

Le Français Chapter 49-58

By BreaktheBar

Commissioned by ThL

Chapter 49

Aftercare in a threesome scenario was a bit more complicated, especially with the strange relationship mixing and the fact that Marc had bent Astrid's role a little bit during the course of play. The green-haired hacker certainly hadn't gone full-submissive, but between the rough sex, Marc applying a few toys to her and Astrid not attempting to get back at him... Marc felt like he owed both women a bit of the aftercare that should follow a long scenario like they had played out.

The first thing to do, once the sex was over and everyone had a moment to catch their breath and shake off the topmost layer of the whirlwind of emotions such games stirred up, was to get Felicity into the shower. All three of them were covered in sweat, spit and sexual juices. Taking the initiative, Marc had stood up and stretched, rolling his neck, before going to Felicity and scooping her up in his arms. Being a full-bodied woman, Felicity already wasn't exactly an easy carry, and the drag on his limbs from the extended sex didn't help things, but Marc didn't stumble or quaver as he walked her into the en suite and into the glass-encased shower stall. He sat her down on the small stool-like tile outcrop at the back of the little room and gave her a sweet, soft kiss before making sure the showerheads inside were pointed away from her and turning on the tap so the cold water in the pipes could get cleared out.

Marc then quickly went back out into the bedroom and grabbed Astrid by the ankle, dragging her across the bed playfully as she smirked and rolled her eyes. She let him pull her feet and into a kiss that had her draping her lithe body against his, her nipples still hard and her mouth telling him she was still hungry for more satisfaction. She let that die down though, and he led her into the bathroom and then took it upon himself to wash both women. Doing that sort of thing with Felicity was a long-practised ritual he enjoyed, and Felicity leaned into him as he used a gentle loofah and soap to wash every nook and cranny of her body from between her toes up to her hair. Astrid stayed back, allowing them their moment, and started to wash herself until Marc clucked with her tongue and frowned. She soon got her own introduction to the ritual, though it was a little more brief as she washed her own ass crack and hair.

Once the shower was over Marc went through the process of drying them, and then both women seemed to come to a decision with just a few looks and they tag-teamed drying him off as well. Marc left them in the washroom for a moment, quickly going out and stripping the bed, resetting it with fresh sheets and pulling the blankets up for use from where they had been set aside before the scene ever started. Then he went to the walk-in closet and returned to the ladies with the luxurious terry cloth dressing gown he'd purchased for Felicity and his own for

Astrid. They'd been chatting softly, and he found Astrid applying a little of her own aftercare as she brushed out Felicity's hair.

The blonde let him wrap her up in the ridiculously soft robe, but Astrid smirked and shook her head as he offered to do the same for her. "I should get going," she said. "You two have your rituals, and I'll just get in the way. And I don't have the same needs here."

She quickly kissed Felicity on the cheek and whispered something to her, and Marc slipped the robe on himself as she went out to gather her clothes.

"I'll walk her out," he said to Felicity, standing behind her and wrapping her up in a hug as he looked at her in the mirror. "I'll be back soon, *ma petite fée*."

"Of course, dear," Felicity said with a tired smile, patting his hand with hers.

Marc kissed her on the other cheek, pausing to nuzzle her hairline near her ear as he continued to hug her until she giggled softly and pushed him to go with Astrid. When he left the washroom he found Astrid already half-dressed, though she flicked her panties at him and winked before putting on her bra and shirt. Marc stowed the gift into the pocket of his robe and then walked her down from the loft to the main floor.

"This was a lot of fun," she said as she reached her shoes and slipped them on. "And now I'm *really* glad that I asked for this as payment instead of cash."

"Thank you for that again, by the way," Marc said. "*Cela m'a été d'une grande aide*."

"*Mon travail a été amplement récompensé*," she replied with a glimmer in her eyes.

"Your accent is getting even better," Marc said with an approving nod and smile. Then he took a breath and let it out. "Thank you for not trying to go overboard, or push things, tonight."

Astrid sighed and shook her head. "I know last time was a bit much, but I didn't understand the dynamic as well as I should have then. We were both still... new. To the idea of sharing. I think this time went a lot better."

"*Tout à fait d'accord*," Marc nodded again. "Though, no offence, this will remain a rare, invitation-only event."

Astrid laughed, heading for the door as Marc walked with her. "I knew that coming in, Marc," she said. "Felicity is yours, and I have my own little playthings. Though I'm jealous of how you two are together. I will say, though, that if you come back to me with another job like this again - well, Felicity won't be the one submitting. I got in and out cleanly, but from what I saw, if what I dug up got tied back to me, even I might be in some trouble. Tell your cop she needs to be careful."

Marc knew what she was implying, and also knew she was drawing a line in the sand. If he tried to loop her into his game with Sinead again, he would be the one spending an hour or two as the bottom. And they both knew he wouldn't be doing that, so she was cutting him off. "*Je comprends, ma très chère amie,*" Marc said, taking her hands and looking into her eyes.

"Oh, don't look at me like that," Astrid said, smirking again and shaking her head. "I'll admit that tonight was *very* good, and it was more than just playing with Felicity. I might find myself with an itch to scratch sometime, and you'll be the number I call. Not full submission, but something more... neutral. No games, just sex."

"I... would be interested in that," Marc said with a little smirk of his own. "*Tu es une belle femme et une bonne amie. Comment pourrais-je résister?*"

"Don't start flattering me, thinking I'm a princess like that one up there," Astrid chuckled. She grabbed Marc back the back of his head and pulled him forcefully into a kiss as they stood at the front door. "I'm a bitch, Marc. That's why you love me."

"Then go home and get some rest, Astrid," Marc chuckled, giving her a slap on the ass. "I have a princess to pamper."

Astrid laughed and winked at him before leaving, and Marc had to shake his head again as he closed the apartment door and took a breath before heading to the kitchen. It would be another hour or two of care with Felicity, between feeding her, massaging her and cuddling as they talked through everything that had happened. She would sleep over, and he would make her brunch since they were up so late. And maybe she wouldn't leave for a while after that - he would, he decided, encourage her to stay later into Sunday so they could be domestic again with each other. It was good to touch on those normal feelings of intimacy.

Translations

- *Cela m'a été d'une grande aide.* = *This was a great help to me.*
- *Mon travail a été amplement récompensé,* = *My work has been well rewarded,*
- *Tout à fait d'accord* = *Totally agree*
- *Tu es une belle femme et une bonne amie. Comment pourrais-je résister?* = *You are a beautiful woman and a good friend. How could I resist?*

Chapter 50

Sinead was pissed off. With herself, and with *him*. And it switched back and forth who she was the most angry with.

