

The Hunters



By: wwwolf

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Journal.....	1
Chapter 2: Another Day at the Office.....	10
Chapter 3: I Hate My Life, and My Boss Hates it Too.....	19
Chapter 4: Job Search.....	34
Chapter 5: Office Work, with a Twist of Carnage.....	43
Chapter 6: New Best Friend.....	54
Chapter 7: The Lion, and the Lion.....	71
Chapter 8: Swimming in a Suit and Tie.....	82
Chapter 9: Another Day, Another Broken Bone.....	98
Chapter 10: Take This Job and.....	110
Chapter 11: Never, Ever, Take a Government Contract.....	121
Chapter 12: What We Show the World.....	132
Chapter 13: Getting Out While the Getting's Good.....	146

Chapter 13: Getting Out While the Getting's Good

I woke up, the sun shining in my face just wouldn't go away, however much I swatted at it. It took me a moment to figure out where I was. How about that, I'd finally spent a night in my own bed. I moved to get up, when I realized that the arm laying across my chest didn't belong to me.

Shifting around the covers, I found Rebeca beside me, still in her leather, dressed to kill. It took a few moments to disentangle myself without waking her. English was splayed across my chair out front, all four of his limbs brushing the floor. I was surprised he didn't crush the thing.

I took a few moments to wash the grit and sweat from me, watching the warm water as it swirled down the drain. On my way out, I caught Rebeca in the hallway, crossing to her apartment. Her hair was a mess.

"Were you serious about what you said last night?" I asked.

I was dripping wet, but I followed her, leaving puddles in my wake.

She didn't turn to meet my eyes; all I got was a "Yes."

"So, I guess this is it then? You can't stay here, and no way in all the gods' names they would ever let me come with you. I'm what they're running away from."

Funny, I'd always been a runt, now I was 'that thing' the entire human population was escaping.

I watched as she peeled off her leather and knives. "Need any help with that?" I wanted to reach forward and pull her out of that jacket myself.

"Sorry, wolffy," She turned to me and winked. "I'm going to have to move fast to get back out, and I don't want to start anything we can't finish."

I just sat on the same sofa we been on together only a night ago, watching as she disappeared into her bedroom. Curling up with the jacket she'd dropped, it still smelt of her. She'd just spent the night in my arms, and now she was going to be gone.

It didn't take her long; she must have stayed packed just for a case like this. I helped her back into her coat and hoisted the pack on her back. It wasn't big; she must only have what she needed.

"What do you want done with the apartment?" I asked.

She just shrugged, "It's only things. When the rent runs out, let the landlord do as he will. If you want anything, well, it's yours, wolffy."

I walked her to the elevator, the hallway was empty – for that I was grateful. I pressed the call

button and we waited in silence for a moment.

"I don't want to go, Tommy." She stared determinedly into the closed elevator doors.

"You don't have to... I could, I could protect you." I pulled her around to face me.

"No, Tommy, you couldn't. You can't, we can't fight the government, an entire city."

I pulled her towards me, my arms closing around her. A face like mine was never made to kiss, a muzzle coming to a point with a big wet nose. I had to bend down to make contact, but we managed.

It was brief, only a handful of seconds, and the elevator dinged.

She steeped in, the doors closed without another word. I looked down, her key was in my hand.

I puttered about her place for the next couple of hours or so, not really doing much, just looking for an excuse not to leave. Took out the trash, straightened some knickknacks, even made her bed.

The morning sun warmed my face as I sat by the window in her apartment. Below me, a crowd worked its way down the street, shouting slogans and cheering itself on. Suddenly I felt the need to spit. A hole always opened before them, the protesters strode bold as day where ever they pleased. No one even spared them a second glance, neither encouraging nor confronting them, everyone had something more important to do.

I heard a crash from my place, and arrived just in time to watch English pulling himself from the shattered remains of my favorite chair. So much for using that again.

"Awake now I see." I leaned in the doorway as he pulled splinters from his mane and stretched in ways only a cat can.

"Not quite the way I'd like, mate. But here I am. Where's your friend?" He shot me a half hearted grin.

"She had to leave." I still wasn't sure if he'd figured it out yet.

All I got was a shrug. "Best thing. What time is it, anyway?"

"About eleven in the morning by now I'd guess."

"Works for me, mate. Let's catch some late breakfast and figure our next step before going to see our friends downtown, shall we?"

Two steps out the lobby door I felt a hand clamp on my shoulder.

"You two gentleman will be joining us."

It wasn't Jon, but it may as well be his clones. More dogs, roties this time, as perfectly pressed as Jon had ever been.

