

The ranch-style house was large, but with minimal security. Cameras so the occupants knew who was approaching, but no gate, no wall except for the fence keeping the quad bovines and equines from running off.

“You going to be with Royal Security, Mister Cartwright?” Elias asked. He just couldn’t stop teasing me about it. I’d explained why I wasn’t an Orr as part of the security company. Being identified as the owner’s son wouldn’t be helpful, but he just found it hilarious that me, a mighty Orr, had an alias.

“No.” I pressed the buzzer and immediately the door opened and a rhino that would make uncle Dietrich hire him on the spot and give his head trainer the boner to end all boners looked us over. “Wyatt Orr, I’m here to speak with your boss.”

“Mister Abraham isn’t accepting visitors without an appointment,” the rhino replied and made to close the door. I put my hand on it and it stopped. The man didn’t show the effort he put in pushing on it, but I could feel him trying.

I smiled. “Unless your boss wants to have to explain to the FBI why he helped a child molester and killer, he’s going to explain it to me. And if I don’t like his answer, he’s not going to have to worry about explaining anything to anyone. Ever.”

Elias raised an eyebrow, and the rhino reached for the gun at his hip. Texans and their guns.

“Let them in, Walter,” a reedy voice came from the man’s radio clipped on his other side. Radio? In this day and age?

The rhino wasn’t happy, but he escorted us to a bedroom and I heard the sounds of machines before I saw them. Joseph Abraham lay on a bed surrounded by them. He looked nothing like the pictures on the bio I’d found. There, he was a strong and proud man. Here, he was frail, still defiant, but without strength.

“You have some explaining to do,” I told him. Of course, I care that he’s dying. I can’t help that part of myself, but the man provided a child molester housing to select his target from and to perform his twisted rituals. I won’t let his old age influence me.

He raised an eyebrow. “Do I? I don’t think you’re the police.”

I stepped closer and the rhino interposed himself.

“It’s alright, Walter.” The rhino glowered but moved away.

“What kind of monster are you?” I demanded.

He laughed weakly. “Oh, that’s rich, coming from you, Mister Wyatt Orr, considering the things your family has done. You should clean your own house before you complain about how messy someone else’s is.”

“So you know who I am. Good. Then you know if you don’t answer to my satisfaction, there’s nothing that guy can do to keep me from snapping your neck.”

“Oh joy,” the man said. “Threatening my life. Look around. It’s already under threat.”

“These tell me you aren’t ready to give up yet,” I commented. “So you don’t want me to kill you. And to be clear, my house is clean. We don’t go around helping child killers.”

“Of course you don’t,” the buffalo said derisively and looked at Elias. “I don’t recognize you. Are you a Chouteau?”

I snorted. “You think I’d work with one of those assholes?”

“You know bout the Chouteau?” Elias asked. “The Society?”

“And the Thinkers, the Sisters, the Green man, and the others. I may be old, but I’m not stupid. When the world changes around me, I learn everything I can about it.”

“I’m Elias Johns. I’m helping Wyatt investigate the disappearance of five boys eight years ago.”

“He owns you, you mean.”

“I’m afraid I don’t understand,” the otter replied.

The old man rolled his eyes. “The Orrs own people. They don’t have friends, they don’t seek help. They demand it and if you don’t give it, they make you pay.”

I didn't contradict him, and the man seemed surprised.

"Your information isn't entirely accurate," Elias said, "but the status of my relationship with Wyatt isn't relevant. You provided housing to a murderer. I'm curious how you justify your actions."

"You think I knew what he was planning?"

"I didn't read anything about you coming forward with information," Elias said.

The man frowned at him. "I didn't think the police worked with people like him."

"Didn't you say he owns me? Wouldn't he not give me the choice?" Elias was enjoying himself. He didn't get to play around with truths during a normal investigation. But as nice as it was watching him, that wasn't why we were here.

"What did he tell you he was doing?" I demanded.

The buffalo turned his gaze to me. "What is the information worth to you?"

"You didn't just go there," Elias said.

"You don't understand the situation," I told the man. "I'm not paying for the information. The absolute best result you can expect is me to leave here satisfied you were used and weren't colluding with Wanna Be."

