

I didn't want to stop.

I wanted to keep riding so fast I'd forget what I'd done, but even with all the gifts I have, I have limits.

I can't tell you where I was other than Virginia along the I95. This time, it isn't to protect anyone. I was so tired that I don't remember the exit number, the name of the town, or the motel. I do remember it wasn't the kind of place you wanted to remember.

I'd parked my bike, stumbled in, got a room and stumbled into the bed and into nightmares. What happened earlier in the day was the trigger, but like all of them, they quickly became a mishmash of just about all the bad things that happened in my life.

No, that's not accurate.

The things that happened to me, which felt bad.

I didn't remember details, for which I was, as always, grateful, but I was a mess. I'd barely gotten two hours of sleep out of the four I'd need to be functional, and I'd ended up on the floor between the bed and the bathroom, phone in hand, staring at the screen, the number illegible through the tears.

I knew calling him wouldn't help. It wasn't that he wouldn't want to help; he was just not emotionally equipped. But out of everyone in my family, he was the most like me.

I called him.

It took four rings before he answered. "Wyatt? What's wrong?" Albert asked.

I hiccuped a laugh, I'd become predictable. "I had a bad day, dad."

"Anyone get hurt?" Not 'did I get hurt'. The others always asked about me when I called after the kind of day I had. Albert was the only one of my dads who understood that to me, it didn't matter how hurt I got.

"Yeah."

"Are you the one who hurt them?"

"Yeah." I wiped my eyes.

"Did they give you a choice?"

"No." It didn't matter. It didn't matter if I did it, if I couldn't prevent it from happening.

Fuck, on bad days watching a kid get slapped around in a movie could send me in a spiral of pain and self-pity.

I heard Albert breathing, I didn't push him to say something. I didn't call him for comfort, not anymore. I couldn't get that from him. The best I could ask for was a reality check, and sometimes, that was enough.

"I know you tried to avoid getting into the fight. Wyatt, that's all you can do; try to avoid it. If they force the issue, you have to defend yourself. Did you end it as fast as you could?"

Today, it didn't help.

"Why do I have to be like this, Dad?" I sobbed. "Why does it have to fucking hurt? Why can't I be like you and the others, why am I such a fucking freak? Couldn't you find some fucking magic to fix me?" I was angry then, which wasn't the improvement anyone who knows my family thought it was. I'd feel ashamed of losing it on Albert when this was over.

"You are not a freak, Wyatt. You are different, that's all."

"I hate it. I hate myself!"

"No, you don't. You're just having a bad day. You know I care about you. We all do. If it gets too bad out there, you know you can come home for a while."

I snorted the laughter, then had to hunt the tissues in the room, and had to settle on toilet paper to blow my nose. "Like that's going to help anything. I stay away for my own sanity, dad, you know that." In my head, he's Albert, but out loud he's dad; they all are. It makes for very confusing family reunions on anyone not intimately familiar with us. The rest of those just makes outsiders uncomfortable.

"We try."

"I know. I just wish I could be like all of you and not give a shit about anything."

Albert laughed. "You know we care, not just about you and our family. You're simply not as destructive in how you express your emotions as we are."

"It feels like I'm tearing myself apart, dad. The pain I caused those men."

"They asked for it, Wyatt."

"That doesn't matter! I should have come up with something, found a way to reach them, get them to stand down! Fuck, I should have fucking stayed out of those two's lives."

"Who's two live?" And I gave him the short version of what happened. "Wyatt, you realize that not one of us would have let that happen, right?"

"But—"

"Can you imagine what Wolfgang would have done? How about Arnold, or Aaron?"

The image that came to mind was hilarious in how horrible it was.

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Some background, before we go on.

My dads are not nice men by any stretch of the imagination, but they try, and as Albert said. One of the way is that they won't let things like that happen. They're more excessive when it involves kids because of their own abusive childhood, but if there's one trait all my dads share is that they go too far. The best scenario involving here is the fox ending up in the hospital and my dads paying off the authority to forget any of that happened.

The worse case is they call Wolfgang.

