

Alex's dilemma

Alex checked his watch. It wasn't time yet. He knew it, but he couldn't help himself. He should have set the meeting for an earlier time, but he would still have arrived half an hour early and fretted about it.

"Officer Orr?" The waitress said as she showed up to his booth with the coffee pot. "This is a surprise, and out of uniform even."

Alex forced a smile. He always made sure to stop by the diner when he did his patrol, there was a lot of criminal activity in the area. Their coffee was great and the staff friendly.

"I'm meeting my uncle here," He said as she filled his cup.

"oh, that's great. do you want something to eat while you wait?"

"No thank you." He was too nervous to eat, he wasn't even sure he'd be able to drink the coffee the way his stomach felt.

"Well, if you change your mind, Eugene brought freshly made apple pies this morning."

he smiled at her. "I'll let you know if I want one."

He checked his watch again. Couldn't his uncle be early for once? He loved the man, but he hated how precise he was with everything.

Just a little before nine the door chimed open and the tiger entered. He sat opposite Alex.

"Good morning, Alexander. I hope you are doing better than you look."

"No, I feel worse. the situation in the precinct is..."

Damian raised a hand to silence him, and the waitress arrived with the coffee pot.

"What can I get you?" she asked, filling his cup.

"What do you recommend, Beatrice?"

The waitress had a moment of surprise then glanced at her name tag and smiled. "Well, our meat eater's breakfast is very popular, that's a steak, with sausages, ham, bacon, and two eggs."

"I'm afraid I already had breakfast, how about something lighter?"

"Well, we have freshly made apple pies."

"Freshly made you say? I'll have that. is it too early to have it a la mode?"

"Not at all." She wrote down the order

"Good."

Alex stared at his uncle. "You're eating here?"

"Yes, is the food bad?"

"No, it's good. It's just that I didn't think you liked restaurant food. I don't think I've ever seen you eat at one."

"My ordering the food doesn't require that I eat it. You set the meeting place. If I am going to be here, I will justify my visit by ordering something."

Alex nodded and forced himself to calm down. He wanted to get to it right now, but he didn't want to be interrupted by Beatrice's return.

"Why exactly don't you eat at restaurants?" He asked to give himself something else to think about for a time.

Damian looked at him for a moment. "For one thing, I happen to think I can produce better result when I'm cooking."

"But you hate cooking. When ever we have cook outs you always let my dads take care of it."

"Hate is too strong a word, Alexander. I don't care for it, that's certain, but I don't hate it. And your fathers love cooking, why should I deny them that joy?"

Beatrice returned with a slice of warm apple pie topped by a scoop of vanilla ice cream. Damian breathed it and smiled.

"This smells wonderful," he complimented her. she beamed. "I hope this won't be an imposition, but me and my nephew need to speak in private. I'd appreciate it if you didn't check in on us. If we need anything, we'll let you know."

"Won't be a problem. You enjoy the pie."

She left them and his uncle leveled his gaze on Alex.

"You sounded troubled on the phone. What can I do to help you?"

"Can you make me like you?" Alex said in one breath, there, he'd said it. Now he was terrified of his uncles answer.

Damian didn't say anything for a very long time. "Why?" is all he finally said.

"Things at work, they're getting bad. I'm a nervous wreck, I'm terrified of what they're going to do, of what I'm going to have to do. I can't live like that. I know you. you're not scared of anything. I want to be like that."

"No, Alexander, you don't. What I am isn't something to be wished for. It isn't a cure for whatever your problems are. I grew up this way, I am comfortable with who I am, but I still understand that it's a terrible burden. For me to make you like this. You wouldn't be you anymore. You wouldn't be a brother, or a son."

"I don't care," Alex growled, having trouble keeping his voice down. "You don't get it. This isn't what I thought it was going to be when I joined the force."

"Then leave."

"I... can't. Not anymore."

Damian studied him. "You need to give em details, Alexander. I can not do what you are asking simply because you find your work stressful."

"But you can do it, right?"

"You are evading my question, Alexander."

"I can't tell you."

"Then I can't help you."

Alex grabbed Damian's wrist, to stop him from leaving, even though he hadn't moved. "Uncle, you have to help me, please."

This is killing me. I'm barely sleeping, or eating. but I can't tell you. You have no idea what will happen if I do. Please, uncle. you're my last hope."

Damian watched him, silent and perfectly still. "I can not give you a response now."

