

Then the phone rang.

Alex and Ray both wavered and glowered at the offensive machine. Alex's intuition warned him he would not like it. He swigged a mouthful of coffee and reluctantly picked it up. "Detective Boswell, Manhattan North Homicide."

A detective from the 20th Precinct. "We've got a DOA in an Upper West Side apartment."

Tetchy, Alex snarled, "Is it suspicious? I hope you're not calling Homicide because some poor old bat died of heart attack."

"Of course it's fucking suspicious," grumbled the detective. "The vic has a bullet in his head."

They needed another case like Broadway needed more potholes, but they'd caught it. The B team was still catching today. Greenwood was out with Finnane, the unenviable task of giving the death notice to Tariq Khalid's wife. Both Greenwood and Finnane had developed a rapport with her, so they'd volunteered to do it. Wheeler was somewhere else, hiding from the phone.

The cop said, "The apartment's right over Lincoln Center, off West 66th and Amsterdam." He rattled off the address and hung up.

After Alex had recapped the conversation, Ray exclaimed, "Lincoln Center? West 60s! That's a *nice* neighborhood. What were you saying to your pal last night about the bottom of society?"

Weak with shuddery exhaustion, Alex shrugged on his jacket, and when he stood, a torrid round of pain stabbed through his back and his side. His face bleached, but he felt flushed and hot. He doubled the recommended dose of ibuprofen, and Ray shot him a look of acetous disapproval.

"That's terrible for your stomach."

"My stomach's already fucked."

"All the more reason for you to be more careful. That stuff will make your ulcers worse."

"It's fine. I take it with antacids." Damn Ray and his sententious health lectures – sometimes, he thought he was getting better at living with it. Sometimes, he realized that he wasn't. "Anyway, when has social class *ever* been a barrier to people being venial?"

"You just don't expect it... in that area."

"You know having money doesn't stop people from getting up to really weird shit."

They were both sick of being in the car, neither wanting to drive, so they tossed a coin, and Alex lost. He scribbled a semblance of his name on the logbook to sign out a Crown Vic. Then he fought like battle-fatigued soldier through snarled trenches of Broadway to Lincoln Square, only to find the semi-circle drive in front of the building chockered with half a dozen RMPs. More police vehicles blocked the spaces on West 66th. After practicing that longstanding New York ritual of looking for an elusive parking space, he decided, *fuck it*, double-parking next to a radio car a block away from the apartment building. It was a high rise of smoky, black glass, rearing above the classical architecture and European-style square between the Metropolitan Opera and the Juilliard School.

To his annoyance, the square was amassed with people listening to a jazz band playing dissonant tunes in front of the Juilliard School. The music disconcerted him. He sped up his pace, limping hurriedly through the crowd, which suddenly, maliciously, trapped him in Lincoln Square.

A fountain of adrenaline spurted through his bloodstream. He couldn't breathe. Both lungs deflated. Sirens screamed in his head. His heart thudded against his breastbone like it would shatter it. Lincoln Center disintegrated. He didn't hear the Coltrane tunes. He stood in the middle of a lonely street, the rain pouring down, and those sirens howled in his ears. He heard nothing else.

"Alex?"

Ray's voice sounded distant, as if shouting across a deep canyon.

"Alex!" Ray repeated more forcefully, grabbing Alex's shoulder.

Alex whirled around, Ray's fingers digging into his shoulder bringing reality back to him in a dizzying rush. "What?" He looked into Ray's severe, chiseled features, now etched with concern.

"You okay?" Ray asked.

Alex shook his head and blew out a lungful of air. "I'm fine. Just tired. Yesterday was an exhausting shitshow. Like I said, my back's bothering me."

Ray looked doubtful but he didn't say anything else until they reached the building. As they squeezed through the barricade of radio cars and flashed tin at the cops stationed at the entrance, Ray observed that it would be sweet, living in an apartment right over Lincoln Center, if you could afford it and liked the opera.

Alex had no reply, not even a tasteless joke. His throat and mouth were agonizingly parched, and he couldn't swallow. There was a bitter taste on his tongue. He dug his shaky hands into his belt. Walking through the revolving door, he tried to go through the mental checklist he always had before processing a death scene, but he could not keep his thoughts aligned, or think at all. He'd slammed into a stone wall, the fatigue of being awake for more than twenty-four hours, his emotions rising dangerously close to the surface.

Uniforms from the Two-Oh patrolled the lobby. The detectives nodded towards the cops and flashed tin at the doorman, before taking his details. The doorman knew the DOA's name, Sean Ferrin, and added that he was a lawyer of some sort.

Alex steadied himself, but he would sell a limb for water. "Has anyone who doesn't live in the building come in during your shift?"

