

CHAPTER-37

“Are you insane?” Thomas and Yating yelled to the armadillo holding the grenade at the same time?

“You’re calling me insane?” Gilbert replied. “After his friend fried my van?”

“I’ve never seen you before now,” Donal said.

“Not you, the kangaroo.” He looked around. “Now. I am done with this shit. Thomas. Put that hood over your head and you’re coming with us.”

“Gilbert,” Olavo said, “please ease up on the threats.”

“You want him to vanish on us again?”

“Will someone tell me with the fucking big deal it is?” Thomas yelled. “I get that teleportation is a big deal, but come on! We were friends.” He paused and rolled his eyes at the glare Felix sent his way. “Most of us, anyway. We were frat brothers. Now you guys are chasing me across the country for some Raphael person.”

“Look,” Olavo said, stepping in front of Gilbert and Donal. “You can’t betray your family like you did and not expect people to react, but —”

“Hey! It was my dad’s idea for me to get out of the city!”

“Your father?” the capybara asked, confused. The others shared in Olavo’s confusion.

“Yes, he and my family are who sent me west. They figured it would be safer if I was away while they worked out what had happened. But you keep showing up and making my life more and more difficult.” His answer did nothing to stop the confusion. In the quiet that followed, Thomas noticed someone was missing.

“Where’s Madoc? Why isn’t he here yelling at me about upsetting that Raphael guy, when I don’t even know who that is?”

Now the expressions went from confused to embarrassed.

“Don’t you all speak up at once,” Thomas said.

“He’s been kidnapped,” Gilbert said, pushing Donal around the capybara. “That’s why we’re after you now.” The following words seemed difficult to say. “We need your help.”

Part of him wanted to yell this was a trick, that they were appealing to his love for the frat to get him to lower his guard. Only that love had been burned out, and they had to know it.

“I’m going to need some really good explanations from you to even consider helping the lot of you.” He raised a hand to stop Olavo. “With coffee. The good stuff. And you’re paying.”

Thomas didn’t think his frat brothers had ever been in this low class of a coffee shop outside of the university grounds. And even then, he couldn’t remember one of them frequenting those. Felix had suggested something as he looked at his phone, but even before Thomas vetoed that, Limbani said “two blocks up the street.”

The otter looked about to complain, but Olavo started walking. Thomas was fine with anything that kept him out of the armadillo’s van.

They attracted attention as they entered. All of them for the way they were dressed. Maybe if they’d come separately, they wouldn’t have been as noticeable. Gilbert let Donal to a semi-circular booth at the back and Thomas went in on the opposite side to ensure he was next to Donal who smiled at him before taking off his gloves and pulled at his assembly of items he worked on every so often.

Now, it seemed to Thomas it was nerve related. Some fidget toy maybe? So long as the two of them were close by, Thomas didn’t mind. Hopefully, they’d forgotten he could take someone with him when he teleported. He kept the grotto in his mind. Since it was the only place he’d been able to go to that he couldn’t see. He’d do his best to explain what he needed Donal to do before passing out and pray to

that god of his the man was willing. Other than the initial joke when they'd met, there had been no talk of sex since.

Being homeless was way too much work to have the energy left to fuck.

"Couldn't you have seen us at an upscale place?" Felix demanded of Limbani as he sat.

"You know what?" the monkey replied, "I'm done explaining how this works." He turn and headed for the capybara at the counter.

"So you're Thomas's friends from university," Donal said, not looking up. "You aren't what I imagined."

"And just what did you imagine his friends were like?" Gilbert asked.

"Not totting grenades, for one thing."

Gilbert looked at the rat. "You didn't tell him about me?"

"I told him you were hunting me for no good reason. There wasn't more that was needed. Definitely not your obsession with fireworks. Do you keep grenades in your truck?"

"Are you kidding? If I had, there wouldn't be anything left of it." He patted his pocket. "This is my good luck charm."

Olavo returned with a tray of coffee and teas. So Thomas was spared commenting on the absurdity of a good luck grenade.

