

CHAPTER-1

“I don’t believe him!” Thomas yelled at the top of his lungs. He’d kept it in for the length of the drive and the walk from the parking lot, but he’d seen a rat in a suit and for an instant, he’d thought that was his father, on his trail again and he couldn’t hold it in anymore. “There’s no avoiding him. He was up before I was out the door, in spite of getting up even earlier than yesterday. Can you believe that?”

The tiger with the pale orange fur and brown stripes next to him rolled his eye and chuckled. “I’m the one picking you up ever earlier in the morning, so yes, I do believe that. But he’s just looking out for you. Uni’s a big step.” He motioned around them, at the stalls and tables with people around them, calling out to the students walking through the park.

“I think that by being here, I qualify as being old enough to deal with this on my own.”

“Of course, Mister Hertz, and how are you dealing with deciding what your major’s going to be? It would help pick a fraternity.”

Thomas glared at his friend. “Do not call me that, Paul Heeran, you’re going to summon my father. And I have plenty of time to decide.”

“Figuring out what you’ll major in would make finding a frat house that fits you easier.” He stepped away from the rat. “Speak of which, give me a moment.”

Thomas watched Paul walk to a booth with a sign for [need the frat name] over it and talk with a lemming who handed him a pamphlet. With no one to distract him, Thomas looked more attentively at the booths.

The one Paul was at had pictures of lab equipment, and with his friend going for a Biochem major, it wasn’t hard to guess what they were about. Others had pictures of stars, possibly an astro-

physic frat. One had pictures of machines, so Thomas couldn't work out which one it was among all the possibilities. One had a projection, instead of a picture of—

Thomas's gaze was pulled away from the booths by the couple that passed by, a muscular bear and curvy lioness, both dressed in tight-fitting clothing. He didn't bother with discretion. He wasn't the only one looking. He envied her a little. The guy looked like a quarterback, and Thomas touched his left eye as he remembered kissing his high school quarterback. If that hadn't put him off the type, nothing would.

"I'm glad to see the opportunity given to you isn't going to waste," Paul said next to him.

Thomas pointed to the bear. "Excuse me, but have you seen him?"

Paul looked at the man Thomas pointed to up and down, then nodded. "Yeah, definitely a great specimen. Have you kissed him already?"

Thomas narrowed his eyes at the tiger. "No. Have you seen that he's with someone?"

"If I remember correctly, wasn't the one you kissed in high school dating one of the cheerleaders at the time?"

"That was a dare." Thomas pouted.

"Do you want me to dare you to go kiss this one?"

"No, thank you very much. One black eye in my lifetime is more than enough."

"Could anyone tell?" Paul asked innocently, walking again, "I mean, your face fur is black."

"It's not about people seeing it," Thomas replied, falling into step, "those things hurt."

"How about them?" Paul pointed to a booth with plenty of

devices on the table Thomas couldn't identify.

"What do they do?" he asked once he realized his friend wasn't pointing to one of the men.

"Mechanical Engineering."

Thomas looked at his friend, then motioned to his thin frame. "Do I look like the mechanically inclined type?"

"Engineering," Paul said, enunciating the word. "That means working at a computer or drafting table. You tell muscular people what do to when it comes to building your creations."

Thomas hummed. "I'd get to tell guys what to do." He looked back to the bear and imagined telling him to get on his knees while Thomas face-fucked him. "I could do that."

Paul sighed loudly. "Tell me you have a relative who's a lawyer because you are going to be piling on the sexual harassment suits." He checked his phone. "I think there's a frat for people who can't make up their mind."

"I can make up my mind," Thomas stated, "but a major's a major decision."

"Very funny," Paul replied drily.

"Thank you." Thomas smiled.

"How long have you been waiting to use it?" Paul put the phone away.

Thomas shrugged. "Just since the start of the year."

"You know, I think I have the perfect frat for you." He nodded ahead and Thomas looked for who he might mean. There was a table with pictures of the ocean. There was no way Thomas was getting close to that much water. A table with only two guys beside it, the muscular armadillo motioning a guy over and talking to him while running a hand over his arm. The one after that had signs with melted metal pouring from a large bowl. Nope, not risking getting his fur

burned off. After that was one with doctors standing in an operating room. Too much blood for his liking.

“I give up,” Thomas said.

The tiger pointed to the nondescript table where the armadillo leaned close to the man and whispered something. The man stiffened and hurried away, which made the monkey next to the armadillo laugh.

“Who are they? Shouldn’t they at least have a sign up with their frat name?”

“You don’t know about Sigma Theta Gamma? Come on, tell me you at least did some research into the frat houses here.”

