

Sub-Rosa Six

By Xaqtly

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-= 60 seconds to green light. =-

Jack Saunders heard the voice in his mind and was amazed by it yet again. He had been with this group for 6 months and every time Relay told him something telepathically, he had to smile. It was just so COOL. This entire project was the stuff of his dreams, the realization of every boyhood super hero fantasy come true. He remembered the second day of training when he first met Relay and she greeted him without using her voice. He couldn't stop talking about how cool it was to anybody who would listen, which ended up not being very many furs. "Relax," she had told him mentally. "Plenty of time to get used to it." That had just sent him into further spasms of excitement, drawing a number of stares from his far more jaded teammates. Relay had rolled her eyes and left the room, smiling to herself.

Jack chuckled to himself at the memory and began to concentrate on the job at hand. He instinctively ran a quick arsenal check, paws moving quickly to each of his weapons and devices, noting that they were all present and accounted for. He tested his guidewire release to make sure it would drop him from the ceiling quickly and silently, then put his feet through the loop and tightened. He stood at the edge of the skylight and did one more sweep with the goggles, verifying that all was clear, and dropped into the opening. The guidewire tightened and held him suspended upside down 50 feet above the floor. He closed his eyes, found the quick release and grasped it loosely.

-= 30 seconds to green light. =-

This time he didn't hold back his grin. He was excited, and this was going to be FUN. "This is so cool!" he thought excitedly.

-= Rein it in, cowboy. You have a job to do. =-

"I know, I know. I can't help it though, I love this stuff!"

-= I can tell. Try not to screw it up, okay? =-

"Me? Screw anything up? You MUST be joking."

-= I wish. 15 seconds to green light, let's get a roll call, people. =-

Jack heard each member of the team verify their state of readiness in his mind and calmed himself.

-= 5 seconds to green light. Good luck. =-

Jack's smile remained on his muzzle as he heard Relay counting down.

-= 2... 1... GO! =-

His wrist jerked at Relay's last word, releasing the brake. He dove headfirst towards the floor as he searched within himself for the trigger. Finding it, he began to draw power in a steady flow. It began at his feet and worked its way up his body to his head, quickly enveloping him in an invisible matrix of energy. The instant he was completely surrounded, he disappeared. Or at least it would have looked like it to anybody who might have been watching. Jack felt the energy surround him and knew the transition was complete. The initial nausea he used to feel after transitioning was nothing more than a bad memory now, and he was able to devote his full attention to the work. "Looks like all that training was good for something after all," he thought. He stopped falling just above the floor and hit the quick release on the guidewire, dropping to the floor and releasing himself from it. He watched as he let go of the wire, allowing himself to become momentarily fascinated as the wire left his cocoon of influence and seemingly stopped dead in midair. He quickly looked around and noted with satisfaction that everything was stopped dead in midair, even the dust particles illuminated by the exterior spotlights.

"This is so cool."

Grinning, he began sprinting towards his first objective, mentally shaping his distortion field to fit his body. He had spent a good amount of time memorizing the floor plans for this building and he had no problems finding the stateroom he was looking for. He ran towards the door and yanked it open.

"Be reasonable, Mikael. How do you expect to leave here alive? This place is littered with surveillance systems and alarms, they must know what you've done by now, and they probably know exactly where we are. What are you going to do, beg for mercy? You know they won't let you get away with this."

"Quiet! Your keen observations are neither wanted nor needed, Mr. Packer. I've been planning this for quite a long time, and if you think I'm going to let a few security guards stop me, you're -"

Alfred Packer saw the door slam open out of the corner of his eye at approximately the same time as he saw Mikael go flying backwards across the room and into the opposite wall. He thought he saw a blur of something in-between those two events, but there was no way to be sure. He jumped up to see what happened to Mikael, and was astounded to find that he had been tied up and rendered unconscious. "How the hell?" he thought. Then he noticed the note pinned to Mikael's shirt. It read: "Love, the Dream Team."

The Dream Team? It couldn't possibly be, hadn't that entire project been derailed over a year ago? Alfred distinctly remembered the arguments against the Team in their high security leadership meetings. Too unstable, too deadly, too hard to control if anything were ever to go wrong. And they had been right to an extent, nobody wanted a repeat of the Bastion incident. "Poor Bastion," he thought. His power to breathe life into inanimate objects had driven him insane, and he had gone after his teammates during a practice

session after one of them had mishandled the free weights earlier that day, screaming that free weights deserved the same respect everybody else did. Alfred could still hear Bastion's anguished screams as the tranquilizer darts he wasn't able to turn into butterflies hit home and took him down.

That incident had put the staff on red alert and made an awful lot of spineless politicians frightened for their lives. In the end, the politicians won out and the project was deep sixed. Alfred had cleaned out his desk, said his goodbyes to the friends he had made there, and went to look for another job. But what had just happened wasn't his imagination; Mikael was still tied up and unconscious in the corner. "Well," he thought, "what the hell else could it have been? It had to have been the Team, that's the only possible explanation. But there was nobody on the team that could do anything like this when I was there, and - wait, how is the Team even possible? All their funding was cut and the government repossessed their facilities. How..."

Then a smile slowly appeared on the badger's face. "Monitor", he said out loud. "It had to be Monitor."

-= You always did have a good head for deductive reasoning, didn't you Packer? =-

"Relay!? Is that you?"

-= How many people do you know that can read your mind? =-

"Just you and Heather. It's so good to hear your voice again, Relay."

-= Likewise. Sit tight and we'll have you out in no time. By the way, the blur trail that tied up your friend there is called Velocity. He's a good kid, if kind of excitable. =-

"That was a fur? I didn't even see anything!"

-= Yeah, he's just a tad on the speedy side. Right now he's going through the rest of the building, taking out the trash. Stay put, we'll come get you. =-

"Thanks Relay, I owe you big time."

-= Don't thank me, thank Monitor for getting us all back together. =-

"Monitor," he thought. Of course Monitor would have wanted to get them all back together again. The Dream Team was Monitor's pet project right from the start 3 years ago. Ever since Monitor had discovered his precognitive abilities when he was in his late teens, he had been on a mission to find others like him, to get them together and train them. He had seen it coming for a long time, and after showing Alfred what a few of these furs were capable of, Alfred was convinced his project needed government backing. The government had a way of finding out about this sort of thing anyway, so Monitor believed it was better to let them in on it right from the start. And of course, how could

the government deny such a potent opportunity? The grant was given, just as Monitor said it would be. Alfred became the official liaison between the Dream Team and the government, keeping them informed of the Team's progress.

But after the government disbanded the Team and cut the funding, Alfred had lost track of them. They had all gone their separate ways and even Monitor didn't stay in touch with him. The thought suddenly occurred to Alfred that money would never have been a problem for Monitor; it's not too hard to win at the races, or Blackjack or even the lottery when you're a precog. "Lucky swine." So Monitor must have kept in touch with the Team and gathered them together in secret, he reasoned. Apparently they even picked up a new guy along the way, and from the looks of things he might be the most powerful of them all. He looked over at Mikael's extremely relaxed form and shook his head, chuckling to himself.

The sudden cracking sound and smell of ozone made him jump, and he turned to find a gorgeous husky femme grinning at him. "Transit? Oh, you are a sight for sore eyes!"

"Hiya Alfie!" she said as she walked over and kissed him on the cheek. "Look who I brought with me!"

As she said that, a pair of eyes materialized right next to her. They batted their lids a few times in Alfred's general direction, and he started laughing. "Cat, it's great to see you too. Well part of you anyway."

