

Chapter 39

Denton wasn't surprise to see light coming out of the cave's mouth and in the tunnel. He had everyone stay behind as he cautiously proceeded to the entrance. He checked each side to make sure no one was hiding there, then looked around the room, keeping his gun at the ready.

He was surprised the light came from four flood lamps setup around the cave. A quick glance didn't reveal anything so he looked around again. The tiger's body was suspended in the middle pf the room, a few feet off the ground, without anything holding it up. The four lamps lit the room... and nothing else.

He frowned. "It's clear."

"It is?" Martin said, entering the cave. "I'd have expected the rest to be here. We're missing three of them, right?"

"Maybe more. We don't have any way to know how many people Damian has under his control."

"We can deal with them after this. Once Damian is out of the picture, they should lose their powers, right?"

"I really hope so."

Denton looked around the room again. Maximilian studied the walls for a moment then went to the tiger.

Bruce was already there. rubbing his nose. "There's a solid field around him, be careful."

"I didn't think that would be here too." Denton joined them. "I thought it was just something in the other world. You know there should be a name for that place. I can't keep calling it the 'other world'."

"Most people who can step out of their bodies call it the astral plane."

Denton glared at Maximilian. "You could have mentioned something before."

Maximilian just shrugged, running a hand along the invisible wall.

"Fred, you okay?"

Denton turned to watch Frank steadying his brother. Fred was shuddering, and stumbling.

"Maybe the bear's claws were poisoned?" Oscar suggested.

Fred stood still, then took a deep breath. "Oh yeah, this is a nice body." He backhanded Frank and turned blue eyes on Denton. "We have some unfinished business you and I."

"What's going on Fred?" Maximilian asked.

"Guys!" Colby yelled. "Trouble!"

Three guys were blocking the entrance, all of them armed.

"Take cover!" Denton yelled, and immediately felt absurd. There was nothing to take cover behind of.

"Don't shoot the cheetah, he's mine!" Fred roared.

The room echoed with gunshots. Denton stayed low to the

ground. Fred had blue eyes now?

"What's wrong with Fred?" Martin asked.

"It's Damian, he's controlling him." Denton kept Damian's body between them, forcing Fred to go around the invisible field. "Can you keep him busy?"

"What?"

"I'm going to try to get out of my body and see if I can something from there, in the astral plane."

"Dent, he's a good forty pound heavier than me, and it isn't fat."

Denton sat down. "Shoot him."

Martin stared at him.

"In the leg or something, just keep him off me. If I can get out I should be able to help from there. I can touch Damian directly." He closed his eyes to focus and tried to wrench himself out of his body.

Denton flew out and was across the cave before he stopped himself. That had been a lot easier than before. He turned to see Damian inside Fred slashing at Martin, who was doing his best to stay out of claws reach. All the fighting was eerie to watch in the complete silence of the astral plane.

He ran at Damian and tackled him. They both fell to the ground and rolled. Denton was up and in a fighting stance.

Damian stood. "You don't get to ruin my fun this easily."

"I thought you wanted to kill me. Well? What are you waiting for?"

"Oh, I'll kill you." He waved a hand and Denton went flying, to hit the wall. "But I'm going to have myself some fun hurting your friends first."

Denton watched Damian go to Fred, who was looking around confused. The tiger touched a bright line on the lion's arm and then was inside him. Then Fred's attention was back on Martin.

The force holding Denton in place weakened enough for him to break out of it. That's how he'd possessed Fred. He had to get back in his body.

And he was back in there. he looked up and rolled out of the way as Frank jumped on Fred and they landed too close for his comfort. "Martin!"

The cougar looked at him.

"Everyone needs to heal their wounds. That's how he gets in, through the exposed blood!"

He looked on the other side of the room. Oscar was down, Colby was fighting a rabbit who seemed to be able to dodge all his blow. Maximilian and Bruce were tangling with a coyote and another bear.