“And let my dad think I care about anything related to university? He’s already overbearing about everything related to it. If he thinks I care, I’m never going to survive it.” The tiger opened his mouth, but Thomas silenced him with a glare. “That man arranged to be my advisor. It isn’t enough my father is a teacher at the university I’m going to, and on top of that, he manages to be one in charge of my course load. There’s no way that’s legal. Do you want to see all the classes he wants me to take?” Thomas pulled his phone out and brought up the very long list. “I’m not even going to have time to sleep with everything on there.”

“He’s doing it because he wants you to succeed, you know that right?”

“Don’t go taking his side, you’re *my* best friend.” He put the phone away. “And he was supposed to have gotten over being overbearing with Vic and Jude. I have no idea how those two survived having him constantly look over their shoulder when it came to school.”

“Maybe they were just training for you,” Paul said with a grin. “Just think how he’s going to be when your younger brother gets here.”

“He’s going to be on a football scholarship, just watch him. It’s

going to be about the sport for him.”

Paul sighed and grinned. “Then, my friend, you are doomed.” Thomas’s snarky reply was cut off by the monkey.

“You came!” the monkey exclaimed, then turned to the armadillo. “I told you he’d be here.” He had an accent Thomas couldn’t place and his face coloring was interesting with the dark brown fur shaping it, surrounded with a white, then tapering to a lighter brown. He hurried toward the two of them, with the armadillo rolling his eyes.

Thomas took a step back, hands up. “Woe there.” Then he stopped. “Hey, I know you.” He couldn’t believe it hadn’t immediately come to him, with that face.

That pulled the money up short. “You do?” Paul was also looking at Thomas, but speculatively.

“Yeah, you were the one making out with the Margay by the ice cream shop where we had the social after the orientation tour.” He stuck to calling it making out. Even if he was confident, appendages had been out of pants in the glance he’d gotten. Thomas tried to pull more about the monkey. “Adesida, that’s your name. We’re in the same Studies for Success class too.”

“Wow,” the armadillo said from where he leaned against the booth, “they have a fuck your way to the top class here? How did I not know that.” Thomas stared at the man, who just grinned at him.

“You’re the one with the giant Sunday!” the monkey exclaimed, and Thomas blanched.

“That’d be him,” Paul offered helpfully.

“What was that about?” Adesida asked.

“Oh,” Paul started, and Thomas looked at him, horrified. No, his friend was not going to betray him like that. “Just a father showing how proud he is of his son.”

“I hate you,” Thomas grumbled.

“Your father is a teacher here?” the monkey asked. “What does he teach?”

Thomas sighed. “The sciences.” One reason for him not to go into engineering, his father was would arrange it so he was teaching him every science-related class.

“I’m Limbani.” He offered his hand to Thomas. “I’m sorry, but I didn’t get your name.”

“Thomas.” He hesitated, then took the hand. “Thomas Hertz.” He yelped as the monkey pulled him into a hug.

“It’s a pleasure to make you acquaintance, Tom.” He leaned in. “You and I are going to have so much fun,” he whispered.

Thomas pushed away. Was the monkey seriously hitting on him? Here, with the armadillo there? “Ah, err,” he cleverly stammered. “Thank you?” the monkey’s muscles were leaner than the armadillo, but they were there, and he’d felt the bulge in Limbani’s pants during the hug; definitely something there. He took another step back and looked at Paul for support, but his friend was covering a smirk with a hand.

“And you are?” the monkey asked Paul, offering his hand. “I’m sorry, remember you from the social, but also don’t know your name.”

“Paul Heeran,” the tiger answered, smiling, “and I’m going to pass on the handshake, if you don’t mind. I don’t know you well enough to let you grind your crotch against me.”

“I can grind it against your ass,” Limbani offered, no sign he was joking in his tone.

“That’s going to take getting to know you a whole lot more.” Paul looked the monkey over, and as usual, Thomas saw none of the lust he was sure had been on his face when he was looking Limbani over. Paul didn’t want guys in that way. “Do you waltz?” he asked, which earned him a confused expression.

Limbani turned to the armadillo, who raised his hands to stop the question.

“Don’t ask me, I’m from Texas. If it ain’t line dancing, I don’t know anything about it.” He had a marked Texan drawl. “I’m Lawrence Rowling, this guy’s minder for the time being.”

Limbani rolled his eyes. “Sure, like you didn’t hit on every guy that came by, too. At least I know Tom’s interested.”

“You’re awfully sure of yourself,” Thomas replied.

The armadillo sighed. “You have no idea.”

“Lawrence, grab the clipboard and sign them up for the party,” Limbani said, pointing to the booth’s table. Thomas saw a clipboard on it, on the opposite side of where the armadillo leaned against it. Then what the monkey said registered, and he was looking at him again.

“What?”

“Here,” Lawrence said, handing the clipboard to Limbani. “You do it since you’ve already decided they’re coming.”

Thomas looked at the clipboard the man held, then at the table. Had there been one closer he hadn’t noticed? No, the one eight feet away from where the armadillo had been was gone. Had he stared at Limbani that long? He hadn’t even noticed the armadillo move.