Cheshire Cat materialized the rest of the way and gave Alfred a hug. "We missed you, you old badger."

"I missed you too, Cat. All of you. I'm so happy to see you again although it could have been under better circumstances. Is what's his name, Velocity, finished cleaning up?"

-= He's all done. Transit, it's go time. Get him out of there. =-

"You got it. Ready to go Alfie?"

Alfred suddenly realized he wasn't going to be leaving the conventional way, and began backpedaling. "Oh no," he said apprehensively. "Isn't there another way?"

"Sorry hon. We gotta go, and we gotta go right now. Cat, you ready?"

Cheshire Cat nodded and pushed Alfred towards Transit. "Let's go, big boy. You can thank us later."

"Oh, joy," he mumbled as Transit took one arm and Cat took the other. Transit looked at Cat for confirmation, then closed her eyes. "And here we go!"

There was a crack, and then Alfred was on his knees, puking his guts out. Transit shook

her head and moved backwards. "It gets them every time," she said, making a face. "You think I'd be used to it by now."

"Well, that's what the hose is for," Cat responded with a smirk.

###

"Shouldn't he have been here by now, Relay?" Void was pacing impatiently at their designated rendezvous point, nearly half a mile from their target. He had been absorbing the sound in the local area to hide any noise he might have made, and also to build up energy he was using to enhance his eyesight far beyond its normal limits. "I don't see a damn thing."

-= Any second now, Void. =-

"I hate waiting. Just makes it worse that you can't contact him."

-= I know, but he hasn't failed us yet. Just give him a little more time. =-

"Time is one thing he's got plenty of. It's the rest of us that don't have enough of it."

-= What do you- =-

"Wait, here he is!" interrupted Void. He watched as a slight distortion in space that would have been imperceptible to anybody else split open and reveal Velocity's head, then the rest of him from top to bottom. He was breathing hard - very hard. He bent over and put his paws on his knees, almost hyperventilating.

"Are you ok?" Void asked as he dropped his dampening field.

"I... think... I overdid it... a bit," he panted breathlessly.

"Okay. Relay, please get Transit over here right away, we need to get Velo back to HQ ASAP."

-= She's on her way. Monitor isn't gonna like this. =-

"No, probably not," Void agreed as he established his dampening field again. Transit noiselessly appeared in front of them and her expression turned abruptly to one of worry as she took Velocity's paw in hers. She reached over to grab Void's arm and just as silently, they were gone.

There was a loud crack, and Transit, Void and Velocity appeared on the landing pad. Velocity collapsed to his knees, his body shaking from so much stress in such a short period of time. He was furiously panting, trying to get his wind back. Transit helped him lie back as Relay spoke directly to his mind.

-= You done good, kid. Real good. Time to relax, concentrate on your breathing, you're going to be fine. =-

Relay didn't particularly enjoy planting suggestions in the minds of others, but she thought it was called for this time. It would help him relax, after all. But fighting the temptation to use that aspect of her power was getting old real fast. She was starting to wonder if she hadn't been doing it subconsciously to her teammates - a thought that didn't sit well with her at all. She was going to have to talk with Monitor about that pretty soon.

"Overdid it a little, huh?"

All heads swiveled to see Monitor enter the room, followed closely by Alfred and Relay. He walked up to the landing pad and looked down at Velocity, who was still gasping like a fish out of water. "I thought we agreed that you weren't going to push it this time. This was an important mission, you knew that. Was it worth jeopardizing both yourself and the mission to get your speed fix?"

"I... got him... out... didn't I?"

"Actually Transit got him out. Yes, you did what you were supposed to and we're all very pleased about it. But by the looks of it, you barely made it back to the rendezvous point alive." The tall black panther crouched down next to Velocity and affixed him with his green-eyed stare. "It wouldn't do to have to go find your lifeless body halfway between the target and the rendezvous. You made the wrong choice today, but at least you're still here with us and the mission was successful despite your carelessness. If you're still alive tomorrow, we'll discuss what we need to do so that this doesn't happen again."

"Got it... chief," he wheezed.

"And don't call me chief."

"Sure... thing, fearless leader." Velocity was grinning despite his respiratory distress, and Monitor couldn't help but smile slightly.

Alfred walked up to the platform once it looked like Velocity's breathing was back under control and introduced himself. "Velocity? I'm Alfred Packer. It's an honor to meet you. I was very impressed by how you handled Mikael back there, that was amazing! How do you do it?"

Velocity grinned at the chance to talk about his abilities with somebody new. "Time distortion. I can summon an energy matrix that accelerates time inside a bubble. Anything inside the matrix gets accelerated, and I can control the shape of the matrix to a limited degree so I can surround more than just myself if I want to. When you're inside the matrix it looks like time on the outside slows to a complete stop. When I hit Mikael, I had plenty of time to tie him up as he was flying through the air."

"That's absolutely amazing. I've never head of anybody being able to do anything like that before."

"Yeah, well, it comes at a cost. I can control the rate at which time is accelerated, and the faster I go, the more it takes out of me physically. I was going almost full out when you saw me, and I paid the price... by the time I got to the rendezvous point I was barely able to stay accelerated at all, and I risked being seen even though I was still moving multiple times faster than normal time. Monitor was right of course, it was stupid. I didn't need to be going almost full out to deal with Mikael or the others. But you know, the adrenaline kicked in and I was going at almost full speed for quite a while. I think I'm going to need to sleep for a week."

"Well don't let me hold you up," Alfred said as he stretched out a paw. Velocity took it and hauled himself to his feet. "Thanks Alfred. Please excuse me though, I'm about to drop again. I've got to get to bed."

"Have a good rest, I'm sure we'll talk more tomorrow."

"Night."

Velocity walked out of the transport room and down the hall to his quarters, where he gratefully stripped off his clothes and fell into bed. "Gonna feel this in the morning," he thought as he drifted off to sleep, blissfully unaware of a pair of eyes that had been watching him walk down the hall and had followed him into his quarters, observing with silent longing as he had removed his clothes and collapsed into bed. Once she was sure he was asleep, Cheshire Cat materialized just long enough to brush her paw against his face and pull the covers up around his neck.

"You shouldn't take chances like that," she whispered. "What would I do if anything happened to you...?"

###

"Monitor, you got a minute?" The slender lioness stood framed in the doorway of Monitor's office, the hallway lights giving her an exotic backlit aura, her blue eyes shining like diamonds from her darkened face.

"Sure, come on in Relay." He stood and indicated a chair in front of his desk and she dropped gracefully into it, draping her tail over the side. Monitor sat down behind the desk and folded his paws on the surface. "So, you wanted to talk to me about your suspicions that you might be subconsciously influencing your teammates?"

Relay felt a slight shock down her spine and her eyes widened noticeably. "I, uh... yeah. I guess I shouldn't be so surprised every time you do that."

"I can't predict everything that's going to happen, but I knew this conversation was coming. So how can I help you with this?"

Relay sat back and thought for a moment before answering. "I'm not sure. I was hoping you could tell me, actually. You're aware of how easy it is for me to place suggestions into the minds of others, right?" Monitor nodded. "What you may not know is how I've used that in the past. You remember the circumstances of our first meeting, don't you?"

"How could I forget," he said with a smirk. "You don't easily forget somebody using your mind as a punching bag, you know?"

"Hey, I said I was sorry! You startled me! I mean I couldn't even see you standing in the alley, what was I supposed to do when you stepped out of the shadows like that?"

