

Blood red love

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Charlie was looking into the car, and Vidar was looking back at her.

“My bus will be here any moment, but thank you,” Charlie said. Nothing changed. Vidar kept looking at her. The driver was still holding the door open, and Charlie was feeling as awkward as ever. She would hold out this time, she told herself. Vidar slowly raised an eyebrow, and Charlie sighed. The bus would drive past if it came right now, as it looked like she was getting into a car. She surrendered and got into the car. “Thank you,” she told the driver. She watched him close the door and get back into the driver’s seat.

“Same hotel as last time, mademoiselle?” he asked.

“Yes, please,” she answered, and they were off.

“I have a proposition for you,” Vidar said. Charlie didn’t expect him to speak. He hadn’t during their last car ride and he had been ignoring her all night. Therefore it took her a moment to realise what he had said.

“I’m grateful for the ride, Mr Vidar, but I’m not into any kind of propositions you have,” she told him and she felt her pulse pick up. She was in a car with two strange men. If Vidar wanted to push the subject, Charlie didn’t think his driver would come to her defence. She should have listened to James, she thought. Vidar raised the damned eyebrow again and looked at her as if he was trying to figure something out.

“Ah, excuse my poor choice of words. I assure you I’m not interested in your body in any way,” he then said. Ouch, did he really have to make it sound like he was repulsed by the idea?

“Okay?” she said.

“I am interested in making a business agreement,” he added.

“What kind of business?” she asked. He looked uncomfortable.

“I realise I need to tell you in order to get you interested. But I can’t disclose any details until you have signed an NDA,” he told her. Charlie nodded. It seemed reasonable.

“I understand. I’ll give you my word that I won’t talk about what you are about to tell me,” she said.

“I don’t care. I have calculated the risk,” he said. He was really adding on the compliments thick, she thought and felt herself become irritated. There was a silence in the car. “I might have an issue with my IT system. The head of my IT department has suggested we hire an outside consultant,” he finally said.

“And you want to hire me? Based on what? My skill in serving drinks?” she asked. She could have kicked herself. He was offering her work, work that involved her passion, and she had to be a smart mouth?

“You may not realise it, but I don’t have extensive contacts in the IT world. For most aspects of business, I can get a hold of anything. But IT, I draw a blank,” he said. She nodded. “That doesn’t mean I will hire you straight off. You will have to come to my office and have an interview with me and the head of my IT department. If he is happy with you, I will make you an offer and we can discuss salary and workhours,” he said.

“And it’s for a limited time, right?” she asked.

“Yes. You will only work for me until you can assess if we have an issue and if we do, until you have found it and fixed it,” he told her.

“Good, I can’t commit to anything long term. When is the interview?” she asked.

“Tomorrow afternoon at two, be on time,” he told her.

“I will accept, only because I have the day off and I don’t have anything planned,” she told him. The car turned into the parking in front of the hotel. Vidar handed her a black business card, then the driver opened her door, and she got out.

“Thank you... Sorry I didn’t get your name,” Charlie said to the driver.

“Malcom, mademoiselle,” he said.

“Thank you, Malcom.”

“My pleasure, mademoiselle. Have a nice evening.”

“You too,” she said and again she waited for the car to disappear out of view before heading back to her apartment. She switched on the lights in the hallway and made sure all the locks were in place. This part of the city wasn’t the best, but it wasn’t the worst either. The apartment wasn’t huge, but it was enough, and it was home. She took out the envelope and the business card from her bag and headed into what should have been the livingroom, but was her office. Her computer setup took up enough space for it to be impossible to get a couch inside the room. Charlie fed her fish and sat down at the computer. She counted her tip and had to recount twice to make sure she got it right. Realising it was correct, she sat down to plan the next day. Charlie would spend the morning doing housework, which she had put off for far too long. Then she would go to the bank

before heading to her interview. She would have four hours between the interview and her date. That had to be enough time to finish the interview and get ready, right?

The following day, Charlie made her way from the bank to the headquarters of Grim Inc. It had taken her more time than she would like to admit to choose her outfit. If it had been because of the nervousness of the interview, she would have accepted it. But half way through the archaeological dig out of her closet, she had realised she was worried about what Vidar would think of her. Charlie was irritated by herself. Vidar had been nothing but a jerk, ignoring her most of the time. So why on earth did she want him to notice her? Why did she want his approval? That needed to stop. Despite of her resolution, she had picked out black dress pants that showed off her ass and a white blouse that hinted at cleavage, without showing any. At least she hadn't gone with a dress or skirt, she thought as she looked up at the massive building in front of her. She took a deep breath and walked in and up to the security desk.

“Hi, I have a meeting with Mr Grim at two o'clock,” she said to the man behind the desk. He typed something into his computer and smiled at her.

“Miss Maynard? May I see a photo ID please,” he said. She handed him her driving licence, and he tapped away on his keyboard for a while. “Here you go. Please wear the badge visible at all times. Please use the blue elevator just around the corner, tap the badge on the panel in the elevator, and it will take you to the correct floor. When you leave, hand in your badge. If the desk is unmanned, please put the badge in the marked opening. Have a nice day,” he told her.

“Thank you, you too,” Charlie said as she pinned the badge to the front of her blouse. The man pressed a button, a buzzing sound was heard and the barrier that blocked people from the elevators opened. Charlie found the elevator and used the badge to get it moving. She checked the time on her phone, ten to two, and then turned it off. When she stepped out of the elevator she was met by a desk with an older woman sitting behind it.

“Miss Maynard?” the woman asked.

“Yes,” Charlie said and walked up to the desk.

“You're on time,” the woman said.

“Yes,” Charlie said again.

“That's a good start. Take a seat. I will let you know when Mr Grim and Mr Peniro are ready to see you,” she said, indicating an area with a comfortable-looking lounge set.

“Thank you,” Charlie said and sat down in one of the armchairs. Why was she so nervous? She could do this, she was good at this, this was her thing, she reminded herself. The woman walked over to her after a while.

“Follow me please,” she said, and Charlie stood up and followed her. They walked up to large doors and the woman opened one of them. “Your two o’clock, sir,” she said and took a step aside to let Charlie walk into the room. As Charlie entered the office, she had to take a moment to admire the room. The room stretched out in front of her. On the back wall there were thick drapes in dove-blue, the walls were painted in a matt grey-brown and the large desk in front of the drapes was a shade darker. The art on the walls was all in shades of grey, brown and dove-blue. Vidar stood by the desk and he just seemed to fit into this room. It was clear this was his office. It matched both his looks and his personality. Next to him stood a younger man.

“Mr Grim,” Charlie greeted Vidar.