"Nope," said the doorman.

"No guests, anything?"

"No."

"How long is your shift?"

"Eight hours. I'm just about to sign off. If I can get outta here."

"You'll have to go to the precinct house and give a statement to the detectives."

The doorman sighed, hassled.

Then Alex and Ray rode the nippy elevator up to the 52nd floor. Even the elevator in this place had a mirror and a red carpet with gilded Persian artwork. *This is how the other half lives*, Alex thought. He made the mistake of looking at himself in the mirror. His complexion was pale, the brown eyes watery, pupils wildly dilated. Sweat shone at his hairline.

"A lawyer, eh? That makes half of this city into fucking suspects," he cracked.

The comment bounced off Ray like a basketball on a blacktop. "That doorman says no one's been in the building."

"Wonder what a NITRO check on this building would tell you. Old Jews complaining about the paint job, the criminally ugly carpet, the Juilliard student parties." Alex forced the joke with a tight smile. If he could fake the wiseass, he could cover up whatever happened in Lincoln Square. "That's what my mother would be doing."

"Well, it has CCTV. I saw the cameras. We can check them too."

A female uniform, the rookie charged with the unenviable task of sitting on the DOA, met them near the elevator.

"Whaddaya got?" asked Alex.

She looked relieved. "The DOA is a white male, probably in his fifties," she reported eagerly. "Looks like he's got a gunshot wound to the head. He's in that apartment at the end of the hall. My partner's with him. The cleaning lady came in and found him."

"Where's the cleaning lady?"

"She's in the apartment with the precinct detectives."

"Has anyone else disturbed the scene?"

"Just EMS, sir."

The detectives signed in and ducked under the crime scene tape zig-zagging across the hallway. On the deceased's door, Alex noted four locks, jotting it down in his memo pad. You could grade New

Yorkers' paranoia. Two locks were normal. Three meant they were a little neurotic but still within reason (Alex had three). Four meant they thought they were living in Bed-Stuy or East New York, even when they were on the Upper West Side, or they really did live in the projects, in which case it was sensible. More than four meant that they were either nuts, or someone was genuinely out to get them. The latter most likely had a rap sheet of their very own.

Alex ran his gloved hands along the door, touching the locks. His skin heated up under the latex. The locks looked and felt undamaged. At his back, he heard CSU shuffling along the hall, rustling in their Tyvek suits. He tugged booties over his shoes, nudged the door open, and stepped into the apartment, his feet feeling soft and awkward.

A moon-faced rookie cop slouched on a white leather sofa, the TV on, but he wasn't watching it. Two bored paramedics stood over a middle-aged white male, dressed in a Saks Fifth Avenue black suit and tie, like he had been out for an evening at the opera across the road. The man wasn't giving EMS much to do. He lay crumpled on his left side, and had a gunshot wound in his temple. Blood had soaked into the pale beige carpet and splattered on the white wall like a lame imitation of a Jackson Pollock painting.

This was real, and the weird stuff in his head wasn't. A DOA, who needed him to find answers. *Thank fuck*, he said to no one but himself. He had a routine, the things he did at every callout. First, he burned some coffee grounds on the stove, masking the putrid smell of death permeating the apartment.

Then the homicide detectives went through the standard litany of questions to the first officers, the EMS crew, and the cleaning lady. When did you find him? About two hours ago. Do you know him? Cleaned his apartment once per week. He was usually at work. Where was work? Brooklyn. Do you *really* know him? No, he just leaves the check. Who else was staying in this apartment? No one. You sure? No. Has anybody found a weapon? Not yet. They were looking. The standard litany of answers was, for the most part, unhelpful.

Someone from 1PP radioed in, relating that the city of New York believed that the apartment was owned by Sean Ferrin, and there were no outstanding warrants nor complaints associated with the place.

Holding his breath, Alex knelt on his right knee beside the DOA, eyeballing one of the man's hands, then the other, hunting for defensive wounds. Not a mark. Nothing on his face or neck, either. His clothes were unblemished – if you discounted the blood spatter – his pearly white shirt buttoned all the way to the throat, and his tie more neatly tied than Alex's at this moment. Lightly, Alex prodded the body. The poor bastard was as stiff as a two-by-four; *rigor mortis*, dead for at least eight hours, but not more than eighteen hours.

Then Alex checked him for lividity, gently unbuttoning the shirt so he could see the flesh. A dark blue-purple tinge greeted him, the discoloring along the ribs and the upper arm, except for where his weight pressed into the floor. The shoulder, the curve of the ribs, and the hip were cast in a ghostly white. He'd died here, where he fell.