English just replied with an easy smile, "Sure thing, mates. Tommy and I here were just stopping by for some breakfast on the way. You boys are welcome to join us if you can bend yourselves enough to fit in a seat."

The hand didn't leave my shoulder, but they started walking, dragging the two of us along.

"You will accompany us to police headquarters, immediately. By direct order of Inspector Sayer."

Okay, this was not likely to be good.

The cops never let up all the way to HQ. They didn't ask any questions, hardly said a word. We went back in the front door again, this time I was a touch more nervous than last round.

It didn't take long to get to Sayer's office, no one barred our way. Our friends didn't wait for us outside either. They stood in front of the closed door, blocking the only exit.

The dane once again sat behind his desk; he looked older than before, as if he'd advanced ten years in two days.

"What are you trying to pull, English?" His voice was tired, as though he hadn't slept in a week.

"What are you talking about, Bob? We found the nest, something your men couldn't, and now

we're ready to put this contract in the bag."

"No you're not." He didn't raise his voice, but he might just as well have banged his fists on the desk and thrown a lamp across the room. "They're gone, English. Gone. They ran again, at first light from what we can tell. We sent a team out to eliminate them."

"What!?" The Dane may have not thrown a fit, but English did. He kicked the desk hard enough to splinter a board. Even the guards winced along with me. "Smeg! We'll track them down again! We'll find the buggers."

"No you won't, English. Our sources suggest they've left the city, fled into the wilds of the northern mountains. Unless you know where they are, you'll never find them. Neither will we."

"To the gods with you all! I'll call in the hunters. I'm not going to lose this contract!" His teeth were barred, mane up in hackles that almost encircled him like a halo.

"The hunters aren't your toy to throw around to do your dirty work, English. We don't have enough of them to begin with, and you have no jurisdiction."

"Fine." His voice had fallen again, almost back to normal now, but cold, distant. "Do as you will, Bob. You can count me out." He walked to the door where the guards stood impassively. "Get out of my smeging way before I rip your whiskers off."

They didn't move.

"English, we didn't bring you here to tell you what happened. We brought you here for you to tell us where they went."

He turned around slowly, eyes glinting in the flat office light. "Are you saying I let them escape?"

The dog only shrugged, "Perhaps, perhaps not. We don't have all the facts yet."

The lion took a step forward. "You're moll told you everything that happened, you already know the whole story."

"Yes, yes he did." Sayer adjusted his glasses, "As I recall, it was your partner who suggested that we wait until this evening rather than move in immediately. Speaking of partners, where is your female associate? We require her for questioning as well."

The lion took another step forward, one of the dogs claws clamped on his shoulder. Unlucky dog, he almost lost that hand.

With a roar that was almost deafening in the small room, English turned and launched himself at the door. It splintered in front of him; the guards were sent flying off in different directions - almost an afterthought.

The dane didn't even get up; he passively watched as English flew out of the room like a cannonball, I just did my best to follow behind him.

We didn't get more than a dozen feet before doors started to open. From each, dark blue uniforms flowed like water to the sea. Around every corner they came, not a word or shout, they set upon us like an oncoming tide.

English tore into them, crimson erupted across the hallway like paint, it covered bodies and coated the walls. I did my best to join in; coming from all angles I just tried to follow the lion's forward progress while keeping them from his back. We took a few turns at random before yet another door opened and the rising flood cut us apart.

I'm a bit ashamed to admit that once I lost the lion's protection I didn't last more than a handful of heartbeats – and they went fast enough as it was. Two dogs to an arm, they quickly had me immobile, then a sharp whack to the back of the head, and that was all I knew.

I came around to with a monster of a headache, but a ginger touch to the back of my head and I

could feel the lump was already going down. It took me a few moments to work up the courage to open my eyes.

You know that sometimes you wake up in the morning, and you don't remember where you've been? Figurers, the one time I'd like that, and the whole last few minutes are clear as crystal.

Well, it was one step better than what I was expecting, I was alone. At least no one lording over me with a chain, whip, or any other form of 'You will tell us what you know' instrument.

The room its self was small, I looked about as I rolled onto my back. Simple poured concrete made the walls, floor and ceiling. The only things that weren't concrete were the light and door. The former was behind a grill on the roof, and the later a solid slab of metal.

I tried to get to my feet, but found that both my hands and ankles were cuffed in the old human contraptions I'd used so many times on others.

It mustn't have been long, my welt hadn't even gone down before the door slid aside with a squeal of unhappy metal on metal.

Yet another police officer walked in, a Bloodhound of some description. He was dressed, unlike the rest of the pack, in clinical white.

"Hello, Tommy." His voice was simple and deep, not a trace of threat stained it. But his eyes were flat, they looked towards me, but not at me.

