

## CHAPTER-25

Thomas made it past two houses when common sense kicked in. He couldn't just run blindly. A pair of jeans, a faded 'Shot-em Down' t-shirt, and worn shoes weren't the right clothes to run in a building snow storm. He checked his pockets and cursed. His phone was still with his other pants, which meant he couldn't even take a bus home. He doubted he could blow the driver to pay for the ride; as surreal as his life had become, it wasn't a porno yet.

He ran up the steps to the closest townhouse and rang the bell, rubbing his arms for some warmth as he waited. At least with the snowfall, it wasn't as cold as January could get in the Twin Cities.

He heard motion inside the house at the same time as someone yelled his name. Four of his frat brothers were out of Sigma Theta Gamma, the armadillo pointing in his direction. Thomas cursed them for being out so quickly while taking the time to dress and put on a jacket against the cold. With him, he made out a badger and a collie. The other was too wrapped up in his clothing to be identified, but the cut and size could make him Felix.

Why couldn't *he* let Thomas go? Of everyone in the frat, the otter was the one who liked him the least.

The four of them ran in his direction and Thomas tried to get a sense of how quickly whoever lived here was approaching. He couldn't let Hubert get his hands on him. As strong as the collie was, Thomas wouldn't get out of his grip.

Not fast enough, he decided and ran down the steps and away from the others. At least running would keep him warm, while had the energy to maintain it.

The rail? He could probably get in without paying, and it would be warm, not that the Green Line would get him home, but it would move him a lot closer. With that plan in mind, he headed for the river. There was a stop just on the other side, using Washington. He poured on the speed. He had ways to go, and he needed to stay

ahead of them. He tried to remember who in the frat was a runner, and Chima was the only one that came to mind.

He looked around. The adonis of a hyena would be easy to spot even in the snow, but Thomas didn't remember where he was. Olavo had sent him to fetch Henry, but it wasn't like the bat had bothered telling him if Chima had returned with him. Thomas shuddered at how creepy Henry had become in those last moments.

The bridge was in sight when he recognized Firmin's voice ahead of him.

"There!" the badger called.

"No!" Thomas cursed, fear mounting, and collided with someone.

"Whoa, you okay?" the woman said, trying to steady him. "I'm sorry, didn't see you there. You sort of came out of nowhere."

Thomas wanted to run, but he needed to catch his breath. He felt like he'd just sprinted. He looked around, cursing this delay. With Firmin in front, it meant Jacques was with Hubert and...

He was on the bridge.

"How?" he looked ahead and back. Closer to the east side, and he felt like he'd run all this way.

She chuckled. "Well, in this snow, I guess you can easily miss others. Are you okay?" When he focused on her, she was studying him, and the cold reminded him of how he was dressed. Fuck.

"Had to leave in a hurry," he said lamely. What would this be like if Henry had shown up two minutes earlier? "I really have to go, sorry." He ran again, then cursed himself. He should have asked to borrow her phone.

But who would he call? He tried to remember Paul's number, but the only time he'd paid attention to it was when he entered it in his phone the first time. Every other phone he'd gotten his contact list had just been transferred automatically. He could look for it online,

but then what? Sit around and wait?

Kuno had to know the city as well as Thomas, being from the other side of the river, but would he think of transit? Like the rest of the frat, he was rich. He drove if he couldn't walk somewhere. But they knew him. They didn't make his lower social status a thing, but they'd be smart enough to know Thomas would have to travel by transit, even without his phone.

He'd call Paul and have him wait at the last stop. Paul wouldn't ask too many questions and he'd be fine with Thomas not wanting to answer until later.

With a plan in mind, he pushed himself.

The stop came into view, along with the crowd making its way in. He started cursing, then stopped. A crowd was good. He could lose himself in it; he might even be able to slip inside with whoever was in front of him without having to pay.

The heat of the crowd was also nice.

"I'm telling you," a voice came, far too close, "this is where I'll see him." How had Limbani gotten here so quickly?

Tried to push his way closer to the door, looking ahead to judge the distance. He could see them and through the glass the safety of the stop.

"I don't know how you can have seen him here," Kuno replied. "I can't tell who's who in there."

The person in front of him shoved Thomas back, and curses were muttered around him. Not taking his eyes off the doors and safety on the other side, Thomas did his best to will them to settle down before—

"There!" Limbani yelled. "Thomas, wait up!"

No, they couldn't get him and—

"Hey watch it," the man curse as he pushed Thomas away

from him, then looked around as if trying to figure out where the rat came from, then shrugged and stepped away before going back to studying his phone.

He was inside the building. A train was approaching. It was warm. Thomas wanted to lean against the wall, soak in the warmth, rest. He was exhausted. But a look at the doors and the crowd on the other side reminded him of the monkey and margay looking for him. He hurried to the stairs.

While waiting, he tried to borrow a phone, but they took one look at him, in his wet clothes, and moved away. When the train he wanted arrived, he got in, found a seat, and finally relaxed enough to go over what had happened.