Monitor laughed. "All is forgiven, my child. Please do go on."

Relay rolled her eyes at him and continued. "Anyway, my reaction to you that night was a fairly practiced one. I'd been running with a bad crowd for a couple years at that point, and I had let them take advantage of my abilities by orchestrating robberies. Nothing fancy, just convincing the proprietors that they needed to give us the register money. Nobody ever got hurt and nobody ever caught us. The problem was that I became way too comfortable using the power to make people do what I wanted. I wouldn't even think about it any more, people would just do what I told them all the time. What changed everything was the day some guy decided he needed my purse more than I did. He grabbed it off my shoulder and ran through a busy intersection and down the street. I was pissed of course, and I really wanted my purse back as it held the contents of our latest raid. I yelled out 'Stop that guy!' and to my utter amazement, everybody in the immediate area dropped what they were doing and took off after the thief. Furs were jumping out of their cars and running after him, bike messengers were tearing after him, I could see furs streaming out of nearby buildings going after this guy! Oh, and did I mention I wanted to kill him?"

"No, but I can imagine," Monitor said, shifting slightly uneasily in his chair.

Relay grimaced and looked down at the floor. "It was horrible. The mob descended on the poor guy like the hounds of hell. These furs didn't want to merely stop him, they wanted his blood. By the time I realized what was happening, it was far too late. They ripped him limb from limb and didn't stop until there was nothing left of him. There was so much blood..." she paused and closed her eyes for a moment, recalling the wholesale slaughter that had unfolded before her eyes. "I didn't even realize it was me that caused it until later. I was so shocked and nauseated by what I had just seen that I couldn't even go look for my purse. Chances are it was ripped to shreds along with everything else anyway. I turned and ran as fast as I could in the opposite direction and didn't look back. I never found out what happened after everybody came back to their senses."

Monitor regarded her carefully. "It must have been somewhat of a shock when you

realized it was you who commanded the actions of half a city block," he said cautiously.

Relay raised an eyebrow at him. "Shock may not be a descriptive enough word. I cried for a week, I was scared out of my head. And during that time I began to notice how everybody around me was an emotional mirror image of me. When I was happy or scared, so were they. It finally dawned on me that I had been affecting my friends like this the whole time, and I knew at that point that the robberies hadn't been their idea, it was all me. They were just being strung along by my own desires, including the desire to believe I was being manipulated by them and not the other way around." She paused and rubbed her temples. "I had to get away from them. I couldn't stand the idea that I was manipulating everything they did, and I was afraid I was going to cause another disaster somehow. I ended up using my abilities to hitchhike across the country, and you found me shortly after that."

Monitor sat thoughtfully for a moment before responding.

"Relay, for as long as I've known you, I've never seen any evidence that you've manipulated anybody here. I've seen you disagree with people and they haven't inexplicably started agreeing with you. Even you and I have had our own disagreements, and the fact that I can remember that tells me you haven't been interfering." He pushed his chair back from the desk, stood up and took his shirt off, then started into a series of muscle beach poses, flexing his muscles and showing off. "It's not as if the thought hadn't occurred to me that you might have tried to influence some of us, so I've been keeping an eye on you and I'm pleased to say I haven't observed anything that I could attribute to your influence, either intentional or not." He put his shirt back on, sat down at his desk and folded his paws on the surface again. "So to be quite honest with you, I don't believe you have anything to worry about."

Relay had to stifle a laugh. "So do you mind telling me what that floor show just now was all about? By the way, you're in very good shape," she added with a leer.

"I guess I just felt like I needed to do some calisthenics. I was feeling a little tense and wanted to stretch a bit."

"Are you sure about that?"

"Yeah, why?"

Relay looked steadily at him, raising an eyebrow. "Don't you think it was just a little odd to do a Mr. Universe impression in the middle of having a conversation?"

Monitor raised his paws in defense. "Okay look, I know what you're getting at but there's no way you could have... could have..." His eyes widened considerably as he realized what had just happened.

"Oh no."

"Oh yes. Can you see now why I might be concerned about it? You would never know if I were doing it or not, and neither would anybody else." Relay sat back and stared levelly at Monitor.

"But I could swear... I was positive it was my idea to do that."

Relay shook her head at him, grinning.

Monitor sighed in resignation. "All right, I see your point. But I trust you Relay, I've trusted you for years. I don't think you would have agreed to help me with this project if you had simply been manipulating me, there wasn't enough in it for you."

A frown appeared on Relay's muzzle, and she looked down at the floor, her hair cascading over her shoulders. "And how would you know if I had been manipulating you?" she asked quietly.

The question took Monitor by surprise. He had always thought he would have been able to tell if she had ever done it to him because of his precog ability, he figured he would have been able to see it coming. This demonstration informed him that he was way off, and he never would have known if she had been manipulating him.

"Relay, listen to me. You're not here because you've been manipulating everybody into accepting you, if that's what you're worried about. I have seen you show marvelous self control, like when Void gets in your face for example. You could easily change his mind for him, but you don't, not even accidentally. I think I understand now why you're so worried about this, but you've learned a lot about your abilities since that incident with your purse, and your control over them has improved immensely. You were aware enough to determine what you had been doing to your friends, right?"

Relay nodded slightly, still looking at the floor.

"That's why I'm not worried about it," Monitor continued. "You know I consider you a friend, a good friend. You also know I had to earn your friendship. You didn't exactly make it easy for me in the early days."

"No, I guess I didn't."

"That's how I know this is real, not fabricated. You learned a very hard lesson the day that fur stole your purse, and I don't think you've ever forgotten it, have you?"

A shake of Relay's head confirmed his suspicions. He got up and walked around the desk, taking Relay's paw in his own. "Don't worry, Sandy. You've been particularly diligent about controlling your abilities, out of necessity. After all you've been through, I hardly think you're going to start losing control now. You're doing fine, and you're the most valuable team member I have, in addition to being my friend. Just keep doing what

you've been doing and everything will be fine."

Relay stood up and hugged him. "Thanks Sean, I really needed that. You're the only person I can open up to, thanks for being there for me."

Monitor returned her hug. "Any time. Now go get some rest, we had a good day today."

"Okay. Good night," she said as she turned and walked out.

Monitor watched as Relay left his office, and he sighed heavily. He walked back to his desk and sat down. He allowed himself to think about the conversation he had just finished, and the demonstration he had unwillingly participated in and he shuddered. He knew Relay hadn't been manipulating him in the past because he had foreseen her involvement in the project and knew the outcome already. But to experience being her puppet like that was more than a little unsettling. He found he couldn't concentrate any more, so he decided to hit the mess for a late night snack. At least, he was pretty sure that was his decision. It could have been a suggestion planted by Relay and he wouldn't have known the difference, and that still spooked him a little bit.

###

Transit made her way through the compound to her favorite spot, the room they all called Ten Forward. They thought it was a fitting name because it came from some sci-fi TV show franchise that had been running for almost 60 years, and they were a little bit sci fi themselves. It afforded a lovely view of the surrounding forests, and on a clear moonlit night the whole room would be bathed in a blue pearlescent light that made her feel like she was the queen of her own private ice realm. She delighted in going there long after the others had gone to bed, simply to enjoy the silence and the beauty of the surrounding fauna coated in a thin white blanket of moonlight. Being the team's resident night owl had its advantages, and she intended to enjoy them. She entered Ten Forward and failed to notice the dark shape next to one of the far windows. She dropped into a couch and stretched languidly, wrapping her tail around her legs.

"Can't sleep?"

