match the crowd, in a pair of skinny jeans, knee-high boots, button up blouse and vest, also taking care to dress herself to suit her mission. Missions... SHE had been reduced to performing tasks which she generally wouldn't bother even lower ranking members of her organization with. Reconnaissance was a menial task. It was far beneath her. However, she was short staffed, and training could not be interrupted when her ranks needed to be rebuilt from the ground up. Perhaps Dolosus would make this interesting for her. Who knew?

Putting on the vaguely interested disposition of the typical bookstore shopper, Demonic pushed open the door, which gave a little chime to signal a customer's arrival. Cool and casual, she surveyed her surroundings. It was a decent sized store, but it was about three in the afternoon, when most would be at work. As such, it wasn't busy. Perfect. Tall shelves filled the store in rows, the checkout was at the front, and a help desk sat in a back corner. Two people at checkout, one at customer service.

Demonic's objective was simple: gain access to the employee records of this bookstore. All she needed was an in...

As she pretended to scan the shelves, she managed a glance at the fellow working the customer service desk. He looked to be about forty, the remnants of a very attractive younger man. The years had added lines about his face, and at the moment, he was sporting an oddly appealing five o'clock shadow. Yes, he was a little older than Demonic's usual pick, but he had kept reasonably in shape despite his worn

appearance. And just like that, she had her man.

Day 3:

*As of now, the subject has shown little self awareness or social ability. While she has mastered speech and a range of every day physical activities with remarkable efficiency, she has proved unable to grasp concepts such as sarcasm, hyperbole, metaphor, small-talk and social interaction as a whole. She has not developed much of what one would consider a personality as of yet. Nothing can be said of any combat abilities just now. Training begins tomorrow.*

Behind the cover of a book shelf, Demonic unbuttoned her blouse a little at the top, then approached the man at the help desk.

"Excuse me..." she said in her sweetest voice. The man looked up, made eye contact, glanced down at her chest, and back to her eyes. *Well then, he's not gay*, she thought, *ugh, I hope this isn't TOO easy...*

"Can I help you?" he said in a trained "helpful employee" voice.

"Yes, I was wondering if you carried any anatomy reference books."

"Ah, yes," he got to his feet and made his way around the desk to her, "I'll show you—right this way."

Demonic followed him and when they arrived at the correct section, she was free to work her magic.

"Oh, okay, thank you so much." Charming smile. Stand close. Make eye contact. She caught him staring again. "I've been meaning to draw up some studies of human anatomy, so this should help."

"Studies, huh?" he replied. It was a dull response, but he was trying to continue conversation. His entire body faced her.

"Mhmm, I'm a studio art major, actually." Demonic said.

"Really now? You're in college? I would have pegged you for a little older than that." She laughed and he smiled, obviously enchanted,

"Well what about you? You're, what... 28?" Now he laughed. The conversation continued on like this for a little while. Demonic saw no ring on his hand, but quickly noticed an unmistakable guilt in his eyes and manners now and then as they flirted. There was definitely some other involvement. Another relationship of some sort. Regardless, Demonic eventually found her opening.

"Listen... why don't we continue our conversation somewhere a little more..." Subtly, she moved her hand to his, touching just one finger to his hand to break the physical barrier, "private..?" He hesitated. Damnit. Had she made her move too quickly? She was sure she'd gone through all the motions. He should be putty in her hands. It was that blasted other woman... Regardless, a few agonizing moments later, he took her hand and lead her to a door at the back of the store bearing the words, "Employees Only" in bold black lettering. He pulled a key from his shirt pocket and unlocked the door, beckoning Demonic in after him.

The door closed behind them with a low metallic moan and in an instant, Demonic had the man up against it. Lips met, tongues danced, hands wandered. Demonic's partner pursued this with an eagerness akin to men who haven't experienced pleasure in some time, however, as suddenly as she had initiated intimacy, he halted it.

"Wait... wait..." He muttered, panting slightly as he held her at arms length. His hair and clothes were disheveled, shirt untucked and half unbuttoned, and his arousal was obvious, however, when he looked at her, it was with the eyes of one who knows they've done wrong, "I don't... do this..." Demonic sighed and rolled her eyes. This was why she kept a knife on her at all times. In one fluid movement, she slid it out of her pocket, flipped it open and had it up against the man's throat.

"Look," she said very matter-of-factly, "You've got a wife or something, right? That's why you've got this whole noble guilt complex going." He nodded, eyes wide with shock, "And things aren't going well for you two right now—that's why you're not wearing a ring and why you were going along with this until

now, am I right?" Again, he nodded, "Right, then here's how this is going to work: You give me that key in your pocket and never speak of this, and I won't tell the Missus about our little 'chat.' Oh, and as an added bonus, I won't kill you." She punctuated this by pressing the knife more firmly against his neck. Cautiously, the man raised a trembling hand to his breast pocket and drew out the key he'd used to open the door to this back room. Demonic held out her hand and received it graciously. "This is a master key, correct? It will work on all of the locks in this store?" he nodded once more, "Good. Thank you for your cooperation." She lowered her knife and backed away from him, "You're free to go. Oh, and if you get the cops involved, you and your wife will bear the consequences. I can find your address in the employee records, I'm sure, mister..." she glanced down at his nametag, "Robert McKahill." She shot an overwhelmingly charming smile at him, and with that, he straightened his clothes as best he could and left the room, pale and still shaking.

