

The sun set, and outside, the air cooled down from the summer day's warmth.

Bansou leaned against his living room's window, absentmindedly rubbing the scaled bridge of his nose. He glanced to the clock on a wall. 12:30; the others would be on their way.

He waited patiently, but as time passed, his brows furrowed, and his scaled fingers moved to run over the small scales on his forearm.

Bansou looked to the clock again: 12:50. His eyes drifted to his satchel and the small duffle bag that sat beside it. He took a glance outside once more before stepping over to his luggage. Once opened, the bags revealed sparse clothing and small necessities, which included his comb and toothbrush, and the satchel held portioned food, his wallet, aviator goggles, and a pocket knife. He closed the bags, bit his lip, and checked his outfit for the night, which lay on top of the chair where the bags sat.

The winged, young man straightened out the wrinkles in his overcoat, pulled two clipping belts on top of the coat, and picked up his hat to put on his head. After straightening the brown, military-style cap over the pointed portions of his ears, he stretched his wings, careful of the furniture. He then looked once around the room before returning to the window, where he peered outside again.

He could see neither of his friends, out in the dark, nor in the lights from the streetlamps which sliced through the shadows of the parking lot and sidewalk. However, he did notice some people walking through the lot and closer to his apartment complex. The people moved slowly and appeared to avoid the lights as much as possible.

Bansou's icy-blue eyes narrowed as a tingle went up his spine. Something felt wrong, and when he glanced to the clock, he noted the time as a quarter past one. Aisling and Jasper should have been there long ago.

When Bansou looked outside again, he saw none of the people whom had lingered before. His head turned away from the window towards the door when he heard footsteps outside of it. The feathers on the back of his neck stood on end, and his heart rate increased. He slowed his breathing as much he could, but when footsteps reached the outside of his apartment, he stopped breathing all together.

Body tensing, the winged nonhuman's knees shook as he clenched his hands and brought them together. His jaw shut tight, and he didn't utter a word, listening intently to the faint sound of voices outside. His eyes darted to his bags when a crackling voice—as if over a radio—shouted.

"Go!"

Without further warning, Bansou's body loosened, just as the door bent in with a "slam!" He took hold of his satchel and grabbed the clothes not in the duffle bag. Another hard hit to the door caused it to burst inwards. By that time, however, the winged nonhuman had made it to the window and flung it open.

Five men ran to meet him, ordering him to stop, but Bansou took his bundle and jumped out of the window. His body only halfway through, he noticed the larger number of darkly-clothed, armed men surrounding the bottom floor of the apartment. Some from behind him continued to shout, while others down below joined in, but only a few of them rose their guns to take aim.

Spreading his wings wide, Bansou flapped hard to gain headway in the still, cool air. He thought he heard one man shout a warning that they'd shoot if he kept going, but he continued, anyways. Before he got a hundred meters from the men in uniform, however, he felt a sharp pain in his leg and heard a gunshot. More pain in one of his wings and additional "bangs" followed, and he lurched and plummeted to the ground below.

Bansou might have broken a limb or worse from that height of a dozen meters in the air, but he had enough experience flying to spread out his feathers to soften the landing. Regardless, he thudded to the ground, and with little time to make another attempt at escape, he found himself surrounded by the strangers in their black and gray uniforms and body armor. Sitting on the ground and grasping at his leg wound, his eyes searched their faces: some full of hate, others nervous, but most of them held stoic expressions as they watched him. They each had a simple logo with the letters "NHSF" stitched into their uniforms, but Bansou knew nothing of what the acronym meant.

"What do you want?" Bansou glared at them, one of his wings spread out to make him look larger, while his other bent from the pain where the bullet had grazed it.

"Put your hands up. You're coming with us," said one man in a similar uniform to the others as he waded through them, each moving out of his way with a nod or acknowledging glance.

"Why?" Bansou said, narrowing his eyes as his breathing quickened and fists tightened.

"You're under arrest, for disobeying the law," said the man, putting his hands on his hips. "You should know that all nonhumans must report to the local authorities to be sent to our facilities and tested, for the safety of the public. Resisting those orders means you are now considered a threat to the public, and we must take you in for further evaluation."

