

The Three Men

comicanon

Thanks so much for checking out this story.

The Three Men is a story about ZPD Officers Wolford and Delgato, out at a diner in the middle of the night, getting caught up in a dangerous situation with three deadly individuals. It takes inspiration from film-noir movies, pulp writing, and a hefty dose of Hemingway.

It's divided up into five chapters: 'Famous for it's Pies', 'He's Never Been to Deerbrooke', 'Only If They Move', 'Where They All Go', and 'What was Left'. Musical accompaniment is available for every chapter underneath the titles, if you would like.

Any comments or criticism you have will be very much appreciated: your responses, your thoughts, your praises and your complaints, all help make me a better writer, and I'm grateful for them.

If you would like to read more of my work, you can check out a comic script I did called Now by following this link:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1oiAoo5b4b2QZMpoEuLCYC9Yla3K8qfZE_MEPLMRP14/edit?usp=sharing

Thank you once again for checking out this story. I very much hope you enjoy it.

-comicanon

Famous for it's Pies

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zdDhinO58ss>

"So, what flavor pie you thinking, huh?" Woford smiled.

Delgato nearly spilt her tea as she snorted. "If you want pie, you get pie."

"Yeah, but you got to get pie, too."

"I don't *want* pie!"

"Naw, you definitely want pie. I told you this place is famous for it's pies, and you said you wanted to go."

Delgato shook her head incredulously and smiled. "I just assumed *you* wanted pie, since you were so excited when you told me about this place, so I figured I needed to say yes for *you*."

"Now, see, that's why you never assume anything about anyone," Delgato explained, leaning towards her, "you make an ass out of you."

"...and me."

"Right, you make an ass out of you and you. Right." Woford shrugged as Delgato laughed.

"Well, you *assumed* I wanted pie," Delgato asserted, leaning over to Woford. "What does that make you?"

"Right. Makes me right because you want pie. See," Woford nudged Delgato as she laughed, gesturing to the the wall where the end of the counter turned into a glass baked goods display, "I know why you chose to sit here: you wanted to get a nice, good view of all those delicious looking pies. All this time we're eating, you're secretly looking over at the pies, scoping them out, thinking 'Mmmmm!'."

"Can't believe you found me out," Delgato sarcastically admitted. "I thought I was being so sneaky."

"Yeah, well, you know, I've known you too long for you to pull a fast one on *me*."

"If you actually learned anything about me, you'd know I don't eat desserts or sweets."

"No. That's-- that's just not possible."

"It's true!" Delgato's face was bright. "When I was a kid, all my friends were told to eat their vegetables, but I never had that problem: I would never eat dessert!"

"No way that's true!" Wolford slapped his hand on the counter, shaking his head. "Yeah, sure, right, whatever!"

"It's *true*!" Delgato pushed Wolford, who, due to their size difference, had to catch hold of the counter. "I'm telling you, my parents would always try and get me to eat ice cream or chocolate, and I just wouldn't! I'd flat out refuse!"

"See, that's that then: your parents *wanted* you to try some dessert, so you sh-should-- well,-- try some, maybe, I guess..." Wolford's voice trailed off, the joke started but left hanging like acrid smoke in the air. He turned away and squeezed his hands under the counter, wincing.

Delgato folded her hands in her lap and looked away. She stared at the family in the booth along the wall-- a family of pigs slowly finishing their meal. There was a mother, a father, an older son and a younger daughter. All of them were dressed in crumpled clothes, and all of them looked tired. She continued looking away, revolving in her stool to see an old goat in an old checkered tweed suit in the booth behind her, reading a newspaper and smiling softly. She turned to see the empty entrance, the restroom, and the baked goods portion of the counter, where a lovely selection of pies, cakes, buns and glazed fruits shone in fluorescent brilliance. And she looked at Wolford, who smiled meekly and shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't spin too fast or you'll get dizzy," he said, apologetically.

Delgato smiled. "It's okay."

"First night out together off duty and I-- ah..."

"It's fine."

"Next time we go out, we'll go where you want to go."

"Oh yeah?" smiled Delgato. "Why don't we just ask Nick and Judy if they want a double date?"

Wolford caught himself as he chuckled in surprise. "Oh, come on, that's just mean!"

Delgato smiled, shaking her head as she returned to looking forward.

"Which one would I be, huh?" he nudged her, "Nick or Judy?"

"You'd be both, because you're as annoying as both of them."

"Alright, you got me two for two."

"Those two need to just... fuck. And get it over with."

Wolford's eyes widened as he stared forward, feeling his heart skip in surprise. He looked out of the corner of his eyes at Delgato smiling and shaking her head, and curled his lips against his teeth.

"Do you think it's weird?" he blurted out.

Delgato raised her eyebrows at Wolford.

"I mean, you know, if, like, the two of them *were* dating. Would you think that's weird?"

Delgato shrugged. "It's not common."

"Yeah, but, that's not what I'm asking! I'm asking if you think it's weird."

"Why?"

"I just..." Wolford shrugged, looked away, suddenly disinterested in the topic.

"If it's not common, then it's not normal, and if it's not normal, then it's out of the ordinary.

That's another way of saying weird."

“Yeah,” Wolford smiled and nodded, looking down at his plate. “Definitely not common.” He let his knuckles softly rap the table. “But what do you think about it?”

“Well, I mean, it's just so...” Delgato lowered her voice to a whisper. “...unnatural!” she said, smiling.

Wolford smiled and nodded, looking down at his plate.

“It goes against hundreds and thousands of years of evolution. How could you make that sort of thing work, even if you really wanted it, when, deep down inside, your body and brain are telling you ‘you need to eat her’, or ‘you need to run away cause he’ll eat you’? Not natural at all.”

Wolford stopped nodding and looked to Delgato. “What do you mean?”

“I mean he’s a predator and she’s a prey! Personally, I think, deep down inside, there’s gotta be some residual something there, something that’s--”

“Oh! I-- well, no, yeah, totally! But I was talking more... generally. You know what I mean?”

Delgato blinked. “What do you mean?”

