

Patrick was running errands. They needed laundry detergent, a few light bulbs, before they ran out, and he wanted to see if the discount store had good drinking glasses.

He saw the car, and recognized it, before he saw the tiger leaning against it. There was no way he'd ever forget that car, even if he'd only been in it once. He walked by him without even looking up. He made it was five steps beyond him.

"Patrick, stop." The voice wasn't loud, it didn't sound like an order.

Patrick found himself slowing, and then stopping. He sighed, turned, and looked at his uncle. "What do you want?"

"I want to offer you a job."

Patrick stared at him, and then burst out laughing. "This is a joke, right?"

"No. I don't joke, ever. I find it to be a waste of time."

"Well, thanks, but I have a job." He turned to leave.

"You really intend to bounce for the rest of your life? Or maybe work in the scrap yard?"

Patrick whirled and went to his uncle. "What the fuck do you care what I do?" Patrick noticed his uncle's eyes were almost completely gray, there was only a hint of blue in them.

"You're much better than this, Patrick." He indicated their surroundings with a movement of his head.

"Oh, right. It must really stick in your craw that someone who's related to you lives in the bad part of town. Well, I got news for you, this is my home. It might not been pretty, or wealthy, but it's where I grew up."

"And I grew up in Pittsburgh," Damian said. "This discussion isn't about where you grew up. It's about where you want to go from this point on. Think about your mother, she is finally pulling herself out of poverty. Think about all that's possible for her now."

Patrick stared at Damian for a moment. "Don't you dare. Don't you fucking dare use my mother against me." His voice was a low growl. "If you ever do anything to her I'm going to . . ."

"Stop."

Patrick was stunned, he was actually seeing those eyes go from gray to blue.

"Do not threaten me, Patrick, ever. You are family, so I wouldn't hurt you, but I would make you regret it." Damian took a breath, and some of the blue left his eyes. "I'm not threatening your mother, Patrick. I'm asking you to think about her. You're almost twenty-one now, are you going to live in her house for your entire life? She is finally at a point where she can start living again. She's had a series of promotions, she's making good money now. She doesn't need your help to pay the bill anymore. Don't you think you should be giving her more space?"

Patrick looked at Damian, something wasn't adding up. It didn't matter how smart he was, how did he know so fucking much.

"Oh my God. You bought the factory where my mom works."

"Technically, a subsidiary of a subsidiary bought it, but essentially, yes."

"You gave her those promotions. You said you'd look after her, so you gave her to them."

Damian laughed. "Hardly. I told you, she'd never accept a gift from a fag like me."

"You're not a fag," Patrick interrupted.

"Excuse me?"

"You're not a fag. You're gay."

Damian looked at him, "you're going to have to explain the difference to me." There was puzzlement in those eyes, which were loosing some blue.

"The fags are those guys who don't have any respects for others. All they want is for you do what they want. Which usually is sex. They're sleazy, dirty guys who no one should ever have to deal with. Gays are the ones who are respectful. I'm not going to say they always care about others, but at least they have the decency of accepting we might not want to do what they say.

"I might not like you Damian, I certainly don't trust you, but you respect the people who have earned it. You trick and manipulate, but you never actually force anyone to do your will. I'm certain that if someone was smart enough, and willful enough, they could resist you."

Damian smiled. "I like that definition. You don't mind if I start using it?"

"Knock yourself out."

"To get back to your mother. No, I did not give her the promotions. She doesn't even know I'm involved, and unless you tell her, there's no reason she'll find out. I didn't put anything in front of her, that I didn't put in front of everyone else at hat factory

"What I did, was put a door in front of everyone who worked there. It was their job to figure out how to unlock it, and then to decided if they wanted to step through it. Your mother did. She took the courses, did quite well on them in fact, was not given, but earned the position of department supervisor.

"Six months after that, all the department supervisors were offered a new course, she took it, passed, and earned the position of floor supervisor. A month ago, she became junior assistant to the assembly manager. In a year, a new door will be presented to her. Your mother can go as high in the company as she wants, and is willing to work for. She can earn all of that. None of it will be given to her."

Patrick was awed, and scared. In one play, Damian had done what he said he would, he'd taken cared of his mother, and he'd given himself the perfect tool to control him. He'd said he wasn't threatening her, but how could he trust that. There was no way to make certain she'd be safe. Actually . . .

