

# Pretentious Title

*“The world’s a cruel place – continuous strife and bile spread and manifest themselves wherever’s seen fit. If you want a lick of a chance of making it out there, you’ll have to be the world’s pawn – play the game designed for you, and win it. Become the one who rigs it against others, lest you want to be the one it’s rigged against.”*

This was the quote they had always lived by. It got them far in life – showed them the only way to make it was to work in their own interests, and fuck over everyone who stood in the path of their own success. Their father was a wise man, and his realization of this reality is no exception to the man’s brilliance. They always had admired him, trying to follow in his footsteps in every way; the way he spoke, acted, and viewed the world. In their eyes, even now as an adult, he was practically a deity.

And yet, the empire their father had built in their mind crumbled. It was all for nothing. They felt like a complete traitor to all of the ideals that had been meticulously structured by their father, all of the goals he planned for, all of the plans that countless years went into crafting. All because, for once in their life, they put their trust in someone else.

Jesse paced their office, thoughts of their new acquaintance – friend? – running through their mind. He seemed kind enough – eager to help them, provide comfort, to laugh with them. But they knew he had another alternative. After all, they were among the most important people within their industry. It was likely a plot by a rival company to gather information on a new business model, or perhaps one of their newest prototypes, or maybe...

*Knock. Knock. Knock.*

They paused their internal rambling and stared at the wooden door. Who could that be at this time? It was a scheduled bit of private time for Jesse, in which they underwent undisclosed activities – although it was already established among their employees what they were up to during this brief period; something Jesse liked to call to themselves “analytic preparation.” There’s only a select few candidates it could be, however they were sure that Sherri was currently hosting a meeting with all the possible individuals. Unless...

It was *him*.

“Hey Jess, open up, dude – I know you’re in there!” A voice behind the door eagerly said. Jesse began to panic; after all, they hadn’t yet deduced what his plan could be! There were too many variables unaccounted for, and they haven’t even gathered together a brief flowchart of the likely timelines! And

yet, if they displayed a bit of unease at his presence, it'd showcase weakness, it'd showcase their conflicted position on trust. Such was not something Jesse could allow to happen.

"Ah, Gregory, what a pleasant surprise! I'll open the door in just a moment – my workspace is a train wreck currently, to say the least." Jesse mustered in the most confident voice they could, which, fortunately, was rather accurate.

"Please, as if a bit of loose paperwork will make me see less of you. You know I don't give a shit about that, Jess! Come on, let me in." Greg began to jiggle the doorknob as a sign of his impatience.

"Fine, fine, but don't say I didn't warn you!" Jesse said as they begrudgingly opened the door, hoping what little mental preparation they *did* get would suffice.

Greg entered with a large smile plastered on his face as he surveyed the office, taking note of all the minute details, such as the small tinkering toys littered on Jesse's desk, or their small stacks of paperwork, or the various leather chairs spread about.

"Haha, come on man, this is tidy as hell! First time I've seen you get worked up over a few misplaced papers. Normally it's you trying to hide some weird porn magazines." Greg said with a smirk, looking at Jesse, as they began to get visibly flustered.

"I'll have you know that has not, and will not, ever happen! I don't indulge in such... informalities."

Greg burst out laughing "Quit with the stiff shit, dude, I'm just messing with you! Besides, if anything, I'll bet your ass I've got even worse lying around my place." He said with yet another smirk, albeit a slightly smaller one in comparison to the prior.

Jesse couldn't help but crack a smile and roll their eyes. Greg always did have a way of making him chuckle. "As much as I'd like to stay around and exchange jokes with you, I'm rather busy right now, so you'll have to excuse me when I ask, what exactly brings you here?"

Greg's smile faded as he took on a more solemn look "Alright, I'll just cut to the chase. Just, keep that somewhat good mood on you when you hear this."

Jesse raised an eyebrow – it wasn't often Greg was worried about something, and this only began to further previous suspicions Jesse had of Greg. "Go on." They said, suspecting this of being an elaborate plot by Greg to take them down.

"Remember that old rival company we took down? Turns out, the people who ran it are still alive, and are pissed – and I'm pretty sure they're coming to kill you."

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