

Denton whistled through his teeth. "That's one big fucking place."

"It's a mansion," Alice said, "Of course it's big."

He nodded. It had to be five hundred yards away, white marble, columns. The place could probably house everyone who worked at the station, and their extended families.

They were standing by their car, in front of the gate, along with two other unmarked cars and four squad cars. They were waiting for the gate to be unlocked.

"Detective Cooper!" the uniformed officer with the phone to her ear yelled.

Alice looked at him. "What, Carpenter?"

"The security company finally agreed to unlock the gate."

At that moment the gate clicked loudly, and started opening.

"Finally." She ran her hands over her head, pushing her long ears back. She shook herself, and her gray fur settled down.

"You need to learn not to let stuff bother you, Alice," Denton said.

She shot him a glare and he raised his spotted hands to appease her.

"Alright, We're driving to the house, but no one goes in until I say so, got it?"

Everyone nodded.

Denton slipped in the passenger seat, knowing better than to even try to take the driver's side. Alice had never let him drive the car in the six years they had been partners. The first time he'd tried, on that first day working together, she'd decked him.

She got behind the wheel and followed the two cars in front of her. The driveway to the house was lined with perfectly trimmed hedges, nothing fancy, just a square hedge, but he'd swear the corners were perfect ninety degrees.

As they got closer the mansion became even more impressive. four floors, at a quick count thirty windows per floor, if it was two windows per room, that was fifteen rooms, on this side. he had no idea how deep the place was.

"Who the fuck lives in a place like this?" he let out.

"The Lewistons," She offered.

He looked at her. "The Lewistons? As in *the* Lewistons? The guys who paid for half the new library? Donated the money to build the school last year?"

"And had a new wing added to the college, and keep the two soup kitchens alive. Yeah, those Lewistons."

"Fuck me."

She slowed the car to a stop. "Really? You're asking me to fuck you?" she looked at him and raised a finger. "One, I'm married, remember?" She pointed to the ring in her ear. "And two, I'm a girl, since when do you let girls get in your pants?"

Denton's ears shook, and he rolled his eyes. "It's a figure of speech and you know it." He got out of the car, two other detectives were already waiting by the door, with two uniformed officers standing nearby.

"Reilly," he said, nodding to one, "Flint." to the other.

"Brislow," Flint replied coldly, while his partner, the German Shepherd, just glared.

"Behave, the three of you," Alice said. "Or I'm sending you home." She looked everyone over. "Alright everyone. We're here because we got a call of something that sounded like gun shots, and no one is answering the phone."

"Who called it in?" A giraffe in uniform asked.

"We don't know, Matilda. The caller didn't leave his name, and he was on a prepaid cell so we couldn't trace it. As you can see this is a big place. Reilly, Flint, you take the top floor. Matilda, you and Jefferson take the third. Carpenter, and Narn, the second. Opis, and Dresden, the first. Me and Brislow will take the basement."

Everyone nodded.

"If you find something suspicious, secure the scene. if there are victims, see to them, then report it. When we finish clearing our respective floors, we'll join you." She turned to the door, then turned back. "Oh, and Carpenter, remember to wear gloves this time."

The gazelle raised her hands to show she was already wearing them.

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The foyer, because this certainly wasn't an entryway, was majestic. The floors were a brown stone with gold veins running through them. Anywhere else, Denton would just think it was something that looked gold, something golden. But here, he wouldn't surprise to find out it was actual gold.

Everyone went to their assigned floors, and Alice lead him to a door, then dark stairs, which looked like they belonged in a house worth a hundredth the value of this one.

"You take me to such wonderful places," Denton commented, on shining his light on the paint peeling stairs and plain cement wall.

"Stop complaining, I could have brought my husband, you know."

He thought about that for a moment. "Is it too late to get him to take my place?"

They were at the bottom of the stairs, her light fell on a switch, and a moment later a corridor was lit. The first four doors opened on storage rooms, with bins and shelves full of stuff.

"Someone's a bit of a pack rat it looks like," she said, looking at the fourth such room.

"Well, they are rats, and they seem to pack a lot of stuff."

The next two doors were a root cellar and a pantry with a lot of home canned vegetables.

"That's a lot of food stored. almost as if they worried about a holocaust or something," Denton commented.

"Maybe they were scouts."

Denton just stared at her.

"You know, 'Be prepared'?"

The stare didn't waver.

"God, sometimes I swear you don't know the most basic things."

"Right, like it's my fault I didn't want to join an organization with a history of abusing kids."

She hit his shoulder. "You fucker, you knew what I was talking about."

He laughed.

She opened the next door and his laughter died.

The room was large, probably forty feet on all sides. It was empty except for a big block of stone in the middle. An acrid and slightly sweet smell assaulted them

"What's this smell?" She asked, wrinkling her nose.

"You're kidding, you don't recognize it?" The walls were bare, although at times he thought he could see markings on them when the light hit them at an angle.

"Should I?"

"You do have a husband, right?"

"What does he have to do with this smell?"

"Are you telling me you've never had to wash some of his underwear that smelled like this?"

She stared at him, "Of course not."

"Wow, either you're really keeping him satisfied, or he washes his cum rag himself."

"That's...?"

"The smell of dried cum."

"Ewww."

"As strong as this is, there's been a lot of it in this

room."

He was next to the stone block, the surface was perfectly flat, and polished, like a table. He looked up, and around, and for a moment, he was hit by a sense of familiarity. He'd never been here before, and yet, standing here, looking out onto the room felt like something he'd done before.

"Is this an altar?" Alice asked.

He looked at it again, and he had a sense of having laid down on something like this before. He shook his head to chase the sensation away.

"You okay?"

"This place gives me the creeps. Let's move on."

They'd done half the basement when the call came in, three bodies in the second floor library.