“Like, I don’t know.” Wolford pushed his plate and placed Delgato’s plate in front of the waitress and murmured a thanks.

“I don’t know... What if they were both-- prey?” Wolford decided.

“If they were both prey?” Delgato raised an eyebrow. “So, like, if they were both different species, but they were both prey?”

“Yeah. You know, more... generally. Do you think it's weird?” Wolford was intently focused on cleaning the nail of his forefinger.

Delgato faced forward in her seat, furrowing her brow and slowly rubbed down her chin with her thumb, snaking her tail around her stool.

“Well,” Delgato made to rub her nose to hide her smile, “it’s not common.”

“But it’s more common, though.”

Wolford turned away and shrugged, smiling. “Yeah, totally.” He held his tail firmly to his side.

Delgato’s smile broadened as she stared down at Wolford, watching the base of his tail twitch convulsively.

Then the two men came in.

He's Never Been to Deerbrooke

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZwvH24IRSk>

The two men that came in were a porcupine and an antelope. Both wore suits. The antelope wore a heavy overcoat.

The antelope closed the door behind him and sat in a booth with the porcupine two tables away from the old goat. They said nothing.

The waitress came to their table. She greeted them and placed menus in front of the two. "Can I start you off with anything to drink?"

The two men stared at her and then at each other. The porcupine looked her up and down as the antelope looked at him.

"You," the porcupine crisply declared, "are new!"

He nodded at her, smiling wide. "You are new," he sighed. "This must be your first day on the job."

The waitress paused.

"Um, yes, it is," she laughed.

"First *night* on the job." The porcupine looked her up and down. "That must be very exciting. And you're not from around here, either."

"Um, no, I'm new! I mean, I'm new to the city, too," she laughed, nervous.

"New to the city. Tell me, darling, where are you from?"

"Deerbrooke County."

"Deerbrooke! She's from Deerbrooke. Mickey, are you from Deerbrooke?"

"Nope." The antelope was slouched over.

"You ever been to Deerbrooke, Mickey?"

"Nope."

"Tell me, darling, how do you like this city?"

"I love it." The waitress put her hands on her chest and laughed. "I mean, it's *way* different from Deerbrooke, obviously."

"Obviously." The porcupine nodded.

"But it's been my dream to come here, so..." The waitress waved her hands. "Here I am! And I'm so excited!" she laughed.

"So you came to the city to follow your dreams." The porcupine nodded. "But your dreams weren't to become a waitress," he said shaking his head.

"Well, no, not specifically, yeah." The waitress shrugged and waved her head. "This is just, you know--"

"No," said the porcupine. "You came," he said, slowly pointing at her and nodding, "because you're *beautiful*!"

The waitress was silent and still.

"Ain't she beautiful, Mickey?" smiled the porcupine, turning to the antelope.

"Tell me, darling, did you come down here to be a model? An actress?" the porcupine cracked his gloved knuckles.

"I mean," the waitress began to laugh out loud, flustered and blushing, "yeah, well, little of one, little of both, maybe, yeah, you know--"

"And you know what I bet?" the porcupine said, pointing at her. "I bet you like *Gazelle*."

The waitress shrugged and laughed. "Yeah! Yeah, she's, kind of my idol a little, maybe. She's a big reason I'm out here, so, yeah."

"Well, you're beautiful. Ain't she beautiful, Mickey?"

"You're beautiful," said the porcupine, "and I'm really glad you're here tonight."

“Well, thanks!” The waitress blushed, laughing. “Really, I’m just, you know, following my dream! So, thanks, really, I really appreciate it.”

“Um, can I get you anything to drink to start?” the waitress asked as she pulled out her notepad. “Or anything to eat?”

“I don’t know. Never eaten here before. What’s good here, darling?” asked the porcupine.

“So, it’s a french diner, we’re known mostly for our baked goods, and we’re open all night,” said the waitress.

“We can see that.” smiled the porcupine.

The waitress laughed. “Um, so, we have--”

“You hungry, Mickey?” the porcupine asked the antelope. “We’re not very hungry, but, I’d sure like a pot of coffee. We have a long night ahead of us.”

“Um, sure!” The waitress looked at her notepad and back down to the porcupine. “We have cappuccino, macchiato, we have espresso, and we have latte.”

The porcupine blinked and smiled. “What?”

The waitress looked at her notepad. “We, um, have cappuccino, macchiato, espresso, and latte.”

“I’d like a pot of coffee.”

“I’m really sorry, we don’t really serve coffee.”

“What kind of a diner doesn’t serve coffee?”

“It’s, um, a... French... diner?”

“They got coffee in France?” asked the porcupine. He turned to the antelope. “Hey Mickey, you ever been to France?”

“Nope.”

“Apparently they don't got coffee over there,” he said, looking at the waitress.

“I'm really sorry,” said the waitress, shrinking into herself.

“You don't need to be sorry!” smiled the porcupine, laughing. The waitress laughed with him. “You don't need to apologize at all.”

“Okay,” laughed the waitress anxiously.

“You just need to get me coffee,” smiled the porcupine.

“I can,” asked the waitress, “um, maybe make you, ah, Americano? Is that okay?”

“You're not too good at listening, are you?” said the porcupine. He turned to the antelope. “She don't listen too good, does she, Mickey?”

“She don't listen to good.”

“You remember that giraffe that didn't listen too good? She didn't listen too good, neither.”

“She didn't listen to good.”

“Then she didn't walk too good, neither,” the porcupine said turning to the waitress. “You got coffee beans back there?”

“Yes.”

“I need you to go back into the kitchen and make coffee. Got me? *Coffee-ato*.”

The waitress was still before she looked to her notepad. She wrote nothing on it and put it away. Gently, she slid the menus off the table and took them into her arms.

She trembled as she made her way past Wolford and Delgato to the end of the counter, and walked past them behind the counter, sniffing softly, into the kitchen.

“There a problem, Wolfy?” the porcupine said to Wolford.

“What's your *problem*?” barked Wolford, growling hard at the two.

