

The next few days were a blur between his training with Alex Elkins, the Bureau and the Thirteenth Floor.

Gakota had become as much another mentor to him in working toward getting the Bureau back to work. The cat taught him how to delegate much of the tasks under his responsibility. Many of the Bureau members could do the work as well as him and in any event had more experience.

By Wednesday afternoon most of the large scale work in the office spaces was either done or within hours of completion. Sahar was showing just how well she could force her will on reluctant contractors. The short female was never one to disrespect due to her size and had no problem showing it on a moments notice. More than once Jeremy stood back and watched the small squirrel stand up to a slow moving worker who would look down at her with surprise. Each and every time they would go back to work with new respect for the short but ferocious female.

Jeremy was helping unwrap and assemble the office chairs for one of the conference rooms when his phone rang. Used to getting calls at any hour of the day he answered almost automatically.

"Hey, Jeremy. That sounded really professional." Was the cheerful response.

"Allen? You sound good." Jeremy replied.

"Yes, things have kind of worked out. I can tell you about it now, since its going to be announced later today. Have time for a coffee?"

"Sure. I can make the time. Where do you want to meet?" Jeremy answered walking out of the room.

"You know that bakery you met me before? How about there?"

"I can be there in about half an hour." Jeremy said stopping outside Gakota's office.

"Great. See you then." The cheetah replied and ended the call.

Jeremy stepped into the cat's office and offered "I'll be out for a while." The ocelot only looked up and nodded. On the way out Jeremy smiled at the progress that had been made in just days. The offices looked nearly finished. They'd even gotten two calls from different sections of Nicholson. Makannish was out on one of them. Jeremy smiled wider at the idea of everything being in its place when the fox got back.

On the street Jeremy turned toward the bakery. He would have to walk a block or more to the nearest subway entrance. Halfway there he stopped to watch a group of youths that had gathered at the entrance to one of the nearby buildings. While Jeremy had known they had moved close to a museum he was more interested in the cluster of young that had just exited.

Obviously a field trip for one of the feeder schools for an academy he still stopped to watch. The sight caused a memory to return from his road trip. There were only three carnivores in evidence in the group just leaving the museum. He walked behind the group guessing they were also heading for the same subway terminal. There were perhaps more than a hundred students being corralled by only three chaperones.

None of the students noticed his presence until they were waiting on the platform. It was a squirrel that had taken to looking around to fill her idle time that saw him first. She started at him openmouthed for a few seconds before elbowing the squirrel next to her. Jeremy watched the nudging and whispering

spread through the group as eyes turned to glance up at him. The nearest chaperone had noticed the action as well and caught his eye.

With a shrug and a mouthed 'Sorry' the adult otter smiled to him as they waited.

He shrugged himself and nodded to her smiling his acceptance. As the cars came in the station all the students started jotting in preparation of boarding the train. Jeremy was one of the last to enter the car. He'd noticed the jostling had had a purpose. The car they were in was filled shoulder to shoulder with the young students, all were turned his way and staring up at him.

The otter chaperone stood next to him obviously trying to keep the smirk from her face. The otter only came midway up his chest.

A rabbit standing just to the side of him nudged his companion and whispered "Go on, ask."

The female looked back at her companion with a shocked and embarrassed expression. Looking up to see Jeremy looking back to her she gulped and cleared her throat. "Sir?" The rabbit spoke up over the noise of car coming into the next station.

"Yes?" Jeremy said as the noise ended. He could see most of the students around him were watching and listening.

"Sir, did you go to a higher academy?"

"Yes." Jeremy answered. Glancing at the otter standing next to him he continued "I graduated from Flack Street Academy."

There was a considerable amount of looks exchanged amongst those watching the discussion.

A young skunk three rows back blurted out "Was it worth it?" just as the doors closed and the car started up again. His tone was almost challenging.

