

Chapter 47

Alvin, TX, March 26th

Thomas groaned and couldn't tell if it was because of the headache what he'd experienced had given him, or the orgasm. What he'd remembered had been so clear, so real he now had cum on his stomach. He looked up as he realized Donal was panting heavily, and the front of the squirrel was gaining a wet spot.

"Are you okay?" Donal asked, the inside of his ears nearly as red as his fur. "How do you remember it?"

Thomas closed his eyes and tried to make sense of it. "I remember what really happened, but I still remember what Henry wanted me to remember. And they're both just as real." He looked at the squirrel. "I thought what you'd do would fix things, not make it more confusing."

Donal looked at Grant.

"This is your area," the kangaroo replied at the silent question, "but if you're asking me to guess, I'd say that unearthing the real memories doesn't lead to the false ones being buried."

"But why do they both feel as real?" Thomas asked.

"That could be because of how Henry does it," Grant said. "Is there any sign of how he did it in what you remember?"

Thomas touched the side of his neck reflexively. "He bit me."

"The Stroker were known for that," Owen said. "They were addicted to the power."

"He made me forget he had, though. That has to mean something, right?"

"Consuming blood is forbidden among us because of the danger the Stroker showed us it brings. If any of the boys at the frat realized he did it, they would sound the alarm."

"The important question, for what we did," Grant said, "is if you can tell which memory is real."

Thomas closed his eyes again. He remembered them side by side, as if two nearly identical movies were projected on the same screen. It was what led to the building headache. "I can work out what really happened, by some things they said. They wouldn't let me remember talk of magic, not even hints of it."

"Like Limbani saying he saw where you'd be," Donal said. "Yes, I saw your memories as you experienced them," he added at Thomas's raised eyebrow. "I wasn't in them, as you seem to have been, and I think that I might be able to increase the distinction between them in the future. There was a... tactileness to the memories. I was too overwhelmed to try anything with it, but maybe I can, I don't know, pull them apart as you remember?"

Thomas nodded. "Okay, then let's go again so you can practice. The sooner you are good at this, the sooner you can help Madoc remember his son."

Donal chuckled. "Hopefully, this time won't end in sex."

"I wouldn't count on that," Thomas replied. "If there's one thing you have to know with the frat, is that it always ends in sex." He grinned. "Just enjoy the show."

"Hopefully, this time it will be a show," the squirrel said, reaching to place a hand on Thomas's temple.

The motion and the rat's question were interrupted by the explosion that shook the house.

Thomas looked at Owen. "Does Gilbert have anything here like the arsenal he has at the frat?"

The armadillo shook his head, standing. "I had the bomb squad go over his room when he started college, and every spring after he goes back."

With a curse, Thomas followed the older man out of the kitchen. Grant would be able to keep Donal safe if this proved to be serious. Felix fell into step with them, then Madoc as they exited the house.

Two black vans were parked before the house, the sliding doors were open and men in body armor and holding nasty looking shotguns stood in front of them, along with an armadillo in jeans and a shirt. To the side, a pickup was overturned against the garage's doors.

Owen looked at the wreck, then fixed his gaze on the armadillo. "Laurence, what is the meaning of this?" he demanded.

"He's under Henry's control," Thomas quickly whispered, "just like the others." Two rats and seven margays.

Owen glanced at Thomas. "He can do that? Turn him against his family?"

"Uncle Owen," Laurence said, raising his voice to be heard despite the distance. "I don't know what Thomas or Gil told you, but you can't trust them. They tried to kill the Richard Elder."

Owen studied the younger armadillo and the men around him. "Then have them call Gavin, Laurence."

It's something elders deal with, not thugs, and especially not with them throwing my truck around. You know how much work went into getting it working again, Laurence. It's a classic!"

"I can't do that, uncle," Laurence replied. "For all we know, our elder's already compromised by that kangaroo who's with them. He has mind control power. He probably already got to you. Just stand down, Owen. We have someone who can fix all your minds."

"Fuck this," a margay said, just as Thomas wondered how likely they wanted any of them alive armed like they were. The shotgun came up and Thomas didn't think.

"No!" Laurence screamed as the margay fired, but neither Owen nor Thomas were where he aimed, and the large window shattered.

Thomas caught his breath, holding onto the guard rail at the end of the porch.

"That was a fucking mistake," Owen growled. The armadillo jumped over the rail and ran toward the men still aiming at the front of the house. A glance told Thomas that Madoc and Felix had been smart enough to duck inside.

"Scatter!" Laurence yelled, jumping out of his uncle's path.

Three of the men obeyed the order, but one of the margay sneered as the approaching armadillo planted his feet and readied himself to intercept the older man. In response, Owen shifted so his shoulder impacted the margay, flinging him aside without slowing, then hitting the man behind that one who hadn't reacted in time. The other two jumped out of the way and the armadillo impacted the van, causing it to skid a few feet before coming to a stop. Owen was lying on the ground, unmoving.

"I told you my uncle's got momentum!" Laurence yelled, running toward the downed armadillo. "Do you have any idea what my family'll do if he dies?"

