

The next day Jeremy prepared for work while reviewing the movements of the four police officers. Each had spent the entire night patrolling the park. They were now presumably back home sleeping off the night's activity. He would wait for the right time. He'd had all night to calm himself and had a plan of how to proceed. He smiled as he left his apartment for the Nicholson building. It was going to be a busy weekend.

The workday went quickly. He gathered a little more for his plans on moving the Bureau. He felt almost ready to present it to Gakota again. He still hesitated though. There was a nagging feeling that made him feel as though he was missing something. He tried to shrug it off, he had been given plenty of time to gather all the information he needed. He left work early and headed to his apartment.

He stopped at his apartment to prepare for his appointment with Buttons and arrived at the fox's building just a little early. Stepping into the elevator he punched in the code Jackson had given him to reach the penthouse floor. The doors opened to an anteroom the size of his living room. Stepping out into the room he was impressed at the decor. Marble floor and rich wallpaper and a table the size of his dining room table that had a large flower arrangement set on it. He could by the fragrance that the flowers were real. There were only two doors on either side of him as he stood with his back to the closing elevator doors. He turned to the door with Jackson Buttons name printed on a brass label next to it. Jeremy waited after ringing the bell.

Jackson opened the door wide and said "Come in, good to see you again."

Jeremy slowly walked inside openly looking around at everything. It put the apartment he shared with his brother to shame. Just the entry area was far larger than their entire apartment. Even the furnishings showed the fox's wealth and taste. Overstuffed couches and chairs were scattered about and surrounded by other assorted items. Everything filled the space yet failed to make it seem cluttered nor make it seem smaller.

When he finally looked to the fox he could see Jackson was smiling at his distraction. "This way, I'm in the middle of preparing dinner."

"Really?" Jeremy asked before he could stop himself. "I mean, I didn't expect you to actually cook something. I mean, I should probably stop before I make more of a fool of myself."

Jackson laughed. "Not to worry." He led Jeremy into the living room. He slowed at the size of the room. Taking it in he could see what looked like a formal dining room where Jackson was leading him. Jeremy could only guess at how expensive the furniture was. Everything was luxurious and likely to be spotless if one were allowed to inspect it closer.

"Oh." Jeremy muttered. He turned from the fox leading him. He couldn't help himself.

He walked over to the floor to ceiling windows and stared. Jackson had followed him and stood at his side as he took in the view. Situated at the northern edge of Central Park he could see down the length of the tree filled park. The late afternoon sun cut shadows of the buildings across the spotty foliage of the park. The leafless branches of the trees were already in shadow making them seem even smaller from the height of Jackson's condo. Jeremy could see several of the clearings from where he stood looking down. He shivered at the memory of his first flight as a hawk. Some of the lights lining the walkways had already come on lending to an odd otherworldly nature of the view.

Five minutes went by in silence as Jeremy simply stared. "It helps remind me how great this view is when someone new comes." The fox said softly.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to stare like an idiot. I'm sure you didn't invite me here just to watch me." Jeremy apologized with a grin.

"No worries. Come on into the kitchen and help me with dinner."

"Wait, its just you and me here?"

"Yes, I wanted us to get to know each other."

Jeremy smiled to himself as he followed the fox to the kitchen. There he joined the fox in cutting and preparing the ingredients of the meal Jackson had planned. The male had a completely different approach to cooking than his brother. He prepped everything and placed them in small bowls before the first burner was turned on. As the fox started the actual cooking he gestured at a stool at the other end of the kitchen island. Jeremy sat as indicated and watched as the male started cooking.

As Jackson looked down watching what he was working on he asked "So, how's life been treating you?"

"Good, its been calming down quite a bit since Chile, but then you probably know that." Jeremy said, watching the fox for reaction. He was sure his supervisor would have given Jackson constant updates. Gakota had never said anything but Jeremy had always had the feeling the ocelot had to know of his relationship with the fox.

"I mean, how's your family?"

Jeremy took a breath. "Well, my brother, Sam, is kind of looking for work. He asked me not to mention it, but I guess since you asked, sort of, well, not that I'm asking you to make any effort to hire him or anything like that. Its just, I don't know, I feel bad for him." Jeremy stopped himself again. He couldn't understand why he was acting so out of character.

