

A Shock To The System

So you lot are back for more. Well, for this week I'll be speeding things up a bit, going to have a lot of ground to cover so buckle up.

Jeremy never opened PATOMES for months after the encounter with the three predators. In his occasional run in with the bullies and larger carnivores asserting their greater size and power he took his licks stoically. He also took to the self defense classes at the academy with a new passion. The other choices for his physical fitness module no longer held any interest for him, not with the resolve that had formed after his horrible error.

While no one in his family noticed the importance of the marble container they did notice his sudden tendency toward silence. His parents voiced their concern over his change of behavior but when he simply shrugged and replied he was fine there was little for them to act on. After a few months of the same behavior they seemed to accept his change of attitude as part of him growing up. His silence was the only lasting outward sign of Jeremy's change of attitude.

Already showing a tendency of solving puzzles and mentally planning out the steps of anything he did Jeremy became even more calculating. His friends and instructors hardly noticed the change. He had learned the valuable lesson to be careful in everything. He'd resolved to never act so impulsively again.

His seeming rapid growth continued, but it now brought him little joy. With the stain of his actions through PATOMES to color his continued growth it was simply another facet of life he had to deal with. His brothers took his ambivalence even worse than they took his previous excitement. He was soon taller than Ian and rapidly gaining on Sam.

As summer turned to fall Jeremy passed his advancement exams and started his next year of studies, the same year Eric was still in. The situation only lasted a month until his brother passed his own advancement exams. Even then their parents now pressured Eric to do better. His brother in turn made every attempt to take his frustration out on who he considered the source. His taunts slowly escalated until Eric got physical, but that only happened once.

Jeremy's added effort in his self defense classes coupled with his larger size proved to be more than equal to his brother's challenge. He subdued Eric in seconds after his brother picked a fight with him. While satisfied he took little pleasure in seeing his defeated brother slink away from him once he allowed him to stand back up after besting him. Ian had seen the confrontation as well and also had a submissive posture as he stared at his younger yet larger and demonstrably stronger brother.

His brothers must have shared the incident with Sam as well. He too began looking at Jeremy with new respect even though he was still an inch taller. He still had to acknowledge even though he was taller Jeremy outweighed him by a large margin. The extra weight was after an occasionally shirtless summer well known to be all muscle. Neither Ian nor Sam ever repeated Eric's mistake of challenging their younger brother.

A few months after the fight with Eric, Sam had orders from his workplace. He was being transferred to an office in downtown York City. He had been given two months to prepare. The transfer would come with a slight raise in pay to offset the increased cost of living within the city. He would still have to find a

roommate situation, the increase wasn't enough to live by himself anywhere close enough to the downtown location.

Only days after Sam's announcement Jeremy was called into the dean's office at the end of the week. Jeremy'd only seen the dean in passing as he went about his days at school and had never been called to her office before. His parents arrived as he was waiting to be seen and shown into the dean's office without having to wait. He was shocked and started wondering what he'd done wrong. He couldn't think of any incident in any class, or an encounter with another student to justify his parents being called in to a meeting. It was only a wait of a few minutes before he was told by the secretary to go in himself.

The dean was standing behind her desk and his parents were also standing when he came in. He walked over to his parents and apprehensively stood next to his father a second before the dean asked everyone to take a seat.

Once everyone was settled and with a glance at Jeremy's father she locked her fingers together placed her elbows on her desk and settled her head on her fists. "Mister Dawn," she started as her eyes settled on Jeremy "I've just discussed with your parents what were about to share with you. I've also previously discussed this with many of your instructors and trainers. To put it simply, we here at Flack Street Academy have reason to believe you may be becoming a dominant alpha."

Jeremy sat in shock. As she'd begun his heart sank still thinking he was about to be expelled for something. It took a second for the implication of the statement to become clear. When he looked to his parents they were looking back with pride. He had, like everyone seen the occasional dominant. They were rare, appearing at less than one in a million among the population. To think he was going to become a dominant thrilled him.

"Of course, we'll have to schedule the usual test, and until the results can either confirm or negate the possibility we should all conduct ourselves properly. It is our policy to continue as planned until the results and make any necessary adjustments then." She paused and looked between Jeremy and his parents.

"Yes, ma'am." Jeremy replied. His mind was a blur. He'd only fantasized about becoming a dominant alpha. No one, as far as he knew ever really expected to actually have lightning strike them. That had been the main reason for him to keep his initial growth at a slow measured pace. He hadn't been using PATOMES in months, and yet he now worried that in using it he'd done something to spur a bout of unnatural growth. He still didn't know much about PATOMES, so it could be just as likely. If that were true he'd be exposed.

Turning to Steven and Elisa the dean continued. "Of course, should the testing come back with a positive indication the Academy would be more than pleased to have someone of dominant status continue in their education here. Considering his recent marks, I'm sure the board would be willing to give a generous discount for Jeremy's future years." Dean Simmic said.

Jeremy's mother brought his attention back to the discussion by reaching over and rubbing his back reassuringly. He glanced at her and smiled back. His mind was still working on the possibility of his cheating with PATOMES being discovered.

"Yes," Steven said "of course. At this time we can't commit to anything until the results of the testing."

Jeremy was still listening with only half an ear. His mind was on the testing. He'd only heard there was a test for dominants but had been granted none of the details. He realized his mind had wandered and forced himself to pay attention to the dean. She was once again extolling the virtues of the academy as opposed to other institutions of learning. He paid closer attention to the conversation but felt it was a

bit premature to debate on his future before the testing had even been conducted. Still he let them chatter until they were done.

Apparently satisfied that she'd had enough of her say in the issue the dean stood. Jeremy and his parents followed suit and after a moment his parents turned for the door.