The capybara and monkey sat and Thomas as to squeeze tighter against Donal. So much the better. He breathed in the coffee's aroma before taking a slow sip. This was heavenly. As much as he appreciated Mirabel's weekly coffee, it was only good compared to the swill he got the rest of the time.

He placed the cup down. "Alright. Start from the beginning. Don't even make that joke, Limbani. I'm not in the mood."

The monkey closed his mouth.

“We were at your grandfather’s place for nearly two days,” Olavo began, “waiting for you to arrive. Even if you’d left with that kangaroo—”

“After he fried my van.”

“—We figured you’d head there since Limbani saw us there.”

“Why do we keep going when he ‘sees us?’” Felix asked. “It got Gilbert’s van blown up. That old man wouldn’t even put out and—”

“You hit on my grandfather?” Thomas demanded, then turned to Limbani accusingly. “You?”

“Of course, Limbani hit on him,” Gilbert said. “He’s Limbani.”

Thomas turned his glare on the others.

Gilbert rolled his eyes. “He’s old.”

Olavo shrugged. “He told these two no, I didn’t expect to get a different answer.”

“Anyway,” Limbani said, “that’s about when we saw the news show. Felix recognized your truck and a couple of calls got us the location. It was clear you weren’t coming there, so we packed up and headed in that direction.”

“We kept him from seeing anything,” Yating said, nodding to the monkey, “so we wouldn’t be sent on another wild goose chase. We figured that either you or the kangaroo were going to try to get the truck out of impound.”

“I could have told you there weren’t going to be there,” Limbani said, then primly drank.

“Well, while we were there, a van showed up, guys jumped out and grabbed Madoc, then they drove off.”

“Wait. Some guys grabbed Madoc?” Thomas asked. “Our Madoc? Lifts close to three hundred pounds, Madoc?”

“The guys who grabbed him were bigger than he was,”

Gilbert said.

Thomas looked at Limbani.

The monkey sighed. "You know how this works."

"No, I don't."

Limbani rubbed his face. "I've had to explain it to you a dozen times, Thomas. At this point, I have to think you're doing this because you know how aggravating I find it."

Thomas looked at the others, who didn't seem surprised by the outburst. "Limbani. Until I teleported away from the frat, I didn't even know there was such a thing as magic. Now I get how you kept showing up to places so we could have sex, but no, you never explained it to me."

The confusion was back.

"What can I do?" Olavo asked.

"Dress better than Felix," Thomas answered.

Snickers erupted, except for Felix, who glared more intensely at the rat.

"I'm serious. We all gave you a demonstration before the holidays."

"Unless you're referring to all the sex we had, I don't know what you're talking about."

"That kind of counts," Limbani said.

"You're serious?" the capybara asked. "You have no memory of us showing you what our powers are?"

"I only know Yating's because he walked through the truck. And Limbani from hearing you bitch about his visions."

"Well, at least we know why you're running so hard," Olavo said. "That kangaroo messed with your memories."

Thomas narrowed his eyes. "Don't go accusing Grant of anything. He saved my life. If anyone had their head thrown in a blender, it's the lot of you. Now let's get back to Madoc. Limbani, why didn't you see it coming?"

The monkey sighed. "Fine, on account you don't remember. I have to focus on when I want to see, and I only see me and my surroundings. I wasn't looking at where we were. I was glancing later, seeing as little as I could as to not lock myself into a set of action but still be able to determine we'd found you."

"Okay. So why didn't you look where they would be?"

"I've tried. But before I saw them, I saw you. In that alley."

"You saw me running, which is why you had Olavo and Gilbert outside the lot. Why didn't you see me knocking you on your ass?"

Limbani smirked. "Who says I didn't see that happen and just figured you needed the boost to your morale?"

"You didn't bother," Thomas said, working things out, "because you already knew we would be here, talking."

"I knew you were a smart ass on top of being a really fuckable one."

Thomas rolled his eyes. "Sure. So why even bother asking me? You know I'm going to say no. After the way you've made my life hell, Madoc can get fucked by these guys for all I care."

