

Storyboard-28

Paul sat up, head clearer than the previous times he's woken after being knocked out. His body hurt, but it was more of an ache than pain. He used SUV as support to stand, then reached for the empty holster as he caught motions out the corner of his eye.

The wolf groaned, getting to his feet.

"Pierce," Paul called. "Pierce!"

The wolf shook himself. "Here, boss."

How long had they been unconscious? He pulled himself up to look over the SUV. Bodies littered the beach all the way to where the portal had been. No one moved, but they couldn't all be dead.

"These are the times I hate being this tough," the moose said, standing. "I'd love to stay unconscious until all the work's done."

"Joseph, you and Pierce comb the beach. You get the staves and you bring them back here. Now!" he ordered when the buffalo looked like he'd argue. Chambers could still be a problem without their staves, but unlike the Society, they didn't have an innate power to rely on if they couldn't create the magical tool they needed. The staves were that 'innate' power; only it could be taken away.

Paul headed for those still unconscious on this side of the barricade, locating Thomas first, and pulling him closer to the SUVs. If the Chamber started waking up before the rest of his people, Paul wanted them all in one location so he could cover them easily. He had Roland next to his brother when Wuhan woke up, and she helped.

Paul found another conscious person, although from the metal pole [way wrong word, something no more than half an inch in diameter] sticking out of his chest, Raoul probably wished he wasn't.

The raccoon noticed him and forced a smile. "Better go help someone else. I'm a goner." His voice was raspy, but the blood seeping around the pole wasn't foaming. That meant it had missed the lungs, Paul knew at least that.

"Thomas!" He yelled, looking to the other end of the barricade. His best friend was still unconscious, as were Roland and anyone else from the Society. Wuhan wasn't visible, probably elsewhere on the beach dealing with waking Chambers.

Paul wasn't equipped to deal with this kind of injury. Thomas had only shown him the minor healing sigil while they waited. Paul had practiced it enough he was confident he

could draw it properly, but he hadn't had to power any of them at this point.

It was one thing to be told to 'push your horniness into the sigil', but how the fuck was he supposed to feel horny right now?

And there was no way a minor sigil could deal with this. What they needed was Olavo.

He kneeled next to the raccoon. "You're not dying here." Would putting cloth around the pole and applying pressure help? This was as far beyond his first aid course as it was minor magic. "You have three husbands depending on you, remember?"

"I kept promising I was going to stop," Raoul said, "but the pay's just too good."

Okay, bottom line was that if he did nothing, Raoul was going to die. He didn't trust first aid, so that left magic. At least, the sigil should stop the bleeding, right?

Paul dipped his finger into the blood. Thomas had warned him against using blood, but the alternative was cum, and the golden tiger didn't think he could produce that under these conditions.

"Right, you're one of the magic folks."

"This isn't going to fix things." Paul took the raccoon's hand. It had to be drawn on skin. "But it's going to make sure you live until someone stronger than I am can heal you fully." Now he was happy Thomas had had him practice with a finger.

The sigil looked good. Now he had to power it.

Raoul was in an even worse state to get horny, so Paul had to be the one. He imagined Thomas touching him, but that immediately became the image of his unconscious friend. Fuck. Niel brought thoughts of Roland. Just about anyone he knew had a connection to Thomas, Roland, Kuno—where was the margay and the others—and the danger they were all in was a turnoff. He needed something unconnected, something that wasn't linked to his friends.

Everyone he had sex with was a friend. It didn't matter what memory he used, they were all interconnected.

No, they weren't.

Paul had a few extra sets. He didn't think about them often, but they were there, they were his. In those memories, he was someone who had had sex with strangers. Who had loved it. Henry had loved making himself the center of many sexual memories he gave Paul, and that was one man who didn't make him think of his friends. Henry hadn't wanted Paul distracted. In that one memory, Paul didn't have friends. All he had was the bat, and he was devoted to him. Just the idea of touching him made him hard, made him want to feel the bat moving inside him.

Paul opened his eyes, panting, hard, needing to be fucked.

