

Hooray for the big milestone. And an even bigger hooray for all of you that have been reading along to this point.

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Sam was as always up first and making breakfast when Jeremy came out to the living area. He chatted with his brother as they both ate. Jeremy helped clean up the kitchen before Sam had to leave for The Floor. His brother mentioned he had a full schedule for most of the day. He would also have the next day's schedule clear and planned to spend it with Dan.

With Sam out of the apartment for the rest of the day Jeremy had the opening he needed. He selected a few clothes and stuffed them in his backpack. He'd waited a couple weeks to contact Barnard. Having talked with the badger Dominic had an appointment with the male in a little more than an hour. He was to introduce Dominic to someone that could make alternate identification papers that could pass for the real thing.

It wasn't that his Dominic persona really needed such things. He simply desired to maintain somewhat of a front. Jeremy left the apartment with the change of clothes in his backpack. He managed to find an alley and was in his alternate rat body in no time.

Walking into the small cafe he saw the badger at the far side of the seating section. As Dominic walked toward the male he noticed the area he was seated in was clear of other patrons. They'd be free to talk without anyone overhearing anything.

As Dominic sat he wondered at just how similar this meeting was to any that Jeremy had had with Allen. The badger greeted him cordially saying the person they were to meet wasn't a morning person giving them plenty of time for a leisurely coffee. Dominic tried to relax but the idea of sitting casually chatting with the badger caused him to think of how many ways an ambush could be sprung as they sat idle. Barnard was attempting to engage him in small talk for several minutes before Dominic cut the male off.

"So, you're Faraday's right arm?"

The badger blinked at the direct question. "In a way."

"You think that makes you untouchable?" Dominic asked keeping a neutral tone and expressionless face.

"Yes, it does." The male replied in the same manor.

"Then I have to ask, how vulnerable do you think I am?"

Barnard leaned close to the rat and in a soft yet non-confrontational voice replied. "I can answer for the both of us. We think you're one of the most dangerous people in the city. There is no reason for us to antagonize you."

"Which is why you didn't try to retaliate?"

"Mostly. It also helps that it can be said that you had no idea who Karresa was beforehand. That she's back to normal sends all the message we need to give."

Dominic nodded. "Just so there's no misunderstanding..." He paused to push his coffee away from himself "I have no intention of either crossing your boss, or joining his organization."

The badger nodded. "That's fine. We can live with that, so long as you stay a neutral, disinterested party. Or perhaps a bit more friendly. We'd appreciate that." He said and leaned back in his chair.

Dominic nodded and leaned back as well. Looking around a moment he pushed his chair back and looked to the badger. The male stood first and buttoned his jacket. He hadn't yet noticed anything different.

He had a pleasant smile on his face as he watched Dominic stand from the table. His expression changed to mild surprise. Dominic ignored the reaction. The male was now six inches shorter and only a head taller than the rat. He'd been altering the badger's body very slowly.

"Just so you know what it's like..." Dominic said as he lifted a paw to snap his fingers the same time as activating the command for the badger to return to normal.

A few seconds later the male took a deep shuddering breath. "Hell's bells, that's quite a rush."

Dominic smiled. "Yes, it is. Shall we?" he added as he stepped out of the badger's way.

Barnard led the way to the door. He paused before leaving the cafe to adjust himself in his trousers. Dominic smirked at the reaction. It seemed every male had the same reaction as they grew larger and stronger.

Eventually they arrived at Faraday's forger. The badger led him up the side stairs to the space over a dry cleaners. As they waited after the badger knocked Barnard asked "Have you done that for yourself a lot?"

"Not very often." Dominic replied.

His companion snorted. "Probably a good thing then. Seems like it could become an addiction."

Dominic saw Barnard was watching him from the corner of an eye. He nodded and turned his eye to the door. He responded to the badger as he heard the locks on the door being released. "You watch too many movies."

"Still..." He replied with a smile as the door opened to a gap about six inches wide.

"Barnard, wish I could say it's good to see you again." The rat said as she opened the door further. She glanced at the fellow rat next to the badger and turned to head back deeper into her apartment. "Alright, come in, you know I don't stand on ceremony."