The others turned to Limbani. "Oh, now you want me to share what I saw? I thought you were all, never tell us anything ever again."

"Limbani, we're here because you saw us here," Olavo said. "I'm happy we found Thomas through your visions, but get off it, okay. You have to go save Madoc. You are the one who saw that. Now unless you want to prove your visions don't have to come true so we can stop having to do what you say, you have to convince him to help."

The monkey smiled at Thomas, who considered teleporting him and Donal. That was the smile that usually preceded Limbani announcing they were about to fuck. This was way too public for that. "You're going to help because I've already seen us doing it."

"Not happening," Thomas said. "Why would I want to help? You can see what's going to happen. Why do you even need my help?"

"Thomas, Madoc is your frat brother," Gilbert said.

"Don't even think of using that," Thomas snapped. "You invaded my grandfather's home. Fucked in his rooms, probably held him hostage like you are my parents."

"Look," Yating said. "I understand we can't ask you to do this out of the goodness of your heart considering the way your memories have—"

"You're the one with the scrambled memories, not me."

"Fine. Still, don't you want answers? Even if we're the ones whose memories have been altered so, we'll chase you. Don't you want to know why? Why would Raphael go to those extents?"

"Who is that Raphael?"

They looked at each other.

"He's Madoc's elder," Olavo said.

"Like village elder?" Thomas asked.

"Family. He's the one making all the decisions for what the Lewiston family will do."

"Okay. Having answers would be nice, I will grant you that. But I don't trust you. This is just some elaborate trap."

"Then leave," Olavo said. "We can't stop you."

Thomas looked at the large window. If he didn't go too far, he should be able to take Donal with him and have enough strength to jump on his own again.

He looked at the men seated around the table. Limbani wasn't as good as he thought he was at hiding his worry. Olavo and Yating didn't bother trying. As usual, Felix was pissed at him, and Gilbert looked worried and tired.

It was a trap, Thomas told himself.

Only, what if it wasn't? What if Madoc was in trouble and Thomas could help? Regardless of how they'd hunted him. What kind of person did it make him, if he didn't help when someone came asking?

"Let's say, for the sake of argument," he told the monkey as the smirk formed. "That I'm willing to help. How can I even do that? I'm not some action hero. I don't have training in how to rescue anyone. You have money. Can't you pay someone qualified to go rescue him?"

The look of discomfort that passed among them was answer enough, but Thomas had trouble believing it. There was something money couldn't buy?

"Okay, why can't you pay for his rescue?"

"Because it would make the situation worse," Olavo said. "Probably."

"The city they took Madoc to is controlled by a family no one wants to piss off," Gilbert said. "Anywhere else, and one of us could ask for support from our family, but..." he shook his head. "Things are too dicey with them."

"So you think I have a chance?" Thomas asked in disbelief.

"You can teleport," Yating said. "You can take him out of where they'll be holding him, then we run like crazy and deny ever being there if someone asked."

"Wait, are you saying those people everyone is scared of took Madoc?"

"Oh, Sweet cum I hope they aren't involved," Felix said.

“They aren’t,” Limbani said. “I’d have seen one of them if they were. I’m sure of it. And the only tiger I saw was the one who was in the van when they took Madoc. He wasn’t an Orr.”

“I’m going to guess that’s the family you’re all terrified of and want me to risk my tail against.”

“No against. Just in their city.”

“And what city is that?” Thomas asked. Reconsidering agreeing to this.

“San Francisco,” Olavo said, placing his phone on the table. On it was the website of a gym. The logo was the silhouette of a man with his arm at his side, in front of a golden shield. Some flexing pose Madoc had shown him as part of his training.

‘Hot Muscle’ was the name of the gym.

Thomas looked at them. “So, a bunch of jacked-up guys kidnapped Madoc, and they took him to a gym? Are you sure he didn’t arrange it to get out of having to do what Limbani says?”

“There’s no way Madoc went to San Francisco willingly,” Gilbert said. “Not after what took place between their families.”

