

The Tale of Gwendolyn Gwilt: Chapter 2 - The Hunt Begins

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A moment later...

Talis appeared in his workshop, where he had always retreated to whenever he had a magical task to be done. This situation was no different. If he could not be told where this Gwendolyn Gwilt was, he would have to resort to scrying in order to find her. Talis removed his cloak and set it on a one of the hooks before sitting at one of his tables. Exhausted and weary, he rested his face on his palm and let his other hand rest on his hip. So many thoughts swam through his mind. All of those pirates that needed to leave London. Meeting the one woman who could make them all go away. He had no desire to even deal with pirates, as he tried to tell everyone, but no one seemed to care about his thoughts.

What would he have to tell his wife again? He was looking forward to spending a quiet season with his family after risking so much for their sake. Was that so much to ask for in life? *A well-deserved rest is really too much to ask for*, he figured. But that was another thing he was not looking forward to. How he had to explain to his family how much in trouble he was in again. He wondered why his wife stayed with him. Why his children didn't despise him for living such a life. Why he deserved them.

All these thoughts and more rushed through his mind. Talis took one last deep breath and decided to get this situation over with as soon as possible. But before he could stand, Talis noticed an oddity. Something felt out of place in one of his pockets. Something was resting there that he didn't remember putting in there. He clasped his fingers around the object and pulled it out. It was a small coin made of iron, but what caught Talis' attention were the glowing runes decorating the coin in the shape of an eye. Immediately, Talis tensed. This wasn't in his pocket before. How in the world could it have gotten in his pocket in the first place? And what were the glowing runes? Already he could guess that whatever magic it was doing, it was already activated.

Talis figured that he might as well try to get a read off of the coin and see what sort of purpose it had. He closed his hands around the coin and closed his eyes to concentrate. Softly, Talis muttered another incantation.

“As far above and so far deep below,

Reveal to me the way this magic glows.”

Talis opened his eyes and let his hands reveal the coin. The runes were still glowing, but Talis saw a different colored hue. A light reddish color lined each of the runes. This told Talis exactly what he needed to know.

“Interesting,” he mused to himself. “Magic suppressing.” The object was meant to disable his magic, but there was one thing that puzzled Talis. If it disabled magic, how could he use magic

to determine its purpose? Talis paced around the room, thinking. As he held the object in his hand, he watched the runes glow. Suddenly an idea struck him. He took his free hand and tried to focus his energy to create a fireball. Nothing happened. He concentrated harder and still nothing appeared. Talis looked at the coin and noticed that the runes were glowing with a fiercer intensity. The moment he stopped concentrating, the rune's glow softened. He decided to put the coin down on the table and let it go. The moment his fingers left the metal, the runes stopped glowing. Talis concentrated again and immediately, the fire began to grow again in his hand. Talis grabbed for the coin again and once he touched it, the fire in his hand dissipated and the runes began to glow again. He took his fingers back off and the fire returned.

“So this disables my offensive spells,” he thought aloud to himself. He left the coin on the table and thought about how it could have got onto him in the first place. Suddenly, he felt himself wincing at the pain in his stomach. He had almost forgotten about what Nemo did. "That's it!" he thought to himself. Nemo must have planted it on him before he escaped. He must have meant for Talis to battle Captain Gwilt without the use of his magic. Talis smiled to himself. “You foolish pirate. Instead of sending me to die, you led me right to her.” If it only disabled his offensive spells, then he could still use divination to find her. He had only hoped that the good captain had given it to Nemo herself.

Talis quickly walked over to the rock pool in the middle of his workshop and leaned over the water. Holding the coin in one hand and holding his free hand over the water, he spoke another incantation to himself.

“Beyond the winds that carry breath and storm,
Show unto me this object's owner's form.”

Slowly, the water in the pool began to ripple. The clearness suddenly grew gray until the black bottom of the pool could no longer be seen. Talis gazed into the murky waters anxiously. After a few moments of swirling, colors began to mix into the waters as if someone had poured dye into it. Colors swam through the waters until they slowly began painting a scene in the water. The image was muddy and unclear still. Talis only had to wait moments until it became clear. Eventually, Talis could see a torchlight and cobblestone. So she was still in the city. Talis began to make out other markings. He saw wooden crates everywhere and wooden supports where the cobblestone ended. Somewhere along the river, he imagined, maybe one of the docks, but he saw no figures.