"Hello." I nodded from the floor. "I'd say good morning, but I haven't the faintest what the time is." I tried to crack a smile, but his lack of expression made it fall flat.

"You have some information we'd like to know, Tommy."

I'd be lying if I said a single brave thought went through my mind, I was in way over my head and I knew it.

"You know everything I do already, we found them and they escaped."

I took a closer look at him, the only tool held had was a single short sheath knife lashed to his hip. "How did you find them, Tommy?"

"My neighbor knew where they were. She heard people talking on the Diamond Dice."

"Yes, Rebeca." He squatted down on his haunches, next to me. "She hasn't worked at the Dice in over a week, she didn't have that conversation. How did you get that information, Tommy?"

Aw heck. "She told me. That's all I know, I swear."

"Very well, Tommy. We'll return to that question later. Where is your friend, Rebeca?"

Well, that was one good piece of news; they hadn't caught her on her way out of city.

"Her apartment is next to mine."

"She isn't there, Tommy. You were found with a key to the door, and our trackers place you in her rooms earlier that morning. Where is she? Where are they?"

"I don't know."

Slowly, methodically, and likely more than a little bit theatrically, he slid the knife from his belt, buffing it on the back of his hand. "You know, Tommy, they told me you have regeneration. Is that true?"

I set my head back on the cold hard concrete. "Yes."

"That's good, Tommy. I should almost thank you; you're going to make my job a whole lot easier. Your kind doesn't die as often."

Oh smeg. I was never much of one to pray to the gods, but if there was ever a good time for divine intervention - this was it.

I kept my head back and my eyes closed as I felt him move closer.

"Where are they, Tommy?"

"I don't know."

He didn't even bother to ask again. There was no gentle touch, no threats. The next thing I felt was the cut of a blade. He came in almost horizontal, just above the bottom of my ribs, pushing upwards. The knife lay just under my skin and above the bone.

I felt the heat of the cut as it went in. For just an instant the blade was cool, almost soothing against me, before it turned to white heat.

He let it lay still for a moment, enveloped in my flesh. "Where are they, Tommy?"

It hurt to breathe, hurt to move.

"I... don't... know."

He rotated the blade as it lay within me, the edge scraping against my ribs, the dull back pushing my hide upwards in a tent.

The questioning continued, or should I say the question. It never changed. First my chest, then my gut, my legs, arms, even my head.

I couldn't tell time down here, one howling hour was the same as the next. After he had gone through me I had already started to heal. It must have been a day, perhaps more... Then it began all over again.

It never occurred to me to say anything else; I really didn't know where they had gone. Over time the three words I had repeated so many times became a mantra to me. I woke up in my own blood, whispering them, even in the few precious moments when he was gone.

There was no drain in the floor, and no one had come to clean the cell. I'd painted the walls from the knees down, the concrete so coated it was dyed a sticky burnt crimson. It pulled at my fur every time I moved. I didn't move much.

Surprisingly, with my blood spilled all over the floor, I didn't see a single insect – we must be deep underground, and locked up tighter than I'd ever seen. Around me the silence was heavy and clear. Other than my own ragged heartbeat, nothing broke into my little world.

Then I heard it. Far away, to be honest I couldn't be sure it wasn't just my imagination, I heard a roar.

My eyes popped open, stars dancing before me. English. I was never so happy to hear a cry of pain. I lay limp and listened, breath held, doing everything I could to calm my frantic heart as it beat deafeningly in my ears. I laid like that for what seemed like hours, the silence closing in around me before finally I gave up.

It came again as I let out my breath, trying to close my eyes. Another roar whispered down the walls, followed by a string of curses. I couldn't make them out, but I could guess what he was screaming – and to whom.

I rolled on my back and sat up, the world swam out of focus. My body had kicked in like it always did. I'd been through a lot, but to be honest I wasn't all that worse for wear anymore. The bigger problem was that for the time I had been here they hadn't fed me, and I'd had hardly a drop of water. Regeneration takes a lot of energy, and I was normally famished after just mending a few cuts and scratches. Right now I was little more than bones with some fur stretched across them.

I'd have to worry about that later though, unless I suddenly acquired a taste for concrete, I was stuck for it. Instead, I turned my attention to my bonds. The cuffs on my hands were of little use, they were solid metal and tight to my wrists, I'd either need a key or a pry bar to get them off. My feet however, they were different matter.

They'd never really come up with a good way to bind a canine's feet. Then again, with punishment being the way it was, you normally didn't need it that often. Unlike a human's feet, mine didn't mushroom out after the ankle so much. Like an old fashioned wolf, I walked on my toes, and

they weren't that much larger than my ankles.

