

Trembor looked across to the other cage. Derimak was no longer in it. She'd been moved with comments of 'why are the two of them able to talk?' There had been apologies, and uncomfortable looks to her and him, but she'd been moved to a different section so they couldn't coordinate their story.

He could have used her company, not that he could have talked with her; the cages were monitored. Now he had no one to distract him from what Marlot had told him. What he'd asked him to do. How could his wolf ask to risk losing him? He wanted to scream. He wanted to get out, find Marlot and shake sense into him.

The door to the section opened a bull, Rakit, stepped to his cage and unlocked the door. "Your lawyer's here with that hippo for the prosecutor's office. There were delays, that's why they took longer getting here."

Longer? Trembor didn't even know they were coming. As he entered the interrogation room Prosecutor Flattooth smiled at him.

"I'm guessing you thought you were going to get away with it, didn't you? Well, the judge saw things my way and the previous deal's been erased."

"Don't say anything," Barany replied.

Trembor sat in the seat beside the armadillo. Rakit stepped into the corner, under the camera.

The hippopotamus turned in her seat to glare at the bull. "I want you out of here."

"Sorry, my instructions are to stay and make sure nothing happens." He smiled at her. "Something about threats against you having been made." She fumed, but faced Trembor and Barany again.

Trembor kept his ears from folding in puzzlement as he noticed Rakit had his pad in his breast pocket, and that it was on. That was completely against procedures. If someone called him during the interrogation, he could lose his job.

The bull caught him looking and gave him a small smile.

The pad wasn't an accident. The camera wouldn't have caught him as he walked from the door to under it. Why? The camera recorded the interrogation. Who could want their own records of it? Or to listen in? Marlot? But why? He couldn't be watching over him to make sure he did what he asked. Even if that was his style, he wouldn't be able to do anything about what happened here.

He sighed. Why had Marlot gotten himself involved in his problem?

"Finally understanding the futility of your situation, I see," Flattooth said with a grin.

"Don't answer that."

"It was a statement, not a question."

"Which you'd have been happy to twist into my client's admission of guilt," Barany replied.

"Oh, I don't need him to admit anything. So much has come to light in these last few days that all I'll have to do is present it to the judge and your client will disappear within the caging system for the rest of time."

The armadillo snorted. "All you have allegations, as far as I know, nothing's been

corroborated.”

“I have witnesses.”

“Yeah, and those are so reliable, not to say that they can end up someone’s meal before the case is over.”

“Are you threatening my witnesses?” she demanded.

“I’m stating a fact. Something like seventy percent of cases relying purely on witnesses are dropped because they end up eaten. So unless you have them under protection, you’re not setting yourself to win.”

She smiled. “Oh, don’t worry yourself over this; before your client ends up in court, I will have evidence aplenty. I’m here to make his life easier, I’m certain he doesn’t want his family’s name to be dragged into the mud with him.”

Barany replied something and Trembor folded his ears back as he put his head in his hand in an attempt to block their argument. Could he do this? Could he risk Marlot? Could he even pull this off? He wasn’t much of an actor. He’d always depended on being straightforward to get things done. Marlot was the one adept at subterfuge, and Trembor chastised him often for it.

He sighed. He missed his wolf so much. He realized the room had grown silent and that he needed to make his decision.

He shook his head. “I can’t do this anymore.” The exhaustion in his voice wasn’t even an act. He was tired. Tired of everything.

“Don’t say anything,” Barany said, as the hippopotamus said.

“So you’re ready to admit to everything?”

“I—” Trembor’s voice broke as he raised his head. He rubbed his face. “I covered up for him.”

“What?” Flattooth asked, confused

“Trembor, I’m advising you to remain silent.”

“This is too much, Barany. You didn’t sign up for this. Fuck, I didn’t sign up for this.”

“What are you talking about?” Flattooth demanded.

“His name is Marlot Blackclaw.” Trembor swallowed and looked away. He was doing what Marlot had asked, so why did this feel like he was betraying him? “He is who tampered with the evidence in my brother’s case.”