As the image in the pool cleared even further, he saw it. A dark figure stood at the dock's edge, staring out into the dark river. Talis leaned closer to try to get a better look, but only saw a female figure cloaked in black. Talis silently cursed. Getting a full visual would be ideal so he could actually see what he was up against. He had to trust that this was Captain Gwilt. He had no choice otherwise.

Thoughts rushed through Talis' head. He had to confront this woman and somehow convince her to make her crew leave London. Talis looked at the coin still in his hand. The runes were still faintly glowing when suddenly, a plan formulated into his head. He assumed that Gwilt would

think he couldn't use any of his powers. If she tried anything, he could be able to catch her off guard and subdue her easily. Talis thought this plan over and saw that there really wasn't much else he could do. Talis decided to grab his staff this time. He had thought about remaining diplomatic. *But how can I trust a pirate?* he thought. He knew it was better if he went prepared for anything.

Talis took a piece of chalk and drew a circle around himself and the pool with the vision still clear in the waters. He hoped that by combining a teleportation circle with the image, he would be transported to wherever that image was. When the image was finished, he placed the coin outside of the circle. Talis took a deep breath and prepared himself, still uncertain of what was to unfold. Quietly he muttered an incantation to himself and took a step through the pool of water.

Talis' form reappeared in the same image he saw Gwilt completely dry. The place was not lit very well and smelled horrendously, but it was a private section near the river. If there was to be a confrontation, he could use his magic without drawing too much attention. Now that he had removed the coin, he felt his energies flowing through him again like a fiery elixir. He had no idea who this Gwendolyn Gwilt was, but for the sake of a good challenge, he hoped she was not as much of a fool as her lackey.

He stepped forward out of the shadows towards his prey, her back still turned to him. He readied himself for a possible attack and approached slowly.

"There's no need for such cowardice. We can face each other with dignity." The remark surprised Talis, stopping him in his tracks. He was still several feet away and was walking as silently as possible. No human should have heard him over the river flowing. He steeled his mind and body even further. This would be more of a challenge than he thought.

"That's the first time I've ever heard a pirate even consider using dignity." Gwen laughed softly before turning to him.

"I'm impressed with your speedy arrival, Talis Riverwind."

"And we are far from done here. I have several questions for you, captain." Once again, Talis spat out the last word in disgust. "For starters, how do you know my name?"

"You are correct, Talis, in the fact that we most certainly are not finished," she sneered as she slowly sauntered across the street. Talis never took his eyes off her, but held a hand behind his back, preparing a silent energy behind him. His other hand gripped his staff tightly. Suddenly, over the stench from the river, he smelled something else. Something that smelled very... "You've proven yourself to be a more than adequate seer. Let's see what else you're good at." Talis knew what was coming, but so did Gwen.

She saw his muscles twitch, but her pistol was ready in her hand. She fired at the street lamp in front of him. It fell before him and flames erupted around him. Talis was taken aback at first.

He should have noticed the oil on the ground, but quickly dispelled his fire and used his force magic to wipe away the flames licking at him. When they were gone, the street was dark and Gwen could not be found anywhere. Talis summoned his fire back again and the flames enveloped his hand. He knew he was making himself an easy target for Gwen, not only giving a light source, but giving away where he was at all times, but he saw no other choice. He cursed at himself during those tense, silent moments. She *had* been waiting for him this whole time. She somehow knew exactly how he would react. Just thinking about this notion sent shivers down Talis' spine, but she shook it off quickly to search the dark for his opponent.

Suddenly, he felt a disturbance coming from behind him. A shot fired from the darkness just a moment after he turned to meet it and fell just to his feet. Immediately, he shot a fire bolt down the darkened alley. Though the shot missed, his eyes didn't. He saw the faintest glimpse of her form illuminated by the passing bolt. Immediately, he shot bolts of arcane energy from his staff again and again and again. She was very dexterous and agile as she seemed to leap along the alleyway towards him. He wasn't sure how she was dodging each of his attacks, until finally, one seemed to strike her. He hit her just above her stomach and sent her flying back into a barrel of crates.

Talis silently cheered to himself as he rushed towards her, ready to apprehend her. Upon approach, he sifted through the crates to look for her, but once again, she was gone.

