

Episode 7: Rot before Recovery

Seanan McGuire

From set *Murders at Karlov Manor*

Kellan didn't have an office so much as he had an alcove, a semi-partitioned little corner of the main floor where room had been made for a desk, a rickety file cabinet, and a small brass machine on a perfectly sized pedestal. Kellan tapped the machine as he ushered Kaya into the space. The machine made a soft humming sound and clicked on, its cracked glass screen becoming consumed by a web of notes and rough sketches.

Kaya blinked. "What is *that*?"

"It's my private projektor," said Kellan. "We use them to visualize the things we're investigating, when the answer isn't clear-cut. Part of why Profit's the best detective we have is because he doesn't *need* one. He can just keep everything in his head and spin it around and around until it falls together the right way. The rest of us use visual aids."

He leaned over, taking a large feather that Kaya suspected might have begun as one of Ezrim's out of a mug on his desk. The bottom inch or so had been tipped in mizzium, which gleamed a dull copper-gold in the light from the projektor.

"Every projektor has an associated stylus," he said, moving back toward the machine. "You can't update the files without them, unless you do it through uploads to the central unit."

"Wow," said Kaya. "I knew you had to have a way of keeping track ... but that's amazing, Kellan. The evidence capsules, the barrier wards, the—well, the filing system. It's all very impressive."

Kellan stood a little straighter, clearly pleased by her praise, and touched the screen with his stylus, bringing up an array of small notes and pictures. "This one's from the thopter that found us in the alley," he said, tapping one of the pictures and expanding it to fill the whole display. "It's the newest piece of information we have."

"Information, not evidence?"

"Evidence is something we *know* relates." He frowned. "That sort of ambush usually means you're getting close to an answer, but I can't see what that answer might be. No two pieces fit together the right way. The fur on those cultists doesn't match up with Rakdos stirring people to murder again."

"I don't think Rakdos is behind this," said Kaya. "It feels like Judith *wants* us looking at her parun for some reason—and I can come up with half a dozen reasons she'd want us to do that—but this isn't his style. Yes, killing Teysa and Zegana causes a lot of chaos and instability." She paused, swallowing. She knew she was right. Dismissing Teysa's death so casually still burned. "But it won't throw the city into freefall. It won't cause riots in the streets. Rakdos would want to see the bodies clogging the gutters, if he'd stirred himself for something like this."



Art by: Gaboleps

“So who do you think is behind this?”

“I don’t know yet, but we need to find out fast. If this gets much worse, things are going to explode, and the city hasn’t fully recovered from the invasion.”

Maybe the city never would. Maybe, like her, Ravnica would be feeling the aftershocks of Phyrexia forever. And maybe that was a good thing. It meant they’d remember. Tragedies weren’t forgotten until the injuries started to heal.

Kellan nodded, expression thoughtful. “Do you think Trostani—”

He didn’t have time to finish his question before an alarm blared through the building, too loud to ignore. Kaya jerked bolt upright, the sour taste of adrenaline filling her mouth.

“What—?”

Kellan tossed his stylus onto the desk and started out of the cubby, moving fast. Kaya had no choice but to hurry if she wanted to keep up.

“Someone’s compromised the evidence locker!” shouted Kellan, straining to be heard above the alarm. “Some of the things we have—oh, no.”

He had stopped dead in the middle of the narrow passage between desks. Kaya almost ran right into him before she managed to stop and turned to look at whatever had captured his attention. The rest of the agents were running in that direction, except for the ones who had, like Kellan, stopped to stare.

The room containing the evidence locker lay in ruins, the walls completely shattered by the force of whatever had been released. The ceiling of the headquarters hadn’t fared much better. The cause of all

this damage wasn't currently visible, obscured by a wall of roiling dust and debris. Some of the agents closer to the evidence cage were shouting, their voices adding to the din made by the alarm and chunks of falling masonry.

Kaya stepped forward, stopping shoulder to shoulder with Kellan. "Has this ever happened before?" she asked.

"The capsules are secure before we put them in the locker," he said, not moving. He didn't look like he remembered *how* to move. "We have protocols in case a system fails, but the locker isn't supposed to—"

Something in the smoke roared.

