The Interview:

Ralpho sat back and admired his reflection in the two way mirror. The vulpine’s handpaws were cuffed to the metal table in front of him, but that didn’t bother him any. It’s not like he hasn’t been here before. The vulpine smiled knowingly at the reflection, his wide cheeks and muzzle forming a smug grin at what he hoped was the cop on the other side. He had no idea why he was here. But Ralpho was confident he could be it. *After all,* he thought, *I always do.*

Chase snarled a bit at him from the other side of the mirror, *Smug bastard knows what he’s doing,* he thought. “He hasn’t asked for a lawyer yet,” said Griff. The equine ear tilted a grimace at him, one that didn’t travel down to his muzzle. Griff was always all business. It’s how he climbed up to Captain in the same time it took Chase to make lieutenant. “Try to keep him talking.”

“With as much as he’s been in here, I wonder why he hasn’t asked for a lawyer yet,” Chase wondered aloud as he thumbed through the thick paperwork. The paperwork on Frisk Henskill hadn’t reached biblical proportions, yet. Though, it was rapidly approaching bible thick and would soon fill a filing box easy, this much Chase knew from hard won experience of his many years of working on homicide cases.

Griff Pulled a swig from lukewarm coffee than grimaced down at it. “He probably doesn’t think he needs one. He’s a preening fat bastard who lives the vulpine stereotype.”

Chase rolled his eyes, his tail flicking a bit in annoyance. “Great, another egomaniacal asshole. This will be a lot of fun.”

“Yes,” Griff growled, “but he’s the asshole that can make or break this Frisk case. Don’t forget it.”

Chase smiled a bit, “Captain, please,” he said as jovial as possible. “It’s me. Besides, you forget,”

“Yeah, yeah, I know. Gators like cold meat,” Griff said with an eye roll. “Just get in there and get it out of him.”

When Chase walked into the room, the rotund Vulpine had reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a cigarette, letting it hang loosely from his lips. “Evening detective. You want to tell me why I’m here?”

“Mr. Ralph Oscar Harskill, I’m lieutenant Chase Whicker. I’m a detective with the police department,” Chase pulled out a chair and began to sit down.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you detective. Call me Ralpho” Ralpho replied now a cigarette hanging from his muzzle. As he leaned down to light it, his rotund belly protruded a bit, giving him the resemblance of an overdressed meatball with a tail. He puffed proudly for a moment, then flicked the ashes on the floor, looking the detective in the eye with a smile.

Chase grinned back. The chairs they were seated in where both industrial, and comfortable for a mass-produced means of resting your keister for a lunch break period or so. They had thin padding with fake leather covering their thick steel frames. Chase’s massive frame dwarfed the seat, his thick scaley tail, snaking around from the chair over to Ralpho’s side. When Ralpho dropped the cigarette back down, he felt the thick digit of Chase’s tail swipe at his handpaws, knocking the cigarette out.

“Terribly sorry.” Chase feigned, “but you can’t smoke here. Try your vape.”

“Very good eyes, detective,” Ralpho remarked as he pulled the pen from his jacket pocket. His white shirt and tie somehow still remained straight through all of this. “Now, tell me why you requested the pleasure of my company?”

The gator tossed a gruesome photograph in front of Ralpho. It was of a homeless feline, one staring up at the ceiling in shock and horror as he laid in a pool of blood. “Strangest thing about this,” Chase said as his muzzle pulled back into a snarl, “is that the pool of blood was a perfect circle. We tested it. It was his blood. He was dead when they got there. The entire scene was staged. He obviously wasn’t killed in that warehouse. Someone took the time to collect it, slice him in half, place the top half and bottom half perfectly over one another, just an inch apart.”

“Obviously,” Ralpho agreed, then pulled on his vape. Soon the air was thick with the sickening sweet scent of nicotine infused candy vapor. “What’s this got to do with me?”

“We found these on the victim,” Chase replied, placing a small bag on the table and sliding it in front of the vulpine. “These are from a car’s catalytic converter. We know your shop deals in that sort of thing.”

Ralpho sighed, exhaling thick vapor smoke out of his nostrils and his mouth. He then turned towards Chase, exhaustion in his voice. “I run a legitimate business. I sell and recycle used auto parts. I don’t ask questions if they come from strange places, and I buy the vehicles I cut up. It’s an honest business with a license and everything.”

It was Chase’s turn to lean back a bit and grin. His chair groaned in protest under the weight, but held. “Sure you do Ralpho.” He said, then tossed another photograph onto the table.

“Hey!” Ralpho shouted. “If that’s how I’m going to be treated, then I want my…” His eyes fell down upon the photo stopping him in mid sentence. Frisk was alive. He was animated in some discussion, with Ralpho, and a couple of other felines. They were sitting outside of his business after hours, Frisk waving his hands up and down as he spoke, “fifty percent off,” Ralpho muttered as a sad grin touched the corners of his muzzle. His ears pulled down a bit.

“We got an excellent view of your place,” Chase replied. “And this right here proves you know our victim. We have a feline cut in half, his only crime seems to be not having a home.” The gator leaned forward, snarling in the face of the smaller vulpine. “And I find it disgusting, Ralpho, that someone killed him for that in MY city.”

The vulpine paused a moment, drawing on his vape pen, and blowing out the smoke out of the sides of his muzzle. “No, Chase, since we’re on first names here, his only crime was having asshole parents,” Ralpho muttered, as he avoided eye contact with the cop. “Okay, so I knew the kid. He was a typical street urchin, you know running around, saying wild things. But he hurt no one. When he was hard up, I’d hire him and let him watch my stuff. He never touched nothing, and always did exactly what I asked, every single time.”

Ralpho looked up at the detective, “but what they did to that poor kid, it ain’t right. His parents threw him out cause he was crazy. I guess when you have kits to match your drapes, crazy clashes with the furniture. But he was smart, harmless, had his catch phrases, true. But you got used to it! He had ones like ‘fifty percent off!’ and like ‘five on Friday!’ That was another of his. You’d ask him if he wanted something like McCarni’s, and he’d slap the table and shout ‘Five on Friday!’”

Ralpho’s eyes grew distant as they got lost in the memory. “That was his favorite.”

“I grow tired of this,” Chase growled. “Tell me what happened. You obviously know the truth.”

“Alright detective,” Ralpho smirked. “I can tell you the tale of poor Frisk, if you can help me here.” He said, motioning to the handcuffs.

“No,” Chase growled. “You tell me what happened to Frisk Ralpho, or I’ll make it my personal mission to crush you for obstruction of justice.”

The gator half stood as he spoke, leaning over the rotund, and now, feeling very diminutive vulpine. “okay, okay,” he said finally throwing his handpaws up. “Consider this a freebie. Though it’s because I want to see this bastard fry. Promise me that much detective, and I’ll give you everything.”

Chase sat back in his chair, trying not to smirk, those his tail tip flicked lazily back and forth in pleasure. “I’ll do everything I can to make sure he does. But that’s up to a judge and jury, not me.”

With a shrug and one last pull on his vape pen, Ralpho said, “close enough.” Then he leaned forward. “You know Dupree?”

Chase shook his head. “You will,” Ralpho grumbled. “You’ll know that rat bastard all too well. It all started two weeks before, well,” Ralpho said, tapping the photograph, “this.”