Whoever had put on the restraints, they did all they could, but there simply wasn't that much to latch onto – especially now that I'd lost more than a little weight over the last few days.

I wrenched at my restraints, dragging them across the tender flesh of my ankles. The sharp cut of steel bit me as blood welled forth from beneath the metal. Only a couple of days ago this would have been enough to stop me, now such elementary pain was beneath notice. Another kick and they slid free, stained metal glinting against the dark floor.

All I could do now was wait. I lay back down, trying to avoid wallowing in my own blood. Legs coiled beneath me, I focused my eyes on the door.

I'm not sure how long I had to wait, I fell into a bit of a trance; not asleep, but not quite awake either. In any event, the mutt returned, knife sheathed on his belt, clean and shiny again.

I waited, watching him as he strolled into the room, letting the door screech shut behind him. He never locked it, why would he with me bound hand and foot? I'd never seen anyone with him, never seen anyone pass in the hallway.

"Hello, Tommy."

"Hello." I looked up at him but didn't move. I didn't even twitch my tail; my exhaustion was so that I wasn't sure I was acting.

"Shall we pick up where we left off, Tommy? We have much to resolve today."

"Yes. Let's."

It took him a moment to realize what had happened as I sailed through the air towards him, but we were only feet away, and that was a moment he didn't have. They had foolishly cuffed my hands in front of me, perhaps for when they eventually expected to feed me? It didn't matter now, my claws dug into the dog's chest. I only saw his face for an instant before I was upon him; it was so brief it didn't register until long afterwards. His eyes were wide, mouth open.

He never had the opportunity to call for help, my hands clutched his chest, but that was not my target. As my jaws closed around his throat, I felt the warm gush of salty blood slide down into my belly. He may have cried out, but it came as nothing more than a bubbly wail. A second longer and I severed his spine with a crunch, the body fell to the floor as though devoid of bones.

His head bounced off into a corner, eyes blinking, mouth still moving to give voice to soundless protests. His blood deprived brain had a few final moments of clarity to watch as I advanced upon it; my brown fur was crisscrossed by scars, stained red now, with both his blood and mine.

I reached forward with my cuffed hands and smacked the head against the floor until it split open. I couldn't stand those eyes. They looked back at me, as though I was the one who had done something wrong, something horrible.

I lay on the ground beside him for a time; his warm body still pumping out blood, more than I'd ever seen, it was flooding the floor. I waited for my breathing to slow; even that short sprint had taken everything I had left.

I'm not proud of what I did next. I'm ashamed of it, no, I'm disgusted. I... ate him.

The gods help me, I ate him. I consumed another person. He had walked and talked not five minutes before, now I was pulling chunks from him and shoving them down my maw like a rabid animal. If I weren't already in the trouble I was, this alone would get me 'kill on sight' status in any civilized part of the world.

But I did it anyway, I satiated my hunger and stemmed my thirst upon him. Then I slept. It couldn't have been long. No one came to check on us, no one seemed to miss my screams echoing

down the halls.

I stretched, and searched what was left of the body, it was a gristly task. I was in some ways happy for my aversion, if nothing else, at least I hadn't lost all of my soul. Within the folds of the fabric I found a key ring, it freed my hands, I kept it.

With much trepidation, I screeched the cell door open, no one was in sight. I almost swooned when I got a breath of the dank hallway air; I hadn't realized just how rancid the cell had become. I pushed the door back closed the locked away the horror within. Now what?

English. If he was alive, I was getting him out of here with me. Not only was he my best chance of surviving a wade through the blue tide, but I was the one who had gotten him into this to start with.

I tried to remember what way I had heard his roar, but my memory failed me, and the hallway looked the same both ways. I picked a direction at random and began running. I was pleasantly surprised. My nap must have patched up most of my remaining holes. I was moving almost as smooth as before all this had come down on my head.

I was glad I didn't run into anyone. Fur matted down all across my body as I was, soaked from skin to tip in blood and viscera. As I said, I wasn't much for the gods, but I must look pretty close to a risen demon of the first order by now.

The hallway was simple concrete, just like my cell. At regular intervals barred doors scarred the walls on either side, so far they were all open and empty. The next one wasn't.

I stood at the door as I fumbled for a key. There were no signs of who might be within. It could be English, it could be a psychopathic killer, I didn't know. And right now I didn't care.

The door screeched open with a protesting grind from its frame. Within sat my lion, cross legged on the floor, resting against the far wall. I was relieved to see that he didn't look nearly as worse off as I had. Not good, but not as bad as I. Parts of his mane were missing, one eye was bruised shut, and he had lumps sticking out from here and there.

