

Chapter-46

Thomas moaned as a wave of well-being pulsed through him in time with the cock in his ass.”Wha?”

“Not yet,” Olavo whispered in his ear. “You made a sound and Limbani’s going to want in on this. I think you need further healing.”

Healing?

The capybara pulled out, then pushed back in, his thrust quick, but not hurried. A hand reached under Thomas, and closed around his cock, the slickness causing him to thrust in it.

“That’s it,” Olavo said. “Move with me.” He picked up speed, forcing Thomas’s cock to move in the grip faster.

“Oh Fuck,” the rat groaned, and came in the hand.

“Oh yeah,” the capybara gasped, the cock pulsing again against the spasming ass.

Thomas felt more awake, but there was no wave of well-being this time.

The door opened. “I herd him!” Limbani yelled. “It’s my turn, he needs all the energy he can get.”

Before Thomas could voice an opinion, Olavo was out of him and he was rolled on his back, legs moved over the monkey’s shoulders and the cock in his ass. “Welcome back,” Limbani said, then started fucing him,

* * * * *

Thomas staggered out of the shower, a grinning Armadillo in tow. He was going to need Olavo to heal him again, after that session. Gilbert had to had dislocated Thomas’s sternum or something.

“Now that everyone had a turn,” He said, eying the naked guys in the large bedroom, only Grant was dressed and hadn’t had

sex with him. Thomas remember him, breaking his staff over a knee. He wanted to go ask how he felt, but was more pressing matters. "How the fuck am I still alive?" when he'd passed out, he'd thought it was for good. He'd had a knife in his side and had no energy left.

Olavo raised his hand. "You might remember me fucking you."

"I doubt you did it in the parking lot where I fell." Thomas motioned to the room. "You got me here."

"The truckstop's across the road." Gilbert said and pointed to the window. Thomas looked, had to search, but then saw it. Across the road was an exaggeration, but they were much closer than he'd expected. No more than a block.

"And they let you drag a bleeding man in and didn't ask question, or call the police?"

"This is a Marriott Hotel," Olavo said.

"Okay, so we were lucky enough there was a hotel Madoc's family owns, why would they let us in?"

"Every hotel has one person who knows what it means to be Society," the capybara said. "I explained who I was, and we were escorted to the back, and then to this room. If we'd needed it, they would have provided medical assistance."

"So you can go anywhere and find help at a Marriott?" when Madoc had told him his family owned the chain, Thomas hadn't expected it meant every hotel was set up as a safe house.

"Pretty much," Limbani said. "World wide franchise, no where in the world a Lewsiton can be and not have a place to go to for help. We're just lucky they didn't lock the rest of us out like two families we could mention."

"Okay, fine," Thomas said before Olavo could reply. "You have safe houses everywhere if you're on the Lewiston's good side. What happened to me? When that knife went it, it was like I'd teleported to San Francisco, but I wasn't allowed to lose consciousness

until the fight was over.”

“That was due to blood loss,” Gilbert said. “Not the *phrase* on the knife.” He lobed something in Thomas’s direction and the rat made out the wooden handle before reaching for and moved away.

“Are you crazy? That thing nearly killed me.” He glared at the armadillo, then the knife. Even the blade was wood, and the dark red inscriptions stretched along its length.

“It’s can’t hurt you,” Gilbert said. “It needs to come in contact with blood, and the magic won’t kill you either. It’s designed to sap nearly all your energy and keep you there.”

“You sound like you know a fair bit about it,” Thomas said cautiously and reminded himself that altered memories or not, it wasn’t that long ago they were trying to capture him. It made no sense they still wanted to, but after the constant reversals, he was having trouble not imagining another one around the corner.

“Because that’s our magic,” Gilbert replied angrily. “That another faction used against you.”

“That doesn’t happen?” Thomas asked.

“Not often,” Olavo said. “I mean, we tend to be insular. We have no reasons to work with other factions since we follow different gods. And to get one of them to work against one of us...” the capybara shook his head. “Look, I can’t speak for everyone in the Society, obviously, but to those in power, it would be considered bad form to go to someone outside the Society for that kind of help.”

“Not to say of the fact that not a lot of people know Thomas is one of us,” Gilbert said. “That thing would be useless against any other faction or without magic. Even if somehow they had that in their arsenal for a while. They had no way to know to use it.”

“Unless someone told them,” Limbani said.

