Shoutout to **Zildjianzone** for becoming my newest patron! Thanks for the support, and I hope you enjoy reading this story and more to come!

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 I always preferred asphalt to alpine trees.

Nothing personal against Mother Nature or anything. Inner-city life always possessed a...rush, a claustrophobic ecosystem amidst a jungle of concrete that always made me feel at home. Seeing all of the farmland turn into immense trees and thick greenery, feeling the asphalt beneath the police cruiser turn into uneven gravel, didn’t disturb me. What did though was the unnatural quiet that replaced the shouting, honking cars, distant sirens and smell of rotting garbage dumpsters that made me miss downtown Milwaukee.

“So, you comfortable?”

“Tch.” I addressed to the deputy in the driver’s seat left of me with a single grunt.

“It’s mighty brave of you to go in there all on your own,” he tried initiating a conversation from me. “Those beatnik commies have been bothering us for too long…”

My eyes remained on the winding road ahead of us. Not on his handsome features such as the emerald eyes, well-toned body or black wavy hair that belonged more to a farmhand rather than a deputy from some hick town. The guy, whose badge read ‘Police Officer Jim Martins’, seemed nice enough, but I preferred to spend my time focusing on what to do once I made it to the compound on the hill. The last thing I needed to do was listen to his voice. Or, imagine what Officer Martins looked like underneath his—

I blinked back to reality, willing myself not to get too distracted. Between last Friday and the phone call from Kimberton’s Mayor Hill, another day spent packing my suitcase and taking the next drive from Milwaukee all the way to a town I’d never been to in northern Wisconsin, I hadn’t gotten any action in bed. Tommy visited me in the dead of night as planned, slipping into my apartment and locking the door before dropping to his knees.

The way he feverishly choked down my length, gasping and slurping on it like the tastiest of hotdogs while locking eyes with mine, almost caused me to alert the neighbors with whatever noises rose in the back of my throat. Granted, Tommy and I knew better than to do something like that, but I still felt tempted back then. Hell, I always did.

Tommy knew how to service men like me. In privacy, in dark alleyways or the homes of closeted faggots. By the time we were finished hours later, that talented hustler drained me of sixty dollars and all the jizz I could muster. Not even an entire night of self-love and sinful memories could trump the real experience of a man’s willing asshole.

Yes, I was a sexual pervert. A homosexual. A deviant. My line of work made it essential that nobody could ever know, which was why I’d been reluctant at first to take the damn case. The farms surrounding a close-knit community reminded me too much of home.

I was prepared to say no, until they offered me a $50 deposit. Basically, motivation for me to take Kimberton, WI as my client.

“Alrighty then, here we are.”

Officer Martins slowed the car down until we stopped at the side of the gravel road. If it weren’t for the mile marker indicating we were nearing the town limits, I likely would’ve guessed it to be like any other part of the stretch. He awkwardly unlocked the car, then didn’t say anything as I lifted myself out of the passenger seat, brown trench coat draped around me and instruments of investigation hidden in its deep pockets.

 We didn’t say another word to each other. Whether it be his fear for my destination down deeper in the woods, or maybe he wised up about making conversation for someone like me, I didn’t know. Either way, I didn’t look back to see the car circle back to town. Part of me would scoff at the way he burned rubber back onto the highway, like the Followers were boogeymen or shit. Still, if the rumors were to be taken at face value…

 “Focus, dumbass,” I murmured to nobody but myself and some owl hooting in the trees nearby. “Just get going. Get going. They’re just some hippies.”

As I began my trek down the gravel road into the Wisconsin wilderness, I recalled what Kimberton’s burly, balding mayor told me hours ago, in his main office with the blinds closed shut. The small town I arrived in was nothing special compared to everything else in the state; vintage, full of families and old people, an occasional greaser or two standing out in the school shared between villages. Seemed like a nice place to retire with a wife and kids, if you hated the city enough and wanted to go back to the farm. Me? The only reason I decided to travel to that hick town was my new case. If things went well, then I’d be made in the shade for some time.

“Kimberton...has always been a nice town…” Mayor Hill told me earlier that day at his desk, the Sheriff and his assistant fidgeting beside him as he explained to me my new case. “Truth be told though, Mr. Spade, we wouldn’t have called you all the way up here if we weren’t in serious need of your…expertise.”

Some called me a ‘commie hunter’, even though ‘J. Spade Investigations, Inc.’ advertised many other services to provide from my Milwaukee office. If the client had enough cash, I could provide them photos of their spouse sneaking out behind their backs, investigate the evidence held against them by a prosecutor in some court case, or even search for some precious memento like a diamond bracelet that belonged to their grandmother. More often though, thanks to Senator McCarthy’s witch hunt against left-leaning citizens, my clients desperately wanted to know if their neighbor/acquaintance/colleague had secret fantasies involving a hammer and sickle with the Soviet anthem in the background. Either way, I still got paid in advance.

Mayor Hill and Sheriff Baker explained to me that after the war, Kimberton was one of many towns in the Midwest in desperate need of revenue. Most of their money came from the farms and a few hunters wanting to escape the suffocations of the suburbs, but one nasty drought resulted in the previous mayor getting desperate enough to sell some of town’s land off to whoever could afford.

That man would be Langdon E. Dowe; retired archaeologist-turned-convert who desired the land so he could build a small commune for his fellow congregation. It was assumed they were a new sect of Christianity or the like, so the sale went through. Months passed as the townsfolk saw construction material be brought to the private property, as well as men and women not from their plot of Wisconsin.