The porcupine looked at the antelope. “Wolfy over there thinks I got a problem, Mickey.”

"What's your problem, Lou?"

"I'll tell you my problem," said Lou, scratching his neck with the back of his gloved fingers, "My problem is it takes ten minutes to order coffee." A crinkle of newspaper came from the booth with the old goat.

Delgato gaze was piercing as she glared at the two while the antelope slouched over and pulled down his coat.

Delgato watched the waitress come back from the kitchen. "They're acting real weird," she whispered, watching her pass.

"Yeah, they're real dumb jerks," growled Wolford.

"He's wearing his coat at the table."

"Yeah, it's weird. Or, 'not common', right?" murmured Wolford, smirking aside to Delgato and nudging her with his elbow.

Wolford's eyebrows jerked to attention. He glanced at Delgato, then over to the table with the two men.

The antelope caressed his gloved knuckles while his eyes slowly rolled over to Wolford, but Wolford was looking away. A crinkle of newspaper came from the booth with the old goat.

The waitress came out with a large round green cup on a platter and placed it gingerly on their table. Lou looked at the cup while the waiter looked at him, hugging the platter.

"Is this okay?" she asked.

Lou looked up at her and sighed. "You're not too good at listening, are you?"

The waitress cowered.

"What did I ask for?"

"Coffee?" she asked.

Lou drank a gulp from the steaming cup. "What did I ask for?" he asked, looking at the cup in his hands.

"...Coffee?" she asked.

"I asked for a pot of coffee," Lou said, taking a gulp from the steaming cup.

The waitress looked at the cup. "I'm sorry, we-- we don't have pots."

"How did you make the coffee?"

"I-- brewed it in a teapot for you," the waitress said, holding the platter tight as her lips trembled.

"Tea *pot*." Lou said, putting the cup in the center of the table. "They got schools where you're from?"

"Yes?"

"Okay. In school, you ever have those little homework assignments where they give you pictures on one side of the page, and words on the other side, and you have to match the two?"

The waitress tried to balanced herself, crossing her foot tightly behind her calf.

"You know! There's a picture of a car, and you have to match it to the word 'car', and there's a picture of a leaf, and you have to draw a line over to 'leaf'. You remember doing that when you were in school?"

The waitress nodded.

"I said pot, you got cup," said Lou, gesturing to the cup. "You're not too good at listening, are you?"

"I'm sorry," the waitress was able to quiver.

"What are you sorry for?" Lou asked, smiling. "There's nothing to be sorry about! What are you sorry for?" Lou asked, laughing.

"I made you mad."

"She thinks I'm mad, Mickey."

"You don't look mad, Lou."

"Do I look mad, Mickey?"

"Nope."

"Remember that time with the squirrel?"

"You were real mad, Lou."

"I was so mad, I tried to stretch him into a ferret."

"Didn't work, Lou."

"Turns out it don't work that way, no." Lou smiled to the waitress. "Go in the back and get your boss. I need to speak with him."

The waitress barely nodded. She didn't blink so that her tears wouldn't roll down her face. She turned and took a wavering breath.

"Turn around right now," Lou said. "I need you to turn around and look at me. I did not say call him. Look at me and do *not* call him. Not too good at listening, are you?"

"I need you to go in the back and get your boss," said Lou. "I need to speak with him."

"I gadda use the restroom," said the antelope, taking a gulp from the steaming cup as he got up.

The waitress turned around and began walking to the end of the counter, but turned around to see Lou following her. When she got to the end of the counter, she went through the push door and looked at Lou.

"It's... employees only past this point."

Lou looked up at her and put his gloved hands in his pockets.

"And why are you telling me this?"

The waitress gulped. "It's... the rules. I... needed to tell you--"

"You *needed* to?" Lou stepped aside. "No, you didn't *needed* to tell me, cause I wasn't going back there. I was standing right here."

"I just-- thought you wanted to come back here,--"

"If I wanted to go back there, I would be back there. That is a promise," Lou said. "That is a promise."

"Hey, Mickey!" Lou called. "You think she needed to tell me not to go back there?"

"Nope." Wolford heard the antelope quietly lock the door to the entrance.

"She didn't need to at all, did she, Mickey?!"

"She didn't need to at all." Delgato spied the antelope flipping over the 'open' sign.

"She didn't need to at all," Lou said, his gloved hands reaching out of his pockets and onto his lapel. "So then you said it cause you *wanted* to."

The waitress gulped dryly. "I didn't--"

--want me back there?"

"I'm sorry," she cowered, blinking the tears out of her eyes.

"If you're sorry, then don't say 'I need to tell you you can't be back here.' Stop lying to me and say, '*I don't want you back here.*'"

"I'm-- not lying," the waitress tried to gasp.

"I know," said Lou. "You honestly, truly do not want me back there. I need you to go get your boss. Don't worry, I'm waiting right here."

"I'm waiting right here!" Lou called out to the waitress as she went through the kitchen door. Delgato saw him turn around, hands on his lapel, looking at the family of pigs.

Wolford glanced over to see the antelope leaning on the wall next to the baked goods display counter. The antelope's eyes rolled over from the kitchen door to Wolford, but Wolford and Delgato were looking straight ahead.

Delgato could feel Wolford's body pulsing, the hair on the scruff of his neck standing up on end.

"I got the one on the left," Wolford whispered without moving his lips.

Delgato affirmed him with a steady blink.

The two took a silent breath, their bodies hardened, white hot electric light coursing in their skin. Their slow, deliberate breaths synched together perfectly.

"On my mark."

She exhaled, and slowly began turning in her stool towards Lou. She saw him looking at the family of pigs, and saw the family of pigs, who all stared back at Lou. She continued turning all the way around until she was facing opposite the counter, and directly towards the booth with the old goat.

And she saw the old goat, who was facing directly towards her.

Only If They Move

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9-MOKcBb9w>

The goat was staring directly at her with a faint smile.

He was sitting with one leg crossed over the other, facing directly towards her, his hands each resting on each of his knees. The newspaper was neatly folded in half around his right hand, covering up whatever was in his hand that was trained directly at Woford and Delgato.

