

Weredragon: Assassin's Guild

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Someone is out to inhume every member of staff in Neon Junction, but, naturally, nothing really goes according to plan.

Everything (c) me (Amy)

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1 - New Recruit

Great water ways wound between the tall white buildings, the bright sunlight glinting off the metal framework, concrete and glass. Shuttle trains glided quickly through the slim glass and steel tubes that laced the city, sometimes disappearing into the water or ground and re-emerging somewhere in a large building. Kez stepped from one of the two seater pod-like train carriages of the three-thirty shuttle train. "I don't trust you as far as I can throw you, Eric!" She snapped angrily.

Eric, a tall, weasely man in his mid twenties stepped out onto the platform behind her, waiting for the crowd of people to disperse.

"And why not?" He asked innocently.

"Because you're a lying, thieving bastard." She hissed and strode forward, stamping down the concrete steps and into the clean cut gardens below the station, walking out into the main street and leaving Eric behind.

She walked past more, smaller clean cut gardens that surrounded the tall buildings as she headed towards the outskirts of the city centre. A squat building, five storeys high, lay ahead of her. She'd been called back in mid-assignment. It wasn't the first time it'd happened since being on this job. She walked into the gym and walked through a door labelled 'Staff Only'. Beyond the stairs, at the end of the long corridor was the office which belonged to Master Archer, the leader and founder of the Assassin's Guild.

Kez sat down heavily in the chair opposite him, arms folded, waiting for him to stop writing.

"You're three hours late." He said levelly when he finally stopped what he was doing.

"There was a cow on the line." She grumbled angrily.

"In the shuttle train tube? What is this world coming to..."

She grunted unintelligably, not in the mood for light hearted jokes.

"I have to be back at the club in four hours." She said.

"I know. But we've acquired a new recruit and I want you to show her the ropes."

"I ain't taking a Nub on my assignment! It's taken me ages to get in to Bently's good books and I don't want some clueless brat ruining things for me! Especially with the kind of staff he hires." Kez protested.

"That's why I've told her to get a day shift over at the take-away on the opposite catwalk, so she can take up day-time observation. And before you say anything else, I want you to check up on her twice a day. You know the consequences of disobeying the laws and orders handed out by your superiors."

Kez sighed heavily, finding no space to wriggle out of the situation.

"Yes, Master Archer."

"Good. She's waiting in the front lobby. Her name's Susan." Archer said calmly and gestured toward his office door.

Kez rose and stormed out of the room, the door slamming shut behind her.

When she stepped back in to the main lobby, a girl, no older than seventeen, leaned against the main reception desk, flirting with one of the gym's patrons, flicking her long blond hair over one shoulder. Great. Just what I need; a spoilt little rich brat to frack things up. Kez thought sourly.

"Susan!" She barked.

The girl jumped, her pleasant features turning hard and irritated.

"And who might you be?" She said bitterly.

The man walked off.

"I'm your boss for this assignment." Kez said as she approached her. "You will obey my orders, understand?"

"Or you'll do what?" Susan said, looking Kez up and down in distaste. "Set your pack on me?"

Kez tried not to gape. She didn't know how the girl knew about her and a surge of anger coursed through her body.

"My dear Kezzara, if your Alpha knew what you were doing for a living, he'd have you strung up by your ears quicker than you can blink."

Kez growled in the back of her throat. Was this what she was going to be stuck with for the next month?

An arrogant rich girl who thought she knew everything about being an assassin?

One of the women at the desk handed Kez a file and she flicked through the pages, quickly taking everything in.

"Susan Meyark, the youngest daughter of the late governor Meyark and half sister to Tillie Meyark."

Susan stared at her. Kez continued.

"Inherits four million dollars and thirty-five cents on the twenty-first birthday, courtesy of your father. And your business, Jheylande Cosmetics, is currently struggling to stay above water. Would you like me to continue? Reel off a list of your dirty little secrets, maybe?" Kez finished sweetly, looking Susan dead in the eye.

"This is blackmail!" She exclaimed angrily. "How did you get your hands on such information?!" She demanded.

Kez padded slowly over to her and leaned down to whisper in her ear.

"This is an assassin's guild, little girl. You figure it out." She then stood up straight and walked out the doors.

A small titter of amusement rippled through the air when she left, the two receptionists trying hard not to laugh.

Susan stepped off the shuttle train and followed Kez. They stopped in front of an old, raised manhole that lay hidden away at the end of an old alleyway, secreted away by a month's worth of forgotten rubbish from the old furniture shop nextdoor.

"We're not going down there, are we?" Susan asked, a shade of worry and fear edging slowly into her voice.

Kez nodded. "You first. Wait for me at the bottom."

"I'm not going down there-!"

"Yes you fracking are! You have a job interview in an hour and a half, so get moving. I'll be damned if I let you screw this operation up. Kez snapped angrily and pulled the heavy metal cover up, it's rusted hinges protesting tiredly.

Susan sighed heavily and hesitated before carefully climbing down in to the rancid darkness, the bitter musty air settling heavily in her lungs.

2 - Close Quarters

Shadow woke up and unsteadily pushed away from Ode's tangle of limbs and climbed out of bed, picking up her old back pack and discarded clothes before disappearing into the bathroom.

When she re-emerged, Ode was still in bed, but he was wide awake with his guitar in his lap, lazily strumming out random notes.

"I'll owe you for last night when I get back from work." She said, leaning across and placing a kiss on his forehead.

"You better." He grinned slyly and watched her walk out the door.

Shadow stepped on to the cold metal catwalk and inhaled deeply, the mixture of sharp metallic, musty scents stinging her nose and lungs forcing a sneeze.

"Had that coming.." She chuckled quietly to herself and stepped into the crowd, making her way up to the top levels of the underground city where the night club, Neon Junction lay.

The sign was flickering brightly and already a crowd was forming, all studs, brightly coloured leathers and other materials. A well built pale Polar Bear-esque man dressed in black stood to one side of the closed double doors. He looked over at Shadow as she approached, weaving effortlessly through the various races and species, heading towards the club.

"Enjoy your day off?" Xan asked.

"It was rather tiring actually." She replied.

A flicker of amusement shone in his cool eyes.

"Let's get these people inside then you can tell me all about it."

"Not all about it." Shadow said with a slanted grin.

