

Today's Forgotten Hero

Okay, here we go with more of the same. Well, maybe not more of the same, that would be repetitious and boring. While this isn't full of action or intrigue it is setting the stage for a lot of what is coming up later. Thanks for staying with it, you lot are really impressing me.

The next day as he entered the meeting room Jeremy was surprised to see Zane there with Terrance. Zane began even before Jeremy had crossed to sit at the table. "Jeremy, while its good to see you again I have to apologize. I let Terrance volunteer not knowing just how bright you are. Thats not meant as a slight to Terrance, in fact even I feel a bit intimidated by just how smart you are."

"Does that mean you don't intend to mentor me?"

"I'm saying that to highlight the limits of what I have to offer. You're exceptional, there's no doubt about that, I can offer only so much to someone like you in a mentorship role. It would be my experience that I have to draw upon against your natural intelligence. Perhaps I'm explaining this poorly."

"No, I think I understand. I do want your advice, even if you're unwilling to extend a mentorship."

"Yes, I was explaining poorly. I am offering myself as a mentor, but you need to understand the limits of what any mentor has to offer as well."

Jeremy smiled at the pangolin. He wanted to get up and hug the male but with the tiger there he was slightly embarrassed. Although by the tiger's own smile he doubted it would be considered out of the ordinary. "Okay, thats great news. Thank you, its really appreciated." He said. Still grinning his triumph he added "So, what now? Is there something to sign that makes it official?"

"No, nothing like that. From here its simply a mutual beneficial relationship. I'll always do my best to help you in whatever advice or coaching you need."

Still smiling Jeremy said "Okay." After a few moments of everyone looking at each other enjoying the moment Jeremy added. "There is something I'm having trouble with."

"Tell me what it is."

Jeremy explained the trouble he was having with his clients and the frustration they were causing. Zane listened attentively and nodded several times, and yet the smile that slowly spread across his face made Jeremy wonder. Terrance too was listening and watching Zane's reaction. When he was finished he sat back and waited for Zane to give his advice.

"That's," he said almost laughing "about what you have to expect from most people. There's really no way for you to change their attitude or motivate them more than they wish to be motivated. About all you can do is once you have enough clients to replace them, do so. If they complain, and they most likely will, just let them know you're giving their place to someone who can benefit from your help and might just have the motivation to follow your coaching."

As Terrance nodded and looked over at him, Jeremy sat and thought about his response. "Thanks, I'll do that. I'll also take it to heart myself."

Zane replied "That was really only meant as advice on your situation, but see, you took it and even assessed your own attitude. Most people don't have the brains to do that at your age."

Jeremy looked from Zane to Terrance wondering if he was reading too much into the comment. Eventually, with the lack of response from the tiger he said. "Thanks, I guess."

The pangolin asked if Jeremy had any questions about what he and Terrance had discussed the previous day. Jeremy thought a bit and asked a first question that was followed by another. By the end of the half hour Terrance had a perpetual bored expression on his face.

"That's all the time I have for today. Jeremy, if you still have any questions feel free to give me a call." Zane said as he stood.

"Thank you, I will."

Terrance stood as well and said "Well, sorry Jeremy, but its clear I have nothing to offer."

"I'd appreciate your friendship, since we're both mentoring under Zane."

The tiger smiled and offered his arm. "Thanks Jeremy." Jeremy grasped the thick forearm in the gesture of equals.

The three of them left together, Jeremy and Terrance listening to Zane as he explained his schedule for the week. It seemed a roundabout way to say he didn't have much time but Jeremy figured he may need to. The tiger struck him as perhaps someone who needed mentorship a lot more than he did. Once they parted ways he made his way to the library and started his tutoring hour.

With the rest of the week's final half hour free Jeremy was again spending the extra time in the library. Once classes were over the library started filling. What he'd started more than a year ago had now become something far beyond anything he'd expected. He was also asked far more questions now, since he was only a year and a half from finishing. It was with a bit of pride that there were now also more than a dozen others fielding questions as well. He felt that once he graduated the tutoring hour might continue without him.

His brother took his advancement exams on Friday. Eric said nothing once he got home. His silence was really nothing new, nor was his disappearance after dinner. With Eric gone and Ian back to dating his female prospective it was left to him to do the clean up chores after dinner. With the increased demands of the extra chores, homework and his job there was little time left for anything else.

It wasn't until Sunday afternoon that Jeremy had any idle time for himself. He filled it with reading fiction, television had seemed boring to him for some time. He finished the night with his job at the gym, attempting to help several less than motivated clients. He was beginning to privately agree with his parents, the physical training job at the gym with its frustrating clients wasn't for him.

Monday started another week at the academy and the routine Jeremy had become used to. He was at the door to the Meeting Room of Potential Mentors as he had come to think of it. Knocking and entering he found a red panda sitting at the table.

As the male stood Jeremy crossed the room and joined in the usual greeting of equals. After the red panda introduced himself Jeremy tried to remember where he'd seen Alex Elkins before. Jeremy sat at

the table with the male and said "I feel like I know you from somewhere but, I'm sorry, I just can't remember."

"Probably from news accounts about ten years ago." Alex replied, his expression and tone made it clear he was reluctant to discuss the issue.

Jeremy nodded and waited for the male to speak next. He frowned after a few seconds. "I do remember now. I don't understand why you wouldn't want to discuss that. You were proven right."

"The problem wasn't that I was proven right so much as that I let myself get mixed up with them in the first place." The red panda answered.

Jeremy shook his head. "I don't know. I was still pretty young back then but from my point of view you did the right thing."

Elkins stood. "Then it seems there's not much we can see eye to eye on." He said as he stood and started toward the door.

