

## Tales of Zenathia #9: Funeral Fury

“Well the ceremony was nice, even if they fucked up the reception catering,” Tochi commented, slouching back in the cold metal seat. Her stomach growled. Her heart shaped pupils looked over to Huet, the shades of purple in her eyes reflecting the light of the candle that danced upon the white clothed table.

Huet’s gaze was toward the main table, where his uncle and leader of the Anulli mafia talked with his aunt. Huet lifted the thin flute of champagne and downed it. The bunny man’s ears drooped as his brow furrowed. “I thought I was his favorite, Toch. Look how far we are from the table... you should have worn something nicer.”

Tochi scoffed, gesturing to her black minidress and gray leggings, her tennis shoes tapping together. “Hey, I did the best I could with what I got. It’s not like I can just pop into any shop. Not with the Syndicate after me.”

“Naw, I guess not... But like, couldn’t your squeeze just... mystify you some slick slacks or something,” Huet mumbled and raised his hand toward a server circling with a platter of champagne.

Tochi shook her head as her bunny friend relieved the rodent server of the entire plate of alcohol.

“No... No, she doesn’t know how it work. I don’t know... I don’t know if I even believe that part, Hue. Like, maybe all that time living under her dad messed with her memories or something.” Tochi’s fingers reached out and fiddled with the fine metal fork.

*Even the steel is better up here... fucking wild...* Tochi shook her head and looked back to the inebriating bunny man. Her triangular ears bobbed as her brow arched.

“Like... some of the shit Nikita was telling me he did. I was able to verify a lot through that data we stole. If I find this man...” Tochi fell silent as the corners of her muzzle pitched low.

“Yeah, I don’t know, Toch. I’ve seen some weird shit in my time. People breaking the limit. Yeah, MilGov says its chems, and a lot of it is...,” Huet threw back a fourth glass and stared into the hollowness, “Shit... most of it is chems. But I don’t know...”

Pausing, his brow arched in confusion, a memory replaying within his mind. “Like... a year ago. Right after our second, Rory... I was slinging double time trying to keep us all fed. Bonnie wasn’t working, you know,” Huet took a wavering breath and licked chocolate lips.

“There was this girl.. I don’t know, like your age, maybe a little younger. Anyways, she always came through, every week. Real bookish type. Shy. Quiet. Always asked for stuff that would make her sleep without dreaming. Wild, cause the dreams are the best part of chems. Anyways,

one day, she come through early. She's agitated, nervous. I could see she wasn't sleeping. She said the usual shit wasn't working no more. I give her the top tier shit. We say our goodbyes and she hops out the van. She takes five, six steps out into the street, and bam..."

Huet's balled hands splayed open before folding onto the table.

"Some skidball, high off his kite, plows right into her."

"Holy shit..." Tochi's muzzle pulled into a frown.

"Yeah.. that's what I said too. I mean, I jumped out the van, ran out to the street. Like... I knew it was pointless... I mean at those speeds..." Huet's eyes closed and his brow furrowed again, tall slender ears drooping slightly.

"It must have been gruesome," the feline commented, eyes flicking down to the cutlery as her stomach lurched.

"That's the thing, Toch. It wasn't. Like... like it hadn't happened. She was there. That car came through, and then she was gone. Not dragged. Not roadkilled. Gone. Not a trace. Skidball lost control and crashed not even a block up the road. Swears she just... poofed... right out from in front of his hood. Like nothing. And I never saw her again."

Tochi swallowed and leaned onto the table, her hands clasped tight beneath her chin. "The uh... the chems you were dishing her. Were they pills?"

"Yeah... yeah, little red and white ones."

"Fuck.. dude, Nikita takes little red and white ones every day," Tochi groaned and buried her face in her hands. *Bitch is the defense minister's daughter AND she got superpowers?! Why you do this to yourself, Yume?*

"Then maybe she do do the poof. Like that bunny girl I knew," Huet shrugged in and leaned close to his sakura haired friend, "And maybe you coulda worn something nicer, ho."

"Ass," Tochi hissed softly, "I mean, I don't see what the big deal is, anyways."

