

I 70, CO, February 3rd

Thomas banging his head on the metal floor of the van didn't stop Limbani from banging him. He'd complain of the one, but he was enjoying the second too much. Oh, how he'd missed this.

"Next," the monkey said dreamily as he rolled off Thomas. He let out a shriek as his back hid the floor. "That's cold!" He grabbed the blankets that had been moved aside by Thomas's banding and pulled them under him.

"Hey Gilbert," Thomas called to the armadillo at the wheel, "how come you're still driving this thing? Wouldn't it be easier to buy a new one? You are rich, after all."

Gilbert glared at him over his shoulder. "This is my van. I'm not letting some asshole of a wizard take it from me just because he threw lightning at it. It survived that. It'll survive anything you want to throw at it."

"Eyes on the road," Yating said.

"Don't tell me how to drive," Gilbert snapped. "I let someone else drive my van once, you, and look what happened to it."

The red panda sighed. "Again, I wasn't in it when the kangaroo blew it up."

"He wasn't trying to blow it up," Thomas said.

"How do you know?" Gilbert demanded.

"Because plenty of cars, trucks, and vans have been hit by lightning and *not* blown up," he answered, unable to mask his annoyance at them making Grant the bad guy any chance they had.

"Like you didn't tell him what I normally carry," the armadillo said in an accusatory tone.

"I didn't." Thomas rubbed the heel of his palm into his eyes. "Fuck. I didn't even know you guys would be coming after me. And even if I'd expected you, me and Grant weren't past the keeping everything vague part of the driver-hitchhiker relationship."

"Aren't you happy Henry didn't let you hit the road with all your explosives now?" Limbani said, reaching for Thomas's cock. "Doesn't look like these two are coming over, so how about you fuck me?"

"Hey," the armadillo snapped. "If I'd had my stuff, he wouldn't have run off. You saw how my good luck charm was in keeping him still. Imagine what I could have gotten him to do with the rest."

Thomas didn't pay attention to the red panda's response. Limbani was on his stomach, offering him his ass, and that was far more appealing.

Thomas had definitely missed this monkey.

* * * * *

[I have a sense there should be a series of flashbacks here establish Thomas's and Limbani's relationship, but I can't think of what to use]

* * * * *

I 80, UT, February 4rd

“I want to talk to Donal,” Thomas told Limbani, sitting in the passenger seat. Yating was snoring next to Thomas after a long fucking. The red panda always made for a comfortable pillow to rest against. “Hand me your phone.”

There had been one pit stop since leaving Denver. Both to use the restroom and so Gilbert could take his turn at Thomas’s ass. There had been a suggestion Yating take over the driving so the armadillo could rest, but Gilbert had vehemently nixed the idea.

Limbani looked at Gilbert, who shrugged, then placed the call and handed the phone over.

“What do you want?” Felix answered and Thomas glared at the monkey, who smirked. He just had to call the otter instead of Olavo.

“To talk to Donal,” Thomas replied curtly.

“Oh, it’s you.” The otter sounded bored. “You can’t talk to him. Since you’re with the others, I figured we didn’t need him anymore and threw him out our hotel window. He’s got a nice wail. Now I wish we’d gone to one with more floors so I could have listened to it longer.”

“I’m okay,” sounded a distant voice, before Thomas could unleash his anger on the otter. “Was that necessary?” the squirrel asked, closer now.

“I’ve got to get my fun somehow,” the otter replied, “since you aren’t letting me fuck you anymore.”

“I need rest,” Donal protested, his voice clear enough to be the one holding the phone. “Don’t you guys ever need to stop?”

“Not really,” Thomas said. “So, you’re into guys?”

“And girls. I thought you realized that when I mentioned the sugar daddy.”

“You laughed at me when I offered you my ass,” Thomas replied.

“I wasn’t laughing at you, just the situation.” There was a silence, and when he spoke again, Donal sounded concerned. “How are you holding up?”

“I’m good. On my way to catching up to all the sex I’ve missed these last weeks. You have no idea what you missed out on when you didn’t accept my offer.”

“I think I so,” the squirrel replied with a chuckle, “not that I have any idea where we’d have found a place for all that sex, or been able to do, you know, the surviving part of surviving on the street. And before you get ideas. It’s not because it would have been you that my ass would have been able to magically take that much sex.”

