

Chapter 48

Alvin, TX, March 26th

Thomas wished he'd gotten more than one of the armadillos writing a sigil on his palm as a form of healing, as he returned to the living room from a walk through the house. He'd been told it would heal him, and while a sigil like this had helped him heal from the abuse Raphael had given him, he was certain it hadn't done a complete job. His bad was still sore where the bean bag had hit him. What he wanted was Olavo's cock. That, he knew would heal everything wrong with him.

Unfortunately, the capybara had been pressed into healing Owen as soon as he'd arrived, and then seeing to the men Gilbert had dismembered. Olavo had been pissed at how casual the armadillo had been about cutting limbs, and it had devolved into an argument that ended with Gilbert walking up yelled about wanting to see Olavo deal with men pulling out pistols and firing them at him and not have to resort to something drastic.

Considering how pissed Gilbert had been going in, Thomas was surprised no heads had been lobed off. Olavo would be fucking each of the men multiple times before everything was grown back.

One element of luck, or so he'd been told by Samuel, who'd arrived along with Olavo and other armadillos, in Gilbert not killing anyone, was that it would avoid making the conflict with Raphael worse. The two rats who were part of the attack were Lewistons.

A discovery that surprised them all was that by the time they were pulling the unconscious men into the house, one of the margay had transformed into a badger; into Firmin.

Samuel had been pleased and annoyed at the same time. One of his relative was safe, but this was the kind of situation that could make things worse for Firmin, having impersonated someone from another family. Thomas had been confused by the badger and this had been one time Samuel hadn't answered his unvoiced questions, taking the unconscious badger to one of the bedroom.

From Limbani, he'd found out Firmin was a body thief, a shapeshifter who could look like other people, and that there was a history of them abusing the power. And that Firmin was in an especially precarious position because on top of looking like someone else, if they were Society, he also copied their power.

He and the man he'd copied had been those responsible for the air being sucked out of the house, and that had ended when Yating had phased through the van and knocked Firmin unconscious. It had saved Firmin from Gilbert and without two people to pull the air in different direction it had come rushing back in.

With the intel they could provide, those he charge had decided the Richards were to be healed first and then Donal was to restore their memories. That left Thomas and his frat brothers with little to do, other than each other, and Thomas had needed a break from that, the discomfort his back caused, after a while.

He looked up from where he'd dropped into a seat as a pair of armadillo entered. One older than the other by a couple of decades. The younger one noticed Thomas and nodded in his direction, then the two of them headed for him. Because of how much his senior the man was, Thomas stood.

"You must be Thomas," the older armadillo said, with a noticeable drawl, as he looked the rat over appreciatively. "Ezequiel tells me you're at the center of all this. I'm Gavin Rowling, this is my son, Colby."

The younger armadillo tipped his cowboy hat at Thomas.

"Yes, sir," Thomas replied, suddenly nervous at being in the presence of the elder of the family. He had learned the hard way they were men he didn't want angry at him. He decided not to wait for it to be asked. "I can show you what I can do, but if you want to be sure I'm not trying to trick you, we're going to want a closed room with a window or—"

"That won't be necessary," Gavin said, sounding amused. "You aren't some bull being put on display so you can be sold. I came here in part to see how you are doing. I grew up being groomed to become an elder in what was tumultuous times, so I know a little of what it's like to have som much happen to you because of who you are. It can be draining."

"That's one way of putting it," Thomas replied with a snort, then nearly teleported to the other side of the room afraid he'd offended the men, but Gavin chuckled and Colby looked amused. "Finding out I have this power literally put me in the run, and the first part of that was me actually running. It feels like I barely stopped to catch my breath a handful of time since. I want this to be over so I can finally have one good night of sleep in my bed without having to be terrified someone's going to break the door down and drag me away to turn me into some mindless drone of screw with my memories again."

Gavin nodded solemnly. "I know Ezequiel made you the offer, but I want you to know you have a safe place in Texas if you need it." He raised a hand before Thomas could voice his protest. "This isn't an 'or' situation. You can accept Ezequiel's offer and you will still be welcome here."

