Lowell couldn’t resist waking me with his tongue. More so on my right shoulder as his muscular arms wrapped tenderly around my shivering waist, his boner being the one to entice me to speak up.

 “Mm…What’re you doing back there, Low?” I asked groggily, blindly reaching behind me to caress his handsy paw. Feeling him press his erection against my right ass cheek made my tail twitch and a long, resonated purr rumble from the back of my throat. “Heh, you horndog…”

 “Hey, don’t blame me, kitty,” he chuckled, his voice clearly unabashed. Then again, neither of us were, “Your purring’s making me so fucking hard right now…”

 “Hehe, how hard?”

 “Feel for yourself, Adam.”

 I certainly felt it, hot and throbbing and leaking under my sore tailhole. As the wolf teasingly humped me from behind, causing my purrs to heighten in uncontrollable waves, Lowell snarled his muzzle onto my shoulder, his rough tongue licking the fur alongside his teasing fangs. They lovingly tormented me, threatening to pierce the skin underneath without actually doing it. As I veered around to wrap arms around his torso and nuzzle my whiskered nose into the back of his warm, musky neck, I could feel myself growing lost in his scent. Lost in his comforting form. All as we lay together under the dark blankets.

 *What would Stephen think of me being with Lowell?*

I didn’t know why that thought suddenly crossed my mind, but it did make me freeze for a moment.

 Lowell seemed to have noticed, “What’s wrong, Adam?”

 I sighed. The fact that I did not think about Stephen in such a time…it made me feel somewhat remorseful. Towards myself and for his well-being. During my last birthday, Stephen had been out of town for an internship at college but did leave me a message on Dove. I couldn’t remember the finer details though. It did leave me happy to see him again, one of the final times we saw each other.

 “Is it bad that I’m not thinking about him as much as I should?”

 “You mean Stephen?” he guessed. I tentatively nodded, which caused the wolf to flick an ear uncomfortably before sitting up, looking at me with concern in those beautiful auburn orbs of his. Staring at me, begging me to open up. “Do I…make you feel guilty about your ex?”

 I straightened up and placed my paws atop the blankets. My tail curled uncomfortably underneath.

 “No, no, I…we weren’t boyfriends, but he was…is still important to me,” I sighed, hating myself for “Still, wherever he is, I should move on, right? Dwelling on the past isn’t healthy.”

 “You’re right,” he said after some hesitancy. He clearly wanted to readily agree with me, but there was some doubt in his reply. I could also feel it in how Lowell then rested his comforting right paw on mine. “I don’t know much, to tell you the truth. I didn’t go to college like you, pretend to have a girlfriend, have a mom or dad who are alive…I do know that what you and I got is real.”

 “It goes ‘what you and I have is real’,” I laughed for no other reason, which got the cocky wolf sitting next to me to laugh as well. “If what we have is real though, what do you see in me? I’m…I’m not exactly the greatest looking cat out there…”

 Lowell raised a sharp eyebrow. As if I had asked why the Moon were made of cheese or why the sky turned from blue to orange between sunsets.

 “Who’s to say you aren’t?” he accused me. Not waiting for a reply, Lowell gently pulled me a little closer to him, to the point I could feel the warmth and heat radiating from the wolf’s strong, fluffy chest. “I think you’re a catch, Adam. You’re cute, you’re smart, you’re adorable when you purr.” I giggled unexpectedly, “Seriously though, I didn’t start hanging out with you just because I was bored or wanted to fuck you. I love talking to you. Like I said a while ago, you…make this life more bearable.”

 There I found myself swooning yet again into his warm lips. Following a few more minutes of exploring his body and tongue further, nature called for us. We decided to wash out each other’s scents in the shower before asking Johanna for permission to go downstairs to the gym (“Permission granted, but don’t make too much noise, alright?”). Better not to risk any guests, let alone our own comrades within the hotel, what we did the previous night.

 I had finished putting on some fresh workout clothes when Lowell stalked over to the blinds and opened them slightly. Mid-morning light bounced off the flat tv screen and partially lit up the darker parts of the room, including the quote beside the TV: ‘Whence spring these inclinations, rank and strong? And harming no one, wherefore call them wrong?’

 “Do you think they’ll thank us in the end?” I asked out of nowhere. “When it’s all over?”

 “Who?” Lowell asked, then followed my gaze out the window to see the rows of cars driving out and about. He sighed, “Can’t be sure. There’s plenty of turncoats who don’t want change, but they’re not important. I dunno what’s going on through some of their heads sometimes, Adam. I’ve never had the luxury of being ignorant.”

 “And all of them out there are?” I asked again, to which the wolf shrugged. I honestly had to agree with him, for the most part. “Maybe they’re like I was, and don’t know what to do.”