“That’s why you’d have been sucking me off in the mean that. It would have made for a great meal.”

The squirrel laughed, and Thomas smiled.

“If you get tired of his bitching, just suck him off. He is an asshole, but he tastes great. Seriously, though, how are they treating you?”

Donal laughed again. “Do you have any idea when was the last time I stayed in a hotel, let alone the penthouse of one? I had a shower, with fur soap and all that. It’s been months since my last one, and that was more me standing under a broken rain gutter. Olavo did something weird. I mean, it’s been all kind of weird since watching you bounce around that parking lot and go through the panda. But I never had someone cum, then write on me with

it.”

“He what?”

“Relax, it’s all good,” Donal said calmly. “I’ve had this rash for weeks, not mange, just chemicals that got in my fur from one of the coats I found. He also insisted we have sex before I had my shower. When I pointed out how much I had to stink, he said stuff about the danger of using soap after so long without. To be honest, I tuned that part out and just said yes. The itch went away and my fur’s never looked this good. I know I’m a hostage and all that, but I could get used to being this kind of prisoner.”

Thomas had trouble processing what he’s heard.

“That’s good,” he said finally, and wasn’t sure he sounded certain. At least he’d confirmed Olavo and Felix hadn’t hurt Donal. He’d tried to convince himself the guys he knew would never hurt anyone, but the way Olavo had categorically refused to let the squirrel go after Thomas agreed to help them and since he was sure they wouldn’t have hunted him down just because some guy told them to, the doubt had remained.

The royal treatment hadn’t even been on the distant radar of his expectations.

“Are you there yet?” Donal asked.

“No, we’re somewhere west of Salt Lake City.”

“Halfway there,” Gilbert said.

“Halfway there,” Thomas repeated.

“What’s the plan once you get there?”

Thomas had a good idea what Donal meant, but even if he had one, he wouldn’t say it out loud in the van. “We don’t know. We’re hoping to have more than Limbani’s visions once we get there.”

A door closed. “Are you talking to Thomas?” Olavo asked.

“Olavo wants to speak with you,” Donal said. Before Thomas could protest, the phone changed hands.

“Are you satisfied we haven’t tortured your friend?”

Thomas sighed. “What did you expect me to think, Olavo?”

“That you shouldn’t try to bluff a master poker player. It’s clear you remember that about me.” Now it was the capybara who sighed. “We aren’t the monsters you seem to think we are, Thomas.”

“I didn’t start this thinking you were monsters,” Thomas replied. “But then you chased me out of the frat, out of Minneapolis, out of the fucking state, then another, all the while spouting stuff about Raphael, me betraying my family. How long did you expect me to continue thinking you guys were the same friends I’ve roomed with since the start of the school year?”

Thomas could almost hear Olavo run a hand down his face in the pause. “Alright. Hearing it said like that I can understand your reluctance to trust us.”

Yating stirred under Thomas’s back. “Looks like I’m about to be put to work again,” he told Olavo, ignoring the panda’s snicker. “You take good care of Donal.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll have him screaming for more in no time. I know a few phrases that he is going to adore.” The call terminated, leaving Thomas to wonder what that meant. Grant

said the Society had a magic like his talisman, something Thomas could learn. Was that it? Only Olavo had said it like Thomas already knew what he meant. Something of their screw up memory then?

He lobbed the phone back to Limbani.

“Yating, how do you feel about seeing which one of us can get the monkey to howl the loudest?”

“I—” the panda began.

“Yes!” the monkey yelled, jumping in the back.

“Hey! Watch how you rock my van. The suspension’s seen better days.” The armadillo looked over his shoulder. “And record it. I don’t want you to be able to claim he was louder with you, when *I* show you how it’s done.”

* * * * *

“Well?” Yating asked Limbani who had been watching the front of Hot Muscle for the last fifteen minutes.

“We’re not going in,” the monkey finally said.

“What do you mean, we’re not going in?” Gilbert demanded. “We’re here because you said we were going to rescue Madoc.”

“I said,” The monkey snapped, “that I saw us driving to San Francisco with Thomas. So what else would be have been doing here?”