"I want you to promise me you won't use her against me."

Damian smiled wide. "I see someone told you about me."

"Yes, and before you ask, yes I did piss myself."

That didn't engender any reaction, and Patrick realized that Damian hadn't been boasting, back then, in the car. He'd just been stating what would happen.

"So, I want you to promise me that you won't ever use her to influence my decision."

"Very well. You know how precious promises are to me. I promise that I will not use your mother to influence your decision. Further more, I promise that I will not use any of my subordinates, or any associates, or employees, to exert pressure on you via your mother."

Patrick swallowed, he hadn't considered there would have been ways to go around that promise.

"This was a show of good will, Patrick, don't expect that I'll plug the holes you leave open in the future. You are smarter than that. You need to think before you speak."

Wait, was this a lesson? Was his uncle trying to teach him something?

"Actually, why don't we go somewhere more appropriate for this sort of discussion?"

Patrick's blood froze. There is was. He was going to get him alone someplace.

"How about the Starbuck over there?"

"What?"

"You do like coffee, right?"

What was his uncle playing at? There was going to be other people there. Didn't he want to get him alone, work him over, fix him? "Yeah, I do."

"Good." Damian headed there, and Patrick followed him.

"What do you want?" Damian asked, when they were at the counter. "I'm paying."

"Just a coffee, black, no sugar."

"Really? You have this entire selection." He waved at the board, "more various ways of getting your coffee done than you could ever imagine, each more delicious than the other, with someone else paying for it, and all you ask for is a regular coffee?"

"Look. Coffee is coffee. The rest is just stuff I don't need. And it isn't because you're the one paying for it that I'm going to waste money."

Damian smiled, and turned to the barista. "It's going to be two coffee, black, no sugar. Regular size," he added. "None of that venti crap. I know, you are simply earning your keep, but do me the decency of understanding I know what your employer is trying to pull here."

The barista, a retriever, who couldn't be more than sixteen, got the coffees, took Damian's money, handed the change, without ever saying anything, or looking at him.

"What was that about?" Patrick asked, as Damian led them to a table at the back of the room. "You go on about how wonderful all those different, expensive coffees are, and you just get a regular one? Are you testing me, or something?"

Damian sat with his back to the wall, and smiled at him.

Patrick sat in front of him, which meant all he could see was Damian, and the wall behind him, while his uncle could watch the entire room.

"Before we continue," Damian said, "Let me make you another promise."

Patrick stared at him.

"I promise never to lie to you. I'm not going ask that you do the same in return, but I would appreciate it if you could avoid lying to me."

"Why would you do that?" he asked, barely getting the words out of his mouth. Considering the kind of person his uncle was, the danger he was putting himself in right now was enormous.

"Because, I'd like you to trust me. You said you never would, and I would like to change that. You can ask me any questions, and the worst you will get is 'it's not my place to answer this'."

Patrick put his head in his hands. Did he want this? Did he want to know that guy, his uncle, that well? He found that he did. He wanted to know why he did what he did. He opened his mouth, but his uncle raised a hand.

"One other detail. I will not sugar coat my answers. Some of the questions you will ask will give you ugly answers. I don't say that so you won't ask them. I say it so you will be prepared for it."

Patrick nodded.

"What did you do to Adam? Ever since the camping trip you two went on, he looks at you with admiration and fear. He was always cautious around you before that, everyone in the family is, but now he's actually afraid of you."

"It's not my place to answer that, Patrick. You'll have to ask him."

"I have. He won't tell me. Neither will Aaron."

"Then I'm sorry, you won't be able to find out."

"Right, you don't boast."

Damian smiled. "That's correct."

"Alright, then why did you do it? I know it was to fix something you saw as wrong with them, a limitation of some sort. But there had to be another way to do it, one that wouldn't leave them terrified of you."

"You're right, there are other ways, I can think of six I could have used with Adam, and over ten to fifteen years, he would have gotten over it. Adam didn't have that kind of time to waste. I am efficient, Patrick, brutally so. I knew that I could get him to over come it in a period of seven days. The price to pay was some of the affection he felt for me. That was fine."

He took a sip of his coffee.

