

BIOLOGICAL 43

Chapter 43: This is not a normal behaviour (2)

Erik's eyes opened, revealing a white ceiling above him, adorned with rectangular lamps. This view, unfamiliar at first, soon made sense as he surveyed his surroundings. The hospital - that's where he was.

He lay in a hospital bed, encircled by various machines. Fortunately, none connected to him.

Beside his bed stood a man in military attire. Erik's vision, blurred, initially prevented immediate recognition. However, after a moment of observation, recognition dawned on him.

"Uncle Benjamin..." Erik's voice, raspy and weak, rose above a whisper. His eyes, clouded with confusion, tried to focus on the figure before him.

"Erik!" Benjamin said, his voice a mix of relief and lingering worry. He leaned forward, scrutinizing Erik's face for any sign of discomfort. "How are you? How do you feel?"

"Not bad..." Erik said, his words slow, reflecting his struggle to comprehend his situation. He attempted a faint smile, though it faltered. "I have been better, though..."

Benjamin's expression softened, a look of concern etching his features. "You got me worried for a moment, boy..." He reached out, gripping Erik's hand in a comforting hold, seeking to offer reassurance through his touch.

Benjamin then focused on Erik, his brow furrowed. "What the hell happened?" he asked, his gaze searching Erik's face for answers.

Erik's mind pieced together the events leading to his hospitalization. He was the victim of an attack by Conal, Orson, and Logan.

They had employed their powers against him, a move he found excessive.

Erik, grappling with the reality of the situation, recognized a need for a more dominant stance to prevent such incidents.

Yet, the ease with which they had crossed the line into physical aggression baffled him. Despite not being surprised, his anger was undeniable.

He felt anger not only towards them for their actions but also towards himself for his naivety in believing that his actions in the cafeteria would be enough to stop their attacks.

He lingered over his thoughts before responding to Benjamin, who observed Erik's contemplative silence, sensing his best friend's son's struggle to articulate his thoughts.

Erik found himself engulfed in an emotional tempest. The unfairness of his situation eluded his understanding.

What had he done to deserve such a fate? Was his past life marked by grave sins like slaying a god or annihilating a world?

Why was he the target of such relentless torment? And why was he cursed with a power that seemed trivial in a world where power dictated one's place in society?

Amidst his internal rage, Erik restrained these emotions, uncertain of Uncle Benjamin's trustworthiness.

He hadn't overlooked the coincidence of his house being searched when he had left with Benjamin.

The timing of his assault and Benjamin's presence at the hospital raised suspicions.

These events, though not unusual, now painted a picture of potential deceit. Could it be that all these years, Benjamin had an ulterior motive?

That was upsetting, as it would mean the only positive relationship he had ever had was a lie.

As Erik dwelled on the assault, his anger swelled like a storm gaining strength over the ocean. He realized he could no longer endure the relentless waves of aggression and injustice.

Shouldn't anyone have stopped these guys if they were trying to kill him? Was there someone with a shred of compassion? No. That was obvious to him.

In his mind, he likened Frant, his nation, and New Alexandria, its gleaming capital, to a grand theater where the display of power unfolded, with him cast as the tragic hero.

Conal, Logan and Orson were like relentless hawks, circling a wounded dove, each swoop more vicious than the last.

He had enough. Enough of dancing to the discordant symphony of a society that celebrated strength over kindness, enough of being the pawn in their cruel game.

It was as if the very roots of his being were crying out for change, yearning to break free from the chains of this oppressive world.

Perhaps leaving Frant behind and seeking refuge elsewhere would be Erik's best course. A place of safety, where worries like his current ones were nonexistent.

The idea of dwelling in the jungle among the Thaidis, creatures driven by instinct, seemed more appealing than his current predicament.

Yet, finding such a sanctuary was akin to locating a needle in a vast haystack. Every nation, every city, portrayed itself as a paradise, but certainty was elusive. The same horrors that plagued him in his current life could resurface elsewhere.

At the same time, another thought crystallized in his mind, gaining clarity and intensity. It started as a mere seed but soon grew into a towering tree, overshadowing all other considerations.

