“Ahhh…..”

Marcus Kholyawsky arched his back, wincing as he felt the muscles twinge. The raven cricked his wrists as he rolled them loose, at the same time working his aching beak.

Changing appearance was one thing, but changing species? There was a reason he didn’t do it very often.

The middle-aged hero pulled on a dressing gown over his fluffed feathers and tapped over into the kitchen of his apartment. It was completely bare - having a salary of $90,000 was all very well, but it couldn’t buy taste.

Marcus liked to keep things simple - the only decorations were a Star of David and one or two pictures of family. Mom and dad, the three sisters, and....

No.

He only took that photo out when he could be sure there would be no visitors. He’d never even had it framed. Instead he kept it by his bedside, locked away like so many other things close to his heart. Sometimes he thought back to those days, when he had the courage to. It was a pleasant day dream, marred by nightmares.

Opening the drinks cabinet, he picked out a suitable bottle and poured it out. It was only early evening, but then again his fellow professors didn’t have the same hobbies as he did.

Relaxing in the leather chair, the raven put the glass to his beak and tipped some down. He didn’t even bother to savour it on his tongue, as he tapped the TV hand-control and the plasma set flashed on.

“Breaking news, as this evening the masked Bureau Agent Pryvid struck again, apprehending violent bank robbers outside….”

Marcus snorted as he saw himself on the TV screen, garbed in a black hooded bodysuit with white cape, gloves and boots. Only he was not wearing his own skin - instead it was a beagle clad in that suit, young and handsome beneath the hood.

His beak still twitched painfully. Everyone seemed to believe that Pryvid was several different Agents all wearing the same costume and going by the same name - but that was not so.

Being able to switch species was a godsend at times - it made the dangers of being unmasked so much less threatening. After all, all he had to do was change back to his original form and no one would be the wiser. But it still hurt like a bitch, even after all this time.

The raven turned as the phone rang, the digital speaker bleeping painfully in his ear.

“Alright, alright….”
The scientist picked the phone up and clicked.

“This is Professor Marcus Kholyawsky, who’s speaking?”

~

The figure on the platform stood immovable, stock still with arms outstretched like a priest beseeching the heavens. Before him was a huge ball of red hot metal, crackling and sparking away merrily, the size of a family car. The place had been a steel factory at one point - now it was Bureau property, acquired as a space for him to test his abilities in safety.

Duncan Gunn threw his head back and hissed as his body roared out in pain. He shoved it to the back of his mind and focused. It was all about the metal in front of him, nothing else - he had to focus on it, control it. Slowly, the metal began to shift like wet clay under the barrage of magnetic pulses he threw at it, until it began to cascade down like water over a rough invisible slope. When he was finished, the mound of molten bronze slanted forward and curved at the top, exactly like a wave on the ocean.

That was what he wanted - it had taken months to get enough scrap metal. He’d had to look all over the US for it - and even then, the wave would have to be hollow.

Invisible strokes scoured tiny grooves down the red hot metal and rippled through it, distorting the surface like the churning of the sea. Each bit had to be perfect, and in his mind Duncan went through every wave he had ever seen, everytime he had been to the sea, everytime he had seen water flow.

Finally he came to the foam, and with a final burst of energy he brought enough tin to the top to make the edges of the curve a paler shade, the hot metal bubbling away like silver froth.

The otter stumbled as he let himself rest, gripping the rails as sweat dribbled from his chin to evaporate on the hot floor. His heart was thumping within his breast, and his heavy muscles ached with every tremble that ran down them.

There could be no stopping now, not while he was so close. Not while the metal was still hot.

Breathing in a lungful of hot air, the otter outstretched his arms once more - now came the hardest part. He had no memories of her, and that was what hurt the most. Everything would have to be done from a single photograph, and from the memories of others. It wouldn’t really be his own work at all - but it was as close as he could get.

With a heave, he drew metal from deep within the molten wave, until it trickled up from the steaming, red hot surface and into two spires. He would have to go slowly - the metal on the outside would have to cool enough to harden, while he brought up more from within the wave to build her up.

Sweat trickled into his blue eyes, and he shook it away without a thought. Gritting his teeth, the otter winced as bile rose at the back of his throat.

They were good legs - muscular and strong, built for propelling a body through water like a bullet through air. Or at least, that was what Germania had said.

Now came the torso, then the chest, then the arms, and finally the head. Each was sculpted from the photograph he had of her, standing proudly on that rock in her costume, all those years ago. He didn’t even know what her face looked like under the mask. But now, before him, there she stood.

Mother. Leaning forward into the wind while riding the surf, spear grasped in her hand, her bronze hair flying wildly behind her, brow furrowed in concentration.

