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The next day, Charlie was nervous. It felt like this date with James would be the real deal. Their first had been a test run to see if the dynamic of going from friends to something else would work. It had been positive. Then yesterday he had been sweet and caring and it had set the expectation for this evening. There was only one thing to do: go shopping. Charlie needed a dress that made her feel sexy and confident. She tried to avoid spending money if it wasn't necessary. But sometimes you had to treat yourself.

Three hours later, she returned home, having found the perfect dress and shoes to go with it. She also had lunch and had bought new fish food for her lovelies. Charlie spent a couple of hours at her computer before starting to get ready. She styled her hair into a messy style. The dress was a dream in deep purple. It was a short cocktail dress which looked like someone had wrapped sparkling purple fabric around her, enhancing her natural curves. It created a slit in the front where a lighter fabric peaked out. The shoes were the same colour as the dress, covered in sequins. She felt amazing as she looked in the mirror. She added a small black clutch for her phone, some money and a lipstick. At exactly eight o'clock, the doorbell rang. Charlie smiled at the stunned look on James' face as she opened the door.

"Hi," she said.

"Oh, hello. You look.... that dress. Wow, you look amazing," James finally said.

"Thank you. You look very sexy. I like you in a suit," she told him.

"Ready to go?" he asked, holding out his arm.

"Ready," she said, grabbing her keys before taking his arm.

"I was thinking we should go to the new place, 'Fortuna'," he told her as they got into his car.

"Isn't it a bit pricey?" she said.

"Don't think about it. This is my treat. You have dressed up and you deserve to go to a fancy place that can try to match your beauty," he told her. "And I have already made reservations. I was thinking of a drink at the bar. It's supposed to be very nice, and then dinner. After that, we will take it as it comes," he suggested.

"That sounds lovely," she agreed. It was. The bar had an understated luxury that only came from spending lots of money on the interior design. The staff was professional and just friendly enough that they made the guests feel relaxed, but not crowded. James helped her sit down at a small table and sat down opposite of her. They talked about old memories and laughed. Charlie enjoyed being on the receiving end of the excellent service at the bar and had ordered a Gimlet, which was her go to drink when out. James ordered a scotch on the rocks.

"Would you excuse me for a moment? I need to use the restroom," James said. Charlie nodded. As soon as he left the table, Charlie's phone buzzed. She looked at it, there was a message from an unknown number.

?: Are you on a date?

Charlie looked at the message. Was someone following her? Why should they, in that case, let her know they were following her?

C: Who are you?

?: I'm your boss. Answer my question!

C: Jenni?

?: No, lilla lo, your other boss.

C: Mr Grim? Are you having me followed?

Charlie frowned, but added his name into her phone.

V: Answer my question!

C: No! I'm on my own time. And if you are having me followed, then fuck you. I have a right to a personal life.

V: Look at the far corner of the bar.

Charlie frowned again, but did what the message said. There, in the dark corner, sat Vidar. His eyes locked on her.

C: Why are you here?

V: I own this place. I'm here to check on my investment. Answer my question, lilla lo.

C: Why do you keep calling me 'lilla lo'?

V: Answer the question and I might tell you.

C: Not that I see why it's any of your business, but yes. I'm on a date.

V: Do you know who he is?

C: Of course I do.

V: Is this your way of telling me you are still employed by the police?

Charlie shook her head. What was he talking about? She briefly considered that her new boss had been drinking too much. But then, she had seen him down large amounts of alcohol during a night without being drunk.

C: No. You have my employment records. Why would you assume that?

V: Your little playmate isn't being entirely honest with you, lilla lo. Why don't you ask him what he is working on at the moment?

Charlie was about to answer him when James came walking. She put her phone away to focus on the date. But she couldn't relax. In the back of her mind, the nagging voice of Vidar kept bating her to ask James what he was working on. She tried to ignore it and enjoy the conversation. When the hostess came to show them to their table, she glanced at the back corner and saw Vidar watching her every step. It should creep her out, but for some reason, it didn't. But she was acutely aware of his eyes on her. They sat down, listened to the specials, and ordered. As the waitress walked away, there was a lull in the conversation.

"So, what exciting case are you working on at the moment?" Charlie asked,

as calmly and aloof as she could. She saw James tense up, and it got her suspicion going. He tried to smile at her, but it looked forced.

"You know I can't talk about that," he told her. She raised an eyebrow. He had never held back information like that before. She knew it was the policy of the department, but James had always talked about his work in their close friend's group.

