

Aaron was putting his books away in his locker, classes were finally over. It had been a long day, three exams, and a chem lab. He was looking forward to going home, and getting a massage from Aiden, but he'd have to wait some more. Only Adam and Alexander were here, the others must have been delayed.

Adam was talking with Barry, someone he knew from shop class. From the sound of it they were talking about classes, and not making plans to have sex. That's what Alex was doing with Rufus, from the chess club, not that Aaron could hear their whispers, but the tent in the aardvark's pants made it pretty clear.

Aaron hadn't been planing on doing anything, but then he heard the distinct whirl of the floor cleaner. He looked around his locker door and the old goat was pushing it down the end of the row of lockers.

"Hey Fred," he called.

The white goat looked up and smiled. "Hello Aaron."

Aaron motioned him over. Fred took a moment to shutdown the cleaner and walked to him, his steps deliberate. He was pretty spry for pushing ninety. His skin was starting to hang loose on his face, making folds of fur. He kept in shape although his muscles weren't what they had been when he was younger. He'd shown Aaron pictures earlier in the year.

"About to head out?" The goat asked, nodding to Adam and Alexander.

"That was the plan." Aaron ran a hand up Fred's side. "But that was before I saw you. I could stay and help you." He leaned in and nuzzled the goat's neck. What he really wanted to do put his hands on his ass, pull him close and grind against him like crazy, But they had rules. Public display of affection were fine, but hands had to remain above the belt and over the clothes. But fuck did the old goat turn him on.

Fred gently pushed him away. "Do you think you should be doing this in public?"

Aaron indicated Alexander and Rufus, who were now kissing, with hands roaming each other's back. "No one minds them." Student were walking by without looking at them, Or the guy and girl making out further down.

"Well, they are the same age. I'm old enough to be your grandfather."

"So? I still love making out with you and having sex, lets not forget the sex."

Fred chuckled, and Aaron could smell his arousal. "If you help me out, how are you going to get back home?"

"I'll just take the bus."

"Isn't that risky? You never know what kind of people you'll meet on there."

"That's what makes it fun. I should tell you some of the great sex I've had on busses." Okay, so he'd broken the rule a time or two. "Actually, you should ride the bus with me one of these days."

"I don't think that would be a good idea."

Aaron leaned in. "Come on, just think about it," he whispered. "Pinning me against one of the poles, pounding my ass right there in front of everyone?"

The goat swallowed. "You are going to give me a heart attack, young man."

Aaron chuckled. "I doubt it." He rubbed over Fred's heart. "You had that replaced at the start of the year. It's going to pump for years to come. I mean, it works well enough to get this hard." Aaron almost groped the old goat. Fuck it was sometime difficult to control himself around him. He couldn't wait for them to be in his office after they were done. bent over the desk, the goat moving in and out of him, braying and swearing. Fuck it was going to be hot.

"Guys! Guys!" Albert yelled running down the length of lockers. "We have to get home ASAP, Patrick's in the hospital!"

"What happened?" Adam asked.

It took Aaron a moment for the words to register. Patrick was in the hospital?

"I don't know, I just got the notification of his admission a moment ago. The others are at the van waiting for us."

Aaron looked at the goat. Fuck. "I'm sorry, I really didn't plan on turning you on like this and ditching you, but this is an emergency."

The goat nodded. "I get it, and I know you'll make it up to me."

Aaron kissed him hard. "I promise." He couldn't help himself, he groped him. He was definitely hard. Fuck he wanted that. He forced himself to step away. His three brothers were already halfway down the row and he ran to catch up.

He took the passenger seat as usual and turned to Albert once Adam had the minivan moving. "What happened?"

Albert was putting on the glasses. "Give me a minute." He moved his hand around in front of him, moving files only he could see. "Okay, I have the initial report. He was shot."

"Shot?" Alexander asked. "Why in Hell would anyone shoot him?"

"This doesn't say."

"Is he going to be okay?" Aaron asked.

Albert read for a moment. "It's shoulder wound, the right one."

"That's the side where his scar is." Aiden said.

"What hospital is he at?" Adam asked.

