Marlot looked at the stores facing the construction site; electronics, clothing, protective clothing, vegetables, books, everyday items. They were small and matched the lower rating of the area. Bars over the window and the door, brickwork in need of repair. People in the alleys huddled in small groups, unmoving. In this weather they might be frozen to death, the enforcer patrols would dispose of the bodies, if the other vagrant didn't do it first.

For his body to have been found here, he needed a reason to come. He hadn't worked at the construction site; the company managing it had confirmed that. His clothing fit the area, so shopping was the more likely thing he'd done. The construction site was surrounded by stores, and without a fence, the victim could have been crossing it to go from one to another on the opposite side.

The tracks in the frozen sand hadn't yielded anything yet. The lab was backlogged, so he needed to do this the old fashion way. He crossed the street when the traffic slowed and entered the electronics store. Everything was a few years out of date and rebuilt.

He showed the picture to the clerk who shook his head. Asked about any security cameras inside the store that looked out and another shake of the head. The clothing and vegetable store had the same result. The clerk at the protective clothing though she remembered him stopping by, but wasn't certain.

The clerks at the bakeshop across the corner didn't even look at the picture, too busy serving everyone coming in to get out of the cold. Marlot had a pastry to justify staying a few minutes.

His pad buzzed.

"Trem." He smiled as he greeted him.

"Marl, I hope you won't be too disappointed," the lion said, "but I'm not going to be joining you for the search."

"That's fine," Marlot replied, hiding his disappointment. "Is everything okay?"

There was hesitation in Trembor's voice. "Yeah, yeah, it's…" he sighed. "Lunch didn't go as I'd hoped."

"Bo's okay?"

Trembor chuckled dryly. "He's not the problem. I just need to be alone for a while. I have to see my lawyer in a few hours."

"Are you sure? I can keep you company. This is just trying to catch a scent in the wind, it can wait."

"I—Thank you. I just want to rest. You keep looking for the body's killer."

"If you're sure." Marlot didn't like the tone in the lion's voice. He sounded more than tired. "You know you don't need to do this alone. I am here for you, no matter what."

"I know."

"Do you want me to come over tonight?" Marlot asked after too long of a silence.

The answer took just as long. "Can I get back to you on that after I've seen my lawyer? I want to Marl, but if that meeting leaves in anything resembling the state I'm in,

I'm not going to be good company."

What did it matter if he was good company or not? Marlot wanted to demand. He needed someone there. Marlot would take Trembor's company in whatever state he was. He just wanted to be with him.

"Okay," he said, "I'll wait for your call then."

"I'm sorry, Marl. I know this comes at the worse possible time for us. I'll make it up to you."

"It's okay, Trem. Life happens. We'll get through this together."

"Yeah. You will." Trembor didn't sound convinced of it to Marlot's ears. Or maybe he was just that tired.

"You go rest. I have a bunch of store clerks and owners to question."

"I love you, Marl."

"I love you too, Trem."

The lion ended the call.

Marlot considered ignoring what Trembor had said and driving to see him. His lion needed him. Marlot needed to be there for him, to comfort him, to make up for how he'd treated him. But that would just be him forcing himself on Trembor. Forcing the lion to do what Marlot wanted.

Marlot hated Gorrek. Hated finding out about him. Hated that some of how he interacted with Trembor even resembled how Gorrek had treated him. Hated doubting each and every action he wanted to take to make sure Trembor was fine.

Trembor wanted him to keep working, so that was what he was going to do. Hopefully, the meeting with the lawyer would put his lion in a better mood and tonight they could give spending time together another try.

He braved the cold. The forecast called for a few days of it before it warmed again. And hurried to the next store, and the one after that, and the one after. Each telling him the same thing. They had no idea who the body was, and that they had no cameras that looked outside. They didn't care about outside, just protecting themselves and their inventory.

He had a different answer at another bakeshop. This one didn't offer the patrons space to eat, they just sold pre-made meals to be taken home. The owner and primary baker knew him as a regular. Hardir Mixcoat. He knew little about him, other than he seemed to have constant bad luck in his hunting, but made enough to be able to supplement what he couldn't hunt with the meals this shop sold.

Marlot hurried to call into the computer at the office and add the name to the tracking program. That would make all the difference. With a name, he could pull the social circle, and from there confirm the body's movements. He continued around the block, but even with providing the name, no one knew anything else. Hardir didn't socialize when he was shopping, he went in, got what he wanted, and left. A clerk at the used clothing store gave Marlot the area where the thought Hardir lived, and he noted it, but didn't head there. His tracking program would give him the exact address.

With the entire block questioned. Marlot checked his pad for any messages.

Nothing from Trembor. Ezk'Eriel had messaged him to let him know the mink had come for another meal. Marlot had asked to be kept informed. Galden was in a precarious situation, and while Marlot couldn't pull him out of it, he figured he could check in on him if he didn't come for a meal at any point.

He checked on what work he needed to do on the bodies in his freezer as he headed to his car. He didn't want to sit around waiting for Trembor to call, driving to the closest precinct for an update, even if he already knew the answer, would keep him from rushing to the lion's home.