

Le Français Chapter 4-7

By BreaktheBar

Commissioned by ThL

Chapter 4

Marc cinched his robe tightly as he quickly stepped down the stairs from his loft, heading across the apartment to the door. It wasn't so late that a visitor was out of the question, but he hadn't been expecting a delivery or anyone dropping by so it was a little strange that his evening was being interrupted. He had been an early adopter of the Ring doorbells with the built-in camera and had a tablet mounted to the wall near his front door. He thumbed it on and looked out and raised his eyebrows in surprise, then turned on the microphone.

"*Bonsoir*, Detective," he said evenly.

"Mr Fornier, mind opening the door?" Detective Connors said after a startled moment at hearing his voice. She quickly spotted the doorbell camera and looked down into it.

"Well, meaning no offence, Detective," Marc replied. "But this can't be a social visit so I must ask if you have a search warrant?"

The Detective sighed and ran her fingers through her long, coppery red hair. "I don't have a warrant, and I'm not here to do a search or question you, Mr Fornier."

"So this *is* a social visit then?" Marc asked, his lip curling into a bit of a smirk.

"Well, no," the Detective said. "It's something in between. Look, this is uncomfortable to talk about like this. Could you please invite me in?"

Marc let himself indulge in a full smirk for a moment. "Alright, Detective. But no funny business."

He watched her for a moment longer on the doorbell cam and she ran her fingers through her hair again as if fixing it, then glanced down and tugged at the collar of her t-shirt under her leather jacket, fixing her bra to show off a little more cleavage. Marc wasn't sure what she was after, but the Detective was clearly planning on trying to distract him with her looks.

Two could play that game.

Marc went to the door and loosened the collar of his robe so a bit more of his chest showed, then fixed his own hair before unlocking the door and opening it. "My apologies for my state,

Detective,” he said with a welcoming smile. “You interrupted me during my evening ablutions. Please come in.”

“Oh,” the Detective said, hesitating a moment as she looked Marc up and down in his robe, but finally stepped inside.

Marc led her into the apartment and to the kitchen island, pulling out a stool and offering it to her before pulling out his own across from her. “It’s quite a surprise to see you,” Marc said as he led her into the apartment. “I had certainly thought our previous encounter would be our last. Not that I mind seeing you, that is. A pointed conversation with a woman as... aggressively sure of herself as you are is always a stimulating experience.”

Detective Connors had eyed Marc up and down several times, and as she sat she looked around at his apartment in a curiously analytical sort of way. “You have a lovely home,” she offered. “You live alone?”

Marc smiled softly. “You know I do, Detective.”

“Please, um, call me Sinead,” the Detective said. “This isn’t exactly a formal visit, so...”

“Titles shouldn’t come into it?” Marc asked with a raised eyebrow. “In that case can I offer you a coffee? I have decaf.”

“Do you have tea?” she asked.

“I do,” Marc nodded, standing back up from his stool and moving to get a kettle going. “So, Sinead, what can I do for you? And please, call me Marc.”

“Well, Marc, after our last conversation I found myself interested in your line of work,” Sinead said. “Your resume was impressive, and the way your employer spoke about you was very flattering.”

“Interrogation,” Marc said as he set the kettle on the stovetop burner.

“Pardon?” Sinead asked.

“Our last conversation was an interrogation,” Marc said, turning and smiling at her. “Not that I minded, I just think it’s important to remember things in the truest light. I was interrogated by two beautiful police detectives. It makes for quite the story at work dinners.”

Sinead blushed, just slightly, at the offhanded compliment even while she pressed her lips together in a firm line. She really was a striking woman. Her hair hung in thick waves down to the small of her back now that she didn’t have it tied back in a ponytail, and she had a striking jawline to go with her thin frame. If she weren’t in her mid-thirties Marc wouldn’t have been

surprised if she could have been one of those ‘influencers’ on Instagram and done fairly well for herself. Or become one of those OnlyFans self-employed pornstars. Well, she likely would have been successful even with her age. She had a small bust, a pushup bra under her t-shirt likely doing a lot of the work to form the cleavage she had, and while he hadn’t seen it in her tight black jeans yet he remembered that she had a wonderfully formed ass in her business slacks.

“That’s... true,” Sinead said.

“So, you’re interested in my work?” Marc asked.