The fox glanced up at him from his cooking. With a slight smile he said "Relax. I asked you here to get to know you a little better. There's nothing on the line."

Jeremy took another deep breath. After thinking about Jackson's statement he asked "Does that mean you're still thinking of mentoring me?"

"That it does." he looked up with a grin. "Then again, when I was your age the only thing I was interested in was chasing females, but then again you got that covered. So, that helps too."

Jeremy smiled back. "I know its a delicate subject, but how did you meet your wife?" He blinked wondering too late why he'd asked the fox something that personal.

Buttons shrugged without looking up and answered "Its not that delicate a subject. I was introduced to her by my mentor at the time." He looked up to make eye contact. "As a dominant you do understand there's little chance of finding a mate physically compatible outside of another dominant?"

Jeremy shifted in his seat under the scrutiny. He suddenly felt uncomfortable with the fox for entirely different reasons. He looked at the pan the male was stirring yet barely noticed the contents. He searched for a response but was coming up empty. The smells Jackson's cooking were producing rivaled those of his brother's meals. Predictably his stomach was rumbling. "That smells great."

The fox kept his gaze on Jeremy for a few seconds with a slight smile before allowing the discussion to turn to less personal subjects. Jackson finished the cooking to his satisfaction and served Jeremy a plate with a huge slab of steak covered in sautéed onions and mushrooms. He also served a second plate

full of potatoes, greens and butter soaked shrimp. Not done with that he also slid two bowls over, one full of thick brown sauce for the steak and the other a dipping sauce for the shrimp. Jeremy's mouth watered at the sight.

Jackson sat next to him and started on his own meal. They ate together in silence for more than a minute.

"This is really good, thank you." Jeremy said after sampling a taste of everything. Sam had often done the same when they ate out. He thought his brother would have loved to have tasted this meal. He continued eating after Jackson thanked him for the compliment. They talked about a few current events in the news as they ate. Jeremy mostly listened trying hard not to devour the meal too fast.

As Jackson slowed he looked at Jeremy "Thanks for the complement."

"What do you mean?"

"No better complement to a chef than seeing someone clean their plate."

"I'm not done yet." Jeremy observed.

"Close enough." His host said with a satisfied sigh. "I made too much for myself."

Jeremy watched Jackson set his unfinished plate on the empty one and push them away from himself. Jeremy continued eating until finished. Stacking his own plates he stood and picked them up to carry to the sink.

"That's okay, leave them."

"Its not a problem, I'll help clean up." Jeremy answered.

"Nonsense. You don't think I clean all this myself? I normally don't have the time for that so I have someone in to clean everything. Leave it." Buttons insisted as he stood.

Jeremy looked at him and after a moment set the plates back down.

"Lets hit the patio, I could use some fresh air." He said as he stepped past Jeremy. He led the way out to the large patio and hopped up to sit on the edge of a large bricked in barbecue. Jeremy sat on the other side of the barbecue and looked out at the view. The sun was behind the buildings leaving the park in full shadow except for a few thin bands of light. He smiled to himself at the situation. He'd just acted as he had in any of his own family gatherings.

"You know, the best part of the year is coming up next week. For a couple days the sun shines right through the streets to leave these thin slivers of light across the park all the way to sunset." The fox said, shivering either from the memory or the chill air.

"This is incredible. We don't even have a view." Jeremy admitted.

They occasionally talked about issues of the day but mostly just watched the sunset and sky slowly turn vibrant colors. Jeremy shivered more than a couple times, realizing Jackson's earlier reaction was not from the chill. The sky was starting to grow dark when Jeremy asked "So, when are you going to ask what I intend to do with my life?"

"I'm not. Most of us don't figure that out until we've already done it. Do you have an idea of what you want?"

"No. Not really. Can I ask a question?"

Buttons turned his head to look at him eye ridges raised in curiosity.

"How much did you have to do with me getting a job in the Bureau?"

"I thought you'd figure that out."

"And the promotion?"

"The promotion you earned by yourself actually, I hadn't approved of you going to Chile. Mister Ogoltay thought you could handle it, so he brought you along. He told me afterwards he intended for you to shadow him but things got out of paw. Seems you rose to the occasion, much to everyone's surprise."

"I did learn a lot from General Ferris." Jeremy said. He was thinking of the books Jackson had given him.

