

THE PATHFINDERS



P.13

Table of Contents

Chapter 1:	I'm Getting too Old for This.....	1
Chapter 2:	What's Five Times Four?.....	18
Chapter 3:	Why I Stopped Being Mayor.....	34
Chapter 4:	Across the River and Through the Woods.....	50
Chapter 5:	Civilization Isn't Always Civilized.....	66
Chapter 6:	A Cross, A Circle, and An Arrow.....	83
Chapter 7:	Modern Love Walks Beside Me.....	98
Chapter 8:	She was no Jasmine.....	110
Chapter 9:	Not Everyone Is Into This Whole Free Love Thing.....	122

Chapter 9: Not Everyone Is Into This Whole Free Love Thing

I woke the next morning. English's home was nothing compared to Hotel Vancouver, but it was a bloody well slight better than spending another night on the hard floor of the apartment.

Rebecca was still asleep beside me. It seemed she was able to get a better rest than I. I'd gone to sleep late and restless, and woken early and no better off.

Stumbling down the staircase, I saw Jon curled up on the white sofa in the front room. Heh, leave it to a dog to be able to sleep anywhere. The fact he *just happened* to be right next to the front door I'm sure had nothing to do with it.

English was already awake. He, as per normal, looked like he'd just spent the last hour combing out his pelt. I'd spent enough time on the road with him to know that he nearly looked that way naturally.

"Early morning, Mate." He poured me a cup of tea as I sat down at the table across from him.

Looking out the big double patio door at the back of the kitchen, I could see the dogs still out there, tirelessly walking their rounds.

There were a few scraps of meat on a platter before us. I raised an eye ridge at English.

"Sorry, Mate," He smiled. "I wasn't expecting company. It can be days at a stretch I'm away from here, so I tend not to keep the larder too stocked. Speaking of which," He glanced out towards the deep forests that edged the garden out back, "You feel like joining me in finding our own breakfast?"

"Hunting?" I barked out a laugh, "You? I've never once seen you hunt and not get yourself nearly killed."

That earned me a glare. "We each have our strengths, Mate. What do you say? Just you and I? It beats heading back into town just for a meal."

I polished my claws on the fur of my leg. It's been a long time since I last hunted, better part of a year.

English had become a man when he'd dragged himself from the wreckage of a sinking ship. I found mine when I'd taken down my first prey.

"Let's go."

Jon glanced over at us from his position on the sofa as we opened the back door. His eyes were bright and alert. For just a moment I had to wonder if he'd ever been asleep. He nodded once at me and closed his eyes again.

The dogs who patrolled the grounds let us pass without issue. They did fan out a bit as we dived into the trees though.

"How much of the land is yours, English?" I asked as I closed my eyes and took a deep breath of the fresh air.

He laughed. "All of it, Mate. Or close enough to. Enough folks died off in the riots and quake that their lands were selling for pennies. I snapped up everything I could once SF started making a profit again."

He wasn't lying. We passed a few more homes as we ranged through the forest. They had all been damaged far worse than English's own place. Half of them were close to collapsing.

As for the lion... I must be rubbing off on him. His motions were still little more than a shadow of my own, but at least he was able to dive and dodge through the trees well enough without getting his mane stuck up on anything.

That was light years beyond what he'd been doing the first time I brought him out in the wilderness.

I wasn't really all that concerned with finding food. Sure my stomach growled every now and then, but I was just as happy to run wild without a care for a while. Having English by my side just felt natural.

We made a circle of English's property. Out to the edge and then a slow loop back. There were no police dogs out here. This was closer to hunter's territory than it was police.

We were about half way back to the house when I picked up a scent.

A buck deer.

Falling to all fours, English followed suit behind me, we were both as silent as the breeze.

He wasn't far off. It took me no more than ten minutes to track him down. And what a prize he was, any hunter would be happy to have him.

Grazing on the grass out in a clearing, he'd already begun growing his rack. He didn't even have the slightest clue we were here.

