

Point of Existence

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Two rivalling tribes are on the brink of a civil war. A female mercenary called Dakota is send there to assassinate a notorious arms-dealer. Things aren't going as planned once she meets an unwanted stranger...

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1 - A score to settle...

Pfft... The scorching hot sun burns on my back as my driver makes his way over the bumpy sand-roads. The open 4x4 isn't really that comfortable like the commercial said a long time ago. Everywhere I look, I can see refugees going into the opposite direction of where we were going. At some point, we reached a bridge, and I looked down. Bad idea. We were up very high and I could see the large river below us. I sighed in relief once I realized we made it safe across the bridge. "This is it, Dakota...There's no point of return now..." Then the driver started talking to me. He was a local and had a very thick accent... [br]

[br]

Driver: What brings you to this poor country in the first place, my friend? [br]

Dakota: ... Business. [br]

Driver: Whaha! You must be out of your mind to come here! You haven't heard the news? [br]

[br]

Dakota: I'm fully aware of it...[br]

[br]

Driver: You see that little airplane there in the sky? That's the last one out of this country, my friend. Seems like you're stuck here now. I wish you the best of luck to survive. You're gonna need it!

***chuckles* [br]**

[br]

He kept on blabbering, but I ignored his stupid ramblings about the political situations and his stupid jokes. Instead, I opened my backpack and took out the folder which contained my objective. I had a score to settle. To take out Jason McMillan. Black panther, 6 foot 4, Renarian. Notorious arms-dealer. Has an army of mercenaries to back him up, as long as the price is right. He'll witness how the inevitable civil war is fought with his weapons. Former business partner of mine... Also... He's my ex-lover...[br]

[br]

I've been here for five minutes in this very poor country and everything is crystal clear. Things are about to go very wrong. Two days ago, a revolution broke out in this country, and overthrew the government. But the revolution isn't the reason why I'm here... Two hostile tribes called the Bakuba's and the Shaigiya's both has ideas to make this country live in prosperity and basically, couldn't get along with each other. It's been known for years that they blew each other's brains out as a way to solve problems as the government didn't do anything about it. Alas, corruption is every day routine, and the mercenaries and bounty hunters took advantage of that by stirring things up. Jason McMillan is one of those mercenaries. He sells weapons to both tribes, and because of that, genocides have been taken place. Jason was responsible for the genocides as well. He doesn't care that this country is gonna rip itself apart. But he doesn't care. And truth be told, I don't care either. All I'm interested in is making money by doing the things I'm good at while I still could accomplish my objectives. My sources indicate that Jason's been here for about 5 months, taking care of the competition with the only goal he cherishes. [br]

[br]

As for me... My name's Dakota. I'm 32 years old. A female hedgehog with short spiky quills, 2 earrings in my left ear and three piercings in my right ear. And my job...? I'm a mercenary. A gun for hire. People hire me to take care of problems that just don't seem to go away. And like I mentioned before, Jason McMillan isn't a stranger to me... [br]

[br]

Years ago, I worked with Jason. We travelled around the planet, taking care of "business" which paid very good... Everything went rather well, and after travelling and took care of business together for more than a year, I fell in love with him... But our last assignment together... We were hired by the ultranationalists after the war was over in Sercia to assassinate the president... I was set up... And Jason's gotten greedy... He stabbed me in the back... Literally... Then took off with my hit-fee and left me for dead... I was captured by the separatists in Sercia... They patched me up... Only to break me down again. For six months, I was captured and tortured by the separatists, who basically ruled the country. And I lost everything I could possibly ever lose... It's something I'll never forget... The scars will always remind me of that... And then one day, I was liberated... By an ICA agent... And he got me back to Renaria... [br]

[br]

Things weren't looking pretty for me once I got back in Renaria... I got arrested by the ICA, and they had enough evidence that most likely lead to a death sentence for me if I stood trial. And I bet that was coming. However... There was a way out... An ICA agent got compromised while watching Jason McMillan... And with compromised, I mean that he's been killed. Money makes people talk, and that's how the ICA agent was discovered. Ever since then, the ICA lost track of McMillan... So I was their only option... I knew the locations... I had my contacts... I know Jason's way of handling business... He's been on the ICA's most wanted list for more than a decade... So if I could take care of this little problem of theirs, they could take care of a little problem mine. They would wipe my mark away and I would simply disappear again... But there's one thing you need to keep in mind in my line of work... It's something money can't buy... And that's respect. Fact was, I had none... People would probably don't even know who I am, seeing as they all thought I died in Sercia, including Jason... But I'll manage... I always did... And I will get my revenge... Either in this life, or the next...[br]

[br]

So now I'm here... On the continent of Ahtiambo, on the Aegina Islands... And that's basically it in a nutshell...[br]

[br]

Driver: We're here. [br]

[br]

That was the only thing that made me snap out of my daydream... The small town of Sangala... It's been a while... I grabbed my backpack and got out of the 4x4, not looking at the driver or saying anything to him. I made my way on the familiar paths that I once walked... And it's exactly how it used to be... This town is my birthplace... So many things have changed... The sandy roads used to be populated by kids playing, and now all I see are armed mercenaries with checkpoints on every corner of the roads. As I walk past them, I can feel that their looking at me, wondering who I am, and most important, what my business is here. I couldn't help but to feel nervous as I walk past them, but I tried not to show it. Instead, I made my way to an old friend of mine... Iki is his name... He's a meerkat, and another mercenary slash arms-dealer... And dangerous if he's your enemy. And fracked up. Well, just a little. As I walked the paths, the scent of weed penetrated my nostrils. Once I recognized the warehouse, I saw a bunch of guys

standing there, guarding the perimeter. And I saw a meerkat sitting in a chair with a bottle of beer, smoking a stickie. That's definitely him... I couldn't resist but to smile as I saw him again after so many years... I slowly walked up towards him but stayed my distance... Those other guys might be hostile towards me. And I was right. They look distrusting towards me, and held their fingers near the trigger as they continued to watch me. One of the guys poked Iki and nodded over to me. Then Iki noticed that I was standing there... And I just smiled at him...[br]

Iki: Hello stranger!! Ahahahaha!![br]

Dakota: Hello Iki... *smiles* [br]

Iki: For fracks sake!! Get out of her bloody way!! Let her through!! She's one of us, ya fracking twats!!

[br]

[br]

The guys lowered their weapons and I walked over to Iki. He greeted me with a big firm hug... And truth be told, I really missed him as well... [br]

[br]

Iki: How you doing, luff...? [br]

Dakota: It's been years...[br]

Iki: Indeed it has... Welcome home... [br]

Dakota: Thanks... *smiles* [br]

Iki: So what brings you to my humble establishment...? [br]

Dakota: I need to pack some heat... [br]

Iki: Then you've come to the right place... Follow me... [br]

[br]

We entered the large warehouse while the other guys followed us. Everywhere I looked, I saw huge crates, an enormous ammo stock and a shootload of weapons... Knives, pistols, assault rifles, sniper rifles, carbine rifles, bolt action rifles, SMG's, semi automatic shotguns, pump action shotguns, handgrenades, flashbangs, flares and a lot of other types of weapons... It's a mercenary's wet dream... [br]

[br]

Iki: See anything you like? [br]

Dakota: Plenty... *smiles* [br]

Iki: Have a look around... Omar!! Clean that shoot up in aisle six!! I don't wanna see that vomit on the floor when I get back!! Make that motherfracking floor sparkle, you dick head!! [br]

[br]

Dakota: ...[br]

Iki: ... *smiles*[br]

Dakota: ... I'll have the Falaster Steyr G26, the Bianchi Sig556 and the Glock 31. Also, I need a pistol holster, a tactical vest, and an assault rifle bandolier... [br]

[br]

Iki: ... And how are you gonna pay for these...? Hm...?[br]

Dakota: That wont be a problem... [br]

Iki: You do realize that money is worthless here, right...? [br]

Dakota: *pats Iki's cheeks* Money isn't a problem for you either, Iki... [br]

Iki: Hmm-mm... Right... I got something special, just for you. [br]

Dakota: I'm listening... [br]

Iki: The streetvalue of a Glock 31 is around... Hm... Five hundred dinar. Comes standard with a capacity clip which contains 17 bullets... [br]

[br]

Dakota: ... I know that ... [br]

Iki: Then you should also be aware of the fact that you would throw your money away... But!! With the Iki special high capacity clip... [br]

[br]

Dakota: How much? [br]

[br]

Iki grabbed 2 boxes of ammo and a high capacity clip for the pistol. He slams it on the table and looked at me... [br]

[br]

Iki: These!! And these...! Are on the house... [br]

Dakota: Why thank you... [br]

Iki: It's great to have you back, luff... [br]

Dakota: It's sure good to be home... [br]

Iki: *lights up a stickie* [br]

Dakota: Iki, you really need to stop using shoot... It's bad for you... [br]

[br]

Iki: It's bad for me? No!! NO!!! Drugs are good, my dearest Dakota!! Drugs are our mates!! Fuuuuck!!! I'm getting on me own nerves!! Ahahahaha!! I saw me dad hit me mother, me mother hit me brother, me brother hit me sister, and me sister... ...fracked me father!! So I suppose it's inevitable, really!! I mean, you'd have to be on drugs just to live in that madhouse, wouldn't you?!![br]

[br]

Dakota: *shrugs* [br]

Iki: So... Who your after...? [br]

Dakota: Someone not worth to mention... Iki, please, I'm in a hurry, can we get on with this...? [br]

[br]

Iki: Of course, luff... [br]

[br]

I put my backpack on the table and gave Iki his money. [br]

[br]

Dakota: Unmarked bills, not traceable. [br]

Iki: Nice not doing business with you! Paper or plastic?! Ahahahahahaha!! Oh frack, I'm getting on own fracking nerves again... [br]

[br]

And after that, I took the weapons and geared up. I nodded and smiled to Iki... And Iki looked with a serious expression at me... [br]

[br]

Iki: If you're not too busy some time... Come visit me... I might have something to do for you. [br]

[br]

Dakota: I will. [br]

Iki: Also... A word of advice... Money doesn't have any value here... But the right stones however... [br]

[br]

Dakota: *nods* I know... I need to settle down first. [br]

Iki: There's a safehouse you can use for a couple of weeks... It's near the abandoned railyard, a couple of miles to the south of Tecala. You know where it is, right? There's a checkpoint where my guys are stationed. I'll inform my guys to let you through. [br]

[br]

Dakota: Thanks... Take care, Iki. See ya soon. [br]

Iki: Bye love!! [br]

[br]

And with that, I made my way out of the warehouse... It was getting dark, so I best be off then. I'll hitch a ride... By hotwiring a car or something... [br]

[br]

Iki: Say hello to loverboy for me!! Ahahahahahaha!!! frack, frack, frack, oh frack!! I'm fracking hallucinating!! Get a grip on yourself, ya damn crackhead!! This is just like the time with the talking squirrels!! Ahahahaha!! [br]

[br]

Omar: Iki, calm down, you need to- [br]

Iki: I'M TRYING YOU frackING FAG!!! AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAh!!!![br]

[br]

OK, this is shoot is real fracked up. Really, really fracked up. For fracks sake, I came down here for a business trip to close down a deal with the Roxxon Enterprises on behalf of the company I work with, Callahan Nordyne Incorporated. Everything went so well over the week, and I managed to close the deal. Roxxon Enterprises is now a client of Callahan Nordyne Incorporated. Not that it's gonna make any difference now!! frack... I should've been home by now, next to my girlfriend... And I don't know how I ended up in this shoot in the first place!! What the hell have I done to deserve this?! fracking hell...