His head snapped up, but it took a moment for an eye to focus on me. A moment more to realize who I was. "...Tommy?" His voice was dry and cracked.

I nodded as I pulled him to his feet. "Can you walk?"

He just ignored me. "Gods... what did they do to you?"

I took that as a yes, one arm slung over my shoulder we listed out into the hallway together. "I regenerate, remember." He didn't say anything, just shivered. "Can you get us out of here?"

A quick shake of his head. "No. I've never been down this far before. Didn't even know it existed." One bruised lip slowly crept upward, "But we're going to try though."

All the hallways looked the same, but to our advantage they were all devoid of people too. A dozen turns and we found a stairway, a dozen more twists to find another one. I had no clue how deep we were, or even how deep we could go, but we kept on climbing.

At long last the walls changed from gray concrete to white paint. I would have breathed a sigh of relief if I'd had any breath to spare. That was also where we had our first run in with a wondering cop.

He must have been as surprised as we were. Rounding the corner the three of us were nose to nose. English was walking by this time, and relocated that same nose of his into a wall. He fell to the ground without even a yelp.

At this point we started opening doors at random, coffee room, empty office, even a toilet, all thankfully empty. I almost howled when I popped open yet another one, this time to see the clear blackness of the night. We barreled through, no clue as to where we were, but a fresh surge of

adrenaline to just see and feel the world about us again.

The sky was overcast, not a single point of light anywhere to be seen. We hadn't gotten twenty feet before I heard the first yell from within the police buildings.

All of a sudden lights spat to life all about us, street lamps, windows, and search lights. English took the lead again, we were back in his element. We ducked between buildings, under bushes and around garbage to keep from sight, behind us I could hear the fall of padded feet – pursuit was launched and gaining.

They were behind us, so we ran on. They were to the right, so we continued. They were ahead of us, so we fled left. Then they were ahead of us again.

What did we do? We sped up.

The road curved gently down, in the distance I could see the faint outline of Burrard Inlet, shimmering in the nonexistent moonlight. Between us and the water were the dark outlines of the police. They stood in a ragged line, not moving, waiting for us to come to them.

The only sounds I heard were the blast of air through my lungs and the staccato beat of my claws beneath me.

One moment they were a good thirty feet away, the next not but five. As one we leapt, using what little advantage of the rise we could. English must have sailed a good three feet higher than I, his powerful hindquarters doing him justice. He would clear them with no trouble.

I wasn't going to make it. Not by much mind you, but I arched just within reach of an outstretched hand. Below me I saw brown fur encircled in a spotless blue uniform.

A claw tipped hand shot up, just as I reached apex. I felt it grazing my gut, tracing one of my many new scars. I held my breath, just waiting for it to snag, to drag me down to the ground below.

It tickled as it brushed past, I didn't feel the catch of its tip, but only the smooth curve of its back.

Time seemed to explode again as I landed, still running flat out. I didn't even feel the shock as my legs nearly buckled under my own weight. The only focus in life was the poofed tawny tail ahead, rocketing away as though on fire.

The street continued its lazy stroll downward, seemingly indifferent to our plight. Behind us the cops who had stood so silent but a moment before imploded into a rainbow of calls and shouts. By the feel of it, we had just escaped their perfect trap.

I was never so happy to feel the rough wood of a pier under my toes; I had to be careful not to trip on its uneven surface. How would it look to be hauled back now, when I'm a stone's throw from the water?

No real clue where we were going, but I followed the cat as he launched into the dark foaming sea, never breaking stride.

Cold. Cold, cold, cold. The black tide enveloped me, I couldn't feel a thing through the frigid crash of the waves. For a moment I had a flashback to the cell, and the lifeless frost that had enveloped me while my blood had been leaking onto the floor from a thousand cuts. I fought my way back up to the surface, at least I could kick with both legs this time.

Okay, where was the lion? I looked around me, nothing but the foam tipped waves close by and pissed cops in the distance. Oh smeg, English can't swim.

Already shivering, I took what breath I could and dived. No real clue as to where he might be – thankfully, or perhaps not, he was the one who found me. I'd already dived as deep as I could; my lungs were burning as I turned back to the surface. That was when he grabbed my tail – hard.

I would have yelped, but that doesn't work so well six feet under. All I got was a lung full of turgid water. He climbed my body like I was a ladder, scrambling up my back, planting a clawed foot right in my face. It wasn't until he broke the surface that I was able to scramble free and join him.

We both bobbed in the brackish water for a moment, spitting and trying to hack half the sea from our lungs. He clung to me like a life preserver, every time I tried to push him off he just wrapped tighter. I finally got a good look at him, I couldn't help but laugh.