“I can think of two people outside of us who know Thomas is part of the Society,” the armadillo said and looked around.

“Raphael,” Olavo said.

“And that pangolin chick,” Limbani added.

“Shila,” Olavo corrected and the monkey shrugged. Out the corner of his eye, Thomas saw Grant take his phone out and mover away from them.

“And Henry,” he added.

“The guy who Madoc thought was his contact —” Gilbert cursed. “The guy you said ran the frat.”

Thomas nodded.

“Alright,” Olavo said. “I refuse to believe Raphael would stoop to hiring outsiders even if he had a reason to send anyone after you. Shila knows, but you basically have a deal with her, so she’d have nothing to gain by hiring them.”

“And the chick from the east coast said they didn’t care what ‘he’ wanted,” Gilbert said.

“So it’s Henry,” Thomas said.

“As far as we can tell,” Olavo said.

“What happened to the Chamber people who didn’t fly off?” Thomas asked. He remembered two broken staffs, but not what happened to the man and woman themselves and had there been someone else?

Olavo nodded toward Grant, hunched over, phone to his ear.

“I don’t know Shila,” the kangaroo said, voice flat. “Yes, I know.” Pause. “I didn’t plan it.” Another pause. “Yes, Kingsley is angry.”

Thomas took the phone out of Grant’s hand and the kangaroo didn’t react. “Shila?”

“Thomas, put Grant back on,” the pangolin snapped. “We have important things to talk about.”

"Maybe you haven't been paying attention to the tone in his voice, Shila, but Grant needs a minute here." He disconnected her mid angry retort. He put the phone in Grant's jacket and motioned him to a chair.

"How are you?" he asked.

"It's fine," Grant replied in the same flat tone.

"Grant, look at me."

The kangaroo didn't react, so Thomas grabbed his shoulder and shook him. Grant looked at him.

"How are you?"

"It's fine." His eyes were unfocused.

"What's my name?"

"It's—"

Thomas shook him. "My name, Grant."

The kangaroo's eyes focused on him. "Thomas."

"Now. How are you?"

"I'm—"

"If you tell me you're fine, Grant, I'm unleashing Limbani on your ass."

"I don't do straight boy!" the monkey replied.

"Bullshit!" Gilbert yelled. "You'll do anyone you can talk into it."

"I'm bi," Grant replied, then frowned.

"Oh Good!" Limbani exclaimed

"You should have kept that to yourself," Thomas said, "now he's definitely not going to give you a chance to say now." He paused.

“How are you, Grant. Really.”

The kangaroo took a long shuddering breath.

“I don’t know,” he said.

“Okay. Why did you break your staff?”

“I...” his gaze unfocused, and returned after a few seconds. “I didn’t.”

“I saw you break it over your knee, Grant.”

“That wasn’t my staff anymore. I’d let go of it.” He trailed off and frowned. “I didn’t know it would work. But I wasn’t going to let it fall into Kingsley’s hands. I thought that giving up what I am, then destroying it would make that point.”

“Giving up what you are?”

“The staff’s my connection to the universe. There can be staffs without practitioners, but no practitioners without a staff.” He looked at his hands. “Except...”

Thomas waiting. “Except what?” he finally asked.

“I took Harrison’s staff. I wrapped my hands around it and grabbed it.”

“That shouldn’t have happened?”

Grant shook his head. “You saw what happened to the panda. A staff won’t let a stranger touch it.”

“Then you’re still a practitioner, right?”

“But I don’t have a staff.” There was fear in Grant’s eyes. Thomas wished he knew what he was afraid of, could just ask. But — Oh, fuck it.

“What are you afraid of, Grant?”

The kangaroos swallowed. “There’s only one group able to take a staff that doesn’t belong to them. What if I’m one of the

Chamber now?"

Oh, he so shouldn't have asked. How was he supposed to answer that? He didn't know anything useful about them other than they assholes.

"You can't be one of them Grant, you're one of the good guys. And you broke their staffs."

"You don't understand, Thomas. I can't have broken the staffs."

"I saw you do it."

The kangaroo swallowed. "Have you read about Hiroshima?"

Thomas had to think back. "Yeah. The Japanese city on which we dropped the first nuclear bomb?"

Grant shook his head. "That's just the story that was built to hide what happened. From what I learned, it was the first and only active attempt at destroying a staff. Some remnant of the Nazis, and something about bringing the fuhrer back, or some crazy shit like that. The details are vague since no one survived it."

