

Dominic knocked on the door after waiting a few seconds to listen. He'd tracked the two that had been passing out bulletins to what he guessed was their apartment. The door was opened by the male that had watched from across the street. Dominic only glanced at him. His eyes scanned the interior of the apartment.

The male stood for a second before saying "I remember you. Would you come in?" He said stepping back to allow Dominic inside.

Dominic looked back at him and asked "You're inviting me in, just like that?"

"I'm guessing you're here either with information about or as a representative of Dominic. Am I right?"

He stepped inside still looking around and said "And if I said I am?"

The male shut the door behind him as the female said "We and some friends would like to help."

"Help in what way?" He asked as he crossed the room. The male watched as Dominic looked in the bedroom. He continued standing by the door and said nothing as Dominic quickly looked through the apartment. The female had followed him and appeared to almost resent the intrusion. He dismissed her reaction and continued to make sure there had only been the two of them in the apartment. Back in the living area he looked at the male who was wearing an amused expression as he waited at the door.

The male said. "I don't think I have to ask if you're feeling a little heat from your activities yet. We have connections that can help. I'm guessing the first thing you'd need would be some identification papers if you've been using your own name. Maybe some information on what the authorities are up to regarding the investigation would also be helpful. We wouldn't ask much in return, we feel we're on the same side."

Dominic replied "Same side?"

The female had moved to stand beside the male and stood watching Dominic with the same expression. She nodded, smiling. "So that you know what we have to offer, we have information on those two cops you assaulted. They were examined extensively. They're both in perfect health, which is an improvement on their previous condition. The cat had been dealing with a chronic condition that has suddenly vanished. Their story is pretty much being considered on the strength of that, but it isn't enough to force any changes, yet. We're still forced from any public area that we're seen in."

Dominic felt he was being pressured to committing to something. He made an effort to exercise his talent to gain extra time to think their proposition over. He failed, realizing then that he could only accomplish the use of his talent in his dominant body. He took a deep breath and looked at the two rats.

"You make it sound as though I want to be a part of some revolution."

The female tilted her head as she said "Well, aren't you?"

The male stared at Dominic for a few seconds longer as his expression changed. "You already are a part of it. Everyone's now looking to you to lead the fight."

"Oh, please. I know better than to think that can ever end well. Especially for the leader of any open movement."

The male said "You've already started something. Its too late to deny your involvement or simply step away."

The female stepped closer to him. "So, you're educated too. All the more reason for you to be the one to lead us. With what you're able to do we have the best chance we've ever had to stop the endless persecution. With your abilities and our connections, together we can finally change things for us. You can't walk away from that."

"Watch me." Dominic said as he stepped toward the door. He intended to think about it but at that moment doubted he wanted anything to do with the two fervent rats.

The male made an effort to stop him from leaving by taking a half step to block the door. Dominic was forced to stop less than a pace from the male. The male stepped closer and said "You have to do this. We've waited for too long, taken so much abuse, and now you can force them to take us seriously. We can finally demand the respect we deserve."

"No, you can't force people to do anything." Dominic answered. He wasn't about to back away from the male. "If you think you can change how people act toward you by force you'll fail every time. Now, move aside."

The male reached a hand into his pocket and started pulling at something that was too large to easily come free. "I can't accept no for an answer." He stated as the gun finally came free.

The delay had given Dominic enough time to glance over at the female to see that she was only watching. As the male brought the weapon to bear Dominic chopped at the male's paw sending the gun dropping to the floor. He followed with a blow to the male's chest pushing him back to hit the door. He turned at the sound of the female moving and saw she was heading for the kitchen

Dominic activated the waiting PATOMES command. In an instant the female was slowed by her now too large clothing. He looked back at the male to see he'd been crawling for the gun but in a couple more seconds he was too small to properly handle the weapon. Soon both were an inch tall and trapped in a pile of their own clothing.

"I'm not interested in being the public leader of anything. What I've done is simply defend myself, and I will continue to do so as I deem it necessary. That is all, nothing more. I warn you, should you betray me you'll face the same retribution from me any predator would." He stepped to the door and before opening it added. "And stop handing out flyers and playing revolution, that will only make things worse."

Closing the door behind himself he activated the command that would return the two to normal over the course of several minutes. Once he was out of the building he started thinking about what they'd implied. As he made his way back to his apartment he brought up the profile of the ocelot. In checking it seemed he'd finally found a limit to what PATOMES could tell him through an individual's profile.

