

### Series of death-31

The knock startled Trembor, and he fought the urge to look around the small office for someone hiding behind him. He was a predator in the prime of his life; he had no business jumping at every sound. The door opened, and the hyena entered,

“So, that wolf didn’t have anything useful to contribute.”

“What were you doing talking with him? Taking statements is the job is the recruits. Or did you annoy Captain Sharpfang again? Steal his breakfast, his morning brew? His mate?”

Derimak tilted an ear and smirked. “I keep it within my species, you know that. And his drink and food happened only once. He’d—”

“I heard five times.”

“Fine, three times, but he’s always leaving it out on the counter and walking away, what does he expect me to do? It’s food, I’m a scavenger, doesn’t he know I only have so much willpower and it’s better used to refuse bribes?” She sat before Trembor. “And if I’d sent one of the new cubs, all we’d have gotten is a transcription of what the wolf said. No probing questions to find out why he left. Why did you let him leave, by the way?”

“I couldn’t stand to have him there.” Which was true. He’d been careful not to put any falsehood in his report, even if he hadn’t put every little detail.

“I really wish you’d tell me what he did to make you feel that way.”

Trembor fixed his gaze on her. “Deri, I like you, but I told you, I’m not talking about him with you or anyone else. Please stop before I decide I like you more as a meal than a friend.” He gave a toothy smile.

“You do get we ask because we care and we’re worried about you right? Threatening us just makes us think you’re covering up the pain.”

Trembor sighed. “Did Marlot say how showed up just in time to save me?”

“He did. Claims some criminal contact heard about what that hare planned and let him know. He wouldn’t say how he found out where you were though.”

“Knowing him, he hacked the dispatch database, or,” Trembor took his pad out. “Can someone hack a pad if they’re blocked out of it?”

“You need to ask the tech division for that one. But it explains his ‘I’d have to arrest him’ comment. You still have no idea why that hare targeted you? Or who he is? Prey doesn’t usually go after predators. And tying someone up usually indicates your death isn’t what they’re after.”

Trembor had considered that it was related to Bo, but it felt wrong. Bo had been released, and Trembor hadn’t done more than keep tabs on his brother. Not something that should warrant the people who’d taken him attacking him. And there had been a level of competence in the setup he didn’t expect of people running a gambling place. Then there had been the way Marlot and the hare fought; too much viciousness there, even before the wolf had decided to kill him.

“No idea. Something about the hare feels familiar, but that could be because I walked by a dozen of them between here and the parking lot. Have you found out anything about the riot? The timing was a little suspicious if you think about it.”

Derimak grinned. “Thinking a lot of yourself today. A whole riot just so you’d be alone with that hare.” She shook her head. “Those anti-predation fanatics have been baring their teeth for years now. My guess is some predator got fed up, bit one of them, and it escalated. We’re still looking into who organized it since there are half a dozen permits they should have obtained, but the scent’s going everywhere, so if you’re hoping to feed yourself on that, you’ll go hungry.”

Trembor nodded. Ever Marlot wasn’t that manipulative as to pull off a riot. He frowned. Where had that one come from? Did he think the wolf was so obsessed he’d set the entire thing up to what? Come to Trembor’s rescue again? No, the whole thing had been a coincidence. At best the hare had taken advantage of the riot, maybe he was part of it and Trembor was the predator he’d picked to show his displeasure to.

Except that Trembor now had two bodies with broken necks in his freezer and no actual evidence on them of who had killed them. Another coincidence?

“You okay?” Derimak asked, studying him.

“Mind’s going in dark places. Turning all this into a conspiracy.” He indicated his screen. “I should get back to work. And so should you, before Sharpfang blames me for your drop in productivity.”

She smirked as she stood. “No chance of that. I’m among the top ten percent in the precinct.”

“That only holds if you continue working, not spend your time looking after my wellbeing.”

“That is work, Goldenmane,” she replied.

“But it’s not work that counts toward your productivity.” Trembor smiled sweetly at her.