 “We’ll have to wait and see what the future holds,” his uncertainty melted away into that same cocky grin I’d grown to love seeing on his canine muzzle. “Now c’mon! I wanna make you feel sorer than last night!”

 “Ditto to you, Low!” I laughed and followed him out the room.

 Quieting down our chuckles until the only noises were our breathing and footsteps, Lowell and I journeyed to the elevator. A middle-aged, slim lizard—either some type of lowly businessman or a well-dressed chauffer—joined us one floor down, yawning while being distracted enough by his phone that he didn’t notice how rigidly I stood next to Lowell. He seemed calm at first glance, but I could sense the lack of cheer from before to know he too was vigilant. Trying to act…normal and unnoticeable.

 It felt strange, in retrospective. As long as we did not make our sexualities obvious, the guests and even our outside world did not care. So long as they didn’t ask and we didn’t tell, Lowell and I were just like everyone else. We weren’t easy to spot at first glance. To them, we did not fulfill their stereotypes. We didn’t lure unsuspecting men into an immoral lifestyle, hurt innocent cubs or actively push for an agenda that destroyed the ‘holy’ nuclear family. We were simply invisible in a hallway or elevator car.

 The lizard disappeared through the revolving doors in the lobby as we ventured towards the exercise room. Moving to the next set of larger weights seemed daunting at first, but the workout equipment greeted us like old friends as we did standard running on the treadmill for half an hour, several sets between the two of us on the dumbbell rack as well as a few bouts of systema combat. Unfortunately, we needed to cut it down short when a group of women suddenly burst into the room for an unscheduled yoga session.

 Upstairs, we showered and dressed ourselves, though not without some fondling or stroking involved beforehand. Both of us knew we couldn’t stall for too long, so we settled on mutual masturbation. At the last minute, however, I decided on blending in some oral pleasure. Lowell practically melted in my arms when I started teasing his member to erection. He huffed and puffed as I knelt to the white fiberglass floor, my feline tongue caressing his sensitive underside while jerking off. What made it all even better was how…familiar I’d become with his wolfish cock.

 “Heh, that t-tickles!” he giggled at my wandering fingers, fondling at the canine’s perfect glutes. “A-Adam, ah! Ah, oh, fuck…fuck yes, you’re getting there…”

 “Mfh,” I carefully pulled back and brushed my pre-soaked lips against his tip. “Had enough?”

 “Fuck no,” he gasped and humped his way into my maw. “Ahh, oh fuck, I’m almost there…Cumm—I’m cumming, Adam!”

 I had pulled back as it happened. A mixture of warm shower water and his cum soon sprayed all over my face. A drop or two went into my eye, blinding me as I drank the rest of it down. Thankfully, I did not have to worry about any stains or the stinging in my eye. Not just because of the hotel room’s powerful showerhead streaming constantly down on us, or the decent amount of bodywash, but because Lowell felt the need to pull me up and lusciously lick the cum out of my eye.

 “Mmm, tasty,” he panted while laughing. “Now let’s get ourselves washed again.”

 I leaned forward and enveloped him in a long, romantic kiss. My tongue tasted traces of his seed beneath Lowell’s sweet saliva. It sent shivers up and down my entire body until I could barely feel my seizing, ecstatic tailbone. What particularly caused me to spray cum all over our stomach was when he rolled his tongue around the roof of my maw. I was then left a moaning mess wrapped tightly around his firm torso.

 Upon opening my eyes and plucking my lips away from his, the wolf looked at me surprised, only for that smirk to return. “You are so fucking queer.”

 “Shut up, Low…” I groaned and chuckled back into the kiss. We reveled in it for several seconds more. The only sounds were our rabid breathing and the static of falling water surrounding our ears. It only for my right paw to push him slightly away when I felt that erection growing against my thigh, again. “Nuh uh, we should go. Before Johanna breaks down our door and drags us to our stations…”

 “She hasn’t done that since I was…huh,” Lowell paused squirting yet another glob of bodywash into his palms, “Wow, I would’ve been in middle school when she stopped breaking in to wake me up…”

 One of my ears piqued upward with interest, “Did she really broke into your room as a cub?”

 “Aye, she did. Refused to let me help out more than intern with the rest of the cell,” he began lathering his pecs and chest before using the rest on my back. “Still, it didn’t mean Jo wouldn’t teach me some systema and self-defense. Just in case they…came for us.”

 The hesitancy in his suddenly reminded me of how much we weren’t soldiers. Not in the traditional sense. We did not attend a military academy or face enemies in foreign battlefields across an ocean. We were just young men caught up in a guerilla rebellion.

