

Chapter 2:

“Jesus, what happened here?” The captain asks as we enter the room.

It’s been just under an hour since I called in the murder and already this apartment is swarming with police of every shape, color, size, and rank. Sheep and rams are the most common, many working in evidence, forensics, and other behind-the-scenes roles. Now they walk everywhere, covered in full-body suits marking up, roping off, and photographing everything they can.

The captain walks with me, as the first responding officer and as the only animal who witnessed the suspect paws-deep in the blood of the victim. This is the first time he’s ever really paid me any individual attention, even since I was assigned to his precinct. Usually high-administration like him stay in his office. I suppose with a crime like this, even he has to make an appearance.

The coyote we found in the room is being detained in the adjacent bedroom, which, surprisingly, was left untouched by the destruction that happened here. The captain, a large elk, surveys the room just ahead of me with his arms clenched behind his back. He’s both concerned and intrigued by the events of tonight, beyond that aroused by the usual urban murder.

We skirt towards the rope separating the rest of the room from what’s left of the body. The lead forensics investigator notices his commander, stands up from the opposite side of the area and gives us a curt, professional wave. He takes a few steps towards us with his clipboard in his hand glancing over it as we approach, being careful to skirt anything marked off.

“So what can you tell me, since you’ve had control of the scene for over an hour now,” the captain asks.

“Her name was Savannah Summers,” the investigator says through the heavy, plastic bio-suit. “Twenty-eight years old, in near perfect health, she seemed to live a very healthy lifestyle.”

“That’s all well and good,” says Whitebuck, “but can you tell us *happened* here.”

“Oh, yes, right,” the investigator continues. “Well, for all intents and purposes, she was torn to pieces. Somebody extremely large and powerful, or off their rocker enough to lose all contact with the outside world, must have done this. Most likely both. She had both her chest and stomach ripped open by sharp claws and teeth, most likely a very large canine or feline. The perpetrator continued to rip and tear at her extremities after that, but, it is highly like that she died beforehand. Finally, something must have spooked him and he tore up the room before smashing open the front door and making out onto the adjacent roof.”

“Jesus Capybara above us,” is all the captain can muster after that description.

While I concur with him, the investigator doesn’t respond, instead charting a few things down onto his clipboard. It’s likely this is just a Friday night to him. He then clicks his pen a few times and

resumes his work, disinterested. The captain moves on as well, moseying through the apartment while fully taking in the damage. It's all unreal, even to him, I suppose. While this may happen in other parts of the city, it has never occurred on his watch.

He runs a hand across one of the walls where five sharp claws have torn open the wallpaper, creating floral valleys deep and wide. A group of bio-suited animals pushes by us and we pause in front of a door leading into a bedroom. It's one of the few untouched rooms in this studio-style apartment. Inside are three people: a detective, a psychologist, and our suspect. The captain sneers inside at the coyote, who has yet to even reveal his name.

He's still being held on site. While against technical protocol, this is surprisingly common for a number of reasons. The first of which is to pressure them with the results of their crime so close to them. The second is to lay a foundation of offers and counteroffers in case the decision is made to rough-ride them back to the precinct. The third, which is especially important in a situation such as this, is to keep them out of the sights of the press who linger just outside. The last is to, well, keep them away from their lawyer.

The captain gives him a cursory glance and turns towards me asking, "So who is our suspect? What do we know about him, other than the fact that he was the only person found at the scene?"

I look around his blue-coated chest to the scene inside. The coyote is sitting on a full-size bed, his hands resting in his lap in cuffs. The detective is hovering over him, barking something that sounds like a mixture of orders and demands, which the coyote seems unfazed by. The psychologist is sitting in a chair just inside the door, not saying much of anything. Unlike the investigator, she seems more interested in her notes.

"To be honest, sir, not much," I reply. "He hasn't responded to any of the detective's questions, has volunteered no information, and the psychologist can't seem to get a read on him. At least with the time allotted to her and his lack of cooperation."

It would be difficult for me, too, if he wasn't threatened with the electric chair from the word 'go'. And that, most definitely, is what that detective did upon arriving.

"It doesn't matter," the captain replies. "He was found at the crime scene, he's covered in the victim's blood, and most importantly, he's a predator. Case closed."

Whitebuck turns and begins to stride away. I continue to peer inside the room and watch the detective, a thick-necked beaver, reach his limit of bashing his head on the stone wall constructed before him and making no progress. He pounds the ground a few times with his feet, then his tail, and pushes by me angrily, cursing under his breath. The psychologist rises gently on her squirrel feet and follows.