In spite of their…less than former attire (some women wore pants and men togas), Kimberton and the Commune even got along as they sold home-grown food, clothing and even wood carvings at the local market, being described as ‘incredibly friendly’, in spite of the secretive congregation preferring to keep to themselves.

However, that all changed several months prior when it was discovered what the congregation called themselves: The Followers of the Jackal. You could see the problem there, not in the name, but how it could be perceived by a town of three-thousand God-fearing people.

Rumors and hushed panic spread like wildfire the next day. Now, whenever a member of the congregation ventured in for supplies, they were either given hateful, questioning stares or accusations that sometimes resulted in violence towards the Followers.

What really started spooking Kimberton’s residents though was when several of them actually left everything behind to join the Commune. These individuals ranged from a choir boy that recently turned eighteen, a widowed grandmother, a secretary, a few locals at the town’s tavern and even one of the Sheriff’s former deputies, a family man with three children. They regularly get payments after the deputy divorced his wife to become a Follower.

“Franklin left everything after he and his partner Malcolm went in to bring the Lucas kid back to his parents,” Sheriff Baker told me, showing a picture of Franklin Fitzgerald in his deputy’s uniform. As a family man in his late thirties, one didn’t need to squint their eyes to notice the greying in his close-cut black hair, the darkening bags under his eyes or the notable second chin forming under a strong jawline (likely thanks to the largescale breakfasts, lunches and dinners made by the missus. That, or sneaking away too many doughnuts at work).

“They went to the Commune on the outskirts. All that Malcolm says he can remember is going inside the gates and walking back out without a recollection of what happened. Month later and I bring half my men up to try it again, to convince Franklin he’d gone mad. Guess what happens then?”

“You can’t remember a thing?” I answered for him, examining the photo.

“Not a goddamn thing!” the sheriff grumbled. “My men are refusing to go back, and none of us know why. I tell ya, they gotta be either worshipping Satan or brainwashing us to become communists.”

“Whatever is happening,” Mayor Hill added in, “we need you to investigate what in the name of God they’re doing up there. Will you please take the case, Mr. Spade?”

 It didn’t matter what I found inside the commune. Whether it be a dirty pack of communists or the Devil himself, I would see the Commune for myself. I would get it over with and return to Milwaukee next week with two-hundred dollars in my suitcase. After all, the last thing I believed in was superstition, but I did believe in the American dollar bill.

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 The Followers’ entire property spanned over 20,000 acres, from what the mayor and sheriff had warned me. If I didn’t return within forty-eight hours, then they would assume the worst and call in more men from Wausau to get a warrant.

Basically, from the moment my surveillance started, I’d be all on my lonesome.

 The property line didn’t have a chain-linked fence, or barbed wire, or barrier walls that would rival the one built in Berlin, cutting it in two. That surprised me, but not as much as the fact of how…beautiful the Commune looked from my vantage point. The small valley it was situated in seemed pretty enough, with a babbling brook cutting through and circling the edge of a large hill in the center. Even from where I concealed myself, nobody could miss the sight of human civilization atop it.

Beyond a tall chain-link fence, nobody could rebuke the evidence of a large clearing, where half an acre of flat land revealed beautifully fresh, grown stalks of corn and what I believed to be vegetables. Nobody could miss the sight of two and a half dozen log cabins neatly lined up in circular rows around two structures. Nobody could certainly mistake one of them being a cross-shaped priory near the other side of the property, and the other a stone pyramid-like temple. Unlike its more titanic counterpart, it seemed no larger than any of the two-story log cabins. I started wondering how they transported the stone when I noticed movement within its confines.

True to the Kimberton residents’ word, the attire of each inside Follower Seemed...odd, though not ways that deemed them insane. Indeed, the Commune’s choices of clothing seemed like a mixed hodge-podge of cultures. Men and women of the Commune alike dressed in pants or skirts unashamedly as they carried wicker baskets of plucked food, relaxed along the grass under the sunlit sky, or appreciated a running leaf whilst watching over a group of scampering, laughing children playing tag.

I needed to know if Franklin Fitzgerald was still inside. Vying for a closer look, I crouched down and inched myself closer to the Commune. Minutes of self-taught sneaking later led me to distancing deeper into the autumn-covered valley. Closer to the group of buildings but far enough to not be seen, plus giving myself more of a view of the compound behind a thicket of bushes.

Unfortunately, I still couldn’t spot Fitzgerald yet among the groups of people, but I did notice a necklace on each of the Followers’ necks through my binoculars.

The mayor and sheriff mentioned the Followers of the Jackal often wore a strange symbol on their clothing or around their neck, back before they isolated themselves on the property. Basically, it looked like any cross except the top line was replaced with an upside-down teardrop.

The Ancient Egyptians called it an ‘Ankh’, or the ‘key of life’; many of the civilization’s various gods carried it around with them to symbolize life and even the rebirth of life itself. One of whom happened to be—

A crow startled me from my thoughts.

“Ack…goddamn birds…” I muttered under my breath, then placed the binoculars back to my narrowed eyes. “Can’t wait to…to…Heh, bingo.”

Thankfully, my frustration towards Mother Nature dissipated when, who else first appeared in the scope by the edge of the rows of houses? Well, I’d give you a couple guesses.

Franklin fucking Fitzgerald, in the far-off flesh, exiting from one of the dwellings with a wooden staff in hand. Dressed apart from the rest of the congregation in a thick black tunic that draped over his waist like a kilt, the man looked almost different than he did in the photograph I saw hours prior. Outside of his deputy’s uniform, he seemingly lost some weight, to the point a simple belt held his tunic together alongside his grey cotton pants.

