

INT. THE TOWER HALLWAY- DAY

Hero, The Brawn, and Jayde stand together next to the door that leads to the rec room. Hero's broken arm is in a cast and sling.

JAYDE

Hero, you mean you still haven't talked to him yet? It's been three weeks!

HERO

How can I talk to him, Jayde? I was the one who broke up with him in the first place!

JAYDE

But you'll never know unless you try.

THE BRAWN

That's right, Hero. Ivan's been through a lot since your breakup. What with Lucia, his being poisoned, and his banishment a while back. He still hasn't talked about what happened while he was gone. I don't think he'll open up again unless you at least try.

JAYDE

I've seen the way he looks at you, Hero. You need to talk to him.

HERO

Okay, fine. Tonight.

Hero walks away. Jayde and The Brawn exchange glances. The Brawn shrugs. They walk away.

INT. REC ROOM-DAY

Ivan and Vlad are playing pool together. Ivan turns to Vlad after taking his shot. He leans on his pool stick.

IVAN

So, Vlad. You said you were ten when you first started using magic?

NIGHTLURKER

Indeed. I was old enough to see the appeal of using magic, but too young to see the consequences. If I could go back, I daresay I might stop my younger self from ever learning magic.

IVAN

But it got you here, didn't it?

NIGHTLURKER

Indeed it has. And I appreciate where I am now more than anything, but when I think of all the lives black magic has destroyed...

Nightlurker pauses to look at his hand. The one he used to kill Jaqui.

NIGHTLURKER

I must admit I am frightened.

There is a short silence.

IVAN

Sooo... I never heard the story behind you and Jaqui. Who was she?

Vlad tenses up.

NIGHTLURKER

There was a time, many years ago, when we were very much in love.

Ivan looks surprised.

IVAN

Really?! You two?

NIGHTLURKER

Back then, she was a very different person. Our upbringing in Northton was very different than what you

(MORE)

NIGHTLURKER (CONT'D)

would find here in ArbeiVille City,
or even with the ninja village
where you grew up.

IVAN

Right. You said you were a
performer, and that your dad died
in a fire...

Vlad lets out a half-hearted laugh.

NIGHTLURKER

Well, "performer" is one way of
looking at it. In all honesty, I
grew up in a troupe of gypsies.

Ivan snorts.

IVAN

Ha ha! Vlad, I think that might be
the first joke I've ever heard you
make!

There is a short silence where they look at each other.
Ivan freezes.

IVAN

You're completely serious...?

NIGHTLURKER

Our troupe was called The Midnight
Circle. We travelled all over
Northton, performing for the
biggest cities and the smallest
villages.

IVAN

Wow! That sounds like fun! It's
like a circus!

NIGHTLURKER

Indeed. My father was a popular
act. He was a magician. Little did
anyone know that he was using a
long-forgotten secret to make his
act so popular.

IVAN

What was it?

NIGHTLURKER

My father was in possession of the last three known black magic books in the world. He utilized black magic into his act, to truly amaze his audience.

IVAN

How did he get the books?

NIGHTLURKER

They were handed down to him. Black magic has followed my family for generations.

IVAN

Wait. You only have two volumes. Where's the third one?

NIGHTLURKER

My father kept that one for himself. He was a solo act for many years. Then one day, he met my mother. She was a dancer.

EXT. NORTHTON FIELD-NIGHT

There is a large fire, and gypsies are dancing around it, laughing and singing and clapping their hands. Nikolai stands a ways off beside a tent. He is watching Dyktha spinning around happily. She spots him and smiles, running over to him.

DYKTHA

Hi! What is your name?

NIKOLAI

N-Nikolai Bartinski.

DYKTHA

I am Dyktha! Come, let us dance together!

NIKOLAI

Oh, I... I do not dance.

DYKTHA

What? Come on, everyone can dance!
Just move your feet!

Dyktha grabs his hands and pulls him into the dance circle. At first, Nikolai looks uncomfortable. Then he looks at Dyktha, who is having fun. Nikolai smiles.

NIGHTLURKER (V.O.)

My father was captivated.

EXT. RIVERSIDE-NIGHT

Nikolai and Dyktha walk along the bank together. He reaches out and picks a flower off of a nearby tree. When he offers it to Dyktha, he opens his hand to reveal the flower is gone. Dyktha looks surprised. Nikolai reaches behind Dyktha's head and pulls the flower into view. Dyktha is delighted, and accepts the flower.