“I am,” Sinead said. “It’s one of those things that there are only a few people can do well, and it seems like everyone who can does it purely in the private sector. It’s really pretty amazing.”

She was laying it on thick. Sinead knew that she was attractive and was leading into an ask of some sort, but Marc was having fun with this. “Well, to be entirely fair, private practice pays much better than public service in almost every way.”

“That must be true,” Sinead said, looking around the apartment again. “I’m just so curious about it all though, Marc. Do you think maybe you could show me a thing or two? A couple of tips, maybe?”

Marc snorted softly, glancing over at the kettle as it was starting to hum as it warmed up, then back to the redhead. “You came here at almost nine in the evening to ask for tips on corporate mergers, or on forensic auditing? Do you think, Sinead, that maybe you have something else in mind?”

Sinead bit the inside of her cheek, her eyes stuck to Marc as she realized she was either being too obvious or had gotten in over her head. Marc knew she wasn’t there to flirt - to be frank, she really wasn’t that good at it, at least like this. She had an aggressive personality and playing the girly ‘woah is me, I’m so impressed’ role wasn’t attractive on her.

“I don’t know what you mean,” Sinead said.

Marc sighed. “Is there perhaps a file you want me to look at?”

Now she did blush fully, which was an appealing look on her as her freckled, pale skin flushed a warm pink from her cheeks down to her chest. “That would be... very helpful,” she said and reached into her inner jacket pocket and pulled out a USB stick and set it on the kitchen island.

“Well, should I send my consulting fee to the department, or is this ‘off the books’ so to speak?” Marc asked.

“I, uh, it’s not exactly official,” Sinead said, licking her lips with just a touch of nerves. It was a small gesture, but Marc picked up on it. He was used to looking for those little moments of

nervous energy, of questioning whether something would go well or not. If they would be pleasurable or not.

"If that's the case, then I assume you aren't looking to pay for my services out of pocket," Marc said. "How about I make you a deal, Sinead? I'll take a look at whatever files are on there, but you have to do something for me."

"I'm not breaking any laws for you," Sinead said sternly, taking the chance to try and seize the power in the conversation with her anger. She'd been on the back foot pretty much since she arrived at the door.

Marc laughed. "No, no. Nothing like that. I want to take you to dinner. Just the two of us, somewhere nice so that you can dress up and show off that figure I'm sure you work hard to maintain."

Sinead frowned questioningly. "Just dinner?"

"Well, that's all I'm asking for," Marc said. "Anything else would be entirely on your decision."

"I... can do that," Sinead said. "But only after you get me the answers I need."

Marc smiled, scooping the kettle off of the stovetop just as it began to release steam out of its spout. "Of course," he said offhandedly as he opened a cupboard and pulled out a decaf teabag, a paper travel cup and a plastic lid. He quickly filled the cup and put on the lid, turning and passing it to her. "I wouldn't dream of anything else. Services first, payment after."

Sinead, with her eyes narrowed, accepted the cup of tea. "That's really all you want?"

"What else should I ask for?" Marc asked. "I'm fairly sure asking for a professional favour in the future wouldn't go well with you."

"It wouldn't," Sinead said.

"Then dinner it is," Marc smiled. He went to a drawer off the island and pulled out her card for the department, tapping it on the counter. "Yes, here it is. Shall I give you a call when I'm finished?"

Sinead reached into her jacket and pulled out a pen, taking the card from him and scribbling a number on the back. "Don't call me at the station," she said. "Just text my cell, OK? I'll come by to get whatever information you have."

"It's a plan," Marc grinned and nodded. "Now, unless you wanted to stick around and have some tea...?"

“Right,” Sinead said. “Right, um...” She picked up the tea Marc had prepared for her and headed for the door.

“It was nice seeing you again, Detective,” Marc said as he followed, finally getting a chance to glance at that fantastic ass in her tight jeans. She could have stood to wear some heels, even with the jeans, but he understood why she wore a decent, mid-tier boot instead.

“Thanks,” she said, encompassing what she’d asked for, and the tea, in one uncomfortable shrugging gesture. She left, and Marc shut the door after her as he chuckled, locking it and heading back towards the kitchen.

“Playing with your food, dear?” Felicity asked from the stairs. She was still wearing the sheer white teddy and garter belt, but the handcuffs were dangling from one wrist and the ball gag was hanging around her neck.