Henry had acted like what Thomas had done was normal. No, not normal, with his take of gods, but he hadn't freaked out the way Thomas was feeling himself about to do. He'd watched enough television to know what it looked like he'd done was called: teleportation. But that was impossible.

Maybe he'd just blacked out because of the fear. Only he couldn't have gotten out of the house; not with the guys outside his room. He'd looked out the window as the bat rushed him, teeth bared, and he'd been in the street. It was impossible, but Thomas couldn't think of another explanation.

"Or I'm going insane and I imagined Henry eager to bite my neck out."

The older man seated next to him got off and sat further away.

"If I'm not, I'm probably sounding like it." He should stop talking to himself.

Then it had happened again on his way to the bridge. He'd heard Firmin ahead of him while looking at it, got scared and he was on the bridge, and again in the crowd.

Fear seemed to be the trigger, and where he looked where he ended up. Was he the next step in the evolution of—

“Okay Thomas, calm down. This isn’t a movie, so don’t go quoting one of them.”

If fear caused it, he had to remain calm. He’d gotten lucky twice now, appearing next to someone else and they immediately dismissing it. If he did it on the train, he didn’t think anyone could ignore it. Not to say of what would happen since he was in motion, or if he appeared outside.

He wrenched his gaze away from the window and closed his eyes. The best thing he could do now was rest and enjoy the warmth. He’d be cold and running again soon enough.

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Thomas looked at the house, then the van in the driveway. He shivered intensely, and he knew he couldn’t stay out here, but that was Gilbert’s van. That meant the frat was here, waiting for him. For an instant he saw his family, tied to chairs, being threatened by the armadillo holding fireworks, ready to explode.

He shook himself. He was letting his mind get away from him. Gilbert wouldn’t do that. But they were still waiting for him, so he couldn’t go there. He looked down the street and dismissed that, too. If one of them was at his parents’, another would be at Paul’s.

His teeth clattered together.

Fuck, he couldn’t stay outside, but if he couldn’t go in, where could he go? He studied his parent’s house again. Why did he think he couldn’t go in? He couldn’t be seen going in, that was for sure, but all he needed was to see in his room, right?

He had to move down the street to see his window and ducked behind a car when someone looked out the living room window. A rat, so he relaxed a little until he noticed how bulky he was. Madoc. He leaned to the side, hanging on to the car’s wheel well to keep from falling, and looked at his window on the second floor. He could make out the wall from this angle, with his poster of Gerry Erwell.

Now, how did he trigger it?

He'd been scared; his heart rate had spiked, his chest tightened. He did his best to recreate the sensation, going as far as to contract his chest until a shiver ran down his body.

He kept himself from yelling out when he lost hold of the wheel well and fell, but could do nothing about the chair he fell against that rolled and bumped against the desk. In the silence that followed, he waited and rejoiced at having done it. He'd consciously teleported.

And he'd also learned that his position didn't change, so he needed to make sure he was properly balanced and that there was nothing where he was going to appear. He'd been lucky to be next to the chair and not in it.

The distant conversation continued. As thin as the walls were in this house, he couldn't make out what they were talking about. Him, definitely. He couldn't stay. He hurried to the closet and took out the old winter jacket that barely fit him after Madoc's training. He stripped out of his wet and cold clothes and wish he could take a hot shower. No, soak in a bath for the rest of winter.

He had jeans on, damn it. Was everything in his old wardrobe going to squeeze his balls to near torture level now? Why hadn't he left a set of his new clothes here? The door opened as he was fighting to button the tail strap and he clamped down on his fear. He couldn't let it control his teleportation.

He was next to the door, a hand clamped over the rat's muzzle before they realized what had happened. Roland's eyes grew wide in surprise and Thomas tightened his hand on his muzzle to keep them from saying anything. With the door open, he could hear the conversation.

"Look, Madoc," Eric said, tone severe, "I know my son. There is no way Thomas does drugs."

"He didn't take it on purpose," Madoc replied.

“So one of you has drugs, and they left that lying around?” the threat in his father’s voice was clear. This felt early in any kind of conversation, so Madoc hadn’t been here long.

“Of course not,” Gilbert said. “We don’t do drugs. Henry wouldn’t let us even if one of us had an interest in it.”

“Then how?” Eric demanded.

“Some idiot brought a twelve-pack of soda they laced with something at the last party,” Madoc replied, sounding genuinely annoyed. “We found out when one of the guests started acting weird. Like everyone was out to get him. We thought we’d rounded up all the cans, but we must have missed one.”

Gilbert took over. “We found it empty in Thomas’s room floor after he ran out screaming about how Henry was a monster out to rip his neck out. We tried to catch him, but he gave us the slip. The last one of us saw of him was when he got into the Metro station. They tried to get to him, but by the time they were inside, a few trains had left. So me and Madoc got in my van and came here.”

