

While Jeremy was cleaning up his studio after his latest session he looked up at a knock on his door. Used to the protocol on The Floor of knocking and entering he continued working until he realized it was his brother waiting for him to open the door. Half finished with a sheet he crossed the room and let his brother enter.

Sam meekly stepped in looking around. "So, this is where you, um, work."

"Yes." he went back to setting up his bed. His brother sat on the edge of the bed as soon as he tucked the last corner. Jeremy watched as he looked around the room a little more before taking a deep breath and letting it out in a heavy sigh.

"You didn't get the job?" Jeremy guessed.

"I don't know yet. They're talking it over." Sam answered. He barely glanced at his brother.

"What's wrong?"

"That was pretty rough. They said they were being harder on me because they already have you working here. They don't need to appear as though they're playing favorites."

"Oh, shit. I'm sorry. I thought she'd at least be fair about it. Wait, they?"

"Yeah. It was Jenna and Jake doing the interview. Well, thanks for trying anyway. It's just been so hard after being fired from my last job, and everything else."

"Everything else?" Jeremy asked softly. He thought he knew what Sam meant but felt the need to probe for anything else that might have been bothering him.

Sam shrugged and shook his head. He remained silent despite his brother staring at him for several seconds.

Jeremy let it go. His brother obviously didn't want him involved. With a sigh of his own he sat next to his brother noticing only then he was still in his bathrobe. He took the time to change in the small bathroom. He came out and sat next to his brother again and waited with him.

As they waited he thought about Eric. Altering Eric's size with PATOMES was out of the question. He'd have to find some other way to curb Eric's aggression against his brother. Their father would likely have some suggestions on how to deal with their brother. Zane or Alex would probably have a suggestion or two as well.

Finally there was a knock on the door and Jake stuck his head in. "Sam, we're ready for you now."

Sam stood and started for the door.

"Good luck." Jeremy said, slightly embarrassed his voice had no confidence behind it.

Sam nodded his acceptance. The faint smile on his face mirrored his brother's emotion. They both felt defeated. With no appointments until the next day he made his way to the reception room. He guessed Sam would want to travel back home after his final meeting.

He stepped into the reception room to see eight of the staff waiting. He stopped to look at everyone lounging on the couches. He'd never seen so many of the staff in reception before. Everyone must have learned Jenna and Jake were interviewing for a new job. Their inevitable curiosity would have drawn

them. He didn't want his brother to have to face this many people on the way out after having been denied the job.

"Isn't there something else most of you can be doing?"

Judy spoke up for everyone. "Jeremy, they just want to see who was interviewing."

Jeremy answered "Okay, look, its my brother they were talking with but I don't think they're going to hire him. Can you all please let him get out of here without this much fuss?"

Judy glanced around the room and stood. As if she'd given more of a signal the rest of those assembled started getting up from the couches. Before anyone had a chance to leave the door leading to Jenna's office opened. Jake came out first followed by Sam then Jenna. Jeremy didn't look at their expressions, he had his paw to his forehead. With everything else happening to him this was the last thing he wanted his brother to have to go through.

He looked up as Jenna started speaking. "Everyone, I'd like to introduce your newest fellow staff member, Samuel Dawn. I know everyone will be pleased to know he'll start in the role of service worker, but more on that later. For now come on up and introduce yourselves."

Jeremy's jaw had dropped at the start of the announcement. He looked at Sam to see his brother happier than he'd seen him for probably years. As relieved as he was he now realized he now really did share a workplace with his brother. He didn't regret it but it was yet another complication added to his life, and he'd done it to himself. He laughed at the thought.

"Dumbass." Judy said as she punched him in the arm in passing.

He simply laughed that much more. His brother was finally having a good day. It quickly turned from an introduction session to a celebration. Everyone started understanding that the laundry was going to be part of Sam's new duties. Even Jeremy was somewhat pleased at that. Eventually everyone had introduced themselves allowing Sam to leave.

Sam stood next to him in the elevator and looked up at him. "Well, that was a surprise. Now I have to figure out how to break the news to mother."

"Actually, I doubt that'll be too hard." He replied.

"How so?" Sam asked.

"Father knows what The Floor is."

Sam stared at him with an odd look. "Is he..."

Jeremy laughed. "No. I explained to him what it is and why I had to start working here." He answered as the doors started opening.

"Oh. So you think he's also told mother."

"I doubt they keep anything from each other."

"I think you're right." Sam agreed as they walked out of the building. He paused and looked up along the stone and glass front. Looking back down to Jeremy who'd stopped a pace from him he took a deep breath and shouted "Yes!" as he pumped his fist in the air.

Jeremy grinned back at him. "Come on. Its my treat tonight."

He took his brother to a famous restaurant and was able to get a seat because of his status as a dominant. Sam loved the food enough to rave about the quality all through his meal. They were just finishing when Jeremy heard his brother's phone buzz.

Sam pulled it from his pocket and looked at it while holding it under the level of the tabletop. His eyes widened and he brought it up to answer it. "Dad?" After listening for a few seconds he said "Yes, where are they going?"