“And how did you get out, *ma petite fée*?” Marc asked her.

She giggled, biting her lower lip in that way she did that was both utterly innocent and entirely naughty.

Marc sighed and glanced at the kitchen island where the Detective’s USB stick was sitting not ten inches from the white envelope waiting for Felicity. Wouldn’t *that* have been fun to explain?

“You know naughty girls get punished,” Marc said with a smile as he slipped his robe off to one arm, exposing his nakedness as he stalked towards her.

“Oh, I know, dear,” Felicity grinned. “And I’m counting on it. My jaw was just getting a little tight waiting while you turned that woman in circles. You’re not looking to replace me, are you?”

“Never,” Marc said as he mounted the stairs, stepping up to her. Felicity raised her arms and rested them on his shoulders as he leaned in to kiss her pert lips. “Though she would make a very pretty playmate for you, wouldn’t she?”

“She would, not that I think she would want to,” Felicity said. “I think she might have a stick up her ass when it comes to being *fun*.”

Marc laughed, reaching around and grabbing Felicity’s meaty ass with both hands. “You well know what I can do with that.”

“Mmmm, yes please, dear,” Felicity said.

Marc released her butt and almost daintily lifted the ballgag back into place, Felicity opening her mouth with a smile to accept it. The Detective had interrupted the start of what was supposed to be an evening of relaxation and play and now they were going to need to start all over again.

Chapter 5

Sinead felt like an idiot.

Well, maybe not that bad, but she still felt kind of gross for stepping out of line like she was. She'd been kicking herself since leaving Marc Fornier's place, and Jules had asked her three times the next day what the problem was and she'd had to play it off.

Asking Marc to do what she did was totally inappropriate. Going to a top suspect's house, even if he was cleared, was super inappropriate. Promising him a date if he looked through what should have been confidential financial records?

She could get busted down to a street cop again if anyone found out.

So she felt like an idiot.

To be fair, she was also a little concerned about the other thing going on in her head. Marc was smart. Almost too smart to be trusted. He'd known what she was doing, and she felt like she'd been a step behind in the whole conversation. She wasn't usually so... malleable. Sinead was the one who was supposed to be in charge of situations. He hadn't bitten at her flirting at all. She hadn't caught him staring at her cleavage once, and all of his comments were totally in-bounds for polite conversation. Even asking her to dinner had been...

"Fuck," she grunted.

"Are you going to tell me what your fucking problem is or not?" Jules asked. They were in the car headed to a petty robbery scene.

"I'm just off today," Sinead said. "That's all."

"More like this month," Jules said.

"Oh, I haven't been that bad," Sinead said.

"Really? Where are we heading right now?"

"Um..." Sinead hesitated. "3rd street, for the robbery scene."

"Wrong," Jules said. "We're going up to Parkwoods for a home burglary."

"Shit," Sinead grunted. "Sorry."

"Just get your head out of your ass, or the clouds, or wherever it is," Jules said. "I need my partner back."

"I will, I promise," Sinead said.

Jules drove them the rest of the way, pulling into a decent little suburb where the housing prices meant even the average family home was worth well over a million, maybe a million and a half despite the same thing going for a quarter of the price anywhere else in the province. Well, maybe half - Sinead had been looking for a new place anywhere inside the Greater Toronto Area and hadn't found anything that felt reasonably priced.

Just as they pulled into the driveway of the residence Sinead's phone started buzzing, and she fished it out of her pocket before following Jules out of the car. It was an unknown number, but the message was clear.

"Found what you need. Come by tonight."

Sinead almost yelped in excitement but managed to keep her eagerness in check. She wanted to jump into the driver's seat and find Marc Fournier wherever he was, but there was work to do and for all that Jules had been forgiving of her obsession with the Le Français case, she wouldn't put up with that.

So Sinead bit her tongue and got out of the car, trying her best to bury that text message in the back of her mind where it wouldn't distract her.

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Marc Fournier was, despite Sinead's best attempts at remaining at arm's distance from the matter, unfortunately attractive. He was tall, with a thick head of black hair just starting to silver at the temples, and had those piercing green eyes that she'd found so infuriating in the interrogation room and confounding sitting in his kitchen. She felt like they were speaking to her, but in a language she didn't understand.