Alex's head had begun sinking, then raised.

"I need to think about this. Since you aren't able to tell me the details, I need to think about this seriously."

Alex sank in in the chair. "thank you. You have no idea what this means to me."

"I haven't said yes, Alexander."

"I know, but you're thinking about it. That's a better chance than how it was before."

"Go home, I'll call you once I made my decision."

"Thank you uncle." Alex grabbed his jacket and stood.

"Alexander, get some sleep."

Alex nodded and left.

Damian watched his nephew leave, then shook his head to Beatrice when she looked his way. She nodded and paid attention to the patron seated at the counter.

Damian took out his phone and dialed a number.

"Royal Security," a young man answered. He didn't recognized the voice. He would have to drop by and find out his name.

"This is Damian Orr. I need to have someone followed."

"Certainly Mister Orr. What are the details?"

"He's my nephew, Alexander Orr, He just left Sweet Roll Diner, on Evan's Street. He's suppose to be heading to his home, but I need someone to follow him to confirm that's where he's going."

"Certainly sir. We'll have someone on him in a few minutes. Does he still drive a dark blue Ford Elegance?"

Damian looked at the window, watching Alexander get in his car. "He does."

"Very good, I'll contact you back when we know his destination."

Damian checked his watch. "I'll be on another call, just leave a message."

"Very well sir, have a good day."

Damian dialed another number. Patrick was between classes.

"Damian, what can I do for you?"

"I need you to give me a second opinion, you won't be making your next class."

"Okay, shoot."

Damian explained what Alexander had told him.

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Alex was trying to sleep, well, rest as as close as he got to that these days, when someone banged on his door, very hard. He threw on his jean and hurried to open the door.

Patrick burst in the moment he turned the handle. "Are you

fucking insane?"

Alex Stared at him, momentarily forgetting to close the door. He closed it and looked at his brother. "What are you talking about."

"Don't pull that crap. I talked with Damian. I know what you asked him."

Alex stared. "He told you?"

"Of course he told me. I'm his conscience."

"His what?"

"His conscience. Anytime he's faced with a situation he can tell is dicey, he calls me for a second opinion."

"Why would he do that?"

"Because he knows his moral compass is screwed up."

"But why you?"

"He's grooming me to take over his company."

Alex stared at his brother some more. "And you're calling me insane?"

"Hey, I didn't go to him asking to be turned into a sociopath."

"You don't fucking get to judge. You have no idea what I'm stuck in."

"No, I don't. That's why I'm here. You're going to tell me what's going on, and you're going to have to be fucking convincing if you expect me to give the go head."

"I can't tell you! I can't tell anyone. You have no idea what they're capable of." Alex felt the tears come, and he couldn't stop them. He was worn so thin he couldn't hold the fear back anymore.

Arms wrapped themselves around him. He was held tightly and he cried. "It's okay. I'm here. you're not alone, Alex. talk to me."

Alex cried for a long time in his brother's arms. He let it all out, he didn't have to pretend with Patrick. He wouldn't think any less of him for his crying.

When the tears finally slowed, he didn't let go of his brother. "I can't tell you, Pat. You have no idea what they're capable of, if they were to find out I told you, they'd go after everyone in our family. I've seen them doing it."

"They won't find out."

"Pat, you can't be sure of that. they have a lot of resources."

His brother smiled at him. "You're forgetting I have a lot of them myself." He sat Alex on the couch and went the the living room window, searching outside. He took out his phone. "Hey Steven, it's Pat. Is that you in the green civic parked on Stallone? I thought so. Yeah, it's good to talk to you too, look we'll catch up later, I need your assistance. Do the emergency pack still come with a all frequency jammer? Good. I need you to put it at the front door. set it to cover the house. I'll bring it back once I'm done here. After that I need you to walk

around, look for any kind of non radio based listening devices. I don't know, but considering the state my brother's in, it's possible. okay."

He disconnected and pulled Alex off the couch. He lead him to the bedroom. "Steven is going to knock on the door if he finds anything he can't disable. We have thirty minutes until he's done."

They made out during that time.

An hour later they were snuggled together, their clothes scattered across the room.

Patrick nuzzled his neck. "Talk to me Alex. We're as secure as we can be."

Alex didn't say anything, instead he leaned over the edge of the bed and pulled a gym bag from under the bed. he swung it on the other side of Patrick.