Crouching low to the ground, I signalled with my tail for English to hang back. He was a good friend, but his stalking was still sub par. He'd just scare the prey away.

I was halfway across the clearing, still undetected, almost close enough to spring, when something tickled in the back of my nose.

I tried to ignore it, to focus on what was more important. Breakfast. But the itch just wouldn't go away.

Pausing, I took a quick breath to puzzle out the scent. For a moment I couldn't pin it down. It was odd, alien to this environment.

It was bug spray, shoe leather, and rubber.

My body had been moving on automatic while I thought, the next thing I knew I could feel my back legs tensing for a spring as my tail began to wag.

Wait... a human?

Well, I still sprang, but it was for all of about three feet as my paws slipped in the silty soil.

I landed face first in the dirt as the buck turned and bolted.

Bugger! What in all the...

Oh.

Scrambling to my feet, I waved for English, not wanting to shout lest our new prey be nearby.

The lion was by my side in seconds. He didn't say a word as I pointed to where I'd picked up the new scent.

The trail wasn't hard to follow. Whoever made it wasn't much for outdoorering. He blundered through the woods, pushing aside whatever was in his way and stepping on whatever was underfoot without so much as a thought.

That was one of the problems with humans. They wore shoes. It may not sound like much, but English and I walked on our bare paws. That caused us to be sensitive to what was underfoot, to walk on smooth and dry things. The human didn't notice if he was on stone or mud, and resultingly had a tendency to leave tracks all over.

It took less than ten minutes to track him down. We were in luck, he'd yet to try and breach the perimeter of the police dogs' patrols. A few hundred meters more and they might just have well caught him.

The human was far easier to sneak up on than the buck. English at my side, we were less than a single stride from him when I reached out and laid my hand on the man's shoulder.

He would have leapt five feet in the air if I hadn't held him down.

He did his best to turn about, but didn't manage much with me holding him firm.

It was a human alright. Fair skinned with dark hair and decked out in hiking clothing. He looked like he was about to start hyperventilating.

I just noticed his hand reaching for a gun at his hip before English's ham sized fist smacked him hard in the jaw.

The human made the trip back to the house slung over English's shoulder. The first of the police dogs to spot us didn't even bother asking what had happened. He simply turned and made off running for the city.

It was still early morning, hardly even nine o'clock yet when we tied the human up to one of English's kitchen chairs. All the furniture in the house had been made to support the lion's weight. There was no way the human could break free.

Jon uncurled himself from the couch as we stepped in. Without saying a word he watched curiously as English tied the man up.

"Sir," Jon finally spoke, "You are aware that interrogation, especially through the use of... physical means is prohibited. Only the police force is permitted to do such, and only under strict guidelines."

English didn't say anything, so I turned to the dog.

"Jon," I set my hand on his shoulder, "We found him sneaking about out in the forest. There could be more of them. I want you to go upstairs and make sure Rebecca is safe." I gave him a meaningful stare, "And I want you to stay up there until we know it's safe. Don't come back down."

He paused for a moment, surveying the room.

"Understood, Tommy. You may want to note that the force is aware of the man. A team will likely be here in less than ten minutes to take possession of him." He gave me back the exact same stare I'd just handed out, "And they will be under strict orders to collect him no matter your desires."

He was gone a moment later.

"Well now, time to get to work." English was clearing the table. His accent was gone.

"Tommy, time for you to go up and join Jon and Rebecca. Make sure to close the door behind you." A

frown pulled at his lips. "I'll try to make this as fast and silent as I can."

"No." I let out a breath and dropped down into a chair on the far side of the table from English. "It's me their after. You're doing this for my benefit. I'm the one who's going to take responsibility for what we're about to do."

He glanced over to me. "Are you sure, Tommy? My soul's stained enough that another few blotches won't matter. This might be something you don't want to see."

I took a deep breath. "Let's just wake him up."

English hadn't been kidding.

I'd always respected the lion. Now I feared him.

