

So, its going to be no surprise that the Eric story arc is about to elbow everything else to the side for a while.

The next day went fairly normally. Sam continued to adjust to his duties at The Floor and freeing everyone from the task of their own laundry while he was there. Jeremy did most of his work for The Bureau from home, or his studio at The Floor.

His appointment that day went as usual with his client leaving satisfied to the point of exhaustion while he was left wanting. He unexpectedly felt a little uncomfortable bringing his sheets to the laundry area knowing his brother was there waiting. As he came in he couldn't keep his ears up to save his life. It was a strange and humbling experience for him.

Sam noticed the odd behavior and took pleasure in needling him about it. His brother relented after a few minutes and changed the subject. "You know you don't have to wait here anymore, right?"

"Yes. Its just, here you are doing my laundry and I feel like I'm taking advantage of you." Jeremy said hearing the sheepishness creep into his voice again.

Sam laughed. "Its my job. The job you helped me with, how is that taking advantage?"

"Ahhh, I don't know. It just feels that way to me." Jeremy said with a shrug. His brother was smiling back at him clearly amused by his reaction.

"So, is it true that you can do some amazing things with your tongue?" His brother asked with an almost innocent expression on his face, the humor in his eyes put the lie to the rest of his face.

"Okay, I've got work to do. See you later." Jeremy said and walked away from his brother.

Sam's laugh followed him. "I'll get you to answer that eventually."

Jeremy stayed in his studio working on his tablet until he was caught up with everything. Once that was finished he started going through Jackson buttons' notebook again. He had dinner with the dominant the next night and wanted to be ready. After the prerequisite knock Sam came in with his sheets fresh and folded.

Jeremy closed the book and stood from his chair as his brother set the sheets on the edge of the bed. "Thanks. How is it going so far?"

"Good. Its good to be doing something productive, even if it is just janitorial work." Sam said.

Jeremy felt he could almost believe his brother. He grew up with him, he knew when he was forcing himself into accepting something.

"Thats good. I doubt you'll have to stay in this for too long."

Sam forced a smile. "We'll see." He glanced around the studio for a second. "Well, have to get back. See you back home."

"Later." Jeremy replied watching his brother leave. He noticed Sam lift his shoulders up as he crossed the threshold to the hallway. He resolved to ask Jackson for his help with his brother the next day. He got to work making his bed and finished readying his studio for the next client. He didn't have another

appointment for two days but always wanted his studio ready just in case. Jenna was scheduling his appointments more frequently lately. As he left for the night he hoped she'd have someone scheduled for him every day soon.

He stood waiting for the elevator amazed at his own thoughts. Just weeks ago he'd have been shocked at the prospect of servicing clients every day and now he was looking forward to daily sessions.

As the elevator chime sounded Dianne called out to him. "Goodnight Jeremy."

He turned as he stepped into the cab. "Goodnight Dianne." and smiled at her leering expression. The mongoose had been one of his trainers and knew every intimate detail of him.

As he waited for the door to cycle closed Dianne said "Let me know if you have any need for a refresher." She laughed at his abashed reaction.

Back in the apartment he found Eric was still avoiding them. There was no sign his brother had even stopped by to pick anything up. Sam came home after a few hours and was surprised that Jeremy had already eaten by ordering out. He watched Sam from the couch as he looked through the small boxes.

"You hardly touched any of this." Sam observed. Lifting a box and sniffing the contents he looked at his brother and accused "It's no wonder if this is from that place on Ash. Let me fix something for you." He added as he started collecting pans on the stovetop.

"No. I'm fine. I'm about to go to bed anyway."

Sam looked at him. "It's not even eleven yet."

"It's been a long week." Jeremy didn't want to explain that he'd also stopped on the way and had a full meal before the delivery. The use of his talent earlier in the week had drained his reserves more than he'd first thought and he was still recovering. His brother started a couple steaks and as the smell reached him Jeremy stood and moved to watch. Even though he'd just eaten twice his stomach rumbled announcing it was ready for more.

Sam paused and turned to stare at him. "You're fine?" He mimicked with a smirk.

Jeremy ate with his brother and chatted about recent events. Jeremy noticed a change in his demeanor as they talked. It felt as though his brother was suddenly avoiding mentioning the Thirteenth Floor. Jeremy once again didn't want to press the issue so the conversation died to a comfortable silence. They watched television for a while before Sam called it a night. Jeremy went to bed too and was asleep within seconds of laying down.

The next day went by for Jeremy in a blur of anticipation. Soon enough he was headed for Jackson's condo. He arrived early and rode up the elevator to the familiar foyer. As expected Jackson opened the door letting him in to the fox's home. Once again he was struck by the decor. He simply couldn't seem to help himself as his gaze traveled all over the huge living room.