She couldn't believe she'd allowed him to do those things to her. To spank her with a fucking paddle like she was a bad kid in the 1950s? Everything before that night had been... it hadn't been that. She wasn't a fucking child that he got to punish. He wasn't an *authority* over her with that right. They weren't *anything* to each other, he wasn't even her boyfriend. They just... traded things. And he'd taken more than she'd agreed to.

Fuck, she couldn't even believe she'd let him call her a 'brat.' She was an adult woman and a successful police detective.

And then she... threw herself at him. Verbally.

How could I think about going back to him at all? Sinead thought to herself. It had been a moment of weakness that had gotten way too familiar in the past few weeks, and she'd finally given in.

She knew sex with Marc would probably be really good. Maybe even the best she'd ever get. But he or that wasn't worth debasing herself. She could go to any bar in the city and walk out with someone who could give her good sex if she really wanted it that badly.

Sinead grit her teeth, sitting in her car as she tapped her foot on the break. Glancing at the passenger seat, she felt her jaw flexing as she looked over the stack of files there - she'd parsed out as much of the files as she could from Marc's USB drive, but a lot of it was still another language to her. She needed Marc to help her sort through all of it, but she was done giving in to his bullshit. She needed to turn the tables on him - he had what she needed, but that didn't mean he had *all* the power.

Getting out of her car, Sinead slammed the door shut and locked it as she headed into the office building. She flashed her badge to the security guy at the front, who seemed to recognize her and nodded, and she went to the elevator bank. As she got into one she was again struck by the muted opulence of the lobby and elevator. She felt like she was stepping onto the set of *Suits* - though that building was down the street, having mostly filmed in Toronto. She'd worked extra duty security for a couple of their outdoor night shoots earlier in her career.

Unlike the last time, Sinead had stormed Marc's office, and not wanting to hand him more leverage to feel superior or more well-mannered or whatever, this time Sinead didn't blast past the secretary who was positioned at a long desk in front of the elevator bank. Instead, she approached the desk, and she had the feeling that the secretary recognised her.

"Hi," she said and flashed her badge again. "I need to see Marc Fornier."

“Mister Fornier is currently in a meeting,” the secretary said with a polite smile. “I’ll let him know that you’re here if you’d like to wait, or I can pass along a message if you can’t.”

“I’ll wait,” Sinead said.

“Can I get you a refreshment?” the woman asked. The longer Sinead talked with her, the more she realised how ridiculously attractive she was - sharp features, perfect hair, just the right amount of cleavage to tempt someone to look. She was wearing a sleek dress that highlighted her slender form - she could have been a model. Hell, she could have been an underwear model, with that face and body.

“I’m fine,” Sinead said, then a beat after realised she was gripping the edge of the desk a little tightly. “Thanks.”

The secretary smiled and nodded gently, a clear dismissal in the direction of the padded chairs that formed a small waiting area. Sinead turned to go but hesitated and turned back. “What’s your name?” she asked the secretary.

“Jillian,” the secretary said.

“Oh, alright,” Sinead said. “Does anyone named Felicity work here?”

“No one by that name works at the company,” she replied, cocking her head slightly.

“Do you know who Felicity is to Marc?”

“Miss Connors, I think you just wait and if you have questions for Mister Fornier you can ask him yourself,” Jillian said.

Sinead nodded, accepting the mild rebuke and knowing she’d been pushing it, and went to take a seat. It wasn’t until she’d been waiting for almost five minutes that she realised she’d never told the secretary her name, let alone her last name. A long glance over at the woman didn’t get her any more information, though. With a sigh, she took out her phone and began thumbing through the digital copies of the Barisha documents she had there.

“So, when am I going to get you to agree to a date, sweetcheeks?” a male voice said about ten minutes later. The casual misogyny dripping from the words and tone immediately felt out of place from the rest of the office - every time she’d been in Marc’s building, everyone that worked there had been buttoned up tight like they worked for the fucking church or something.

More concerning, however, was that the voice was familiar to Sinead and she glanced up with her eyes wide before quickly looking down and raising her phone up to try and block her face.

"I appreciate the offer, Mr Barisha, but as I said before, I'm in a relationship," Jillian said from behind her desk.

"Oh, what's a boyfriend worth, really?" Victor said, leaning his elbows on her desk and leaning over it, pushing into her space. "That's just a guy trying to play defence. And defensemen don't score goals, do they?"

"Bourque, 410. Coffey, 396. MacInnis, 340," Jillian said.

"What?"

"Those are the three highest-scoring defensemen from the NHL," Jillian said. "Is there anything else I can help you with today, Mr Barisha?"

"One date," Barisha pushed. "I swear it would be the night of your life."

"Can I validate your parking, Mr Barisha?" Jillian deflected with that same polite smile she'd used on Sinead.

Victor did, in fact, get his parking validated and thankfully didn't glance over at Sinead before he entered the elevators and left. She felt like she was sweating bullets under her suit jacket and let out a relieved breath that she wasn't spotted or recognized.

"Miss Connors," Jillian said, calling her attention. "Mister Fornier will see you now."

Right. She was here to yell at Marc.

Chapter 51

“Marc, what the *fuck* was he doing here?” Sinead hissed as she entered his office and shut the door behind her.

Marc sighed. He was fairly certain that he’d told Sinead that they would connect *after* work on Monday, but their brief conversation had been right before things kicked off with Felicity and Astrid and it had been a busy weekend afterwards. Then, Barisha showed up that morning with hard copies of documents he didn’t want getting emailed around - which very obviously meant they contained things he didn’t want a digital paper trail on. But dealing with Barisha in person was as frustrating as usual. The man was obtuse even in his rough charms.

And now Sinead came in hot-headed.

“*Bonjour*, Detective,” Marc said evenly. “Please, come in. It’s so nice of you to drop by my office once more, making demands and accusations. It truly is becoming a highlight of the gossip around the water cooler.”

“Cut the smarmy attitude,” Sinead said, her face grim and she stood in front of Marc’s desk and placed her hands on it. “What the fuck?”

Marc took a beat, re-evaluating. Sinead was more aggressive than usual. Either something had happened with Barisha, though Jillian had assured him via text that it hadn’t, or something had happened over the weekend or that morning. Something had changed since she’d made overtures on Saturday to- Ah. She was feeling spurned.

“Are you appropriately dressed for this conversation, Sinead?” Marc asked quietly.

“What?” Sinead practically spat.

“*Je n’aime pas me répéter*. Are you appropriately *accessorised* today, Detective?” Marc asked.

Sinead’s jaw clenched and she reached into her inner suit jacket pocket, pulling out the silver buttplug he’d given her. She practically slammed it on the desk. “You mean *this* accessory, Marc?”

Again, Marc had to take another beat to re-evaluate. The fact that she’d brought it meant that she *was* thinking about it, but she wasn’t embarrassed by presenting it. She was still just angry.