NIGHTLURKER (V.O.)

My father never told my mother
about black magic. She always
believed he was simply good at
tricks.

The couple keeps walking. Behind them, two men look at them darkly.

NIGHTLURKER (V.O.)

Of course, there were those who
suspected that pure talent alone
could not conjure the antics my
father included in his show... And
they were right.

The two men suddenly disappear into the darkness as Nikolai swivels around to look at Dyktha. He looks nervous, but happy.

NIGHTLURKER (V.O.)

But my father was never one to
worry. Any problem he had ever
faced, he fixed with his magic.

Nikolai takes Dyktha's hands in his and slowly gets down on one knee.

NIGHTLURKER (V.O.)

And so, it wasn't long after my
father and my mother began
courting, that they were married.

INT. GALLERY-DAY

NIGHTLURKER (V.O.)

And it wasn't long after that,
before I was born.

Nikolai holds baby Vlad in his arms, doing his best to look serious, while the baby pokes and plays with his face. Dyktha's laugh is heard. The screen turns to a painter, who looks annoyed.

PAINTER

Mrs. Bartinski, please stay still.
You're not making this easy.

Dyktha covers her smile with her hand.

DYKTHA

I'm sorry. Please continue.

INT. TENT-NIGHT

Dyktha cuddles her baby, while Nikolai sets up the painting on a stand.

NIKOLAI

There! How does that look?

DYKTHA

Wonderful, Dear. But, why didn't we
get a portrait of the whole family?

NIKOLAI

You're the prettiest out of the
three of us, Darling.

Dyktha giggles. She continues to play with baby Vlad, while Nikolai watches them fondly.

NIGHTLURKER (V.O.)

In the words of my father, those
were the happiest times for our
family.

The screen goes black.

NIGHTLURKER (V.O.)

It's a shame that I was too young
to remember them.

EXT. NORTHTON FIELD-DAY

It is cloudy, and a young Vladimir sits on a rock, looking
lonely and sad.

YOUNG JAQUI (O.S.)

Your eyes...

Vlad looks up with surprise, to see a girl standing a ways
in front of him, looking concerned.

YOUNG JAQUI

They're as cloudy as the sky. They
look like they might rain.

Vlad sniffs and looks away. Jaqui draws nearer to him.

YOUNG JAQUI

Why are you sad?

YOUNG VLAD

Mom's got the sickness. Dad says
she might not...

Vlad stiffens, blinking back tears. Jaqui comes to sit
beside Vlad, looking sad.

YOUNG JAQUI

Oh. The sickness took both my
parents away.

Vlad looks at her. Tears well in her eyes.

YOUNG JAQUI

Grandma says it's okay to cry. It's
not good to hide away your
feelings.

Vlad bows his head and cries as well.

NIGHTLURKER (V.O.)
We met each other during the
hardest parts of our young lives.
We needed each other.

Nikolai runs towards Vlad, his eyes wide.

NIKOLAI
Vladimir!

Vlad stands, fear in his eyes. Nikolai stops before he reaches his son, tears beginning to stream down his face. Vlad understands and let's out a sob. He runs to his father and they hug, both crying.

EXT. NORTHTON FIELD-DAY

There is a small gathering of Gypsies around a small grave. Everyone is wearing black. Vlad clenches his father's hand, fighting back tears.

NIGHTLURKER (V.O.)
Growing up in a traveling gypsy
troupe was grand, most of the time.
There is so much freedom in it. But
I will never forget my mother's
funeral. Soon after it was over, we
had to move on. Leaving that place,
I had never felt so lost. I was so
young, I can't remember where she
was buried. I've gone back to look,
but I still haven't found my
mother's grave.

Jaqui looks at Vlad. She moves to stand beside him, and holds his hand.

INT. TENT-EVENING

Nikolai sits in the dark, scribbling notes into the margins of his magic book. He looks wearied, and slightly intense. He mutters to himself.

Young Vlad and young Jaqui peek into the tent timidly, then exchange worried glances.

NIGHTLURKER (V.O.)

After my mother's death, my father delved deeper into his research of black magic. Part of me wonders if he was looking for a way to bring mother back, but... having experienced black magic myself, I'm fairly certain he was merely trying to fill the void. What parts of his soul he hadn't sold for magic, he had given to my mother, and suddenly, she was gone.

