

"Sanders!" Don yelled over the crowd before throwing the key to Patrick. "Alright everyone. This is the last call. Order up and enjoy."

Patrick locked the door and then sat at the bar. The place was very crowded and they were loud. He was getting a headache from that and not getting enough sleep. He only spent one night at Zach's place, somehow his dad had learned about Patrick being there and he'd exploded. Patrick wished he'd been there so he could have taken the blunt of the anger.

On Thursday he'd slept on Max's couch, the poodle was a guy he'd gone to school with, and who had stayed in touch with him after Patrick had left. Max was on track to get out of the neighborhood, he was graduating in the spring and had been accepted at Berkeley on a football scholarship. Of the few guys he still knew from school he was the only one getting out. Max couldn't let him crash over the weekend because of how late Patrick worked, so he'd used the cot at the back, and hadn't gotten much sleep.

Mary brought him an orange soda, and he sipped it while keeping an eye on the customers. the last drink could make some of them forget themselves and become a nuisance and he'd have to escort them out, but tonight, for as noisy as they were, they were well behaved.

Finally the last one left, it was almost three, and Patrick enjoyed the quiet through the ringing in his ears. He reached over the counter and dropped his soda can in the garbage. Fifteen minutes later Mary hugged him before leaving and handed him sixty dollars.

"Here's your pay," Don held the hundred twenty for the weekend.

Patrick looked at it. "Can you hold on to it for me? I'm not comfortable walking around with that kind of money."

"Then put it in the bank."

Patrick stared at the panda. "To have a bank account I'd have to keep money for more than a couple of days. My mom opened one for me when I was a kid, I found out they'd closed it for inactivity when I started bouncing for you. Normally I give most of it to my mom."

"You're not giving this to her then?"

"Why should I?" Patrick snapped. "If she thinks so little of me she had to lie about my father why the fuck should I give her my hard earned money?"

Doc took a step back and raised his hands in surrender.

Patrick sighed. "Sorry."

"Still angry at her then."

Patrick nodded.

"Yeah, I can hold on to your money till you need it. You'll want to get a bank account if you're going to be keeping it. I mean I don't mind doing it for you, but I can't give you interest on it."

"I'll do that tomorrow."

"Good. I'm closing up. are you sleeping in the back?"

"No. Thanks for the offer, but that cot is a health hazard. I made arrangement with a guy I know. I'm heading there directly."

"You need a ride?"

"No, thanks. I need the walk to clear my head."

Don accompanied him outside and they went on their separate ways. Thinking about his mom had gotten him angry again, and had brought his father to the surface again, both of them, the fictional one and the real one. Thinking about who he had believed his father to be made him ache, he'd imagined so much about him he hated knowing it had been for nothing. Thinking about the real one made him long to know what it was like to actually have a father.

It was why he'd called Rich before work. Richard Zilescky was a rat he'd met a few years before when he turned a corner and walked in on him being beaten up. He'd chased his attackers away and helped him to his place. He was a few years older than Patrick, another school dropout, but he was pretty smart, he'd taught himself programing and now he did hacking work for the gangs.

He knocked on the door. Rich had a ground floor apartment in a converted house. The curtains parted, closed and then multiple locks turned. the door opened and a thin white rat pulled him in and hugged him.

"Man Pat, I never thought I'd get to return the favor and help you out."

"Thanks for letting me crash."

"Hey, man, no problem, Mi Casa and all that. I never thought you'd ever call and ask for help, usually you're just checking in on me. Hell when I gave you my number and you didn't put it in a phone I thought you'd just brush me aside as a good deed. I can't believe you remembered it from me just saying it once."

"You said it once, and I told it to myself a hundred times while I helped you here. You sound like you're working on something, don't let me interrupt, just tell me where you want me to crash and when you want me out."

"Yeah, I'm working, but it can wait. I guess I'm hyper, I've been drinking espresso all evening."

"It's four in the morning."

"Is it? really? Wow, I guess I've been at it longer than I thought, I must be close to being done then. I can't wait to be done with than and get paid."

"Just tell me where to sleep."

"Oh, just take the stuff off my bed and stretch out there."

"Where are you going to sleep?"

"Me? oh, I'm not sleeping, I still have work to do. I'm probably going to be going for hours and hours. I have plenty of espresso in the machine. I'm good, thanks."

"Okay, when do you want me out?"

"Do you have to be some place? I mean it's okay if you do, but if you don't you can stay here, as long as you want. you said you had problems at home, right? that was you, right? Yeah, it was. so you can stay here until that's fixed. Don't worry about it, I owe you a lot more than that."

Patrick hid a smile. "Okay, I'll go crash then." The bedroom was the first door he saw. In the living room Richard was typing on a keyboard so fast Patrick couldn't make out the individual key stokes.

Across the hall was the bathroom. He used it, then took the electronic parts off the bed to make space. He was asleep before his head hit the pillow.

* * * * *

Patrick came awake as he felt someone against him. He'd turned in his sleep, he realized, and pressed against he guy next to him. Patrick had a moment of horror when he thought he'd gone to bed with another guy, then realized he was still dressed, and that it was Rich next to him. The rat had come to bed once he finished his work.

Patrick carefully got out of bed to avoid waking him. Made a stop in the bathroom, then headed for the kitchen. It was a mess, cans of energy drinks everywhere, dishes piled up high in the sink and takeout containers on the table, and counter, so old Patrick worried they would attack him.