Jeremy smiled back. "Yes, I think it was. It took a lot of effort and was the hardest thing I've ever done." He paused at the audible groans coming from a few students. Smiling himself at the display he added. "I know, its sounds cliché, and no doubt you've heard that before. I know I did growing up. Thing is, looking back its not so much the things we were taught but more about learning to make the effort."

The train started its screeching halt into the next station. Jeremy could see most of those around him didn't quite understand. He waited until the sound had started to die before continuing. "Take for instance when you were learning how to read." He said looking around him to see every eye on him.

"Thinking back, as slow and tedious as it seems now it was the foundation for everything that came after. Think also on your handwriting skill. Its most likely much better than it was last year, yes?"

Seeing most nods of acceptance and also a few glances and nudges as the doors closed again. Jeremy continued his lesson as the sound of the train once again dropped. "Its because through practice and effort you continue to improve on each skill. There's no more of the alphabet to learn, instead the focus shifts to increasing vocabulary. After that it becomes, what?" he asked hoping someone would guess where he was leading them.

In talking about his experiences his mind had also gone to work on a separate pathway.

The skunk glanced around a second and again spoke out. "Essays."

Jeremy pointed to him with a smile. "Right." Just as the sound of another screeching stop started. Waiting until he could be heard again Jeremy followed the sudden thought. His work at The Bureau had fallen into a routine. He'd first been hired with the intention of being the first of a new generation of members. With all the focus on moving the Bureau out from under Nicholson he'd lost that focus.

In the silence after the train stopped he again continued. "At first I hated them. It was hard thinking of what to write. That too is another step to gaining more skills. Each thing you learn is another step in the process of adding skills that are needed later on."

In watching the group he could see most had followed his reasoning. It was more of a success than he'd expected. The otter at his side caught his eye. She was smiling up at him and as he looked turned to her students. Jeremy looked back at the faces before him. "Anything else? My stop is coming up soon."

They all looked around at each other as if searching for a spokesperson. His internal introspection continued as well. He'd not thought about how to recruit new members since before his trip to Chile. Now, with so many young faces looking up to him and eager to listen to every word he felt the familiar feel of his mind about to make an epiphany. Jeremy knew from his time working with puzzles it was just at the edge of his conscious mind. He just needed a few seconds of mental stillness to let the thought come to him.

A young wolf was the one to speak up. "Okay, but does all the effort really make a difference?"

Jeremy knew he shouldn't have felt surprised at the question. He also should have expected such an attitude from a carnivore. He was about to explain everything that he had experienced since graduating. The face of the young wolf bore a distinctly sly look. "Excepting myself, since I'm a dominant, and you're no doubt going to say I've had more opportunities because of that. I can say that my brothers that have also graduated are enjoying lifestyles far above any they could have had without a certificate."

The wolf's sullen reaction let him know he'd avoided the trap. He could guess with an almost certainty the wolf was a young copy of Hugo. It would have pained him except for the widening of multiple eyes around the wolf. The rising sound of the train kept the conversation from continuing for several seconds. Allowed to think of a rebuttal once the sound of the train allowed the wolf almost challenged. "So everyone in your family went to the academy, then you're from a family of privilege."

Jeremy considered for just a moment about letting the insinuation of the wolf go. Shaking his head and staring at the male he answered. "No, we weren't. The only reason we were all able to enroll was our grandfather had insurance when he became the victim of predation." He held eye contact with the wolf staring his own challenge back at the male, until the youth dropped his eyes. From the reaction of those around him Jeremy knew his conclusions were accurate. He quickly added the wolf's profile to PATOMES.

In the silence that followed he was able to program alerts attached to the wolf's profile to look the male up every couple years.

"Well," the otter beside him started, doing her best to defuse the situation "everyone please thank Mister," she paused looking to Jeremy.

"Dawn, Jeremy Dawn." He answered her implied question.

"Mister Dawn for his time." She finished.

