

Patrick got off the bus, looked around and wondered where he was. This didn't look like the San Francisco he knew. Sure, he knew Old San Jose was where the rich folks lived, but this... He was standing next to an eight foot wall made of white stone. On the other side of the road was a similar wall, with trees behind it, and in the distance a house. A large house.

The people on the side walk were looking at him and he didn't blame them. Fuck, he should just turn around and go back, he had no business being in this part of the city. If he had enough money he'd get on the next bus and do just that. As it was he might as well see this through before walking home.

The street he wanted was the next one, and it slowly wound up the hill. After the first one, the houses were no longer walled, but they were all very large and the one with the bright red wall with purple... waves? and yellow awning was rather gaudy.

How could he be related to anyone living here?

The number he was looking for was on a post next to a driveway winding further along. Next to it was a path, which he took. It was lined with some bushes and purple flowers.

He looked up from the flora and stopped. He'd called the building he saw on his way here houses, but standing close he now realized how wrong he'd been, this was a mansion. His mom's house could probably fit twenty times in it. Just who the fuck was his father to live in a place like this?

The driveway led to the garage, partially inside the hill. He stared at the door. It was bigger than his house, how many cars did they have? And why wasn't this place gated to keep guys like him out of it?

Above that and slightly recessed, was the two story mansion in a tan color stucco. At least it wasn't as bright as some of the other houses, Patrick thought. Then realized how stupid that thought was. so it wasn't brightly painted, it was nonetheless extravagant.

Again he considered turning around. This was a mistake, but since he'd already made it, no point in leaving now. He forced himself the rest of the way to the door, which was a deep red clay in color. He knocked, then noticed the buzzer. Maybe he should have used that instead? He waited for a moment, and was about to press the button when the door opened.

The smallest of the tigers who'd shown up at his door stood before him, mouth agape and eyes wide. Patrick didn't remember his name, but he thought he'd been the one to knock on his door. He was bare chested, and well built.

Patrick's gaze lingered for a moment on this pecs and biceps before realized what he was doing and looked up at his face. his breathing had intensified, and he couldn't stop a though that the short guy was pretty good looking. He smelled sweaty and wore only sweat pants. Patrick hadn't realized it the last time, but he was one of those dwarfs who was built proportional.

"Hi," Patrick said in the stretching silence.

The tiger closed his mouth. "Hey," he said in what sounded like a forced conversational tone.

"I'm Patrick, you and your brothers came to my place the other night."

The small tiger nodded. "I remember."

"Is your dad here?"

The guy nodded, took a deep breath and yelled. "Dad! Patrick's here!"

Patrick winced and took a step back. For such a small guy he had one Hell (sorry) of a pair of lungs on him. Once his ears stopped ringing he thought he heard people moving about further in the house. Not long after that a man showed up.

He too was only wearing sweat pants and smelled sweaty, but there was something else mixed in that scent. Patrick didn't know what it was but his heart started racing. He forced himself not to look at the well defined biceps and abs.

"Thanks Arthur," the man said. He had to be in his forties, but he looked good for an old man. What the fuck was he thinking? Patrick wanted to run away. This was the worse mistake he'd ever made.

The man ruffled Arthur's hair And sent him back. then he moved out of Patrick's way. Patrick looked at the large hallway behind them and felt like this was the cave leading to the dragon that would threaten to eat him.

Get a grip, he told himself. This isn't a fantasy novel. And even if it was, the dragon always holds answers. And regardless of anything else, he wanted answers, didn't he? The dark cave, he realized what this was. the place where everything changed for the stories' main character.

Would things really change for him if he crossed that threshold? It wasn't just the obvious wealth, these were f... what they were and they acted like it was the most normal thing to be. They claimed he was like them. Would going in confirm that?

"Are you okay?" the man asked.

Patrick realized he'd been fixed in place for some time. He'd made the journey, crossed the wild land to come here. He entered.

"Should I take my shoes off?" he asked. The floor was

black, polished to the point he could see his reflection in it. The walls were off white, slightly gray maybe? At least it didn't feel harsh against the black floor. There was a mirror on the wall in a gold frame, over a small table. At this point, he figured the frame was actual gold and promised himself he wasn't going to touch it. he should probably avoid touching anything, if he broke something he'd never be able to pay it back.

"Only if you want to. Don't worry about getting stuff dirty. We have seven kids, nothing stays clean long in here."

Patrick eyed the shiny floor and had trouble believing him. they probably had an army of people keeping this place clean.

"If you want to take off your jacket the closet is over there." He pointed to the opposite wall.

There was a polished wood door, it had to be solid wood, not the wanna be stuff the closet doors in his mother's house were made out of. Should he leave his jacket there? was he expected to leave all his close in there?

"Is there a dress code or something?"

"excuse me?"

"You and Arthur are only wearing sweat pants. Is that how you dress here?"

The man looked down at himself, as if he'd forgotten what he was wearing. "Oh, no. You just caught us...exercising. If you prefer I'll go put on something more appropriate."

"Exercising? like the whole lot of you?"

