

Sometimes, being a vampire would make life a lot simpler.

Chris stared down the gun barrels facing him, rather than their owners. They were the more pressing element of this situation.

In his mind he was already evaluating trajectories, working out the optimal number of steps to close the distance to his opponents, and how many bullets he could afford to take along the way. The still-falling snow would make the ground treacherous.

They wouldn't kill him, of course – very little could any more. His mutated DNA and the endless series of rituals he'd performed on himself had seen to that. They'd still hurt, however. Being halfway between human and vampire had plenty of drawbacks.

"D'you hear what I said, freak?" the first gunman said, distracting Chris from his calculations. "Leave the money, walk away, and maybe we don't put six in your back on your way out."

It was a narrow, alleyway between two nondescript buildings, the perfect place for the kind of deal Chris needed to survive. His body craved blood, among other things, and it always forced him into meetings with exactly the kinds of people who'd sooner shoot him than take his hard-won cash.

The three thugs attempting to shake him down were the usual sort – low level muscle, only here on the order of someone better-protected. Whether their bullets were loaded with something more harmful than regular bullets depended entirely on how well-informed their boss was.

"I heard you fine, I'm just not in the business of walking away from my deals, gentlemen," said Chris. Forced civility always seemed to unnerve people in a standoff.

The third gunman, youngest and twitchiest of the crew, threw worried glances at his comrades. Chris had already clocked him as the most likely to shoot first.

"We know what you are," said the second man, whose gun hadn't wavered from Chris' head since he drew it. "Don't think we won't shoot."

Chris shifted the medical cooler containing his prize under his arm, using the movement to mask reaching for one of his knives. He could probably get one off mid-roll to help even the odds, but he'd almost certainly take a few shots before getting close enough to any of the gunmen.

"I know you'll shoot," said Chris, finally picking up movement in the shadows behind the three men. *Finally*, he thought. "If you can, I mean."

The first gunman frowned, his finger tightening on his pistol's trigger.

"Hey, *baumgartner*!" came a female voice from behind him. He spun round.

Straight into the meaty *crack* of a metal alloy baseball bat, impacting his face with an expert swing.

He span round and dropped face-first into the snow.

"What the – " managed the second, before a throwing knife embedded into his shoulder with a soft *shunk*.

As he screamed in pain and reeled backwards, the last gunman – the young, twitchy one – finally got a shot off.

Chris grunted as the bullet slammed into the meat of his arm, even as he bounded towards the kid, arm behind his back.

"Ah-ah," said the woman's voice again, as a hand grabbed the youth's pistol and wrenched it out of his grip.

He turned, finally seeing the owner of the baseball bat.

Blonde curls, pale skin and an impish smile grinned back at him. She was early twenties at the most, five feet tall and not an inch more.

"Bit rude," she said, a moment before Chris tackled the youth to the floor. The youngster fought back, limbs flailing, but in moments Chris had pinned him to the floor, looming over him.

As the youth stared up at him, Chris let his other side show. His eyes filled with a blood red swirl of colour, incisors lengthening. Chris found such displays distasteful, but often necessary.

"Get out of here," he rumbled, his voice deeper, feral. Releasing his weight on the youth, the boy scrambled to his feet and took off back down the alley, not looking back.

"What about these two?" said the girl, as Chris rose and dusted himself down. Chris checked the scene – one man unconscious, nose obviously out of joint, the other writhing and moaning, clutching the blade deep in his shoulder.

Chris recovered the medical cooler, popping the box's lid to check its contents. "Can't hurt to send a message back to Mr. Kether, Twist. I'll let you decide what that message says."

Twist grinned – revealing fangs of her own, her eyes taking on that same crimson hue even as Chris' returned to normal.

She reached down, grabbing the jacket of the injured thug and hauling him upright with ease. The man briefly forgot his pain as he stared, horrified, into Twist's face.

"This *is* going to hurt," she said matter-of-factly, "and I *am* going to enjoy it. Just so you're aware of the terms of service here."

"Wha – " the gunman said, before Twist lunged forward, mouth wide, fangs seeking his exposed neck.

Chris turned away, leaving Twist to feed as the man moaned, energy fading along with his struggles. Twist's arms were locked around him, keeping him still. She gulped and drank deeply, before pulling away with a gasp.

Woozy from the blood loss, the gunman's eyes fluttered as he took in Twist's hellish visage. Fresh blood, his own, running down her chin.