The man beamed. "I have something you want. So I have the power here."

I looked at the closest machine. The controls for the breathing assist that was keeping the man alive. The on/off switch was nicely marked. I flicked it off, then held the rhino by the neck as he came to turn it back on.

"In your research on my family, did you read up on one of my fathers? Arthur. I didn't get to meet him; he was murdered outside a child's hospital. So I read up on him." The man's eyes grew wide. He was already gasping for breath. "I have an affinity to learn stuff and as part of learning about my dead father, I read a good number of medical books. I'm no doctor myself, but I know enough to know which of these machines can hurt you the most if I turn it off. This one will kill you if I let it go on long enough." I flicked it back on and leaned in to look into the man's eyes. "So don't think you have anything resembling power here. I'm an Orr, I can live without getting what I want out of this meeting. You can't."

The man's fear was muted by weakness and pain. He might even think I couldn't see it. "You don't scare me."

I flicked the machine off again.

"Then you don't know my family as well as you think you do."

"Wyatt," Elias said. "You can't do this."

The smile I gave him wasn't pleasant. "I can, and I am. You knew what it might come to when you agreed to help."

"He's an old man. I have no problem with you doing anything you want to Wanna Be, but he's just someone who was used."

I flicked the machine back on and Elias thought he got through to me. The old man couldn't speak if he couldn't breathe.

"Rich folks aren't used, Elias, they use people."

The old man let out a weak laugh. "And here you are, using him."

"I am." He knew it. He might not understand how far I'd go, and if it got to be too much, he'd leave. I looked down at the buffalo. "You see, the big difference between you and my family is that we have no problem admitting to the kind of assholes we are. We're not worried about appearing nice. So when we are, we mean it. When we aren't. We're just being ourselves." I reached for the machine's switch. "I don't feel like being nice right now."

"Wait," the man said tone desperate.

I smiled. "Good. We finally understand each other." I let go of the rhino and he immediately swung at me. I had him on the floor and was standing before the rhino understood he was unconscious from his head impacting the hardwood. "So, Wanna Be?"

The old man looked like he'd try for a deal again, but as I reached for the switch, he said. "He told me his name was Steven Mullen. He's a jaguar. I didn't try to find out if it was his real name. He promised me a cure for this." He motioned to himself, the machine around them. "I'm

dying, have been for a long time.”

“And you believed him?” Elias asked.

“You wouldn’t?” the buffalo replied. “Have you looked around? Magic is real. Why wouldn’t I believe him?”

“There are others who offer proven methods.” He nodded to me.

“And become his family’s slave? I didn’t make it to where I am by bending over for other people.”

“No, you inherited your wealth,” I said. “He said he’d keep you from dying. I’m guessing you found out he lied to you when he just up and vanished after killing the boys.”

“He didn’t lie,” the buffalo said. “He’s still perfecting the process. That’s what he told me when he left. The police were starting to pay too much attention, and there’s only so much I can do to get them to look elsewhere.”

“He’s trying to perfect what, immorality?” Elias asked in disbelief.

I thought over the symbols, the ones in the building and the ones at the farmhouse. Eight years of evolution. It gave me an idea of where Wanna Be was heading with them, and they still made little sense. They weren’t aiming toward any symbols I recognized.

Of course, I’m not an expert on magic. But I do know one.

I checked the time, did the conversion. It was very early in Kenya. If I had the luxury, I’d call him directly. Instead, I call the palace.

“Odinga Residence,” an official sounding woman answered in Swahili.

“This is Wyatt Orr, of the San Francisco Orrs,” I answered in the same language. “Is the King available?”

“It is late here, Mister Orr.” She was still speaking Swahili, which told me she wasn’t pleased.

“I know, and I offer my sincerest apologies. If I was in a position to wait, I would have.”

“I will see if he is willing to speak with you.” Singing replaced her. I was on hold.

“Who are you calling?” Elias asked. The buffalo was watching me intently. Did he understand Swahili?

“Fred Odinga. If anyone can tell me if those symbols mean anything, it’s going to be him.”

