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| BASKETHEADS  by  M. G. Sinclair |

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| Adult  Mystery |

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| CHAPTER ONE  Hugo Beckett |

‘I’m sorry to say, you were right.’

‘And I’m sorry to say, I’m not surprised.’ She said that, but I could see in her eyes the shock. And the heartbreak. ‘What did you get?’

‘Enough.’ Reaching below the table, between the aluminum trim of the tabletop, and the speckled red faux leather bench, I unzipped my yellow messenger bag—there’s a tear in the edge between the zipper and its cover strip. It’s not worth fixing, I should replace it—pulling out the folder, I placed it on the table and opened it. ‘Everything in this folder is yours, should you want it. Most don’t.’ I said that last bit quietly; not intending to hide anything, just the truth of the situation.

Most of the files I pulled out were photos, then a few movement logs, and a dialogue between his employer and I. Adalaide grabbed them, slowly flipping through the documents.

‘Who was she?’ She asked.

‘A coworker, named Jacquelyn Bhor.’

She landed on a particular photo, taken from my car; Kent and Jacquelyn sat on the couch in front of the TV, lips locked with each other’s.

‘As far as I can tell, they’ve been involved for at least three months. I spoke to their boss; occasionally they’d both leave early together.’ As much as she was fighting against it, a tear began to well up in her eye.

‘So brazen. It’s like they wanted to be caught.’

‘Maybe they did. Or maybe they got so caught up, they forgot the subtleties. Relationships like this, born out of infidelity, can flare up quickly, but never last. Once the novelty has worn off and the sneaking around isn’t needed, they’ll realize that they’re disgusted by themselves, and the other. Love is built on trust, and a relationship born of lies will ultimately die by them.’

‘Does it make me a bad person to say that makes me glad?’

‘No.’

She wiped her eye with a finger, then breathed deeply. ‘I’m just glad that I found out before the wedding.’ There was a reluctant sigh of relief in her voice, but it was strained, almost choked, and her hands trembled placing the photos back on the table, though her eyes still on them. Her engagement ring: a small scuffed bluish gem on a silver band, caught the diner’s yellow light, and her attention as she began slowly spinning it about her finger, revealing pale skin underneath.

‘I don’t know what to do.’ She said in a small mousey voice, to no one. But she did know, they always do. That’s just what they say in the moments while they cling to something that was falling away. ‘I have to confront him.’ I could almost read the coming conversations in her eyes, the excuses, the look on his face.

I nodded. ‘If you need support when you do, give me a call. Not standard procedure, but I’ve watched him enough to make this exception. No extra charge.’

‘I hate him.’ Her voice was sharp now, and cold, no longer looking at the photos, but through them. ‘I hate that he did this to me.’

‘I would too.’ I put my hand over hers, covering the ring. ‘That may not pass. But he will. Eventually, you’ll forget about him, find somewhere better.’

She didn’t respond right away, eyes still locked to the photos. I moved my hand, collecting the photos, and documents, returning them to the folder, and slipping that folder back into my bag. As soon as the photos were out of sight, her eyes returned, as if pulled out of a trance.

‘I get paid on Friday; I’ll give you the money when you come to pick Eddie.’

‘Take your time—’

‘You’ll get your money on Friday.’ Her voice was blunt,

‘Okay.’