"Pleasure doing business with you," she said sweetly, releasing him at last. He slumped to the floor, sprawled out beside his fallen comrade.

"Clean yourself up," Chris said curtly, as Twist walked back over to join him. "Remember what I told you."

"It's genuinely hard to tell sometimes," said Twist, wiping the blood away with her sleeve. "You expect me to remember a lot."

He shot her a look. She responded with an innocent smile that was neither of those things. "Come on," he said, just about hiding his smile. "We've got what we came for."

Twist looked back into the alley as the two headed for the lights of the street beyond. She offered a little wave to the two prone thugs.

All in a night's work.

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Chris preferred loud bars to quiet ones. One of the benefits he liked about his condition was selective hearing – being able to communicate down to a whisper and have his target hear him with perfect clarity.

It worked better if said target was actually listening, however.

"Hey! Hey!" yelled Twist, putting fingers in her mouth to whistle for the bartender's attention. "Oh, oh, look. That's right. Go serve the tits at the other end, instead of an *actual paying customer!*" she barked, voice rising sharply.

"Calm down," said Chris, an untouched pint in front of him. "We've got plenty of time before Carla gets here."

"That doesn't mean I want to spend my time waiting to get served, just because I don't look like I'd rather be *twatting about on Instagram!*" Twist barked again, directing her closing statement to the far end of the bar.

The bartender, unaffected, continued taking his time to serve the trio of heavily-retouched young woman holding his attention.

Twist settled her chin on her crossed arms, slouching down in her chair. Chris carried on checking a chain of messages on his phone.

Around them, the bustle of the bar rolled on, oblivious to anybody within in. Music thumped from a high-mounted DJ booth. Chatter, laughter and shouted conversations filled the air. It was anonymity in plain sight, and a welcome change from their evening so far.

"Remind me of the plan," said Twist, still petulantly slumped across the counter. Chris exhaled. This wasn't the first time she'd asked.

"Carla's bringing a contact called Miles to see us," said Chris. "Apparently, he has some work that needs people with our skillset, and is prepared to pay well for it."

"Is this an underground kind of job, or something else?"

"Something else," said Chris, noting Twist's eye roll in response. "You know very well what my stance is on dealing with the trades, Twist."

"Yeah, yeah, I know," said Twist glumly. "Somebody else's problem."

Chris glanced up, registering a well-dressed woman entering the bar, accompanied by a tall, skinny man in an attempt at a tailored suit.

"They're here," he said, tapping Twist's arm as he rose from his seat. Making eye contact with the woman, he nodded towards a nearby booth.

Chris and Twist were already waiting as the new arrivals joined them, exchanging brief nods of greeting. The woman slid easily along the bench, while the larger man's frame made folding himself into the space a more awkward affair.

"Good to see you, Carla," said Chris. "This must be Miles?" he asked with a glance.

"Chris, Twist," Carla replied. "Hope the nomadic lifestyle's been treating you well?"

Twist raised an eyebrow in Chris' direction. If he noticed, he chose not to respond.

"Nothing to report. And you must be Miles?" said Chris.

"Ah, yes, er... yes," said the man, offering a hand. Chris looked at the outstretched hand, then to Carla.

"What can you tell me about the work you need doing?" said Chris, as Miles slowly retracted his hand and coughed. He looked to Carla, who nodded her assent.

"You'll have to forgive me, ah, I've never – I mean, I haven't dealt with a –"

"Vampire?" said Twist, a smirk creeping across her face as Miles shifted in his seat. She leaned forward, interlacing her fingers. "Please, tell me what you were expecting."

"Cut it out, Twist," said Carla, well versed in Twist's behaviour. "Alex has a legitimate job for the two of you. He's stuck his neck out to even set up a meeting with you both."

"Has he?" said Twist, fluttering her eyelashes. "Now isn't that *just* how I like it."

Impatient, Chris nudged her back in her seat, grabbing the reins of the conversation. "Please don't let my associate's attitude deter you. I can assure you we're both professionals."

Miles didn't seem fully convinced, but with another urging nod from Carla, he continued.

"I work in press. Centrally. Who for isn't important, but the kinds of things I cover are. It's come to my client's attention that an investigative journalist is in possession of... materials that would be highly damaging to my client if they became public."

"Porn," said Twist. "It's always porn."

"Who's your client?" said Chris, but Carla shook her head at his question.

"Not relevant," she said. "Alex, go on."

