

Marlot stopped the car in its spot in front of their office and quickly got out to open the other door.

"I'm saying it again. You should be going home. You've just been released." He offered his hand to the lion.

Trembor looked at the hand, then at Marlot. "I'm fine," he growled, but he took the hand. "I don't want to let the report fall behind any more than it has."

Marlot helped him out. "I already did most of it."

"And I need to add my part so we can close the case." Trembor leaned against the car while Marlot took the crutch out of the trunk. He didn't give it to him, instead, he draped the lion's arm over his shoulder.

He turned to help him to the office but stopped. A dachshund in her thirties was getting up from the stairs.

She took a tentative step toward them. "Are, are you investigator Blackclaw?" Her trembling voice, petite size, and lack of confidence made her seem younger than her scent indicated.

"I am."

She tried to say something but closed her mouth. Trembor noticed the worried glances she was casting in his direction. She looked at her feet. He could see Marlot was confused by her behavior, but he'd seen it multiple times when his sister didn't want to admit something in front of witnesses.

He took the crutch out of the wolf's hand. "I'll see you in the office when you're done." He hobbled away.

Marlot grabbed his arm. "What do you think you're doing?"

"I'm giving you two some privacy." He smiled at Marlot's worried expression and cupped his cheek. "I'll be fine. It's not even twenty feet to the door. No one's going to pounce on me between here and there."

Reluctantly, Marlot released him and watched him go.

"I'm sorry," the dachshund mumbled. "I didn't mean to get in the way."

Marlot waited until the door closed behind his lion and then sighed in relief. "It's alright." He focused on her. "He's right. I've been overprotective since he got hurt." Her fur was well kept, brushed. Her gray business suit had a conservative cut to it but smelled a little musty. "What can I do for you?"

She dug through her bag and pulled out a cash card. "I wanted to give this to you."

He simply looked at it. "Why?"

"The newsies say you killed the male who r..." She tried to get the word out, but couldn't. When she started panicking Marlot placed a hand on her shoulder, and she flinched a little.

"How long ago?" He didn't need to hear it to know what this was about.

"Th... Three years. This is part of my savings. I want you to have

it, to pay his tax."

Marlot smiled. "He wasn't worth all that much." He had been surprised at how little he'd had to pay. Considering the iguana had owned a successful business. He'd known his crime would bring his value down, and that his assets would be liquidated to pay what he owed for Aiden's death, but he hadn't realized it would end up being quite this low. He's even called the administrative office to make sure there hadn't been a mistake.

"I don't care." Her tone was firm, but her eyes were wet. "You've made it so I can sleep again. I want you to have it."

Marlot could smell the misery coming off her. He had the impression he was the first person she'd told. He closed a hand on hers. "Alright, I'll take it, but on none condition. I want you to see a counselor about what happened to you."

"I can't." She cringed.

"You have to. If you don't, he's always going to haunt you." The fear in her eyes made him tighten his hand on hers. "I know a good one. Her name is Dauro. Promise me you'll take with her."

The dachshund hesitated a moment before nodding.

He let go of her hand and took out his pad. He brought Dauro's information while he waited for her to take out hers. She nodded when she was ready to receive it.

At the same time as his pad sent the information, it pulled her pad number out. Marlot's pad shouldn't have been able to do that. And normally he wouldn't have done it, but he was worried she wouldn't do to see her.

He took the card, then hugged her. She dried her tears and thanked him again, then walked away. While he watched her leave Marlot sent Dauro a message explaining what had just happened. He included the dachshund's number so she could follow up with her.

He smiled at Hela'han as he entered, and she said something, but he saw Trembor leaning against their desk so he didn't pay attention to her as he hurried to the lion.

"Shouldn't you be sitting down?"

Trembor rolled his eyes. "I'm fine. Who was she?"

"one of his victims. She gave me a reward for killing him, but I'm going to use it to pay for her visit to the councilor I convinced her to see."

Trembor smiled. "You're a sneaky wolf." He grabbed his hand and pulled him close. "I love you." He wrapped his arms around the wolf and kissed him.

Marlot froze, remembering the door was open and Hela'han in the other room. With an effort, he forced his worries away so he could enjoy the feel of his mouth on his lover's.

He heard an amused chuckle from the other room, then the door closed quietly.