“It’s beautiful, Duncan.”

The otter spun round in shock, anger etched onto his scarred features. It ebbed away as he saw Velocity Blaze standing there, the female raptor having watched him, entranced, as he sculpted.

He straightened up, trying to stop his hand from trembling. There was something in Velocity’s eyes that made him uneasy. If nothing felt wrong, then nothing felt right either.

Stepping gingerly forward the velociraptor took Duncan’s huge palms in her left hand, ignoring the searing heat on her scales. Reaching up she tugged the huge otter’s head down to kiss him full on the lips.

“Corazon….”

She hefted a bottle in her hand - 1914 Scapa Single Malt. Duncan was looking down at it when he felt her lips brush his ears.

“Duncan….We found your father.”

Duncan froze and looked at her, his face blank and uncomprehending.

“His name’s Marcus Kholyawsky, he’s a raven and a Professor of Physics living in Minneapolis.”

The otter stared. “How…”

“He’s a member of Bureau, he’s a shapeshifter under the name Pryvid. His DNA is in the database.”

His eyes twitched, as the otter’s heart began to race once more. The raptor held him in her arms.

“Duncan, Duncan mi corazon, you-”

The otter held a hand up, and pulled away from her. Slowly, the huge youth thudded from the chamber without a sound, the bottle in his hand.

Vera blinked back the tears, turning to look up at the cooling statue of Moire Gunn. The bronze otteress loomed over her like a goddess. “<I will watch over your son, Gaisgeach. I promise.>”

~

Minotaur tapped on the file, shaking his head sadly. “I can’t believe this…He must have known.” The bull grumbled. He flopped back into the chair, scratching his cheek.

Betsy was in disbelief. “I don’t understand….This man is a raven, yeah? How the heck could he be Duncan’s dad? I mean hybrids happen, but Duncan doesn’t look remotely avian.”

Dr Henry Lane was perusing his own copy, the stallion wearing his civilian labcoat. “Hmm...It says here that he’s a shapeshifter.”

Medic raised a timid paw. “If er...Well, if he has the Chameleon Gene, that would explain it.” The skunk fell silent as all eyes turned to her. Smoothing her coat down, she explained.

“It’s a rare mutation and it's only been documented amongst Eastern Europeans, particularly Ashkenazi Jews. His powers work by shifting the DNA that affects his appearance. When he...made love with Duncan’s mother, the DNA within his sperm simply changed itself in order to be compatible.”

Lane nodded slowly. “A full one species or the other is normal, but they usually show subtle signs. A shapeshifter for a father would explain why Duncan’s fur darkens when he powers up.”

The stallion turned to Fixer. “How is he taking it?”

The rabbit sighed. “...Poorly. Poor guy is in the rec room. Vera was able to talk him into going there with her. She didn’t want him drinking alone.”

~

Duncan let the whiskey rest on his tongue before letting it sear down his throat. Vera let him have some space, the velociraptor's gentle hand resting on his back. The Scottish youth ignored it, staring into the table. Inside, he felt numb. “... All this time. He was a Bureau member…” He put the tumbler down and nudged it away. He appreciated the gift, but right now he didn’t feel like drinking. A million thoughts boiled their way through his mind. He thought of his childhood on the isles, and of how he’d watched and helped as his grandparents scratched a living on their croft. He thought of the night when he’d screamed for help as knives dug their way into the corners of his lips.

*You abandoned me.*

The thoughts focused around the name he now had. Getting over the shock of discovering that his father was a bird had been nothing compared to realising that he was as unlike him as it was possible to be. Marucs Kholyawsky - he couldn’t bring himself to call that man “dad” - was scholarly, reasonably well off, and a respected scientist. *You let my grandparents work themselves to death.*

He heard Vera at his side, her voice tentative. “Well at least…. at least now you have a chance, si?”

Duncan made no reply to that.

“Duncan-” Vera started, but the otter cut her off. An unpleasant realisation had begun to dawn on him, and the more he thought about it, the more it bit at him. “He musta read my file, by now.”

“And?”

Duncan grunted. “...Ye know what’s in there. The….the shite I did. The things I saw.”

The otter turned to face her, not bothering to conceal the shame in his eyes. He still remembered being told that the crimes he had committed would have to stay on his record, just as surely as the scars would stay on his face.

*Every day, I see my past when I get up in the morning. Great. Now I’ll see it in my…in his face, too.*

“Duncan, mi corazon…” Vera stood and tapped over to him. She rested her dainty hands on his shoulder, her breath a soft sigh. Her digits rubbed gently into knotted muscles. Reaching up, she tilted his face to hers. “I promise, I will help you through t’is. Si? Missing my own father...I can imagine what you must feel now. But...I will not let you face t’is alone. And if he did not come forward? He is likely ashamed - ashamed that you grew so tall without him.”