*Day 12:*

*A week of training has passed. The subject appears to harbor an innate propensity for stealth and information gathering. Social awareness and a sense of empathy have begun to develop slowly, along with almost frightening insight into the human thought process. Our new member is naturally skilled at discovering what makes an opponent 'tick' and utilizing this information to the fullest. I've been instructed to note any signs of extraordinary creative ability, however, I cannot discern any at the moment. After three more weeks of training, we will begin sending her on simple missions for the glory of the Superior.*

The back room Demonic's new friend had lead her to appeared to serve as a meeting room of sorts. A long table stretched down the center with wheeled chairs lining it like rows of soldiers and a whiteboard mounted on the wall behind it. A series of small filing cabinets stood against the wall to Demonic's left, all helpfully labeled with marker on tape. She approached these and scanned the labels until she came to one: "employees." This should have her information. She searched for the usual alias.

"A... B... Br..." she muttered to herself, and finally, "Brite! Here we are... Ian Brite..." Vaguely noting that her former assassin must not be trying too hard to hide from her if he was still using that old alias, Demonic pulled out his file. She flipped through the pages quickly, scanning each one for an address, a phone number with an area code, anything. As she gathered information, however, she checked it online using her cell phone and discovered all which was easily found to be either fabricated or information which existed, but certainly wasn't his.

"Identity theft..." she murmured, raising her eyebrows with a sardonic grin, "Tsk, tsk, Dolosus. And here I thought you'd found morality." The cell phone number he'd entered might be his, but as it wasn't a land line, it most likely wouldn't help her to locate the man. He could have moved a hundred times since obtaining that phone and kept the same number. She could find a way to track the number, though it would involve a lot of pulling strings. But wait-here was something...

"He only left the job three days ago..." she frowned curiously. There was some likelihood that he was still in the area, then. "Though he could also be half way across the country..." she sighed. This information did raise her odds of finding him in this city, but not by enough to really encourage her. Having recorded all of the information she found, even that which she knew to be fake or stolen, Demonic replaced the folder, then closed and locked the filing cabinet once more. She surveyed the room one final time before departing. Security cameras... She frowned. No matter. She'd arranged for a couple of her subordinates to be waiting in a café across the street if she needed them; they would disable the cameras and dispose of the tapes when she handed the master key over to them.

*Day 36:*

*The subject has been sent on, and has completed, two missions. Each was completed with only slightly higher than average efficiency, however some new traits have begun to show. In the second mission, the subject was partnered with two members of superior experience and ability. Despite this, she gained their respect and obedience almost immediately, and thus was able to direct her team towards the completion of the mission. The subject has displayed an extremely dominant personality and immense leadership ability. It is my personal opinion that this sort of individual should be carefully monitored, however, the Superior chooses to send her about her missions as per usual. I shall, as I always have, obey.*

A little under an hour later, Demonic sat at the bar of the Aeternus, an old haunt of hers. A place she used to go when she had first begun her organization and needed an hour or two away from the anxieties of running it. Classy, old-timey, sophisticated, the club featured a grand stand for a live band to play, several pool tables, an expansive bar and spacious meal seating. For now, it was still early in the day (not quite five o'clock), and thus it held a quiet, almost lonely atmosphere; however, Demonic knew that this place would be transformed come that night, brought to life by faithful regulars and curious new-comers with enough cash for what it had to offer.

She had decided on a glass of water, figuring it better to stay away from alcohol in the midst of business, and sipped it absently as she mulled over her current situation. She could return to that bookstore and inquire as to Dolosus' whereabouts—perhaps he had mentioned the next job he sought to pursue. Though, he had never offered much personal information in conversation, thanks to her own training. He did seem to be displaying a pattern of sorts, however. It was clear that he favored jobs requiring minimal social interaction—stocking shelves, moving supplies, delivery and the like. He worked mostly for small, private stores and businesses, and his employers had always seemed pleased with, but also perplexed by, the man. These trends, at least, made it a little easier to track him.

*What are you after, Dolosus? Why all of these menial jobs? What are you trying to do with your life, now that you've left me?*

"Deirdre?" Demonic looked up at the sound of a vaguely familiar voice calling, "Why, Deirdre Allens! I haven't seen you in, well, it has to have been years now!" An old acquaintance. Demonic recalled the stout, blonde woman as the owner of the place, and graciously (in her opinion) indulged her in conversation, weaving a tapestry of fabricated information about her life and what she had been up to the last few years. Yes, galleries, exhibits, a big art show in the works—no, no, it's half way across the country, I couldn't possibly ask you to come, etc. In this manor, Demonic suffered through small talk with a pleasant smile, until her old acquaintance called over her shoulder,

"Hey, Ian! Yoo-hooo, Ian, come meet an old friend!" Demonic suddenly sat up, her drink all but forgotten and hovering in her hand an inch above the bar. She heard the sound of a heavy box or crate being placed on the floor, then approaching footsteps, and soon enough, she saw the man himself. A head of messy brown hair and sharp, alert hazel eyes greeted her from behind glasses. The artist caught his mutual shock for the shortest of moments before he regained total composure.