“Not the time for gossip,” Olavo said as Felix opened his mouth. “But yes, the Lewistons aren’t welcome in San Francisco these days.”

“Hey, look at it on the bright side,” Felix said, smiling. “Since no one knows you’re a Lewiston, even if they do catch you, what’s the worse they can do?”

“I am not a Lewiston,” Thomas replied, ignoring the way the others wince at what the otter said. That couldn’t be good.

“You should go,” Donal said, and Thomas joined the others in staring at him. “Look, he needs help. So you should help. Pay it forward, and I mean.” He grinned at Thomas. “Come on, it’s San Francisco. How could you not want to go there?”

His backup plan. Thomas had completely forgotten about it in the weeks he'd been here, working to survive. If this was a trap. He had someone he could go to for help there.

"Alright, I'm in."

"Told you," Limbani said, smiling proudly.

CHAPTER 1.5-37

“Are you insane?” Thomas and Yating yelled to the armadillo holding the grenade at the same time.

“You’re calling me insane?” Gilbert replied. “After his friend fried my van?”

“I’ve never seen you before now,” Donal said.

“Not you, the kangaroo.” He looked around. “Now. I’m done with this shit. Thomas, put that hood over your head; you’re coming with us.”

“Gilbert,” Olavo said, “Please ease up on the threats.”

“You want him to vanish on us again?” Gilbert snapped.

“Will someone tell me what the fucking big deal is?” Thomas yelled. “I get that teleportation is a big deal, but come on! We were friends.” He paused and rolled his eyes at the glare Felix sent his way. “Most of us, anyway. We were frat brothers. Now you guys are chasing me across the country for some Raphael person.”

“Look,” Olavo said, stepping in front of Gilbert and Donal. “You can’t betray your family like you did and-”

* * *

“It was my dad’s idea for me to get out of the city!” Thomas snapped.

“Your... father?” the capybara asked, confused. The others shared in Olavo’s confusion.

“Yes. After you guys started freaking out he and the rest of my family sent me west. They figured it would be safer if I was away while they worked out what was wrong. But you kept showing up and making my life more and more difficult.” His answer did nothing to stop the confusion. In the quiet that followed, Thomas noticed someone was missing.

“Where’s Madoc?” Thomas asked, “Why isn’t he here yelling at me about upsetting that Raphael guy?” The expressions shifted from confused to embarrassed. “Don’t you all speak up at once.”

“He’s been kidnapped,” Gilbert said, pushing Donal around the capybara. “That’s why we’re after you now.” He tensed slightly before adding, “We need your help.”

Part of him wanted to yell this was a trick, that they were appealing to his love for the frat to get him to lower his guard. Only that love had been burned out, and they had to know it.

“I’m going to need some really explanations from you to even consider helping the lot of you.” He raised a hand to stop Olavo. “With coffee. The good stuff. And you’re paying.”

* * *

#####

Thomas didn't think his frat brothers had ever been in this low class of a coffee shop outside of the university grounds. And even then, he couldn't remember one of them frequenting those. Felix had suggested something as he looked at his phone, but even before Thomas vetoed that, Limbani said "Two blocks up the street."

The otter looked about to complain, but Olavo started walking. Thomas was fine with anything that kept him out of the armadillo's van.

They attracted attention as they entered. All of them for the way they were dressed. Maybe if they'd come separately, they wouldn't have been as noticeable. Gilbert led Donal to a semi-circular booth at the back and Thomas went in on the opposite side to ensure he was next to Donal who smiled at him before taking off his gloves and pulled at his assembly of items he worked on every so often.

While Thomas understood it was habitual, he now wondered if it was nerve-related. Like a fidget toy of sorts. So long as the two of them were close by, Thomas didn't mind. Hopefully, they'd forgotten he could take someone with him when he teleported.

He kept the grotto in his mind. Since it was the only place he'd been able to go to that he couldn't see. He'd do his best to explain what he needed Donal to do before passing out and pray to Him the man was willing. Other than the initial joke when they'd met, there had been no talk of sex since.

