

Patrick wanted someone from the Sarantos to show up, as he walked hard toward... He didn't have a destination in mind, he just needed to get away from his mother and her lies right now. He'd have to figure something out soon, if only because he needed a place to sleep, but right now he was burning energy, and spoiling for a fight.

His expression kept the people on the sidewalk from accosting him, and no gang member caused trouble. Why couldn't they be there when he actually wanted them around? Instead of making his life miserable the rest of the time? Brooding on the gang kept him from thinking about what those two men had said.

Eventually he had to slow down, his legs were hurting from the forced pace, and he was hungry. That he couldn't do anything about, He'd given his mom all his money. He should have kept some. Hell (sorry) he should keep what he made. It was his money, not hers.

He looked around, where was he? He didn't recognize any of the store fronts, nor the intersection he was at, Alida way and Country club. Okay, he'd walked longer than he thought. The area certainly looked better than his neighborhood.

It took him a few tries before he got someone willing to give him directions to Don's Cup. The first people he tried to approached looked at him once and walked faster. Eventually a woman, a sheep, cautiously let him approach and she pulled out her phone to find the bar. Okay, he definitely was further than he expected. He thanks her and started walking, keeping his pace reasonable this time.

The bar only had a few people there, even for a Tuesday it was a slow evening here.

Mary smiled at him. "Pat, I didn't know you were working tonight."

"I'm not, I just need to make a call. can I borrow your phone?"

"It's in my bag, in the back. Once I've served these beers I'll go get it."

"I'll handle it," Don said, suddenly standing next to Patrick. for a large man he could move quietly at times. "Come on, you can make it in my office."

Once there the panda handed him his phone, and it took a moment for Patrick to find the call function among all the others on it. He thought, as he entered Zack's number, he had to be the last person left who memorized numbers, everyone one else relied on their phone to keep them.

"Hello?"

"Hey Zack, it's Pat."

"What's up?"

"Can I crash at your place tonight? Had a fight with my mom and I don't want to go back home."

"Yeah, sure. but you're going to have to be gone before seven in the morning. That's when my dad comes back and you know how he is about my friends spending the night."

"Won't be a problem, thanks. I'll be there in twenty." That was tonight taken cared of.

"You okay?" Don asked. "You want to talk about it?"

"No, I don't want to talk about it." Patrick forced a breath to calm himself, he'd almost snapped at Don. "I'm okay, just stuff with my mom."

The panda nodded and motioned for Patrick to follow him past the store room. Don opened the door next to it, just before the back door that leading into the alley. it revealed a small space with a cot.

"I set this up a couple of years ago when me and the wife went through a rough patch. Haven't used it since, but never needed the room for anything." Don took a key off his keychain. "That's a key to the back door. If you need a place to crash feel free to use it."

"I can't do that," Patrick protested.

"Bullshit. You work for less than I'm legally required to pay you and you don't bitch about it, and you do a good job bouncing."

"I don't need the money that badly." Patrick said, even though that wasn't true, but he didn't want Don to feel like he had to do this.

"Fuck you can be stubborn." He put the key in Patrick's hand. "Take the fucking key. You're in a rough patch, make use of it if you need it."

"Okay, thanks." He added the key to the ring containing his house key. "I better get going, I don't want to keep Zack waiting."

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Patrick was taking lamps out of a pile of them as the Ocelot pointed them out. She wanted something antique looking, ideally from the nineteen-nineties, So Patrick was treading on the treacherous ground made by those lamps.

Lamps weren't worth much so Joey only had them thrown in this pile. they were all broken in some way because of that, but it didn't stop her from excitedly pointing to one and then another.

Over thirty minutes Patrick brought her eight lamps, all of which she loved. She hated having to chose only one of them. He pointed out the her that if she wanted all of them,

Joey was sure to be happy to give her a great deal on them, just to be rid of them.

She was brimming with joy and had him bring them all to her car. Joey asked for forty bucks and she happily paid it.