"Ian, this is Deirdre Allens, an old friend and remarkable artist—perhaps you've heard of her?" His new boss said, and at first, "Ian" didn't seem to acknowledge that she had spoken at all, but then, he nodded and held out his hand. Demonic took it, also having regained her expression of calm interest, "Yes, of course I've heard of her. It's a great honor. I've seen much of your work—it's remarkably life-like." Dolosus quipped, a sly grin playing on his lips which the third party would naturally mistake as a courteous smile.

"You're very kind," Demonic responded, looking him in the eye, "I've actually been working on a particular project for about six years. Once I'm done, it may even turn out to be my crowning achievement." A twinge of satisfaction marked her expression as she noticed her former assassin's lip

twitch in agitation. Before he could make his response, the owner cut in,

“Goodness, and just what is this magnificent work of yours, Deirdre? It must be very impressive to warrant such an introduction!”

“Oh, I don’t want to ruin the surprise. Besides,” she replied with a casual shrug of her shoulders, “It hasn’t quite been going as planned. I need time to iron out a few mistakes here and there.”

“I’m gonna go finish unloading this morning’s shipment.” Dolosus cut in suddenly. Sneaking a sharp glare at his creator, he turned and returned to the storage room, letting the door swing shut behind him. A brief silence allowed Demonic time to revel in her small victory, sipping down the last of her water and sighing with satisfaction as she set it on the bar with a soft clink.

Demonic took her leave, paying for the water (go figure) and parting pleasantly with the owner with the assurance that she would be back that evening. This had pleased the bouncy little woman beyond expression and she positively glowed at the idea of a former regular returning to her flock. Thus, with warm wishes and an exuberant smile, she bid her farewell for the time being, and Demonic had left with a neutral smile on her face and the thrill of success in her heart.

She returned to the busy streets for a moment, and scanned the area quickly for her backup. One at a bar across the street and one at a bus stop nearby. Satisfied, Demonic turned into the alleyway next to the Aeternus which she knew would lead her to the back where Dolosus would be unloading the supply truck. Sure enough, she saw the truck just as it was closing up to depart. Dolosus stood by, observing the proceedings, his job done for the moment. Demonic watched the truck carefully pull out of the narrow driveway behind the club and into the cramped New York streets (naturally, this took about fifteen minutes). Then, it was time to make her move. She marched over to where Dolosus stood and pushed him around to face her, grabbing a fist full of his shirt.

“We’ve already suffered pleasantries so I’ll make this brief and to the point. We have Kat. She’s in danger and you’re going to help us.”

“And what if I don’t want to?” he replied, backed up against the wall of the club, but defiant to the end. Demonic rolled her eyes,

“I don’t have time for trivialities like your free will. I think that’s caused enough problems for me in the past. And need I remind you that Kat is involved?” Dolosus laughed bitterly. It pained him to even hear her name, but...

“How can you expect me to believe that, Demonic?”

“That’s Master to you, you treacherous little—”

“Not anymore and never again!” he spat back, practically snarling at her. She was slightly taken aback, and was about to retort, but held her tongue. Gritting her teeth, she whispered harshly to him,

“You will be here tonight and we’ll discuss this. I have information and I n-need you.” Those words left a horribly bitter taste in her mouth, but it had to be said. Dolosus seemed placated for the time being. He scowled, but sighed and relaxed ever so slightly. Pushing her hand away from him, he muttered,

“Fine... If you’re lying, there will be Hell to pay. You know what I’m capable of.”

“... Very well.”

*Day 44:*

*A standard regimen of training missions has been followed regarding our newest member, as per protocol. She has gained an affinity for a wide variety of close combat weaponry, and wields them with deadly precision.*

*The Superior calls her perfect. He calls her his trophy, and his crowning achievement. She appears proud to hear this, and yet, she shows signs of insubordination. The subject has made it clear that she feels free to speak out at any opportunity, and has on at least one occasion, jeopardized a mission for*

*the sake of personal interest. I have voiced my concerns regarding this, but the Superior will not speak of the matter. I was told that the subject has been disciplined, and not to think of it further. I obey for my master only.*

The usual white-noise of socializing greeted the artist as she opened the door to the Aeternus that night. Now garbed in a slinky black cocktail dress, her mascara-framed eyes scanned the room for Dolosus. Cigarette smoke hung heavily in the air and a live band played jazz, swing and big-band style hits of days long passed. Through the haze, Demonic made her way to the bar to await her former assassin's arrival, humming along as the man on stage did his best Frank Sinatra, singing "I've got the World on a String," an old classic and a personal favorite of hers. She ordered herself a stiff drink and picked up the day's newspaper someone had left a few feet down the bar from her.

*Murder... political unrest... unstable economy... makes me wonder why I even bother doing my job,* Demonic mused as she scanned the headlines. Though to be fair, the services her organization offered had been of use in the past, when government officials had paid her to dispose of some source of unrest. Scanning the monochrome pages, however, she found an article of some interest. Raising her eyebrows, green eyes fixed on the story of a string of murders which had begun in the Tri-State area. Wealthy victims were disposed of, after having withdrawn their entire bank accounts. Money was clearly the objective of the murderer, but police and investigators had found no further patterns or clues than this. The sudden cash withdrawals seemed to be the only connection; no evidence or DNA had been left behind, and each murder had been in an entirely different fashion. One body found bleeding on the sidewalk early in the morning, one found in a body bag filled with cement in a river... Even Demonic had to admit, this criminal had a sick mind.