"Here's another reason I chose that method, a more selfish one. As you've stated, I manipulate people, I find their buttons and I push them. When I do that, I feel a thrill. I feel alive. It's basically the only time I feel anything close to what the rest of the world feels. I did it the way I did, because it let me feel alive."

"Aren't you ashamed of using him that way?" Patrick was appalled.

"No. For me to feel shame, I would have to be able to empathize with Adam. To imagine the emotional pain he felt while I forced him in the position I did. I am incapable of that. I can see it on his face, I knew he was in pain, but I didn't care. It isn't that I didn't care because I was getting something out of it. No, I simply didn't care."

Patrick swallowed. He forced the disgust aside. His uncle was a sociopath. He had a problem. It wasn't his fault, ultimately, and instead of becoming a monster, he had found a constructive way to use it. Patrick wished that reasoning helped more than it did.

"If that's the only time you really feel alive, why aren't you doing it more? Shouldn't it be like a drug, a high you keep chasing?"

"I am very self controlled. A man with my condition can't afford to lose control. That's how most sociopaths end getting caught for the horrible crimes they commit. Do I want to feel alive more? Yes. But I can't afford to. I need to pick the people I will let loose on very carefully, not only so I won't get caught, but so I am certain they deserve it."

Patrick had to think about what Damian said. There was more to it than visible at first glance. Patrick was sure there was a level of test in there. Damian was playing a game with him.

Not get caught.

"You've done this outside of our family."

"I have."

"So are you like Dexter?"

"Who's that?"

"He's a character on an old TV show. He's a serial killer who only goes after other killers."

"No. For one thing, I'm not a killer. I do my best to avoid killing. Also I don't target killers. I target bad people."

"How do you know if someone is a bad person?"

Damian sipped his coffee. "Will you be satisfied with a simplified answer, or do you want the complete one?"

"Simple," Patrick answered, after thinking about it for a moment.

"At it's simplest, I define 'bad people', as anyone whose conscious actions lead to hurting other people, or worsening the situation others live in."

"That's a lot of people."

"It is."

"So I guess you don't lack of opportunity to feel alive."

"You would be wrong. I can't simply make a criminal disappear, do my thing, and throw him back on the street. Someone like that would have nothing to lose by going to the authority, that they have proof or not. I need to pick my targets very carefully. You are correct, there are a lot of bad people out there, but not that many who could be forced to remain silent after what they go through."

Patrick held his cup in an attempt to keep his hands from shaking. If anyone else was in front of him right now, he wouldn't believe a word he was hearing.

"What do they go through? What do you do to them? Are trying to fix them too?"

"No. They aren't family. I don't need to look after them. As for what I do to them." Damian smiled, it wasn't wry or vicious. It's was wistful?

Patrick immediately looked at Damian's eyes. They were completely gray, no trace of blue in them. He was remembering something, what he had done to them? What it was like to feel alive? Was that the code? The more blue, the less alive? No that couldn't be right. He'd said that he only felt truly alive when he was manipulating someone. But he'd seen hims having sex, and those eyes had been mostly gray. But when they were blue, they did seem cold.

Except, he had to remember, his uncle was extraordinarily controlled. He had demonstrated his ability to control his orgasm, the morning after the orgy, by, without ever touching himself, getting hard, and then, within a minute, cumming. Could he be controlling his eyes changing color? What would be the point? To trick him? Again, what's the point? If he wanted to gain his trust, he wouldn't accomplish that with tricks.

"As for what I actually do to them," Damian repeated. Patrick had no idea how long they had both been with their own thoughts. "To use the vernacular, I fuck them up. I get inside their heads, I put them through the worse emotional trauma they can imagine, actually, it's worse than they can imagine. I break their mind. As you can probably imagine, it ends with us having sex."

"Willingly?" Patrick asked, after a moment of hesitation.

Damian thought. "That would depend on your definition of willing. They are certainly eager for it, but they wouldn't be considered in their right mind by that point."

"You rape them," Patrick stated. He didn't feel anything about that revelation. He didn't have to tell himself they were bad people, that they deserved it, not that anyone deserved to be treated that way. He'd felt so many things in so short a time he thought his emotions had just shutdown.

"What happens afterward?"

"After a time, most snap back to their right mind. They

accuse me, threaten me with going to the cops. That generally only last until I point out they have no proof, and I show them video of them begging to be fucked. People in their position can't really afford the scandal those recordings will cause. They go back to their lives, traumatized, and try to find ways to deal with what I did to them."

