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"Miss Charmeze Maynard," Vidar said. He had a smirk on his face and Charlie got the message. He now knew her first name, and the game on Thursday nights was his to win. "This is the head of my IT department, Lucas Peniro."

"Hello," Charlie said and shook the hand of the younger man. He looked like the definition of an IT nerd, she thought. His dark, curly hair looked like it hadn't been brushed for a week and the glasses with the heavy black frame took away from his dark brown eyes. He was dressed in black dress pants, a little too big for him, a jacket that wasn't buttoned and showed the white shirt underneath, complete with a pocket protector full of pens in his breast pocket.

"Nice to meet you, Miss Maynard," Lucas said.

"Please, call me Charlie," she said.

"Sure, Charlie. As long as you call me Lucas. Mr Grim hasn't told me much about your background. Could you please enlighten me?" he asked.

"Lucas, it's custom to ask her to sit down and offer something to drink," Vidar said, in an amused tone.

"Right, sorry," Lucas said, looking around as if he had no idea where they should go.

"Please, Miss Maynard, take a seat. Do you want something to drink?" Vidar

asked. He showed her to a group with a couch and two armchairs, all in grey-blue velvet.

"Thank you," she said and sat down in one of the armchairs. "I'm fine, no drink necessary," she added and opened her bag to take out what she had prepared for the meeting. She handed the neat stack of papers to Lucas. "This is a record of my education and my certifications, a list of the freelance work I have done and a list of references you can call," she told him.

"Oh, well prepared," Lucas said as he took a seat on the couch and started reading. Vidar looked at Lucas with amusement and sat down in the free armchair.

"Have you included your employment as a waitress at 'The red lady' in you CV?" Vidar asked. Charlie almost frowned. His tone made her believe he thought she was ashamed of her work in the bar.

"Naturally, it showcases my talent for customer communication and dealing with demanding persons," she answered.

"Police department, Holier Inc.," Lucas mumbled.

"And that you dropped out of school?" Vidar asked. It was a touchy subject for Charlie, but she wanted this job. It would be a good addition to her CV for when she was ready to go after her dream job.

"I haven't dropped out of school. I'm taking a sabbatical for personal reasons," she told him.

"Those reasons being anything we should know?" he asked.

"No, Mr Grim. Nothing that will impact the work I perform."

"This is an impressive background, Miss Maynard, Charlie," Lukas said as he finally looked up from the papers.

"Thank you," she said and smiled at him.

"Give me the short version. I don't see myself reading through it," Vidar said.

"A bachelor's degree in information science from an ivy league, certified in a hand full of programming languages, both some of the most used ones as well as some of the more obscure ones. She also holds certificates in the most sought after data security protocols. Two summer internships at the top law firm in the city as a forensic IT investigator, two years into a bachelor in Cyber Security, she has worked as a freelancer for the police department, for three major cooperations and for the law firm where she was an intern," Lucas said.

"All the while being a waitress by night," Vidar said.

"Yes," Charlie agreed.

"If you are as good as those papers say you are, why are you working at 'The red lady'? Isn't it a waste of your talents?" Vidar asked. Charlie got the feeling he was trying to provoke her. Well, let the idiot try, she thought.

"May I be honest?" she asked.

"I would prefer it to you lying."

"The money. On a good night at 'The red lady', I earn what takes me about two weeks to earn as a freelancer," she told him.

"Is money that important to you?" he asked. He seemed genuinely surprised.

"Yes," she confessed. He nodded.

"Would you excuse us for a moment?" he then asked.

"Of course. Do you want me to wait outside?"

"No, stay, we will leave," Vidar said, and he left together with Lucas. Charlie spent the time admiring the interior design of the office and wondering if she had been too honest. Vidar irritated her. It felt like he was poking her with a stick to see how she would react. She hated to admit it, but he had made her show glimpses of her temper. Which annoyed her even more. She was usually better at holding it back. The door opened, and the men came back. Lucas had a smile on his face and Vidar looked like he was going to have all his teeth extracted without anaesthesia. "I am prepared to make you an offer," Vidar said as he sat down. "I want you to come and work for me. Lucas will be your manager. We think we have an issue in our system. It will be your job to work with Lucas to identify the issue and make it go away. I will talk to Miss Termene and let her know your shifts at 'The red lady' have to reduce. I will need you at least four days a week. What you do with the other three days, I don't care. To make my colleagues happy, I will let you have Thursdays and Fridays off. You can pick the last day. I will match you pay on an average day at 'The red lady'. Do you accept?"