The man's name was Richard. Even getting that from him had been a challenge.

When he first woke he refused to say a single word, though the fear was obvious in his eyes when he saw me.

I'd expected English to work the man into a bloody pulp to make him talk. I was wrong. The lion had more... gods, the term 'civilized' most definitely did not apply to his methods.

English had to do little more than tap the man with his claws to make him scream.

Those screams were enough to make my fur bristle and haunt my nights for more than a few weeks.

The first time a scream rang out I could hear the dogs outside mobilize. A few barked orders from Jon out the window above us at least kept them from knocking the door down.

Jon's estimate of the new team arriving in ten minutes was just about spot on. We'd only had a chance to just begin when they did, quite literally, knock the door in.

There was only a single thing we managed to get out of the man in that time. The name 'Human Defence League'.

I felt dirty. Not only for what I'd done, but for how little I'd gotten out of it.

The dogs made off with our prisoner soon after. They couldn't figure out why the man's face was contorted so when there wasn't a mark on his body. English and I decided not to enlighten them.

Rebecca and Jon came down stairs a few minutes later. Neither said a word as we watched the man get dragged away in cuffs.

There was a long silence until Jon cleared his throat.

"Perhaps you'd like to return to your apartment, Sir?"

"Yeah," I shook my head, "Yeah, let's head back to civilization."

We took the long way back into the city.

I wanted to get back to the apartment, but I wasn't quite ready to face the empty rooms again.

The normal road we took just went straight back – you could almost see English's house from my apartment. This route was a little more roundabout.

Someone had come along here and done the road up like an old style country lane, complete with white picket fences and fruit trees. It was like they were trying to mix the city and the forest. Like they were trying to take the trees and bend them to the desires of the city.

It made me sick.

Glancing over to English, Rebecca, and Jon, none of them seemed to see the problem.

I started walking a little faster.

The doors to the apartment building were only a hundred feet away when a police patrol

swooped in to surround us. Jon stepped forward to have a few words with the commanding officer. They were soft enough that I couldn't make them out, and in that odd speech the police used so that I doubted it would do me any good if I could.

"Sir," Jon turned to me, voice level, "These officers have orders to take to you to Commissioner Sayer. Immediately. It appears that he has some... questions about the latest individual brought into custody." I could just see Jon chewing his lips ever so slightly.

"Fine." I rolled my eyes. "Let's get this over with." I looked over to English, "You want to hang around for a bit? I shouldn't be long."

"Love to, Mate," He threw me a blinding smile, "But I've got to drop by at SF *sometime*. They just don't know what to do without me there."

And that was that. I gave Rebecca a quick kiss goodbye and went with the dogs back to police HQ. It was a familiar walk.

Through the front door, we never even slowed as we headed up to the third floor. Sayer waited for me in his office, hands folded on his desk, unmoving.

"Mr. Taggart." I could hardly make out his voice.

I settled into the chair across from him. "Sayer. To what do I owe the pleasure?"

There was just the faintest wrinkling of the dog's brow. I interpreted it as a scowl.

"Mr. Taggart. I have received *troubling* reports this morning about a suspect that was just brought in. It was reported he was found on Mr. English's property. You and he arrested him..." He paused for breath, "And then there was some confusion about what exactly happened next."

I slumped back in the chair. "We interrogated him, Sayer. I'm not happy about it, but that's what we did."

"*Interrogate*, Mr. Taggart? I believe you and I had a rather involved conversation along these lines not so long ago. It resulted in you taking away my ability to *interrogate* people in exactly the manner you're describing."

I reached up to rub my eyes with the balls of my fingers. "Sayer, don't get started. It had to be done. There has been how many attempts on my life now? I had to do something."

He didn't say anything for a moment. The only sound in the room was the soft leaves-on-concrete rustle of his breathing.