He was also fit in that way that someone who was very active but didn't work out was. He had useable muscles and hadn't gone and gotten fat with his office job.

To be frank, if she'd met him at a bar and not on the job, Sinead *may* have considered a one-night stand with him. A flash in the pan, ghost him afterwards, wonder what she was thinking with sleeping with a guy a decade older than her one night stand. But that's not how they met, and even as she waited for Marc to open his God damned front door she felt a nervous energy at what was going to happen now. He had what she needed, and he had an expectation.

Marc opened the door with that smile of his. God, Sinead found it smug. Not that he seemed to be *trying* to antagonise her, but there was just something about the way he held himself that wasn't at all intimidated by her badge that set her off. The only other people she'd met like that

were criminals who were either insane or so powerful in their own little worlds that even when she had been part of taking them down they'd felt untouchable and sure that the lawyers would do their work.

"Sinead, thank you for coming by," Marc said to her.

"You said you had it already?" Sinead asked. "That was fast." God, she felt like a junky here trying to get her fix.

"Well, when you know where to look," Marc smiled. "Please, come in."

At least this time he wasn't dressed in that fucking robe. He was wearing a pair of dressy slacks with a perfect crease in them, along with a knit sweater that she guessed would have cost more than her entire outfit by itself, underwear included.

Fuck, why did she wear lingerie today? She'd thought it would help her feel confident that morning, but now it was just making her feel slutty.

Sinead followed him into the apartment and to the kitchen island where he had a laptop out, along with a couple of files with papers. "Is this it?" she asked.

"Not all of it," he said, closing his laptop and then pushing one of the files to her. "One of the accounts you included didn't seem to have any connections to the others. The other three, however, have an interesting correlation between when money is moved and what shell companies they are filtering through. I did some checking and it seems you've uncovered a nice little shell game, Detective."

"Is any of this illegal?" Sinead asked. "I need something I can use to get warrants."

"On the surface, no," Marc said. "I thought you might appreciate a little extra initiative though and I expanded the scope of my search. This," he moved the other file folder over to her, "Should get you the warrants you need. The accounts you brought me are numbered holding companies masquerading as small businesses. There are likely storefronts attached to them somewhere, though they will either be empty or have some cash-only business where the owner says their relatives pay the rent for them. More importantly, the funds that move through them electronically all filter through the same five shell companies, all at the same times of day and in amounts that sit just under certain thresholds that would automatically flag with financial institutions. If I were a betting man, I would say someone is washing money from a regular stream of income through this network. *That* should get you the warrants you need to dig for more accounts and pull in some accountants and business owners. With the amount of money moving around, one would expect to be able to find purchase orders for goods or services. If you can't find them, or employees to offer those services, you've found a criminal enterprise."

Sinead was left feeling... unfulfilled. "That's it?" she asked.

Marc raised an eyebrow. "Were you expecting something else?"

"I- I guess it was too much to hope for some payment labelled 'For Drugs' or something," she sighed.

Marc snorted a little and shook his head. "No, that's unlikely to happen. Whoever is orchestrating this little shell game is too advanced to make a mistake like that."

"How advanced are we talking?" Sinead asked.

He pursed his lips in thought for a moment. "Sneakier than most, not quite at the level of a Fortune 500 accounting wiz," he said. "Unless this is all just a facade for an even bigger operation, which isn't out of the question. It was just difficult enough to dig out that I wouldn't be surprised if it's a red herring to warn the mastermind someone is looking."

"So I'm either dealing with an above-average criminal or fucking Moriarty?" Sinead grunted.

Marc smiled, taking the USB stick out of his laptop and placing it on top of the file folders in front of her. "I'm looking forward to hearing how it goes at dinner," he said. "Saturday, 8 PM. I've made reservations at George."

Sinead gulped and hoped he didn't hear it. George was one of the nicest fine-dining restaurants in the city. The only reason she even knew about it was that she'd done a little undercover sting in Secrette, the attached speakeasy bar. The place had a fucking Michelin star, and he was planning to bring her there?

"I probably won't be able to tell you about an ongoing investigation," she said instead of what she was thinking.

"Well, I look forward to hearing any other interesting stories you can tell me," Marc said. "Now, can I offer you a glass of wine?"

"No," Sinead said, grabbing the files and the USB stick and standing from the kitchen island. "I, ah, should get right on top of this. Thank you very much for the help, Mr Fornier."