Dominic glanced at the badger who smiled as he entered the rat's domain. He followed looking around. This had been the first time he'd actually been in a rat's home since seeing the results of an eviction. He was pleasantly impressed. Their reputations, or rather stereotypes he reminded himself, were rather poor. This place, however small it may have been was spotless.

She herself was a bit unkempt, the bathrobe tied around the waist possibly the only clothes she wore. For being a Sunday afternoon he guessed allowances could be made. About average for her species she only stood at three feet. Her movements were easy and graceful, reminiscent of flowing water. He was intrigued with the female.

"My friend here is in need of your help."

"Figured so. What's this character's name?"

The badger looked at Dominic.

He answered "Dominic Ash." Almost without thinking what the family name implicated.

She raised her eye ridges at the name. "Well, you know what my fees are, right?" She opened the fridge of the little kitchenette and bent down to reach inside.

Barnard cleared his throat and looked at Dominic. "Well, no. I haven't brought that up yet." he confessed.

The rat turned from the fridge with three cans in her paws. "Barnard, you'd lose your own tail if it wasn't plugged into your ass." She stopped in front of the badger offering him one of the cans. After he took it she held the other can out to Dominic.

He was about to decline and explain he didn't drink until he noticed it was canned ice tea. Barnard was already popping the top off of his. Taking the can he said "Thank you. Seems you've known Barnard long enough to have him pegged."

She smiled and stepped back a bit. "Doesn't really take long to form the right impression." She stated as she stared at Dominic. Her eyes traveled over him appraisingly. "An Ash, huh?"

"Yes, that's true." Dominic smiled at her nod of acceptance. Ash wasn't a commonly used family name for a reason. He wondered idly if Eric had also adopted the name after his ostracism.

She was still looking him up and down, unabashed at her own forwardness. He was beginning to like this rat. She was an inch or two shorter than Dominic. Despite being a part time rat he was finding her attractive.

"I charge thirty-five hundred for the full package, up front before any work is done. It only takes me a week to have everything ready. I also don't give discounts to friends or friends of friends." She finished turning to stare at Barnard.

"Understandable," Dominic said "I imagine you don't get any repeat business."

She turned to him with an enigmatic smile. "You'd be surprised." She motioned to him with the unopened can in her paw. "Drink, please, there's nothing in there other than what the store put in there."

He looked back at her, his smile staying on his face of its own will. "I can have your fee tomorrow. Barnard said you don't make appointments, but considering the source," he said leaving the statement open.

"My afternoon is free. Come then. Unlike someone we know, I tend to have a schedule that I like to keep to." She said glancing at Barnard.

"If business is concluded?" he answered back holding his can up as if awaiting further permission.

She smiled wider in return and held up her own can. They opened their flavored iced tea at the same time. After she took a sip the rat said "I'll be taking pictures for your passport, so come well groomed." She said in a tone that made him think there could be more in store than a set of false identification papers.

"Understood. By the way, Barnard didn't say what your name is."

"Alicia Moon. Nice to meet one of Barnard's better friends." She answered holding the can up once again in toast fashion.

Dominic returned the gesture and took another sip of the beverage. He was defiantly forming an instant bond with the female.

The badger said "Why am I always the but of your jokes Al?"

"Because you don't follow the rules you schmuck. What day is it, do you even know?" her voice suddenly sharp and cutting.

The male looked at Dominic as if for rescue and back at the rat.

"It's Sunday you useless ball of fluff. I don't work on Sundays, its the one day I have to myself and this is the third time you've dropped by for whatever reason. You do this again and I'll have that bottle cleaner you call a tail hanging over the door as an inspiration to follow the rules. Clear?" Alicia had step by step gotten closer to the badger and from her vantage under him had been harsh and intimidating enough for him to back away until he was against a wall.

"Okay, sorry. You know I keep odd hours." Barnard said his voice paralleling his position.

She backed off the cornered male looking to Dominic. "Sorry about that but some people need to be reminded sometimes."

Dominic shrugged. "I've noticed that seems to be a common trait in the general public."

The badger simply sighed. Alicia smirked as she looked at Dominic. He had her pegged as an alpha. Clearly not a dominant but an alpha all the same. Barnard was clearly a beta in his actions and reactions. For all the mass and muscle he had on the rat she still clearly had him cowed. He wondered if this was why Faraday used him as a lieutenant.