Next, he inspected the gunshot wound, taking note of the halo of powder burns around the edges. The shot had been fired at close range, and he made some rough calculations about the angle and trajectory of the shot, inferring from the wound and from the blood spatter on the wall that the vic had probably been sitting on the floor, the gun level with his head. Possibly, of course. Until you, the ME, or CSU take actual measurements, you never write your initial crime scene observations in concrete, committing language that can bite you in the ass on cross-examination.

A precinct detective stood behind him, watching him work the body, transfixed. Finally, he said, "Boswell, my partner and I have talked to some of the neighbors. Mostly, no one knows anything. But we took a statement from one who says he might've heard a gunshot at one or two in the morning."

"He report it to the police?" Alex inquired, still on his knee, waving at Andre Brown, the assistant ME, who hustled through the door and dropped to a crouch beside the DOA.

"Alex, what do you think?"

“He’s got a gunshot to his head, he’s in rigor, and I checked lividity. No one’s moved him.” Alex stiffly rose to his feet and twisted his hips from one side to the other, stretching his spine.

The precinct detective stated, “No, the witness thought it was a car backfiring.”

“A car backfiring *in* the building?” Alex raised a cynical eyebrow.

“This ain’t Washington Heights. The people in this building, they’re not gonna know what gunfire sounds like.”

Fair, thought Alex.

“Is that witness still here?” asked Ray.

“No, he said he had to go to work. We took a brief statement.”

“We’ll have a look at that later,” said Ray. “Maybe bring that witness back into the precinct.”

“How well do they know the DOA?” asked Alex.

“This is New York,” the precinct detective said dismissively. “You think people actually know their neighbors?”

“You never know,” retorted Alex. “Maybe they saw him bringing prostitutes into the apartment every night or something, or heard the wild parties, or the domestics, or the gambling ring.”

“Yeah... Or an opera singer,” sighed the detective.

“Hey, he could be running a prostitution ring with opera singers,” said the other Two-Oh detective. “Or Juilliard students. Think of what you could do with a violin bow.”

“Don’t discount the mishegoss theories,” Alex said, and he set off on an exploration of the apartment.

While Alex was nosing around the kitchen, a cop found a wallet, stowed in a drawer, and he got Alex’s attention and handed him the wallet.

The first item Alex pulled out was an American Bar Association membership card with the DOA’s face in the left-hand corner. “Sean Ferrin, J.D.,” he said, reading the card. The next card was a New York driver’s license. Same name, same face, this address.

Ray removed another card. Alex heard him take a gulp. “Oh, shit. He was an ADA in King’s County.”

“In that case, there could only be like two million people who would want him dead,” Alex quipped, but his voice scraped in his throat. “Take a fucking number.” That explained the excessive locks.

“This must be an expensive apartment,” Ray speculated. “It’s not like he’s earning a bazillion dollars working in the KCDA’s office, not like he would in private practice.”

“Fuck knows,” Alex replied, unwilling to speculate.

“How much does an ADA make? Enough to have a place like this? Expensive West Side neighborhood? You could spit and hit the opera. With a doorman?”

Ray was getting ahead of himself. Scratching at the corner of his left eye, Alex swiveled away and opened several drawers, uncovering a monochromatic collection of white shirts, white socks, black y-front underwear, plain solid-colored ties. This guy didn’t even vary the color of his underwear.

Unexpectedly, Alex’s brain leapt to a case from 2001. One of the co-defendants, a cop Alex had vaguely known from their days in Queens, had been found guilty of taking bribes and conspiring to commit murder. The son of a bitch had tried to weasel out of the charges, deflecting attention by accusing Alex of accepting payoffs when he’d worked at the wild One-Oh-Three in the ‘80s. Alex’s transgressions most certainly included drinking far too much and sleeping around, but most certainly did not include skimming money off drug busts. Ray, only recently assigned to MNHS, had almost believed the fuckwit. So had IAB, but they cleared him, although he’d sweated it and almost started drinking again. Still, Alex had been wounded. The IA stuff he could blow off, but Ray, his partner, should have trusted him. Just because he wasn’t the paragon of abstemious behavior and virtue didn’t mean he was capable of sinking to other – and far worse – lows. There was being a whistleblower when you had evidence of malfeasance, and then there was just being a prick when you didn’t.

“Do you just assume everybody’s getting some payoff now?” Alex snapped, over-sensitive.

“I’m not,” said Ray, surprised by the rebuke. “I’m just saying, it’s a luxurious apartment.”

“Who are you? Serpico? You can’t assume everybody’s corrupt.”

“What the hell are you talking about? I didn’t assume anything. I was just thinking aloud...” Ray folded his arms over his chest and gave Alex a strange look. “I’m sure there’s a rational explanation anyway. Why does he only own black underwear and white socks? Is that weird?”

