

CHAPTER 70

Bonnie answered the doorbell. The young cop stood there. Shit.

The cop's face said the same thing, but he covered it, hoisting the bag of Chinese food he carried. "Oh. I didn't know you were . . . I'm sure there's enough food for—"

"I was just leaving." She let him in and put on her coat.

"Bonnie, you think this'll hold?" Ster held up Fuzzy's hoodie.

Bonnie took it from him. The formerly missing ear was inexpertly but sturdily sewn on. "Nice job."

"You were right." Ster blushed a little. "Easy as sewing on a button."

"You take care now. And Fuzzy," Bonnie walked over to the child mesmerized by the TV, "I'll see you soon. Bye bye."

"Bye bye." Fuzzy twisted to see her and noticed Will. His eyes got big. "Bad," he said. "Bad cop."

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Commented [CB3]: I would delete this section break since the parts above and below are a continuous scene.

"It's the uniform," Ster said. He hoped it was. He also hoped his seizure hadn't messed with his instincts. He relied on them a lot right now.

Shaken, he crutched the few feet to where one of the homeless men held Fuzzy close to his skinny chest. “I . . . I . . .” Ster didn't know what to say. The guy's pit bull nuzzled Ster's leg. Right. Spidey's friend.

“It's okay, man.” He put Fuzzy down and grabbed the dog's leash. “It's not like you can hold his hand or anything.” He nodded at the crutches.

“Thank you, thank you.” What had Ster been thinking? How was he going to do this? Hell, how were they going to get into the church? So many damn steps. “Do you think you could, uh, help us get up the stairs?” he asked Spidey's friend.

“Church's closed,” he said.

“But . . . what about the daycare?”

“It's Saturday,” the dog owner said. “They're closed.”

“I'll babysit, Mr. Cop. Maybe you'll buy me breakfast.” Another one of Spidey's crowd: the asshole with the chains. “Or do I need to narc on my friends?”

Ster crutched to a nearby bench and patted the seat beside him. Fuzzy obediently climbed up. Ster had literally no idea what to do next, and they couldn't sit outside in the cold weather and think about it when whoever sent the card might be watching. Frozen sitting ducks.

“I'm hungry,” Fuzzy said.

“You are killing it with those whole sentences, buddy.” Ster felt a rush of something—pride? Love? Whatever it was, it felt good and bad at the same time. Good because of the way his insides suddenly felt open and light after being squeezed shut in some dark closet, but bad because the person responsible for this lightness was a child in desperate need of his help, and he didn't know what to do.

“I'm hungry,” Fuzzy said again.

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CHAPTER 75

Lydia had been in town at Thanksgiving. Was she still here? Why had Bonnie lied? Did the card's threat include Lydia? Ster was so lost in the questions he forgot to look at his feet and caught a crutch tip on an uneven bit of pavement.

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"Whoa." Spidey put out an arm to steady him, his other arm keeping Fuzzy steady on his shoulders.

"I'm okay." Ster shook off Spidey's arm, then noticed the injured look in his eyes. God, had he always been such an asshole? "Sorry, I'm distracted. It's just really important we find more information about Jane, and Lydia."

"Why?"

". . . Jane's death wasn't an accident."

"Whoa, shit, really?" Spidey shivered dramatically. "You ever hear the saying, 'Someone walked over your grave'? That just happened to me."

"Let's hope it's not true," said Ster. He didn't want to think about graves. He reached out to touch Fuzzy, to be sure he was safe, even though he knew he was right beside him.

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Ster's chest felt tight. Maybe it was *his* grave they should be worried about.

CHAPTER 78

“Couldn’t help overhearing,” Jay said after Ster had hung up. “How you gonna do that? Find the father?”

“I don’t know.”

“Can you get one of those DNA tests?”

Ster shook his head. “Not quick enough. Plus, we’d need to have the father’s DNA.”

“Right.” The two of them sat in silence for a minute, Fuzzy’s sleeping breath the only sound. With shaking hands, Ster dialed again. “Hey, Jordan, it’s Ster McCaffrey. Is Spidey around?”

“Just a minute.”

Ster heard the clunk of a landline receiver being put down. Then, “Hey.” It was Spidey. “You find out something?”

“Sort of. But what I really to know is . . . You were close to Jane, right?”

“Yeah . . .”

“Any chance you’re Fuzzy’s father?”

“I’m not sure,” Spidey said finally. “I lose time sometimes. Part of my illness.”

“Like blackouts?”

“Sort of. Why do you need to find him?”

Ster gave the short version of their predicament.

Commented [CB7]: Not exactly copyediting but I wanted to flag that Ster already knows this (p. 267).