[br]

[br]

I guess it all started two days ago. I was on my way to the airport to go home until the bus stopped. A few armed guys searched the bus, and then they picked someone out. Apparently, that was the guy they needed. He was taken outside, and they started to argue. And then all of a sudden, he was shot. So, was I scared shootless? Of course I was!! And well, everyone got taken out of the bus as they strip-searched it, going through all luggage and everything. Seems they found a few stowaways. But instead of shooting them, they threw a few Molotov cocktails which practically, made the bus explode. And well, we all ran away in different directions. I managed to get some of my stuff. A briefcase which contained the contracts and everything, but my luggage and clothes and... Shoes were on fire... I guess I somehow ended up in the poor districts, where drug gangs and stuff ruled the place. I didn't had any of this on my way to Azania, the city metropolis where Roxxon Incorporated was in the business district... A very beautiful city, where I was in the rich districts, stayed in a luxury hotel and ate top notch food until it was time for me to go home... [br]

[br]

I still tried to make my way back to the airport by foot. But everywhere I came, I saw heavily armed guys, patrolling the streets, checking documents of people who walked and everything. And sometimes, they opened fire to other people. I tried to stay as far away from it, but at some point, it was inevitable for me to get caught up with it. And that moment came when I reached the town of Tecala... There wasn't really a way to avoid Tecala to get to the interstate, unless I wanted to imitate a mountain goat. So I took the most reasonable option. And it was something I did for the very first time. To try to sneak around them... But, as you can probably guess, that wasn't a success... [br]

[br]

Of course, I got noticed. All of a sudden, I felt someone placed a hand on my shoulders and asked me where I was going.. The guy had a foreign accent but didn't really seem like a local... They asked me for my papers, but seeing as everything blew up, I had nothing. I told them I'm a Sales Manager working for Callahan Nordyne Incorporated, a banking and investment corporation with more then 5000 employees all over the globe. We had offices in Renaria, Buthainah, Alaine, Kalubya, Managua,

Prajevitzza, Sechenia, and San Samalia. [br]

[br]

...[br]

[br]

Then they all laughed at me for a moment, pulled a serious face and aimed their weapons at me while one of them searched my briefcase. I scared the living shoot out of myself and immediately raised my hands up in the air. They kept asking stuff, and I just answered what I know. I told them my name is Nick, that I'm a kangaroo, which was probably stating the obvious, that I'm 29 years old, that I'm a Sales Manager living in Veyska with my girlfriend, with two sport-cars, an SUV, a budgie, and a nice penthouse. After a moment, the guy puts everything back in my suitcase and closed it. They continued asking a lot of other stuff, but I simply didn't know the answer to that. Then all of a sudden, I heard a massive explosion, and the guys were alert. They aimed at everything that moved, and at some point, I saw in the distance a figure running away. So they all shot at him, and I saw the figure falling down. And then they continued to ask if I was with Mc...McMi-... I can't remember his name. So I shrugged and said I didn't know the guy. And after that, they picked me up, threw me in a shed and locked the door. [br]

[br]

A few hours passed by. I could see outside that it already turned dark. At some point, I heard a car stop. When I peeked through the wooden cracks of the shed. I saw this figure in a car, and by the sounds of her voice, I heard she was a female... She didn't had any accents or something and spoke Renarian pretty fluently, so I presumed she's Renarian, like me. What made her so special that she could pass through, and I couldn't...? And then not long after that, the car drove off... [br]

[br]

I woke up by the sound of gunshots. I must have dozed off a little. I looked at my watch and only an hour passed by. It sounded like firecrackers or something, with a groan every now and then. When I looked outside the window, I saw nothing because it was too dark to see. Two of the guys who asked me questions are dead. I could see them near the shed. Maybe someone found out about me and that I'm about to be rescued. At some point, I felt confident enough to say that I'm being rescued. So all I did was sitting down and grinning and holding on to my suitcase, waiting for someone to bust the door and take me to the airport. And I was right. The door got indeed busted in, and I saw someone who seemed to be a local yelling at me in a foreign language I didn't know. He kept pointing at my suitcase, not knowing what he meant with that... I said "What? I can't understand you!". Ehm... He started to yell louder at me and I kept on yelling that I didn't understand him. Then all of a sudden, he aimed his weapon at me. I didn't hesitated for a moment there. I leaned back on my tail, and kicked his chest with all of my strength. He flew back quite a distance... I ran out of the door as fast as I could, back in the direction I came from. I thought I would be safe in the hills, and while I was running, I had a good view on a train-yard. I noticed two wagons were blown up, which was probably the explosion I heard earlier that day. Then I looked back, and I noticed I was being followed by these guys and that they started to shoot at me from a long distance... So I started running again... At some point, I reached a house on top of a hill. I wanted to bang on the door to let me in, but seeing as they were closing in, there wasn't any time left for that... Instead, I saw a dumpster, quickly raised the lid, and jumped in there... At some point, I heard that they were closing in, and searched the place... They banged on the door of that little house, but no one answered it. So they busted in, by the sounds of it. I slowly opened the lid a little bit to see what was happening... A few moment later, they came out and they walked away... [br]

[br]

And that's where I am now... In a fracking dumpster... [br]

[br]

I stayed in that dumpster for a while, as the unbearable smell penetrated my nostrils... At some point, I thought the coast was clear and that I could come out of it... So I opened the lid and got up... But as I stood up, I noticed I was staring at a barrel of a weapon... And a female hedgehog stood there, aiming her weapon at me... [br]

[br]

Nick: Oh bloody frack, not agai-Aaargh!![br]

[br]

She grabbed me by my collar, and violently pulled me out of the dumpster which tumbled over. She was way stronger than she looked... She yanked the briefcase out of my hands, kicked me in the back of my legs and forced me to kneel. It all happened so fast that I could hardly do anything... And I don't think it was such a good idea to pull something in her presence... After all, she was the one with the guns... [br]

[br]

Dakota: Who the hell are you? [br]

[br]

I recognized that voice... The same voice of that Renarian woman when I was locked up in that shed... [br]

[br]

Nick: Eeeeh... I, eh-[br]

Dakota: Did McMillan sent you? [br]

Nick: Oooh! So that was his name! McMillan! I forgot his name but the guys back at the checkpoint asked me the same thi-[br]

[br]

All of a sudden, she kneed me in the back. I fell down on my stomach as she presses a knee in my back...[br]

[br]

Nick: Whoa, whoa, whoa...!![br]

[br]

Dakota: He sent you, didn't he...? Don't you think it's a little convenient...? Hm...? First, he sends you to scout the place out... Blow up Iki's shipment... Then the checkpoint got attacked by the Shaigiya's's... And then he sends you AND the Shaigiya's to get rid of me...? [br]

[br]

Nick: ... Shaigiya's? [br]

Dakota: Don't play dumb with me... I'm on the fracking edge here... I would have shot your face off the moment you came out of that dumpster if it wasn't for me needing some information... [br]

[br]

Nick: What information?!! I'm just a Sales Manager!! Leave me alone already. for fracks sake!! For the last two days I've been threatened with guns to my face!! I don't know anything!! [br]

[br]

Dakota: Uh-huh... Right... [br]

[br]

She got off of me and took a look in my suitcase, while she still aimed at me. After she thoroughly searched every compartment in the suitcase, she finally came to the conclusion that I'm not who she thought I was... [br]

[br]

Dakota: Just who are you? [br]

[br]

Nick: I told you, I'm a Sales Manager. I work at Callahan Nordyne Incorporated... I closed a deal with

Roxxon Enterprises and now their a client of ours... Check my suitcase if you don't believe me. And now I'm here, being threatened by a chick with a gun. [br]

[br]

Then she checked my suitcase for a while and carefully inspects every letter I had in there while she still aimed her weapon at me and looked at me every now and then...[br]

[br]

Dakota: ... [br]

Nick: Look, things aren't kosher here and I know that. For the last 2 days, I see a lot of people with guns and shooting and asking me stuff. I don't belong here. I don't know what's happening here, what your business is here, and quite honestly, I don't care. All I want is to get to the airport as soon as possible and go home... [br]

[br]

Dakota: You do realize that the airports are closed at this moment? [br]

Nick: ... What...?! [br]

Dakota: The government fell, a civil war is about to start, economy is a load of shoot and people aren't afraid to die for their believes. And besides, they occupied the airports and blocked the harbours... You wouldn't survive long enough just to get there, and especially you. [br]

[br]

Nick: ... No... No...!! Noo!! Noooo!! [br]

[br]

At that point, she slapped me in the face... [br]

[br]

Dakota: Will you keep you're frackin voice down...?! The Shaigiya's might still be out there...! [br]

[br]

Nick: What am I gonna do now...? What AM I gonna do now...?! [br]

Dakota: You're on your own. Good luck. Now get your shoot and leave. [br]

Nick: B-B-But I can't go out there on my own...! Like you said, I wouldn't survive...! You can't do that to me...! [br]

[br]

Dakota: ... Eh, yes I can. First of, I don't know you. Second, I don't know if I could trust you. Third, and most importantly, you can compromise my presence... And you already saw me. So you're either killed out there, or you'll be killed by me. I don't mind. But you can still betray me if I let you go. So I think it's best to put a bullet through you're head right now. [br]

[br]

Nick: *sighs* [br]

Dakota: It's your call. [br]

Nick: No, please, don't... I got a girlfriend back home and... A budgie and... Gaaah... Please... Don't kill me... I beg you, don't... I got so much to live for... [br]

[br]

Dakota: ... [br]

Nick: Please... [br]

[br]

Apparently, my pleadings and begging's were helping. She looked at me for a while and lowered her weapon. I think my sparkly eyes and good looks were the reason for that. I can't blame her. [br]

[br]

Dakota: ... You can stay for the night. But I want you gone before dawn, you got that? [br]

[br]

Nick: Yeah, yeah, sure...! Whatever you say...! [br]

Dakota: Get your @\$ inside... [br]

Nick: ... You know... Thanks... Thanks for like... Not putting a bullet through my he- [br]

[br]

Dakota: Move it... [br]

[br]

So I got inside... The place wasn't really that big... There was only a bed, a chair and a radio... And that's it... I didn't mind... I flopped down on the bed and sighed in relief... [br]

[br]

Nick: Aaaaaaaaah... A bed... Finally... I'm exhausted... I never realized how good a bed can be... [br]

[br]

Dakota: Oh hell no. That's my bed. Get the hell off of it. [br]

Nick: ... Then where do I sleep? [br]

[br]

Dakota: On the ground, or in the chair, or on the roof, or in the middle of a Shaigiya camp, for all I care...!! I don't give a shoot...!! But if you don't get out of that bed right now, I swear I'll frackin' shoot you off of it...! [br]

[br]

Nick: ... 'Kay... [br]

[br]

So I sat down in the chair while she flopped down on her bed. She closed her eyes while I still looked around... [br]

[br]

Nick: So eh... [br]

Dakota: Goodnight. [br]

Nick: ... What are you doing here in the first place...? [br]

Dakota: I SAID goodnight... [br]

Nick: ... [br]

[br]

Just my luck... What the hell have I just done...? [br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

2 - Another day at the office

Jason kneeled before me... He looked at me with penetrating eyes as I was down on my stomach while feeling the excruciating pain in my back... I felt how my shirt was slowly soaking with blood and that a puddle underneath me was slowly forming...