Jackson lead him to the kitchen where the male had already started preparing the meal. As he resumed cutting vegetables he insisted he finish by himself. After Jeremy took a seat at the fox's encouragement Jackson asked how he had fared since they'd last talked.

"My brother has a son now." Was the first thing out of his mouth. He met the fox's surprised gaze with a grin.

"You're an uncle now. Congratulations, to you and your brother, and sister in law." Jackson replied with a smile of his own.

"Thanks, I don't know why I told you that. You're the first person I've brought that up to outside the family."

"Don't apologize for sharing good news."

"I didn't mean to, I mean, I'm not sure what I mean." Jeremy said his voice trailing off at his lack of understanding his own motive.

Jackson looked at him a moment. "At a guess, you've held the good news in for so long that the first opportunity came and got blurted out. Still, I'm humbled at being the first to know outside of family." He finished as he returned to prepping for dinner.

"I guess you're right." Jeremy said.

"Well, thanks for the inclusion. Its not often I'm treated like part of anyone's family."

His mentor looked up at him again. "You look like you've had a rough week."

"That why you're keeping me away from the knives?"

Jackson laughed. "No, but now that you mention it..." he replied as he scraped diced peppers from the cutting board into a small bowl.

To Jeremy it looked as though everything was ready for the cooking to begin. Jackson's habit of having everything in bowls prior to even turning the stove on had covered almost half the countertop. He could see every ingredient but still had no idea what his host had in mind for their meal. He looked up to meet the fox's eyes as he tapped the flat edge of the knife he held on the counter in a rapid staccato.

"Whats bothering you tonight?"

Jeremy looked down at the counter and replied. He had always found it difficult to confide in anyone about family issues and kept his explanation short and to the point. Even a short explanation took several hard minutes. Jackson drew him out with more questions and after a good deal more time had a clear understanding of the entire situation. He'd paused in preparing the meal and had sat next to Jeremy and continued asking questions. In the end Jackson had an arm around his shoulders in support.

With a sigh the fox dominant gave the advice that Jeremy's intended response, while drastic and unfortunate was likely the only way to resolve the issue. Jackson agreed wholeheartedly with his father in that family always comes first. Jeremy looked at him confused at the seeming dichotomy between the sentiment and his intended action.

"Whats best for a group is sometimes painful to a single individual with the group." The fox explained meeting Jeremy's eyes with an unwavering gaze. Jeremy could only take a deep breath and nod his acceptance.

They sat silent for a long moment before Jackson squeezed his shoulder and stood. Moving back to the other side of the island countertop he resumed making their meal. The fox stayed silent letting Jeremy mentally rally after the emotional talk. The fox glanced at him occasionally while he continued cutting vegetables.

Jeremy sighed and broke the silence. "Sorry to lay my problems on you like that."

"Nonsense. Mentors don't get to pick and choose the issues to help with. Personally, I think we should be prepared for the harder things that come along more than the easy ones." He paused again and stared at Jeremy holding eye contact to make it clear the importance of the point he was making. "Also, I'm honored that you'd trust me enough to confide in me on such a tough decision."

"I can't thank you enough for listening. Even though I don't feel any better about it, its still not any easier knowing there's nothing else I could have done." Jeremy said only able to make eye contact with his mentor occasionally.

The mood slowly lightened as Buttons started cooking the meal. By the time the food was ready Jeremy had his emotions back under control. Jackson made light conversation until he started plating the meal. It turned out to be large chicken breasts stuffed with all kinds of diced vegetables mixed with cheeses. To Jeremy it was on par with his brother's cooking and said so.

"Really? I'm as good as someone a fraction of my age? Thats some complement." He humorously replied grinning at the irony.

"I didn't mean it that way," Jeremy started apologizing until Jackson laughed.

"I know but you walked into that one." Jackson said still laughing.

Jeremy held his tongue and continued eating. Jackson made a few comments and asked a few questions about other members of Jeremy's family. By the time they finished the meal Jackson had gained a partial insight into most of the Dawn family interactions. He allowed Jeremy to help clearing the table as they continued discussing Jeremy's family. Once the chore was done Jackson led the way to the huge patio.

With the sun having set almost an hour before and the sky covered in clouds the air felt cold enough for snow. Jackson sat in one of the lounge chairs indicating Jeremy sit next to him. As he settled himself he felt the radiant heat from he tall gas heaters spaced around the deck.

"Your father's right. As a dominant, and you're mature enough, you have to lead your family now. I have no doubt Steven is an alpha, but now that you outrank him, it falls to you, like it or not."

"I understand. I will follow through with this, it just sucks that he's forcing the issue."

Jackson said nothing. He watched Jeremy for a time before looking up at the darkened sky.

Jeremy knew the fox was letting him think through everything they'd discussed for himself. He appreciated Jackson's unreserved endorsement of his intent regarding his brother's behavior. His trouble was that he couldn't really think. He was still upset even after their talk. In reality he had hoped Jackson would have told him to take some other action.