He’d been walking a knife’s edge with her, he’d known that from the beginning. Push her too hard, and she’d refuse to play. Don’t push her hard enough, and she would think she could walk all over him. Her reaching out had changed the dynamic, but with his focus on Felicity, he hadn’t appropriately shifted his own stance. The game they were playing wasn’t unlike sparring in any martial art - control, leverage, experience and muscle memory were all just as important to

being a Dom as they were in a fight. He had gotten distracted, hadn't adjusted to the new tempo, and now the duel was turning into a brawl.

He needed to regain control but however well it had gone last time, putting Sinead in her place through playful punishment... that wasn't a lever he could pull this time. Not here in the office, and likely not with the emotional state she was in.

"Sit, Sinead," Marc said, gesturing to the chair that Victor hadn't been using prior. She sat, crossing her arms over her chest and crossing one knee over the other as she leaned back and narrowed her eyes. She was taking the aggressive power position in the conversation, trying to force him to account for himself, but she was also revealing that she was feeling vulnerable through her body language. Crossing her arms and legs to protect vital points. Leaning back to create space.

Marc took another breath. "Obviously we need to discuss some things," he said, his voice low and soft. "First, how is your bottom? I assume the massage helped soothe things afterwards, but the strike with the cane can leave a lingering sting."

"We're not talking about my ass, Marc," Sinead said. "But sure, we can start with how you sexually abu-"

"Don't," Marc held up a finger, his voice dropping as he cut her off. "Don't you *dare* attempt to call our play from the other night *abuse*, Detective. We talked about consent, and you consented. As I said then, we have a larger conversation in our near future about general consent, but you specifically agreed to what happened that night."

Sinead ground her teeth in a decidedly unattractive way for a moment before letting out her breath. "Fine," she grunted. "It wasn't *abuse*. It was still demeaning, and disgusting. You have no right to punish me, whether I piss you off with my words or anything else. You're not my boss, you're not my Dad, you're not an authority figure for me. Calling me a brat, treating me like you can just demand how I act, or how I feel... Fuck you for that."

Marc breathed in and let it out slowly. "Fine," he said. "If you would like to stop our game, then we can stop. I'll even help you, as you asked, with some of the details in the latest batch of information so you have some clear next steps in your case. But, if you feel like I haven't earned your *respect* and that you really are done with the game, then that's it. You can walk away, Sinead. I haven't been blackmailing you, or leveraging you in some way - you hold the actual power in this game, letting it go on. When you say stop, we stop. That's how BDSM games *work*. When someone says stop, it stops. I'll fire Victor as a client so that I'm no longer associating myself with someone like him, and I'll let Detective Xu know that I will no longer be helping with the case. We both go back to our lives."

"Good," Sinead said, but then obviously hesitated.

“Stop means stop,” Marc repeated himself. “But once that happens, it’s difficult to start things again. Not when the trust is so weak.”

Sinead’s jaw clenched and unclenched rapidly as she glared daggers at him. “What was he doing here?” she changed the subject, not giving Marc an answer.

“He gave me hard copies of records,” Marc said, pointing to a stack of files at the corner of his desk. “To go along with the digital files he sent me over the weekend. I haven’t had a chance to look through them, but some of them seem to be notated by hand.”

“Meaning they weren’t in the files you already got me,” Sinead said, staring at the files now.

“Correct,” Marc said.

“Fuck,” Sinead grunted and looked back at Marc.

“Do you want to stop?” Marc asked. “Ignore the case, Sinead. Ignore the files, and the numbers, and the chase. Do you, as a woman, want to stop the game?”

Sinead swallowed.

“Let me take you to lunch,” Marc said, glancing at his watch. “It’s a little early, but that means we should have our privacy. We can have that broader talk about consent so you are more fully informed.”

“Who is Felicity?” Sinead asked.

Marc blinked.

Translations

- *Je n'aime pas me répéter.* = *I don't like to repeat myself.*

Chapter 52

Sinead could tell she'd finally, *finally* taken Marc by surprise. She'd come into the conversation hot, and she'd known it. She'd planned on it. Planned on giving him a piece of her mind.

She hadn't been ready for Marc to be so fucking... sincere.

He'd just stop?

Really?

But everything he said made an odd sort of sense. She could argue that he *had* been leveraging her to start out, but the leverage was based entirely on her own desire to make a case no matter what. She wasn't sure she *did* want 'the game' to stop, and Marc showing her that the door was unlocked and she could walk out at any time was different than what she expected. She'd thought he would fight her on it, argue with her. She'd been ready for him to press hard and convince her to keep going.

And, deep down, she'd sort of wanted him to fight and keep her in it, which was a disturbing thought.

But the door was open, and she was looking back out at the world, and her metaphorical feet felt heavy. She was scared, and frustrated, with who and what Marc was, and what he did to her, but...

God, he made her come hard. And made her stomach feel like a teenager getting asked to prom by their crush. And that fucking smile...

But he wasn't smiling now. She'd caught him unaware, maybe for the first time.

"I assume you heard that name at the fundraiser?" he finally asked. His face had barely twitched from the neutral expression he'd worn as he'd outlined the state of things between them, and what would happen if they stopped. But it *had* twitched, just a little.

"People didn't mention her *to* me, but I heard her name joined with yours a lot in nearby conversations," Sinead said. "And I'm not an idiot. You have sex toys on hand in your bedroom. You're... experienced in things that I'm not. You're way too good at buying women's clothing as a gift. So who is she? Because I'm not looking to be the person you cheat with, Marc - I know you're not married, at least legally. Is she your girlfriend?"

Marc worked his jaw a couple of times, forming the right words, and even in her frustrated concern Sinead felt a little spark of a smirk starting to form, knowing she was finally putting him on the back foot. She suppressed the urge to let that smirk fly though because it would be- *Fuck, it would be bitchy*, she thought. *Or... bratty.*

"Felicity is a very good friend of mine and long-term casual partner," Marc finally said. "We are..." he took a breath. "We are lovers, but not in a traditional relationship. So no, she is not my 'girlfriend,' though many of my acquaintances assume that we are joined in that way and it is easier not to disabuse them of that."

"Does she know about me?" Sinead asked. "Did she need to approve you starting this thing with me?"

"No, she didn't need to approve," Marc said. "And yes, she does know about you, Detective. She doesn't know who you *are*, only that I am involved with a female police detective."

"And she knows about the... games?" Sinead asked, not knowing *how* she felt about that.

"She does," Marc nodded. "It was actually her idea to take you to the fundraiser. She thought you would enjoy seeing a bit more of my world, and I agreed."

That was a weird feeling in her gut. 'Jealousy' wouldn't cover it, and neither would 'envy.' For a second Sinead thought she was disgusted, but that wasn't right either. A woman she didn't know was suggesting to the man who she was... 'playing' with what sort of things she might enjoy.