Jeremy stood for a chorus of 'Thank You's' from the students. The sudden feeling of the idea about to come to him had faded. The smile on his face suddenly felt forced as he stood hoping the train would come to the next station faster. He was doing his best to keep his ears from folding back against his skull

at the sudden realization of the height and nearness of the young ones. Most of the students were just under waist high to him. Their uplifted muzzles were right at the level of his crotch.

Jeremy was pressed up against the side of the car in trying to keep an appropriate space between himself and the nearest student. Clearing his throat he said "Welcome." suddenly struggling to keep his ears up. He looked back at mostly unknowing smiles as they continued looking up to him even as the train started slowing.

Making his exit Jeremy walked away from the car forcing himself not to look back. He wondered at the itch that had started in the middle of his back. He'd never felt as he had with so many young faces staring up at him. Hearing the train leave the station as he started up the stairs Jeremy paused and looked back despite himself.

Alone for the moment he sighed. He'd been doing fine until he had nothing left to say. He'd not felt as self conscious even when the dean had ambushed him with the request for a speech during his graduation. The worst had been the sudden hyper awareness of the size difference between him and the horde of students. He'd seen several eyes glance down as they all waited through what to him had suddenly become an uncomfortable silence.

Jeremy moved on shaking his head. He was gaining a new understanding of why few dominants went about in public. Glancing down his front he could see the undeniable large outline of his sheath even through the fabric of his slacks. He reached the bakery with his ears still folded back and a frown on his face. Stepping inside he saw Allen had arrived well before him.

Jeremy stepped up to the table the cheetah had taken and smiled down at the ferret sitting with him. "Didn't expect to see you as well Detective." He said as he held out a paw in greeting. "I should have expected it though."

Once they'd shared a greeting Jeremy sat across from the cheetah. "I take it since we're meeting in public Allen's no longer in any danger. Since you're here with him I guess the department hasn't yet caught Dominic, but instead he's likely on the run."

The ferret and cat shared a glance. Allen observed "See? I told you he was smart."

Detective Frick sat back with a one sided grin. "Not bad so far. What else would you guess?"

Jeremy looked from the grinning ferret to Allen. The cheetah was smiling back at him expectantly. "Well, if the rat is still at large you might expect him to make a run at Allen." he speculated starting to glance around while making it seem casual. "You might even have your partner somewhere watching. Maybe even more personnel scattered about."

He hadn't been able to see the jackal in his short glance. Looking back to the detective he saw a hint of surprise on his face. "Then again, by Allen's relaxed attitude you don't think it's all that likely. At a guess you're only steps behind him by now."

Jeremy stopped at the change of expression on the ferret. He'd been following what he'd have likely thought of the clues to their conclusion working to keep his insider knowledge from skewing the results. He would have had to make a wrong guess. Letting the slight smile drop from his face he stated "Not so close?"

The ferret answered. "He seems to have abandoned whatever he had planned and gone to ground." Looking at Allen he added "Mister Alversten should tell you how that happened himself."

Jeremy looked at the cheetah feigning surprise. "Allen?"

The cat's chest puffed out a bit as he sat up straighter and smiled. "Actually, he sent me a package." After a glance at the detective Allen started detailing his side of the story. He began with the revelation that the detectives had been with him as a precaution. Jeremy admitted he'd expected such after hearing the noises during a recent phone conversation with the cat. He simply smiled back at the ferret's smirk as Allen continued.

As the cheetah finished Detective Frick started filling in the rest. Sudden realization caused Jeremy to sit up straighter and interrupt. "Wait, go back. You said he took to releasing some of his victims as ferals in the park?"

Jeremy had been going over their side of the story and seeing how they'd connected the dots. He was shocked at the realization that he'd inadvertently given them a clue that could connect him with his Dominic persona. He was thinking furiously and stared at the tabletop unseeing as he said "I saw them, once."

