

Letting Marlot go that morning had been difficult, but his wolf had to work. Without him there, moving forward had been difficult. Trembor sat at the table for too long, looking at his empty plate. He had things to do, needed to do, if only to get him to move, to stand, to clean his plate.

With a sigh, he took the plate to the sink, washed it along with his glass, dried them. Put them away, stared at the plates and glasses there. He shook himself. If this was how what he was planning left him, he needed to consider it might not be the right thing to do.

“Of course it isn’t,” he grumbled, “it’s just the only option left.”

He forced himself out of the kitchen, cleaned his bedroom, changed the scratching post, the filters in the air circulation system, put the used ones away, realized they didn’t belong with the clean ones, and threw them out; the cold air in the garage helped chase the fog out of his mind.

He had more important things to do than mope around the house. He grabbed his pad, put on a heavy jacket, and drove to the financial district.

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The bank was busy and loud with people arguing. For as much of it that could be done over the network, it seemed most people still wanted to interact with others. Bare their teeth to get their point across, threaten the person on the other side of the counter when bank policy didn’t allow them to do what was demanded.

Absently, Trembor wondered what the employee rate of replacement was in an institution like this. Their rating would afford them some protection, but it had to be unnerving to have someone threaten them while seeing their accounts and knowing they could easily carry through with the threat.

Maybe they had a counselor on-site to help deal with the frayed nerves.

His time came, and he informed the young fox facing him he needed to access his safe deposit box. After confirming Trembor was who he claimed to be, he called an attendant who escorted him to the back. She unlocked the vault door, then entered the bank’s half of the code to his box. He entered his and she carried it to a private room. He entered the second code and unlocked the box itself once she’d left him alone.

He took out the items in it one at a time. Nothing had actual value, this was more a box of memories than wealth. The action figure grandfather Oliangha gave him a few days before his last hunt. The male had felt mythical to a young Trembor, doing his own hunting while being so old. Trembor’s father never did his own hunting, and he was young in comparison. It would take a long decade without his grandfather before Trembor understood he hunted his own food because his mates were all dead, or that the last hunt hadn’t been a hunt at all, just what his parents told him because even in a harsh world like the one they lived in, they were things a cub should be protected from; like there came a time when a predator might decide he had enough of being a burden on those around him.

He took out pictures of the old male, then some of his parents, at various ages. Holding babies, his siblings. Pictures of said siblings holding their own babies. One

picture was of Trembor, leaning against an older, darker lion. He'd been so in love when it was taken.

He'd kept it as a warning, a reminder that things weren't always what they seemed; that beautiful eyes, a tender touch, could hide viciousness. Now, with Gorrek dead, Trembor wasn't sure how he felt looking at the image. The pain was still there, but muted by time; by the knowledge he'd found someone who, for all his flaws, did try to be love and caring.

"Fuck." He dried his eyes and hurried through the box for the one item he needed.

The Will was a folded form. He'd filled it years ago; before the electronic version was introduced. He hadn't transferred it. A mix of not being as tech-minded as Marlot and sharing some of his father's distrust of the electronic medium as a place to keep valuable documents. He'd seen too many cases of hackers pass through his firm to believe it was as secure as the government claimed.

He unfolded it. It held a few lines detailing which of his few possessions would go to whom, with a few exceptions, everything went to his parents, since he trusted them to distribute them to those who could make the best use of what he left behind. If they weren't alive, Cerek was to handle it, then Elin. He scratched off Bolifen's name and replaced it with Baytil, initializing the change, then placed Marlot Blackclaw's name above his parents. Added his initials to make the change official.

He'd have to tell them, so they could be angry at him, instead of his wolf. That would be a difficult meeting. He'd have to keep them from scenting his intentions, while appeasing them, explaining that he and Marlot were working toward fixing things. Serene might make things easy on Trembor and gut him there.

He folded it, placed everything back in the box, added a picture of him and Marlot, his wolf looking nervous while Trembor had an arm around his shoulders. It had been during the celebration after Ruxul's death. They weren't actually together then, but it was when Trembor had decided he wanted to make the wolf his. There had been a kiss, later that night, after both of them had drunk a little too much, and he'd known then Marlot was interested in him too.

On top of the pictures, he placed the Will. He didn't want his father to have to dig through the memories to find it.

He closed the box, listened to it lock, and kept looking. Now what? He needed to tell his parents, but he wasn't doing that right now. He wouldn't be able to keep himself together. He needed to leave something for Marlot, an explanation, a justification. Something that wouldn't send his wolf on the warpath. Whatever he said, he would hurt him. He doubted there were words that existed to tell someone that no matter how much he loved him, they couldn't be together.

There were a few people he needed to say goodbye to. For all those he knew, only a handful he felt he needed to see again one last time. And one institution, the one that had molded him in large part into who he was now.

That one might be easier to start with. Less personal. Less chances he'd accidentally reveal his intentions and set up a chain of events that would lead to Marlot

trying to stop him.

He also needed to figure out his last hunt, but he had some time before that one.