It was a deep, guttural sound, loud enough to shake the foundations. Kaya grabbed hold of Kellan's arm as the shifting floor threatened to knock her off balance. Kellan's face had taken on a glossy pallor, making him look like a man who'd just seen a ghost—and not one in the service of the Orzhov. More agents shouted. Some screamed, turning to run from whatever they saw in the billowing cloud.

The roar came again, and the smoke parted as its occupant lunged forward, massive, spatulate front paws slamming into the floor. One of the screams cut off abruptly as a paw landed on the screamer, presumably smashing them flat. Each paw was tipped in a daggered claw easily longer than Kaya was tall, tapering to a wicked point.

The beast that had done all this damage swung around, sniffing at the air. Its nose was a star-shaped flowerburst of fleshy tendrils. The whole thing resembled nothing so much as a mole twice the size of an adult troll, flesh etched with runic lines that gleamed green with power.

Kaya swallowed. "That the Gruul god you were telling me you detained?"

Kellan nodded, momentarily speechless.

"And what do we know about the god?"

"The Gruul call him Anzrag," said Kellan. "He's ... I guess he's a harvest god for them? Planting and growth and that sort of thing? Only they call him 'the rampage mole' so I don't know how good a fit that is ..."

"Uh-huh. Feel like your legs are working again?"

"I think so—why?"

"Because he's over there, and we're over here, but he's doing a lot of damage, and he's going to come over here eventually."

"Oh." Kellan seemed to shake off his shock, giving Kaya a brief, sheepish look. "Thanks."

"No thanks needed." Kaya released his arm and drew her daggers, their edges taking on a purple gleam. "Let's make this an unfair fight."

With that, she charged toward the divine mole, using a fallen chunk of ceiling as a ramp onto an unbroken desk, leaping from there to a much taller shelf. The Gruul god had yet to notice her, and so she was able to climb to the absolute top before launching herself toward the massive mole.

Kellan, meanwhile, was running toward the god, the basket hilts in his hands already activated, motioning agents out of his way as he gathered momentum. They weren't the only ones going on the attack: while the Agency had their share of analysts and investigators whose understanding of combat began and ended with documenting the aftermath, far more of them had been recruited from the streets, former guild members or people whose instinct for trouble had been too finely honed to keep them safe at home. Some of them had produced knives or swords from inside their dusters. One woman

with a shock of frizzy blond hair was holding a device of clear Izzet make, shooting rays of electricity at Anzrag to keep him at bay while she waved less combat-minded agents clear of the chaos.

At least four people were down, two buried under chunks of masonry, one flattened by the god, and one sliced nearly in two by her claws. Kaya roared a Kaldheim battle challenge as she flew toward the god, and Anzrag turned toward the sound, snout quivering with curiosity and confusion.

Kaya struck him square in the middle of the tendril starburst, daggers biting deep. The Gruul god howled with pain, backpedaling and shaking his head hard from side to side. Kaya held fast to the hilts of her daggers, pulling herself up so that she was level with Anzrag's tiny, almost hidden eyes. Anzrag seemed to focus on her for the first time, making a confused sound that was still loud enough to make Kaya's eardrums ache.

Below her on the ground, Kellan had reached the fight and was slashing away at Anzrag's forelegs, forcing the god to dance backward, Kaya still hanging from his nose. Neither of them had severely injured the great mole. Both had surely gotten his attention.

There was another roar behind them, less bestial than enraged. Kaya dared a glance over her shoulder. Ezrim was standing in the open space between the agent desks and the evidence pen, mounted on his steed, whose wings were spread as wide as they could go, mouth open in unmistakable challenge. Anzrag roared again, throwing his head back and sending Kaya flying, daggers still grasped firmly in her hands. She shouted as she fell and was only marginally surprised when Kellan was there to catch her, keeping her from hitting—or passing insubstantially through—the floor.

Anzrag paid them no attention, stalking toward Ezrim instead, head down and bloodied nasal tendrils twitching as he snuffled at the floor. Ezrim roared again, wings spreading wider as he challenged this intruder to his territory. Kaya elbowed Kellan gently as he set her feet on the floor.