He'd still have to look into the claim. If what the rat had said was true and the cat had gained the benefit of better health after his interference he'd need to know what else it did. He also couldn't begin to think of a way to test the claim. He found it odd that his scars from the fight at the academy were unchanged but the ocelot had somehow been cured of whatever she'd been suffering.

He still had to think his recent actions through. In light of what the two rats had said and tried to get Dominic involved in, he had to reconsider his next course of action. He had to admit his initial reaction had been one of outrage that anyone would be treated as he had been as a rat. In hindsight he had acted perhaps a bit rashly. No, he realized it went further back than that. The first time he'd dealt with predators had been Hugo and his pack. That had been a matter of survival.

Looking back his actions against the four police officers had been more than an overreaction. All the same, they were also overstepping their authority in forcing rats out of the parks. He had seen things as if he'd actually been a rat. Dominic reached the back alley of his apartment building and entered through the back. Using the stolen set of keys he entered and in the common restrooms situated just off the fitness room changed back to his dominant weasel body.

With everything situated in his pack and in his own clothes he stared at his own reflection thinking. In examining his own reactions and motivations when he'd been in the body of Dominic he admitted he'd taken the point of view of a rat. He'd never considered that he'd see things from the point of view of whatever species he masqueraded. It seemed to him that his outlook had been influenced by the biology of the body he inhabited. Jeremy would have to proceed carefully in the future.

Coming back into his apartment he saw Eric lounging on the couch. His brother lifted his head and watched as he crossed to his bedroom. Jeremy wasn't too concerned that he woke his brother. He'd left the television on so the slight noise he'd made was minor compared to the sound of the television still on.

He put everything away from his backpack and went to the bathroom to get ready for bed. Glancing into the living room as he crossed back to his own room he saw Eric had sat up and was watching the television. Jeremy was able to tune out the noise of the television and fall asleep.

Jeremy chose to stay and work from home Monday. He set his tablet on the breakfast bar and sat on one of the stools to work on it. With it being Celebration Day week there was little going on in the Nicholson building anyway. Eric was still sleeping on the couch as Sam came out of his room and started making breakfast. Jeremy watched him make a start of it and said "Just something simple for me, I'm not even hungry yet."

His brother glanced up at him a second. "You're never hungry, but you eat your fill anyway."

Jeremy stared at his brother watching him smirk as he continued fixing breakfast. Shaking his head he turned his attention back to his work. He lost track of time for a bit and looked up as Eric sat next to him.

Eric was looking at his tablet with a confused expression. His brother looked up to meet Jeremy's gaze and asked "What's that?"

"Work." Jeremy answered. He turned back to his tablet ignoring his brother as best he could.

"Desk job, huh? You're going to get soft with a job like that." Eric asserted.

Jeremy looked up while avoiding eye contact with Eric. Sam was in his line of sight and had an odd almost humorous expression. "I think I'll be fine."

"You never should have quit the gym. You look like you've lost ground since you left. If you're willing I could help get you back into the condition you were in a few years ago."

Jeremy stared at his tablet. Several possible replies were going through his mind. He wondered at his brother. He wondered if he had very many clients. He wondered if he was saving most of his income and mooching off people to do so. He wondered if Eric's income had actually fallen to the point where he couldn't afford an apartment of his own. He wondered how many people fell for the pitch he'd just given, especially given the shape Eric was in.

"No thanks, I can take care of myself." Jeremy said and turned his focus back to his work.

"Whenever you change your mind, just let me know. I'll even give you a ten percent discount."

They both looked at Sam when he laughed. Jeremy he was smiling in response to his brother's humor but could also see Eric was not amused.

Sam looked over at them from the stove. "Sorry, I just remembered something funny," he said still smiling.

Eric hummed and said "Probably a good time to keep it to yourself."

Still smiling he answered "It'll keep." and turned back to his cooking.

Jeremy heard Eric mutter "Fucking cocksucker" under his breath. Shaking his head he guessed his brother knew he was the butt of Sam's humor. Another couple minutes went by before Sam finished making breakfast. He served his brothers before plating something for himself. They all ate in silence. Jeremy guessed Eric was still stewing over the slight but he and Sam were just waiting for him to leave. As brothers they all knew there would be several minutes of reliving the moment, and more laughter.

