

Chapter 18

Paul winced as he came awake and threw his hand between him and the light, mumbling, "Turn down the spotlight, will you?"

"You're going to have to wait a few hours," Donal said.

"More than a few," Grant added. "This is Iceland in the summer. The sun's up for a long while."

Paul jerks to a sitting position, searching for threat. There had been fighting, before he was hit, and a vole pointing a gun at Grant. "How?" he asked, when he realized they were in a grove. How was it this warm? How was he dry? How was he...

"Thomas?" he asked with a sigh. "Where are my pants?"

The rat raised him, seated on the other side of the fire from him. "I had to take them off to make sure you weren't injured when Wassa threw you around with the rest of us."

"Can I get them back?" There were a lot of things around the fire. Small versions of campfires made with balsa wood, a drawing of a fire, stone together as a miniature version of the fire. Magic was how he was warm. It would be how he was dry.

Thomas was still looking at him, instead of handing the pants over, so whatever was going with his best friend wasn't done. At least he hadn't gone as far as taking advantage of his unconscious state. He'd be feeling it if he'd been topped by the rat.

He motioned. "Come on. This isn't a locker room, a bedroom, or one of those Society meetings you love to tell me about. And we have—"

"We have those dressed," Thomas protested. "Well... to start with," he added at the looks the men gave him. Thomas had taken to the Society as if he'd been born to it. Sex as often as he could, and clothing as little as possible. Only Roland was more into it, and Thomas's brother had the excuse of multiple remembered version of a life where that was how he'd been raised.

The rat threw the pants over the fire and Paul hurried to catch them, glaring at Thomas as he put them on. Once he was covered, he turned to face the seal, who now had one of Donal's coats over her thin gown.

"Ma'am," he greeted her. "I'm guessing you're the reason we're not prisoners of the Chamber." He stifled a groan. What was he doing, assuming she spoke English? She'd been buried in ice for centuries. Even if she spoke that version of English, would she understand him?

"I am indeed the one responsible," the seal answered in a stilted and formal English.

He stared at her and noticed the phone hanging around her neck with copper wires taped to it, along with pages from... he leaned forward... from an English to Icelandic dictionary. And that was his phone around her neck.

Why was that the most surprising thing in all this? Were the wires to hold the phone or was there some sort of concept relating to communication attached to them he wasn't aware of?

"It was the only one not used," Grant said, when Paul sat back. "Don't worry, no permanent modifications."

The golden tiger nodded. "I'm guessing you weren't expecting a living Practitioner when you started this quest." The gown had to be her staff, like the coat of many colors. He was pretty sure he'd gotten enough of an eye full of her while she floated in the water that he'd have seen anything else she had.

His ears burned at the memory.

"Can't say that I was," the kangaroo replied.

"Where's the Chamber? You all seem too at ease for them to be close by."

“Wassa got rid of them,” Grant said, “but you’re going to have to wait for that explanation. You woke up while the two of us were discussing something.” He leaned closer to her and lowered his voice. They were all too close together to mean Paul couldn’t listen in if he wanted to, but the request for privacy was clear.

And he had someone to check in on.

He sat next to Thomas. “Why haven’t you taken us to one of your landing zones?”

Thomas raised a hand, and half of a set of old style handcuff was dangled from his wrist. Paul raised his. He’d pretty much forgotten about it since it had done nothing to him. Thomas’s was silvery, while his was steel gray.

“It’s keeping me from teleporting,” the rat said. “Handcuffs, so it’s going to be something around the concept of not escaping. Grant’s going to take it off, but he wants to have that talk first.”

“You think the woman who slapped this on me thought I was you?”

Thomas looked Paul over and smiled, then licked his lips hungrily. “No one’s going to confuse that smoldering body of yours for mine.”

“Settle down, Thomas,” Paul warned. “There’s a woman present.”

The rat leaned in and whispered, “She’s kind of busy with Grant.” He placed a hand on the inside of Paul’s thigh. “She’ll never notice.”

The golden tiger chuckled. “I’m pretty sure she’d noticed the things you want to do to me.” He nodded to the seal and kangaroo. “Exactly how did she take care of the Chamber?”

“You should have seen her,” Thomas said, suddenly no longer seeming to lust after him. “She’s really on the ball for a lady that’s been frozen for six hundred years. Anyone openly aggressive, she washed away. She said that they might reach the ocean, if they can’t get out of the river she created. Anyone unconscious, she immobilized, and those of us clearly prisoners, she questioned. Well, once Grant Made a translation talisman.”

“My phone.”

“That 2.0. The first one was Donal’s translation dictionary, copper wires, and broken glasses. It didn’t work well, because she doesn’t speak Icelandic, but there was enough to the concept Grant explained you were also a prisoner, and that the others were with the Chamber. So they’re on their way to join the rest of their merry band to the ocean. He borrowed your phone once she dried it, along with all of us. Electronics are his least favorite things to work with, but access to the internet brings with it too many concepts he can tap into. You woke up not long after he was done making it and they started talking.”

Thomas leaned in and Paul readied himself to hold his best friend at bay. “If you ask me, she has the hots for him. She can’t stop watching him like he’s that date she’s been waiting on for a while.”

Paul opened his mouth to ask...

Thomas was nibbling on his neck, and thoughts were difficult. He turned to tell him to stop, but Thomas kissed him. The tiger put his hand on the rat’s shoulders, but instead of pushing him away, he pulled him closer and they fell back as their tongue mingled.

He grabbed the rat’s ass as he rolled onto his back. Thomas grinned in the kiss. His shirt was pulled out from his pants and a hand sneaked under. Then Paul gasped as Thomas pinched his nipple. The tiger under the tail strap and grabbed a solid handful of furry rat ass.