"Do you do the same things with her?" Sinead asked.

"Felicity is a submissive," Marc nodded. "We are very close and have shared many experiences and games together. She and I are not the same as you and I, though, Sinead. I- This is a complicated subject, and I say this honestly - the more you see behind the curtain, I think, the faster the *newness* of our game will wear off and you can only have that once. I can tell you more, but you need to decide if what you've been experiencing is something you want to continue or not."

Sinead grimaced, uncrossing her legs and crossing them the other way. Why the hell did he need to sound so *reasonable* and *caring* about how she experienced things?

"I don't know," she said. "I need to think about that." Marc nodded but didn't say anything, leaving the conversation open to her. "Does anyone else know about me, or... us?"

Marc shook his head. "N-" he started but clearly changed his mind. "Yes, actually, though she knows less than Felicity. She is the woman who helped me collect the original Barisha files that we can compare against what he's given me himself and is a Domme in her own right. She doesn't know who you are at all, or what you look like, or your name, but she knows I've started a new game and that you work in law enforcement."

"I won't get passed around," Sinead said. "*If we...* continue. I'm not interested in being a fucking town bicycle for whatever kinky friends you have."

"*Mon Dieu*. I would never even consider it, Detective," Marc said, leaning forward and frowning at the very idea of it. He paused, however, taking another breath. "Again, this is another thing that would be brought up in a conversation about consent. But I assure you, I am not the sort of man who enjoys the idea of *sharing* with other men. Other women, *eh bien, c'est une autre histoire*. But your identity, your safety, is important to me."

Sinead swallowed, feeling like she had a lump in her throat all of a sudden. The anger that had built up over the weekend felt like it had dropped out of her ass during the conversation and she was left with a hollow, silly feeling that she'd overreacted. Except she *hadn't* and she knew she should still be- She wasn't sure.

She glanced at the files again. "If we're going to lunch, it better be a working one," she said, gesturing to them.

"Bien," Marc nodded, and reached for the phone on his desk and pressed a button as he lifted the receiver to his ear. "*Allo, Jillian. Veuillez téléphoner à Canoe si ils peuvent me trouver une table pour deux. Et commandez un repas à emporter en plus. Merci.*"

"She speaks French, too?" Sinead asked.

"Jillian?" Marc asked. "She also speaks Spanish, German, Italian and Mandarin fluently, and is working on several others. Her ability with languages is one of the many reasons I hired her."

"Are you fucking her, too?" Sinead asked.

Marc frowned at her, and Sinead immediately felt a flash of shame go through her. "No, Sinead," he said. "I'm not fucking my highly paid, extremely competent, and entirely indispensable secretary."

"Sorry," Sinead sighed.

"If you're interested in her, however, I do know she and her girlfriend sometimes take another woman into their bed," Marc said. "You could always ask her out, just be more polite than Victor."

Sinead could feel the heat run to her cheeks.

Translations

- *Mon Dieu* = *My God*

- Other women, *eh bien, c'est une autre histoire* = *Other women, well that's another story*

- Allo, Jillian. Veuillez téléphoner à Canoe si ils peuvent me trouver une table pour deux. Et commandez un repas à emporter en plus. Merci. = Hello, Jillian. Please phone Canoe if they can find me a table for two. And order a takeout meal too. Thanks.

Chapter 53

Sinead couldn't *believe* the restaurant Marc brought her to. If she'd thought George was fancy when they'd gone on their stakeout-date there, it was practically old and musty compared to Canoe. At first, she'd been confused because Marc had led her walking a block over and into another big finance building and towards an elevator, but when they'd emerged on the 54th floor she'd been shocked.

Just the view, looking out over the city and with a clear shot of the CN Tower, was a little breathtaking. The place was modern and fancy as hell and Sinead immediately felt like she was underdressed, but one of the staff met them and shook Marc's hand warmly before escorting them through the empty restaurant dining area to a seat right next to the big windows. She had a brief moment of vertigo when she looked too far down as Marc pulled out her chair for her, but she quickly quelled that as she focused on the waiter.

There was a brief whirlwind of activity - no alcohol, since she was technically on duty, so the wine list was waved away. They were offered the menus, but Marc said they would have whatever the chef was prepared to serve - it was only 10:30, an hour before the place was supposed to open, and he didn't want to be trouble for them. The waiter, or *maître d'*, or whatever he was assured Marc that they would be happy to serve, and Sinead watched the dance between the two men as it was decided that lunch would be chosen by the chef and it might not be something on the menu at all. There was noise coming from the kitchen, more than Sinead would have expected, and without any music playing or other people or conversations going on she could hear the cooks in the back calling things to each other.

It was a little surreal.

"So," Marc said once they were left alone, Marc with a San Pellegrino blood orange soda and Sinead with what turned out to be freshly squeezed orange juice. "Puzzle first, or conversation?"

Sinead hesitated but nodded to the file folder Marc had brought with them. "Let's see what sticks out. I'm still digesting what you said earlier."

Marc gave her a nod and a look that said he understood and then began slowly pulling out sheets from the folder. He was thorough in his explanations, and Sinead found herself able to follow more than half of what he was explaining - or at least recognizing words and concepts, if not connecting the dots - from her studies. Between what she'd done herself, and what she and Jules had gone over together, she was still floundering in the numbers but at least had a grasp on generalities.

And Marc was like a tornado ripping through the records and numbers. It was almost awe-inspiring, like watching a crack marksman on the shooting range. The way his mind worked was methodical and almost computer-like in his ability to recall numbers and connect numbered companies or accounts together.

They were served an appetizer of fresh blueberry scones that were fucking amazing, and hot out of the oven, accompanying fresh coffee that had Sinead blinking like she'd already drunk a cup just from the aroma. While they munched on that Marc identified the companies and accounts Victor Barisha had 'off the books.' The cash flow was high in volume for most of them, seemingly cycling in and out but never holding a large amount for an extended period. One, however, had almost two million in funds that had barely been touched and, in a handwritten note, was marked 'needs offshoring.' Most of those funds had come from a pair of numbered companies - one was connected to a string of car washes, while the other was harder to track down.

"This is his personal money," Marc pointed out the holding account. "A nest egg, hidden away from his business interests, his wife and his girlfriend. This is one place to hit him and make it hurt."

"I still need to find a legitimate reason to do that, though," Sinead said. "I can't get audits or search warrants without evidence."

"But you can threaten them, no?" Marc asked. "You can lie to people legally. When you do have a reason to interrogate him, *ce gros porc*, threatening this will panic him."

"Noted," Sinead grimaced. There was a lot more hidden in the numbers though. Marc identified several more accounts that were hidden away with money moving through them, and he noted them to track where that money was going. There was going to be a lot of legwork to do once he had those destinations tied to physical locations.

