

There was no hint of another victim of Dominic in the news the next day. If the police had rescued him they didn't make it public.

Once again in his own body Jeremy had gone back to the park and tracked down the tiger. After casually introducing himself Jeremy was a bit disappointed in noticing the tiger had acted completely different towards him. It took him a few minutes to realize the male was intimidated by him. Even though he stood a few inches shorter than the tiger, Jeremy as a dominant had the male assuming a deeply submissive role.

Disappointed he'd bid the male a good day and removed his profile from PATOMES. Due to the encounter he wouldn't bother going out as Dominic again for some time.

Between his work at the Bureau and the Thirteenth Floor it took Jeremy several days to catch up on world events. The protests of rats had spread across the world. In some countries the reaction had been swift and occasionally brutal. As he'd been informed while still in Madagascar a number had even used the protest as an excuse to make 'examples' of the 'unruly' as many governments claimed.

Not surprisingly the protests in those countries allowing them to continue became a regular occurrence. Jeremy had in response made it a habit to check the local news before heading out to work or the floor. It was almost becoming a necessity to see where the latest march was snarling traffic. With the numbers of rats and their supporters coming out to make their grievance known the police simply didn't have the numbers to do anything but watch from the sidelines.

Work at the Bureau continued but not without a hitch. Jeremy was a bit disappointed when Gakota informed him that Makannish and Sahar were taking lead on the Madagascar account. This time the ocelot didn't waste time letting Jeremy think through his reasons before explaining himself. It was likely going to take both of them to find the specialists to examine the object. It was also explained that as COO Jeremy simply didn't have the time to spare. Besides, they were going to need to recruit more people if things worked out the way Gakota thought.

In late July the find in Madagascar became headline news. There were from the start wild stories that made Jeremy wonder at how so many news outlets could be so far from the truth. Once again The Bureau was well ahead of everyone. They'd brought in a media consulting firm in preparation of the news getting out. By the time the find in Madagascar was even mentioned Lightspeed Media Consultants were already contributing some of the facts to a large number of news organizations. The wild rumors died a quick death, for the most part.

It wasn't long before The Bureau had more applications to enter Madagascar than they could handle. From scientists to politicians to even tourists everyone wanted to be front and center in the biggest news story of the year. With The Bureau suddenly in the spotlight Gakota had little choice but to hire a security firm to control the access to their offices. The need to bring on more staff put enormous pressure on Jeremy.

His solution was typically Bureau as anything else. He set up a tablet in the closest conference room to the door with a blank job application as the only accessible file. The assumption was that if anyone were clever enough to get past security and brazen enough to then apply, they just might be worth looking at. There were ten applications filled out on the tablet the first day. Four were from people working for the security firm. Jeremy interviewed them before the end of the day. The next day, two of them were shadowing Bureau members to see if they could cut it.

Soon enough the media frenzy died down from hysterical to something to talk about after the weather. The ebb of attention allowed Mak' and Sahar to get a grip on who they should petition Madagascar for entry. Jeremy too was starting to get a handle on the flood of applicants to the Bureau. It was a pleasant surprise to be able to pick from a vast well of people. He also had to resort to the same tactic that had been used on him when he was recruited. He also put his own finishing touch on the process. He was the final interview. If they could talk with a dominant without cowering in a corner then they moved on to shadowing another member to see if they could handle the job.

In early August Jeremy finalized his search for a new vehicle. He picked an oversized SUV that a well known rental company no longer wanted and was replacing with a newer model. It was still low miles and the interior didn't suffer from too many strange smells. It was one of only a few that had tinted windows for privacy and enough head room for someone of Jeremy's size. He now stood at an even seven feet tall. He was entering the large side of the spectrum even for a dominant.

It was Sam who convinced him to take a celebratory drive out of the city with his new purchase. It was a strange new experience for Jeremy. He'd been so used to the constant need to adjust gears, throttle and brakes on his bike that driving the SUV seemed boring. His brother loved it, even though he had to almost climb up the side to get in.