Impossible! Talis thought. *I hit her solar plexus. There's no way she would be gone already!* Before Talis could think anymore, he heard footsteps coming from his left side and saw her lunge out at him. She was able to tackle him and the force knocked Talis to the ground. For a while, they struggled on the ground with Talis' staff being the only barrier between them. Talis had no time to wonder about her now. Instinctively, he pressed his feet on her stomach and sent her flying over him. Gwen tumbled and regained her balance on all fours like an animal. Talis regained his composure quickly, aimed his staff at her and glared back at Gwen, now on two feet with her cutlass drawn. Talis instantly saw that her hat had fallen off and saw something familiar, an emblem on her maroon bandanna. It was the same emblem tattooed on Nemo's right hand, the howling head of a wolf. Then it clicked into his head. Skylana dreamed about him being chased by a wolf. Was Gwen the wolf? What did this all mean?

Gwen circled around him, waiting to see what he would do next. Talis wanted to end this quickly. He sent a lightning bolt towards her. This time, she let it hit her right between her collarbones. She flew back, hitting the side of one of the adjacent buildings and coughed as Talis slowly approached. Gwen rose slowly and smiled at Talis. She saw his eyes widen in shock. Talis was about to conclude that she wasn't human, in which case she needed to be taken care of by any means necessary. Suddenly, he saw something small and silver roll across Gwen's fingers. She stopped rolling it just long enough for Talis to see that it was the same coin that was planted on him. There was more than one. Talis aimed his lightning once more at her. At least the force of the impact could subdue her, right? But as soon as the bolt neared her body, he saw it dissipate and the runes of the coin glowed fiercely in the night. Gwen smiled. His magic had never hit her. She only made it seem like they did. She was experienced with fighting mages. She knew he'd find the coin and take it off of him. She had been counting on it. Everything from the moment Talis found Nemo was all planned.

Talis began to panic. What good was he if he couldn't use his magic? Gwen eyed Talis and challenged him to come forward if he dared. For a brief moment and for the first time in a long time, Talis truly felt like there was nothing he could do. He still held his stance and tightened his grip on his staff. Regardless of what little could be done, he still held true to the Order. Never surrender to an enemy. Fight until the bitter end. With that code in mind, Talis ran forward and attacked Gwen with all of his fervor. He knew he would not last long, but without his magic to harm her, he saw no other option to overcome her. Gwen was able to gracefully deflect all of his blows to her. She was a very skilled fighter, but all of her moves were defensive. Then Talis realized that she never really attacked him. She meant to miss the shot at his feet. When she lunged at him, she wasn't really attacking him back. She wasn't fighting him. She was toying with him.

"Fight back you coward!" Talis shouted. He grew more enraged as he continued to fight. Somehow, he had to beat her, but she was able to deflect every attack to her. He thrust his staff one last time towards her core, but she grabbed it from him in one hand and let his momentum run into the hilt of her sword. Talis doubled over as she tossed it aside. It was over. All of Talis' weapons had been rendered useless. He didn't want to admit it, but this just might be the end. Gwen placed her blade at Talis' neck. Talis looked up at her defiantly as Gwen stared back at him coldly, almost disappointed.

"You're not what I expected," she replied. An eternity seemed to pass between her and Talis as he waited for the inevitable. Suddenly, Talis saw her expression change for a brief instant before she leapt backwards. In her place a flaming arrow was shot. Then a flurry of arrows shot out of the darkness as she bounded back with each attack. Talis looked up to where the arrows were coming from. On the rooftops stood a familiar male figure firing arrows with speed and grace towards the assailant. Immediately after, he felt a pair of hands drag him back.

"Skylana! What are you doing here?" Talis asked.

"What does it look like I'm doing? I'm saving your skin!" she shot back as Ryder quickly shot another arrow towards Gwen, who dodged it.

"That fire doesn't happen to be magical, does it?" Before Skylana could answer, one of Ryder's arrows finally hit a mark. Gwen tumbled as an arrow shot straight through her leg. Skylana helped Talis up and they both slowly approached Gwen, Ryder's bow still drawn. The fire had dissipated, but it didn't matter. The arrow remained real.

"You're welcome, by the way," Ryder spoke as all three approached Gwen.

"Good to see you too, Ryder," Talis shot back. Slowly, Gwen laughed as she struggled to stand.

