

Chapter 07

This is the end of the world.

Well, okay, not really. It just feels that way with how I got sent home.

Sure, I haven't spent that much time with him, but it was enough to know how Tristan does things, how he is. He's detached, basically, ice cold. Oh, he gets angry, but that's controlled. What he doesn't do is tenderness.

He doesn't need to. He's too damned good to have to care.

Sure, there was that sex, with him touching me all gentle and things, but that wasn't him caring or being tender, he said it. He was exploring my body, figuring out how to control me, my orgasms.

Fuck, why's my mind have to go there? Now I was him slamming me against the floor and pounding my ass.

And I'm out of coffee.

Maybe one of the other mugs has some left? Enough, I can wait until my boner goes down?

No such luck.

Well, here goes. Hopefully, no one will notice the tent while I'm up.

I make it to the counter with the coffee machine without anyone calling me out.

"Mister Crimson," Kat says behind me, startling me. The bitch made me spill coffee. That's got to be a capital offense, right?

"Fuck," I mutter under my breath, throwing Napkins on the spill.

"Something I should know?" she asks. I swear, if she is smirking when I turn around, I am going to lose it.

I settle for looking over my shoulder. "Yes, surprising me and making me spill coffee is dangerous to the health."

Her expression is quizzical. "I didn't think you could be surprised. Something on your mind?"

Oh no, not at all, it's in my ass I want that something. Maybe I should tell her, as punishment for the spillage. "Just family stuff, I mean stuff." Fuck.

She doesn't comment, so I keep wiping at the spill, feeling like I should keen with each coffee-soaked napkin that ends up in the trash.

"You ever thought about how bad for the environment paper napkins are?" I snap. "Each one of those is one step closer to the last tree on earth being dead." I glare at her, the last napkin flying off course as it's basically dry when I throw it at the trash. "And don't even think of bringing up those recycling adds. They have no interest in saving anything but their bottom line. Fuck, I should leave a stack of cloth towels and burn all this paper stuff."

"And who's going to take care of cleaning them?" She asks as I refill my mug.

Cap secured, I turn. “Why should I care, Kat? You’re the one destroying the environment, not me.”

She’s annoyed at me, but not angry. Is that a victory or defeat on my part? I don’t even know what I was trying to make happen with this. “I get that having problems at home, not that I knew you had a family, can be stressful. But I’ll remind you this is a workplace, and I’m not your therapist.”

I snort, which adds a raised eyebrow to her annoyed expression. “I keep away from those after that last one finally signed the papers stated I was sane.” I grin at her.

“I can’t tell if you’re joking or not,” she says, her tone pained. “Because even if a question about your sanity never showed up in the background check I ran on you, neither did the existence of a family.”

“That’s how I like things. So I’m guessing there’s a reason you stalked me.” I sip the coffee and curse. “Fuck, did we switch to decaf or are you buying the cheap stuff now? This is nothing more than water.”

“Maybe you should cut down.”

I gawk at her.

“Fine, how about focusing more on the assignment, and less on what you drink or what your family is up to? That Korymaro Industry report was supposed to be—”

“Shell corporation; doesn’t own anything actual assets, but moves money around like a multinational corporation should.”

“What are you talking about?” she asks, serious. Everything I did to annoy her is now set aside.

“I take it whoever gave you the contract neglected to mention the part where there is no

Korymaro outside of the internet. And even there, like I said, it's just a shell so they can move money."

"No company can be registered in the US without having a physical address linked to an office."

"Sure, they have that. Problem is that they are fitting seven hundred twenty-three employees in a nine by nine room. That's what the address in Chicago leads to. I mean, sure, I guess if they have the right efficiency expert on staff, you might convince me they can all work in that space."

She rubs her face. "Mister Crimson, your assignment was to test their internet security."

"Did that; it failed. I did have to put some work into it, but that only took fifteen minutes. Since I know how you don't like it when I'm just sitting back and relaxing, I looked around and found out what I told you. Don't worry," I add, as she's about to warn me off. "I'm not going to include any of that in my report. It's going to stick to just their firewall and how to fix it. It's not my job to bring to light when your company's being played."

Her expression darkens. "I was about to tell you to write a full report on it." She looked at her watch. The man's watch that's always on her wrist. "And I don't want to see it until the end of the day, so how about you use the time you have to dig a little deeper?"

"That's five hours away; I can dig all the way to China in that time. Hell, I'll have the name of the man who set the corporation up and in underwear size."

"I'd prefer you don't include that little detail, but I want to see everything else in it."

"Sure, it's your reputation." I turn to head for my desk."

"Mister Crimson?"

I stop and lower my mug. Fuck, that stuff is vile.

“This isn’t the first time you’ve done amazing work in a surprisingly short period of time.”

“It’s what you pay me for.”

“True, but now I have to wonder how it is you only scored mid-range on all the tests you took when we hired you.”

I grin at her over my shoulder. “Because I’m not an idiot.” I mutter the rest as I continue to my desk. “Unlike everyone else at this company.”

I fight not to spit the coffee as I sit down. The mug’s already half empty.