"You said 'most of them' snap back."

"Yes, a few don't come back, or not in a reasonable time frame. Those I relocate to a very good asylum, where they take good care of them, and do their best to cure them."

That was said with the same level of emotion as if he'd stated a cut of meat needed to go to the freezer. Patrick put his head in his hand.

"Holy Mary, mother of Jesus fucking God." He'd been wrong his emotions weren't shutdown. He had trouble breathing. His uncle could send men to the asylum with the same level of care Patrick would slice bread. Okay, he had to control himself.

"I'm sorry for distressing you," Damian said.

Patrick looked at him, hate in his eyes. "You're not," he growled.

"Do you prefer that I dispense with the social niceties?"

The question brought Patrick's emotional turmoil to a stop. His uncle was acting normal, like he cared. He was forcing himself to be his uncle. Patrick knew he had to put effort into that, it didn't come naturally to him.

"No. I don't think I could deal with the 'true' you." It didn't matter why his uncle did it. The fact that he tried was comforting to Patrick. "And I'm sorry for growling at you. I thought I could handle this better than I am."

"You are learning some ugly truths, things that don't mesh well with your beliefs. Turmoil is normal. Do you want to stop? Take time to digest what you've learn?"

"No. If we end this now, you're never going to see me again. I will spend the rest of my life working very hard at avoiding you. I'm that scared of you right now."

"Thank you. For your honesty," Damian added, at Patrick's look of horror.

Patrick was about to say something.

"Patrick?" someone said behind him. The voice was familiar.

Patrick forced his face into a neutral mask, and looked over his shoulder. A brown rat was walking toward them

"It is you, man, it's been a long time."

Patrick put a smile, he didn't feel, on his face. "Rich, how are you doing?"

"I'm doing great. Man I'm so thankful you put me in contact with that company, the work I'm doing now is amazing."

"I'm glad to hear that."

"Ah, man, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt, I was just so surprised to realize it was you, I just had to come and say thank you."

"It's alright. This is my Uncle, Damian." He introduced him, because it felt like the thing to do.

Damian extended a hand. "Richard, is it? It's pleasure to meet you."

"Same here, man. I'll leave you two to your coffees, thanks again Patrick." Richard ran to the counter, grabbed his to go cup and left.

Patrick took a while longer to work through what had just happened. "You planned this," he said. There was no anger behind his words, not even surprise. This was how his uncle worked, how he thought. Nothing ever happened around him he hadn't planned.

"Yes. Richard stops here every day, around this time, for a cup, before going back to his desk. I thought it would be good for him to express his gratitude, and for you to see that he's doing well."

"How do you know his schedule?"

"I have him followed."

Patrick stared at his uncle.

"I have anyone who hasn't proven himself, or herself, to me watched."

"And he hasn't proven himself?"

"No yet. His test will come in three months."

"How?"

Damian took a moment to reply. "In three months, Richard will come in possession of information that could be damaging to my company, nothing illegal, but something my competitors would be able to use to undermine some of my work. Once he has it. Multiple scenarios are possible. The best, for him, is that he brings what he found to his superior, and explains the weakness in the software that allowed him to access it.

"Another scenario, is that he goes looking for someone willing to pay for the information. Richard is a bright and capable man. I'm certain that he could get a very good price for it. If he does that, something will happen just before the exchange is to occur. That incident will result in the information being destroyed, but not because of Richard, he won't get the money, but his client also won't blame him for that happened.

"If he does neither of those things, if, for some reason, he simply holds on to the information, in another three month, he will be contacted by someone looking to undermine my company. He will have found his name through his old contacts, when he did less legal work. Richard will be informed that he would be paid a great some of money for anything that would help that person. In this scenario, only two endings are possible. Richard advises his supervisor that someone is trying to bribe him. Give the information to the supervisor, and explains why he waited so long before handing it in, or he takes the money and hands over the information.

"By that point, both actions will lead to the same result."



Patrick forced himself to stay calm. "What result?"

"Richard will never advance. He will never receive any promotions. He will stagnate in a position that allows him to have a good life, but he will never be given the opportunity to push himself."

"You're not going to fire him?"

"No. I don't see a point in doing that, although it's entirely possible he'll grow disenchanted with the position, and leave the company, maybe even go back to his previous work."