“How do you spell your last name?” Limbani asked.

“Wait, what?” Thomas looked at the clipboard, a tablet in a metal case, and the monkey holding the stylus, waiting on his answer. “I haven’t agreed to anything.” He took another step back. “Paul?”

“I say we go for it,” the golden tiger answered. “When is it?”

“Friday,” Lawrence answered, “it’s the one welcoming the Freshmen.” He smiled. “The guys attending are always a lot of fun.”

“Paul?” Thomas asked again, this time in disbelief. He motioned to the two other men. Sure they were hot as hell, but they were clearly jocks. He didn’t know his friend to be into those kinds of parties.

“You really need to do your research, Thomas,” Paul said, with a hint of exasperation in his tone. “This is Sigma Theta Gamma.” Again, he said it like it should mean something to Thomas. “You know the Freemasons?” the tiger asked.

“Of course, they’re—”

“Well,” Paul cut him off. “Compared to STG, the Freemasons let anyone in.”

Lawrence winced. “It’s Sigma Theta Gamma, STG makes it sound like we’re some sort of sexual disease.”

“If you have as much sex as the stories claim, there might be a few,” Paul replied.

“Nah,” Limbani said, “we have way more sex than that.” He winked at Thomas. “That’s why you’re going to be there.”

“I don’t know about this,” Thomas said.

“I do,” Limbani replied with a level of confidence that made Thomas uncomfortable. There was no threat in the voice, just this knowledge he was speaking the truth.

“I don’t know if it’s a good idea, Paul. I mean, are you really going to enjoy that?”

The tiger shrugged. “You never know I could find someone there who knows how to dance.”

“Wait,” Lawrence said, “when you say dancing, you actually mean dancing? Not the Horizontal Mambo?”

“We’re going to have to dance a long time before I consider that one,” Paul said seriously. “And yes, Thomas, I think it’s a good idea. Who knows, maybe you’ll impress them enough they’ll loosen their admittance criteria and offer you a bed.”

“I don’t think...” the armadillo said, looking at Limbani, who got a faraway look. Thomas wondered if the man was imagining the two of them in his bed. He glanced down at the tent in the monkey’s

pants. Yep, he was, and now Thomas was imagining the cock that had to be in there sliding into his ass.

Was he a bottom? Thomas hadn't considered the question before, since the idea he'd have sex had always been academic. Now, it was looking like he'd actually...

Oh fuck, he might —

He took another step back. "I'm not so sure about this."

Limbani was focusing on him again. "Oh, you are going to have a great time," he said, his smile broadening. "I just know it." Again, with that certainty. How was anyone that confident?

"Come on," Paul said, as the traitor that he was turning out to be. "It'll be a chance for you to experience something new."

He glared at his friend who'd just about told those two he was a virgin. Still, a house full of guys, at least one of which was interested in him, for some reason. As scary as the idea was, hopefully, he wouldn't get punched in the face this time.

"Alright, I'll go, if I can get my dad to agree to it."

"Your father has you on that tight of a leash?" Limbani asked.

"My dad's obsessed with me being successful," Thomas replied, trying to keep the annoyance from his voice. "I don't know if he's going to allow me to do anything fun."

"You can always sneak out," Lawrence offered.

"You don't know his father," Paul said with a chuckle. "I'm starting to think the man never sleeps."

Limbani smiled. "He's going to agree."

Again with the confidence.

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The Hertz household was quiet when Thomas returned from

the walk around the park and the other frat house booths. Considering how adamant Limbani was that Thomas would be at the party, he'd been mildly surprised at how easily he'd agreed to let them go, and disappointed. As forward as the monkey had been, Thomas had been expected to be pulled behind a bush to have a quickie.

He wished he'd had the confidence to make the offer.

His father was probably at the university, either looking for Thomas or working on his classes. Paul might be right, now that Thomas thought about it. Maybe his father never slept. Considering he could keep up with his mother and have the energy to work, and chase Thomas around, yeah, the man definitely didn't sleep. Said mother would be out at one of her exercise classes, Thomas couldn't keep track of which one happened on which day, and that was only her hobby.

He walked up the stairs to the second floor, where his bedroom was, along with his brother's and sister's, Roland and Jude, and the guest bedroom, which had been Victor's before he got married.

Thomas opened the bathroom door and came face to back with Roland, fur damp and a towel around his waist. The younger rat looked at the older in the mirror.

"Do you mind?" Roland demanded, and Thomas turned around, closing the door behind him. The vision of that muscular back was imprinted on his mind. When had his younger brother turned into that hot of a guy? And what was he doing, thinking of his fifteen-year-old brother as hot?

Thomas shook his head and headed to the third floor, the one with his parent's bedroom and the other bathroom. He'd needed a shower, no he needed a cold one to get the image of his brother in his underwear out of his mind.

Yeah, Paul was right. He needed that party.