"I'll admit, I'm very impressed" All three exchanged looks briefly before turning their eyes back to Gwen. "I expected no less from mages."

Talis approached Gwen and sized her up. Even though she was wounded, she didn't let Talis intimidate her. He grabbed her by her shoulders and pinned her against the wall. "Now then," Talis spat, "to resume our conversation, how do you know my name?"

"I was told you could help me."

"Help you?" Talis yelled. "Why would I help someone who attacked me?"

"You know I never really attacked you, Riverwind... I wanted to see your skills both with and without your magic. Apparently, even though you can't fight well enough to save your own hide, you have been blessed with amazing luck." She looked over at Ryder, still aiming at her and Skylana, eying her. Talis tried to come back with something, but he realized she was right (much as he would never admit it). He let go of Gwen and pressed on for another matter.

"Anyway, why would I help a pirate?"

"I am not a pirate," she replied smugly, "I've never smuggled anything in my life. I haven't done anything illegal. Anyone who I might have killed, I did in self defense."

"And your crew?"

"They follow my command. They may have been pirates in the past, but under me, they have broken no laws. You'll find that none of these men have made any remarkable or illegal disturbance here. I'm not even a wanted woman. In the eyes of the law, we are innocent. Now I'd like to discuss business, so if you don't mind, please lower that bow."

For what seemed like an eternity, Gwen and Talis glared at each other with equal ferocity. However, Talis struggled with the fact that in every aspect, she was right. He had never had any real problems since their arrival, as much as he didn't want to admit it. He couldn't touch her. He looked to Ryder and slowly nodded. Reluctantly, he lowered the bow from Gwen's face "I trust this is all legal business."

"Of course. Could I do business with you otherwise?"

"What do you want?" Talis demanded before Gwen let out a small grunt of pain as she snapped off the arrow tip, much to Ryder's discomfort.

"Like I said. I need your help." She slowly sank down and sat on one of the unbroken crates. "I need two specific mages in order to do it, so I need to find another, but I promise you that your assistance will not go unrewarded. I need your help opening a gate." Talis raised an eyebrow to her.

"You have cannons. Can't you just break it down?"

"You think I would ask for mages if I could? It's not that kind of gate," she replied. Before she answered again, she took several deep breaths before quickly pulling the arrow out of her

leg. All three winced, surprised that she barely screamed. Gwen pulled out a bandage and began binding her wound. Skylana stepped forward to offer to heal, but Gwen gave her a halting glare and instead continued. "It seals the entrance to a cave off the coast of Carnac in France. It's a magical gate that is said to only be opened by pure light." It took Talis a while to understand what she meant. Even then, Skylana was the first to say his thoughts aloud.

"You need a mage from the Order of the Sun and one from the Lunar Tribe."

"Precisely," said Gwen. Talis thought about this fact for a while.

"What lies behind the gate? No doubt some 'unclaimed' treasure from some long lost pirate king or some object with untold power..."

"If it were the latter, Riverwind," Gwen interrupted, "I would be a fool to try to take it with you around." Talis smirked. At least she didn't underestimate his power, but Talis did notice that Gwen almost began to falter. Talis thought she was going to attack again until her figure seemed to sink against the wall. "The truth is... I'm sick." Both Talis and Ryder let out some noise that sounded like a scoff. They couldn't believe they had to fight a sick woman. It didn't even seem like she was sick. "The place I need to get to has the only cure. I need to you help me."

"What are you sick with?" Skylana asked her, almost with concern. Talis glared at her to even consider helping a pirate, but Skylana refused to meet his gaze. It was not an unreasonable question, but Gwen seemed to ignore it.

"It is a magical sickness. There is no earthly cure for what I have. Carnac is a magical place. The cave that I need access to has mystical properties unique only to that cave. The only problem is that the cave has been sealed for centuries, perhaps even millenia. Very few people today even knew that the cave still exists."

All three listened in on her plight. Skylana took pity on her, but was still annoyed that she didn't know the curse. Ryder remained stoic, but continued to listen for any hint of lies and finding none. Talis, on the other hand, still looked at her with skepticism. Then again, if this place truly held healing properties, he could use it to help others who are ill. Perhaps it cured universal sicknesses as well. "I need to get to that cave. I'm tired of having this... disease."