Duncan turned, looking down into Vera’s eyes. He was suddenly overcome with a welcome feeling of warmth towards the velociraptor, more for her patience than for anything else. That she could be so kind and understanding after all she had been through…it shamed him. But in a way that made him want to be better.

“Vera…”

“Shh.”

The velociraptor put her finger to his lips before gently tracing a claw up his scarred cheek. “...I know. I love you, too.” She smiled kindly. “Come. Let me take your mind off it, si?”

~

An hour and a half later, Duncan was sleeping peacefully in their shared bed, his massive body unmoving and his breathing calm. Their clothes lay discarded on the floor, the sheets still moist from their exertions. Duncan had been harsh and desperate, like a ravening animal in search of shelter. Vera pulled a blanket around herself for warmth and picked up the phone from the coffee table. She scrolled the screen down until she found what she was looking for - the O’Leary address. Tapping it, she put it next to her ear as it rang.

“Sean? Is t’at you? It’s Vera.”

The rabbit’s voice showed his concern. “Evening. I’m guessing that he didn’t take the news well?”

“No. He feels….ashamed, si? He believes that Pryvid did not come forward, because he is ashamed of him.”

The other end of the line was silent for a bit. “Vera. We were both there when Germania told us how they met, how paranoid his mother was back then - and rightly so, given the circumstances of her disappearance. We never did find the body after all, and I have my suspicions. *Pryvid may not have known Moire Gunn was Gaisgeach.* And even if he did? He would have had no reason at all to suspect that her successor was *his* son as well as hers.” He sighed. “Have him call me when he calms down. We have to persuade him to at least give Marcus a chance. In the meantime, I’ll call Marcus and explain some of this to him.”

“Gracias, senor. You are too good to us bot’.”

“Nonsense, my dear. Terry’s added him to our family, after all. Not that she doesn’t feel that way about the whole Boston division as well, of course. And you, too, now that you’ve taken up with her boy.”

Vera blushed despite herself. “Si. He is sleeping right now, we, err... Well, I decided he needed comfort, si? He should be better in the morning.”

Sean chuckled. “I quite understand. Much healthier than letting him drink until he was unconscious, after all.”

“Si. Gracias again, Sean. Give my love to Teresa y los ninos.”

“Of course I will, Vera. Keep an eye on him for us.” He sighed as he broke the connection, dwelling on what he knew so far. *Pryvid, you had years to reach out to Moire’s parents, even if you didn’t know her secret. You poor damned fool.*..

-

They’d set the meeting up in Boston, as neutral ground. Duncan was staying with the O’Leary clan for a few days as the final details were arranged, and the otter was again using their back yard as a workout venue.

“Duncan?” Teresa ventured gently. The otter didn’t look up from his exercises. The pair of them were alone in the yard. “Duncan… You have to meet him.”

“I dinnae have tae do sh– crap.”

Teresa’s tone hardened, hands on her hips as she glared up at the otter. “Young man, don’t you dare take that attitude with me. Not after all the work that we’ve put into this. You don’t have to like him, but you do have to see him and be civil for a few hours.”

Duncan stopped, and placed his weights down on the patio with a clunk. “I’m sorry.” He grunted, looking down to gaze at her. “...I shouldnae take it out on ye. I’m just…I’m just pissed off, that’s all.” No matter how much she nagged him, he could never bring himself to be angry at Teresa - not after the way she had looked after him. It irked him, that was all.

Teresa persisted. “Duncan... Think of all the work people have put towards this day. Eight whole months, Duncan. Germania, Sean, Fire Fox, Medic Mouse... If you can’t do this for yourself, do it for them. Hmm?”

The otter looked back at her. She was right - this was what he had been waiting for, after all. A chance to know why. So why was he so frightened, all of a sudden? Everything he’d been through...it all came down to this. But he still couldn’t shake the anger that throbbed through his temples. Worse than that was a feeling all too familiar, though one he had not felt for years - the shame of rejection.

The realisation hit him.

*I can’t run from this.*

“.....Aye. I’ll meet him.”

He felt a pat on his shoulder. Teresa was smiling gently. “Good lad. And remember - if it goes wrong, we’re all here for you.”

Duncan took some comfort from that. “...There any photos of him?”

She nodded and pulled out her phone. “Right here.” She thumbed the screen and held it up to Duncan.

It was an ID photo. The raven was wiry but quite tall in comparison with the colleagues on either side of his broad shoulders, clad in a white lab coat with half-moon glasses perched on a black beak. There was not the hint of a smile on his features. Duncan immediately decided that he reminded him, more than anything else, of a particularly gloomy school teacher.