Roland tilted an ear questioningly, and Thomas shook his head. None of that was true, but it certainly sounded believable. He hadn’t realized Madoc and Gilbert were such good liars. He pulled his brother into the room but didn’t release him or close the door fully. He wanted to hear the rest of this.

“Thomas would have called Paul,” Judith said. “It doesn’t matter how freaked out my brother is, Paul would be the first person he goes to, no matter what. Especially since he’d probably still be at the university at this point.”

Something clanged softly as it was deposited on a hard surface. The living room meant the coffee table.

“This is how much he was freaking out,” Madoc said. “He left without his phone. It was on his desk. He didn’t even put on a jacket.”

“Oh my God,” Nadia said. “My baby’s out there freezing. We have to do something, Eric.”

“Look,” Madoc continued. “Kuno called his folks. His dad’s tight with the chief of police, so there are people looking for him. We are going to find him quickly. We just wanted to make sure you knew what’s going on in case he somehow makes it here. If he does, just call me, okay? Olavo’s got medical training and we can look after him.”

“If my son makes it home, we will look after him,” Eric said, “and you can expect to hear from me after this is resolved. Sex is one thing, but I will not let Thomas be subjected to drugs.”

“I told you,” Gilbert said, “it’s just a can that an idiot—”

“Sure,” Judith said, and Thomas heard the roll of the eyes in her tone. “Pass the blame onto some else. That’s always the easiest thing to do.”

“We’re not,” Madoc started.

“Don’t bother,” Gilbert said. “We did what Henry asked. They know to be on the lookout for him. Eric had Henry’s number. I’m sure he’s at least going to call us if Thomas shows up here so we can call off the search.”

“Oh, you can be certain I will call Henry once my son has explained what happened to him,” Eric stated. “He and I will have words regarding how he maintains order in that house of his.”

There was silence, then the door opened and closed. Shortly after that, Gilbert’s van started and pulled away.

Roland grunted and pointed to the hand Thomas had around his muzzle. Only now did he realize that through all of this his brother hadn’t fought him. If he’d wanted to, Roland could have broken free. Thomas let go of him.

“What the fuck?” Roland hissed.

“Yeah, that’s how I feel too,” Thomas whispered back.

“Are you on drugs?”

Thomas rolled his eyes. “Do I look on drugs?”



"You look half-naked," Roland answered with a smirk, "which, if I believe the stories I've been hearing, is half more clothes than you normally wear these days."

"Getting here in jeans and a t-shirt wasn't exactly a warm experience. I needed to change."

"I swear," Judith said from the doorway, "if you two are about to make out, I'm telling mom and dad."

"Judith!" Thomas and Roland yelled at their sister at the same time.

She chuckles. "In case you hadn't heard," she said toward the stairs, "Thomas is up here." Running footsteps sounded before she finished talking.

Naida had her arms around Thomas. "Are you alright? Did they do anything to you? You tell me Thomas and I will unleash the Royer's anger on them."

"I'm fine, Mom," Thomas replied, trying to extricate himself and failing. Hadn't all his gym time strengthened him, how could his mother hold him like this?

"You don't look to be under the effect of any drugs," Eric said, watching him.

"I don't know what that was about," he answered, giving up on escaping his mother. "There haven't been any drugs in the house, on purpose or by accident. Like Madoc said, Henry doesn't allow it, and he had a sense about those things." Thomas felt weird talking about the bat as the protector of the frat after seeing the creepy side of him.

"Then why the story?" Judith asked. "Do you think Yat would tell me the truth?"

"I don't know that you'd believe him if he did," Thomas replied, "it's kind of unbelievable."

"So something did happen," Eric said, tone sharp.

“Yeah, but I... there was the oil fire while me and Yat were... and then we were in my room, and they...” Thomas could feel his ears burn with everything he wasn’t saying. He sighed at the expectant and confused looks he received and realized there was only one way he could hope for them to believe him.

“Mom, don’t freak out.” He looked over her shoulder at the corner of his room and worked on recreating the way he felt.

“Honey?” his mother asked, looking at him.

“Sorry, this is harder when I’m not scared for my life,” he replied, recalling how being scared felt and trying to cause it again. He’d managed to get in his room. Tightening his chest until the shiver —

“Thomas!” his mother yelled behind him. He turned to see her looking at the empty space between her arms, and Eric, Judith, and Roland staring at him with a variety of stunned expressions on their face.

“How?” Roland asked, the first to find his voice.

“I don’t know,” Thomas replied and was engulfed in his mother’s arms again.

“Don’t scare me like that ever again,” she threatened.

“Wait, is that what you did at Grandpa’s?” Judith asked. “I knew I saw you there for a second. You looked right at me, then you were gone.”

“I don’t know,” he answered. “I don’t remember any —” he stopped. He’d repeated that in self-defense so often since that day he’d forgotten he remembered more. “Maybe? After you looked at me, I remember this sense of falling, hitting the cold ground, just before I lost consciousness.”

“You should have told us,” Eric said.