"The big deal... Toch look," He flicked his head toward the main table where his crimelord uncle sat, "He's got Bologna Tony up there. Fucking B-T... what an insult, man."

Tochi's attention wasn't following her friend though. Purple eyes were locked toward the entrance. Three individuals had just entered the reception hall and were scanning the crowd. *A crow, a toad and a...*

“Oh fuck...,” Tochi murmured and her back straightened. Body stiff, she drove her elbow into Huet’s side, her gaze turned downward, “Growlers, dude.”

Huet snickered, turning his head. “No way there are Grow-”

The words seized in his throat as he locked on the two suits led by a very angry looking husky woman. He looked back at his uncle and their eyes met. His uncle looked away in disappointment. Huet’s brow furrowed and he stared down at the drinks. His fist trembled.

Ari’s locked onto the pink-haired feline and bunny man. Her heart was racing. Here they were, on a sky borough owned and operated by the illustrious Antulli crime family. The danger lurked all around them. She smirked and leaned toward Barry and Gristle.

“That’s our duo?” the toad commented. With a sigh, Barry reached into his pocket and checked the time on his PDA. “Remember... only them. We touch anyone else here, and the deal with the Antulli is off. I’m too old to be doing sky battles with mafia hardliners.”

“What’s the play,” Gristle asked, his feathers bristling.

“I do the talking. We get them out and to my car. I’ll process them from there,” Ari answered, licking her lips with anticipation. Verdant eyes looked around, eying the guards that lined the reception hall. “Stay close.”

All eyes were on them, quietly watching. Ari’s eyes remained on their prize, intently focused on the feline woman.

“How you wanna do this, Toch...” Huet’s arms crossed, with one resting atop the other. The other had slipped beneath his jacket, clutching the curved handle of his pistol. His ear swiveled toward the feline and he looked over at her. “What the fuck are you doing?”

Tochi’s silverware clattered loudly on the porcelain plate she’d wedged into her satchel. She shrugged, and reached over, grabbing his silverware too. “Just roll with it... no killing.”

“No killing, bitch are you-” Huet cleared his throat as the Growlers drew close. He released his pistol, and dropped his hands beneath the table. Gripping his chair, he tilted his head. Amber eyes observed his feline friend doing the same. *Fuck this takes me back...*

“Well, I figured I’d find the bunny here. But what a treat to see you here too,” Ari’s pitched voiced oozed malevolence. The husky woman looked down into purple pupils shaped like hearts. There was no fear in the eyes of the feline. Ari smirked. *We’ll change that...*

“That was a nice trick with the acid. Where is Nikita?”

Tochi swallowed, her gaze breaking away from the husky woman to stare at the placemat in front of her. *Fuck...*

Her body lurched forward and her hand extracted the chair from beneath her. In a fluid movement, the cream colored cat hurled her chair at the husky woman. It sailed over and collided with the crow, knocking the man aside. Huet's chair came next and the dog woman sidestepped it, letting out a snarl. The toad caught it, but the force sent him toppling onto his feathery compatriot.

"GO," Tochi yelled, fists balled as the green-eyed husky lept onto the table. With a bemused smirk, the feline's foot kicked the edge of the raised platform. With a crack, the legs gave way and the table, glasses, and Ari tumbled down. Tochi was already running to join Huet, giving a peak behind to see the chaos they had caused. Hateful green eyes stared back at her. *Damn she mad...*

"Yo... let me pass, Caesar," Huet barked at the guard by the emergency exit. The guard growled back and pressed against the taller bunny man. A throaty cough echoed out and both bunnies looked up. The portly bunny leader of the Antulli mafia waved his hand, as though to dismiss the two troublemakers from the reception hall. The guard grumbled and stepped away from the exit.

"Come on," Tochi murmured. Watching the Growler's starting to regain their bearings, the feline pushed past her bunny friend.

Huet pointed toward his uncle. "Ay, I knew I was your favorite, Uncle Rod. I fuck'n knew it."

He turned and stepped out into the alley, his long ears twisting toward the scuffled footfall of his ascending friend. Shaking his head, he took off in a sprint, his amber eyes turned up toward Tochi, running along the rooftop. "I'll meet you at the van, Toch. Don't be long!"

