

## CHAPTER 01

Thomas stopped running and leaned against the large advertising panel, hoping it would block the howling January wind that sent more snow up from the ground than the sky was dumping on them.

He hugged himself, wishing he'd grabbed a jacket before bolting out of the bedroom. Jeans, his faded 'Shot-em Down' t-shirt, and shoes were not how to dress for a snow storm in Minneapolis.

He also wished he knew how he'd bolted.

He shuddered as he remembered catching the reflection as Henry hugged him. The open mouth, the fangs about to bite his neck.

Fuck. He knew in the original vampire story vampires were bats, but did the bat have to play it up to that creepy level.

If that had been the only creepiness in the last few hours, Thomas might have been able to laugh it off, but there had been his blackout in the kitchen, as he and Yating were fucking—there had been a flash of light, heat. The knowledge it was the pot of oil on the stove he's been making funnel cakes with. Then he'd woken to being fucked by just about every guy in the frat. Their crazy talk of them initiating him, of needing Henry.

And then they'd left him. Locked him in his room to wait for the bat.

So, instead of laughing off the vampire act, Thomas blacked out and he'd found himself on the other side of the room, a confused Henry looking around for him. Smiling as something occurred bat, then his talk of letting him take it all away. When the bat had walked in his direction, Thomas had looked for an escape. The bedroom door was closed, of course, it was closed, the plan had been to have sex, and unlike most of the other times in the frat, the house leader had closed the door behind them.

Feeling trapped, Thomas had glanced at the closed window,

where he could see the other side of the road, and wished his room had been on the ground floor because jumping through the glass would have been preferable to the crazy the bat was then spouting.

And he'd blacked out and came to besides that same lamp post he'd been looking toward without any idea how he'd gotten out of the room, of the frat house, or why Henry had been at the bedroom's window looking out, searching.

Before Thomas had fully taken it in, the door to the building burst open with someone he couldn't make out clearly to tell more than they were pointing in his direction. Thomas had started running and hadn't looked back.

Now, he was somewhere on East River Parkway, freezing, and being hunted for... well, probably to be the bat's meal or something.

Fuck, Vampires weren't real.

Right?

At least he hadn't blacked out again.

What he needed was somewhere warm.

No, what he needed was to get on the next bus and head home.

He reached in his pocket and was horrified not to find his phone there, thinking he'd lost it in his mad run. It had been in the kitchen with him when he'd blacked out and no one had brought it to him afterward.

He cursed. No phone meant no way to pay the bus fare.

Had his life turned into enough of a porno that he could blow the driver for passage?

"There!" someone yelled, and Thomas turned in that direction in surprise. He made out a badger and a collie rounding the intersection.

Thomas took off in the opposite direction. The collie was Hubert, which meant that the badger had to be Jacques since those two spent enough time together to qualify being attacked at the hips. There had been another one but he'd only made out an expensive well tailors overcoat.

Still enough to work out who that was and to wonder why he was running after him, of everyone in the frat Felix was the one who definitely had no love for the rat. Not that Thomas understood why any of them were chasing him. Blacking out after the creepy house leader tried to bite you didn't warrant this.

He glanced over his shoulder and saw a fourth figure running after him, and all of the catching up. All he could tell about that one was that it wasn't Chima. The hyena was an adonis, so impossible to miss, and of everyone in the frat the only one he knew to be a runner, so his absence was a good thing.

He made out the shape of a bridge through the snow and had an idea. The Green Line had a stop on Washington. It would be warmth and people he could lose himself among. He pushed himself, hoping the exertion would keep him warm too.

The bridge was more defined now. Enough he could make out the covered pedestrian section. Yes, how had he forgotten about that? It wasn't exactly heated, but it would cut the wind and snow and—

"I see him," Firmin's familiar voice came from ahead of him.

No! He couldn't be stopped now with the bridge and his escape so close.

He collided with someone, and she was the only reason they didn't both end up on the ground.

"Are you okay?" she asked, steadying him as Thomas tried to figure out where she'd come from. There had been no one on the sidewalk between him and the group of his Frat brothers who had been with Firmin.

"I didn't see you," she said, chuckled. "It's like you came out of

nowhere.”

Thomas was steady on his feet now, but out of breath. He felt like he'd been running for a lot longer than he had. But he had to keep going. Staying still let the others catch up to him and if Hubert got his hand on him, Thomas wasn't getting away. The collie was way stronger than he looked.

He took a step, looking for the others, and stopped.

He wasn't on the street, he was on the bridge. “How?” he looked to the ends. He seemed to be closer to the east side, and running all that way would explain why he was exhausted, but he hadn't....

Had he blacked out another time?

“It's easy to miss someone in this snow,” she said. She looked at him. “Are you okay?” the concern was clear on her face. Maybe she would lend him her phone and he could call Paul. The golden tiger would pick him up and only ask questions once they were at Thomas's parent's house.

Only, he didn't know his number. It had always been just a screen tap away. Same with his parents.

Standing still also let the cold settle back under his fur.

“Had to leave in a hurry,” he said and added over his shoulder as he took off. “Sorry.”

What had he done for his life to become so insane the Sigma Theta Gamma house leader tried to bite him? Henry had always been a necker, but that was too much.

“When you joined the frat,” he muttered under his breath, shouldering the door to the covered part of the pedestrian walkway. “Duh.”

Only the only reason he'd joined the supposedly exclusive frat was that he'd been convinced to join by Limbani. The monkey had been insistent, even convincing the house leader to let someone who didn't belong to any of the approved families join. Thomas had been

looking for a way to leave his parent's house while at university, so he'd accepted.

The idea he'd be around all those guys and have sex all the time was also an incentive.

Except, the invitation had only come as a result of Thomas attending that first party. And he'd only attended that because of the booth that same monkey and Laurence had been at, promoting the party, on Rush week.

That was it, going there was why his life was crazy right now.

Wait. Did this mean all this was Paul's fault?