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About 1,000 words

## DRUMROLL

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Bone was easier to regenerate than skin. It made structural sense. Skin was more artistic, layered membrane that balled in transport, and had to be coddled and massaged back into place like a frightened dog. Few teleporters could do it as well as Juno.

She shredded herself apart in her battered studio apartment late Friday evening. Vanishing, only to be reborn—reconstructed—in the foyer of a South Kensington mansion.

Long-sleeved black coveralls and a tattered Vikings cap were last to manifest as Juno swallowed back the fresh blood flooding her mouth. This was no place to bleed.

Stained sneakers sunk into plush, ivory carpet that extended past a foyer large enough to fit Juno's entire apartment and she tamped down on the fear running up her spine like a livewire.

*Exposure is death.*

Shaking the feeling, she turned to the muffled jazz wafting from somewhere overhead. In the darkness, Juno could vaguely make out a long staircase leading to the second floor. She took the stairs two at a time, hunger replacing fear.

The music called louder as she reached the top, beckoning from the left, and she chased it past gaudy portraits and ornate vases that a younger Juno would've itched to tuck beneath her jacket. She touched nothing, fixated on a half-open door at the end of the hall with warm light spilling from its opening.

Slowing to a stop, she pressed into the shadows, gauging the light from the door. It remained unchanging for a moment, flickering with a constancy that spoke of crackling fire she could faintly smell now. From somewhere inside, music flurried with finality and ended.

And then—then the light shifted. A blobby shadow tore through the center of the light and the record player belted opening notes of a jazz ballad Juno had giggled to as a child.

*Her favorite.*

Fists balled at her sides as she slid directly into the light beam and kicked the door open with more force than she'd intended.

A dusty old head shot up, eyes widening slightly as newly wrinkled lips tugged into a delighted grin. "Juno."

"Tallon."

The old teleporter reclined in a rocking chair, wrapped beneath a quilt that draped past her feet to the floor and rose high on her chest to veiny hands clasping knitting needles. "It's good to see you," she said.

"Is it?" Juno's eyes fell on a painting of a Scottish manor perched above the fireplace.

"It's been six years." The old woman nodded at a nearby chair. "Would you like to sit?"

“No.” Juno slid a few feet further into the room and stopped, heels grinding deeply into the carpet.

Tallon cocked her head, knitting absentmindedly as though her fingers belonged to a different body altogether. “What brings you by?”

Eyes returned to the painting. “You finally bought a house. How much did it cost?”

“Nearly half. The rest I spent on the artwork, as you can see,” she said, dislodging a droopy hand from the quilt to wave around the room.

Juno scoffed. “You buy things now?”

“Not all things, obviously.” She chuckled toward the Scottish Manor. “My favorites are gifts from friends.”

Juno glared. “Gifts? Friends? I wouldn’t call us that.”

“Perhaps not, more like a mentorship.”

“You made me tear myself apart over and over so I could steal for you.” Juno seethed, scratching against a non-existent itch on the inside of her right palm. “Money. That’s all that ever mattered to you.”

“A person needs to eat.” Tallon rubbed against loose skin sagging beneath her chin.

“It appears you did more than that.”

The old woman smiled sickly, cigar-stained teeth peeking between crackled lips. “You seem upset. I told you I would teach you to teleport on the condition that you bring me gifts as payment. I never set an end date.”

Low drumming began in the base of Juno’s skull. “And I got you anything you wanted on the condition that you left Cypress out of it.”

“Ah.” The old teleporter stopped knitting, a thought settling deeply behind her eyes.

“Your brother. That’s why you’re here.”

“Yes.”

“Pity thing, that. But he wanted to learn. He begged, as I recall you doing. Who was I to turn away a crying child?”

“He was ten.”

“You were younger.” Tallon shrugged. “And look at what a fine porter you’ve become. Your family has a gift, Juno. Even I can’t travel to places I’ve never been. You’re a rarity. I was merely teaching your brother how to replace the void you left. I taught him the sequence. It’s not my fault he fucked it up.”

Silence engulfed Juno, rage pouring into her gut as drums crashed against her skull.

A vicious smile tore across the old woman’s face as if she could sense the shift. “So, that’s what you’ve come for then. To kill me.” It wasn’t a question. Tallon chortled in delight. “You might find it more difficult to murder a teleporter than you expect, even one as old as I.”

“Murder? I’m just a thief.”

“Yeah? What are you gonna steal?”

Fire hot glass shredded Juno’s body apart from one microsecond to the next, coalescing in uniformed agony within the chest cavity of another. Juno reached out, breathing blood and acid as she grasped warm, ropy slime and jerked, teleporting again.

She landed in the tub of her Brooklyn apartment. Hot blood smattered against porcelain, soaking her overalls and staining her teeth. The old woman’s small intestine and pancreas hung heavily between her hands, curling into a pool on one end and dancing from the force of the jump on the other. Dropping it, Juno sighed and kicked the pile to the far edges of the tub. She

cranked the shower tap to hot and tipped her head back beneath the spray, grateful that the drumroll in her skull had subsided beath a gentle swoon of jazz.