"Evidence capsule," she hissed.

"What?"

"Grab an evidence capsule." She kept her voice low. Some of the other agents were still attacking, but Anzrag's attention was much more fixed on Ezrim and the threat he represented. "We don't know how he got out. I'm betting we can put him *back*."

"That's right—all the binding seals we put on him must still be there!"

Kellan nodded and bolted for the ruined evidence cage, jumping over several chunks of fallen masonry as Kaya turned back to Anzrag, watching as the Gruul god stalked toward Ezrim.

"Sir?" she called. "You need anything?"

"A new ceiling would be nice," he said peevishly before screeching at the approaching mole in a distinctly avian tone, mount snapping its wings shut and open again in sharp challenge. Kaya knew now that Ezrim and his mount were technically individual beings, but watching the mighty archon brace for a fight, it was impossible not to see them as a single unit. Anzrag seemed to view them the same way. He moved like he was approaching a large predator, not a man on some sort of massive taloned beast.



Art by: Lucas Graciano

Kellan ran up next to her, a containment capsule in his hands. He eyed Anzrag warily as he passed it over.

“How do I work this thing?” asked Kaya, sheathing her daggers and taking the capsule.

“It’s already keyed to Anzrag. Just press the button,” said Kellan, and then, “Hey!” as Kaya took off running, capsule in her hands.

Anzrag turned, growling under his breath, as Kaya got close. Kaya took a breath and phased out, turning intangible just before Anzrag’s paw passed through her body, claws swiping harmlessly at nothing. The god was still trying to figure out what had happened, standing in baffled puzzlement, when Kaya turned solid again and pressed the button. The capsule chimed, an incongruously pleasant sound, before expanding into a massive bubble, trapping Anzrag inside.

Silence fell over the office, save for the sharp breathing of an injured agent slumped against a broken desk and the occasional thud of another piece of broken ceiling.

Kaya looked at Ezrim, holding up the container. “Where should I put this?”

He closed his wings, turning to face the rest of the room. “Who’s here and uninjured?” he demanded.

“Here, sir,” said several agents.

“Good. I want all of you to go to the Gruul encampments. Find Yarus and bring him back here. I know he had something to do with this.”

Kaya, who wasn’t so sure but wasn’t going to contradict him, turned away, only to see Agrus Kos standing at the edge of the devastation, beckoning to her. She motioned for Kellan to stay where he

was before walking through the shattered desks and fallen rocks between her and Agrus, letting them pass harmlessly through her insubstantial flesh.

“What is it?” she asked.

“There’s something that’s bugging me,” he said. “It’s itching the back of my neck, which I don’t like, since I thought dying would mean no more itches. I always felt like this when things didn’t fit together quite right on a case.”

“Nothing fits on this case,” said Kaya.

“Got that right.” Agrus shook his head. “I need to go somewhere. I think I can get a whole bunch of answers all at once if I do.”

“Great,” said Kaya. “I’ll get Kellan.”

“No. Not *we* need to go somewhere—I need to go. I know you’re in charge of this investigation, but this is too dangerous for a living person. Even Orzhov leaders can die. We don’t need another ghost.” The look he gave Kaya held more sympathy than scorn. “I’ll be back as soon as I can. Before the deadline, for sure.”

“You’re not asking.”

“No.”

“All right. I’ll see you when you get back.”

“Thanks, boss.” Agrus Kos turned and, much like Kaya, walked right through the debris as he left the room.

“Getting a little tired of following you around without you telling me where we’re going,” said Etrata, bracing herself against the slick wall as she and Proft followed the curve of the enclosed street down into the bowels of the city.

“I told you we were going to the Sixth Precinct,” said Proft, in a tone that implied she was being entirely unreasonable complaining about it.

“Yes, *to*,” she said. “‘To’ is not the way most people say ‘under.’ Those are very different words! This is Golgari territory!”