What perplexed me though was how…lively he was. I witnessed him smile a genuine smile to some of the Followers, pause to speak to them without so much as looking bored, as well as to wave to a group of children who called his name from their makeshift playground near the center of the Commune. Franklin had some kind of…sparkle in his eyes as walked, like he felt some form of completeness.

He joined with another similarly dressed member—a younger black man with close-shaven hair that nearly made him bald—and I watched them travel past the houses and then down the hill towards the valley. They were guards, I realized.

My position didn’t provide a decent view, what with the trees blocking my sight, yet I managed to find them dawdling along the chain-linked fence. They then stopped by a crook in the see-through barrier, Franklin turning to the black man to set their staffs alongside the barrier…and kissed. What the fuck?

They didn’t give me any further time to process the sight until I next witnessed Franklin lowering himself to his knees, his hand pulling up the kilt to reveal a black maleness even I could recognize as impressive from the distance between us. Slick and shiny, slightly curved and reddened at the dark, bulbous tip as it disappeared into the white man’s enthusiastic, less-than-virginial lips. And enthusiastically, Frank bobbed back and forth on that nice member while feeling up his lover’s chest and dark-skinned thighs. Providing me a perfect view of his curved buttocks.

*Oh dear Lord that is beautiful*, I reminisced back to a time during my teenaged years, when I’d imagine the size of a handsome older man’s Johnson, especially…

Shaking my head back to reality, I placed my eyes closer into the binoculars whilst making sure I wasn’t seen behind the faraway bushes. “Surprising to say the least,” I murmured to myself. “No wonder you left the missus, old boy…”

As much as I tried to focus on something else, the sight of Franklin orally servicing the black guardsman mesmerized me like no other. Without thinking, I slowly reached down to fondle myself without daring to take my eyes from the binoculars. A jealous moan leveled up the back of my throat, breaking the ambience of chirping birds and fallen leaves, though I believed the noise did not travel far.

Otherwise, I’d have likely been spotted by the duo lost in their homosexual lust.

Unfortunately, good things eventually came to an end when they paused their taboo homosexual act. Franklin wiped his chin, helped himself up with the black Follower’s assistance, planted a kiss on his lips and returned to their patrol deeper into the woods. Whether or not they’d continue from sight, I could never know.

I sighed in (mostly sexual) frustration, returning my hardened member inside of its refastened trousers. “Dammit…” I muttered, scoffing as I could no longer find them in the greenery. “Well, that certainly complicates things. Not like I can tell Hill that his deputy’s a fag…like me.”

Lounging in the woods, surveying the property and watching the earlier exhibition through the binoculars as I hid behind canopies of trees, it made me wish I’d brought my carton of cigarettes. I had work to do though, which involved getting inside the Commune and finding whatever else I could. First target: the strange pyramid-shaped stone temple.

Twilight turned to nightfall before I dared to retreat from my hiding spot. As soon as the next shift of guards weren’t in sight, I climbed over the chain-linked fence with as much majesty as possible, landing on the other side with a soft thud. No guards came, so I made haste in the shadows of moonlight in-between each dwelling, careful not to be heard let alone seen.

No guards at the stone temple. Good. Staying low and quick, I zipped for the front of the entrance and noted the lock holding the two wooden doors together.

Breaking and entering often came with the job description for private eyes. Luckily for me, after pulling out my lockpicking kit from my trench coat pocket and shuffling around for the tumbler, the lock easily detached with only a small *click*.

My left hand blindly closed the door shut while I raised my right hand to peer down a narrow hallway, one ordained in strange symbols I couldn’t understand let alone describe. Some were hieroglyphs, others just lines doodled together, like the languages of some extraterrestrial or shit. Whatever the case, they covered each wall, bathed in shimmering candlelight that faintly came from the room on the other end. Cautiously, I stepped forward, then reminded myself time was of the essence unless I wanted one of the Followers to find me there.

The room’s interior impressed me much more than I expected. Candles lined along the carved wall as the only sources of light, casting everything in a golden glow. The other hieroglyphs on the wall, the ceiling, the steps of a wide altar and the items placed on each carved tread.

I cautiously stepped forward to examine them. Memories of the War resurfaced, but instead of feeling another adrenaline rush of survival instinct in the middle of a battle, nostalgia washed over me. I recalled my unit visiting a destroyed village on the frontlines of northern France, torn apart by Axis bombs save for their church. Inside lay huddled civilians waiting for the Allies to liberate them, which we did, but my unit also found the altar covered entirely in tithes, offerings, letters from loved ones lost or passed. Candles lit and residents kneeling in perpetual prayer.

The alter in the temple certainly had plenty of offerings, tithes, photographs and letters, some of which began to litter onto the neighboring floor. Except, instead of a decently intact stained-glass window, adorned with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ hanging on the cross, the subject of devotion was a bronze statue.

Specifically, a bronze statue depicting a tall man in a loincloth, holding some kind of a special scepter in one hand and a large Ankh in the other, holding it by the circular loop. The most striking part of the statue involved the figure having a dog’s head. Perked ears and even a curved tail visible behind him.

*No, not a dog*, I realized, mentally kicking myself for confusing the species, *It’s a jackal.*

Mindlessly, my eyes traveled from the statue to the walls as I listened for any distinct noises nearby. Especially down the hallway or beyond the door. However, all I could hear besides the autumn winds outside, causing a howl to echo down the hall like the ghost of summertime.

The candles flickered in sudden succession, distracting me before my eyes traveled back to the statue…Wait, did its head just move?

My muscles immediately tensed up, one hand frozen as I almost grabbed my holster under the trench coat. I could have sworn that the statue’s jackal-shaped head had been staring forward. Instead, its head tiled to the left, its neck curved slightly down towards me.