Ari huffed as she burst through the door into the pink Zenathian 'sun' light. Her green eyes caught a glimpse of the rabbit at the end of the alley and the cat on the roof. Her jaw clenched as they turned separate ways. The door opened behind her, Gristle having recovered faster than his toad companion.

"Take the rabbit, he went left. I'm on the cat," Ari barked, her body springing down the road. Her boots plodded loudly but could not drown out the heavy beat of her heart. She rounded the corner and her eyes locked on the pink haired cat sliding down a street light like a fire pole. Ari closed as the cat made for the pedestrian bridge that crossed the wide road. A car honked as it passed and their eyes met. Frustration ripped a growl from Ari's throat as the feline bolted again. She clambered after the cat, huffing her way up the steps.

Reaching the top, green eyes scanned through the shifting crowds. She pushed through panting. Her tail lowered as she realized she'd lost the feline for good this time. "Fuck, she's fast..."

"Parking Garage, Bakers and 23rd," Gristle squawked. His voice echoed from the PDA in her jacket. Ari's tail perked, a slight wag of relief batting the air. She pulled out the glass tablet and held it up to her muzzle.

"Nice work, I'll meet up. Don't let him leave this borough," She ordered. Giving the area a final scan, Ari turned to retrace her steps.

Above on a ledge, Tochi's eyes narrowed. Her long ears had caught the radio transmission, as garbled as it was, and she knew she had to meet up with Huet. Scaling the wall, she took off quickly across the rooftop.

Huet pulled in breaths in deep pants, his chocolate fur dampened by sweat. Amber eyes flicked to the floor numbers as he rounded the stairwell corner. His loafers clacked noisily on the concrete steps. "Fuck... why'd we park so far up. Fucking Tochi..."

On the fifth floor, he gripped the door handle and shoved open the metal slab. His eyes locked on the boxy van parked in the corner. *Amadeux.. You ugly bitch.*

He sprinted toward his affectionately hated ride. His chest ached beneath the fine white shirt. He clutched his collar and popped the button. Loosening his tie, the bunny man gasped for air and slowed his gait. A shadow bounced from behind the pillar to his left. *Fuck...*

"That's far enough, kid," Barry's throat grumbled as he straightened up. His white dress shirt clung to his sweat soaked amphibian skin. Barrel chest swelled and contracted with deep breaths. Webbed digits gripped the cuffs on his belt. "Let go quietly and maybe we can spare you some pain in the future."

"Fuck you, MilGov toadie," Huet snarled, his bunny ears folded back. His fingers wrapped around the grip of his pistol; his hand extracting it with fluid practice. As he raised the weapon, the frogman's mouth opened. Pink appendage snapped out toward the bunny man. Huet lifted his other arm. The wet, sticky tongue of the frog latched onto his clothing.

Barry retracted his appendage, his webbed feet planted, his weight sunk into his stance. With a wet squelch, he yanked the bunny off those nimble feet of his. The government toad's tongue disappeared back into his wide mouth with a wet slurp. His hand rubbed his rotund form. *Guess there's some advantages to all this weight gain in my golden years.*

His brown eyes flicked down toward the bunny man, motionless on the ground. The toad approached slowly. Barry grumbled and lifted his wrist communicator to his wide lips. "I got him... he's down."

His hand dropped and he pulled his cuffs from his belt. "Come on kid, you didn't fall that hard."

Barry sighed and leaned down, only to have his knee kicked. The frogman let out a wail of pain as the tired joint popped beneath the powerful blow from the bunny. He toppled over onto his back, the wind knocked from his chest. A shadow loomed above him.

Huet panted, straddling the fat toad. He had a family. Kids. And to almost lose them in that moment. His hand lifted the pistol, pushing it to the frog man's head. Amber hues glared coldly at the government agent. *Fucking tool for the machine...*

*No Killing...* Tochi's words from earlier rang in his head. Huet's jaw clenched and his heart was torn. His finger trembled on the trigger. He gazed into the fear laden brown eyes of the frog and shouted.