Just as she had moved on to read of the difficulties and controversy involved in asking banks to openly provide information on bank accounts containing over a certain sum, even for protection purposes, she felt someone standing directly behind her. She returned the newspaper to where she'd found it and turned on her seat to see Dolosus there, as expected, wearing a dark blue dress shirt with a black tie and dress pants. She didn't like the look he gave her. As if he were making a huge sacrifice to meet with her and that she should be honored. And she didn't like how confident he looked, standing so tall while she sat beneath him. Still silent, she stood, her heeled shoes adding about three inches to her height. She still had to look up to make eye contact with him.

"... What?" Dolosus said a little uncomfortably. Demonic frowned and pushed past him, aiming for a vacant pool table, muttering as she went,

"Why did I make you so damned tall..."

Only slightly bewildered, Dolosus followed her to where she began setting up a game of pool for them. He watched her coolly for a moment, grabbed a cue stick suited to him, and stood by the table, waiting for her to speak. She grabbed a cue for herself and began to chalk up the tip, and it seemed as if she would never speak up, until finally,

"We have Kat."

"You've mentioned." Dolosus returned, scowling, "I know emotional blackmail is by no means beneath you, but I think I deserve more than that. An explanation, perhaps."

"You deserve what I deign to tell you." Demonic said bluntly as she readied her cue on the bridge of her hand, "I'm calling stripes, by the way." Dolosus noted dully that Demonic, of course, hadn't bothered to discuss whether 'eight ball' would be his game of choice, or which of them would take the first shot. Rolling his eyes, he waited for her to break so the game could commence, then said,

"For our current purposes, all personal feelings aside, I think it would be best if we could discuss this matter on equal terms," Dolosus attempted to be diplomatic, but Demonic scoffed,

"Your move." Was all she said in reply. Sighing, Dolosus took aim and shot the cue ball for a solid,

which rebounded once and landed soundly in a corner pocket.

“After all,” he continued as he took his next shot, which was just off the mark, “I’m not under your control anymore. My scythe drove you to madness, remember? Even though you created it. And I can fight you, if I choose, even though you created me.” Demonic scowled and readied herself, then made her shot. She was just barely off target and far too forceful, however, and the cue ball hopped up over the bumper of the table and onto the floor. A scratch. Dolosus picked up the ball and positioned it for his next shot.

“Let’s not dwell on the past,” Demonic muttered, a hand on her hip as she watched Dolosus sink one and then another solid with one shot. His next was a scratch, and they were both silent for a moment as she considered her next move while Dolosus simply waited patiently. Meanwhile, the artist vaguely recognized the first few notes of an old classic that used to be performed fairly often at the Aeternus. The singer snapped his fingers to the catchy tune as he sung, and Demonic let the familiar music calm her nerves and help her refocus.

*“Oh, that shark, babe... Has such teeth, dear,  
And it shows them, pearly white...”*

“Look...” Demonic started, somewhat more reasonably, “I was recently contacted by an interesting fellow who told me of someone after four certain individuals.” She took her shot and sunk two balls, “Did you ever see the marks on Kat’s ankles? The wings?”

Dolosus frowned slightly, perplexed, but nodded and said,

“Well, yes. They assist her powers—help her fly, or... jump really high or something. We never really talked about it.”

“Well this informant of mine, Nemestrinus is his name, he tells me that there are three other people with similar marks. Altojo may have been one, but we’re not entirely sure. The brother crew is tracking down the third as we speak, and Nemestrinus himself is the fourth,” Demonic explained. Dolosus’ next shot failed to sink any balls, but set him up for an easy shot on his next turn. His former master continued, “these marks endow the bearers with certain enhancements to their elemental powers, but also involve a downside—a unique price to pay for each, or, so I’m told.” Demonic sunk two in a side and a corner pocket. She took her next shot, but was again too forceful and sent the ball rebounding much further than intended, and all the while Dolosus chalked up his cue stick a bit, readying for his next shot.

*“Now on the sidewalk, uh-huh... sunny mornin’, uuh-huh,  
Lies a body just oozin’ life...”*

“And what part would I, hypothetically, be playing in all of this?” he asked.

“Additional strength. Maion’s invasion took its toll on the Organization, and I need as much man-power as I can gather. And, well... I can keep you by Kat’s side. She’s strong, but so is whoever is after her.” Dolosus sunk the ball that had been set up on his last turn, and the cue ball rebounded nicely, hitting another ball into place for him.

“I can’t trust your word that you have her.” He said, as he sunk the ball his last shot had set up, then proceeded to completely miss his next one.

“I know.”

“Besides which, this is very unlike you, Demonic,” he grinned wryly at her as she readied her cue stick, “What’s in this for you? So far, the story you’re giving me is that a poor victim came crying to you with a sob story about him, a man you killed, one you don’t even know, and a woman who fought against you. Forgive me if I find it hard to believe that you chose to help these people out of the kindness of your heart.”

