



*ANOMALY: BEYOND THE RABBIT* picks up immediately after the end of *RABBIT REDEMPTION: Book Three of the Rabbit Trilogy*. The author chose to excerpt a little fun—this is when Chloe Bushman drums up the courage to chase after Elder Roman. Enjoy! ~ Ellen C Maze

***SPOILER ALERT: Contains spoilers for those who haven't read *Rabbit Redemption: Book Three of the Rabbit Trilogy*.***

## 4

He had to come out eventually. At sundown, like a stalker, Chloe parked herself a block away to see if the Elders returned to visit Javier. She watched Canaan enter and wasn't leaving until she asked him about Kilmeade. To pass the time, she studied for her Psych quiz with one eye on Javier's front door.

The day she met Kilmeade, the Rakum cornered her in Javier's hallway and mesmerized her with no effort. He wasn't like those depicted in Beth Rider's book, nor the monsters that abducted and terrorized her in November. Just then, Canaan exited at a brisk walk and did not look at Chloe when she popped out and trotted his way.

"Canaan! Wait!" she called, and didn't he grin? Still, he walked on. Unlike the slender athleticism she noticed in Kilmeade, Canaan was beefy with muscle and a dramatic tattoo snaked out of his collar and left sleeve. His curly blond hair fluttered in the cold wind and he didn't acknowledge her even when she reached his side. "I need to see Kilmeade," she said, breathing hard. "Since you guys live together you can get him to call me."

The Elder climbed into the truck and closed the door. Only after he switched on the vehicle and lowered the window, did he turn. Grinning, he met her eye and Chloe looked away, unnerved by his ice-blue gaze. Catching on, Canaan did not speak until she braved to look up.

"Did you just call us *you guys*?" he asked with a toothy grin. "Together, we're 746 years old. How old are you again? Twelve?"

"I'm twenty," she replied gauging his seriousness.

"Like I said, *twelve*," he huffed. "Here's some advice; you'll catch more flies with a little sucking up."

Ignoring his false indignation, Chloe asked, "How can I reach him?"

The man shook his head, still faking offense. "Can't hear you."

Chloe furrowed her brow in frustration. "Please, um, Master Canaan? The Amazing Canaan?" Chloe's eyes widened as she thought of more grandiose titles. "Your Highness? Oh-Mighty-Handsome-One?"

"Any of those will bend an Elder's ear." He grinned, propped his chin on his palm and gave her an adoring gaze. "Now, what did it want?"

"Your Wonderfulness, will you please tell Elder Kilmeade I want to speak to him?" Chloe said with exaggerated respect. It was a game for this one and she didn't mind playing.

"Like to, but honey, Kilmeade doesn't like humans."

"He likes *me*," she said defiantly and Canaan's grin widened.

"Ooh, it is *sassy!*" Canaan chuckled. "Look, tiny, I gotta look after my brother. Do you know what you're asking? Rakum Elders don't make *friends*." His gaze remained playful, but Chloe's mind went blank. Canaan held up three fingers. "Blood, sex, violence," he said, his opposite hand manually lowering a digit with each word. "That is the limit of our interest and not always in that order."

"I just wanted to talk to him..." Chloe sighed, growing perturbed. Kilmeade had come on strong when they met; it never occurred to her their interaction may have been meaningless.

"What a lip. Look at it," the Elder teased regarding her with a tight grin. "Don't pout, tiny. Kilmeade has spoken of you." Canaan checked his

mirrors. "I'll tell you how to reach him, but you've been warned; he doesn't want to bake cookies, gossip, and paint toenails. *Comprende?*"

Chloe nodded slowly. "Okay."

Canaan fluttered his eyebrows. "Do this..." He put a finger to his temple. "Picture his face, look for his thread, and grab it." Chloe's mouth must have dropped, because he added, "That's all there is to it. *Easy.*" Without another word, he abruptly drove away.

Chloe watched him go, her mind racing. *Can I really speak to Kilmeade telepathically?* She walked to her car, planning what she would say in case she attempted and he answered.

