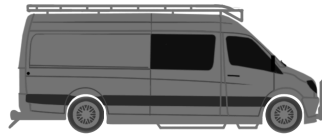


First Move Wins

A Heist Club Short Story

Chapter 5 - Three is a Party



First Move Wins© written by Charlotte

Heist Club© created, developed and published by Blauw Films©

Chapter 5

Three is a Party

Ekster did everything in his power to take all possible shortcuts, but he just didn't know the roads like that. Towards the end of the last tunnel, they got stuck in traffic. It was slow moving, not frozen, but going from 210 kilometers an hour to 20, was a bit of a cold shower. He just needed to get behind his laptop as soon as possible. The plan was to not stop bothering that hacker girl until he had gotten a hold of her. If he had to, he was going to show up at her work tomorrow morning. He knew she'd be there, even on Saturdays.

Åke had turned up the radio, probably to cancel out the silence that had taken a seat between them. Ekster rolled the car window down to light up another cigarette. Åke's entire being came into action.

"You owe me one."

Ekster tossed the package into his lap. "Keeping tabs?"

"Finished mine and since you kidnapped my ass this afternoon, I didn't get around to buy new ones."

"You got into the car voluntarily."

"Do you always make friends like this?"

Ekster rarely ever replied to rhetorical questions.

Åke immediately softened his tone of voice, as if he took Ekster's silence as being offended. "To be honest, the last time I genuinely made a new friend... Can't shake the feeling that people are always kind of... opportunistic."

The silence returned while Åke quietly smoked and pondered his friend-less life. Ekster reasoned that in this specific situation, he'd consider himself quite the opportunist as well.

"You're seeing anyone?" Åke asked out of nowhere.

Ekster plainly replied: "No." Åke really knew how to steer conversations to the most useless topics.

"No?" Åke echoed, with a layer of disbelief. "Don't you get lonely?"

Ekster threw him a judgemental look.

Åke shrugged. “I get lonely all the time. It’s a big city.” He took a long drag from the cigarette while staring out the window. “It’s not like I have family to fall back on, or childhood friends to hit up. Hook ups are a quick and easy fix.” He huffed in this sort of self-deprecating manner and turned back to Ekster. “You’re a funny fellow though. I know a few types like you; married to the job. Lemme tell you this. If you wanted to, I’m sure you’d pull. You’re not terrible to look at. Some people get off on that lofty attitude you’ve got going on. I could introduce you!”

Ekster’s eyebrow twitched. He wasn’t sure if he’d just gotten complimented or insulted. “Please don’t ever.” He had better things to do.

“Your loss.” At least he knew when to stop pushing a topic.

Ekster thanked the lord above when the traffic finally started moving again. They could be back at the house within twenty minutes.

“When is your pickup tomorrow?”

“Five-thirty in the mornin’.”

Ekster cursed under his breath. “*Putain*, that’s early.” It was already an hour past midnight.

“Like I said, don’t sweat it. Neil is an idiot, picking me up at your place once won’t stand out to him at all. Perhaps twice would be out of the ordinary,” Åke added with a grin.

“No matter if we fix that bug in you or not, he’s picking you up at the coffeeshop two blocks ahead.” Ekster growled. “Not at my place.”

Åke tutted like a spoiled teenager, but left it at that. After a short while, he broke the silence yet another time.

“When I feel lonely again,” he said, “can I call you to go cycling?”

Ekster didn’t really know what he wanted to reply. In the end he landed on: “You can do whatever.”

Ekster had to control every muscle in his body to not break *every* traffic rule in the last sprint, although he was sure he could expect some fines in the next few days. In any case he managed to reach the house fifteen minutes quicker than expected, which was great. He knew exactly how to open the garage in time with his arrival so that the door rolled back shut as soon as the car was inside. Åke got out first, while Ekster leaned over to the backseat to grab his bag.

“Uhm. Ekster?”

“Hm.”

“You’ve got a visitor.”

Ekster got out of the car quicker than he had ever moved before. He sure as hell wasn’t expecting anyone.