“What the fuck…?” I whispered in alarm, eyes wide and skin suddenly feeling clammy at the fact I knew what position the statue’s head had been. “D-Did that…No, it couldn’t…”

Abruptly, the next thing I saw had me questioning whether the entire temple’s shrine room had been filled to the brim with incense: it blinked. The bronze statue fucking blinked down at me, then smiled across its metallic muzzle. One second passed, followed by two until my feet finally found the strength to sprint for the exit.

Whatever that thing did back there, I didn’t care. I wanted the fuck out!

My hand gripped the doorhandle, but it did not budge.

“Fucking kidding me?!” I desperately pulled it inward, only to no avail. Frankly, it wouldn’t surprise me if my curses and pulling at the door awoke the entire cult. “Shit, shit, shit, shit! Open, dammit! Open!!”

The heartbeats inside my chest raced like a piston. My sweating hands slipped from the metal knob as I tried opening it again and again. Did a Follower lock me back in? Did they do that, then fill the entire temple up with some chemical gas? Was that why I saw the statue of their deity move? There had to be no other explanation—

 Everything grew dark, as if every candle in the shrine room behind me had been snuffed out. The only source of light came from the faint moonlight outside the door, creeping through the cracks and barely able to let me see my trembling hands.

 Silence. Not even the night wind could be heard beyond the ringing in my ears when I finally heard something else. Movement. It didn’t come from outside the door though. It came from the shrine room.

 *Calm down*, I told myself, gulping down whatever fear started to rise in me. *Think logically. There’s no one else here. You’re imagining things. These hippies—*

 “Mortals of logic are always the most amusing to meet.”

 I abruptly turned around and gasped at the tall, imposing figure made of black fur, standing at the end of the singular hallway. He resembled the bronze statue, except I knew he wasn’t made of metal. His black ears pointed towards the ceiling, nearly touching it due to his height, while his eyes glowed an intense white, which caused the golden collar, wrist bracelets and even the Ankh necklace around his neck to sparkle.

Beyond the initial horror, my wide, disbelieving eyes traveled to admire how built and muscular he was, presenting a chiseled chest and a bulge that lay beneath his loincloth. Any arousal I felt transformed back into confusion and fear though, when his tail curled, and my vision returned to the jackal’s face.

 The jackal man stepped towards me. “Do not be afraid, John Spade…” he spoke in a deep, welcoming voice. “I will not hurt you.”

 “Y…Y-You won’t?” I continued staring as he stepped closer, back pressed against the wooden door that I’d long given up on opening. “I…N-No, you…you can’t be what I think you are. Y-You can’t be! But…”

 “But…?” he echoed with a bemused eyebrow.

 “You…look too real to be a fucking Halloween costume…”

 The jackal suddenly laughed boisterously, then sighed in amusement while taking a final step towards me. His head still tilted downward in order to maintain eye contact with me, who paled in comparison to whatever visible strength this…thing possessed.

 “I mean it though when I say I do not wish to harm you,” he spoke, lowly rumbling as he lifted a clawed finger to my forehead. My body refused to budge. “I do wish to speak to you about the nature of this sanctuary, Mr. John Spade…”

 My mouth dried up, looking away from his finger into those glowing orbs of his. “H-How do you know my na—” Frightened awe transformed into an intense flash, and I blacked out.

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I opened my eyes to a clear night sky, feeling sand tickle my relaxed fingers and a cool breeze crash over me. As I lay there wondering what happened at first, all of the memories from before I passed out came crashing down.

Stumbling to my feet, I surveyed my surroundings. Why was I in the middle of a desert?

“What the fuck?” I muttered, “Oh God…J-Jesus Chri—”

“I am afraid that is not who I am, John Spade,” a booming chuckle vibrated behind me.

My body automatically turned to see him, the half-jackal/half-man. He still wore that golden loincloth, the bracelets and the necklace, but didn’t carry his fancy scepter.

“W-What happened?” my questions came flooding out, like that of a confused yet frantic auctioneer. “Who are you? What do you want with me? Wait, am I…am I dead—”

“Calm yourself, calm yourself,” the jackal interrupted me, raising a paw whilst wisely keeping his distance from me at arm’s length. “No, you are not dead, John Spade. Far from it, dear mortal. I have placed you in a special kind of sleep, one where we can share the same mindscape for a short period of time. In fact…”

A grand and green oasis consisting of palm trees and exotic fruit bushes suddenly sprouted around us. I was taken aback at first, especially when I noticed a small pool of water to my right, gently rippling at our presence.

“My Followers are tending to you as we speak,” he stepped towards the pool and pointed his left hand (paw?) towards the calming surface, reflecting brightly from his intense eyes. “I informed Nate Gunderson, one of the guardsmen, that you were not to be harmed when he found you inside. He and the others would carry you indoors before you caught anything close to a cold, then watch over you as I speak to you in this place…”

Sure enough, within the soothing ripples of the pool’s water, I could see myself wrapped in a large quilt, sleeping on a furnished couch within what I assumed to be one of the dwellings surrounding their temple. The ‘Nate Gunderson’ that the intimidating, muscular (he is NOT sexy!) jackal mentioned was listening to the radio while occasionally glancing between it and me, one hand still caressing the Ankh necklace around his neck. What was he doing?

“He’s praying. He wishes that I’m in your grace…”

My head jerked back to the creature, just as the entire oasis vanished back into dust.

“As for your question regarding who I am, let me assure you I am no demon or ‘creature’, or whatever you describe me as in your mind,” glancing back to me, the jackal placing his right paw to his bare chest in a clasped fist.