When she was home again, Chloe had the house to herself. As teaching physicians at the University, her parents had gone on a medical missions trip. In the three months since she was kidnapped by a devil and rescued by God, she'd attended class and kept up a happy face. Her parents didn't know she'd been abducted; how could she tell them when those involved were of supernatural ilk? Her mother already thought she was a wild child, so Chloe depended on her coping skills and advice from Roman to keep her mind and spirit strong. The now-human Elder helped her understand her infatuation with Javier when he was under the influence of Isaac's blood. He also helped her and David remain friends after their awkward break-up, telling them all that God probably orchestrated her puppy loves with David and Javier as part of His plan to bring the Rakum race to a complete end.

*Complete, except for two Elders...*

Chloe switched on the lamp beside the sofa and furrowed her brow. Did God play matchmaker to bring about His purposes? Roman had tried to give her examples from the Bible, but Chloe had been distracted thinking about Kilmeade. *And Canaan thinks I can contact him telepathically...*

Chloe collapsed in a pile on the sofa and pondered the possibility. When in the horrible Rufus's clutches, he spoke in her mind. It terrified her knowing that one who wanted to kill her could communicate with her so intimately. Then when Javier showed up as the Anomaly, he heard her thoughts. So why not this Elder?

Chloe dimmed the lamp to the lowest wattage and closed her eyes. Only for the tiniest second did her conscience whisper to her to think twice. Blocking her inner voice, she brought up Elder Kilmeade's face from the other night. He hadn't given her much attention, but the first time they met, he'd been brazenly flirtatious.

"Elder Kilmeade," she thought, not realizing until the words flowed that she might be beginning their conversation. *"Please come see me..."*

Chloe experienced a peculiar lightness in her middle. Had it to do with telepathy? She hadn't felt it before, so she experimented more.

*"I have questions only you can answer,"* she thought, picturing his face and

the way his gray eyes twinkled when he shot her each daring compliment upon their first meeting. The floaty feeling resumed and she exhaled; if she could only fall quiet enough, even to the extent of holding her breath, she might hear a reply. She counted to ten not breathing and definitely heard a soft chuckle in the very back of her ear. Without opening her eyes, she sat up.

*“Did I do it? Did I reach you?”*

*“Breathe, Miss Bushman, breeeeeeeeathe...”* the voice teased.

Kilmeade! She grinned. *“Why won’t you come see me?”* she sent as goose pimples covered her arms.

*“You live at 220 Poplar?”* the voice asked.

“Yes,” Chloe said aloud and opened her eyes. The connection remained, and she sensed a tether to the voice on the other end. Then with an almost audible pop, the string snapped, and she was alone. Suddenly anxious, Chloe got to her feet. Was he really coming over? A full-blooded Rakum Elder at her house while she was all alone? Chloe looked at her watch, checked the locks and the alarm on the doors, and hoped she’d done the right thing.

Nearly four hours later, Chloe lounged on the leather recliner in her dad’s den; the voice never came by. She flicked off the television and the room slumped into the brownish glow of an amber desk lamp. Chloe grumbled about the late hour, stretched her arms to the ceiling, and turned for the hallway.

“How scandalous!” Elder Kilmeade said from the doorway. “Inviting me over when you’re all alone...”

“Oh, god!” Chloe hissed with her hand over her heart.

Leaning casually against the threshold, Kilmeade grinned. “You rang?”

“Oh, god,” Chloe said again softer. “You... You just came in?”

He shrugged. “You invited me. I’m here. What do you want?”

Chloe paused, thrown off by his sudden appearance. “But that was...” She glanced at the wall clock. “...three-and-a-half hours ago.”

“I am not a dog. I go where I want, when I want.” He held her gaze, his chin lowered. “Come close,” he said and held out his hand.

Chloe’s throat tightened and she hugged herself. She was still dressed, thank God, although her sweater was tattered and her sweatpants too loose. When the voice hadn’t shown within an hour, she’d dressed down for no one’s eyes but her own.

“You look delightful. Is that cashmere?” Kilmeade asked, hand still waiting for her to reach out. “Give us a feel.”

Chloe unwrapped her arms and looked at her front. It *was* cashmere, but it wasn’t likely the Elder wanted to touch it; he wanted her closer. While she wrestled with what to do, he closed the distance between them.

Inserting his fingers underneath to caress the soft weave, the back of his hand brushed her skin. Chloe gasped and stood frozen in place.

"I knew it," he said inches away. He waited for her to look into his face and he smiled on her. "Would you like to tell me why I'm here?"

