

I hadn't anticipated the possible word play in this chapter when I came up with the name for Jeremy's rat alter ego. His use of the name was only supposed to be a smirking clue Jeremy let hang, almost taunting anyone that might try to find Dominic. After editing this I find that I tended to use Faraday's name far more than usual. It turned out to be easier than the unintended word play. Hope its not too obvious.

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He had made his way to the docks early. The building where he was to meet Faraday had two vehicles parked in front. The rat was making it clear he was already in place. With no point in waiting until midnight Dominic walked toward the front of the building. No one stepped out of the shadows to stop him.

Dominic opened the door and walked inside. He paused only a moment to look the large rat over. Faraday sat in an overstuffed leather chair that had been brought in. He was dressed in a suit that had anyone else been wearing it would have impressed. Cecil Faraday however was a few sizes too large for the suit.

It wasn't that the suit wasn't made for one of his size, it was rather that there was more of Faraday now than when it was made. The two sides of the suit coat had been spread open from the rat's expansive belly. The male had furry jowls under his chin and his neck looked squeezed by the collar of his shirt. His fat fingers held a cigar just in front of his face. The thinning haze of smoke around his head formed a grey nimbus indicating the dominant had just taken another puff, just one more of many. It looked to Dominic that the male would require help in getting out of his chair.

Lounging comfortably in the large chair the rat stared back at Dominic. "Good to see you're punctual." Faraday said before taking another puff on the cigar he held in one paw. His voice was rougher than expected considering the wheezing breath of the male. Dominic wondered if it was the cigars.

Dominic suppressed the reaction of wrinkling his muzzle as the acrid smell of smoke intensified. He instead focused on breathing shallowly through his mouth. His eyes drifted to a slight movement on the table in front of the dominant. "Ah."

The table was clear except for an ashtray within reach of the large rat and two shrunken rats. Dominic's eyes lingered on the two individuals. It took only a moment for him to recognize both. They were the two that had started everything by handing out leaflets. They sat on a small cleaning sponge, clearly provided for their comfort while waiting.

Dominic's eyes moved back to Faraday. "I'm guessing one is either your daughter or son."

Behind a fresh cloud of cigar smoke Faraday confirmed "My daughter. I suppose I indulge her too much, but I'd ask-"

Dominic held a paw up stopping the dominant. After snapping his fingers he said "In respect for your status, and as apology for the unintended offense..." He'd programmed the reset for the female quickly. He'd stopped as the dominant leaned forward to watch. Faraday's attention was focused entirely on the female as she stood and began to slowly grow larger.

Dominic glanced at the others in the room. They too were watching fascinated at the process of the female growing back toward normal size. He'd instantly guessed Faraday wanted to talk because of either

of the two sitting on the sponge. It wasn't really much of a leap. Having guessed that he didn't want to appear to be someone willing to antagonize a dominant. He waited patiently as the process continued.

Faraday was staring down at his growing daughter puffing an ever thicker cloud of fragrant cigar smoke into the air. The sight caused Dominic to consider the possibility that the dominant might be projecting pheromones against him. He actually doubted such a ploy would work, the reek of cigar was not only strong enough to mask every other scent in the air but it was also making Dominic's throat feel raw. Even his knowledge of the possibility of pheromones in the air he could counteract most of the influence. As the growing female stepped away from the sponge Dominic looked at the dominant rat.

There was clear relief in his eyes. His daughter passed six inches tall and without turning her body around looked back and up at Faraday. After a few seconds the male looked to his minions and gestured them forward. Dominic watched as the female rat reached down and picked up a small gym bag. The two rats walked up to the table and looked down at the growing female. She was up to a foot tall making the male beside her look even tinier. The female minion nudged her male partner and handed him the gym bag.

The normal female rat picked up the growing rat from the table and carefully carried her to the side of the room. Together the two normal sized rats brought out a blanket to give the growing female some privacy. Dominic turned his attention to Faraday.

The dominant was watching the two rats. The male had his back to the blanket even as he held it up as a curtain. The female held her half down at shoulder level and was looking over it to watch. Faraday looked to Dominic for a second and spoke as he turned back to the spectacle. "I appreciate this, Dominic."

Faraday sat back and indulged in a few puffs from his cigar as they all waited for the female's growth to finish. Soon enough the female dropped her side of the blanket screening the other female. The pamphleteer was still adjusting her top but was now fully clothed. She had grown to just inches shy of her original height and was closing in on her final height. The gym bag at her feet looked empty. As the final inches came back she gave a huge sigh and let her eyes flick to Dominic for just a second. With her head down and eyes on Dominic she said "Thank you, sir."

"Good. Now go." Faraday said. The male rat bundled up the blanket while the other female escorted Faraday's daughter toward the door with a paw on her elbow.