"Blame the kangaroo," a rat snarled. "He's the one who mind fucked him into attacking us."

"What's going on?" Yating asked, looking out through the shattered window.

Cursing, Thomas was before the window as the men standing aimed at the panda. Before he could grab Yating and teleport them away, the impact at his back sent him flying through the panda and into the living room.

"I'm hit!" Thomas yelled, his back screaming in pain. "I'm hit! Get Olavo!" Fuck, the way his back hurt, there had to be a hole a foot wide in it.

"There's no blood," Madoc said, sounding scared. Thomas screamed as the other rat searched his back.

"Stop screaming," Felix said, "you aren't going to die." Something landed next to Thomas's face. A pouch the size of his fist that sounded like it had sand in it. "They shot you with a beanbag, you idiot. Just get up and—" the otter screamed as he was sent twirling and to the floor. He whimpered, holding onto his shoulder, a bean bag like Thomas; next to him.

"That's what you get for standing in a shooting zone, Felix," Madoc yelled, then lowered his voice. "No wonder you're always snipping him in that shooting game. I'm not Olavo, but as soon as I have you somewhere with cover, I'll use a healing sigil and you can take—" the rest of the rat's words were stolen from him by the wind that blow out of the house.

No, Thomas realized as sand was dragged into the house through the open door. The air was being sucked into the house? It was so bad Thomas found he had trouble breathing. He took as much of a breath as he could and looked around, trying to locate everyone. Felix was squirming by the couch, Madoc was pulling him, Yating was—

The flash of light flying out of the house came with a gust of wind that equilibrated the air so Thomas could breathe again. Before he could make sense of what had happened, it had looked like a fireball, but it couldn't be. A pissed-off Gilbert strode through the hallway with a glowing sphere in a hand and a giddy Limbani trailing behind him.

Thomas had to look away as the heat from the thing felt like it could singe his fur off.

"Gil," Laurence called, sounding worried, "stand down. You don't know what you're doing, that kangaroo—"

"What the fuck did you do to my dad?" Gilbert growled

"He did it to himself!" Laurence hurried to reply as Thomas dragged himself to the window. "You know his power doesn't protect—"

Thomas looked over the edge as the sun in Gilbert's hand flashed so bright he wasn't sure he heard the shotgun, or if going blind had caused him to imagine it.

"I swear on His cock, Lau," Gilbert replied darkly, "that if my dad's dead, I am going to rip you apart even if you don't know what you're doing right now."

“He’s alive! I checked!” Laurence replied. Thomas wasn’t sure how reassuring he came across, yelling like that. “He’s breathing. And he wasn’t anywhere near that fireball of yours. Stand down, Gil and Nanko can look him over. He’s—”

A man screamed, and Thomas made out Yating, stepping through one of the armored men in spite of his heavily spotted vision. The panda grabbed the shotgun out of his hands and unleashed shots after shots until pumping it didn’t let him fire another one. He backed away as the others fired at him, only for the beanbags to hit and dent the side of the van instead.

Motion pulled Thomas’s gaze away from the panda, who everyone in armor was trying to hit, and to Gilbert walking down the steps, another sun briefly slashing in his other hand before vanishing into the closing fist. Thomas stared as a lance of intense light erupted from that fist.

Not only was the armadillo somehow able to make suns, but he could make a fucking light saber?

As Yating retreated through the van, dropping the shotgun, Gilbert was in range of the men. Thomas dropped behind the window, having no intention of watching the bloodbath that was about to happen.

Unfortunately, even covering his ears wasn’t enough to stop him from hearing the screams.

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“Since when can you—” Thomas could only point to the groaning massacre the front of the house was, as a grim Gilbert stepped back inside, dragging his unconscious cousin.

“Always,” the armadillo replied in a barely contained snarl.

“What?”

“That fucking bat had me forget what I could do,” Gilbert snapped. “He fucking had me train over and over until I could make suns, then he made me a joke by just letting me remember the lighter trick.”

“But how do you—” again, Thomas’s words failed him.

“The monkey threw me at Donal with instructions to ‘do me’. Before I could deck him for thinking I wanted to fuck when my home was under attack, he said to make me remember something recent.”

Thomas looked at Limbani, who shrugged. “What? It’s what I saw myself say, then Gil here was going all Lord of the Sith on the bad guys.”

“It’s Jedi, asshole,” Gilbert said. “The Sith are the bad guys.”

The monkey shrugged. “They all use those light sticks, so what’s the difference?”

“I swear, Lim. Once this is over, I am tying you to a chair and forcing you to watch all the movies, including the Christmas special. You will not disrespect that masterpiece ever again.”

“About the going all...” Thomas closed his mouth at the glare. He’d heard about the Christmas special from Niel, who was a fan of old movies, so of that franchise too. He didn’t want to have to suffer through it.

Gilbert let out a breath. “They’re alive. The only thing they lost are hands and arms. One lost a foot. We can fix all that. They aren’t themselves right now, so I went easy on them.”

Thomas swallowed as he remembered the screams. If that was Gilbert going easy on someone, he never, ever, wanted to see the armadillo lose it on someone.