

Patrick paused by the living room, his mother was sitting there, watching the news. It was such an odd sight, her being home this early in the day that he took a moment to appreciate it.

The television had woken him up and it was barely noon. For a moment he thought he'd forgotten to turn it off when he got home, but then remembered he'd headed straight to bed. "Hey mom, what are you doing home?"

She looked over her shoulder and muted it. "Hi Patrick. The factory closed early."

"Closed? in the middle of the day? They've never done that before. is everything alright there?"

"It's fine. I guess the new owners wanted to look over the machinery."

"New owners? Are they going to close it down?" Patrick hoped not.

"No, of course not. They assured us everything would continue as normal before giving us the rest of the day off, with pay."

Patrick hoped she wasn't being too trusting, sending everyone home didn't seem like a good sign. They couldn't afford for her to lose that job. He doubted he could bring in that kind of money even if he did odd jobs all day, every days.

"What time did you get home last night?" she asked. You still weren't in when I went to bed."

"About four in the morning. Don asked me to help out with a private party and it ran late."

She frown. "You know I don't like it when he keeps you out that late."

"I know, but it's extra money, and we need it. I put it in your checkbook." Not to say that being offered two hundred dollars by a woman to get him to dance on the table had been a strange experience. He'd been scared of the idea, of making a fool of himself in front of them, but tempted by the money. When she pressed, and told him there could be more, if he took off his clothing, He'd been even more conflicted. There was no way he'd ever undress in public, was there? Just how much money was she offering, and why had he been excited at the idea of doing it? Fortunately for him, the decision was taken out of his hands when Don reminded her his bar wasn't \*that kind\* of place.

"I hope you've kept some."

"Thirty bucks. That's enough to see me through the day." By her lack of reaction he didn't think she's seen how much

he'd left. Even with disappointing the woman, it had been a good night. They tipped heavily, and she slipped him a fifty after he'd agreed to dance with her.

The dance had been – interesting. She'd rubbed herself all over him in the process, ran her hands over his entire body. The way she licked her lips as she gyrated against him made it clear, even to someone as clueless as he normally was, what she really wanted. Even if he'd been interested in giving her what she wanted, for all the touching and rubbing she did, his body hadn't reacted.

He'd done his best not to show it, but once they were done he spent ten minutes in the bathroom dealing with the shock, the disappointment, of realizing he truly wasn't straight. He might have spent longer there, but he had a job to do.

"I'm going to head out after I grab a shower. There's something I need to take care off this afternoon."

"Alright, are you going to be back for dinner?"

"No, It'll take most of the day, and I'll go directly to the bar after that." The Church was close to ten miles away, so it would take him most of the afternoon to walk there.

He stopped by again after his shower. He was wearing his best everyday clothes, not that they were that great, but at least they didn't have any holes or rips.

He wanted to make sure she was okay. He didn't think she would have lied to him about her job, she would have told him if she'd lost it, but now that he knew she'd lied to him before, he felt like he needed to verify it. He watched her silently, and she did seem unconcerned as she watched the news.

On the screen a gazelle in a deep blue suit was standing behind a podium. Someone said something to her and she nodded, putting papers in order. the 'live' icon flashed in the left corner and next to that 'police commissioner Hyacinthe press conference'

Patrick had been about to turn away when he saw the words, 'gang violence down.' crawl at the bottom of the screen.

"Thank you for coming," the gazelle said. "I called this press conference because today we are celebrating a major victory against gang violence."

'Leaders and lieutenants of Saranto, Claws and Infernals arrested. Gang in disarray.' scrolled at the bottom.

"Over the last few months we have been conducting a series of undercover operations with the goal of infiltrating multiple gangs. This morning, using information gathered from those operations, we arrested the leaders of the Sarantos, the

Claws and the Infernals as well as all their lieutenants and most of the gang members.

"When I became commissioner I promised the citizen of San Francisco I would address the city's gang problem. This is only the start. Know that the police isn't going to rest until all the gangs have been broken. Gangs are parasite on this city and it's time we got rid of them.

"I want to thank this fine city's citizens, who are in large part responsible for making this possible. Your donations helped us properly fund the gang task force. The information you provided allowed us to pinpoint who to target and where to find them. a long time ago the gangs declared war on this city, and now, together, we are fighting back, and winning."

Patrick too a moment to let what she'd said sink in. This certainly explained why the Sarantos had been leaving him alone. was that also why they'd tried to kill him that last time? They thought he'd inform on them? They were idiots if they thought that, Patrick would never bring the cops into his private business.

Then he remembered something that stole his breath. He went to the kitchen and sat down.

"You'll never have to worry about your safety." Damian had told him, during that unnerving car ride.

Had he made this happen? How could he? She said they'd been working on this for months, and the ride hadn't been that long ago. But it couldn't be a coincidence either, could it? He forced himself to calm down, pushed the disbelief aside so he could focus.

Damian was rich, a quick online search had told him that. He owned so many companies he hadn't been able to read the entire page listing them. So he had the finances to do something like that, but why have the commissioner say they had been working on it for months then? To make his involvement less obvious?

He shook his head. This was something out of the novels he read. No one would spend that kind on money on him. It had to just be a coincidence. He looked up. God sure did work in mysterious ways.

He made himself a sandwich and ate it on his way to the door. As he put his jacket on he looked at the frame, on the table by the door, of his mother and 'father'. He didn't feel the ache he used to when looking at it. The wonder about what it would be like to have a father was a memory.

He wondered why she kept it here, now that the lie had been exposed. Was she trying to keep it going? or was it simpler, she'd grown used to the idea of the family they

represented. The family she dreamed they had been? were?

He didn't have to imagine anymore, he had a father, well, two. That was confusing. He hoped that in time he could get himself to do see them again. Even with them being... the way they were. He wanted them to be part of his family. Now that he had a father, he didn't want to never see him.

His mother didn't have that. he didn't know if she'd ever be able to accept them as his father. So she kept her illusory family alive with the pictures. He found he didn't blame her for that.