* * *

Being homeless was way too much work to have the energy left to fuck.

“Couldn’t you have seen us at an upscale place?” Felix demanded of Limbani as he sat.

“You know what?” the monkey replied, “I’m done explaining how this works.” He turned and headed for the capybara at the counter.

“So you’re Thomas’s friends from university,” Donal said, not looking up. “You aren’t what I imagined.”

“And just what did you imagine his friends were like?” Gilbert asked.

“Not totting grenades, for one thing,” the squirrel answered in a calm voice.

The armadillo looked at the rat, “You didn’t tell him about me?”

“I told him you were hunting me for no good reason. There weren’t any reasons to go over you all individually; not even you and Laurence’s collections,” Thomas said and then added. “Do you really keep grenades in your van?”

“Are you kidding? If I had, there wouldn’t be anything left of

it." He patted his pocket. "This is my good luck charm." Olavo returned with a tray of coffee and teas, sparing everyone from having to use the absurdity of a good luck grenade as a talking point.

The capybara and monkey sat and Thomas had to squeeze tighter against Donal. So much the better. He breathed in the coffee's aroma before taking a slow sip. This was heavenly. As much as he appreciated Mirabel's weekly coffee, it was only good compared to the swill he got the rest of the time.

He placed the cup down. "Alright. Start from the beginning. Don't even make that joke, Limbani. I'm not in the mood."

The monkey closed his mouth.

"We were at your grandfather's place for nearly two days," Olavo began, "Waiting for you to arrive. Even if you'd left with that kangaroo--"

"After he fried my van," Gilbert interjected.

"-we figured you'd head there since Limbani saw us there," Olavo continued only to be interrupted again.

"Why do we keep going where he 'sees us'?" Felix asked. "It got Gilbert's van blown up, and that old man wouldn't even put out and--"

* * *

“You hit on my grandfather?” Thomas asked in disbelief. He looked to Limbani who had his patented innocent smirk. “...I don’t even know why I’m surprised.”

“Hey,” Gilbert said, “Some of us show at least a little restraint.”

Olavo rolled his eyes, “Well on my part it was because after watching two people get shot down, why bother. For someone who isn’t one of us, your mother’s father has kept in shape.”

“He’s my father’s father,” Thomas glowered. The silent looks the others shared spoke volumes for their confusion.

“Anyway,” Limbani said, “that’s about when we saw the news show. Felix recognized your truck and a couple of calls got us the location. It was clear you weren’t coming there, so we packed up and headed in that direction.”

“We kept him from seeing anything,” Yating said, nodding to the monkey, “So we wouldn’t be sent on another wild goose chase. We figured that either you or the kangaroo were going to try to get the truck out of impound.”

“I could have told you they weren’t going to be there,” Limbani said, then primly drank.

“Well,” Yating continued, “While we were there, a van showed up, guys jumped out and grabbed Madoc, then they drove

off.”

“Wait. Some guys grabbed Madoc?” Thomas asked. “Our Madoc? Lifts close to three hundred pounds, Madoc?”

“The guys who grabbed him weren’t just bigger than him but his entire entourage,” Gilbert said.

Thomas bit his lower lip and looked at Limbani.

The monkey sighed. “You know how this works.”

“No, I don’t,” the rat said flatly.

Limbani rubbed his face. “I’ve had to explain it to you a dozen times, Thomas. At this point, I have to think you’re doing this because you know how aggravating I find it.”

Thomas looked at the others, who didn’t seem surprised by the outburst. “Limbani. Until I teleported away from the frat, I didn’t even know there was such a thing as magic. The only thing I understand now is how you kept dragging me off to have sex in public without getting caught, but no, you never explained it to me.”

The confusion was back. Eventually, Olavo broke the silence by asking, “What can I do?”

* * *

“Beat people at poker and dress better than Felix,” Thomas answered after only a little thought.

Snickers erupted, except for Felix who glared more intensely at the rat.

Olavo gained control of himself first. “I’m serious. We all gave you demonstrations before the holidays.”