Jason: It's written all over you're face, you know that...? I can see the hate and anger in you're eyes... I don't regret this... Not one bit... It's nothing personal... Just plain business...

Dakota: *coughs* Why.....?

Jason: ... The separatists found out that it was you who pulled the trigger on their beloved president... And you know the rules... Once you're being comprised, it's every men for himself... They paid handsomely for your captivity... And I figured it would be a quick buck... So in the end, everyone gets what they want...

Dakota: Except for me.....

Jason: Except for you... Just close you're eyes and it'll over soon...

And with that, he grabbed the large suitcase and took mine as well... Walked over to the door and knocked on it... The door got answered by a group of guys...

Jason: She's all yours now. Do what you want with her.

And then Jason walked away in the darkness... I could still hear his footsteps echoing throughout the corridor... Eight furries entered the room I was in... And I realized I started to cry... Knowing what would be ahead of me...

Dakota: *gasps*

When I opened my eyes, I saw the sun was coming up... I rubbed my eyes and looked on my watch... Half past 5 in the morning... And when I looked around, there was no sign of that guy I took in last night. It's for the best that he left. I felt how my back hurts a lot... I sat upright to make it a bit more comfortable for myself, but the pain didn't go away. It always felt like stings and I always felt it whenever I woke up. So I took my backpack and took a painkiller and washed it away with water. I really could use a nice hot shower right about now... Or a bath... There isn't such luxury when you live here. So I took a cloth and went to another room, which was the bathroom. Basically, it was just a bowl of water standing on a table with a small mirror on the wall. And that's it. So I took off my top, soaked the cloth in the water and rubbed it in with a bar of soap to clean my face. After I was done washing my face, I looked in the mirror and saw the scars on my chest... And when I lifted my arms to wash my armpits and turned my body, I could see the scars on my back... On the lower left side, there was a burn mark... A scar that would never go away... And I looked at it for a while...

Nick: How'd that happen...?

I looked up surprised and saw in the mirror that guy was still here, staring at the huge scars across my back... I just ignored him and quickly put my top back on...

Dakota: I thought I told you to leave before dawn...

Nick: Well technically, the sun isn't up yet...

Dakota: Then where'd you go?

Nick: Outside, smoking a cigarette... I didn't want to wake you up... I'm trying to quit, but every now and then I just feel like taking one...

Dakota: ... You got cigarettes...?

Nick: No, I took one from you. I hope you don't mind...

Dakota: Do you have any idea how hard it is to get your hands on a pack of smokes here...?

Nick: Oh... Well, I'm sorry.

Dakota: *sighs*

Nick: ... So... What happened...? H-How'd you get those nasty scars on your back...?

Dakota: ...

I walked out of the "bathroom" while I pushed him away. I sat down in the chair, got out my pocket knife and a can of... Some sort of stew or something and I started eating by poking my knife in the goo and everything that sticks to the knife was shoved in my mouth... It didn't really taste that good, but if you're hungry, everything tastes great. I noticed that guy was still staring at me from a distance, and he looked a bit hungry. I just continued eating, but he kept staring at me... So I sighed reluctantly and threw him another can of that goo. He pops the lid by pulling the ring on top...

Nick: Thanks... You got a fork or something?

Dakota: No. Use your imagination.

Nick: ... Oh.

So he lifts the can up and tilted it a little while his mouth was wide open. It didn't come out of the can... Then he shakes it a little and then the whole content of the can fell in his face. Seriously... What an idiot... He looked at me and smiled nervously while I shook my head and continued eating... Un-fracking-believable... He scrapes the goo off of his face and puts everything back in the can...

Dakota: You could also eat it with your hands, you stupid dick...

Nick: I haven't washed my hands.

Dakota: Yeah so? It wont kill you to eat it with your hands. Most people here would kill for a can of food, eat it with their bare hands while they just wiped their @\$@ after taking a shoot and lick the ground clean to satisfy their hunger.

Nick: ...

Dakota: It's called poverty. Get used to it, rich boy.

Nick: *sighs*

It stayed quiet for a while as we were eating. I could see that he was starting to think. And after a while, he broke the silence...

Nick: ... If all the airports and harbours are closed, then how'd you get here?

Dakota: Rubber boat. Docked off on land where a car was waiting for me to take me to Sangala.

Nick: Oh. And... Why you're here...? And what's with the weapons anyway?

Dakota: Business.

Nick: Well... I think that-

Dakota: You wanna know what I think? I think you're talking too much. I think that I should've shot you last night. And I think that I should ask you for the last time to politely leave before I'll shoot you out of this house...

He closed his eyes and sighed... Then he looked up to me again...

Nick: Look... I got nowhere to go, alright...? I see armed people everywhere, and I tried to avoid them as much as possible, but that almost got me killed when I got caught. I don't know what the hell is going on here and all I want is to go home... But... Seems like I'm stuck on this island now... *sighs*

Dakota: ...

Nick: And... I figured that... You seem to have the weapons and... The knowledge of the things going on here... I mean... You're the only I "know" here and you've been... "Kind" to me, ya know... You gave me a place to spend the night and... Food... And... I was wondering if... If I could stay with you for protection until it's safe for me to go home...

Dakota: Pssh... That might take a while... Might even take a few years... And I'm not intending to babysit you... And besides, you're draining my supplies...

Nick: ... If it's money your after... *sighs* I got plenty... Just name your price...

Dakota: ... Five hundred thousand.

Nick: What?!

Dakota: ...

Nick: ... *sighs* Alright, alright... I might have to sell my penthouse... And my cars... And do a little overtime at the office... And-

Dakota: And if you don't stick to the bargain, I'll send someone or I'll personally visit you myself to get even on the deal.

Nick: *sighs* Oh great...

Dakota: So do we have a deal?

Nick: ... I guess...

Dakota: DO we...?

Nick: ... Yeah... I don't really have a choice, I guess...

Dakota: Alright then...

I took a bottle of water out of my backpack and drank some. And when I looked outside, I could see the sun coming up... So I sat in the windsill to take a good look at it... It was always a

beautiful sight to see the sun go up here... I've seen a lot of sunrises, but it never gets boring... It's beautiful to see how the sky and the open savannahs across the hills are gold orange coloured... Slowly, they would take their true colours again... You see a lot of wildlife at dawn...

Nick: So eh... What's gonna happen no-

Dakota: Sssh...

Nick: ... What?

Dakota: You're ruining my sunrise...

Nick: ... You're the strangest woman I've ever met...

Dakota: Says the guy who just poured a fracking can of stew all over his face.

Nick: ... *sighs* Never mind...

It stayed silent for a while again as I continued to watch the sunrise. I felt myself drifting away in a daydream... And for some reason, I was wondering how many sunsets I would still be watching... This one could be my last one for all I know... The more I thought about it, the scarier the idea became. I've faced a lot of near-death experiences, but none made such an impact as the one in Sercia... I turned my left wrist and looked at it while seeing the scars I had... It keeps reminding me of what happened there in Sercia...

I snapped out of my daydream when I felt I was being stared at. And that guy was staring at me again, to my wrists...

Nick: Seriously... What happened to you...?

Dakota: ... There are a couple of things you need to keep in mind if you want protection from me. I can protect you from any danger we might encounter out there, but I can't prevent you from danger you draw on yourself because of stupid actions you might undertake. I don't mind. Technically, I'm not paid for your protection yet, and quite honestly, I don't need your money because it's worthless here. You're the one who needs me, and not the other way around. So listen closely, 'cause I'll only say this once.

Nick: ... D-Danger out there...?

Dakota: First of... If you wander around like that the way you are dressed, you would most likely get shot or kidnapped out there.

Nick: Why, what's wrong with my outfit?

Dakota: You don't get it, do you? You don't look like a mercenary... It won't take long for them to notice that you're not and be killed. So ditch the jacket. The sneakers and the baggy pants will do fine.

Nick: ... O-Okay...?

Dakota: ...

Nick: ...

Dakota: Well come on!

Nick: Oh!! Okay...

And after that, he took his jacket and shirt off which revealed a black tank top underneath. That would do... I could see he was pretty muscled and had a tribal tattoo on his right arm...

Dakota: Keep in mind to stay with me at all times... Once you lose sight of me, you're on your own. If we talk to someone, keep your mouth shut. Don't say anything. I'll do the talking.

Nick: *nods*

Dakota: And that's pretty much it. Put these sunglasses on.

Nick: Why?

Dakota: If you're nervous, your eyes will give that away and people can see that.

Nick: ... Oh. Sounds like you protected someone before.

Dakota: I did. The guy died after being for 2 hours with me. Got shot during a firefight.

Nick: ... Well that's a relief...

Dakota: Another thing.

Nick: What?

I gave him an assault rifle with the bandolier and a pistol I got from Iki the day before.

Nick: What the hell am I gonna do with this?! I don't know how to shoot!!

Dakota: Stick the gun in the waste-band of your jeans. Shoulder the assault rifle over your right shoulder and clip the buckle to the rifle. You're not much of a mercenary if you don't carry any weapons.

Nick: I see.

Dakota: One last thing.

Nick: What?

Dakota: Don't expect us to be best buddies now. You don't watch my back, and I might look after yours. Only the people who got my back are my buddies.

Nick: ... S-So we're really g-gonna go o-out t-there and...?

Dakota: Yeah.

Nick: Oh fracking hell... Can't I just... Stay here and... Do stuff until you come back?

Dakota: Yeah, of course you can.

Nick: Thanks...

Dakota: But the Shaigiya's know where you and I are hiding. So I'm not coming back to this safe-house anymore. You can stay if you want.

Nick: ... *sighs*

Dakota: Alright then.