The main course came, thick and fluffy Belgian waffles with sweet fried plantain served with a tart raspberry compote and crème fraîche. There was some sort of warm, cinnamony spice in the waffles that tied the entire meal together into a mind-bending, mouth-watering masterpiece. After the first bite, Sinead couldn't think of work anymore and dug in, not even caring that she grunted and groaned almost lewdly as she let the flavours wash over her tongue.

Marc was smiling that fucking smile of his, and she didn't even care.

Once they both had about half their plates eaten, Marc set down his utensils and took a long sip of his drink before drawing her attention by clearing his throat.

"I think, *ma petite rebelle*, we should have our talk before the restaurant begins its first seating and there are more ears around," he said.

Sinead glanced behind her and saw that the restaurant was a lot busier than when they had first entered - several waiters were cleaning and setting tables and getting the place ready for the public. She looked back at Marc. "They can't hear us?"

“They won’t,” Marc said. “And if they do, they are paid very well not to stick their noses in the business of others.”

Sinead swallowed, her mouth suddenly feeling a little dry, and she took a sip of her own drink. “So...?”

Marc took a breath and sighed it out with one of those smiles. “When I say BDSM, what do you think of? What is the first thing that comes to mind?”

The immediate flush of her cheeks to Sinead off guard as her mind immediately slipped back to being bent over on his bed, feeling her ass sting and ache with each slap of the paddle. Of the pain, and humiliation, and how *warm* it had felt. Physically. Emotionally.

“The other night,” she admitted.

“What else? Not between us,” Marc encouraged her. “More general.”

“I don’t know...” Sinead said. “Handcuffs. Whips. A gimp hood like from Pulp Fiction.”

“*Bien*, that’s a good place to start,” Marc nodded. “Handcuffs, and the hood. Those, Detective, represent the first letter in BDSM. *Bondage*.”

Translations

- *ce gros porc = the fat pig/what a fat pig*

Chapter 54

“What you need to remember, *ma petite rebelle*, is that all of BDSM comes down to enjoying different aspects of control. Sometimes people, such as myself, enjoy the feeling of being in a great amount of control, while others such as my partner Felicity, and I believe yourself, enjoy allowing someone else to take control. Bondage is a very physical representation of that control element.” Marc was talking quietly, watching Sinead intently as he tried his best to succinctly explain to her an entire breadth of kinks.

The red-headed Detective was listening and nodding slightly, showing she was engaged in the conversation. She had, however, started bouncing a leg under the table nervously and had slowed her eating. Not bad signs, but not good either.

“OK,” she said. “I can understand that. Handcuffs, rope, that sort of thing.”

“The instrument of the bondage is one aspect, but the other is psychological,” Marc said. “By accepting a piece of bondage, the submissive partner is volunteering parts of their mobility, or their senses, or their ability to communicate to the dominant partner. Bondage is a thing people play with without understanding the psychological side of it every day - a pair of fuzzy handcuffs can be a bit of fun teasing for one couple, but for another couple, they might represent something much deeper.”

Sinead grimaced a little.

“You don’t approve?” Marc asked.

“I just think that I’m not sold on the idea of bondage being... sexy,” she said. “Or enjoyable.”

“That brings us back to the main focus of this conversation,” Marc said. “Anything that happens in the bedroom should be consented to. Clearly, in the moment, if not beforehand. If you don’t like the idea of bondage, then you shouldn’t consent to it. On the other hand, sometimes it is healthy to let your partner challenge your limits - say, for example, that we were playing our game and I pulled your thong off of you and used it to tie your hands above your head to the headboard of the bed. You know you would be able to pull it apart fairly easily if you needed to, but you also know that I want free access to... tease you appropriately. Does this make it sound more attractive?”

Sinead had gone a little pink as Marc had given his example, and he could tell that she was turned on. “I don’t know,” she answered. “Maybe.”

“So, you see, there is a spectrum of options. This is the same for Discipline, the second part of BDSM. Some people say it is ‘Dominance,’ but I think Discipline is more suitable.”

“Like the last time,” Sinead said.

“Sometimes,” Marc said gently. “It depends on the people involved. To be a Dominant is, at its heart, to set rules and expectations and then hold the submissive to them. Some submissives like to immerse themselves in the rules and be rewarded. Others like to struggle to meet them, to risk correction. Others still like to challenge rules - Brats, as I called you the other night, are like that. It is entirely possible that *you* are someone who likes to challenge rules, Sinead, and that in the end we would not be compatible. I hope not, of course, but at least if we discover that together we will be able to end on a good note.”

“Marc, this is- It’s a lot,” Sinead said. “I don’t know what to think.”

“Then let me be brief,” Marc said. “The S stands for Sadism. Again, on a spectrum, it is to gain pleasure or gratification from inflicting pain or humiliation. Sometimes, in the uninitiated, someone might say a lover has a bit of a ‘mean streak.’”

“Where are you on that spectrum?” Sinead asked.

Marc smirked. “A little lower than half, I would think,” he said. “There are many different *kinds* of sadism. Entire categories. I do not necessarily enjoy the humiliation aspect - other people might enjoy forcing public acts, such as a submissive walking around with cum on their face. Pain, however, when enjoyed by my partner and properly applied, can be a fun tool.” Sinead’s face, starting to show disgust, was telling. “Now, now,” Marc continued. “Remember the spectrum. And that there is another side to the coin - if I were to spank you in the heat of the moment and I enjoyed what it did to you, it would be sadism. But in the same circumstance, if the shock of the spank is something *you* enjoyed, that is Masochism, the final letter. Enjoying having your hair pulled, or your breast mauled, all of these are mild forms of masochism.”

Sinead had gone deep pink now as Marc continued to list things he had a feeling she knew she liked. He couldn’t help but smile as he met her eyes - she was deliciously horny now, and likely her panties were soaked.

“Each of these elements, however, comes back to consent,” Marc said. “Because, in a proper BDSM exchange, there may be a Dominant and a Submissive, but the dominant only ever has as much control as the submissive is willing to give them. The control they surrender can be reclaimed at any time. So when we talk about the game we are playing, Detective, the thing I want you to consider is that everything between us will be voluntary. If you draw a line in the sand on any issue, I may ask questions to define the line or challenge your reasoning, but I will never cross it.”

“Why do you think I’m submissive?” Sinead asked. “When things first started, what made you think that?”

“You’re an aggressive workaholic,” Marc said with a little smirk. “You want to control every situation, be the alpha in every room. That often means you lean heavily on the Discipline

spectrum when it comes to sex - you either maintain your desire for dominance in the bedroom, or to really enjoy sex you need to let someone else take control."