INT. TENT-NIGHT

Nikolai and Vlad sit in the tent and look at the painting of Dyktha. Nikolai stares intently, and sees the painting blink and smile gently down at him. Nikolai smiles. Vlad looks at his father in confusion, then back at the painting, which hasn't moved.

NIGHTLURKER (V.O.)

I'm not sure exactly when my father cast the spell on himself to make himself fall in love with my mother's painting, but I do remember that a small sliver of normality entered my life around then, too. She wasn't really back, but with how my father interacted with the painting, one could almost pretend that she was.

EXT. NORTHTON FIELD-DAY

It is sunny, and Vlad and Jaqui are slightly older, and playing tag together with a few of the children. Nikolai watches with a smile. He calls them over.

NIKOLAI

Vladimir! Jaquelyn! Come here for a moment, will you?

Vlad and Jaqui obey, looking happy. He bends down to them.

NIKOLAI

I have a surprise for you both.

The two children look excited.

YOUNG VLAD

What is it??

Nikolai produces volumes one and two of the magic books.
Jaqui deflates.

YOUNG JAQUI

A book?!

NIKOLAI

Yes, it's a book! They're books
about magic!

Vlad's eyes grow wide, and he takes volume one.

YOUNG VLAD

You mean, I will get to be a
magician like you one day?

NIKOLAI

If you would like.

YOUNG VLAD

Yes! Yes, I would!

Jaqui takes volume two and thumbs through it.

NIKOLAI

You two must take care of those
books, and don't tell anyone else
about them, you understand?

YOUNG VLAD

Yes, father!

Jaqui nods.

INT. TENT-NIGHT

Vlad reads intently from the book.

NIGHTLURKER (V.O.)

I began immediately. I devoured
every word I read. Before I knew
it, a piece of my soul was gone,

(MORE)

NIGHTLURKER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
and replaced by blackness. But I
didn't care. I wanted so much to be
like my father, it was worth any
price.

EXT. STAGE-NIGHT

Nikolai stands before his audience, who cheer and applaud. He bows deeply. The audience files out of the seating area around the stage, until it is empty. Nikolai looks around, then pulls his magic book and a pen out of his coat pocket. He circles a particular spell with a smile.

NIKOLAI
This new one worked rather well.
I'll add it to the list.

Suddenly, he tenses. He snaps the book closed and lifts his head.

NIKOLAI
You could stand to be more subtle,
you know... Maximil.

A lean, sinister-looking man steps out from the shadows.

MAXIMIL
Vladimir Bartinski. I've heard
rumors that your act is so popular
because of methods that are... less
than savory.

NIKOLAI
Rumors? You're here because of
rumors?

MAXIMIL
As leader of our gypsie troupe, I
must listen to the voices of my
people. Some say you have sold your
soul to the devil, Nikolai.

Nikolai lets out a half-hearted chuckle.

NIKOLAI
The devil, huh? That's rich.

MAXIMIL

I would that you hand over the little book in your pocket. This can all end right now.

Nikolai turns around slowly.

NIKOLAI

You... You want the book for yourself!

Maximil smiles.

MAXIMIL

Any power I can get, is power I can use to help my people.

NIKOLAI

Don't lie to me! You want it for yourself! black magic will corrupt a selfish heart, Maximil!

MAXIMIL

So you admit that it is black magic, then?

Nikolai grunts in frustration.

NIKOLAI

My ancestors have charged me with the care of this book. I will not relinquish it.

Maximil turns to walk away.

MAXIMIL

Suit yourself. Don't think for a second that I won't keep trying to get it, though. I will.

Nikolai watches him leave. Nikolai smiles.

NIKOLAI

That means he thinks I have the only magic book. Good.

INT. TENT-NIGHT

Young Vlad and his father are sleeping.

NIGHTLURKER (V.O.)

After that, months went by with no incident. Everything went back to normal, until one night.

Shadows can be seen on the other side of the tent. They set fire to a corner, and run away. Slowly, the fire grows and fills the tent with smoke. The fire creeps near Vlad. He wakes up with a jolt. He sees the fire and panics, and immediately begins coughing. He shakes his father's shoulder.

YOUNG VLAD

Father! Father! There's a fire!

