

## Chapter 53

Before he hit the floor, Thomas was grabbed. “Thomas?”

Thomas regained his footing. “Roland?” He touched the side of his head and his fingers came away dry. “What the fuck?”

“I thought you were one of those goons!” Roland threw the little league trophy in the hamper behind him, and gave a bashful shrug when Thomas tilted an ear, then his arms were around his brother. “I knew you’d make it back. I told Henry you were too tough to need any kind of rescue.” He looked at Thomas. “How did you get by them? How are we escaping?”

Thomas couldn’t form words. What had Henry done to his brother that Roland had not only defended him, but was hugging him now, was happy to see him. Yes, Thomas expected his brother to be pleased to see him, but he also expected it to come with a large dose of him being pissed off at how what Thomas had done had affected his schooling.

“L..” Thomas tried, and faltered. Okay, this was still his brother, and Thomas had to say something.

“You guys okay?” Madoc asked, stepping into the room, and Roland stepped between him and Thomas. “Sorry, I heard a commotion and with the door open, I thought Rol might have escaped.”

“My name’s Roland,” the younger rat replied, offended. “And I was going to, but Thomas’ here to rescue me. Madoc,” he frowned. “You’re one of the guys who kidnapped him.”

“Is that what Henry told you?” Thomas asked. As he tried to step around Roland, his brother moved so he’d remain between them.

“It wasn’t Henry. One of the cops who’s been investigating told us that the people who kidnapped you are from the Lewiston family, and that’s Madoc Lewiston.” He glared at the rat in the doorway. “Grandma was right. The Lewistons are nothing but trouble.”

“Hey, I had nothing to do with his kidnapping,” Madoc exclaimed, raising his hands placatingly. “I helped him escape.”

“A lot more than that’s wrong,” Thomas added. “Henry changed your memories. Once Donal gets here, he’ll make sure everything goes back to the way they were.”

“Things aren’t going back to—”

“I don’t want to hear about it,” Thomas said, cutting off Madoc.

The other rat sighed. “Thomas, you have to look at how things are. Roland went through two of the ceremonies.”

“No, he—”

Roland snorted. “Like that’s news. I had my second ceremony like two years ago.” He grinned at Thomas. “Remember how you were waiting for me once Dad was done and we—”

“Stop!” Thomas stepped away from both rats, bile rising. “That isn’t real. And don’t you say one thing,” he told Madoc. “My brother isn’t part of this.”

“Thomas,” Madoc said, “this isn’t something you can wish away. He, as in our god, claimed Roland. That’s not something that can be undone.”

“No,” Thomas replied. “It’s just Henry screwing with everyone’s memories.”

“Laurence said—”

“I don’t want to hear about it!”

“Thomas, what’s wrong?” Roland stepped forward and placed a hand on his arm. “Look, whatever it is, it’s going to be okay.” He smiled and squeezed.

Thomas bolted for the door, shoving Roland aside. He couldn’t deal with this. He needed air. “Out of my way,” he told Madoc when the other rat didn’t move out of the doorway. Somewhere miles behind him, Roland called his name, and Thomas did everything he could to ignore the pain in his brother’s voice.

“Not until you apologize to your brother,” Madoc replied sternly.

“That isn’t my brother!”

“Thomas, it’s me. I’m your brother.”

“I remember him,” Madoc stated. “But this is who your brother is now. No, shut up.” Thoma’s muzzle audibly snapped shut. “Do you really want Roland to remember how you’re treating him right now? Because you know that what Donal does doesn’t remove anything. Are you going to run away from a brother who adored you, just because of your memory of one who acts like he can’t stand you?”

Thomas closed his eyes as he felt Roland behind him. The heat of his body, the hand on his back, the

shiver that ran down Thomas's spine at that tender touch. Didn't Madoc get it? Thomas needed Roland to hate his guts. How else was he supposed to keep his own feelings under control otherwise?

"Thomas?" Roland asked quietly, his voice breaking on the word.

He turned, and the hurt and love in his brother's eyes nearly made Thomas run. If Madoc through he could stop me, he was forgetting all Thomas needed was to glance over his shoulder to be in the hallway. But as much as he wanted Roland to hate his guts, Thomas didn't want to hurt his brother.

"I'm sorry," Thomas said, trying to keep his breath from shuddering. "It's been a few rough days. That's all." Roland's expression became pure joy. Then he was hugging Thomas. He stiffened, then forced himself to relax, paying not to get a hardon. He hugged his brother. "How are you, Roland? How were things after I left?"

"They were rough for a few days," Roland replied, his voice muffled by Thomas's shirt, "but then Coach Agrid got the team together and they rallied around me." He looked up and grinned. "You know how the team is. Neil's been over almost every night since and—"

Thomas stiffened again as the implications hit hard. "Oh, fuck."

"What?" Madoc and Roland asked. Only sounded worried, the other curious.

"Henry got to the football team," He told Madoc.

"Henry's never met the team," Roland said, puzzled.

Thomas used the opening this gave him. "Roland, I have to go deal with something. I need you to stay in your room until I get back, okay?" When his brother nodded, Thomas left the room, followed by Madoc.

"What do you mean?" the other rat asked, as Thomas pulled Madoc away from the door before allowing himself to slump against the wall. He kept his voice low and prayed it would be enough to keep Roland from hearing them, in spite of the utter lack of sound insulation in the house.

"The team Roland referred to, that's—"

"His high school football team, I figured. I was at their match with your family, remember?"

Thomas nodded. "They way he said they rallied around him, I'm pretty sure he means that *all...*"

"And the only way the entire team has sex with your brother is if Henry changed all their memories, too." Madoc let out a slow breath. "I've got to give it to the man; he is thorough."

"He's a fucking rapist," Thomas snarled, then glanced at his brother's door and lowered his voice again. "Look what he did to my brother."