“.....He looks like a nerd.”

“Like Sean, you mean?”

Duncan had no answer to that.

Teresa rested her hand on the otter’s shoulder and squeezed. “Duncan… I know you don’t know him. But he’s still your flesh and blood. And you’re not alone in having father problems. So don’t you ever think we don’t understand how you feel, okay?”

Duncan nodded slowly, grunting. “When does he get here?”

“Friday, so you’ve got some time to prepare.”

“Aye…” That was something, at least. “Now I’m nae sure if I wanted to get it over with quickly or not.”

Teresa just shook her head and hugged him. “It’ll be fine.”

~

Pryvid hovered in the air above the forest floor. The raven’s arms were folded across his chest, his gaze pensive. The call had not been from anyone he knew well - it had been from a work acquaintance, none other than Sean O’Leary, the Bureau’s accounting tsar. What did a bureaucrat have to do with this?

His surprise had deepened when O’Leary’s other identity had been revealed to him. And as more revelations about Duncan’s life had come thick and fast in the files, Marcus’ heart had sunk deeper and deeper within his breast. He did not turn to look at the costumed rabbit. “... I never knew.” His voice was barely above a whisper. “She always was a marvellous secret keeper, Moire. Does he... What is he like, my son?”

“He’s a good furr at heart, who’s had to do some horrible things to survive. He’s hurting, and I can’t promise he won’t lash out at you. But Terry and I have both tried to get him to understand that you had no way to know. Germania didn’t know Moire had a son, either.”

His hands tightened at his elbows. Moire had always kept her life strictly compartmentalised, secretive woman that she was. Bitterness rose up within him, colouring his voice. “So tell me now... what can I offer Duncan, after all he’s been through? I can’t give him a home, at least not a happy one. I’m a single, heavy drinking physics professor. Between that and Bureau work, I have about three hours free every week. That’s no kind of life for a young man like him.”

“Actually, two out of three match up. He appreciates a good whiskey, and I’ve convinced him he should be learning physics. He’s in a relationship, though.”

The raven stared at the rabbit. “How did you do *-that-*?”

The rabbit smiled. “Heh. We’re both magnetokinetics. And he *is* your son, after all. Showed him some of my tricks, and how I learned them. I minored in electromagnetic physics, myself, but he needs a professional to teach him. I could probably pick up some ideas from you myself.” His grin faded as he became serious again. “Can you offer him happiness? Not really. No one can give that to another. But at the very least, it will offer him closure. And some for you, I suspect?”

Pryvid nodded slowly, turning to face Teragauss as the rabbit continued. “Besides, if he keeps going the way he is now, you’re going to have grandkids sooner rather than later. Wasn’t sure if they’d be interfertile, but Lily has confirmed he’s inherited your genes. The young ones will probably take after Velocity Blaze, though.”

“Velocity Blaze? Grandkids?” Pryvid stared at the rabbit, unable to comprehend the speed at which the conversation had moved on. “….My mother will kill me. And she might just feed Duncan to death, too.” He could already imagine her coddling the boy, and caught himself smiling at the idea. The smile disappeared when he remembered that she’d just as quickly turn her wrath on him for being so irresponsible.

“Well, she can try. He eats a lot as it is. But I suspect that’ll cheer him up more than anything. He was mostly raised by his own grandparents until they passed.” He frowned. “Which reminds me... I need to find out what happened to their farmstead when they died. Even if it was a rental, someone either seriously dropped the ball when he was orphaned, or someone needs to go to prison for what happened.” He pulled out his phone and sent himself a note. “But here’s a pic of him and Blaze.”

Marcus took the phone and looked down at the screen. Duncan was smiling as best as he could at the camera, holding Blaze under one arm with the beach in the background. “He’s so like her. He has my hair, but... It’s amazing. It’s almost like seeing her again.” The raven looked away. “Those scars - who did that to him?”

“One of the nastier incidents of growing up in the streets. He’s never given the specifics. I have the strong impression that whoever did it has already been dealt with.”

Pryvid was silent for a moment, processing the rabbit’s words. “....I see. Anything else I should know?”

“My wife took him in as honorary family when he stayed with us a year back.” He grinned. “So if you don’t agree to meet him, she’ll probably ring you up and start yelling.”

“I don’t think there’s any risk of that...I’m not going to let Moire down again. I owe it to her as much as to him.”

~

Dealanach’s fists clenched and unclenched as he concentrated on the task in front of him. The building was going to come down at any moment. It was an old office tower from the 1940s, barely built to standard even for its time. All it had taken was a fire on the 3rd floor to weaken the structure enough that it was starting to collapse.