"Mr. Taggart," He spoke slowly, choosing each and every word, "What you are doing is exactly that you forbid me. My men know what their doing. They're trained to perform the act while causing the minimum of pain. Your friend was not. My men," His voice picked up slightly before he dissolved into coughing, "Could have found your attackers by now if you'd allowed us to use our full powers."

"It's not like that, Sayer," I tried to form my thoughts.

"It's *exactly* like that!" He regained enough strength to raise his hand, dropping it down to the desk with a soft thunk. "*I'm* looking out for the welfare of the city. *You're* looking out for yourself. Yet it is I who is the monster when I follow my carefully written procedures to deeply interrogate a suspect."

"Fine!" I threw my hands up. "Fine. I messed up, okay? I hurt the man. I'm sorry. Alright? I feel bad enough already."

The dog didn't smile, but he did bob his head ever so imperceptibly.

"Thank you, Mr. Taggart, but it is not I you should be apologizing to. It's Mr. Richard Cambell. But I wouldn't worry too much about him just yet. There are a number of other offences to his name. He'll be staying with us for quite some time. You can apologize to him when he's released. You should only be thankful that you had police officer supervision when you interrogated him, otherwise we

would have no choice but to charge you with assault.”

“What? But Jon was...”

Sayer moved his head only imperceptibly, but his stare was obvious.

“So, Mr. Taggart, now that you are using such interrogation techniques, does that mean they are available to us as well?”

I dropped my head. Sayer had suddenly developed the ability to make me feel like a pup. He was starting to remind me of my father.

“No.” My voice was soft. “No. I did a stupid thing. Having the top dog do a stupid thing doesn't mean it's alright for all the others of the pack to do it to. Hurting people is still off limits.”

Sayer didn't say anything, but when I looked up again I could see his lips parted in the slightest smile.

“As you wish, Mr. Taggart. You are the City Administrator.” He paused, eyes darting back and forth, as if looking for someone else in the office. It was only then I realized that his helper dog wasn't here. “And speaking personally, Tommy, you made the right decision. Everyone has to learn sometime. It's only sad that your mistake caused so much pain – even if it was to someone who deserved it. Rules exist for a reason. We break them at our peril.”

I smiled. “Between you and my father it seems I can't get away with anything.”

For just a moment... did I see a flicker of a paternal grin? Couldn't be.

“Your father is a wise man, Mr. Taggart. We do not see eye to eye on many things, but I'm happy to have him as my equal. I would hate to have him as my enemy again.”

“Again?” Wait. What?

Before I could get an answer out of him Sayer had called his assistant in to lead me away. I got one last look at the old dog, sitting at his desk, reading yet another report from his pack. He was crooked and bent, at death's door, but yet he continued to work.

We descended to the second floor, my guards and I. Things had been rough enough – and I'd escaped enough times – that they followed me everywhere now, even in police HQ.

It was here, on the second floor, that I picked up a familiar scent. Rubber shoes. It was as alien here as it has been in the forest.

Coming to the next intersection, I stopped, lifting my nose to the air.

One of the dogs tried to bar my way from turning down another hall. I simply ignored him and walked straight until he leapt out of the way.

Thankfully, I didn't have far to go.

The police have an odd tendency to put large picture windows in their interrogation rooms. Well, their *normal* interrogation rooms.

The human I'd caught earlier was seated not five feet away from me, on the far side of a thick sheet of glass. He was talking to a police dog. Or rather the dog was talking to him.

The human didn't look so worse for wear, but there was pain evident in his every motion.

The dog inside glanced my way as soon as I stepped up to watch. Obviously I was unexpected. The human glanced over a moment later. His reaction was somewhat more visceral than the dog's mild surprise.

It's been a long time since I've had someone run in terror from me. The human had been at odds with the police dog a moment ago. Now he cowered behind the canine like he was a big brother.

When I was a youngster I wondered what it would be like to be treated like this. To have people fear me.

I knew now it was not pleasant.

I turned and walked away without a word.

The walk back to the apartment passed in a blur. I didn't really think much of it. The next thing I knew I was opening the apartment door.