"So breaking a staff is like unleashing a nuclear bomb?"

Grant shook his head again. "No, they unleashed a nuclear bomb hoping it would break the staff."

"Did it?" Thomas asked, awed.

"I don't know. Again, no one survived. If it did, it's never been seen since." (okay, this is my attempt at reinforcing the link for the three books. In my head it's the staff that shows up again in the 3rd book, Joan of Arc's sword I think it was. If you're okay with it, when I do the second draft I'd make it more clear it was a sword) but it doesn't matter, that's what it took, so I can't have done it with just my hands."

"Isn't anything possible with magic? I mean I can teleport, right?" Thomas offered the kangaroo a smile.

“That isn’t how it works, Thomas. I’m not a destroyer.”

Thomas raised an eyebrow. “Didn’t you tell me your wind magic isn’t precise, that you could have leveled my grandfather’s house using it close to it?”

Grant took a slow breath. “That’s not what I was going for when I made my staff. It was supposed to be about hope, not the storms. I made it from what was left behind. From what people used to rebuild. Somewhere in there, there was supposed to be this kernel of never giving up. Instead, I ended up with this tool of mass destruction.” He shook his head. “In the wrong hands, Katrina would look like a spring shower compared to what it could unleash.”

Thomas swallowed. He’d seen a documentary about Katrina and the damage it had done to New Orleans. Even nearly fifty years later, it was still one of the most destructive hurricanes to hit the US. And Grant had had something more dangerous in his hands? How could he even consider himself to be similar to the Chamber if he’d never given into the using that power?

He opened his mouth to tell Grant exactly that.

“Fuck yes!” Gilbert yelled from the bed, and Thomas looked in that direction, catching sight of the armadillo with the Capybara’s legs over his shoulder, and then the hard cock, basically shoved in his face.

He looked up at the grinning monkey. Well, Grant did seem to be better, so Thomas did deserve a reward. He opened his mouth.

“Hold that thought,” Shila said, appearing on the screen hanging on the wall. “Since it looks like story time’s over, we have more important things to take about.”

“No we don’t,” Limbani replied. He motioned to his cock nearly in Thomas’s muzzle. “I’m about to get sucked off, whatever you have to say can wait until after.”

“Not if you want to get back to the US without too much trouble. I have Grant’s and Thomas’s passport waiting at the front

desk, and I've inserted the details of how he entered the country with the lot of you, but border security's being increased because of some terrorist threat. So you have twelve hours at the most before they start looking at everyone entering the US with more attentiveness than you want directed are you."

"Are you telling me I have to give Thomas's muzzle up because of some terrorist?" Limbani demanded.

"Are you for real?" Shila demanded back.

Thomas chuckled. "Yeah, he most certainly is." He swatted the monkey's ass as he stood. "And there's a long trip in the truck during which I can make it up to your." Thomas knew he was going to regret the offer, but it had the effect of getting the monkey going.

(I'm cutting it there because appearing in Kansas city feels too much of a break for a simply Scene change.)

Chapter 1.5-46

Thomas moaned as a wave of well-being pulsed through him in time with the cock in his ass. "Wha-"

"Not yet," Olavo whispered in his ear. "You make a sound and Limbani's going to want in on this. I think you need further healing."

Healing?

The capybara pulled out, then pushed back in, this thrusts quick but not hurried. A hand reached under Thomas, and closed around his cock, the slickness causing him to thrust in it.

"That's it," Olavo said. "Move with me." He picked up speed, forcing Thomas's cock to move in the grip faster.

"Oh fuck," the rat groaned as he came into the hand.

"Oh yeah," the capybara gasped, the cock pulsing again against the spasming ass.

Thomas felt more awake, but there was no wave of well-being this time.

The door opened. "I heard him!" Limbani yelled. "It's my turn,

he needs all the energy he can get.”

Before Thomas could voice an opinion, Olavo was out of him and was rolled on his back, legs moved over the monkey’s shoulders and cock in his ass. “Welcome back,” Limbani said, then started fucking him.

#####

Thomas staggered out of the shower, a grinning Armadillo in tow. He was going to need Olavo to heal him again, after that session it felt like Gilbert had dislocated Thomas’s sternum or something.