Delgato did not move. Not a muscle twitched. Not a hair furred. She did not blink.

The goat slowly brought the finger of his left hand up to his lips and gently pressed them, just for a moment.

He slowly dropped the finger down to his neck, and drew a fine line from either side, ending with a swish.

Delgato blinked. She took a breath and slowly began to turn back around. She saw the family of pigs watching Lou, eyes wide and silent and still, and saw Lou looking at the family of pigs, his hands on his open lapel. She faced forward and was completely and utterly still, Woford's tail wagging in anticipation.

"Don't. Move," she breathed.

"Don't. Look."

Woford did not move. He kept his eyes steady and forward.

"*Behind us,*" she breathed.

Woford's tail stopped wagging and his ears slowly fell down to the cusp of the back of his head.

He took in a breath through his mouth and exhaled softly, his fine hair dancing in the draft of the air conditioning.

The top of the kitchen door opened and a fat marmot walked onto the counter. The waitress followed close behind him.

Lou turned to face the marmot. "What seems to be the problem?" asked the bewildered chef as the antelope gracefully leapt over the glass bakery display counter behind him.

"Against the wall," said the antelope to the waitress, who grasped for the wall and threw her back, head, hands and legs up on tiptoes against it as hard as she could, antlers clattering the wall as they scraped against the tiles, her breath caught in her throat between a gasp and a scream.

The marmot turned from the antelope to Lou. "What is this?"

"I need to talk to you," said Lou, smiling, pointing his gun at the chef.

From behind Woford and Delgato, a crinkle of newspaper and two feeble, wispy coughs were heard, barely audible over the air conditioner's hum.

Lou turned his head to frown impatiently at Woford and Delgato.

Lou moved the gun from the chef to Woford and Delgato as he glanced behind them. His eyes widened and a smile appeared on his lips. Delgato stared at him from the corner of her eyes and saw his bristles rise.

Lou's lips parted as he smiled, revealing a top row of white teeth. He lifted the gun into the air, and let it fall behind him, pointing directly at the family of pigs.

"Mister Wolf," he called out in deliberate, measured pace, "I need you to take your left hand and keep it pressed firmly on the counter. I need you to take your left hand and slide it as far as you can to the left of you on the counter. Misses Tiger, I need you to do the same with your right hand-- keep it firmly pressed against the counter, and slide it as far as you can to the right."

Delgato and Wolford stared at Lou from the corner of their eyes. Slowly and steadily, Wolford and Delgato slid their hands across the counter until their arms were perfectly straight and they could not extend them any further.

“Mister Wolf,” Lou called out in a deliberate, measured pace, “I need you to take your right hand and grab the tiger’s left hand next to you. Misses Tiger, I need you to do the same-- take your left hand and grab the wolf’s right. Then, you are *both* going to *slowly* raise your *held* hands *slowly* into the air.”

Delgato and Wolford stared at Lou from the corner of their eyes. They blinked, and moved their eyes to stare down at the hands between them pressed firmly against the counter.

Wolford and Delgato slowly raised their stiff hands up from the counter and inched them towards each others’. Their fingertips caressed as they awkwardly guided their fingers twixt one another’s, and nestled into each others’ fur as they firmly clasped their hands into a tight, trembling knot.

Delgato nearly choked as she took a dry, painful gulp. She stared intently at Lou from the corner of her eyes, slowly raising her fist up to just above Wolford’s ears, which had firmly collapsed behind his head, their tips vibrating incessantly along with his tail firmly lodged under the stool of his seat.

Lou smiled as his quills fell. “Don’t you look *cute!*”, he said, walking back towards the counter. “Don’t you both just look adorable? You ever seen such a picture-perfect scene, Mickey?”

“Picture for a calendar,” said the antelope facing the waitress.

“A *police* calendar, Mickey.”

The antelope stared at the waitress as his neck bent crooked. “Lou.”

“Only if they move, Mickey.”

"I don't like this, Lou."

"Only if they move," said Lou.

Lou reached into his lapel pocket and brought out a photograph.

But the door to the restaurant jingled softly against the lock, and Lou did not move.

There was a knock at the door that echoed throughout the restaurant.

The antelope bent over, further covering his shotgun beneath his coat. "Lou."

Lou was smiling. He pointed the gun at the chef, his bristles rising.

"I need you to tell 'em you're closed," Lou said.

The door jingled and someone knocked. "I don't like this, Lou."

Lou's bristles rose and his smile and eyes widened.

"I need you to tell 'em you're closed."

"We're closed!" the chef called out in a deep, booming voice.

And quiet echoed throughout the restaurant.

There was a shuffle outside, and the sound of footsteps, and then everyone was as quiet as the restaurant was still.

"Lou," said the antelope.

"Smart boy!" seethed Lou, reaching into his lapel pocket and bringing out a photograph.

"Bright boy! You keep being a bright boy and we'll be done with you real quick!"

"I don't like this."

"Hands *firmly* pressed against the counter!" demanded Lou, and Wolford and Delgato jumped as they doubly pressed their outstretched hands firmly against the counter.

From behind Wolford and Delgato, two feeble, wispy coughs were heard.

Lou stood still, moving the gun from Wolford to Delgato to the marmot. He turned his head to face the family of pigs, who were all looking at Lou, eyes wide and silent and still,

except for the youngest daughter, who was shaking back and forth, her eyes streaming tears, her mouth opening and closing as she heaved for air.

Lou let out a sharp breath through his teeth, his quills drooping down. He walked to their table, arm outstretched as far as it could reach, and started toward the family.

He grasped the edge of the table with his free hand and hoisted himself up into the booth next to the mother and father, snuggling into the plastic cushion before placing the butt of his revolver onto the table with a short tap.

He sighed through his teeth and smiled at the mother and father. "How you doing tonight, folks?" he whispered to them.

He looked at the family, his gun following his eyes, spinning on the table like a compass needle finding true north.

He looked at the mother and father, exhaled through his teeth, and relaxed into a smile.

"You," he said, gesturing with his gun, "you... were traveling."

