

## Chapter 23

Denton looked out the side while they drove toward the address for the Orr's house. They passed a building that had obviously been a church before, but was now a dance club. They were taking the long way there because Denton wanted to get a feel for the city, and at this point, he didn't get any bad vibes from it.

He'd seen a few dealers, but no more than he'd expect for the economic level of the neighborhood they were in. A few arguments, and a fight. Again, nothing unusual.

The strangest thing he saw was the number of same sex couples walking in the streets, hand in hand, or kissing. As best as he could tell, the majority of people they saw were gay.

"You know," he said, "I knew San Francisco was the gay capital in the US, but somehow I wasn't expecting to see so many couples."

"There's something to be said about being the first city to allow it," Stefan commented, making a fist and opening it again.

"How's your hand?" Martin, in the back, asked.

"It's fine, the skin just feels a little tight." They'd stopped at a clinic on the way to the hotel, where a doctor cleaned and rebandaged the wound. Once they were settled into their suite, Fred used the healing sigil on him. Denton had watched him do it, and he'd been practicing it.

"I have to say this is looking like a normal city," Stefan said.

"Yeah," Denton agreed, "I'm not seeing any signs that people are afraid. If anything, they seem to be more at peace than in Denver."

"So, no mob enforcement?" Martin asked.

"Well, not in the traditional sense, that's certain. If they can influence people, then it's possible they have a different way to go about it."

"Or maybe they're just benevolent?" Stefan offered, glancing at Denton.

"Maybe," he replied doubtfully.

"Is the armband working?" the cougar asked.

"As best as I can tell," Denton replied, rubbing his bicep. "at least I'm not sensing anyone watching me." Martin had pulled the leather arm band from the bag his father had prepared for them. It had the shielding sigil on it, in dried blood. There was a clear coating over it to protect it. Martin had put it on Denton's arm and instructed him to put some energy in it. Oscar confirmed it was working.

It was only the three of them in the car. The other had wanted to come, but Martin had stopped them. He didn't want this to look like an assault, they were going to talk, nothing more.

Martin was there because as the Denver elder's son, he could speak for his father if needed. Denton because of his investigative background. And Stefan because he could warn them if trouble was coming their way.

The house at the address Frank had given them was large, and sat at the top of a hill. Denton was starting to think that everyone with connection to this God was rich. He didn't care for the way it looked, it seemed to be made from multiple long boxes stacked together, on top of each other randomly.

Stefan stopped the car in front of what they thought was the entrance. at least the driveway seemed to end here, and there was a door. "Seems a bit pretentious," he commented, getting out.

"Well, this is San Francisco," Martin said. "If nothing else, they like to do things on the grand side."

"And ugly," Denton added.

They headed for the door. Which opened as they stepped up to it. A tiger was standing in the doorway, wearing only sweat pants and a wife beater. Denton noted the long scar through the orange and black fur on his right arm. It looked to have been made by a knife, and he wondered how he'd gotten it.

The tiger studied them for a moment. "They're waiting for you," he finally said, turning and walking into the house.

They followed him down a long hallway, up stairs, along another hallways, where they walked by what looked like a living room with a group of young teens from various species having sex. Denton forced himself to keep walking, and not try to determine their age. Right now he couldn't afford to raise a stink about under age sex.

Finally they entered a large room, with a desk and two tigers seated behind of. For a moment Denton's eyes had trouble focusing, his brain tried to tell them there was only one tiger there, not two. When he finally got his eyes to behave, there were indeed two tigers, seated close together. It took him a moment to understand why he'd had this reaction, they were identical, as far as he could tell, every black stripes on their arms, every strand of orange fur were the same. They had the same rich honey colored eyes, the same marking on their faces.

The one of the left had a chuckle at his reaction.

Denton glanced at his friends and saw they were having the same trouble.

on each side of the desk stood another tiger. The one on the left was their guide, and they both looked to be no older than twenty, probably their sons, although the two seated looked a little young, mid thirties maybe.

"I hope you had a good night's rest." The one on the right said.

"I'm glad to see your hand is doing better," the other one said.

"Err, thanks," Stefan said.

"Did you enjoy the drive through our city? I hope everything was to your satisfaction."

"It was fine," Martin replied. "I'm..."

