

CHAPTER-35

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There was no other Denton Brislow, in Denver or anywhere else in the country, as far as any searches told him. The fact there was a Lewiston there, and that they'd tried to capture him seemed to indicate it was the Denton he wasn't supposed to go see, so Grant's informant was right, too bad they'd been cut off before telling them who he was supposed to go see instead.

What was a Lewiston doing there? If the two families hated each other, why would one of them work there? He couldn't be a spy, not with using his last name. Was it a coincidence? Some other rat with Lewiston as a last name? Thomas was believing in those less and less. What did that leave? An attempt at reconciliation?

"Did it have to come now?" he grumbled. Couldn't they have waited until after he was through here to become friends?

So Denton was out. Whoever he should have met within Denver was unknown. Backup plan it was. He tried to schedule the trip and stared at the screen when the price came up. That was... at least twice the money he had, if not more.

How was he going to get himself to San Francisco? Teleport there? He still had no idea how he'd go on himself and Grant to the gro. in Bozeman from wherever they'd been before that, and he was alone. If he made the jump to San Francisco, who was going to fuck him back to health? (really

want to make a “Fuck to death” comment/ joke here, but the mood isn’t right for it.)

Maybe he could teleport onto the bus? No, the windows were 1

dark. And if they weren’t, he wouldn’t be able to tell where everyone was. It only took one person to see him appear for his life to become worse than it was.

Hitchhike?

Now, how many horror shows could he think that started with that? Too many.

Someone cleared her throat. An older boar was looking at him. “Just a minute,” Thomas said.

“We’re closing, young man.”

“I just—”

“We are closing.”

“Fine.” Where had compassion vanished to?

He tightened his overcoat as he stepped outside. It was dark, of course, it was dark. It was January, and he’d stayed in the library until it closed. He hadn’t made it to the end of the block that he was already cold.

He stepped into the convenience store and his stomach reminded him he hadn’t eaten anything today. He looked at the prices of what was on offer and immediately knew he’d continue to go hungry.

If it was hard for him to afford a bus ticket now, it wouldn’t get any easier if he spent that kind of money.

He moved to a spot where he could see outside through a clear section of the window, then at what was within reach. If he grabbed and teleported, who’d be able to tell what he’d done? He noticed the camera in the corner. It wasn’t pointed in his direction, but was there one he didn’t see?

Was the clerk eyeing him kind of intensely? He walked out as casually as he could. Did convenience stores talk to one another? If he was caught teleporting on camera, how

long did he have until the

Faith

government was on his tail? No, if he was going to steal, he couldn't target places as small as convenience stores. No, he had to go big, and then vanish.

He was scanning around when he realized what he was considering.

Robbing a bank? His stomach turned. It was one thing to steal from his grandfather--. That was more borrowing, but a bank?

Thomas wasn't a criminal, and this wasn't a movie where he could return the money when his problems were over and explain how desperate he was and have everyone understand him.

And even if he had the lack of mental fortitude to do that. How was he going to recharge after the fact? Fuck, where was he going to recharge now? He should have searched the closest bathhouse. He couldn't very well ask the people around him.

Fuck, he so wasn't cut out for this. He just wanted to go home.

He found a nook out of the wind and huddled. He had to admit defeat. Without help, he sucked at surviving. When the library opened in the morning, he'd email his parents. Madoc or someone else had to be watching that and when they came to take him. He'd go willingly.

He straightened. He didn't feel better, but with a plan, even a bad one, he at least knew what he had to do. He needed food, then he had to find a place to spend the night. There had to be a cheap motel somewhere. There were everywhere in movies.

He got moving. Cheap food would be where? Fast-food places? Did he have to go that cheap now that this was ending? He'd like something a little more like actual food.

Under a spotlight in the parking lot across the street was a food truck with a lineup of people. Weren't those usually cheap? And the lineup would indicate the food should be okay. Of course, a lineup meant demand, which meant higher prices.

His stomach grumbled.

Fine, he could see what the prices were like at least. If they weren't reasonable, he wouldn't be worst of than now. Well, he'd be hungrier.

The truck advertised Polish food, and the prices were reasonable, so he got into the lineup. He didn't protest when people moved closer since it mean body heat. He put a hand on the pocket he had his wallet in and moved with the line.