"So you took a risk," Sinead said.

Marc smirked again. "I can't share all my secrets, Detective," he said. "Now, tell me. What are you thinking? *Je suis terriblement impatient de savoir ce que tu penses de tout cela.*"

Sinead took a breath and let it out, then delayed her answer by taking a big bite of her waffle and chewing slowly before swallowing. "I can say no to anything?" she asked.

"You can," Marc nodded. "Or, if you like, you can say 'pumpnickel' or some other safe word if you prefer me to do things even when you say 'no' because that turns you on. That isn't so uncommon - roleplaying the inability to say no. I know that you've enjoyed the feeling of being forced into situations and actions."

"Fuck," Sinead groaned softly, closing her eyes. Marc could tell she was deep in her own head about things, so he didn't prompt her and let her think. Finally, after almost three full minutes of silence, she opened her eyes and looked at him. "Jupiter," she said. Marc raised a questioning eyebrow. "That'll be my safe word. Jupiter. I'll- I think- Fuck, Marc. Yes, I'll keep playing. Just... no humiliation stuff. You already don't like it, and there's no way I'm doing anything in public."

"*Bien*," Marc nodded, "Agreed. But I have some musts. Things that I very much prefer."

"What are those?" Sinead asked.

"Oral will continue, and I will reciprocate on occasion, but I very much enjoy a rough blowjob. You already do that well, when you are trying, so I do not think that is too onerous," he said.

"What else?" she nodded.

"I think you know," Marc said. "But to be explicit about it - it won't be today, or possibly soon, but I will be taking your ass, Detective. I am very much an 'ass man,' and prefer it to vaginal sex both due to the sensations as well as the psychology. So, as we play our game, expect that anal sex will be coming your way."

Sinead audibly gulped. "I, uh, guess that explains the buttplug."

Marc smiled and reached into his suit jacket pocket, pulling out the buttplug that he'd palmed from his desk back in his office where she'd slammed it down. He set it gently on the table between them, Sinead's eyes going wide.

"Yes, it does," he said. "So, Sinead. Those are my two musts. I think it's only appropriate that if you agree to keep playing, you should follow through on my direction."

Sinead swallowed, looking around the dining room, but none of the waitstaff were near them.

“The bathrooms are just around there,” Marc said, gesturing back towards the bar.

“Fuck,” Sinead muttered and grabbed the silver plug from the table as she stood up.

“Detective,” Marc said, stopping her in her tracks just as she was stepping away from the table. She turned back, eyebrows raised. “I think, once you have properly accessorised yourself, I’ll want some proof. A picture on your phone should do.”

Sinead swallowed, flushing again, but nodded before heading towards the bathrooms.

Translations

- *Je suis terriblement impatient de savoir ce que tu penses de tout cela.* = *I cannot wait to know what you think about all this.*

Chapter 55

“Sinead, girl, this is- fuck,” Jules said.

They were posted up in the Financial Forensics offices, which were once again empty except for the two women. Sinead had no fucking clue what the two old men she worked with were doing, and she hadn't heard from her Captain in two weeks since she'd given her last report. It was a little ridiculous, but it was giving her the freedom to work so she wasn't going to raise a stink about it.

Maybe if she actually broke Barisha, and that led to breaking Le Français, she could use that to whip the department into, well, looking like an actual department.

“I know,” Sinead said, shifting in her chair. They'd moved some desks around and she'd scrounged a pair of whiteboards on wheels from the basement storage of the building and they'd set up a little command centre to track all the different accounts and businesses moving money for Barisha. The only problem was that, sitting on her rolling chair, she could *feel* the buttplug.

She wasn't sure why she hadn't taken it out after parting with Marc. He didn't expect her to wear it all the time, just when they were going to meet up. But for some reason, she felt like she should keep it in for... some reason. She knew digging too deep into that feeling would lead her down a rabbit hole of thinking about everything else Marc had told her about their 'game,' and she didn't have time for that at the moment.

“This all came from Fornier?” Jules asked.

“The first files we went through were what he gathered himself,” Sinead said. “The new set of digital records is what Barisha gave him to audit - Fornier said they haven't even signed a contract, so there's no legal expectation of privacy. Barisha doesn't want to be a client of the company, he just wants Fornier to do the work. The last hardcopy stuff Barisha hand-delivered to Marc this morning and I went and picked it up. We went through it quickly and he helped me identify a bunch of the core leads.”

“So the new stuff is a little more legal than the last stuff, but without Fornier being an official CI or making an actual report with his name on it, it's still not going to fly in court,” Jules muttered, then looked across the desks at Sinead. “I've talked to him too, but you've been working with him longer. Are you sure we can't get him to agree to anything, or to testify?”

Sinead had a flash of... she wasn't sure. For some reason being reminded of Jules meeting with Marc alone, and knowing that Marc already had another partner, made her feel a spike of worry or jealousy that maybe Marc was starting a game with Jules as well. She was a beautiful woman, and probably a little more experienced in terms of the kind of stuff Marc liked. She even

had that big back tattoo, so she could sit through hours of needles stabbing her skin. If that wasn't masochism, she wasn't sure what was...

"He's set against it," Sinead said, shaking off her wandering thoughts. "It would burn him completely in his actual work, and would burn him as an asset for future investigations as well on our end. This info might not float in court, but it's damn fucking useful since it gives us a lot of puzzle pieces."

"Yeah, I'm just not thrilled at needing to duplicate the pieces so that they're legal," Jules sighed. Then she got a look on her face as she watched Sinead from across the desks. "Are you feeling alright?"

"What? Why?" Sinead asked, looking up from the notes she'd been writing.

"Because you're sitting weird, and keep shifting around like you can't get comfortable," Jules said and then smirked. "If I didn't know any better I'd think you did anal last night."

"Fuck off," Sinead scoffed, though she knew she couldn't hide the blush that rose to her cheeks. Why the hell was she getting embarrassed so much today? Usually, she wasn't so easy to get to.

Jules broke into a laugh. "It's alright, babe. One of these days we'll find you the right guy to take that stick out of your ass for good."

Sinead just buried her head in her work, trying not to think about Marc's promise of what he would be taking eventually.

A couple of hours later, she and Jules had a comprehensive list of businesses they needed to start researching and then checking out, and accounts they needed to tie to names or companies. It was going to be a long week.

Chapter 56

Marc groaned softly as he stretched. He'd hit a wall with how much he wanted to process and had stood up to walk his office, checking in on the various projects that his team was working on, before checking in with Jillian at the front. His secretary had let him know exactly how pushy Barisha had been and thanked him again for bringing lunch back for her from Canoe. He'd made a note to actually take her over there sometime in the next week - he asked a lot of her, and she was exactly as good as he'd told Sinead.

