

Nothing to say this week. Been a busy one and with the holiday coming up I'm probably not going to have much until its all over.

Jeremy woke with a pounding headache. As he remembered the hours before he understood why his head felt ready to implode. He opened his eyes experimentally, pleased that the lights didn't exacerbate his headache. He heard a chair squeak nearby and turned his head to look. It was the wrong direction.

Sager was still sleeping on the bunk bolted to the far wall. Jeremy slowly lifted himself from the thin mattress looking around.

"Well, I guess you weren't as in the bag as Sager."

Jeremy took the time to test his ability to move. Turning his head and rolling his shoulders he assessed the rabbit sitting on the other side of the bars. He was no longer wearing the vest but Jeremy recognized the older rabbit from the bar. He was staring back assessing him equally.

Jeremy took the time to take in his surroundings. The inside of the building looked just what he had heretofore imagined a police station would look like. Stout wooden desks and walls covered in bulletin boards full of whatever notices that tended to catch the attention of the authorities. There was a cheap plastic clock mounted on the far wall, it was just past five thirty. He pointedly looked again at the open cell door and then to the rabbit.

Jeremy felt his mind slowly get up to speed with the situation. "Sorry for the trouble. I know there's no excuse for my behavior." Jeremy stopped when he noticed the rabbit relax.

The rabbit, Jeremy guessed his name wasn't really Whisker, turned to pick up Jeremy's wallet and opened it. Looking at it a second for effect before closing it he said "Every once in a while, Sager and his sister manages to drag a stranger into their idea of fun. You're just the latest in a long line of victims, Mister Dawn."

Jeremy saw him toss his wallet to him but the aftereffects of the tranquilizer made his fingers slow and he fumbled the catch. He opened and closed his fingers as a test before leaning over to pick it up.

"You'll be back to normal in about half an hour. Its a pretty mild tranquilizer we use here."

Jeremy stuffed his wallet in the pocket of his shorts and looked at the rabbit. "Sorry, sir, but I only caught the nickname they called you."

He smiled. "No, that's my name a'right. Whisker Delloux, I'm what passes for a sheriff in these parts."

"Sheriff," Jeremy said acknowledging his authority "Do I take it by the open door I'm not going to be charged with anything?"

"So far, you're free to go."

Jeremy nodded. "Thanks." he thought for a few seconds before continuing. "Just out of curiosity, you don't suspect Sager of being a predator, do you?"

Sheriff Delloux chuckled. "No, that's more of a city problem, but then you should know that."

Jeremy leaned back resting on the cinderblock wall and rubbed at the sore spot on his thigh. "I know its a problem, but you don't face that kind of thing here?"

The rabbit shook his head sighing. "You city people." he said with a bit of condensation. "You think that by denying the normal drives of carnivores, by repressing your natural instincts that you can get along with each other. Well, its not."

Jeremy stared at the rabbit amazed at the implication. He looked at the wolf in the other bunk of his cell and back at the rabbit. "I'm not understanding. You accept it?"

"No, we don't have the problems you city folk have brought upon yourselves."

Jeremy stared at the sheriff openmouthed in amazement.

He crossed his arms and leaned back in his chair, making it squeak again. "You're a carnivore yourself. Tell me, how hard did you try to stay out of that fight last night?"

Jeremy shut his mouth at the accusation. "Well, actually it kind of started before I even had a chance." he said.

The rabbit raised his eyebrows. "But tell me, honestly, didn't you feel satisfied in taking part. I understand fighting or even hunting every once in a while fills a need in you carnivores."

Jeremy looked at the rabbit a few seconds. Thinking back he had to admit it was exciting, he had wanted to prove himself against another predator, no carnivore he corrected himself. He stared at the wolf still sleeping across from him. No, he thought, he was right the first time. He was a killer, several times over now. He was a predator of predators though, that slight distinction should make a difference. It did to him.

Looking back at the sheriff Jeremy shrugged and said "I have to admit that I was into it a bit more than I would have thought. I'm still not sure you're right about it being that simple. No offense."

The rabbit shrugged himself and smiled. "None taken. Maybe there's more to it than you think though. Its worked for us out here for longer than anyone really knows." He stood and took a few steps to the door of the cell. Leaning against the iron door frame he stated "The diner's open this hour, how 'bout I take you over there and we continue this in better surroundings."

Jeremy smiled as he looked around the inside of the cell. His headache was already down to an uncomfortable feeling and his coordination felt just a little sluggish and improving rapidly. Looking back to the sheriff he said "That sounds good. I'd offer to buy, if it weren't for possible charges of bribing a public official."

Whisker snorted and turned from the cell. "Oh, I think since we've already established no charges are pending you're safe from any trouble from buying the local sheriff breakfast."

Jeremy stood and looked at Sager. "What about him?"

The rabbit glanced at Jeremy as he continued toward the front of the office. "He knows his way around."

Jeremy followed the sheriff out of the office and across the street. The diner he spoke of was on the next block. He glanced at the rabbit as he walked next to him. Whisker Delloux was less than half his height and probably under a quarter his mass and yet the male seemed to have no sign of being intimidated by his size.

Entering the diner Whisker greeted the squirrel leaning against the counter. He crossed to her and took a seat right in front of the female. She had straightened and was staring at Jeremy as he sat next to the sheriff. He could see her eyes traveling over him as he settled himself on the stool.

The squirrel finally turned to the rabbit and asked "The usual?"

"Two, this morning, Hellen."

Jeremy watched as she turned to step up on a set of movable steps and half stuck her head in the small window through to the kitchen and almost shouted "Two for Whisker."