Miles paused, still uneasy. "We need you to find the journalist, retrieve the stolen information, and dissuade them from pursuing the story."

Chris narrowed his eyes, turning to Carla. "I've told you before, we don't do this kind of work."

"It's not a hit, Chris. You can stay off the moral high ground on this one."

"We're not interested," said Chris, rising. Twist started to follow.

"Wait, wait, wait," said Miles, hands raised. Chris paused, offering him one chance. "I don't... I don't want anybody hurt or killed. Please believe me."

Chris studied Miles for a long beat. Satisfied for now, he nodded to Twist to sit back down. Miles exhaled, relieved. Carla looked less amused by Chris' strongarm tactics.

"Look, truth be told," said Miles, "I don't even know what these compromising materials *are*. It could be anything. Innocent or otherwise. All I know is that my client is willing to pay a large amount of cash, no questions asked, to whoever can make it go away."

Carla retrieved a USB drive from her suit jacket, palming it across the booth table to Chris.

"Everything you need," she said as Chris scooped the drive up.

"Expenses?" asked Twist hopefully.

"We're prepared to offer two grand a day for up to two weeks," said Miles. "After that, if you don't have any results..." He let the statement trail off.

Carla waited, watching Chris as he turned the drive round in his fingers. Finally, he pocketed it, reaching a hand out to Miles. Miles shook, relieved, before Chris rose from the booth again.

"We'll be in touch with our requirements," he said. "Carla? A word." He nodded for her to follow him, walking away into the bar. Carla mumbled an apology to Miles before exiting the booth to follow.

Left behind with Twist, Miles coughed nervously. Twist reclined in her chair, grinning as she drummed her fingers on the table.

"Whatever shall we talk about?" she said.

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"I don't care what you think you know about me," said Chris, an angry finger jabbing at Carla, "but I don't kill people unless I have a damn good reason, and a suitcase full of money does *not* qualify as a 'damn good reason'."

Tucked away in a darker corner of the bar, Carla folded her arms and exhaled, making a show of Chris' defiance.

"Yes, you've made your position on that perfectly clear every time you've come back with blood on your hands, Christopher," said Carla, unimpressed. "We both know that as long as Malcolm has whatever he has over you, you're stuck. You can either do the work and keep getting paid, or walk away and see how long you last on your own."

"I've been 'on my own' longer than you've been alive, Carla," said Chris. "I can look after myself just fine."

"And what about her? You may act like you can keep yourself out of the sunlight, but do you really think Twist can cope with a target like that on her back?"

"Leave her out of this," Chris snarled.

"Don't become a liability, Chris," she said, stepping closer to him. "If you're a liability, then that means Malcolm doesn't trust you, and if he doesn't trust you, then any protection you've enjoyed working for him disappears. For *both* of you."

Chris exhaled slowly. Carla leaned into her pose with all the confidence of having won the debate.

"You heard Miles, loud and clear. We're not asking you to kill anybody."

"I heard what he said," snapped Chris, "but I also know you too well. Whenever you put this kind of offer my way, there's an expectation."

"Maybe you should ask yourself why that is," said Carla. "Now how about we walk back over there, you fetch your partner and get to work, and leave the details to people who know how to take care of them." She walked past him and back towards the booths, leaving Chris behind to seethe.

He rubbed a hand over his chest. The same part of him that always ached was flaring up again. Whether it was an unconscious warning or something more deliberate, it reminded him of his place in all of this.

Right at the bottom.

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Twist risked a glance towards Chris. Outside the windshield, orange bars of streetlights rolled by. Chris hadn't said a word since they'd left the bar. His hands gripped the van's steering wheel tight. He was coiled tight, and in the mood for no games.

"Hey," she said, jabbing him in the shoulder with her finger. He looked across. She raised her shoulders expectantly.

"Don't," he said. Defeat hung in the air around him, something she'd seen in him more and more over recent months. Whatever arrangement he was trapped in was eating away at him, no matter what she tried to do to lift his mood.

"Are you going to talk to me about it?" she asked. Chris let out a long breath, something he no longer needed to do, but kept as a useful piece of body language.

"What's on the drive?" he said, nodding towards the laptop open across her knees. Twist stuck her chin out, but accepted the change of subject as a signal to bench this conversation until later.

"Our hack's name is Rosie Stapleford," she said, her finger sweeping around the laptop's trackpad. "She's bounced between papers since graduating with a first class journalism and media communications degree, never settling for long. Plenty of high profile stories, lots of powerful people who would have preferred her to study fashion or food science instead."