Proft gave her the delighted smile of a teacher whose student had finally managed to catch up. “Yes, precisely,” he said. “When Korozda rose to the surface, it changed the shape of the warrens below. The Swarm has been largely in hiding since the invasion, but if you knew the warrens before they shifted, you can still find your way.”

“Oh, that’s very reassuring.”

The air here was warm and fragrant, although it didn’t stink like the boilerpits. Instead, the air had the ripe richness of healthy compost, the earthy weightiness of mushrooms. It smelled like a growing world. Decay, yes, but life as well; two things without which all of Ravnica would surely fall.

“Have you never spent time in the Golgari portions of the undercity?”

Etrata shot him a sour look. “I’m an assassin, not an undertaker. Once they’re dead, I’m done with them.”

“Pity. You should consider expanding your horizons. There’s much beauty below.” Proft pushed aside a curtain of cobwebs, leading her into a smaller, more level tunnel. They weren’t going down as steeply

any longer. That was a small mercy, as it made it easier for both to keep their footing. Etrata wasn't accustomed to being the unsteady one, but Proft moved through the damp tunnels as if he had been born to the guild, easy in his environment. It was another oddity piled atop a man made almost entirely of oddities, and she wasn't sure she liked it.

She liked the idea of being left alone in these tunnels even less. They had already made so many turns during their descent that she wasn't confident in her ability to find her way back to the surface alone. Etrata hurried to catch up.

Proft motioned for her to hang back as he rapped his knuckles against a doorway dotted with patches of lichen and clusters of small, glowing mushrooms. No one answered.

Looking unsurprised, Proft opened the rotting door to reveal a large cavern lined with the crumbling ruins of some ancient guildhall. There were no fires, but there was light provided by larger clusters of those same glowing mushrooms.

At the center of the space, barbed spear in hand, stood an elf woman dressed in layered leather, topped with tatters that emulated spiderwebs. Her face was painted with a white spider's-head mask, the lines gleaming stark against her dark skin. She looked at Proft and Etrata, seeming utterly unsurprised by their presence.

"Have you come to arrest me for some fabricated crime, Detective?" she asked, making no effort to conceal the bitterness in her tone.

"I would never have found you if you hadn't allowed it, Izeni," said Proft. "You knew the moment we entered your tunnels. You also know we've been investigating the death of Zegana."

"Teysa as well, now," said Izeni. "I have no doubt they're connected, and you have no reason to believe I wasn't the one who cut their threads."

"I saw your spiders in the tunnels, and in Etrata's cell," said Proft. "If you were responsible for this, more people would be dead, and I'd never have seen your eyes. You're more subtle than that."

Izeni frowned, but Etrata could tell he was getting through to her. No one rose as high in their guild as Izeni had without some degree of pride. "You are correct not to suspect me," Izeni finally allowed. "The Swarm has come under enough scrutiny recently. Even if I wanted to kill the city's leadership, I wouldn't do it now. Not when it could hurt my people so direly."

"I brought you this," said Proft, producing the small vial of powder collected from Etrata's bolthole. "I believe the killers are being controlled in some fashion, forced to do the bidding of another."

Izeni stepped closer and took the vial, shaking it to knock the grains off the sides of the jar before removing the lid and tapping a small portion into her palm. Etrata stiffened. Izeni impassively leaned down to sniff the powder.

"Immunity," she said, as if reading Etrata's mind. "Poisons, drugs, natural or unnatural—it doesn't matter. Nothing does me harm." She shook the powder carefully back into the jar before grabbing a piece of dangling cobweb and scouring her hand clean. Looking at Proft, she said, "This is natural. Biological, at the very least. It's not from any plant or fungus I've ever seen, and I know everything that grows on Ravnica."



Art by: Anna Christenson

She looked around herself, taking note of the ruins around her. “But the Swarm hides our face now because of something *not* of Ravnica.”

“That was my concern as well,” said Proft. “If the invaders have changed their tactics ...”

“We may not have won as decisively as we all want to believe.”

Proft turned slowly, raising his hand to his mouth in thought, and froze as he caught a flicker of motion among the ruins. He lowered his hand again, taking a step forward, and saw the hooded figure lurking there, watching their conversation. The figure began to turn away.