"What about the door?" I ask while looking into the room.

"Hmm? What about it?" The captain replies, glancing over his shoulder while only a few steps from me.

"The door," I continue, "the one leading into this apartment. It doesn't add up. It's been ripped down, all but destroyed. Even the forensic expert seems to agree that somebody the coyote's size couldn't have done it. Surely that casts at least some doubt."

"Miss Brooks, I appreciate your concern for our predator suspect, but, this is an open and shut case," the captain replies with an almost, but not quite, condescending attitude. "We have enough evidence to put him away forever, assuming the prosecution doesn't push for the death penalty or drop the ball completely. It's our job to prove to our city that we are keeping them safe."

"By bringing in somebody immediately, even if it's the wrong guy?" I prod.

The captain smiles and sighs through his nostrils. He takes a few steps forward and places a firm hand on my shoulder, which usually I would find endearing. At this moment, I only find it condescending.

"Listen, Officer, I understand you've been gunning for detective since day one. Word climbs swiftly through the grapevine these days. Your test scores are phenomenal, your physical prowess is, well, above average," he says, causing me to smile. "The commander, and indeed the commissioner, are interested in getting cases like these through the court system, and more importantly making them stick, as quickly *and as quietly* as possible. They, of course, look favorably on those that help them. It's in the interest of the entire city of Zootopia. We don't wish to alarm the citizenry that a maniac murderer may be on the loose."

He takes his hand from my shoulder and turns away. He just presented me with the opportunity to get promoted if this goes smoothly. I smile at the thought, being made a detective. The golden shield and personal patrol car, not to mention the respect and valued work that comes along with the position, dance through my head. If this *goes away*.

But something hits me, churning in my stomach and biting at my neck. I turn and look into the room where the coyote sits, staring blankly at the floor. Then I look around the room at what has occurred here. Even I can't do the mental gymnastics necessary to connect this person to this crime. What evidence is here is convenient at best. A good defense would tear that apart. Would he get a good defense?

And, besides, what's the point of being a detective if I come to a conclusion without even doing what my title demands. To go for the simplest solution, even without all of the pieces, it seems immoral. I sigh as those images disappear from my noggin with a thousand 'pops'. I step forward and take the captain's arm before he can get too far. He turns around, looking at me surprised, but not annoyed.

"Captain, if I may," I begin. "I want to make sure we aren't rushing to a conclusion for expediency. We're the police after all, and if the average person doesn't have the confidence of the animals in blue that patrol their neighborhoods, then what do they have?"

“What are you asking for, Officer Brooks?” The captain frankly arrives at the point after a sigh.

“Give me fifteen minutes to talk to him. I understand your superior’s desires to conclude a case like this post haste, but, we shouldn’t do it while throwing an animal we know to be innocent behind bars. We’re better than that,” I explain.

“Officer, remember that, despite his size, he is still a predator. How do you know he didn’t go mad and do this? For all we know, this is a cheap, conniving act on his part. For God’s sake, he’s a coyote. Trickery like this is their ancestral heritage. You do realize that, correct?” The captain inquires less kindly than before.

“I realize that, sir, and I don’t know what he’s doing,” I reply. “But what I know, sir, is that sometimes being a good police officer means taking risks. And there is no harm running some more questions by him before taking him away. He can’t escape, the collar would kill him. I’m just saying that my intuition makes me think we’re missing some pieces here. Maybe I wouldn’t be the only one.”

The captain frowns hard at me, at the insinuation, something I’ve seen him do many times, though never in the presence of his equals or superiors. But his brow softens after a moment or two and he gruffly nods before turning away. I smile in return, thankful to have won the argument, though fearing what I’ve actually ‘won’. If I gamble this right, I’ll get rewarded. If I find out he did this, I’ll pull the lever at the execution myself.

I wait as a couple of techs pass me by, and then enter the doorway into the room where the suspect sits. Knowing that I can’t close the door fully, I leave it slightly ajar behind me, hoping to block out some of the noise from outside. The coyote doesn’t acknowledge my presence, if he notices me at all. I stand across the small room from him and try to force a smile.

“Hi, my name is Officer, err, Jane Brooks,” I announce semi-cheerily, at least as much as I can muster.

It’s hard to keep a cheery disposition after what I’ve seen tonight. And that’s what I’ll tell anybody if they ask. But the truth is, I’ve never stood this close to a predator that was my size or bigger before in my line of work, especially one suspected of murder. The worst I’ve ever dealt with at work was a weasel, who I easily towered over. So my nerves are a bit on end, my mind instinctively leaping to the weapons at my belt. But I try to fight it, just for now.