 “I think it was the summer of 2010 when she finally let me out,” he mentioned with a nostalgic smile, “She needed extra paws to watch Donald’s back. You heard about the time the Defiant here replaced ‘Isaac Farthing for President’ flyers with porn? I helped out on that!”

 A recollection of rumors crossed my mind. David Farthing’s second son, Isaac, had been campaigning for winning a second term as Devout President back then. However, I had been more focused on arduous schoolwork and summer vacation than listening to the news.

 “How did you convince her to start letting you in the field?” I asked after nodding, to which the timber wolf allowed me to soap his back. I stifled a laugh at how his tail caught some remaining cum in the gray hairs. “I mean, if she could let me into the field, why not you? By the way, there’s some cum in your tail.”

 “What? Oh…” he groaned and brushed his soaked tail under the showerhead. I stepped back to give him space without elbowing me. “Thanks. Anyway, I…It’s very complicated, but to make a long story short, I confronted her about keeping me locked in the hotel, she said some crazy female shit, I said some male crazy shit, then we fought and made up after bawling our eyes out. Mo…”

 Part of me wished he hadn’t faced his back to me when he froze mid-sentence.

 Lowell sighed, “…Johanna really, really cares about me. It started off small. Smuggling, drop-offs, recons, but it took time to really get her trust, ya know?”

 “Tell me about it,” I mused aloud.

 In the end, we managed to remove any trace of our fornication. We not only smelled twice as good under a thick coating of stale deodorant, but our fur also shined following a good half-hour of drying our furs. Occasionally I had to remind Lowell how we couldn’t get dirty again, no matter how flirtatious he acted. No matter how much he patted my rear or ‘readjusted’ himself down under for me to see. Still, a blast of hot air in his direction did the trick.

 “Huh?” Lowell suddenly stopped, then turned to the closed bathroom door. He tentatively opened it, and I too heard the consecutive knocks vibrating from the hotel room’s door, “Seven rapid knocks. Better get that!”

 I quickly shucked on a pair of clean jeans over some boxers, then ducked into the bedroom to snatch a shirt right as Lowell (wearing clothes sans t-shirt, but thankfully some loose shorts) welcomed our guest. Of all furs, I did not expect the one entering to be Hector.

 “Why the fuck haven’t you been answering your radios, *cabrón*?” he pushed inside, snarling. “And where’s Adam? Adam!”

 “I know it’s rich coming from me,” Lowell hissed at the fennec fox, “but keep your voice down, will ya?”

 He ignored my boyfriend and directed his scowl between us. “Adam…Johanna needs you and the wolf to go to the War Room. Immediately.”

 “What’s going on, Hector?” Lowell asked. “Did something happen? Is Johanna—”

 “We did it,” he interrupted with a flickering grin on his muzzle, “They did it.”

 Without a single beat, I snatched a clean flannel shirt from the drawer and tossed it to Lowell, who followed me and Hector to the elevators. Once we made it to the doors, the fennec hastily murmured to us how they managed to crack the List. Apparently, we had Oscar himself to thank for the breakthrough. Against the otter’s better judgement, he had had been working late into the nights. The other tech-oriented members of the Defiant had prioritized a good night’s sleep while he did not. He believed sleep would be earned when they finally completed the essential mission for Operation Crucible.

 That all change last night when a familiar fur had returned to the hotel: Lucius.

 “Who?” I asked the fennec once we entered the elevator. Before they closed or he even clarified who he was talking about, I snapped my fingers, “Wait, that Lucius!”

 Lucius, the raccoon hacker. The same Lucius whom I first encountered with alongside Oscar all those months ago, after I first waltzed into the illegal library. Had it really been months since I last saw him?

 “Almost forgot about him, didn’t ya,” Lowell asked cheekily. I shook my muzzle.

 “Shut it, Low. Anyway,” Hector continued between annoyed grimaces, then hushed his explanation down to muttering when the elevator opened to the appropriate floor, “The raccoon came back last night. He’d been speaking with hackers, activists, smaller resistance group across Cook County. He came back here not long after midnight and helped Oscar finally crack it. *Más vale tarde que nunca…*”

 “Whatever that means, it’s about fucking time,” Lowell laughed shortly while wrapping his arms around me and the fennec.

 Hector surprisingly didn’t pull away or smack the wolf, let alone direct an insult at the foul-mouthed wolf in Spanish, as we walked to the War Room. Instead, he uncharacteristically started to chuckle, “For once, we are in agreement.”