“Unless you’re referring to all the sex we had,” Thomas stated, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“That kind of counts,” Limbani said.

“You’re serious?” the capybara asked, “You have no memory of us showing you what our powers are?”

“I only know Yating’s because he walked through the truck,” Thomas said before adding, “And Limbani from hearing people bitching about his visions.”

Olavo closed his eyes and raised his fingers to his lips as he digested this before responding. “Well, at least we know why you’re running so hard. That kangaroo messed with your memories.”

Thomas narrowed his eyes. “Don’t go accusing Grant of anything. He saved my life. If anyone had their head thrown in a blender, it’s the lot of you. Now let’s get back to Madoc. Limbani, why

didn't you see it coming."

The monkey sighed. "Fine, on account you don't remember. I have to focus on when I want to see, and I only see it as myself at that moment. I wasn't looking at the near future since the guys were intent on staying put, and looking at a moment locks me out of anything between then and the present."

"Okay," Thomas said as he processed this, "But why didn't you search the future for Madoc rather than me?"

The monkey shook his head. "Still not how it works. I see wherever I happen to be at the time I check, and what I eventually saw was you. In that alley."

"You saw me running, which is why you had Olavo and Gilbert outside the lot." The rat paused to parse this. "Why didn't you see me knocking you on your ass?"

Limbani smirked, "Who says I didn't see that happen and just figured you needed the boost to your morale?"

Thomas dismissed the humor and tried to guess the real reason. "You couldn't check the battle, because you'd already seen ahead to right now. In this coffee shop. With us talking."

Limbani beamed, "I knew you were a smart ass on top of being a really fuckable one."

* * *

Thomas rolled his eyes. "Sure. So why even bother asking me? You know I'm going to say no. After the way you've made my life hell, Madoc can turn to that precious Raphael to get rescued for all I care."

The others turned to Limbani, but the monkey just shrugged. "Don't look at me. I know he says yes because I'm sucking him off in the back of the van twelve hours from now. How we get there is in the here and now."

"Limbani, we're here because you saw us here," Olavo said. "I'm happy we found Thomas through your visions, but get off it, okay. We still need to convince Thomas, so unless you want your overconfidence in him doing it eventually to cause one of your visions to be wrong, then you need to contribute."

That seemed to knock a degree of seriousness into the monkey, but within moments he was flashing Thomas his very not innocent 'I'm going to fuck you smile'. "You're going to come because you miss all the sex."

"Grant introduced me to bathhouses, so try again." Of course, Thomas wasn't getting laid now, but after this he had to explain things to Donal, so they'd figure something out. "Seriously, why would I want to help? You guys probably have done who knows what to my parents to get them to tell you what bus I was on; I'm surprised you didn't start this conversation saying they were being held hostage if I didn't comply."

"Look," Yating said, "I understand we can't ask you to do this out of the goodness of your heart considering the way you're

memories have-”

“You’re the one with scrambled memories, not me,” Thomas snapped.

“Fine,” Yating relented. “Still, don’t you want answers. Even if we’re the ones whose memories have been altered to get us to chase you, don’t you want to know why? Why would Rapheal go to those extremes?”

Thomas raised a hand to rub his temples, “Who is this Raphael?”

They looked at each other, and Olavo choose his words carefully. “He’s Madoc’s elder.”

The rat rolled his eyes, “And an elder does what exactly?”

Felix finally chimes in. “He controls the Lewiston family, deciding how their estate is used and what its family members do.”

Thomas took another sip of his coffee, noting how it was quickly becoming just kinda warm. “Okay, having answers would be nice. But how can I be sure the person who fucked with your minds isn’t going to fuck with mine.”

“Then you can leave,” Olavo said. “We can’t stop you.”

* * *

Thomas looked at the large window. He knew Olavo meant after they rescued Madoc, but it was tempting to go. But he'd have to take Donal and he didn't know if he could do sight to sight with a person without blacking out. Still, if Limbani couldn't track them for a few hours...