Jeremy stood out of respect. He hadn't meant to offend the male. His actions years ago had made him a hero to the weasel. "Sir, please, am I wrong to think that predators should be stopped?" He watched as the male quietly stopped at the door.

"No, that's not wrong. To be fair, at the time I thought the same, but I've since come to understand I went too far in killing them. I had the ability to subdue them within my means. That is what I should have done."

"What if the legal system then let them go?"

"Then that would have been up to their peers." He turned to Jeremy and put his paws behind his back "Even as a dominant I do not have the right to take the life of someone just for acting like a predator, regardless of the justness of the situation."

Jeremy's eyes went to the floor as he sighed. He hadn't even remembered the incident with Elkins until meeting him. To Jeremy it had been one of those mostly unremembered formative things one heard, like fables or fairy tales with moral imperatives. When Jeremy had killed the predators he had felt the horror of his actions, and yet had eventually done it again. He had told himself that his actions had been justified because he'd killed predators. He had to convince himself his actions had an element of heroism.

Now, here before him was the very male that had been at the center of that belief. The very male that now seemed to be advising against outright revenge. He couldn't help himself, he didn't want to appear weak in front of this male. Not this dominant. Not his all but forgotten hero. He couldn't stop the sob from escaping before turning from the other male.

He felt a paw on the back of his shoulder, the touch was gentle but firm. Elkins had stepped beside him and as Jeremy wiped his nose with the sleeve of his hoodie the male observed "Perhaps there is something I can teach you. The discipline of defense I practice instructs those of us who acquire the skills to use restraint. Should you wish, I would be willing to instruct you in that discipline."

"I-" Jeremy stopped himself. He'd almost confessed to already killing several people in his own sense of righteousness. He looked up at the red panda. "I don't know if I can ever use the restraint you're suggesting."

Alex nodded without smiling and answered "All the more reason to undergo the proper training, in both body and spirit." he stepped back, letting his paw drop away from Jeremy's back. "Think on it for tonight. I shall be back tomorrow, and the next as you need."

The red panda inclined his head slightly and turned away. This time he did not pause at the door.

He finished his school work just before he had to go to the gym. He spent his typical shift working with clients who only wanted to brag about being trained by a dominant. His mind was on Alex Elkins the entire time. He had almost convinced himself to take the red panda up on his offer of training him. He had taken self defense modules the past few years, but this dominant was the real thing. He had taken on five large predators singlehandedly and had been the only one to walk away, and he'd done it without taking a scratch.

Jeremy was still convinced however hard it had been on him after the fact that killing those first predators had been the right thing. Hugo and his predator friends had been a necessity. If Elkins also attempted to train him in the kind of discipline as he was hinting at, he'd just have to decide when the time came whether to follow it or not.

Still undecided he contacted Zane Rook the next morning and asked his opinion. The pangolin fully supported the idea of Jeremy learning the mental discipline that was also associated with the proposed training. With the positive input Jeremy felt a sense of satisfaction with the male's validation. He'd see about Alex Elkins and make his own decisions when it came time to do so, should it ever happen again.

Throughout the school day he was on the lookout for his brother Eric. He never saw him nor did he hear anything about him. He hadn't come home after classes the day before and their parents were actually worried about him. At the end of the day he entered the meeting room set aside and after their mutual greeting he talked with Alex Elkins the entire half hour.

It turned out that one of his clubs was close to the gym he worked at. He set an appointment for the following Saturday morning before work to meet with Elkins for at least one session. It would dip into his savings a bit if he decided to continue lessons, but that was a decision for later. Jeremy wanted to see what the red panda could teach him.

Eric finally showed back up at home on Wednesday night. He endured his parent's reaction with indifference. With his adulthood birthday only months away it was obvious he intended to rough out whatever they said to him until then. At least it seemed that way to Jeremy. With Ian still at home he had to continue to share a room with Eric. He made the excuse of work to leave early in an effort to avoid his brother's attitude.

Saturday morning came and he went to Alex Elkins' self defense club. It was ironically named First Degree Self Defense. He could see through the glass front of the establishment and saw only the empty front reception area. Thinking that he'd gotten the time wrong Jeremy had to knock on the door. Alex walked out from the back a few seconds later and let him inside.

"I felt since you're a dominant I'd give personal lessons." He explained as they walked to the back area. "I also must admit from experience your presence in a regular novice class would be somewhat disruptive."

Elkins gave him the tour of the wide training area and locker rooms and showers. When completed he loaned Jeremy a simple white training uniform. It fit loosely and as Alex explained was designed for the wide range of movement expected during training. He spent the next hour or more assessing Jeremy's level of training the academy instructors had provided. He was paced through the basic moves, then the more advanced techniques.

Elkins started going through were he considered Jeremy's training was lacking. Several of the most basic moves had been taught wrong. He explained the proper form was the foundation of everything to follow. Jeremy was then forced to stand and repetitively preform the same moves, in the correct way for the rest of the hour.

He was somewhat disappointed at not getting straight into what he expected but Alex's explanation made sense. Even the academy's instructors had said the very same thing. Alex Elkins proved to be considerably harsher in his evaluation than Jeremy expected. It would take years to properly learn the new techniques before Jeremy would even be close to anything Elkins considered competent.

At the end of the session he and Alex settled on morning sessions every Saturday and Sunday. Jeremy's schedule just wouldn't permit anything more. He could quit his job at the gym for more time but then wouldn't be able to afford the training. He would also need to acquire his own training uniform before the next weekend's appointments.

While he was satisfied with Alex's training, he was now left with no free time for himself.

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So here we are at chapter twelve already. Those of you following the story will be happy to know I'm way ahead in writing this out. I'm actually far enough ahead to publish every week all the way into December. Its mostly in first draft form for me but I don't find myself changing too much as I edit, unless I come up with an idea in the mean time.