The next time Jeremy and Sam hosted the family get together they were better prepared. The new dining table and dinnerware met with everyone's approval. Sam's cooking went over as well as always. Dan's inclusion in the gathering was met with smiles and congratulations. It was the first time Sam had introduced anyone to the family. Jeremy had been so wrapped up in work and play he had no idea their relationship had gotten so serious. Still, he was happy for his brother.

By the end of summer things were, if not quite as calm as before, at least manageable for Jeremy. The Bureau had still not doubled in size. There were a good number of washouts through the process, but also some very capable people that were exceptional additions. Mak' and Sahar were green lighting the first trickle of experts to Madagascar. Jeremy and Gakota both stayed up on every report that came out of every visit.

It was the middle of a usual overcast October day when Jeremy got the call from Detective Frick. After the usual pleasantries the ferret dropped a bomb.

"I'm sorry to have to inform you of this, but our mutual friend, Mister Alversten has been missing for a few days. We suspect foul play."

"Allen? Missing?" Jeremy asked. He mentally kicked himself for silently congratulating himself for sounding genuinely shocked. "Sorry, but I thought this Dominic thing was over long ago."

"It may be that he's waited just long enough to feel safe to start his activities again."

Jeremy stayed silent a few seconds. "Is there any way I can help?"

"Unfortunately, there's little any of us can do at this point. We're stuck waiting for something to turn up right now." The detective answered.

"Well, I know some of his friends from our days at the academy. If you don't mind, I could contact them and see if they've heard anything." Jeremy's mind was split. He was worried for Allen but also glad he didn't have to try and fake his reactions.

"It couldn't hurt. We don't know Mister Alversten well enough to completely eliminate the possibility that he might have taken a vacation without telling anyone. If some of his other friends have been in contact, well it would be a huge relief."

"Yes, I understand. I'll get back to you either way, Detective." Jeremy replied. "Thanks for calling." Setting his phone back on his desk Jeremy stared at the screen of his tablet thinking back through the conversation.

He didn't like the lack of hope he'd heard in his own voice. He felt terrible all over again for putting the cheetah in what to the male would have seemed a very dangerous position. As it was Dominic hadn't made an appearance since the kangaroo. In fact, Jeremy realized he hadn't even opened PATOMES in well over two months.

Sitting up at the thought he opened PATOMES and brought up the cheetah's profile. He sat back in his chair with a sigh. PATOMES told him Allen was several miles away and alive. Jeremy sat back up. The question now was, why had no one seen or heard from him. There was no way Jeremy could explain his ability to track the feline down, but Dominic could.

First though, Jeremy would have to follow through on calling some of their mutual friends from the academy. Closing PATOMES Jeremy reached for his phone. It took him half an hour to work through the seven people he thought Allen would have stayed in contact with. To his surprise only Marcus had kept in touch after graduating. The lion admitted he had no idea if Allen had vacation plans.

As disappointed in the outcome of the calls Jeremy smiled again at the thought that the lion had extracted a promise of sharing a meal with him the next day. Jeremy wondered which of the two felines had learned that from the other. He left the Bureau a bit early to make a few preparations. Back at the apartment he put his purchases through the wash while his brother was still out. He had just enough time to put everything away in a new backpack before he had to head to the Floor.

The next day Jeremy met Marcus for the first time since he'd graduated. As he walked into the small eatery the male had picked he recognized the lion easily. Smiling back at Marcus he watched as the male's initial smile changed to one of shock. As Jeremy walked over to the table the lion stood and offered a paw in greeting.

"Wow, Jeremy. I knew you were going to be a dominant but, damn." Marcus said as they touched pads.

"You're looking good Marcus." Jeremy motioned for the cat to sit. Marcus stared a few seconds longer.

"Thanks Jeremy. Wow, you're almost a big as I am." the male said still looking Jeremy over.

