

The building discharges more people than I thought were in there. I find myself looking up it, estimating dimensions based on those I know of the security company. Kat's company took two floors. Which leaves three. Still, this is more people than I expected.

I guess I never really paid attention to those who left along with me these last few months. Before that, I left well after everyone.

Then the torrent slows to a trickle, then, to anyone who doesn't know how things are done, comes to a seeming stop.

I know it's not over, because there's one person I haven't seen yet. I don't think she's ever left her office at five, even with her insisting everyone does. I think she hated that I stayed longer than she did, more than whatever she suspected I got up to, back in those days. No one should stay later than the boss had to, as far as she was concerned.

"It's going to be a bit," I tell Tristan, and take out my phone. "Could be as much as an hour." I log into the company server. I can't do anything this way, but I can make sure no one's accessed my files hidden there. It would suck to discover my programs are gone just as I need them.

"Or less," Tristan says, halfway to confirming that the access tags are still dated from the last time I needed them. Doesn't mean much, really. Any competent hacker knows to reset those, but they'd have to find them, and that's unlikely. I look up and sure enough, Kat's exiting, phone to her ear and smiling. It's only five-thirty. She must have a hot date with Thomas.

Tristan has a hand on my arm as I open the door. "Wait. Security?"

"I work here. They aren't going to care."

"You need to log in. It can be traced."

"It's the last time I'll be here. What—" I swallow. Why's my throat tight? "It's not like it matters if anyone knows this is where I used to work. It's all going to be over, remember? After this, the trafficking ring's gone. We settle in another seedy neighborhood and spend the rest of our days enjoying each other."

His grip tightens. "Are you certain there won't be problems?"

I don't hear the concern, but I know it's there. This isn't how he likes to do things. He likes to plan, go over the angles, plan for everything that can go wrong. Dealing with the trafficking ring's made that difficult most of the, and tonight it's impossible. Any delay and Fernan might vanish into the federal legal system.

I smile at him. "Don't worry, it's not like anyone in there ever knew anything of the true me."

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So of course, it's the one exception to that working the security desk tonight. "Hey Karl," I greet him, stepping to the scanner.

"Jarhead," Tristan says behind me.

Karl doesn't react with the jovialness he previously shared at thinking for her and Tristan were Army. His expression is guarded.

"Aren't you on sick leave?"

"Vacation."

"Then why are you here?"

"Left a few things hanging that Kat wants dealt with. The longer it waits, the more of

a nag she'll be."

"Your boss has never seemed the kind to resort to nagging."

I grin as I head to the elevator. "I guess she and I have a special relationship. You two behave, and Tristan, if you have to, please clean up afterward. Won't do to leave evidence."

The doors close on Karl frowning at me.

They open on a darkened space, with only enough lights to be able to navigate through the cubicles and hallways.

I hesitate; for some reason.

I've been the one to shutoff the lights for a long time, I've never come in with them off and...

I get moving.

It's just lights, and I have a job to do.

The first stop is the floor's electrical panel. While it's never bothered me before, since Kat already knew I was working late, just not what I was working on, this time, I need this to remain secret. I definitely don't want her showing up wondering why one of the computer's been turned on. Even if, she'd probably suspect it was me.

So I need to make sure the electrical monitor doesn't rat me out.

She probably knows I know about it. I expect most of us do. We're hackers. Even white hats will poke around and notice something like an electronics board in the electrical panel. The others probably didn't build a program on a board of their own in preparation for a night like this.

Hey, I can plan for the future.

What? Seven hours ago, this was in the future.

I insert it in, connect the wires and by the time I get to my desk, it will have enough to maintain the illusion there is no excess power being drawn. Of course that won't survive here sitting at her desk and noting a lot of work happened while all those computers were off, but by then, me and Tristan will be long gone, and she can fire the ghost that'll be all that remains of who worked here.

I slow by Kat's dark office. I can make out her computer in the little light that makes it in, the chair she pushed back as she left. Papers strewn about the desk. I force myself to walk past, pushing the unexplained discomfort away.

I start the coffee machine on the way to my desk, and find myself glancing at her office as I drop in my seat.

I shake myself and start the computer. I have work to do. Which starts with... I grope under my desk, then look for my crate of travel mugs... right. I took that out last time. I unlock and open the drawers. Come on, I have to have one in here somewhere. There is no way I—I knew it! I grab the banged up mug out of the last drawer and unscrew the cap, then I'm running to the sink, trying not to gag.

How long has that thing been in there? And how could there have been enough coffee left in it for it to go olfactory rancid?

By the time it's washed and scrubbed twice, the coffee's ready and its delicious aroma covers up whatever my imagination might claim's left of the mug's previous, dead, occupant.

I glance at Kat's office again.

Karl's right, she wouldn't nag. She'd glare.

I smile.

She had a pretty impressive glare, too. I'm just immune to them.

I refill the mug and go to my desk.

First step, get the support array running, then access my hidden folders, confirm my programs are indeed intact, then...

I'm going to have to build myself truly impressive since I won't have access to all this power, to the anonymity. There's a lot to be said for knowing that even if the connection is somehow traced back to its origin point, they won't be able to pinpoint the exact desk. We all go through this array for our work, and with the additions I've made without Kat knowing, well, I'm pretty sure she doesn't know. I figured I'd have heard about it if she did.

Some congratulations for making her employees safer. Or kicking me out for making some truly impressive, unauthorized, changes to company property.

So I'm going to need something to compensate for it, and that means unreasonable power.

We're building our next home, that's for sure. Tristan's going to want all his hidden weapons through the house. I'm going to want wired access in all the rooms. Wireless if fine for games, not for work.

And Emil is getting his own computer. God, do I not want to find another one of his games on my rig. I'll make sure he has enough power for whatever he wants to play.

I smile at the idea of him playing while I'm working away.

I'm setting up a cover screen when the futility of it registers. It's not like Kat's going to walk by my desk, demanding to know what I was thinking, pushing through this client's firewall hard enough to have it catch on fire.

She's never going to walk by it again. I'm never going to get to annoy her by calling her Kat instead of Katherine.

I shake myself out of wherever it is my mind's going. I have actual work to get done. I take out the pad of paper, pencil, then start typing.

Okay, FBI servers, it's time for you to tell me everything.

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