"FUCK," His hand flipped the pistol so the grip faced outward and he raised his hand to clobber the frog instead.

A crushing pressure jolted his body. Then the pain came. It resonated through his form, jolting bone and tissue. Huet's head turned as he felt the sharpness of talons driven into his ribs. His amber eyes looked into the primal coldness of avian eyes. *Fucking crow...*

Gristle flapped his wings and separated from the bunny with his talons, letting his inertia carry the criminal into a tumble across the rough pavement. A few more flaps of jet black feathers brought him to an easy landing. His chest swelled with each pant. The bunny man seemed down for good. He turned to face Barry who was struggling to rise. The crow sighed and offered the clawed hand at the end of his wing to the toad.

"You're getting too old for this job," the Crow said. Barry shook his head in response and leaned his sore body on the back of the dusty old van.

"I'm supposed to be pushing papers. Not fighting kung fu rabbits with mafia ties." Barry panted and produced a handkerchief to wipe his sweat laden brow. The crow shrugged and looked around the garage.

"Where's the mutt... Ari?"

Purple hues locked onto the crow. Tochi's hands tightened around her bag. She'd made good time, evidenced by her arrival prior to the dogwoman. Her heart beat rapidly in her chest, but

each deep breath the cream coated feline took slowed the racing muscle. Her heart shaped purple eyes looked from the crow to the toad. They were getting Huet up. She needed to act.

Gripping her satchel she snuck along the parked cars. She stayed low, her long tail twitching and swaying. Her ears tracked their voices and movements. Her head lifting slowly, Tochi peered from the shadows. She took a deep breath and sprang up. Her feet clapped on the metal exterior of the parked hover car she had hidden behind as she ran over the top. The crow turned to the sound of her foot fall and their eyes met. It was too late. The satchel crashed down on his feathered shoulder and the plates inside her bag shattered from the impact. The crow collapsed as Tochi landed. She pivoted her hip and drew her arms close to her body.

The bag swung low and fast and struck the toad in the stomach. The amphibian groaned and collapsed across his feathery companion. Panting softly, her hand clutched Huet's shoulder, helping pull the bunny man up. Her eyes flicking down, her brow furrowed as she took in the crimson puddle growing across his dirt stained formal attire.

"Damn, Hue..."

"I'm fine.. Tochi, Help me to the van..," Huet's ears folded back as his face scrunched up in pain. He slipped his arm over Tochi's shoulder, his side burning from the wound left by the crow. The drivers door opened with a croak and he dropped in. He reached over the center console and lifted his ChemBong. With a few buttons pressed, he took a deep hit.

"Really dude.. Now," Tochi scoffed and shook her head. Purple heart shaped pupils saw Huet's gun, knocked across the garage. "Shit man... you can't be leaving your blam. I'll get it."

Stepping around the corner of the van, her eyes were instinctively drawn to the stairwell. Tochi's eyes widened as they met green eyes of hatred. "HUET, GET OUT OF HERE!"

Ari's eyes locked on the catwoman, and she snarled. Her hands tightened around her Photasm pistol. The trigger clicked beneath her finger. She stepped forward and shifted her eyes back to the van. She could deal with the feline once she'd removed their vector of escape. Her hand steadied the trembling energy weapon clasped between her fingers.

Krak-shhk

The pistol in her hand shattered into a dozen sparkling pieces as it was torn from her hands. Ari took a step back, confusion playing across her face for a moment. She looked from the fleeing van toward the catwoman. She held a crude, outdated firearm.

Old... but more than enough to put the Growler tracker down if she wasn't careful. Taking a deep breath, Ari wiped the speckled dust from her hands, the remnants of her prized energy pistol laying discarded beside her. Her tail bobbed, her fluffy ears focused on the cat.

“Well... it’s about time. I must say... I was initially surprised you were who she was with. I mean really... you’re not her type,” Ari circled closer, gauging the distance between herself and the feline. Her heart pounded, violent eyes watching as the catwoman matched her motions and maintained distance. Ari’s fingers clenched into fists. “Where is Nikita?”