"You look like a drowned rat!" What remained of his normally impressive mane was plastered about him like a bad comb over. All I got in return was a halfhearted growl.

"I'll deal with you later. Get. Me. Out. Of. Here."

I tried to peer over the waves, but now I couldn't see anything at all. No cops in sight, and I doubted that they'd, no matter how enraged they may be, would follow us on a midnight swim. Wimps.

I picked a random direction that seemed most likely to lead to the far shore and started out. My limbs were made of lead, and I had to drag an over-sized house cat behind me, but I set out.

It felt like it took hours, perhaps it did. At times I was so tired that I just lay back on the tide and floated, holding English above the surface by my claws alone. At long last we did make it though; I almost didn't realize what it meant when my hands started groping sand.

Together we crawled upon the cold shore, coarse sand grinding into every nick and scratch upon me. I was out like a light, the surf lapping at my toes – I didn't even see the lion sprawled out half dead beside me.

"Are you dead, friend? You don't smell like it."

I bolted upright so fast I almost crashed into his face, suspended as it was only a foot above mine.

"Gah!" My heart was racing, visions of knives flashing behind my eyes.

"I'll take that as a no." I looked up, the voice was right beside me, but no one stood there.

"Down here, friend." The speech was rough, words grinding together like gravel.

I look directly ahead, a dog sat before me. A real dog, four legs and everything. And it spoke.

"Hello, friend."

I had to scratch my head for a moment before it kicked in – he had to be a descendant of the cataclysm like us. But a full fledged dog? Did they even exist anymore? I'd heard stories about them, but I'd never seen one, so much as met one nose to nose.

"Um, hello," was all I could think to say.

I extended a hand to him before realizing, and letting it fall.

He just made a choking sound I assumed was laughter. "You lows and your human customs." He cocked his head, hearing something that not even I could. "Are you what all that commotion is about?"

I suddenly felt defensive, but there wasn't much I could do. "Yes, my companion and I."

"Well, you're in luck, friend. I'm not much in love with those across the bay. If you can get your kitty-cat moving, I can offer you a place to hide."

I gave the great golden lump that was English a shove, and was rewarded by a string of curses. Another push and he dragged himself to his feet. He spared the dog a glance before looking back at me.

"I hate water."

He blew a stray strand of hair from his face.

Thankfully we didn't have to go far, only a few hundred feet before a stench filled the air, old

garbage. Where did he get it anyway? He'd have to have hauled it across the bridge.

"My cache." The dog kept walking, coming upon a wooden plank laid over a small depression; he pushed it aside with his nose. "Don't eat my food." He bared his teeth for a moment, but frankly he didn't need to, right now we could be pushed over by a brisk wind.

I dragged the lumber back in place over our heads, the dog promptly sat on it. Wonderful, now I had a good view of dog butt.

There was hardly enough space to fit, the two of us were cuddled up way to close for a couple of guys who still dripped sea water.

I was starting to nod off when I felt a sharp elbow in my bruised ribs.

"So, when are you going to start telling me what's going on, mate?" His voice was a whisper. It held a hint of violence, but no more.

Here it comes. I would have liked to tell him under different circumstances, like say on the other side of shatter proof glass, but I got this instead.

"You remember Rebeca?" He didn't bother to answer. "She was human."

He just grunted. I let out a breath I hadn't realized I was holding.

"I was guessing as much with the questions. So, when were you going to tell me, mate?"

I tried to hold my hands up in front of me, didn't manage to do much more than squirm into the sand. "I didn't know until Jon was on the scene, after that there just didn't seem to be any time." I got another grunt. Anything to change the subject, "So what do we do now?"

He just looked at me. I heard the shadow of a laugh. "Don't look at me, mate, I'm just a bounty hunter – you're the revolutionary here."

"What?" I was cut off by the sound of sand crunching towards us. I couldn't see anything but the dog above, and my nose was filled with the stench of rotting lamb and other trash.

"Get out of the way, rover." By the clipped sound of the voice, it was definitely a cop. The real dog just growled low in his throat, sounding like nothing so much as a feral. The cop took another step forward, no more than a few feet away now. The dog's jaws snapped the air, the cop jumped back.

"You fuc-" He bit his tongue. That's right you fur faced pig, you're on the clock, keep a clean mouth or the public might think different of you. He took one more look around, snorting at the trash before leaving.

Neither of us moved. The sun rose, slowly circling overhead. I was glad now for the shade as the sand warmed beneath us. Every now and then the dog left. A cop would pass by occasionally, but the dog always returned before they got too close.