Nikolai snaps awake, just as something in the room explodes. The whole tent is aflame. Nikolai grabs Vlad and pulls him outside.

EXT. NORTHTON FIELD-NIGHT

Nikolai sets Vlad down on his feet, and checks the scared boy over.

NIKOLAI

Are you alright? Are you hurt?

YOUNG VLAD

I'm... I'm fine!

NIKOLAI

Good!

Nikolai suddenly snaps his head back to the tent.

NIKOLAI

DYKTHA!!

He moves to go back, but Vlad clings to him.

YOUNG VLAD

No, father! Mother's gone, it's just a painting!

Nikolai wrenches free from Vlad's grip and runs back into the tent.

YOUNG VLAD

Daddy!!

Young Jaqui runs to Vlad.

YOUNG JAQUI

What happened?! What's going on?!

The tent collapses. Other Gypsies are trying to put out the flames. Vlad stares at the fire, mortified. Jaqui understands and hugs him, pulling him away.

YOUNG JAQUI

Come, Vladimir! We must leave!

YOUNG VLAD

DADDY!!

Maximil is seen walking away from the scene with a smile, the magic book sticking out of his pocket slightly.

NIGHTLURKER (V.O.)

A small part of me knew that that was the last time I would ever see my father. It was confirmed the next morning when someone found his body, clinging to a charred picture frame.

INT. REC ROOM-DAY

Nightlurker stands, turning away.

NIGHTLURKER

You must excuse me. I didn't think telling this story would be so difficult.

The Brawn speaks up, who is now sitting on a bean bag near the couch.

THE BRAWN

You can stop if you want.

NIGHTLURKER

No. I must continue. This is... good for me.

EXT. NORTHTON FIELD-DAY

Vlad is a teenager now, sitting on a rock by a stream. He is reading intently from his magic book. Jaqui comes up from behind him and drapes her arms around his shoulders. Vlad leans back into her embrace slightly.

TEENAGE JAQUI

Come on. Are you gonna read that all day?

TEENAGE VLAD

I've decided something Jaqui.

TEENAGE JAQUI

What is it?

TEENAGE VLAD

I'm going to start my own act in the show! I want to be a magician! Like my father!

TEENAGE JAQUI

Really? That sounds great! Maybe I should be in an act as well!

TEENAGE VLAD

Yeah! It will be fun!

The two look at each other, and lean in for a kiss.

INT. REC ROOM-DAY

Nightlurker stops, looking slightly uncomfortable. Ivan and Theo stare at him. Nightlurker clears his throat and continues.

EXT. STAGE-DAY

NIGHTLURKER (V.O.)

Anyway, when the leaders of my division saw my idea for an act, they immediately let me join. They said I had even more talent than my father. And of course, Jaqui went on to be an acrobat.

IVAN (V.O.)

That explains a lot.

THE BRAWN (V.O.)

Ivan, sssh!

Vlad practices on the stage, and other gypsies watch with interest.

EXT. STAGE-NIGHT

NIGHTLURKER (V.O.)

It wasn't long before my show was an immense success.

Vlad looks slightly older, and is wearing a nice suit and top hat. The audience is packed, and there are even people watching the show from nearby trees. Trick after trick, the people cheer. Finally, Vlad takes a bow, and the audience bursts into applause.

NIGHTLURKER (V.O.)

After Jaqui and I started performing, we saw very little of each other. One night after a particular performance...

Vlad walks off the stage, pulling his bow tie off with a smile. A young boy with a top hat of his own stands with his mother, smiling at him. Vlad smiles and bends down to the boy.

BOY

Wow! It's really you! You're amazing!

TEENAGE VLAD

What is your name?

BOY

Martin. I'm your biggest fan! Will you sign my hat?

TEENAGE VLAD

It would be my pleasure.

Vlad signs the boy's hat. As he does so, he sees Jaqui waiting for him, a smile on her face. Vlad places the hat back on the boy's head and the boy leaves, laughing. Vlad

approaches Jaqui with arms outstretched. They kiss.

TEENAGE JAQUI

Lucky me. I get a kiss from The
Great Vladimir Bartinski.

Vlad chuckles.

TEENAGE VLAD

It's just a stage name, it's
nothing. How are you these days, my
sweet?

TEENAGE JAQUI

Same as always. Well, except...