“And what, Dad? You’d have thought I was as crazy as I thought I was? I don’t know what happened. Or why I ended up in the

grotto, of all places. I mean, I guess it happened because I got scared. That seems to trigger it, but I normally end up where I'm looking. So I don't know how I ended up there."

"Eric," Nadia said as his father opened his mouth. "I think we should focus on the here and now, don't you?"

The shift was hard for his father to make, but he nodded. "Alright. Why were Madoc and Gilbert here talking about you being on drugs and for us to call Henry if you showed up?"

"I think Henry knows something about what happened to me. He was way too happy about finding out I can teleport."

"Hearing you say it sounds even weirder than seeing you do it," Judith said.

"Alright, I expect you don't know how he'd know about it, so did he cause it?" Eric asked.

*Whatever he can do, it's because we initiated him.* Chima's words, the implication they were responsible, the denial from the others.

"I don't know." He didn't want to even put the hint of a doubt on his frat brothers right now, not with the look his father had.

"How did he find out then? You said something about an oil fire. And please don't skimp on the details because you think we're going to be offended about hearing you have sex."

"I will," Roland muttered.

Taking a breath, Thomas recounted the events of the last few hours, keeping the sexual detail to a minimum despite Judith's snickering. By the time he was done, Roland's ears were as red as Thomas's felt and he was turned away.

Having said it out loud did make him sound insane. But it made him realize one thing.

"I have to go back to the frat and get Henry to explain how he knows what going on? If nothing else, I have to get him to pull the

other off because if they're telling you stories about me being on drugs, what did Kuno have his father tell the police about me?"

"No," Eric said, tone final.

"Dad."

"No, Thomas, I don't think it's a good idea to go back to him. Especially not considering the things he said about using you. Using what you can do."

"I think he was just overly excited. Whatever he knows, seems what I can do is considered impossible there too."

"Even more reasons, then. Thomas, I've been looking into the families at the frat."

"Dad," Thomas whined. "Come on, you don't have to investigate them just because I live there."

"That isn't why, Thomas. While you were in the hospital, Ettore convinced me not to contact the authorities. His arguments almost made sense, and you woke up so I didn't push it, but it made me curious why he wouldn't want them involved. Madoc is also a Lewiston. Did you know his family has been tied to troubles in Denver? I couldn't find much, but they were almost systematically wiped out a few years ago. Kuno Richard's family is deeply involved in politics, not just in the city, but the state. Being tight with the police is the least of what they are."

"Yating?" Judith asked.

Eric shook his head. "I haven't gotten to his family yet since he's from out of the country, but I do know they're also rich."

"I knew that going in, dad," Thomas said. "You brought it up at the start."

"Yes, but now I'm not certain their wealth has been acquired entirely legally, and it makes me wonder how far they're willing to go to get their hands on you."

Roland snorted. "Just get one of them naked and he's going to run to them."

"Roland," Eric warned. "Now is not the time for jealousy."

"Sorry, Dad," his brother mumbled, and Thomas stared. What had Roland to be jealous about? His brother was a hunk. At sixteen, he had to have all the girls in his school drooling after him.

"Thomas?" Eric called. "Are you listening?"

"Yeah, of course," he hurried to reply and got a tilted ear in return. "I guess I wasn't," he admitted.

"I said, that for now, the best course of action is for you to spend the night in your own bed while we wash your clothes, and tomorrow we'll make arrangements for you to go to my father's. It's far enough they won't think to look for you there while I see about resolving this."

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## CHAPTER 1.5-25

Thomas made it past two houses when common sense kicked in. He couldn't just run blindly. A pair of jeans, a faded 'Shot-em Down' t-shirt, and worn shoes weren't the right clothes to run in a building snowstorm. He checked his pockets and cursed. His phone was still with his other pants, which meant he couldn't even take a bus home. He doubted he could blow the driver to pay for the ride; as surreal as his life had become, it wasn't a porno yet.

He ran up the steps to the closest townhouse and rang the bell, rubbing his arms for some warmth as he waited. At least with the snowfall, it wasn't as cold as January could get in the Twin Cities.

He heard motion inside the house at the same time someone yelled his name. Four of his frat brothers were out of Sigma Theta Gamma, with an armadillo pointing in his direction. Thomas cursed; why did they have to be quick at getting into clothes as getting out? He also made out one of the badgers and a collie, so Hubert was in play. The fourth was too wrapped up to be identified, but the rough size and fine cut gave good odds it was Felix.

Why couldn't he let Thomas go? Of everyone in the frat, the otter was the one who liked him the least.

The four of them ran in his direction and Thomas tried to get a sense of how quickly whoever lived here was approaching. Not fast enough; if Hubert got his hands on him, there was no getting out of that grip. He all but jumped down the steps and started running; at least it would keep him warm.

