

Patrick turned on his side and came awake with a bit-off scream of pain. His arm pressed against his cracked ribs when he moved. Panting he looked at the clock. Ten am. Well, seven hours of sleep was good enough. He sat on the edge of his bed, wincing as he bent his knee. He should have iced that while he ate. And he was still dressed. Good thing he was doing laundry today.

He carefully stood. Fuck his knee was stiff. He should stay home, put some ice on it and not move. Except they needed the money. Anyway, the best thing he could do for his knee was to move it, prevent it from getting stiff that way.

He limped to the tiny bathroom, closed the door and locked it. The hamper was already on the washer. He took the whites out and put that in the washing machine. He got the bleach and detergent ready then undressed. Jeans and t-shirt went in the hamper, underwear and socks in the machine.

He ran the shower cool while he washed. He applied as much pressure on his injuries as he could stand as he lathered himself up. Pain wasn't something new for him, and he dealt with it by not being gentle with his injuries. This wasn't going to be the last time they attacked him, he'd had to learn to live with the pain.

His cock demanded attention and he gave it in spite of his pain. If he didn't it would bother him all day, forcing thoughts he didn't want to think about. He knew enough about the biology of sexual urges not to be bothered by masturbation, well, not too much, but if he didn't deal with it the things he thought about throughout the day bothered him.

Once he was done he finished lathering up, then rinsed off. Completely clean he turned the water as hot as he could stand and stood under it, letting the jet force his muscles to relax. He closed his eyes, and tried to think about nothing for a time. He wanted peace and quiet for this moment. He didn't want worries about the bills, the Sarantos, The scrap yard, the bar, or his urges.

He had fifteen minutes of quiet, then the water turned cold and pulled him out of it. he shut off the hot water and let the frigid get invigorate him for a moment before turning that off. he rubbed as much of the water out of his fur as he could before stepping out. He started the washer, poured the detergent in the basket for it and the bleach in the pocket in the lip of the cover then dried off.

A towel around his midsection he headed back to his room. he dressed in one of his less ripped jeans and a wife beater.

Don would understand if he wasn't as well dressed as usual.

The white board had a new message from his mom, with a ten dollar bill stuck behind one of the corner. 'If you're not coming home to eat between your two jobs, keep enough money to get something to eat. I'm going to the eight am service, then to the dinner. Since I won't see you today have a good day, and keep God in your thoughts.'

He pocketed the bill. 'Thanks, have a good day too.'

He had a bowl of cereal dry. There wasn't enough milk for that and for his mom once she got back from work. That done he tidied up his room until the washer finished. He transferred that in the dryer and started it.

He grabbed a cleat t-shirt before going back to the kitchen. 'I did the whites, it's in the dryer.'

He put the t-shirt in a pocket in his jacket, then hesitated at the door. He looked out the peephole, then out the window next to the door.

Miss Harminio was puttering in her flower bed across the road, so it was safe to go out. She wouldn't risk it if any gang members were around.

"Morning," he told greeted her.

The squirrel looked up and waved at him with her dirt covered hand. "Good morning Patrick. Are you doing okay?"

"Just woke up with a stiff leg Ma'am. Nothing a good walk won't fix."

"So you weren't involved in the fight this morning? The screaming woke me."

"No Ma'am. It must have happened before I got home."

The look she gave him told him she didn't believe him. "It's sad, This neighborhood used to be safe. Now we can't even walk home after dark without someone accosting us. Used to be we stuck together when those gang caused trouble. Now we just hide in our homes hoping they won't break our door in."

Patrick nodded. He doubted things had ever been better around here. "I was still a kid in the early thirties, I don't remember them, but I'm sure you're right." There was no point in taking away the little comfort she could find in the past. Comfort was a scarce commodity in this neighborhood. "You have a good day. Hopefully your sleep won't be disturbed tonight."

He saw the tricycle on the front yard of the Jessalyn's. It would be little Suzie's then. The front wheel was bent. He'd see if he could fix that tomorrow. Joey might know how to do it.

His shoulder hunched in, he walked through the crowds, not looking at anyone, but making sure to keep an eye out for Saranto colors. He really wanted to be left alone, but he couldn't count on it. For four years they'd tried to recruit

him, hard. He rubbed his right bicep. If they had decided he was to die, they weren't going to rest.

Fuck, all he wanted was a quiet life, was that too much to ask for? He glanced at the sky. Sorry God, I know it isn't your place to keep me safe. All I ask is that if they manage to get me, you make sure my mom's going to be okay without me to help out. Amen.

