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When Charlie started her shift on Sunday, Jenni had a talk with her about her new schedule.

"If you can still work at the Thursday club, I am happy about that," Jenni said.

"Of course, and if you need me to take more shifts, it's okay. I'm sorry I didn't speak to you before accepting Mr Grims' offer," she said. Jenni waved her hand.

"Don't. I get it. He offers you a chance to work with what you are passionate about. You're a good waitress, the customers like you, you show up on time, you work hard even with tasks you don't like. Once your work with Vidar is done, you are more than welcome to start working full time here again," Jenni told her.

"I appreciate it. Really, I am grateful you gave me a chance and hired me. I would hate to seem ungrateful."

"No, no. Not at all. I know you appreciate your work. I'm going to tell you a secret if you promise to keep it between the two of us," Jenni said.

"I promise."

"The original Thursday club donated a large sum of money when I was trying to get this business started. Without their contribution, I could never have got the project off the ground. The only request they made was that

they could use the back room once a week for their meetings. During my time running this place, the money they spend on Thursday evenings, not including the tip, has sometimes kept the bar afloat. If they ask something of me, I will gladly give it to them," she told Charlie. To Charlie it sounded like Jenni had been running the bar for centuries, but she couldn't be much older than thirty. Then, maybe it felt like a lifetime, trying to get a bar to survive, Charlie thought.

The following day was her first day working for Grim INC. Lucas had arranged for her to have her own office next to his. It wasn't the small broom closet she usually got as a consultant. She even had a window which let in natural light. The work was challenging, the system Grim INC used had been designed and built by Lucas and was maintained by him and four other persons. As all systems that were custom-built, it took time to understand how it worked. Nothing was standard, everything was unique. Some things were documented, either in user manuals or directly in the code, but most things were not. Her first week, Charlie had to forget all about trying to find the leak and just focus on trying to figure the system out. Lucas was of great help, as was the rest of the IT team. Charlie didn't run in to Vidar at all during the week. Which, she told herself, was natural. He had no business in the IT department. Harder to explain was why she felt disappointed by it.

Thursday came sooner than expected and as Charlie made her way towards the back room at 'The red lady', she realised Vidar hadn't told her if him hiring her was a secret or not. She still hadn't figured out the dynamic between the men in the Thursday club. There seemed to be some kind of

friendship, or respect, between them. But sometimes there also was an underlying current of anger and rivalry. She decided she would follow Vidar's lead.

"Good evening, gentlemen. I took the liberty of guessing what drinks you wanted," she said as she walked into the room, handing out their usual drinks. No one objected, they greeted her with friendly smiles. Everyone but Vidar. He was obviously back to ignoring her. Charlie could take a hint, especially when it was the size of a Times square billboard.

"We were thinking of switching it up and play Texas hold'em. Would you consider being the croupier?" Charles asked.

"I would love to. As long as you promise you won't cheat when I need to get new drinks," Charlie agreed. This new development was an improvement. As a dealer, she couldn't sit in anyone's lap. The night proceeded in its usual way. Charlie spent the first part of the evening with the men, joking, talking, making sure they had what they wanted. Soon the name guessing game continued. Even though Charlie knew Vidar had the correct answer, he ignored it, focusing on his cards. It irritated Charlie, and she got even more irritated because she let herself become irritated. What was it with the blond giant that got under her skin? After a while, it was time for the men to talk business, and Charlie took their food order and said she would be back in an hour. She spent the hour helping out in the general bar area and talking to Lilly.

"Do you want to come over on Saturday?" Charlie asked Lilly. "Nea can come as well," she offered.

"I would love to come over. An invitation from you happens once in a blue moon. Nea and I are broken up," Lilly informed her.

"I'm sorry, is it... permanent?" Charlie asked.

"I think so. But then I thought so the last eight times we broke up," she said, sounding tired.

"Come over to my place, we will drink gin and tonic and eat our weight in butter chicken and we will talk about the fucked up mess our love lives are," Charlie said, giving her friend a short hug.

"It's a date," Lilly agreed. The rest of the night continued as usual. The men ate, then they continued playing cards until closing time. Charlie helped with the cleanup and Jenni handed her the now familiar white envelope with her tip. As Charlie put on her regular clothes, a question popped into her head. Would Vidar give her a lift home tonight as well? He had done so the other two Thursday nights. As she made her way towards the bus station, she told herself she was being an idiot. The first time he had helped her when she had missed her bus, the second time he had wanted to make her an offer. There was no reason for him to give her a ride for a third time. She checked her phone. Eight minutes until the bus would be there. While she focused on her phone, a car pulled up in front of her. She smiled and looked up and saw James sitting in the driver's seat, smiling back at her. Why was she disappointed?

"James?" she asked as she bent down a little.

"Get in. I'll give you a ride home," he told her. She didn't see how she

could refuse, or why she would. When she had sat down, a black car drove by. It seemed familiar. Had it been him? "Charlie?" James asked. She looked at him and realised he must have asked her something.

"Sorry, I spaced out. It has been a long day. What are you doing here?" she asked.

"It's okay, I get you are tired. I got caught up in a case at work and realised it was around closing time when we were done. I got some tea and doughnuts and took a chance I would get here in time. Seems it's my lucky night," he smiled and pointed at the takeaway cups in the cup holders between the seats and a bag that had grease stains on it. Charlie opened the bag and was met by the smell of freshly made doughnuts.

"Oh dear lord, this is just what I needed," she sighed as she took a bite and then she took another one and handed to James. Instead of taking it from her, he bent down and took a bite. When she gave him a questioning look, he smiled.

"Need both hands for driving, ten and two and all that," he said, sounding proud. She laughed and kept feeding him his doughnut while finishing her own. He pulled up to her apartment building and turned the car off. He handed her one of the mugs. "Drink. The tea is supposed to be calming and help with sleep. I always get it when I'm working late, but it doesn't work on me," he told her.

"That might be because you eat your body weight in sugar at the same time," she pointed out as she took a new doughnut. He laughed and nodded.

"That might be it," he admitted. Then he looked at her and then at the bag.

"What?" she asked.

"My hands are clean, no sugar. Do you expect me to get them all sticky? How am I going to drive home with a sticky hand?" he asked and did his best try at puppy dog eyes. Charlie shook her head, put the doughnut she had started eating between her teeth and took out a new one and held it up to him. "Thank you," he said. They sat for a while, eating and talking.

"Thank you, James, this was a good way to end a long night," Charlie told him as she tried to clean the sugar of her fingers with a napkin.

"It was my pleasure. I needed to unwind as well. Was it good enough to trade for a kiss?" he asked. Charlie smiled. She leaned in and placed a quick peck on his lips. James looked disappointed.

"That was to hold you over until tomorrow. I'll see you then," she told him and got out off the car.

Lesley Freckelton

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I love the way she told him the kiss would hold him over until their date the next night

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Error correction of this chapter