Marc raised an eyebrow at the use of his name. "It was my pleasure, Detective Connors," he replied, standing and escorting her to the door.

Sinead stopped with her hand on the door handle and turned, tucking the folder under her arm and offering him her hand. "If this works, it really is important," she said. "And... sorry, for the way things went."

Marc nodded and shook her hand with a firm grip, which somehow just made her feel worse since he wasn't a limp-wristed jackoff. "Again, my pleasure, Detective. I look forward to Saturday."

"Mhmm, thanks," she replied, heading out the door. She didn't look back until she was down the hallway at the elevator, and when she did glance back she saw Marc lingering in his doorway with his arms crossed, smiling warmly at her. "Fucking weirdo," she muttered to herself under her breath. He must have been watching her ass as she walked away. She glanced back at him again, making eye contact as the elevator arrived, and gave him a terse little smile and a nod.

God, why did she have to wear the lingerie today?

Chapter 6

"Sinead, Jules," the Captain boomed as he crossed through the Detective's desk area heading for his office. "Excellent fucking work. Here's your reward." The big man slammed down a stack of paperwork that needed filling out. "Silver and Vale and handling the retail interrogations, and Forensic Finance is handling the accountant."

"Um, what?" Sinead asked incredulously. "Why do they get to swoop in and take a crack at *our* perp?"

"Orders from on high," the Captain shrugged. "Everything you put together for the raid raised flags up the chain. High-ups think this might even get bumped up to CSIS in time if the banking shit ends up being international."

"That's not even CSIS's job," Jules said.

"The Mounties then," the Captain said with a roll of his eyes. "Or someone Federal, at least. Either way, your names are on the arrests. Who cares what Forensic Finance gets out of the pencil pusher? You're the ones that broke the case wide open. You want more glory out of it, you're going to need to do more of what you were already doing."

"Yes, sir," both women grumbled, and the Captain stalked away towards his office.

"This is such fucking bullshit," Sinead said under her breath once the Captain was far enough away not to hear it.

"Yeah, says the woman who mysteriously put together enough evidence to cobble together a multi-site raid," Jules hissed. "What exactly *were* we doing to get all of that info, Sinead?"

"Nothing, just following the money like I said at the start," Sinead shot back. "You bothered me for weeks about hounding it solo, and now you want to rag on me for you not following along?"

“That’s not what I meant,” Jules said. “It doesn’t add up, Sinead. Earlier this week you were running on fumes and couldn’t get your head out of your ass, and then in four days all of this comes together.”

“Just take it for what it is,” Sinead lied. “Hard, dogged work that should earn me back into your good graces.”

“Yeah, well pull your weight on this paperwork and maybe I’ll call us square,” Jules sighed, then smirked. “It’s only right considering all the paperwork I covered for you.”

“Fine, you got me,” Sinead said, holding her wrists out as if she was going to get cuffed by Jules. “I’m all yours, Detective.”

“Damn straight, Detective,” Jules said.

Sinead took in a breath and then grabbed the top sheets of the stack. What a way to spend a Saturday afternoon.

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Marc checked his watch again, frowning deeply.

“A drink, sir?” the waitress asked him politely.

“*Excusez-moi*, I’ll wait a moment longer,” Marc said with an apologetic smile. The waitress left him to himself with a simple nod.

Marc was being stood up. He wasn’t mad so much as... disappointed. The Detective would have made an enjoyable dinner companion for a night, and working on her little case had been fun. Most of his work these days wasn’t actually with the numbers, he had people on his team for that. He worked on the people more than the raw data, so digging into it on her case had a nostalgic quality alongside the fun of knowing it was clandestine.

But now the Detective was MIA, and he was doubting she would show up. Not even a text or a call had come through.

He was being ghosted.

Marc sighed and took out his phone, shaking his head to himself as he hit the first number on his speed dial. It rang twice before she picked up.

“*Bonjour*, dear,” Felicity’s honey-warm voice came through.

“Your accent still needs work, *ma petite fée*,” Marc said. “And it would be *bonsoir* at this time of day. Pardon, I didn’t call to give you a language lesson, though. Have you eaten tonight? I’ve been stood up.”

“She didn’t,” Felicity scoffed.

“She has,” Marc said.