"She's telling the truth," Ryder announced. Talis was about to interject before Ryder continued. "Unless you're a really good liar. But you fight as if you have no sickness. Which means if what you're saying is true, either it comes at certain times or instead of making you sick, it makes you into something you don't want to be." Gwen glared at Ryder for a moment of silence as he waited for her to answer. Moments passed as the two glared at each other. Suddenly, his hand reached forward to take the rune that hung around her neck. Her hand instantly snapped to his wrist and squeezed tightly, even when Ryder gently pulled the rune closer for him to see. It glowed with a faint silver light and Ryder immediately felt her tense. "Isa... correct?"

"That's right."

"The rune for stability. Whatever you're sick with, this is preventing you from feeling the effects. Why not just keep it?" Ryder eyes her suspiciously. He had no reason to trust her more than Talis did. All three waited on an answer.

"Why settle with a temporary release when a permanent cure is obtainable?" No one could answer her back. Gwen took the rune carefully out of Ryder's hand and turned to walk away. "Of course," she continued, "if the thought of possibly helping others doesn't intrigue you, I have other offers for you."

Talis snapped out of deep thought to hear her words. "Oh? Such as...?" Gwen paused a moment and smiled.

"On a recent venture, I came across a curious artifact. A stone scroll case." Talis immediately took note and leaned in to Gwen's words. "No matter how hard I tried, I could not open it. There was a design that looked like all of the elements swirling around it. Also, there was a curious symbol..."

"What sort of symbol?" Talis quickly asked. Gwen slightly raised an eyebrow before reaching into her pouch. Talis could also see the faint traces of a sneer. She got him curious and it was all that she needed. Gwen pulled out a piece of parchment and handed it to Talis. On the parchment was a drawing of a scroll case exactly as she described it. In the very center was an odd symbol that he recognized instantly.

"Quintessence," Talis whispered. Gwen turned to Talis half impressed. Talis knew exactly what the drawing was. This was undoubtedly one of the seven Scrolls of Alchemy and based on the symbol on the case, it was the Scroll of Life. It shouldn't have shocked him to know it had fallen into a pirate's hands, seeing as how she seemed to travel the world seeking treasures.

"It seems like you know what this is. Then I needn't to tell you that I've no use for it. If you help me, 'tis yours." Talis paused at this moment.

"That simple?" he asked?

"That simple," she replied. Talis used this moment to try another underhanded tactic.

"You do realize that I could just simply kill you and take the scroll for myself." Both Ryder and Skylana shot a glance up at Talis, astounded that he would even think that, but Gwen caught him first.

"Then you'd sink even lower than a real pirate. I'm offering a fair and legal trade: your services not only for a prized artifact in your eyes, but the chance to help others as sick as I... and you want to sink to a scurvy dog's whim?" Talis faltered. She had caught him.. again.

Skylana let out a small giggle. "I like her."

"She has a point Talis," Ryder pointed out.

"I know that!" he shot back. Talis let out a long sigh before staring down Gwen. "Fine, Gwendolyn Gwilt... We have a deal." Talis, reluctantly held out his hand and waited for a similar act of deception such as the one Nemo had shown him earlier. Gwen was not so cruel, as she took his hand gently and shook it once.

"Excellent."

"Count us in as well," Skylana exclaimed. "You need a Lunar mage too, right?" Gwen looked towards Skylana with a hint of surprise.

"Sky, what are you doing?!" Ryder protested.

"You're of the Lunar Tribe?" Gwen asked surprised.

"Aye. I am Skylana Softbreeze. This is my companion, Ryder Swiftarrow" Gwen's eyebrow arched at the curious surnames, but dismissed it quickly.

"I didn't think any Order and Tribe members traveled together."

"We don't," Ryder interrupted. "Sky, why are you agreeing to this?"

"She requires mages of the Order and of the Tribe. We are all here so why not make the best of this offer? Besides, Talis might need our help. You saw how helpless he was a moment ago."

"You know, I can hear every word you're saying and I can handle things as well as you –" Talis said annoyed.

"When do we leave?" Skylana continued before he could get another word in. Talis silently cursed the heavens.

"This will not be a short journey. We are sailing to the west coast of France. On average, it would take us ten days to reach it."

"And if the winds were constantly in your favor?" Skylana asked.

"Then perhaps a week," Gwen imagined. "Can you manage that?"

