

Fire's Servant or Master?

(Fire is a good servant but a cruel master)

Physically Thomas always was a weakling. Tall and skinny with none of the raw brawn that rules the schoolyard. Mentally there was never anything wrong with him. In fact he was always more intelligent than his peers; Capable of abstract thinking in his early school years. Thomas also had a fierce temper, and an ego to go with his intellect. Something that accounted for his tenacity, which in no way met his physical capabilities.

So Thomas found himself in trouble time and time again, simply because he refused to give in to his status, at the bottom of the pecking order, as a physical weakling. Those were hard times for his sacred pride. The brutal world of schoolyards and their bullies kept knocking him down. Thomas cried bitter tears of anger and tarnished pride. Eventually Thomas realized the power of allies. Or rather, it so happened that he by chance forged an alliance with an older and stronger guy. For a while Thomas' ego and pride could rule as it thought it always should have. But allies come and go, and Thomas eventually found himself alone in the world without powerful allies on call. Maybe the break from being knocked down had allowed his thinking to mature, or at least develop. Or maybe time had ground off a bit of his fiery temper. This time around Thomas adopted a more neutral stance, shy of conflicts. That became his hallmark for quite some years.

But you can paint over the stripes of a zebra, but eventually the zebra will find its way out again. Thomas found himself drawn to masculinity. Masculinity that could match his hidden pride and ego. Dominance and aggression to match his intellect. Films, comic books and heavy literature, they all called out for his hidden primal instincts and drew it closer to the surface of consciousness, like sirens reel in sailors. Thomas started to change. His self-confidence grew beneath him, from a net to a rock steady ground. His clothes changed from safe bets to off beat macho. His hair changed from mother's boy to brutally honest. Whether that was another twist of fate, or simply his unconscious desires pressing relentlessly, he found himself in prison. Two weeks of teaching inmates with a fraction of his IQ, or simply just listening to their desperate dreams of one last score, and then no more. Thomas found himself strangely drawn to the rough no-nonsense world of macho rules among the hardened criminals. He was invigorated. This was like rain for his thirsting masculinity. Thomas saw guys half his size ruling the barred world side by side with steroids-pumped thugs. Inside him it screamed, "It can be done!" Instinctively Thomas knew what to do. Barely knowing why and how he ended up with lots of Edward Bunker books in front of him. "The Predator Factory" and "Dog Eat Dog" raced past his inner eye in a haze where time was defied by need and interest. The ex-convict turned author relayed to him a revelation of how power is exerted. The Sunday Punch. Take no shit whatsoever. These became the cornerstones on which Thomas' male identity would rest. Hating the memories of his weak past, Thomas vowed solemnly never ever to take any shit again, no matter what the price or the outcome.

And with that, he had crossed his path, and had returned to the unspoiled instincts of his childhood. Relying on his newfound mentor, Thomas also knew that he must hit first, using the element of surprise and with all his possible force if he wanted to come out on top. Thomas felt better and stronger by the day as he meditated on this credo. Not since marathon running had he found such a powerful way of transcending his being to a higher level of control. Control over his fears. Control over his surroundings. His beliefs were quickly reinforced, when everybody around him backed down, as soon as they realized he wouldn't. He held his head higher than ever before. He felt effortlessly at ease wherever he went.

Then he was in an instant taken back to his childhood schoolyard of defeats. The guy was an old classmate of no particular importance. He ran into him near the block where Thomas lived. It infuriated Thomas the way he was only too happy to bump into Thomas here in the big city. As if they had anything in common. The guy was a small town kid in the big city, in a dead-end job, with no real education and no real prospects of female company. Still for old times sake he felt he was one up on Thomas. As one of the bullies of times past, he felt comforted by meeting an old victim in the big intimidating city. Taken aback Thomas hesitated, and had for a moment forgotten all about his new way of life. As Thomas walked away from the encounter, he cursed himself for falling back into his old ways. The more he thought about it, the more his rage grew. Involuntarily he clenched his fist till his knuckles turned white.

As he walked home, a man crossed his path. Thomas' left elbow and shoulder hit the man as he passed him. Thomas didn't feel anything. Thomas was lost in the deafening thunderstorm in his head. He regained his senses when the man stood in front of him shouting something unintelligible. But the tone of voice was unmistakable; it was the sound of the thunderstorm. Cold fire flickered in Thomas' eyes. His jaws closed so hard that his lips trembled in a distorted grimace. Throbbing veins rose on his white knuckled fists. Just before Thomas' cold fire had travelled the microscopic fuse to explosion, the man bowed his head, mumbled something inaudible, turned around and walked away. Thomas was so lost in the thunderstorm that he didn't stop to celebrate his victory. He barely realized what had just happened. It all added to his compounded hate of bullies and feeling weak and helpless. As he walked on Thomas didn't feel the salty drops running down his cheeks.