“You—!!” A short girl with lilac-blue hair and a pissed-off expression pointed her finger at Ekster’s face. “You—!!” She repeated. “Y-You creep!!”

“Whoa,” Åke said, perplexed. “And here I thought you weren’t seeing anyone.”

“Stop trying to break into my computer!” The girl yelled.

Ekster opened and closed his mouth. He couldn’t believe it. What were the odds? Luck must be on his side today. A gift sent straight from the heavens. He folded his hands under his chin for a second, to thank the universe. Upon looking back up, a wide smile appeared on his face. “You’re Prisma.” He knew she was, he just couldn’t believe it.

“S-shut up!” the girl called Prisma Sweetspire yelled. “W-What are you smirking for, Creepo!? You know my name!? I’ll go to the police!”

“Did you sneak in behind us?” Ekster laughed, freed from worry. “You’re one stealthy little lass.”

Prisma’s complexion grew cherry red in record speed. The arm she used to point an accusing finger at Ekster started trembling. She dropped it down to her side, balling her fists in restrained anger. She pressed her lips together before yelling: “Don’t accuse me of trespassing! You did it first!”

Ekster shook his head with a carefree laugh. “You have no idea how happy I am to see you. I’ve been trying to get your attention for *weeks*.”

“I noticed.” Prisma didn’t seem to be able to stay angry for very long. Her eyebrows were still furrowed and her cheeks puffed, but at least she had finally stopped yelling. “You’re very messy.”

“Yes.” Ekster snorted and shook his head. “I know.”

“Uhm, okay. Cute.” Åke said between them, crossing his arms. “Should I introduce myself or am I interrupting something?”

“No time,” Ekster snapped, suddenly serious again. “Prisma, help me out. Please.” He added, before she could open her mouth to protest. “Consider it a gig. It’ll pay well.”

Prisma squinted her eyes. “You’re so odd! I won’t hack into banking systems for you!”

“Nothing like that.” Åke chipped in. “I need my tracker rerouted.”

“Child’s play,” Prisma mocked. “You don’t need me for that.”

“Yes we do. You’re essential.” Ekster quickly said. “You’ve seen my skills.” He innocently added.

Prisma huffed, crossed her arms, looked from Åke to Ekster, turned three-hundred-sixty degrees around her own axis, squatted down on the floor with her hands in her hair, mumbled something to herself, huffed again and rose back on her feet. “Show me this tracker.”

Being not one to cook for himself, the fridge was practically empty. Ekster ran a quick errand to the nightshop around the corner and grabbed some snacks, a couple Soda Cola cans and two bottles of red wine. Just in case this whole thing turned into an all-nighter. When he returned, Prisma was sitting on the floor with her back against the green chaise, her laptop on top of a moving box. Åke had draped himself over the lounge chair, sticking out his arm for Prisma to study.

“But how did they get it in?” She cautiously asked.

“Surgically.”

“Ew! How big is it?”

“Uh, don’t remember.”

“From where do they access the data?”

“A computer?” Åke dumbly replied.

Prisma softly giggled and rolled her eyes. “Oh, hi. You’re back.” She shyly said upon noticing Ekster. “Oh my god are those Farmer’s Crisps?”

Now that she had calmed down, her personality had fully switched around. She was softspoken and her kind eyes wore a cautiously curious expression. Ekster wondered what had come over her to stake around the house for god knows how long, but he found it amusing to no end. He had been targeting this girl specifically, for good reasons, but her in-person energy was even better than expected. Ekster grinned to himself for flawlessly nailing down yet another key player.

“Ah— that. He’s pulling that creepy expression again,” Prisma whispered.

“That’s his happy face, I’m afraid,” Åke conspired.

Ekster immediately wiped the grin off his face.

Prisma shuddered. “Is he always like this?”

“No idea,” Åke replied earnestly. “This is the second time we hang out.”

“Ohhh... Do you know his name?”

“He claims it’s Ekster. Surname undisclosed.”