Charlie looked at Vidar. Was he serious?

"Are you aware of how much I earn in tip during a night?" she asked.

"I'm not, but I assume you are going to tell me," he said.

"And you will match it?"

"That's what I said." Charlie was still trying to wrap her head around the offer. She was being handed a dream job, making more money than she ever had been offered.

"I accept," she said.

"Good, please write the sum down here and I will have my lawyer draw up the contract. In the meantime, follow Lucas. He has an NDA for you to sign. After that he will fill you in on what is happening and you can arrange a schedule. I will call for you once the contract is done. You will get you security badge and after that you are free to leave for the day," Vidar said.

"Yes, sir. Thank you," Charlie told him. He nodded and then ignored her while Lucas stood up and guided her out of the office and down one floor to where he had his office.

"This is so exciting. I'm looking forward to working with you," he told her as he showed her to sit on a visitor's chair by his desk. He handed her the NDA.

"Thank you, I'm looking forward to it as well," Charlie said and found it was the truth. She read through the NDA and found it to be in order, so she

signed it.

"Oh boy, I finally get to talk about this with someone who understands what I'm telling them," Lucas said, sounding like a child on Christmas morning. Charlie laughed. He started to tell her what he had found. She listened and asked some questions along the way. He was good at what he did, and passionate, Charlie realised. She enjoyed discussing the case with him. It was just as rare for her to find someone to talk about these things with.

"I'm impressed," she finally said.

"You are?"

"I am. I can't go into detail. But I was working on a similar thing with the police department. They knew someone was extracting information from a system, but they couldn't figure out how. It took me a month to figure it out. And you have found it based on a tiny delay in sending emails to yourself. I'm impressed," she told him. Lucas puffed out his chest a little and gave her a bigger smile.

"I must say this is brilliant," he said. "I usually talk these things through with Mr Grim and Mr Fosaugh, he's the head of security, but they don't really understand it. Then I need to find an analogy that never can be exactly the same. It's very frustrating," he told her. She laughed.

"I can imagine it has to be," she agreed. Lucas' phone chimed, and he looked at it.

"Mr Grim is ready for you. I'll walk you up," he said.

"Thank you."

"Would it be okay for you to start on Monday at nine?" he asked as they headed towards Vidar's office.

"That suits me fine," Charlie said. They reached the top floor and the woman at the desk looked up as they walked up to her.

"You can go straight inside," she told Charlie.

"Thank you," Charlie told her. "I'll see you on Monday, Lucas."

"Yeah, just come up to my office and we will get you settled in," he said and turned back to the elevator. Charlie walked up to the huge door and knocked.

"Enter." She walked in and saw Vidar was sitting behind his desk. He was looking at her. "Good. Come in and close the door. Take a seat," he said, indicating the visitor's chair. Charlie did as she was told, and he handed her a contract. "Read it." So she did. It was not a standard contract. But it wasn't unfair in any way. It clearly stated she would be paid what she had written down on the note, it outlined how many hours per week minimum she needed to work for him, that any findings needed to be handed over to either him, Lucas or the head of security with a report explaining the findings. It listed the causes for termination, for renewal, and so on.

"I'm ready to sign," she told him. He nodded and handed her a pen. They signed a copy of the contract each and then exchanged them to sign the others.

"You keep that copy," he said. "Have you made arrangement when to begin?" he asked.

"Yes, Monday at nine."

"Good. This is your security badge. You can just hand in your guest badge at the front desk when you are leaving today. You can use the regular elevators from now on. Just show your security badge to the screen outside them and they will open. That is all," he told her, sliding a plastic card across the desk.

"Thank you, Mr Grim," she said, taking the badge. As she clearly had been dismissed, she walked out of the office, nodded at the woman at the front desk and took the elevator down. She looked at the security badge. It had a picture of her, taken sometime during the day, her name and an employee number. She handed in her visitor's badge and took out her phone to turn it on. That was when she realised it was almost five o'clock. She wouldn't have much time to get ready for her date.

Carol Searle

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So far this is a good story. I think that Charlie and Vidar might get together???

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