He smiled brightly across his dark-furred muzzle, nearly making my knees wobble, yet I managed to stay standing and calm. Even if I was in the presence of something which I’d always assumed to be foreign myth and legend.

“I have gone by many names, but one that most know me as is Anubis, the God of Mummification and guiding patron of lost souls…at least, I once was. Unfortunately, the time of Pharaohs and Kings of the Ancient Nile River has long since been extinct…”

Anubis’ tail curled slightly before relaxing when he noticed the way I stared at him.

“You do not believe in me.” he stated. Not question or imply, stated. “You do not believe what you are seeing is true. Why do you still question what you see, John Spade?”

“B-Because this changes everything,” I reasoned to what I hoped to be merely a figment of my dreams, and to my drug-induced self. I waved my hand. “Don’t get me wrong now; I’ve never been a big fan of the Bible. Far from it, but I’m a rational guy here. If you are really real, then that means the entire pantheon of Ancient Egypt is…real? It’s all fucking true?”

“In most interpretations, it is,” Anubis flicked his tail amusedly, looking between me and the distant, dark horizon towards the moon. “Anubis is the name I most like, but it is one of an infinite number of names given to me by you mortals. The great civilizations of Egypt named me Anubis while across the sea, the locals believed me to be versions of their own gods. To them, I proclaimed myself as Hades, as Pluto, as Cerberus who guarded the gates to the underworld, Fenrir to the Nordic conquerors, on and on.

“It is true that the gods of Egypt did exist, once upon a time…”

The stubborn side of my brain that always valued rationality wanted me to interrupt him, to tell ‘Anubis’ that he was just a dream-induced figment of my adventurous imagination. It tried to convince me to grab some sand from the ground and throw it in my face to try and wake myself up. However, it slowly receded into the back of my mind as I listened to his handsome jackal tell me his tale.

(God, why did I think of him as ‘handsome’? He was part-animal…)

Anubis explained to me that, following the death of the last Pharaoh, Cleopatra, he and the other gods slowly began to lose their power. Without devoted followers or prayers in their name, plus the rise of Christianity in the Middle East, most of them felt they had no reason to even exist anymore. Some gods chose to stay in the afterlife and wait for the end of time. Other gods chose to leave both realms and rediscover other ones beyond our own, never to be heard from again. The rest decided to sleep until they could sense a return of prayers. Only an honorable few dutifully remained at their respective posts. Among them were Anubis, waiting for souls to arrive so he would take them to an afterlife long since abandoned. This went on for centuries until eventually even the God of Mummification fell into the ‘eternal sleep’, as he whimsically described it to me.

“I dreamed for centuries, unaware of the changing world of mortals,” Anubis continued, “until eight years ago, when I awoke to feeling the aftershock of what I believed to be another god’s destructive power on the other side of the world. Then, it happened again months later…twice, in two different cities to the east.”

My eyes comically widened when it finally hit me, “The atomic bombs.”

“Correct, John Spade.” Anubis nodded, right as a large temple appeared in view, followed by a lone figure inside one of the ancient halls of the stone ruin. “It was the man you know as Langdon Dowe who found one of my temples while on an archaeological expedition, now that the second worldwide war between your nations had come to an end. He discovered me waiting for him in the ruins, almost having the same reaction as you, now that I recall…”

The jackal chuckled once more, then continued, “Langdon believed he would merely find more trinkets to donate to a museum, instead of a god from an extinct era. He convinced me though that I should stay and rebuild myself anew. We could not stay in Egypt, with civil war and turmoil around every corner, so I followed him to America. As we speak, he is now in Nevada forming a second chapter much like the one you’re in.”

“So…you decided to form a cult?” I remarked, suddenly feeling bold again.

To my surprise, Anubis did not tear me apart in anger.

“That word, ‘cult’, has become a twisted version of what it means in your culture,” Anubis scoffed. “I merely hope to return tenets of kindness and understanding to those who believe in my will. Such is given to Followers who believe in my word, the Creed of the Jackal, John Spade…”

I backpedaled to a question that bothered me, “How do you know my name?”

With that, Anubis laughed and placed a paw to his stomach in order to compose himself, his baritone yet silky voice still sending a warm shiver up my spine.

“I am a god who used to judge the souls of the dead, and sometimes even the living,” the jackal simply said. “I know who you are, what you are doing here in my Followers’ commune, and why I found you sneaking inside of the temple they built for me.” He placed his arms behind his back and stared down at me, the muscular canine never so much as wavering on his confident smile. “I find it quite amusing how much paranoia and righteous mania have ruled the lives of nonbelievers. From what I’ve read of their holy scripture, their god preaches love and acceptance, yet they persecute and discriminate without so much as judging a fellow mortal on their character. Such a shame, in all honesty…but I did not expect them to send an investigator inside so soon.”

I lightly snarked, “Says the ancient deity who gladly wiped the memory of a spooked police officer months ago? Yeah, of course NOBODY would be suspicious.”

“Do not insult me, John Spade!” My sarcasm seemed to tick him off, furrowing his brows in my direction with such intensity, I nearly stumbled backward from fright. Thankfully, Anubis calmed somewhat.

“It was a complicated issue,” he spoke in an even volume, “When Franklin and his work partner discovered for themselves of my existence, and what the Followers of the Jackal stand for, Franklin felt the need to free himself from the shackles that human society placed upon him since birth. Franklin Fitzgerald wanted to love freely and live freely. His partner did not. He tried to leave the Commune and promised to bring about, in his own words, ‘the wrath of our Mighty God and the Feds’. I needed to wipe his memories of his time inside.”