They both peered at Ekster, who was starting to feel like he was being toyed with. He decided to ignore the situation and threw the snacks next to them on the floor. He nodded at Prisma’s laptop. “How’s that looking?”

“I’m crossreferencing longitude and latitude coordinates to locate the chip,” Prisma explained while she snatched the bag of Farmer’s Crisps. “It’s not hard, there are just, like, a lot of GPS signals in the air at all times. I’ll take a sec.”

“Will this help?” Åke held up his arm to the computer.

“Won’t hurt,” Prisma giggled while she opened the colourful bag of crisps. “May I ask why you have a tracker in your body?”

“Because someone doesn’t want me to walk out of line,” Åke explained cryptically.

“Hmmm.” Prisma nodded, as if her question had been answered. “So you’re going to break that someone’s rules?” She prompted innocently.

Åke chuckled. “I’ve been wanting to do so for a *very* long time. And now Creepo over there has given me a good reason to. From the sound of it, he’s been building a team of specialists, and it starts to look like you and I are a part of it.”

Prisma stared up at Ekster with wide-eyed distrust. “What were those pathetic attempts at breaking my firewall for?” Prisma asked him unkindly.

Åke laughed until Ekster smacked the back of his head.

“Aïe—! Getting physical now?”

Ekster ignored him. “Just wanted to get your attention. See what you would do.”

Prisma blinked twice and pouted angrily. “It was very naive of me to come here,” she finally said. “I did exactly what you wanted.”

“Well...” Ekster sat down across Prisma on the floor. “I never expected you to walk in like this. How did you even find this location?”

Prisma puffed her cheeks. “I reverse engineered the IP address of your sorry attacks. Piece of cake. By the way, you should really set up better security on your laptop. I didn’t even try very hard and was able to comb through all of your files.” With a frown she stared at the continuous stream of data appearing on her screen.

Åke stared at her with a mix of disbelief and respect. “Girl, you got balls.”

“Have you ever been caught?” Prisma suddenly asked with a pained expression.

“Caught?” Ekster parroted. “Doing what?”

Her response was a bunch of incoherent noises of protest. It was safe to assume that Prisma Sweetspire knew as much about trading art as he did about hacking. Practically the only thing he stored on his laptop was some financial administration. Nothing incriminating. Obviously.

“Just how much are you pushing...?” Prisma asked quietly, as she hadn’t already seen the answer to that question with her own eyes. “A-and, what about that team of specialists?” She turned to Åke. “Are you a convicted criminal?”

“What!?” Åke exclaimed, obviously offended. “Are you blind?”

“You are chipped!” Prisma chirped in defense. “And why else would you partner with this white collar criminal over here!”

“The team is still up in the air,” Ekster calmly explained, before Åke could open his mouth again. “But no one is, or will be, convicted. Unless we don’t fix the tracker. So for the love of everything fine and holy, please reroute that fucking GPS. I’d rather not get indicted with the petty crime of driving unauthorized human trade across district borders.”

“It’s a pretty severe crime, actually,” Åke clarified.

“That can’t be.”

“Yeah you could sit for ten plus years or something.”

“Unbelievable.”

“I’ve seen it happen. We’re very valuable.”

Prisma looked as confused as worried. “You need a custom script for active rerouting,” she mumbled. “It’ll take time to build something stable. B-But I guess I might be able to get you a quick-fix tonight.”

“Perfect. You’ve got—” Ekster glanced at his watch. “Three hours and forty-five minutes.”

In the end, Prisma had miraculously put a first-aid bandaid on the whole situation within no more than seventy minutes. Åke’s tracker history of the past twelve hours was overwritten with a bunch of random locations, ending in a static relocation at the corner shop. It would reset to real-time tracking at five fifteen o’clock in the morning, just in time for pick-up.

“If he asks why you’ve been going around town all night—” Ekster started.

“Oh my God, seriously, leave it to me to lie to my own manager.” Åke cut him off with a dramatic roll of the eyes. “Go worry your ass about how you’re going to get a girl home in the middle of the night, after downing a whole bottle of red wine.”

