

Chapter 8

Martin hung up after listening to what his father said. "Where have you been hiding?" he asked Denton.

"Hiding? What are you talking about?"

"Detective, You don't have to keep up the act with us. You should have realized that we're like you by now."

"What is this? You guys aren't making any kind of sense. I gave you my last name, now you're going to give me the files you stole. You do that now, and I'm going to forget you're involved in this. You don't and I'm taking you in, I don't care how rich you are, or who your father is."

"Why are you being so stubborn? We're Society, just like you. Where were you initiated?"

"Initiated? Society? What the fuck are you talking about?"

"I'm telling you," Fred said, "He's not one of us."

"He has to be," Frank countered. "He's a Stenton, and he resisted Martin."

Denton looked around, everyone had a mix of emotions on their face, confusion, curiosity, concern. He leveled his gaze on Martin. "The files, Now."

Martin growled. "Fine, follow me." He left the room, Denton at his heel. They went deeper in the house, then down a flight of steps. He opened the first door and entered a large room with three desks in the middle and a lot of filing cabinets along the walls.

Two of the desks were occupied, one by a brown and black spotted horse the other a recently sheered white sheep. They looked up from their computers as they entered.

When Denton entered someone yelled in surprised pain.

"Damn it Martin, what's the big idea? Brining here while I'm keeping track? You know what it does to me for him to be in the same room." It was a thin feline seated cross legged in a corner. Denton didn't recognize the species. He had two line, similar to Denton's but instead of going from the bottom of his eyes and down the side of his muzzle, they went to the top of his head, his spots were large, and his fur was grayish brown.

"Sorry Oscar, Didn't think you were still doing that."

"Well, be sure to give me a heads up next time. What is he doing here anyway?"

"I'm trying to figure things out," Martin answered, going to the cabinets, then checking the writing on the fronts. Denton couldn't read it. He wasn't going any deeper in the room then he had to. He wanted to be able to get out if this turned bad.

Martin found the cabinet he was looking for and pulled it open. From it he took out a stack of colored folders and dropped them on the unoccupied desk. "Here."

Denton could tell they weren't the department's files, they used plain yellow folders at the precinct. He thought about leaving and coming back with more officers, but would they stop him? There were still more of them than him, and if he manage to get out, there was no telling what they would do to the files.

He went to the desk. Each folder had a name on it. Micheal Stenton, one was. Carlos Stenton, and others. He spread the top ones, they were all Stentons.

"What's this?" he asked.

"Can't you tell? It's your family."

Denton had a moment of curiosity, he didn't remember anything about his family, but then it turned to suspicion. What were they doing with files on the member of his family. A quick look through them let him find his father, Jeffrey, but his mother wasn't there. Looking them over again he notices the files were only about the males in the family, and there was no file about him.

He pushed them away. "Why are you showing me this?"

"Aren't you detectives supposed to be curious?" Martin said with exasperation. He pulled a file from the pile, took out the top page and laid it before Denton. It was a death certificate, dated March 2021. He took another folder. Another death certificate, dated August 2022. Another one, dated September 2021. Again, January 2023.

Denton swallowed, and pulled out his father's folder. His hand was shaking slightly.

"What is this?" he asked softly.

"This is your family line, Denton. Each and every one of them who was alive up till twenty years ago."

Denton opened the folder. "What happened?"

"Over a three year period, they were all killed."

His father's death was attributed to asphyxiation from carbon monoxide inhalation. The date was November 2023. He sat in the chair. He'd known his father had died in the fire, his dad had told him, but he'd never looked into it before. He hadn't wanted to know the details.

His father's body had been pulled out of the fire with only first degree burns on ten percent of his body. The coroner indicated the bones in his hands had been broken, from striking something multiple time until they broke.

Denton turned the page over. He couldn't read more. He didn't want to know how his father might have suffered. A newspaper clipping slipped out as he did that, exposing the headline "Fire kills family of three."

He took it out and read the small article. It had been an electrical fire, he learned, which had started in the basement, and had ignited clothes. At some point the fire reached a

combustible that burned hot enough to turn the bodies of the mother and child to ashes.

He stopped reading.

He remembered very little from that night, but one thing that had always been clear was him being pushed through the basement window, and pulled out by his dad. He hadn't died. He also didn't have a sibling, did he?

He looked through the papers in the folder. He found a birth certificate for himself, and one for his father. No other.

He found the arson report and went through it. Arson wasn't his area, not by a long shot, but he'd know a few arson investigators over the years. From what he could make out the report supported the article. He looked at the pictures which had been taken, and stopped on one marked 'body of mother and child'. It was mostly wet ashes, and a few bones, and didn't tell him anything.

He took out his cell and snapped a picture of the photograph. A hand clamped over his as soon as the flash went off.

"What do you think you're doing?" the horse asked.

Denton didn't look at him, he looked at Martin. "You're trying to make a point with these, aren't you? Well, I need to send this image to someone I know, and then call him."

Martin nodded after a moment.

Denton sent the image, then made the call.

"Richard? I just sent you an image. Good. I need to know. In your professional experience, has that been caused by two bodies? An adult and a child? Or just one?" There was a long silence, then Richard gave his answer. "You're certain, the report's wrong then? It said two. Okay. Thanks."

He put his phone away, and stood.

"I need to leave," he told Martin.

"I can't let you do that, Detective. You need to stay here."

Denton closed his eyes and forced his anger down. He wasn't angry at this man, at least not right now, not for this.

"Listen. I need to go talk to my dad and find out why everyone thinks I'm dead."

"Listen..."

"No! You listen! You want to keep the fucking files, fine you keep them. Right now I have something more important to deal with, so I'm getting out of here. You want to stop me? You just try it and I'll leave you in pieces."

"I'll take him," Stefan offered.

Martin thought it over. "Are you sure?"

"Yeah. I mean it's not like there's any harm in letting him go. No one knows about him, so he's safe. And if something's

about to happen to him, I'll know it."

"All right, but detective, you need to come back here afterward. It's obvious you haven't been initiated, so you have no idea what you're in the middle of."

Denton nodded. It wasn't like Stefan was going to force him to come back, so he'd be fine.