“Wouldn’t the Thinkers know too?”

I shrugged. “I haven’t fucked any of the Thinkers I know.”

“You’ve had sex with the Kenyan king?”

I rolled my eyes. “I had sex with him before he was crowned. It’s only been ten years.”

“Wyatt?” the lion came over the phone. “Man, it’s been a while; how are you doing?” I made out moans and grunts, but they grew faint and realized he spoke English.

“I hope I’m not interrupting anything important.”

“Nah, just resolving complaints between people. Frank can deal with them for a while. How can I help?”

“Can you look at some pictures for me and give me your professional opinion?”

“Send them.” I did, and a minute later, he spoke again. “What am I looking at?”

“I’m investigating a serial killer and he left those symbols behind. The ones in blood were under a month ago, the scratching was eight years.”

“I never took you for someone caring about stuff like this.”

“Obsidian Black put me on the trail and they wouldn’t have done that without a good reason.”

“Who?”

“Right, you wouldn’t know about them. They’re the hacker who took over for Emerald.”

“Wasn’t she one of Merlin’s people?”

“Yeah. No one’s sure who Black is, or even if they’re with Merlin or another faction. All I know is that they don’t bug me without reason. I know those aren’t sigils, but can they be symbols from another faction?”

“I don’t recognize them from anything I read, except for one.” I received a file. A zoomed section from the bloody wall at the farmhouse. “That looks a lot like a symbol I saw in a book years

ago. But it shouldn't be possible."

"Okay, the only times I've known you not to outright say something, it was really bad news."

"Do you remember the stories about Sahataan?"

"Oh, you have got to be fucking kidding me."

"Look, it could be a coincidence. Sahataan is no more, we know that for sure."

"But someone took his place." Someone related to me on top of that.

"Yes, but Damian has never been seen on the earthly plane. He killed all of Sahataan's followers in his coup, which left him with no one to power him."

"But that doesn't mean he died. Our god starved for a long time, the way gods count time, before the Society found him. So it's possible I'm dealing with the fucking god of sacrifice?"

Fred didn't say anything, which made Elias's stare hard to ignore. He took out his phone, and I grabbed it out of his hand with a shake of the head. The glare he gave me was not happy.

Fred let out a breath. "Okay, dealing with gods screws up calculations, but it's one symbol among a lot that are nonsense. It's possible it's just luck. Or maybe your killer came across something online. A lot of junk appeared online after Diamond, and among all of it, there's a few gems. It's nearly impossible to prevent truth from finding its way now that people are actively searching for it. I miss the days when no one believed in magic."

"So your expert opinion," I said, fixing Elias with my gaze, "is that this isn't a sign Damian is involved."

"That's correct."

I raised an eyebrow and the otter nodded. I handed him back his phone. "Looking at what's there, do you think the guy's getting close to accomplishing what he set out to?"

"Set out to?" Fred is quiet. "No, that's basically meaningless... oh, you're with someone and you don't want him to realize..." He chuckled. "Man, I miss those days. But no, this is junk. The one thing you need to consider, and this is an outside chance on the same level as your uncle appearing next to you for a fuck. Is that if he's magical, his perseverance could empower what he's doing. Magic isn't science. The Hertz kid proved that it's possible to change what we think are laws of magic."

I glanced next to me before I could stop myself and shuddered at the idea Damian might be there. He might be related to me, but no one in my family thinks of him as such. Even before he made himself a god, my fathers had disowned him for taking over the gray church and going to war against us.

"Okay, I'll keep this in mind. Thanks, Fred. If you ever make it stateside, let me know, I'll make space in my bed for you and your brother."

"Yeah, if I can ever escape my palatial life, I will visit you." The next part was muffled by his hand. "You're the one insisting I need to stay here for my safety. I had no say in it, so don't be surprised if I look for a way out anytime you aren't fucking me." He was back. "Anyway, Frank's being an asshole again. I gotta go and plug it." He disconnected.

The buffalo couldn't hide his eagerness.

"You said he left," I said, putting my phone away, "did he say where he was going?"

"How close is he to succeeding?"