" 'ello, here's another who's late." Xan said as Kez hurried towards them.

"Sorry! Sorry!" She huffed. "My cousin decided she wanted me to drop her off at her job interview just as I was about to leave."

"You don't drive though." Shadow said.

"I had to share a cab." She grunted. "And I'm poor enough as it is without having to pay for her too."

"Fair 'nuff." Shadow replied and stepped aside to let her in.

"I get the feeling you two don't get along very well." Xan said once Kez had disappeared deep into the club. "Some kind of Werewolf - Weredragon rivalry?"

"Could say that. Every Werewolf I've ever come across generally has a high opinion of themselves."

"Kinda reminds me of Kez." Xan mused.

Shadow grunted as they continued checking passes, letting people in to the club and turning those away who didn't have membership passes.

"Well tonight's gone pretty smoothly." Xan said.

"Yeah. I was expecting a bit of excitement."

"Don't sound too upset. There's always tomorrow night." Xan replied as the punters piled drunkenly out of the club and wobbled off down the catwalk.

When everyone had gone, they headed inside, locking the outer doors behind them, dull floor lights

illuminating the dark tunnel that led down into the club.

"Have you seen John?" Josh, one of the janitors asked as soon as they stepped inside the main room.

"Last we saw of him was when you arrived. Why, what's up?" Xan asked.

"I haven't been able to find him for the last hour!"

"That's not like him. You two are practically joined at the hip." Shadow mused.

"We'll go have a look for him." Xan offered.

Kez walked over to the three, curious of the commotion.

"What's happened?" She asked.

"We can't find John." Xan replied evenly as he scanned the room with his eyes.

"So...?"

"I don't know if you've noticed, but John and Josh are twins and have always been together." Shadow pointed out.

"Oh God, I have a really bad feeling about this." Josh said.

"Don't worry, we'll find him." Shadow assured.

The two bouncers set about searching the club; Xan on the first floor and Shadow searching the large balconies up on the second floor.

The scent of blood mixed with the scent of stale alcohol and sweat. No surprises there. Several fights had broken out tonight and people had been injured. Xan called up to Shadow and she leaned over the railing.

"I think you should come and have a look at this." He said, his back to the dance floor as he looked into one of the storage closets.

3 - Closet

Shadow leapt over the balcony's safety railing and landed neatly on the polished wood dance floor below. Hillary walked out of Bently's office, her pale hair tied back in a loose bun, a look of curiosity on her face.

"What's all the commotion about?" She asked smoothly as Shadow walked over to Xan.

"Get Josh out of here, please, Hillary." Xan said evenly.

Hillary didn't argue. She could smell the blood from where she stood at the opposite end of the large room. She guided Josh into Bently's office, making up an excuse to try and get him out the way. Shadow padded up to Xan and stood on her tiptoes, peering over his shoulder and in to the murk of the closet. The stench of death was strong. Blood was sprayed high up the walls, dripping off the light bulb, tinting everything a sickly colour of red.

"Holy frack..." Shadow muttered and moved to his side.

"Is that John?" Hillary exclaimed quietly from between the two.

"What's left of him, anyway." Xan said grimly and moved further in. "He's had his head blown off."

"Thankyou for that minute detail, inspector, we never would have noticed if you hadn't of pointed it out."

Shadow grunted as she studied the torn flesh around the remains of John's neck.

"He's been dead for at least an hour and a half." Hillary said.

"What do we tell Josh?" Xan queried.

"I'll go get Bently." Shadow said and hurried towards his office.

They sat on the edge of the stage, Josh huddled up to Hillary, seeking comfort from the Vampire who was more than willing to give it. A police officer stood in front of them, note pad and pen in hand. Every member of staff was there, not a grand sight to behold.

"And nobody heard anything?" The officer asked again.

They all shook their heads and said "No" almost simotaneously.

"You're lucky to hear what your mate's screaming in your ear with the music going." Tiffany, Hillary's younger sister, said pointedly.

"And Kezzara, you're new here, correct?"

"Yeah. Started about a month ago." The Werewolf replied evenly.

The officer made more notes.

"And you're all close friends?"

They nodded.

"Right. That's all for now. Thankyou for your cooperation."

"We'll show you out." Xan said and he and Shadow escorted the officer out of the club.

"Uhm, I don't s' pose you could do a history check on Kezzara, could you...?" Xan asked once they emerged on to the catwalk.

The officer raised an eyebrow.

"Is there a problem?" He asked.

"We're not entirely sure..." Shadow said tentatively. "She doesn't seem.... Genuine, if you know what I mean."

"I'll see what I can find out." The officer said.

They watched him walk to his cruiser which was hovering patiently at one of the taxi stops a few metres

down the catwalk from the club.

"You sure we should've asked him to do that?" Xan asked uncertainly.

"I've never been more suspicious of anyone in my life. You said the same thing back when Bently was on the phone to the fuzz." Shadow replied.

They stood out on the catwalk for a few more moments before heading back into the club to face the others.

"We've been closed down for tonight. We will resume as normal tomorrow." Bently stated.

It was four in the morning and everyone was tired and itching to go home and get some rest, hoping to forget what had happened to John.

"How's Josh?" Shadow asked after a moment, mentally kicking herself for asking such a stupid question.

"He's staying with Hillary for now." Bently said. "It's for the best if he stays with a close friend until he figures out what to do next."

Shadow nodded.

"I'm off then, if there's nothing else you need me for." She said and grabbed her pack and walked back out of the club.

When she opened her front door and stepped down the small steps, cold water swirled about her ankles, a stale smell slowly infiltrating her senses. She flicked the overhead light on and swore angrily, dropping her old back pack on to the table near the door before proceeding to slosh through the water towards the centre of the old sewer pipe abode, cringing as the stagnant liquid seeped into her shoes. She crouched down, reaching in to the dark water, feeling around for the small, circular drain lid in the floor, pulling it out when she found it. The water started to slowly flow down the old drain, gurgling and bubbling past the rusted grate. She sat down heavily on a chair at her dinner table and thought a moment. Her low lying bed and sofa were soaked as were half of her electrics. She looked mournfully up at the old water pipe that ran across the roof of her concrete pipe home. It was old, and the years of rust had finally given way, releasing the fould water. She didn't know when it had burst, but it was empty now, leaving nothing but drips slowly forming and falling from the gapping jagged hole in the pipe's underbelly, as the contents were slowly being sucked down the small drain in the floor. She grabbed soem clothes from her wardrobe, stuff them into her pack and picked up her phone.