"Martin Jefferson Cormoran, we know. You're Stefan Brukammer, and Denton Stenton, or do you prefer Brislow?"

"Brislow," Denton confirmed. "And you are?"

"Donald and Daniel Orr," the one of the left said.

"Which one is which?" Martin asked.

"You can't tell us apart, so that's irrelevant, don't you think?" he answered.

"Now," the other said, "to what do we owe the immense pleasure of a visit from the Society?"

Martin nodded to Denton, this was his show.

"Are you aware that someone from your family tried to kill me a few days ago?"

The two tigers looked at each other, and then at Denton, the surprise evident on their face. The two younger ones exchange a look too, but more curiosity.

"How do you know he was from our family?"

"There aren't any tiger families in the Society."

"There are other factions, he might have been from one of them."

"He was after my power," Denton said, playing a hunch. "The other factions couldn't use it since they follow different Gods. You follow the same as us."

They thought about it for a moment.

"Aaron, where are your brothers?" the one of the left asked.

Aaron was on their right, as tall as the other one, and muscular, but better defined. He had proper combat training, Denton guessed. "Arthur's in the living room, worshipping. Adam is in the garage, fixing up one of his cars. Aiden was at his recording studio this morning. Albert is at the museum. Anakin at his clinic. Alexander is having a talk with the police commissioner, as you told him to."

"Have any of them left the city over the last few days?" the other asked.

"Aiden flew to Seattle two days ago to meet with a prospective new singer. He came back that same evening. No one else left the city."

"There, no one left."

"You have brothers," Denton stated.

The left one sighed. "Dietrich manages his body builders, he has too much to do to travel, and Dominic deals with his

house of worship, I don't think he's left the place in the last two month."

Denton frowned. "So no other family member? No tiger with blue eyes, probably around my age?"

The two got a worried look on their faces. They looked at one another, the one of the right shook his head. The other's ear tilted forward, and his brother canted his head, then shrugged.

"You can't have seen him."

"I did. Who is he?"

"Damian, except he's dead."

"Anakin?" their guide asked.

"He wouldn't dare." the one on the left replied.

"Are you certain he's dead?"

The exchanged a look. "Dad said he was. It took him and his brothers to take him down."

"When was that?"

"Twenty years or so?"

"Do you know why they had to take him down?"

"They just told us he was out of control, that he was putting us all in danger."

Twenty years ago was around the time his family had been wiped out. If this Damian had done that, it would certainly qualify as being out of control, and them stopping him would explain why nothing more had happened afterward.

"So you weren't there. All you have is your father's word that he's dead."

"Yes."

"Is he still alive?"

They nodded.

"Then I'd like to have a talk with him."

They looked at each other.

"I don't see why not. Arnold, go tell Adam to get ready to drive you and two of our guest to your grandfather's place."

Their guide, Arnold, left.

"Dad, this isn't a good idea. Adam shouldn't be the one going with them."

"Be quiet, Aaron."

"Now, which one of you will grace us with his presence?"

"I don't see why one of us needs to stay behind," Martin said."

"Really? Two of our sons will be escorting you to our dear father's home, where the three of you might overpower them and do who knows what to them."

"We're not here to cause trouble," Denton said.

"Maybe not, but you seem to think our dead brother has tried to kill you. What if our father's answers don't please

you? What if you decide you want vengeance? No, I don't think we can risk it."

"By having one of you stay here," the other continued, "it evens out the odds, two of you, two of our sons. And if you do something to them, we have someone here we can take out our anger on."

"We're not going to do anything," Denton repeated.

"They you have nothing to worry about."

"You guys go," Stefan said.

"No," Martin stated, "We're not leaving anyone here on their own."

"And you can't send Denton on his own," the collie insisted. "You certainly can't be the one who stays here, and neither can he. So it has to be me."

Martin glared at the tigers, who didn't seem impressed. "Fine. But I swear on the God's balls, if you hurt him in any way, I will make you pay."

"You have nothing to fear. We won't do anything to your fucktoy."

"He's my friend."

"Really?" that seemed to surprise the three of them. "Still we won't hurt him, we promise."

Arnold returned. "The Cadillac's ready."

"Good. Aaron, why don't you escort mister Brukammer to the lounge. we'll be there shortly." Stefan gave Martin and Denton a nod of comfort before following the tiger.