

Tales of Zenathia: Midnight Mirages (Part Two)

Nikita's blue and brown eyes swam over the glimmering neon lights of the Mid-base. Gabi's lev-car rumbled with menacing power. Like Tochi's ride, but unhinged, Nikita observed. She was in the backseat. Again. She flicked eyes forward. A silence hung in the air between Gabi and the feline. The dogwoman in the back would be blind to miss it. Her gaze lingered on Tochi's crossed arms, the feline's head turned toward the window. Nikita wanted to break into the silence. To reach out and comfort her. But the words didn't come. Taking a deep breath, Nikita leaned back in her seat.

"So... how do you and Huet know each other, Gabi," Nikita asked over the thrumming bars dropping on the mouse woman's speakers. Nikita's eyes peaked the way her slender fingers tightened on the steering wheel.

"We go way back," the murine woman deflected. Tochi scoffed and Niktia could practically envision those heart shaped hues rotating in the catwoman's head.

"That's an understatement," she said. Nikita's ear bobbed, her eyes switching between the cat and the mouse.

"So like..." Nikita persisted with her inquiry. Gabi and Tochi clearly had some history, but it was Huet who brought the mouse in. It spoke to deeper layers within this family Nikita had found.

"Like... six years now," The mousewoman relented before stabbing a finger at Tochi's direction, "Before this one made him all soft."

"Pfft," Tochi deflected the accusation, "He was already soft when I met him."

The two clearly knew Huet's nature deeper than the Huskywoman. She looked back at the mousewoman. There was a faded, shaved patch at the base of her gray furred skull. Just beneath her black curls, Nikita could see the black and white checkered barcode tattooed behind Gabi's ear.

"Was that when you were in the military," Nikita blurted out, before realizing the words escaping her mouth. Her brown and blue eyes shifted back out the window as Gabi rubbed the tattoo.

"Yeah, puppers," Gabi murmured. Her gloved hand returned to the wheel and she flicked her gaze up to the rearview, watching the dogwoman in the back.

"Good eye," She said to Nikita. The dogwoman's tail wagged. Not from Gabi's comment but the smirk being beamed toward her by Tochi. Nikita soaked up the subtle admiration. Her cheeks warmed beneath her monochromatic fur.

“So this job. What is it, exactly,” Nikita asked. She knew it was glossed over at the apartment, but her mind had been preoccupied. Those same thoughts threatened the peripheries of her focus and she forced her eyes on Gabi.

“Prep,” The mouse replied, and she gestured toward Tochi, “Jeez, she’s a little short on the drip, isn’t she?”

“Go easy, bitch,” Tochi hissed and it took Nikita a moment to process what the strange speaking mouse had said. She’d pulled a compliment and an insult in less than a minute.

“I just want to be prepared,” Nikita huffed with indignance. She could feel her tail stiffen against the back of the seat. The dog wanted to reach for her cat again. Instead, she reached for her Nicovape. The warm taste of cherries would work down her nerves for the rest of the drive. She didn’t recognize where they were and she knew better than to ask. Stepping from the LevCar last, Nikita caught a knowing exchange of looks between cat and mouse before the former departed.

“Hey,” Nikita started to speak, but Tochi didn’t stop. A shiver ran down dogwoman’s spine. They were on the job. Instinctively, the Zenathian husky rushed in behind Gabi.

“Where is she going,” Nikita whispered. Peering over her shoulder, she looked for Tochi but the cat had disappeared into the shadows. Her hands tightened into fists that she drove into her pockets. Gabi paused, staring into Nikita’s eyes with her scarlet irises. Up close, Nikita could see the faint glow of cross shaped reticles projected upon Gabi’s eyes.

Sharpshooter mods... Nikita thought. Gabi blinked the crosses away and scoffed.

“Why are you whispering,” The murine woman giggled and rolled her canvas jacketed shoulder for the dog to follow. “She’s got her bit, we got ours. We all go home happy, got it greens?”

They turned into a darkened alley and before Nikita knew it, she was descending a ladder after the woman. Pipes dripped above the faint rumble of Lev-Car traffic on the skyways above.

“Greens... come on, I’ve done a job,” Nikita retorted, dropping down rung by rung. Her tail bobbed with each step she placed with booted foot. She was grateful for the upgrade in footwear Tochi had provided.

Almost like she knew... The husky thought. Gabi’s laugh tugged Nikita from her musings.

“A job,” Gabi emphasized with sarcasm. She hit the bottom and Nikita joined her. For a moment, they caught their breath and gathered their bearings. Nikita rolled her shoulders, looking over the mouse.

"So you've done lots of jobs for Huet," Nikita asked between the pants of her breath. The mouse shook her head.

"I don't do jobs for Huet. I do jobs with Huet," Gabi answered as a matter of fact. Her hands adjusted the fingerless gloves. "It's a small but important distinction, ya'know?"

"I get it," Nikita answered, hardening her brow slightly. She followed Gabi as the mouse woman set off again. It was cool this low down. Nikita wasn't sure she'd ever seen Ped-ways so narrow and confined. The smell of sitting water hung heavy.

"What is this place," Nikita asked, falling in behind the shorter woman. The woman's murine tail whipped back. Nikita stopped as Gabi turned suddenly. Those cross shaped laced red eyes bore into the husky's brown and blues.

"Y'know, you ask a lot of questions, greens. You some kind of correspondent," Gabi asked with a mix of sarcasm and suspicion. Nikita paused and swallowed her tongue for a moment. She shook her head.

"No, I'm just curious is all," the husky answered, her hands raised innocently. It earned Nikita a huff from the mouse before the murine gestured to the dimly lit door they'd paused beside.

"Well why don't you be curious about this door and get it the fuck open," Gabi stepped back and crossed her arms and Nikita stepped forward. She hadn't noticed the door before. The blue glow of her holo-visor peeled across her face in a narrow band of light. Nikita worked quickly. Lines of code darted across her field of vision. Almost at once, she was able to gain access to the building network. A lot of things in the lower base simply weren't hardened.

It helped to be Spire trained. Best of the best, Nikita thought with a smirk. Her eyes flicked over the information she could glean immediately from her network access and her brow flexed.

"Sanitation," She questioned before peering back to Gabi through the lens of data. The mouse woman nodded.

"Yeah. We need Reclamation uniforms. Reclamations is Section 11. But Sanitation is Section 4. Way less security," The gray and white furred woman answered. Nikita's brain ticked onto the correlation almost immediately.

"Oh... and because they wash all the uniforms here and it's easier to crack," the dogwoman answered, her voice trailing off. Gabi nodded and gave the husky a slap on her shoulder.

"See, not such a slow drip, after all," A smirk tugged at the mouse's murine muzzle. The door snapped open behind Nikita and before she could react, Gabi was inside. Nikita swallowed her slight trepidation and followed. Her mind lingered to Tochi. She hoped the feline was okay.