Although he doesn’t respond, I can tell he at least knows I’m here. His ears stand tall atop of his head, like tuft-topped mountains. His fur, mostly white, but with grays and browns strewn about, makes me think of the great outdoors as well. That is, what parts of them aren’t flecked or completely covered with blood.

He’s wearing a tan overcoat straight out of a pulp fiction. It obviously took the brunt of the staining and which hangs above a well-worn blue suit and striking red tie. It only helps to accentuate the big, black collar that chokes into his neck. While it looks uncomfortable, I know it might be the biggest thing standing between him and my life. But I try not to focus on that.

"May I sit down?" I ask him.

To this I at least get some sort of confirmation. His eyes make contact with mine and then return to staring at the floor. I take this as a 'sure' and sit down on an armless chair just inside the door. Leaning forward, I clasp my hands together and try to understand the person sitting across from me. I've done a lot of arrests, bookings, and tickets, but I've never gotten the chance to do an interrogation and this is the closest I think I'll get for quite some time.

I make the judgement that going the direct route wouldn't suffice. It sure didn't work for that detective. Maybe a more gentle approach would get me somewhere. Just keep up the tone I've had before and maybe he'll soften up.

"Would it be ok if I asked you what your name is?" I inquire of him, still gently, hoping to coax him out of his castle.

I receive more than a quick glance this time. His eyes, bright and ice blue, float up to me and stay there blinking for a moment or so. After a few silent moments, he swallow hard and looks away. My smile disappears when I think he's disappeared again, behind that wall of his. Glancing down to my vest, I pull out a notepad and flip it open to the first page, completely blank.

I actually bought a lot of supplies myself when I graduated from police academy. Most of it didn't get used, though I wouldn't know it at the time. My folks bought some of it for me as either a gift, or a 'good luck' message, depending on who you ask. Turning my eyes back up, the coyote still hasn't replied and doesn't seem to want to.

"Hey, I'm not going to hurt you," I say to him, gently. "I don't know what that Detective Ashe said, but I'm not with him. I'm not going to threaten you, I don't believe in that. I'm trying to be better than that."

The coyote doesn't respond to me, still. He just sits, the metal chain between his cuffs swinging between his arms. I look away, deflated, tucking my notepad and pen away.

"Jackie," he then suddenly says, barely above a whisper. "Jackie Quartz."

I look up in almost alarm, my tail standing on end. I'm so surprised that I don't even think to write any of it down. I just scoot forward on my seat and try to keep my cool.

"Hi, Jackie," I say to him, trying to smile once more. "Can you tell me what happened here?"

His mouth opens, but then quickly shuts again. Maybe I've asked the wrong question.

"Ok, ok, then. How about I ask why you're here at all?" I ask, rephrasing myself. "Could you describe who you saw, if you saw anyone at all?"

He must find that question a little more agreeable, as he turns his entire head towards me, but he doesn't reply. Those eyes, like cut sapphire, meet mine and begin to look over me. It's as if he's

silently judging me, or maybe sizing me up. With that thought, I can't seem to hold my regained smile and I immediately lose it, searching for a new question if he doesn't answer that one.

"Well, uhm, how about—"

"I know—I knew her," he says quietly.

"You did?" I reply incredulously.

He gives a curt nod and then looks away. His eyes seem to scan the room, as if never having seen the inside before. I follow his gaze about, looking at the staples of what I would consider the average middle-class apartment. Though, the fact it's owned by a single lady makes that a little different. It's plainly obvious, despite the off-white painted walls and red curtains.

The walls are covered with posters, most seem new, as if she just moved in. Amongst the singers, Gazelle is a popular one, that big popstar that comes into the city a lot when she isn't abroad. If it isn't her, it's her tiger dancers, or other male models. The tigers stand out, though, as most of the models are prey species. Horses, bulls, rhinos seem very popular. I've always found the tigers to be, well, repulsive at worst, off-putting at best.

She gets away with a lot of stuff just because she's a popstar, because she has money. But it's started making more prey species turn predo, or at least that's what my father says. I've only met a few people with any inclinations that way, none who are actually giving in to their desires. I suppose if they were to date any preds, it would be a tiger. Because that's just what you do. Not that it's illegal or anything. At least, not anymore.