“Nemestrinus offered money,” she said simply, taking a shot which sunk one striped ball and, much to her surprise, rebounded to sink another, “I need money.” Dolosus still looked skeptical, but that was all the explanation she would—or even could give. He set his cue against the table and approached her,

looking her in the eye,

“I have defeated you once and I can do it again. If you’re lying about... she had better be with you, and safe, alright? And I am free to do and say what I please. Those are my conditions.”

“Wait, shh...” Demonic hushed him, frowning with vague interest as she let her focus return to the singer on the stage, “Do you know this song, Dolosus?”

*“Now, did ya hear ‘bout Louie Miller? He disappeared, babe, After drawin’ out... all his hard-earned cash...”*

“I’m... not familiar with it, no.” he responded with an absolutely dumbfounded look, “We weren’t a very cultured bunch back at the Organization, if I recall. Why?”

Demonic’s eyes widened, her eyebrows raised, and she looked up at Dolosus as if expecting him to read her mind. When he failed to show signs of this, she said, “I know who we’re after... but I thought Maion had him... but... but Maion’s dead...”

*“Yes, that line forms on the right, babe, Now that Macky’s back in town...!”*

“Come on.” She said urgently, grabbing Dolosus by the wrist and pulling him along after her, “You have my word that your conditions will be met. We need to get back to the organization.” Already, she was sending a text message for a subordinate to have a car ready for her at the nearest street corner. They walked briskly out into the humid summer night, Dolosus now keeping pace with her, rather than being dragged behind.

“You say you know our man?” he asked, “You were just suddenly inspired?”

“I didn’t think of him at first—Maion has had him locked up for years. But with her gone, he seems to have made his escape. It’s imperative that I discuss this with Nemestrinus immediately. Keep up.”

*“Look out, old Macky’s back!”*

*Day 70:*

*For some time now, the subject and I have been paired for missions. We’ve begun a series of more advanced missions, and each has been accomplished without incident. The subject has not attempted to overpower or dominate me, and I let her have her way when it is beneficial to our end. We speak from time to time, and she tells me of the Superior. She tells me that she is in love with him. She speaks the words as if they are entirely inconsequential—as if the entire world is already aware. What’s more, she believes that the Superior returns these affections. It is a disturbing development, to say the least... I continue to observe and report. Glory to the Superior.*

**You had better have her.**

Demonic sent the message to the Sister Crow’s personal phone, issued by the organization itself, being careful not to allow Dolosus so much as a glance at the words. She needed him to believe that she already had Kat, but the truth was that the last time she heard from the Crow, she had met up with Kat and was trying to persuade her back. Time was of the essence now, and though she could certainly stall her former assassin for perhaps a day or two, he would demand to see her soon enough. She could not afford to disappoint.

“You kept your old alias.” She said, breaking the silence as her driver pushed on through a sudden fog towards the main base. Dolosus paused for a moment, then shrugged and said,

“I didn’t think you’d be coming after me, what with everything that happened. That alias is, as it always has been, only to protect my identity from government authorities. I’m not sure if you’re aware of this, but I’m technically a murderer.”

“Technically?” Demonic replied with a wry smile, “We’re all ‘technically’ murderers, Dolosus. It’s people like me and you who are actually murderers, and don’t you forget that.”



The man's expression was unreadable. The two fell silent and Dolosus turned his gaze out the window, feeling an odd turning sensation in his stomach as he noticed his surroundings becoming more and more familiar as they neared headquarters. In the distance, he could see the steeple of a church he recalled from two snowy nights. His brow furrowed and he fixed his gaze on it, watching as they came nearer and nearer...

"Sir, stop the car, please."

"What?? No, keep going," Demonic ordered her driver, turning on Dolosus indignantly, "what do you think you're doing? We had a deal."

"I know, I know," Dolosus responded hastily, "I'll make good on it—I can get back to the organization with my scythe. I just... I really need to take care of something. Stop the car."

Demonic sighed heavily and rolled her eyes, then said lamely,

"Stop the car." The driver complied and pulled over to the side of the road, about fifty feet from the church. Dolosus got out, thanked the driver and shut the door, then turned to face the church and, more specifically, the graveyard which rested in its shadow.

He sighed heavily and hooked his thumbs on the hems of his pockets, then walked towards where he knew the grave would be. It was next to the one he'd visited twice before, and so he had the exact spot memorized. When he neared it, however, he scowled angrily at what he saw. The spot in front of the tomb stone had quite obviously been dug up. The grass had been overturned, leaving a clumpy mound of dirt unceremoniously piled over the hole. Dolosus' heart throbbed with rage as he stood over the defiled resting place of a man he respected more than any, and he cursed under his breath, fists clenched.

"He's been dug up," said a soft voice behind him. He whipped around and saw a girl standing in front of him, familiar pink hair long and curling sweetly around her face. Her soft features were marked with years of worry, and she had grown up some since Dolosus had last seen here, but there was no mistake. Without a word, he wrapped his arms tightly around her, practically squeezing the breath out of her lungs. She struggled a little to reciprocate the embrace, and she laughed, but it was almost a sad kind of sound. After some time, she tried to pull away a little, but Dolosus held on, his heart pounding against his chest as her hair brushed his neck and face. Finally, he let go, but still held her arms gently. "Kat..." he looked her up and down, then laughed a little uncomfortably, "Kat, how old are you?" Her initial response was an oddly amusing expression of incredulity. Her mouth hung open for a moment, then she laughed as well,

"I see you haven't learned a thing about social etiquette," she said with a grin, "Is this one of those old 'making conversation out of random thoughts' things? I didn't mean for you to take that so literally."