The voice startled Transit, and she jumped off the couch in surprise. "Who - Void? is that you?"

Void chuckled softly. "Yeah, it's me. Sorry to startle you." The large grey wolf emerged from the shadows with a smile on his muzzle.

"You nearly made me transport! What are you doing in here this late?"

"Same as you, I bet. Just thinking."

"About today?"

"Yeah." He looked out the window and scratched behind his ear.

"Tired of getting left on the sidelines?" Transit asked gently.

Void turned to look at her, slight surprise registering on his face. "She's way too perceptive," he thought.

"All this training we have to go through, and you're the rendezvous man more often than not. It's not exactly fair, is it?"

Void snorted. "What am I training for if I'm constantly playing backup? I feel like I might as well stay home on some of these gigs."

"Void, you're invaluable. You know that, right? Your abilities make it possible to do the really stealthy stuff. I know Monitor hasn't been putting you on the front line all that often recently but we couldn't do this without you. The only reason we can even transport into stealth missions is because of your dampening field, and your other enhanced senses are just as vital. Don't sell yourself short."

"I'm not the one doing the short selling around here. Ever since..." He had to bite his tongue to prevent saying something stupid like 'ever since that hotshot speed freak joined up' in front of Transit.

6 months back, Void had almost worked up the courage to ask her out when Velocity joined the group, and Velocity worked his charisma on her almost immediately. All Void could do was watch from the sidelines as this rank amateur swept Transit off her feet. As if it weren't bad enough that Velocity had taken his place as the front man on most of the missions, now he couldn't even badmouth the guy thanks to his obsession with Transit. He would never do anything to hurt her, even if it meant keeping quiet about his dislike for Velocity. Just being there alone with her in Ten Forward, moonlight streaming in through the windows...

"Uh, ever since Monitor decided to start using me as the rendezvous point all the time, I've been feeling pretty useless." He looked back over at the window and grimaced. "Nice save, Mr. Smooth," he thought. "Gotta be more careful than that if you ever want a chance with her again."

Transit put her paw on his arm. "You're not useless, you're one of the most experienced team members and your abilities are about as useful as they come. Don't worry, you'll be back on the front lines soon enough."

Not wanting to argue with the object of his affections, he conceded. "You're probably right. Any second now." He grinned and took in the sight of the light and shadows playing tag across Transit's muzzle as she laughed and smiled at him.

"That's the spirit." She leaned over and gave him a quick peck on the cheek.

He turned to look at her, and held her gaze for what seemed like an hour. He could get lost in those eyes, and he knew he couldn't let that happen. He didn't like Velocity but he would never do anything to interfere with their relationship, no matter how badly he wanted to. "I, uh... I should really be getting to bed, it's pretty late. I'll see you at debriefing in the morning."

Transit seemed slightly disappointed, but she nodded her agreement. "Good night, Void."

Void smiled and walked out of Ten Forward, then down the dimly lit corridors to his quarters. He closed and locked his door, established his dampening field and proceeded to beat the hell out of his punching bag for the next hour.

Transit watched him leave, then went back to the couch to enjoy the silence and the view. She lay down on the couch and arranged her tail over her legs, and looked out across the trees to the mountains in the distance. It had been an exciting day, and she was a little tired from the multiple jumps she had made. The mission had been a success, Alfred was with them again and everybody was okay. "This was one of the good ones," she thought. It was so peaceful and quiet that she decided she could afford to take a little nap as long as she was already on the couch. She made herself a bit more comfortable and closed her eyes. A smile slowly crept onto her muzzle as she began to dream of Void.

###

"As you know, I was taken prisoner by Mikael Uderrov, a one time friend gone bad." Alfred looked around the table at the Dream Team, watching their reactions carefully. "I had known him for a long time through my work as a government liaison, even before I started working with the Dream Team. What I didn't know is how deep he had gotten into the ranks of the Azure Elite, a black ops type of military spin-off based in Moscow. AE takes a different view of America than we do, and although they haven't been very active in the past, they're certainly capable of making a powerful statement if they choose to." He got up and started walking around the table. "I can't imagine it was a coincidence that Mikael happened to take me as his prisoner, and their operation seemed a little too elaborate to be routine espionage. They fully expected to find me there, they would never be so careless as to be surprised by somebody working late. So then that begs the question, what were they doing there? And why did they need me specifically?" He leaned over and placed his paws on the table, looking around at each member of the team.

Void spoke first. "You said you knew Mikael through your work as a liaison. How much did he know about what you did and what you had access to? Did he know about us, for example?"

Alfred stood up straight and resumed his circuit of the table. "I certainly never mentioned the Dream Team to him, but if he found out through a leak somewhere, that would definitely explain why he picked me to take prisoner. Can you imagine if AE had gotten

detailed statistics on all of you? They would be able to counter every move you made."

Transit shook her head. "I'm glad we got to you in time, then. If they had been able to hook you up to a Syphon..."

"They would have found out everything, yes," Alfred finished. "Luckily for you and for me, you showed up when you did and took them out." He glanced over his glasses at Velocity who just grinned back at him.

"Clearly AE knows something. They wouldn't have come after me for no reason. The Dream Team is the only real deep cover operation I've ever been involved with, so it's logical to assume that's the reason. How they found out about your existence I don't know, but you can bet if they know about you they're going to keep trying to find you by any means necessary. I suggest that if you have any relatives or friends who know of your abilities and your current whereabouts, you should encourage them to go somewhere else for a while till this gets taken care of."

He watched as both Cheshire Cat and Velocity's eyes got a little wider, and they started looking a bit nervous. "We need to go on the offensive now. They still don't have your secrets, and if we're going to keep it that way we need to strike before they can counter us. Monitor and I have discussed our options in this regard and hitting their base of operations and cutting off communications to Moscow seems to be our best bet. So let's draw up some battle plans, furs and femmes."

###

"... nice move when you got my leg like that. Didn't even see it coming." Void smiled broadly at Transit, who was looking fairly pleased with herself. "Thank you," she said politely. "Just a little something I picked up from my teacher." She smiled and winked at him and it caused a tingling sensation to run up and down his spine. He caught himself staring slack jawed at her and closed his mouth, thankful that she wasn't looking at him right then. "Down boy," he chastised himself.

As they walked past the comm room, a voice called out to them. "Hey guys! Could you come in here for a sec?" Transit and Void stopped and walked back towards the comm room. "Sure, what's up Cat?" Transit asked once they were standing in front of the comm center.

"I don't know. Maybe nothing, but... I wanted somebody else to see this. Can you explain this anomaly?" She showed them a multiple layered graph on the computer screen, with a spike in the middle of it. "That spike shouldn't be there, it's on an entirely different frequency than anything we use. Records show it took place late last night, about 3:30 AM, from a console in Conference 4. Any ideas?"

Void moved in closer for a better look. "You sure it's not a power surge, or maybe a bad read from the sensor bank?"

"Negative. Backup sensors recorded it too. Whatever it is, it's not an error. A power surge would have shown up in this band here." She indicated a steady red line near the bottom of the graph.

"And it doesn't conform to any patterns we know of?"

"Not a one. Might as well be cosmic static as far as we're concerned. But it's no fluke, nothing happened last night to cause a spike in any of our systems. That spike indicates a foreign transmission originating from Conf 4, and it only lasted a split second. Normally I wouldn't be concerned, but with what Alfred told us this morning I'm a little more on edge than usual. What do you guys think?"