He was so going to—

“Excuse me,” Grant said sharply.

“Come back in an hour,” Thomas said between pants. “We’re busy.”

They were busy, Paul realized, but it shouldn’t be with sex. With effort, he pushed Thomas off him.

“Okay.” Paul adjusted himself. “That settles it. I have to be Society. I’ve never been this needy before.”

“When was the orgy?” Grant asked.

“The wha...” Paul stared at the kangaroo.

“Even if we assumed you only needed the last one to be fully initiated, it still takes thirteen Society guys to do it. Did you have one of those recently?” Grant offered Paul his hand.

“Not since Roland’s initiation,” Paul answered as he was pulled to his feet.

“Then you’ve just been too long without sex.” He patted the tiger’s shoulder. “Believe it or not, you don’t have to follow a sex-addicted god to really want sex.”

“Did you just insult a god?” Paul asked. “And you’re forgetting about Niel. He didn’t need thirteen guys.”

“No tigers among the Survivors,” Thomas said. “But the Orrs are tigers.”

“And they’re Society,” Grant countered. “So still no dice. Don’t worry. We’ll figure out which faction you’re with when we have the time. Until then, you and Thomas van knock boots once we’re in Denver.”

“Knock boots?” Paul asked.

“Do the nasty? Get busy? The horizontal—”

"I know what Knocking boots means. I just didn't think you used expressions like that."

The kangaroo smiled. "What can I say? I'm a man of many talents."

Paul looked at Thomas, still on the ground. "You never mentioned that side of him."

The rat simply stared at him. Then he shook himself and snapped out of whatever that had been. He stood and barely caught his pants before they fell, and Paul wished he hadn't.

"I can't take us anywhere until you take this off," Thomas said, offering his cuffed wrist to the Grant.

"Is Denver wise?" Paul asked. "The Chamber was already doing stuff there. Even with Shila bringing the sickness to a stop, that wasn't so long ago they'll all be gone, right?"

"With me, Donal, and Wassa," Grant said as he looked the cuff over, "we can deal with whoever they send to his house before they're within a hundred feet of it." He took something that look very much like a hairpin, put it in the lock, giggled it, and it opened.

"That's it?" Thomas asked in surprise. "I could have done that myself."

"I didn't know they were no magical safeties until I inspected it." He took Paul's wrist and studied the cuff. "They're made to keep Thomas locked in place, but it's best if I take yours off, too. In case it prevents you from coming along. It would be a bitch to have to come back for you." The hairpin went in.

"You know," Thomas said. "Maybe me and Paul should fuck before we leave so I can imprint this place. You know, just in case one of you stays behind. I'd be able to come back and—"

"No, Thomas." The pin giggled. "The four of us are nowhere near your limit. Fuck, you've been to Donal's house often enough. I doubt you even feel it." A click and the cuff opened. The kangaroo took it off and pocketed it, too.

"Alright," Thomas said, sounding more lucid. "Gather up close and take hold."

Paul stepped to the rat and placed a hand on his shoulder. Thomas placed an arm around the golden tiger's back and squeezed his ass.

"Kids," Grant said with exasperation.

"You're just jealous, old man," Thomas replied.

"Of you lewd and obsessive sexual—"

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"—Desire? Absolutely—"

Paul went flying from the kangaroo's shove just before the gunfire registered. There was frenzied movement in the too crowded bedroom. Another gunshot, and a hole appeared in the wall next to Paul. He dropped. Thomas blinked out, then was behind a bear, who cried out in pain as he fell backwards.

The other three were taken down by Grand and Wassa, who, even without water, was dangerous.

The door burst open, and a chimpanzee rushed in. "What's the—"

Thomas grabbed a lamp off the dresser and slammed it into the chimp's stomach, and then the side of the head. The simian dropped too.

"That was the guy who had the brass knuckle staff," Paul said, getting to his feet.

"In the mail," Donal said in answer to Grant's look.

"Okay, this changes things," the kangaroo said. "Donal, Wassa; we focus on material. Thomas, you and Paul tie these guys up, and please stay focussed. Now is not the time to start fucking. If they're in here, there's going to be Chambers outside too. Thomas, we need somewhere safe for you to take us."

"Argentine," the rat answered, ripping the electrical cord off the lamp. "The Medeiros aren't going to let anyone storm their hotel." He tied the chimpanzee's hands behind his back.

Paul ripped sheets into strips, and they used them to bind the others. Then, they offered to carry supplies, but Grant and Donal already had shoulder bags filled, while Wassa had drifted off, mesmerized by all the modern items among the cluttered house. Paul wondered if she could understand the concept they held, or if she'd need to understand with the item and what they did before the concept registered.

They moved quietly, not wanting to attract the attention of anyone outside. They'd already been lucky enough the gunshots hadn't brought everyone running in. When they tracked Wassa down this time, the seal was in the living room, studying her reflection on the screen hanging on the wall.

Grant opened his mouth, but a knock at the door froze him silent.

Paul checked the windows. The curtains were closed and heavy. They hadn't changed any of the lights, so no one outside should be able to tell they were here.

Wassa looked at them, then at the door.

Grant shook his head emphatically, mouthing something that might have been 'it's bad,' at her. She ignored him.

Thomas appeared behind her as she studied the door knob. His arms went through her as if she, and her clothing, were made of water as she opened the door.

The cheetah in a suit standing on the other side looked at her, then around her to Grant, Donal, Thomas, and Paul.

He gave a satisfied nod. "Good. You're all here. Now," his tone hardened. "Will one of you tell me why the fuck He's been filling my dreams with the four of you for the last week?"