He was close enough to make his selection from the pictures on the side of the truck when he's shoved aside by someone and ended on his ass.

"Asshole!" He yelled at the runner and regre.ed his outburst. He got up and dusted himself and his pocket was thinner. He put his hand in it. His wallet was gone. "Son of a bitch!" He couldn't have his wallet stolen. He literally couldn't afford to have that happen.

He took off after the back of the runners. The thief had distance over Thomas, but Thomas had one hell of an advantage. He crossed the light of a street lamp and as soon as he was out of it, he teleported three ahead. He did it again and was close enough to see the runner round the corner.

When Thomas rounded it, he teleported a full block, a few more, and he'd have—the asshole turned into an alley. Thomas stepped out of a light and he was in front of the alley, nearly skidding on his ass as he tried to turn suddenly.

He was in the alley and the thief was further away than Thomas thought. But that was easily fixed. He threw himself in that direction and teleported.

What was it Grant had said about trying something new

under duress? Right, bad idea.

Thomas appeared higher than he'd expected and only clipped the thief's shoulder as he crashed down. He ignored the pain in his shoulder and pushed himself to his feet.

"That's my wallet," he said through gri.ed teeth, "give it back."

Faith

Thomas couldn't tell much about the thief in the dark alley,

but he was lanky. "I'm afraid you're mistaken, buddy."

"I've had a really bad couple of days now," Thomas growled. "You really don't want to piss me off."

"Is that so?" he asked, sounding cocky. Thomas was going to show him how wrong he was. "I'm afraid things ain't going to get any be.er for you then, buddy."

Thomas readied himself to jump him when the fist smashed into the side of his head.

His head rang before he hit the wall. He tried to steady himself when a fist collided with his stomach. He made out a form, a bulky one, between him and the lanky thief, then another fist hit him. He slid against the wall.

"Don't bother," the thief said. "Just grab the backpack." Hands ruffled through his pockets. "I told ya, things weren't going to get be.er. But I'm going to be a nice guy and leave you that nice-looking overcoat. You're gonna need it to survive our nice Denver nights."

Thomas tried to curse. To yell for them to come back with his things. He even tried to stand, but all that happened was that darkness claimed him.

* * * * *

A hand was on Thomas's neck as he woke up and he shoved the thief away with a yell, then groaned in pain as his stomach protested the sudden movement.

“Careful there, friend.”

Thomas glared. “I’m not your friend, you—” The man before him wasn’t the thief. He was too wide. And he didn’t think his burly friend would bother talking. “Sorry.”

“You’ve gotten a serious trashing,” the man said. “I’m sorry I couldn’t get here soon enough. I’d have given those two something to remember me by.” He shook a cloth-covered fist in the direction the thief had left in. Thomas realized that some of his burliness was because of the number of jackets he was wearing.

“You saw?” maybe he knew who they were?

“I was rounding the alley when they were searching you.” The man rifled through the snow on the ground and smiled as he picked up something.

“Fuck!” Thomas tried to sit up and his stomach nixed the idea. He reached into the inside pocket. Please let them have missed it. There was nothing in the pocket. His backup plan was gone. “No!” he wailed.

“What’s wrong?” the man asked. He now had a stone in his hand.

“Shit!” Thomas crawled away from him.

“What?” he looked at what he was holding. “Oh, it’s for your eye. You want to put something cold on there early to reduce the swelling, and out here in winter, this is better than an ice pack.” He offered it to Thomas.

The stone was smooth, its sides rounded. It was the size of a flattened egg and, as the man said, it was cold. It felt good through the sting as he placed it on his eye.

“I’m Donal,” he said, offering his hand. “Donal Hines. Now, what’s wrong?”

The hand Thomas shook had to have three pairs of gloves over it. “Thomas. And I’d need all night to tell you.”

“How about you keep it to that wail?” He reached into the multiple jackets and pulled out a thermos.

“That’s just the last stay on an already broken back. I had an envelope with vital information on it.”

“Oh, right!” Donal handed the thermos to Thomas. “Server yourself. It’s tea. I hope you like tea. I can’t stand coffee.” He searched through the pockets of multiple layers while Thomas unscrewed the cap. Except for the cold, being outside instead of in a truck, this felt eerily familiar.

He paused as he was about to pour some in the cap. “I can’t pay you back for this.”