Once the door closed behind them Dominic looked at the badger a moment. The male had moved to stand at the side of the rat's chair. He maintained eye contact with the badger a moment before turning his attention to Faraday. Both males were relaxed to the point Dominic felt almost certain they had little intent of acting against him. "Was that all you wanted to talk with me about?"

"I appreciate you making this easy. There's the issue of what to do about this one." Faraday said as he leaned forward his gaze settling on the tiny male.

"I have no interest in him." Dominic replied.

Faraday took several heavy puffs from the cigar thickening the air around his head with smoke before pulling it from his mouth. "I thought you might take that position." The rat said. He brought his cigar down toward the ashtray as if to flick some ash off the end. At the last moment his paw changed course and brought the glowing end down on the tiny male. The cigar enveloped him with a slight sizzling sound and a small cascade of sparks from the burst tip. Faraday brought the cigar up off the surface to display an empty sponge and dropped the cigar in the ashtray.

Faraday looked at Dominic as he pulled another cigar from the inside of his suit coat. "Just so there's no misunderstanding, while that was personally satisfying it's not intended to send any hidden message or intimidate you." He brought out an odd looking lighter and as he brought the fresh cigar to his face he pressed the top of the lighter. With a click, blue flame came from the side and Faraday set to lighting his cigar.

"My daughter has a tendency to follow the wrong advice. Having taught her a valuable lesson with little lasting harm I am in your debt." The rat puffed on his cigar a few more times and seemed to be waiting for a reply.

Dominic was still trying to get the image of the tiny male's last moments out of his head. The male had been staring up at Dominic oblivious to the descending cigar until the end. "I really don't need anything."

"No?" The rat stated more than asked. "I would think, someone as sought after by the cops as you are could use at least a little help, if only from time to time." He smiled at Dominic from behind a fresh cloud of smoke. "I'll bet you've heard a lot about me. While half of it may be true, the parts that are true are only the half of it. For instance, I have a lot of connections. Some of those connections allow me to gain information that's not available to the public. This is how I know the two of us are not that far apart in how we see the world." Faraday paused long enough for another puff.

"I know, for instance you only accosted cops that tried hassling you. From what I gather you had an agenda, a plan of action. My daughter and her confederates spoiled that, or so they say. As a result you removed them from the picture. The clever part, and I respect this a great deal, you turned them over to the cops. Kind of a notice of surrender, or that's what it was supposed to seem like on the surface. It's too bad that my daughter and her misguided friends had already started something that now can't be controlled."

Faraday took a moment to draw on his cigar and assess Dominic through the haze of his exhalation. "As for Green, well, let's just say you did me a favor there too. That you have the balls to take on one of us," He showed his yellow stained teeth in a grin "fuck kid, that's impressive."

Dominic at first thought Green was the now dead male entombed in the crushed cigar. It took him a moment to remember the dominant he'd lured from the subway. He again considered the possibility of the rat attempting to influence him by projecting. He'd tried to breathe shallowly through his mouth but had constantly fallen back to his normal practice when his throat started burning. He once again redirected his breathing pattern but could smell only the pungent cigar. His eyes started watering.

Faraday grinned again. "Yeah, you do know a lot about us. Don't worry though," he said waving his cigar in front of himself "these things kind of negate that ability."

"Go on then, I'm listening." Dominic said.

Faraday grinned. "I know better than to think you'd be a stooge. I'm not asking that. I'm suggesting we can help each other. As it stands now I owe you. At a guess I bet you could do with a set or two of alternate identification papers." The rat stopped and let his grin linger as he watched Dominic.

Dominic was initially inclined to deny the need but in order to maintain the facade he replied "Well, that might be helpful."

"I can put you in touch with an expert in that particular field." Faraday said. His smile dropped off his face as he paused with his paw holding the cigar inches from his mouth. "Of course, this person will keep any arrangements completely confidential. I have no doubt that should I dare ask she'd keep even me in the dark."

Dominic couldn't keep the slight smirk from his face at the dubious admission. "I just might take you up on that." He paused and brought a paw up to scratch under his chin in a conscious gesture. He wanted to display some observable mannerisms in front of the dominant. "My only concern of course would be what I'd have to do in return."

"I don't keep markers or any of that nonsense. If we're going to have a relationship I'd want to be the one helping you more than the reverse. The only thing I'd ask in return is that you hold off from, well, doing whatever it is you do to my people. Or at least come to me first. A sign of mutual respect, you might say."

"That would seem reasonable on the face of it but how am I to know just who 'your people' are?" Dominic asked.

Faraday raised his eye ridges in an apparent look of surprise. "They wear my pin." The rat said as he reached up with his left paw and touched a small pin on the lapel of his jacket.