"The Four Clover."

Adam told the van and the information appeared on the windshield. "That's way north, and at this hour it's going to take a few hours to get there."

"I don't think we should go," Arthur stated.

They stared at him.

"We can't let him go through this alone," Aaron replied. "We're his brothers, we have to be there for him."

"He doesn't want to see us."

"That doesn't matter," Alexander said.

"Yes it does. How do you think he's going to feel about us if we show up mere hours after his admitted because Albert's been a virtual stalker? It isn't going to endear us to him."

Everyone was silent for a long moment.

"He's right, you know." Adam finally said.

"I know." Aaron looked over his shoulder. "Thanks for being the voice of reason again."

"It's becoming a bad habit of mine, isn't it?"

"No, it isn't," Anakin stated, "But You must be getting really tired of keeping us in line."

Arthur shrugged.

"Let's just go home," Aaron said. "Hopefully the dads are going to know what we should do."

* * * * *

They filed into the kitchen, where Daniel and Donald were preparing dinner. The adults looked at them then the clock.

"we weren't expecting you for another hour. Dinner won't be ready till then."

"Patrick's in the hospital," Albert said.

"What happened?"

"He was shot, but it's only a shoulder wound, nothing life threatening."

Daniel and Donald exchanged a look. "You deal with this, Donny, I've got dinner."

Donald sat at the table. "When did this happen?"

"A couple of hours ago. He was admitted just as class ended."

"Sit down, everyone." He waited until they did then looked at Albert. "How do you know this? It can't have hit the news yet"

"I had a sniffer functions floating around the web

looking for any mentions of him."

Donald and Daniel sighed together.

"You can't do that Albert," Donald said. "There are laws against cyberstalking. you know that."

"I'm not stalking him, I was just wanted to know a bit more about him, I mean he left pretty distraught and I wanted to see what he'd say about it, but he doesn't have any social pages. As far as I can tell, he isn't online at all. all I found were pictures he's in with friends of his. So I got the sniffer going to look for whatever it could find, which isn't much."

"Shut it down, Albert."

"Dad, come on. I'm not hurting anyone."

"I know, but the law doesn't care. If anyone from the cyber crime unit comes across your sniffer they are going to track it back to you. You're eighteen, you'll be prosecuted as an adult."

Albert looked down. "Oh, I hadn't thought about that."

"I know. I know you didn't mean any harm, but the laws are in place because before you were born a lot of people caused harm that way."

Albert nodded, put his glasses on and manipulated the functions for a time then took them off. "I've erased it. How much trouble am I going to be in if they find traces of what I did?"

Donald patted his shoulder. "I don't think they'll bother looking at the history unless they get a complaint, so you should be fine."

"Dad, what are we going to do about Patrick?" Aaron asked.

"There's nothing to do. He isn't our responsibility."

"But he's our brother, we should be there for him."

"Aaron, you can't force yourself on him. If you try you're just going to push him away. We have to let him come to us."

"What if he never does?"

"Then he doesn't. It's his choice."

"But we could call him, right?" Adam asked.

"Once his shooting hits the news feed," Donald agreed.

"No, we can't," Albert said. "The number uncle Damian gave us is his mothers."

"Why would he give us her number and not Patrick's?"

"He doesn't have a phone."

"How can he not have a phone?" Arthur asked.

"You've seen where he lives. Phone cost money."

"Come on Dad. Phone are cheap. I mean okay, ours aren't."

He tapped the bracelet he was wearing. "But basic models hardly cost anything. They could afford that, right?" He looked at Albert.

"Don't look at me. I don't know what their finances are like. I didn't go look into their private life."

"If he doesn't have a phone," Donald said, "It's probably because he can't afford one."

"If he can't afford that, how is he going to pay for his hospital stay?" Anakin asked.

Worried expressions filled the table.

"I can probably cover a good part of it," Aiden said. "My first album is selling pretty well."

"Isn't that going to make him feel like your forcing yourself on him?" Alexander asked.

"I just want to help him out," Aiden complained.

"We can't force it on him. Maybe we can call his mother and offer to help?"