“Now that everyone’s had a turn,” he said, eyeing the naked guys in the large bedroom. Only Grant was dressed, and was the only one not to have sex with him. Thomas remembered him breaking his staff over a knee; he wanted to go ask how he felt, but there were more pressing matters. “How the fuck am I still alive?”

Olavo raised his hand, “You might remember me fucking you.”

“I doubt you did it in the parking lot where I fell,” Thomas motioned to the room, “You got me here.”

“The truck stop is across the road,” Gilbert said and pointed to the window. Thomas looked, and while he had to search he did see it. Across the road was an exaggeration, but they were much closer than he’d expected. No more than a block.

* * *

Thomas turned away from the window. "And they let you drag a bleeding man and didn't ask questions. Or call the police?"

"First thing, we removed the dagger and used a healing sigil before moving your body," Olavo said, "But even if we didn't, this is a Marriott Hotel."

The rat ran a hand down his face. "Okay, so we were lucky enough there was a hotel owned by Madoc's family. Why would that be the answer to my previous question?"

"Every hotel has one person who knows what it means to be Society," the capybara said. "I explained who I was, and we were escorted to the back, and then to this room. If we'd needed it, they would have provided medical assistance."

Thomas raised an eyebrow. "So you can go anywhere and find help at a Marriott?" When Madoc had told him his family owned the chain, Thomas hadn't expected it meant every hotel was set up as a safe house.

"Pretty much," Limbani said. "World wide franchise, so nowhere in the world a Lewiston can be and not have a place to go to for help. We're just lucky they didn't lock the rest of us out like two other families we could mention."

"Okay, fine," Thomas said before Olavo could reply. "You have safe houses everywhere if you're on the Lewiston's good side. What happened to me? When that knife went in, it was like I'd

teleported to the moon, but I wasn't allowed to lose consciousness until the fight was over."

"That was due to blood loss," Gilbert said. "Not the phrase on the knife." He lobbed something in Thomas's direction and the rat made out the wooden handle before reaching of it, instead flinging away.

"Are you crazy? That thing nearly killed me." He glared at the armadillo, then the knife. Even the blade was wood, and the dark red inscription stretched along its length.

"It can't hurt you," Gilbert said as he walked to pick it back up. "It needs your blood here," he continued as he pointed to a single groove along the knife that didn't share the small blood red as the rest of the knife, "In order to power up. Which as a script designed to drain you of all magical energy is sadistically clever, but not lethal aside from the gut stabbing."

Thomas paused, "...aside from observation, why do you sound so sure that's what it did?" The rat felt like he was really not going to like the answer.

"Because that's our magic," Gilbert replied angrily. "That another faction used against you."

"And I take it that doesn't happen?" Thomas asked.

"Not often," Olavo said. "We're all kinda insular; each faction

has their own god that provides them with their own motivations. And to hand one of them a tool that is basically designed to take one of us down..." the copybara shook his head. "It's just not smart even if you trusted the person to not backstab you; the fallout from the other families much less your own would be huge."

"Not to mention not a lot of people know Thomas is one of us," Gilbert said. "That thing would be just a fancy somewhat blunt dagger against anyone else. Even if they just happened to have it in their warchest, why would they know to break it out?"

Thomas bit his lower lip, "Lullaby mentioned having a deal with someone... mostly about not honoring it and keeping me for themselves."

"Do we have to keep using the pangolin chick's codenames," Limbani said, "It makes them sound way more powerful than they really are."

"It's Shila," Olavo said, a name drop that finally made Grant come to attention only to get out his phone and move to a corner of the room. "And as the guy who got himself knocked unconscious as soon as the fighting started, you don't have leeway into saying how powerful they are."

"Focus," Thomas said, practicing what he preached as he continued to shelf checking on on Grant further down the line, "From the little they said, we can at least assume they had a deal to collect me, from someone who could arm them to complete the task. Can't you all think of one person who would fit that description?"

* * *

There was an elongated silence before it hit them all, "Henry."

"It would make sense," Olavo said. "Madoc checked in at least once after we saw that new video of the fight but before the kidnapping. There's still some big questions of how he'd know to contact these Chamber people, but if he did it would make sense for him to have something like this on hand."

Thomas raised an eyebrow, "Why?"

