

Molvoy and Yew trail slightly behind Lotus.

"So what do these breeders look like? I mean the ones that come out on the final night."

"Same as the others."

"There's no difference? I mean no difference between the breeders and the ones you killed last night?"

"Not that I've noticed."

"So then why do the Agents call them breeders?"

"It's not an official name."

"So it's something Lotus made up?"

"No. It's a name that most agent's use."

"But it's not official?"

"It doesn't get used in reports."

"So then why does it get used?"

"People need names for things. Someone gave the last larvae a name."

"But you two said last night that those ones, the ones that come last I mean were the breeders."

"It's a guess."

"Your guess?"

"Mine and many other agents."

Molvoy stops the line of questioning for a moment and enjoying the v shape of a flock of birds moving through the sky.

"Why did you give me your book last night?"

"You were interested."

"Are you trying to recruit me? Do you want me to be an agent?"

"That is a door you must open yourself."

"I am interested. You Agents have always fascinated me. That is, I haven't ever met one before you two but the idea of the Agents has always... well I just like the idea."

"What do you like about the idea?"

"I don't know. I guess it's not much different from being a deputy, really. Agents just get the a bigger territory to cover, right?"

"I've only been an Agent, not a deputy."

"Yeah, well from watching you two it looks kind of the same as what I do. You take care of business, get things accomplished and straightened out because no one else will do it."

"So why not stay a deputy?"

"It's too small a place, too few people and the problems are always the same. Usually even involve the same people. I'm sure you can guess that David and his brother are often involved. Heck, their whole family gets in on the action sometimes."

"They are a large family?"

"Yeah. The sheriff and I call them 'the clan'. Well, I should say everyone in Fasix calls them the clan, the sheriff and I being no exception to that rule."

"And does David stand out?"

"How do you mean?"

"Is he their leader?"

"Oh no. He's just one of them. I don't know if they really have a leader. There's a pecking order, for sure, but no one really guides anything. They've just kind of got a code. A sense of pride, I guess. It doesn't make sense to me every time they do something but I can see how it ties into their feelings about what they stand for."

"So why did they confront us when we first came into town?"

"This is their town. You don't belong. They solve the problems here. Same reason the sheriff and I get in trouble with them - we try and solve problems for people and the clan thinks that is their business, not ours."

"Would they rather see you solve the problem than us - the Agents?"

"I suppose so. Though they didn't really much care for me being along for the ride last night. They just saw me as another affront to their dignity."

"And are you?"

"Am I what?"

"Are you an affront to their dignity?"

"Most of the time, Agent. Most of the time."

Yew offers no reply for a moment and then stops walking. Molvoy stops as well, wondering if he has said something offensive. Lotus, not noticing or not caring, continues forward.

"It's power."

"What's power?"

"It's not a code or dignity that the clan cares about. It's their power."

"How do you mean, Agent?"

"What was Fasix like before the sheriff was here?"

"I see what you're getting at. There's always been a sheriff her in Fasix, though. Least as long as I can remember and for as long as I've heard stories there's been a sheriff."

"Some sheriffs are no doubt more lenient than others."

"Surely they are, Agent. Surely they are."

"And so in those times, groups like the clan hold more sway."

"I suppose you're right. You getting all this from that book of yours, Agent Yew?"

The Agent goes silent in response and begins to walk again. After a few steps, he pulls his book out of his bag and begins searching through the text, mumbling lightly as he does.

He taps the page happily when he finds it. "What words capture, they kill. What experiences convey, they destroy."

Molvoy shrugs. "Never been much of a poet, myself."

Yew closes the book. "All men are poets. Even you, deputy."

There is a muffled shout up ahead from the out of sight Lotus. The two men, previously lost in

thought and conversation, leap forward through the sparse trees. Within seconds they come upon Lotus, hanging upside down from a rope trap.

"Cut me down." She states it plainly.

Molvoy walks over to the tree which holds the rope, pulls out his knife and begins to saw through the rope. "Hunter's trap."

Lotus speaks in a remarkably calm voice for someone who is suspended by fifty feet of rope by one leg. "Who hunts with a rope? And what do they hunt for?"

"Almost through. You ready?" The deputy looks over. Lotus has about ten feet to fall.

"Cut it." Her voice is even flatter than before.

The rope snaps. The Agent turns in the air, lands in a deep squat and then rolls onto her back. She stands up, brushes herself off and walks away all in one dismissive gesture. "Watch out for ropes."

"The clan?" Yew asks.