The idea was simple yet extreme: eliminate the source of his torment. End Logan, Orson, and Conal's reign of terror. Remove anyone who dared stand in his way.

<Yeah, that would do. It makes sense...> Erik thought, trying to justify his wish.

These malicious individuals were a threat to him and deserving of whatever consequences they would face.

If he crossed paths with them once more, he would not hesitate to tear them apart, knowing they would never cease their torment.

If they were willing to go as far as sending him to the hospital, they would probably be willing to do it again.

Benjamin observed Erik's distant gaze, recognizing the turmoil of emotions swirling within him. Erik appeared lost in a sea of thoughts, his mind grappling with heavy, unseen burdens. Benjamin remained silent, respecting the space Erik needed.

For a while, he simply sat there, his eyes fixed on an empty space, giving Erik the time to navigate through the storm of his internal struggle.

"What's the matter, Erik? What happened? Tell me something," Benjamin asked again.

A cautious demeanor marked Erik's abrupt return from his deep thoughts. He briefly acknowledged Benjamin's presence with a fleeting glance.

"I was assaulted..." His voice was flat, guarded, as he offered this fragment of truth.

"Do you know who they were?" Benjamin inquired, his concern clear.

"No," Erik responded, his reply quick and deliberate. His eyes shifted away, avoiding direct contact, a clear sign of his intention to keep Benjamin at arm's length. The mistrust he harbored cast a shadow over his words.

"I think they were just thugs or something like that..." His tone lacked conviction, a deliberate vagueness employed to deflect further probing.

In his mind, Erik was resolute about keeping his plans for Conal, Logan, and Orson concealed, especially from someone he now viewed with suspicion.

Erik shifted his position on the bed, turning to face Benjamin once more. His movements were deliberate, and measured, as he posed his question, "What happened once I lost consciousness?"

Benjamin's response was detailed, "A passerby found you losing blood in the middle of the street and called an ambulance. You were rushed here in critical conditions, losing a lot of blood. You are lucky to be alive."

Upon hearing this, a surge of anger simmered within Erik once again. The extent of his assailants' actions now fully dawned on him—they had gone too far this time.

Benjamin, sensing the gravity of the situation, said, "Look, I'm going to call the police. Whoever did this to you must pay..."

Erik's response was a simple "Ok..." His tone was noncommittal, his expression unreadable. He remained guarded, withholding his true thoughts and feelings, still wary of revealing too much to Benjamin.

Erik briefly thought about giving the police the footage he took during the confrontation. However, that was just a fleeting thought. He thought of what they did, and what he wanted to do, and dismissed that idea.

As Benjamin dialed the police, Erik's thoughts swirled like leaves in a tempest. He pondered the motives of Logan, Conal, and Orson.

Why hadn't they ended his life? Did fear of police intervention hold them back, or did they lack the resolve to commit such an irrevocable act? Erik suspected a more sinister reason: they relished the thought of prolonging his torment, betting on his silence out of fear.

In Erik's eyes, their assumption was a testament to their understanding of his character, and they were right.

He had no intention of revealing their identities. A lifetime of disappointments shaped this decision—the countless times authority figures, like teachers, had turned a blind eye to his plight.

To him, society seemed as rotten as a decaying tree, hollow and incapable of providing support.

When the police arrived, their questions rained down on him like an unrelenting storm.

Erik offered them the same narrative he had given Benjamin. His words painted the picture of a random, brutal mugging by faceless thugs, leaving him to suffer because he had nothing of value.

This lie, though a heavy cloak to wear, was his chosen armor against a world he no longer trusted.

Erik's irritation intensified, noting how swiftly the police responded to his uncle, a sergeant's call. He was certain that had he been the one to call, their indifference would have been palpable. In his eyes, muggings were a common scourge in the city, often orchestrated by members of the Crystal Cross Gang. Yet, the police's efforts to curb these crimes seemed lackluster at best.

This lax response struck Erik as odd, especially given the extensive efforts Becker put to eradicate the Crystal Cross Gang from the nation. It appeared to Erik that, despite these efforts, Becker's control over the situation was virtually nonexistent.

Once the police had concluded questioning him and left, Benjamin returned to Erik's side. Erik, visibly perturbed by the day's events, was tense, primarily because of Benjamin's presence.