"I... I wanted..." Chloe began and stopped.

"I'm not very patient," Kilmeade said and moved his hand from her sweater to touch her face. He ran his fingers down her cheek and then over her lips. "Your mind is bloated with conflict. Shall I choose?"

"I wanted..."

"You want...?" Kilmeade sent her a tiny smile. "Tick-tock."

Chloe swallowed and sought the right words.

Kilmeade's thumb brushed her bottom lip when she hadn't replied. "Allow me to help. You want to let your blood. Right now."

"Oh, no, I..." Chloe stuttered. Part of her indeed wondered what it would be like if he took her blood as Javier had in November. But hadn't she just wanted to talk?

"I no longer prefer human blood, Miss Bushman. Haven't for decades," Kilmeade said absently, his eyes trained to her neck. He pushed her long brown curls aside. "But a female that consents? I would make an exception."

"Umm," Chloe moaned wishing he wouldn't rush her.

"Do you?" Kilmeade's two fingers touched her chin and he turned her face to his. "Consent? I have to hear it."

She found her voice. "I don't think I'm supposed to..." The Elder rolled his eyes and began to pull away. "No! I mean, yes! I mean, it's okay," Chloe said in a rush, clutching his thick biceps through his burgundy sweater. "Yes."

Kilmeade drew her close in an instant and pushed elongated teeth through her skin. One arm embraced her gently, but the one at the back of her throat pressed their contact together too firmly and she reflexively struggled to be free.

"*Be still,*" she heard in her mind as she began to panic. Then it was over. The punctures stung only a moment before the sensation of his tongue pressing against the wound melted the discomfort away. Then he backed completely and leaned against the threshold across the room.

Chloe dropped to the sofa, and with her mind numb, she watched him savor the aftereffects. When the clock noisily rang the quarter hour, Kilmeade met her eye and smiled.

"That was a treat," he said with quiet reverence. He seemed to be waiting for her to speak or move, but she did neither. When she still hadn't reacted, Kilmeade stood off the doorframe and thrust his hands into his slacks pockets. "Three, two, one. Bye," he said out of patience.

She wanted him to stay. She wanted him to leave. And she wanted

him to do it again. All of this was moot, for the Elder turned on his heel, waved his fingers from behind, and disappeared down the hall. Chloe didn't hear him exit the front door, but she hadn't heard him earlier, either. She turned the dimmer to full-light and relaxed into the couch.

Rufus took her blood when she was terrified, Javier when she was unaware, and Kilmeade took it by consent where she recalled 100% of the experience. And she was, well, *fine*. Tired, sleepy, but no worse for wear. Chloe allowed the moment-by-moment recollection to return and pondered it until she fell asleep where she sat.

# 5, JAN 8

The sun had been down an hour when Kilmeade and Canaan rose from the light-tight basement to lounge and reflect in the ridiculously comfortable living room recliners Roman had chosen. After Kilmeade shared highlights of his visit with Miss Bushman the night before, Canaan launched into his recollection of when he shot Beryl with Marcy's Glock. Afterward, both Elders fell into their own thoughts. Beryl knocked on the living room threshold five minutes later and neither of them paid him any mind. Sensing they purposefully ignored him, Beryl cleared his throat. When they still hadn't acknowledged him, Beryl finally spoke.

"Javier asked me to come by. Either of you want to go?"

Canaan rolled his eyes to Kilmeade and raised his eyebrows. In response, Kilmeade only exhaled. "Go on, B. Take my truck," Canaan said and fell quiet.

Beryl regarded them in silence a few moments before he was heard exiting the front and Kilmeade snickered.

"What so funny?" Canaan asked with eyes closed.

"Your little Beryl," Kilmeade said softly.

"You told me his brain was fine, so what's funny?" Canaan asked again, obviously too relaxed to open his eyes.

"I shouldn't have laughed," Kilmeade said and pushed his recliner back further. "We're supposed to be *nice* now. Our transformed brethren can't take the ribbing like they used to."

"Oh, Beryl's funny because he's pitiful," Canaan agreed with a chuckle and nodding with his own statement.

"Not only that, but he's so *self-accusatory*. Everything is his fault." Kilmeade shivered. "It's disgusting. Javier isn't like that."