A doberman was raising his gun at him.

"No!" Paul snarled, anger exploding among his horniness, and he shoved it ahead of his run without thinking. The man staggered as if Paul had already hit him, and the golden tiger didn't give him the chance to regain his footing. A punch in the stomach had the doberman on his back and Paul picked up the gun, ready to end this man who would have killed him and Raoul.

Wet coughing behind made Paul look over his shoulder and he curse at the blood on the raccoon's lips. He forgot about the doberman and ran next to Raoul.

"Hang in there." He took the hand and check to make sure the sigil was intact, then he pulled up the memory, and instantly, he was horny. He pushed that into the sigil and Raoul seemed to relax. His breathing seemed to steady.

"Well," Raoul said, resting his head back. "Looks like I am going to have to quit after all."

"I'm sure there's three guys who are going to be overjoyed to hear that." He used a piece of cloth to wipe at the blood around the pole.

"Only until they find out how much we need to cut back on everything."

"I doubt they're with you because of the size of your paycheck." The bleeding had mostly stopped, and new skin was growing against the pole. That wasn't going to be fun to remove, Paul thought, but at least Raoul would live to get it removed. "You need to stay here until someone deals with that. I'm going to see who I can find."

"No worries, I am going to be glued to this spot." Raoul looked at his chest. "Well, spiked to it, anyway."

Paul didn't question the macabre humor. He was just happy the raccoon wasn't angry at him for not having done more.

He hurried to the others. Roland was awake, kissing Thomas, who moaned, then was responding, and then Roland pulled away.

"What the fuck hit me?" Thomas asked.

"Us," a Jaguar dressed in black and gray said. "A shock wave came from the lake, and everyone got knocked unconscious. We have four of the staves the Chamber used, and we're looking for more before too many of them wake up. Seems they don't have the magic we do to deal with injuries."

"The lake?" Thomas was on his feet. "What about Grant and Wassa, Kuno, Donal?"

"I don't know. If that lightning hit where they were, doubt they—"

"Don't even think it," the rat said. "They're going to be fine. We just need to clear the beach before they—"

The flash of light was bright enough it hit Paul as if it was solid.

"You have lost!" a woman with a Scottish accent said. "Your champion is dead, destroyed by the power he sought to master! If you surrender to me now, you will be shown mercy. If you don't, you will find out what we did here is nothing compared to the pain I will bring down on all of you."

"Do you think she caused the lightning?" Roland asked fearfully.

As Thomas opened his mouth, the lake's surface exploded and Grant walked out of the water holding Excalibur with Wassa at his side. Behind them, Donal helped a barely conscious Kuno walk.

"Stand down!" Grant ordered, and his voice shook the SUVs.

"Do not listen to him! Attack and get our staves back"

Grant sliced an SUV into two and the pieces moved away from him. "I'm not going to tell you twice." He growled, and again his voice carried.

“Is that him, or Excalibur?” Paul asked.

Thomas and Roland shrugged.

The woman was a porcupine, and her staff seemed to be made of lanterns. It didn't look easy to wield, but then she pointed it at Grant, an intense light shot from it, which he deflected with a flick of Excalibur. Paul saw the shock on her face, then he had to look away as flash after flash of light tried to wash away all the colors. Then he glanced in that direction. Grant kept deflecting the attacks as he walked toward her.

She stood her ground, sending a steady beam of light that winked out after a quick motion from the kangaroo left her holding two halves of a staff.

She looked at them and mouthed something Paul couldn't hear, then Grant punched her hard and she fell back.

He looked around. “Is there anyone else looking to get some of this?” He demanded.

The Chambers watched the kangaroo, stunned, then one dropped to his knees and put his hands behind his head.

“I think we just won,” Roland said.

“We were always going to win,” Joseph said.

Thomas looked around, and Paul followed his gaze. Yuhui was still unconscious, Kuno was barely that. Three of the Steel Link men were injured, and then there was Raoul.

“I wish it hadn't come at such a price,” Thomas said.

Paul wondered if a victory that came at the cost of even one life could be considered as such.