"No, no," he laughed and let his hands drop to his sides, "I just realized that I never asked you... I never asked you a lot of things, really. I've... had a lot of time to think about it."

"Three years." She said. They were silent, made eye contact briefly, but looked down quickly, laughing nervously, "I'm twenty now."

"I see... I'm six." They both laughed, and Kat slapped her forehead.

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"So you know about all that's going on now, right? About your marks and the three others?" Dolosus said in a fairly casual manner, glancing at Kat beside him out of the corner of his eye. They were sitting on the grass in front of Altojo's grave. His body no longer rested there, but the spot seemed sacred regardless, and so they'd sat to have a few quiet moments within the chaos and talk things over together.

"Yeah, I heard. The sister Crow told me about it. Seems I just can't get away from these people, huh?" Kat said wryly, then shrugged, "though I suppose that goes double for you."

Dolosus gave a short laugh and leaned back, resting his weight on his hands. He looked over at her and

his half-smile slowly faded.

“Seems true, yeah,” he replied. He watched a soft breeze weave through her hair for a moment, eyes half lidded, then turned his eyes up to the cloud-covered sky above them, “How did they find you?”

“I wasn’t careful enough,” Kat said, clearly a little embarrassed, “I had an online profile, just for kicks. The sister Crow found it and hacked my profile. She looked through my photos and found one Crimson took at our favorite café. There was a napkin with the name of the place, and well, she followed her leads.”

“You’re with Crimson still?”

“Yeah, we’d been traveling around western Europe together. Changed locations fairly frequently, but the picture was recent enough to pinpoint us in England.” Dolosus nodded and Kat sighed softly, crossing her legs and leaning forward. Dolosus mimicked her movements and they sat quietly together. Kat let her head rest on his shoulder.

“And what about you?”

“Demonic found me.”

“She went to get you herself?” Kat said, impressed, “Man, she must really be short-staffed these days. Maion took her toll” Dolosus nodded again,

“She found me at this bar I’d been working at. My mistake was in staying in one place for too long.” He finished and said no more for a time.

“What have you been doing for three years?” Kat asked when he didn’t seem to offer any continuation of his thought process.

“Mostly stayed in America,” he answered, “It’s a big place, a lot of different cultures depending on where you are. When she found me, I was in New York City, taking odd jobs here and there, mainly stocking shelves and things like that—jobs where I could watch people, but not have to interact with them much.”

“And you stayed there long enough for her to find you?”

“I was... having fun.” Dolosus laughed and shrugged a little awkwardly, “Watching people is more entertaining than dealing with them, and... it’s not something I’ve ever really done before. Besides, I didn’t think she’d actually try to find me, so I didn’t try too hard to hide myself from her.” He got to his feet and brushed off the seat of his dress pants, then offered his hand to Kat. She took it and stood with him, looking at him curiously, “I told Demonic I’d meet her back at the Organization. She knows who’s after you and as such, who we’re after.”

“Oh! Well, I guess we should go-”

In an instant, Kat thought she saw a blur of Dolosus’ scythe, and it was gone. She blinked and shook her head, and now in front of them was a portal back to headquarters. *He’s gotten faster...* she thought, *so these three years weren’t just about travel...*

“Shall we?”

Kat nodded and held his hand tight, then stepped into the portal with him. She felt the odd sensation of utter silence enveloping them as she left the dimension she knew and followed Dolosus through the emptiness.

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Dolosus lead them directly to Demonic’s throne room at headquarters. He and Kat were greeted with blank stares from Demonic, Crimson, and a man neither of them recognized. The three had evidently been conversing when the portal opened, and on seeing them, Demonic spoke first,

“Good timing. I was just about to fill these two in on what I’ve concluded regarding our target for this mission. This is Nemestrinus, by the way,” she added as the two new arrivals approached the group, “he’s our client, but he’ll also be partaking in the mission.” The tan, brown haired fellow nodded

graciously to his new acquaintances,

“Nice to meet you,” he said in an even, sociable tone, “I’m looking forward to working with you both. Demonic tells me you’re some of the best in the business. And you must be Kat,” he turned to the girl, “You bear a mark, correct?” Kat nodded,

“Yes, but... I don’t know too much about it, apparently.” Nemestrinus smiled kindly,

“That’s quite alright, Miss. I’ll tell you all I know soon enough. But first, I think Demonic should explain her findings.”

“Right, regarding our target,” Demonic began. Dolosus noticed she seemed oddly at ease, given the situation. If he had to guess, he’d say it was because of Nemestrinus; the man had an oddly calming presence.

“About ten years ago, before Dolosus’ creation but some time after I’d gained control and established myself as leader of this organization, Maion captured a man by the name of MacHeath. His general pattern had been to murder his victim using only a switch blade, and for no discernable reason. As far as anyone could tell, he was just demented; he killed people whom he thought would be fun to kill. He was making business hard for people like me and Maion. Kept going after our men and jeopardizing our missions for the fun of it.