"That's what I'm thinking. They've got a few trappers and this strikes me as kind of a warning I guess." He looks at the quality of the rope. "I hope this is done after tonight, Agent. This is pretty subtle as far as they go and it's bound to get less so pretty quickly."

"What men capture, they kill." Yew laughs slightly to himself. "What agents encounter, they deploy."

Molvoy repeats the two phrases over in his head. "Isn't that blasphemy?"

"What, re-purposing?" Yew begins walking again. "An Agent of change uses the tools that are available at the moment."

"And that includes your own sacred book?" The deputy is puzzled.

"The book is to be used, yes." The Agent means for this to be an obvious statement.

"But to change the words..." he pauses. "And for a joke - a wordplay - that can't be right, can it?"

"Right for whom? For you?" Yew is actively scanning the trees for something or someone.

"No. Just... the right way - the way it is supposed to be. Aren't there rules about how the book can be used, how it is to be respected and treated?" The deputy takes his cue from the Agent

and begins actively searching with his eyes.

“It’s a book. You read it. You look for ways to relate what you read to what you experience.” Whatever Yew is looking for, he isn’t finding it.

Molvoy sees it. There’s a person laying down in the crook of some tree roots. They’re difficult to spot because they’re wearing a camouflage suit - one with leaves and twigs cleverly sewn into it. The only reason the deputy has seen it is because what otherwise looks like an innocuous pile of nature is rising up and down slowly in a rhythmic pattern that speaks of breath. He nods at Yew and motions with his eyes towards the pile. “And what have you read in your book that relates to what you experience.”

Yew nods back and changes direction slightly so that the two of them will soon walk next to the pile. “That we often see only what we want to.”

“Where did you get that from in your book? Are you going to quote me that part too?” Molvoy struggles to sound truly engaged in the conversation and finds himself wondering if the person under the leaf pile can tell.

“It’s the story of the cloud man. The one your Aunt used to tell that you enjoyed so much.” They are within twenty feet of the hiding place. “Why did you like that story?”

“Oh I loved anything my aunt did. She was a very magical woman. Very charming. Any child who spent even a few minutes in her company hung on her every word. She was a phenomenal story teller.” Molvoy tried to remember if his gun was loaded but couldn’t picture the last time he had checked it.

“Ah.” Yew kicks the pile of leaves. The pile of leaves lets out a thud and a muffled grunt. “Get up.”

The figure stands up slowly, revealing a sturdy chunk of man, standing slightly taller than either the Agent or the Deputy. “Just going for a hunt, fellas. A little hunt for the animals.”

Yew glances at Molvoy, asking him with his eyes who this man is. “It’s one of David’s cousins. Roscoe.”

“And what are you hunting, Roscoe?” The Agent begins padding down the leaf covered man.

“Rabbits, turtles, birds... whatever critters wander along, right.” It sounds like an honest answer.

“Did you set up the rope trap back there on the path?” Yew points back towards where they had cut down Lotus.

Roscoe's eyes fire up brightly. "Yes sir. Sounds like there was a critter caught up in it. Did I catch something? Was there something fighting in there?"

Molvoy weighs in. "Nothing got caught, Roscoe. A friend of ours stepped in it so we had to cut her down."

"You cut my ropes!" Roscoe stamps on the ground and slaps a nearby tree. "That's quality rope you ruined, sucker man. I'll be expecting the sheriff to be shilling out the coins for that. Why you going and cutting her down, anyhow? Don't you know anything about trapping and ropes, man? All you gotta do is untie the other side, you don't gotta cut the rope. That's the dumbest thing I heard all month long and you know who I keep company with, sucker man, right?"

Yew immediately grabs a pouch from around his waist and begins counting coins. "How much was your rope?"

"Who are you? And who's gone and tripped up in my rope? You say some fool of a woman tripped up the rope? Well where has she got to?" Roscoe spits a bit onto the ground.

"I'm Agent Yew. How much was the rope worth?" The agent looks Roscoe in the eye.

"Oh. I see the business man now. Then the one who I tripped up must have been that other Agent that I heard was rustling through the streets. The lady Agent, right? David told me he saw you two in town. Thought maybe you'd be coming up this way to tangle with the creek and such. Is that what you're doing?" Roscoe smiles proudly.

"How much for the rope?" Yew repeats the question slowly, word by word.

"Twelve. Pieces." Roscoe puts out a hand.

Yew places the coins in Roscoe's hand. "Be more careful where you hunt, friend."