Digger was helping firefighters battle the blaze with desperate courage, while Ironsides was flying people off the roof as quickly as she could. Down below, Velocity Blaze had already caught several jumpers before they hit the concrete and was trying to keep the crowds back.

Cracking his fingers, the otter outstretched his arms and got to work. This would be lifting work, so it was just as well he was directly above the blazing tower. Closing his eyes, the otter let the taste of ozone fill his mouth as he constructed in his mind the necessary field. This was the kind of thing studying physics helped with - patterns, calculations and leverage. Gritting his teeth the otter put his field into action, and almost immediately his muscles began screaming as he took the weight of the building onto himself.

Over his earpiece he could hear Minotaur co-ordinating the rescue. “Dealanach has bought us some time, so do what you can to get those people off. I’ll grow high enough to help out, but we need to be quick.”

Velocity Blaze looked up with nervous eyes at the figure in the sky, increasingly shrouded by inky black smoke. “Hold on, corazon, just a little longer…”

Up above, Dealanach was wincing as coils of electricity began to spike and lash up and down his limbs. It was getting harder to breathe, even with his respirator. Fresh, cool oxygen was pumping through the mask, but even through it he could smell the fire. He could taste burned plastic, steel and something worse. Something that focused his mind even as the bile rose in his throat. Roasting flesh.

Closing his eyes, the otter locked his muscles and anchored himself in mid air, taking slow deep breaths from his canister. Down below screams arose as the concrete crumbled away from the face of the building, joined by globules of molten glass. Beneath it, just visible through the morass of black fumes, was the building’s exposed steel skeleton - each girder glowing a cherry red, and dead to his powers as the fire heated the third floor beyond its Curie point limit. The heat was so intense that Minotaur had to step back to shield his face, while several fire crews made valiant efforts to cool the softening metal.

Minotaur looked around. “The fire’s spreading upwards, and we can’t get the people off fast enough.” The boss stared with intense concentration, clearing his mind as he went through every possible scenario he had trained for. Then it hit him. “Dealanach, Dealanach can you hear me?”

He did not like the sound of the answer. “Aye...Go ahead…” Dealanach was wheezing, strain audible even across the air waves.

“Dealanach, we can’t get those people off fast enough. I’m...I can’t believe I’m asking this but...I need you to pull the upper half of that building off and plant it in the river.”

Silence.

“It’s the only way we’ll put that fire out. The riverbed is boggy, if you can hold it there we can freeze it in place and-”

“Aye.”

Up in the sky, Dealanach breathed sweet air as the blades of a news helicopter washed the smoke away. Oxygen surged through his veins anew as the teenaged Agent’s heart pounded. He’d never lifted something this big before, and his muscles were already going numb and beginning to twitch as energy blasted through them.

*You have to do this. You will do this.*

The red hot steel groaned and began to stretch like melted toffee until suddenly, in a shower of sparks, it snapped away. The crowd watched in awe as the upper half of the tower block came loose. On the rooftop the survivors screamed and clutched tight to the hot concrete roofing, as above them Dealanach hovered. His face was hidden beneath a grim mask, the otter’s eyes blazing an electric blue through the eyepieces of his respirator. Smoothly, like a cloud drifting in the wind, the upper half of the building began to glide out over the streets, Dealanach’s magnetic field shielding the crowds from burning debris.

The weight was incredible - heavier than anything he’d ever felt before - but he kept going, his palms crackling as his lungs worked like pistons. Finally, he was over the river - the water was rippling under his magnetic field, steam beginning to rise up as the ends of molten girders hovered above it. Gingerly he began to weaken his field, slowly and gradually, gently lowering the truncated tower’s burning end into the river like a match into a cup. Steam geysered upwards as hot metal hit cold water, and with a hiss the fire was extinguished as Dealanach sunk the building down until it hit bottom, the water just lapping over the windows of the last burning story. No sooner had he done so than Digger appeared by the river banks, the diminutive mole reshaping the riverbed to form a suction base around the still-broiling concrete mass.

On the rooftop, the survivors slowly stood, singed and soot-blackened, but alive. Most were still in shock as one by one they were lifted from the roof by the otter’s powerful arms and into those of the medics, who promptly set up a triage centre as Velocity Blaze zipped into the building across a land bridge, before running straight back out, her eyes wide in disbelief. “No one. T’ey all made it out. But how?”

“I believe I may be able to answer that, Velocity.”

Teragauss was hovering above them, the rabbit having watched Dealanach’s actions from a distance.

“T...Teragauss? How?”