Ode wrinkled his nose when Shadow walked through the door.

"One of our janitors has had his head blown off rendering Neon Junction closed for a night and that old water pipe has burst and has ruined pretty much everything in my house." She said sourly, dumping her pack on the floor.

"shoot, that's rough." Ode said as he ran his long scaley fingers through his limp mohawk.

"Shower?" Shadow sighed.

"All yours, babe." He said and watched intently as she shed her clothes on the way into the shower.

She stepped in and turned the water on, feeling the cool pellets turn warm, washing the day's grime from her partially scaled skin. She heard Ode step in behind her and his arm slid around her. She leaned back against him and enjoyed the moment, forgetting the day's stress, letting it flow down the drain with the water. He reached up and grabbed a bottle of soap gel, squeezing some of it's contents into his palm and lathering it up before massaging it onto Shadow's skin.

"How long you gonna be here?" He asked curiously as his hands slid up and down her body, teasing her tender areas.

"Dunno." She murred, pushing into his touch. "Until my place dries out, I guess."
She turned around and tilted her head back, letting his lips claim hers.
"Stay as long as you want." He said.

4 - Run

Kez walked into Ted's Take Away and snorted a short laugh when she saw Susan stood behind the counter in a long red dress, hair net and a greasy apron, no signs of any make-up on her fake tan features.

"Having fun?" Kez asked and leaned against the counter.

Susan grumbled something under her breath.

"I've never been so humiliated in my life!" She snapped quietly.

"Well, if you wanna be in the business, you gotta learn all kinds of things. Blending in is the key." Kez said slyly.

Susan turned her nose up and wiped a greasy-wet cloth across the tall counter top.

"I want you to keep an eye out for any of Neon Junction's staff coming and going within the next twenty-four hours." Kez continued in a more serious tone.

Susan snorted softly. "Fine. I'll keep an eye out for your freaks."

"Good. Just try and remember that the club's meant to be shut down for the day, so when I get back, I want a full report."

Susan pulled off a sarcastic half-salute and watched as Kez sauntered out of the small take away.

Kez stood in a huddle of bushes on the edge of a clearing. She inhaled the midday air deeply, glad to be back on the surface instead of being trapped in the underground city. She stripped off her clothes, hiding the brightly coloured garments under one of the bushes and she stood there naked, enjoying the feel of the cool breeze tickling across her body. This was the edge of her pack's territory. A safe place in the woods where they could run and hunt freely. She sank to her knees as her change slowly took hold, speeding up as her muscles spasmed, pulling her arms and legs beneath her as dark hair sprouted from her skin, the Wolf in her taking form.

When the change was complete, she panted, her tail gently swaying and her nose twitching, picking up the many different scents that were being carried on the breeze. The air smelt sweet with the faintest musky odour being carried on the lazy breeze. She tilted her head back, a howl escaping her muzzle, pouring out into the spring air. She was answered back, the distant howl familiar, driving her forward, eager to see her pack mate, the one who had taken care of her when she was first turned by one of the many outcasts, the Werewolves who refused the pack.

She sprang over a rotting log and splashed down and through a muddle puddle that lay on the other side. David's scent was getting stronger now, his scent everywhere making his location difficult to pinpoint. Kez spun around, trying to pick up the strongest trail when a large brown Wolf with grey streaks in his fur leapt from the foliage beside her, hitting her hard and sending her rolling. He had her pinned down, his nose buried deep in her fur. Kez yipped angrily and bucked, throwing him off. She hunched and bared her teeth, ready to pounce, a soft growl filling the air. David dived out of the way as she leapt at him, her teeth finding his tail as she moved awkwardly, pulling a tuft of fur free. He wheeled and came back at her, knocking her to the ground, snapping and clawing at each other, they tumbled about the forest floor, their growls and yips echoing through the forest. Above, perched precariously in the trees, Shadow sat and watched silently as the two Werewolves wrestled below.

"Are you gonna tell me where you work?" David asked as they lay in the grass.

"You know I can't. I signed a secrecy contract. And if I break that, I'll get my @\$@ kicked into the middle of next year." Kez sighed. "Sorry. I wish I could tell you, I really do."

She kissed his neck and sighed heavily. The sun was setting and the air becoming chill, sending goose bumps skittering across their naked forms.

"I do have the night off, though." She said hopefully, hitching herself up onto her elbows, looking down at him.

"Have any plans?" He asked curiously as he slid a hand up her side.

"A few...." She replied, pulling herself over him.

David brought his other hand up across her thigh, working his way slowly towards her small breasts.

"Care to let me in on them?" He queried softly.

Shadow snorted softly and left silently from the trees, her wings flicking out and taking to the sky. Neither of the Werewolves had realised that she had been following them, hoping to gain some insight into John's messy demise. She landed at the edge of the forest and started snuffling about for her clothes. She finally found her blue leather jacket, her black cargo pants and her black and red boots. She grunted when she found that her underwear shirt had been chewed on by some kind of critter, leaving it torn and full of holes.

No matter. She thought. It's not as if I really wear anything under my clothes anyway.

Her change back to her Human form came relatively easily. She hadn't been in her Dragon form for long enough, so it took longer than usual. When she was done, she sat in the grass, the fine spring rain starting to tickle her bare skin. She sat naked in the grass for a few moments, leaning back on her hands, letting the rain wash away the sweat from her scale dappled skin before she got dressed and disappeared back through the hidden manhole and descended back down the ladder and back into the musty noise of the massive underground city.

5 - Suspicions

"A surface dweller?" Xan said.

Shadow nodded.

"Apparently, she has a pack too."

"So she's not an outcast Werewolf like she said..." Xan mused.

They were sat alone at one of the balcony tables outside a cafe. Shadow zipped her jacket up a little further as those around her started staring more and more.

"No shirt?" Xan queried amusedly, flicking a quick glance at her chest.

"Some critter decided to eat it along with my underwear whilst I was stretching my wings." Shadow grunted and took a deep sig of her coffee, cringing slightly as the bitter liquid hit the back of her tongue.