“Well, I’ll be along as soon as I can, dear,” Felicity said. “Blue tonight, I think?”

“The blue would be lovely,” Marc said, thinking of the dress she was mentioning. He’d gotten it for her last year and it had a plunging neckline that she joked always made him smile after a long day.

“I’ll see you soon, dear,” Felicity said.

Marc hung up, shaking his head again. Why was it the only women in his life who were dependable were his secretary and his whore?

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Sinead looked at the restaurant from the outside. The paperwork had taken most of the afternoon, but it wasn’t the reason she was sitting out in her car instead of in the plush seating, eating fancy whatever-they-served across from Marc.

No, she was out there because she couldn’t go in. It was absurd, really, what he was asking. It was sexual harassment. It was creepy. It was...

God, she felt like a stupid teenager with all the wrong ideas in her head. Or her gut. Or somewhere else. Meeting Marc was a bad idea. She knew that. So why the fuck had she even driven here? She hadn’t dressed up at all; she was still in her pantsuit from work. She probably still had the smell of ink on her fingers from all the signatures and notes she’d had to record.

Sinead watched as a woman walked from just up the street. She was gorgeous, rocking an amazing dress that hugged her curves in all the right ways. The blonde woman had on earrings and a necklace that Sinead could spot as impressively real from across the street, and her tits... God, those were some great tits. The woman opened the door to the restaurant with a self-satisfied smile and entered.

“I don’t belong in there,” Sinead shook her head, talking to herself.

It was a bad idea all around. She needed to just walk away and write Marc Fornier out of her life. It wasn’t like he could come looking for her at the station or anything. Plus, he didn’t strike her as crazy. Or, well, *that* kind of crazy at least.

Sinead glanced at her phone again. Still just one text from him, a simple question mark. It had come in almost forty-five minutes ago. She put the phone down and reached for her keys, turning over the engine and letting the car thrum for a moment before she shifted into gear and pulled out onto the street.

Doing anything else was definitely a bad idea. Sinead didn't date suspects.

Chapter 7

"Mother fucker," Sinead swore, slamming her desk phone back into its cradle.

"Still nothing?" Jules asked, looking up from her computer.

Sinead rubbed both hands on her face and groaned. "Nothing. It's like Financial Forensics is a black hole."

"You're lucky the Captain even let you continue on the case," Jules said. Sinead's partner had been covering their day-to-day work again for about a week after Sinead had found out that nothing had progressed on the Le Français case since she'd orchestrated the raids. There had been a handful of petty charges and a bunch of fines, but nothing big. No leads that hooked the money laundering network to whoever had been organizing and using the whole thing. "What if there isn't anything else to find?"

"There has to be something else," Sinead said. "We know Le Français is still active on the street. There isn't a CI on this side of Brampton that doesn't have a rumour about him. Most of them are worthless because they're too old."

"Sinead, you're spiralling," Jules said with a deadpan expression.

"I'm not fucking spiralling," Sinead grunted. "I'm just getting fucking cockblocked here."

Jules leaned forward over her desk, lowering her voice. "What are you saying? You think Financial Forensics is covering something up?"

"To say that I'd have to know if they are doing anything at all," Sinead said. "I mean, seriously. I don't even get e-mails back, and there's an admin who takes my messages but I never get a call back."

"Could just be they are actually understaffed," Jules said.

"Maybe," Sinead said, chewing the inside of her lip. "Either way, it's dumping this case in the fucking toilet."

“Well, what did you do last time?” Jules asked. “Just do more of that if you really can’t make Financial Forensics put out work product.”

Sinead took in a deep breath and blew it out. Jules still didn’t know what Sinead had done to get the last break in the case. It had been three weeks since the raids, and the night that she’d ghosted Marc Fournier. There was no way that she could go back to him for more help.

“I’ll try,” Sinead growled more to herself than Jules. It was just numbers, right? How hard could it be to figure out a few tips and tricks?

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“Well, I got one answer at least,” Sinead said as she flopped onto the couch and picked up the beer, taking a big swig of it.

“Please, come in,” Jules said, still standing at the door of her little two-room apartment. “Help yourself to a beer.”

“Sorry,” Sinead said.

“What’s the problem?” Jules said, shutting the door and heading into her little kitchenette to grab another beer from her fridge. “What did you find out?”