Patrick sat up and pulled it closer. "What is in it?"

"Open it."

Patrick did and his eyes grew wide. he pulled a wrapped stack of hundred dollar bills. "What is this?"

Alex looked at it. "That came from a drug bust on Centennial avenue."

Patrick stared at him then pulled out a brick of bills tightly wrapped in cellophane.

"That came from lockup."

Patrick dropped it like it was on fire. he stood. "Holy fuck. You stole from the cops?"

Alex laid back and chuckled. "No. I'm not the one who did it. that's just my cut of it."

"So what, it's pay off money? you took a bribe?"

"You say that like I had a choice in the matter." Alex was amazed at how calm he was. Was it because of the sex? This had been the first time in weeks, no months. The last time had been in March, their birthday party. Two weeks later he'd transfered department and his hell began.

"How could you not have a choice? Alex, you could have refused it."

Alex turned on his side and looked in the bag. He pulled out a small brick of bills, twenties, held together by rubber band. He threw it at Patrick he caught it, but held it away from himself.

"That was the first one. A drug bust I assisted on, turned into shootout. Lots of dead on their side, plenty of injured on ours. There was twenty of us, eight plain clothes, the rest uniformed. As we were going through the scene, the plains clothed started bagging pack of bills, just like that one.

"I asked what they were doing, as did two others, new to that department, like me. 'Taking our cut,' Mitchell said, then he pulled out a brick, the one you're holding and lobbed it at me. I caught it by reflex, but held it pretty much like you did. 'It isn't like anyone's going to miss it,' Hernandez said. he

threw one to the two other next to me. 'That's your cut.' Allan protested before I could. he didn't want to be part of this. 'That's fine,' Mitchell said, 'but remember, if you're not with us, you're with them.' He pointed to the bodies on the ground, and Hernandez pulled the slide on his service weapon.

"We didn't protest after that. I was going to hand it over to internal affairs, I was going to turn them in. I went to their office, I found one of them, and she let me into her office. I almost told her, but before I spoke I notice that in her purse was a stack of bills, just like that one, the edges frayed, the red rubber band. What were the odds of someone else ending up with a two inch thick stack of twenties with the same kind of wear and rubber band? She might have noticed I saw it. I don't know. I didn't stay. I don't even remember if I made an excuse before leaving.

"Pat, they have IA in their pockets. I asked about how high this went, the answer was 'high enough'. I've seen Hernandez with commissioner Hyacinthe, I mean really cozy together. I think even she's in on it."

Patrick threw the brick in the bag and sat on the edge of the bed. "Fuck. have you spent any of it?"

"Are you crazy? Of course not. I thought about burning it, but I couldn't think of a way to do that without leaving any traces. That why I need Uncle Damian's help. I don't know how else to cope."

Patric stood, zipped the bag shut and lifted it, weighting it. he dropped it back on the bed. "Okay, we're going to help."

"Oh thank God. You have no idea how grateful I am."

"Don't be. We're not turning you into a sociopath."

"But you said."

"That isn't an answer. It would be kinder to put a bullet in your head."

"Uncle Damian manages okay."

Patrick fixed his brother with a glare. "You have no idea what Damian has done. Be grateful for that." He pulled out his phone his his jeans, started to input a number, realized he didn't have a signal, remembered the jammer and cursed.

"You have no idea how dangerous they are."

"No, Alex. We're Orrs. Those fuckers have no ideas what we're capable of."

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Damian sat in Alex's small living room. The bag of money was in the middle of the room and Alex had told him everything. Patrick held his brother through it, Alex looked utterly defeated.

"What are our options?" Damian asked.

Patrick glared at him. "Options? there are none. They did that to my brother, we take them down, hard."

Alex pulled away and stared at him.

Damian nodded. "How? You heard Alex's description. They

seem to be very well connected."

"Like you care. You have Royal Security. Those people can get to anyone. You have some of the best hackers in the world on your payroll. Hell, We have Aaron and his black ops group. We can jut have them bomb all of them."

Damian canted his head. "You want to kill them?"

"Fucking right I do," Patrick growled, then he closed his eyes. took a breath, held it for a long time and released it. "But that isn't what we're going to do. We gather the information and then turn it over to the FBI. There's no way they've managed to bribe all of them. If you don't know any trustworthy ones, I knows a couple, they were at the Denver office last time I talk with them, but I trust them. And finally, we have an inside man." He turned to his brother.