"He's smart. He'll get used to it." Canaan then lowered his

voice and cleared his throat waiting for Kilmeade to look over. “You realize we can’t compare Beryl to Javier. Between Roman and Jack Dawn?” Canaan regarded Kilmeade with one eye. “Javier had it easy with your brother.”

Kilmeade agreed with a chuckle.

“Damn straight,” Canaan huffed. “We all wanted to be like Jack. Meryl and Beryl especially; they worked hard at it.” Canaan grinned as his memories rolled in. “Jack Dawn—he was a powerhouse...”

Kilmeade scoffed. Jack was ruthless and he was old—1200 when he died—yet he had no class. “Your master did not impress me,” he replied. “As for the twins, Meryl had the personality. Him, I enjoyed.”

Canaan chuckled and Kilmeade glanced his way. “Assembly 1969,” he stated and peeked sideways. “Meryl came to me about you.”

Kilmeade grinned, chortled once, and looked to the ceiling. “Petulant squirt.”

“Indeed!” Canaan laughed more boisterously. “Always searching for a pet, weren’t you? *Shiiiiit...*”

“I only asked him to travel with me,” Kilmeade said with a sideways grin. “Anything else was of his creative imagination.”

Canaan shook his head still smiling. “Jack would never have released either of them, you know he wouldn’t.”

Kilmeade said nothing, his mind playing on memories of better times when his brethren were intact and they loved, loved, *loved* their Elders. Every grunt *served* and Elders were allowed their whims. If an inferior’s appearance pleased Kilmeade before Last Assembly, he exercised his will in any way he chose. Some grunts took it better than others, but any that expressed disdain of Kilmeade’s attentions were manhandled all the more. Add to that, Meryl had been very young, so gullible and eager to impress his masters. Kilmeade chuckled anew and Canaan looked over, after catching a glimpse of what he’d been thinking.

“Judas Priest, you were relentless.”



“What?” Kilmeade shrugged innocently. “I sent his brother to see you. I heard no objections.”

“*Hah*,” Canaan huffed softly and then exhaled, deep in their conjoined memories. “Jack was very possessive. I’m surprised he didn’t strike you back. He was vindictive.”

“What could he do? Jack Dawn was no match for Kilmeade. I am the greatest Elder that ever lived. Everyone knows that.”

“Yes, they do,” Canaan said with a curt nod.

Kilmeade allowed the silence to stretch as he stared at the ceiling. Canaan sighed when he did and he looked over. “Brother, the Old Way is over. The *New* Way will be foreign and challenging.” He took a deep breath before continuing in a soft voice. “No matter what we do, over time, you and I will grow more human. It is inevitable.”

Canaan didn’t disagree. He exhaled thoughtfully and stared off. Kilmeade picked up his internal ramblings and smiled. *Javier and Roman will help us make sense of it. And the Bushman girl...if Kilmeade continues to see her, her presence will soften things up...*

“I like the way our minds are melding. It’s very—” Kilmeade began without looking over.

“Comforting,” Canaan said finishing his thought.

“Precisely,” Kilmeade sighed. “I’m too comfortable to move. I might order pizza, watch TV, and sit here all night.”

Canaan agreed with a grunt as his phone rang. He answered it and hissed at Kilmeade when he saw the caller ID. Kilmeade overheard their exchange: Rafa wanted to drop by. Kilmeade shook his head, no.

Canaan grinned mischievously. “Your master doesn’t like mortals.”

“*Elder Canaan, please...*” Rafael’s telephone voice was plaintive. “*...I’m down the street. It’ll only take a minute.*”

Kilmeade grimaced when Canaan met his eye. “I won’t see Iago,” Kilmeade grumbled. “Tell him.”

“Come on,” Canaan told him. “But don’t bring that Cow. Just you.” Canaan ended the call. “I was nice to Beryl. You be

nice to Rafael.”

Kilmeade groaned histrionically and sat up without closing the footrest. “I miss my freaking pet!”

“You and your pets,” Canaan said under his breath.

Kilmeade shook his head. “You have no idea what he was like—what it was like having him with me—and our time was much too short.”

Canaan nodded. “I’ll take your word for it.”

“You are not above it, my brother. Take Javier—when you reconnected last year, you wanted him with you.” Kilmeade stared at Canaan’s face.

