

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

A/N: Zatanna follows the trail.

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On the one hand, Zatanna knows she needs to be careful, especially if she's dealing with what she thinks she is. Hunting down a Lord of Order, even with completely friendly intent, is not exactly the healthiest of decisions.

On the other hand, they can't afford to just leave it be. Or rather, she can't anyways. If she doesn't track down the man who dealt with Chemo so decisively, if she doesn't make every effort to try and make it clear she's attempting to find him... then others in the League will start their own hunts. And that could prove disastrous depending on their quarry's temperament.

So yes, Zatanna can't just sit on her hands and hope the problem goes away. She needs to produce results sooner rather than later. The problem, of course, is that using magic to track down a Lord of Order is *usually* an exercise in futility.

Someone of that power, with centuries of experience and skill under their belt, wasn't going to be found if they didn't want to be found. Not by a simple tracking spell meant to lead her directly to them anyways. And yet, it's not like Zatanna has any other options.

All of the eyewitnesses were clear about what they saw, after all. The ones who had dealt with Chemo had left into a dead-end alley, disappearing into shadow like they'd never been there at all. There was no trace of where they'd gone next... which meant the only way to really hunt them down for Zatanna was through her own magic.

... But why that magic had led her to a particularly brutal crime scene, she couldn't imagine. Staring at the laundromat, cordoned off by police tape and crawling with cops and forensic scientists, Zatanna furrows her brow in consternation.

She can't see the full crime scene from where she's standing, but she can certainly see the massive amount of blood splattered across the inside of the laundromat's front window, giving some idea of just how nasty things were inside. And yet... she couldn't exactly stay out here forever because 'inside' was precisely where her magic was pointing her.

With a sigh, Zatanna finally approaches the crime scene tape properly, catching the attention of one of the officers making sure no civilians slip by.

"H-Holy shit, you're Zatanna Zatarra!"

Fortunately, there were benefits to being a card carrying member of the Justice League. Her reputation preceded her and Zatanna smiles as she nods, slipping under the tape with a confidence she doesn't quite feel but nevertheless must project. The cop doesn't try to stop her at least, eyes shining with hero worship (and a bit of lust) as he tries not to stare too hard at her fishnet clad thighs.

"That's right, Officer. Can you tell me a little bit about what's going on here?"

Blinking, the Police Officer looks back at the crime scene and then back to her, now on his side of the tape. For a moment, he looks unsure... before shrugging.

"I'm afraid that's probably a better question for the Detective, ma'am."

Right, passing the buck. Zatanna wishes she could say she was surprised... but also, she's not complaining. After all, it gets her past him and deeper in either way.

"Then I'll go ask."

"Er... y-yes ma'am."

With that, Zatanna strides forward. Some might call it a strut, but that's a natural consequence of her heels and how they affect her gait. She doesn't do it on

purpose necessarily... but she won't lie and say that she's completely ignorant of her own sex appeal or anything like that.

Eyes follow her, both from the bystanders looking on from outside of the crime scene and from the forensics and cops that are working within the tape. Nobody tries to stop her from entering the laundromat, however, and so a moment later... she's inside.

Luckily, she'd had the view of the window to prepare herself ahead of time. If, for instance, the air around Chemo's attack site had been unnaturally clean... the opposite is true here. Outside might have been the usual disgusting New York air, but in the laundromat... it smells like a charnel house.

Zatanna has girded herself though and her only reaction is a wrinkled nose as she stares at what's left of who can only be this establishment's proprietor. She doesn't even need to talk to the Detective to know that... the magic in the air tells her of this place's defilement and the death of its owner.

"Zatanna Zatara. What the hell brings you to my neck of the woods?"

The detective in charge of the crime scene turns out to be a scrappy Asian woman, her eyes narrowed as she straightens up from where she'd been crouched next to the murder victim. Forcing a slight smile onto her lips, Zatanna waves a hand.

"I was... in the area and thought I might lend my expertise. This doesn't seem like your average mugging, from what I can see."

Eyes narrowing even further, the female detective shakes her head.

"No, not at all... though how'd you know it was a mugging to begin with? We just figured out that there's no money left on the premises. Not a single dollar or coin in any of the machines... or on the remains."

Zatanna's eyes widen at that and she hesitates for a moment before finally admitting the truth.

“I can feel the Greed in the air. Magic was used here, Detective. Extremely dark magic... demonic magic, even.”

Now her eyes widen, the other woman looking around with a bit more hesitation.

“Shit. Are we fucked?”

Honestly, that was a fair question. This place WAS defiled fairly heavily... and any lingering malevolence and malignance would love to attach itself to anyone it could. Zatanna lifts a hand and waves it through the air, casting a quick spell.

“Levaer rouy ginregnil stceffe!”

Everyone in the laundromat tenses up as the very air turns red. The detective looks down at herself to see some of that red already resting on her shoulders, like the aftermath of an explosion leaving dust and other particulates to collect on the bodies of those caught in the ensuing smoke cloud.

If allowed to remain, if allowed to fester, it was the kind of thing that could have affected them down the road. Even if it took weeks, months, or even years, they might have eventually succumbed to Greed themselves, turned away from their previous personalities and dispositions... or influenced towards their worst impulses and darkest desires.

“Fuck me...”

Zatanna resists the urge to make a stupid joke (the other woman IS cute) and instead waves her hand again.

“Hsaw yawa eht noitpurroc!”