Patrick closed his eyes. He couldn't let that happen. He couldn't let Rich go back to shady deals, not after he had found a good job. They weren't really friends, but Rich had helped him out before. He'd have to find a way to let him know what was going to happen.

"Please don't." Damian said.

"Don't what?" Patrick replied, trying really hard to be nonchalant.

Damian smiled at him, a knowing smile. "I appreciate the effort, but I have been observing people since I was two and a half years old. I know you are trying to think of a way to warn Richard of what I intend to do."

Patrick sighed. "What would you do, if I did?"

"I would have to create a new scenario, which would be an annoyance, since I already have a perfectly good one in place."

"Damian, uncle. You can't do that to him. He's great with computers and programs. You can't condemn him to rot in a bottom rung job just because he isn't perfect."

"If he gets promoted, that will give him access to increasingly more damaging information. I can't afford to do that if he's untrustworthy."

"Please uncle. Don't do this. Please, pro . . ." He stopped himself. He couldn't do that, his uncle had already made him two promises. No, three, he'd promised he'd be safe, on that first meeting. He looked down at his still full cup, and sighed in defeat.

"How about this?" Damian said. "Find me an alternative."

"How am I suppose to do that? I don't run your company, I don't know what you've got access to."

"Use your imagination. Give me your ideas, and I'll tell you if it can be done."

Patrick thought about it. He needed to keep Richard employed and happy, that meant computers, programing, but no sensitive information. Well, his uncle had said to imagine.

"I'd find a programing company, something not related to my main business, like a place that makes apps, or games, well, something more suited to Richard. That way, my secrets are safe. And he gets to go fulfilling work."

Damian nodded. "I can make that happen."

That had been too damn quick. His uncle hadn't even had to think about it. Now Patrick was certain this had been a test of

some sort. Not that his Uncle had lied at any point, but he had already thought about this conclusion to Richard's test, and he hadn't told Patrick.

His uncle wouldn't lie to him. It didn't mean he would volunteer the whole truth

"Alright, I will make you a deal."

There is was. This was where his uncle was going to trap him.

"You give me your word that you will not tell Richard what I have planned, and I promise that I will see to it that he is transferred to a company where he will thrive, without being a threat to me."

"That's it?"

"Isn't this satisfactory?"

He just wanted him to keep out of the test? He wasn't going to use this to force him into something he wouldn't have agreed to otherwise? Was his uncle really trying to gain his trust? There had to be more to this.

"Alright. I promise that I won't tell Richard what you have planned." He paused, and then added. "I also promise that I won't contact anyone, so they can pass along the information to Richard."

Damian smiled at him. And now Patrick was certain, this had been a test. "I promise that if Richard fails my test, he will be transferred to a company where he will be given meaningful and fulfilling work."

"Thank you, uncle."

"No, Patrick, thank you."

"For what?"

"For measuring up to my expectations."

What did he mean by that?

"Do you want another coffee?"

Patrick looked at his full cup. "No. I'll drink this."

"It has to be cold by now."

Patrick sipped it. "It is, but I ordered it, I'll drink it."

His uncle went to get himself another coffee, and Patrick used the time to think. He'd lived up to his expectation, whatever that meant, but why did his uncle have expectations of him? It did confirm that this was a test of some sort. But what was it for?

His uncle sat down. "What next?"

"Your eyes, do you control how they change color?"

"Not entirely. I can force the mental state that cause specific hue, but it's more work than it's worth." He smiled. "It took me years to even realize they changed colors. Uncle Byron would infuriate me by pointing out when I was being calculating, when I was in the moment. As you can imagine, someone like me doesn't do infuriated very well. But Byron has dealt with monsters like me, so while I scared him, he wouldn't

let that control him."

"What did he do?"

"He was a TV producer. His most successful series was 'Predators'. It ran for fifteen years."

"I've heard of it."

"Eventually, I did get him to tell me how he did it. That when I found out."

"How did you do that?"

"I broke down. I cried, and I begged him to tell."

"Wait. You don't 'break down'."

Damian smiled at him. "I know. Here's something to remember. The biggest advantage someone like me has, over someone like you, is that you want me to be normal. You want me to stick to the social niceties, because that makes me seem normal. So, when I do something so utterly normal, like break down from hurt feelings because you won't tell me what I want to know. You immediately forget I'm a sociopath and you provide me comfort."