Jaqui pulls out her magic book with a smile. Vlad grins.

TEENAGE VLAD

You've been learning magic!

TEENAGE JAQUI

I've had a great teacher!

TEENAGE VLAD

R-really? Someone else here knows
black magic?

Jaqui tosses her head with a mischievous smile. She talks
with a singsong voice.

TEENAGE JAQUI

Yep! And he told me that you're
doing it all wrong!

Vlad halts, a look of concern crossing his face.

TEENAGE VLAD

Wait... What has he been teaching
you?

Jaqui smiles and pulls Vlad by his arm back on stage. The
seating area is empty, and Maximil stands on stage with a
smile.

MAXIMIL

I've been teaching her the true nature of black magic, Vladimir Bartinski. It's time you learned too.

TEENAGE VLAD

True nature?

MAXIMIL

Black magic is merely a tool. To be used for dark purposes. It's what it was invented for. To get gain, to get revenge, why do you think they call it black magic?

TEENAGE JAQUI

We're going to use it next week when we travel to Westcheshire. We're going to steal the royal jewels!

Vlad looks horrified.

TEENAGE VLAD

Why... Why would you do this? This is wrong!

MAXIMIL

We were given this gift to use it! Not flaunt it like some toy!

TEENAGE JAQUI

You're either with us, or against us, Vladimir.

TEENAGE VLAD

Jaqui...

Maximil takes a step towards Vlad.

MAXIMIL

He won't join us, Jaquelyn. He's too much like his father.

Vlad looks frightened. Maximil reaches out a hand to Vlad. It begins to spark angrily. Suddenly, he screams in agony, like he's being shocked, and falls to the ground. Jaqui has

her arm outstretched. She smiles.

TEENAGE VLAD
Jaqui... What did you do?

TEENAGE JAQUI
He was creating a rift between us.
Besides, he would've betrayed us.

Vlad slowly shakes his head and takes a step back.

TEENAGE VLAD
You killed him...? Jaqui, you're
the one who's created this rift. I
won't join you.

Jaqui looks slightly disappointed. Suddenly, she lets out a terrible scream and falls to her knees. A man runs to them, seeing the scene.

MAN
What happened here?!

Jaqui sobs.

TEENAGE JAQUI
He- he killed Maximil!

TEENAGE VLAD
What?!

TEENAGE JAQUI
He stabbed him! Look, he still has
the knife!

Vlad lifts his hand, which suddenly has a bloody knife in it. He drops it in horror.

TEENAGE VLAD
Jaqui... Why?

Jaqui smiles evilly at Vlad before burying her hands in her face again. The man comes up and inspects Maximil's body, then looks darkly at Vlad.

MAN
You killed my brother.

TEENAGE VLAD

W-wait, this isn't... I- I
didn't...

MAN

Get out! Leave! As the new leader
of the gypsies, I banish you! I
banish you from Northton! If you
ever return, I will kill you
myself!!

Nightlurker backs up. Jaqui smiles and waves goodbye. Vlad
turns and runs away.

NIGHTLURKER (V.O.)

After that, I left. Of course, I've
been back to Northton since, but
I've never seen the gypsies again.

EXT. ARBEIVILLE CITY TRAIN STATION-DAY

NIGHTLURKER (V.O.)

I travelled for several years,
learning more about magic along the
way. I refused to believe that
black magic was completely evil. My
father was proof enough of that for
me.

Vlad is older now, looking almost his current age. He steps
off the train, a suitcase in one hand, and a slip of paper
in the other. His coat is draped over his arm.

NIGHTLURKER (V.O.)

I had heard of a hero that single-
handedly protected a large city
with her mind powers. Assuming it
was magic, I had to investigate.

He looks at the paper, then up at The Tower a few blocks
away. A portion of the large building is under
construction. Vlad approaches an information desk.

VLAD

I'm looking for a Jayde Hemmings?

WOMAN

You mean Unstoppable Jayde? You might be able to find her at the Tower. If not there, she's saving the day somewhere. It's almost impossible to be sure.

Vlad deflates slightly.

VLAD

Oh. Alright. Thank you for your time.

Vlad walks away. The woman and the other lady working with her watch him leave.

WOMAN

Wow.

OTHER WOMAN

Was he handsome or what? He looks like he's from the North.