“No surprise there. There!” He pulled something and offered it to Thomas. “That’s why I was running after you. That’s quite the pair of legs you have on you.”

Thomas stared at the envelope poking out of the cloth covered hand. In the low light, it looked suspiciously like the one Grant had given him. His backup plan.

“Where did you get that?” he asked cautiously.

“It fell out of your coat when you ran by me.”

“And you chased me to return it?”

The man shrugged. “Call it doing a good turn ahead. Despite what just happened to you, maybe my kind act will make it more likely that you’ll help someone in need the next time you across one. It’s a harsh world we live in. I try to smooth its edges when I can.

Thomas put the thermos down and took the envelope. “Thank you. You don’t know what this means to me.”

“I’m just glad I was able to help.” He filled the cap as Thomas put the envelope away, then offered it to him. The heat on his fingers as he held it in both hands was almost painful. “Do you have someplace to go?”

Home, he desperately wanted to say, but not it looked like he wasn’t even going to make it through the night. He shook his head.

“That’s what I thought. You sort of have that lost look about you. How about I help you some more?”

Thomas finished the swallow of tea he'd started and looked at the man over the cap. "You brought me back the envelope, and now you're going to just help me more?" He couldn't help the bitterness that followed. "That's awfully convenient."

Donal laughed. "Convenient would be some sugar daddy stopping his car at the end of the alley and offering to take care of you for the rest of your life just for a piece of that sweet ass of yours." He stopped and looked at the street at the end of the alley. After hesitating, Thomas looked, too.

"Nope, not showing up. So I'm the never best thing. What I have going for me is that I know these streets and alleys very well, and, more importantly, I know where the warm places are. What do you say?"

Thomas took another long swallow of the tea. "You aren't going to make it conditional on getting some of my ass?"

Donal smiled. "I'm not in the habit of making my help conditional on anything."

Thomas handed him the empty cap. "What if I ask really nicely?"

Donal stared at him, then burst out laughing.

CHAPTER 1.5-35

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How was he going to get himself to San Francisco? Teleport there? He still had no idea how he'd gotten himself and Grant to the

grotto in Bozeman from the charging station, and he was alone. If he made the jump to San Francisco who was going to fuck him back to health?

Maybe he could teleport onto the bus? No, the windows were tinted. And even if they weren't, he wouldn't be able to tell where everyone was. It only took one person seeing him appear for his life to become worse than it was.

Hitchhike? No, he got lucky with Grant. Relying on that again was asking to star in a horror movie.

Someone cleared her throat. And older boar was looking at him.

"Just a minute," Thomas said.

"We're closing, young man," the boar said in a calm voice.

"I just-" the rat started to say in desperation.

"We are closing," she repeated in the same calm tone with just a hint of motherly finality.

"Fine," Thomas mumbled as he got up. Were had compassion vanished to?

He tightened his overcoat as he stepped outside. It was dark,

of course. It was January, and he'd stayed in the library until it was closed. He hadn't made it to the end of the block before he was already cold.

He stepped into the convenience store and his stomach reminded him he hadn't eaten anything today. He looked at the prices of what was on offer and immediately knew he'd continue to go hungry. If it was hard for him to afford a bus ticket now, it wouldn't get any easier if he spent that kind of money.

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He was scanning around when he realized what he was considering.

Robbing a bank? His stomach turned. Larceny against his grandfather was more borrowing without permission. But a bank? Thomas wasn't a criminal, and this wasn't a family movie where he could return the money when his problems were over and explain how desperate he was and have everyone forgive him.

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And even if he had the lack of mental fortitude to do that, how was he going to recharge after the fact? Fuck, where was he going to recharge now? He should have searched for the closest bathhouse while in the library. He couldn't very well ask the people around him.

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He found a nook out of the wind and huddled. He had to admit defeat. Without help, he sucked at surviving. When the library opened in the morning, he'd email his parents. Madoc or someone else had to be watching that. When they came to take him, he'd go willingly.

He straightened. He didn't feel better, but with a plan, even a plan to surrender, he at least knew what he had to do. He needed food, then find a place to spend the night. There had to be a cheap motel somewhere. They were everywhere in the movies.

He got moving. Cheap food would be where? Fast-food dollar menu? Probably not, he'd be too tempted to buy their more premium items. If not there, then where?