"We can try that," Donald agreed.

Albert looked at his father. "What if he didn't know the money was from us?"

"It would be difficult to pay the bill for him without him finding out."

"That's not what I'm thinking. He has friends who have online presences. we could talk to them, and arrange for a crowdfund to be setup. I'm sure they'd want to help, and once people start putting money in it, so long as we keep our donations in the same range as theirs, no one would notice."

"And we'd be able to give often," Aaron added. "that way we can cover whatever the others can't."

"That sounds like a good idea," Daniel said, from the stove. "Just be careful you don't force it on them. It might not be sex, but no still means no."

"Why would they say no?" Aiden asked.

"I don't know, I just want you to be careful. Because we have money isn't a reason to force our ideas on those who have less."

Aaron shared nods of agreement with his brothers and they left to set it up.

* * * * *

Patrick lay on his bed trying not to mess with his bandaged shoulder. The doctors had warned him against that, it was full of micro stuff that would help the wound heal. He had to wear it for three weeks, after which they hope it would be fully healed.

Unfortunately during that time Patrick couldn't do any heavy lifting, which meant working at the junkyard was out. At

least, he could still bounce, so they wouldn't be too short on money. It was already enough of a miracle they hadn't gone broke paying the hospital bills.

He listened to the saved call again.

"Hi Patrick, it's Aaron."

"And Alex."

"And Arthur!"

"Come on guys, we said I'd be the one talking," Aaron sounded exasperated. And multiple voices talked over one another for almost a minute. Patrick couldn't help smiling.

"Alright, that's enough." An older voice sounded. "Hello Patrick, it's Daniel. Since the kids can't make up their minds as to who is their spokes person I'll do it. we heard on the news you got shot. We thought about visiting you in the hospital, but considering the way you left we weren't sure you'd want us there, so we agreed to call and let you know we hope you'll get better soon." There was a pause, and the silence was complete. "We hope that..." Now Patrick could hear some labored breathing. "Just get better Patrick."

The call ended.

His mom had been the one to listen to it first since he'd been in the hospital. She'd brought the phone on her next visit so he could listen to it. He'd been touched that she did, considering what Daniel and his family represented.

And he'd almost cried when he listened to it for the first time. They'd cared enough to want to visit, and he did wish they had. He almost called them back, but his mother was there. What would she think of them all here.

Now he wished he had called them anyway. He had to stop making decisions with his mother's wellbeing as the deciding factor. He had to live his life for himself.

Holding the phone he saw the time and it reminded him of the call he needed to make. he punched in the number.

"St-Benedict, Mother Rosetta Speaking."

"Hi, It's Patrick."

"Hello Patrick. How are you doing? I saw on the news you got shot. I've been praying for you."

"Thank you. I think God listened to you."

"How so?"

"We don't have insurance, so I expected my mom to have to get a loan to pay for my treatment, but some of my friends got together and setup a social site for people to donate money toward my medical bills. So many people donated that it's all covered, as well as my checkups. Whatever's left over afterward I'm thinking I'll donate it to the hospital."

"That's very generous of you."

Patrick chuckled. "I don't know about that. I'm just not comfortable keeping it. To be honest, as grateful as I am for the donations, I feel a bit weird about it."

"You have friends, you should cherish that."

"I do, I just never realized how many people actually cared. Except for a few friends, I always thought of myself as a loner."

"You don't have to run around shaking everyone's hand to have an impact on their lives. A kind word, or a gentle action are sometime all that's needed. From our conversations I have no trouble believing you've affected the people around you in a positive manner."

Patrick felt himself blush. "I suppose so." He fell silent, still not quite believing he'd touch the lives of so many people.

"And about your other situation, have you made a decision?"

"Yeah, I'd decided to follow your advise and start exploring the gay culture. I've found a gay bar a few miles away, but with getting shot, I didn't get a chance to go. I'm going to wait until my shoulder's healed before going."

"Alright. And have you told someone? Your mother?"

"No, not my mom. there's no way I'm telling her."

"You should."