Alex spread his fingers across his forehead. “Yeah, there probably is. Never mind. Doesn’t matter. And yeah, it’s fucking weird.” Sleep deprivation, the headache, pain searing holes in his spine and ribs – it conflagrated and left him reactive and histrionic. He’d flashbaced to that unsettling case from three years ago but given Ray’s baffled expression and wiseass remarks about the DOA’s wardrobe, he guessed that it had not been on the younger detective’s mind at all. Why had it suddenly been on his? Because he’d run himself aground. Oh, he desperately needed to finish this tour and then sleep for about forty-eight hours.

“Boswell! Espinosa!”

They jerked their heads towards the detective who’d called out. The precinct detective and the assistant ME had rolled the body and found a gun.

Alex and Ray sprinted across the apartment and examined the weapon, a Smith and Wesson M&P .22. It did not look like it was used much, lacking the scuff marks of a gun regularly slid in and out of a holster. Alex removed the magazine. Nine rounds, but the gun would take ten. He guessed that the tenth was in the vic’s head. Then he light-checked the bore using the reflection of his thumbnail. Not much wear. He tied a tag to it and located the serial number. Next, he phoned the ATF’s National Tracing Center in West Virginia, describing the firearm and reading off the serial number to the wearied agent on the other end of the line. He was probably one of about a thousand cops phoning the Tracing Center today, and he knew that the agents would be excavating thousands of microfilms and a rat’s nest of an antiquated library catalogue, hunting for records, because federal law insanelly prevented the ATF from computerizing any data relating to firearms sales.

Once he’d set that in motion, he bagged the weapon and prepped it to go to the ballistics lab for testing, and then he squatted on his haunches near the ME. “Exit wound?”

“Can’t see one,” Brown answered.

Alex re-examined the entry wound on the side of the forehead, a bloody hole, flecked with shards of bone and grey matter. “Then it’s probably still in there.”

The ME nodded as he slipped plastic bags over the DOA’s hands. Alex stood, swearing at his pain, and he continued to inventory the apartment.

A survey of the ADA’s paperwork, filed alphabetically on a shelf in his office, revealed that he lived alone, but he had an ex-wife and a kid in Westchester. He had worked in private practice at a prestigious criminal defense firm before embarking on the life of public service in the Brooklyn DA’s office. He was on the committee of the Lincoln Square Synagogue. Receipts and credit card statements showed he’d shopped at the Whole Foods at West 97th and Columbus, and he had recently donated three hundred bucks to Senator Chuck Schumer’s election campaign.

Alex hunted for evidence of vices: gambling, drugs, women, men, anything. Instead, he found two copies of the Torah and a wide-ranging selection of history books, everything from Napoleon to post-9/11 US intervention in the Middle East. There was no booze in the apartment, and he didn’t keep much food. Soymilk, whole wheat bread, spinach curry in the fridge, a small collection of vegan cookbooks. The kitchen was so clean you could do surgery.

Even Ray observed, “Man, this guy is like an OCD neat freak.”

Alex arched his eyebrows. “Pot and kettle, huh?” he teased. Then he picked up the only decoration in the kitchen, a brass Star of David perched on the windowsill, and he held it up to the light, a guilty reminder of his own Jewish blood and traditions that he paid little attention to most of the time.

They finished processing the scene and rode the elevator back to the ground floor, and then looped around the building towards Lincoln Center. Alex dreaded going anywhere near the square, but if he

asked Ray to bring the car to the main doors of the apartment, he would have to explain why. How could he? Just that he had an acidic, sour feeling in the pit of his stomach. He stopped breathing as they navigated the square. But the crowd had dissipated and only a handful of people lingered near the fountain. That frightening disengagement with reality didn't make an appearance, only his splitting headache, queasy stomach, and the cop who they had blocked in lounging against his car, giving them an icy stare.

Once inside the Crown Vic, he drooped his head and neck over the steering wheel and pushed his palm against his right eye. The veins in his forehead pulsed, dilating and then constricting. Years ago, he could withstand more than twenty-four hours on his feet, but he supposed age and not taking care of himself as well as he should were getting the better of him.

Ray hadn't stopped staring at him with that quizzical countenance. "Are you sure nothing's wrong?" "I've been awake for more than twenty-four hours. I'm tired, and my head's fucking killing me. We still got aspirin in here? I guess I don't handle twenty-four hour tours as well as I used to."

"Should you be doubling up on your painkillers?"

"Yes. It's fucking aspirin. It's fine."

Ray squeezed his lips into a thin, doubtful line, but he dug around the car's glove compartment and proffered two aspirin tablets. A bottle of water kicked around the passenger door pockets, and Alex grabbed it, quaffing down the pills with the water.