"That isn't how this works," I told him, smiling. "You want something, you have to pay for it. Where did he go?"

"He said there was something in Denver that would help him."

Denver. Why, oh why, wasn't I surprised? I nodded and leaned to his ear. "The guy conned you. He was never doing anything magical. He's just a sick bastard, and you're one too, for thinking anything is worth the life of children."

I reached for the switch as I watched the despair fill his face, then stopped. The news was destroying him. If I killed him, I was ending his suffering. The guy didn't deserve that mercy. I left him there.

"Denver," Elias said, once we were outside.

I nod. I had my reason to visit Eddy, but what were the odds I'd be able to avoid his father?

"I can go there with you."

I shook my head. "I doubt Bodenman will let you. That's Brislow territory."

"I thought the Cormorans were the official head of Colorado and the area."

"They are, but whoever runs security is who you have to worry about. In Colorado, that's the Brislow family. You know Bodenman is in their elder's bed, right?"

"Yeah, they go way back. From before there was a Brislow family is my understanding."

"He and my family have a history. We also have one with the Brislow. My visit there won't be fun."

"You guys are going to have sex. That sounds fun to me, no matter how angry it is."

I smiled. "It's the rest of my time there that isn't going to be fun."

At least Eddy would make a lot of that bearable.

The Cormoran estate is more... pretentious, is the only term I can come up with. Black stones compose the wall of the mansion, and it is a mansion, unlike the Brislow home. A large three story building with black columns on each side of the door. A long driveway from the street. Unlike the Brislow house, this building is old. Dating back before Denver was even a city.

The Cormoran and Lewiston, who used to run the city before they screwed with Brislow, are responsible for the city existing at all. They were the money behind most of the infrastructure, but unlike my family, they let that power go, preferring to fade in the background, influencing decisions through more donations instead of pointedly reminding the "powers that be" of who put them there.

They probably feel they deserve a mansion.

I pressed the buzzer, and a deep bong resounded.

The door opened, and a cougar stood before me, dressed in a suit.

"Justin," I greet him.

"Mister Orr," he answered, forever proper. Justin Cormoran, next in line for the role of Elder. Man with the stick so far up his ass that when I fuck him, I can't even feel it. He was the current elder's nephew and two years older than Esteban, the elder's son who would make for a much better elder, if only because he didn't take himself as seriously.

"I have an appointment with Elder Cormoran."

"Follow me."

Unlike the Brislow house, this one was busy with sex. I saw otters, lions, bears, rats, antelopes. I doubt there was a representative of each family here, but it would be close. The Cormoran are the buffer between our god's champion and the rest of the Society.

The Brislow elder considers himself a father, friend, employer, investor and only then, champion. Anytime he's called on to act as such, he whines the way Eddy does when sex is withheld.

Justin opened the door to an office. "Wyatt Orr is here."

"Let him in." Came the answer.

Justin stepped out of the way. "Behave yourself," he whispered the warning, and I was tempted to smack his ass in response, but an elder was waiting for me.

Martin Cormoran was pushing eighty, and unlike the Brislow elder, who is only a few years younger, he showed it. As our god's champion, the cheetah has His vitality running thought him on a level no one else equals. It's bound to have benefits.

"Wyatt, it's good to see you again." Martin's smile was genuine. His problem with my family is limited to Adam and, unlike a lot of people, he differentiates between the man and the family. He stood, hugged me, and squeezed my ass. I returned the favor. "Denton called to say to expect you, but he didn't give me details."

He motioned to the seat, and instead of going behind the desk, took the seat next to it, turning it so we faced each other. Martin has a warmth to him I'm told the Brislow elder has, but that I've never seen due to our family's history, and the fact Eddy likes me so much. For as shrewd a businessman as he is, he'd rather have a good meal with you while giving you a hand job and sucking you off for dessert, and then taking you to bed.

"I'm investigating a serial killer who's targeted young boys and is wrapping his acts in

something resembling our rituals.”

Martin stilled. “Does the FBI know?”

I nodded. “They’re doing their own investigation.”

He leaned in his chair. “And you aren’t letting them handle it why?”

