

Chapter Eight

His grandfather hadn't been wrong about the challenge, yet it wasn't what he expected either. Reporting for work at the DaLair Paris office he was put through orientation like any other intern. Unlike many internships in America here he would be paid the same wage as a starting employee. He would have the same vacation time as well as access to the company's benefit package.

Although it was an American company it adhered to European standards as far as vacation time and leaves of absence, including maternity leave. On top of that the company offered extended leaves which easily doubled and, in the case of maternity leave, tripled the amount available. Maternity leave was also offered to new fathers as well as mothers. According to his trainer even their CEO, Julius DaLair himself, used it when his daughter was born so they shouldn't be shy when it came to such requests.

In fact, his trainer spent a good portion of the time singing the praises of their illustrious boss. It seemed Julius DaLair made quite an impression on his subordinates earning praise and loyalty. Between the DaLair's ruthless persona and these praises Marcus wasn't sure what to expect when he finally met the infamous Julius DaLair. However his first assignment as Julius's personal assistant blew all of his expectations out of the water.

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"What is this?" Julius asked eyeing the thin file he had been handed.

"It's the report on the Otthild proposal you asked for," Marcus said with a bored sigh.

For two weeks he had been instructed in the mundane tasks of learning the company's computer system and general operations. Once others found out the position Marcus had been hired to take they usually responded with looks of astonishment, awe or jealousy. One or two looked at him with pity and he eventually learned why.

Though Julius was much beloved by his underlings there was also an unspoken understanding that he was a hard taskmaster to please. This was the first assignment that required Marcus to directly report to Julius. Opening the file he perused the contents with a frown.

"It's concise, easy to read and...worthless," Julius sighed closing it. "Did you spend more than ten minutes on this?"

"...Twenty," Marcus hesitated.

"Do you think you could do better with forty?"

"I'm not sure what the issue is. You asked for a review of the proposal. I listed all the pros and cons as well as projected profits."

"And what about Otthild? What did you find out about him?"

"Otthild? I don't understand."

"Otthild, the person. Who is he? What are his aspirations? Where did he study? What was his major? Is he a drinker? Does he have a family?"

"Why does that matter?"

"It's a question about motivation and focus. Otthild isn't the only proposal I'm considering. I have at least five others that are very similar. I need to know which one is the better investment."

"But shouldn't that come down to the amount they are asking for?" Marcus asked. If the proposals were similar then it would come down to who was asking for more money and the potential profits.

"It's about weighing risk versus rewards," Julius said. "If two proposals are similar but one person already has a lab while the other one doesn't and therefore needs a larger start-up fund which increases the initial investment which do you invest in?"

"The first one?"

"What if person A is known to drink heavily?"

Marcus hesitated. Did that really matter?

"It may take longer for person B to get rolling because they need to build their infrastructure but if they are passionate and focused then they will achieve results better and faster than the first who spends the majority of their time in a bottle. Understand?"

Marcus grimaced at the comparison but he recognized what Julius was trying to explain. It was far riskier to invest in the first person if they were unreliable.

"What's more a lot of start-ups look for multiple investors so that the financial burden is shared. But more investors mean more people wanting results and expecting a profit which can lead to conflicts of interest: too many chefs in the kitchen. If the investment looks good maybe I want to offer more to keep out those other chefs."

Marcus hadn't even considered that option. While he deliberated this Julius pulled a thick file from his desk and set it down next to the one Marcus had given him.

"When I ask for information, this is what I expect."

Marcus accepted it with some trepidation and read it carefully. It was the Otthild proposal. There was very little information about the proposal itself. Instead it detailed his education, family, mentors as well as how long he had been in charge of his own offices. There was even a copy of Otthild's college dissertation which seemed to focus on the same issue as the proposal.

"You already researched it?"

"Of course. It was too important to leave to an intern. This was a test to see how dedicated you are. I had to know."

Marcus rolled his eyes. He was annoyed he had been asked to do something Julius clearly handled himself. What was the point of wasting his time?

Aloud he said, "Look we both know why I am here..."

"Correction, I know why your grandfather sent you here, but that doesn't really tell me anything about you," Julius said. "I've never had a personal assistant. I've had several that tried out for the position and none of them lasted a month. Should I go easy on you because you don't want to be here when they actually wanted the job?"

"I'm not going to kill myself for a job."

"Who's asking you to? All that information took me about two hours to compile," Julius nodded to the file.

Marcus looked at him, dubious.

"Here, this is my planner. Have a look," Julius tossed him a date book. "Go on. Tell me what you see."

Marcus sighed reading the weekly entries, "Caden's recital, Macey's exhibit opening, Lyra—spelling bee; Aria choir performance..."

"Now tell me what you don't see," Julius challenged. His implication was obvious as there was not a single mention of board meetings or work-related events. "When I need to schedule a meeting I check that first because that is what is important."

Julius stood taking his jacket off from the back of his chair. He shrugged into it before accepting the planner back. He gave Marcus a hard, appraising look. There was nothing hostile in his gaze but Marcus still found it hard to meet.

"Set your priorities and keep them. Never compromise," Julius intoned. "I almost lost the most important things in my life once and I won't ever do that again. This company's future is important for my children's future so I have to take it seriously, but I won't put it ahead of them. Now I have to go."

"Go? It's only two o'clock."

"Coda has a soccer game today, excuse me, football game. Priorities. You'll understand when it's your turn."

Marcus rolled his eyes. That would never happen. But was it really okay for the boss to simply leave in the middle of the day?

"Look over the Otthild proposal again and make sure you memorize how he likes his coffee. He'll be here tomorrow to discuss the proposal in person."

"His coffee? Why?"

Julius smirked, "You'll be amazed how much more smoothly negotiations go when you give them their favorite drink just the way they like it before they even tell you how they want it. It really sets the tone."

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There had been a mischievous glint in Julius's eye and it was a look Marcus soon became very familiar with. It turned out Julius had a wicked sense of humor but that didn't stop him from taking the job seriously. For the life of him Marcus couldn't figure out how Julius earned a reputation for being a maverick because he certainly wasn't.

Every business decision was carefully thought out, planned and executed. He had an amicable personality with his subordinates and friends but he was no less ruthless and decisive as his father and brother.

Except where his children and wife were concerned.