"I'm inclined to agree," said Void as he traced the spike with his finger. "We'd better get Monitor in on this one, just to be -"

"Not a bad idea," said Monitor as he entered the comm room.

"Would you quit doing that? It really freaks me out!"

Monitor laughed. "Sorry, Void. Can't help it. Now let me get a look at this spike." Cheshire Cat showed him the spike, and he looked at for a few seconds. "I don't think it's anything we have to worry about for now. It won't affect what we have to do."

Transit, Cat and Void looked at each other uneasily, not liking the sound of that. "It sounds like you already know what the spike is," prompted Cat.

"Not exactly. All I can tell you is that it's not relevant to what we have to do. I suggest you put it out of your minds and focus on the tasks ahead. Our survival as an anonymous, autonomous group depends on our success with this mission. We'll be meeting again tonight, so I'll see you all then. In the meantime, I suggest you hone up in the combat room and get some rest afterwards, you'll need it."

With that, Monitor left the room, followed by Void and Transit. Cheshire Cat thought for a moment and headed back to her quarters. As she walked down the hall, she thought she could hear... singing? She followed the faint sound, and stopped short when she realized where it was coming from. Velocity's quarters. She instinctively became invisible, not wanting to be seen loitering around Velocity's door, but still drawn to his voice. Before she knew what she was doing, she had opened his door and entered his quarters. The off key singing continued from the shower in the rear section, and she slowly made her way back towards it like a sailor to the siren. She stood outside the shower, and she could make out Velocity's form behind the curtain, gesturing wildly like some crazed conductor. She drew slowly closer and closer to the curtain, then pulled it aside and entered the shower behind Velocity before she could stop herself.

Some part of her mind was screaming at her to get out and get back to her own quarters,

but the urge to be with Velocity was too strong. "What if Transit catches you here? She'll kill you!" She ignored her inner voice like one ignores a housefly buzzing around the room, and focused on the raccoon standing naked in front of her. The hot water pelted her invisible form as she observed his well toned back and thick grey and black ringed tail. She noticed how his grey fur looked like velvet when it was wet, and she could no longer resist. She inched slowly closer to him and when she was close enough to smell his fur, she wrapped her arms around his chest from behind and lay her head on his shoulder, the closeness of his body and the hot water putting her into a near trance state.

"What the hell?" Velocity shouted. He jerked loose and spun around expecting to find something, but found nothing. The force of Velocity's reaction to her phantom caress and his abrupt 180 ejected Cat out of the shower stall, past the curtain and onto the floor. Being tossed backwards like that snapped her out of her trance, and she panicked, scrambled to her feet and ran as fast as she could out of his quarters. Velocity stood there for a second trying to figure out what had just happened. He had definitely felt something around his chest, and something on his shoulder... hadn't he? But there was nothing there. He reached up and felt his shoulder but felt nothing out of the ordinary, and nothing looked out of place. He pushed the curtain aside and looked around the bathroom, but saw nothing. He stood in the soothing stream of hot water trying to figure out what had just happened but couldn't make any sense of it, and now the sensations had disappeared completely. "Maybe I'm just imagining things," he thought. "I shouldn't have pushed it so hard on that last mission." Satisfied with the only explanation his mind could come up with, he finished his shower and got out to dry off.

Cheshire Cat ran as if her life depended on it through the halls to her quarters, leaping through her doorway and locking it behind her. She materialized and sank to the floor, shaking violently and dripping wet, taking deep, ragged breaths. "What the hell is wrong with me?" she thought, her heart racing. "That has got to be the dumbest thing I have ever done. Whatever possessed me to do that?" Even as she asked herself the question, she knew the answer. She had fallen hard for Velocity, and she couldn't reconcile the fact that he was seeing somebody else. "Dammit!" she exclaimed. "Why did this have to happen to me? And why now? And why him?" She pounded her fist on the floor in frustration, nearing the verge of tears. She sat on her knees with her eyes squeezed shut for another couple of minutes, then slowly got up from the damp ring on the carpet that had formed around her and dragged herself to the bathroom to take her own shower, and to try to wash her desires away like so much unwanted grime.

###

"Are you sure you want me to turn invisible for this?" Cheshire Cat asked disbelievingly.

"Yep. Just because I stay where it's safe on missions doesn't mean I shouldn't be able to defend myself. And as long as you're my sparring partner, we may as well make it interesting. What if I get attacked with the lights off?" Relay paused in her stretching exercises to look at Cat questioningly.

"I guess you're right, but just remember this is your decision. I deny responsibility for any injuries to your pride or to anything else." She laughed and resumed her own warm up routine, reaching out and grabbing her toes.

-= We'll see who's laughing once you remember that I can read your mind, =- Relay sent to Cat telepathically.

The look of surprise on Cat's face was too much, and Relay burst into laughter. "Don't worry, I don't pry into people's brains unless I have to. I don't have to read your mind to know where you are, I'm psionically aware of my surroundings at all times. Sort of like telepathic radar. As long as it has a brainwave, I can sense it."

Cat looked visibly relieved, and she continued with her exercises. "Sorry Relay, I didn't mean to imply you were prying. You just caught me off guard."

"Not a problem, hon. I did set you up for that one." She grinned at Cat, who stuck her tongue out in response.

Relay finished her routine and stood up, stretching her arms over her head. "Okay, enough with the pleasantries. You ready to rumble or what?" She flashed a feral grin at Cat, who looked surprised for a second but then broke into a slow smile.

"You got it." She shook herself loose and walked across the padded floor towards the equipment lockers near the door. She removed two full sets of pads, two padded Bo staffs and a pair of helmets, and tossed one set over to Relay.

"Staffs?" Relay asked. "I thought we were going to brush up on my blind hand to hand skills."

"You're the one who wanted to make it interesting," Cat responded with a grin.

"So I did. Fair enough." She began putting the pads on and had a thought. "Say Cat, you accepted my offer to spar with you awfully quickly this morning. Almost as if you had some aggression to work out. Care to talk about it?" Seeing Cat's expression, she hastily continued. "And no, I haven't been reading your mind. Don't need to be a telepath to pick up on observed behavior, you know."

Cat looked down and sighed. "Sorry again. I promise to stop jumping to conclusions. And yeah, you pretty much nailed it, but I don't think I want to talk about it."

"Suit yourself. But I'll always listen if you need me."

"I appreciate that Relay, but this is something I've got to work out on my own."

"No problem, just try not to let it control you, okay? I'm not looking to get hurt here."

"Don't worry, I'm just going to annoy you to death with my padded staff of doom."

Relay laughed at that, and finished putting on her pads and helmet. "All right, let's do it."

They walked to the center of the padded training room and checked each other's equipment, then took their places opposite each other in the middle of the room. Centering themselves, every detail of the room began to assault their senses. The white padded walls and floor seemed to melt together as the large glass window separating them from the control booth became their only means of establishing perspective. The heavily insulated room absorbed every sound, leaving only the sound of their own breathing as they focused in on each other.

"Ready?" Relay asked.

"As I'll ever be. Just give the word."

"Then let's go." Relay watched as Cheshire Cat slowly and with great effect began to disappear until all that was left was her paw, and it was waving goodbye at Relay.

"Cute", she said with a grin. Cat's paw completely disappeared, and Relay closed her eyes to concentrate. She shifted her focus and spread her psionic net around the room. Cat was still standing right in front of her. To Relay, Cat looked like a vaguely Cat-shaped bundle of miniscule sparks, almost like a cityscape at night. She was able to focus her perception so that Cat's body and limbs were defined enough to resemble her actual shape. She could see the activity in Cat's brain, especially the cluster near the brain stem that apparently controlled her ability to turn invisible. Curious as to why Cat hadn't attacked her yet, she opened her eyes. Cat was still invisible. "Something wrong, Cat?"