Eric finished and instead of leaving for work lingered watching television. Jeremy was too focused on his work to notice that Sam had finished cleaning the kitchen by himself. Sam caught his attention by standing on the other side of the breakfast bar for more than a few minutes. When he finally looked up to see Sam watching him Jeremy gazed back waiting for his brother to speak.

"So, you're working from home today?" He asked quietly.

"Yeah, not much point in going to Nicholson. Why?"

He shrugged. "Just wondering," he answered in the same soft voice.

Jeremy didn't need to turn around to know Eric was still in the apartment. The television was still on and clearly tuned to something he would watch. "Did you have something planned?" He asked only loud enough for Sam to hear over the sound of the television.

Sam shook his head. Jeremy noticed his eyes moved to a point behind him, clearly looking at Eric, and back to him.

Jeremy glanced down at his tablet and back to Sam. "Just give me a few minutes to wrap this up."

"No rush." Sam replied. He stood across from Jeremy a few more seconds before leaving the kitchen.

Jeremy watched him from the corner of his eye. He made his way to his bedroom but didn't bother closing the door. He sighed and got back to his tablet only to see Sam come back out and start a load of laundry. He finished what he needed to and closed down the tablet. He spent a few minutes collecting a few things and stuffing them in his backpack. He added Jackson's notebook.

He hadn't had a chance to start reading his mentor's notes yet. He also had an appointment at The Floor later in the evening. He'd decided to bring it with him in case he had extra time to do some reading in his studio. As he finished collecting everything he looked at Eric. His brother's eyes were glued to the television.

Jeremy blinked at the sight. His brother's vacant stare and half open mouth was just like he'd been when they were young. Watching the program a few seconds he was a little surprised to see he was watching a child's cartoon. He turned to Sam and with a wink said "I'm going out for a bit, thanks for breakfast, again."

"I'll go down with you. I need to get some groceries anyway." Sam stated. His eyes had darted to Eric and back to Jeremy as he'd spoken.

Jeremy slipped the backpack on a shoulder and said "Sounds good. Actually, I've got a bit of time, I'll go with you this time. I kind of want to get a few things to snack on too." He turned to Eric and took a bit of a risk. "Eric?"

His brother looked up at him. "Huh? Oh, no thanks." He said and turned back to the television. In seconds he was back to his vacant stare fully absorbed in the cartoon.

Jeremy smiled at Sam as they left together. Sam was looking at him clearly making an effort to seem disproving but the humor wrinkles on top of his muzzle ruined the impression.

In the hallway Sam observed "He still loves the simple things."

"Yeah, well I might have kept the habit too if I didn't have so much to do." Jeremy said. He pushed the call button for the elevator looking at his brother.

Sam stared at the doors and looked up to him after a few seconds. "I've got about four months of savings left."

Jeremy sighed. "Sorry to hear that." Their father had always stressed saving enough from their income for emergencies. Sam had been the first out of the house and had followed that advice. Now though, he had been without a job for an extended period and was forced to confess running out of savings. "Please, let me ask around. I'm sure one of my mentors could help find a position somewhere."

The doors opened before Sam could reply. They both looked in the cab as the doors exposed the inside to their gaze. They stepped into the empty elevator. Once the door closed Sam said "Sure, I guess I have no choice now."

Jeremy heard the emotion in his voice. Pulling him to his side he gave his brother a one armed hug. "Family first, just like dad always said."

Sam nodded wiping the sleeve of his shirt across his nose. "Yeah, I know. It just kills me that I have to ask for help."

"Hey, you helped me with a place to stay when I first got a job away from home. You helped find this apartment too." Jeremy reminded him. "Actually, both were your ideas. I don't know where I'd be if it weren't for you."

Sam looked up at him and after a moment smiled wanly. "That feels like an age ago."

At the ding of the elevator arriving at their floor Jeremy let his arm drop from his brother and took a half step away. He knew Sam's pride had been taking a beating recently. He was sure he wouldn't want any strangers to see an awkward moment in an elevator.

As they stepped out of the cab Sam said "Thanks. I'll take just about anything at this point."

"I hope I can do better than 'anything'."

"Me too." Sam replied smiling genuinely.

* * * *

And now things get complicated all over again.