"I'll be sure to be here just after the lunch hour." Dominic said softly letting the humor he felt at seeing the exchange into his voice.

She nodded. "You I feel I can trust." The rat replied. Turning to the badger she pointed and added. "You're about to get it cut off."

Barnard held his paws up in surrender and as he backed toward the door with an apologetic grin said "Fine, I'll be good."

Dominic followed him out and glanced back. His look allowed Alicia to smile and wink at him just before he closed the door.

As they descended the steps at the side of the building Barnard laughed. "Alicia only acts like that when she wants to impress someone. I think she likes you."

Dominic kept his silence. He was wondering at the exchange between the two. Trailing behind the badger he could still detect the not so faint hint of arousal lingering on the male. Of course his coyote senses were more capable than most but he still guessed Alicia wouldn't have failed to catch his scent as well. He managed to conceal the smirk he felt as they parted ways.

The routine of making his way back to his apartment had become second nature. There were plenty of out of the way alleys with back doors set deep into the associated buildings available for his needs. This time he had taken yet another different route that had brought him through the part of the city where the seedier aspects flourished. Besides it only took him a matter of moments to change clothes. Today a break in the routine found its way to him. As he was leaving the alley as a coyote heading for his second change he was stopped by a rat assertively standing in his way.

Having stopped and looked down at the rat Jeremy was more surprised than irritated. Before he could react the rat shoved a pamphlet in his paw and stepped to the side in his search for another victim. Turning to watch the rat Jeremy felt a smirk on his coyote face. Even before he looked at the handbill he knew what he'd see. He looked down to confirm his guess, knowing also that he stood in front of an adult theater. The rat wasn't the only one working to attract passersby to one show or another. It wasn't what he'd expected.

Stepping toward an already full trash receptacle an idea had formed. He paused as he reached out over the overflowing bin. Opening the leaflet he stood reading it for the few seconds it took. Finally crumpling it up he shoved it deep into the trash mostly to make sure the litter was pushed a bit deeper. Stepping back into the flow of foot traffic Jeremy made his way to his next station of change.

Stepping inside his apartment he could tell Sam was still out. With little to do for the rest of the afternoon Jeremy set to catching up on recent events. He tended to get bits and snatches of events thanks mostly to Sam. With his focus on work his brother had been his sole conduit of information from the outside world. After just a few minutes of browsing through the news updates on the net Jeremy realized there had been much more going on than even Sam could impart.

The first item he sought out was the person the handball had informed him about. Hannover Turlock was running for city office. It was the first time a rat had done so. Jeremy had up until that point avoided politics. He wasn't even involved enough to register to vote. He had no idea what exactly the seat Turlock was running for accomplished. He started there.

He smiled as he read the description of York's Commissioner Of Public Services. Should he be elected to the seat Turlock would be overseeing the full spectrum of public services the city received. That included the police. Jeremy sat back and pondered for a moment. He knew for an almost certainty what changes the rat would really make once in that office.

A bit more searching and Jeremy had learned about the rest of the field running for Commissioner Of Public Services. Eight people in all were running. Turlock was one of two rats competing for the office. The rest were as typical, mostly from carnivore species. More surprisingly Turlock was currently polling well. He was in third place and also well above the mass of the also-ran category. With only weeks left before election day Turlock still had little chance of success.

Jeremy searched through a few more of the races coming to a close the next month. Having largely ignored politics until then he was less than was surprised to learn that rats were running for several offices. As a whole they had never sought publicity or organized enough to run for so many public offices. By the time he needed to head to The Thirteenth Floor Jeremy had resolved to register to vote. He fortunately had six days before the deadline.

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Okay, so I said I was going to pause here at chapter 100, but I managed to get a few more chapters done. I'll go through March, at least, and see where I am at the end of the month. My plan had always been to get to a point where I could pull some chapters from the first run that hadn't been seen before. I'm almost there so it could be a few more months after that too.

On the negative side, I'm putting most of my free time into getting more of Jeremy done and not getting much done on those stories I -still- owe Patrons. I will get to those soon-ish.