“Well, eventually MacHeath started rummaging through Maion’s files and data for kicks in his off-time and it seems she had enough of it. I had resorted to simply intensifying training and preparing for his attacks. She took a more direct route and managed to capture the man himself, who by that point had gained the alias ‘Mac the Knife.’ I don’t know how she managed to get her hands on him, but she kept him imprisoned with an amulet around his neck.”

“Like Ikonu...” Dolosus said to himself. When he saw the rest of the group watching him expectantly, he said, “I fought him during the invasion three years ago. Could manipulate gravitational pulls. Anyway, he wore a gem or amulet or something around his neck which kept him bound in servitude to Maion.”

Here, Crimson cut in, though she’d only listened silently up to this point,

“So now that Maion’s dead, Mac the Knife has somehow escaped.” She mused, “and how did you come to this conclusion?”

“His nickname wasn’t meant just to be catchy,” Demonic responded, crossing her arms, “It’s based on an old song. The song is about a serial killer, and it details his various crimes. Lately, someone has been committing those same crimes locally. Their detailed resemblance to his namesake and the locations, so close to Maion’s mansion... he wants me to know he’s back. Somehow, he knows that I have you,” she nodded to Kat, “and he’s declaring war.”

“Couldn’t it just be any mentally disturbed fan of the song? Or a complete coincidence?” Crimson said.

“The deaths are too unique for a coincidence. And no, I’m almost one hundred percent certain it’s him. He targeted both Maion’s and my groups while he was at large, and he knew of our... rivalry, of sorts. He played with it, and provoked us into a race to catch him.” Demonic scowled, glaring at no one in particular, “I never heard the end of it, after Maion finally caught him first. She was a braggart, and would talk so much that she was careless. Let on about the kind of data Mac had been looking into.” A brief silence followed, but Crimson prompted,

“And?”

“Elemental power. The exact power he’s after now.” Silence prevailed for some time, as each person fully took in the situation. Dolosus suddenly became aware of how very exhausted and overwhelmed he felt. Just that afternoon, he’d been going about a day of work as usual, then Demonic came out of nowhere and brought all of these new worries and concerns with her. A serial killer, four powerful marks, Kat in danger... too much. It was all just too much.

Eventually, it was Nemestrinus who broke the oppressive silence,

“Miss, I mentioned I would tell you what I know about your mark,” he said to Kat, “If you like, I’ll escort

you to your room and you can show me the mark, tell me what you already know, and I can fill in the blanks.”

“Oh! Yes—that would be really helpful,” Kat replied with a smile, and Dolosus immediately stood at her side and said,

“I’ll go with you,” he glanced at Nemestrinus, then Kat, then added, “I’m... curious about those marks. I’ve never heard much about them.”

“Very well, I’d be glad to have you. In the meantime, I believe you two are our most tactically minded,” Nemestrinus said to Crimson and Demonic, “so if you would like to discuss our next course of action, I believe it would put us one step ahead.” With that, he, Dolosus and Kat turned and headed towards the door, then down the hall towards the room where Kat had stayed three years ago. Nemestrinus made pleasant small talk, hands resting comfortably in his pockets, and Dolosus stayed by Kat’s side all the while, his hand barely an inch from hers and brushing it now and then.

Once in her old room, Kat made her way to the foot of her bed and sat, gesturing towards her desk chair for their new ally as Dolosus made himself at home on the bed next to her. He was silent, but watched carefully. Nemestrinus moved his chair to sit across from Kat, and he began,

“Now... I’m going to need to see your mark first.” Kat nodded and rolled up the bottoms of her jeans to about knee-height, then turned her leg and focused her power on the marks, so that a small wing, like a tattoo, appeared on each of her ankles. He nodded slowly, eyebrows raised with curiosity. He bent down and placed a hand on the mark.

“Oh, I’m so sorry,” he said shyly and withdrew his hand, “... May I?”

“It’s fine, you need to see it, right?” Kat responded, amused and slightly bewildered by the man’s impeccable manners. Moving his seat a little closer to her, he raised her right foot up to rest on his lap and set himself to examining the mark. Intrigued, he frowned slightly and traced the lines with his fingertip and said,

“And what about when you really activate them?”

“Well... this.” The girl replied simply, and in an instant, small translucent wings sprouted from the marks themselves, flapping gently. This truly captured Nemestrinus’ interest. He made to touch the one near him, but his hand passed through it, though it met some resistance. It felt like moving his hand through slowly flowing water. Kat began her explanation,

“Those wings don’t exactly do anything of their own, but I figure they’re sort of a... physical manifestation of what’s happening. The mark’s power allows me a jumping ability that’s near flight, really, and heightened agility. They’re very useful, but Alt—someone told me once not to use them unless it’s an emergency.” She stuttered over Altojo’s name, but managed to tell all she knew, as Nemestrinus continued to observe the wings and marks.

“I see... and that’s all you know?” Kat nodded, and he went on, “Well... that person was right. You shouldn’t use these unless it’s an emergency. But you’ve been in hiding for a while, so you haven’t used them recently, right? You should be fine for now. Anyway, the reason is because each mark has its own drawbacks. There’s a price for that kind of power, though it’s not always obvious. Would you happen to know anything about that?”