“Yeah,” Canaan said noncommittally. “Maybe..”

“No, *for certain*,” Kilmeade countered with more vigor. “If there had been no Rufus to destroy and you came upon little Javier all human and mixed up, you would have carried him home with you.” Kilmeade laughed at Canaan’s impertinence. “Do not pretend with me. I see all.”

“I wasn’t alone. I had Marcy.”

“*Pssshhh*. Another Rakum is what an Elder needs. A mate has her place, but she can’t know you like a brother.” Kilmeade nodded to himself. “Rafael was perfect. I had a very nice life ahead of me with that one by my side.” Kilmeade’s voice tapered off, deep in thought.

“It’s not all shit. You’ve got me.” Canaan reached across the distance between their recliners and held out his forearm. “Pet it. You can pet my arm...”

Kilmeade chuckled and slapped it down. “I’ll pet you...”

“*You* want to pet Miss Bushman,” Canaan teased. “I warned her how tough it is to please an Elder as great as Kilmeade.”

Kilmeade grinned despite his disconcert regarding Rafael. *She already pleases me a great deal*. Kilmeade rubbed his face.

Canaan exhaled, having overheard his unspoken sentiment. “She’s tiny,” Canaan mused aloud. “Makes me think of those little birds—chickadees. Marcy loved those silly things.”

“Little bird...that’s what she is,” Kilmeade said softly, his

mind on her face, her scent, her laugh.

Beside him, Canaan grew still, scheming an attack. Before Kilmeade could warn him of the futility, his partner surged forward and took a swipe at his feet, hard enough to knock his legs off the footrest.

“Are we bored?” Kilmeade asked and finished sitting upright. He made an effort to stand and Canaan reached forward in a blur to grab his shirt into his fists. Kilmeade returned the grasp on Canaan’s thick sweater and pushed into him as he found his feet. “Now I’ll pet you!” Kilmeade said in an urgent grunt as Canaan shoved him backward.

“All this talk of pets has me thinking. It’s time I made you my bitch,” Canaan said, grinning now with exertion, putting every ounce of his strength into pushing his friend off balance.

In the Rakum heyday, Elders pummeled each other on a regular basis. Pulsing with adrenaline, Kilmeade shoved Canaan hard enough to surprise him and break free.

“Old man’s still got it!” Canaan barked and leapt in to reestablish his hold on Kilmeade’s clothing.

“You’ve gotten so flabby!” Kilmeade barked and advanced into Canaan until he was forced to leap out of his grasp or be pushed into the side table. “Come here, you big baby!” Kilmeade called and chased him to the back of the couch.

Canaan turned, ducked behind Kilmeade’s reach, and came up behind him to yank one arm up hard against his own back. “I’ll show you flabby!” he said and surged forward until he’d pressed the Elder’s cheek into the drywall. “If you cry uncle, I won’t snap it off..”

*“That’s adorable. You fight like a pup just out of First Ritual,”* Kilmeade sent and concentrated on his next move. When he had built the appropriate energy, he pushed them both off the wall with his free arm and sent Canaan sprawling. His partner’s body struck the back of the couch at hip-level and flipped head over heels. He crashed into the glass coffee table, which disappeared into a thousand harmless chunks. Canaan lay on his back in the shattered mess and laughed.

“You surprise me, old man!” he said and laughed again. The doorbell sounded and the bolts clanked as Canaan opened them with his mind. “*Be sweet, Kilmeade. He’s had a shock.*”

“*Never instruct your Elders, Flabby,*” Kilmeade replied telepathically and turned to see Rafael enter as tall and devastatingly handsome as ever, but with a new aroma that revealed his rapid and unwelcome transformation.

“Elder Kilmeade,” Rafa said without entering fully. He didn’t know how to behave and Kilmeade didn’t know how to receive him.

“Rafa,” Kilmeade said and remained as he was, standing over Canaan littered with glass. When neither spoke for a few seconds, Canaan stuck his hand out to Kilmeade.

“Rafael, you look great,” Canaan said as Kilmeade yanked him to his feet. “Not all the way there?” he asked and reached the man in a few strides. Rafa consented to Canaan pulling him close to sniff his head.

“Almost, Master,” Rafael whispered and cut his eyes to Kilmeade. With one hand on his shoulder, Canaan held the man in place at the living room threshold.