"No, just making sure everything was working on your end. Didn't want to attack you while you were still sorting yourself out," her disembodied voice explained.

"Everything's good on my end. Come get some," said Relay, grinning.

"You asked for it," said Cat from somewhere else in the room.

Before Relay had a chance to focus again, Cat's staff had connected with the back of her left leg, swinging it out from under her and unceremoniously dumping her on her tail. She scrambled to her feet and took up a defensive posture. "All right, that was a freebie. Next time you won't have it so easy." She closed her eyes and focused again, and saw Cat closing in behind her on her right side. She waited until she could sense Cat's arms drawing back for the swing and turned her staff to block it. Cat's staff connected with hers and she immediately went on the offensive, swinging her staff around Cat's and extending to connect with the side of her head. Cat went down into a roll and came out of it on her feet a short distance away.

Relay smiled. "Nice shot," she heard Cat say from across the room.

"Nice recovery," she answered. "I guess cats really do always land on their feet."

"Very funny."

Relay sensed Cat moving closer for a frontal attack, and she moved into a defensive posture. Cat went for a leg sweep and Relay jumped over it, coming down with her staff for another head shot. Cat blocked it with the left side of the Bo and swung the right side around to connect with the back of Relay's knee. Relay's knees buckled and Cat's staff made contact with her chest, knocking her backwards.

"I think you're getting better with that thing," Relay said as she got to her feet. "So, feel like talking yet?"

There was no answer from Cat, but Relay sensed her coming up from behind. As Cat moved to strike, Relay dove and rolled out of striking distance. "I told you, you won't get me that easily again."

"I really don't have anything I can talk to you about. It's personal, okay?"

"Sure, sure, whatever you say," replied Relay as she moved sideways in a circle, keeping Cat in front of her. Then Cat attacked with a rush of thrusts and swings, with Relay successfully blocking most of them. Cat narrowly missed Relay's head with her staff, and Relay grabbed it and pushed it aside, rushing Cat and tackling her to the mat.

"It's just that I've been sensing some tension from you recently, and I thought you might want to get it out in the open. I won't tell anybody, you can be sure of that. As you can probably imagine, I take privacy very seriously."

Relay got up and offered her hand to Cat. She accepted the hand and was hauled up off the floor. "I still can't believe you can see me, I'm not used to being countered when I'm invisible."

"Well then this is good practice for both of us."

"Look, it's not like I don't trust you, it's just that this is pretty personal and I don't feel comfortable talking about it. I think I'd rather just spar some more if it's okay with you."

"Who said we were finished sparring? En garde!"

They both went into defensive postures and began sparring again. They battled it out for another 20 minutes, each of them taking a good number of solid hits and blocking many more. Once Relay became adjusted to Cat's invisibility and her psionic image, they were fairly evenly matched. Cat was forced to go on the defensive much more than she was used to, and Relay became pretty good at predicting the arc of the staff's swing as it came at her.

After a particularly rough exchange, Cat materialized on her back with her paw in the air. "Okay, I give up! You win!" She was out of breath and a little bit dizzy.

Relay opened her eyes and took her helmet off. "I was just about to call it myself. That was a good session." She walked over to where Cat was lying, and sat down beside her. They were both out of breath and exhausted, so Relay resorted to telepathy.

= So, feel like talking yet? =-

"Would you drop it already? It's not like I'm the only girl who's ever had boy problems." She knew instantly that she had slipped up, and she groaned and covered her face with her paws.

= So that's what this is all about. All right, you let it slip, so spill it. You're not leaving this room until I get the full story. =-

Cat sighed and thought about her options. She came to the conclusion that she really did need to talk to somebody about it, and she did trust Relay. After all, she trusted Relay with her life every time they went out on a mission. "All right, you win. But this goes nowhere, you tell nobody and you will deny knowledge of this if anybody asks."

= That serious, is it? All right, I promise. =-

Cat nodded and proceeded to tell her everything about her obsession with Velocity, from the day he arrived in the compound to what had happened yesterday in his quarters. She detailed all her heartbreak, her loneliness and her total frustration with the situation, eventually breaking down into tears. Relay's buoyant façade dissolved, and she took Cat in her arms and held her, sensing her overriding frustration and pain, and wished she could do more to help. "Poor girl's got it bad," she thought. She waited until Cat had calmed down a bit, then asked, "So what do you want to do about it?"

"Do?" Cat asked slightly incredulously, with more than a hint of annoyance in her voice. "What can I do? He's perfectly happy with Transit and there's nothing I can do about that."

"Cat... I sense something deeper from you than what Velocity and Transit share. Neither of them are in it for the long term, they're just having fun. I can tell you that their relationship won't last forever and that Velocity doesn't find you unattractive, so maybe you should wait it out and see what develops. I'm not about to play matchmaker though, so don't expect me to take an active role in any of this, and I certainly don't recommend interfering on any level. What you did yesterday is bad enough, that could have had serious repercussions for the entire team."

Cat's head snapped around to stare at Relay at that. "What? What do you mean the entire team?"

Relay looked down at the floor and sighed. "Cat, you violated his personal space in his own quarters and you even threw yourself on him. You're very lucky he didn't catch you, because that would have violated all kinds of trust with him, and it would have made him nervous and unable to concentrate around you. Every member of this team is as important as the next, and if we don't all have a solid trust between us things can get really hairy in the field. Velocity is relatively new to all this, and he's more likely than any of us to be distracted or lose his focus in the middle of a mission. If he saw you and lost his focus, even for a second, there could be serious repercussions for all of us."

Cat was silent as she considered Relay's words. She already knew Relay was right, but she sure as hell didn't want to admit it. She felt that insufferable longing beginning to grow again in her chest and winced, pushing it back down beneath a veneer of false civility. "All right Relay, you win. You're right. I didn't think about the possible consequences it might have, but..." She turned to Relay with a look of pained desperation on her face, "I couldn't help it. I swear I couldn't. It felt like I was somebody's puppet with no will of my own. I couldn't help it..."

That struck a little too close to home for Relay, and she became anxious to end the conversation. "Look, Cat. You're fine, okay? There was no permanent harm done, you learned your lesson and now you know there might still be a chance for you to grab Velocity at some point in the future. Try to relax and let things happen, don't let your heart push you around too much, all right?"

Cat was a little taken aback by Relay's abruptness, but nodded. "Sure, Relay... well thanks for everything anyway. And you promised not to tell anybody, remember?"

Relay smiled. "I remember. Don't worry, your secret is safe with me. Thanks for a great workout, I learned a few new tricks that I'll definitely be able to use in the field."

"Me too." They stood up and began to put away the equipment, and Cat idly wondered if Velocity's front looked as good as his back...

###

Void frowned as he stood on the landing pad next to Transit and Velocity, awaiting the go order. Once again he had been relegated to watchdog duty and it didn't sit well with him. Having to work directly with Velocity didn't make him feel any better either. He looked over at Velocity with irritation, then at Transit who smiled at him, and he forgot all about Velocity. He managed to work up a smile for her just as Monitor's voice infiltrated their heads via Relay.

-= You're go for deployment. Good luck and be careful out there. If they know about your abilities, you won't see the trap until it's too late. =-

"We got it Chief," said Velocity. "We'll be careful. Let's do it!"