Clothes are strewn about the place, though it looks like it was done by the victim and not during her untimely demise. Wide-necked shirts, cut-off and ripped jeans, black boots and hoof covers seem to make up the bulk of what's about, thrown on her bed, or hanging from the dresser. More Gazelle influence, I suspect. Beyond that, nice shirts, slacks, and shoes, most likely for work, hang neatly in an open closet.

"She doesn't keep his picture out anymore," Quartz says.

My eyes wander back to him, but he seems distracted. He looks to the nightstand beside the head of her bed. Reaching over, he goes to grab at the drawer, but without a second thought, I'm on my feet to stop him. As if forgetting what I had said before.

"Hey, hey, keep your hands still!" I bark at him. "What are you doing?"

He looks back to me with a slightly hurt expression, though one that is unsurprised. His eyes move down to my hip. I realize my hand rests on the unclipped holster of my tranquilizer gun, which is displayed proudly at my hip. Although I'm quietly wondering what I'm doing myself, my lips tighten with resolve and when he meets my eyes again. Then his hands relax. When I see he wasn't trying to do anything, I relax myself.

I take a few steps forward, glancing over my shoulder to see if anybody has heard me yell, worried I've blown my chance. When the door doesn't bust open, I assume no one has and I'm still ok. The coyote doesn't move when I cross in front of him, though he doesn't seem glad about my words, to go to the nightstand. Pulling open the small drawer, I see a picture frame inside. When I lift it from the drawer's shadowy depth, dumping half-full makeup bottles and nail polish off, I flip it over to reveal a happy couple.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean that. It's just training, that's all," I say to him softly, turning it towards him. "Please, who are they?"

I'm not exactly sure he 'forgives' me. But the glance he gives me doesn't seem angry.

"Yeah, see? They always have three photos in their house: the bedroom, the living room, the front room. And they all go away when they don't love you no more," Quartz says a little louder than before. "His name is Bastion, he works as an adjuster at Blue Claws Blue Shield uptown."

Bastion is an Oryx, and the picture shows them relatively happy. They're in some park or maybe outside the city at a public forest. They're embracing as he takes the picture with the camera and they both appear genuinely in love with one another. I put the picture up onto the nightstand and close the drawer before stepping back from Quartz.

"She doesn't like to see his face when he brings *him* over," he says.

"Bring who over?" I ask him.

"Who do you think did this? The new boy toy, of course," Quartz says.

"She was cheating on her husband?" I ask, glancing over my shoulder towards the door.

"Boyfriend," Quartz says with a sigh. "Bastion was going to propose to her this weekend. Even though they aren't, well, the same species. He said it didn't matter to him. I guess she thought the same thing and wanted to move on to something a little spicier; maybe something more *dangerous*?"

As I look at the picture on the nightstand, a scene plays in my head. She has this new male over, they're having a good time. Then, maybe she says something wrong, or he does, and they argue. The argument gets too heated and he swings. Maybe she hits back, maybe he just spirals down into baser instinct and hits harder. Then harder. Then the claws come out, followed by the teeth.

And before you know it, she's dead. Well, deader than dead, she's mutilated, pulled apart at the seams, thrown over the room. I swallow hard and gasp for breath, stumbling back away from the coyote, the set of teeth and claws, sitting on the bed. Without realizing it, I bump into the wall and gasp loudly. Quartz just furrows his brow and looks away.

"You never answered me, why are you here at all?" I demand of him.

He quickly reaches up and into his coat pocket, causing my hand to jump to my gun, though I don't pull it. A moment later, he reveals a business card and presents it to me. I let free my weapon hastily, hoping to not let him see me do that, not again, and take a tentative step or two forward to retrieve it from his claws. Bringing it into the light shining from the ceiling and table lamps, I read: "J. Quartz, Private Investigation. Hire the craftiest, the calmest, the most qualified PI you can find: hire a coyote."

There's even a little coyote profile that's standing in a desert scene in a very trendy, modern line style.

"You're a private eye?" I say and look up to him.

He nods and rests the end of his muzzle in his paws, his elbows on his legs.

"Why didn't you tell the detective?" I say, almost angrily.

"Wouldn't have done anything to help me," he replies cryptically, closing his eyes and looking away. "Probably would've earned me a kick."

"No, that wouldn't have happened," I say, before I'm able to catch myself. "Well, maybe with Ashe . . . Ok, you're a PI and you're here. So you were following her? What did you see? What do you know?"

He looks back to me and reveals these bright, striking blue eyes once more before saying, "Everything."