He looked at the men seated around the table. Limbani wasn't as good as he thought he was at hiding his worry. Olavo and Yating didn't bother trying. As usual, Felix was pissed at him, and Gilbert looked worried and tired.

It was a trap, Thomas told himself.

Only what if it wasn't? What if Madoc really was in trouble and Thomas could help? These guys were his friends for half a year, and if their memories have really been altered to get them to chase him... what kind of person did it make Thomas for him to turn away their plea for help?

"Let's say, for the sake of argument," he told the monkey as the smirk formed, "That I'm willing to help. How can I even do that? I'm not some action hero. I don't have training in my power much less in how to pull off a rescue mission. You guys are rich, can't you pay someone more qualified to go rescue him?"

The look of discomfort that passed among them was answer enough, but Thomas had trouble believing it. There was something money couldn't buy? "Okay, why can't you pay for his rescue?"

* * *

“Because it would make the situation worse,” Olavo said, “Probably.”

“The city they took Madoc to is controlled by a family no one wants to piss off,” Gilbert said. “Anywhere else, and one of us could ask for support from our family, but...” he shook his head. “Things are too dicy with them.”

“You can teleport,” Yating said. “You can take him out of where they’re holding him, then we run like crazy and deny ever being there if someone asked.”

“Wait,” Thomas interrupted, “Are you saying those people everyone is scared of took Madoc?”

“Oh, Sweet cum I hope they aren’t involved,” Felix said.

“They aren’t,” Limbani said. “It would have been a bunch of armored men in body armor from their security company instead of thugs in a van if they were involved. There was one tiger in the van, but being a tiger doesn’t make you an Orr.”

Thomas nodded, “I’m guessing Orr is the name of the family you’re all terrified of and want me to risk my tail against.”

“Not against,” Gilbert said, “Just operate in their city.”

Thomas was starting to reconsidered just based on how half-

brained this all felt. "And what city is that?"

"San Fransico," Olavo said, placing his phone on the table. On it was the website of a gym. The logo was the silhouette of a man with his arm at his side, in front of a golden shield. Some flexing pose Madoc had shown him as part of his training.

'Hot Muscle' was the name of the gym.

Thomas looked at them. "So, a bunch of jacked-up guys kidnapped Madoc, and they took him to a gym? Are you sure he didn't arrange it to get out of having to do what Limbani says?"

"There's no way Madoc went to San Francisco willingly," Gilbert said. "Not after what took place between their families."

"Not the time for gossip," Olavo said as Felix opened his mouth. "But yes, the Lewistons aren't welcome in San Francisco these days."

"Hey, look at it on the bright side," Felix said, smiling, "Since no one knows you're a Lewiston, even if they do catch you, what's the worse they can do?"

"I'm not a Lewiston," Thomas replied, ignoring the way the others winced at what the otter said. That couldn't be good.

"You should go," Donal said, and Thomas joined the others in

staring at him. "Look, he needs help. So you should help. Pay it forward, and I mean," he grinned at Thomas. "Come on, it's San Francisco. How could you not want to go there?"

His backup plan. Thomas had completely forgotten about it with having to be ready to get him and Donal out of here if things turned south. Even if it was a trap, they were taking him to the one place Thomas could find help.

"Alright, I'm in," Thomas said, doing his best to sound reluctant.

"Told you," Limbani said, smiling proudly.

OUTLINE-37

Right now, Gilbert essentially has the entire close quarters including himself hostage, and only Thomas can get away if he chooses to leave everyone to die.

Thomas asks what is wrong with everyone. Not just Gilbert, but everyone. They were friends, except for maybe Felix, and then this teleporting nonsense started and suddenly they're chasing him across half the country. Someone might mention him turning his back on his family, and Thomas will quickly shout that his family told him to run and hide... and now he's here and they're back in the Twin Cities having who knows what done to them.