“Ah.” Ekster hadn’t even noticed the bottle emptying. “Fuck.” Not that he was feeling tipsy in the slightest.

Prisma apologetically waved her hands in the air. “Please don’t worry about me, a colleague still expects me to stay over. He lives close”

“Where do you live, Prisma?” Åke politely asked.

“Oh, hmm, across the alps, actually. Closer to Genève.”

“Man, that’s a whole journey from here. Do you have to be on this side of town often?”

Prisma laughed lightly. “My job is on this side. I take the company’s bullet train every day.”

“Whoa a company train? Fancy stuff. Must be a huge enterprise.”

“Uhh, quite big, yeah.”

“Let me guess. You’re one of the best programmers out there. I’ve heard that those hiring processes are brutal.”

“Haha...” Prisma awkwardly laughed with a blush. “No... No, not at all.”

“Girl, what are you on about,” Åke playfully tutted. “As if I didn’t just watch you work your magic. You’ve got serious skills. On top of looking this cute and stylish? You’re practically the coolest person I’ve ever met.”

Prisma obviously didn’t know what to do with herself under Åke’s flattery, as she clumsily stuffed some crisps in her mouth while the flush of her cheeks rapidly expanded down her neck.

Åke, however, shamelessly continued his yapping. “I love your hair, by the way! Where do you get it done?”

“I-I do it myself,” Prisma replied with a small voice.

“So cool!” Åke exclaimed. “See, I’m so right about you. And I totally noticed your pretty nail art earlier. Do them yourself as well?”

Ekster only got a glimpse of Prisma’s charm-embellished nails as they disappeared yet again into balled fists of pure constrained emotion. Åke laughed brightly at her reaction.

“Hahaha, help, you’re too cute! I’m so sorry, please don’t be embarrassed, Prisma. I apologise. You’re just too adorable. Are you aware?”

Prisma looked helplessly in Ekster's direction while her head was affectionately patted by a laughing Åke. She seemed perplexed, sure, embarrassed definitely, though amused and perhaps even guardedly charmed. Åke really had a way with people.

"Are you certain you don't need a drive?" Was the only thing Ekster knew what to say. "I'll order you a taxi."

Prisma immediately shook her head. "No, no, no. No need."

"You're absolutely not walking there all by yourself!" Åke protested loudly.

"I-I have a scooter."

"Useful." Ekster said.

"Man, so cool!" Åke exclaimed.

"Is 'cool' all you care about?" Ekster peevd.

"If you cared more, it'd perhaps motivate me to stay associated with you," Åke readily replied. "Your coolness absolutely *pales* in comparison to Prisma's, who I am *dying* to hang out with again."

Prisma winced under the weight of all that praise and started stuttering something about never showing up again. Ekster quickly grabbed his phone from the pocket of his zip-up and opened up the calendar.

"About that. How are we looking the twenty sixth of this month? Let's meet again," He added, when both of the others gaped back at him in confusion. "The twenty sixth is a Friday. How about seven or eight in the evening? I'll take care of dinner."

Åke was still too slow to catch on. "Is this a triple-date type of deal?"

"Heh!?" Prisma exclaimed in terror.

"No, like a team meeting type of deal."

"Not this team-thing again," Åke boredly said.

"You sounded rather into it earlier."

"Whatever, I don't know. When?"

"Twenty sixth."

"Fuck me, guess I can't ask my manager to jot that down for me."

"Too stupid to remember one single date?" Ekster jabbed.

"Get off my back, I'm a busy person," Åke complained.

"I'm free," Prisma quietly chirped in between them.

A moment of silence followed, after which Åke was forced to conclude: "I'll keep it open."

"So that's sorted." He noted down the meetup in his agenda.

"Say..." Åke started. He didn't finish his sentence as he stroked the direction of the lounge's velvet from one side to the other.

"What?"

"Is this, uhh, team meeting part of your plan to... do the thing?"