“I don’t fucking believe it,” the armadillo grumbled. He started the van. “Fine, where is it that you’re seeing us going instead?”

When Limbani didn’t answer, they looked at him.

“Limbani?” Thomas asked at the worry on the monkey’s face.

“Look, I don’t know, okay?”

“How the fuck—” Gilbert began, turning around in the seat.

“Shut up,” Yating ordered.

“I know I’m like the one who knows the least about this stuff,” Thomas said cautiously, unsure how to keep the worry from escalating. “But didn’t you say your range is something like two days? We have to go somewhere in that time, right?”

The monkey closed his eyes tightly. “You’re going to make a call, then we’re driving and we’re on...” he looked left and right, then up. “Pennsylvania Avenue and... it stops.”

“What do you mean it stops?” Yating asked.

“I don’t see anything after that.”

“Does that means...” Thomas swallowed. “That you die?”

“No,” Limbani protested, “I’d...” he shuddered. “Balls I hope not.” He seemed to search, his head canting. “This reminds me more of how a call gets fuzzy when you jump from one cell region to another, but without resolving. I can tell there should be something there, but I’m not receiving it. Actually, it feels sort of like something I felt when we found you in Lewiston, I think that’s why I didn’t know the kangaroo would should up.” He took his phone out. “But this goes on as far as I can try to see. So the next two days.” He handed the phone to Thomas.

“Who is he calling?” Gilbert demanded.

“I don’t know.”

“Lim, I’m fucking getting tired of—”

“I don’t know,” the monkey snapped. “I already looked beyond that point, so all I have to go by is my memory of what I saw, and I was fucking more curious trying to understand where that call was leading us than listening in on a call.”

Tomas looked from the phone to the monkey. “If you don’t know who I’m calling, how do you expect me to? I don’t know anyone in San Frans...”

“What is it?” Yating asked as Thomas put a hand to his breast pocket.

Had Grant said it would lead it to them, or let him call them? Considering what Limbani had seen, the answer seemed obvious. He didn’t want to use it. He shouldn’t. That was his backup plan and might still need to escape his friends.

Only... if something could keep Limbani from seeing what they were going to do, didn’t it mean they were screwed without help?

“Fuck.” He took the envelope out of the pocket, and the plastic bag, pocketing that again. Opening it, he was surprised not to find anything in it.

Had he lost the content somehow? Had Donal taken it out when before handing it—

Thomas shoved his paranoia down. Grant had written in the envelope, not put something in it.

Call first. The word said, above a phone number. Below that was an address.

He entered the number. It rang twice before someone answered.

“Who is this?” a woman demanded.

“Hi?” Thomas said hesitantly.

“Who is this?” she repeated.

“My—Name’s Thomas. Thomas Hertz. I—”

“I don’t know you,” she stated.

“No. Grant Summer gave me your number. He said to call when I was in the city and that you could help me.” This definitely wouldn’t be how the kangaroo had envisioned the situation.

“Did he now?” she replied, bitterness dripping off her tone. “Kind of presumptuous of him to think that.”

“Please?” Thomas pleaded. “I can...” He hesitated. Somehow, this felt more degrading than when he’d considered selling his body to have something to eat. “I can sort of pay.”

“Kid,” she said, exasperation added to the bitterness. “A sort of payment only gets you a sort of help.”

No, she couldn’t just refuse. Grant had made it sound like— “he said that you’d consider what I can do worthwhile when you saw it.”

She sighed. “Can’t say I’ve ever needed muscle before. But since it’s Grant, we can at least meet. I’m at—”

“Oh, I know where you live,” Thomas hurried to say.

“Do you now?” she said sarcastically.

“Grant gave that to me too.” He read the address
The call terminated.
“What just happened?” Yating asked as Thomas stared at the phone.
How was he going to tell them she wasn’t helping?
“Was that a code?” Gilbert ask angrily. “Was that so she would trust us?”
“Don’t be stupid,” she answered, her voice coming from the van’s sound system.
They all stared at the dash.
“Didn’t you say the speakers were blown by the lightning bolt?” Limbani asked.
“They were,” Gilbert replied uncertainly.
“Ohhhh, it’s almost like I can do magic, isn’t it?” she said in a spooky voice.