“Stop!” yelled Proft.

The figure bolted. Proft started after them, not listening to Etrata shouting for him to wait, to stop, to tell her where he thought he was going. He was running. He was in pursuit. This was something his body knew how to do.

The figure had a head start, but Proft was gaining, closing the distance between them with his long, loping strides. He reached out, hoping to catch the figure’s cloak, but fell as something slammed into the side of his head with force enough to take the rest of the world away.

Consciousness left, and Proft left with it.

Rix Maadi cast a long shadow, even in the undercity. Agrus Kos had always hated this place when he was alive. He truly wished he didn’t feel compelled to visit now that he was dead. But the evidence ...

Too much pointed to Rakdos without forming a full and coherent picture. The attack by Massacre Girl had been too sloppy. Judith had been too eager to point Kaya and Kellan at her own parun. None of this made sense.

There was one thing he could do to contribute to the investigation that no one else could do, and he reminded himself of that as he passed through the walls of Rix Maadi, descending through the Rakdos guildhall toward the great lava pit where Rakdos himself dwelled.

No one stopped or seemed to see him as he traveled lower and lower, until the gleaming basin of the pit itself cut through the gloom. Glad he didn't need to breathe in his ghostly form, Agrus moved to the edge of the pit and looked down.

Rakdos lay curled at the burning center of the lava, eyes closed, seeming oddly peaceful. A thick layer of dust covered his body, interspersed with patches of blood-red moss. He had been here and asleep for quite some time.

Rakdos couldn't be the answer.

Agrus began to turn away, intending to leave the same way he had entered, and stopped as smoke snaked out of nowhere, wrapping around his wrists and ankles, holding him down. A sudden searing pain swept over him. He fell to his knees, fighting to look up and see what had attacked him, but collapsed as the pain grew more intense.



Art by: Domenico Cava

Then, with a flash of reddened light, he vanished, and Judith stepped out of the shadows, a crystal skull in her hands, smirking at the place where he had been. “Now, now, darling,” she said, caressing the skull. “Can’t have you spoiling all my fun when I’m so close to getting what I really want.”

She raised the skull to her face, smirk becoming a smile as she saw the small figure of Argus Kos screaming inside, wrapped tight in chains of smoke.

“Rakdos sleeps now because he wishes to, but it would be a small matter for the other guilds to bind him in dreamless slumber, if I could only convince them that his desires had become a danger,” she said, sweetly. “Our guild needs new leadership, a ... *dramatic* change of scene. All I need to do is throw enough clues in front of those amateur crime-chasers, and this ends with me at center stage. You’re not a part of my script, little spirit. You’ll stay where I put you.”

She turned and sauntered away from the lava pit, leaving the demon she ostensibly served to slumber.

Proft groaned as he woke, raising one hand automatically to cup the side of his head, and was distantly pleased when he felt no blood or gaping wounds. He opened his eyes as he sat up and froze, staring at the blue-white room around him. Wonder, awe, and confusion warred for control of his mind as he pushed himself to his feet, looking around the impossible edifice of his own mind palace. How could he have summoned it while he wasn’t even awake ...?

He turned again and froze. A figure in a long, hooded cloak was rummaging through one of his drawers, looking at the files inside.

Proft cleared his throat. “Excuse me, but I don’t remember inviting any guests. What are you here for?”

“Ah, you’re awake, or whatever serves for waking in dreams,” said the figure, sounding almost amused. Their voice was distorted, clearly disguised in some way. Not looking up, the figure added, “I came to meet you. To see this place for myself. Very impressive, what you’ve created here.”

“Thank you,” said Proft, suppressing the urge to preen at the flattery. “But as I said before, I’m afraid you weren’t invited. Are you by any chance the killer I’ve been tracking? Your powers of suggestion must be extraordinary to have worked your way in here.”

“Sadly, my friend, I’m not the one you’re looking for,” said the figure, pulling a folder out of the drawer and flipping it open. “I’m merely passing through. Ravnica is a waypoint, not the destination. But your contributions will be remembered, and I’ll see you’re rewarded in some way when the time comes.”

