

“Are you sure?” Alex asks, typing on the laptop while I navigate the city’s traffic.

“It’s what I got off the drives you sent me in the day I’ve been able to read what’s on it.” The digitized voice from the phone in the holder answers. “The encryption on them was top-notch.”

“Eduardo Aleman is some real estate tycoon well-enough off he’s got no need to get involved with human trafficking.”

“Like money has to have anything to do with those kinds of perversions,” Asyr replies.

“Other than making it easier to get access to what they need to satisfy them,” I say. The GPS is guiding us downtown, and the traffic is increasing. Alex is focused on gathering information, but that will only work for so long to keep him from thinking about what can happen the longer we take to reach the target.

“And the picture on his company’s site does match what I saw of him, same silver hair, same built. Some Latin features. You think he has ancestry linked to Mexico?”

“I’ve traced some of the financial threads to companies I can link to him.”

“So, one of the primary money movers,” Alex says, still typing. “Looking at the company’s public financial disclosures, I’m not seeing anything that would speak to connections to the Mexico cartel we destroyed. I’d expect at least something linked to that fruit plantation that was the cover, but there’s never been anything. You see anything in the back accounts that connects them?”

“Nothing direct,” they reply. “Even what I can link is thin enough it could be explained as the normal exchange of money between companies. It’s only knowing where they all lead to that makes the connection more than it seems.”

“Any threads in the other direction? If he’s moving money, it’s coming from someone.”

“Nothing yet.”

“Nothing?”

“Anything I find I can’t put on the chain of money moving toward Mexico just returns to his company.”

“That’s weird,” Alex says. “Best reason I can think for that is so his primary accounts don’t look as full as they are. Dear Old Dad had an argument with an accountant about stuff like that, back when I lived there. It wasn’t until the lawyers got involved to confirm it wasn’t technically illegal that he was okay with it being used.”

“It also serves to camouflage the money moving to the companies,” Asyr says.

“I wish I could look at those accounts directly,” Alex muttered. “Okay, so Aleman is single, no official kids. There’s a news story about a decade old about him being under suspicion of sexual abuse, but that was resolved when one of his assistant confessed to the crime.”

“Any indication the assistant took the fall for his employer?” I ask, thinking of half a dozen ways I could shift blame to someone who worked so close to me.

“Nothing that jumps out as being in that direction, but with this thing, while on cellular, I’m not getting into any server to see what stories were kept from being published.”

“I’m not finding anything in the major publications,” Asyr says.

“I doubt it would be in one of those. They’ll already have the story they’re told to

sell. Like this one, about how Aleman setup a fund to have the sick man treated and his family looked after, instead of being pissed the guy got him entangled in all that and nearly ruin his reputation. It's going to be one of the smaller one that'll have been working on an angle where Aleman might have been guilty. When mister big money finds out, he has it killed."

"Anything on Aleman's charity work?" I ask, turning onto a side road to avoid the slowdown the GPS is warning about. I feel Alex's stare. "I need to know how outside his norm supporting the man who caused him problems is."

More typing while I reach a less congested road. It means a less direct approach, but longer without having to come to a stop will be better for Alex. Less chance he will think about delays.

"The usual stuff companies like his engage in to get tax rebates," he says.

"Is he involved directly with any of them?"

"He signs the checks," he replies while typing.

"His signature is more likely printed on them," I correct.

"I don't see any indications he's even aware of what charity his company is supporting."

"Then it's likely Aleman was guilty, and he either threatened or paid the employee to take the fall."

"Isn't that a lot to assume?" Asyr asks. "That he doesn't directly involve himself in the charity doesn't make him someone who will abuse a partner."

"Woman," Alex says, "According to the article."

"True," I reply. "But Aleman's presence at the house we raided, and in a room with at least one woman, indicates he doesn't see them as people, but objects for him to use for his pleasure. It would be why he remained single, even if a man in his position would benefit from the family image."

Alex snorts as I expect it's what he feels about his own family, arrangements of convenience for the benefit of keeping the good thing they have going.

"If you go back to his teen years, you will likely find multiple sealed records."

"Or not so sealed," Asyr says. "If you wanted a connection with Mexico, I might have one for you. I have a sixteen-year-old Eduardo Aleman arrested for beating a woman after he had sex with her."

"I don't have anything here about Aleman being in Mexico at any point," Alex says, typing furiously. "He was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico."

"I can strengthen the link further," Asyr says, "if you're interested."

"How much?" I ask, recognizing the shift in tone even through the digitization from I'm working for the sake of curiosity, to this is worth money.

"The rest of the account," they reply without hesitation.

Nearly two hundred thousand dollars. "Agreed," I say without hesitation, either. Asyr doesn't play games.

"So, Eduardo Aleman was born to a low ranking military officer named Xavier Andre Aleman, never did anything of note for Mexico, or anyone else, except you, when his mistress, named Encarnacion Fernan, had a child which she named Juan Manuel."

"They're half brothers?" Alex exclaims in disbelief. "How the fuck did he get in the

US unnoticed? How did he get his company started and why do I have to be stuck with this piece of shit!" He looks at me. "You know what that means, right? We aren't heading to some money mover's penthouse."

"Edwardo Aleman is the head of the snake we've been cutting up."

"Well?" he demands, snapping the laptop shut hard enough any other would break under the force.

"Getting into an accident getting there is not going to let us resolve this faster," I reply.

"Asyr, do something about the fucking traffic," he orders.

They snort. "You don't have access to the kind of money a miracle of that magnitude requires."

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