Nick: So... What's gonna happen now?

Dakota: I'm gonna see an old friend of mine... Most likely, he has something to do for us. Well, for me that is.

Nick: ... Okay... So... Do you have a name or... Something...?

Dakota: ... I'm Dakota.

Nick: ... Nick.

Dakota: Alright. Let's go then... "Nick"...

Why was she sounding so sarcastic...? I don't know...

Alright so... Within a few minutes, I changed careers. I went from being a sales manager to a mercenary. Hm. Interesting. I wonder what my girlfriend will say once she hears this.

*So we went out of the house... There was a car right next door, but we went on foot. Why, I would never know. She seems aggravated all along and that was the only reason I needed not to ask her. It stayed quiet the first half hour until she broke the silence by explaining of what happened. She tells me that I should be aware of the situation in order for me to survive. So, in a nutshell... The government fell and all that, *bladibladibla*. She already told me. But then she told me of these tribes. The Shaigiya's and the Bakuba's... Two of the largest tribes on the Aegina Islands who never could get along with each other... Each tribe counts at least five hundred thousand people, and if a civil war was about to start, meant that it was booming business for mercenaries and arms-dealers. So basically, they all came down here to sell weapons to both tribes and offer their services and loyalty for the right prize. And that's basically it...*

Nick: ... So you're a mercenary?

Dakota: No, I'm a nun.

Nick: ...

Dakota: Of course I'm a mercenary, you country matters.

Nick: ... *sighs*

We made our way to the warehouse while we didn't say anything anymore. He annoys the frack out of me, and I really wanted to get rid of him... I didn't give a shoot about his money, but it would be nice if I could cash it... Either way, I wouldn't care if he died or not. Every time he opens his mouth, it annoys the frack out of me. Something tells me that I made the wrong decision by protecting him...

Once we reached the warehouse, the armed guys nodded to me to walk through, but they looked distrusting towards Nick. I explained that he's my associate, and after that, he was allowed to walk through. They still kept a very close eye on him... Once we entered the warehouse, I noticed that Iki and some other guy was standing on one leg, while the palms of his hands touched each other and they both hummed... We stayed at our distance... They didn't noticed we were watching them...

Iki: Hmmmmmmmmm.....

Omar: Now, release your negative energy... Clean your Chakra's and let it aaaaaaaaall out...

Iki: Hmmmmmmmmm...

Omar: You need to find your centre... Find your centre...

Iki: Hmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmarghblarghdaaaaaaaammmmmmmmmmnnnnnnnnn.....

Omar: ... Find your fracking centre!!

Iki: OMAR!!! It's my own interpretation here, alright?!! You're messing!!! With my delicate energy-field!! It's bad for my KARMA!!! You fracking twat... Hmmmmmmmmmmmmm...

Omar: ... Cocksucker.....

Iki: Will you stop with the fracking cursing already?!! It's not fracking nice to curse, ya son of a genital wart!!

Omar: ...

Iki: Omar, it's a joke! Come on! Smile!!

Omar: *smiles sarcastically*

Iki: ... You stupid country matters...

Omar: ...

Iki: Dakota!!

And then Iki noticed us. He pushed that guy away and nodded us to get closer. So we did.

Iki: I-I just had my therapy...

Dakota: Is it working...?

Iki: NO!!! Because I'm having a HUGE... frackING problem here!!

Then it stayed silent for a moment as he was looking at Nick for a while...

Iki: ... Who's your friend?

Dakota: My associate.

Nick: Hi, I'm Nick.

The fracking idiot reached his hand out to shake with Iki's... Bloody hell... What an unbelievably country matters he is... Iki just frowned at him and looked baffled at him while I poked Nick in his waist...

Nick: Ow!

Iki: Your associate, huh? Maybe your associate and you can do a little something for me...

Dakota: I heard it. You're talking about the rail-yard thing?

Iki: Yes!! Those fracking fags had the frackING nerve to blow up MY shipment!! That was MY money that got blown up!!! Twenty million dinar worth of equipment!!! frack!!!!

Dakota: Calm down already.

Iki: Calm down?!! The Bakuba's ordered another shipment!! AND THEIR SHIPMENT BLEW UP!!!! I can't sell something I don't have!!! Son of a dog!!!

It stayed quiet for a moment as Iki tried to calm down...

Iki: I've been keeping tabs... On Serina... She's a lioness, and a mercenary, like you... She gained my trust by doing jobs for me... But in the end, her loyalty lies with the Shaigiya's... She was the only one that knew of the shipment for the Bakuba's... She might have sabotaged the shipment to give the Shaigiya's the advantage... So last night, I let her to be followed by one of my guys... And my suspicions were right... She walked right into a Shaigiya camp...

Dakota: Whadda ya want me to do?

Iki: I want you... To... Take her pretty little head... And blow it off of her fracking shoulders... I paid others to pillage the armoury of the Shaigiya's in Pandura.

Dakota: My services aren't free, you know.

Iki: I know that, my dearest Dakota, and that's why I got this lovely little bag filled with pretty shiny stones...

Iki handed me a small bag and I counted the stones... Fifteen blood diamonds... For this, I would kill two Serina's...

Dakota: You're being generous...

Iki: Money wont be a problem if I smell a rat somewhere...

Dakota: Alright then... Where can I find her...?

Iki: She has a safe-house near the outskirts of Barandakesh. My guys found out that since this morning, she's being guarded by 5 heavily armed guys, which only confirm my suspicions about her. Those guys are most likely Shaigiya's... Waste them all... I trust you and your associate to get the job done...

Dakota: Alright... Don't worry, we'll take care of this...

Nick: ... W-What....?!!

Then all of a sudden, she poked me in the waist again... And it hurt.

Dakota: I need some supplies though.

Iki: Take what you need to get the job done. No charge.

So I took another assault rifle with a scope, three hand grenades, ammo clips and a pistol.

Iki: Oh frack, my hands are fracking shaking...

He gets out a bag of green stuff and a cigarette-paper and rolled a stickie. He lights it up with shaky hands and after he took the first puff, I smacked it out of his hands. Iki looks kinda baffled at me...

Dakota: *smiles innocently*

Iki: You... *points finger at Dakota* You're a good friend... *hugs Dakota*

Dakota: Hehehehe...

And with that, we walked out of the warehouse and made our way to Barandakesh... Walking would take about 3 hours... And on the way, Nick didn't say anything. But I could tell that he was fracking nervous. I couldn't resist but to smile. For me, it just felt like another day at the office...

3 - Stuck on you

I'm starting to regret my decision... I really, really want to get rid of this guy... So... What'd he do, you might ask? Well... Annoying the frack out of me while we had a long walk ahead of us was just one thing...

Nick: Are we there yet...?

Dakota: No.

Nick: ... How about now?

Dakota: ... No!

Nick: ...

Dakota: ...

Nick: ... Pffft, it's hot.

Dakota: *sighs*

Nick: I'm thirsty.

Dakota: ...

Nick: My legs are-

Dakota: Will you the hell up already?!! For the past 2 hours, you did nothing but doging about everything!!

Nick: Oh. Want me to sing then?

Dakota: No!

Nick: Well, I wanna sing. *sings quietly* Somewheeeeeeeeeeeeeere-

Dakota: Don't you ever shut up?!!

Nick: Want me to sing a different song then?

Dakota: NO!!! Just shut up!! Shut!! Up!!

Nick: ...

Dakota: *sighs*

Nick: ...

Nick: *hums*

Dakota: Will you shut up already??!!!

Nick: I can't even hum it?!

Dakota: No!!

Nick: ...

Dakota: *sighs* When will you start acting your age... Seriously...

Nick: *whistles the song*

Dakota: Alright, that's it.

So I tackled the bastard and pressed my knee in his back while I pressed a gun to his head.

Nick: Ow!! Hey! I'm sorry, I can't help it! I'm just really nervous!! I'm sorry!!!

Dakota: Normally, I'm very patiently... But you're pushing me to the edge here...

Nick: ... How many times have you either threatened me with a gun or threatened me verbally to kill me? Seriously, if you're making a threat, be sure to do it right.

Dakota: ... *cocks pistol* That can be arranged...

Nick: ... Shutting up now.

Dakota: ... I feel sorry for you're girlfriend.

Nick: ... Don't you say anything about my girlfriend.

Dakota: Or what?! Psh. Get up.

Nick: *sighs*

And after that, we continued walking... It stayed silent for another half an hour until he broke the silence again...

Nick: What's with those... Stones the guy gave you earlier?

Dakota: Their not stones, their blood diamonds.

Nick: Well that guy said they were stones-

Dakota: Diamonds. Blood diamonds. Their used to fund genocides and pretty much everything that's for sale. Money doesn't have any value here.

Nick: G-Genocides?

Dakota: *nods* You never heard it on the news?

Nick: Yeah, but I never imagined I'd be actually witness one.

Dakota: We need to take out five guys and a chick. That's not a genocide.

Nick: I'm eh... I'm not having any part in this killing thing, right?

Dakota: No. I'll do everything on my own. You just stay out of my way and out of sight.

Nick: Okay, good. Sounds easy enough.

Dakota: And please, for the love of everything that is holy, please!! Shut up... I don't wanna hear you.

Nick: ... But-

Dakota: Ssh.

Nick: Yeah but-

Dakota: Zip it.

Nick: *sighs*

Finally, he stayed shut. And stayed that way until we reached the safe-house...

When we did, I told Nick to stay put. The safe-house was located on the other end of a hill, and I had a good view on it from a ledge on the other side. So I climbed that ledge and got down on my stomach. Once I looked through my scope, I could see five armed guys walking around. So I waited until one of them was isolated enough to take him out. After I picked my target, I shot him through the head. Once I did, I looked around again to see if any of them was alarmed. Gunshots are heard every day, so they didn't really seem to mind. Then I waited for another one to be isolated. Bang. His brain splattered all over the ground. Three more left. Once one of them found a dead body, he alerted the others, which was the easiest part. Bang, bang, bang. That's it. I

grinned with satisfaction... So after that, I got down where Nick was still waiting... He was looking at the scenario in the distance and didn't noticed I was behind him. So I slapped the back of his head and told him to take cover in the hills...

So I carefully reached the house while Nick stayed hidden in the hills. I checked my ammo and opened the door slowly, while aiming inside... The first thing I noticed was a dead lioness on the ground... Then all of a sudden, I felt a huge blow in the back of my neck... And I passed out...

When I slowly opened my eyes, I noticed I was still in that house... But on a bed... My head hurts like hell, and I saw a figure smoking a cigarette while looking through my backpack... Those are MY... Cigarettes... Then he noticed I was awake and he walked towards me... And he was a panther as well... But it wasn't Jason...

???: Finally, you took your time...

Dakota: Who the hell are you...?

???: ...

Dakota: ... Jason...?

???: ... No. I'm his brother.

Dakota: ... Jason never mentioned he had a brother...