What’s already gathered on the detective and others in the laundromat flows off of them, leaving them clean once more. As they’re busy looking at themselves and each other in wonder, Zatanna sees an opportunity.

“I can clean the magical malignance up for you, detective, but you and yours should probably wait outside for me to be done so nothing untoward happens.”

None of them need to be told twice. They might not see much magic in their daily lives, but they live in a world that has survived demonic invasions alongside alien invasions. And of course, Zatanna IS a member of the Justice League.

“Right! Everyone out!”

With the detective barking orders, the laundromat is cleared in moments and Zatanna is left to do her work. Of course, she’s not going to immediately try and purify the place of its defilement. Rather, the reason she wanted privacy was so she could do her own investigation. Why had her tracking spell, intended to find the Lord of Order, lead her *here* of all places?

“Levaer tahw denepah ereh!”

Her magic spreads out through the laundromat, pushing the lingering red malignance to the far edges as a byproduct even as she temporarily takes over the spaces. Images of events past begin to overlay over the present as time reverses to before the death of the laundromat’s owner.

What follows is a recreation of the events that had led to the man’s death... and confirmation that something truly dark and demonic had been involved in this murder. After all, if it were any mundane killer, Zatanna would be able to see and identify them through her magic and therefore be able to give the police a name to hunt down.

Alas, her spell does not reveal the perpetrator... instead, it shows them in the shape of a dark, demonic shadow of evil and malevolence, hiding their true identity from her. Zatanna scowls at this... but to be fair, that wasn’t why she was here anyways.

Pouring more magic into the spell, Zatanna speeds things up, moving backwards in time past the murder, reversing things over the course of the past

twenty four hours. She's looking for something, anything that will catch her eye. She watches as dozens of people, likely regulars, come in and out of the laundromat making use of its machines.

And then she watches a very interesting interaction between the owner of the laundromat and a young man in surprisingly clean clothing... and she watches as time continues to move in reverse, showing the young man running his hands over the machines and cleaning them before heading into the back to clean up there as well.

Zatanna's eyes widen and then narrow as she follows the see-through ghost of the young man throughout the laundromat. His work, now that she's looking for it, can still be felt. Beneath the defiling of the business, there's a light sense of cleansing. The beginnings of a purification that could have become a consecration if it had been done enough times.

She winds time forward again and rewatches the interaction between the laundromat owner and the young man, frowning when the former cheats the latter out of his earnings and the latter leaves in anger. Some of the power of his cleaning goes with him as he departs... but beyond that, he makes no other attempt to try and take revenge on the older man.

How... strange. Specifically, what's strange is that the young man's cleaning magic reminds Zatanna of how the street where Chemo was defeated felt to her. However, the difference in that power and what she sees now is... well, it's like comparing a mountain to a mole hill isn't it?

And yet, the tracking spell did lead her here, to this location for some reason. There's a resonance between the faint cleaning magic used here and the extremely powerful magic used to wipe Chemo off of the face of the Earth over on the other side of the city.

Finally, it dawns on Zatanna what must be happening and she lets out a little rueful laugh as she shakes her head.

"Of course... I should have expected this much."

The Lord of Order... he was toying with her. But at the same time, he wasn't just toying with her was he? No, that sort of playing around just for the sake of playing around was more in the realm of Chaos. Everything a Lord of Order did had a purpose to it in the end.

In this case... he'd no doubt sensed her tracking spell and decided to redirect her to something he found to be more relevant. For a moment Zatanna considers whether or not the young man cleaning up this laundromat with his magic might be an apprentice to the hidden Lord or not... but no, that doesn't quite make sense.

However, there's no denying that the young man is very much of a person of interest to the Lord of Order that Zatanna had been trying, unsuccessfully, to hunt down. If this wasn't an obvious clear sign, she didn't know what was. Clearly the Lord of Order expected her to find this young man and render him aid before the demonic entity that had killed the laundromat owner was able to track him down.

As far as rebukes went, it was startlingly light. Zatanna could count her lucky stars that the extremely powerful immortal sorcerer she'd been hunting hadn't taken any greater issue with her efforts to magically track him down. This was basically the equivalent of reassigning her to something he considered more important.

Well... she'd do it. Not just because she really didn't want to get herself or the Justice League on the wrong side of a Lord of Order, but also because this young man was clearly being hunted by dark forces beyond his reckoning. And if that wasn't the sort of thing Zatanna was supposed to fight against, she didn't know what was.

Letting out a sigh, she goes ahead and shuts off her spell, before waving her hand again.

"Naelc siht ecaps fo noitpurroc!"

She's able to wipe away the last of the lingering malignance, though the physical crime scene remains intact. Moving to the door, she steps out to find the detective and everyone else waiting for her. Smoking a cigarette, the detective arches a brow.

"Well Ms. Zatara? What are we looking at?"

Smiling softly, Zatanna shakes her head.

"I've removed any lingering magic. You all can process the crime scene without any side effects befalling you. However... I cannot help you solve this murder. And for the same reasons I can't help, I would advise you not to look too deeply. The one who committed this crime... is above your paygrade."

The detective narrows her eyes for a moment before looking to the blood-coated window. Finally, she jerks her head in a nod.

"Noted. I'll make sure to put down your statement in my report. Thanks for the help."

"Of course, Detective. Good luck and goodbye."

"Same to you."

With that, Zatanna casts a quick obfuscation spell on herself so she isn't immediately harassed or assailed by curious bystanders as she makes her way away from the crime scene. She has a young man to find... and a demonic entity to save him from.

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