“We just got in, and came straight out here. Pryvid started ‘porting out casualties as soon as we got into range.” The rabbit’s voice was grim. “Not all of them made it. But more wouldn’t have, if it hadn’t been for him.”

“Oh I see-Wait? Pryvid is here?” She stared in brief surprise, then nodded knowingly. “...I understand.”

~

“Hello.”

Duncan looked up at the raven from the chair. The rec room was completely deserted save for the two of them, everyone else having left in order to give them privacy. Both were still in their hero costumes. The air was still.

“So….” Marcus started. “I gather you’re studying physics?”

Duncan nodded. “Aye. Doin’ fine.”

“Well, that’s good to hear.” Marcus drew in a sharp intake of air and shifted ever so slightly. “So, I have-”

The otter suddenly snapped, fists clenching as he stood up and towered over his father, eyes narrowed in suppressed anger. “First. I wanna know - did ye fuckin’ know about me?” Fury smouldered beneath his voice. “Did my ma fuckin’ tell you, before ye left her?”

The raven stared back up at him. If he was frightened by the display, he didn’t show it.

“No.”

The otter sneered. “And ye never came tae visit her ma an’ da after the ship went down, eh?”

Marcus remained stoic. “It was too...painful.”

“And what would ye fuckin’ know about pain, aye!?” Duncan’s sudden explosion seemed to shake the very room. Above them the lights flickered, and out of the corner of his eye Marcus saw cutlery rise up into the air. The otter began to pace like a caged animal, teeth bared. Marcus stood completely still, face impassive.

“Ye never showed up! Ye never fuckin’ cared enough tae stop by, just once! If ye had been there just once, ye’d have seen me!” Duncan’s voice threatened to tremble for a split second before he reined it in. “....I’d have...Perhaps they’d wouldn’t have…”

He felt a hand on his shoulder and lashed out, hoping to see the raven flinch away. Instead he felt his fist collide with the beak, only to stare as the raven seemed to ignore it. “It’s my fault.” Marcus’ voice was a level whisper. “I loved your mother, Duncan. I still do, after all these years.”

“T-Then….” Duncan took a second to restrain himself. “Then why did ye ne’er come tae see her parents?”

Marcus looked over to the sofa. “I think I should tell you the whole story, first.”

~

Marcus scribbled in his notebook, occasionally looking down to take readings. The young student made a lonely figure out on the windswept rock, his boots dangling just out of the sea as it lapped against the hard granite.

“Good place tae think, aye?”

The voice made him start so much that he almost dropped his pen. As it was, it was all he could do to grab it while at the same time looking around for the source of the voice.

“Down here, *amadan*.”

Looking down between his knees, Marcus found himself staring down into a pair of piercing green eyes. The otter’s face was set in a playful smirk, her long, fiery red hair slicked back by the sea water.

For a second Marcus was struck dumb, and the otter only giggled. “Oh, I am sorry. I must’ve startled ye. I’m Moire, I work at the marine biology unit.”

“Marcus. My name is Marcus.”

“Ye’re American?” Moire raised an eyebrow. “We don’t get many of your kind ‘round here.”

“Y-Yes, well, you see, I’m on exchange from Yale.”

“Doing what, may I ask?”

“Physics, I do physics.” Marcus was battling against his stutter. The otter’s smile slowly became a frown.

“Ye work at the nuclear power plant?” She nodded over to the two huge concrete chimneys in the distance.

With a pride that was rather inappropriate given her expression, Marcus nodded. “Yes, indeed!” His stutter returned as her frown deepened. “Er, well, that is to say, you see, I-I don’t work there, I’m just here to learn from it.” He held up the notebook. “I’ve been taking radiation readings, actually. I’m just consolidating my notes.”

His passion overcame him as he began to expound upon his ideas, relieved to have a companion who was at last willing to listen. “It’s my hypothesis that the accident last year was worse than they’ve admitted, a-and although the residual radiation is admittedly low in the areas I’ve been searching, I’ve been doing some math of my own and the sequence of events the plant personnel gave just doesn’t add up. Why would a new pipe crack, when there was no evidence of faults in the metal? According to my calculations, the water pressure would not have been enough to cause it to fracture.”

He was relieved to see that Moire had been listening intently, face set as she processed what he was saying. “Well, that’s interesting and no mistake. I’ve been studying the effect o’ the plant on marine plant life.”

“Really?”

“Aye. It’s strange, the kelp around here has been thinning out recently.” She frowned. “Ye say the plant says the accident was cleared up?”

“Yes. Absolutely.” He paused. “At least so far as I’ve been able to confirm so far. But as I said, there’s some inconsistencies in the reports…”

~

Duncan had been listening intently. “Then what happened?”