"Speak normally."

"You know." He opened his eyes wider. "Finish what we started tonight."

"What's with you? Of course it is. It takes a well organised team to pull off a heist like this."

Prisma gasped. "Heist!?"

"Oh man, way to be discreet," Åke moaned.

"And you can stop pretending to be clueless." Ekster pointedly told Prisma. "As if you didn't know what you were running yourself into. You've got blondie fooled, but I wasn't born yesterday."

Prisma pressed her lips together and leered back at him through her eyelashes.

"What did you just call me you—"

"I'll let you two in on a little secret." Ekster cut Åke off. "I am *always* one step ahead. Only a deranged person would show up at a person's house in the middle of the night, fully knowing they professionally smuggled millions worth of cultural heritage. Are you an adrenaline junkie, Prisma Sweetspire? Or did you simply smell an opportunity and are you out for a piece of the pie?"

Prisma squinted her eyes. "I knew something was off."

"A-plus for your gut feeling. But gut feeling doesn't win from the perfect plan. And I've been planning. For a long, long time. I highly suggest the two of you attend the first team meeting. Who knows what it'll bring you." With that said, he rose to his feet and straightened out his clothes. "Well. Today's been great. Thanks to everyone for your seamless collaboration. We made leaps of progress. Is everyone ready to wrap it up?" He looked down at the two perplexed faces staring back up at him. Åke was the first to regain consciousness.

"You're a fucking weirdo."

"And yet..." Prisma frowned.

“You said it, girl. And yet look at us fools. Cosying up in the trap he set up for us. This place is already starting to feel like a second home!” He made himself comfortable on the chaise lounge, his legs way too long for the two-person seat. “Can I just crash right here?”

Ekster felt his eye twitch. The Victorian mahogany was really an object for looking and light use only. He quickly went over the other options in his head. The hardwood floor. His own bed.

“Just— don't drool.”

At the door, he exchanged phone numbers with Prisma before handing her a set of keys.

“This one is for the first front door. This one is for the second front door, the one to your left. That door leads you directly to the garage, in case you want to park your scooter inside. Feel free to drop by whenever you need. Perhaps it's more comfortable to work here on the project, rather than somewhere in public.”

“Ah, uhm. Thanks. About that, though.” Prisma fiddled with the keys in her hand. “I honestly can't say for sure how quickly my meddling with the code will get noticed by the engineers. It was really, really cleanly written. Custom, build from the ground up. The back-end was completely encrypted, the only thing I could manage was to trick some calculations. I don't know... what it looks like... to the user... and how long it will... hold up.” Her voice trailed off as she lost confidence with each word spoken. “Will Åke be in trouble if they find out?” She anxiously asked.

“Yes.”

“S-shit.” She stuttered. “I'll see what I can decipher...”

“Prisma,” Ekster said, in his best soothing voice. “You'll manage. I trust you will. Worst case scenario, I find some back-alley surgeon who'll just rip the thing out of Åke's arm.”

It was a joke, but serious distraught was painted all over the girl's face.

“W-what'd be the ideal solution?”

“Ideally? Some type of way to control the tracker data at all times.”

Prisma fell incredibly quiet. She didn't look too happy. “I don't know if that's possible... but I'll try to work it out...”

“I'm certain you will. You've dealt with tougher obstacles, after all.”

Prisma let out a little huff. “I guess that's true.” After a beat she said: “How do you know that?”

“You're very good at your job, and I'm very good at mine,” Ekster smirked. “Get home safely, Prisma.”

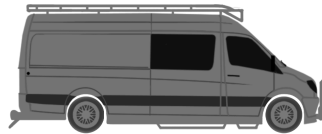
While walking down the street, she looked back over her shoulder a few times to check if he was still watching her. Every time she did, she waved. Ekster waved back until she disappeared around the corner.

When he saw Åke out cold on the small sofa, he decided that there was actually some work he still wanted to get done. He didn't feel tired in the slightest. In fact, he was just getting started.

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END



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