He tucked the folder into his cloak, turning as if to go.



Art by: Magali Villeneuve

Proft began to protest this blatant theft of his intellectual property, only for the mind palace to shatter as his eyes opened and he woke for the second time, cheek stinging and hot with pain. Again, he touched the side of his head and winced at the already blooming bruise.

Pushing himself up onto his hands, he looked around, quickly finding Etrata crouched only a few feet away, her own eyes wide and glossy with the fading remains of panic. “I hit you when you wouldn’t wake up,” she said. “You took off running, and then I found you like this. I thought maybe whatever’s ... been making people kill ... maybe it had you, now.”

He looked past her to Izeni. “Did you see anyone else here?”

“No,” said Etrata.

Izeni merely shook her head.

“I see.” Proft rose. “Come, Etrata. We’re needed in the city above.”

“How do you know that?”

“Unconsciousness is marvelous for organizing the thoughts. Izeni, many thanks. You have my sincere gratitude, and my hope that your help today will allow the Swarm to step closer to their return to proper prominence.”

“Your lips to the Guildpact’s ears, but your wishes are appreciated,” said Izeni as she turned away. “Go back to your sunlit realms, Detectives. You’re no longer wanted here.”

“He should have been back by now,” said Kaya, glaring at the door.

“You say he told you this was too dangerous for a living person?” Kellan shot her a concerned look before he returned to entering notes into his projektor. The building rang with the sound of lithomancers and engineers clearing away the rubble. Ezrim had arranged for the removal of the fallen Agency detectives, while the agents he had dispatched to recover Yarus had yet to return. In the aftermath of the chaos and with two groups already effectively out in the field, he had instructed Kellan and Kaya to stay put for the time being.

Kaya was getting restless.

“He said he’d be back before the deadline.”

“We have hours yet, then,” said Kellan, almost cheerfully.

His cheer died as the front doors slammed open and Aurelia marched into the room, followed by an entire garrison of Boros soldiers. She stalked past the clean-up crews, not sparing the wreckage a second glance as she made her way toward Ezrim’s office.

Kellan and Kaya exchanged a look. “Oh, that can’t be good,” Kellan said.

“No, it’s not,” said Kaya. “Wait here.”

Kaya walked calmly toward the wall between them and the private offices, and through, continuing through the building in a straight line. Ezrim looked up and frowned as she stepped out of his office wall.

“Knocking is still polite,” he said.

“You’re about to have company,” said Kaya, just as Aurelia hammered on the door.

“Enter,” said Ezrim warily.

Aurelia opened the door and stepped inside, looking only mildly annoyed by the sight of Kaya. It was a small thing, compared to her clear and towering rage.

“Agrus Kos is missing,” she spat. “He was meant to report in at the sixth bell, and he didn’t appear. This is an insult too far. I’m done waiting. The Boros Legion marches to war. The Cult of Rakdos will pay for what they’ve done.”

Kaya took a large step backward, through the wall into the next office. If the Boros were going to war, all of Ravnica would quickly follow. She lunged for the office door, pulling it open to reveal a youth, perhaps twelve or thirteen years of age, with the hardened expression of someone who had been surviving guildless in the city streets for as long as they could remember.

“You Kaya?” they asked.

“Yes,” she replied. “You are?”

“Delney. Got a message for you.” They held out a slip of paper.

Kaya took it, reading quickly. *Meet at Karlov Cathedral. Come alone.*

“Can you tell my partner—” she looked up as she spoke. Delney was already gone.

Kellan would understand. He would have to. With Ravnica on the brink of war, she didn’t have any time left to waste on niceties. Besides, where could she possibly be safer than at the heart of Orzhov territory?

If there was one thing the Orzhov were good at, it was burying their own. Not that they had a higher rate of death than the other guilds—according to civic records, full Orzhov members lived longer than

most people—but when someone died, the people responsible for organizing the funeral did so with the full awareness that their absent colleagues were likely to show up and critique the flowers. Written instructions were to be followed with absolute precision, and in the absence of written instructions, the closest friends of the deceased were consulted. If the ghosts wound up angry with the results, well, it was their own fault for not communicating clearly.