Alex just stared at him.

"What do you say, Alexander. Are you ready to channel that anger at the people who really deserve it?"

Alex looked at his uncle, bewildered for a moment, then his features hardened. "Yes. Yes. Oh fucking Yes!" He felt almost giddy with relief.

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Anita Hyacinthe closed the garage door behind her, again telling herself she needed to get the remote system fixed. She couldn't wait to get out of her suit, have a glass of wine and then a long bath. She always felt like her body had been twisted into a pretzel after having to deal with mayor Sintano.

The gazelle turned off the alarm and then sighed when she took off the torture device they called high heel shoes. She missed the days when she patrolled the street, in comfortable sneakers.

She headed for the kitchen and the wine cabinet when she froze. She pulled out her service weapon, there was someone seated in her living room.

"Please, Anita. That isn't necessary."

Now that her eyes were adjusting to the low light, she could there there was actually two of them. One in her reading chair, at ease, the other on the edge of the couch, hunched over. She kept her weapons pointed at the floor, ready to use it if needed.

"Who are you and what are you doing in my house?"

The one in her reading chair raised both hands. She got a sense of strength from him. "I'm going to reach for the lamp with my left hand and turn it on."

He didn't move immediately, and she nodded. His movement was slow and calculated to let her see it and tell where he was going. The light came on, and she could tell they were both tigers. The one in her chair older, regal. the one on the couch, younger, unsure of himself.

She looked at older one, and then she knew who he was. "Mister Orr?" She hadn't had direct dealings with him in years,

not since he'd helped finance her anti gang task force, but they still crossed path here and there, at balls and ceremonies.

"Would you mind putting away your firearm? We're just here to talk."

"You could have made an appointment with my office."

"I'm afraid not. What we need to talk to you about has to be done in private."

She hesitated a moment, then put her weapon back in its holster.

"Thank you. You'll want to take a seat." He indicated the other tiger. "This is Alexander, my nephew. he's one of your officers."

"You should know better than breaking and entering then, Officer Orr," she commented, her tone snide.

"As you can tell by his posture, he'd prefer not being here, but it's his story to tell."

She sat, wondering what this was about. "Alright, I'm listening."

Damian nodded to Alex, who took a breath and then told his story, about being forced to take a bribe, trying to involve IA, only to find out they were also on the take. His nervous breakdown, going to his family for help. The six months of data gathering, recorded conversations, surveillance, and finally coming here.

She didn't interrupt, when he was done she looked from one to the other. "Let me get this straight, you've been conducting an illegal surveillance operation on the entire San Francisco Police force?"

"No, the FBI is involved."

"From the start?"

Damian smiled. "I didn't see a point in bothering them until we had something solid to show them."

"Alright, and where is this proof?"

Damian pulled a thick file folder from between the himself and the armrest and handed it to her.

"You're showing it to me?" She was stunned and didn't move for a moment, then she took it from him. "I was expecting you to say it was somewhere safe. How do you know I'm not involved in this corruption ring?"

"If I had found even a hint of your involvement, we wouldn't be here."

"Still, why are you giving this to me?"

"Because this happened under your watch. I want you to know how extensive the corruption is. Then I want you to make a decision. Take responsibility for your failure, or try to pass the buck."

"Why? if what you're saying is true, my career is over regardless of what I do."

"I know."

"Then why are you doing this? wouldn't it have been kinder

to leave me in the dark?"

"It would have." Damian stood. "You have seven days to go over the file and make your decision. Next Friday at five pm, the FBI anti corruption task force will be taking down your people."

She stood. "Damn it Damian, why are you doing this?"

"Seven days, Anita. Go over the file, decide what you're going to do."

She watched them leave, while she held the bomb that was doing to destroy her life.

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Patrick leaned against the desk, behind him someone as typing at a computer, so was someone in front of him and on either side, the entire room was filled with computer. This was his uncle's media control room. It was his first time here. The wall in front of him was one giant monitor, currently showing a clock indicating ten to five in the top left corner and ten different image of the same location from different angles.

"Be alert everyone," he said. "five minute to show time. Tom, what does it look like on the ground? If anything leaked, this is their last chance to try to stop us."

The Jaguar looked up from the monitor at the desk he was seated. "Everyone is in place. I have twenty eight teams in civilian dress mixed in the crowd keeping an eye out for anything out of the ordinary. The FBI has snipers hidden on the roofs, and I have three of my own they don't know about, just in case."