“Obsidian Black brought me in.”

“I’m afraid I don’t see the connection. Obsidian Black is a hacker. What would his opinion mean in this?”

I chuckled. “Calling Black a hacker, is like calling you nothing more than a businessman.” I motioned around us. “Whatever he is, however he does it. He’s much more than a hacker. If he brought this to my attention, there’s a reason for it. He just won’t tell me.”

“I didn’t think the Orrs were ones to let someone lead them around.”

“He isn’t leading me around.” I stated. “He pointed me at it and I decided to remain involved because of the kids.”

“And this killer is here?”

“Was. Around eight years ago. I don’t know where he is at the moment, so I’m tracking his movements to get a sense of how he operates.”

“You understand that you aren’t the law. You have no power in this city. If you do anything illegal, I’m not going to protect you.”

I smiled. “I’m not planning on doing anything illegal, and I’m a big boy. If there’s trouble, I can deal with it on my own.”

“I have no doubt, it’s the collateral damage I’m concerned about. I might not run the city, the way your family and many others have taken to recently, but I’m still the visible head of magic. I’m the one the city government comes complaining to when things explode.”

“I can pay for the damage.”

Martin shook his head in annoyance. “How about your promise it won’t come to that?”

I shook my head. “I can’t give you that. I don’t expect trouble, but I don’t know what I’m going to find. If something blows up in my face. I’m going to blow it right back.”

He quirked a smile. “A blowjob is a good way to resolve problems.”

“That I can do.” I dropped between his legs and undid his pants.

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A few hours later, I had his approval to operate in his city and I’d been fed, yes, also food. Martin Cormoran was a good host.

Justin escorted me to the door and, in spite of having just fucked, was as stiff as usual as he motioned me outside.

The door closed behind me as I stood frozen on the porch, staring at the grinning badger leaning against the red sports car. He lowered his sunglasses to look at me over them.

“Hey kid. Denton said you could use some help.”

I was going to kill our god’s champion the instant I got the chance.

I looked for my bike. The easiest way out of this was to get on it and ride off, but it was already on a rack on the back of the sports car. I could run, but Marrows would chase me. He wanted me to run; he wanted me to make him work for it.

Yes, the ‘it’ is exactly what you think. Marrows likes it angry. The only times I’ve known him not to have angry sex are while performing his duties to our god. If he’s going to bottom, he will piss you off until you lose control. If he’s going to top, it comes after you’ve made him work for it. He’ll have arranged it, like touching my bike, keeping me from riding it, egging me to run.

The really annoying thing about the badger is that he doesn’t care which one happens. Even in the Society, with every guy being versatile, they have preferences. Marrows only wants the sex to happen and be angry.

Knowing this was the only thing I could do to annoy him in return, I swallowed my anger and stepped up to him.

“Tom.”

“Wyatt. Do your Daddies know your playing in Denton’s sand box?”

I narrowed my eyes. Because of his age, Marrows had a few odd expressions, old ones that have lost meaning. Why would anyone play in a box filled with sand, anyway?

“Unlike you with the Brislow Elder, they don’t bother tracking my every move. They trust me to inform them of what’s important.”

He laughed. “Your folks trust you? They don’t trust their reflexion, kid.”

“Don’t act like you know my fathers, Marrows. You only have an arrangement with them. I lived with them.”

“Exactly. Of the two of us, I’m the one with the least prejudiced point of view.”

“You do know I can tell Anakin to stop fucking you, right?”

The badger beamed. “Not if your fathers want to keep the sweet, sweet, protection racket I have with them.”

The urge to smash his head in the car’s window was strong. The implication my family needed him cut deep. Deeper because he’d demonstrated we do, three times since I was born. Once, before he was even a follower of our god. The power he gained from submitting to Him means he’s the perfect guy to keep someone alive.

People can’t die around him. It’s that simple. His range isn’t big, just under five feet, but if he can get to you while you are breathing, you will not die. He does nothing to fix the damage, or take the pain away, but you will stay alive for someone else to do that.

