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(Picks up directly after RABBIT LEGACY)

Something was not quite right and Canaan blinked his eyes several times to clear his vision. Below him, lying on the carpeted floor, undergoing a violent rejuvenation treatment administered by The Last, Isaac Akaron, was *his* body, pale, limp, and apparently deceased.

Yet, Canaan wasn't dead.

On the contrary, he watched the scene as if suspended from the ceiling. Standing in a semi-circle around his still form, he recognized his brethren watching the show with keen interest. Dimple, a sturdy Rakum grunt from New Orleans with fair skin and bright pea-green eyes; Boris, six-foot-six

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and black as night, hailed from Rufus's pack before the Elder went bananas; and Hoss, a burly grunt with a crew cut and curiously large biceps, known for being slow-witted, but obedient to his superiors. From his insane ethereal position, Canaan could see one more, just outside their group, sitting against the wall and leaning over his knees. Without his flesh, Canaan had no extrasensory abilities to discern this one's identity.

"YAH-HAH!" Isaac yelped with apparent joy below him, both palms against Canaan's head. "RETURN!" he bellowed and flashed his face toward the ceiling where Canaan hovered.

Canaan blinked with surprise and when he reopened his eyes, he was looking into Isaac's face from the floor.

"I am amazing!" the boy said and removed his hands. He rolled onto his butt, crossed his legs Indian-style, and put one hand to Canaan's blond curls. "Hey, there, buddy," the kid said, a victorious smile in place. "How do you feel?"

"Hey," Canaan said and nodded, trying to appear as unaffected as possible.

"Rufus cooked you a little," Isaac said, still awaiting a report. He swirled his fingers a few more times on Canaan's forehead and then smoothed his long sideburns with his forefinger.

Canaan did not reject The Last's affections, the previous hours clear in his mind. This blond and perfect, seemingly fourteen-year-old boy was High Father Abroghia's last laugh, the most powerful Rakum that ever lived. Now, the kid would be in charge of their race, what was left of them. Canaan kept his thoughts positive—the kid was more telepathic than them all.

"I don't mind if you ponder my amazingness, Elder Canaan," Isaac said then, his voice soft.

"Thank you," Canaan said on top of Isaac's last word, "for bringing me back."

"Of course, I'd bring you back, silly," Isaac said and hopped to his feet with athletic agility. "I'm not sure it's completely *fair*..." he stressed and turned toward the thick red-headed Rakum nearest him. "Dimple shot Rufus just when it was getting really interesting."

"Shot him?" Canaan said, not really asking. He had heard several explosions before he passed out and now assumed this was the explanation.

"Don't get me wrong, Canaan, I want you with me. I *need* you, actually, but..." the kid shrugged, "a gun?" He looked at Dimple again and the guy

wincing as if he'd been struck. Isaac returned his attention to Canaan, still lying flat on the carpet. "Um, buddy... Naptime's over."

"Of course," Canaan agreed and commanded his body to stand. His limbs responded sluggishly, but all-in-all, he probably looked pretty sturdy to those watching on. He had no pain, and only a vague tickle remained along his spine from Elder Rufus' attack to his nervous system. The Last truly was amazing. Then an unexpected thought popped into Canaan's mind and he knew Isaac would read it and respond: *Did Roman and the rest get away safely?*

"I let them go, they're gone," Isaac said, ending the discussion. "But that's not all," Isaac said grasping Canaan's hand. "I healed Beryl, too. He had burnt to a crisp running to the house at dawn." Isaac laughed out loud and shook his head.

Canaan was familiar with Beryl and Meryl in many ways. The first and most recent was regarding when they served Rufus. A mere week ago, Meryl and Beryl were dispatched by the insane Elder to kidnap Canaan's lover, Marcy, to lure him to Jackson. Meryl had actually buzzed off her before Canaan could get there and intervene. This breach cost him dearly—Canaan broke his neck and left him to die. Obviously, they somehow survived.

Isaac caught Canaan's eye and winked. "You can be dangerous, can't you," he giggled, not truly asking a question. "But they're your little brothers, right? Elder Jack Dawn's pack—did I read that right?"