At long last the sun began to sink into the waves that we had so recently crawled from. No more cops wandered the barrens; they must have retreated back across the bridge before nightfall.

"Alright, friends, the show is over." He began to dig and nose at the plank. We unbent, and began working ourselves out of the sand. I felt each and every vertebrae in my back pop.

"Thank you." It was all I could say to the dog who'd saved our lives. "We don't have anything to offer you in return. I don't even know your name."

"Never mind it, friend." He cocked his head to the side, "I never expected anything anyway. You washed up on my beach, that makes you my problem."

I smiled. "Do you live here?"

"Here and there." His tongue hung out, "More places when it's sunny, and fewer when it rains."

"Sorry to break into your tail sniffing session, mate, but we need to get ourselves out of here, pronto." English's large hand grasped my shoulder, slowly pulling me away from the shoreline.

"Call me Fisher." The dog turned and disappeared over a sand dune.

The long shadows aided us as we dodged through the rubble of West V-town, what had looked imposing enough before was downright haunted now. We weaved and dodged among the crumbled walls. From the corner of my eye, I could swear I saw a flash of blue in every shadow.

The mountains loomed ahead of us, slowly growing larger as we worked north. They hemmed in the city on three sides, the sea embracing what was left. No matter where you turned they stood respectfully off in the distance, though I'd never thought much of them before. It took us a couple of hours, but we made it through the rubble and decaying husks unmolested.

Much like I'd once seen, the asphalt ended in crumbling clumps as the forest slowly encroached on what had previously been city. English strode on without a second thought, I wasn't so fast.

He turned, feet firmly planted on the soft moss, while mine were still on the jagged shards of concrete. "What is it, mate?"

"I've almost never been out of the city... never without my Dad."

He just shrugged. "We're not going back to get him now. You've dug your den, mate. Time to go. Either that, or you're welcome to head home and give my regards to our friends in blue."

I shuttered. "I'm coming." Reaching down I plucked a pebble from between my toes, tossing it among the trees. It knocked off an aged truck with a hollow thunk, rolling out of sight between the shadows.

I took two steps off the road, soft moss carpeting my feet. And neatly tripped over a stray vine to land straight on my face.

We made our way slowly forward; English was about at home as I was. He may have grown up in the wild, but his body was made for running in the savanna. The dark green cloying closeness of the forest resulted in both of jumping at every sound, real or imagined.

That was what saved us in the end. If we'd been running flat out, then neither of us would have heard it. A twig snapped, not thirty feet behind us. The sound should have been lost in the folds of the trees, but the two of us stopped dead. A low growl echoed amongst the leaves, disappearing into the gathering darkness.

"Oh smeg. Run."

To my own credit, I did bother to warn English before I took off. Not that my lead did me much good, he was ahead of me in mere strides. Behind us I could hear the whisper of our pursuer, every foot fall padded, every motion smooth.

This was no cop, and it was no random tail out for an evening stroll. This was a hunter. With every stride she gained on us, every heartbeat and she was one step closer as we dodged around ancient tree trunks and vaulted shallow pebbly streams. A handful of seconds and she would be upon us.

"Run, English." I gasped it out, my voice rasping for breath. I saw his head turn just a fraction to look back before he was out of sight.

I could only hope I was right, if I wasn't then we were dead anyway. A quick turn and I was facing towards her, my feet still skidding through the soft ground. She was on me half an instant later, a fury of black fur and lavender eyes.

Lavender eyes, I'd never been so happy to see those eyes.

We flew through the air as she wrapped around me, teeth grasping for my face. I didn't fight back.

"Hello, Lucy."

We were on the forest floor, wild grasses and flowers filling my peripheral vision. It's odd the things you notice. The face before me I had seen a thousand times, almost every time she had beaten me at something or other.

"How's uncle Gowan?" I asked, cracking a smile. It might not be a smiling face that looked down at me, but it was more than a slight better than anything I had right to expect.

"Tommy?" Her voice was still as deep and husky as I remembered. I was relieved when she pulled herself off me to sit on her haunches, looking as confused as I would expect. "What are you... how did you... Dad's fine... Huh?"

I pulled myself off the ground, propping my back up against a tree trunk. It took me a few moments to work out the new kinks in my spine and find my fresh bruises.

"Bet you weren't expecting to meet me here, eh?"

"Tommy, you never leave the city. What are you doing... oh."

I pulled a twig from my fur. Wonderful, I have a whole forest to fall in, and I find a prickly bush. "I'm guessing they're not saying nice things about me, are they?" I tossed the branch away, turning to look at her. Her head was cocked so far to the side I wondered if she was about to fall over.