Void rolled his eyes and sighed, then established his dampening field around the three of them. "Let's go," he said telepathically through Relay.

Transit nodded and closed her eyes, and then the three of them were standing in a sparsely wooded forest at the edge of a large field. Void quickly scanned the surrounding area for any anomalies with his enhanced vision and didn't find anything. He nodded to Transit, who promptly disappeared. He grabbed Velocity's arm and they moved quickly towards a high spot in the woods near the edge of the field. As they got closer to the edge of the woods, they could see what looked like a military compound of some kind about a half mile away in the middle of the field. After finding a knoll with an overhang right on the edge of the field, Void settled there and began to scan the compound with his greatly enhanced vision.

He began to speak telepathically through Relay. "This is Void. I can see armed guards on the South and West sides of the compound... I see two on the South side and one on the West side. Seems a little thin, don't you think?"

-= It's supposed to be a deserted satellite control base, it would be pretty conspicuous if it were crawling with guards. Besides, I doubt they'd ever expect anything like us to hit them. =-

"Yeah, you're right Relay. It does make me a little suspicious though." He looked over at Velocity, crouched down next to him. "Velocity, are you ready to go?"

"You know it Void," Velocity telepathically replied via Relay. "Charged and ready."

"Okay, but watch your tail. I don't care how fast you are, something doesn't seem right to me. If this group is as together as Alfred made them out to be, there should be more defense against something like us, especially if they already know about us."

"Void, you're gettin' old, man. You can see better than any of us and you just told us there's only three guards. I'm not worried. I'll be past them and inside before they ever see anything."

"It's not the three guards I'm worried about! The fact that there's only three guards means - oh, hell with it. Look, just be careful okay kid?"

"No problemo Big V. Monitor, let's get this show on the road!"

Monitor spoke via Relay to the minds of everybody on the team. "Patience, Velocity. We have 5 more minutes to wait. Transit, status?"

"Ready and waiting, Monitor," she replied. She was standing on the landing pad at HQ, waiting for the call to evac team members.

Void's expression softened as he heard her voice in his mind, and he allowed himself a smile for a moment before focusing on the base again. "No change at the base, Monitor" he said.

"All right. Everybody's ready, let's start the 2 minute countdown Relay."

-= 2 minutes and counting everybody. Stay on your toes. =-

Velocity smiled as the countdown continued in his mind. He loved this. He loved being the hero, he loved the excitement, the action, the feeling of total superiority when he was accelerated. He lived for this, and it was his time to shine.

-= 3... 2... 1... GO! =-

Velocity triggered the switch and felt the energy field encapsulate him. He could not stop grinning as he took note of a falling leaf as it slowed and then appeared to stop in midair. He looked over at Void, who appeared to be frozen in time, looking in his general direction. He began to run at a controlled pace towards the base, taking in the sight of the world as if it had been flash frozen. As he ran through the field towards the South entrance of the base he saw birds stopped in mid flight, bees hovering nearly motionless over flowers, and now he could see the guards completely motionless in the middle of their patrols. This was so easy for him.

He concentrated as he entered the rear of the base. He had to find his objectives and execute them. The first one was to find the control center and destroy it, to prevent any more transmissions from being sent to Moscow. As he ran through the corridors he thought something was a little funny but he couldn't quite put his finger on it. He was used to seeing nothing moving, so it wasn't that. He made his way deeper into the compound and located the hallway that lead to the control center. It was a long hallway, and he ran as fast as he could to get through it. As he ran, he realized what the problem was. "There's nobody here!" he thought. "Not a single person in this base! But why - "

As he realized what was happening, a laser suddenly flashed into life four inches above the floor, severing his right foot just above his ankle, cauterizing the stump as it burned through his flesh. He screamed and fell forward onto his face as his time distortion field evaporated. As he fell back into normal time, every member on the team heard his screams in their minds. Relay was stunned by the incredible pain she was receiving from Velocity and it took her a moment to filter it out. She managed to gather as much information from his mind as she could before he passed out, and as she did that she worked on blocking his pain receptors.

-= Monitor, Velocity has been taken out by a laser, his right foot has been severed and he's nearly unconscious. There isn't a single living being in that base, it was a trap! =-

"Transit, get Void out of there immediately!" He shouted telepathically. "Relay, do you have a lock on Velocity?"

-= Yes, but only as long as he's conscious, and he's almost out! -=

"I'm back with Void, boss!" yelled Transit.

"Go get Velocity, NOW! Make sure you get his foot too!"

Relay fed Velocity's coordinates directly to Transit's mind and she teleported away, returning a couple seconds later with an unconscious Velocity, holding his foot in her paw. She dropped the foot and vomited all over the floor, shaking violently. The medic arrived just as Transit was emptying her stomach's contents, and Void helped the medic lift Velocity onto the crash cart before running over to help Transit.

"Oh m-my god," she sobbed at Void. "He... h-his..."

Void gave her a towel he had picked up from the crash cart and sat down next to her, putting his arm around her. "I know, hon. It's not a pretty sight. He'll be all right though, it was a clean cut, the doc should be able to put him back together just fine." He began to feel guilty for not being more forceful with Velocity to try to keep him out of trouble. He knew something was not right with that whole situation but had let it go.

"I should have told him to be more careful," he muttered.

Transit finished wiping her muzzle and looked at Void, tears running down her face. "W-we've never had anything l-like this happen before... why is it happening n-now?"

"That trap just confirms that something is not right with this whole situation. They knew we were coming, they knew when and they knew exactly how to stop us. That's much worse than what Alfred had suggested."

"So what -"

-= Get up here NOW! Monitor's life is in danger! -=

###

"Go get Velocity, NOW! Make sure you get his foot too!" Monitor got up to run down to the transport pad, but before he could get to the door, Alfred walked through it pointing a fusion pistol at him.

"What's the matter, Monitor? Didn't see it coming?"

"Alfred? It was you?"

"Of course it was, Sean. I'm surprised you hadn't figured it out yet. But then again, considering I was able to block your precog ability from seeing anything I did I guess I'm

not too surprised after all."

"You did what? How did you do that?"

"Monitor, Monitor, Monitor. The people I work for are very high up the chain, you know that. What, did you think the government just forgot about you when they cut your funding? They've spent years trying to figure out how your precog ability works, and they finally figured how to block it. Not on a large scale, just localized to a small area, say one person. Ah yes, things are starting to make sense now aren't they? Sadly though, it's too late for you. Your team is distracted and I have you right where I want you."

"Mikael... the Azure Elite... all of it was just a cover story?"

"You catch on quick! Of course somebody had to be on the inside to get to you, you know that. What better bait than me? Nobody here would ever question my motives after all, would they? You're a trusting sap, Monitor, and you always were."

Monitor closed his eyes as he learned a lesson he would never forget. A deep seated hatred towards the government began to take hold in his mind as he tried to figure a way out of this predicament. He called to Relay with his mind but he knew it was too late as he watched Alfred raise his gun. As Alfred's finger began to squeeze the trigger, something happened to him. His eyes widened and the gun dropped to the floor, then his entire body spasmed for a few seconds and he dropped to the floor like a bag of lead.

Wide eyed, Monitor walked carefully over to Alfred and checked him. His eyes and mouth were open and he was completely motionless. He was quite dead. "What in the hell just happened here?" He asked out loud.

"I did," said a voice from behind him.

###

Cheshire Cat was in the comm room monitoring the transmissions at the satellite base when she heard Velocity scream in her mind and she froze.

"No," she whispered.