Misinterpreting Erik's unease, Benjamin inquired, "What's wrong?" He mistook Erik's tension for the distress caused by the assault, unaware of the deeper layers of mistrust and suspicion harbored by his nephew.

"Nothing," Erik responded, his voice terse, his gaze averted. He remained guarded, unwilling to disclose any details to Benjamin.

"Do you mind if I call Mister Fox?" Erik shifted the conversation, seeking a semblance of normalcy.

"No problem," Benjamin said, his tone accommodating.

Erik reached for his phone, tucked in his backpack beside the bed. He dialed Mister Fox, his employer, and relayed the day's events with measured words.

He explained his absence from work, while Mister Fox expressed concern for him, an out-of-place sentiment Erik acknowledged but did not dwell on.

Benjamin interjected, as the call ended. "When you were sleeping, I called a healer, Erik."

"There was no reason, Uncle Ben. They are very expensive," Erik said, his tone flat, his body language stiff and closed off. He was dismissive, maintaining a physical and emotional distance from Benjamin.

"Stop dismissing the thing as if nothing happened, Erik. I couldn't leave you in that state," Benjamin insisted, his concern palpable.

Yet, Erik's reactions and responses continued to be marked by caution and vagueness, his suspicions of Benjamin coloring their interaction.

A healer was someone possessing a brain crystal power that allowed mana to heal injuries.

Not every power was unique. Most people had weapon-conjuring ones. Some could even imbue weapons with elements. Few could control the elements. It was a power more common in Thaidis, especially the flying ones, and among the most powerful powers.

A healer wielded a brain crystal power that harnessed mana for mending injuries. In the spectrum of powers influenced by the Sinister Cold, not every ability was distinct. Many individuals could conjure weapons, some adding elemental attributes to these creations. A rarer group could control elements directly, a skill especially prevalent and potent among the Thaidis, notably those capable of flight.

Healers found their place in the middle of this hierarchy. More prevalent than elementalists and less so than weapon spawners, they held a unique and vital role.

The presence of similar powers across individuals did not equate to diminished strength. The effectiveness of these powers varied depending on the user's skill and application.

Another intriguing category encompassed those who could manipulate various aspects.

This was the second most common brain crystal power, characterized by its diversity. Individuals like Floyd and Erik epitomized this group, and whose strength depended on the power itself.

They could be ridiculously weak, like Erik's power, or absurdly strong.

Floyd possessed an energy negation power, placing him potentially among the world's strongest.

His ability excelled both in defense and offense, capable of negating the momentum of a punch or, in theory, stopping a heart. Yet, Floyd's power was limited by high mana consumption and his current inability to fully exploit its potential, requiring him to be judicious in its use.

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An hour passed before the healer arrived to attend to Erik. His session, taking merely ten minutes, effectively sealed Erik's wounds. The relief Erik felt was immediate, a testament to the healer's competence.

"You're okay now," announced Raul, the healer, known city-wide in New Alexandria as the premier healer. His esteemed reputation guaranteed a steady stream of clients, primarily from military and affluent circles. Like many in his profession, Raul had also served in the military as a medic.

"Thank you, sir," Erik responded, his voice carrying a respectful yet reserved tone toward Raul.

"Don't mention it," Raul said in a professional, matter-of-fact manner before exiting the room.

Left alone with Benjamin, Erik sensed the shift in dynamics. When Benjamin broached the subject of school, his concern was obvious. "Erik, if you don't want to go back to school, just let me know. I'll talk to the teachers."

Erik's response was a noncommittal shrug. Although healed by Raul, he didn't feel the need to avoid school, nor did he wish to owe Benjamin any favors, especially given his current suspicions. "There is no need to... Thanks, uncle." His tone was polite yet distant.

Benjamin, picking up on Erik's reluctance but still eager to help, offered, "Ok, well... Since you're okay now, I can take you home. Is that alright?"

"Yes, uncle. Thank you..." Erik's acceptance was laced with politeness, yet his body language remained guarded. He was wary of raising any suspicions, thus choosing to accept Benjamin's offer despite his internal reservations.