"Rich, what does the waves look like?"

The rat smiled. "Nothing out of the ordinary. We have a lot of cells active, TV and radio, a couple of old style Ham channels are going, but we've checked those out, they're clean."

"Okay, is the machine ready to roll?"

"The machine is ready," someone said.

"Good, bring up the podium, center front."

The images showing the crowd and other angles of the podium shrank and formed a ring around the center image, showing a gazelle stepping up to it. Commissioner Anita Hyacinthe looked over the crowd, then behind her to the officers in their dress blue.

"Do we have volume?"

"We do," someone said, "their mics's off at the moment."

Patrick went to say something, but a screeching stopped him.

"Okay their mic just came on"

"You think?" Patrick mumbled, his ear ringing.

"Thank you for coming," The gazelle said, "I appreciate that you made the time out of your schedule to come and honor the brave men who protect us." She paused, visibly gathering herself. Patrick noted some concerned looks in the crowd's front row.

"I'm sorry you came here under false pretense. When I became police commissioner of San Francisco we were dealing with a gang problem, and I made that my crusade. With your help, that crusade succeeded. We have the lowest gang activity in the country.

"Unfortunately, in my zeal to keep us safe from gangs, I was blind to another problem creeping in. Not only into our city, but inside our own police department. Over the years corruption has become rampant, and I missed it. I was complacent. I thought my police force was above reproach, instead of being ordinary people."

Men and women with FBI jacket came out of the woodwork to surround the police officers standing behind the podium.

"Alright, People," Patrick said. "Get the spin machine going. I want all the news talking about her at six."

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"What a revelation," the anchorman said. "The FBI hasn't revealed how many police officers have been arrested, but the estimate is in the hundreds. How could all those people have broken the law and Commissioner Hyacinthe missed it?"

"But you have to give her props for taking responsibility for it," the anchorwoman countered. "It takes a lot of character to do that."

"Sure, but you can't tell me that you want someone like that in charge of our police force."

"What police force? after this we're going to have so few people we'll probably have to get neighboring cities to lend us personnel. Who do you want to rebuilt the force? someone who doesn't know anything, or someone who has gone through the fire, been burnt, but learned from it."

"But has she learned? What's to say this just won't happen again?"

"Did she sound like someone who wants this to happen again? She came out, knowing this would cost her the job. Her predecessors couldn't wait to find someone else to blame when something went wrong, but her? no, she had integrity. she made a mistake, a big one, but she owned up to it. If we let her go, it will be a loss for San Francisco."

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Anita stood behind her desk.

How it was she was still here, she couldn't figure. She'd been sure her career was over, but somehow, the city rallied behind her and when she went to the mayor to hand in her resignation, he refused to accept it. He praised her. Her, who'd allowed corruption to seep through the force to a point where it had taken someone from the outside to bring a stop to it. She didn't know how yet, but she was going to make sure nothing like that could ever happen again.

a shadow came to her door and knocked.

"Come in."

The tiger entered, looking uncomfortable. "You wanted to see me, Ma'am?"

"Yes, Officer Orr. For your part of the work you did in brining down the corruption ring, I want to give you this." She handed him a white, none descript box, the size of his hand.

He took it, a questioning look on his face, took the cover off and surprise replace the expression. He sat down.

"I..." he didn't seem to be able to say anything.

"I know it's a lot, being a detective is more responsibility, the danger will be greater, but you'll also have an increase in pay."

He put the cover on the box and that on the desk. "I can't accept this." his voice was pained.

"Excuse me?"

"Madame Commissioner, I'm really grateful that you want to make me a detective, but I didn't do this to get a reward."

"I understand that, but you still deserve it."

He shook his head. "I don't. Yes, I took part in it. But it wasn't my decision. I was trying to run away. I was so scared I couldn't see a way out. No, I wasn't even looking for one. I'd told myself nothing could be done. it wasn't until..."

"Your uncle made you face up to what was happening?"

Alex chuckled. "My brother, actually, but he's taking after my uncle a whole lot now days." He looked at the box. "I am going to wear this badge one day, but I'm going to earn it, just like every other detective on the force."

He stood, and she saw confidence in him now. She stood too. "Alright. I believe you, so I'll keep it aside for you." She shook his hand. It looked like they both had hard work ahead of them.