That’s it. Tomorrow I’m bringing a coffee machine for my desk. The rest can be jealous of the aromas coming from here while I enjoy an actual drink.

I look at my screen and smile. Well, my day just got more interesting than faking being busy. Let’s see who set you up, Korymaro Industry, and exactly how corrupt they are.

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I’m three layers down just over an hour later, another shell company, this one in Delaware, when my work address pings. It’s work, so it needs to be answered now rather than later.

Or maybe not.

The address is way wrong for anyone from the office. It’s a string of random numbers and letters. A quick search tells me the server it originated from is in Nigeria. Oh, joy, one of those made it through our spam filters. I delete it and go back to work.

I go back to work

I said, I focus on—damn it.

I pull the email out of the trash folder because something’s not adding up. There is no way some

Nigerian prince scam email should have made it through the filters. Those were custom-designed, not by me, but I went over the work when I was hired, really good, and it's been maintained. I never use spam filters with my personal email. I like having an easy list of targets when I'm bored and don't have some perverts to take down.

Spammers aren't all that much better anyway.

I quick read confirms this is the work of amateurs, bad English and all. Some prince is in trouble, and if I can simply find it in the goodness of my heart to send him a measly thousand dollars, he will thank me with a fraction of his fortune when his troubles are over. A few million. So generous.

And here's another reason it kept nagging at me. Instead of the usual request for a reply, so they can add my email address to the bank of sucker they can go back to over and over when they need more money, there is a link.

I don't click it. Again, I'm not an idiot.

It looks like an amateur's work, the way all those are meant to look like because they seem to think that if someone doesn't type proper English, he must be a rich foreigner and in trouble. But one of those mass-generated email addresses wouldn't have made it through the filters.

I look at the address again. Somehow, someone has worked out a way to string letters and numbers together so they can bypass it. That's really clever, and my first thought is that it's got to be Tristan. The guy is amazing enough to pull this off.

Only, he doesn't do his own hacking. He has some second-rate hack on retainer for that. Okay, maybe not second rate, since I haven't found them, yet. But give me time, I will.

What I do know is that it isn't the one hacker living on the reservation. She's good, really good,

in fact. Good enough she had to fake her death after hacking Darpa leaking online some of the things they really shouldn't have been involved in.

But I found her, so she isn't who he's using.

There's something disappointing about knowing Tristan doesn't do everything to perfection. That he needs help with his hacking. That he isn't asking me is downright annoying, but that's going to change once I've exposed who he's using as the fraud they are.

But the thing I remind myself of is that Tristan's smarts are in how physical he is. How he can take me down, hold me there, take me, hard.

Here I go, getting a boner again at the idea of him taking me.

And I can't do anything about it either.

Because I'm not an idiot, I take the link apart and reach its destination sideways. It's a folder in one of those cloud-drives everyone uses these days, but this one is on what the media likes to refer to as the 'dark web'. Add scary music here.

It's not as anonymous as the people behind it would like it to be. I could track back who opened it. Will do so, in fact, since I want to make sure, but I doubt it'll lead me to Tristan's hacker. They might not be as good as me, but they aren't idiots either.

In the folder is a simple text file, as if they want to convince me this is inoffensive.

Ah. Nice try.

I deconstruct the file and discover that it's... a simple text file.

That's... unexpected.

Bart.

First off, next time I see you, we're talking about that name. I don't know why you let them force you into using that name. You are an Alexander.

I got this just after you left, so I asked Asyr to send it to you.

I had them look deeper into Liaison, as well as its supposed owner, Keith Riddle, and the man he had with him when he attacked us. A new name has come up, both in their research and some of my own. Juan Manuel Fernan. The information I have places him in Mexico. I figure you can look into this and we can talk about what you come up with when you next visit.

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His name isn't anywhere there, but it doesn't matter. I know it's him. And I can't stop smiling. I'm not even annoyed he asked their hack to look into it instead of me.

It isn't because he wants to talk; I just want him to fight me, then fuck me.

No. It's because he looked into Liaison, even if he had no reason to. His only interest in them was to find the girl, and that's done. He found it and did whatever he set out to do, return it to her dad, I think is what he said.

Even with Riddle coming after us, there's no reason for him to look deeper since he killed him and I took care of anyone else who was there.

No. The only reason he looked into this is that he knows I'm not done with them and the human trafficking ring connected to them.

This is his way of saying he wants us to work on this together.

I sigh, and I don't care about the look I get from the woman one desk over. I can sigh in

happiness if I want to. I'm a grown-ass man.

The rest of the file is a lot of information I really want to get into right now, but Kat gave me to go-head to look into Korymaro; wants a full report on it, in fact. And because she's caught on that I'm a lot better at this than I wanted her to believe, I can't say I did all I could anymore.

If you weren't so dirty, Korymaso, and the person behind you, this might be a harder decision, but you don't get a stay of execution because my hunk handed me a gift. I'm taking you down, and then I will enjoy my cake.

Anyway, I'm going to need the work Tristan gave me so I don't end up jerking off before I see him again.

I grin and get to work. Time to crack more shells and see who's hiding behind them.

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