The worse part for people like my fathers is that Marrows doesn’t bargain with his power. He doesn’t make deals, hold it over anyone. He simply uses it. He holds the power of life and death at a time when anyone needing his help would have no choice but to give him anything he wants, and he just acts.

I’m the most altruistic of my family and it feels wrong even to me. I know I should count Uncle Paul, but he’s Dietrich’s son, so he’ll never be thought of as ‘family’. It’s an Orr thing.

“Get in,” he ordered and walked around to the driver’s side.

I did so, because I couldn’t win no matter what I did.

“So, Kid,” he said as the car sped out of the property much faster than it should. I doubt he’s had many passengers who took it as calmly as I did. I share quite a few of the gifts he received from my fathers, so a speeding car isn’t something that bothers me. “Why are you in Denver?”

“Do you have any idea how weird it is for you to call me kid? You barely look older than I do.”

His grin told me I’d played his game. Tom Marrows had to approach a century at this point. Anakin’s brought his age down way back in the time of the Church War. Read your history books, it’s now included in them. It’s also when he received my father’s gifts. He even went with Albert, which I’m told back then was an anomaly. Albert’s gift has always been seen as more like mine than that of the rest of our family, useless. And Anakin’s been keeping him young ever since.

The problem with finding out how old he is, is that Tom Marrows isn’t his real name. It’s the only one he uses now, as far as anyone’s concerned, but the list of aliases he has is long enough to need a few megs of data in any directory folder. My fathers have tried to find out who he really is, but if that information was ever online, it no longer exists. The only person reputed to know his real name is the Brislow Elder.

“Stop brooding, Kid. It doesn’t suit you.”

I rolled my eyes. “Like you know what suits me.”

“A cock up your ass does.”

I could rip the door off and throw myself out, but damaging Marrows’ favorite car would only lead to him fucking me.

“So, out with it.”

“Didn’t the Elder tell you?”

“He told me what you told him, but unlike him, I’m not the trusting kind, so I find it difficult to believe that an Orr, of all people, is here, looking to catch a serial killer who, as far as I can tell, never even got close to San Francisco. You guys don’t really care what happens to other people.”

“They were kids,” I snapped.

“So they were,” he replied flatly. “I’ve never heard of you going after every pedophile out

there, so you'll excuse me if I have trouble believing there isn't more to this than that."

"It's paranoia, Marrows. That's what makes you so untrusting."

He smiled. "It's what kept me alive so long."

"Can you even die?" I asked, both because I wanted to change the subject and because it just occurred to me. "Your power keeps people around you from dying. Doesn't that mean you can't die?"

"Never tested it," he replied readily. "No interest in testing it. But you're changing the subject, which tells me there's something you don't want to tell me."

I rolled my eyes. "The list of things I don't want to tell you would keep us busy until the sun goes nova."

"Better start now, then." He grinned. "And with what brought you to Denver?"

I sigh. "I told the elder everything, Tom. Obsidian Black put me on the trail, which means it's important. Wanna Be is killing boys, which is bad enough, but he's wrapping his acts in something that echoes our rituals too much to be comfortable."

"Keep going."

"There isn't more to this, Tom."

"That's bullshit. I don't need Aiden's ears to tell you're leaving something out."

I glared at him.

"You can either answer me or get angry about it," the badger said without taking his eyes off the road. He grinned. "Either leads to me being happy."

"If I thought fucking you would make you drop this, I'd grab the wheel and force you to the curb."

"And knowing it isn't going to stop me is pissing you off mightily, doesn't it?"

My grinding teeth are the only answer I gave him.

"Look, Kid. I do believe you when you say it's important and that you're into this because the bastard is killing kids. I just know you enough to know that there's more to it."

"There wasn't," I snapped.

"Meaning there is now."

I cursed, loudly and obscenely.

Marrows didn't smile at his victory, and I deflated. I sometime forgot that under the guy looking for an angry fuck, the semi-retired hit-man, there was a man who cared about the people close to him, which, that I liked it or not, included my family.

"Uncle Damian might be playing a part in this."

The car skid partially out of control as Marrows slammed on the breaks. "What?" He glared at me and ignored the honking cars and curses thrown at him as cars had to navigate around us.

