

He'd reached the main road, then gone a few blocks before he started shaking. Fuck, he shouldn't have come here. Why couldn't they have left him alone? He would have happily gone on thinking he was the son of a war hero. Now he was going to have watch what he did and thought all the time so he would remain on the Path.

He looked up again, but there was too much light here, he couldn't see the stars. Why did life have to be so complicated? Isn't my life miserable enough, God? I'm doing everything I can to be a good person, why do you keep piling the crap on top of me? He sighed. "Sorry, that isn't fair to you. I know you haven't made me Job. You aren't testing me. It just... Some time it doesn't feel fair."

He realized the car had been pacing him for a time. he wasn't worried, he'd have time to get out of the way if it swerved on the sidewalk, and if the driver got out he was going to beat the crap out of him.

"Hop in, kid. I'll give you a ride."

Patrick didn't look at the person in the car, although he had a sense he was leaning in the passenger side to talk to him "No thanks. I'm just going to the bus stop."

"Really? How are you going to pay the fare?"

"Fine, I'll walk then." Was the way he was dressed so telling any stranger knew he didn't have any money? "I don't get into some stranger's car."

"Kid, I'm not a stranger, I'm your uncle. Now get in. I'm taking you home."

Patrick stopped and turned to look at him. the car stopped too and the tiger straightened back in the driver's seat. The door clicked and opened. It was a gray sedan, it looked expensive.

The driver leaned toward him again when Patrick didn't move and pierced him with his cold gray blue eyes. "Patrick," he said in measured tones. "Get in the fucking car."

Patrick blinked, he was seated in the car and it was in motion. He looked at the driver trying to understand what had just happened. The tiger looked to be the same age as the men in that house. Was he really his uncle?

"Who are you?"

"My name is Damian."

"And you're my uncle?"

He nodded.

"And you were just waiting there, waiting for me to leave so you could pick me up?" Was he like the others? If he was, he better not even think of trying anything.

"Calm down, Patrick. I'm not going to do anything. I wasn't waiting for you, I was just coming over to visit my nephews and saw you leaving. You looked out of sort so I thought I'd give you a ride home. Considering how long it took you to realize I was there, you were out of it."

"I'm not going home."

"Yes you are. Your mother's been worrying herself to death since you left. You need to take better care of her you know. Not everyone's fortunate to still have his parents in his life."

"Why the fuck do I care if she's worried? She didn't give a damn about me when she lied to me."

"Most people lie, Patrick. That's how they are."

"Do you?" Patrick asked without intending to.

The tiger got a thoughtful expression and Patrick couldn't believe he had to think about it before answering.

"Yeah, I guess I do, but always with good reasons. Not that you'd know what they are."

"Fine. I still don't care. I'm not going home. I'll tell you where to drop me off when we get close to it."

Damian didn't reply. he drove in silence for a minute, then he swerved the car into an almost empty parking lot and stopped. Damian stared ahead for a moment. When he turned to look at Patrick his face was expressionless. his eyes had lost all the gray and were pale blue.

They were cold and emotionless. They weren't looking at him, Patrick realized, they were looking through him. he swallowed and tried the handle.

"Door's lock," Damian said in a flat tone.

Patrick looked for a way to unlock it, but there wasn't any buttons. He slammed his elbow in the glass and only got pain for his effort.

"Bullet proof glass. You're not getting out of this car unless I let you."

The tone, the words, they made Patrick shy back, trying to push himself as far from this man as he could. He remembered what he'd been told about the Orrs having eccentric tastes. He now realized that the few he'd heard might be nothing compared to some.

"What are you going to do to me?" Patrick had told himself if this man tried anything he'd beat him up. Now he thought he might not be able to do anything to stop him.

The eyes blinked, and warmth seem to come back to them. Damian gave him a wry smile. "I'm going to explain a few things to you." He looked at him and the smile widened. "Relax kid. You have nothing to worry about. Not yet anyway." He thought of something and chuckled. "But one day someone's

going to tell you about me and you're going to piss yourself remembering this meeting." He got the car moving.

"When my father was on his deathbed he made me promise to look after my family. I take my promises extremely seriously. And to be clear, to me it isn't your last name that makes you my family or not. It's your blood. So no matter what you call yourself, you're an Orr. That means I'm going to take care of you."

Patrick watched him drive for some time and wondered what he meant by that, but he didn't dare say anything and interrupt whatever thinking that tiger was doing. He'd gone up against multiple gang members over his life and something told him none of them had been anywhere near as dangerous as this man was.

"And you're mother," Damian said, as if he hadn't been thinking for some time. "She isn't blood, now, normally she wouldn't matter, but you care for her, so I'm willing to make an exception, this one time."

They drove in silence again. Maybe he'd imagine the danger coming from him. After all he said he'd take care of his mother too. Not that Patrick was sure she deserved it.

"What do you mean by 'take care of me'?" He asked after a time, curiosity getting the best of him. "Are you going to shower me with money so I never have to work? Get my mom a house like the one Donald and Daniel have?" He realized he couldn't think of one of them without thinking of the other.