 “This is great!” I felt my chest flutter with pride. Not just towards Oscar and Lucius for what they did, but for the fact those two finally agreed on something. “With the List now open, we can know who these tithingmen are and tell everyone who’s who…”

 “Yeah, I betcha they’re all gonna be scare shitless, huh?” Lowell grinned before pulling his arm off of Hector’s shoulder. “I would kill right now to see the look on one of their faces when we…”

 The excitable wolf paused mid-sentence when we caught movement at the far end of the corridor, only for us to sigh in relief when we saw a random hotel guest hauling his luggage from his room to the elevators. We quietly slowed our walks to a bored stroll, passing by the War Room as if it did not in fact happen to be the planning area for a rebel cell. We were just random hotel guests trying to find our way to a vending machine or our rooms, not members of said rebel cell who had just accomplished hacking the Devout government’s list of sleeper operatives.

 Once the guest disappeared down the elevator, having not so much as acknowledged our presence, Lowell, Hector and I bolted to the Warm Room’s entrance. It immediately opened to reveal a raccoon with baggy eyes and equally baggy pants, plus a bright smile directed at me.

 “Adam, how long has it been?” he shook my paw before his smile slowly went dour. “Lowell, Hector, as much as I’m glad you’re here, you all need to come in. Now.”

 Lucius joined us after locking the door shut. Going inside to the main planning table, we were surrounded by not just Lucius, but Johanna and Olivia. All of them stood contemplatively at the table, trying their best not to stare directly at me. Or Lowell.

 “First of all, I want to thank you again, Luc, for what you and Oscar did today,” Johanna cleared her throat and nodded to the semi-proud raccoon. “With the List’s contents in our paws, Operation Crucible is almost complete. However, I want you to make sure Oscar isn’t faking his much-needed rest when you and Liv have the chance, okay?”

 “Yes, ma’am,” he and Olivia murmured.

 This was supposed to be a good thing, right? Why were they all acting saddened by this?

 Before I had the chance to voice my opinion, Lowell beat me to the punch.

 “I dunno about you, but why’s nobody here celebrating?” he asked, “Johanna, where’s the shit-eating grin. We should all be dancing about how we finally got proof of those damned tithingfuckers.”

 “Lowell.” The doe spoke up. “Normally, I would be, but…something came up…” She sighed deeply, turning her muzzle towards me. Her ears flickered in clear apology. For what though? “I’m sorry to say this, Adam. I really, really am, but I’m afraid I will have to relieve you from active duty for the foreseeable future.”

 My tail arched in confusion, more than anger. “Why is that?”

 “Yeah, why is he no longer gonna be in the field, Johanna?” Lowell voiced my confusion as well, though his tone held a laced layer of doubt. “He didn’t do anything fucking wrong.”

 At my wolf’s irritated question, Johanna and Lucius exchanged momentary looks.

 “A conflict of interest has some up between you and Operation Crucible,” she defended her decision in a level voice, as if the doe herself could not believe what she said. “It…Lucius, can you tell him what we discovered on the List?”

 The easy-going raccoon did not hold out on explaining the ‘conflict of interest’, “The good news is this, Adam: we know where your friend is. Stephen…Stephen McConnell is alive.”

 A swindling flicker of hope started to burn bright inside of me. My limbs became completely rigid with shock and confusion. This would be followed by an exited sensation that built its way up my chest to its beating heart. Whatever confusing emotions or conflicted feelings I held about letting go of my friend’s fate suddenly disappeared altogether.

 “Y-You do??” My tail and ears raised up to attention, completely feeling ecstatic at first. “Where is he then? Where is he? If you know Stephen’s out there…then…why are you looking at me like that? What’s going on, you guys?”

 Seconds of awkward silence later, I found my answer. Lucius solemnly leaned down at an opened laptop connected into the wall. One of the mounted TV screens flickered to life, and after a few clicks from a mouse, Lucius displayed the contents of a large computer document. I presumed it had to be the List—now finally cracked open for the Defiant to see. It seemed simple in layout as well as computer design for such an incriminating file.

 “We…We didn’t want you to see this until we were absolutely sure it’s true.”

 Lucius scrolled down to a certain portion of the document. Then, that burning flicker of hope became doused in unyielding fire retardant. The hitched breaths and alarmed growled were drowned out by the blood draining from my orange-tipped ears. It could not be.

 Amongst the professional photographs of faces and muzzles of random furs, all of whom were assigned to spy and report on potential insurrectionists throughout the Devout States of America, I thoroughly recognized one of them. A charming red fox who used to knowingly and lustfully smile back at me whenever we had the chance to be alone…before we were both caught by Dad that day.

 NAME: Stephen K. McConnell

 AGE: 24

 GENDER: MALE

 RANK: Assigned undercover civilian operative for Project Parish. GRADE B

 SERIAL NUMBER: TITHE-IL-CHICAGO-1056048