The clock on the stove said it was seventeen hundred. That couldn't be right, the sun was coming in from the living room, and that was to the east. The clock on the wall said it was twelve twenty five, that was more reasonable, but then he realized the seconds hand wasn't moving.

Well, unless he was planing on going out to look for work the time didn't matter, and he couldn't do that. He needed to talk with Rich once he got up. To pass the time he decided to clean the place. He filled three garbage bags in the kitchen and two in the living room. There, the computer clock told him it was ten fifty-eight.

He was in the middle of doing the dishes when Richard

stumbled in. He blinked at him, considered something, then nodded. "Right." he looked around. "You didn't have to clean the place, Pat." He pulled the fridge open and took out a energy drink, which he downed.

"I had nothing else to do. Should you really be drinking that? you just woke up."

"Got nothing else until I get paid. Didn't you look in the fridge?" He sat at the table and looked at the top like it was the first time he's ever seen it. Considering how much stuff had been piled on there it was s distinct possibility.

"Not my place. I didn't open anything except under the sink to get the garbage bags." He took twenty out of his pocket and put it on the table. "Here, buy something to eat."

"Shit man. I can't take your money. I already owe you my life."

"Would you take it if you did a job for me?"

"What kind of job?"

Patrick took out the card Daniel had given him, It was blank except for a hand written number on it, and handed it to Richard. "I need the address that goes with this number."

Richard took the card, looked at both side of it. "Who's is it?"

"My father," Patrick replied after a moment.

Richard nodded. "He owe you child support?"

"No, nothing like that. I just want to talk to him. I guess I don't feel comfortable doing it over the phone."

"Sure. You do know you can get that info by doing a reverse lookup, right?"

"Sure, but you can use the money."

The rat chuckled. "Okay, I'll do it. Shouldn't take more than a minute to get your info. Hell, Starting the system is going to take longer."

"Alright. I'll go out an get myself breakfast while you're doing this."

"Get me something too. There's a fast food place two blocks that way. Get me a number two combo, and that'll be my fee for getting the address."

"are you sure that's enough?"

"For a minute's work? that's plenty, and I finished my previous job so I'll be getting paid later today. I'll be able to fill the fridge then,"

"I'll be right back then."

* * * * *

Patrick returned fifteen minutes later and Richard was still at the computer. "Food's in the kitchen when you're done." He sat down, said a silent prayer then ate. He was in

the middle of his second breakfast sandwich when the rat sat down.

"Okay, who is he, really?"

Patrick looked at him questioningly.

Richard put the card on the table and slide it toward him. "Who is he?"

The tiger swallowed. "He's my father."

Richard studied him for a moment. "Okay, but 'who' is he? He is a spy or something?"

"What? of course not... I mean, I don't know what he does for a living. I've only met him once at this point."

"It was a lot harder getting the address then it should have been. I wrote it on the back. Nothing came up on the reverse lookup. Even the sites that hold private numbers didn't have anything. I had to hack the phone company to get the information."

"Is that going to get you in trouble?"

Richard chuckled. "Nah. Their security's decent enough, but it was nothing for me to slice through it. They don't even know I was there."

Patrick turned the card over. "Can I use your computer to figure out how to get there?"

"Sure. I'll go get it. It's on the south side of the city, in the Hills."

While Richard was in the other room Patrick went through the money he had left. forty-eight and change. It had been a while since he'd looked at the cost of tickets for the busses, but he through eight dollars was enough to cross the city. Realistically he couldn't walk across the city. Not if he wanted to get there in a reasonable amount of time.

"Here." Richard handed him his phone. It was a large black model with a home made casing. Patrick took it and looked it over before raising his eyes to Richard.

"I added a few things to it. I don't like that the government can track it or listen in to my calls. If you want I can do the same to your phone."

"I don't have one." Richard didn't have as many programs on it as he expected.

"Really? I can get you one, if you want. Wouldn't be as powerful as mine, but I don't think you need something that can slice through the city's security."

"That's okay," Patrick said, starting the mapping program. He put in the address. "I can't afford a phone plan." It was pretty far. In the Saratoga Hills, just outside of Old San Jose. It would take a good part of the day to get there, but at least he'd remembered right. It was only six bucks for the trip, but a lot of transfers. He looked up. "Sorry?"

"I said, I can get you a plan that wouldn't cost you anything."

It took a moment for Patrick to realize what Richard was talking about, phone, right. Free plan? that could work, except. "That wouldn't be legal, would it."

Richard shrugged. "Who's to care if they don't know?"

"Thanks, I appreciate it, but I'll pass. I've lived this long without a phone. I'll be fine." He wrote down the list of busses he'd have to take on the card and stood. He put forty dollars on the table.

"What's that for?"

"To pay for the work you did."

"I told you breakfast would cover that."

"That was when you thought it would just take a minutes. It was harder than that, so you deserve more. Look, just take it, Rich. Get some food, you look like you haven't had a decent meal in ages."

Richard chuckled. "I guess I owe you again."

Patrick shrugged. "I'm not keeping score. I'll probably be back late again. is it going to be a problem?" He'd have to walk back.

"Nah, I don't expect to be working, but I never go to bed early anymore."

"Thanks again for letting me crash here." He squeezed Richard shoulder on his way out.