"It was a road trip," he said, and his forehead bristled with sweat.

"A road trip..." he exhaled through his teeth. "And there was *unexpected* delays!"

"Completely out of the blue... not... fun... at all..."

"You couldn't even get dinner!" he declared, smiling, his eyes wide and smile brimming.

"So, you stopped at the first restaurant you saw," said Lou, letting the butt of the gun fall onto the table with a short tap. "The first one that was open..."

"You *don't* need to tell me," said Lou, his quills lowering.

"It was... a *vacation*."

Lou smiled and began nodding, his chest rising and falling. "I get it. Sometimes... you just need to get away from it all... but it don't always work out how you want it."

Lou smiled and nodded, and looked over to the little girl pig, his gun following his gaze.

“Well, hey there sweetie!” Lou said, smiling, leaning forward, face bright and full of vim.
“Look at you! Aren’t *you* adorable? What a good little girl. Are you a good little girl?”

Lou nodded. “A good little girl!” he cooed. “That’s what you are!”

“And look,” he said, leaning towards the girl with excited surprise, “is that what I think it is? Did you just have *dessert*?”

The little girl pig stared, wide eyed, silently and still at him, and slowly started to nod. Lou slowly nodded along with her in perfect synchronicity.

“Tell me,” Lou said, “I think you had *pie* for dessert! Did you have *pie* for dessert?”

“Of course you did!” said Lou, nodding in perfect synchronicity with the little pig girl.
“Pie’s your favorite.”

Lou reached over and pressed the barrel of the revolver sharply onto the rim of the little pig girl’s plate, tilting the face of it towards him as the family all winced.

“Raspberry?” he queried.

“Raspberry,” he answered, and the little pig girl began nodding in perfect synchronicity with Lou.

He swung himself out of the seat leaving the plate clattering behind him, walked to the end of the counter, pushed the push door open and walked past the marmot, Delgato, Wolford, and the waitress and the antelope, who watched him as he slid open the back of the glass display case.

“Lou,” said the antelope.

Lou slammed the back of the glass display case closed, walked past the waitress and the antelope, Wolford, Delgato, and the marmot, pushed the push door open and walked to the table with the family of pigs carrying a glistening pie.

“Today,” Lou announced, bringing the pie to the edge of the table, “is your lucky day. Your parents might not give you seconds for dessert, but today, you’re getting seconds for dessert!”

Lou threw the pie onto the table, clattering the empty plates and silverware across the booth and echoing a clang throughout the entire restaurant.

“So you’re going to eat that pie,” seethed Lou, smiling as his bristles rose, “and you’re all going to eat that pie!”

“And I don’t want to see you or hear you doing *anything* else but eating that pie!”

“Now pick up your forks,” Lou hissed, bristles raised, “and get to eating that pie!”

The family of pigs grabbed for their forks and began eating the pie as silently and quickly as they could, staring wide eyed at Lou as he walked over to the end of the counter, his gun pointed directly at the marmot. A wispey cough came from the booth behind Woford, who cowered, haunted by the feeling of someone’s hand above his head.

“I need you to come over here!” shouted Lou as he walked, bristles on end and smiling wide. “I need you to come over here and look at this photograph!” he shouted, pulling a photograph from inside of his lapel.

“Now!” he seethed, pointing his gun at the marmot.

The marmot came over to Lou, who extended his arm as far as he could to give the photograph to him. “I need you to look at this photograph and tell me if you know them.” Lou extended his arm and stood on tiptoes to give the marmot the photograph.

The chef looked at the photograph, and then to Lou. He trembled, and looked to Lou. “I know him.”

“That is *not* what I asked!” shouted Lou, his teeth bared and spittle flying out of his mouth as he hit the marmot with the barrel of his revolver. “I didn’t ask you that! I told you to tell me if you knew *them*!”

“I know them!” the marmot cried out. Lou stood on tiptoes and glared hard at the marmot on the counter.

“You got a big mouth!” Lou hissed as the chef bled, his bristles standing violently on end. “You don’t follow directions and you got a big mouth, and now you got *big* problems!”

“Lou!”

“*Big problems!*”

A cough was heard.

“I need you to take this pen,” breathed Lou, thrusting a pen from his lapel pocket in front of the chef, “and you’re not going to say a goddamn word. I need you to write down where this person is on the back of the photograph. I need you to write it *very clearly*, and you’re *not going to say a goddamn word.*”

The marmot got up and went to take the pen.

Lou jerked it away.

“Gloves. Off.” Lou’s eyes were wide as he gripped his revolver tight.

The chef took his hands into each other and took off his cooking mitts, dropping them where he stood. He took the offered the pen and trembled. He flipped the photograph over, looked at Lou, and looked down at the back of the photograph, and wrote something down as he looked at Lou.

The chef looked at Lou, eyes wide and blood streaking down from his nose, and nodded.

Lou carefully took the shining metal pen and placed it gently into his lapel pocket, sliding it down with a finger.

He snatched the photo from the marmot and stared at it, flipping it over and over, eyes wide and spit flying from his clenched teeth as he breathed.

Slowly, his breathing slowed, and his quills began to slope down. His eyes watered and his lips went soft.

“What,” the chef whispered in a deep, booming plea, “What are you going to do with him when you find him?”

Lou’s face jerked to look at the chef’s. Slowly, a smile bloomed from his lips.

“What are we going to do with him when we find him?”

Lou began to laugh a deep belly laugh, his face curling as his laugh grew louder. “What are we going to do with him when we find him?”

“What are we going to do with *you* if we *don’t*?”

Lou laughed a high pitched explosive laugh as he made his way past Delgato and Wolford, his free hand clutching his belly as he walked.

“Hey, Mickey!” he called as the antelope gracefully leapt over the glass bakery display counter. “What are we going to do with *you* if we *don’t*?!” he said, imitating himself with a grandiose pantomime. He laughed uncontrollably as the antelope turned off the outside lights and turned up the rest in the restaurant.

“We’re not leaving!” explained Lou as he stood with the antelope by the door. “We’re stepping out, but we’ll be right outside!”