“No, why would I?” she said, rolling her eyes, “I told you, I hardly ever use them. I mean... sorry, that came out wrong.” She laughed awkwardly. Dolosus frowned curiously, and Nemestrinus simply stared at her for a moment. “B-Besides,” Kat went on, “He also gave me this ointment to use on the marks after I activate them. They start to sting after a while, so it helps the pain.” She pointed over her shoulder to a bottle on her bedside table.

“Dolosus, could you hand that to me?” Nemestrinus requested, and once he had it in hand, he squirted some of the cream in his hands and began rubbing it on Kat’s foot and ankle. He took his time practically massaging her, watching her steadily all the while. Dolosus scowled, noting dully that the

oh-so-polite persona had vanished now that he had his hands on her. What was worse, he glanced over at Kat, and she seemed rather contented with this arrangement.

*But... that's not like her at all...* he thought incredulously. Just as he was about to get to his feet to put a stop to this, Nemestrinus gently pushed her foot off of his thigh and onto the floor. Kat groaned and smirked at him,

“Oooh, c’mon, why’d you stop?” Dolosus clenched his fists and opened his mouth to speak, but Nemestrinus put his hands up defensively,

“Purely for study. Let me explain.” He said calmly, “Miss Kat, deactivate the marks.” She seemed perplexed, but did as told regardless. He watched the wings dissolve, then said, “Right, so, would you have let me touch you like that normally?” At first, she said nothing, taking to a moment to really consider what had just happened. Dolosus watched her expression transition to utter embarrassment as a cute shade of pink spread across her face.

“N-No, definitely not... why did I...?”

“The marks.” Nemestrinus got to his feet and stretched out his back and arms a bit, “It seems like this may be one symptom that all mark-bearers share. They turn you into a different person. Well, not really, your basic personality stays the same, they just slowly do away with your values, morality, that sort of thing. Does that sound about right?”

Dolosus frowned and let his mind wander back to a time four years ago, on the day when he first met Kat. Back then, she had casually slaughtered at least a dozen of Demonic’s men, burst into her throne room, and proceeded to make demands of her. She had been sarcastic, mocking and sadistic. Weeks later during training, she had been somewhat curt towards the crows, though she had always gotten along alright with them. She had used the marks on both occasions, to varying degrees. What Nemestrinus said did add up...

“Well...” Kat frowned slightly, “I noticed they tended to make me feel sort of... liberated, but guilty. Like I could do whatever I wanted, but it would all be terribly wrong... Like that?”

“Precisely like that,” Nemestrinus nodded, heading for the door, “I should take my leave—I want to see how Demonic and Miss Crimson are fairing. I’m not sure that was the socially optimal situation to leave them in, come to think of it... thank you for your time.” he shut the door behind them, leaving the heavy silence to engulf the two still sitting on the bed. Kat glanced over at Dolosus. He was bent over, resting his head on his hands, with an unreadable expression. She bit her lip and waited, hoping against hope that he would speak first. Silence dragged on however, and it slowly dawned on her that Dolosus was, of all things... jealous.

“Dolosus...?”

“Hm?”

Kat didn’t know where to go from there, and he certainly wasn’t helping. She placed a hand gently on his cheek and turned his face to her,

“Dolosus, please don’t be upset. I-I wasn’t in the right mind while he was doing that, and he didn’t mean anything by it...” he kept silent, and she went on, “Too much is going on to worry about little things, and we’ve been apart for too long,” as the words left her lips, Dolosus finally looked into her eyes. Then, the urge struck her all at once, and Kat kissed him, deeply and tenderly, and his arms wrapped around her tightly. Each seemed equally surprised and relieved to finally have time together like this, and so held nothing back. She let her fingers run through his thick, brown hair as his tongue slide into her mouth, then, all at once, Dolosus gently pushed her back onto the bed. His heart thudded heavily in his chest as he continued to kiss her, atop her now. His hands slowly made their way down her sides, in at her waist and out around her hips, memorizing every contour.

Their lips parted, and Dolosus began to kiss her neck, letting her soft, curling hair brush his face. Kat whispered his name, and he moaned in reply, swept away by how incredible his name sounded in her

voice. She gasped aloud as he bit down at the base of her neck, leaving a small pink mark, then moved lower, kissing and nipping her collar bone and her chest—

“D-Dolosus... is... is that your phone...?”

He paused for a moment, completely frozen, and listened to the ring which was, sure enough, coming from his pants pocket. Dolosus let out a low groan and planted his face in the pillow beside Kat’s head. She laughed and stroked his hair gently,

“You should pick it up—it could be Demonic.”

Dolosus propped himself up on his forearm, still on top of Kat. He stuffed his hand into his pocket and grabbed the phone, pressing the “call” button and putting it to his ear,

“What is it?” He growled into the receiver, “...I’ll give whatever tone I like, we have a deal... ugh, fine, fine... I get it, I’m coming.... Yes, Kat too.” He hung up and shoved the phone back into his pocket. He groaned, “I really hate that woman.” Kat laughed and kissed him once more. The two got up from the bed and straightened out their clothes and hair as best they could. Dolosus took a moment to clean his glasses, and Kat asked,

“So what was that about? Something up?”

“Yeah. They’ve found us. We need to relocate immediately.”

Owari.