"Jeremy." The fox said softly gaining his attention. Once the weasel made eye contact with him the fox continued. "I'll clear next Friday night again. Now is clearly not a good time. Come back then and we'll talk about our plans for the Bureau."

Jeremy was both relieved and chagrinned at the reprieve. "Sir, I'm sorry. I never meant to make my problems--"

"Stop. You don't have to apologize for needing my advice. I already said thats essentially what mentoring is all about." Jackson said cutting him off. He spoke softly and with clear empathy for Jeremy's situation. "I understand how hard this is for you. Its going to be rough, for you and the rest of the family.

Someday, you'll be able to look back at this with a bit of perspective, when that time comes you'll see it for the learning experience it is."

Jeremy was looking back at the fox as he spoke. Jackson's eyes met his evenly and were filled with understanding and real emotion for him. He distantly wondered at the puffs of mist coming from his breath as he talked. Even as cold as it obviously was he felt warm from the heaters aimed at each lounge chair. Jeremy nodded and thanked his mentor again seeing the fox's face smile just slightly.

Jeremy wondered if Jackson was feeling as much discomfort at the decision as he was. He knew it was the one thing he would never ask his mentor. Looking away and up to the glow reflecting back from the clouds he sought to change the subject by asking "Think it'll snow tonight?"

"It's not supposed to, but I kinda think it will."

"I could use some snow," Jeremy said. "When we were young we'd play in the fresh snow for hours."

"Jeremy, don't do that to yourself," Jackson said.

Jeremy looked at him not understanding for a moment. With a sigh he caught his meaning. His mind had started reminiscing about his youth and playing with his brothers. Jackson was right, his fond memories of his brother would only cause the pain of his anticipated action to deepen and erode his resolve. He nodded and sat up. "I should go. He may be back by now."

Jackson stood with him and extended his arm in the gesture of equals. Jeremy took his arm and held it for several long moments.

"Thank you sir," Jeremy said as he released his mentor's forearm. He stood for a second and on impulse stepped up and hugged the fox.

Jackson returned the embrace pulling him in with a surprising strength. Once they stepped away from each other Jeremy was struck with the fact that he was now a shade taller than the fox. Considering his body was filled out with more muscle Jeremy was certain he was also physically stronger. He stood blinking at the realization feeling a physical response beginning in his nethers. He was further embarrassed at his reaction as Jackson tilted his head.

"What?"

"Nothing. I, it's nothing," Jeremy said. He doubted the male would care about his observation and was certain he would be less than amused at his stirring.

Jackson stared a second and started smiling. "Let me guess. You just now noticed how big you're getting?"

"This is so inappropriate right now," Jeremy muttered.

"It's all part of maturing as a dominant," Jackson stated as he grinned back.

"Are you saying you constantly embarrassed yourself?"

"More than you can guess right now. Remember, we dominants all go through the same thing."

Jeremy heard the humor in his voice. "Great..."

* * * *

In Memoriam...

Oh yeah, Jerre really sparked some comments last week. Two things to I want to go over about that so this post chapter section is going to be a bit long. I have a sense that you lot got the gist of it so I'm going to go through it just to provide the background details.

He went through a lot. I understand amputation or anything similar its extremely traumatic to one's sense of self-image. While it would be one thing to endure two years being only an inch tall what came next for him would test anybody. Then he was shifted into the feral form of another species and given a glimmer of a chance at taking revenge on the person that had caused everything up to that point.

Remember, Dominic actually spoke to him as he waited in ambush, practically taunting him. As I was writing that scene it was with the idea that for Jerre that moment was sufficiently stressful to force him into a feral nature. When Dominic altered him back to a leopard it worked as well as a reset. Jerre was back, until he then was turned into a female of another species. While not enough to make him go feral again it would completely unbalance him, ur, her.

The treatment she received from the fox would just exacerbate his mental state. She'd pretty much be in a hellish in-between, not completely sane but not feral either. It should be noted also that Jeremy has noticed being in his Dominic body has altered his outlook just a bit. So as for PATOMES affecting him, its influence was only as far as what body he wore at any specific point. The distinction to me is that its the biology of the body any character wears has an affect on their mental outlook.

So, while I had always intended for Jerre to end this way the two little side stories of his endeavors are probably responsible for getting you lot interested in him enough to react as you have. Its also interesting to me that neither of them would have happened if not for a reader commenting and earning a story cookie. So, while Patreon supporters get stories as a reward some of you lot can also earn stories by finding little hidden cookies. For full disclosure the reader responsible for the Jerre side stories noticed a repeat character from another of my stories in Jeremy.

There have been a number of similar cookies no one noticed. Don't bother looking, you gotta comment after that week's chapter is published and before the next. Anyway, thanks for enjoying the story so far.