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The rail? He could probably get in without paying, and it would be warm. Not that the Green Line would get him home, but it would move him a lot closer. With a destination in mind, he headed for the river. There was a stop just on the other side, using Washington. He poured on the speed. He had a ways to go, and he needed to stay ahead of them. He tried to remember who in the frat was a runner, and only Chima came to mind.

He looked around. The adonis of a hyena would be easy to stop in the snow, but Thomas didn't know if he was in the frat when this all went down. Olavo had sent him to fetch Henry, but it wasn't as if the bat wasted any time talking about his journey back to the frat.

Thomas shuddered, remembering how creepy Henry had been in those last moments.

"There!" the familiar voice of Firmin called out from in front of him. The bridge was in sight, he couldn't be cut off now.

Fear mounting, Thomas screamed "No," and promptly collided with someone.

"Whoa, you okay?" a woman said, trying to steady him. "I'm sorry, didn't see you here. It's like you came out of nowhere."

Thomas wanted to keep running, but he needed to catch his breath. He felt like he'd just sprinted. He looked around, expected everyone to be closing in on him-

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He was on the bridge. "How?" He looked ahead and back. Closer to the east side, and he felt like he'd run all this way.

She chuckled. "Well, in this snow, I guess you can easily miss others. Are you okay?" When he focused on her, she was studying him, and the cold reminded him of how he was dressed.

"Had to leave in a hurry," Thomas said lamely. What would this be like if Henry had shown up two minutes earlier? "I really have to go, sorry." He ran again, then cursed himself. He should have asked to borrow her phone.

But who would he call? Every number he ever needed was saved to his phone; he couldn't even remember Paul's number. To look them up online they'd need to be listed somewhere, and he couldn't think where Paul's number would be located. Even his father would have his work phone listed in the school directory, not his private one.

Seeing nothing but dead ends, he put it out of mind and pushed forward.

The stop came into view, along with the crowd making its way in. He started cursing, then stopped. A crowd was good. He could lose himself in it; he might even be able to slip inside with whoever was in front of him without having to pay.

The heat of the crowd was also nice.

"I'm telling you," a voice came, far too close, "This is where I'll



see him." How had Limbani gotten here so quickly?

He tried to push his way closer to the door, looking ahead to judge the distance. He could see them and through the glass the safety of the stop.

"I don't know how you can have seen him here," Kuno replied, "I can't tell who's who in there."

The person in front of him shoved Thomas back, and curses were muttered around him. Not taking his eyes off the doors and safety on the other side, Thomas did his best to will them to settle down before-

"There!" Limbani yelled. "Thomas, wait up!"

No, they couldn't get him and-

"Hey watch it," the man cursed as he pushed Thomas away from him, then looked around as if trying to figure out where the rat came from, then shrugged and stepped away before going back to studying his phone.

He was inside the building. A train was approaching. It was warm. Thomas wanted to lean against the wall, soak in the warmth, rest. He was exhausted. But a look at the doors and the crowd on the other side reminded him of the monkey and margay looking for him. He hurried to the stairs.

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He was a nervous wreck as he waited, thinking they'd push through the crowd and find him at any moment. Eventually, the train did arrive, he got in, found a seat, and finally relaxed enough to go over what happened.

Henry had acted like what Thomas had done was normal. No, not normal, but he hadn't freaked out the way Thomas was feeling he was starting to do. He'd watched enough television to know what it looked like he'd done: teleportation. But that was impossible.

Maybe he'd just blacked out because of fear. Only he couldn't have gotten out of the house by just looking through the window, or to the bridge right when he needed to. Or through the crowd and into the train station. It was the only answer.

"That or I'm going insane," Thomas muttered to himself. The older man seated next to him got up and sat further away. "And I need to stop thinking out loud."

Fear seemed to be the trigger, and where he saw the destination. If that was the case, he needed to calm down. He was lucky so far what he'd done had been dismissed by others. If he did it in a way people couldn't dismiss it... or worse he ended up outside who knew where.

Thomas wretched his gaze away from the window and closed his eyes. The best thing he could do was now rest and enjoy the warmth. He'd be cold and running again soon enough.

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Thomas looked at the house, then the van in the driveway. He shivered intensely, and he knew he couldn't stay out here, but that was Gilbert's van. That meant the frat was here, waiting for him. For an instant he saw his family, tied to chairs, being threatened by the armadillo holding fireworks, ready to explode.

He shook himself. He was letting his mind run wild. Gilbert wouldn't do that. But they were still waiting for him, so he couldn't go there. He looked down the street and dismissed anyone else. Even if no one was at Paul's house, his mother would be there and there's too big a risk she wouldn't understand why he needed to wait until the frat mates were gone before contacting his parents.

His teeth clattered together. Fuck, he couldn't stay outside, but if he couldn't go in, where could he go?

He studied his parent's house again. Why did he think he couldn't go in? He couldn't be seen going in, that was for sure, but all he needed was to see in his room, right?