Gilbert swore, and grabbed his phone and started taking pictures of the dagger. "Blood magic. It's part of why the Stoker's are the boogeymen of the Society. I gotta get some pictures of this back to the others so they can double check it against the Lewiston phrase records. If there is something I missed--"

"I would have healed it," Olavo calmly stated before Thomas could join Gilbert in freaking out. "But yeah, blood is powerful. In fact if they had some of Grant's blood, then Henry could have built them a scrying phrase to punch through any warding as part of his payment to them. Which if what you and Shila have said about his relationship to these people is true, they would have been collecting everything and anything he leaves behind to help with scrying."

Thomas nodded, "Did we find anything like that on then, then? Actually, what did you guys do with three unconscious bodies?"

Rather than answering, Olavo nodded towards Grant, whose ear was glued to his phone.

* * *

"I don't know, Shila," the kangaroo said, voice flat. "Yes, I know." Pause. "I didn't plan it." Another pause. "Yes, Kingsley is angry."

Thomas took the phone out of Grant's hands and the kangaroo didn't react. "Shila?"

"Thomas, put Grant back on," the pangolin snapped. "We have important things to talk about."

"Maybe you haven't been paying attention to the tone in his voice, Shila, but Grant needs a minute here." He disconnected her mid angry retort, put the phone down, and then guided the kangaroo to sit down in a chair. "How are you?"

"It's fine," Grant replied in the same flat tone.

Thomas tried again, "Grant, look at me." The kangaroo didn't react, so Thomas grabbed his shoulder and shook him. Grant looked at him. "How are you?"

"It's fine." His eyes were unfocused.

The rat winced, and pushed forward. "What's my name, Grant?"

"It's-" the kangaroo started to respond on autopilot.

* * *

Thomas shook him again. "My name, Grant."

The kangaroo's eyes focused on him. "Thomas."

Thomas breathed a sigh of relief. "OK. Now, how are you?"

"I'm-" Grant started to respond.

Thomas didn't let him finish, "If you tell me you're fine, Grant, I'm unleashing Limbani on your ass."

"I don't do straight boys!" the monkey replied.

"Bullshit!" Gilbert yelled. "You'll do anyone you can talk into it."

"I'm pan," Grant replied.

"..." the monkey opened his mouth to respond, then stopped, and reached for his phone.

"You should have kept that to yourself," Thomas said, "Once he checks what that means, he's not going to give you a chance to say no." The rat paused. "How are you, Grant? Really."

* * *

The kangaroo took a long shuddering breath. "I don't know."

"Okay," Thomas said, taking progress where he could get it. "Why did you break your staff?"

"I..." his gaze unfocused, and returned after a few seconds. "I didn't."

Thomas raised an eyebrow. "I saw you break it over your knee, Grant."

"That wasn't my staff anymore. I'd let go of it." He trailed off and frowned. "I didn't know it would work. But I wasn't going to let it fall into Kingsley's hands. I thought that giving up what I am, then destroying it would make that point."

Thomas frowned. "Giving up what you are?"

"The staff's my connection to the universe. There can be staves without practitioners, but no practitioner without a staff." he looked at his hands. "Except..."

Thomas waited for an answer, and then when one didn't come asked, "Except what?"

"I took Harrison's staff," the kangaroo said. "I wrapped my

hands around it and grabbed it.”

Thomas nodded automatically as he tried to follow. “That shouldn’t have happened?”

Grant shook his head. “The rules of who can touch a staff and when are encyclopedic, but in the middle of battle while being wielded... me even trying to grab it was an act of desperation that shouldn’t have worked.”

“But it did,” the rat said.

“Yet I don’t have a staff,” the kangaroo stated.

There was fear in Grant’s eyes. Thomas wished he knew what he was afraid of, he couldn't just ask. But- Oh fuck it. “What are you afraid of, Grant?”

The kangaroo swallowed. “There’s only one group able to take a staff that doesn’t belong to them. What if I’m one of the Chamber now?”

Thomas knew he was out of his depth; he didn’t know anywhere near enough about the Chamber to formulate a defense here. But there had to be- “You broke their staves, Grant. Even they seemed shocked by that.”

Grant didn’t seem reassured. “You don’t understand, Thomas.

I couldn't have broken their staves."

"I saw you do it," Thomas stated.

The kangaroo swallowed. "Have you read about Hiroshima?"

Thomas paused to dredge up high school history, "First of two cities that got nuclear bombs dropped on them to end World War 2."

Grant nodded, "There was a staff stored in a Practitioner safe house maybe a quarter mile of the epicenter. When someone went to find it's remains, what they found instead was the whole staff, completely intact."