Canaan nodded. Jack had favored them a great deal. The twins were renowned for their exceptional physical beauty, but Canaan was aware of their other skills, the ones that made them Lieutenant—and eventually Elder—material. Now this one looked broken. And where was his twin Meryl?

"Don't worry, Canaan, Beryl's all fixed up," Isaac said, still giggling at the man's misfortune. "It *was* hilarious, though. He was oozing puss. Completely black and red when Officer Dimple, here, yanked him inside." Isaac tugged Canaan to where the Rakum sat with his head over his knees.

Canaan had seen Rakum burnt by the sun, and if they were allowed to crisp up even a few minutes, they would expire. Yet, Beryl had no apparent burns and Canaan was impressed again. Healing consumed tremendous energy, and Isaac had healed two of them within hours. Isaac squeezed his hand then, grinning into his face.

“All of you...” He took a moment to catch the eye of every Rakum standing. “You guys are going to help me set things right.”

“*Ta’Avah...*” Beryl whispered from their feet.

“*Pfffft*,” Isaac responded, spitting at no one in particular. He caught Canaan’s eye. “Just so you’ll know, while you were passed out...”

His eyes actually shined with humor then, reminding Canaan of their new leader’s ruthless nature. Sure, he was the youngest of them all, but there would be no limit to his power or his ambitions. Reading his run-on thoughts, Isaac smiled as he completed his statement.

“...our maker stole Father Theophilus from the basement.”

Canaan had questions, but Isaac beat him to it.

“From now on, we will know him as *Ta’avah*, but he embodied High Father Abroghia in a previous incarnation. All of you,” Isaac said to each, “must understand our maker is a spirit, and for the moment, he inhabits this Rakum’s dead twin.” The kid gestured to the kneeling man.

Canaan nodded. He had his answer. It was a damn shame; before he attacked Marcy, Meryl had been *his* favorite between the two brothers, their personalities more alike. Beryl had always seemed “less than,” and Canaan and Elder Dawn had discussed that very thing on more than on occasion.

“Yes, he’s a moron. Canaan...” Isaac interrupted his thoughts, pointing a thumb Canaan’s way. “...you’re the only one not paying attention. Focus on me. Got it?” Isaac asked the group at the last edict, not truly chastising Canaan alone.

Canaan nodded.

“I will get Father Theophilus back,” Isaac continued easily, “and then I will vanquish *Ta’avah*. It is my birthright to rule our people.”

“I’m with you, Boss, one hundred percent,” the lumbering black Rakum to Isaac’s left said in a low baritone.

“I know you are, Boris,” Isaac said and rubbed the big guy’s arm. “The rest of you—are you with me? Will you stand with me as your Father, against anyone—man or Rakum—who dares challenge me?”

“I will,” Hoss said without hesitation, then Dimple agreed in a low voice. Canaan nodded and Isaac seemed satisfied.

The Rakum on the floor still hadn’t moved or looked up. Canaan was about to help him rise when Isaac booted Beryl with his tennis shoe.

“Beryl, are you with me?” Isaac said and waited. A low “yes” was his response. Isaac paused another second and kicked Beryl in the shoulder

harder than before. “We’re fresh out of pacifiers, Beryl,” Isaac said. “This is no house for babies. Is that what you are? A whining baby?” Isaac looked to Boris and pet Beryl’s soft, brown hair. “You can eat this if it’s a baby, Boris. You’re my favorite.”

“No, Master, I am a Rakum,” Beryl said and rolled to his knees, then to his feet. “I will serve you.”

The Rakum’s eyes remained downcast, but it was enough. Canaan saw his face. Only half of it was healed; the other half puckered with red, yellow, and black oozing flesh, as if a burn tried to heal, but was being prevented.

Isaac laughed then and turned away from the circle. “*I do what I want,*” he sent telepathically to Canaan alone. “*Now, come feed me,*” he said silently and crawled into what used to be Rufus’ throne. “Come now,” he said aloud, although all present realized who the kid wanted.

Canaan crossed the room and rolled up his sleeve.

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