Thomas hesitated, then counted on how easy the men seemed to say. "I'm too precious of a bull to scare off?" He chuckled, hoping to take out the potential sting from it.

"And the analogy comes back to gore me," Gavin replied, with a chuckle of his own. "Yes. The only person who can teleport is someone I would prefer have as an ally, having you as an enemy would be too dangerous."

"I don't want to be anyone's enemy," Thomas said, then sighed. "All I want is to go home to my family and my studies so I can forget any of this happened."

"I'm afraid that last part isn't something you get the luxury of receiving," the elder armadillo said seriously.

"But you guys have people who can erase all these memories, right?"

Gavin considered Thomas before speaking. "Unlike Raphael, I'd never do that to someone. I can't stop you from seeking one of them out, but I'd like you to consider that not knowing what you can do, or what happened to you isn't going to make others forget what they know. All it will do is make you unprepared for those who won't have any compunctions against using you. We would do what we can to keep you safe, but if you no longer know about us, we wouldn't be as effected." The stretching silence, with the armadillo's gaze on him was too purposeful for Thomas to say anything. "I am only saying this to impress on you the severity of the situation you find yourself in, but I believe that forgetting all this would only lead to your family being in more danger."

Thomas nodded. As nice as it would be to act like nothing had happened. Gavin was right. He had—

"Thomas," Laurence said, stepping through the living room archway. He looked exhausted and looking like he's just stopped crying. "There's something I—" he stopped on noticing the other armadillos in the room, then he collided with Gavin, wrapping his arms around him. "I am so sorry, Grandpa."

"It's okay, Laurence," the elder said, embracing him. "You're home now. I'll keep you safe."

Thomas looked away as Gavin raised Laurence's face to kiss him. Colby cleared his throat and gave a nod to the archway. Thomas looked to the embracing armadillo, about to point out Laurence had come here to tell him something, and quickly looked away as the kiss had turned intense, and Laurence was pulling his grandfather's cock out of the jeans.

It was a reminder of how sex found its way into everything with these men. Colby cleared his throat again and this time, Thomas left the living room with him. When the armadillo stopped, he opened a door and motioned Thomas inside.

He stopped a few steps in on seeing the bed, and realizing what Colby intended. "Okay," he said, feeling the armadillo at his back. "I don't know why, but the only thing that surprises me with this, is that you bothered looking for a bed." He stepped forward to give the armadillo room, then turned and watched as Colby undressed, never taking his eyes off him.

Thomas's breath caught as he watched the muscular armadillo get naked, then at that hard cock standing straight. When he looked up, Colby didn't have the smug expression Thomas had often seen on very well hung guys after they exposed themselves, but one of hunger as he looked the rat over again. Then, as if the expression wasn't enough, Colby licked his lips, stepping forward.

"Come on," Thomas said feeling self-conscious. "I'm not that tasty looking."

The armadillo planted his lips on Thomas's the moment they were in reach, put a hand at his back and pulled him against him as the tongue parted the lips. The cocks pressed together as the tongues moved against each other for long enough that Thomas was panting when they broke apart.

Colby smiled, and said what Thomas realized was his first word since arriving. "Wrong." Then he pushed Thomas on the bed, and seemed to be a man relishing a meal after too long without.

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Thomas whistled as he prepared a sandwich. He'd decided that while no one could hold a candle to Chima—and those memories had better be real—Colby came a close second to the hyena. After devouring him, the sex had turned slow and languid. It had looked like they were heading for a third time when Colby's phone buzzed, and after listening for a few seconds he'd started dressing, keeping the phone to his ear. He given Thomas the once over, looking like he wished he could stay, then left without a word.

Thomas would have loved another go, but two had also been great, so he'd headed to the kitchen, and here he was, about to satisfy another hunger.

"Can you make more of them?" Gavin asked, stepping into the kitchen with Laurence in tow. Thomas's

gaze was pulled to the naked, older, armadillo. Gavin was leaner than Laurence, but much more hung. Even soft, it looked to be only slightly smaller than Colby. If he was a grower. Thomas swallowed and was happy the island hid his lower half from view.