The two women watch him walk away with dreamy looks on their faces.

Vlad wanders absent-mindedly through the busy sidewalks.

VLAD (V.O.)

So this hero goes by Unstoppable Jayde. It is amazing that she uses her magic strictly to help others. I must have her teach me.

Vlad bumps into a man.

VLAD

Oh. Please excuse me.

X. Plods grins at Vlad.

X. PLODE

I hear you're trying to track down Unstoppable Jayde?

Vlad stiffens.

VLAD

Who told you that?

X. PLODE

I have eyes and ears all over this city, kid. If you wanna talk to the hero, that'll prove to be pretty difficult. She doesn't mingle with us common folk much.

VLAD

But I must speak with her! It is of utter importance!

X. PLODE

Listen, kid. I know a sure-fire way to get her to talk to us. But I need your help to do it.

X. Plode smiles. Vlad's face darkens.

VLAD

Absolutely not.

X. PLODE

Come on, kid. You haven't even heard me out!

VLAD

I don't need to. I can sense your intentions and they are less than honorable.

Vlad glances at a pair of policemen across the street, talking beside their car. X. Plode glares at him. He grabs Vlad's forearm and leans in to growl in his ear.

X. PLODE

I don't believe I introduced myself properly. The name's Xander Plode. Otherwise known as X. Plode, the famous bomb criminal!

His grip tightens of Vlad's arm.

X. PLODE

And you're gonna help me rob the bank, because if you don't, you're gonna go out with a bang!

Vlad's face grows very serious.

VLAD
Understood.

INT. BANK-DAY

Vlad walks calmly into the bank. He now has his coat on. He has a Bluetooth in one ear. X. Plode talks to him over the blue tooth. He sits on a bench near the exit, talking quietly into his phone.

X. PLODE (V.O.)
Now go over to the front desk, and
place the charge in the underside
of the counter.

Vlad walks forward and smiles warmly at the woman behind the desk. She blushes and smiles back.

LADY
How can I help you today?

Vlad puts a small piece of paper on the counter and slides it over to her. She reads it. It says, "I am a hostage. Stay calm and call the police." The lady looks back up at Vlad, who is still smiling.

VLAD
I'd like to open an account,
please.

He opens his jacket slightly to show that he has bombs strapped to his chest.

X. PLODE (V.O.)
What's taking so long? Just place
the bomb!

Vlad discreetly takes a small device covered in tape, and presses it to the underside of the counter. At the same time, the clerk reaches under her desk and pushes the alarm button. Then she smiles nervously and puts her hands on her keyboard.

LADY
Are you a current resident of
Arbeiville City?

VLAD

Indeed. I just moved here from the North.

X. PLODE (V.O.)

Did you place the bomb or what?!

Vlad turns to one side and nods once.

X. PLODE (V.O.)

Then get out of there!

Suddenly, the doors burst open, and the police enter. X. Plode jumps away from them.

X. PLODE

What?! What are they doing here?!

Vlad turns and bows slightly to the lady behind the counter, murmuring his thanks. He turns and lifts his hands into surrender. X. Plode runs up to him, grabbing his arm and holding up a detonator.

X. PLODE

Nobody move! Or I'll detonate the bombs strapped to this man!

Vlad calmly opens his coat to reveal the bombs. Onlookers gasp in fear.

X. PLODE

I also have a group of friends just outside to help me pull this off! Now, I want one hundred thousand dollars in their hands in three minutes, or he gets it!

The doors burst open again, as the henchmen run inside.

HENCHMAN

Boss! We've got trouble!

X. PLODE

You are supposed to wait outside!

HENCHMAN

But-

Suddenly, a green aura surrounds him, and he is thrown to one side. A slightly younger-looking Jayde steps into the room, her costume is slightly different, and her hair is longer. As she walks in, everything slows down. Vlad stares at her, dumbfounded. He lowers his hands slightly. Jayde tosses her hair, and Vlad's face turns red.

X. PLODE

Stay back! I will kill him! I- I also have a bomb hidden in this room!

Vlad simply shakes his head.

VLAD

He doesn't.

X. PLODE

What- yes I do! You placed the bomb yourself!

VLAD

You mean this?

Vlad holds up the charge. He shrugs.

VLAD

Also, none of these bombs work.

X. PLODE

What are you talking about? I made these bombs myself!