She was also a fun conversationalist, and despite what he'd told Sinead he would have been sorely tempted to test things out with Jillian if she wasn't a lesbian and in a relationship.

Still, even after getting back to his office, he felt distracted. There were no fires to put out, at least not by him, and there were no looming deadlines. He ran a tight department and the Executive Suite for the company had learned not to try to lean on him.

Sitting back down after stretching, Marc looked at his computer and grimaced. Then he sighed. He could dive into the next official project and wow his subordinates by accomplishing half of it before they ever got a chance to glance at it, or he could work on the Barisha stuff for Sinead.

Or he could take a little time for himself.

Clearing his work programs, Marc smiled to himself as he went online and began searching and making some orders. First were flowers for Felicity - a delivery to her office at the University, with a rush premium, would reach her before she left for the day. Then another delivery to Sinead's apartment building. They got different arrangements, Marc wasn't enough of a bastard to order them the same thing. Felicity got an arrangement of amaryllis, calla lily and white jasmine, representing pride, beauty and sweet love. Sinead got morning glories and irises for affection, trust and hope. Then he switched to his phone, ordering a new set of lingerie for both women as well, and he smirked as he added a third set to the cart as he found a set he knew Astrid would appreciate.

Then, once his credit card had a new balance, he decided he wasn't done and he made a call.

"*Bonjour*, dear," Felicity answered her phone. She wouldn't have gotten the flower delivery yet, and it gave Marc a smile to know she'd be surprised after the call.

"*Bonjour, ma petite fée*," Marc said. "Your accent was excellent that time."

"I've been practising," Felicity said, her voice warm over the call. "DuoLingo."

"*J'apprécie tes efforts*. I was wondering if you would like to come over tonight?"

Felicity took a breath. "I thought you were meeting with the detective?" she asked. "Did something happen?"

"No, no," Marc said. "We met this morning and then had lunch. I'm sure you'll be interested in the story though. But that leaves my evening free and I cannot think of a better way to spend it than with you."

"Marc, I- I would love to, dear. But after spending all weekend with you - which I adored, by the way - I need to put more time in on my thesis. The deadline is coming up for my final submission."

"Come over anyway, Felicity," he said. "You can work there, and I'll cook you dinner. Perhaps I'll even massage your feet as you read me the passage you are working on."

Felicity groaned into the phone at the idea of the comfortable and productive evening. "You don't need to do that, Marc."

"But I do," Marc said. "I'll make the onion soup you like so much, and my quiche lorraine."

"You're trying to fatten me up," Felicity laughed.

Marc scoffed playfully. "I haven't even told you what I'll make for dessert yet."

"OK, Marc," Felicity agreed. "I'll come over. But I really do need to work."

"I know, *ma petite fée*," he said. "I promise it will be a low-key night, and we'll be entirely domestic."

"Thank you, Marc," she said. "Honestly, I can't stop smiling. You spoil me."

"I'll see you soon," Marc said, and they hung up.

A half hour later he got a picture message from her - she'd received the flowers and was overwhelmed with happiness. He could even see several of her fellow grad students in the background wowing over the large display. Another one, several minutes later, was sent from some bathroom - she had one of the flowers in her teeth by the stem and had undone her blouse and pulled her big tits out from the bra, flashing in the mirror. They didn't usually trade nudes like that, Felicity not being big on it and Marc not necessarily finding it fun to demand them, but as an occasionally unrequested gift, it put a smile on his face.

Finally, he had cleared his head enough to get back to work. Part of him wanted to dive into the Barisha case - to keep his cover he would need to do some actual work on it. The thing was, Victor was an ass and Marc didn't mind keeping him waiting. Instead, Marc smirked to himself and opened up the next big project his department would be working on. It was always good to

remind the young and hungry that the old lion basking in the sun was king of the savannah for a reason.

Chapter 57

Sinead ducked a little so she could get a better look out the rearview mirror at the warehouse. She and Jules were camped out in an unmarked car about a block north of the city Port, and things had been quiet for the past couple of hours.

"This is starting to feel like bullshit," Jules murmured from the passenger seat.

"Well, bullshit or not, it's the shadiest of the locations," Sinead said. "We can't touch the car washes without trying to force an audit or getting a warrant even if we're sure they are laundering cash through them. This warehouse is our best lead."

"That doesn't mean we just sit out here for days waiting for something to happen," Jules said. "Even if we do see a truck come in, we can't exactly go up and ask them what they are transporting, or for whom. It's a plain warehouse owned by a numbered company. This isn't a television show - we aren't going to get lucky and hear a woman scream, or a gunshot that gives us exigent circumstances to enter."

"How are you bored already?" Sinead asked. "We've only been here two hours."

"Yeah, but I don't know what we're looking for. When you said you needed to do a stakeout I thought you were waiting for Barisha to show up or something."

"We *are* waiting for Barisha to show up. Or something."

Jules scoffed and shifted in her seat, pulling a can of Pringles out of her bag in the back and popping it open. "So what's your working theory, then?" she asked.

"Smuggling," Sinead said. "I don't know what yet."

"Himself, or for one of the gangs he's in contact with?"

"It's got to be for himself," Sinead said. "The account tied to the company doesn't filter cash through like the others do, and it holds onto a lot more before transferring it into that 'to offshore' account Marc noted. I think this is his backup cash flow or side gig."

Jules blew out a long breath. "The amount of cash, and the size of the warehouse, don't match up with drugs. That's something at least; we don't need to loop in Vice."

"I don't think it's human trafficking either," Sinead said. "The Triads and the Cartels dominate that space for the most part and Barisha works with both of them. He wouldn't want to step on their toes even if he's scummy enough to do that himself."

“So he’s smuggling product of some sort,” Jules concluded. “Commercial goods? Just getting around tariffs?”

“I don’t know,” Sinead sighed. “Fuck me, I hope it’s not exotic animals. You remember that bust up in York?”

“Ugh,” Jules gagged, only half-joking. “The smell still hits me sometimes in my sleep and I wake up nauseated.”

“Let’s assume it’s not animals,” Sinead said. “What’s next highest on the ‘oh shit’ scale?”

“Knocking out drugs, people and animals?” Jules pondered. “I mean, it would have to be guns.”

“Are there any reports of an uptick in guns on the street?” Sinead asked.

“No, but we don’t know how long he’s been working, or if he took over from someone else. Just because it would be new to us doesn’t mean it’s not old in general.”

“True,” Sinead sighed. “Alright. So right now our worst-case scenario is guns, but it’s probably something more commercial.”

“To be fair, he could also just be a stopping point,” Jules said. “Shit gets brought down the Saint Lawrence to Lake Ontario, then he holds it and transfers it to whoever makes the next leg of the journey. Maybe it ends up in fucking Calgary by truck or train. Hell, it could be destined for Mexico for all we know.”