He had to move down the street to see his window and ducked behind a car when someone looked out the living room window. It was a rat, which almost made him relax until she saw the bulk: Madoc. He leaned to the side, hanging on the car's wheel well to keep from falling, and looked at his window on the second floor. He could make out the wall from this angle, with his poster of Gerry Erwell.

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Now, how did he trigger it?

He'd been scared; his heart rate had spiked, his chest tightened. He did his best to recreate the sensations, going as far as to contract his chest until a shiver ran down his body.

He kept himself from yelling out when he lost hold of the wheel well and fell but could do nothing about the chair he fell against that rolled and bumped against the desk. In the silence that followed, he waited and rejoiced at having done it. He'd consciously teleported.

He'd also learned that his position didn't change, so he needed to make sure he was properly balanced and that there was nothing where he was going to appear. He'd been lucky to be next to the chair; otherwise, he'd learn if he could teleport into something or if he'd telefrag it. Both had disturbing implications.

The distant conversations continued, and as thin as the walls were he couldn't make out what was being said. There was little question it was about him. He couldn't stay.

He hurried to the closet and took out the old winter jacket that had barely fit him after Madoc's training. He'd stripped out of his wet and cold clothes and wished he could take a hot shower. Or better yet, roll up in the blankets and just sleep this insanity away.

The old jeans were proving a hassle. Was everything in his old wardrobe going to squeeze his balls to near torture level now? Why hadn't he left at least one set of his new clothes here? The door opened as he was fighting to button the tail strap and he clamped down on his

fear. He couldn't let it control his teleportation.

He was next to the door, a hand clamped over the rat's muzzle before they realized what had happened. Roland's eyes grew wide in surprise and Thomas tightened his hand on his muzzle to keep them from saying anything. With the door open, he could hear the conversation.

"Look, Madoc," Eric said, tone severe. "I know my son. There is no way Thomas does drugs."

"He didn't take it on purpose," Madoc replied.

"So one of you has drugs, and they left it lying around?" the threat in his father's voice was clear. Also, this felt early in the conversation so the boys hadn't been here long.

"Of course not," Gilber said, "Henry would go ballistic if he found something like that, and that's even if one of us was interested in them."

"Then how?" Eric demanded.

"Someone, we think one of the other frats, brought in a bunch of sodas laced with something at the last party," Madoc replied, sounding genuinely annoyed. "We found out when one of the guests started acting weird. Like everyone was out to get him. We thought we'd rounded up all the cans, but we must have missed one."

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Gilbert took over. "We found it empty in Thomas's room after he ran out screaming about how Henry was gonna rip his neck out. We tried to catch him, but he gave us the slip. The last one of us saw of him was when he got into the Metro station. They tried to get to him, but by the time they were inside, a few trains had left. So me and Madoc got in my van and came here."

Roland tilted an ear questioning, and Thomas shook his head. There were enough elements of the truth in there that Thomas almost believed it, but he hadn't had any soda today. He hadn't realized Madoc and Gilbert were such good liars. He pulled his brother into the room but didn't release him or close the door. He wanted to hear the rest of this.

"Thomas would have called Paul," Judith said. "It doesn't matter how freaked out my brother is, Paul would be the first person he went to, no matter what. Especially since he'd still be at the university at this point."

Something clanged softly as if was deposited on a hard surface. "This is how much he was freaking out." Madoc said. "He left without his phone. He didn't even put on a jacket."

"Oh my God," Nadia said, "My baby's out there freezing. We have to do something, Eric."

"It's OK," Madoc continued, "Kuno called his folks. His family's tight with the chief of police, so there are people looking for him. We are going to find him, but we didn't want you out of the loop. Particularly if he manages to make it here. If he does, just call me? We

can get him to the right doctors to scrub this from his system before there's any damage."

"If my son makes it home, we'll make sure he gets the care he needs," Eric said, "And you can expect to hear from the dean after this is resolved. Rampant public sex is one thing, but leaving contaminants around the frat house like that for the unaware to find definitely breaches your charter."

"We told you," Gilbert said, "It was planted there by--"

"Sure," Judith said, and Thomas heard the roll of the eyes in her tone. "But did you think to tell everyone in the frat so they'd be on the lookout for unfamiliar cans?"

"Listen," Madoc started, "Mistakes were made, but we're doing--"

"Don't bother," Gilbert said, "We did what we came here for. Eric has Henry's number. If nothing else he'll call us if Thomas shows up so we can call off the search."

"Oh, you can be certain I have a lot to discuss with Mister Hendrick once my son is found," Eric stated.

There was silence, then the door opened and closed. Shortly after that, Gilbert's van started and pulled away.

\* \* \*

Roland grunted and pointed to the hand Thomas had around his muzzle, and Thoams realized Roland hadn't fought him through all of this. If wanted to, Roland could have broken free and pinned his older brother like a rag doll. Thomas let him go.

"What the fuck?" Roland hissed.

"Yeah, that's how I feel too," Thomas whispered back.

Roland continued, "Are you on drugs?"

Thomas rolled his eyes. "Do I look on drugs?"

