

Ravine laid awake with his thoughts. The crook didn't think he'd be sleeping again tonight. Too much on his mind. The same thing that had kept him up many a times before. Loss. Thinking about them... Thinking about what happened. He felt so many emotions about it, but anger and grief primarily. He didn't want to forget their faces, their laughs and their voices, but they faded. Memories of their actions were what stayed predominantly, but even then the finer details were lost.

His pack... Their protection, was gone.

Gone too soon, he thought. It had only been a *month* before the crook banishment ended and having returned to skire. If he had known, maybe he could have fought even harder against that other protection to ensure the survival of his own kin. Maybe-

"Psst, are you still awake?" The cccat across the room whispered. One of his two traveling companions. Ravine let out a drawn sigh.

"Yes, Cali. Can't sleep tonight." He replied back, talking quietly though not caring enough to whisper. "Why are you awake?"

"Woke up, couldn't fall back asleep." Cali replied. "Had a... nightmare, I guess? I don't know, but it's bothering me."

Ravine gave a grunt in acknowledgment, before Cali spoke again. "D'you wanna go on a walk?"

"I suppose." Ravine grumbled, sitting up in bed. He could see the faint outline of the other arching his back in a stretch, in the shadows of night, and watched as he slinked off the bed in an almost flowing motion. If he hadn't already known Cali was there, he likely wouldn't have noticed. Without another word, both the

crook and cccat quietly stepped out of the room, as to not wake up the pod they happened to travel with as well. Cali gently shut the door behind them.

They happened to be staying in a small hotel, as they had been the past few nights. There weren't many options when travelling long distances, and even fewer that offered such comforts. It got pricey quickly, but the cost was worth it.

Ravine looked up and down the brown, red, and brass halls. "Did you have anywhere in particular you wanted to wander?" he asked.

Cali shook his head. "Anywhere works."

Ravine nodded. "I suppose we could walk down to the café then. Grab a coffee, considering if we went back to sleep, we wouldn't be getting any."

The two turn and walked down the hall towards the direction of elevators. Neither said anything for a moment before Cali spoke up first.

"So what's got you up still?" Cali asked, not knowing the weight of the answer.

Ravine tensed a little. "You first." He replied bluntly. Cali was confused but just shrugged.

"Just old issues with a human I used to know, one I met shortly after my wormling took a host." He spoke. "We used to be thick as thieves up until she just... disappeared one day without another word. No idea where she went or what happened to her. I think that was... 7 years ago at this point?"

Ravine gave a nod of acknowledgement, but said nothing as he let Cali continue to speak. "But, anyways, despite the time I still get dreams or rather nightmares about it. Just various 'what ifs'. Of course, I doubt the reason is ever as extreme about the dreams but... they're haunting sometimes, and tonight was one of those nights. So yeah, that's my issue. Heh, thanks for listening to me ramble."

“Course.” Ravine said, before taking in a deep breath and letting out a sigh. “I understand that, relate to it anyways. You’re familiar with a crook protection, yes?”

“Um, kind of? Isn’t that like a hive?” Cali asked genuinely, click on the elevator button on the wall.

“Not exactly. Doesn’t exactly have the communication Cccat’s have with their crowns. It’s more or less a group of close family or friends, usually fellow crooks but I’ve seen some with other species as well.” Ravine said.

“Oh, I see. I’m guessing something happened to yours.”

“Yep... Aside from me, the entire pack was killed. We were ambushed by another, much larger protection.” Ravine felt bitter, mix of anger and grief. Cali’s ears flattened. The elevator doors dinged open.

“Wow... I’m sorry to hear that.” Cali said as the two stepped inside the elevator. “I can’t imagine what it’s like to lose someone that way. Is that why you were still up, thinking about it?”

“Mhm.” Ravine hummed. “Happens often.”

“I see... I know it’s probably not the same, but if you ever need someone to rely on, I’m here and I’m sure Vacant is too, in his own strange way.” Cali gave an awkward smile. This caused Ravine to give a short dry laugh.

“I appreciate it Cali. I suppose I never thought about it that way. It is different, but that doesn’t mean it’s bad. Just something I need to focus on more and get used to.” Ravine replied, returning a smile to the cccat, but a genuine one. The elevator doors closed behind them.