

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: Getting things settled.

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The urge to rush over and defend what's his, to ensure order and cleanliness in *his* space... is almost overwhelming. But fortunately, Cole has one of the most delicious breakfast sandwiches in the entire state of New York to focus on and as he and Raven both consume their BECs from Rafael, he's able to calm himself down a little bit.

Rushing into the situation half-cocked... really didn't seem like a very good idea if he thought about it for a bit. He'd already had that incident with Chemo, and while everything had worked out for the best, things could have gone a lot worse if he didn't have Raven with him. She'd really saved his bacon in more ways than one on that front.

And while he did still have her to help out now... he definitely didn't want to needlessly endanger her. Which is precisely what recklessly charging in might do. No... seeing as nothing was on fire and everything seemed to be relatively calm in the neighborhood, the better thing to do... was to take things slow.

As such, when he and Raven are done with their breakfast, Cole leads her out onto the sidewalk and they make their way over to his apartment building. The place looks a teensy bit like a crime scene, with caution tape over the broken window up above. But Cole quickly assesses that the window in question was not actually one of *his* windows. Rather, it was the window out in the hallway outside of his apartment from the look of things.

Entering the building itself, Cole heads for the little office down on the bottom floor first and foremost, where he finds the building superintendent, aka his apartment's manager, sitting staring at a computer.

"Hey, Brad."

Brad, a portly middle-aged man, jolts in his seat and looks at Cole like he's seen a ghost.

"Hey... you!"

Cole raises a brow at that... he's not exactly surprised Brad doesn't remember his name though, truth be told. Either way, he shrugs off the other man's weird reaction.

"I'm breaking my lease. Moving out today."

"T-Today? That'll... that'll cost you."

Thinking about the stolen money that he and Raven found in the park, Cole just shrugs. Because he'd wound up acquiring the House of Mystery for free, they still hadn't found a use for all that cash yet. But hey... what better way to see what his 'cleaning' of that money actually did then using it here, right?

"Sure, figure out how much and get all the paperwork made up for me, okay?"

Brad blinks slowly, before realizing Cole is already starting to pull out of the doorway.

"W-Wait! Where are you going now?!"

Blinking at the weird amount of concern in the building super's voice, Cole gives Brad a curious look.

"Uh... we're just going to head upstairs to start cleaning out the apartment. Unless there's some reason we shouldn't?"

Maybe he was wrong with his first thought that his apartment was alright? It was just the hallway window that had been busted, but perhaps he'd walk upstairs and find a damn crime scene waiting for him. Just as Cole is starting to feel anxious over the idea... Brad relaxes back into his chair.

“Oh... yeah. Alright. That’s totally fine. I’ll uh... I’ll get the paperwork ready and bring it to you when it’s finalized?”

Cole slowly nods, giving the other man a strange look.

“Yeah, that works. Thanks Brad.”

The portly man nods his head, looking oddly relieved for some reason. In the end, Cole just shakes his head and walks away, Raven following in his wake. Neither notice when Brad reaches for the phone instead of his keyboard.

Making their way upstairs, they swiftly arrive in front of Cole’s apartment door... to find it seems perfectly untouched. To be fair, Cole continues to have a strange feeling that he would know if his apartment had actually been disturbed. Back at the bodega, he’d been confident that it remained undisturbed... and it seemed that confidence was not misplaced.

Sighing, Cole fishes his key out of his pocket, a much smaller one than the key he could summon at will to connect to the House of Mystery. A moment later and he and Raven are inside his small apartment, the door swinging shut behind them both.

Almost immediately, Cole finds himself casting some cleaning magic on the place. It wasn’t like it had much of a chance to get dirty given they were only gone for a night and nobody had been in there in this time, but dust was dust and it made Cole feel better... even if he was giving the place up in the next few hours.

Cole found himself of two minds on that front. On the one hand, this small apartment now felt... almost ridiculously tiny in comparison to Mystery and her expansive insides. The House of Mystery was a mansion in truth, and Cole had explored her depths in detail in the past twenty four hours... no pun intended.

On the other hand, this was his place. It had been the first residence he could truly call his own. Meticulously maintained. Perfectly pristine. To leave it

behind... part of him hated the thought. But at the same time, he simply didn't need this place any longer and continuing to pay for it, especially when there was apparently crime in the area... there was just no point.

"Alright... let's get started. We'll clear out the closet first and move everything to the bed so we can use it as a doorway to Mystery."

Raven nods sharply, following his lead as they proceed to do exactly what Cole has said. There's not much in his closet anyways, just some clothes and what not. After emptying it out and putting everyone on his bed, Cole wills Mystery's key to appear in his pocket, pulling it out and putting it in the closet's keyhole.

A moment later and he's opening the door to Mystery instead. Literally, as the house's blonde avatar is standing on the other side of the door before it even opens, a bright smile on her lips.

"Welcome back, milord. Have you had a productive morning so far?"

Cole considers that for a second before smiling crookedly.

"That remains to be seen."

Sure, the breakfast sandwiches and seeing Rafael again had been good, but only once he'd paid Brad and signed any remaining documents related to breaking his lease would Cole really feel productive. Not to mention moving out...

"We're moving all of my stuff over to you today. Can you... leave yourself?"

Mystery blinks, glancing at the doorway speculatively for a long moment. Finally, she takes a step forward... only to hesitate at the threshold.

"... It appears I cannot. I remain confined to my own premises."