Thomas blinked, "OK. I'm not up on my nuclear weapon trivia but can I assume..."

"Even Little Boy was powerful enough to destroy most buildings within a mile radius of it's epicenter," Grant stated.

Thomas nodded, swallowing. "Still, that doesn't dismiss the fact that you did it. And as the world's first teleporter, let me assure you that anything is possible with magic."

Those words didn't seem to reassure the kangaroo, and the rat could feel him shutting himself off again. Thomas knew he was having an identity crisis, but this also felt more than that. It was almost like Grant was mourn- "Tell me about your staff."

* * *

The kangaroo looked at the rat, eyebrow raised.

Thomas kept his poker face up, "I mean, it's at the center of all this. The ramshackle pieces of wood held together with twine and nails... capable of calling down tornados on a casual whim."

Grant snorted, "It was never supposed to do that." He paused, only to find Thomas looking at him expectantly. Taking a slow breath, the kangaroo started to talk. "My staff was supposed to be about hope, not storms. I made it from what was left behind. From what people used to rebuild. Somewhere in there, there was supposed to be this kernel of never giving up. Instead, I ended up with a tool of mass destruction." He shook his head. "In the wrong hands, Katrina would look like a spring shower compared to what it could unleash."

"And you kept it out of those wrong hands as long as you could. And when you couldn't any longer, you let it go," Thomas said, putting a hand on Grant's knee. He could see it forming, exactly how he was going to Hallmark movie his way into pulling Grant out of this depression. He opened his mouth to do just that...

"Fuck yes!" Gilbert yelled from the bed, causing both rat and kangaroo to look in his direction. The armadillo had the capybara's legs over his shoulders, plowing him for everything he was worth.

Thomas realized someone was missing, and he found Limbani right next to him and Grant. The monkey was looking at the two of them with completely innocent attention... despite being both naked and rock hard. That innocent look shifted to one of confusion as he tilted his head, "Is story time over?"

* * *

"If it is," a familiar voice sounded from the television, "We have a few important things to talk about."

"You're going to have to make it fast, Shila," Thomas said as the monkey started to crawl up to Thomas, "I have yet to find the off switch to this monkey."

"How about a terrorist threat that is going to result in increased border security in about the next twelve hours?" Shilla asked. "I already have Grant's passports waiting at the front desk, but you guys need to get moving now if you want any hope of that ward trick of yours working twice."

"Are you really telling me to delay sex just because of a few terrorist," Limbani demanded.

"...is he for real?" Shila asked incredulously.

Thomas chuckled. "If he's a mirage, he's very tactile." Thomas stood up, pulling the monkey with him. "I'll give you dibs in the van. Now get dressed." Thomas paused to look about. "...and where did you guys put my clothes?"

Outline-46

Chapter 46

###

Red Deer, Thomas, Grant, Search Squad, Shila: Mood:

When Thomas wakes up, he's being fucked by Olavo. Which might raise some questions before he remembers he just had a blunt wooden dagger shoved into his guts. Which is pretty easy to remember when he tries to move and the pain from where he was stabbed shoots through him. So he lays still like a good boy, maybe with some help with the others holding him down, while Olavo does his thing. Once he can move again, the first words out of his mouth is what was that?

Their first assumption was the dagger. Which they can show him. It's covered in Society scripts made in varnished over blood. They sent pictures back to Madoc since scripts are kinda his thing, but he hasn't gotten back to them yet. Still, Madoc would only be able to describe how it did what it did. What it did Thomas experienced first hand.

Thomas will elaborate further; what happened to the Chamber. Which, yeah, they ran away good and won't be coming back. Both because they were beaten down thoroughly... and... well they have nothing to come back for... which redirects things towards Grant.

Grant is... sullen, off to the side, and wrapped up in a conversation with Shila over the phone. He's giving very automated responses like "I know" and "I don't know" to things like "I thought you said breaking staves were near impossible" and "So how did you do it".

Overall, Grant doesn't know what to tell Shila and she is all questions. So Thomas will take the phone, tell Shila that Grant needs a moment and then hangs up on her.

And then Thomas will sit down next to Grant, and ask how he is. And if Grant tries to slip into automatic mood Thomas will make sure he actually listens to the question. How is Grant at the moment? And Grant is melancholic at best, depressed at worse. He doesn't know if he's even a practitioner anymore, but he must be something because he broke the staves... that just can't be done with fists and stone.