Dominic looked at the badger. He too wore an identical pin on the left lapel. Both pins were small enough to be overlooked unless one was looking for them. "I suppose I can abide by that so long as they don't trouble me."

"Fair enough." The dominant rat said. He eyed Dominic for a few seconds while puffing on his cigar. "That's all I had. Unless you have something else to discuss we're done."

Dominic stood thinking for a second. "In case we need to get in touch again, how is that to be accomplished without kidnapping someone?"

With a wave of his cigar Faraday said "Barnard here can handle anything."

The badger that had stood almost unmoving to that point nodded and stepped away from the rat's chair. Dominic tensed as the male put a paw inside his coat only to withdraw it with a small business card. Handing the card to Dominic, Barnard said "It's a message service, but anything will get to me within minutes."

Dominic slipped the card into a pocket. "Since that's all..." he said turning to the door.

"You're not from around here, are you?" Faraday said. From the tone it was more statement than question.

Dominic turned with a paw on the doorknob. "Slipped up with that pin, huh?"

Faraday smiled. "Yeah, anyone that grows up in The Battery knows about my pin."

Dominic shrugged and with a grin replied "Does it matter?" He was a little unnerved at how perceptive the dominant had been.

"No." Faraday answered through an even denser cloud of cigar smoke.

Dominic let himself out and closed the door behind himself. Fresh air had never smelt so good. Stepping away from the door he saw an SUV parked just paces away. It was idling with its lights off. Dominic could see the silhouette of the three rats that had left the building waiting inside. He ignored them and made his way around the building in order to retreat from the scene.

Pausing behind the building opposite Faraday's location Dominic assessed the sturdiness of the thick electrical conduit above the meter that was fastened to the side of the building. He climbed the pipe quickly and managed to crawl up onto the roof. Crossing to the side he crouched and watched as Faraday entered the SUV. A few seconds later it drove away.

Dominic waited a few minutes for any more activity but saw nothing. He couldn't help but feel the whole encounter a bit anticlimactic. He retraced his steps to his backpack and made his way out of the dockyards. With PATOMES he started tracking Allen Alversten. He could tell the cat was on the move.

An hour later Dominic finally spotted the cheetah. Pacing the cat from the opposite side of the street Dominic could tell the cat was in a good mood. Allen was nibbling on something from a little paper bowl, the likes of which street vendors gave when one bought food from them. Dominic crossed through a break in traffic and quickly caught up to the feline.

Dominic walked beside the cheetah for several steps before Allen noticed someone at his side. Once he recognized who was walking next to him the cat almost stumbled.

"Relax. I'm just checking up to see they didn't harm you." Dominic said as he smiled up at the cat.

"I, I'm good, sir." Allen stammered as he slowed to a stop.

Dominic took the cheetah by the elbow and steered him toward a nearby alley. "Need a bit of privacy for your reward."

"Sir, really, I don't need a reward." The cat said clearly afraid of the rat, or perhaps the idea of being alone in an alley with Dominic.

"Nonsense." Dominic replied as he used more force to propel the cat in the the alley. Once they were ten paces inside the alley Dominic could see they were alone. "So, I apologize. I didn't anticipate someone using you to get my attention."

"Sir, please. Its not a problem. I don't need anything." Allen said. His paws held up waist high with his palms down, a clear sign that he meant what he was asserting.

Dominic saw the cat was clearly terrified of him. "Allen, relax. You've done well by me, I'm not here to punish you. Quite the opposite actually." he replied as he brought his paw up. Simultaneous with the snap of his finger he activated the programmed changes on the cheetah.

Dominic watched as the cat's eyes widened and he took a half step back. A soft groan escaped him as his back arched. Clearly feeling pleasure of the growth surging through him the feline closed his eyes. An instant later Dominic could hear the cheetah start purring. He had watched carefully but could at first see little difference in the cats appearance.

As Allen opened his eyes he at first looked up but lowered his gaze to meet Dominic's eyes. "Um," He said as he started looking himself over "thanks, sir."

Dominic smiled back. "No problem. I added what I thought appropriate considering you would find it hard to explain too much growth."

The feline groaned lightly in pleasure again. "Wow. This is amazing." Allen said sliding his paws down his front. Dominic had added a few pounds of muscle over the cheetah's body but the cat's paws lingered on the more noticeable change. Dominic had felt free to almost double the size of the feline's member. The obvious tent in the cheetah's slacks now reached an impressive thick ten inches. Allen's paws slowly felt his now massive length.

"Well, no doubt you want to take that on a test run so I'll leave you to it." Dominic said as he turned toward the alley opening.

"Sir?" Allen said softly but just loud enough for the rat to hear. Once Dominic had stopped and turned back he added "If this is your typical reward, consider me available when you need me."

Dominic smirked. "I'll keep that in mind."