"Ah, the curses of being a Weredragon." Xan said and leaned back in his metal chair.

A tall man with slicked back hair and wearing the heavy underground police armour made his way through the crowd of tables towards them. It wasn't the same officer from the other night, but he still greeted them by name.

"I have come with some information for you." He said and sat down. "Kezzara Wayatt has no job history. She's also an illegal immigrant. She has no official underground documents and what little surface info we could get, told us she has a pack, isn't a natural born Were and she has an extensive criminal record."

Xan and Shadow exchanged looks.

"What about her crim record?" Shadow asked.

The officer shrugged helplessly.

"We couldn't find out. The surface police aren't that cooperative when it comes to us."

"Anything else?" Xan asked curiously.

"If you can prove her guilty of the murder, let us know. But, until then, the surface dweller's your problem. The officer said and stood up, touching his finger to his forelock before walking off.

"So her job history's false and she's an illegal with a record..." Xan said ponderously.

"Suspicious much?" Shadow said and Xan nodded.

"We need to tell Bently." He said after a moment.

"And Hillary and Tiffany. See if our resident Vamps can squeeze any real info out of her."

They both finished their drinks in silence.

Bently sat down at his kitchen table, his small webbed hands splayed on the paperwork that littered it's scarred surface.

"I see...." He said ponderously. "That does raise some questions."

"Ones that really need to be answered before anymore of our heads get blown off."

"Have you told Hillary and Tiffany of this?" He asked.

"Shadow's already on it." Xan said, running a white paw - like hand through his long pale hair.

Bently smiled warmly.

"You lot're the finest bunch I've ever hired."

"That mean we get a pay rise?" Xan asked cheekily.

"Don't push it. I'm already paying you seven Sefs an hour. That's bordering the maximum wage."

Bently replied with a crooked grin.

Xan shrugged lightly.

"Y'never until you try."

Tiffany sat on a stool at the bar. Her white hair was pulled back into a loose tail, her finger tracing patterns on the bar's counter top as she intently watched Kez go about her business, setting up the bar, studying the way she moved and how she did things. Kez had strong mental barriers, barriers that Hillary, her older sister, couldn't break through.

"Problem?" Kez asked suspiciously.

Tiffany shook her head lightly.

"No, sorry. I was just thinking." The Vampire said.

"Oh?"

"About the twins. Poor Josh ain't had any sleep since his brother was er, inhumed, as it were." She said carefully, gauging Kez' reaction.

She eyed her suspiciously from behind a well practiced mask of innocence. as a flicker of guilt quickly danced through the Werewolf's eyes.

"It's a shame. Poor John. I really liked him. Nice bloke. No one should go out like that." Kez said, trying to sound hurt.

"Opening time, people!" Bently shouted from his office door beside the stage.

"I'll go let our guard dogs know." Tiffany said light heartedly and slid from her stool.

"Holy shoot! You made us jump!" Xan gasped, hand gripping his chest, when Tiffany appeared between them.

"Drama queen." Shadow muttered jokingly with a slanted grin.

"Time to open up, guys!" Tiffany chirped and stepped to one side. "Oh, and our little outcast is guilty of something, though I'm not quite sure what. Her mental barriers are too damn strong. Even Hillary can't break through them."

"shoot." Xan muttered.

"Oh, by the way; your sister's gone home. Apparently Josh's taken a turn for the worst.

"Looks like it's just me and Kez then." She sighed heavily.

"If you need any help, just give us a shout." Xan said.

She knew what he meant and he she nodded, placing a kiss on both their cheeks before disappearing back through the door and into the darkness of the club beyond with the trickling flow of customers.

Susan stood behind the counter, serving a feathered woman, trying not to wrinkle her nose at her small amount of studded clothing and her feathered head, her royal blue feathers pulled back, fanned out at the back like a Peacock's tail. Susan leaned on one foot to try and see around the woman. The line for Neon Junction was dwindling. Her view was blocked and she swore under her breath as a tall, muscular man with greying brown hair walked in, wearing an old leather jacket, seemingly the best he could do to try and blend in with the city's inhabitants.

"Where's Kez?" He demanded.

"Uhm, who're you?" Susan asked sourly.

"Her pack mate." He growled angrily.

"Doesn't mean I know where she is." Susan snapped.

"Woah! Cool it!" The woman said. "The sooner you tell him, the sooner I can eat, kay?"
Susan snorted and glared at them both.
fracking Werewolves. She thought angrily. Think they own everything they come across.

6 - Ruckus

"Fine." Susan snapped. "She's working at Neon Junction."

"Where's that?" David demanded.

The feathered woman pointed out the door.

"See that brightly lit up set of double doors over there? That's Neon Junction." She said sarcastically.

David grunted something and walked towards the take away's door.

"You won't get in. It's members only." Susan said pointedly.

"Then I'll sneak in. We're very good at things like that." David said defiantly.

"No you won't." The woman said. "You won't get past the bouncers, no matter how good you think you are."

"And there's only one entrance. You ain't got a hope in Hell of picking the fire exit's outer lock." Susan added, enjoying David's visible frustration.

"I could get you in." The woman said smugly. "I'm a frequent punter. I could get you in as a guest. But it'll cost ya."

David glared at her.

"Cost me what?" He growled.

"I get you in, you have to buy me a drink."

He hesitated a moment, then nodded grudgingly. Susan tried not to laugh at his discomfort.

"Fine." He grunted sourly.

"My Bea. What's yours?" She said cheerfully, wrapping her arms around one of his.

"David." He grunted. "And once I get you that drink, you leave me alone, got it?"

Bea nodded, slight disappointment playing on her bony features.

"Fine." She pouted mockingly. "This way."

She looked over her shoulder and grinned.

"Meals on me, kiddo."

"Gee, thanks." Susan grumbled as she watched the pair leave the take away.

Shadow and Xan watched them approach the club.

"Pass?" Shadow asked.

Bea rummaged in her purse and produced a plastic green and yellow swipe card with her picture on it.

Shadow looked at the picture then at Bea.

"What about you sir, d'you have a pass?" Xan asked.

"He's with me." Bea replied and retrieved her pass from Shadow.

"You have one guest point left now. Enjoy yourself Ms. Tighn." Shadow said and let them into the club.

"What's up?" Xan asked curiously, studying the look on Shadow's face.