Jeremy sat up straighter at the excited tone of Sam's voice. He watched waiting as Sam listened.

"We'll be right there. I'm with Jeremy." He listened a bit more. "Right. We're on our way." Sam ended the call and looking around mouthed apologies to everyone looking at them.

"Shirley?"

"Yes." Sam answered standing.

Jeremy followed suit and pulling his wallet out dropped more than enough to cover the bill on the table. They almost raced from the table to the door. Jeremy was at the curb first hailing a cab. As they climbed inside Sam ordered the driver to head to Mercymount Hospital. To Jeremy it felt as if they could get there faster walking.

They finally arrived and burst out of the cab. Jeremy again barely counted before throwing the fare and a little extra in the front seat. Directed to the third floor they joined their and Shirley's parents in a waiting room. Everyone was tense and on edge hoping that good news would come soon. Five minutes after Jeremy and Sam had arrived one of Shirley's brothers came in. Aaron too was nervous for his sister and could sit for only minutes before he had to stand and start pacing.

Soon Jeremy had examined every ancient magazine in the room. The wallpaper was supposed to be cheerful but to him it seemed to impart a brittle vibe in the room. He couldn't get the inappropriate impression out of his head. It looked as though the designer had been up against a deadline and forced out of desperation came up with pattern they could only guess as soothing. The choice hadn't gone over well in Jeremy's opinion, like the plastic fake smile of anyone's least favorite politician. Jeremy wanted to rend the walls down to the clean white chalky plaster until his claws bled. He needed out. He needed air. He excused himself and went down to the ground floor and stood outside for a few minutes.

Even outside he still felt tense. It was as if the entire world now shared his feeling of strained expectation. It was a few minutes before he realized he was standing with some of the hospital staff next to the emergency entrance. Shaking his head Jeremy moved back inside and up to the third floor waiting room. His absence wasn't even commented on. Eric had arrived while he had been out and was sitting with his arms crossed over his chest and chin down looking as though he were sleeping. It was another fifty three agonizingly slow minutes before Ian came in.

His brother was all smiles putting them at ease on first sight. "They're both fine." were his first words to everyone. He went on to explain they could all see Shirley and the new family addition in a few minutes as soon as the doctor finished checking them both over. It took Glenda asking whether it was a male or female before Ian grinned and said "He's a male."

Eric was unsurprisingly being his usual fount of negativity and seemed to purposely be mentally isolating himself from the occasion. They were all much calmer and able to sit still now with the knowledge that everything had gone well. Almost everyone was sitting and chatting when the doctor

came in. The wallaby stood in the doorway and imparted the news that Shirley was able to have visitors. When they filed into her room Jeremy was the last to enter.

Shirley looked exhausted but extraordinarily happy. She stared at a small bundle held on her chest. Everyone was softly congratulating her and Ian, Jeremy joined in the praise and stared at the small bundle waiting to catch just a glimpse of his new nephew. Shirley smiled but barely looked up, and then only to Ian. He was standing right at her side leaning close. His paw stroked the fur of her head. He too was looking at his new son with tears in his eyes.

Ian leaned just a bit closer, his head touching his wife's. "They want to see Able too, Hon'."

Shirley looked up at him then to everyone else in the room. "Sorry, everyone. Its just-"

"We know dear." Glenda said stopping her daughter.

Jeremy could see Shirley's lower lip tremble as she looked up at her mother. Ian was gently slipping his paws under the bundle of colorful blankets that Able was wrapped inside. As he lifted his son Shirley's hands went to his arms and gently squeezed in a show of tenderness. Ian shifted sideways to show those gathered his new son. From his position at the edge of the family gathering Jeremy noticed everyone leaning in to get a closer look, even Eric was curious. He also noted he was no exception. Ian tenderly pulled away the edge of blanket from his son's face and Jeremy saw his nephew for the first time.

Able's face was so tiny. His eyes were still closed but his tongue came out to slowly lick his upper lip a second. It looked as though his fur was dry but still slicked back and flat against his skin. Jeremy gave a short chuff of laughter.

"His markings look almost like Sam's."

Eric snorted drawing everyone's attention. "Lets hope he doesn't end up gay like Sam."

The atmosphere in the room seemed to drop ten degrees at the comment. Silence reigned for several seconds. Jeremy could see everyone was struggling to ignore and forgive the unfortunate comment. Ian looked over to make eye contact with Jeremy, then Sam as he smiled and said. "Yeah, I noticed his markings too. I'd be proud of him if he's even half the male Sam is."

Sam smiled, more than a little embarrassed at the sudden attention as everyone looked between him and Able a moment. "Well, if he's got to have my looks lets hope he'd got Ian's character."

Steven put an arm around Sam pulling him close. "It would't hurt to have some of your character too, Kiddo."

Jeremy smiled. It had been years since their father had used Sam's early nickname. Jeremy realized then his parents had already known. He seemed to always be the last to realize things about his own family. The rift that had formed years ago between Sam and their father had clearly healed. Eric had failed in his never-ending bid to make a scene once again.