"You don't know her. I've tried to bring it up, well, to bring my dad up and she always shifts the subjects. When she doesn't, she acts like he's a threat to me."

"You've never mentioned your father before."

Patrick was silent for a moment, then told her about their visit. The only thing he left out was that they were brothers.

"So you're father's gay too. And he knew you were gay?"

"Yeah, he said every man in our family is. I don't know if that's true, but I am." He didn't mentioned his brothers.

It was such a strange idea, he had brothers. He hadn't really thought about them since visiting their house and he wondered how they were doing. Maybe he should call them? go for another visit?

"Well, I don't know anything about genetics," she said, "but I'd think it couldn't be all of them."

"I guess it doesn't matter, not really. If they are, or aren't, it doesn't affect who I am, and I'm the one who needs to come to terms with this."

"True. So you haven't told your mothers. anyone else?"

"No, well, Joey knows, but he was kind of instrumental in screwing my head on straight. I was thinking about talking

with Natalia, I've known her for years, I'm curious if she knew, but she's out of the city until summer."

"You could call her."

Patrick smiled. "I'm not much of a phone user. and for that kind of conversation I prefer face to face."

"Then have a video call."

"I mean in person."

"Are you sure you're not just finding reasons not to ask her?"

Patrick considered it. Would he know if he was? "I don't think so. I know that on the day I was shot I wouldn't have asked her, but during the few days I was in the hospital, I had lots of time to think. That's when I decided to ask her, but I couldn't manage to have her alone, and by the time I was released she had to go back to her college."

"Hopefully you'll be even more comfortable with yourself by the time she'll be back, asking the question won't feel uncomfortable. Speaking of your shooting, how were you during the fight?"

"I don't remember it clearly, it happened pretty fast and I lost blood. I got angry, but I think I stayed in control. I slashed him a few time, claws out, but I don't think I was trying to do more than force him to back off."

"The news made it sound like you just held your own until your friends intervened."

"Yeah, I heard that too, and I guess that's true. It's a blur and I'm just happy it's in the past."

"Well, I'm glad you're alright."

"Me too. I think I'm going to nap. it was good talking to you Mother Rosetta."

"And to you too. God be with you Patrick."

"And with you." he disconnected the call, placed the phone on the bedside table and fell asleep as soon as he closed his eyes.

* * * * *

The beep sounded from his comm system. "Yes Alice?"

"Miss Tremaine is here to see you."

"Send her in, Alice, thank you." He wiped his desk clean of the file he was working on and brought up the one that was relevant to this meeting.

"I see you're still using a flesh and blood receptionist, Damian." She said as soon as she'd closed the door. "You really need to get yourself a reception kiosk, they're a lot cheaper"

"Please take a seat Josephine. Alice does a perfect job. I don't see any need in replacing her with a machine. I take

it you are using one?"

"More than one. I have them anywhere I can make it work. Now, what did you want to see me about?"

Damian studied her for a moment. Her reddish brown fur was graying, unusual considering she was the same age as him. Genetic predisposition? Stress? She was relaxed. It wasn't the first time she'd been in his office in the ten years since he'd appointed her to run the security company.

She'd been the only one in the company who hadn't given into corruption when he bought it. She'd been an army captain when she was kicked out for bringing her corrupt superior to justice. She hadn't been very discreet in the process, and the army, like most large organization hated it when it's disgrace were made public. Josephine paid for it by being discharged with honors.

She'd done a good job running the company, as far as Damian knew. He didn't micro manage, she was a competent leader with an exemplary record, so had been the perfect choice. He hadn't heard anything until this incident, and her comment about saving money made him wonder if she was still the right person to run it.

He tapped the file and slid it to her. "I'd like to know what happened."

She activated it, and a news report played before her eyes. It was short, simply stating that a young tiger had been shot in the Brownstones while playing basketball. That the incident seemed to be gang related. and that he had been hospitalized but the wound was minor.