While he was almost used to the stares and extra attention to have an old friend like Marcus react as he was brought the typical self-consciousness back. They were nearly eye to eye. Marcus had perhaps twenty pounds on Jeremy. The major difference between the two of them was Marcus' huge mane. Jeremy let him stare a moment longer while he looked the male over.

Marcus was dressed well. While Jeremy was, as usual for those in The Bureau, dressed fairly casually the feline looked as though he could have stepped out of a boardroom. The lion's suit even highlighted the male's stout build. As sharp as the feline's suit appeared his well coiffed mane left no doubt he was well off as far as his finances were concerned.

"You're not the scrawny kid anymore yourself." Jeremy asserted with a grin. His thoughts were still on the comparison between the two of them. He had left his jacket at the Bureau leaving him in just a shirt, a simple one at that. Jeremy had yet to even consider spending anything but the bare minimum on his clothing budget when he would likely outgrow them within a few months. As such his shirt was a bit tight

around his chest while there was plenty of extra loose material around his middle. he had long ago given up finding anything that fit him properly.

Marcus finally sat but kept examining Jeremy even after they'd ordered. The lion easily chatted about a number of banal subjects. It was a perfect example of how to avoid controversial subjects. He only stopped once the waiter brought their order. After a few bites Jeremy asked "So, has anyone gotten back to you about Allen?"

The lion half shrugged and replied "I have to confess I haven't stayed in touch with Allen for over a year."

"What?" Jeremy asked, surprised and shocked at the admission.

Marcus sighed before continuing. "He was running with a bad group. I tried to convince him to avoid the kind of people he was associating with. Once it was clear he couldn't pull himself away from them I, well I didn't want to get involved."

Jeremy almost admonished him but stopped himself. While Marcus had left Allen to fend for himself against an unsavory peer group he had done worse. As Dominic he'd let him think he was alone against an even greater foe than his predatory friends. "Well, I didn't stay in touch as much as I should have, but I do know he wasn't running with that crowd any more."

Marcus looked down as he nodded. "Thats good to hear."

Jeremy suppressed a frown. It had sounded as though Marcus presumed Allen was likely dead. They ate in silence for a minute or more, each in their own thoughts. Jeremy finally asked "Was there any particular reason you wanted to have lunch with me?"

"Actually, yes. I understand you're working at that company that helps business in trouble. From what I understand you can help my father's business."

"In what way?" Jeremy asked.

"Ever since the actions of East Africa we've been facing some boycotts. We're only an accounting business. We don't have any connections of any kind with the East African government. I was hoping you could do something to help."

"Thats more a marketing situation." Jeremy replied. "Sorry to disappoint, but thats not what we do."

"Oh, I see." Marcus said breaking eye contact and looking away. He was clearly disappointed.

Jeremy thought that perhaps the lion assumed he sided with those boycotting his father's business. He didn't know anything about their business. He did however wonder why anyone in accounting would be dressed as well as Marcus. To his sensibilities dressing as well as Marcus might send the wrong impression for an accounting business. He could almost hear his father opining about accountants that dressed better than the bulk of their clients. "Whats the name of your company anyway?"

Marcus looked back. "Fortune Builders." There was clear hope in his eyes.

Jeremy blinked. He couldn't keep the smile from his face. "An accounting business named Fortune Builders?" A guffaw escaped him. "Thats a good one."

Marcus grinned back. "Yeah. My dad thought the same when he came up with it."

"Well," Jeremy said "with any luck this thing in Africa will end soon."

Marcus nodded. "I hope so too."

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Time for some background on East Africa in Jeremy's world. The nation covers what we know as Ethiopia, Somalia and Kenya. It is also one a a handful of countries where Lions are still the majority of the population. In the case of East Africa a male lion has reigned as king for centuries. The past three kings have also been dominants.

The lion culture of East Africa still reflects some of their past feral nature. For instance the king has a large number of wives, much like a lion pride of their feral counterparts. The difference is that the females have the real political power. It's well known that the king is largely just a figurehead. The Council Of Queens as they are called in East Africa are the true rulers. Considering the current events in Jeremy's world it would seem they don't like rats...