"Is she human?" said Chris. Twist tapped at the keyboard, searching.

"Far as I can tell. Hey, remember that one guy in government who got found out about the thing a while back?" She tilted the screen his way, so Chris could glance at a blog post's headline. "That was her." She returned to work, whistling as she scrolled down a list of Rosie's achievements. "She's good. Blown a lot of public interest stuff wide open. Must have cost a lot of people a lot of money. I remember reading a lot these stories... they were all her!" Twist chuckled. "Keeps getting herself fired by pissing off the wrong people, too. I like her already."

"Any indication on what it is she's sitting on that has Miles and his client so concerned?" said Chris. He turned the wheel, the van heading off a main road and down into a business area of the city.

"Nah," she shook her head. "Just lists some file names we need to retrieve or destroy, no details." She closed the laptop lid and resumed her critical study of Chris. "Despite my undeniable skills, we're not hackers. Or assassins. Why are we taking this? And when are we going to get back to your *actual* to-do list? You know, the one you went on about at *great* length when we first met?"

"What do you want me to say?" he said. "That we're broke? We are. That our kind of work has been thin on the ground since Parker Industries kicked up their efforts? It has been." He shrugged. "I don't like it either, but I made it clear to Carla we're not hitmen."

“But intimidating a legitimate journalist because somebody rich said so, that’s fine?” Twist replied, an edge to her words Chris never liked to hear. “I don’t like this. We seem to be getting dragged into this kind of thing a lot lately. I don’t like what it’s doing to us. To *you*.”

“I said —” Chris said sharply, cutting his sentence off and reeling his frustration back. He took a moment, sensing Twist shift away from him in her seat a touch. “We handle this however we choose to,” he resumed.

“That doesn’t have to mean violence,” she said.

He brought their van to a halt in a small car park, surrounded by tall office blocks on all sides. A handful of other vehicles were parked up, scattered lights on throughout the buildings nearby.

Chris looked out and up, focusing his attention on one corner of a floor halfway up one of the taller buildings.

“She’s still at her desk,” said Twist, fingers tapping at the laptop keys. “Been on a bit of a tweetstorm about electoral malpractice, phone GPS puts her in the office.”

“Let’s get this done quickly,” said Chris, reaching into the body of the van for a black backpack. “I want this one out of our way tonight.”

Twist snapped the laptop shut, stuffing it into her own bag and opening the passenger door. She reached under her seat and retrieved her baseball bat, tucked away in its own shoulder bag.

“I managed to get the floor plans, but if you want to go in now, we’re not going to be able to spoof IDs or get around the security,” she said as Chris joined her, the duo striding across the car park. “And last time I checked, you regrettably do *not* have a grappling hook in that little go-bag of yours.”

“Then we’ll go in the front door, and ask nicely,” said Chris. They exchanged a smirk. Bad vibes surrounding tonight’s task aside, this was the part they both enjoyed.

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Darren never thought he’d end up in security, but given his frame and love of tackling smaller people, it had been a natural fit. When bodyslamming would-be thieves in TK Maxx had lost its lustre, he’d started applying for private work, and now here he was.

Feet up on the desk, West Brom’s latest defeat on the tablet propped against the CCTV screens, a footlong Marinara Meatball ready to devour.

His mates had warned him about working at a news corporation these days – attacks on journalists were common in the current political climate, and nobody wanted to get stuck defending some uni snob who read a poem once and thought they were a writer against the EDL, or whoever else was out to get them that week.

In Darren’s experience, it had been plain sailing. Quiet in the evening, monotonous routine during the day, suited him down the ground. He did miss the chance to practice his wrestling moves on lowlifes, but his baby brother was big enough to take an RKO now without crying to mum, so that’d have to do.

Unwrapping the first half of his dinner, he took a deep, gooey bite before pausing. Something felt off. Not with the sandwich, but out in the empty foyer.

He put the sub down, rising from his desk to scan the large, square room before him. The boss men upstairs insisted on leaving the lights on all night, something about a show of 'resilience' or some bollocks like that. Apart from giving Darren a headache by the end of his shift, it at least made spotting people lurking outside easier to spot.

Right now, however, there was nobody in sight. So why was he getting goosebumps, like somebody was standing an inch behind him?

He narrowed his eyes, grabbed his torch and swept its beam across the foyer.