Maybe God was looking out for him today, or maybe he given the Sarantos something to think about this morning. Whatever the reason, he made it to the junkyard without trouble. The gate was open and someone was dumping appliances out of a pickup truck.

Patrick knew where he'd be starting today.

"Morning Joey," He called out as he walked into the office. His limp was barely noticeable now. He was use to the pain in his knee.

The bulldog looked over his monitor. "Hey Pat. We have a bunch of stuff that needs to be sorted."

"I saw. Appliances."

"That's just the latest. had a family dump a lot of housewares. They must have bought one of the wrecks on the outskirts. We also had a truck load of rims. Deal with those last. I put in a call with Alison, she's suppose to come by take anything that's still usable. Maybe She'll get here before you're done with the rest."

"Sure. I got to leave around six fifteen. Going to church."

Joey scuffed, but all he said as "that's fine." He wasn't a religious man, and that was fine by Patrick. To each their own.

Was Joey going to Hell for not believing in God? Patrick didn't know, but he didn't think it was his job to worry about other people's souls, his own was work enough by itself. He also hated it when someone tried to shove his or her beliefs in his face, so he didn't do that.

He hung his jacket and turned to head back out. Joey was standing. "I'm going to help out for a bit, get some sun in my fur, maybe get it lighter a shade or two."

Patrick opened his mouth to comment, but Joey clapped in on the shoulder with enough strength to make him bend into his side and buckle his hurt knee. With a yell of pain Patrick grabbed on to the counter to avoid falling down.

"What the Hell Pat? You hurt?"

"No, no. It's okay." He was panting fighting against the pain.

"Bullshit, sit your ass down." The bulldog didn't give him a choice in the matter. He forced a chair under him and

made him fall back in to it. "Now. What happened?"

Patrick sighed, relieved to be off his feet. "The Sarantos jumped me this morning after work."

Joey went around him. "Haven't you thought that it might be better to just join them?" He gently pressed the tiger's knee and Patrick held back a hiss. "Painful?"

"Yeah, but I can deal with it. And giving into them wouldn't have solved anything, just validated their bullying. Anyway, they don't want me in anymore, they want me dead."

Joey looked at him. "Fuck. What are you going to do?"

"What else can I do? I'm going to keep standing up to them, until I can't anymore."

"Well, you're not doing any standing at this time." He pulled out a crate and placed it under Patrick's foot. "You're staying off your feet today."

"I can't. I need the money."

"Bullshit. You're not going to be able to work if you ruin your knee. If you're worried about the money, I'll pay you your day's wage regardless."

"You can't pay me if I don't do the work."

"You do three time the work of anyone else who helps out here, and I'm not paying you anymore than them. so consider this earned. Now shut up and tell me what else they did to you."

Patrick wanted to argue. He wasn't a freeloader. He earned what he got. Instead he slumped back in the chair. "I think I have a few cracked ribs."

"Lift up your shirt." Joey ran his hand over the area the tiger indicated, pressing until Patrick winced in pain. "Okay, yeah, that doesn't feel broken, but I should still tape it up to make sure it doesn't get worse. Anything else?"

"Just a sore jaw."

Joey gave him a look.

"I swear, that's all. No teeth fell out, none of them feel broken. It's just sore."

"Well, you certainly are thick skulled enough for that." Joey pulled out a rusted first aid box from his desk. He grabbed a pack, bent it until something cracked inside then shook it. "On your knee," He said as he handed it to Patrick. Humidity was already frosting over it.

"How do you know so much about injuries?" He asked applying the pack to his knee.

"Do you have any idea how many people ignore all the signs I have around the yard about not trying to carry stuff themselves? about how precarious some of the stacks are? Every week I have to patch up an idiot or two."

"Really? I've never seen that happen."

"That's because you're big and strong. People see you and they automatically ask you for help. If I could afford it I'd have you here everyday just to keep the injuries down." He wrapped the length of fabric around Patrick's chest and adhered it to itself. He attached a dial to it. "Let me know when it's tight enough." He slowly turned the dial and the fabric tightened.

"That's good," Patrick said through clenched teeth.

"You're a fucking masochist." The bulldog turned the dial back two notches, detached the dial and handed it to Patrick. "You know how a compression band works?"

"Sure. Clockwise to tighten counter to loosen, in a pinch center button to return it to his slack state."

"Good, now you relax there and I'll make sure things get done outside."

Relax? Patrick wasn't one for sitting around not doing anything. At least in church he had someone to listen to. He dragged himself back until he could reach Joey's computer. He went through the music sites in the memory. He ran each for a minute, to get a feel for them, and settled on one that played jazz. He liked the soothing feel of the instruments.