There was something wrong.

My fur was up and teeth barred before a thought could even form in my mind.

There was the scent of someone else in my apartment. Again.

I flew in with a snarl, falling to all fours to attack anyone who might have been stupid enough to be here.

Strangely enough, that put me at the perfect height to run nose to nose with Sunny and the other Class Fives.

They were all here. Even Gold.

I must have looked at least as pissed off as I felt. Sunny's ears immediately fell back. A moment later he was on his side, showing his belly. All the others followed suit. Again, even Gold. Oddly, it was Gold who moved quickest.

"Tommy!" A whack hit me in the back of the head. I was a heart beat away from turning and snapping when I realized it was Rebecca.

"What are *they* doing in here?" I forced the words past the snarl in my voice as I rubbed the back of my head with one hand and used the other to steady myself enough to get back on two feet.

"They were in the lobby when we got back. They were just coming out to see you when the police carried you away." She stepped in front of me and lowered something to the floor. My nose started twitching again, but for a different reason. Cub Caf takeout. My favourite.

"We came here to speak to you, Tommy," said Sunny around a mouthful of food.

The term feral had never really crossed my mind to describe the Class Fives, but I couldn't help it now. They ate like dogs. Like animals. Each pulling down as much food from the bowls that had been set in front of them, as fast as they could. It was a surprise they weren't sick.

Taking a seat on one of the stools, I looked down at them. "Didn't the city send out a negotiator?"

He looked at me oddly. "Yes. But we want to talk to you. You're alpha. Not some rat."

I just reached up and rubbed my temples. "Sorry. Can't help you. I've got someone trying to kill me right now. Talk to the government. They'll do whatever needs to be done. I'll help as soon as I've stopped fearing for my life."

Turning, I looked over to Rebecca with big eyes. "Babe? Any of that left for me?"

All that netted me was an empty takeout box thrown in my face.

I hustled out the Class Fives as quickly as I could. I did, however, make sure Jon called them a rep from the government to make sure things were getting done. Pissing off *another* group was the last of my desires.

I was just about ready to settle down with Rebecca when we got *yet another knock on the door*.

It was the last two people I'd been expecting.

"Doggie!" Molly threw herself at me the moment I opened the door. The pure white wolf wrapped her arms around me and kissed me flat on the nose. I could just see her looking over my head, daring Rebecca to say something.

"Young master." Amstys followed her in more sedately. The salt and pepper wolf was as massive as I remembered. "It's nice to see you again."

There was something in Amstys' speech... life with Molly had been good for him.

Clasping the wolf's shoulder, I led him into the apartment.

"What are you two doing here?" I asked.

"I called them, Wolfy." Rebecca perked up from across the room where she sat with Molly. "I figured you and Amstys could get the apartment back in order while Molly and I put the finishing touches on the wedding. It's just in a few days now."

I nearly fell flat on my back. I'd been so concerned with the wedding *coming up* that I hadn't realized it was so soon.

"Anyway," she continued speaking to Molly, "You want to see it?"

"Sure, why not. I'm sure it's beautiful."

"Tommy," Rebecca looked over to me, "Could you grab the dress?"

I let out a mighty sigh as I went to the closet, Amstys at my heels. For better or worse, the dress was still there, pristine in its box.

I pulled it out and spread the dress across the floor between Rebecca and Molly. Its smell still made my nose wrinkle.

"Wow!" Molly reached down to brush the back of her fingers against it, "It's amazing! They just *gave* this to you?"

Rebecca shrugged. "Yeah. They see it as good advertising."

I turned my back to them. I could hardly stand to even look at that thing.

Amstys was beside me a moment later. "Are you alright, young master... Tommy?" He reached out tentatively to set an arm across my shoulders. "You look uneasy."

"Yeah, I'm fine. Let's see what we can do about some furniture, eh?"

Seems we didn't have all that much to do. Jon had already ordered some basic replacements for what we'd lost. They were sitting down in the lobby, still in boxes. All Amstys and I had to do was carry it up two flights of tight, steep stairs to the apartment.