“Talk with someone, Trembor. Don’t keep what the wolf did you inside, it’s not healthy.” She left him alone with his thoughts.

Thoughts of a black wolf running his fingers through his fur, of him digging his claws into his chest and ripping his heart out. Of a hare who held his own against Marlot. Not a lot of people managed that when the wolf put his mind to it, and the way Trembor remembered that fight, Marlot was determined. If the hare hadn’t been distracted when Trembor broke the armrest and freed himself, would have Marlot even taken him down?

And Trembor remembered why the hare was familiar. He’d seen him fight before.

He pulled up the gym’s number and called. “Grebtor, Trembor. Question, the hare that took on people at your gym, he—yes, how did you know I wanted his name?” Trembor wrote it down, Al’garinam. “Of course he called you too. Anyway, thanks.”

Marlot had beaten him to that too. He entered the name in the system and a dozen names came up. Except for three, all were zebras who had that as a family name. A search gave him the origin of the name, it was Pavorian, meant stripes. Of the three others, two were horses and one a tiger. No hare. So he hadn’t used his real name when registering at Grebtor’s gym. It made sense if he was looking for targets.

But targets for what?

Had his two bodies been part of a gym? Trembor accessed the coyote and rhino’s

files, pulling up where their IDs had been scanned in the last... six months, he decided. If this Al'garinam frequented gyms to pick who he would kill, it would be relatively recent. The coyote did frequent a gym three times a week. Serious fighter, that guy. A call told him no one under the name Al'garinam had ever registered there, but women he talked with did remember a hare coming over a few times. She didn't know if he'd fought anyone, though.

As expected the rhino didn't frequent a gym. Prey didn't fight, and as big as Roughskin was, he was still prey. Something did register. The rhino had scanned his ID at a club which was flagged within the enforcer's system as catering to 'deviants'. A call to the vice division told him the club's patrons were predators who wanted to be treated as prey and vice versa.

Trembor set aside the wrongness of that and focused on the implications. Roughskin, being prey, would go there to act as a predator. Did the hare go there too? Calling the club didn't give him anything. They wouldn't divulge who their clients were, wouldn't even search for a specific name.

Vice couldn't help him either. The club wasn't illegal, sex, between people of predations age, could take whatever form they agreed to, but more than one bodies found in someone's territory had been tracked back to it. Nothing had been linked directly to the club itself, but the current theory was that the bodies were the result of 'plays' the patron engaged in, and the club was watched to determine if it helped disposed of the body, which was illegal.

So, in theory, he had two places the hare could have found a predator to kill. Three is Trembor included himself. This was beginning to feel like a hunter to him, except he could only place the hare at one body, and not on the body itself. Hunters weren't careless, but they did tend to leave a trace. Enforcer experts on them claimed hunters wanted to be caught; that on some level they understood what they did was wrong, and even if it wasn't conscious, they left clues. It had been how they caught Roxul. He'd left some of his fur on every body.

Trembor cursed. Roxul brought the memory of meeting Marlot for the first time, the timid wolf at the back of the room who'd looked so out of place. Trembor had wanted to comfort him right there.

His pad buzzed, provided a welcome diversion until he saw the name. Herelex Goldenmane. He hesitated. For his nephew to use the bypass, this couldn't be good news.

"Herelex?"

"Uncle Trembor." His nephews sounded on the edge of panic. "Dad's been arrested." The sounds around his nephew made Trembor think he was at the academy.

"What? Why?"

"I don't know. Dad called me in the middle of class and told me to get Isie and go to Grandpa after classes. I heard one of his coworkers ask what he was being arrested, but dad disconnected before I heard the answer. I don't know what to do."

"I'm going to call Bay, her or her mate should be able to pick you and Isenson up.

Get your brother right now, if your adviser has problems with it, have them call me. I'm going to find out what's going on with your father."

A call to Baytil had Ufen on his way to pick up their nephews. A second one got him the precinct where his brother was taken to, and Trembor was out the door.