Madoc fixed Thomas with narrowed eyes. "You've got to stop this, Thomas."

"And what the fuck does that mean?" He replied angrily. "Henry is who—"

"Stop shoving your brother in the closet because you don't know how to deal with having the hots for him."

"What?" Thomas asked, barely keeping his voice from breaking in fear. "I'd never—"

Madoc rolled his eyes. "I'm not blind, and you aren't as subtle as you think."

Thomas swallowed. Who else knew? "What you think I feel doesn't matter. Roland's straight. He always—"

"Never was."

"He is straight," Thomas insisted.

"I met your brother before all this happened, remember? At Thanksgiving and at the after game celebration. I've seen the way he looks at you."

"You're just fantasizing."

Madoc smirked, then forced it away. "I saw that look in his eyes when he thought no one was watching. He was looking at you and he wanted you, and he felt guilty about it. Fuck, it's just about the same look you get anything you look at him and think we can't see. It's in how you react that you're different. You look away. He clamps down and scowls."

"Let me guess, you want me to go in there and—" Thomas closed his mouth. For all he knew, his brother was at the door, listening.

"Of course not. What I'm saying is that what you feel isn't wrong. Your brother's hot, you'd have to be straight not to react. Just like you and your dad are hot."

"My dad?" Thomas said, the start of his protest at how hot he might be blown away by the fact Madoc thought his dad was hot.

"Don't worry," the other rat said with a smirk. "I know your uncles have dibs. And if he says no after, I'm dropping it. I'm not like Raphael. I remember sex is sacred to Him, and that consent is needed from both sides."

"Right, you expect me to believe Raphael raping me for days after days did nothing for him?"

"It's sex," Madoc replied flatly, "And Raphael's an asshole, so he had his fun, but without the consent, he got a fraction of the energy he'd get otherwise, but that's distracting us from the important point. In two years, he's—"

Someone cleared their throat, and Madoc closed his mouth.

They turned to look at the naked Thomas standing at the top of the stairs, who nodded toward the other end of the hall. Swallowing the dread, Thomas turned.

Roland was looking at them through the partially open door. His wide eyes, fearful expression made him look much younger than his sixteen years. "What do you mean, you were raped?"

Thomas's mouth moved, but nothing came out. How the fuck was he supposed to—

He hit the wall, then Madoc kissed him. "That's to get your brains working again," the rat said, expression and tone serious. "My family caused it, so I'll explain it to him." He pushed the dressed Thomas toward the naked one. "Take a load off in the meantime and enjoy yourself."

By the time Thomas processed what had happened and turned, his brother's door was closed and neither rats were in the hallway. He turned to look at Firmin wearing his body and was about to look away when something caught his attention.

He stepped up to his double, trying to work out what was off. Firmin stood still, the puzzled expression looking odd as Thomas walked around him. Okay, it was indeed him. Muscled thighs, arms and back, firm ass, defined pecs and abs, all courtesy of Madoc's training and supplements. Even the cock, now hard, was his, and yet...

"You did something to my body, right?" Thomas asked. "You can make subtle alterations, right?"

His double shook his head. "What you see is what you have."

"No, I don't look anywhere that good."

Firmin snorted. "Trust me, you can believe what you see. You were too busy sucking cock to see the guys drooling and lining up. You have no idea the number of guys I did as you."

"You what?"

Firmin motioned to the body he was doubling. "Hey, look at this and tell me you wouldn't... right. You didn't put yourself out there, so I took advantage of it."

Thomas tried to decide how angry he should be, as a few on campus encounters made more sense with this new information.

"Felix was pissed when he realized that way more guys were at the mid-semester party for you than him."

"Because of you," Thomas said.

"I probably didn't hurt, but no. Once Madoc started beefing you up, you were pulling them in on your own."

"You don't realize what that's going to do to my reputation, do you?"

His double raised an eyebrow. "You mean the one about how great in bed you are? We have fucked, you know. I know how good you are. No one's going to think you aren't living up to the example I set." He smirked.

Thomas shook his head and chuckled. Yeah, he had to admit that it was in line with what the Firmin he remembered from his time at the frat would do, if he'd been able to copy people. How many times had he caused trouble just imitating their voices? Firmin had always been the happy-go-lucky kind who didn't bother with the consequences of his action, well, until Donal had made him remember...

"Wait a minute," Thomas said. "Last time I saw you, you looked like you wanted to die. And now you're all full of life again."

Firmin shrugged. "Felix, of all people, pointed out that I don't have to let my real memories define me. I know what it's like to enjoy my power on top of being so shamed into never doing anything with it." He raised a hand and Thomas closed his mouth. "There's a sordid history of people like me justifying their behavior. And considering some ways Henry made use of me, I actually understand why my family treated me the way they did. But now, I get to decide how I feel and how I live. Fuck, I get to be one of two teleporters in the world. How much more awesome than that can it get?"

Thomas sighed. "You're going to make me regret agreeing to letting you copy my body, aren't you?"

Firmin pressed against Thomas, and whispered into his ear. "I will honor this body as if it was our god. I will see to it that it is treated with pleasure and orgasms." He let out a slow breath, and the shiver that cause ran down Thoma's spine, down his ass and into his cock. "And I will give you the best spot in my bed if you ever want to find out what it's like to fuck you."

Thomas opened his mouth to say... he had no idea what he was about to say. Yes? No? Do me now?

The commotion in the living room chased all that out of his head once Judith spoke.

“Let go of me,” she said, in that tone that Thomas had seen quarterbacks run away from. “If you don’t, I swear on His balls that my boyfriend is going to rip yours out.”

“She does mean His balls,” a man answered smugly as Thomas raced down the stairs. “And yes, one word from her and yours are gone, Mercier.”