Frankly, we *could* have used the elevator, but the exercise made me feel good.

We'd just carried the mattress in when I overheard Molly and Rebecca talking.

She'd just offered Molly the position of being our bride's maid.

"It's not like I have all that many friends left from before the exodus." Rebecca's voice cracked for a moment, "I'd love to have you with me when I get married."

I never heard Molly's reply, but it must have worked out. When next Amstys and I walked past they were embracing.

It was twenty minutes later, while Amstys and I were navigating a sofa up the stairs, I spoke to him.

"Uh, Amstys?"

His deep voice was calm and unemotional. "Yes, Tommy?"

"Thanks for all your help on this. I just want you to know I'd appreciate it if you'd come to the wedding. I'd like to offer you the position of being the best man, but I already asked English."

The wolf shrugged. Somehow he managed to do it even while hefting a sofa.

"You needn't worry, young master." He smiled when the title slipped out, "I already owe my new life to you. That's more than enough. I'd be honoured to just attend."

I smiled. "You will, Amstys. I'll make sure you get a seat in the front row."

Molly and Amstys stayed with us for the rest of the day. Amstys and I had the furniture done by noon, but Rebecca and Molly were still working away on wedding plans. They seemed to want to keep them to themselves. They just said that us boys would meddle if they told us before they were ready.

It was with that that Amstys and I were chased from the apartment.

I stepped in with Jon for a few moments. He was happy to talk to Amstys. The three of us – plus Rebecca and English – had returned to V-town together a year ago.

It was while they were catching up that I slipped away. I didn't quite have any idea where I was going, but I was restless.

The police were doing everything they could to find my assassins, but I needed to make sure the problem was solved before the wedding. And I knew there was more to it than the single human I'd found.

Hopping the trusty garden wall, I was out in the world again. I'd have to sit down and have a long cry when the dogs patched this hole in their security. Then again, knowing Jon, the only reason this hole existed was for me.

There was a problem with heading out to investigate my own assassination. While most folks didn't really recognize me – I'd lost a lot of weight over the last few days due to regeneration, I hardly had an ounce of fat on me any more – I could safely assume that those who wanted me dead would still pick me out of a crowd.

Wandering through alleyways, I ended up in an industrial district. And, much to my delight, stumbled across a box of coal. Not that we burn coal much around here anymore – most of our power comes from dams to the north – but it did still have its applications here and there.

A quick peek up and down the alley to make sure no one was watching and I dove into the box.

Bad idea. I'd forgotten just how hard coal was. I nearly knocked myself senseless.

I did accomplish my goal though. There was enough powder and dust in here to rub into my brown and cream fur. In a matter of moments I managed to cover myself from nose to toe in coal dust, dying myself a midnight black.

I nearly looked like my uncle Goawn.

And there was another up side. Coal doesn't have *that* much of a scent, but its enough to help disguise my natural one. Anyone who knew me well would be able to still tell it was me, but anyone with just a passing familiarity would likely be fooled.

A smile edged to my lips as I strode confidently out of the alley and into the living river of people who walked the streets of V-town. Not a single head turned. I was just another wolf.

About two hours later I realized just what a raw deal being anonymous was.

I'd become used – despite what I may have thought – to being former mayor Tommy Taggart. Now I was just another wolf, and a relatively thin and puny one at that, meandering down the street.

There was at least one bright point. I'd remembered to bring my belt and wallet – and keep them clean from the coal dust. At least I could afford to do whatever I wanted.

Problem was I didn't know what that was.

I was trying to track down my assassins, but I didn't even have the slightest where to start. I was no private investigator.

I tried checking some of the dive bars that English and I had frequented when we were bounty hunting, but not a whiff of the people I was looking for. I must have spent a week's wages in drinks for people without even a nibble.

Changing tactics, I tried the more upscale places. These were harder to get into with my current appearance, and far more expensive to buy drinks at. I got about the same results.