"That's Kez' mate." She said.

Xan raised an eyebrow.

"Time to expect trouble?" He asked hopefully.

Shadow grinned slightly.

"If Kez has been lying, then I wouldn't say no." She replied evenly and let another club goer pass through the doors.

David handed Bea her drink and walked back through the crowd of dancing bodies, and back towards the bar. Kez looked up and her eyes went wide with panic when she saw him.

"What the frack are you doing here?" She hissed angrily over the music.

"What am I doing here?" He growled. "More to the point, what're you doing here?" He demanded.

"I work here!" She snapped.

"You're not a fracking undergrounder!" He retorted angrily, slamming a fist onto the hard countertop of the bar. "You're coming back to the surface with me, now."

"You can't order me around!"

"Yes I can." He growled and reached across the bar.

"You're not dragging me across the bar!" She snapped, stepping back, out of his reach.

"Is there a problem?" Tiffany asked.

"Yeah-"

"Stay out of this dog." David snapped, baring his teeth at her.

Tiffany pursed her lips and frowned, watching as David made his way around to the back of the counter.

Kez shrank back as he approached, but Tiffany stood in his way.

"No customers allowed behind the bar." She said sternly.

"Tiffany..." Kez warned.

The small Vampire ignored her and sized David up, her arms folded defiantly across her chest.

"Get out of my way." David growled.

"I don't think so." Tiffany said. "Just because you're puffing out your chest like an angry Pidgeon, doesn't make you intimidating." She grinned.

David growled angrily and grabbed Tiffany, swinging her out of the way and into a shelf of glasses, shattering them. She righted herself and plucked a large shard of glass from her forearm and strode up behind him as he made another grab Kez. He grabbed her wrist tightly and she yelped at the sudden pain. She vurled her hand into a fist and cracked him on the jaw, his grip loosening in surprise of the sudden attack. The crowd whooped and Tiffany lept nimbly onto his back, her fangs grazing his neck as he reacted quickly, spinning around, knocking her into the counter. He grabbed a fistful of her pale hair and threw her into the crowd. Kez ducked past him and hit a button under the counter just before an arm scooped her up, pinning one of her arms to her side. She swore angrily and loudly and bucked and kicked, trying to hit him with her free hand. She saw the inner doors swing open, knocking back a few of the spectating punters and Xan strode in, his Polar Bear-like features twisting into an angry snarl when he saw what was happening. He waded through the crowd of people, towards them, his cold eyes fixed on David.

"And who's this?" David snarled into her ear.

"Someone who's hopefully gonna kick your @\$@ outta here!" Kez spat.

"And if he doesn't?" He taunted.

"Then his friend outside will."

David barked a harsh laugh and dragged Kez forward.

"Outta my way, freak!"

"Not until you drop the girl." Xan said evenly.

The club was silent. Even the music had stopped. A grin twisted David's lips and he pushed past Xan, but he spun around and wrenched the Werewolf's grip from Kez, who dropped to the floor and promptly lept into the crowd. David lunged at Xan, knocking him over and pinning him to the dance floor and started hitting him. Xan bucked and flipped him over, returning the punishment.

7 - Friendly Warning

David stormed out of the club, blood dripping from his nose and mouth, trying to pick up Kez' scent on the grimey underground air. He looked at Shadow and growled.

"Where is she?" He snapped at the bouncer, slamming her up against the wall and pinning her there.

The air rushed from her lungs and she gasped as he pressed against her throat, making her gag.

"How in the frack should I know?" She wheezed angrily.

"She had to have come past you, this is the only exit!" He growled.

"Why don't you go ask blondie over at Ted's?" Shadow replied hoarsely, purposely refusing to remind the angry Werewolf about the fire exit a little way down to their right.

He glanced over at the small take away that sat snugly on the opposite catwalk.

"D'you know that girl over there, dog?" He snarled.

"frack no. I don't like to affiliate with the likes of you." Shadow snarled back, growing more and more annoyed as the seconds dragged by, his grip continuously and slowly tightening around her throat.

He swore at her under his breath, insulting her, hoping she wouldn't understand the word. But she did.

And a hot pain seared through his side and he doubled over, clutching at the claw mark, the pain made stronger by the suddenness of the attack.

"Don't piss me off Fluffy." Shadow growled, bringing her knee up into his face, toppling him over backwards. "I have a habit of holding grudges."

David wheezed and spat a glob of bloodied saliva out onto the catwalk. He didn't know what she was, couldn't pick up her scent through his own blood. But he knew he didn't like her just by looking at her. He looked up at her and snarled angrily. She just crouched down calmly and looked him dead in the eye.

"You may be a big bad Wolf, but that doesn't mean I, or my friends, are scared of you." She said in a near monotone.

David growled at her again.

"Stop trying to intimidate me, little man." She chuckled cruelly. "And a little warning: If I ever catch you sniffing around down here again, I will make you hurt, understand?"

Something in the back of his mind told him that she wasn't lying, that every threat she made, wasn't an empty one. A chill ran up his spine when he saw the cold malice deep within her black eyes, and he pulled himself to his feet, trying not to look defeated, and limped away down the catwalk.

Xan sat in Bently's office, an ice pack resting on his collar bone.

"He made a bit of a mess of you, didn't he?" Shadow said, looking the Polar Bear-esque man over.

"As I did to him." He gurgled, spitting a glob of blood into a cup.

"Where is he?" Bently asked.

"Ran off with his tail between his legs." Shadow replied with a sigh, rubbing gently at her throat.

Bently gave her a look.

"What?" She asked innocently.

"I know what you're like, Ms. Ironclaw." Bently replied, a mischievous glint in his dark green eyes.

"Okay, so I gave him a friendly warning..." She said after a moment's hesitation, finally caving in under the small green man's gaze.

Xan chuckled quietly.

"We know what your 'Friendly warnings' are like, Shads." He chuckled, flipping the ice pack over.

Bently gave a light sigh and hopped into his seat at his desk.

"Where's Kezzara?" He asked in a more serious tone.

"Dunno." Xan said.

"She might've gone back to the surface." Shadow offered.

"If she doesn't turn up tomorrow, I want you to go and have a look for her. And I want you to take Tiffany with you." He said.