“So…are people allowed to leave,” I asked after a moment of silence, “or…?”

“Oh no, they are allowed to keep in contact with their loved ones outside of the Commune…” he answered. “Plenty of my Followers, if they desire to do so, love to visit relatives during the holidays that are celebrated in this region of the world. ‘Christmas’ and ‘Thanksgiving’, I believe you call them.”

“So…” I finally asked, “why did you bring me here, really? Why aren’t you wiping my memory of speaking to you right now? Or when I was awake back in the temple?”

Anubis placed both of his paws to his sides, grinning with visible white fangs. They almost rivalled his eyes, still glowing and still as bright as the moon peeking behind his ears.

“You are…different from what I expected, John Spade,” he mused aloud. “You are persecuted and discriminated as well. Not as harshly as some of my Followers within these walls, but you live in constant fear of what will happen if the authorities ever learned you preferred the male flesh…”

My nostrils flared at the accusation, “Wha—”

“I am aware of your tastes, John Spade,” Anubis interrupted, coyly tilting his head again in a cutesy manner that was NOT warming up to me. “I watched you from your hiding spot earlier this evening, voyeuring on Jamal and Franklin as they stood guard.” The jackal grinned, “If you’re wondering why they did that, it’s not just because they wanted to, but because I told them to perform a show for you.”

 “I-I-I...” my words came out of my mouth like a broken record player. A deep blush reddened my face. “I don’t know what y-you’re talking—”

 “Do not be afraid, John Spade,” he said soothingly. “We do not hold such archaic taboos in high regard. And neither do I; not now or before the great temples were even imagined within the minds of their architects. It is nothing to be ashamed of, since I for one know that you find me attractive.”

 Before I could even say or comprehend anything else, a gust of wind made me suddenly realize that I was completely naked. Not a stitch of clothing on me remained, much to my shock as I tried covering myself with my hands and knee.

 “Ack! What the…” I tried to protest, but words failed to reach my lips as I felt my cock brush upward against my inner thigh. “I…maybe I am, but-but…”

 “There is no need to be bashful, John Spade. After all, you dress so modestly when you just desire to feel the flesh of another man,” Anubis grinned again, licking one side of his muzzle as he winked at me. Another shiver went down my spine and up my firm shaft, which peeked up from the corner of my knee for the jackal god to see. “I have been watching you ever since you arrived in Kimberton. I know you hunger for me. I can feel your eyes wander over my body when you think I am unaware.”

 “B-But this is…this isn’t real…” I whimpered, feeling less like a thirty-something man and more like an awkward teenaged boy discovering the joys of his hidden sexuality.

 Relaxing somewhat in his presence, I let Anubis step forward to place a paw on my hairy, fit chest, rubbing his pads along my nape. Following the end of the War, inner city restaurants and homemade cooking had taken their visible toll on my body. No longer was it as muscled or chiseled since I was in the Army, notably giving me a slight beer belly. Yet, despite all of the grilled burgers and nights spent with a six-pack, I still had enough muscle mass in my biceps to give a good blinker in a fight.

 Plus, enough stamina to enjoy when a man’s finger teased one of my nipples.

 “Ooooh…” a craving lament rumbled from my mouth.

“Even in dreams, the greatest of pleasures can be felt, John Spade.” Anubis lowered one of his paws to unfasten that loincloth of his. Lost in his heavenly gaze, staring up at the god to watch him invite his muzzle to mine, I barely heard it tumble to the sandy earth under our toes. “I like you, John Spade. You are among the most…‘human’ of mortals I have met in recent times. You remind me of dear Langdon, that sweet man…

“If you wish, you can say the word and I will give you a night of passion that mortals only dream of,” the jackal god rose his paw to my shoulder, trembling at his manly touch. “So, do you wish for us to…indulge in such an act?”

“I…” My voice wavered momentarily, until all I could do was nod vigorously. “I do.” Whatever inhibitions I felt disappeared with whatever logic remained at the front of my skull. All that remained was that need he described: the need for male flesh, or rather, HIS male flesh. “I want you, Anubis. Please…”

 Anubis’ lips were nothing like I expected. I tasted smokey pine, sweet strawberries and freshly plucked herbs on the jackal’s breath. His longer muzzle made the kiss more awkward at first, but with the right positioning of my head, it weakened my defenses enough to give the god access to the rest of my mouth. His wet black nose occasionally poked mine, inhaling into my taste while making my cheeks tickle from his huffs.

 The god’s body was spectacular as well. Chiseled to perfection, like a statue carved from soft obsidian. Furry biceps and pecs radiating heat. A tail that wagged against my hip as I melted into the jackal’s kiss. The freed erection, hot and throbbing against my lower stomach as mine leaked against his inner thigh, causing a craved moan to erupt from the base of my throat and into my tongue, which licked against his longer organ. That tongue…it practically covered my entire inner jaw.

The fact I was kissing a half-man/half-jackal, both of us completely naked, didn’t bother me for some unknown reason; all I care about was finally letting another stronger man take control. It was a change of pace I never experienced before, but greatly welcomed. Especially from a fine specimen such as Anubis, God of Death.

Pulling away from the havenly kiss though, I finally noticed something else: we were now in a bedroom. Or rather, MY apartment’s bedroom back in Milwaukee.

 “I thought a change of the scenery would make you feel more…comfortable,” Anubis explained in a casual manner, “Feel more relaxed in a familiar environment?”