Huh. That was unfortunate. Though a small part of Cole is a little relieved that Mystery seems to have *some* limitations at least. She'd really been coming

across as larger than life and a bit 'all powerful' for a second there. Not that he distrusted her. He just... never mind. It wasn't important.

Between the three of them, clearing out the apartment is fairly easy. He and Raven move things from the apartment into Mystery via the doorway, and Mystery in turn organizes all of it and sends it on. Cole can't help but be grateful for that, especially because even seeing the clutter through the doorway might have been a problem for him.

Still... there isn't much in his apartment to begin with. He had a few pieces of furniture, his bed, and a handful of appliances. All in all, with the three of them working like a well-oiled machine, it only takes approximately an hour to get through, and apparently that's just enough time for Brad to finish up things on his end as well, because a knock at the door comes just as the bedframe is disappearing into Mystery.

Making sure to close the closet door up so his building manager doesn't see anything magical, Cole walks over and pulls open the door with a forced smile.

"Hey Brad, you-!"

Except... it's not Brad on the other side of the door. In place of the apartment superintendent is a woman... a very beautiful, very recognizable woman. Dark hair, blue eyes, and the appearance of a stage magician mixed with a stage dancer, given the combination of a black tailcoat, white tuxedo shirt, and fishnet stockings.

Zatanna Zatara, of course. Cole would have to be living under a rock not to recognize one of the members of the Justice League, after all. Still, he's completely caught off guard by her presence. Not least because she seems like she's slightly out of breath, a bead of sweat slowly swelling on her brow. Had she... *ran* all the way here?

Without really thinking about it, Cole casts a cleaning spell on the slightly sweaty magician... and then realizes he's just cast magic without permission on a

magical superheroine. Before he can do more than blanch a little bit, however, she blinks and straightens up before letting out an explosive breath.

“Thank you.”

Oh, she’s reasonable. That’s good.

Zatanna’s eyes slide past him further into the apartment and then widen as they land on Raven for the first time.

“Demon!”

Ah fuck. That’s not good.

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Zatanna was very, very glad that she’d had the forethought to speak to the building’s apartment manager before departing the previous day. She hadn’t wanted to draw too much attention to the apartment given that the demon hadn’t managed to actually make it inside, so she hadn’t told the first responders anything about it.

However, she had stopped by the office of the man in charge of the apartments, a man named Brad and asked him about who lived in the apartment. Maybe that was a bit of an invasion of privacy, but Zatanna was getting a little desperate for leads.

After Brad told her about ‘Cole’, Zatanna had come to the plain and simple conclusion that the young man he’d described was not the Lord of Order she was looking for. Instead, he was probably the same young man that said Lord of Order had redirected her to when he’d sent her to that laundromat.

It was still as much of a lead as she could hope for, so she’d asked one more favor from the apartment superintendent, that being for him to call her whenever he next saw Cole so she could pay him a visit.

Unfortunately, when Brad initially called, Zatanna had been deep in research. It hadn't been until almost an hour later that she'd finally gotten the message. At which point she'd promptly freaked out and bolted over here as fast as she could because the apartment manager seemed quite confident that Cole was about to disappear, given his desire to end his lease that very day and what not.

So yes, she'd taken the stairs two at a time and not exactly stopped to consider if there was any sort of spell she could use to make her speedy run over here a little easier. Still, as his magic washes over her, cleaning her brow of still-forming sweat and making her feel a little less sticky in her uniform, Zatanna is happy to express her gratitude.

No sooner has she done so, however, then she looks past Cole and sees the demon sneaking up behind him. Eyes widening, Zatanna doesn't hesitate to lunge forward, putting herself between Cole and the female demon as she snarls.

"Get behind me, Cole!"

The demon rears back as if surprised, blinking owlishly at Zatanna's sudden aggression. Good, if she's caught it off guard, all the better. She'll-!

"Wait! Stop, she's not a threat!"

Only for Cole's voice to cut through the mix, the young man grabbing her by the arm as if she's afraid he's going to attack. Which... she was, but she hadn't expected him to be upset about that. Brow furrowing now, Zatanna looks back at Cole to see a pleading expression on his face.

"Get away from him."

The demon, on the other hand, has recovered from her stupor and when she speaks, the threat in her voice is obvious. Zatanna whips back around to see coiling shadows spreading from the demon's hands, her eyes glowing with dark power as she glares daggers.

Zatanna tenses up again, ready for a showdown because despite Cole's words, it definitely *seems* like the demon is a threat.

"Raven, stand down!"

... For all of a moment before those words permeate and the now-named 'Raven' immediately pulls back, the shadows dissipating. In that moment, Zatanna can't help but see a dog who's just been squirted with a spray bottle or smacked on the nose with a newspaper. She looks shocked and a little hurt by Cole's sharp words... but that doesn't stop her from obeying him instantly and without hesitation.

Forcing his way back in front of them, Cole holds his hands out between the two.

"Please, just calm down... Raven isn't a threat, ma'am. I promise. And Raven, this is a member of the Justice League... we shouldn't try to fight her."

Slowly, Zatanna relaxes. This was... a bit more than she expected. But at the same time, her previous assumption has all but proven correct at this point. Cole isn't a Lord of Order. He's just a young man likely in over his head.

How a demon had managed to get her hooks into him, Zatanna didn't know... but perhaps that was one of the reasons the actual Lord of Order had sent her in Cole's direction.

Still... this was going to be rather tricky to navigate, wasn't it?

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A/N: Remember to Vote, leave a Like, and let me know what you think!