My brother is a beast, physically and emotionally. There is a firm belief in my family that somehow Aaron and Arnold put aside their hatred for each other to conceive Wolf together. Now, if you're in the know, you know that's possible. Back then, we didn't know, but it's the only way Wolfgang can be explained. He has Arnold's short temper and predilection for a fight and Aaron's utter lack of common sense. Until our dads got him a cadre of nannies, me and my brother's life was anyone's definition of hell.

If Wolf had been present, he'd be paying the diner's owner to rebuild it. There would only be one casualty, but there would be nothing left of him after Wolfgang punched him through every hard surface in the building.

As I said, my dads go overboard, and Wolfgang takes after them more than any of us.

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"Feeling better?" Albert asked.

"No. I'm sorry, I know you're trying. And it was funny, but—"

"Wyatt, that wasn't my goal. You resolved that situation without anyone getting seriously hurt."

"They—"

"They brought that down on themselves." Albert was getting exasperated. "You have to understand that."

"I do, dad. In my head I get that they got what they deserve. The rest of me says I'm a fucking monster for hurting them."

"I do wish you listened to your head more than the rest of you." He added something else, but it's one of those you either don't need to be told what it was, or don't want to be told.

"I wish there was magic to get me to do it."

"You know there is no good kind of magic that does that. Mind control is dangerous."

"I know, dad. I wasn't being serious." I was. I was in a bad enough state that if you offered to strap a nuclear bomb to my back and promised it would take the pain away, I'd let you do it. I was lucky I rarely got this bad. Usually a guy in my bed was enough to get me through them.

I said I wasn't giving details, not that I'd lie about what I do. I am an Orr, after all.

"Wyatt, being different, being special, it isn't easy. You know how I was treated by my family until Arnold took over. I got lucky that they finally realized my gift was something they could make use of, yours..." he trailed off. "It just means you have a harder road ahead than most, but I believe, Wyatt, that one day we will all understand why He made you this way."

“Can’t He just fucking show up and tell us?”

Albert chuckled. “You are on good terms with the Brislows, so you are in a better position to try and make that happen.”

I snorted and blew my nose again. I was on good term with Eddy Brislow. His dad always eyed me suspiciously when I dropped by. He and my family have a long and tumultuous history. I don’t think he’ll ever completely trust me around his son because of it.

“The next time I’m in Denver I’ll see if I can get Eddy talk his dad, the mighty champion, into communing with Him.”

“Just...” he trailed off again. “Just be careful you don’t end up owing him too much.”

I heard stories of who the Brislows were before Denton erased them and made the family Brislows. It was just history to me, but my dads are from a generation where my family and the Society weren’t on good terms, and Denton was at the center of it; on our side, in the end. He’s the reason the Society even acknowledged my family exists, but there’s a reason I was the one acting as intermediary and not anyone else in my family. Kicking the gray Church out of the San Francisco Metropolis gave us a certain notoriety, and a whole lot of fear factor. It didn’t help that in the process we kicked a society family out too. Robert’s generation, and his father’s were even nastier than my dads.

“I’ll be, it’s not like I’m heading there, anyway. You know what the Carboneaus want with us? They called, but I was tied up and they didn’t leave a message.”

“I haven’t heard anything from that side of the continent, that’s more Arnold’s department than mine.”

“I figured I’d ask since we’re talking.”

“You sound better.”

I felt morose, which was an improvement. I’d say no to that nuclear option now. “A little.”

“Maybe Paul can help more.”

“No dad, he’s can’t. He’s not you. He’s not my dad. I don’t—”

“But he’ll understand empathy more than I ever will.”

“Aren’t artists supposed to be all about empathy, dad?”

“No, we’re supposed to be addicts and drunks, there’s a difference. I did it, and I no longer need it. But Paul—”

“Doesn’t get me any more than you do, dad. Yes, he’s empathic, but he doesn’t get depression. He helped when I was younger, when I’d shut myself down, but now he still thinks it’s just a question of me willing myself better. Like I wouldn’t already do that if I could. I love the guy, he’s family, but if I’m going to talk with someone who doesn’t get me, I want him to be my father.”

“Thank you.”

“Thanks for listening, dad. I should see about getting a few more hours of sleep, I don’t think the nightmares will come back now.”

“Sleep well, son.”

“I love you too, dad.”