 “Good idea,” I joked offhandedly. God—or rather, Anubis—he had gotten the tiniest of details down, from the crack in the ceiling’s beige plaster to the way the wool carpet felt coarse against my wiggling toes. Even the way my bed always looked unmade each morning. “Last thing I need is some hot sand getting between by ass cheeks…”

 Anubis surprised me further by promptly tossing me towards the bed. Chuckling and laughing together, I scooted back onto the bedsheets to let the large jackal have some room.

 “Indeed,” he purred like a lion, kneeling on the far end while crawling his way to my legs, “it is not the most pleasurable of sensations to experience. But I can show you others, Ace.”

 I raised an eyebrow. “‘Ace’?”

 In response, the jackal god quietly laughed as he delicately held my aroused shaft in his strong paw, stroking it once and twice to solicit a guttural gasp from me. It worked. “Hehe. Ace, as in the Ace of Spades, John Spade.”

 No man I ever discreetly met, be they mortal, masculine or feminine, had ever given me a blowjob like Anubis did. The velvet mouth of Tommy was nothing compared to how the jackal licked, caressed, sucked, and nibbled on my length.

At some point, I switched our roles so that I was worshipping his member between his furry thighs, the tail enthusiastically tickling my stomach with each groan I elicited from Anubis.

“Oooh, you are talented, mfh!” he panted

 I often preferred to be sucked than to suck, but this was one of few exceptions. And boy, was this one exception. Contrasted to my own cock, the jackal’s leaking red member stood thicker than a beer can and almost a foot in length, protruding from a canine sheath and having two globular bulges near the bast that he referred to as a ‘knot’, whatever it was.

My fingers fondled his fur-covered scrotum, each the size of a tennis ball, almost as needily as I tried to get the entire length down past my jaw, something which greatly amused Anubis as he watched.

“Do not fret, my faithful Ace,” he cooed playfully, patting my head, “You are not the first mortal to struggle in worshipping all of me, and you will not be the last. I can think of another use for that tongue of yours.”

“Hm?” I paused my ‘worship’ to look up to him, only to yelp as the large canine quickly rolled over onto his stomach to present two black mounds. The pink hole that rested between his raised tail and his musky scrotum suddenly entranced me, slurring my words into nonsensical drool, “Oooh….uh…hol…holy…”

“Heh,” Anubis panted between short breaths. “Indeed, it is holy.”

The ass of an ancient god tasted as beautifully as it sounded; tight yet soft against my lips, pungent with a sweet hint of lavender. His perfect cheeks, covered in dark fur and muscled underneath like an athlete’s, brushed against the sides of my head each time I lapped up and down, inside and out. I found myself lost in hearing Anubis’ panting as one of my hands grasped onto his legs, smiling fondly whenever he started to whine and pushed back onto my wet tongue.

In all honesty, I would’ve been tempted to do this for all eternity…if it weren’t for the main event minutes later.

I lied on my back with lifted knees, the more muscular god carefully placing his tapered member underneath my balls as I stared into those illuminative eyes of his.

“Breathe with me, Ace…” Anubis whispered the command to me, having finished magically lathering up his canine member. “Breathe…and I shall show you the greatest of pleasures.”

He did. After slowly rolling his hips against my buttocks, the jackal stretched my ring open whilst licking the bridge of my nose. Tears formed in the corners of my wincing eyes, which he then licked away. The pain started to gradually build, but so did the incoming pleasure. I breathed in, then out, then in and out again as instructed.

Finally, I felt that divine red rod of his send a spark of pleasure I’d never experienced before.

“Oooohoooohhhhooooohhhhhooooohhhhhhh~”

My chorusing whines and gasps hinted that I wanted more, if it weren’t for my blushing red face and how I gazed up at Anubis with such intense love.

His cautious thrusts evolved towards confident pushes as one of his paws grabbed my buttocks for support, while the other lowered my chin, allowing the jackal god to snake his expert tongue once more into my smaller maw. That combined with the aim of his animalistic cock, the way his rich dark fur brushed against my hairy skin, his sculpted muscles and pert nipples swept closely against my sweating chest…I grew lost in all of the sensations.

 This was what I loved about homosexual sex, being in control and making another handsome man beneath you whimper for more. Now though, my role was reversed. Anubis was in control of me. Unlike previous hookups where my partner and I needed to keep ourselves quiet, we could be as vocal as each of us wanted to be. Thus, instead of biting my lower lip or gritting my teeth (or hell, telling myself over and over not to fuck into the creaky bed so fast), I allowed my moans and groans and howls of pleasure to vocalize from me like a loud choir boy.

 Great things always came to an end though. In the case of Anubis, our climax arrived when his concentrated snarls became more primal, when his strong arms caressed me into a tender hug, and when his forehead pressed itself to mine. Every addicting sensation and kiss and thrust between us finally began to form a crescendo.

 “Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh~”

 “Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh~”

The cock of Anubis throbbed without stop, until at long last, he pushed one final time and I felt his heavy scrotum empty inside of me. I followed suit by ejaculating all over our chests until the large jackal collapsed on top of me.

 He rolled over my body minutes later, his right paw resting atop my chest as it slowed in our afterglow. Cum clung and dripped off my fingers like warm maple syrup. Sweat drenched my face as I lay there in blissful rapture.

 “That…” I rasped, “That…was…That was…”

 Anubis chuckled beside me, his member still leaking his divine seed, “I know, Ace. I know.”

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 “So then,” he yawned behind his desk, despite it being well an hour before high noon, “you found nothing at all suspicious while inside the Commune, Detective Spade?”

I momentarily glanced between my wristwatch and Mayor Hill, who eyed me for even the tiniest of doubt. “Nope.”