“We’ll be watching you,” said the antelope.

“You won’t be able to see us!” said Lou.

“But we’ll see you.”

“I need none of you to move while we’re gone!” Lou said, pointing at everyone with his revolver.

"Nobody moves."

"Cause the first one we see move..." Lou clucked his tongue and raised his gun straight into the air.

The antelope opened the door and Lou stepped out into the darkness. The antelope followed, his coat whipping the door as it closed with a hard jingling stop.

And everyone was silent, and everyone was still. The harsh light of the restaurant made everyone appear to shine as sweat glistened on their faces and arms.

Slowly, a faint rustle of newspaper echoed throughout the restaurant. Wolford heard tepid footsteps tapping the linoleum floor, paused briefly by the clinking of the green coffee cup, as the old goat made his way to the trash can by the exit, and Delgato saw him fold the newspaper neatly over twice before placing it through the trash bin slot.

The old goat made his way to the door and turned around, pushing it open from behind. He smiled as he stepped backwards into the darkness, the light falling off him into thin air, until only his outstretched hand remained, and the submachine gun was the last to be seen of him, its polished black metal shining in the dark until the door closed with jingle.

And all the family of pigs were silent.

And the waitress against the wall was still.

Delgato and Wolford held each other's hands tightly as they could.

And the chef on the counter's face bled.

Nobody moved, nobody spoke.

Their shadows danced against the wall before disappearing as a passing car slowly turned and its headlights shone in.

And all was silent and still.

Where They All Go

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0bKZaohyv6I>

Delgato and Welford let go of each other's hands.

She was the first to hit the floor: her feet had barely touched the linoleum before she was twelve feet sideways crashing her back against the end of the booth the old goat was in with weapon drawn, scanning the suddenly illuminated sidewalk.

"Clear!" she shouted to Welford by the light switch.

"Clear!" Welford shouted as he rushed in from out the door. "They're gone!"

Delgato swerved to face the marmot and was on top of him.

"Where are they going!?"

The chef looked to the family of pigs-- the parents had climbed over the table to huddle their crying children down into their seats.

"You need to look at me!" The marmot looked at her. "You need to tell me who and where they're going to! *Now!*"

The marmot fell onto the counter. "They're going to kill him. They're going to kill him."

"Who!?"

The chef looked behind him to see the crumpled waitress on the floor behind the glass display case, hoarse cries reverberating as she yanked her horns. "I never wanted this."

"Look at me!" Delgato shouted. "Where?! Who?!"

The marmot couldn't help but smile as he spoke: "Hirsch's rooming house, off Trip street. Apartment 313. Close enough by foot."

"They're gonna kill him," the chef said in disbelief to Delgato's back as she made for the door.

"What about us?!" called the father pig, "What if they come back?!"

"Wolford!"

"Go!" Wolford barked as Delgato vanished out the door.

The darkness of the night blurred as she tore through the dark. She was already halfway there by the time she was put through to ZPD central. She was driven by something outside of herself, in instances she could only catch glimpses of.

Be on the lookout; three individuals; armed and dangerous; unable to locate; in pursuit; Hirsch's rooming house near Trip street.

"They're gonna kill him!" she roared as she landed in front of the red brick building.

The door to the complex was locked, but the lock burst from the old wooden frame in a cloud of a thousand splinters as Delgato leapt up the stairs.

Delgato passed every corner certain that she would reveal the three smiling figures, and so kept her hands steady so as to aim her weapon precisely, and tensed her skin in the hope that it would dull the piercing hail of fire awaiting her. But every turn revealed yet another empty hallway or stairwell until she turned to see the door to 313.

Delgato paused.

"This is Officer Delgato, ZPD!" she hammered her fist onto the door, "Open the door! Now!"

The door opened before Delgato had to break it down. The sheep peeked his head through the dark.

"Don't you need a war--rant to come in here?!" he gasped as as Delgato shoved her way past, and his wide eyes followed her sweeping gun as it did a full circle around the room. "Oh god!"

"You need to remain calm." Delgato slammed the door shut with her shoulder.

“Oh god!”

“Three men are coming.” Delgato look out the window, but could not make any movement out in the dark yard below.

“Oh god oh god oh god!”

“So you need to remain calm,” Delgato exhaled, taking a knee and taking steady aim at the door.

For a moment, everything was silent and still.

“This is Officer Delgato,” she breathed into her phone. Beads of sweat dripped onto the screen. “At location with the target. Room 313. No signs of the suspects. Need back up.”

Back up is on it's way, hang tight.

She couldn't brush the sweat out of her eyes without taking her eyes off the door, so she mopped her forehead best she could.

“Oh god!”

“You need to tell me everything you know about them.”

“I have no idea! I have no idea!”

“What do they want with you?”

“Oh god, I don't know!”

“Any connection with criminal organizations, any illegal activity-- you need to tell me *now.*”

“Oh... god...”

Delgato's eyes quaked: her vision had tunnelled. She kept her gun pointed directly at the door.

“I didn't know--!”

“I was just brought along--!”

"He put me up to it--!"

"It was--"

Delgato could not tell whether it was her eyes or the door that pulsed.

--Berney Calhorn!"

"*Who?!*" Delgato took her eyes off the door.

"Berney Calhorn!"

"Berney Calhorn! He's a year above me!"

"He said he knew a guy!"

"I literally just bought twenty bucks worth, I didn't know!"

Delgato's arm suddenly felt heavy as she held tight to her gun.

"Berney Calhorn?"

"He's a year above me! He's a ram!" he answered, "He's an art history major!"

She blinked, and began to stare into the little quivering sheep's bloodshot, teary eyes.

Delgato brought herself up with great difficulty as if she had landed from a great height.

She took a moment, her eyes adjusting to the dim ultraviolet light, nose twitching as she became aware of the stale, acrid smoke.