"Yes, it's a family tradition. We like to stay in shape. It looks like you do too."

Patrick shrugged, he was muscular, sure, but it wasn't because he worked at it. Working at the junkyard took care of that, as did having to defend himself all the time. But that explained why they were sweaty. He put his jacket in the closet, and it looked like rags next to the others there.

"Look, I don't want to offend you, but I don't know which one you are. I wasn't really paying attention when you, or the other one, said your names. I only remember one, are you Daniel?"

"No, I'm Donald. And I understand. That meeting wasn't exactly smooth."

Donald, so he was the one with the temper, Patrick thought, just like him. "That's certainly one way to say it."

"How would you describe it?" Donald asked.

Patrick thought about it for a moment. If he was back home he'd never think of using the kind of language that kept coming to his mind when he thought about it, but thinking back on Donald's behavior then he got the feeling he preferred

honesty over proper language.

"I'd call it a fucking load of shit, blowing up over everyone."

Donald laughed. "That's certainly colorful. And don't worry about not being able to tell me and Daniel apart, no one can. Don't be afraid to ask who's who. The kids just call us dad so they don't have to worry about it, but I don't expect you to call us that."

"I wasn't planing on it," Patrick replied, harsher than he'd intended.

"I understand. How did you find the house?"

"I know a guy who's good at finding stuff like that out. I gave him your number." He left it at that.

They walked by what had to be a living room, by the large couches, plush carpet and large entertainment center. Donald hadn't been kidding after all, the place was a mess, cushions all over the floor and one of the chair was tipped against another. A strong scent of artificial freshener came from the room, roses or something.

"What happened there?" he asked.

"Like I said, we have seven kids," was all Donald gave as an answer. not long after the opening to the living room was a stairwell going up, and after that the wall had frames with pictures in them. not photos, Patrick noted, art of some sort, bright art.

They entered the dinning room which, again, was larger than his house. At one end of the table, which could seat at least twenty people, was Daniel, with the seven kids seated close to him.

"Grab a seat," Donald said and went to sit next to Daniel.

Patrick didn't move, watching him. Donald had said no one could tell the two of them apart, but Patrick hadn't believed him. No two tigers had the exact stripe patterns. You could always tell them apart on a subconscious level. You might not know what was different, but you knew they where.

Now he looked from one to the other, and realized it was true. Not only couldn't he see any differences, but he felt like he was looking at the same person. He looked at the teens, their arms and chest, the patterns on their furs, the shape of their muscles, ears and muzzle, and he could easily tell them apart.

And now he was breathing hard from looking at those bare chests so he focused on the table. Chestnut colored wood polished smooth with years of use. calmer he sat at the opposite end of the table.

"I have questions," Patrick stated.

"Feel free to ask them," Daniel replied. It was Daniel, right? He was pretty sure Donald had sat on the left. Did it matter? no, it didn't. he was delaying what he'd come here for.

"First off, why do you even want me to be your kid? I mean, I'm poor, I live in the bad part of town. I won't exactly fit in here."

"Hey, you can fit in anywhere you want to," one of the kids said.

Donald and Daniel looked at one another and then Donald? spoke. "It isn't about us *wanting* you to be our son. You *are* our son. That you live here or not, and we don't expect you to, we are still your fathers, but I don't expect we'll ever be your family."

"Actually, can you clear up something for me? Exactly which one of you is my father?"

They shrugged in unison. "We don't know."

"How can you not know?"

"We both had sex with your mother, so there's no way to tell."

Patrick noticed none of the kids displayed any of the discomfort he was feeling at hearing people talking about sex.

"okay, but we can get a paternity test done."

They smiled, and even that looked identical. "I don't think that is going to help," the other man said. How the fuck was he going to tell them apart? They hadn't move and he was getting a headache trying to figure out who was whom?

"Of course it will, everyone's DNA is different, so it'll tell us whose genes I got."

"just like no two tigers ever has the same stripe patterns?" the other said.

Patrick closed his eyes and massaged his forehead. Forget the names, it's the left one and the right one from now on.

"I'm not saying we won't do it," the one on the right said, "We'll be happy to, but I don't think you'll get the results you're hoping for."

Patrick looked at the other teens. "How do you deal with it?"

"What's there to deal with?" said the one who had been in the minivan's passenger seat. Aaron maybe? or Albert? At least he could tell them apart. he'd just have to learn the names. "They're both our fathers, we don't care who's genes are in us."

"So long as they are in us," someone said, softer, which elicited chuckles from a few of the others.

"Aiden," the one of the left warned. "Watch your

language, we have a guest. You know the rules."

"Sorry dad."

"Next question?" the same one asked.

Patrick took a breath, okay, this was the big one. The secret that would change his life. "How do you know that I'm..." He couldn't say it. Fuck, he'd thought he'd be able to say it. He didn't want to say it in anger, not only was it wrong to do so, but he wanted to do what Joey had suggested, get to know them, respect them. Maybe there was a chance the bible was wrong and he could stay on the Path even with being...?