“But why stop it here and not in Hamilton?” Sinead pointed out. “There’s way more ports and docks there and it would probably be easier to smuggle something through.”

“Yeah, but then you could ask why not just boat it all the way to Buffalo, or Detroit, or Chicago,” Jules said.

“Whatever, we’re just spitballing at this point,” Sinead sighed. “We aren’t going to know until we get in there and crack a few crates open or something.”

“Sinead, I am not doing a goddamn B and E for this case,” Jules said.

“That’s not what I meant,” Sinead sighed.

“Good, because you’ve been like a dog with a bone on this case.”

Sinead frowned, looking over at her friend. “You really think I’d break in?”

“Usually, no. But right now I feel like you’d go to extreme lengths and I don’t know what has you so caught up in this case in particular. Something is biting your ass to keep running full tilt like you have and it’s not the department.”

Sinead turned away, looking out the window. It was late February and still cold, but not bitter cold like earlier in the year. There had been a light dusting of snow earlier that made even the dim, industrial street look a little clean and pretty. Why was she so focused on the case in particular?

She really wasn’t sure what it was about the whole Le Français thing that got her so focused and bothered her so much. Maybe it was the pure mystery and the fact that no one else was close to cracking it. Then she was in it, and everything with Marc made it feel more personal... And things with him kept getting more complicated. Everything they’d talked about on Monday had been a lot, and she was still feeling like she was a crazy person for saying Yes to him and not taking any more time to think about it. But the way she felt about it, about the things he said, and even the way he talked about it...

And then there was the way he treated her like a fucking princess or something, at least when he wasn’t treating her like a whore. And both of those wildly different sides of her were attractive because he did it so *well*. The flowers when she’d come home from work had been... Ugh. Almost too perfect.

“I’m sorry,” she said, turning back to Jules. “If I’m being too much.”

“It’s fine, babe,” Jules sighed, leaning back her seat a bit and pulling a couple of Pringle chips out of her tube and munching on them before offering Sinead the can. “Just remember that you need to have a life outside of all of this. I miss Fun Sinead.”

“Fun Sinead is still around,” the redhead said. “She’s just... occupied.”

Jules snorted. “We need to get you laid.”

Sinead bit the inside of her cheek, looking back out at the street again and watching the warehouse in the side mirror. “Maybe,” she said.

She had a date with Marc on the weekend. Hopefully, that would lead somewhere.

Chapter 58

If Marc were to judge his happiness on a scale of one to ten, his face likely read somewhere in the seven range. Inside, he was at a two.

The lights, the loud music that felt more chaotic than rhythmic and either lacked a melody altogether or had a melody so repetitive it might as well be a droning. The crush of sweaty twenty-somethings and the smell of cheap liquor passed off as expensive.

Dance clubs were *not* his scene.

Unfortunately, they were included in Victor Barisha's many evening haunts and Marc had to play along. He'd suffered through such things before for legitimate clients - older ones trying to feel young, using their money to attract young things. Twice it had been younger ones as well, one who had made too much money too quickly through a tech startup and didn't understand what it did to people, and the other who had inherited his parents' wealth and company after a sudden death.

None of those prior excursions had been 'fun' for Marc, but he'd put up with them. With Victor, he wasn't even actually going to be paid if things worked out properly, and he was reaching his limit quickly of how much he would put up with.

"Bring us a bottle," Victor half-shouted to the scantily clad waitress. She was pretty in that way that so many women in their twenties could be - especially in the flashing coloured lights of a dance club. Dark lipstick, bright eyes, and a dress that hugged her youthful curves and made promises she didn't intend to fulfil. Those deep red lips cracked into a smile as she nodded to Victor, and he winked at her before she left.

"We don't need a bottle," Marc said as Victor turned back to him. It was just the two of them at the VIP table currently - when Marc had arrived there were two other men and five women at the table with Victor. Marc had been introduced and the two men had only given him a casual glance while most of the women had taken one quick look and turned back to the younger, flashier men. One of the women, a blonde with soft, pretty features and a sharp glint in her eye, had paid him more attention and Marc was still trying to decide if she was simply better at assessing the people around her and had identified him as the truly wealthy man in the mix, or if she was an escort hired by Victor to try and distract Marc or make him happy.

Marc had played along, flirting lightly with the woman in a friendly way. She'd had a sharp wit and claimed to be a business major attending her undergrad - he'd already decided to check into her story. If she was telling the truth, he'd check into her grades and coursework through a couple of his friends with connections to the department. A woman who could assess a man, adjust to his level of comfort and maintain the wit she had was going to go places. An internship offer might be in the offing.

"The bottle is to get the party started again," Victor said loudly to Marc. "Come on, man. You called me. What's going on?"

"I've gone through the files you sent me, and the ones you brought on Monday. You'll get a report on the digital files, but I wanted to let you know that the handwritten notes are accomplishable but will take a little time to set up," Marc said.

"That's great!" Victor crowed and grinned. "So no problems, then?"

"I didn't say that," Marc said loudly to be heard over another change in the music. Somehow it felt even louder since Victor had sent his friends away. "You're leaking cash, Victor. From a couple of your personal accounts."

"What?" Victor asked, suddenly losing the joy in his features and leaning forward. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that when you have off-the-books businesses, there's a tendency for decimal points to get moved around."

"Fuck," Victor spat, grimacing heavily. "Which accounts? I can find out who's skimming or stealing."

"It won't be that easy," Marc shook his head. "And I'm not done with my initial search so there might be more. I assumed you would want to know immediately, however, *espèce de grosse limace*."

"Right, right," Victor nodded, not catching the insult one bit. "Alright. What are you going to need?"

"To talk to whoever keeps your books for your personal businesses," Marc said.

"I keep the books."

"Then I need to see the businesses," Marc said and noted Victor's wince of a grimace. "You have a dripping faucet and I am a plumber, Victor. My business is money and discretion."

He hesitated and then finally nodded. "Alright," he said. "We can start this weekend, I have a game set up and there's still a seat open. You can come and see that operation first."

"A game?" Marc asked.

"Poker," Victor said. "Ten thousand buy-in. Three tables get narrowed down to one by the end, the winner takes all minus a cut for the house. I assume you play? You can come and play, and get a look at the operation. See if that's where I'm leaking."

"I know how, but I'm a little rusty," Marc said. "I'll come, though. It will be fun."

"Great," Victor said, slapping a hand down on Marc's shoulder. "And you can bring a lady along if you'd like. A little eye candy around the room is always appreciated."

Marc flashed a smile. "I know just the woman," he said.

"That feisty redhead from the other night?" Victor asked.

"The same," Marc said. Sinead was going to love this.

Translations

- *espèce de grosse limace.* = *you big slug.*