"You're the boss." Shadow replied, with a small, two-fingered salute. "Right, I'm gonna go back to the doors and stand guard. Take it easy, kay?" She said and patted Xan lightly on the shoulder before leaving the room, grinning playfully as the big man winced and swore at her.

Shadow went back to Ode's as her own place was still drying out. She stepped through the door and into the dim red light that illuminated the square, single floor abode. Ode was sat on the couch, novel in his slender, lightly scaled hands, a sight rarely seen by anyone. He looked up from his reading and gave Shadow a quick once-over.

"You look like shoot." He said after a moment.

"Love you too." She retorted lightly and sat down heavily next to him, kicking off her boots.

"Rough time at work?" He asked, putting his book down on the coffee table.

"Could say that. A damned Werewolf broke in and tried kidnapping Kez from under our noses. As much as I dislike the girl, I can't stand by and watch someone else pick on my prey." She said.

"What happened?"

"In a nutshell? Tiffany got thrown about, Xan went to Kez' rescue. Kez ran off and I gave Fluffy a friendly warning."

Ode chuckled.

"I know what your friendly warnings are like." He said teasingly.

"Funnily enough, the others said that too." She mused.

"So, can I lock up, or are you still needing to go out?" He asked.

"Staying in." She said and watched as he got to his feet and walked to the door.

8 - Guilt

"Master Archer, I can't!" Kez pleaded.

Archer grunted and put his pen down.

"Three years as an assassin and five as a Werewolf? And you say you can't kill? You better not be going soft on me." He growled angrily.

"I'm not going soft!" She snapped. "The staff are on to me and Dave tracked me down and caused a massive scene! And anyway," She huffed. "I though it was just Bently I had to kill, not the others too."

"Well the customer changed her contract, and now she wants all of them destroyed." He said coolly.

"Are you crazy?! I'll get caught out for sure!" She protested.

"You won't if you're careful." Archer replied smoothly, leaning back in his chair.

Kez calmed down a little, taking a deep breath and letting it out slowly.

"You're right." She said calmly.

Archer smiled.

"I won't get caught. Because I quit." She finished.

"I beg your pardon?" He blinked, taken aback by her words.

"I get treated better down there than I do up here!" She snarled, standing up.

"You know what happens to those who leave before a job is finished, don't you?"

"Oh, I know. But you won't be able to do a damn thing once I get my Underground Citizenship."

"And what about your pack, little Wolf? They won't let you go so easily, and that Weredragon of theirs won't exactly welcome you with open arms and a warm heart."

"I don't have to please everyone, y'know." She growled and stormed out of the office.

"Did you find Kez?" Tiffany asked as she stood shaded in the darkness under a cluster of trees that lay on the outskirts of the glistening city.

Shadow folded her wings and peeled her scaled lips back into a sharp toothed Dragon's grin.

"I see..." The Vampire said slowly. "Bently will be pleased."

She reached up and scritchd the Weredragon between the horns, gaining a small shudder of pleasure and a soft huff as her slender fingers rubbed through the coarse furred crest, her perfectly manicured fingernails grazing the fine scales beneath. Tiffany withdrew her mind from Shadow's and leaned against the tree, her hand still buried in Shadow's crest.

"If she has quit the Guild and left her Pack, should we trust her?" Tiffany mused quietly, almost to herself.

A soft, throaty growl escaped Shadow's lips and a whisp of grey smoke curled from her nostrils and dispersed lazily in the cool late afternoon air.

"Guess you're right." Tiffany agreed, knowing how Shadow felt about the Werewolf. "I dunno about you, but all this fresh air and sunlight's giving me a headache. I'm going back downstairs." She finished.

Shadow watched Tiffany disappear down into the manhole that lay hidden in the long grass. When the lid slammed shut, Shadow turned around and loped off into the forest.

She trotted to a halt and inhaled the sweet air deeply, enjoying the mixture of scents that it carried. A bush to her left caught her attention immediately and she flicked her tongue out, tasting the weak, yet familiar scent. Only this time, there was more Wolf than Human. It was David and he was crouched in

the bushes, testing how close he could get, thinking that she couldn't see him or smell him. A mistake on many of her enemies' part. For some reason, they all thought of themselves as being superior to her, especially the Werewolves. Shadow decided to humour him and she sat on her haunches, wings lax, pretending to have not noticed him, letting him think that she'd let her guard down. All went silent. Then he leapt from the bushes, teeth bared angrily and ears flat. Shadow ducked and rolled, flinging up dirt and leaves and wooden debris as she rolled neatly to her paws, head dipped, displaying her own, much larger, teeth set in jaws that could crush bone like twigs. David slid and spun awkwardly and lunged back at her unthinking. She jolted forward, slamming her head into him, sending him flying into a thicket of bushes. She padded forward, but she heard him shift.

He was sticking to cover after having some sense knocked into him. She lost track of him. He'd circled her three times, now she couldn't pinpoint him, his scent all around her and very recent. She growled in slight anger and frustration. He erupted from the bushes at her right hind quarter, slamming into her, trying to sink his teeth into the hard scales of her hide.

She roared in surprise and spun around, whipping her tail and flaring her wings, her teeth snapping at the Wolf as he held on, his claws scrabbling at her scales. When he wouldn't let go, she hit the floor and rolled. David yelped, the air rushing from his lungs as her weight threatened to crush him. Even before she got back upright, she snapped at him, grabbing a mouthful of flesh and fur, and slung him like a toy into the trees, where he landed heavily with a yelp. To her surprise, David stirred. He looked up at her, clawing himself back upright, swaying uneasily as he padded forward with a limp, blood matting his brown and grey streaked fur as it trickled down both sides of his neck. Shadow huffed.

Why do they always insist on fighting those bigger themselves? She mused to herself as he approached, his low, menacing growl filling the air.

He lunged at her, but she spread her wings, bursting through the canopy and into the sky. She circled low over the trees and watched with a sick delight as David looked up and around himself, trying to spot her, his frustration quickly growing. She circled him a few more times, then folded her wings, diving back down through the canopy with a chorus of snapping wood and came up behind him, her back talons sinking into him as she scooped him up, letting him go a mere second later, slamming him into a tree. She landed and paced around him, looking at him as he lay at the roots of the damaged tree. She didn't know if the blow was enough to kill him, but she didn't care. It'd serve as the follow-through to her earlier warning.