They didn't say anything. they gave him the time he needed to formulate it, but eventually he gave up. "I can't say it," he growled. "I'm sorry, but I can't. But you know what I mean, right?"

"That you're gay?" the one on the right said, and Patrick felt like he'd been slapped. He wasn't like that. he couldn't be. "Yes, we know."

"How do you know that?" he asked through clenched teeth.

"Because you're one of us, you're an Orr."

"I'm not an Orr, I'm a sanders!"

The teens looked at him with a shocked expression, but the two adults kept their steady gazes on him. He felt like he should apologize for his outburst, but he wouldn't. They wanted to take away who he was.

"Sanders is your last name," the one on the left said. "We're talking about the blood that flows through your veins. That's what makes you an Orr."

"I could take after my mother."

"You don't."

"How can you know that?" Patrick's voice broke, and they waited for him to regain his composure.

"Somethings you take after your mother, you have her eyes. But when it comes to your sexuality, you take after us. It's always been that way in our family. We always have sons, and they are always gay."

"And eccentric," added one of the kids.

"Albert," the one on the left warned.

Okay, if that was Albert then the other one was Aaron, he was sure of it.

"What? It's true."

"What does he mean, eccentric?"

"Do you mind if we keep that question for after we've answered all the other ones?" said the one on the right. "The answer to it is going to make you uncomfortable, and I'd prefer we go through the ones you have first."

"Okay, sure." What could he mean by that? "You had kids, so you're not entirely..." fuck. "like that. I could too."

They gave him a sad smile, and Patrick felt his hopes crumble.

"We're not bi, we're gay. Yes, we had sex with women, but that was only so we could have children. We could have gone with tubes, but that didn't feel right to us." He paused. "have you had sex?"

Patrick felt his ears could start a fire and looked away. When he looked aback the teens were staring at him in disbelief.

"The sex was good," the one to the left said, "sex always is, but we were able to perform through will power, not because we felt anything for them. We're virile men, even as old as we are."

"Speak for yourself, I'm still young," said the one on the right in a failed attempt to break some of the building tension in the room.

"Like I said, we're virile," the one on the left continued, "and yes, if we set our mind to it we could have sex with a woman, but we wouldn't want it. we want men, that's what makes us gay." He paused. "That's what makes you gay."

Patrick closed his hands into fists. he didn't want to be angry at them, he really didn't want to, but he didn't want to hear this. "Fine, but I don't have to do anything about it, right? I don't have to act on how I feel."

"What?" Aaron exclaimed.

"Why would you ever not want to have sex with another guy?"

"Alexander!"

"But dad?"

"Enough!"

"Yes dad." Alexander looked at the table.

Patrick continued to control his anger, but he could tell from the whispers that Alexander's opinion was shared by the others. What was wrong with them? Man didn't sleep with Man, it was a sure way off the Path.

He forced himself to take a mental step back. Okay, he could accept, for the sake of the argument, that the desire wasn't the work of the devils, that it was genetic, like a lot of people claimed. But they also claimed that fighting was genetic, ingrained in us from century of evolution. it didn't mean that was something he should do. He wouldn't act on how he felt, that was final.

That resolved he went to ask his next question, but nothing came. He knew he'd had more of them, but he couldn't think of them. He glanced in Albert's direction. Might as well

get that over with. "What's the eccentric thing about?"

The men sighed, but the teens looked up, excited.

"We did promise ourselves we wouldn't lie." The one on the right said.

"Yeah, we did." The one on the left took a deep breath. "okay, on top of being gay, Orr men have eccentric tastes."

"What does that mean?"

They looked at each other. The one on the left nodded and the one on the right continued. "As an example, me and Donald, we like to tag team our partners. It isn't a fetish, it isn't something we need to do to reach orgasm, but given the chance, it is how we prefer doing it."

"Aaron likes them old," Albert said.

"What's wrong with liking mature men?" Aaron countered.

"with wrinkles." Albert shuddered

Patrick swallowed. "okay, I think that's enough."

"Adam likes them married."

"Enough!" Patrick stood his weight was on his hand and the table was holding him up, he was shaking. He couldn't tell if it was fear of anger.

"What's wrong?" someone he didn't know the name of asked.

"You were right, this is making me very uncomfortable, so I'm going to leave."

"But we haven't showed you!"

"No!" Patrick slammed his palms against the table. "Look, I came here of my own free will. I asked for answers, so as much as I want to be angry at you all, I have no right. But. I. Really. Don't. Want. To. Be. Here. Anymore."

"I understand," one of the man said, "Arthur, why don't you escort Patrick to the door?"

"Yes dad."

Patrick started walking, barely aware of the small tiger next to him. He grabbed his jacket and the door was already opened by the time he had it on. He walked out.

"Patrick?"

Patrick felt the motion close to his arm and he thought Arthur would grab him, but he didn't. He stopped, but he didn't turn around.

"I'm sorry we made you uncomfortable. I hope you'll visit again."

"I don't know." Patrick looked up, there was so little light pollution here he could see the stars. He tightened his jaws. "No. I won't."

He thought he heard sniffing as he walked down the path to the road.