???: No of course not, it's to protect us both... You see, I'm with the ICA...

Dakota: Oh great...

???: And I've come here to keep tabs on you... I know everything about you.

Dakota: So you keep your big brother out of jail while you cut yourself a nice piece on the deals he makes?

???: ... Bingo...

Dakota: Whadda ya want from me?

???: I know you're hired to kill my brother... But if you do that, my ridiculously low government salary won't be enough to cover my expenses... So... Here's what I want you to do... You know the contacts, the deals and you set it up. And when you do, you call me. I want fifty percent of you're hit-fees... If not... Life sentence in a maximum secured prison in a solitary confinement, with your smelly @\$\$ up rotting away... And if you do... I'll get you out of here and you'll be free to go... You need to help me to help you...

“Help me to help you”? What a country matters. If he actually believes I'm gonna help him...

Dakota: *grins*

???: Do we have a deal?

Dakota: Yeah... Of course... I don't wanna rot away in solitary confinement...

???: Good...

Nick: Dakota?!

Oh shoot... No, no, no... Don't let him do anything stupid, or I'll be dead... Apparently, he did anyway... Once he noticed that the guy had a gun, he reached out for his gun... He has a fracking assault rifle on his back and takes his... Gun... What an idiot... He aims at the guy who was

standing next to me, and all he did was raising his hands in the air...

Dakota: Nick!! Put the frackin' gun away!!

Nick: G-Get away from h-her!!

???: *sighs*

Dakota: Lower your gun!!

???: I'll best be off then. Your friend seems dangerous. *chuckles*

Dakota: For fracks sake, put the gun down!!

???: Remember now, this is our little secret... *grins*

And with that, he walked off... But before he left, he stood before Nick and looked him in the eyes.

???: Boo.

Nick: *gasps*

???: Hehehehehe...

Then I looked back at Nick and I could see he was so nervous... Seriously, his hands are shaking and his eyes are all wide from the adrenaline rush...

Dakota: Get a hold of yourself, dick head!! You almost got me killed there!! That guy was an ICA agent!!

Nick: ICA agent?! You think he can get me home?!

Dakota: NO!! Why the hell would an ICA agent talk to a mercenary and walk off like that?!

Nick: ... Because I aimed at him...?

Dakota: NO!!! It's because he's a corrupt agent, asswipe!! Gaaah!!

Nick: ...

Dakota: Watch where you point that thing!! Put the gun away!!

Sooooo... He sticks the gun back in his wasteband, but while he was doing that, I could hear a loud bang...

Nick: ... Ow...

His eyes were so wide all of a sudden, and he fell down... I could see that he shot himself in the leg when the gun accidentally went off... I looked at him for a short moment, shook my head and made my way out of the house...

Nick: Ow! Oooooooooow!! frack... Don't leave me here!! Please..... It hurts...

Dakota: That's what you get for being so frackin' ignorant...

Nick: I just saved your life...!

Dakota: And you just shot your frackin' dick off!!

Nick: What?!! Gaaaaaah!! No!! shoot!! shoot!!! I'll never be able to pee properly again!! shoot!! Damn it!! Why the hell is this happening to me?!!

Dakota: Calm down, I was only kidding.

Nick: You can't leave me here!! Please!! I beg you!! Don't let me die like this!! Oh frack, oh frack, I can't feel my leg!! Please!!

The longer I stared at him, the more sorry I felt for him. Yes, he's an annoying piece of shoot who almost got me killed, and he shot himself thinking he could handle a weapon and I thought that my problem got taken care of by itself, but... I'm not someone who kills innocent people... And if I leave him here, he'll die eventually. I do have a conscious... Or at least, what little pieces there's left of it... So I sighed reluctantly and got bandages from my backpack and a pocketknife to cut his pants open. After I cut his pants open, I used my lighter to heat the blade of my pocketknife to sterilize it...

Nick: What are you gonna do?!!

Dakota: This might sting a bit.

Nick: What are yo-!! NO!!! DON'T!! STOP!!!

Dakota: Want me to get the bullet out of your leg, or not?!

Nick: Yeah!! B-b-but I'm not ready for it!!

Dakota: Ok, on three... One, two, three-

Nick: STOP, STOP!!!

Dakota: *sighs*

Nick: ... Ok... Ok, I'm ready... NO WAIT!!!

Dakota: ... *rolls eyes*

Nick: You sure you know what you're doing?!! You don't look like a doctor to me!! I don't think that-
OW!!!

While he was blabbering, I took the bullet out with my knife... I showed him the bullet and he looked surprised... By the looks of it, he wasn't really that mortally wounded...

Nick: That's it...?

Dakota: ... Pretty much. It's not that bad.

Nick: ... Oh... Okay...

Dakota: ... Pussy...

After that, I bandaged his leg and tried to get him on his feet. And once he did, I yanked the gun out of his waste-band and turned the safety on. And tossed it back to him. He catches it with shaky hands, stares at it for a while, stretched the wasteband of his pants and carefully lets it down...

For the rest of the day, we've been walking to a place I used to know where I spend the night when I was younger. It was out in the open, near a small waterfall and a lake, but the place was surrounded by high rocks and steep cliffs, and the place was pretty desolate in the open. It took us all day to reach it. And Nick didn't say anything for hours, which surprised me a bit to say the least. At around 10 pm, we reached the place. Nick flopped down from exhaustion as I took my backpack and rolled out a sleeping-bag and got in to it...

Nick: You got one for me as well.....?

Dakota: No, I'm sorry...

Nick: Oh...

Dakota: We need you to get some supplies...

Nick: Yeah...

Dakota: How's your leg doing?

Nick: *shrugs*

Dakota: What's wrong?

Nick: I just don't understand why you're taking care of me while acting like a dog... If you wanna get rid of me that bad, just say it... And... I'll just go...

Dakota: *sighs*

Nick: Why'd you saved me in the first place...?

Dakota: I do have a conscious... Or... At least what's left of it... Also... In my line of work, things can get pretty lonely...

Nick: So you need someone to talk to?

Dakota: *shrugs*

Nick: I don't wanna be a burden for you... Just... Teach me what I need to know to survive here...

Dakota: ... Why? You wanna become a mercenary?

Nick: ...

Dakota: Hm?

Nick: *sighs*

Dakota: ...

Nick: ... A few years ago... I saw someone who got robbed on the street... The guy started to fight with the mugger, but the mugger was beating him... He... He beats the guy to death... And I just stood there and watched how the guy died... And I just didn't do anything... I felt so powerless, you know... And for some reason, it's still haunting me... I feels as if I could have prevented it... I don't wanna feel like a coward whenever something like that happens to me... And especially here... And... I've always ran away from confrontations and fights... I don't wanna be a coward anymore...

Dakota: ...

Nick: How about you...?

Dakota: What?

Nick: How'd you end up like this? How'd you become a mercenary?

Dakota: *shrugs* I just rolled in the business...

Nick: How?

Dakota: ... You know, these islands used to be a colony of San Mantégua, the birthplace of my species.

Nick: Hedgehogs?

Dakota: *nods* And I was born here, in Sangala. Then at some point, people wanted independence. And my dad saw how unfair the people were treated. So the people took on the government. A civil war broke out. And my dad fought with the masses for independence. They carried my mom away as a political prisoner. Seeing as I was an only child, I was caught up with all the violence. I was 14 years old when I first had my hands around an assault rifle, and I was 15 years old when I took my first life. And then one day, my dad died... I eventually met Iki... And we stayed together ever since... Once the

independence of this country was acknowledge, the genocides started... To kill every "foreigner" and hostile tribes... Peace only lasted for a few years, and shoot is about to hit the fan once more...

Nick: Oh whoa... So... You're not here for business...?

Dakota: No... I'm looking for people... And once I did, I'll be out for good... But... You can't get around here if you don't know the right persons... So in the end, I'll have to do what I always did to find the persons I'm looking for...

Nick: Heh...

Dakota: ...

Nick: You know, you're not that bad once you're not swearing and cursing at me.

Dakota: Don't get any ideas.

Nick: I'm not, I'm just saying.

Dakota: Uh-huh...

Nick: For your information, I got a girlfriend. I would never hit on you.

Dakota: ...

Nick: You wanna see a picture of her?

Dakota: ... No.

Nick: Well I wanna see my girlfriend...

I got out my wallet and stared at a picture of my beautiful girl Meagan... She's my chocolate snugglebunny... And I miss her... At some point, I noticed Dakota was looking at me. So I showed her the picture while I just couldn't resist but to smile...

Nick: This is my pride and joy...

Dakota: ...

Nick: She looks good, doesn't she?

Dakota: ... If she'd entered a haunted house, the ghosts will be the one's petrified...

Nick: ... As if you're that good looking.

Dakota: *shrugs* I don't care. I don't get influenced by the media telling you what's beautiful and what's not. I bet she's only out for your money.

Nick: No, she doesn't.

Dakota: Psh...

After I flipped through a few photo's, I found one of my budgie... I didn't know I had one.

Nick: And this is my budgie.

Dakota: ...

Nick: I taught him how to speak. All day long, he just talks. He's quite the chatterbox. *smiles*

Dakota: It doesn't surprise me if he learned it from you...

Nick: ... Just what the hell is you're problem with me?

Dakota: ... I'm thinking... And you're blabbering isn't helping.

Nick: About what?

Dakota: The informant of Iki... I think he set us up...

Nick: What?

Dakota: Think about it... He told Iki that Serina was alone, guarded by five men...

Nick: ... So?

Dakota: When I arrived... She was already dead... And the ICA agent was there instead...

Nick: ... You think the informant and the ICA agent are on the same level...?

Dakota: I don't know... That's what I'm gonna try to find out tomorrow... But if they are, Iki's life is in danger... The ICA agent is a brother of McMillan... And McMillan wants Iki dead...

Nick: Why would McMillan want Iki dead...?

Dakota: Iki is the competition... He and McMillan are the most notorious arms-dealers on these islands... But their both heavily guarded... It wont be easy to get close to either... But with the ICA agent on their side... Things could get nasty...

Nick: ... Oh...

So that night, I had another added objective while I was here. To track down and assassinate McMillan. Track down the informant of Iki and make him talk. And to protect Iki when the time is there...

Nick: ... Question.

Dakota: ... *sighs*

Nick: You're a mercenary, right?

Dakota: *nods*

Nick: The definition of a mercenary is that the subject is a professional soldier that joins a foreign army or fraction, while asking payment for his services.

Dakota: ... Pretty much, yeah. Why?

Nick: But you're not a soldier. Aaaaaaaand... Killing that lioness sounded more like an assassination. So... What makes you that?

Dakota: ... If the price is right, I'll be whoever people want me to be, as long as it lies within my knowledge and psychical conditions... Which is pretty much everything...

Nick:

Dakota: ... Not like that, you fracking idiot...