He presses the button on the detonator. Everyone except Vlad flinches. Nothing else happens. Vlad smiles warmly at Jayde.

VLAD

It's a pleasure to meet you, Jayde.

Jayde stares at Vlad in stunned silence. The police put down their guns and apprehend X. Plode and his accomplices. A cop helps Vlad take off the bombs strapped to him. Vlad offers a hand to Jayde. She takes it, and Vlad bows deeply.

JAYDE

How did... How did you do that? I know Xander. He wasn't bluffing.

Vlad holds out an elbow.

VLAD

I let him take me hostage because I need to talk to you. May I buy you a cup of coffee?

Jayde looks mystified. Finally, she shakes her head.

JAYDE

Uh, yeah! Sure!

INT. COFFEE SHOP-DAY

Vlad and Jayde sit together at a table, sipping coffee. Vlad explains his story.

VLAD

After that, I lived in Weston for a few years, and that is when I started hearing stories about you. I had to see for myself. It is magic, isn't it? When you threw that criminal to one side?

Jayde looks at Vlad. Through her eyes we can see the way she sees him. Words appear by Vlad's head. "Character: Genuine. Current Mood: Pleased. Aura Color: Indigo. Recent Emotions: Calm, Collected, Lovestruck." The word "Lovestruck" is bigger than all the other words. Using her psychic powers, she takes the lid off of her coffee cup, adds cream to it, stirs it in, and puts the lid back on. All without moving. Vlad's face changes.

VLAD

You did all that without uttering a word.

JAYDE

I'm psychic. No magic here. I'm sorry, Vladimir.

Vlad's countenance deflates.

VLAD

I see. Another dead end.

JAYDE

I don't think so.

Vlad looks up.

VLAD

What do you mean?

JAYDE

You want to use black magic to help people, right? Becoming a superhero sounds like the perfect opportunity. You could live at The Tower with me.

We see the words around Vlad's head again. The words change as he puts on a slightly awkward face and his face turns red. "Character: Genuine. Current Mood: Embarrassed/ Flattered. Aura Color: Indigo. Recent Emotions: Budding Affection." Jayde blinks in surprise.

JAYDE

I- I mean, not with-me, with me! I just mean as a team member! You know, how saving the city all the time is getting too hard for one person to-

Vlad raises a hand with a smile.

VLAD

I understand, Jayde.

There is a short silence. A hint of red returns to Vlad's face.

VLAD

Forgive me if I'm out of place, but I find I cannot but speak my mind when with you.

JAYDE

Go ahead.

VLAD

You are the single-most beautiful person I have ever laid eyes on.

INT. REC ROOM-DAY

IVAN

What?!

THE BRAWN

You said that?!

Jayde nods, who is now sitting beside Vlad. She smiles.

JAYDE

It was the first time I'd ever seen
him so forward!

NIGHTLURKER

And last.

Jayde nods.

JAYDE

That's true. Until recently.

NIGHTLURKER

After all the darkness I had
experienced from my youngest days,
Jayde was a breath of fresh air.
She wanted to help save her city,
even if she had to do it all by
herself. And she was the loveliest
creature I had ever seen. She was
the light for my broken soul.

Everyone stares at him in silence. Vlad blinks at them in
surprise.

NIGHTLURKER

Did I say something wrong?

The Brawn whimpers.

THE BRAWN

That's the most beautiful thing
I've ever heard!

Ivan puts a finger to his lips.

IVAN

Hush, Theo! Let him tell the rest
of the story!

NIGHTLURKER

There's not much left to tell,
really. I joined The Unstoppables.

IVAN

I think we all know you're trying
to skip an important part of the
story.

Nightlurker's face turns slightly red as he folds his arms
and looks away.

NIGHTLURKER

... Fine.

INT. THE TOWER HALLWAY- DAY

Vlad and Jayde walk along the hallway in the first
renditions of their costumes.

JAYDE

And the cafeteria is down this way.
Since we're superheroes, we get to
eat here for free.

VLAD

Alright.

JAYDE

So! Have you decided on a superhero
name yet?

VLAD

What do you mean? You don't have
one.

JAYDE

Actually, it's my real name I got
rid of. I'm just Jayde, now.

VLAD

Don't you mean Unstoppable Jayde?

JAYDE

I've been thinking. I think I'll
just shorten my name to Jayde, and
we can share the Unstoppable name.