"That's scary."

"Not for me."

Patrick forced himself to smile. "You do realize that you saying that, makes it even scarier, right?"

"I do."

Patrick's smile died.

"You expected something flippant, right?"

Patrick nodded.

"Why?"

Patrick sighed. "Because that would have been the normal thing to do."

"You know I'm not normal, this conversation has reinforced the point, multiple time, and yet . . ."

"I still want you to act in a normal way. I don't question it when you act that way. It's more comforting, A part of me doesn't want to have to acknowledge that you aren't normal."

Damian nodded.

Patrick forced himself to drink a long swallow of coffee. Cold, it really was horrible. If he'd been home he would have thrown it in the sink and brewed himself another cup, but now it was a matter of pride for him to finish it.

The absurdity hit him as soon as he finished the thought. He laughed.

Damian was staring at him. "I don't think I said anything funny," he said, but there was uncertainty in his voice.

Patrick shook his head. "It's just the ridiculousness of what I just did. I forced myself to drink cold coffee because I'm worried of what you'll think if I waste it. Only you don't give a damn if I drink it or not. It doesn't matter to you at all, does it?" Patrick pushed the cup away.

"No, it doesn't. Do you want another one?"

Patrick shook his head. "No, I'm good. Do we seem as

ridiculous to you as I feel right now?"

"Yes. A lot of the things you do look ridiculous to me. Part of a complex social structure that feels like a waste of time. Many time I think this whole world would be much better if everyone was like me."

"Not always?"

"No. If everyone was like me, I'd have no one to manipulate. Also, no one can be as self controlled as me, someone would slip and then things would be very bad."

"That reminds me." The question surfaced, and he immediately knew it was a bad idea to ask it. He wasn't going to like the answer, but he couldn't stop himself. "Earlier, you said you prefer not to kill. That implies you have. Have you?"

"I have."

Patrick's heart sped up before Damian gave the answer. He knew what the answer was going to be. His uncle didn't waste words, he didn't say anything he didn't mean. He'd said it that way because he wanted Patrick to pickup on it.

He really shouldn't ask more about this.

"How many?"

"Four."

Patrick swallowed. His uncle had killed four. He grabbed the sides of the table to keep himself from bolting. Part of him realized his uncle wasn't justifying anything. Which was good. He was sure that it would just have made the situation worse.

Leave this be.

"Why?"

"Three I consider accidents. I was young, I didn't understand myself very well, I didn't understand other people either. I pushed too far, and they died. The fourth was in retaliation for someone trying to have me assassinated."

Patrick looked up. Someone had tried to kill his uncle? "Why did they do that?"

Damian looked at Patrick, and his eyes became bluer for a moment. "I won't give you the details, Patrick, unless you ask for them. You are barely holding on right now. I do not want to cause you anymore distress."

Patrick nodded.

"They didn't like some of the things I was doing. I was helping a group of people they wanted to see hurt."

"You killed the assassin?"

"No. I subdued him, and sent him packing. I tracked the man who had given the order."

"What did you do to him?" Patrick's voice was barely audible.

Damian looked pained. "Are you sure you want to know?"

Patrick nodded.

"I'm not giving you the details. Patrick, please do not ask for them. If you force me to tell them to you, you will never forgive yourself. Please trust me on this. What I will tell you

is already more than you should know. Are you certain you want to know?"

"Please tell me."

Damian's eyes were the pale blue of ice. "I got inside his head. I dug out his deepest fears, and used them to crush his hopes. I broke him so utterly that in the end, he was begging me to let him take his own life. I only let him once I got every ounce of satisfaction out of him." Some of the blue faded. "The coroner called it a suicide, but I killed him, I put him in the mental state where that seemed like the only option he had left."

Patrick closed his eyes. He couldn't look at him. "Why am I here, uncle? Why are we having this discussion?"

"Because I want you to be the heir to my company."

Patrick thought he might throw up. This was too much. He stood and tried to leave the table. Damian caught his arm.

"I have to go to the bathroom," Patrick said. "I'll be back, I promise, but I need . . ." He wasn't sure what he needed right now, other than some distance.

His uncle wasn't looking at him, he kept his gaze straight before him. "Patrick, am I gaining your trust?" the voice was stained.