Thomas will ask why did he try and break his own staff if he thought it was impossible, and Grant's response is that he wasn't breaking it... he was setting it free. He couldn't keep the promise he made to it to keep it safe, so he was letting it go. And then he goes into, without prompting, what his staff meant to him. Both what it was meant to be, and how he important he felt it was to keep the staves from the hands of the chamber.

This will finally be interrupted by Gilbert climaxing into Olavo... which raises the question of were is the monkey. Answer is right on the other side of Thomas. The rat will give him a raised eyebrow, to which LImbani will give one in return. Thomas may never understand this monkey...

Not helping with the monkey confusion, Shila will pop up on the television and says that now that storytime is over, it's time to discuss what they're going to do now. Because she gets that teleporting all the way to San Francisco may be overkill. Thomas

doesn't get to hear most of that conversation, as the moment that Limbani hears that storytime is over he takes it as a cue to get back to work on charging Thomas up.

###

Kansas City, Thomas, Search Squad, Grant, Donal: Mood:

The ride back south was blissfully uneventful. Once they got Grant's fake passport in order, it was the obvious choice. After all, countries ask questions when people enter countries without exiting them. Still, the van was rather cramped, and Thomas was grateful to be back as they drop Grant off with Donal at the hotel they set him up with.

Donal is doing OK, but they haven't heard from any of the others in the time they've been gone. That's the next thing they are going to check in on. Right now they need to make sure hotel bill is paid for another two weeks. Once that is done, Grant will double check with Thomas is he's sure about going this route. Yes, he's been informed about the details of the mind alterations during the long ride, but still... getting involved with a family is in some ways a bigger commitment than a god.

Thomas... isn't sure, but he's involved with this family just by existing. And they already have a trained team of professionals dealing with getting the rest of his family safe... so he owes them to at least try. Which now that he says it out loud, he's really eager for an update on how things went down in the Twin Cities.

###

Kansas City, Thomas, Search Squad, Rapheal, Samuel: Mood:

The gang wasn't expecting a party when they returned to the safehouse, after all, the people there were taking care of a baby. But they certainly wasn't expecting Rapheal to be there on his own. He's

known they were back the second they returned to the city, and they get bonus points for returning to where they were supposed to be... eventually. Question... where the fuck were they?

Answer doesn't matter, as Rapheal is pissed anyway. Things didn't go well in the Twin Cities. Only Ettore managed to make it out, and only by exhaustive use of his power. This Henry, whatever he is, has appeared to have taken over the Richards. Or at least enough of their resources to hire private security forces backed up with the powers of both the fraternity and the Richards... so things went poorly all around.

While this wasn't Thomas's fault, him being missing when Rapheal went to check on him didn't help. Thomas is a Leswiston now, meaning he goes and does what the elder tells him. For the good of the family, of course. It was a lesson Rapheal was hoping Thomas would learn quicker than his brother.

It takes a moment for Thomas to realize that Rapheal doesn't mean Ronald but Victor. He asks what did Rapheal do to him, and Rapheal says he only made an offer of all the power their god represented... and then set about enlightening Victor to those blessings till he said yes. The implication of this doesn't take much to get through, and Thomas immediately teleports across the room to punch Rapheal.

This goes as well as one might expect, as goons swarm in from the shadows and secure Rapheal's safety. They're even equipped to restrain Thomas. Rapheal, even with a bloody lip, can't help but be smug about this. He's about to order everyone to be taken away...

when Samuel walks in.

Rapheal asks what he's doing here, and Samuel says he recently learned about the... conditions the Xu and Chouteau were being housed in, and was coming to Rapheal to inquire about it. And a good thing too since Rapheal was about to make the same mistake twice. He's about to order his men to seize Samuel, when the badger asks if he's declaring war on the Mercier as well?

That gets Rapheal to pause, and Samuel continues to list off all the families whose children he's either imprisoning or about to imprison. Xu, Chouteau, Rowling, Adesida, and Medeiros... that last one the child of the family's elder no less. Yes, they "disobeyed" his will he never bothered to voice to them, but there are appropriate actions for everything and this is a form of escalation Rapheal won't win.

Rapheal doesn't like this... but Samuel is right. He eventually settles to cast everyone, including Samuel, out of Kansas City. Thomas stays, though. He is of his blood, after all. Some of the others might look to protest, but Samuel shuts things down to just to get them out of there safely.