“I don’t know who the fuck that is, lady. Back off before I put a bullet in you,” Tochi spat back, her heart shaped eyes peering between the slot and post sights of the pistol in her hand. Her steps were measured. She folded her ears back in warning. She watched as the woman drew closer with each step and her jaw clenched. She could see the husky woman wasn’t going to back down.

*No more killing... promise me....* Nikita’s words echoed in Tochi’s mind. Her stomach tightened as the pistol in her hand wavered.

Ari could see it; the hesitation. Her mind pondered the feline before her. Was it fear to take a life? No... the swiftness with which the feline had dispatched Ari’s companions told a different story. The cat could kill. Had killed. So why stop now. She scoffed, stepping closer.

“You’re either really honorable... or really stupid. Either way, you’re going to tell me what I want to know.”

“Fuck you... you don’t know me. I said back off.” Tochi’s teeth bared. A soft hiss pulled at the back of her throat.

Ari’s green eyes narrowed. There was only one way this was going to go her way. A twisted grin pulled at the edges of monochromatic muzzle. She shed the long jacket and wrapped her padded palm around the hand of her electric prod.

“Oh... I have a feeling I’m going to know you very well.”

Tochi’s tail batted the air with more force, her fur on end. Her hiss grew louder and she slid the pistol into the hem of her tights. This woman was relentless. *I have to settle this...*

Purple heart shaped hues stared at the menacing weapon as Ari lifted it. The feline was at a disadvantage but took her stance. She sank her weight into her legs, bending her knees. One foot skirted the ground in a sweeping arch. She planted one foot forward and her eyes watched the woman. Clawed hands assumed their position with elbows tucked close to defend her ribs. Her heart beat fast in her slender chest. Tochi licked her lips in anticipation.

Ari scoffed, and her free hand produced her PDA. She watched the cream brow of the cat furrow in confusion and her smirk widened. Her voice, dripping with malice, echoed on the cement walls.



“How about we set the mood,” She sneered and her finger slid on the PDA. The lights in the garage lowered until naught but the faint pink light of the sky offered solace from the dark.

Tochi’s eyes struggled to adjust and as they did, she could make out the shimmering green eyes of the husky. The dogwoman was circling in swiftly.

“Nice trick,” Tochi adjusted her stance, shifting her weight on her back foot. She turned, hands raised to counter the attack. “But you’ll nee-”

A brilliant light blinded the catwoman and stunned the words upon her tongue. Her body froze in the splitting luminescence. A crackle of electricity bent her ear. She couldn’t see the attack until it was too close to avoid.

Tochi screamed, her voice distant in her ears. No, the pain was what took her focus. Her shoulder jolted back, the feline stumbling and shuddering. A shaky breath escaped her clenched teeth. In that moment of contact, every muscle in her side had burned. She felt an exhaustion washing over her. And yet the light the husky bore upon her shrouded the assault.

Feet scuffling drew the feline’s attention toward the light. She jumped backwards. Her movements were panicked. Random. Ari grinned inwardly, her PDA glowing bright upon the magnetic clip upon her jacket. Depressing the trigger on the handle, electricity arced once more. She thrusted inward and found purchase across the cat’s abdomen. Another wail of pain rang like a symphony to the dogwoman’s ears. She stepped back, giving the cat a moment to consider her mistake. The light went out, shrouding the two in darkness. Her voice rang out.

“Care to answer my questions, Cat?”

Tochi breaths pulled painfully and she clutched her abdomen. Her stomach lurched as waves of nausea fought her resolve. *I can’t get close... I can’t even see.*

Her ears twitched and purple eyes watered. Closing them, she saw the worn face of her mentor from long ago. He held up a blindfold as they stood upon his rooftop dojo. His voice rang clear, even after so many years.

“Your eyes are sharp like a sword. But they can be dulled with time or technology. You must hone your other senses, Yumeto, or like a soldier with a dull sword, you will be bested and slain. Will you fight MilGov from the grave? Will you avenge your father as a radiation blasted corpse beyond the Wall?”