"So, do we turn her in, or what?" Tiffany asked.

Bently looked down. Kez was a killer and now her mate, David, was onto her. So now it was only logical to assume that her Pack was too. That was something he and his staff didn't want to be dealing with. Shadow walked into the club, Hillary following closely behind and they took up a perch on the edge of the stage with Xan, Tiffany and Ode. Both women were looking grim and tired.

"Hillary?" Bently prompted.

The Vampire looked up, her silver eyes watery with sadness.

9 - Caged

"Josh died last night." Hillary sniffled quietly.

Everyone went silent.

"He lost the will to live." She continued, a tear rolling down her pale cheek.

Xan pulled the Vampire into a tight hug as she started crying.

"What happened to you?" Bently asked Shadow after a moment, spying her awkward position as she sat on the edge of the stage.

"David, that's what." She grunted, placing a hand on her rear, wincing slightly as she shifted position. "I followed through on the warning when he attacked me whilst I was stretching my wings."

"I hope you didn't kill him-" Ode stopped, seeing the darkened, angry look in the Weredragon's eyes.

"You can be very bloodthirsty at times, y'know that?" He finished with a sigh.

"What can I say? I like a challenge." She replied deviously.

"Back to the matter of Kezzara." Tiffany said flatly, a hand on her sister's back as she sobbed into Xan's massive chest.

Bently paused, mentally rearranging his words.

"She goes." He said flatly. "As soon as she gets here, bring her to my office."

"That it?" Ode asked, disappointment clear in his voice.

"Yes. I will handle it from here until I say so otherwise." Bently replied evenly. "In the mean time, I want you and Shadow to go and find out who the assassin's client is. And no messing around, got it? You have four hours."

Everyone slid from the stage. Shadow and Ode headed out of the club, Bently disappeared back into his office and the others went about setting up the club, ready for business as usual.

"So, who d'you think it is?" Ode asked curiously as he walked along Shadow, both weaving through the masses of colourful Undergrounders.

"My monie's currently on Tillie Meyark." She replied, neatly side-stepping a heavily pierced man in a green net shirt and red leather trousers.

Ode thought about it for a moment.

"Ah..." He finally said. "Order an assassination on those who ruined your life from prison, and the suspicion on you won't be so high! Such a flawless plan." He said sarcastically. "Only problem is, what do we do if she is the client?"

"We can either report her like good citizens, or we can wait until she's released, and then take care of her ourselves." Shadow replied.

"I like the sound of the latter. Presuming you let me in on it." Ode said and hailed a hover-cab.

The bright yellow and black chequered vehicle floated up beside the catwalk at a railingless area just ahead of them and they climbed in.

"The prison please." He asked, and the cab took off, making its way to the other side of the underground city.

"We're here to see Tillie Meyark." Shadow announced.

The tall guard looked them over, then placed an electronic clipboard in front of them on the desk.

"Sign in and take these beepers. Sign out when you leave."

They signed their names, grabbed their beepers and stepped into the main prison once the large, heavy metal door had rolled to one side. The prison was like a cavern filled with cages stacked high, one on the other, in tall towers, each cage containing two people. A heavily armed guard walked up beside them.

"Cage?" He asked flatly, as if bored of his job.

"Tillie Meyark." Ode said.

The guard escorted them amongst the cages, walking until they came to block fifteen. The guard unlocked a small gate on a dark grey hover-platform. Shadow stepped onto the four-man pad, closely followed by Ode and then the guard. The small gate clanked shut and they held onto the waste high safety rail as the hover-platform was manouvred upwards.

"What's the matter with him?" The guard asked, his curiosity and amusement getting the better of him.

"Doesn't like heights." Shadow replied simply.

Ode crouched, gripping the rails so tight, his green knuckles turned white.

"I thought all Geckans were good with heights..." The guard mused.

"Not me." Ode burbled, his eyes squeezed shut.

The hover-pad slowed to a stop and the guard swung the small gate open.

"Cage one-five-nine; Block fifteen; Tillie Meyark." The guard announced.

Shadow grabbed Ode and dragged him off the platform and onto the small catwalk. Tillie was sat croslegged on her bed, reading a tattered, year old fashion magazine. Her blonde hair was un-shining, her skin pale and thinner, her grey and red prison overalls hanging from her bony frame. Shadow made a noise in the back of her throat and Tillie looked up, a manical grin spreading onto her thin, near white lips.

"Shadow!" She exclaimed happily. "Why I haven't seen you since I tried having you eaten!"

"Yeah, good to see you too." Shadow replied dryly, the images of the pit in her basement infiltrating her mind once more.

Tillie slid from her hard bed and ambled casually over to the Weredragon and her lover, the wooden planking beneath her creaking stressfully at the movement.

"So," She said jovially, clapping her hands together. "what can I do for my darling little Undergrounders today?"

"We want to know what your involvement is with Kezzara Wyatt." Ode said, trying his hardest to ignore the long drop and the jeers of the other inmates.

Tillie's face went blank.

"Who?" She asked after a moment.

"You know who." Shadow said. "You hired her from the Assassin's Guild up top."

"Assassin?" Tillie snorted amusedly. "Oh please. I'm a Do-It-Yourself girl, you know that."

Shadow looked at Ode.

"She's got us there." He said, shrugging.

"If you're suspicious of me, you should meet my sister, Susan Meyark. She's always had an un-healthy obsession with assassins. And if she doesn't come clean, tell her that her big sis will be out in two weeks time, and watch her crap enough bricks to build a house with." She grinned cruelly.

"How can we trust you after what you did last time...?" Ode asked suspiciously, praying for the conversation to be over with, so that he could get his feet back on the ground.

"I have a score to settle with that little dog-bag." Tillie snarled angrily, her hands wrapping tightly around the solid bars of her cage. "And if you get to her before I do, I wanna know how you dealt with the little blonde frack."

Shadow and Ode exchanged looks as Tillie turned around and stalked back to her bed.

10 - Chase

Shadow and Ode stood with the others outside Neon Junction, watching Kez kicking and screaming as she was wrestled into the back of a police hover cruiser, the vehicle bobbing and swaying as she fought the heavily armed underground officers.

"Get any more results?" Bently asked quietly, so the officers wouldn't over hear.

"Yeah. We need to talk to Susan, Tillie's little sister." Ode replied.