Under a spotlight in the parking lot across the street was a food truck with a lineup of people. Weren't those usually cheap? And the lineup would indicate the food should be okay. Of course, a lineup meant demand, which meant higher prices.

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Fine, he could see what the prices were at least. If they weren't

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When Thomas rounded it, he teleported a full block, a few more, and he'd have- the asshole turned into an alley. Thomas stepped out of the light and he was in front of the alley, nearly skidding on his ass as he tried to do a ninety-degree turn.

He was in the alley and the thief was further away than Thomas thought. But that was easily fixed. He threw himself in that direction and teleported.

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“You’ve gotten a serious thrashing,” the man said. “I’m sorry I couldn’t get there soon enough. I’d have given those two something to remember me by.” He shook a cloth-covered fist in the direction the thief had left in. Thomas realized that some of his burliness was because of the number of jackets he was wearing.

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"You saw?" Maybe he knew who they were.

"I was rounding the ally when they were searching you." The man rifled through the snow on the ground and smiled as he picked up something.

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"What's wrong?" The man asked, he now had a stone in his hand.

"Shit!" Thomas crawled away from him.

"What?" he looked at what he was holding. "Oh, it's for your eye. You want to put something cold on it early to reduce the swelling, and out here in winter, this is better than an ice pack." He offered it to Thomas.

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"Where did you get that?" He asked cautiously.

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“It fell out of your coat when you ran by me,” Donal answered calmly.

Thomas raised an eyebrow. “And you chased me to return it?”

The man shrugged. “Call it doing a good turn ahead. Despite what just happened to you, maybe my kind act will make it more likely that you’ll help someone in need next time you come across one. It’s a harsh world we live in. I try to smooth its edges when I can.”

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“I’m just glad I was able to help.” He filled the cap as Thomas put the envelope away, then offered it to him. The heat on his fingers as he held it in both hands was almost painful. “Do you have someplace to go?”

Home, he desperately wanted to say, but now it looked like he wasn’t going to even make it through the night. He shook his head.

“That’s what I thought,” Donal said sagely. “You sort of have that lost look about you. How about I help you some more?”

Thomas finished the swallow of tea he’d started and looked at the man over the cap. “You brought me back the envelope, and now you’re going to just help me more?” he couldn’t help the bitterness that followed. “That’s awfully convenient.”

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Donal laughed. "Convenient would be some sugar daddy stopping his car at the end of the alley and offering to take care of you for the rest of your life just for a piece of that sweet ass of yours." He stopped and looked at the street at the end of the alley. After hesitating, Thomas looked too.

"Nope, not showing up," Donal said cheerfully. "So I'm the next best thing. What I have going for me is that I know these streets and alleys very well, and more importantly, I know where the warm places are. What do you say?"

Thomas took another long swallow of tea. "You aren't going to make it conditional on getting some of my ass?"

Donal smiled. "I'm not in the habit of making my help conditional on anything."

Thomas handed him the empty cap. "What if I asked really nicely?"

Donal stared at him, then burst out laughing.

* * *

OUTLINE-35

Chapter 37

###

Denver, Thomas: Mood: on the road to destitution

Thomas... doesn't actually know what to do. He was extremely certain that that Brislow was going to be the one he was seeking. But there was a Lewiston in there... so was it a diplomat in the court of your enemy type of situation, or was this just not the right Brislow again?

He could keep trying... and let's be honest the library is warm so he just might for that excuse, but still... what if he doesn't find anything. At the rate he's been burning through money, he has a little over a week left. After that... his powers would make him an incredible thief, but he doesn't know if he has the moral constitution... not to mention getting away isn't the same as not getting caught. Things could get... bad quickly. He might need to leave the city in the long run, but he'd like to not be chased out.

With that said, should he make plans to leave now? The longer he stays the less likely he'll be able to afford a ticket fair, and that means robbing convenience stores along the way. Do 7-Elevens talk to each other about known shoplifters?

Of course, there is also the issue of charging his power if he's going to steal. Do bathhouses all charge an entry fee?[Serious question, can not find the answer. And yes, I did try both google and bing. Bing was at least less censored, but still didn't give me what I needed.yes, bathhouses will have entry fees. back when I went to them it was somethign like 8\$ for a locker and 16 for a room and that was good for 8 hours] Is prostitution an answer he wants to consider. ...does he look

good enough to sell himself? Wouldn't be a question if Madoc has a few more weeks to help him recover before all [censored] broke loose. ...god he misses those guys being his friends rather than serving some antagonistic force.