Marcus sighed. “Well...This was just a few months after I’d started moonlighting as a hero, and I’d remade my costume in Scotland using gear I had purchased in Glasgow. What your mother said about the kelp dying off piqued my interest, so that night I decided to go and do a little snooping at the power plant myself. It turned out I wasn’t the only one.”

~

“Mffff!”
The dark corridors of the power plant echoed with the sound of a fierce struggle. Marcus liked to think he was master of the night, but the raven had not expected the figure who had lashed out from the darkness above him.

Before he could react he had found himself on the floor, two powerful thighs around his neck in a vice like grip. He managed to grasp the figure by the hips and roll himself free, only to dodge a kick aimed at his head.

“Who the-”

He found himself staring at a figure quite unlike what he expected. The female otter was tall, well built and clad in a one-piece wetsuit bearing a stylised G across the chest. Her red hair was tied back in a ponytail, and her eyes were hidden behind a mask. What caught his eyes the most, however, was the long metal spear that she grasped in her right hand. The tip was levelled at his face.

“Who are you?” She growled.

"I could ask you the same thing,"

The raven got to his feet, fists ready.

Her eyes narrowed as she gazed down at him. Marcus frowned, then gulped as he recognised her outfit.

"Gaisgeach? The Spear of Justice?"

"Well spotted." Her voice was hard and mature, but there was an undertone to it that sounded familiar.

"And you?"

"Pryvid."

Her frown deepened. "What are you doing here?"

"I-I…" He quailed for a moment before mastering himself, making his best effort to sound tough without feeling it. "I heard rumours that something was going on here. Like the restless dead, I never sleep."

The otter stopped and stared, and he was outraged, not to say embarrassed, to see a smirk cross her lips. "Interesting battle cry."

"I'm working on it."

Her smile faded as she looked about, her eyes taking in their surroundings. "You should probably try and get out o' here - I work alone."

Something in her tone angered him, and he stood his ground. "Like hell. I don't run from a fight."
The otteress looked him over, and snorted.

“Fine. Just don’t get in my way, and I won’t get in yours.”

~

Duncan was staring at his father, hanging on his every word like a child. “You mean…”
For the first time, a smile crossed his scarred lips.

“You mean ma kicked yer arse?”

The raven shrugged slightly. “Well…I guess so, yeah. If she’d been out to kill me, she could’ve skewered me there and then. Your mother was a real warrior, not like the bozos they have these days.”

He looked over at his son, and, slowly, returned his smile. “I guess she was a lot like you.”
He was agonised to see the happiness fade in his son’s eyes. Despite his size, the otter reminded him of nothing so much as a small child.

“Aye.” He murmured. “...Everyone who knew her says that. Guess I’ll ne’er find out fer myself, aye?”

Without thinking, Marcus reached out, and took his son in his arms. Duncan made no attempt to stop him.

“I’m so sorry, Duncan.”

He whispered. “My son…I’m so, so sorry.”

The only answer he got was a strangled sob, and the feeling of wetness against his neck.

“Sshh…”

The raven sighed. He could feel himself welling up. He remembered her face now, and her voice. The boy even smelt like her.

*My boy*.

“...” He decided it was best to continue, if only to try and keep himself composed. “Well, we found out what the problem was…”

~

“Close it!”

Pryvid strained at the metal, wincing as he did his best to ignore the whining sirens. Gaisgeach was yelling at him from below. He could hear the water roiling, and could see the warning lights nearby flashing. “Close it now!”
She was risking her life down there, holding the water at bay. If they didn’t close the valve, the sea would flood into the reactor room, and the reactor would release everything it had into the surrounding ocean. Had he had the time, he would have been fuming at whoever had designed the thing to use seawater.

As it was, all he could do was strain at the metal, his arms bunching. He couldn’t see her, but he knew that she was holding what must have been several dozen metric tons of water back. The reactor was down below, beneath several tonnes of coolant and concrete shielding. The force of the water would crack it wide open, and they’d both be lethally irradiated.

Pryvid strained, and the ring finally gave way. He heard the metal doors slam shut, and not a moment too soon. He dashed over to the guardrail, and saw Gaisgeach slump over, her coat shining in the light of the warning beacons. At first he thought it was water, but as he got close he realised it was sweat. The otter was heaving, her arms hanging limply by her side.

“That was amazing…” He murmured. She stood up, and glanced over at him. “You weren’t so bad yourself.”

Her mask slipped as she stood, perhaps moistened by perspiration. “Fuck!” She grabbed at it, but he caught sight of her face just long enough to make out her unmistakable features. It was Moire - the otter he had met by the beach that very same morning.

