

The Max, in downtown Omaha, was one of those rare clubs that properly earned their name. It was one of the largest clubs I'd been to, and I've been to a lot of them, with possibly the loudest music, the biggest drinks and the easiest men I'd ever come across.

That last one wasn't as much of a draw for me as they'd like, but it was a draw for other men. They were grinding around me on the dance floor, against me and each other. I definitely saw appendages out of the front of pants during my time on the dance floor and felt hands on me, over and under my clothes. Anything too personal was gently moved out of the way. I wasn't here looking to get laid, and if I was, it wouldn't be with someone whose idea of getting to know me was a hand down the front of my jeans.

Getting off the dance floor resulted in even more groping, and actual requests for me to take them to the restroom so I could take them. Easy, so damned easy it wasn't even appealing. I made it to the bar with a minimum of what qualifies as molestation in my family, got a drink, whatever was on tap since I wanted the privacy of a booth as soon as possible.

I sat down, took a sip of my rather decent beer, and realized a dingo was seated across me, her martini glass half empty. She smiled at me.

"Did you know I was going to sit here?" I asked her, barely hearing myself talk over the music, "Or was I so distracted that I didn't see you sit down?"

She smiled. "That would be telling, wouldn't it?" Her voice was lush, the type that could make a man fall to his knees asking for her hand in marriage if he was the type, and barely at the volume of conversation, while still cutting through the loudness of the music.

Alicia Cardinal was a Thinker. One of the magical faction, one of the more visible ones since at first glance what they did wasn't so much magic as a lot of research.

Thinkers can work things out. It isn't the knowing of precogs or remote viewers. They needed to know what they were looking into, so it makes them great for science and most types of research. That made them more comfortable for mundanes.

Until you notice that the stuff they worked out lets them do things you can't work out. Like speak at a conversational tone in a club with deafening music and still make me hear her words. She'd worked out how to get her sound waves to slip through that of the music's, instead of being buried by it.

She could also be annoyingly obtuse about explaining what she'd done. Which I thought was better than most Thinkers, since they tended to go on and on about it.

I pulled out a pen. "Do you mind if I give us some quiet? The music's going to get distracting." She shrugged. She probably didn't hear the music unless she wanted to. I traced sigils on the far corner of the table so it wouldn't get smudged if a server came to serve us, added the right connectors, turning into a *phrase* and fed it some of my unending lust and the music diminished to a soft, background level. I let out a sigh of relief.

"I thought this was your kind of crowd," She said.

"You're confusing me with the boy band. I like clubs for who I can find for a night, but I wouldn't spend all my time in a place like this."

"Can't remain in the same place too long, or your family might find out?"

I snorted. "They know where I am at all times. If they want me, all they have to do is call and tell me to come home. They know I will."

"But where's the fun in that? Your family is all about the stalking and the hunt, right?"

I shrugged. "We're tigers. Hunting is what we do."

She smiled. "At least you acknowledge what you are. The veneer of civility some of the people out there force on themselves is sickening."

"The joys of being able to work out all the little lies people tell themselves?" I asked.

"There's a reason most of us Thinkers are loners. There's only so much bullshit we can endure."

"Well, consider me as bullshit-free as I can afford to be. Speaking of which, is

Obsidian Black one of yours?”

“No one I know has worked out who they are.”

“How hard are you trying?”

She shrugged. “Not very. Whenever they contact us, it’s to put us on the tail of a problem before it becomes a problem, so I’m happy to let them operate in the dark. We don’t care that much about them getting into our servers and sniffing through what we’re working on.”

“Yes, most people in your faction have no problem telling everyone what they’re working on. How did the Church ever keep the lot of you from revealing magic existed to the world?”

She shrugged again. “Before my time, the old brains thought about research differently.”

“Onto business then?”

She took her phone out. “You want just the file, or do you want me to walk you through it?”

I accepted the file. “Are you offering to explain how you worked things out?”

“No, just point you to the important stuff. The file is a terabyte big.”

“Give me the highlights then.”

“Your killer has been active for close to eight years. I can’t confirm his body count, but I estimate he’s up to at least five hundred kills.”

“How does he kill five hundred kids in eight years and not get noticed?”

“Primarily by targeting kids of illegal immigrants and locations where they are seen as nuisance.”

“I thought we’d done away with treating them like cattle back in the forties.”

“Until we dismantle the class structure, there will always be a need for a class of people at the bottom to be abused and feared at the same time.”

“So he goes after kids, the parents of whom won’t be interested in going to the police for help,” I said to keep her from continuing her social commentary. “Does he pick just any kid he finds, or does he have a type?”

“Male, of course, between the age of seven and ten, beyond that I’m not certain. I’ll tell you that yes, he has more criteria. You might be able to work out something from all the information I provided on each child since you are into having sex with them, but—”

“Don’t, Alicia,” I snapped.

She looked surprised. “It’s a known fact that your family has—”

“That’s among us and you know it. It’s been over fifty years since one of us had an attraction to children. We do not do that to children.”

“But you have had the pull to have sex with—”

“No.” I reined in my temper hard. Alicia was not a friend, but she was an ally. “What I shared with my brothers; what my fathers shared with me, isn’t anything like what he does.” I indicated her phone. “We share a connection because of our god and that’s how it expresses itself. The rest of the Society is the same. Our god is lust, so how else could it be, but we don’t force it on others.” Her tilted ear forced me to correct myself. “We’re doing our best not to force it on others, but with that one exception, we have never forced ourselves on children. We wouldn’t. No, not even my fathers. The abuse they suffered made them want to keep that from ever happening to others, not lash out at them.”