"Can I answer when I come back? I don't know how I feel right now." Damian let him go, and Patrick headed to the bathroom at a fast walk.

He splashed water on his face, multiple times, while trying to get his emotions under control. His uncle was a killer. There was no way around that. He'd killed, and he might kill again. Fuck. He shouldn't have to know something like that, but he'd asked. He couldn't blame his uncle. He had asked the question. Sure the clue had been put there, but he didn't have to ask. He could have ignored it.

He felt dirty.

Could he ever claim his soul was safe now? If he didn't do something about what he knew. Three 'accidents', the tone had made it clear that they weren't really accidents, whatever had happened. Was the last one justifiable homicide? Self defense?

And he was expecting him to take over his company? That was insane. Patrick looked at himself in the mirror, as a giraffe entered the bathroom. What was he getting himself into?

"Buddy, you okay?" the giraffe asked, looking over his shoulder, while pissing. "What's that guy doing to you that sent you fleeing in here?"

Patrick said what he said, just to give a reply, not actually thinking about it. "It's a job interview." And the realization hit him. It was as clear as a glass of vodka. That's what it was.

"Fuck man." The giraffe said, breaking Patrick's chain of thought. He zipped himself up and came to the sink next to his. "If a guy got me to run off, during an interview, I wouldn't

hire him. Know what I mean?" Patrick stared at him, while he washed his hands. The guy left, and Patrick kept on staring at the empty spot. His emotions were muted, in the back of his head, he was too busy thinking to pay attention to them.

What the guy said made him realize something else. Exactly just who was interviewing whom? Damian was interviewing him, that was for sure, that as why all the little tests, but Damian was letting himself be interviewed too. The extreme honesty, and Patrick was sure now that Damian was being honest.

Why was he doing that?

'I want to earn your trust.'

But why did he want that?

'I want you to be the heir to my company.'

But why him, damn it. Why would he ever want him over his other nephews. Patrick washed his face again. His hands were steady now. The fear, the worries, all that was at the back of his mind. He'd have to deal with it at some point, but for now he had questions to ask.

He sat back down, and saw he had a hot coffee. "Thanks," he said, and took a long swallow.

"I thought you might need something after this."

Patrick nodded. When hot, this was good stuff. "First off, Yes, I am starting to trust you."

"Thank you. That means a lot to me."

"Now, I need to know something. Why me? You have seven nephews you've known all their lives, you hardly know anything about me."

Damian smiled.

"You know everything about me, don't you?"

"I won't claim to know everything, but yes, I have researched you. Let me start answering the 'why you' question by asking you one of my own. How are you feeling right now?"

"I'm okay, why?"

"You went to the bathroom, a hair's breath away from, either passing out from fright, or running off, as fast and as far as you could. Now you're back, composed."

"That's all there. It's just to the side for the moment. I'll deal with it later. I have to keep a clear head on this."

Damian nodded. "Your capability to control your emotions, is one of the reasons why I want you. Also, you are smart. Don't sell yourself short. You aren't to my level, but you are smart. Too smart to work at a scrap yard, or bouncing at a bar." He raised a hand. "I'm not passing judgment, I'm simply stating that you can do much better. Also, I am not guessing, at how smart you are. I dug up an IQ test you took in eleventh grade. It was high."

"How high?" Patrick asked. He didn't remember taking such test, let alone ever seeing the results.

"I won't tell you. You can dig it out yourself."

"I thought you weren't going to lie to me?" Patrick said,

amused.

"I am not lying," Damian replied, "I won't tell you."

Patrick could swear his uncle was also amused.

"The third reason, is that you care about people. You were ready to deck me, when you saw the state Adam was in on his return. You didn't care what the consequences were, If your fathers hadn't held you back, you would have tried to punch me.

"You fought for Richard, someone you hardly know. You owe him, I believe is the reason you're about to give me. Except that if you didn't care, it wouldn't matter if you owed him or not.

"You threatened me over your mother. Not because you didn't want me to manipulate you, but because you didn't want her put at risk. You care, Patrick, it's part of who you are."

Patrick thought about it. Part of him wanted to deny all of it. He wasn't that smart, he hadn't even finished 11th grade. If he was so controlled, why did he still loose his temper at times. He couldn't argue about caring, he did care about his friends and family.

