

Chapter 16

Antonio stared intently at his computer monitor.

Rows of code.

Security reports.

Vulnerability scans.

Password policies./

But despite his best efforts his mind was distract and diffused.

The digital equivalent of watching paint dry.

He sighed.

Cybersecurity paid remarkably well for a profession that seemed determined to suck every remaining ounce of joy from a man's existence.

He leaned back in his chair and looked out the window.

Still nothing.

Rocky's driveway remained empty.

Antonio checked the clock.

Strange.

Rocky was almost always home by now.

He glanced toward his phone.

Nothing.

No texts.

No missed calls.

No William.

No Rocky.

Antonio frowned.

He wasn't worried, exactly.

He just...noticed things.

Rocky would've said Antonio never paid attention to anyone but himself.

Rocky would've been wrong.

Antonio simply preferred people not knowing how much he paid attention. How much he actually cared.

He picked up his phone.

Opened the browser.

Immediately regretted that decision.

The screen displayed exactly what he'd been looking at twenty minutes earlier.

"Oh."

Antonio quickly looked over both shoulders, as the naked woman on his screen stared at him unabashedly.

Nobody saw him.

Of course nobody saw him.

He lived alone.

Still...

It seemed like the sort of thing one ought to be discreet about.

He closed the browser.

Thought about it.

Then reopened it.

"...later."

He closed it again and opened a new browser.

News feed.

Nothing exciting.

Weather.

Cold. Same as yesterday.

Sports.

The Tigers had somehow found another way to disappoint him.

Wrestling.

Rumors.

Always rumors.

He read three articles explaining why the Royal Rumble winner was secretly changing at the last minute.

None of them agreed with each other.

Typical.

He checked his favorite band's page.

No tour announcements.

No new music.

Nothing.

He sighed.

The apartment felt unusually quiet.

Too quiet.

Antonio looked back out the window.

Still no truck.

He checked the clock again.

Now he was officially concerned.

Not because Rocky couldn't take care of himself. Lord knows that Rocky could probably survive a bear attack and still manage to apologize to the bear afterward.

It was just...unusual.

Antonio hated this kind of unusual.

He picked up his phone again.

Thought about calling.

Put it back down.

No.

Rocky would never let him hear the end of that.

Instead...

he opened the browser.

Again.

The same paused video greeted him.

Antonio smiled.

"Well..."

He looked over both shoulders.

Again.

Still nobody.

"...I've got time."

Just as he reached for the Kleenex and the volume...

Two headlights swept across the trees outside.

Antonio immediately abandoned the phone and hurried to the window.

Rocky's black truck slowly climbed the driveway.

Antonio smiled.

"Thank God."

He caught himself.

Not because Rocky was late.

Because he'd missed him.

That was annoying.

Antonio didn't like missing people.

He preferred pretending they irritated him. Especially Rocky.

Much healthier.

He watched Rocky park beside the house.

The porch light came on.

The front door opened.

Rocky's wife appeared.

Even from this distance Antonio could see Rocky bend down to hug one of the kids.

Another little figure came sprinting across the porch.

Family.

Antonio smiled despite himself.

He looked at the clock.

No.

Too soon.

Give them time.

Dinner.

Homework.

Stories.

Life.

He wandered back toward the couch.

Picked up his phone.

The browser was still open.

Antonio stared at it for several seconds.

He looked toward the window.

Nobody.

He looked toward the stairs.

Still nobody.

He shrugged.

"Well..."

He sat down.

"I've got at least twenty minutes."

The video resumed.

Exactly seven seconds later there was a knock at the door.

Antonio nearly launched the phone across the apartment.

"Oh, you've got to be kidding me."

Another knock.

"Antonio?"

It was a familiar voice.

Antonio closed his eyes.

"...God really does hate me."