It seemed at the moment a safe admission. If they had already made the connection his reaction could help to throw off suspicion. "There was a raccoon, it actually started scribbling in the dirt in front of me. At the time I thought it had been a trained show animal that had gotten away. I didn't think anything after that since it was attacked and taken off by a fox."

Jeremy stared back at Frick. He and Allen were both looking at him in surprise. Considering their reaction they could really be chalking it up to coincidence. Still, Jeremy was trying to remember when he'd introduced Hugo's friend to the group. He remembered the fox had made the excuse that the one time predator had become unstable and had to be put him down. That had been less than a week after their introduction. There could have been enough time for him to get to know their method of communication.

Had they done so they might know he had been running with Hugo before the attack. From there the police would also know the location of the attack. The cemetery was well outside the city. Through Hugo, that would point them to the academy. With Allen's involvement they would have enough to make inquiries. Jeremy was the sole common denominator in everything. He would even have had a motive for attacking Hugo and his pack. That left one burning question. Had there been enough mental stability left in the predator to communicate anything incriminating to the fox?

The detective was the first to speak. "That's, that was their planned routine. The raccoon and fox you saw were actually working together. There were a couple other of Dominic's victims also. All of his victims from the park have been returned to normal. From certain things that he's known to have said to those he turned over to us through Allen; he's given up whatever plans he had for them."

"Hells, I still feel horrible not catching on. I should have realized after hearing what he was capable of from Allen." Jeremy said. He was fairly relieved that they'd not made the connection. He saw that Allen's face and taken on a haunted look. No doubt he was considering the chance that he could have just as easily become one of the park ferals.

"God's, Allen, I'm sorry I didn't put enough stock into your story at the time." Jeremy said letting his feelings into his voice.

"For what its worth, Mister Alversten is to get almost the full rewards." Frick said.

Jeremy looked at him. "What rewards?"

"Well, there was a rather large one for any leads that lead us to Dominic. There's also numerous rewards that were more recent, mostly for the activists that took over the park. All told he'll collect nearly fifty grand for his troubles."

Jeremy looked at Allen surprised. The cheetah was smiling back, but it was clearly forced. After a moment Frick continued filling in the rest of the story. Once the ferret was finished Jeremy sat back thinking everything over. He was satisfied that he was indeed in the clear, for the moment. He would still like to get his paws on all the reports just to be sure. With a sigh he looked at Detective Frick.

"That's quite the story. I wonder that you're speaking so freely in public."

The ferret grinned as he shook his head. "You don't miss anything, do you? No, normally we wouldn't be having this conversation in public. However, the Mayor's been briefed, and from experience, the entire story will be in the press by the end of the day tomorrow."

Jeremy nodded. Looking at Allen he observed "You're going to be a bit of a celebrity."

"No," the ferret said. "His identity has been withheld, for his continued protection. Even the mayor can't force us to disclose that."

Allen said "I prefer it this way. I couldn't stand all the intrigue as it was happening. I just want to get back to a normal life."

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Now that took a bit of work. I was halfway through this chapter and got stumped, and basically had to stop for a bit. I needed to mull this one over for about two weeks to get everything just right in my head before finishing it. I hope this feels like it ties up a lot of ends, because it essentially does.

Its chapters like this that makes me glad I've got such a large lead in writing the story. At the time of writing this chapter I was publishing parts 35 to 38. Most of the events described hadn't even been published yet, but still, I like to have the option of going back and changing things a bit when I get an idea. Had I been posting as I write them that option of having such a clean tie up goes out the window. So, now bring on the questions...

As for the geography tour; as stated last week Oregon is to the north of Shasta. Oregon is a fairly new country cobbled together after the wars. Small in size it only covers less than half of what the state of Oregon we know. From Shasta to the south and only as far east as the Cascade range its northern border in the Columbia river. Being so small there's little it can do against any of the larger countries that surround it even with the resources it does have. Going to go into the history of the region a bit next week.