

Leo was completely naked. His eyes were bloodshot, with deep shadows smeared underneath.

'I'm sorry to disturb you,' I said. 'I'm here about Dante.'

Leo blinked. 'Who?'

'Your boyfriend.'

Leo smothered a yawn. 'I've only just got back from work. I fell asleep on the sofa. What the hell do you want at this time in a morning?'

'It isn't morning anymore. Can I come in?'

Leo turned away, leaving the door open, and giving me an unimpeded view of his tanned buttocks and broad back. A snake tattoo traced down his spine, ending in a fanged head just above his coccyx.

The flat was small and open-plan. Leo grabbed a pink dressing gown from a hook on the back of a door, and wrapped it around his body. He moved like a trained dancer.

'I smell Unit,' he said, looking me up and down.

I fumbled for my ID, but Leo waved a hand. 'Don't bother. It's the clothes. Nobody except a Unit rookie wears cheap, ill-fitting black with their hair scraped back. And no makeup. Tut tut.'

'I'm afraid I've got some very bad news. You might want to sit down.'

Leo pulled a beaker off a shelf and poured himself some just-like-juice.

'Nothing can shock me. Not anymore. Go on.'

'Dante – your boyfriend – he threw himself off a balcony above a dress shop on North Side. I'm afraid he's dead.'

Leo swigged, swishing his mouth before swallowing.

'Dante...' his voice was dreamy, his eyes far away. 'What makes you think he was my boyfriend?'

'That was the word on Shifter's Alley,' I said. 'I was led to believe you were his next of kin.'

Leo snorted and ditched the beaker. 'We had sex a few times. He bought me flowers. Real ones too, not the cloned sort. Must've cost him an arm and a leg. Probably stole the credits that paid for them.' Leo swung away and tightened the cord around his waist. 'Dante always did have expensive taste.'

'Dante died earlier this morning. He went on a two day drink binge before he flew.'

Leo kept his back to me. 'Shit. You don't say.'

He reached a hand up to scratch the back of his neck, where the tail of the snake disappeared underneath his hairline. His fingers were trembling.

'I'm trying to piece together Dante's final movements. I believe he had surgery recently. About two weeks ago?'

Leo began rifling through things stacked on the table, tossing them aside with agitated movements.

'Dante fucked his liver up with too many drugs. I warned him, but he wouldn't listen. And before you ask, just because I dance naked to pay my way doesn't mean I'm hooked on crap too.'

'I wasn't going to ask,' I said.

'Well, you'd be the first. Most people assume I'm just like the rest of the crowd, but I actually want to get out, you know? One day I want a window garden with real carrots growing in it, and a regular table at Hex's. I gave Dante the opportunity to change and to come with me.'

'How long had Dante been an addict?'

'Long enough,' snapped Leo. 'He got so ill that his dancing suffered. He couldn't keep muscle on, couldn't work a shift without adding steroids to his protein shakes – couldn't stay awake for the high-tipping punters, you know, the ones from Upstairs at your place?'

'Nobody ever sees the ones from Upstairs. Not unless you work above floor Eighty Nine.'

'Don't you believe it.' Leo stopped looking for whatever he'd lost. 'I told Dante he had to live clean, or he wouldn't work at all. Who do you think is going to pay for you to shoot up then, I said, because it won't be me, lover boy.'

He snatched something poking from underneath an empty Veggie No Death snack-box, and held it to his chest.

'So how did Dante get hold of the new liver?'

Leo took a deep, shaking breath. ‘Dante’s condition had gone too far to be treated. He couldn’t afford to pay for a new liver to be grown, so he said the next best thing was to go recycled.’

‘You mean use a donor.’

‘I prefer to think of it as recycling. I mean, you don’t have to ask the person who originally grew it why they don’t need it any more, do you?’

‘So Dante had a private op.’

‘Yes. But I don’t know how, on his wages.’

‘I’ve traced the donor.’

Leo's head snapped to attention. His eyes widened with alarm, and his fingers loosened around whatever he was holding. It was a photograph, but not a holo photo: it was one of the old fashioned sorts that flick between a couple of static images. Retro, they call them.

‘You’ve come to the wrong place if you’re looking for a bankroller, sister,’ he snapped. ‘I certainly didn’t pay for a transplant. Hell, how would I do that living in a dump like this?’

My eyes roved the ceiling, which was peeling, and the corners of the room, blackened with dirt. Leo opened a drawer. There was nothing inside. He put the photograph face down and closed it, then began to pull a pile of clothes off the settee. His movements were rapid and bird-like, his fingers pecking at the fabrics. He looped everything carelessly over one arm. I didn’t say a word. I

knew I didn't have to. He'd talk, when he was ready. Eventually, Leo stopped and stood, like one of those kid's toys with its solar panel covered, motionless, but weirdly so, as though he'd got stuck in the middle of a manoeuvre when the power cut out.

'Dante said he didn't need dropping off or collecting from the clinic. I don't even know where he had the op. All I know is, it was a good place, with anti-rejection therapy and sonic scar healing. Said he'd be dancing again within days. Said that's what you got if you were prepared to pay for the best.'

'Did Dante's operation take place in River City?'

Leo shrugged. 'I never found out. And I don't want to know either.' He picked a shiny body suit up, and shook it out. The material tintinnabulated delicately, as though it was made of myriad tiny parts. 'Real lizard scales,' he said, holding it up.

It glittered in the light.

'I thought all the real lizards were dead.'

Leo laughed bitterly. 'You can get anything providing you've got the money. But then again, you should know. You're Unit.'

'Tell me about the meetings at the Fork Tongue club, Leo.'

Leo waved a hand. 'There's always some group or other holding meetings downstairs. I didn't get involved. If you want to know more, just look at the flyers. One month there's a run on political lobbying, the next they're making

cloned flower arrangements for the rich.'

'What about Dante's interests?'

Leo slung the clothes over the arm of the settee. 'Apart from the drugs, I have no idea what interested Dante. All that sex, and I never really got to know.'

'But you said you wanted to start a new life with him, away from here.'

Leo shrugged. 'It's the same speech I give everybody.'

'Did Dante ever mention a group who use the sigil of the ram's head?'

Leo picked up the feather boa and ran it through his fingers. 'Yes. Dante was into new groups. I used to joke he'd be doing yoga next.'

'Did you go along to the meetings?'

'Only once.'

'What happened?'

Leo tipped his head on one side, remembering. 'It was just like you'd expect. Some fat guy stood at the front whipping everyone into a frenzy, asking would you like to change your lives, would you like eternal happiness, how about if death and disease no longer existed... the usual trash.' A single feather detached itself from the boa and floated like a fluffy parachute, dipping and swaying towards the floor. 'Dante went a few times, but I never joined him again. Then he stopped talking about it.'

'Was this just before his transplant?'

Leo nodded. 'Yeah, I guess it was. Now if that's all, I really do have to

catch up with my beauty sleep. I've a gig tonight and I have to look fresh.'

'Are you OK?'

'You win some, you lose some, honey,' he smirked. 'I'll never be short of somebody to take me out to dinner. Poor Dante. Be sure to kiss his corpse for me. Was he... was he pretty mashed up?'

'You can visit him in the Unit morgue... although I can't guarantee how much of him you'll be able to view.'

Leo looked thoughtful for a moment. 'Nah. The doormen give me the creeps.'

'Thank you for your time. And I'm sorry.'

I let myself out of the flat into a gust of cold air. As I took the steps down to street level, something fragile smashed against the back of the door, and Leo began to wail.