This gives them all pause, so Thomas follows up with where is Madoc. He should be starting up a rant at how he's upset some guy named Rapheal that he's never even met. No one answers right away, so Thomas prompts for an answer. The answer... is Madoc has been kidnapped[we know the why he was taken. did you ever explain how he came to the attention of the kidnapper?He fucked one of their members while they were doing the circuit competing in the Twin Cities.]

[Based on what we've established for Dietrick's gym, this would have to be one of the moderate members, rather than rookie tier, as they would need Dietrick's gift for it to be noticeable.]...

...OK, yeah, this is going to require some coffee.

###

Denver, Thomas, Donal, The Search Squad: Mood:unbelievable

conversation

Recap time, now with less grenades. OK. So they saw on the news that Thomas was at some gas stations, and while it was clear that he left, he left his truck behind. Not Thomas's truck, doesn't matter. Point is, that could give them better leads than sitting around in Montana for weeks on end. So the head out to where it was eventually impounded so Yating could break in and search for evidence... and then some roided up thugs break into where the rest of the group were waiting for him, grab Madoc, and leave[how did the thug know where Madoc was?Was very much glossed over in Draft 0.]

[Right now, I've been picturing Madoc having to keep his "fan club" back at the Twin Cities happy and assured he'll be back. So some things can slip there.]

[Beyond that, I imagine they may have hired a slicer. Madoc might be confident in his phone's security, but it is likely all civilian grade since he likely doesn't warrant whatever Raphael gives his field team.]. Limbani could only give them a two minute warning and it was nowhere near enough for what descended on them.

That [is all of that being talked abotu with Donal there?He's the hostage, so yes. He's just watched Thomas and Yating have a fist fight where they were teleporting and phasing about the place respectively, so it's not like the magical world hasn't been revealed to him already.]raises some questions as a distraction. And yeah, turns out Limbani is a precog. Self precog to be exactly, which raises the question of there being different types, but that's unnecessary information. Point is, he's how they tracked Thomas down before, how they tracked Thomas down now... and why... they can't believe they're going to say this... asking Thomas... for help... to rescue Madoc[here there's a question of why they come to thomas for help. regardless of Limbani's vision, how do they think Thomas can help them?unless they are so used to going along Limani's visions that is

the reason for them doing that? Limbani is the reason they bother asking, but Thomas is the first teleporter. Of course he can help with a rescue mission. Even considering unknown limitations, they know he can teleport while taking someone along with him since he's done it twice. Once at the fraternity no less.]

[And since they believe they are going up against the Orrs rather than just some bodybuilders operating behind the Orr's back, they believe they need an edge. Also, while I can't think of an organic reason Thomas would ask the question, Gilbert doesn't try to use any Rowling connection to negotiate because I assume the Orrs are on the side of the Brislows in the little cold war. And since the Rowlings are more likely than not to be pro-Brislow as well, they might tell him to stand down.].

Everyone can't believe that was just said, even the person who said it. Everyone but Limbani that is, who is his all too familiar eager self. Of course even he can't avoid reading the atmosphere [Read the Atmosphere is a Japanese saying. Closest English equivalent is read the crowd or read the room, but with read the atmosphere there is also an implication of going along with what the crowd/room/pack is doing.] for ever, and he's ask what is up. He saw Thomas traveling with them this morning, so he's going to say yes. Someone points out that his sight isn't flawless, and Thomas is quick to ask driving where... because if he is going to help... heavy remphasis on the IF... then they need to know where Madoc is.

Once again there is silence before Olavo speaks up and holds up his phone showing a logo... a gym logo. It's a gym in San Francisco, he says, which means its the Orrs. Once again, Thomas needs more information. Quick and dirty recap, they are allies to the Brislow, meaning enemies to the Lewistons, Madoc's family... and Thomas's. Thomas will grumble something about being pretty certain the Hertz don't have blood feuds with anyone, much less some family in the

deep south west. Still... San Fransico?

Thomas will be silent for a long while before speaking up... he almost doesn't... but these people were his friends once, and maybe reminding them of that is his way out. So yeah, he'll help them... in fact he knows someone in San Fransico who will be a bigger help than even the world supposed first teleporter.