“No,” Tochi growled, her eyes squeezing tight. The gravel of her voice echoed on the walls, and her ears bobbed the shifting sound waves. She drew in a wavering breath and steadied her heart. *I must find my center.*

Ari's muzzle slumped into a frown. A bitter foam clung to her tongue. Swallowing, she ignited the light within her PDA, directing the beam toward the feline's face. She furrowed her brow. *Her eyes are closed... whatever...*

Sprinting forward, her electric prod sparked to life. She thrust it toward the feline's chest. Her grin widened as the crackling of electricity cascaded off the walls of the garage.

Tochi's brow furrowed and her head tilted as long whiskers twitched. In the sea of sound, the cream color coated cat could pick out the footfall. The vibrations in the air tugged at the sensitive strands lining her snout. Her body shifted as her nostrils flared. Scents of frustration, arrogance and violence filled her sinuses. Her face hardened.

The huskywoman's scent was clear. Tochi's held the breath in. She swayed to the right and swept her left arm across the space before her. The cat's right arm coiled back, her hand rotating as fingers balled into a fist. The coolness of metal glided across her sweeping forearm. Tochi guided the electric prod to the left. Her torso twisted into the motion. The tension mounted in her right arm before springing her fist forward with every fiber of muscle she had. A smirk tugged at the feline's short muzzle. *I wish I could see her face...*

The world seemed so slow to the huskywoman. Her body had carried her strike forward, but the feline had parried. Parried. With her eyes closed. That bitter foam had taken over her mouth. Green eyes widened with shock before the flash of a beige fist met her face. Pain resonated across her skull. Her head had stopped, but she'd been sprinting when the cat parried. Her legs folded beneath her and prodstick and PDA went flying. Sprawled out on her back, there was a deep darkness.

Ari's vision blurred. She tried to blink away the stars, panting for air. Did she black out for a moment. Her brain couldn't tell. The left side of her face was awash in agony. Trying to scramble to her feet, the Growler agent felt the heat of a predatory body press upon her back.

Tochi's arm slipped beneath huskywoman's chin. Her legs looped around the woman's hips and her ankles locked. Wrenching, back her arm tightened around the monochromatic agent's neck. Purple hues squeezed shut, her breath escaping in a long hiss. She counted away the seconds as she felt the dogwoman's struggles grow weaker before her body went limp. *A few more seconds and you won't be anyone's problem anymore...*

"No Killing... promise me..." Nikita's voice rang in the back of Tochi's head. Her beloved husky's face played across the back of her eyelids. Purple heart shaped pupils greeted the darkness and she released her grip on the dogwoman.

She rolled away from the unconscious furry form of the Growler. Deep breath pulled at her chest. Furry shoulders rolled as a tumultuous tempest of emotion flooded her form. Tail batting the air, Tochi rose and looked over the still dark garage.

Closing her left eye, she accessed her PDA remotely. Her implant rang in her ear. She limped toward the stairwell. The line connected as she began ascending. Each step was agony.

“Yo, you good?” Huet’s voice filled the feline’s ears and she felt a sense of relief. *We did it...*

Pink light graced the feline’s sakura hair as she stepped out onto the roof of the garage. She took a few steps before dropping down into an empty space. “Yeah... a little fucked. Come get me off the roof. I need something for the pain.”

Her head swam in a sea of agony and adrenaline. Laying down onto the warm cement, the feline could feel the faint shudders of the sky boroughs massive LevEngine. A chill shivered through her furred form. Her right hand ached and looking down, she could see her knuckles starting to swell.

“I gotchu, Toch. Two minutes.”

Tochi nodded and her ear bent to the distant whirl of Huet’s van. Relief flooded her fatigued furred form. Darkness grew at the edges of her vision as exhaustion replaced the natural chemicals of combat. Eyes sliding shut, the feline’s mind drifted into faint thoughts.

“Fuck, what happened, Huet,” Nikita’s hands clasped around her muzzle as she took in Tochi’s unconscious form sprawled out in the back of the worn van. Her calm afternoon of gaming had been split by Huet’s arrival into the hideout she shared with Tochi.

“We got jumped at the funeral,” Huet sneered as he reached into the van and lifted his feline friend, “fucking growlers.”