She numbly heard Relay tell Monitor that Velocity had been taken out. "No," she cried, as panic overwhelmed her.

"NOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAGH!!!"

She screamed as a bolt of white hot fire lanced through her mind, burning her synapses mercilessly until she lost consciousness.

She awoke an eternity later to a throbbing headache, and she groaned as she recalled the

pain she had just experienced. She winced as she opened her eyes, then all pain was forgotten as she realized she was floating 4 feet above the floor.

"What in..." she said, looking around in shock. She felt the beginnings of panic creeping up from her stomach and willed herself to calm down long enough to figure out what was going on.

"I'm... floating. I'm not falling. I'm okay," she reasoned. "Why the hell am I floating? Am I doing this or is it something else?"

She tried willing herself to the floor, and she found herself floating towards the floor. "Okay that's good, I can control - no wait, hey, hold on! Stop!" she yelled as she kept going right through the floor and stopped with only her head sticking out the floor.

"I'm intangible?!" she said with disbelief. She willed herself up and once she was above the floor, willed herself solid. She became solid again and dropped to the floor. "This is amazing. Can I still become invisible?"

She willed herself invisible and noted with satisfaction that nothing seemed to have changed in that regard. She tried becoming intangible again while invisible and willed herself towards the wall, and she found herself floating in the air outside the compound. "This is crazy," she thought.

=- Get up here NOW! Monitor's life is in danger! =-

Panic built up inside her again as she suddenly remembered what had happened. Velocity had been incapacitated and now somebody was trying to kill Monitor! She shot back through the wall and up towards the control room where Monitor was. She flew through the wall just as Alfred was aiming at Monitor's head, and inside of a split second she realized that it had been Alfred who had deceived them, and Alfred who had been responsible for injuring Velocity. Enraged, she flew with her hands outstretched towards Alfred, and when her hand was inside his head she willed it to become slightly more solid. She watched as her molecules interfered with Alfred's brain causing him to seize, then die. She phased her hand completely out again as he dropped to the floor.

"What in the hell just happened here?" Monitor asked.

"I did," she said as she materialized behind him.

"Cat? Hmm... you did this?"

"Yes," she said, arms crossed, not showing an ounce of remorse for what she had done.

"If you don't mind... tell me how you did that."

"Apparently I can become intangible now, as well as invisible. When I heard Relay's call,

I flew up here through the walls and saw him pointing that gun at you." She indicated the plasma pistol lying on the floor a couple inches away from Alfred's lifeless hand. "I didn't think, I just acted. I put my hand inside his head and willed it to become slightly more solid. I think I screwed up his brain."

"I'd say you definitely did that. And just in time too, he was going to kill me. So I owe you my thanks and my life."

Cat frowned as she began to realize what she had done. "But I had to kill Alfred, Monitor. How could I have even thought of doing that?"

"You did what you had to do, and if you hadn't I'd be dead right now and not him. You did the right thing."

"But... no, I killed somebody and it was Alfred! Poor Alfred..."

"Poor Alfred nothing. Cat, he had been working against us the entire time. He's the one that set the trap for Velocity, the government had sent him here to kill me to make sure the Dream Team could never hurt them. Unfortunately for them, they didn't know about your latent abilities."

Cat turned and stared at him and was about to say something when Transit, Relay and Void burst into the control center. They stopped short seeing Alfred on the floor and Monitor and Cat looking back at them, and Void said "Uhhm... are you okay?"

"Yes, Void." Monitor said. "As I was just telling Cat, Alfred has been working against us the entire time. His rescue, Mikael, the Azure Elite, all fabricated just to get him inside the compound to kill me. Cat, I've known about your latent abilities for a long time now, and I knew it was going to take a traumatic experience to bring them to the surface. Apparently the government has figured out a way to block my precog from seeing certain people, so I wasn't able to determine what role Alfred had until it was too late. However, I did know you were going to save me from death somehow with your newly found abilities. I just couldn't determine how I would be attacked or by whom, because of Alfred's precog blocking technology."

"But then that means... you knew Velocity was running into a trap! You knew he was going to be hurt! How could you let that happen?" Cat lamented, close to tears.

"If it hadn't happened, you wouldn't have discovered your latent abilities and Alfred very likely would have killed me. I also happen to know that Velocity will be as good as new in a couple months. I'm sorry I had to put him through that, but it was the only way to resolve this situation without Alfred killing me."

The gathered furs and femmes stood for a few moments trying to take everything in, and then Cat asked "But what about that spike in the comm logs? You said it wasn't important..."

"Ah yes, the spike. It was Alfred communicating with the government. I wasn't able to see that at the time or before then because Alfred was blocking my precog ability concerning him, effectively covering his tracks. However, none of the other possible future paths had changed, and what happened still had to be done the way we did it so I decided to not pursue it until after this was resolved. So Cat, when you get a chance, please fully analyze that spike and get me all the information you can about it. I'd like to send the government a little thank you note."

"Sure... I will. You said Velocity is going to be all right?"

"He'll be fine, yes."

"Okay, well... I'm going to go down and see him if I can." And with that she phased out, dropped through the floor and headed to the infirmary, leaving her teammates staring in confusion at the spot in the floor she had fallen through.

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- Epilogue -

2 months later

Relay, Velocity, Cheshire Cat, Transit and Void sat assembled around a large conference table, chatting with each other.

"Why did Monitor call this meeting, anyway? Void asked.

"I've called you all here to discuss the future," Monitor announced as he walked in through the sliding doors.

"Geez, I hate when he does that", Void griped, causing Transit to giggle.

Monitor took a seat at the head of the table and continued. "First of all, I hope you like the new digs. It was necessary to relocate after the fiasco a couple months back, and I think you'll find this place has some improvements over the old one."

"Yeah, it's great except the location, Chief," Velocity quipped with a grin. "Why did you have to build it in the backwoods of Vermont?"

"I've always felt an affinity for the East Coast," Monitor answered. "Besides, it doesn't really matter where we have our HQ as long as we still have Transit with us."

Transit looked up and smiled, then lay her head back down on Void's shoulder.

"Now obviously we will have nothing further to do with the government whatsoever, and in fact I've taken extra steps to ensure that our whereabouts are unknown. You all know why we can't trust them. But before I go any further, I need specific confirmation from each one of you that you are willing to continue our work on this team despite being an essentially invisible operation."

He looked around the table as each of them nodded in agreement.

"All right then. The reason for this meeting is simply this - we need a new name. The Dream Team is what the government called us, and I find it hits a little too close to home. Any suggestions?"

"What about something with ninjas?" Velocity said. "You know, because they strike hard and fade away into the night?"

Monitor chuckled, and said "As tempting as that is, I think we'll have to pass on that one. Any more?"

Relay spoke next. "Well we're supposed to be invisible right? Clandestine? So what about Sub-Rosa?"

"Sub-Rosa? What's that supposed to mean?" asked Velocity.

"It's Latin," said Relay. "It means 'under the rose', and it comes from ancient times when a rose was hung over a council table to indicate secrecy."

"Ooh, I like that," Transit added. "And there are six of us, so..."

"Sub-Rosa Six," Monitor finished. "I like it. Even though it seems strange to have a group name when we're supposed to be invisible and unidentifiable, I believe it's good for our morale and our conviction in what we're doing. Does everybody agree on our new name?"

Another round of nods answered.

"In that case, I declare the first official meeting of Sub-Rosa Six to be at an end. You all have the weekend off, so I suggest you enjoy yourselves while you can. On Monday, the real fun begins."