"Oh, I think I can manage easily," she replied with a sly grin.

"Then it's settled. We leave first thing at morning's light. I gather 'tis around midnight, so you have plenty of time to gather what you need. When you're ready to leave, I'll be waiting by my ship at the dock. Look for the one called 'Maiden's Call'..."

"Is that the name you assumed?" Talis sneered at her.

"Shrewd as ever, Riverwind," Gwen replied with grace. "Yes. I don't like the same name I use on the sea. Better business that way. You understand."

"Of course," he replied dryly. Talis was in no way amused. It would be half a month away from his family again. Talis did not want to be in any way associated with pirates, especially one who always seemed one step ahead of him. He didn't trust Gwen any further than he could throw her. But he saw no choice. If she truly had the Scroll of Life, he'd be a fool to pass up an opportunity to obtain it. "Until then, good night, everyone." Talis quickly took his leave of the three. Gwen nodded to the remaining two before ducking into a dark alley.

"Talis, wait!" Ryder and Skylana chased after Talis for a short while before turning back.

"What now?" I've had enough for one night. Can you at least let me rest?" Talis almost pleaded. He had already suffered a humiliating defeat. The least they could do now was leave him alone.

"I know you've no reason to trust her," Ryder spoke quietly out of Gwen's earshot. "I have no reason either."

"Finally, something we agree on."

"There is something she's not telling us. She didn't even really tell us what she's sick with."

"Then tell me why you agreed to come along and help?" Talis spun around exasperated.

"First of all, you agreed to go along," Skylana interrupted. "She was able to suppress your magic. If what she's sick with is dangerous to others, you might not stand a chance." Talis struggled to retort, but couldn't. He knew they were right. There was something Gwen wouldn't tell them and it unnerved him.

"You'll need all the help you can get, especially on a ship full of pirates," Ryder added.

"Secondly, did you see how she reacted when Ryder went for her rune? She looked as if she was going to rip his arm off if he took that rune from around her neck, and from the ferocity I saw in her eyes, I am fairly certain that she could do it. Whatever she's sick with, she knows it poses a danger to those around her. I do not blame her for wanting to be rid of it for good. She may consort with pirates, Talis, but when you really think on it, she is someone in desperate need of help. Can you honestly not appreciate that?" Talis gave out a heavy sigh and gazed at them. Even though what Skylana said was correct, he still found it troubling to even consider lending aid to a pirate.

"I'm going home. I need the rest for this journey. I'm going to bring all the supplies I can take. Will you two be needing anything?" For a moment, both stood surprised at Talis' generosity. When the silence was too much, Talis continued. "You saved my skin. You deserve some form of gratitude. Come back to my home. You can spend the night there. We'll gather our supplies together. Agreed?"

Ryder and Skylana looked to each other before turning back to Talis and nodded. "We hopefully won't need to take much," Skylana replied.

"We'll figure that out when we get there. Come." The three figures walked down the alley and back to the house.

Nemo waited impatiently at the ship. He had worried for his captain, since no word from or about her had been heard from in a while. Some of the men, who didn't get Nemo's word were already at the ship and waited for their captain with him. Nemo knew exactly what Gwen was capable of doing and that she was able to take care of herself, but it didn't stop him from worrying.

Suddenly, one of the men from the crow's nest shouted out that he saw movement coming towards the docks. Nemo shot to the port side to see his captain limping towards the ship. As she walked up into her vessel, Nemo ran to her side to try to help her. She quickly refused and trudged along onto the ship. Nemo tried to open his mouth to speak, but she knew what he was going to say.

"It's done. I've found them both."

"Both mages were here?" he quickly asked.

"Aye. They're coming with us. And one of them has a companion." Gwen raised her voice so that the rest of the men heard her. "Tell the crew we leave come morning's light." Her men hastened to her command and quickly departed from the ship. Like before, Nemo stood by his captain for a few moments more, gazing out after her men.

"Your leg... do you need...?" he began to ask before Gwen cut him off.

"It'll heal quickly," she said quickly. Nemo still managed to catch her flashing a grin.

"Things are starting to look up, are they not?" he mused.

"Aye, Nemo," she replied softly. "If we're lucky, we can make it in a week." She felt Nemo give a relieved smile towards her as she gazed out into the night air.

"We're so close..."