There – what was that? Something moving, a shimmer, like the bits floating across his eyes he could see in the morning before his glasses were on.

As Darren left the sanctuary of his desk to walk out into the foyer, Chris and Twist continued their slow circle around him, being careful to give the security guard a wide berth.

The illusion Chris had cast over them both would last long enough to get them safely up the stairs at the back of the foyer and out of sight. Twist stayed close to him, treading lightly. Their footsteps were deadened to near silence, but they still left a faint afterimage behind them.

Chris motioned towards the stairwell, indicating the path they should take. Twist nodded, looking back towards Darren.

She froze as his torch beam rolled over her – but all Darren could see was a slight ripple in his awareness, as if looking through cellophane for an instant.

Unsettled, but satisfied the foyer was clear, Darren cautiously returned to his desk. Just a bad feeling, he shrugged. Probably needed a nap once the footie highlights were over.

He sat back down and reached for his sub, as behind him the apparitions that were Chris and Twist made it to the stairs and headed upwards.

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Back to their natural place on the visual spectrum, Chris marched on through open-plan floors of empty cubicles, Twist following behind.

She glanced up at a CCTV camera mounted on the wall, but she knew Chris' glamour would hold and keep them from being seen. All but the most ultra hi-def cameras could register more than a flicker when he'd thrown up the invisibility cloak like this.

"There's a line about companies wasting energy by insisting on leaving the lights on," said Twist, "but I forget what it is." Chris stayed quiet. They walked on.

"What are we going to do when we find her?" she said. Chris decided not to answer. "'Cause, you know, we *could* just ask her what she's working on that would have somebody so worried, and then make our own call on whether or not that justifies killing her story..."

"The less we know, the better," said Chris. "I want to be out of here before she even knows what happened."

He carried on walking, getting a few more steps before realising Twist had stopped. He sighed, knowing already this was going to be a painful conversation. "Twist..." he began, turning.

"No, no, you don't get to 'Twist' at me this time," she said, angrily stepping up to meet him. "What the hell are we doing here? I gave you the benefit of the doubt up 'til now because, you know, I thought maybe you were just bluffing back with Carla and whatsisname, Miles, maybe you were bluffing with *me* because God knows, you mess with me often enough all the rest of the time, so I thought, just now, I thought 'I'll give him one last chance. One last chance to show me he's not serious about this.' And guess what? You failed." She folded her arms. "And I'm not taking another step until you promise me we're not going to hurt this girl, and we're not going to bury her story if it matters."

She stared him down, ready to throw down if she had to. "You know I'm right. People like her shine a light on the kinds of people we like bringing down."

Chris held her gaze for as long as he could, before bowing his head. "I'm sorry," he said quietly. Twist opened her mouth to respond, before her brain caught up and she realised just how rare an occasion she'd just stumbled into.

"It's... look, I get that it's difficult," she said, shifting her weight. "But I'm not going with you if you're really going to silence her. We don't know enough about this. We need to find out what she knows. And I couldn't care less if Carla's boss, or Miles' boss even, would rather we burn her hard drive and rough her up. She's one of the good guys. We shouldn't be acting like the bad guys."

"I think you're right," said Chris. "It's just... there are things you don't know, Twist. Situations I try to protect you from."

"I can take care of myself," she said, attitude creeping back into her stance.

"I've never said you couldn't. And I know this isn't what we do, but..." he trailed off.

"But what?" said Twist. "Whatever it is, you can tell me. You *have* to tell me. I'm in this with you to the bitter end, you know that. But I can't do that if you're keeping secrets from me. I can handle a few, but not if they're going to drag us into becoming the kinds of people we usually go up against."

Chris hesitated, formulating a response – before the sound of a door opening across the floor sent them both ducking for cover.

Peering over a partition wall, Chris watched Rosie walk back from a photocopier room, a sheaf of freshly-printed papers in her hand. She was tall, slim and bookish, with large round glasses and long, straggly blonde hair.

She reached an office door, unlocked it with a swipe of her access card and stepped through.

"Guess we're out of time to argue about this," said Twist, before vaulting neatly over the partition and making for the office.

"Twist, wait! *Twist!*" hissed Chris, but there was no stopping her now. Muttering a curse, he rose and hurried after her, reaching her just as she made it to Rosie's office door.

Within her office, Rosie looked up from her PC screen as she heard the door click, turning with a frown towards it.