OK, you know what, he's tried. His bargain shopping revealed a reasonably priced food cart that opens near the park in about... five minutes. He can get a sandwich and coffee and think when he's (chemically) awake. Not like he was going to leave on an empty stomach even if he up and left now.

The bad thing with good reasonably priced food is that the demand goes up. Thomas knows what his economics class says they should be doing... but he's glad they aren't. So Thomas waits in the line, and gets his simple order ready in his head as he cradles his wallet. Right before he reaches the front of the line, however, someone bumps into him while cutting through the line to get to somewhere else... and suddenly Thomas finds himself at the front of the line without his wallet.

Thomas literally can't afford to be robbed at the moment, so he of course goes after the thief... and well it is broad daylight but the situation is a bit desperate, so there is no way this person is going to outrun him. Thomas at least has the clarity of mind to time his blinks so he's rounding corners so people will just think he disappeared and wonder where rather than knowing where. This does mean he catches up with the thief...

...and his two bodyguards. Or maybe bosses. The social status of his assailant in when he's getting sucker punched in the face faster than he can physical blink, much less magically, isn't something Thomas has time to contemplate before darkness takes him.

###

Denver, Thomas, Donal: Mood: a new friends in the lowest of places

Thomas wakes up with a black eyes, and someone standing next to him. One person, a squirrel, and not the gang that should have been there in the worse case scenario. Still, the throbbing pain in his eye isn't helping. This person is there to help... with a rock[waking up from a beating with someone holding a rock over you.... not a good way to wake up I think Kinda the point, though Donal means well.]. Good as an ice pack in this weather. Thomas thanks him, and looks around. He doesn't see the gang nearby, and his bedside observer says that they left real quick once they saw Thomas didn't have anything else on him.

This makes Thomas panic, as he should at least have the envelope from Grant, but the squirrel is quick to hand it to him. Says he dropped it while he was running. This makes Thomas raise an eyebrow, and the squirrel shrugs. He was behind Thomas in the line, so he saw most of it. He was only there for coffee anyway. Speaking of, he hands Thomas a cup. This makes Thomas pause, and he says he can't pay him back, and the squirrel says he knows. His name is Donal, by the way.

Thomas introduces himself, and two talk because... what else are you going to do? It's obvious to Donal that Thomas is new to the whole homeless thing, which yes is obvious. If he was a little younger he'd say runaway. Still might be the case, but who is Donal to judge? Thomas can see where this is going, and it feels too convenient.

Donal counters by saying convenient would be some sugar daddy looking to feed and pamper Thomas in exchange for some of that sweet tail at night. Donal is just some well adjusted homeless dude willing to show Thomas the ropes so the rat doesn't become just some statistics on the homeless death rates this winter. Thomas considers, and asks if

Donal will throw in a good fucking if he asks nicely. Donal doesn't know if Thomas was kidding or not, but he's already set on doing this so he isn't going to let a strange sense of humor stop him.

###

Denver, Thomas, Donal: Mood:homeless 101

What follows next is a montage between Thomas and Donal, with the squirrel showing the rat the ropes of homeless living[This comic is the main resource for both of us. Might be a good read just to make sure your homeless characters are less stereotypes as well.]

[https://www.theduckwebcomics.com/how_to_be_homeless/]

[I haven't read it in a few months, so I can't give a point by point of what should be covered. Just following my gut.]. Stuff like where to get food, how there is no such thing as dressing too warm, and that staying dry is even more important. Notable plot detail will be how to keep important belongings in a gallon sized ziplock, and the biggest thing Thomas will put in there is the letter from Grant.

Climax is when Donal [grant came back? <grins>*groans* Substitution typos with names... they are my bane.]

[But yes, this should be Donal.]shows him where to sleep. Which is only the first of many places, since people like to chase the homeless away from one shelter or another, sometimes for their own good but often just because. Grant is also willing to talk Thomas's ear off about that... mostly as an argument for Thomas go home if he's a runaway... but Thomas's situation isn't that simple. Eventually they go to sleep[And no, I don't think they should actually sleep together.the only reason for them to do so(not in the having sex way) is if heat is a problem and they need to use body heat to keep from freezing in the

night].