“Then I apologize. I didn’t intend to offend you.”

“You need to be more tactful, Alicia. One of these days, your mouth will say something to someone who isn’t going to be as self-controlled as me.”

“I did say we’re loners for a reason. But you raise a possibility I hadn’t noticed. Not so much as part of his criteria, but as part of his reasons for what he is doing. Maybe he is looking to create the connection you share with your family.”

I considered her words. “Do you mean my family specifically, or the idea of the connection my god engenders?”

It was her turn to consider. She took longer. That they could work out things that should be impossible to do didn't mean it happened fast. "I don't think your family is visible enough to be targeted specifically, but the Society does have public members now, and while most of them are careful not to offend the average person, it's impossible to listen to them for an extended period of time and not work out the implications of that kind of sex drive would involve within a family unit. And the killer is imitating sigils. Of that, there is no doubt. Could he accidentally write something that works?"

I shook my head. "It needs to be our blood, our cum; the power flows through us. With anyone else's, all you get are drawings. Why did you say he had more criteria before we got sidetracked, but didn't sound certain?"

"There's something in the pattern of the information. I can't see what it is, but I can see that it is there. There will be something about each boy he picks that sets them apart, but it's going to be something subjective to him that I suspect will only make sense in hindsight."

"Or if I can get in his head."

She smiled. "You are one of the few within the Society I suspect can do so." She indicated my phone. "I have given you as much information as I could gather or gleam as to whom your killer is."

"I don't know if I want to get in the head of a man like that."

She got out of the seat. "That's for you to decide. Oh, before I leave, someone's looking for you."

I chuckled. "Tell me something I don't know."

She placed her hand on my arm. "Wyatt, someone in this club is looking for you."

I looked around at the crowd, then at Alicia.

"I don't know who, but I can sense the pattern of their search." She closed her eyes. "I don't think their intent is negative."

"Thanks for the warning." I finished my drink and stood. "If they're looking for me, I should make myself visible and get it over with. You want to dance?"

She chuckled. "Not in this crowd. Women having their hands all over me isn't my idea of a good time."

"There are men here too."

"And they will be all over you. You have fun. I am going to head home."

"Thanks again Alicia, I owe you."

"And I will collect. I'm simply not certain when." She left, vanishing far sooner than she should have, considering how light the crowd was near the booths.

I made my way back on the dance floor and lost myself in the sound and movement, even enduring the too-personal touches that stayed over my jeans. Eventually, I noticed a man had been dancing before me for longer than normal and once I looked him over, I knew he was who Alicia had warned me about, and I could have laughed.

I hadn't seen him up close since he'd been with the forensic specialists by the house, but even out of his government-appointed suit, the otter was distinctive with his light brown fur with almost white marking around his eyes. I wondered if he had raccoon somewhere in his far ancestry.

I figured the easiest way to see if this was entirely work-related was to grab him, pull him to me and grind against him as we twirled to the music. Oh, he was definitely into me. No matter the reasons he was looking for me, we were going to have a good time.

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"Fuck," he panted, leaning back against me, his fur matted by more than sweat. We were seated in the massive seat that was in my luxury hotel room with some movie playing on the wall before us.

I'd offered for us to retire to my hotel after a few drinks and a lot more dancing. While he was definitely into me, he was a perfect gentleman the entire time, which just made me want to do what we'd just done even more. A guy with the self-restraint not to turn

into a slut even when he knew the guy would do him without question was such a turn on. I'd asked if he wanted to watch a movie as I made us coffee and then we'd sat, with him on my lap.

We watched the movie only for as long as it took for us to finish our coffees. Then we were making out, clothing came off, and he was bouncing on my lap.

"Am I as good as you've been told?" I asked, nuzzling, and nipping at his neck. I loved the thickness of otter fur; I could sink my teeth into it.

"What do you mean?" he asked, almost purred.

"We've had sex, Eli, I think we can be honest with one another, don't you?"

"It's Elias, I don't like being called Eli."

"Alright, Elias, I expect Special Agent in Charge Zikabar Malhotra Bodenman gave you a rundown of who I am before sending you to seduce me." The otter stiffened. "Hey, it's okay," I whispered. "I'm flattered, really. Anyone other than him would have sent a goon squad. I love sex a whole lot more than fighting."

"Really?" he replied, relaxing again. "That's not what I heard."

I smiled. "Fine. But I do like sex more than fighting, even if it isn't by a lot."

"I heard you can fuck without stopping."

"That is true."

"Can I get a demonstration?"

"Why don't you tell me why you were sent to seduce me first?"

"Can't you guess?" he moved his ass against me and I reacted.

"I can, but I prefer being certain." I ground back. It didn't take long and I was in him again.

"My boss wants to know what you found out."

"You should start by telling me what you know, so I don't have to worry about going over it again and wasting your time." My hand closed over his—

Right, keeping this more general audience. We had fun, a whole lot of fun. We did so for over twelve hours, only stopping five minutes here and there to talk and see who could get the other to reveal the most.

I won that part, no doubt about it.

As for the sex, I'm not sure who got the most out of that, but he definitely got his demonstration of Orr sexual superiority.

I so can't wait for Zikabar to send him to question me again.