Damian laughed, a cold mirthless laugh. "Your mother would spit on anything a fag like me might give her. No, I'm not going to give her anything." He was silent for a moment. "That's not how I work anyway. You need to make your own way in life. You don't appreciate it if you don't have to work for it."

Patrick studied this man, his uncle for a moment. "What are you going to do then?"

"I'm going to promise you something. I'm going to promise you'll never have to worry about your safety again."

Patrick stared at him.

"Yeah, I know about them. About how you got that scar."

Reflexively Patrick put a hand over his bicep. How did he know about the gang?

"They won't bother you again. I swear that to you."

"How?"

"How do I know? Or how can I promise that? The answer is the same for both questions. I know people. Which reminds me." He pulled a business card out of his breast pocket and handed it to him. The card was plain, with a diamond in the center of it. 'Diamond Industries' was written over it, and 'because

diamonds are just coal under pressure' under.

Patrick looked at it, read what it said a few times. "You do know that doesn't make any kind of sense, right?"

Damian smiled. "Sure it does, kid." He glanced at him. "And something tells me that if anyone ever manages to figure it out, it's going to be you."

Patrick stared at him.

"Anyway, on the back is the number to my company's recruitment office. Give it to that friend of yours, the one who managed to give you my brothers' address. If he ever gets tired of shady deals and going hungry for weeks at a time, I'm always looking for talented people."

"If you know so much about him, why aren't you making the offer in person?"

"Come on Patrick, you can answer that yourself."

"He doesn't know you from the serial killer down the block. I'm not sure I trust you myself."

"That's very wise of you."

Patrick was silent for a long time. Considering what this meant. He was offering Rich a job. He was looking for talented people.

"You're not offering me a job, are you?" That made sense. No one wanted a dropout like him.

Damian didn't reply immediately. "Do you want me to offer you one?"

Patrick almost said yes. He'd do anything for a real job, a way to help his mother with the bills once and for all. Well, almost anything he thought as he remembered those eyes, blue and cold. What might it be like to work for a man with eyes like that. What things might he be required to do?

He shook his head. "I think I'm going to make my own way."

Damian smiled. "Another wise thing you've said."

Patrick felt a smile creep up his muzzle. "Although I could use someone to pay my tuition for school"

Damian snorted. "Don't look at me for that. that's what fathers are for."

They were silent again, for the rest of the drive. When the car stopped Patrick realized they were in front of his mother's house.

"How did you know where I live? I never told you."

Another wry smile. "Who do you think gave your brothers your address? You go in, you're mother's going to be relieve to see you."

The door clicked and opened. Patrick stepped out and looked in, holding on to the door. "D.. uncle Damian." The

words felt strange coming out of his mouth, alien. He'd never had an uncle before. "Why am I scared of you?"

His uncle gave him the brightest smile he'd ever seen, but it didn't comfort him, the smile didn't reach those eyes. "Because you are a wise young man, Patrick, very wise indeed." He motioned for him to close the door and drove off.

Patrick watched the car pull away, then looked at this mother's house. There was light, so she wasn't at work. He stood there for some time, trying to figure out if he wanted to go in or not. No that was the wrong question, he didn't want to go. The question was, did his mother deserve to suffer for trying to protect him. He sighed, No, she didn't.

"Patrick?" she called as soon as he closed the door.

"Yes, mom, it's me."

She rushed out of her room and hugged him. "Oh my God, I was so worried. You just walked out and I didn't know where you were. Please don't ever do that again. Where were you?"

"I just stayed at friends." He didn't return the hug, but he didn't push her away, even if the urge was there. "Looks, about what happened."

"It's okay, Patrick. Don't worry about it, those men are gone and they're never going to bother us again. You don't have to worry about them."

Patrick almost told her this wasn't about them, but his anger was just waiting for an excuse to lash out at her, and he wouldn't let that happen.

He gave himself long enough for his temper to quiet down. "Mom, you're working tomorrow, you should go to bed, I'm okay. I'm not leaving."

She looked at him, her eyes were wet. She wiped them. "I'm sorry, I was just so worried they might have taken you away from me."

His anger flared. They aren't interested in taking me away. you're the one determined to keep me away from them. But she'd already turned away, so she didn't see the snarl on his face. He headed to the kitchen for a glass of water and to calm himself.

It wasn't her fault, he told himself, she grew up in a different time, Her parent were pretty stern, not that he got to know them, It had always just been him and her. He wondered if he had grand parents now. Were is father's parents alive?

He couldn't excuse her attitude. She'd raised him the same way she was raised, and he was over coming it, wasn't he? He'd gone to see them, asked questions, gotten to know them. And screamed at them before rushing out because what they said made him uncomfortable.

How could he be so angry all the time when he was trying

to follow the Path, while they seem perfectly happy living in sin? He should ask Father Durony next Sunday. Maybe stepping off the Path, deciding you weren't going to even try to reach Eden again meant you didn't worry about anything else. Was that kind of bliss worth going to Hell?

Fuck, he had to stop thinking about that, he was going to give himself nightmares. He drank two glasses of water and headed to his room. He dressed down to his underwear to sleep and lay down. Seeing the frame with the picture of the man he had thought was his father for all his life, he shoved it in the drawer of his side table.