The hippopotamus was silent for a few seconds, then looked at her pad. “You expect me to believe that some random person tampered with your brother’s case, when everything points to you?”

“Not random. He’s my mate.” Trembor swallowed. “He’s my everything.”

“And you’re just doing to betray him?” She asked, her tone mocking.

“I didn’t know how far this went,” Trembor snapped and surprised himself at the anger in his voice. The anger that everything had gone so far off the trail. All he’d wanted was to protect Bo, and now he was dead.

“Do you take me for an idiot? You never mentioned this Blackclaw before. You’re just trying to—”

“Have you ever loved someone?” Trembor asked, swallowed hard. “Loved him or her so much that you forgive him their flaws Excuse the things they do? Even when they mistreat you, you tell yourself ‘they didn’t mean it, it was an accident, they won’t do it again.’”

Barany and Flattooth looked at him.

“I knew Marlot wasn’t the most law-abiding male. But he always bent the rules to help us close our cases. As far as I know, he never falsified anything about our investigation. When I found out what he did for Bo, I didn’t hesitate to cover for him. I thought he’d done it because he cared for me, for my family. Now...”

Fuck, how the fuck was he going to say this?

“Now I don’t know. He came to see me earlier. He was pissed that I’d somehow gotten involved in the rest of his affairs. Even then I didn’t know how deep it went. I’d just noticed something odd about a few of his kills, so I thought I’d change the trail’s scent a little. I didn’t think it would fall back on me so quickly. But I can’t cover for him, not for all the deaths he’s caused, not if what I’ve been told about how he’s been slowly replacing people in positions of power is true.” He swallowed. “I can’t be with someone who disregards the law like that.” He put his head in his hands again and fought not to throw up.

The silence broke under Flattooth’s laughter. “This has got to be the biggest pile of shit I’ve ever been asked to sit in, and trust me, I’ve dragged some pretty shitty people into court.”

Trembor looked at her in horror. She hadn’t bought it. This was going to fall apart before it even started.

She smiled. “Oh, don’t worry, I’m going to look into that Blackclaw character if he’s even real.”

“He was here,” Trembor said, “look at the recording.” Only then remembering the camera had been turned off.

“Good, then you have nothing to worry about.” She canted her head. “So why do you look worried? Could it be the recording isn’t going to show what you want me to believe? Sucks not being in a position to create the evidence to back up your stories, doesn’t it? What happened, your palls within the precinct no longer want to go along with your schemes? They’ve seen me drag you in here, are watching me tear you apart and they’re thinking it’s them they hunt with me?”

“I wouldn’t stretch my neck too far if I were you,” Barany said, reading his pad. “I just received a report from one of my firm’s network investigators and they’ve uncovered some anomalies within your offices.”

“What are you talking about?” Flattooth asked.

“We don’t have all the details yet, but seems someone received a large amount of money over the last few weeks.” He looked up. “Interestingly enough, those weeks you were away.”

“Are you accusing me of being dirty?” the hippopotamus demanded. “You’re making that up to save your client.”

“I’m not accusing you of anything. I’m telling you there are irregularities within your offices, irregularities that might have had an impact on how my client has been treated. As for making this up, feel free to contact our expert, her name is Afirna Grabs. She works for the network security division of the enforcers and freelances for us from time to time.”

Trembor frowned, why did the name sound familiar?

“I have nothing to do with whatever she uncovered,” Flattooth stated.

“I have no doubt,” Barany said, “but I think it’s enough for us to pause the questioning for now; until you’ve cleaned up house. I’ll also have my firm’s investigators look into what my client has said about his mate’s actions.”

“Don’t tell me you believe that crap.”

The armadillo canted his head. “Maybe you should check the records. Trembor Goldenmane is mated to a Marlot Blackclaw as of close to six months now. Before any of this happened. I think we owe it to the judicial system to check this new information, don’t you think?”

“You’re only saying that because it could get your client out from under this mess,” she replied angrily.

“I’m saying it because if my client is innocent, then you’re abusing your position in this very public vendetta against the enforcers you’ve been on for these last few years.” He looked at the bull. “Please take my client back to his cell. This interview is over.”