She fumbled with the mask before throwing it to the ground in frustration, the material slapping wetly on the floor. “Dammit!” She grunted, glancing back in his direction. Her eyes, which had been so kind and light hearted on the beach, were now hard and rueful. “Well…No point. I guess you’d have tae be pretty stupid not tae guess it was me, by now.”

“Erm…Yeah…” Pryvid was too embarrassed to admit that he hadn’t. There were quite a few otters around the islands, and he was ashamed to say that he wasn’t the best at telling mammals apart at the best of times.

“Well,” He looked up to see that Morie was already managing to get her mask back on. “You comin’? I could go for some chips.”

~

“So…” Duncan blushed. “When did ye…”

There was a painful silence as Marcus shifted awkwardly. “...Not immediately afterwards, if that’s what you’re thinking. We went out on a couple of missions and…well, it happened. I never realised it at the time, but I was in love. I…”

He raised a finger, as if trying to teach a recalcitrant child.

“I need you to understand something, Duncan. Me and Moire…I don’t think either of us thought it would be possible to have a child. So we neither of us really bothered with protection.”

“Aye,” Duncan smiled again. “Me and…” He went pale, a sudden look of deep anxiety crossing his eyes. Perhaps sensing that it was best not to enquire, Marcus continued with his tale.

“We dated for about a year in our civilian identities.”
“A year? How come I ne’er heard about it fraae my granny, or grandpa?”
“Duncan, I only met your grandparents once in the whole time I knew her. I don’t even think she told them who I really was. She was strange, like that - I think she was trying to protect them, more than anything else.”

“From what?”

“I still don’t know. But it was a dangerous time to be a cape, Duncan, much more so than it is now. There was no safety net, no rescue teams, and no legal protection. Back then, we had to be much, much more careful about who to trust.”

“Yet she trusted you enough tae go tae America?”

A grin tugged at the raven’s beak, his hand flicking up to scratch the soft feathers at his chin. “Trusted me? Son, she quite literally sprinted onto the plane at Glasgow Airport. One time I took her to New Haven for a couple of weeks to see Yale. After that, we went to West Virginia.” His black lids closed shut as he withdrew into his memories. “That last trip was the happiest time I’d had since I was a child. We went camping in the Blue Mountains. She loved camping, you know - it was one big thing we had in common.”

Duncan had gone silent again. “...So why didn’t you stay?”

Marcus’s eyes narrowed, and for a moment the raven glanced away. “We argued. It was about that time that the Bureau was being set up. I wanted us both to sign up.”

He rubbed a hand over the bridge of his beak.

“I guess I was stupid - I had this silly fantasy of us marrying and settling down as the superhero couple in somewhere like Maine, ot. Your mother…That didn’t suit her. She was too much of a free woman, and she hated the idea of being away from her parents. More than that, I think she was terrified of the idea of handing over her identity to people she didn’t know. At the time I thought she was being paranoid. But I wish...I so, *so* wish that I had listened to her.”

DUncan found himself looking into those bright blue eyes - eyes that mirrored his own in every aspect.

“I know you’re angry at me, Duncan. But if it helps, I’ve been angry at myself for the last eighteen years. If I had been on that ship, she’d still be alive today. We were a good team.”

If Marcus had been expecting a harsh retort, he was to be surprised. Instead, Duncan simply nodded. There was no satisfaction in it - merely an acknowledgement. There was another brief silence, before he asked the question that had been nagging at him since the start.

“Why didn’t she tell you about me?”

Marcus suddenly looked very tired, and it occurred to Duncan that he had probably been asking himself that same question. “That’s something I honestly can’t say for sure. My best guess is that she was too stubborn. She had a proud streak, your mother did - she hated being a burden on others. And, as I’ve already pointed out, she had a paranoid side to her.”

Duncan sat, listening. Disappointment, clear and cruel, hung on his scarred features.

“I was..I was hoping you could tell me more.”

“I’m sorry, Duncan. I truly, truly am. I know what happened to you, and I know that it's my fault. But that doesn’t mean I can’t at least try and make amends for it, even if I don’t succeed. Let me help you, Duncan.”

“...Can I call you da?”

Two wiry, avian arms wrapped themselves around his head. “You can call me that, if I can call you son.”

“...I can live with that.”

~

Vera and Sean looked up as the pair emerged from the conference room, talking quietly. The velociraptor smiled at the rabbit. “Well, t’ey didn’t need an intervention. We did good today, si?”

He chuckled. “We set it up. *They* did good.”

Duncan waved them over. “Vera! C’mon an’ meet my da.”

Vera flashed Sean a smile, before jogging over to where her lover stood. Somehow, he was left with the feeling that, whatever happened, things would soon be picking up.

End