The click turned into a *crunch* as the handle deformed, pulled from the other side with inhuman force, and Rosie leapt to her feet as the door swung open.

"Okay, okay, I know how this must look," said Twist as she entered, hands up in deference.

"Who – what – what are you doing here?" said an alarmed Rosie, stumbling back across the room, colliding with empty chairs. The room had space for four people, desks covered in files, clutter, personal effects.

Chris stole in behind Twist, pulling the door closed and bracing it with a chair to give them some privacy.

"I promise, we're not here for trouble," said Twist, before tracing Rosie's eyeline to the nearest phone. "Don't," she said.

Rosie darted for the phone, Twist moving to intercept, but Rosie got there first. Receiver in hand, she started hammering out a code.

*Shink.*

The receiver cable fell limply to the floor, cut cleanly in two.

Shaking, Rosie looked down to see the blade of a jet black katana embedded in the desk, having neatly severed the phone line. She followed the blade back to Chris, its owner. With a grunt he wrenched the blade free from the desktop.

"I did say 'don't'", said Twist in apology.

Rosie straightened, determined to show defiance. "Security'll be here any second."

"No, they won't," said Chris, returning his sword to a sheath hidden within the folds of his long duster coat.

"Look, we're not here to hurt you. I swear," said Twist, removing her backpack and bat and laying both on the nearest surface. "See? We just want to talk."

"Whoever sent you," said Rosie, showing the backbone of somebody used to being intimidated for her work, "it doesn't matter. We have lawyers. Protections. Something called 'integrity', that people like you wouldn't know the meaning of."

Chris and Twist exchanged a look. Twist grinned. "I *really* like her," she said.

"Rosie, please," said Chris, backing a few steps away. "Hear us out. I apologise for the way we announced ourselves," he said, with a sidelong glare at Twist, "but you need to hear us out. My name is Christopher Barclay, this is my colleague Sophia McFadden."

"Call me Twist," said Twist, offering a hand to shake. Rosie's arms stayed tight by her sides.

"What do you want?" Rosie asked, as a sheepish Twist lowered her hand.

"Just to talk," said Chris. "Twist, show her the filenames we were told about."

Twist nodded, retrieving her laptop and bringing up the contents of Miles' USB drive. "Somebody wanted us to get these files back," she said, "but we think there's more to this."

Rosie hesitated, not willing to take her eyes off either of them, but leaned forward to scan the screen. Her eyes widened as she read down, before her previous belligerence returned with interest.

"You need to leave. *Now*," she said, firm. "I don't give up my sources, and I will never compromise an active investigation, no matter who Mitchell throws at me."

"Who's 'Mitchell'?" said Twist.

Rosie blinked, confusion setting in. "You... you weren't sent by Mitchell? Or McCaig?" she said.

Chris chewed his lip, choosing his words carefully. "They used a middleman. Tall chap called Miles."

"Do they have, like, an alliterative name recruitment policy or something?" said Twist.

Rosie let out a sigh, sitting back down, her defiance replaced with weariness. "Miles, of course," she muttered. "Here, let me show you something," she said, turning back to her PC and starting to type.

Twist pulled up a chair, sitting close enough to Rosie to make the journalist shift her chair a few inches further away. Chris leaned back against the wall, arms folded.

"This is who you're working for," said Rosie, bringing up a series of articles and pushing away from her desk to let Chris and Twist read.

Chris scanned quickly down the page, taking in the top-line facts – Miles' name appeared in a lot of stories involving extortion, libel, blackmail and other cases stretching back several years. Always at the side of powerful, untouchable men.

"*Told* you he was a prick," said Twist, punching Chris in the arm.

"Miles makes a living protecting people," said Rosie. "Let me guess, when you met him, did he seem out of place? Suit looked cheap, nervous, that kind of thing?" Rosie took the pause that followed as confirmation. "All part of the act. He's a nasty piece of work and we've been on each others' radar for a while now." She let out a bitter chuckle. "Just never thought he'd actually send the goon squad after me," she added, her eyes flicking to the concealed blade in Chris' coat.

"I think if we were going to cause trouble, it'd be happening by now," said Chris, trying to keep his tone even. "Why don't you tell us what's on these files that Miles wants back so badly, and if it's a situation that needs help..." He glanced at Twist. "... then maybe we can help."

Twist smiled, proud. Rosie studied them both, still trying to figure out what was actually happening. Finally, she stood. "I can do one better," she said. "I can show you."