

"Come in!" I said.

There was a single abortive rap on the door and then it flew open. The woman who stepped into my office was tall, leggy, beautiful - and bewildered. "How did you know I was about to knock?"

"Like it says on the door, I'm a precognitive detective. Have a seat, Ms Harlowe."

"Please. Call me Joanne. I'm here about my-

"-lover, the brilliant but ruthless financier, Othniel Mulliken. You think he's seeing another woman."

"I don't-"

"-expect him to be an angel, but you're afraid there's something more to it than simple philandering. Something darker."

Those emerald-green eyes smoldered. "That's terribly annoying, you know. The way you won't let me finish my own sentence."

"I know," I said. "All my ex-wives told me so."

"So be honest, Mr. Hammett, is he seeing another-"

"-woman? No. Man? Yes. Many, many men. Last week, when he told you he was at a board meeting, he was actually at Allegro, an exclusive orgy club for gay male CEOs. A colleague of mine infiltrated it as a towel boy and managed to take these photos." I spread them out in front of her. "You've been used, Ms Harlowe. You were nothing more than his beard."

Joanne took a deep breath, and then swept the photos into her purse. "Well, I imagine that my -"

"-lawyer will want to see these photos. Indeed he will. Tell him that it's unprofessional to smirk."

"How much do I-"

"-owe me? Ten thousand for the consultation, fifty thousand for the footwork, and an extra twenty for the towel boy. He earned it. Film and developing are on the house."

"That's a little-"

"-steep? Not at all. Considering how much moolah you're about to rack up in palimony, it's only a drop in the bucket."

That cheered her up considerably. For the first time since entering my office, she smiled. Then she eyed me up and down. A predatory look came into her eyes. "Maybe you and I could... go out sometime, Mr. Hammett?"

"Naw," I said. "It would only end in heartbreak."

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