The chuckle made Thomas realize that his face was as expressive as his cock in a case like this.

"After I've eaten, you're welcome to enjoy yourself with me."

"What? No. I didn't—" Thomas sputtered and gave up protesting. What was the point? He had been imagining it, and everyone in this house was more than happy to fuck. Then he noticed the way Laurence couldn't seem to look at him and all thought of sex vanished. "Laurence? What's wrong?"

Gavin looked at his grandson with a questioning expression.

Laurence looked from Gavin to Thomas, and his face fell more. "I'm sorry," he whispered.

"Okay," Thomas said cautiously, looking at the older armadillo for a clue, but he was as confused. "What for?"

The younger armadillo hesitated.

Gavin stepped away. "I'll give you privacy. I can—"

Laurence grabbed the older man's arm. "No, I need you here. You need to be here." There was pleading in his eyes. "You... I—"

"Laurence, it's okay," Gavin said, but the other armadillo shook his head.

"I did—" He swallowed. "Henry made me part of it."

Thomas pushed the plate with the sandwich he'd made to Laurence. "Eat. Take the time you need to figure out how to say what you need to. In the meantime I'll make your grandfather and me sandwiches too."

"Call me Gavin, Thomas."

"Not how I was raised," the rat replied, as he set about assembling more sandwiches. When he was done, and Gavin had his own plate, along with a tall glass of beer to the soda the older armadillo had placed before Thomas and Laurence, there was only one bite taken from it.

"I remember everything," Laurence started. "Owen insisted I be next once I woke up. Your friends didn't have a problem with that, and no one in my family other than grandpa argues with Uncle Owen in his own house." He looked about to take another bite, but looked at Thomas.

"When you ran and Henry sent the others to track you down, he had the rest of us cover so no one would realize you or the others weren't at school. If one of their dads called, we just told them they were busy fucking. Firmin would call them back, mimicking their voice." He frowned. "You have heard him imitate people, right? Even without shifting form, he loves to pull that act."

Thomas nodded, have watched as Firmin spoke with someone on the phone in a voice devoid of any French accent and sounding like whoever they claimed to be. The badger had even pulled one of Thomas, sounding like Roland in the frat's entryway responding to advanced from Madoc. If not for the other rat storming down the stairs as Thomas exited his room, Firmin would have managed to get Thomas pissed at Madoc.

"That and having your dad and brother drop by every other day was enough for him for a while, but then that video of you, the kangaroo and those others during the storm popped up and one of us showed it to Henry since you were in it, and he was way more entranced by it than it warranted. He locked himself in his office for an hour, and was on edge until this vole showed up the next day."

"Vole?" Thomas asked, ears perking up.

"Yeah, weird as shit with this walk staff he wouldn't let go of painted to look like it was made from those bar magnets I used to play with as a kid, with one red end. They were in his office for a few hours. I have no idea what they spoke about, but it had to be important, because Henry made me forget about it and the video."

Thomas racked his memory for Grant saying his name. "Kingsley."

"You know who he is?" Laurence asked, surprised.

"I encountered him. He was in the video of me at that charging station. And I think you answered where that knife they stabbed me with came from. Go on, I'll explain my part after."

The armadillo nodded. "Then came you talking with him, and Henry went DEFCON 1 on us. He and Kuno made calls. Some of the Richards came over, including Kuno's dad. Kuno introduced Henry as a friend of his visiting the frat and looking to have a good time. Then things get stranger. We had sex, and when Henry came in one of them, their behavior changed. They acted like they'd known Henry their entire lives."

Laurence shuddered. "I don't know which is creepier. Remember how someone changed so drastically and not being bothered by it, or letting Henry drink my blood because of course, it was just one of the thing

Henry did." Gavin placed a hand on Laurence's arm and the younger armadillo leaned into his grandfather.

"After that, Henry left the frat with those Richard. Thomas, twenty-four hours after your call Henry ran the Twin Cities. That's how easy it was for him to take control of the Richard Elder. It's terrifying."

"Is he at the Richard estate now?" Gavin asked.