The reynard nodded. "Trial by fire, as it were."

Jeremy understood the reference, he guessed the fox was probing for any clue as to whether the general had put him in harms way. He shrugged. "More like sink or swim, really. I had the thought that she'd send me back to Gakota if I didn't measure up."

Jackson still eyed him appraisingly. "So, from what I hear you joined in with them in their physical training. Did you get any other kind of training?"

Jeremy took another deep breath. "Yes."

Jackson raised his eye ridges as a sign he should explain further. The appraising look on his face gave Jeremy the impression that any sign of evasion would be taken seriously.

"They trained me in a little of everything they do. That included tactics, weapons and personal combat. Before I left Ferris said I could qualify as an officer under her command." He admitted.

Jackson snorted humorously. "You must be a fast learner. I happen to know a few people that came out of that program. It takes years of preparation to reach a level they accept."

"I had a head start, I'd been training in self defense with Alex Elkins for several years."

Jackson snorted at the comment. "Still, thats an impressive performance." He said as he looked out at the city.

Jeremy looked away too. The questioning had gotten a little uncomfortable. He wondered at the vulpine's point. Looking back at his host he said "So, anyway, thanks for the job. I'm really enjoying it."

Jeremy could see the fox smile. "So, I hear you're going to find a place for the Bureau. Its about time."

Jeremy nodded. "I almost have everything ready to present to Gakota."

Jackson hopped off the brickwork for the barbecue. "Before you do, I should let you know the original intent for the Bureau."

"What?" Jeremy asked following suit and catching up to the fox as he re-entered his condo.

"I've always meant for it to be a separate company. It shouldn't be part of Nicholson. I've had to wait until we could find someone that had the ability to lead it properly. With the extra experience you gained in Chile, we're closer than ever to making that happen."

"You mean, you intend to break all ties between the Bureau and Nicholson?"

"Eventually."

"Why?"

"At the end of the day, it can't survive in a corporate atmosphere. As it is, it would have died long ago if not for Gakota's continuous efforts to protect it."

"You say that as if time's almost up." Jeremy said, he could hear the question in his own voice.

Jackson nodded and stopped. They were in what looked like his home office. The simple desk looked out of place considering the rest of the furnishing in the condo. Jackson walked behind the desk and sat. Jeremy looked around as he opened a drawer. There were stacks of books and files on every surface. The clutter was even more out of place than the average office desk.

"Here," Jackson said. "I want you to read this. Once you do, change your plans for the bureau in whatever way you deem necessary. Or not."

Jeremy stepped over to the fox and took the small notebook from him. Looking at it he saw that it was likely older than him. There were small pieces of tape and tags marking numerous places throughout the book. Turning it over he saw no markings on the outside of any kind. He was tempted to open it but had the feeling once he did the act would commit him to a course of action that would align him with Jackson in more ways than he could guess. Without lifting his head from the book he looked at his host.

"What is this?"

"It's everything I wrote down in relation to the bureau. From the time I formed it right up until I found you."

Jeremy looked down at the note book even as he took it in both paws. It hadn't taken on more weight but it suddenly felt heavier than an ordinary note book. Looking up at Jackson he said "I will. read it I mean."

The fox smiled. "Good. Think of the book as an impromptu Celebration Day gift. I ask nothing in return. After the break with Nicholson the Bureau will be yours."

"What? Just like that? What about everyone that works with me?"

"It'll be up to you. Although, I'd suggest discussing this with Gakota the next time you see him."

"Does he know of your plan?"

"Yes, he's had to. He paid a high price for keeping the Bureau as autonomous as its been. He has no more allies within Nicholson now. Once the Bureau is gone, so is he. At this point I won't even be able to stop his corporate enemies from taking him down."

"So he should come with us."

A smile was all the answer the fox gave.

Jeremy thought for a few seconds. "He would make a great leader of the company. I don't know enough about running companies. That's what you're saying."

The fox stood silent and only moved his arms behind himself and likely clasped his paws together behind his back.

Jeremy weighed the book in his hands again and asked "How much time do we have?"

"From my estimation, no more than a year. Likely much less."

Jeremy had so many questions spring into his head from that comment.

"One other thing, be careful what you communicate on company devices from here on out."

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And now Jeremy's life gains a bit more intrigue and complications.