"Kez mentioned something about her as she was being arrested.." Xan said thoughtfully.

"Know where she is?" Shadow queried.

Hillary nodded toward the take-away on the opposite catwalk.

"Apparently she's working over there, supposedly undercover or something." The Vampire said.

"Hillary? Mind coming with me?"

"Why, what you gonna do to her...?" She asked the Weredragon, several inklings forming in her mind.

"Well, if Tillie's actually told us the truth for once, then I'm going to beat the shoot out of the little bint."

Shadow chirped happily.

A cruel grin played on Hillary's full lips.

"Count me in." She grinned wickedly.

They walked into the small take-away, locking the door behind them.

Susan stopped what she was doing, greasy cloth paused a few inches away from the counter top as she stared wide eyed at the two women.

"Susan Meyark?" Shadow asked.

"N-no." She said, trying to cover up her fear and continued wiping down the counter top, leaving streaks of grease as the cloth moved.

"Lying..." Hillary sang softly.

"Now what gave you that idea?" Shadow replied, sarcasm touching the edges of her voice.

A soft chuckle filled the following silence and they stepped toward the counter. Susan twitched, giving away her thoughts to the two hunters.

"I wouldn't do anything stupid if I were you." Hillary warned as she slowly approached.

Susan froze.

"Why the assassination contract?" Shadow asked, taking another step forward.

Susan stepped nervously away from the counter, her eyes darting from side to side, searching out the nearest exit like a trapped animal.

"Assassination?" She asked worriedly.

"Don't play stupid." Hillary growled.

Susan's jaw worked around the outlines of some words, but they failed to make it past her lips. Shadow and Hillary leapt cleanly over the counter when Susan bolted, and chased her through the greasy, gritty kitchen and out onto the rear catwalk that was sandwiched between buildings and cluttered with rubbish, the remains of a week's worth of unsold goods. Susan had vanished amongst the rotting debris, so the Vampire and Weredragon split up, going in opposite directions, nostrils flaring, trying to pick up the Human's scent amongst the everyday odours of the massive underground city.

Shadow ran out onto the main catwalk, finally picking up the distorted scent of Susan. She inhaled

deeply, continuing to do so as she pushed her way past the heaving throngs of people and creatures that dwelt within the mighty industrialised cavern, following the scent as best she could. She wondered if Hillary was having better luck, if she'd picked up a stronger scent. But she cast that thought aside as she saw the girl's blonde head bobbing and dodging in the crowd up ahead. She surged forward, shoving people aside, gaining shouts and insults as she went, trying to catch up with Susan, finally lurching forward and missing her collar as she looked over her shoulder, seeing Shadow gaining on her with a grim look of determination etched on her features. Susan spun out of the way, clumsily landing her foot in Shadow's side, making her stumble against the safety rails, falling down three levels before landing heavily on one of the safety nets that were stretched across the gaps between catwalks at random intervals. She blinked hard, swore and scrambled onto the catwalk to her right. She searched for Susan's scent for half an hour before finally admitting defeat and lowering her mental barrier to seek out Hillary. She felt the mental tug of the Vampire and followed it for twenty minutes, climbing up steps and down steps joining catwalks, before finally finding Hillary perched atop a large metal pipe section on a construction site. She pointed up at the main scaffolding tower, a partially erected building at its base. Susan was scrambling up the network of metal poles, making her way towards a manhole in the cavernous roof.

"She dun'arf pick her exits, don't she?" Shadow mused.

Hillary chuckled softly.

"Shall we?" She said nonchalantly, waving an elegant hand towards the metal tower.

They hopped from the pipe section and ran towards the tower, climbing it faster than Susan, trying not to disturb any of the long lengths of metal piping so as not to make a sound too loud enough for Susan to hear. They were gaining on her quick and before she realised what was going on, Hillary had grabbed onto a pole and swung herself up, landing neatly in Susan's path on a plank that was lay across a gap in the scaffolding. Shadow pulled herself up behind her and Susan's face went pale as both hunters slowly closed the gap, moving as casually as they would on a solid and sturdy surface.

"You wanna know why I hired an assassin?" Susan spat. "Because you killed father and ruined my home and life!" She screamed angrily, almost losing her footing, terror flickering in her eyes as the two loomed over her.

"That's not a good enough excuse." Hillary sneered, leaning forward.

Susan swayed a little, daring herself to take a step backward.

"Now, be a good little girl, and climb back down so we can end this in a peaceful manner." Hillary said sweetly.

"And don't look down." Shadow added twistedly, grinning when Susan's head twitched, trying to resist the urge to look down.

Hillary sighed heavily when Shadow gave the girl a hard prod in the back, making her flinch and lose her balance. She screamed as she fell, landing with a wet bone shattering thud, the sound of metal mixing with the sound as she landed heavily on a pile of discarded metal scraps, the pieces jabbing through her body, having sliced through her flesh as if she were made of tissue paper. They looked down at the bloodied mess and Hillary sighed again.

"What a waste of a meal." She said.

"If that's what you had in mind for her, then I guess I shouldn't have told her to not look down..." Shadow mused.

"You also poked her." Hillary added.

Shadow paused a moment, then shrugged.

"Let's get back to work." She finished.

"Well at least they're out of the way." Bently said, relief obvious in his voice.

"That all you can say?" Xan said and took a swig of his drink.

"Do we tell the police what happened when they find the body?" Shadow asked.

"Nah." Bently said after a moment. "She was a Surface Dweller. They'll bury her up there somewhere out of the way."

"And if anyone asks, we had nothing to do with her untimely demise." Hillary added.

"Death by sarcastic prod..." Ode mused lightly. "There's one for the books."

"What about Kez?" Tiffany asked from the otherside of the bar.

"She's being sentenced tomorrow." Bently replied coolly and sipped his drink.

All went quiet around the bar.

"Now what?" Xan asked, finally breaking the silence.

"We open up like usual." Bently said. "Ode, set up the music. Hillary, Tiffany: Finish the bar prep. Xan, Shadow, open the doors in half an hour. I'll set about looking for new janitors." He added quietly at the end.

He hopped from his stool and disappeared into his office beside the stage, leaving everyone to go about their jobs. Thirty minutes later, the bouncers open the doors and business resumed as if nothing had happened at all.