"Tommy, they told us they needed a pair of fugitives tracked down. That they killed at least a dozen cops."

"A dozen?" I shrugged. "That's a smaller number than I would have expected they'd claim."

"What's going on, Tommy? I'm supposed to kill you?" She laid back, arms behind her head, not quite taking her eyes from me.

"Kill me, Lucy? You couldn't." I did my best puppy dog eyes. All I got for my trouble was a stone bounced off right between them.

"What's going on, Tommy? You couldn't take down a four months pregnant doe, likely a police dog."

I would have blushed, but it just didn't seem worth it anymore. "I guess I can't take credit for them all – my partner is a heck of a lot more lethal than I." She shot me a look. "Okay, I did kill at least one. It's complicated."

"Keep talking."

"Long story short, it's genocide. Plain and simple. The government's got it in its head that they want to clear out the last of the humans, and the humans in question don't care for that much."

"And that's important how? There's crazy people all over, why are you involved all of a sudden?"

I shrugged. "Picked the wrong side I guess. Fell for a girl who could pull her ears off. Human girls are high maintenance, and this one decided she didn't want to kick the bucket just yet."

"You've got yourself a girlfriend?"

A moment later she was rolling around on the grass laughing, didn't seem to care about keeping an eye on me anymore. "Just wait until I tell everyone! The runt's got a girlfriend!"

"I'd really prefer you didn't."

"Fine, fine." She wiped a tear from her face. "So, I'm not going to eviscerate you, now what?"

"Who knows? I need to find what's left of the humans, there's nothing for me here. Maybe they could use a gimpy hunter? With what I last saw of them, they'll need anything they can get."

"The humans?" She scratched her chin with a claw. "That could be a problem."

"Oh gods, what now?"

"That's what Dad's up to. He's setting out tonight, leading a pack and tracking them down. Direct request from the government. From what I heard, they're paying a king's ransom."

I let a smile touch my lips, "Gee coz, you don't think that uncle Gowan might be losing his sense of smell in that ripe old age of his?"

The moonlight danced in her eyes. "You know he'd smack you for even saying such a thing... However, if I get running now, I might just make it back before he sets out. I'm sure dear old Dad

would love a little motivational chat with his little girl before he heads out on a hunt."

"I owe you one, Lucy."

She just smiled and was off. "What are we at now, runt, twenty?"

I lay amongst the weeds for a bit until I realized that something was missing. A particular lion.

No use in being subtle now, anyone in the neighborhood would have already heard us.

"English? English!"

For a moment all I heard was my own echo, silence held until from the distance I could just make out, "Tommy! Get me outa here!"

He must have been a good quarter mile off. Picked the single hardest path, too. I had to stifle a laugh when I found him. Three feet in the air, he was suspended by a tangle of vines the split from the branches of a gnarled tree.

"Do I even want to ask?" I set to work slicing the vines with my claws, they were tough little buggers, and it took some effort.

"I was climbing the tree," he replied indignantly. "I've just discovered I don't climb trees well." Another vine snapped, he fell to the ground in an undignified heap.

"Don't they have trees on the Serengeti?"

"We have grass, mate, lots and lots of grass. I like grass. Not vines, not trees. I do concrete, buildings, grass." He pulled the sticky sap from his fur with a grunt.

"I'll remember that." I sat down next to him. "Perhaps we'll head east, I'll let you romp on the prairies."

"Thanks, mate. You're a saint, do you know that?" He dumped the shredded vines in my lap. "I'm assuming we lost our tail, so what now, McKenzie?"

"I don't know, find the human camp? I doubt they'll be thrilled to see us, but I haven't any other ideas."

"Works for me, mate. Right now I want a shower and a hot meal, and they might at least have something warm. Which way?"

I just rolled my eyes. "Haven't the slightest."

"Well, mate, you're the tracker, you'd best start tracking. We know they left the city this way, you've got to be able to find something."

It's not that easy, and he knew it, but I guess there was nothing else for it. It's not like I can just put my nose down to the ground and point the way, I need to be able to pick up a trail and follow it like a string. Around us lay nothing but our own scents and those of the unfamiliar forest. We were lucky only in that although the trail was a couple days old, we'd at least managed to starve off a good rain that would wash it away.

I picked a direction at random, walking off parallel to the city on all fours, breathing in every few steps to try and catch a whiff of human. Out here in the wild they would stick out like a cracked claw.

We were at it for over six hours, my nose was burning from the effort and I was more than ready to quit when it hit me like a boot to the face.

"I've got it." Exhausted, I rolled on my back. "After a brake."

"Works for me, mate." He plunked down beside me. "All we need to do now is follow it in, and we'll be welcomed like saviors."