“Tell us what’s happening,” Canaan instructed on Kilmeade’s behalf.

“The sun pains me at high noon. Other than that,” he said in a low voice, “very soon, maybe tomorrow, I will be completely human.”

Kilmeade groaned and dramatically turned away to the kitchen.

“I’m moving Iago to Las Vegas,” Rafa said quietly and Kilmeade stopped his forward motion. “He has family there. He wants to run an art gallery,” Rafa continued. “His cancer returned; *es malo.*”

Kilmeade slowly faced him, still a room away. Canaan moved Rafael forward by the contact on his shoulder and stopped a few feet from where Kilmeade stood with his hands in his pockets.

“Iago has been a good companion,” Kilmeade offered.

Rafael nodded with sad eyes. “I will leave information

with Javier so you will know where we are.”

“*Be gentle,*” Canaan sent and Kilmeade sighed with a miniscule nod.

“May I speak with you privately, Master?” he asked in a whisper.

“I’m not your master any longer, Rafa, but yes. *Yes,*” Kilmeade said exasperated, “Canaan, go away.”

Kilmeade crossed the kitchen without turning on the overhead light. The only illumination came from a nightlight set in the door of the stainless-steel fridge. He exhaled and leaned against the counter. Crossing his arms, he sighed again. “What in the world do you want?”

“I have a couple of messages,” Rafael said and leaned on the island across from Kilmeade in the dimly-lit space. “Elder Canaan, you can hear, too,” Rafael said to the side aware Canaan was listening from wherever he waited out of sight. “A moment alone is all I request.”

Kilmeade looked down. “Okay, he heard you. Go ahead.”

“First, Guap and Polly are dispersing the Father’s funds to the Brethren. They deposited mine today allotting me twenty million dollars. Javier asked me to tell you since you don’t use a phone. The Elders are also entitled to a portion so contact him to make arrangements.”

“HOT DAMN!” Canaan’s voice resounded through the house with gusto. Kilmeade shook his head, but smiled at his enthusiasm. Rafael grinned, too, and Kilmeade’s heart melted a fraction at the sight.

“Second, I am sorry to say that James DuPont killed himself over the weekend.”

Rafa waited for Kilmeade to meet his eye. On the one hand, DuPont had been a good Cow for many years. On the other, all Cows were emotionally unbalanced. Kilmeade gave Rafael an end-of-topic nod.

“Also, I intend to dispose of the contents of Locker 1191.”

Kilmeade’s eyebrows went up. “My babies?”

For the Rakum race, only the Ten Fathers were fertile.

Nonetheless, in 1901, Kilmeade's keen inquisitive nature led him to experiment on his own seed after acquiring a Cow who was also a pioneer in the field of genetics. Using Black Magic, Dr. Penny succeeded in fertilizing her eggs with his seed. Thinking ahead, he stored the preserved materials to await the future technology. But now? With no Rakum spirit to embody the progeny, who was to say one of the horrible demons they fought in November wouldn't enter them as the one called Zahdone had the infant Isaac? No, it was better to destroy the cells than risk it.

"I will alert you when it is done," Rafa added.

Kilmeade tipped his chin once, morose at saying goodbye to his fantasy of fathering children.

"Last, I know you don't prefer to drink from mortals, but still, whatever I have is yours." Spoken like a Rakum grunt to his master.

Kilmeade watched his dark eyes; the Rakum he had been was gone, but a sincere and intelligent man remained. Kilmeade stepped off the counter and cupped the back of Rafa's neck and pulled him into a warm embrace.

"I will check on you from time to time," Kilmeade whispered.

Rafael returned the gesture, standing slightly taller, his chin tucked in beside Kilmeade's ear. "Please do," Rafa whispered. "I will miss you."

Kilmeade held onto him another long minute and then pushed him away to arm's length. "Now go make your offer to Canaan."

"OH, YEAH, BABY!" Canaan again shouted from the other room. Kilmeade and Rafa both grinned at his antics and Kilmeade watched him leave. He had lost his pet, but Rafa wasn't at fault.

Kilmeade exited the kitchen the back way and headed up the stairs to his bedroom. The aroma of blood hit the air and he shook his head. It was human. Rafa was human.

A colossal cluster.

END OF PEEK



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