Note to self: New objective added. Get rid of this asshole ASAP.

4 - Rock bottom

It wasn't a strange thing to hear gunshots at night... I already got used to that when I was little. This time, however, was different... I could hear my mom was nervous throughout the day. We would leave the next day to go to safer grounds, and maybe that was what made my mother so nervous. I didn't realize what was really going on... But that very same night, marked the end of my childhood... And the beginning of a life I vowed I would never to turn to... [br]

That night, I woke up by the sounds of people screaming, and gunshots. Normally, that wouldn't be something that surprised me, but the moment I heard it, I knew this was different. In just a fraction of a second, I knew what would happen. And I was terrified... I took cover underneath my blankets, clenching it, as if it would be the only thing that could prevent me from harm. Then a few moments later, my mom barged in my room... She looked terrified as well... Maybe even more than me... Then she closed the door behind her and locked it with the key... [br]

[br]
Merete: Dakota...!! Quickly...!! Hide...!![br]

Dakota: M-Mom...?![br]

Merete: Hide...!! [br]

[br]
I could already hear them running up the stairs. And I got under my bed as quickly as I could. They tried to open the door, but realized it was locked... So they shot the lock and the hinges and kicked the door down... I can still hear my mom, trying to plea and beg to them, but it got interrupted. They responded to her pleas by hitting her to the ground as I saw a few blood splatters on the wooden floor. And that's when I last saw her face... A fraction of a moment to stare in her eyes... As if she wanted to say goodbye... She got picked up after that and got carried away to the hallway... And they just threw her down the stairs... I could hear her cry and yell... And just like that... She disappeared out of my life... I started to cry... A little whimper... A small tear... And all of a sudden, I saw a black posture of a face, down on his knees, turning a flashlight on and shining right in my face... In that short moment, I could see the look in his eyes... A soulless figure who's eyes were only filled with hate... And I was stunned into submission while staring in those eyes for a short moment... It was something I never saw... And I didn't understand... He pulled my hair and dragged me from underneath my bed. And then I got carried away as well... Out on the street where I saw a few dead bodies... And I got thrown in the back of a truck not long after that... I never saw my mom again... [br]

[br]
For hours, I was crying in the truck while there were a few more kids... That's where I first saw Iki... He was sitting next to me, but he wasn't crying for some reason... We couldn't speak that loud because a guard was at the back of the truck. Iki was trying to comfort me and everyone else who was within talkative range. But then, we started to notice something. Every once in a while, the truck stopped. A few guards asked the driver for papers and then one of them looked in the back of the truck to check. And every now and then, the guard in the back of the truck

talked with the driver while the truck was moving... So Iki told me that we had to jump out of it along with a few others when he was not looking... And so we did... Five kids including me and Iki jumped out of the back of the truck when he wasn't looking. It was a rough landing, I can tell you that... We didn't escaped unharmed... One of them died when she hit her head against a rock and basically splattered her brains all over the ground... And so, the four of us escaped... We stayed together, knowing we've just entered the grown-ups world... But there was nothing that could prepare us for the things we witnessed and experienced over the years... [br]

[br]

We received no compassion from them... They didn't regret what they were doing nor showed remorse... They were so caught up in their own beliefs, convinced that they were doing the right thing, that they just didn't see us as an individual. We weren't the ones who exploited the poor... My father was fighting with the masses, which proves how devoted he was to his own people... But they considered all foreigners and colonists to be the "oppressor"... Since my mom was foreign, I was considered to be part of as well... [br]

[br]

All throughout the night, I couldn't rest peacefully. Every now and then, I fell asleep only to wake up a short moment later. For some reason, it was also very relaxing... I was staring at the night sky whenever I was awake, and I could see that there wasn't a single cloud covering up the stars. I could see them clearly while I heard the small waterfall... At some point, I didn't fell asleep anymore... I was just thinking. Thinking about my mother... It's been eighteen years since I last saw her... And there hasn't been a single day that past by without thinking of her... I miss my father as well... But at least I knew what happened to him... And I didn't know what happened with my mother... I gave up the search many years ago, but I always hope deep down inside of me that she's still alive somewhere, away from all this... And if she's still alive, would she still think about me...? I didn't know... I was desperate to know for so many years, but it never got answered... Wherever she is, she's better off then me... [br]

[br]

I could see the sun coming up... I feel it's warmth embracing me as if I'm an old friend... I looked over to Nick, and he was still asleep... So I thought... "Why the hell not? For old time's sake"... I walked over to the small waterfall and placed my weapons nearby as I got undressed. The water was always nice and warm and it just plunges on you. It tingles and makes you feel as if you're reborn after you got out of it... [br]

[br]

All night long, I couldn't really sleep. I thought it was a bit cold. Still, when the sun finally showed up, it was nice. I had my eyes closed and bathed in the warmth of the sun. And when I slowly opened my eyes, I noticed Dakota wasn't there... I didn't see her backpack as well... She didn't left me, did she? If she did, I'm so fracked... I sat upright to look around, and then all of a sudden, I saw her standing underneath the waterfall. I sighed in relief and got down again while I closed my eyes to slowly doze off in... a... relaxing sleep- wait... Was she naked?! ... I peeked at her again... Indeed, she was naked... What the frack... Once I looked back at her, I forgot I why I was looking at her in the first place. Her back was facing me, and I could see she had huge scars across her entire body... I knew that already but... Seems she has a lot more... fracking hell... Her legs, her back, her arms... Even around her ankles... Why isn't she telling me of what happened to her? Was it really that traumatising that she closed herself down...? She didn't seem to have this problem with this Iki guy... Still... Underneath those scars she's kinda pretty... What the hell am I saying?! I got Meagan! My chocolate snugglebunny! If she found out I was staring at Dakota's butt... And legs... And every other female curve she has... But..... Snugglebunny isn't here right now, is she...? One quick peek wouldn't hurt anyone, I guess... Hey, I'm

a guy, I can't help it. Sue me. I blame puberty. At some point, she turned around and got dressed. I had a good view on her "goods"... .. Shaven... Respect... How'd she do that in the wilderness anyway? With a machete and snail goo? Everything is so primitive... And I guess- Oh shoot, she's coming back! Close your eyes and pretend to be asleep!! [br]

[br]

When I got back, I noticed that Nick was still asleep. So I threw my backpack at him which didn't really land softly on his head... [br]

[br]

Nick: Ow!!! What the!! frack!! [br]

Dakota: Get up. We got a long day ahead of us. [br]

Nick: *fake yawn* What time is it? [br]

Dakota: Seven AM. Come on, move it. [br]

Nick: ... *Sighs*[br]

[br]

So I got up. I was already dressed and my pants was still cut open... Psh... What a waste... Those pants costs me 120 dinar... She could have taken my pants off if she wanted to get the bullet out of my leg. Speaking of which, it's still hurting a bit. Walking still hurts... But as always, she didn't seem to care. [br]

[br]

I had no idea where we were going or what the plan was. Apparently, she seemed to know. We were following the road back to Sangala. And at some point, we noticed a car coming our way from a distance. And Dakota stood in front of it to let it stop. The driver however, wasn't intending to stop. Instead, he accelerated, so Dakota took her assault rifle and shot through the window. And there was this big blood splatter on it. She jumped out of the way as the car just rolls past us until it finally stops. So we both ran towards the car and told me to drag the dead body out of the drivers seat while she aimed at the passenger. He got out of the car without too much resistance. Then she told me to drive, and well, I did... We've been driving for about half an hour now, and all this time we've been quiet... I just can't believe she just killed an innocent person while she said she would never do that... [br]

[br]

Nick: ... You killed that guy... [br]

Dakota: I know... [br]

Nick: ... He was innocent... [br]

Dakota: ... He wasn't. [br]

Nick: How would you know? [br]

Dakota: Look at the backseat. [br]

[br]

I looked at the backseat and I could see the car was rigged with explosives... [br]

[br]

Nick: HOLY shoot!! WHAT THE frack!! I'M DRIVING A frackING TIME BOMB HERE!!! [br]

[br]

Dakota: ... Suicide bombers. Hm. Figures. Well, their not uncommon. [br]

Nick: How the frack can you stay so fracking calm?!! [br]

Dakota: As long as you don't bump into stuff, we're safe. And besides, it's the reason why I let you drive. [br]

[br]

Nick: frack!! frack!!! This is fracking ridiculous!! [br]

Dakota: Calm down already, their not even activated. [br]

Nick: Yeah so?! That doesn't make it alright! [br]

Dakota: Just shut up and watch the road. [br]

[br]

Then it stayed silent for a long time again. I was scared shootless but hey, so far, we didn't blow up. The longer I was driving, the more I relaxed... Of course there were still powerful explosives in the back of the car, but hey! I didn't blow up yet! Psssh... shoot's just getting weirder and weirder for me... So, like I said, it stayed silent for a long time again until I broke the silence once again... [br]

[br]

Nick: So eh... What's the plan? [br]

Dakota: We're gonna see Iki... Ask him about his informant, and if he really is that reliable... [br]

[br]

Nick: ... I'm confused. Yesterday, he send us to-[br]

Dakota: You're not that bright, are you? Think. Every fracking retard could understand what's happening right now. [br]

[br]

Nick: ... [br]

Dakota: *sighs* [br]

Nick: Sangala is still a long way. Care to explain? [br]

[br]

Dakota: ... Iki had an informant saying that Serina, the lioness we were supposed to kill, was no good. So he sent us after her. When I arrived, she was already dead and some ICA agent, who turns out to be McMillan's brother, was waiting for me. Apparently, he wants to blackmail me to set up others, bust their asses and cut half of my hit-fee. So, if he really is McMillan's brother, means that he won't be so easily taken out. ICA agents have the nasty habit of not being alone in the field. Also, he would pose a threat to us if he sides with McMillan. He would have access to the locations, dates, names, and all he'll have to do is to ring his ICA buddies to arrest them, while he cuts himself a nice piece on the deal his brother makes... [br]

[br]

Nick: How would you know if the ICA agent really is his brother? [br]

Dakota: I don't. Just because he's a panther doesn't mean he's McMillan's brother. [br]

[br]

Nick: ... Maybe he's bluffing. Maybe he's not a real ICA agent. You cant know for sure. [br]

[br]

Dakota: Which is up to us to find out. [br]

Nick: Us? [br]

Dakota: ... Me. [br]

Nick: Damn right. [br]

Dakota: ... [br]

Nick: You know... [br]

Dakota: ... What? [br]

Nick: I always use a strategy when selling stock shares... [br]

Dakota: ... Stock shares?! [br]

Nick: ... Stock shares... Basically... Whenever I'm buying or selling stocks on HRIBC I wait for the right moment... I wait for the others to sell... And when a stock is sold, the prices of it are lower then the initial bid... Timing is crucial when it comes to that... Wait for the right moment... Buy stocks like a motherfracker... And when it reaches it's peak... Sell everything... That way, you can make well up to 150% profit... You see where I wanna go? [br]

[br]

Dakota: ... You mean, selling weapons? [br]

Nick: Like you said, it's booming business... And it will eventually lead to the people you're looking for while getting a lot of profit... [br]

[br]

Dakota: Uh-huh... And how the hell do you plan to do that? Selling stocks isn't the same as weapons.