A whiteboard covered with scrawled with old dates in red marker was stuck next to the door. "He brought me along with a lynx, said it'd be no big deal, said it's where they all go!" To the right was a cheap wooden desk, home to piles of papers, books, notepads and pages, and a computer monitor glowing with blocky letters reading 'PAUSED'. "I mean, I never wanted to try the stuff, really, I swear!" She turned to see the posters of bands, movies, psychedelic shapes and neon green colors, and two sheep kissing tacked up crinkled and crooked on the wall framing the window. "It was just forty bucks worth, I didn't think it was a big deal!" The bed to her left was unmade; her eyes lingered on a bottle of sunscreen sitting open on the stand next to it.

She blinked.

“And... who are you?”

“I’m Nick Cashmeyerson! I’m a sophomore! I’m in civil engineering!”

Delgato gazed out the window to see the empty yard bathed in flashing red lights as ZPD vehicles parked outside. “Do you know,” she tried to piece together, searching for the words, “a marmot who is also a chef?”

“The guy who lived upstairs?! He used to complain to the landlady about the smell all the time! But he’s gone!”

Delgato took a step back, vision blurred and heart out of step. The room was spinning and everything was too dark-- she needed to be in the light, to hold onto something.

“Wait!” the sheep thrust something into her hand, and Delgato held her gaze at the green leafy bulbs in the reflective plastic bag. “It’s everything! I swear, it’s everything! Just don’t leave! You need to be here with me! It’s your job! You need to protect me!”

There was a knock at the knock at the door. “Oh god!” cried the sheep.

She opened the door and was amazed when she did not see the three men.

Delgato sat in the back of the patrol car, leaning her head against the window. She watched the world beyond the glass, where the red patrol lights flashed before it all faded to black, lost as reality was briefly presented in red luminant clarity before being snuffed out, until yet another revolution ignited it all and a new world was revealed. It was only when the diner appeared in that Delgato could let herself out of the car and in through the jingling door.

Wolford leaned over the counter, his face nearly nestling into his paws, looking apologetically at Delgato.

She looked around, trying to find him. Her hands trembled and clutched, and her skin stung against the air conditioning.

"He's gone."

Delgato careened like a spinning top shoved to one side and had to catch hold of the glass baked display case. She kept her hand pressed firmly against the counter, sliding along as she walked toward the booth that had the family of pigs, table littered by the mess that was left of the raspberry pie. At the end of the counter, she found a few neat drops of blood, dried out in perfect circles like spilt coffee.

"I'm sorry," Wolford said. "The pigs, they-- they just were so mad! They asked why we didn't do anything, wanted to know if we were cops and kept shouting about how we didn't do anything!"

Delgato turned to look at the empty booth where the old goat sat.

"I wanted them to calm down," Wolford said, looking to the booth, "and while I was away--"

The waitress's long cry broke off as she began to gasp for air. She was crumpled in the corner behind the counter, her face buried into the crooks of her elbows hanging between her splayed legs.

"He just... told her just... so much *garbage*." His head hung and he gritted his teeth. "Apparently he told her she was going to be in trouble, that we were going to arrest her--"

"No. That's not true."

"Told her that we'd have her name and info in a public database." Wolford stepped aside. "Told her that they'd--"

“...that they’d be able to find her.”

“He was *lying*,” Delgato told Woford. “He lied about where to go!”

“He was *lying*!” she pleaded to the waitress, falling to one knee. “We wouldn’t *do* that!”

“He was lying about *everything*!” the waitress’ screamed. “He doesn’t even *make* the pies! He orders them from-- *so-o-o-mewhere e-e-else*!”

“She-- I mean, she flipped.” Woford rubbed his eyes, unable to look at Delgato.

“Spooked to hell, you know?”

“And I wanted to calm her down, but the pigs were shouting at me, and she was screaming and I wanted to calm them down, and he said he was going to go in back and get her something, to help calm her down, and he--”

“I didn’t even know there was a back door,” he shrugged, pressing one foot on top of the other as he rung the tip of his tail between his thumb. “He’s gone.”

Delgato whipped around and spittle flew from her fangs as she started for the waitress.

“You need to tell me *anything*--! Look at me!-- *anything*--! *Anything*--!”

She turned to Woford, shocked that she could see his hand holding her shoulder before she could felt him holding her steady.

“I wanna go *home*!” wailed the dripping waitress. A puddle of tears and snot had pooled beneath her, glistening shining white lines.

“We can take you home.”

“*I wanna go home*!” she wailed.

“*I wanna go back to Deerbrooke*!”

What was Left

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQH0GPL33uc>

"Hoping to see them out there?"

Rain rolled down the windshield as they drove.

Wolford silently kicked himself.

"Just wanted to know if you're alright."

"I'm alright."

Delgato stared out the window.

"You know, if you want to talk, you can talk to me."

"I've been over it a million times at the station."

"Yeah, but that's with Bogo. You can talk to me about different things than you can with *Bogo*. Can't talk about--" Wolford thought of a dozen funny things you couldn't talk to Bogo about.

He just drummed his fingers over the steering wheel.

"Look, you don't want to let what happened eat you up. You might think you need to, you know, rewind the tape and go over it again and again to look at it all again, but if you get stuck in it, you know, you'll just..." Wolford shrugged. "...be stuck."

"You know? Every situation, every... thing, that happens, you get a choice: you chose to let it define you, or you chose to define yourself like you want."

Wolford swallowed, his tongue heavy. He watched the grey clouds in the distance.

"I just don't understand."

His ears perked. "Well, what don't you understand? Let's talk about it."

"What did they *want*?"

Wolford nearly said 'coffee' but coughed to cover it up. "Information? Needed to find someone. Guess someone's out on the lamb."

"Why did he lie to me?" Delgato's face twitched.

"I mean," Wolford concentrated on the fog blanketing the empty road. "Maybe he didn't trust the police. He didn't want to get involved with us, didn't think we could help him, so he set you out on--"

"Did he lie to *them*?"

Wolford looked out the corner of his eyes to see Delgato's blank expression.

"Who can say? That's the point where we can't know, and that's the stuff we can't think about because there are no answers."

"There *are* answers. We don't *know* them."