"You look half-naked," Roland answered with a smirk, "Which, if I believe the stories I've been hearing, is half more clothes than you normally wear these days."

Thomas felt like his eyes might roll out of his head, "The city streets aren't as heated as the frat. Though they are wet, so I needed to change."

"I swear," Judith said from the doorway, "If you two are about to make out, I'm telling mom and dad."

"Judith!" Thomas and Roland yelled at their sister at the same time.

\* \* \*



She chuckled. "In case you hadn't heard," she said towards the stairs, "Thomas is up here." Running footsteps sounded before she finished talking.

Nadia had her arms around Thomas. "Are you alright? Did they do anything to you? You tell me Thomas, and I will unleash the Royer's anger on them."

"I'm fine Mom," Thomas replied, trying to extricate himself and failing. What good was all that gym time if he could be pinned by a forty-year-old housewife?

"You don't look to be under the effect of any drugs," Eric said, watching him.

"I don't know what that was about," he answered, giving up on escaping his mother. "There haven't been any drugs in the house. Like Madoc said, Henry would go ballistic and he has a sixth sense about rule violations." Thomas felt weird talking about the bat as the protector of the frat while still feeling afraid of him.

"Then why the story?" Judith asked. "Do you think Yat would tell me the truth?"

"I don't know if you'd believe him if he did," Thomas replied, "It's all kinda unbelievable."

"So something did happen," Eric said, tone sharp.

\* \* \*

"Yeah but... there was a grease fire while me and Yat were... and then we were in my room, and everyone..." Thomas could feel his ears burn with everything he wasn't saying. He sighed at the expectant and confused looks he received and realize there was only one way he could hope for them to believe him.

"Mom, don't freak out." He looked over her shoulder, at the corner of his room, and worked on recreating the right feeling.

"Honey?" his mother asked.

"Sorry, this is harder when I'm not scared out of my mind," he replied, trying to recall how he got up here again. Down there in the street, looking into the window. Tightening the chest until he felt the shiver-

"Thomas!" His mother yelled behind him. He turned to see her looking at the empty space between her arms, and Eric, Judith, and Roland staring at him with a variety of stunned expressions on their faces.

"How?" Roland was the first to find his voice.

"I don't know," Thomas replied and was quickly engulfed in his mother's arms again.

"Don't scare me like that ever again," she threatened.

\* \* \*

“Wait, is that what you did at Grandpa’s?” Judith asked. “I knew I saw you there for a second. You looked right at me, then you were gone.”

“I don’t know,” He answered. “If it was, it’s more similar to what happened with Yat during the grease fire. I blacked out and the guys had to... resuscitate me.”

“Resuscitate how,” Eric said sternly.

Thomas’s ears flushed, and he tried to work his mouth but failed. Eventually, his mother spoke up. “Eric, I think we have more pressing concerns than Thomas’s lack of pride in his exploits.”

His father raised an eyebrow, but after taking another look at Thomas he just nodded. “Alright. Why were Madoc and Gilbert here talking about you being on drugs and for us to call Henry if you showed up?”

“Cover-up,” Thomas guessed, “Everyone acting as if I had done something that I shouldn’t have been able to do. Everyone but Henry,” he paused, swallowing. “He was actually very excited that I could teleport.”

“Hearing you say it sounds even weirder than seeing you do it,” Judith said.

\* \* \*

“Alright, if he was excited, there’s another obvious question. Did he cause it?” Eric asked.

Whatever he can do, it’s because we initiated him. Chima’s words, the implication they were responsible, and the denial from the others.

“Not intentionally,” Thomas said cautiously, “As I said, the rest of the guys were really freaking out, but Henry mentioned something about how he should have noticed the signs or something.”

“OK,” his mother said, pulling him to the bed and making him sit down. “I think questions are just pulling us in circles. Start from the grease fire, and tell us everything.” She paused to put a finger on his mouth. “Everything. No one is going to be offended about hearing you had sex.”

“I will,” Roland muttered.

Taking a breath, Thomas recounted the events of the last few hours, keeping the sexual details to a minimum despite Judith’s snickering. By the time he was done, Roland’s ears were as red as Thomas felt and he was turned away.

Having said it out loud did make him sound insane. But it also made him realize one thing.

“I have to go back to the frat,” Thomas stated. “They know what is going on, I just need to get Henry to sit down and talk to me

instead of being all creepy vampire about it. Besides, if they told you guys I was on drugs, what did Kuno's family tell the police?"

"No," Eric said, his tone final.

"Dad?" Thomas asked.

"I don't think it's a good idea to go back to him," his father elaborated. "Especially not considering the things he said about using you. Using what you can do."

Thomas pursed his lips. "I think he was just overly excited. Whatever he knows, he seems to think what I can do was considered impossible until I did it."

"Even more reasons, then." Eric sighed, "Thomas, I've been looking into the families at the frat."

"Dad," Thomas whined, "Come on, you don't have to investigate them just because I live there."