"Come on in," Joey said, after she'd left. He sat at his old desk and reached in the older fridge behind him. He pulled out a beer for himself and a can of orange soda with a deli sandwich for Patrick. "Okay, What's going on? You were at the gate before I got here and you said you didn't mind working for free. You've never been someone who requires a lot of money to work, but I've never taken you for the kind to give away the work. so what gives?"

Patrick took a bite of the sandwich and a long swallow of the soda to give himself time to formulate an answer. Unlike with Don, he didn't mind talking about this with Joey. There was something comfortable about the bulldog in his ripped and dirty jeans and grime covered t-shirt.

"My mom's been lying to me about who my father was. He isn't the war hero she told me. he isn't even dead. He's a..." Patrick found he couldn't say it. He'd hurled it at them easily enough when he was angry, but he'd realized they didn't deserved it. That they were... the way they were wasn't their fault, and they hadn't done anything to him. It was his mother who had lied. And he found that if he wasn't saying the word in anger, he couldn't actually say it.

"He's a homosexual. And he said I was too."

"Are you?"

"No! Absolutely not! There's no way I'm a fag!" Patrick yelled.

"That's a pretty energetic denial," Joey said, unaffected by the anger directed at him, "for someone who said he isn't one."

Patrick glared at him, but the bulldog just took a sip of his beer without taking his eyes off him. Patrick looked away.

"I don't want to be one," he finally admitted.

"Why?"

"Really? You have to ask? even forgetting that it's a sin, you've seen the news. They molest kids, breakup marriage. Who in their right mind would want to be one of them?"

"Really, Pat? I thought you were smarter than that. You're using the news? You know damn well that's nothing to go by, of course those who make the news are the bad ones. Why else would the news talk about them. There's been a bunch of hyenas on the news recently for murder, are all hyenas murderers then? You're a tiger who's poor, are all tigers poor?"

Patrick looked at the floor, finding his appetite

vanishing under Joey's rebuke. "But it's a sin. I don't want to walk off the Path."

Joey shrugged. "Look, you're talking about the bible now. A book that was written thousands of years ago. I never read it, but I have to say I'm suspicious of a book that old having any relevance in today's world."

Joey didn't get it. He couldn't get how important God's opinion was to Patrick. It showed how to stay on the path. To set off it was to start walking toward Hell.

"Let me ask you this." Joey finished his beer. "Do you think I'm heading for hell?"

"What? of course not."

"How do you know? Maybe I'm gay."

Patrick started to answer, but stopped. his reaction had been to say that of course Joey wasn't... "Are you?"

"No, but that's beside the point. The point is, how do you know? You told me that gays are just the ones who see on the news, they do the bad stuff, so everyone else you see on the street is straight, right? You're assuming how people live their lives base on some fears you have from a book that's older than... Older than anything I know. Seems to me you're doing all of them a disservice."

Joey stood. "Anyway, It isn't my place to tell you what you should do or think."

Patrick shook his head. "No, thanks. I think I needed someone to give me a reality check. You're right. for all the reading I do, I haven't really tried to get to know all that much about them."

"Look, don't worry about it. Maybe try to get to know him. You say he's your father, right? wouldn't it be better to know your father, even if he isn't perfect?" He took twenty out of his pocket and handed that to Patrick. "Here."

"You don't have to do that. I said I'd work for free today."

"I know, but if you hadn't been here, I'd have been the one to help that woman and fight with the mountain of lamps. And I only pay fifty cents per lamps, so even with paying you twenty bucks, I've made a really good profit on this."

"Thanks."

"Are you going home after this?"

"No. I don't want to be in that house for now."

"Okay. Do you have a place to spend the night? My place isn't much, but the couch is mostly clean."

"Thanks, but I'm good." He'd call some of the guys he knew, hopefully one of them would be able to let him couch surf for a couple of night. and if not, he might take Don up on his offer to use the cot. "Once I'm done eating, I could

use a shower, unless you have something you need me to do."

"No, you go get clean and then enjoy your day."

Patrick thought about the card in his pocket. Joey was right, he'd spent his childhood wishing he had a father, and now he did. He couldn't ignore him, and him being... what he was, was part of the package. he'd have to find a way to deal with it.