

Marlot watched for a parking lot across the housing building as three busses pulled in front and people piled into them. Among them was Grift Stripe; he was dressed better than when Marlot had spoken with him. Not enough to work at a top-rated company, but his pants and shirt were clean, as were the others. If not for the fact he recognized one of two from when he'd waited in the post office, and seen how they dressed then, he'd think the whole group was your average-rated workers taking transit to wherever they needed to go. They'd also talked like they were used to hanging out before the building waiting for the busses.

He noted the busses' tags, then followed them. When they separated, he followed the second one; the one Grift stepped in. As much as possible he wanted to stay with the tiger.

Marlot realized this couldn't be normal as the quality of the neighborhoods went up. Not difficult to do from where they had begun, but the value kept increasing past his own neighborhood, past Trembor's parents, past anything he'd even been to.

When the bus pulled into a driveway leading to a house larger than Marlot's entire block, he thought Grift and his bus full might do some sort of labor on the small property. He noted that for Vlein and found a parking spot that let him watch without being noticed.

An impossible thing when every car parked before the properties were worth a dozen of his, so he had to park a long block away and hurry to walk back to the front of the house, tightening his jacket against the cold wind.

He got there as a car pulled into the driveway. Marlot took pictures of the ram that stepped out of the house dressed in a business suit and got in the car. He couldn't see the tag as it left. He wasn't certain, but Marlot thought the ram had been one of the people on the bus.

Another car came, and a bull got in, better dressed than he'd arrived, but more for manual labor than an office. After that, it was a weasel, dressed for office work. Over the next hour, car after car drove to the car to pick up someone who'd arrived looking like a factory worker and exited looking like they belonged a few rungs higher on the productivity ladder.

When Grift stepped out of the house, Marlot ran to his car, cursing he'd had to park so far. Fortunately, as he got in it, the car passed before where he'd parked. Unfortunately, his car wouldn't start, no matter what he did. After cursing, he opened the hood; the electrical around the engine had been trashed. Checking the area around the hood's latch and lock, he saw the signs of tampering.

He slammed the hood shut and looked around. Obviously, whoever had done this was better at hiding their trail than Marlot had been. That was what he got for getting roped into something that wasn't his job.

Of course, if his surveying of the house had caused his car to be disabled, it meant there was something there. Unless it had been simple vandalism? He looked at the wealthy houses and other untouched cars and had trouble imagining any youth walking around breaking into the hood of his car. Of course, his car did stand out, so maybe this

was their way to telling him he didn't belong.

He knew that already.

He called a towing company and began working on who he was going to pay to watch the house. He looked around again. Did he know anyone who could look like they fit in? The better question was, would he have any money left to afford his next hunt after this?

He needed to talk to Vlein about covering his expenses if he was going to do investigations that didn't relate directly to a body.