A shiver ran through Bansou's body as he listened to these words. His hands clenched more tightly and the both his breathing and the shivering increased, until his body shook. The man at the lead took notice of this and raised a brow, smiling a bit.

"No need to be so afraid. Not if you follow orders, that is," he said, adjusting the square-rimmed glasses he wore on his face. "Now, do as I said, and put your hands in the air. Wings to your sides, too. We won't shoot you again, if you do as you're told."

Bansou heard none of this, as his hearing focused on his heart pounding in his chest and the heavy, ragged breaths that exited his open mouth. He fell forward on his fists and convulsed. All the while, he murmured, "No, no, no" and shook his head back and forth slowly.

"Get up," said the man, holding up a hand to the others in uniform whom rose their guns. "What are you doing? Get up, now. We don't have time for this."

The man in the glasses stepped forwards, towards Bansou, and brought out a hand to grab the shaking figure of the young, winged man. Before his fingers touched Bansou, however, the winged nonhuman went through a change which caused the man to jump back and his followers to step away in a mixture of amazement and fear.

Bansou's skin ripped, darkened, and grayed as his body mass increased. His face elongated and the scaling on the bridge of his nose, above his brows, and under his hairline enlarged as more scales burst from the surrounding flesh. His clothing ripped when his body outgrew them, and the last portion of his pants tore off when a tail emerged from his rear. His wings more than doubled in size, as did his arms, which half covered with feathers and half covered with thick, dark scales. The dark-gray feathers along his neck increased in number and seemed to flow down his spine, and white feathers covered his neck, hips, and chest. His ears elongated and feathers grew along the top of his tail and at the tip and base of it. As a few last details made their way onto his body, his growth stopped, and his body no longer shook. Only the satchel he'd worn remained—swinging around his neck like a cloth necklace.

During this transformation, the nonhuman's jaw shut tight, nostrils flared, and eyes closed, but by the end of it, all loosened and gained full attentiveness to his surroundings in the new form. His large maw opened, revealing multiple, pointed teeth, and he bared them at the surrounding people.

"Oh my god; it's a Class A!" remarked one of the uniformed men.

"Holy shit!" agreed more than one his companions.

The man with the square-rimmed glasses stared up at the creature—as tall as an elephant—mouth agape as he took a few steps back, following his men whom thought it a good idea to give the beast a wide berth. However, unlike many of his followers, he kept his focus on the dragon-like monster which had, only moments before, been like any other young man but with wings to set him apart. When the feathered dragon let out a screech, he involuntarily covered his ears, just as the majority of his small squadron did. He failed to follow suit of his peers when a handful of them turned tail to run, and instead, he pulled his gun from its holster and aimed for the beast's head.

"Get back here and ready yourselves to bring it down!" he shouted to those around him and those whom had decided it safer to be as far away as possible from the angry dragon. "It may be a Class A, but if it is, we'll need to kill it! If it's a Class B or C, we need it alive! Either way, we can't let it get out to hurt the public! People are counting on us to keep them safe from monsters like this! Now, come back and fight!"

The men roused and returned to their leader's side, aiming for the creature as it extended its wings to more than ten meters across. Some of them continued to shake in

their boots and held their eyes wide open in fear, but many of them regained confidence and stood firmly around the beast, ready for their commanding officer's orders.

"Now, shoot the wings, before it gets away!" the leading man said, waving with one hand at the expansive wings and aiming his own gun at the injured one with another.

Before any of them could shoot, however, the dragon breathed in deeply through its nose and opened its mouth wide, expelling a freezing gust of air from its body and sweeping its head from side to side, in order to hit all targets. The men shielded themselves with their arms from the icy blast, and many of them ducked. Few avoided the cold as the moisture from the breath mixed with the freezing air coming from the dragon and hit their bodies, leaving weapons frozen to hands and—in some cases—feet frozen to ground.

In the chaos and confusion that followed, the dragon bent its legs, raised its wings above it, and leaped into the air, pushing down with its wings and creating a strong draft which knocked many of the men over. It turned north, away from the humans on the ground whom struggled to rise or attempted to remove ice from their weapons in order to shoot him down.