"Well, no matter how much we want them to, no matter how much it hurts and eats us up inside, they won't just appear to us: there's no point in circling back again and again."

"Yes, there *is*!" Delgato seethed at Wolford.

Wolford drove.

"Well, then, what's the point?"

"The *point* is to figure out what went wrong!" Delgato slapped the table of the dashboard.

"Everyone got away, and we're left with nothing, so instead of doing *nothing* and putting our hands into the air and going 'oh well, don't want to think about it, better just wait until something happens', you figure out what you *needed* to do!"

"That's the *point*!" Delgato said, breaking the silence.

"Well, fine!" Wolford stared hard out at the road. "Tell me what we did wrong!"

"We did *nothing*! That entire time, we just sat there and did *nothing*!"

"I didn't do anything because you told me there was someone behind us!" Wolford shouted. "I didn't even see him! *You told* me not to move!"

"He *had* a gun! He had it pointed *right at us*!"

"Okay! I didn't know! I trusted you!"

"I did *everything* I needed to do!" Delgato bared her teeth. "I went to the apartment, I got there first, I--"

"You didn't get there *first*!" Wolford laughed. "They were *never* going there! You got the wrong address!"

"*He* told me where to go!"

"Yeah, and he lied! About everything!" Wolford growled back at Delgato. "Even if you went back in time and did it all perfect he'd lie to you again and you'd still go to the wrong place! And that's *all* we had to go on, and that's all we *have* to go on, so what's left to go over?!"

"I *did* do everything perfect! The person who fucked up was *YOU*!"

Delgato dug her fist deep into her forehead, smouldering in guilt. Her stomach churned as she tried to figure out how to apologize.

Wolford stared out the window at the grey passing streets. His eyes roved along the empty sidewalks as he drove with a fleeting moment of hope that he might see a marmot.

He cleared his throat and closed his eyes, and when they were open he was smiling.

"Just a few more blocks this way, yeah?"

"Raining in Sahara Square," Wolford murmured. "Didn't even know it rained in Sahara Square."

"Didn't know it fogged, either. Guess I *mist* that day of class, right?" he nudged Delgato with his elbow.

They were two blocks away from Delgato's house.

“And here we are!” Wolford rolled up to the sidewalk. “Bet you’ll be happy to see your bed.”

The car stopped in front of Delgato’s house. She got out and walked passed the car, briefly nodding as she walked.

Wolford rolled down the window. “Hey!”

Delgato looked over her shoulder.

“I’m sorry!” his voice peaked. “I really was just trying to help!”

He turned away.

Delgato turned around to face the car, standing in the rain before approaching the window.

“I’m going to be fine,” he said matter-of-factly before she could speak. “It’s been a long day and I’m just tired.”

“Or ‘long night’, I should say,” Wolford grinned, “right?”

“Are you going to be alright?” Delgato asked.

Wolford shrugged and smiled, looking nonchalantly past her. “So, this all yours?”

Delgato looked at the house and brought her hand up to hold her arm. “My parents left it to me.”

“No roommates or nothing?” he said.

“Dang, you’re lucky!” Wolford laughed. “Take is from a guy with three roommates: living alone is the best.”

Wolford began to nod.

“Are you going to be okay?” she asked.

“I’m fine, no worries at all.” Wolford smiled. “I’m just looking forward to getting some sleep.”

"You sure you want to drive, then?"

"I've driven in way worse than this," Wolford laughed. "And way tireder, too. If I get sleepy, I just jam the music real loud and sing along."

Delgato nodded, holding her arm and looking down the road. "So long as you'll be okay."

"Don't worry about me. I'll be fine. But you take care of yourself-- get some rest, you know? You've been up and turned up to eleven all night long, so you get yourself inside there and get some rest!" Wolford gestured. "That's an orders."

She swallowed, looking at the steering wheel. "I have a fold out couch..."

"Yeah, those are awesome."

"Yeah," said Delgato. She turned, and stopped to wave before entering her house.

Wolf slouched low in his seat, glowering through the rain-slick windshield, arms outstretched as far as they could extend and digging his nails into the wheel. He got lucky with every green light, but he could not stop the visions of the night from replaying in his mind-- unable to shake off the feeling that he had missed something crucial-- a piece of the puzzle that was there in front of him the whole time, and if only he had the a new perspective, the ability to look at it all from afar, that he might have been able to grasp hold of it, as firm as if it were real, and put everything right in its place.

What was missing?, he wondered. *What did I miss?*

He saw the porcupine, the antelope, and the smiling goat sitting behind him, and the crying waitress and the shouting pigs, and watched as the chef walked through the kitchen door.

Where did I fuck up?

He closed his eyes as he drove. He had wanted to do the right thing, and he had helped no one.

What was I even doing?

The car left two feet of skid on the street as Welford's hair stood on end.

He howled as he tried to twist off the steering wheel and jumped in his seat.

He sat silent and still, face bespeckled in dark droplets from the red stop light shining through the windshield.

He took out his phone, but he had to avert his eyes against the bright white LED light.

He tried to collect his thoughts, but none came. He started typing into the phone.

Hey, he began, and smiled.

just realized we didnt pay for our dinner. Oops?

He deleted everything and looked out the passenger window.

Next restaurant we try should be a cake place

He held his thumb down onto the delete key and watched the stoplight turn from green to red.

*When we catch those assholes who you want first the porcupine or the
annnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn*

He ran his hand over his head and grit his teeth, smacking his face against the glass and leaving it there until it no longer felt cold.

He brought up the phone in his right hand and watched himself type.

Im here if you need me

He read it only after he sent it.

The timid drizzle fell onto the roof of his car, the sound of the drops imperceptible flowing into one another yet punctuated by sudden large taps that came and went, and it all slid down the windshield in coursing lines that disappeared just out of sight.

He looked down at his phone without realizing it was on silent.

Come over?

He read her text again, then his, just to make sure.

So he turned the car around drove down the empty streets. None of the stores, offices, restaurants or bodegas were open, and nobody walked in the mist: it was too early for anyone to have started their day, and just late enough for those who had long nights to put behind them.