Nikita’s heart skipped when Huet mentioned MilGov’s special police agency. She swallowed and followed the bunny man to the bedroom. Her voice stammered, “I.. I guess they really want that data back.”

“Fuck the data, bitch,” Huet sneered, easing the unconscious Tochi upon the bed. His amber eyes glared at Nikita as he straightened up. “They was looking for your ass.”

Nikita’s face froze, her tail stiff behind her back.

“Tochi told me about your daddy. I don’t know if you’re a limit pusher, or if the only thing your pushing is a big pile of shit, but they think it’s real. And today it got real out there.” His finger pointed upward toward the city’s spire. The central hub of the city-nation and the symbol of MilGov’s authoritarian power.

“And Tochi caught it because of your shit. So, Nikki, you need to be real with me. Right now.” Huet stepped around the bed and squared up in front of the shorter husky woman. He crossed his arms, bunny ears alert atop his chocolate furred skull. His eyes bore down on her as a bitter expression took to his face.

“You do the poof? You got powers or some shit? Or are you fucking over my family because you don’t got anyone else in this shit heap?”

His finger flung back toward Tochi, who murmured under the raising voices, “Because that’s who that is in that bed, right now. My family. And no one fucks with my family.”

Nikita took a step back, her muzzle trembling. “I... I don’t know. I’m... I’m sorry.”

Turning, she felt the sting of tears in her blue and brown eyes. She circled the couch and dropped down, burying her face in her hands. Her mind raced between her furry digits.

“I don’t know why he’s after me. After so long. Tochi was so careful. And my ID has been scrubbed for years. I... I didn’t mean for this to happen.”

Huet’s grumbled beneath his breath as he closed the door to the bedroom. His hands rested on his hip and long ears bent to the subtle sobs that fell from the husky woman. Sighing softly he stepped over to the kitchen area and flung open the fridge. Extracting a couple beers he maneuvered to the beanbag chair and dropped down with a groan. Padded hand clutched his side while he passed a beer to the husky.

“Shit happens, I guess,” Huet murmured before settling in. On the corner of the coffee table he sheered the cap of the bottle away and tugged back the acrid fluid. A fuzzy pleasure filled his chest.

“Still, you got some heavy bag you need to deal with sooner than later. Whatever way it goes, you gotta deal with it, Nikita. Or the people you care about will just keep getting hurt.”

“I know,” Nikita said, holding the beer with little interest in consuming it. Her eyes glazed over her reflection on the glass bottle. The distorted face mocked her heavy-heartedness and she leaned back into the couch with a weighted sigh.

“It aint so bad, Nikki. But you gotta learn the world doesn’t always agree with your ideals. You can’t always make everyone happy. And sometimes... you never get what you really want. It’s a different game down here.”

"I know," Nikita retorted and her ears lowered, "I'm not dumb. I just... I didn't expect any of this. Tochi... the jobs we were doing... the data. It's like this... this ball of chaos and the more I try to contain it..."

"The more it become uncontainable. Yeah, that's how chaos be," Huet interrupted. He threw back the beer and guzzled down the half the bottle before letting out a satisfied belch. Wiping his fuzzy lips he shrugged.

"Maybe don't fight it... don't try to lock it up. Be a part of it. I mean... you're more in than out at this point."

"I... I can't," Nikita stammered softly and tucked her lip behind her canines. Her eyes slid shut and the memory of the burning highrise replayed in her mind. Even distant as the memory was now, it still produced shivers that rocked her core. Her stomach tightened and she swallowed.

Huet nodded knowingly and sighed, "You're going to find out, Nikita... you're going to find out that sometimes you don't got a choice. It's you or them. Or them or someone you love. What are you going to do then? Would you let Tochi die to spare the life of the person trying to kill her? Would you put your life out there to save her?"

Nikita was silent, her head hung low. A guilt tugged her soul low and she slumped back into the couch. Huet nodded again and shook his head.

"Then maybe you ain't as crazy for her as I thought." With a shrug he pulled his shirt over his face, "wake me up in a few hours. I'm so fucking high right now."