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“The notes for the first meeting with the Abrams group are in the blue folder, the first draft of the McKenzie contract are in the yellow folder, and the red one had the credit information on the companies involved,” Xavier told Simon. They were in Simon’s office and Xavier was giving Simon the information he needed for the string of meetings that were lined up for the morning. The door separating them from the Xavier’s office, which was just outside of Simon’s, was open as was the one between Xavier’s room and the outer area where Marcia, Simon’s secretary, sat, and they could hear Marcia as she spoke on the phone.

“It sounds like the your wife is on the phone, do you want me to wait outside?” Xavier asked just as the intercom buzzed.

“No, no, stay here,” Simon said, waving Xavier over toward the burgundy leather sofa that occupied the wall opposite his huge cherry wood desk.

Xavier sat down and tried not to listen as Simon spoke to his wife on the phone. He put his pad down on the low, dark wooded coffee table that sat in front of the sofa and pretended to examine his notes. He was really thinking about the weird conversation that he had had that morning with Ralphie Delaware.

Ralphie Delaware had stopped by Xavier’s desk this morning just as Xavier had thought he was safe at about half past nine o’clock. Usually Ralphie made his rounds earlier and if Xavier could manage to look busy until after a quarter after nine o’clock when Marcia got in, then he was safe. But Marcia had been delayed this morning and hadn’t been there to run interference.

Ralphie walked right by the empty desk and into Xavier’s office and asked, “Good morning! And just where’s the lovely Marcia today?”

Xavier looked up from his computer screen and regarded the forty year old man for a moment before answering. “She called and said she had car trouble. She’ll be in as soon as she can,” he answered. “Good morning to you, Mr. Delaware,” he added for form’s sake.

“Oh, please, ‘Mr. Delaware’ is my father,” Ralphie said. “Call me Ralphie!”

‘At six foot and a little bit and already losing his graying hair, you would think the man was too big and too old to be called by such an idiotic, diminutive name,’ Xavier thought to himself, not for the first time. But he forced a smile on his face and said, “Ralphie.”

“That’s right! Now tell me, what are you working on? Got a lot of balls in the air just now?” Ralphie said eagerly, stepping further in to Xavier’s office and leaning forward as though he were going to peer across Xavier’s desk to see what was on his computer screen.

Xavier sat back and said, “Oh, I’m busy, all right, but not as busy as the Yankees were last night. Talk about balls in the air! It was a real cock-up, as my dad used to say.”

“Oh, right, right, very embarrassing,” Ralphie said as he beat a hasty retreat back toward the door. “Tell Simon I’m looking for him, all right? I’ll be joining him at the McKenzie meeting.”

Xavier barely managed to suppress a groan. “Okay, I’ll let Simon know. Will you require a copy of the contracts or the legal background, or do you have that information?”

”Um, legal background? Why is legal involved?” Ralphie asked.

‘You’d know if you really belonged at that meeting,’ Xavier thought but was wise enough to not say. “The McKenzie property is where they found the bones, the ones from the eighteen hundreds. It looks like there was a family cemetery on that part of the property,” he informed Ralphie, who, despite being the titular head of the department, never kept informed .

“Oh, right, right. Er, I’ll just go see if I have what I need for the meeting. If not, tell Simon not to wait for me, don’t want him to be late on my account,” Ralphie called over his shoulder. He had begun backing up out of Xavier’s office as soon as he heard the word ‘cemetery.’ “See ya!” Ralphie said, flipping one hand toward Xavier in a limp-wristed good-bye. “Oh, hello, Simon. I was just telling Xavier...”

Xavier was struck by the same thought that he had had earlier that morning, when Ralphie first appeared in his doorway. ‘Is Ralphie gay?’ Mentally reviewing the habitually dapper appearance of the company owner’s son, who was very particular of his wardrobe and hair, Xavier considered the question more seriously now that he had a moment to think about it. ‘He’s forty years old, never had a girlfriend – that I know of - and mentioning particulars about a sports game makes him flee before you,’ Xavier thought. ‘Oh God!’ It was all he could do to not slap himself on the forehead. ‘And I said ‘cock-up’ to him! Shit, could he think I was hitting on him? Is that why he left so quickly? It’s the fastest I’ve ever gotten him away from me!’

Xavier considered a moment longer and had to chastise himself for stereotyping a man he barely knew. ‘But then again, it’s not like anyone in the office knows about me. Besides, Ralphie isn’t that bad looking. If he’s so completely in the closet, I’d be happy to flirt with him, provided he just leaves my immediate vicinity every time I do.’

“Well, that’s an evil looking grin,” Simon said loudly, getting Xavier’s attention on what was perhaps the third try. “Want to tell me about it?”

”Oh it’s nothing, sir,” Xavier began. As he knew he would, Simon stopped him.

“Not ‘sir,’ call me ‘Simon’ for kripe’s sake!” his boss demanded as he stood up and began gathering the files Xavier had laid out on his desk together. “Tell me the color coding again?”

”Blue for notes on a bid that was accepted but hasn’t reached the contract stage, yellow for the unsigned contracts, and red for the supplier credit checks,” Xavier said.

“Huh, maybe we should change to green for the supplier credit checks,” Simon said as he put the folders in to his briefcase. Getting his coat from the rack in the corner of his office nearest his desk, he explained with a grin, “You know, be a little more optimistic about how the credit check is going to go.”

“Okay,” Xavier said. “Then do you want to use green for the supplier credit checks and red for the client invoices?” he asked, returning Simon’s grin.

“Nah, kid,” Simon said, shaking his head. “You’ve got a good system worked out. I’m really please with your work,” Simon went on as they left his office and walked across Xavier’s own. “You’re doing brilliantly, and I think you’re training me as much as I ever trained you.”

Xavier tried not to blush. This was high praise from a man he both liked and respected. “Thank you, sir.”

“Oh don’t start that shit again,” Simon called back over his shoulder as he walked out of Xavier’s office.

Xavier overheard him stop to speak to Marcia for a moment. ‘He’s asking about her car,’ Xavier realized. ‘God, Manny never knew or cared whether or not I had car trouble. He just docked my pay if I was even five minutes late!’ Xavier once again blessed the day he that Simon had hired him.

The money and not having to deal with the Mannys of the world had been enough to make Xavier grateful to have the job in the beginning. His father had found a job, a good, permanent job, the week after Xavier had started at Delaware Designs. That didn’t matter to Xavier, who was glad to be in a place that offered work that was either back breaking or mind numbing work – or both. He had intended to keep the job with Simon only until things got a little easier around the house.

‘Once Dad gets a couple of pay checks in the bank, I can quit here,’ Xavier had thought at the time. ‘At the latest, I’ll leave here right before school starts again in September. I have to get Simon’s office straightened out and I’ll try to stay long enough to train my

replacement, Simon's permanent assistant. I owe Simon that much. He's been too good to me already for me to just up and leave him with his office in the mess it is now. After all, he set it up so that I could tell Manny to take the job and shove it! And for me to get that last pay envelope.'

Xavier was glad now that he hadn't spoken to Simon about those tentative plans. He liked his work and felt that he was good at it. More over, Simon thought that Xavier was good at what he did, and often told him so. And as things worked out, he really needed the job at Delaware Designs. Even if it meant flirting with Ralphie Delaware to keep the other man out of his hair.

Chapter 4 (Coming soon!)