"It isn't confirmed," I said. "No one's seen or heard of him since he took Sahataan's place. As far as we know, he doesn't even have followers, which means he's basically powerless."

"Damian Orr is never powerless," Marrows snapped. "Especially not when he has you thinking he is. How the fuck could you not tell Denton that part?"

"It's family business." Oh, how weak that reply is.

"Bullshit! He's a fucking god! If he's back in circulation, it's everyone's business. I should fuck you right now. Fuck! I was really hoping to never hear that name while I was alive." He slammed on the accelerator and the drivers he navigated around at twice the legal speed had to be throwing more curses our way.

"Where are you going?"

"You tell me. You're the one in town to catch this Wanna Be. But first, tell me why you think Damian's involved."

"I sent pictures of the symbols to Elder Odinga, and he pointed some that look a lot like Markings used by Sahataan's followers."

"Oh, I am so fucking him." The badger ground his teeth. "You, I get keeping this to yourself. Family and that Orr need to deal with problems on your own. Odinga knows better than to keep even the hint Damian could be active again from Denton. He was around when the bastard nearly

destroyed him.”

I didn't react to the blatant disrespect he's showing to an elder. The casual way he acts around the Brislow Elder is one thing. The two of them go so far back stories say Marrows was the first guy the elder ever fucked. It's either him or Bodenman. But he bad mouths any elder.

I've heard of him storming into Elder Isouga's chamber, throwing him over the back of a chair and just fucking him in front of the assembly. The details of exactly what the elder did to piss off Marrows are vague, but revolved around a plot against the Brislow Elder. Still, there is a way to deal with that and it isn't how Marrows did it. Even my fathers would be wary of just barging into an assembly held by an elder.

I checked my phone for any information from my hackers. Nothing hinting Wanna Be was ever in Denver. If not for Abraham's word, I wouldn't be here. The man didn't lie. Could Wanna Be have come here and not killed? Could have had another reason? If he was involved with Damian, the Brislow Elder was the most likely other reason he'd have come here.

“Did anything happen around the Elder eight years ago?”

The badger thought it over. “Nothing that jumps out. No attacks on him, no attempts, just the usual hassles that come with being an elder. Why?”

“There weren't any reported missing kids that can't be explained via 'normal' happenings.”

He nodded. “Then you're looking for people who wouldn't want to deal with the law.”

“Illegals.”

“Yeah, but I don't think neither of us is going to get anything out of them.”

I smiled. “You don't think I can be charming?”

“You reek money. They can smell you from here and money means someone about to take from them.”

“What about you then?”

Marrows smirked. “I'm the guy Money pays to take from them. If they don't know my face, they at least have boogie-man stories about me. Oh, don't worry,” He added as I stared at him in shock. “I haven't done any of that since Denton brought me into the fold, but you'd be surprised by the people the mob wants removed at times. It's not always the wealthy politician or noisy cops.”

I looked at my phone. Could I convince Paul to come here? He was on good terms with Thomas, so he could be here in minutes.

“Yes?” a voice sounded over the sound system; there was caution in that one word.

“Donal, it's Tom Marrows.”

“Believe it or not, Tom, I do have call display. The question is more about what you want.”

“How would you feel about me owing you a favor?” the badger said.

The man on the other side took a long time answering. I tried to figure out who this Donal might be. Donald is too common a name to narrow it down, but he goes by Donal, and I don't know any Donal in the list of important people I've memorized.

“Knowing what I can have you do as part of that favor, this has got to be a doozy.”

“Does that mean you're taking it?”

“Not without knowing more.”

“Where can we meet?”

“Colonel and Warsaw.”

Marrows sighed. “Can we do this somewhere more... normal?”

Donal chuckled. “You're the one who called me, Tom.”

“We'll see you there.” The badger disconnected the call.

“Not that I think that's the problem, but I can pay whatever the entry fee is,” I said, knowing Marrow's wealth was on a level with mine, before taking into account the resources he had access to as an Elder's best friend and one of the Missionaries.

He shook his head. “Money isn't the problem.”

“Then what is?”

“You'll see.”