It was the middle of the afternoon now and I was just about ready to call it a day. I never realized how bad dark pelted people had it off – I was just about frying alive under my newly black fur.

Ducking into a mid-class coffee shop to get out of the heat, I was reading down their menu to try and find something cool when I heard voices behind me.

“So Richard failed? I haven’t heard anything from him in over a day.”

I glanced backwards discreetly as I pretended to scratch an itch. There were two humans sitting at a table, sipping coffee.

Paying with the last of my money, I took my iced coffee and began walking slowly towards them.

“What were you expecting, Victor?” the other human muttered. “He wasn’t a animal, didn’t have regeneration. He didn’t stand a chance against that wolf. At least the other man has regeneration – not that it’s helped him much. Richard’s only selling point was that he was cheap.”

“Couldn’t help but overhear you fellas are looking for someone with ‘gen. May I offer my services?” Sauntering up to the table, I took a seat without waiting to be invited. I roughed my voice up when I spoke, making it sound like I’d spent a decade working under a smokestack.

“This is a private conversation, dog. Get lost,” the first human growled.

I just about laughed. Perhaps I did look like a dog.

Shrugging, I picked up my coffee and took a swig. I had to hold back a face from its bitterness. “Fine with me, fellas. Just couldn’t help but notice it sounded like you were looking to hire someone. With all the attacks going on recently...” I smiled as I let my voice peter off.

The one human scowled as the other went white.

“You wouldn’t dare go to the cops.” He whispered under his breath.

“Not if I have a job.” I smiled.

Thirty minutes later we were knocking on the door of a townhouse in one of the more damaged parts of V-town.

The door popped open a moment later, held by a strong chain. “What’s the animal doing with you?” came a gruff voice.

“He’s good. He’s our next... employee,” replied one of my companions.

The door slammed shut and opened again a moment later just long enough to allow the three of us in.

The inside of the building was a tad more comfortable than the outside lead me to expect. Ushered into a sitting room, I reclined on a sofa as a good dozen humans clustered around me. They were all holding weapons.

Frankly, I was more interested in the ghost of a scent that hung in the pillows under me. It was that of a wolf. A scent I’d never forget. The same one that had invaded my apartment.

“Hey! Wake up!” I was jostled out of my thoughts by a harsh human voice.

I vaguely recognized the human who sat in front of me. I think he had been one of the elders back at Horseshoe Bay. One of the ones who had wanted me to teach them how to hunt.

“Do we have a deal or not?” He leaned forward with a scowl.

“Huh?” I had to force my mind to focus on him with the scent of the other wolf around twisting me.

“Gods, how stupid are you? We want you to *kill* someone. Can you do it?”

I shrugged, faking nonchalance. “Sure. If there’s enough money in it for me. Who’s the target?”

“You know the old mayor? Taggart? We want him dead.”

And that’s where I just about broke out laughing.

A slight chuckle, despite my best efforts, did escape my lips. “Him? Why?”

The man didn't look happy. "None of your bloody business. You kill him and we'll make it worth you're while. You don't even need to worry about the current mayor. Just kill Taggart."

I smiled, a long, predatory smile slipping to my lips.

"Sure. I'll kill him. No problem."

And that's when the world seemed to implode.

I had just enough time to cover my head and dive for cover under the sofa as all of the windows and doors around us crashed inward.

It was followed by the sound of barking. Hard, harsh, clipped barking.

Looking up, I had to brush glass off my mussel before I could see the dozens of police dogs that swarmed into the small sitting room.

I was about to smile before two of them hauled me off the floor and snapped a set of reinforced cuffs around my wrists.

"Hey! Wait, I'm--"

I never got a chance to finish before they snapped a mussel around my face.

And, honestly, I'd *never* seen the police snarling and snapping like this. Every other time I'd encountered the police on an operation they had been cool and clinical, almost robot like. Now they snapped and growled like they were going to eat us alive.