"Since when?" she asked with a laugh. She hoped she was better at acting than he was. She saw him shifting uncomfortably in his seat. "It's okay, James. I'm only teasing you," she said in a light tone. He relaxed and gave her a smile full of relief. There was definitely something he wanted to hide from her, Charlie thought. The date continued. It would have been the perfect date if it wasn't for her knowing James was hiding something from her.

"Is everything okay?" James asked as they were driving home.

"Yes, thank you for a wonderful date," she said. He smiled and reached for her hand. "I thought you needed both hands to drive," she commented and she let him intertwine their fingers. He laughed.

"One of my more smooth moves. I'm quite proud of it," he confessed. Charlie laughed with him. This was James, she thought. Her brother's best friend, someone she had known most of her life. She knew he would never do something to hurt her or put her in danger. And it wasn't like she had been completely honest with him. She still hadn't told him about her new job. She would let it go. James would tell her when he could, she could trust

him. He parked the car and followed her to her door.

"It has been a wonderful evening," she told him.

"It has. When can I see you again? Are you free tomorrow?" he asked, taking her hand.

"Sorry, I have a girl date with Lilly. She broke up with Nea," she told him.

"Again? If they make it to ten breakups, are we supposed to celebrate it?" he asked. Charlie chuckled.

"This is number nine, according to Lilly, so I guess we will find out," she told him. He shook his head.

"She could do so much better," he said. Charlie agreed with him.

"Let's hope this time it sticks," she told him.

"So, if you are ignoring me tomorrow, when are you free next time?"

"Next Friday," she answered.

"How about Wednesday evening? I could come over with pizza and beer and we could watch tv?" he asked.

"Have you forgotten I don't own a TV?" she asked.

"Right," he chuckled. "So I'll get you and we can go to my place?"

"Sure, you have yourself a date," Charlie agreed. James smiled. There was a

moment of silence. They both looked at each other, both knowing where the moment was headed. Charlie knew that if she was to back off, this was the time. Instead, she leaned a little closer to him. It was all James needed. He cupped her cheek and closed the distance between them. The kiss was nice. He was a good kisser, Charlie thought as she let her arms wrap around his neck. His free hand took a hold of her waist and drew her body flush with his. Charlie wondered if she should invite him in, but her instinct said no. She was too occupied to analyse her response. She just accepted it wasn't the right moment. As they came up for air, she pecked a quick kiss on his lips and drew back.

"You keep surprising me, Charlie," James said. He sounded out of breath and a little dazed.

"Right back at you, James. I'm looking forward to Wednesday," she said. He smiled and nodded.

"Go inside. I'll wait until you lock the door," he told her. She gave him a quick kiss.

"That is for being so sweet," she told him before going inside and locking the door. She took off her dress and got into a tank top and panties, poured herself a glass of juice, and plopped down in her computer chair. Charlie watched the fish swim around in their tank. She should be happy, at peace. She had had an amazing date with a man that was caring and sweet, and who had kissed her with passion. So why couldn't she let go of her conversation with Vidar? Why was it so hard to forget his eyes following her all evening? Against her better judgment, she took out her phone.

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C: What is James working on?

She sent the message before she could change her mind. The answer came almost instantly.

V: Did you ask him?

Charlie frowned. Vidar obviously knew the answer, and he wanted her to know. So why was he playing games with her?

C: Why won't you just tell me?

V: Why are you dating someone who isn't honest with you?

C: I don't know he isn't being honest. He's a good man.

V: So why are you texting me at one in the morning?

Charlie looked at the last message and chewed her bottom lip. That was a good question. She should put the phone down and go to bed. Forget all about it.

C: Just tell me.

C: Please

V: You deserve better, lilla lo. You shouldn't settle for scraps. You should hold out for someone who worships you and who can set you on fire with a single glance.

C: Are you making an offer?

Charlie stared at the screen. Why on earth had she sent that? He was her boss, and even worse, he was one of the best customers 'The red lady' had. With one sentence, she might have lost both her jobs. She was an idiot.

V: Careful, Charmeze, you are playing with a fire that will burn you to ashes.

Charlie's mouth felt dry and when she reached for her glass of juice, her hand was shaking. She remembered the feeling of his eyes following her, and her body felt like it was on fire.

V: As a gift from your benefactor, and as someone with an interest in play. Your good man is investigating me. He has been quite persistent in finding something illegal with me or my business. Sweet dreams, lilla lo.

Marcelle McCalla

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Dang, I don't know if that was a warning of getting burned or an invitation to get cl...

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Error correction of this chapter