Ian turned and lowered Able back to his mother. Jeremy could hear a soft squeal from him as her paws took over from Ian's in supporting him.

Jeremy stepped back and wiped his eyes. Blinking he looked back up to see Steven looking back at him with a huge grin. His father turned to look at Able and his mother a moment before speaking. "Alright, that's enough. Lets go. They some need rest right now."

"Yes, everyone out. Let my daughter have some time with her son." Glenda ordered with a good deal more firmness than Steven had.

Jeremy was forced to back toward the door as everyone else started making space around Shirley's bed in preparation to leave. He was turning his body and blindly reaching for the door handle when he saw Glenda look at Ian and pull him into a hug. He turned and opened the door and was forced to step out feeling Steven's paw on his shoulder. They gathered in the hallway and as a group made their way back to the waiting room. Ian had stayed behind. Eric had slipped away rather than join them in the waiting room.

Back in the waiting room the discussion was centered around Able as they mingled and chatted. Jeremy noticed Elisa and Glenda were standing next to each other. They were leaning in close and almost whispering. If Jeremy hadn't known better he'd have taken the two females as sisters the way they were interacting. With a smile Elisa turned and announced "Okay, lets all go home. They'll be sleeping most of the night after Able gets his feeding anyway."

Over the course of the next few minutes everyone spread congratulations around on achieving new status as either grandparents or uncles and aunts. Sam and Jeremy left together. They made their way home and arrived well past three in the morning. Jeremy opened the door and turning on the lights woke his brother.

"Couldn't even stay long enough to apologize?" He asked as his brother sat up blinking at the sudden light.

"What?" Eric asked rubbing his eyes.

"You asshole. What was the point of that comment?" Sam asked furious at his brother.

"Whats the big surprise. Everyone clearly knew already." Eric asked challenging his brother.

Jeremy caught Sam's jacket stalling his rush and pulling him back toward the door. "Forget it." He said as he pulled him through the opening and into the hallway. Closing the door on his brother Jeremy said "Fuck him, he's not worth the effort. Besides, at this point he'll never learn."

Sam shrugged off Jeremy's paws and turned to face him. "What? You think I would have gotten hurt? Is that why you stopped me?"

"No. At that moment you'd have kicked his ass but like I said, he's not worth it." Jeremy said turned toward the elevator. "Besides, could you sleep right now?"

"No, but why are we leaving the apartment to him? You know he's just going to take that as another victory."

"Leave him to me." Jeremy said turning his head to make sure Sam was following him. He stopped and turned to look at his brother. He hadn't moved from the front door. "Come on. I'm hungry. We can celebrate Ian's fatherhood without him."

Sam shook his head as he looked at the floor at his feet and putting his paws on his hips. After a few seconds he started walking toward Jeremy.

Jeremy knew his brother well enough that he had debated going back inside and confronting Eric. Satisfied that he'd bowed to his request he waited for Sam to join him. His brother came up and slowed as he neared.

"If he doesn't change his attitude real soon you're not going to talk me out of kicking his ass."

"You think you can take him?" Jeremy asked as he turned to walk with his brother. He hadn't asked with any doubt of his brother evident in his voice.

Sam snorted and glanced at him. "He's slow and stupid, and never had to learn to fight dirty to survive. I'm sure Ian could take him too."

Jeremy looked at his brother surprised. His smile had had no humor in it. "So, what, you two protected him in the academy?"

"You too, to an extent. Well, until it became known you were going to be a dominant. At that point there was little Ian could do to keep the attention off you."

"Well, I never guessed, but thanks." Jeremy said as they waited for the elevator to come up.

"Yeah, no problem." Sam said also looking at the lighted numbers above the door change.

Jeremy looked over at his brother a smile slowly forming on his face. "So, you think you can take me in a fight?"

Sam laughed. Looking up at him he smiled. "Maybe a while ago, if I got you from behind got lucky and had the element of surprise. Now though, ever since you came back from down south, not a chance." He sobered a bit and added "Now you move like a coiled snake waiting to strike. I wouldn't want to see what happens to anyone that pisses you off."

Jeremy was a bit surprised at the evaluation. He knew the training in Chile had sharpened his abilities but Sam's assessment shocked him.

Sam had watched him. "Eric doesn't even know enough to recognize the change in you." He paused as the doors opened. As they stepped into the empty elevator he continued. "I actually considered taking him on tonight to save him from you."

Sam snorted humbly at his own statement and looked at him. "Imagine my surprise when you grabbed me from behind to stop me. I hadn't known you were even half that fast."

Jeremy shrugged. "Alex's training focuses on speed. I've been training under him a few years now."

Sam looked at him skeptically and hummed his doubt. "Anyway, what did you have in mind for an after midnight snack?"

Jeremy smiled. "Ice-cream is always good."

Sam smiled back. "I know just the place."

"Of course you do."

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What with the holiday here in the US I don't have any after chapter comments ready. I do however have a Patreon Reward story that only Patrons can see. Since its a Patreon reward its only fair they get to see it first. I'll post it everywhere else this weekend so stay tuned.