

Forty One

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8 months prior to present time

The lemon cream fish wasn't as delicious as he had expected it to be. He was rather disappointed.

But then again, only few times in a million was he ever satisfied with the food that restaurants served. He would naturally gravitate towards stronger, richer flavors. This didn't exactly hit the spot. Certainly not like his mother's legendary paella would.

"I heard that Oliver got his appointment at the Herendale Medical Center," the blonde haired man who sat across him, muttered immediately after swallowing a cherry tomato.

"Yeah, he works there now," Antonio replied as he sipped on the red wine. "It's what he wanted. He didn't want to deal with the trouble of moving," ¹

"Fair, I would say. Finding a good place isn't easy,"

"I agree," he said, taking another sip.

"Speaking of residences, he lives close by, huh?" he questioned Antonio, as he popped an olive in his mouth.

"Floor above mine," the Spaniard sighed, recalling all the times he would come home drunk on a Friday night and try to barge into his penthouse by pressing '14' instead of '15'.

"You meet him often?"





"I try not to," Antonio replied as he raised his eyebrows, earning a laugh from his friend. "He mentioned you recently,"

"Did he?"

"He did. He said 'Jonathan started his own company. Here I am, still paying off my student loans,'"

Jonathan chuckled, trying his best not to choke on the wine. "I did start up a company. I'm just not really one to mention it in a conversation,"

"Mm hmm," Antonio nodded. "I'm guessing it's thriving; you're upgrading to a Corvette,"

"Well I wouldn't want to jinx anything," he chuckled nervously. "I got to know through Oliver, to be honest; about your car that is in a perfectly fine condition with not too much mileage,"

"Oh," Antonio mumbled. "Why am I not surprised?"

Jonathan chuckled once more upon hearing the indirect insult. "I was surprised by how much he knew about your cars,"

"Well, other things aside, Oliver's driving skills are satisfactory," he said hoping to satisfy the man's curiosity.

"You let him borrow them?"

"I do; once in a while,"

"He didn't tell me you were generous like that,"



"Of course he didn't," Antonio muttered.

"So I'm guessing you're looking to upgrade?"

"That is the plan," he nodded, pursing his lips.

"Have you decided what to buy yet?"

"No solid decisions as of now," Antonio replied curtly, determined not to give away anymore information. He was most certainly not about to mention the Bentley Flying Spur that he had his eye on.

"Right," Jonathan pursed his lips.

"Probably not an SUV,"

"In my honest opinion, sedans fit you better too,"

Antonio chuckled as he took in the unusual statement. 'Uh huh..' ¹

The boring conversation about engines and mileage continued for 20 minutes and 47 seconds more, before Antonio glanced at his watch.

"I should probably get going," he said after taking the last sip of his wine.

"Me too," Jonathan sat up straight as he prepared to leave. "I've some things to take care of,"

'Thank goodness' Antonio thought. He couldn't wait to get back to doing nothing at home.

He didn't quite understand why Jonathan wanted to physically meet

Forty One

up to discuss the deal. It could've been done over the phone just as effectively.

After all, they did study at the same university. They were associates for those few years.

Jonathan would consider Antonio a 'friend' right off the bat.

Antonio, on the other hand, wasn't too sure about his end of the relationship. He would've been quite comfortable with 'acquaintance'. Surely, he wouldn't go as far as calling him a 'friend'.

Not many people in his life, would he describe as 'friends'.

After all, 'Being evil is something only humans are capable of,' said Jane Goodall; primatologist and anthropologist.

And he therefore believed that trust should only be given very selectively.

"Dessert?"

"I'm actually going to skip that one," Antonio said, patiently.

"Oh that's great," Jonathan's face lit up. "I'm trying to cut down on sugar myself. My gym instructor wasn't too excited when I told him that I like sugar in my coffee,"

"Sugar is the enemy," Antonio shrugged, hoping that this conversation wouldn't drag out for too long.

After half a glass more of wine and a slightly reasonable excuse, he found himself walking out of the restaurant at 1.34 p.m.

Having exchanged their goodbyes, the two parted ways. Antonio made his way towards his black Chevy Corvette C6.

He took a deep breath as the engine of the car that he would soon part with, roared to life. He'd only used it for 2 years, but decided to sell it when he received a very unexpected call from Jonathan Collins, that mentioned that he was hoping to buy a Corvette C6.

The purchase will be made ASAP; he said.

Making his mind up to contact a dealer right away, he passed the exit and onto the narrow lane.

As he took the left turn, a slender figure dressed in blue cut across and stopped immediately in-front of the shiny black buffer of the sedan.

"Qué m****a!?" Antonio slammed his foot on the brakes. He stared in disbelief, at the woman who stood before him, panic stricken. She rushed over towards his side of the car and bent over to meet his eyes.

She was evidently in the process of running away from something; panting and looking over her shoulder repeatedly.

"What!?" Antonio yelled.

"Help me!" the woman screamed.

"M****a..." he groaned as he pulled the shutter down just enough to hear her properly. "Que!? What do you want?"

"You have to let me in. They're chasing me!" She screamed in an unusual accent.

Scoffing, Antonio watched the woman in disbelief.

"Come on! Please!" she pleaded.

Group mugging? He started to wonder as he spotted two men running towards the car.

Her hands... are empty. The chances of this woman being armed are pretty low.

Perhaps just another gold digger?

What kind of mischief was this woman involved in to have two men dressed in black suits, chase her down the lane?

Well, Antonio was certain that it seemed like the kind of business he didn't want to get involved in.

To his relief, the woman started to run, down the lane and away from his car as the two men were closing in on her.

"Hmm," Antonio narrowed his eyes as he analyzed the situation.

After few seconds of observation, the two men ran past his car, following her.

She was extremely lucky Antonio was having a fairly satisfactory day. If not, he wouldn't have pulled over beside her and let her jump in the passenger's seat.

"Hurry up!" he yelled.

Before she could shut the door Antonio slammed his foot on the accelerator, allowing the car to race down the lane.

Once they were safely away from danger, Antonio pulled over. "What's your deal?" He snapped, not making the effort to turn to look at her.

"I'm sorry?"

"Don't act as if you weren't just being chased by a bunch of goons," he rolled his eyes at the woman's ignorance.

"Oh... that.."

Antonio simply glared at her. "If you're not going to talk, you'd better get the hell out of my car,"

The brown eyed woman sighed. "I'm sure it's obvious that I'm not from around here,"

"Illegal immigrant?"

"Not exactly. My arrival here was very legal, but..." she said. "I'm here without my trust fund,"

Antonio chuckled. "Trust fund?"

"What's so funny?"

"Let me guess..." he muttered. "You are from somewhere in Asia or Africa... your parents sent you here.. alone... to fend for yourself..." he

Forty One

said, observing her intently. "You thought working at a club or bar could earn you big bucks and that's exactly what you did... before you got into some mischief..." Antonio's lips curled into a small smile as he watched the haughtiness in her face slowly crumble down. " Judging by the audacity you have displayed so far, it's very likely that it was a dispute... with a customer... no... a co-worker," he watched her gaze fall low in regret. Satisfied with his deductions, Antonio sat back, giving her a smug smile.

"How did you know I'm from Asia?"

"Your accent,"

"I could be Spanish... or Italian"

"Por quién me tomas?" Antonio raised an eyebrow at her. 1

"Oh... you're Spanish..." she muttered and looked away, embarrassed.

"And I also have friends from Middle East,"

"Okay, you're right," she said in defeat. "I'm from Iran,"

"Ah.. that wasn't so difficult, was it?" 52



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