The report was from one of his news company, and they all had rules to keep to the fact and avoid theorizing. Other reports from other news agencies went more in depth, and tried to interview Patrick, but wisely he'd turned them down. Damian hadn't worried about how that might have affected the family, there was nothing out of the ordinary here, but Patrick would have found that once he'd let the news media get its teeth in him, they would have been reluctant to let go. He felt his life was difficult now, it would have been more so under the constant eye of the news hungry public.

If not for his friends, the news might still have stayed focused on him, but three of them, a bear, an ermine and a panther with bleached fur had been more than happy to relate everything, and how this was affecting them, making themselves a spectacle the news was happy to consume.

She looked up once it stopped. "What do you mean, what happened?"

He looked at her blankly. He found the result far more interesting when he didn't ask questions and let a person's

paranoia speak for them. he did note her pupils were dilating.

"Look, you can't be blaming us for this. We had no way to know this was going to happen. We did everything you told us to."

We? she was including the whole company in this, trying to shift the blame. She knew she'd done something wrong, but didn't want to take the blame.

"What did I tell you to do?"

"You told us to protect that kid from the gangs."

"What else?" Was she mis remembering or purposely altering her recollection?

"What do you mean, what else?"

She was becoming agitated. She was worried. Was this the tip of an iceberg she didn't want him knowing about?

"You know what I mean Josephine. I was quite clear in my instructions when I gave them to you on the eighteenth of March. I want to know if you still remember them."

She gave an exasperated sigh. "You said to protect him from the gangs and make sure he didn't know we were doing it."

"Good. Now, please answer my question. What happened?"

"I just..."

"No, you didn't. You made sure I knew this wasn't your fault. You did not explain how it was that, not only did someone wearing gang colors was able to get close enough to this young man to shoot him, but the young man and his friends had to be the one to deal with it."

His voice was cold, something he knew made people uncomfortable, they expected the heat of anger, not cold calculation.

"Considering your instructions, I'd like to know how this happened."

"Damn it, Damian. What did you expect me to do? The gangs were all arrested. I needed my personnel for other jobs. I didn't see a point on leaving people on him if there was no threats."

"If there was no threats, how do you explain he got shot?"

"I couldn't know that was going to happen."

Damian nodded to himself. "I see." When had making money become more important to her than protecting someone she was told to protect? "Very well, that's all Josephine."

"What do you mean that's all?"

"I mean, I have no more questions, and you can leave. Unless you have something you'd like to add?"

She opened her mouth to say something, and then must have realized the situation she was in because she closed it. "No."

I don't," she growled. She glared at him and Damian could tell that gaze had intimidated many people over her carrier, but it was wasted on him. When he didn't react she got up and left, slamming the door behind her.

He waited a moment going over what she'd said and what she hadn't. It was apparent she was no longer the person to run Royal Securities.

"Contact Audit." there was a beep.

"Auditing department, Emil speaking.

"Emil, Damian."

"Mister Orr, what can I do for you?"

"I need you to get an audit done on Royal Securities. If anything criminal is found, get an outside agency to redo the audit, otherwise forward me the results."

"Yes sir."

He disconnected.

"HR." there was three rings.

"HR."

"This is Damian."

"Oh shit. Yes Mister Orr. I'm Beltane."

Beltane Dupree, nineteen, been with the company for a year.

"Beltane, let me start by saying I expect more professionalism from the people working for me."

"Yes sir. I'm sorry sir."

"Now, I need you to go through Josephine Tremaine's employment record. I need her transferred to a position better suited for her, not a leadership role. Then go through the personnel at Royal Securities and give me a list of the ten most qualified to run it."

"Yes sir."

"And Beltane, as you are doing this. consider that Miss Tremaine is someone who didn't measure up to my expectations." Damian disconnected the call before the your possum could say anything.

He brought up the files he'd been working on before. It was his nephews crowd sourced funding for Patrick's hospital bills. He was please with them. They had beat him to it, setting it up within hours of the incident, and in a way Patrick wouldn't know they were involved unless he got his friend to dig into it, and Damian had seen to it there were a few level of security added to make it much more difficult.

He was glad to know they were this eager to help their brother even if they haven't gotten to know him quite yet. At this rate, Patrick might actually manage to join the family without any intervention.

That would certainly be best for him.