"That isn't why, Thomas." Eric took a deep breath. "While you were in the hospital, Ettore convinced me not to contact the authorities. His argument almost made sense, and you woke up so I didn't push, but it made me curious why he wouldn't want them involved. Madoc is also a Lewiston. Did you know his family has been tied to troubles in Denver? I couldn't find much, but they were almost systematically wiped out a few years ago. Kuno Richard's family is deeply involved in politics, not just in the city, but the state. Being

tight with the police is the least of what they are.”

“Yating?” Judith asked.

Eric shook his head, “Aside from confirming the size of the estate they own, it’s hard to get information quickly from out of the country. But that alone confirms they are rich.”

“You brought that up at the start, dad,” Thomas said, “And the guys don’t exactly hide it.”

“Yes,” his father nodded, “But now I’m not certain their wealth has been acquired entirely legally, and it makes me wonder how far they’re willing to go to get their hands on you.”

Roland snorted. “Just get one of them naked and he’s going to run to them.”

“Roland,” Eric warned. “Now is not the time for jealousy.”

“Sorry, Dad,” his brother mumbled, and Thomas stared. What had Roland to be jealous about? His brother was a hunk. At sixteen, he had to have all the girls in his school drooling after him.

“Thomas?” Eric called, “Are you listening?”

\* \* \*

“Of course,” he hurriedly replied and got a tilted ear in return. “I guess I wasn’t,” he admitted.

“I said,” his father repeated, “That for now, the best course of action is for you to spend the night in your own bed while we wash your clothes, and tomorrow we’ll make arrangements for you to go to my father’s. It’s far enough they won’t think to look for you there while I see about resolving this.”

## OUTLINE-25

### Part 2

#### Chapter 28

###

Minneapolis Streets, Thomas: Mood: I need to get assistance, if only they could stop chasing me long enough to get it!

The first thing Thomas tries is just to run, but he eventually gets his brain on straight and things to ask one of the neighbors for help. Any of the neighbors, doesn't matter. Unfortunately before a door is answered, a few fraternity brothers burst out the front door hastily dressed [We need an excuse to keep Chima out of this chase. After all, with the limited control Thomas currently has on his powers it wouldn't be much of a chase.], and suddenly running is Thomas's best option.

Thankfully this is Thomas's city, so he loses them. That just leaves him cold, alone, and without a phone. He may not be naked, but without his phone he may as well be... whatever he threw on isn't really cutting it for early January. Still, cardio is good for warmth and he's going to be getting plenty of running [I would probably throw in a few reflexive jumps and a few attempts by Thomas to control them so that by the time he gets to his parent's place, jumping next to the truck isn't out of left field okay maybe not actively trying, and I just realized the truck scene is gone.] in.

Mind ablaze with what to do, he knows he needs to go to someone. And while Paul comes to mind if only because he wouldn't feel compelled to hold back on the sex details, there really is only one answer to who he can turn to. His parents.

###



Hertz Household, Thomas, Hertz Family, Laurence, Madoc: Mood: I'm just going to get a jacket, and now I have to explain everything

In the dark, it is a bit hard to see the truck in his parent's driveway, but it does give Thomas pause. He doesn't know how close to the house he wants to get; some of these street lights are motion sensitive, but they aren't perfect with going off.

Not wanting to risk getting caught, Thomas will glance at the window to his room, and for the first time ever make a conscious decision to do one of his blink teleports. It's successful, though he falls flat on his face, knocking something over. Posture is apparently maintained through the teleport, meaning losing what you were halfway leaning against without preparing yourself not to be there is a bit unbalancing. He gets his jacket and is about to get something else when the door opens, Roland having come to investigate the noise. Thomas is quick to cover his brother's mouth. Downstairs they can hear Madoc talking, spinning a yarn about someone leaving behind a spiked soda during last December's party, Thomas being the unlucky one to drink it, how he started acting unpredictable, and then ran off before poison control could get there[I know it's convoluted, but they needed to convince them that their baby boy isn't in his better mind right now. it might be good to have an implication that someone at the frat called the a favor or two from the police to help find Thomas before he hurts himself or someone else.].

It's only when Madoc leaves that Thomas let's Roland go and they both go to see their parents. It is only then that Thomas tries to convince them that is not what happened... and he does, even if it takes teleporting in front of them[I mean... let's be honest, why wouldn't he teleport as proof? It might affect their behavior, but beyond this one scene that matters little to the foreground of the plot.]. Properly convinced, Thomas will tell his side of the story as best as he can... and eventually comes to the conclusion that he needs to confront Henry before this escalates anymore.

\* \* \*

His father shoots that down quickly. He's being doing research ever since Thomas got accepted into the fraternity, and... these people's families are powerful. The Richards in particular are powerful and with fingers in Twin City politics. What Thomas needs to do now is disappear... before they make him disappear. His grandfather's should be isolated enough; once Thomas is safe, Eric will think of something.