"You realize that the way you're describing me, sounds a lot like how you act."

"That is correct, I happen to believe that it's a good basis for what I intend." He sipped his coffee. "Now, that I've explained why I am choosing you, let me explain why I don't think any of my other nephews would work out.

"Aaron would never agree to this, simply on principle. If it comes from me, he wants nothing to do with it. The only reason he has sex with me, is because we're family. And in two months, that won't matter, he'll start his training."

"What training?"

"He joined the army. He probably won't tell anyone until much closer to his departure. He doesn't want to take a chance anyone will convince him to stay. He is using that as an excuse to go as far away from me as possible, without actually feeling like he's running away."

"How about Arthur, he's pretty smart."

"He is, but he's aiming to become a geneticist. He wants to make sure no one ever has to grow up with his condition, if they don't want to. I could offer him the company, but the scope of what I intend is too vast for what he wants.

"Aiden, will become a composer, as you've probably guessed by now."

"That doesn't bother you?"

"No, he's talented, he loves music. If he hits hard times, I own two television station, and a movie studios, I can make sure they employ him."

"You own a movie studio?"

"Of course. How else can I hope to influence public opinion?"

Patrick chuckles. "Alexander is going to become a cop, so

that takes him out of the running. Adam is into cars. Anakin is going to be a mortician, although, being at the head of a company like yours would certainly help him with his eccentricity, all that money to make sure no one finds out."

"It's much simpler for him to just work with the corpses. So long as he isn't caught in the act, no one will ever find out."

"That leave Albert."

"Art conservation and restoration."

"Really? I thought he'd head for a museum."

"That's where they do conservation and restoration."

"I didn't know that."

"As you can see, that's all of them. Some have the qualifications, but none of them would be interested in what I'm doing."

"But you think I am."

"Patrick, you are almost twenty-one, and you never even once considered you'd get out of here. Not even after finding out your fathers were rich. You never even asked them to pay for you to go back to school. I don't know if you are interested in what I'm offering, but I hope you are. You are capable of much more than staying here, bouncing at a bar."

Patrick nodded. "I need to know something. This is probably the last question, after that I'll give you my answer. How do you do it? How do you cope with the fear you see in everyone's eyes? I would have gone insane way before now."

Damian didn't answer immediately, he finished his coffee. "I cope, by knowing what I am. I'm a monster, Patrick, I know that, I accept it. I'm a well socialized monster, but a monster none the less. I know that I will be feared by those who know me, no matter how many times I help them, because I am someone to fear. None of you can know when I'll decide that a personality trait is holding you back. My intentions are good, but my methods are brutal, terrifying even. No one wants to be on the receiving ends of them, and rightly so."

"One of the things my father made sure to do, when he made me promise not to lie to him, was to also make me promise not to lie to myself. Being a monster isn't that bad, Patrick. Being a monster who thinks he's a person, that would be horrible."

Patrick nodded. "That's a lot deeper than I expected. As for my answer, I accept. I'll be the heir to your company. I guess that means I'm going to be following you around from now on?"

"No." Damian pulled out a card, and handed it to Patrick. It read 'Royal Security' and had an address under it. "This is where you will start working, come Monday."

"Doing security work? Why?"

"Because, a man in my position, and yours, at some point, needs to be able to defend himself, more than you are already capable of. You will be the victim of attacks, just because of



the position you will occupy. People will hate you, because you are more powerful than them, richer than them, get laid more often. Take your pick. You will be attacked."

"Isn't that what bodyguards are for?"

"I can't trust my safety to anyone who can be bought. And no matter the measures I put in place to make sure everyone has been vetted, everyone has a lever, which can be pulled and make you do anything, even betray your employer.

"As part of your work there, you will be trained by the best hand to hand fighter they have, Tomas Bracha, look for him when you get there, he'll be expecting you."

Damian handed Patrick a pen, and he wrote the name on the back of the card.

"I expect that you won't have to be there for more than four years. After that you'll be going to business school. You'll need to know how to run a business. After that political science. You might be surprise how much of my work consist of playing politics."

"How am I going to live during all that? There's no way I can make enough in four years at the security company, to pay for all that. Let alone living arrangements."

Damian stared at him, and then smiled. He leaned in.

"Patrick, you're an Orr. Believe it or not, money isn't going to be problem."