He couldn't just watch. he sat down again and stepped out of his body. He had no idea why it was so easy now, but he

didn't have the time to wonder about it.

He rushed Damian again, but with a gesture he sent Denton flying away. He didn't hit the wall quite as hard this time. He ran at Damian again, and was flung away again.

Denton cursed. He couldn't keep doing that. Damian pushed Frank off him and stood. Martin pointed his gun at him, and Damian hit him with the torrent of his influence.

"You've got to be fucking kidding." His voice, loud in the absolute silence, made him wince. He couldn't be doing that, his body was up there. He hated magic at times. Although...

He reached for Damian's ability, and instead of just getting a sense of it, he could feel it. He pulled on it and Damian's head snapped in his direction.

"What do you think you're doing?"

"I'm stopping you."

Fred wasn't moving while Damian was looking at him. He laughed. "You think you can do anything against me? I'm a God in this place. Fine, so you can block my influence, but I'm still in this body, and you're not going to tackle me out of it again. One's already down." He nodded at Frank. "And I think I'm going to pull this one's spine out of his body."

Martin was just now getting back to his feet, and he still hadn't shaken off Damian's influence. Denton had to stop the tiger, But how could he do it? Even if he somehow managed to affect him in the astral plane, his body was still in that case, where he couldn't reach it. All Damian had to do was to back in it to be safe.

But what if he couldn't, Denton realized. It took him a moment to find it, but he saw the thread that connected Damian's astral body to his physical one. What if that thread was cut, then he'd be trapped here.

He rushed to where the thread came out of the floating body, and hit the invisible wall. Fuck, he'd forgotten about that. He got back up and found the thread again.

He hesitated before cutting it. Damian was inside Fred, would this affect him too? Could he take the risk? Maybe he could find a way to get Damian out of him?

Fred punched Martin, then grabbed him by the neck.

Denton couldn't afford to wait anymore. His hand shone bright as he sliced the thread. It frayed into multiple threads, most of them burning away, but the central one sizzled for a moment then reconnected.

"What the fuck did you just do!" Damian was rushing him.

Denton got out of the way in a room spanning jump. Fred was crumpled to the ground.

"That hurt, didn't it?" He had to keep Damian angry, hopefully that would keep him from remembering what else he

could do in here while Denton tried to figure out why that thread hadn't burned off like the others.

Damian was next to him and punched. "Yes, that hurt! Do you have any idea how long it's been since I've been hurt." He struck over and over.

Denton felt the blows, but there was no real pain behind him. Still he tried to block them, he had no idea what the consequences were going to be.

"I don't know how you did that, but if you think a little sting like that is going to save your friends, you're going to have to do a lot more."

Was that it? Not enough energy?

Denton threw himself at the tiger, surprising him, and wrapped his arms around him. He shifted all his energy to his hand and closed it around the thread. he didn't stop pouring energy in it. If he had to kill himself to stop Damian, then so be it.

Damian screamed in pain and tried to push him off. After a moment Denton didn't have the strength to hold on and just fell to the ground.

Damian glared at him. "You're going to pay for this. I won't just kill your friends now. I'm going to find their families and killed them too, but first, you're going to pay." Damian took a step for him, and staggered.

Denton fought to keep his eyes open, He could just make out the thread burning off toward the body.

"What did you do to me?" Damian asked, bewildered.

Denton would have gloated, if he had the strength. The tiger was starting to fray at the edges.

"No." Damian tried to keep the strands of energy from leaving him. "How is this possible?" He focused, but nothing happened. He looked over his shoulder at his body. "No." He was starting to fade away.

Denton forced his eyes to stay open. He wasn't going to die until he was sure the tiger was completely gone.

Damian seemed lost for a moment, his mouth moved, but sound came out. Fear was clear on his fading face. He turned and ran to his body, but he was stopped by the barrier. he slammed his fist on it, screaming silently until he disappeared.

"Good riddance." Denton's eyes closed.