Vlad's face goes completely red.

VLAD
Sh-share a name??

JAYDE
Yeah! We could call our team "The Unstoppables"! Jayde and Vlad!

VLAD
Nightlurker.

JAYDE
What?

VLAD
My superhero name. I shall be called Nightlurker.

Jayde smiles.

JAYDE
It certainly fits your style.

Jayde turns to leave. Vlad watches her go, then takes a step after her, grabbing her hand.

VLAD
Wait! Before you go, I...

Jayde turns back to him, her expression surprised.

VLAD
I wondered if I might ask you...
er... on a... non work-related
outing of the city?

There is a short silence.

JAYDE
Are you asking me on a date?

Vlad's face turns red and he looks away.

VLAD
Um... Maybe?

Jayde looks sad for a moment. Then she smiles sadly.

JAYDE

Vlad, I'm sorry. But I can't return
the feelings you have for me.

Vlad's eyes widen, his face even more red. He lets go of
Jayde's hand, bowing his head.

VLAD

O-of course. I understand. I
apologize. I was being much too
forward.

Vlad turns to leave, but Jayde calls after him. He has his
back to her, but turns his head back slightly.

JAYDE

Vladimir?

VLAD

Yes?

JAYDE

Will you do something for me?

Vlad speaks quietly.

VLAD

I will do anything you wish, Jayde.

JAYDE

Please understand. If my past
wasn't so close behind me, things
might be different. I just don't
want you to get caught up in it as
well if it comes back to haunt me.

Vlad turns back, putting on a small smile.

VLAD

If or when that happens, I will be
there to help you fight through.
Until then, I will be your partner
in keeping your city safe.

Vlad bows deeply to her, then leaves. Jayde watches him go,
sighing as he disappears.

INT. REC ROOM-DAY

JAYDE

Of course, I was taken by him from the very start, but it took me a while to sort through my past.

NIGHTLURKER

But we are together, now. And that is all that really matters to me.

Ivan puts on a thoughtful look, nodding slowly. He turns suddenly to look at the door. Hero is leaning against it. Ivan straightens.

IVAN

Hero! How long have you been there?

HERO

Since Dyktha had her self portrait made. None of you guys noticed I was here? Seriously?

THE BRAWN

We were engrossed in a story! Cut us some slack!

Ivan smiles and pats the seat next to him. Hero reponds with a smile and takes his offer.

THE BRAWN

So, Jayde. What about your past?

JAYDE

Oh, no. You won't get me to tell that easily.

Vlad snorts.

NIGHTLURKER

You think that was easy?!

Everyone but Vlad laughs. Theo looks at his watch.

THE BRAWN

Hey! The cafeteria's open for dinner!

Everyone but Hero and Ivan get up.

VLAD

It is about time. I am famished!

THE BRAWN

You guys coming?

IVAN

We'll catch up with you guys later.

Jayde winks at Hero, who just smiles. Finally, they are alone. Hero plays with a piece of her hair and casts her eyes downward. Ivan just smiles warmly at her.

HERO

Listen, Ivan. I wanted to-

Ivan interrupts her by kissing her. Hero looks surprised, than accepts the kiss. Finally, Ivan pulls away.

IVAN

I've been waiting for you to come around. How I've missed you.

Hero is mystified.

HERO

But... But what about the rut we were both supposed to get out of?

IVAN

Listen. I never really talked about what happened when I was in the desert. I was taken in by this sweet little family, who cared for me like I was part of it. Being part of a family felt so nice, it pulled me completely out of that rut. But you know what?

Ivan gently grabs Hero's hand.

IVAN

I jumped back in. And you're just gonna have to forgive me for what I did in my past because I belong right here with you. Even better

(MORE)

IVAN (CONT'D)

than being adopted by ninjas or
taken in by a wonderful family, is
being yours. For as long as you'll
have me.

Hero smiles as tears run down her face.

HERO

Ivan... I love you!

She buries her face in his chest, and Ivan buries his face
in her hair.

IVAN

I love you too, Hero.

INT. THE TOWER HALLWAY-EVENING

Theo and Jayde have their ears pressed against the door.
They grin at each other excitedly and give each other an
enthusiastic fist bump. Vlad looks at them curiously.

NIGHTLURKER

What are you two going on about?

END.