 “Nothing suspicious at all?” I inquired further, leaning forward while holding his meaty hands together. “Nothing criminal to report to me or the Sheriff about the Followers?”

 Tired and dry of laughter, I couldn’t help myself from scoffing, “Not unless you count some weirdo hippies growing and planting crops, singing songs in a circle as ‘criminal’, Mr. Mayor…As for the former deputy of the Sheriff’s, he’s all fine and dandy. Grew some hair and lost some weight, but from what I witnessed, it seemed he just wanted to turn over a new leaf…Nah, I don’t think the Followers of the Jackal got anything to hide.”

 I prayed that this would work, almost feeling tempted to take my left hand and reach it inside my trench coat pocket. Reach for the trinket and hold it for comfort’s sake. However, I knew better than to do something like that. Not that I needed to anyway. Despite having had little to no faith in anything twenty-four hours prior, I had faith this would work out. And it did.

 “Well, I think I have to agree with you, Mr. Spade,” Mayor Hill pushed his chair back and stood up to shake my hand, then give me a check. The content relief did little to hide the forced smile on his round face. After all, what would you do if you were a mayor and wasted time and money over several silly rumors? “There’s your payment. Thank you for coming to our little village, Mr. Spade, and I hope you decide to visit again sometime.”

 *Maybe so*, I thought to myself, thanking Anubis as I held the check to my eyes. $214.37. *Cha-Ching! Happy day for me and the Jackal!*

As I stepped out of the town hall, making my way past the trees and towards my motel down a block, the late morning sunlight descended on me like an accusatory spotlight. The sun accused me of lying, which I neither bothered to rebuke or deny.

A few civilians made their way for the groceries, wearing their jackets closely to protect themselves from the chilling breeze that signaled winter would arrive very soon. I did the same, occasionally interacting with the residents who passed by me on the same sidewalk.

As they smiled at me and wished me—a complete stranger they never met—a swell day, I offered a mirroring smile back while placing my left hand in my trench coat pocket, feigning boredom during the walk back to my motel. My fingers pursed and caressed the trinket inside, wrapped in a necklace that the Followers gifted to me before I returned to Kimberton’s town limits. It didn’t seem anything special at first, a cold steel small enough to hide in my palm. However, what set it apart was the fact that its top branch was looped together, with the braided necklace itself tying together.

A familiar and deep voice resonated into my ears as I held it tightly. I could hear him.

“Normally, I do not approve of deception,” Anubis spoke like he stood right next to me on the sidewalk, “but thank you, Ace. Greatly.”

Looking left and right to see if nobody was in sight, I whispered to the necklace in my pocket, “So long as you lot stay quiet, I think they’ll leave you alone.”

“The offer still stands though,” the jackal god reminded me, “Should you want to join us at the Commune, we will welcome you with open arms. You will be able to be yourself.”

“Hmmm.” I looked up from my shoes to take in the autumn scenery around me.

Kimberton’s main street, already decorated for Halloween within a week, paled in comparison to Milwaukee’s overcrowded and bustling downtown boulevard. However, what it lacked in variety of shops or diversity, it made up for in the quaintness that was given to any small town; the polished sidewalks littered with ruby leaves, the innocent pack of children riding their bikes to adventure after spending half a day inside a cramped classroom, a pumpkin pie baking in the bakery’s impressive windowsill, close-knit shops that valued wholesome waves to neighbors and strangers (so long as they weren’t Leftists or anything but as white as me). Giving you a smile without know what you really were, or who you really were.

“Thank you very much, but I can’t got for the offer just yet,” I softly smiled while holding the Ankh amulet with a tender grasp, “I’m not up for the whole ‘living with the land’ thing yet. I got a life in Milwaukee, but if you ever need anything done in your name, Great Anubis, I will gladly help.”

“Fair enough,” he hummed, “but consider yourself an Honorary Follower either way.”

Humbly, I nodded as I came to my motel room’s front door. Fishing for the key in my other pocket, I still held the Ankh necklace in my left hand. Though initially cold due to the outside temperature, I swore I could feel a small warmth in my palm. Like a mighty heartbeat.

“By the way, Ace, I have one proposition for you to take, before you leave for your city tomorrow morning,” Anubis spoke to me before I went inside, “Tonight at midnight, almost every adult in the Followers of the Jackal are gathering together in the Temple to hold a…festivity of sorts called the Festival of the Harvest Moon. It is to celebrate the end of the harvest this year, where they will sleep together in what you would call a ‘slumber party’, I think is the term?”

Amused laughter bubbled from the back of my gruff throat.

“It is,” I nodded with interest. “What will be going on then?”

“Within my shared mindscape all of us will be partaking in a ritual of fertility. Although it will be within your dreams, I know that it will not be a problem for you. Would you be interested in attending this celebration as well? All you will need to do is fall asleep, Ace.”

The way he vaguely described it reminded me of the way he scratched my itch, back in the temple and within my mindscape apartment. Like he even needed to ask.

A lustful grin appeared on my face, and I told the ancient jackal deity, “You bet your holy ass I want to attend.”

I couldn’t help but laugh with him, offering Great Anubis my thanks and a nice evening before letting go of the necklace. The world turned silent again, save for an Oldsmobile’s honk and an owl hooting in the trees. His love though, I could feel it in my chest and especially in my loins as I reminisced on the night prior that would remain with me for the end of my life. As well as hope for many similar nights to come.

Closing the door behind me, I expected sweet (and sexy) dreams on my last, but never the final, night in Kimberton, Wisconsin. Deep down, I knew I would eventually return.

Praise Anubis. Praise the Jackal.