“Financial Forensics isn’t just understaffed. They have two guys covering everything across the entire Greater Toronto Area. I guess it was some sort of budget cut issue, along with low wages compared to the private sector. No one with the know-how wants to stick around for a Cop’s pay.”

“Bastards,” Jules sighed. It wasn’t clear if she meant the people who quit because of the pay, the higher-ups who decided where budget cuts went, or the politicians who fucked with the Police budgets to begin with. It was usually a mix of all three when the issue came up. “At least that means there probably isn’t a mole or something.”

“Or it means that one of the guys sticking around *is* a mole and is supplementing his shitty pay to make it worth sticking around,” Jules said.

“You know you can’t investigate that,” Jules warned her. “That’s an OIPRD issue.”

“I know, I know,” Sinead said. “It’s not like I have anything but suspicions to report to the Independent Review pricks anyways.”

“So what now, then?” Jules asked. “Maybe you should take a break. You know, go out and have some fun or something. You’ve been head-down on this for almost three months now in total.”

“The money is going to disappear,” Sinead said. “If I don’t break this soon, Le Français is going to be a fucking ghost all over again.”

“What about the thing you did last time?” Jules asked. “It’s not working?”

“Teaching myself forensic accounting isn’t exactly an easy task, Jules,” Sinead grunted. It was, in fact, mind-meltingly boring and totally complicated. She had a stack of books from the public library on her coffee table at home, along with about three dozen youtube tabs open on her home laptop, and both the videos and the words were like she was learning Greek.

“Well, you’ll get it,” Jules sighed. “Just don’t burn yourself out completely. I do need you back eventually.”

“Yeah,” Sinead grumbled, thinking about what she would have to do. “Yeah.”

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“Detective,” Marc said as he opened his apartment door. It was almost eleven at night and this time he was still fully dressed. He’d just gotten home from an evening session of his PADI re-certification course. “This is a surprise.”

“Marc,” Sinead said by way of a greeting.

“Well, please come in,” Marc invited, shifting out of the way for her to enter his apartment. There were only two reasons for the Detective to have come back, and he doubted it was to deliver an apology for standing him up and ghosting him.

Sinead entered, looking somewhat mollified compared to the last several times they had met. She was in a similar outfit as before, though she was showing less cleavage and had left the pushup bra at home. Marc followed her into the kitchen, but she didn’t sit on one of the stools and instead stood with her hands braced on the kitchen island.

“I need your help,” she said.

“Really?” Marc asked. He wasn’t going to make this easy for her.

“Yes, really,” Sinead said, a spark of that fiery personality rising back up. “It’s-”

“Important,” Marc said, waving a hand dismissively. “*Rien n’est important tant que ce n’est pas important*. If it was so important for you to have my help, you certainly have an interesting way of repaying favours.”

“I was busy,” Sinead made her weak excuse.

Marc tutted and shook his head, making it clear that wasn't a good enough excuse. "You broke your word, Detective. And not only that, but you were *rude* about it. Why would I trust you at all with any further deals we made?"

"Because this *is* important," she said sternly.

"I'm going to want payment up front this time, Sinead," Marc said, swapping to her first name. It was a simple tactic, shifting the footing of the conversation. She had started to get comfortable, that edge in her voice coming back.

"Fine," Sinead said. "Whatever. I'll do a quick dinner with you. Tomorrow. Then you look at the files and-"

Marc tutted again. "No, Sinead. Dinner was a favour between friends. And, considering it all, it wasn't much of a favour at all. If you think dinner is all it will take to make up for your lies and your rudeness, you need to rethink your position."

"I can't afford your consulting fee," Sinead said.

"I don't want your money, Sinead," Marc said. "If this thing is going to happen between us, I'm going to want something more intimate than dinner, and certainly more personal than money."

Sinead dropped her jaw at his brash intimation. "How dare you?" she demanded.

"You're a beautiful woman," Marc shrugged. "And if I'm going to debase myself, I think it only fair if we feel even."

Sinead turned on her heel and stormed out. Marc didn't bother following her, and only blinked when she slammed the front door closed behind her. He'd taken a chance and planted the seed. He couldn't tend to it or water it, and maybe it would die without sprouting.

The Detective knew what the price would be now.

Marc considered calling up Felicity to see if she was free, but it was late and a weeknight. Starting something with her now would take hours, and he needed his sleep.