[br]

[br]

Nick: Every investment starts off small... [br]

Dakota: So? How the hell do you plan to get the weapons? [br]

Nick: By having a lot of patience... [br]

Dakota: ... You're crazy, you know that? [br]

Nick: *shrugs* [br]

Dakota: Take a left here. [br]

[br]

Nick: ... [br]

Dakota: ... You're really serious about this, don't you? [br]

Nick: *shrugs* Just an idea, I mean... It would only have advantages. [br]

Dakota: Name one. [br]

Nick: Well, first off, you got Iki on your side who's practising the same business. Second, you'll be able to have a lot of money... Third, the people you're looking for would eventually show up in front of you... Four, you can buy protection. [br]

[br]

Dakota: Unless their not loyal, like Iki's informant. [br]

Nick: Like you said, loyalty has a price. [br]

Dakota: ... True. Speaking of diamonds, I do have those- ... Oh no... frack...!! [br]

Nick: What? [br]

Dakota: ... That son of a dog took my diamonds... [br]

Nick: Who? [br]

Dakota: ... That fracking ICA agent. [br]

Nick: Meh, don't worry. We'll get around. [br]

Dakota: ... You sound confident. [br]

Nick: Yeah, I mean, think about it. You on the rampage with an assault rifle like a squirrel on fracking steroids, Iki with his "expert" knowledge of guns, suppliers and selling them to the right people, and me as a... [br]

[br]

Dakota: ... As? [br]

Nick: Consultant. [br]

Dakota: ... Consultant? [br]

Nick: ... Yeah. The first moments I see an executive, I know straight away if a deal is gonna be made or not. I gained a lot of important clients for my company that way. Manipulating is one way, but it's about the little things that break the ice. [br]

[br]

Dakota: Uh-huh... Right. What about the other things? [br]

Nick: What other things? [br]

Dakota: Defending yourself. Shooting people and actually hit them. [br]

Nick: So? Teach me how! [br]

[br]

Dakota: ... Go frack yourself. Last time you tried to shoot, it almost costs you you're dick. [br]

[br]

Nick: Give that a rest already... [br]

Dakota: ... No. *chuckles* [br]

Nick: *sighs* [br]

Dakota: Still, I gotta admit. It's a plan. Seems plausible. Especially now that we hit rock bottom. [br]

[br]

Nick: Speak for yourself. I didn't hit rock bottom. [br]

Dakota: ... Yet. You'll will if you hang out long enough with us. [br]

Nick: *shrugs* I don't really have a choice, do I? [br]

Dakota: ... Hm... No, not really, no. *smiles* [br]

Nick: ... [br]

Dakota: Not that I really enjoy you're presence though. [br]

Nick: Ah... I was waiting when the insult was coming. [br]

Dakota: I got plenty more if you wanna hear it. [br]

Nick: Maybe in half an hour. [br]

[br]

It stayed silent for a moment again. The closer we got to Sangala, the more it seemed as if I was driving in thick black smog... Once I got over the hill, I noticed huge thick smoke was floating up on the other end of town... [br]

[br]

Dakota: Oh no... Oh ho, no, no, no, no... Noooooo...[br]

Nick: What, what's wrong? [br]

Dakota: Go, go, go, go, go!! Step on it!! [br]

[br]

Well it was pretty obvious that there was a fire in the distance. I saw fires everywhere, sometimes small ones, and sometimes bigger ones. So what would make this one any more different? She seemed to freak out, so I just obeyed. I floored this sucker. Almost pushed the throttle through the bottom. She directed me where to go, and I almost hit a goat. Took a right at some sort of an intersection, and almost dodged a chicken. Almost. That chicken is probably as flat as a motherfracking pancake. My first kill here. Whooooo... Not long after that, we reached the warehouse... Aaaaaaaaaaaaaand... It was on fire... Like... really, really bad... Dakota jumped out of the car before I stopped, and I just followed her... [br]

[br]

Dakota: IKI!!! IKI, WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU?!! IKI!!![br]

[br]

We ran around the building, yelling for Iki but we had no response... After trying for a while, she gave up... She kicked a dumpster out of frustration and looked as if she was about to cry her eyes out, but then all of a sudden... [br]

[br]

Dumpster: OW!!! What the frack!!! You got me!! YOU GOT ME!!! I'm coming out!! I'll cooperate!! Just don't frack kill me!!! [br]

[br]

Dakota/Nick: ... [br]

[br]

And then, slowly, the lid opened up and this big cloud of smoke escaped... First there was one hand up... Then the other which held a joint... And then the rest of Iki's body, firmly closing his eyes... Dakota and I just stared at him... At some point, he opens one eye... [br]

[br]

Iki: Dakota!! [br]

Dakota: Iki... The hell happened...? [br]

Iki: The hell happened?!! Th-They came for me!! They frackng came for me!! [br]

Dakota: Who...? [br]

Iki: I don't frackNG know, man!! They blew up my beautiful grocery store!! Something that took so many years!! I knew it!! I frackng knew it!!! I lost everything!! frack!!! [br]

[br]

In Iki's anger rage, he was moving around in the dumpster until it finally tumbled over. Iki falls down face first, but he quickly recovers and throws his stickie away. He dusts himself off and looked at us... [br]

[br]

Iki: *sighs* [br]

Dakota: ... How reliable was that informant of yours...? [br]

Iki: I don't know... They came for me, I'm sure about that... The moment I first heard the gunshots, I ran away as quickly as I could and hid in this dumpster while my guys tried to fend them off... And well... I mean... Look... "Big Devil" is there... "Little Devil" is over there... "Big little Devil" is over there... ... "Little Big Devil" there... "Big Pimpin' Mack Daddy G" is- [br]

[br]

Dakota: Yeah I get it. Their all dead. [br]

Iki: Even Omar is dead... [br]

Nick: Who? [br]

Iki: Omar's mah dog. I can yell and curse at him as much I like, which is part of my therapy. And now fracker's dead. ... frackng country matters... [br]

[br]

Dakota: You see what I mean with "Hitting rock bottom"? [br]

Nick: ... Yeah... [br]

Iki: Rock frackng bottom... Back to square one... [br]

Dakota: When did it happen...? [br]

Iki: Few hours ago... *sighs*[br]

[br]

Nick: ... So now what...? [br]

Dakota/Iki: ... [br]

Nick: I mean... No weapons, no shelter, no money... No-[br]

[br]

Then all of a sudden, we heard a very loud explosion... As soon as we turned around, we noticed our car exploded... [br]

[br]

Iki: ... No transportation... [br]

Nick: What the frack?!! [br]

Dakota: Hm. Guess it was timed. [br]

Nick: You frackng made me drive that thing!! [br]

Dakota: So? You're not driving now, are you? [br]

Nick: ... True. [br]

Iki: ... *whimpers* [br]

Dakota: ... What's wrong? [br]

Iki: *sobs* They killed my dog, man... [br]

Dakota/Nick: ... [br]

Iki: *sobs* They killed my dog...! My little poochie...! My little poochiemoochiecootchiepooshie... [br]

[br]

Dakota: ... You don't have a dog... [br]

Iki: Oh yeah, I forgot, hehe. [br]

Dakota/Nick: ... [br]

Iki: I'm hungry, how about you guys? [br]

[br]

Like I said... Rock bottom... It's inevitable to reach rock bottom when you're hanging out with us... [br]

5 - Making a difference

I took care of Iki's cuts and bruises he had, and that was a lot. I cleaned his face a bit and found out I was running short on bandages and water. We sat there for a while, looking at Iki's "grocery store" on fire. So, after me hitting rock bottom, Iki reached rock bottom as well. And Nick... Well... I just don't give a frack about him.

Iki: *sighs*

Dakota: ... That's the risk you take in our line of business... There's always a competitor...

Iki: True...

Dakota: What's the name of you're informant?

Iki: Rico... A coyote... And he's not stupid... He's probably got his own reasons for this.

Dakota: We got our reasons as well to put him on my "to-do" list. That fracker almost got me killed...

Iki: We...?

Dakota: *nods*

Iki: Oh no... Nooooooooooooooooo... I'm not doing that anymore... The "to-do" list is the number one reason why I quit...

Nick: "To do" list...?

Dakota/Iki: ...

Dakota: Come on, Iki... I need you with this... I can't find the people I'm looking for without you...

Iki: ...

Dakota: Please... I'll help you with whatever it is you need help with... You know me... You don't have to buy loyalty from me... You know that whatever happens, I'll always stick with you...

Iki: ... That's not what you did last time...

Dakota: *sighs*

Iki: ...

Dakota: Please... Like old times sake, Iki... Please... For me...

Iki: ... We don't get around if we don't carry the right currency...

Dakota: I know...

Iki: So what's the plan then...? You do have a plan, right...?

Dakota: *smiles*

So I told Iki about Nick's plan... Everything... The first thing we need to do is to find a safehouse and a few jobs to do... When the time is right, we'll doublecross those frackers and steal everything we can... I spend a long time explaining about Nick's plan. I told Iki that we're gonna help each other out... I needed Iki to find the persons I'm looking for... And he needs me to set up his business again, hoping that Nick would die in the process... I really didn't like him, if you haven't guessed it already...

Nick: ... But that's my plan...

Iki: Hm... I like that... *smiles*

Dakota: Come on, Iki... Please...

Iki: I'd say...

Dakota: ...

Iki: To a global partnership!! Whooooooooooooo!!

Dakota: To a global partnership... *smiles*

Nick: ... *sighs*

Ok so... Let me get this straight... I went from being a sales manager to a student mercenary, while being stuck with a homicidal girl who has PMS for like... Years, and a damned crackhead with a grocery store in ruins who also happens to be a complete nut.

...

Is it just me or is this not making any sense to me? Right, I knew I'm not the only one thinking like that. But I'll just have to keep that training video in mind... "Just smile and nod". I don't know about the smiling part though. Seriously, if she wants me to watch her back, she needs to teach me stuff, you know. It's not like I'm learning things on my own. I'll guess I'll just have to wait and see. ... Pssh...

So. Walking. Uh-huh. No idea where we were going, no one tells me anything nowadays. All day long we've been walking, and rested every now and then, and when we did take a rest, Dakota and Iki were sitting somewhere alone, where they talked until we had to walk again. I feel left out. It stayed like that until nightfall came, and we entered a small village. No one seemed to be awake, and unlike every other village I saw, this one looked as if it wasn't affected by the masses... Then again, the village itself was far away from any other civilisation and didn't really look that primitive... Maybe it's because there were signs everywhere, indicating that it was a "cease-fire" zone, and that there were armed guys everywhere making sure it STAYED a "cease-fire" zone...