"Thank you for your time ma'am." Jeremy said before turning to the door himself.

"You're welcome Mister Dawn." he heard on his way to the door. He'd rarely been addressed as Mister by any of his instructors let alone the dean. Fact was he'd never even been spoken to by the dean before.

He rode home with his parents. It was obvious to his brothers that something had happened but after a comment from his parents the subject was dropped. The weekend seemed longer than usual in part from the anticipation of the test being conducted on Monday. His brothers also probed for information as to why he'd arrived home with their parents. He kept them in the dark as much as possible and by Sunday night they still didn't know the real reason for the meeting with the dean.

The genetic test was simpler than he'd expected. He arrived at the dean's office before classes to find the school health professional waiting. After signing several release forms, overseen and witnessed by the dean the health technician scraped the inside of his cheek with a long cotton swab. As he was taking a second sample the technician explained that the process collected enough epithelial cells for a DNA analysis. Both swabs were sealed in clear plastic tubes and initialed by Jeremy and the technician. The tubes were then placed in foil envelopes and sealed again. After signing the seal on the envelope the technician proclaimed the process complete.

After leaving the dean's office his two weeks of anxious waiting began. Most of the day went as expected other than his concern over the test results. By the end of the day he heard the rumor that one of the academy students had been tested for dominance. The speculation was that the individual tested was among one of the larger carnivores.

There were five contenders by the time he heard the story. Oddly only one was in their final year at the Academy. The top contender by far was a wolf named Hugo Whinder. Jeremy, like all the students at the academy, knew him by sight. He was hard to miss as he was among the largest of the students. Clearly already an alpha of his specie he also strove to make sure everyone knew of his disdain for those smaller than him.

Another student in the mix was a tigress by the name Felicity Montgomery. She was in her second year and well liked by everybody to the point Jeremy felt her inclusion was mostly by popular choice as opposed to Hugo's. The wolf's inclusion was obviously driven by fear.

A third was a reynard that Jeremy knew little of other than his first name. Max, or more likely Maxwell was said to be the typical average student and about to take his advancement exams for his third year. Jeremy wondered at his inclusion but had too little information to really form an opinion. The fourth was a more interesting and would have been an almost spectacular choice had it been true.

Marcus Fortune was a lion. Jeremy had met the male and knew him better than the rest due to having been in the same math module once. Marcus was already larger than Hugo and yet had a gentle and amiable personality. Jeremy had liked him despite being slightly intimidated by the male's much greater size. Had he not already known the truth Marcus would have been Jeremy's pick.

A distant fifth was a cheetah named Allen Alversten. Getting the story from a friend may have been the reason nothing was said of Alversten, Jeremy couldn't recall meeting the cat nor could he place the name to a face.

He was tempted to correct his friend and let it be known it was actually him but declined. He'd had the time to think the situation through. He was large for his age but still within the size range of normal weasels. All of the popular choices for the dominant were larger than him. Their choice by popular vote also made it even clearer his decision to hide his possible status was correct. When it became known he was the one on their way to becoming a dominant there would be reactions. He needed more time to have solutions at the ready for whatever might happen. Especially with Hugo. That male was not going to be pleased.

That night after finishing his homework he spent some extra time researching dominants. There wasn't much in depth information in the public domains. What was published was for the most part a who's who of dominants. In less than an hour Jeremy had read all there was to know in all the search sites. It looked as though the public was intentionally being kept in the dark. He did learn that dominants didn't grow all that much faster than normal but continued to grow even well after the normal growth years of their normal peers. It was speculated that up to half the dominants from the smaller specie didn't make it to their full size.

Done and alone in his room Jeremy set his mind to figuring out what he should do with the time he had left before his status became known. It was already bad enough when the larger carnivores targeted him for a little bullying. When they found out he was about to outdo them, he figured things would only get more intense. With his still small size he'd still be outmatched and vulnerable.

At the end of his internal debate he guessed he could only hope for Marcus as an ally. He would need several more to make it through until he could fend off people like Hugo on his own. He'd been taking self defense courses but that only helped so far. Most carnivores ran in packs, he'd be swamped by their numbers and all but defenseless even considering his still meager self defense skills.

Time was the issue. He needed more time and would never be granted enough. PATOMES came to mind. It would have to be a last resort situation, used only to save his own life. The fallout of his using it in public would be catastrophic. Even if he were found justified in using it there was no way to predict what would become of him. Someone that was seen to be as potentially dangerous as he would have proven to be would never be allowed back in public. Life as he knew it would be over.

He'd have to carefully enlist allies to gain the needed time. There was no other way.

Just before going to bed he composed a note and sent it to the dean of the academy. He respectfully requested his status be kept secret for as long as possible. Even after the results came back.

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So, it's been a busy week. The combination of that and working on several different sections of the story at the same time has me leaning toward caution. Don't want to spoil anything so I'll focus this week's comments on a single character.

I've had a hard time with not giving the mother much involvement. That's not to say she has no influence. It's just that with four brothers and the father still in the picture (not saying anything here) she kind of gets eclipsed. Those of you that saw the first run know that she had a larger role but in this one she's almost been reduced to a shadow. That's not been my intent but with the focus so far on the interactions between all the males in the family there's not much room to explore the relationship with her.

Some of you know there are plenty of strong female characters ahead. I just wanted to be clear that the change in the mother's character wasn't really intended but was something that seemed to have happened as part of the rewrite.

Also, the rewrite has advanced to chapter 26 so there'll be weekly updates for some time to come. I'll work on having more substance to that beginning snark in future updates too.

As always, I'm open to questions.