As he reached the front door of his apartment block, his rage had calmed down to the extent where he could consider what had just happened. He had no way of knowing what waited for him. As he climbed the stairs to the first floor, Thomas felt proud of his strengthened resolve. He couldn't possibly see who waited for him. As he climbed the stairs to the second floor, Thomas' remembered his earlier disappointment; it tainted his pride and left him with a bitter taste. The shadow waiting for him was still out of sight. As he climbed the stairs to the third floor, Thomas vowed that he would never let anybody get away unpunished if they challenged him in any way. He reached the third floor without noticing the shadowy figure on the stairs to the fourth floor. He picked out his keys without realizing the shadow was now right behind him. He opened the door before he felt the shadow landing on his back.

Thomas stumbled confused through the doorway, as the shadowy man pushed his way into the apartment. Thomas' body anticipated the blow of the opposite wall in the narrow corridor. Massive amounts of adrenaline shot into his bloodstream. But the impact of the wall never came; Thomas landed on his feet. He felt fingers trying to cover his mouth. Thomas' eyes only showed a bright white light. His teeth closed around the man's middle finger. Now the adrenaline kicked in. Thomas' eyes opened the floodgates in a flickering blurry slow motion. He never saw the gun between the fingers. The adrenaline hit his jaw-muscles, and Thomas molars sank effortlessly like surgical steel into the finger. Thomas didn't hear the crushing sound of breaking bones, but he felt the tremors of the tissue yielding in his skull. Somewhere very far away he heard a hushed scream. Thomas felt warm liquid pulsing into his mouth. The metallic taste sent him back to his senses. The blood made him gag, and again his jaws closed around the finger. The scream now came from somewhere right behind Thomas' ears. In the distance he heard the thud of a heavy metal object hitting the floor. Drool and blood flew out of Thomas' mouth as his head turned to face the intruder. Thomas' body followed. The finger between his teeth was torn out of its crushing prison. Before Thomas saw his opponent, the confusion was overpowered by rage. The adrenaline sprayed like gasoline on the flame that had been flickering since the situation in the street. In Thomas' head there were no questions. Every thought drowned in the thunderstorm in his chest and the fire in his belly. His heart shot another beat full of adrenaline forth. Thomas' vision changed from a blind blur to supernaturally sharp. There he was. A tall slim silhouette. His hair slicked back in a pony tail. A shockwave erupted in the thunderstorm. Thomas hands shot out towards the head in front him. His thumbs cramped deep into the eye sockets of the man. His right knee exploded into the man's lower abdomen and was stopped by his pelvic bone. The sharp pain in Thomas knee cut through to his consciousness like a razor of ice. Fragments of words formed in his head. "What the hell?" The fire in his belly rose like a volcano sickeningly close to erupting. He took a step back as the figure slouched forward. The white knuckles of Thomas' right fist sunk deep into the man's face. The nose snapped and red rivers covered the man's mouth and chin. The man fell backwards. As the man hit the wall behind him, Thomas felt his right fist cleaved in two by the adrenaline delayed arrival of the pain. Tears rained down Thomas' grimaced face as he clutched his right hand in agony. The man's shirt turned from white to red, as he slid down the wall, his head whirring from side to side. Thomas roared out an oath as he shook his right hand violently. Pain pumped into his hand with a throbbing beat. Thomas' tears mixed with curse words and monosyllables as he drew his left leg back. He kicked blindly in front of him. Thomas' foot found flesh with soft a thump. The man lay moaning on the floor. Rage still pumping in his veins, Thomas looked around. Grabbed a box full of library books. A screeching primal scream leapt from his throat as he held the box overhead. The box hit the figure on the floor, and the heavy books burst out of the walls. The man lay motionless. Thomas' scream died out. His arms started to tremble violently. Thomas stood for an eternity trembling with grim eyes open wide and foamy spit around his grimacing open mouth. Then he felt his knees give way under him, and he sunk to the floor. Slowly he regained his consciousness. Thomas

saw the shiny automatic handgun lying on the floor, where he had stood moments ago. Thomas' head shook in disbelief. His mouth muttered "no, no, no, no..." over and over again. Slowly it dawned on him and nausea blew his abdomen apart. He bolted to the toilet next door, where his adrenaline-saturated stomach was ejected onto the tiles. Thomas' belly kept cramping long after the last eruption. He found himself kneeling on the floor, shivering violently, with drool and stomach acid dripping from his separated lips.

Game starts!

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