Kaya's carriage let her off in front of a cathedral dressed to the nines in climbing moonflower and bruise-black phantom kisses, the windows draped with sheets of white velvet and the mirrors covered in layers of crepe. The building echoed with silence. Until Teysa's body was brought for the week of formal viewing, only her closest friends and family members were expected to enter the building, allowing them a few moments of private time with her spirit—assuming it had chosen to linger.

Kaya walked up the steps, heart in her throat and knots in her stomach, and told herself again and again that Teysa would choose to linger. Teysa would be back. Teysa would be back, and she could tell Kaya that the note in her pocket wasn't what it looked like; Teysa hadn't betrayed them all.

She slipped inside, walking through the door to avoid alerting the attendants, and made her way to the grand nave, where pews had been set up for the mourners—and the debtors, who would be expected to attend the actual funeral and ceremonially reaffirm their intention to repay Teysa what they owed her.

The pews were empty, save for two vaguely familiar figures. One, a man in a long Agency coat, sat toward the front. The other, a female vampire who had changed at some point into her own guild colors, sat closer to the doors, watching them warily. She tensed at Kaya's appearance.

Proft waved a hand. "It's fine, Etrata. We invited her. Planeswalker, if you would?"

"I have a name," said Kaya, walking over to sit near him on the pew.

"Yes, but as we're not that well acquainted, it seemed presumptuous. My investigation has progressed."

"How did you know to call me?"

"I knew of the chief's intent to involve you, and once I heard of Guildmaster Karlov's unfortunate demise, I knew you wouldn't be able to resist. You have my condolences, by the way."

"Thank you." The words were like ashes in her mouth. Kaya glanced at Etrata. "At least now I know where *she* went."

"Yes, well, I needed her, and the Azorius can be so narrow-minded when it comes to matters of guilt," said Proft. "The killers are being controlled by an outside force. She has no memory of the murder. Which means ..."

"She's not responsible either," said Kaya. Proft shot her a glance. She sighed. "Teysa's murderer claims not to remember killing her. I don't want her to be dead, but I guess I ... I wanted this to be simple."

"Teysa Karlov was not a simple woman."

"No," said Kaya. "Never. But I was gone for so long, and I'm worried that she might have been complicated in ways I didn't expect."

"What do you mean?"

Kaya took a deep breath. "When I found her body, I found ... something else. A note, in her own hand, but not her own language. It was written in Phyrexian."

"And you're afraid she sold us out?"

"I'm afraid she may have let greed overwhelm sense, and thought she could get the Phyrexians into her debt. But if her killer was mind controlled ... who would want *three* guild leaders dead?"

“Three?” asked Proft, looking briefly alarmed.

“There’s been an attempt on Aurelia’s life.”

“Ah.” The alarm faded. “What have you learned?”

“I don’t think Rakdos is responsible, for all that Judith seems to want us to think he is. We—Kellan and I—traveled to Vitu-Ghazi to consult the Guildpact. I’m still not sure what the passage she told us to look at meant, and there hasn’t been time to really discuss it. We were attacked on the way back into the city.”

“Attacked? By whom?”

“A group of people in robes I didn’t recognize. We didn’t get to question any of them. Once they were defeated, they swallowed some plant that turned their bodies to moss. They blew away.” She grimaced. “Other than some fur on their robes, we don’t have a lot to go on. And now Agrus Kos is missing, and Aurelia’s ready to go to war against the Rakdos—”

Proft said nothing. Kaya turned to look at him. He was staring off into space with an expression she would have called blank, if not for the satisfaction creeping around the edges. He looked like a man who had just been handed a glorious and unexpected gift, and intended to savor it.

“Detective? Are you all right?”

Proft rose. Etrata, who was becoming attuned to his signals, moved to join them.

“I know who’s responsible for this,” said Proft. “All of this. And I can prove it. But I need you to keep Etrata’s whereabouts to yourself, and to arrange a little gathering for me before I can explain ...”

Kaya stared at him.

Etrata shrugged.

“You get used to it,” she said.