"Maybe," Laurence replied. "He was there for a few days, but then he came back to the frat. Now that I remember everything, I can count on one hand the number of times he left the frat. The only times he did was to deal with the deans, but only when he couldn't convince them to come to the frat for that 'talk'. But that he be at the frat or the Richards, he's gearing up for a fight. Battle down the hatches and all that."

"It's batten down," Gavin corrected.

"Okay, that all sounds bad," Thomas said, when Laurence didn't continue, "but you started this with telling me you're sorry, and nothing in that needed it."

Laurence nodded and took a breath. "First off, he didn't harm your family. That's one thing you don't have to worry about."

Thomas stilled. "But he did something to them," he said, his voice cold.

The armadillo paused and visually forced himself to speak. "He put your brother through the Ceremony of Vitality and of Submission."

Confusion stole most of his anger. "What does that mean?"

Laurence frowned. "Right, you never actually went through them yourself, or have us explain them to you. Fuck, figuring out which memories are real and which aren't is going to be hard." He ran a hand over his face. "Okay, that first party, you remember going around sucking off everyone there?"

"Well, I remember sucking some. Paul said I'd done the entire frat, I saw the video of me sucking off Chima. Most of it is kind of blurry." He frowned. "Did Henry changed those memories for me?"

"Your friend didn't fix your memories yet?" Laurence asked.

"We did a test, I now remember what actually happened with the safe sex class Limbani gave, but before we could do more, we were attacked."

Laurence winced, but then continued. "Paul's right. You did suck off every member of the frat." He paused. "All thirteen of us."

"Ah," Gavin said.

"That's the sound of something important I'm not getting," Thomas pointed out.

"Thirteen is an important number for us," Gavin said. "Please continue, Laurence."

"Well, that was us accidentally putting you through the Ceremony of Vitality. Then there was the Ceremony of Submission, which we kinda, sorta, did on purpose." He avoided looking at his grandfather.

"You mean the hazing," Thomas said, raising an eyebrow.

"Laurence," Gavin said, offended.

"It wasn't bad," Thomas hurried to say, then blushed. "I mean, I liked it. Well, I remember liking it. Fuck, did I like it, or is it something else..."

"If it means anything," Laurence said. "You got into it real fast and yeah, you sounded like you loved it. Especially Chima. Once he was in you, it was like you couldn't let him go."

"That doesn't matter," Gavin said. "You were raised better than this, Laurence. Or is this something this Henry arranged?"

"No. It was Felix's idea," Laurence said. "Limbani was all about we needed to make Thomas a brother, because he saw it happen, and Felix figured that was going to scare him off when everyone else through Thomas would be fun to have around."

"So the thirteen of your, all fully initiated, fucked Thomas," Gavin said. "Yeah, that would be the Ceremony of Submission."

"Okay, but I liked it, so I don't get what..." he looked at Laurence as what the armadillo had said about Roland being put through that ceremony, and the way he'd apologized. He swallowed his anger. "You?" He told himself Henry was who had orchestrated all of it.

"Yeah," Laurence said weekly. "I was one of those who..." he trailed off as Thomas glared at him.

"Did you like it?" the rat demanded, and Laurence looked away. "Laurence, did you—"

"I thought he was one of us," Laurence said softly. "That he'd picked the frat to be with you. I know Henry made that up, but that's how I was when it happened."

"I'm going to fucking kill him." Thomas was up and heading for the door. "I am going to rip that bat's balls off and feed them to him."

Gavin blocked his way.

“Get out of my way,” Thomas growled. “Henry had my brother raped by thirteen guys.” He forcefully stopped himself from pointing at Laurence. He’d seen the pain in his eyes. How ever he’d felt while he was doing it, it hurt him to remember taking part. “I don’t fucking care if he screwed with my brother’s memories so he thought he wanted it, Roland’s straight!”

“Thomas,” Gavin said calmly. “Roland is your brother, that makes him one of us.”

“He’s straight!” He shoved the armadillo out of his way and left the kitchen, to come face to face with Firmin, and the sight of the badger shattered Thomas’s anger into tiny, insignificant pieces that flew away