Jeremy was still smiling at the display when he turned to Whisker and asked "I didn't just buy two salads, did I?"

"Paying doesn't entitle you to be a smart ass, kid." He shot back and a second later snorted at Jeremy's reaction. "No, you'll like their breakfast platter, its the best in town at this hour."

Jeremy stared at the rabbit. He saw the challenge in his eyes as he waited for the obvious comeback. "I'm not going to push my luck."

The sheriff laughed and turned to Hellen. "Smart kid." He observed.

Hellen had taken to staring at Jeremy again. He looked at the sheriff as he projected a sense of calm and reassurance. The female had looked a little scared when he'd walked in and even with the sheriff sitting next to him she still hadn't yet relaxed. Delloux leaned back in his chair and looked at Jeremy.

"So, ask." The rabbit said.

Jeremy looked at him. "Well," He started, glancing at the squirrel. "You seemed a little tense when I first woke up, or was I seeing things?"

Whisker smiled and looked at Hellen a moment. "Yeah, I was a bit unsure what you were going to do, considering what you were in for. I've never met a dominant before. Hell, most of us around here haven't." he shrugged. "We don't know what to expect, really."

Jeremy smiled, still projecting. "Well, I can only speak from my own experience, but for the most part we're just like anyone else. I've met a few that are condescending as they could possibly be, but they're in the minority." This was the first time he'd projected since altering his sense of smell. He could detect nothing.

He quickly reset his sense of smell with PATOMES and only then could he detect his pheromones in the air. Jeremy had to assume only other dominants could detect the projected pheromones. It made a kind of sense, projecting would be useless if those intended to be controlled could detect the interference. It would then take a simple act of will to ignore the dominant pheromones. He changed his sense of smell back to match that of a coyote.

Hellen was slowly reacting to his projected pheromones. Her eyes were down to normal size and her shoulders had relaxed just a bit. She didn't even jump when the bell over the door jingled. Jeremy turned to see Sager walking toward the counter. He sat on the other side of Whisker.

"Morning Whisker, Hellen." He leaned forward to look past the rabbit and added "I never did catch your name."

He saw the rabbit between them looking at him with a slight smile. "Jeremy." He answered.

The wolf smiled. "Morning, Jeremy." he rubbed his chest and continued "I feel like I've been kicked by a mule."

Jeremy glanced at Hellen. He'd thought Sager's comment would have alarmed her but instead she seemed more relaxed than ever. The female even looked at the wolf and asked "Your usual for Saturday mornings?"

"Please." He replied with a grin to Hellen.

As the squirrel turned to pick up a coffee mug Whisker asked "You did remember to lock up after yourself this time, right?"

"Yeah, Whisker, I remembered." The wolf said with humor but also a tone that implied this was a familiar exchange between the two.

Sager's Saturday Morning Usual turned out to be a cup of coffee, a bottle of aspirin that he took a couple pills from and a glazed jelly doughnut. About the time he was halfway through the messy meal the two breakfast platters were presented to his eating companions. Jeremy was pleased to see there was plenty of meat as well as eggs and two waffles. Before they started on their platters Whisker plucked the aspirin bottle from in front of Sager and set it next to Jeremy's plate.

Smiling his thanks he opened the pill bottle and stated "You seem to have a set routine, don't you."

"One does seem to have comfortable patterns after a time." Whisker noted with a smile.

The bell over the door announced new arrivals. With a forkful of egg stuffed in his mouth Jeremy turned to see a pair of skunk enter. They were more focused on taking a table than Whisker or either of the two next to him. Jeremy continued eating as the usual routine of any diner went on around him. Whisker and Sager occasionally asked him questions to draw him out. By the time he and Whisker were finished half a dozen other customers had arrived.

As promised Jeremy paid the tab for their breakfast and added a generous tip for Hellen. Stepping out of the diner Jeremy looked up at the sky. The predawn glow had started in the east exposing only a few drifting clouds. It looked like it was going to be a good day to ride.

"You two are free to go, so long as you don't start anything for the rest of the day."

"Sure Whisker. The only plans I have are to go home and sleep this off." The wolf promised.

Jeremy looked at Whisker to see the rabbit staring up at him. "Me? I was passing through before last night, nothing has really changed since."

Sager surprised him by observing "If you've been on the road for days I'll bet it's about time to clean whatever clothes you have with you. My place is just a few blocks from here. You could use a shower to get the smell of my sister off you too." He added with a disarming smile.

Jeremy stared at the smiling wolf. His scent had nothing but humor and friendship about him.

Unaware of the wolf's intent Whisker said "Play nice Sager, or I just might have to act like a sheriff."

Jeremy said "That's alright sheriff. I think I'll use the facilities at the hotel. Besides, you look like you need sleep more than anything else, Sager."

The wolf shrugged as a way of accepting his decision. Whisker stood for a second and walked away with a wave of his paw. The wolf stood smiling at Jeremy a few seconds more.

"Thanks for a memorable night, Jeremy." he said and with a wave of his own walked away. Jeremy watched them for a few seconds before making his way toward the hotel. He spent more then an hour waiting in the small laundry area for his clothes to finish. After showering and getting everything ready for travel again he took to the road.

After the experience of the night before he payed more attention to those he passed and those that passed him. The proportion of prey specie to carnivores was much higher than in York. After an hour on the road he'd only counted perhaps a dozen carnivore specie out of more than a few hundred prey. In York the proportion was close to two prey specie for every one of carnivores.

Jeremy had to admit that perhaps Whisker had it right about predation but for a completely different reason.

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Got nothing here this week either, for now. I'll bet this chapter just might bring up some questions, so lets here `em.