I knew exactly where we were going... Iki didn't mention it, but I knew where we were going. Once I entered the village, I cracked a smile for some reason, knowing that I would see her again after so many years... And before I knew it, we stood in front of her house...

And so, Iki knocked on the door... After a while the door opened up and an old, chubby meerkat lady was looking suspicious at us. Iki smiled nervously and innocently as possible while the door opened up. The woman placed her hands on Iki's cheek... Then all of a sudden, she slapped him across the face...

Damali: What kind of a man comes home in the middle of the night looking like a bruised turd...?!

Iki: B-B-B-but auntie-...!

Damali: *slaps Iki* Don't you backtalk to me, boy! I haven't heard from you in two weeks! You know how worried I was?!

Iki: Yeah b-but-...!! *gets slapped*

Damali: Don't backtalk...!

Nick: *chuckles*

Damali: ... *slaps Nick*

Nick: Ow!! What the frack!!!

Damali: No foul language in my presence, young man! *slaps Nick*

Nick: Ow!!

Iki: ... I'm sorry, okay...?

Damali: That's better... So who are your friends?

Iki: ... The guy you just slapped is Nick...

Nick: ... That really hurt... *rubs cheek*

Iki: And you might remember her...

She looked at me and squinted her eyes a bit... All I did was smiling at her as she took her glasses off... Hehe... I know all too well who she is... She's Iki's aunt, Damali. She took care of us ever since our parents died... She's a really sweet lady, but she takes everything strictly... If you don't follow her rules, well... You might end up as Iki being slapped... She never slapped me though. Maybe it's because I'm a girl or maybe it's because she sees me as a foster child... The moment I first saw her, I knew right away that I was gonna like her. And in some way, she became some sort of a foster parent. There was always room at her home to take in orphans... Maybe it's because she didn't had any children of her own and her husband died a long time ago... And now, looking at her after so many years... She really grew old... I expected her to be mad at me... But after looking at me for a moment, she embraced me with a big firm hug to my surprise...

Damali: Dakota...? Is it really you...?

Dakota: Hey Damali... *smiles*

Damali: It is you...

Dakota: Yeah...

Damali: I missed you so much, dear...

Dakota: I missed you too, nana...

Damali: Come in, please... Make yourself at home...

Dakota: Thanks... *smiles weakly*

So we entered the house. The woman invited us to sit down in the living room, and although there were more furniture inside than all the other houses I've been, it still looked pretty basic... The woman and Iki started talking while Dakota stayed silent... She didn't really seemed to be herself ever since we got here...

Iki: They burned down my grocery store today...

Damali: Oh... I'm sorry to hear that...

Nick: *pokes Dakota and whispers* Why the hell is Iki referring his armoury as a grocery store...?

Then all of a sudden, she started to crack a smile while looking in front of her... That's the first time I see her smile while talking to me, which was... Kinda awkward to say the least...

Dakota: ... Because, his aunt thinks he's having a legit business in Sangala in the form of a grocery

store..... If she found out Iki is selling weapons to the wrong crowd, the poor woman would have a heart-attack... And she'd slap him silly...

Nick: Oh...

Then the smile disappeared again and her face was, once again, serious while Iki and his aunt kept on talking. Dakota and I stayed quiet though... At some point, I could see that she was starting to get some sort of a sad expression on her face...

I wanted to talk to Damali. But for some reason, I couldn't talk to her. Not until everyone else was gone. Damali offered us a place to stay, so she told Nick and Iki to go upstairs...

Damali: And no shagging up there...!

Nick: Yeah, su- Wait, what?

Iki: *winks and drags Nick upstairs*

Nick: Whoa, what the-...!

I kept sitting but I couldn't face her... She couldn't face me as well I guess... She nervously got the glasses from the table and brought it to her ragged kitchen and started to do some unnecessary cleaning in the middle of the night...

Dakota: Damali... Please... Sit down... You're gonna wear yourself out...

Damali: You're telling me what to do in my own house, Dakota...?

Dakota: ... *sighs*

Damali: ...

Dakota: ... Please...

She looked at me for a moment... But decided to sit down next to me anyway...

Damali: ... Why'd you come back...?

Dakota: ... I'm so sorry, Damali...

Damali: No..... You broke Iki's heart... You broke mine... You swore you'd get out of here with the intention to start a new life somewhere else... I trusted you to... And you left without ever saying goodbye... You've abandoned those who cared the most for you... You've abandoned ME..... And yet you're here again, still carrying weapons which is something you vowed not to do anymore... So why'd you come back...?

Dakota: It was too painful to say goodbye and leave everything behind... A lot of things happened in the eight year's I've been gone...

Damali: Then why did you leave in the first place...?

Dakota: ... I don't know..... And... And I'm so sorry, Damali... I don't know why I left... Or why I came back... I just.....

Damali: ...

Dakota: I don't know... I should have never left... I-I-I... I just... I don't know what I'm doing... I wanted to

start a new life somewhere safe... I had the opportunity... But... I-I-I messed up... I never seem to get away from it... A-And with the way it's going now, I'll doubt to survive much longer... I-I can't go back... Bohan and Fabian would still be alive if it wasn't for me..... I-I'm so sorry, Damali... I truly am.....

While I was in Iki's room, I could hear the conversation between Dakota and the old woman. At some point, I heard Dakota was starting to cry... Seemed that she experienced more than I thought... Iki was on his bed throwing a knife on the wooden floor...

Nick: What's the deal between Dakota and you anyways...?

Iki: ... Bah...

Nick: ... Hm?

Iki: She's me ex-girlfriend... But that was waaaaaaay back...

Nick: So how did you meet her?

Iki: In the back of a truck.

Nick: Ooooooooooooooh.....

Iki: ... Not like that you fracking idiot... I was fifteen at the time... She was fourteen years old, came from a rich family until the civil war broke out.

Nick: ... Oh. She was rich?

Iki: ... Yeah... Then we've lost everything we could ever loose...

Nick: What happened...?

Iki: You don't know wanna know... You wouldn't understand... You're not from around here. You're not even a merc.

Nick: ... What?

Iki: You think I'm fracking retarded or something?! The doctors called it "braindamage" but that doesn't mean I'm fracking retarded!! I'm on to you, ya frackin' bloodclot Batty boy!!

Nick: The hell are you talking about?!

Iki: You come down here, closing those deals wit those rich @\$\$ companies! The rich get richer, the poor gets poorer!! Tat's how it all started!! That's how the war started in the first place!! fracking rich @\$\$ people trying to buy us out and exploit our labour and factories!!

Nick: Whoa, calm down!

Iki: Don't tell me to calm down, you fracking furfag!! All of us who experienced the civil war and the genocides are scarred for LIFE!!! You don't need to-!!

Damali: Iki...!!

Iki: ... Sorry, auntie...!!

Nick: ...

Iki: *sighs*

Nick: What does it have to do with you and Dakota...?

Iki: ... Everything.....

Nick: Nobody tells me anything... How the hell do you expect me to understand if you guys don't tell me what happened...?

Iki: ...

Nick: Look, I don't know what it's like, okay? I can only speculate... And maybe we can do something about it...?

Iki: That's what Dakota and I have been trying...

Nick: Whadda ya mean...?

Iki: Dakota and I took on the real jobs when we were in our mid twenties... It paid good... I can't say we were doing the right thing, but once we had enough people, enough money and an armoury filled with weapons enough to wage a small war, we turned against them... We killed most of our former employers, knowing that their exploiting the weak, asking for protection money they didn't have, and all that...

Nick: The two of you...?

Iki: No... We had more then 50 people working for us... Money buys loyalty...

Nick: ... So what'd you do...?

Iki: ... The Shaigiya's claimed the food droppings and all of the supplies to their own... So we basically raided their warehouses, killed everyone and distributed the supplies among our people, where it rightfully belonged... People were thankful and considered us to be saints, but we were far from being one... And then one day, Dakota left...

Nick: Oh... So... How did you meet her...?

Iki: In the back of a truck when the Shaigiya's were raiding the villages... Kids got carried away while most adults were killed... Dakota, me and three others jumped out of the back of the truck while it was moving... One girl died. So there was only the four of us left. We walked and walked until we ran into a group of Shaigiya's once more... So we got carried off to a village, and they basically gave us a crash course on how to be cannon fodder for the distraction of enemies. And then one day, Dakota and I were taken to a room where there were two kids sitting on a chair, blindfolded. They gave us both a gun and aimed with a rifle at point blank range at our heads and told us to shoot the kids on the chairs. I didn't want to... Heh... They didn't take it so kindly...

Then Iki showed his left hand... And I noticed his pink and ring finger were missing... I never noticed that...

Iki: With every refuse, they beat us... Until we finally couldn't take it anymore and shoot those kids...

Nick: ... Why'd they do that...?

Iki: It's part of their "training" program... If you manage to kill an innocent little kid, you can kill anything...

Nick: ... Oh whoa...

Iki: And then one day, Dakota and I managed to escape... And we stayed together ever since until she left one day... And over the years, we've seen and experienced things most people wouldn't even experience in a lifetime... And maybe that's the reason why we're so close... Dakota lost everything she could loose...

Nick: ...

Iki: And maybe that's the reason why she's so distrusting towards you... You're a stranger, and a guy...

Nick: ... Damn...

Iki: So now you know... And hopefully, you understand... I know I'm fracked up in the head... But at least

now you know why...

Nick: ...

Iki turned over on his bed and got down while his back faced me... I saw he had scars as well, just like Dakota... And all of a sudden, I had a total different perspective on Dakota and Iki...

I looked outside the window and I saw how the streets were filled with raggedy sheds... I saw on my left a small figure walking, and when I looked at it, I saw it was a little kid, all alone, walking in the darkness... He lies down on the sidewalk and seemed to have fallen asleep after a while... It really struck me... I never knew poverty, or actually witnessed it, but the few days I spend with Dakota and Iki showed me how bad poverty can get... That kid, sleeping on the sidewalk, had no one to look after him... In just a few days, he'll be dead... And once I realized that, I was startled by the thought of it...

The story that Iki told me made a deep impact on me. I always thought that money was the only thing that kept them going, seeing as they both were very poor... And then I finally started to understand... There isn't a good tribe and a bad tribe... Their both equally bad... It's the people that had to suffer just because those two tribes couldn't get along... So I guess Iki and Dakota tried to make a difference... Even though it might have been unnoticeable, they still made a difference and did the right thing... But like Iki said, they both killed people for their own good cause, so what exactly does it mean to do the right thing...? If only it was that simple...

It made me think that I could make a difference too... Whenever a charity ringed my doorbell and asked for a donation, I slammed the door in their faces... I heard so many stories about donations getting sidetracked and ending up where it's not supposed to be... But now, I can make a difference... But I'll need help with that...