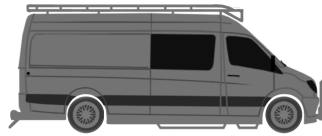


First Move Wins

The Founding of Heist Club

Chapter 9 - Unparalleled Potential



First Move Wins© written by Charlotte

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Chapter 9

Unparalleled Potential

“Dust! Fuck, I literally thought I messed up so bad that we’d never get to see each other ever again.”

It was around eight in the evening when Åke finally arrived. He jumped into Dust’s arms the moment she opened the door for him. He was wearing a black, sleeveless shirt and his tanned skin was glowing with after warmth from a day of sun. He smelled like rosewood and tobacco.

“Glad to see you too,” Dust grinned while she patted the guy’s back. “Did you come straight from the gym?” She asked, referring to the bag around his shoulders.

“Yeah, yeah,” he beamed, keeping his arms around her as he gently swayed their bodies from left to right. “Swam some laps. Ah, man, I was so scared that I would never get to see your gorgeous face ever again!”

“Oh that’d be terrible,” Dust laughed, tightening her arms around his waist. The two stood in the doorway just like that, hugging and laughing as if they were long lost friends who saw each other again after years of bitter separation.

Despite the little emotional setback he had caused, Dust had forgiven him the moment it happened. She didn’t believe he was completely at fault, and somehow she just couldn’t seem to stay mad at him. She’d rather have him here. There was a connection between them that felt undeniable.

Back when she first moved to this continent, Dust had to learn the hard way that most Europa folk weren’t too fond of intimacy between strangers, neither physical nor emotional. In her native culture, the body was considered an integral part of the physical realm; in need of connectivity to stay grounded with the earth. The soul would float and disconnect without love. The first few years on this side of the Aegean sea had been quite the alienating experience. Not many of her people ever settled on the mainlands of the European continent, the cultural mismatch was simply too large. Luckily for her, Farello had found her and decided to keep her constant company.

Up until now, she hadn't met many people like Åke; someone who offered physical touch as a genuine form of communication. Mina had completely stiffened up in their hug earlier, Prisma flinched when she did as much as sit next to her, and Ekster would plainly instruct her to keep her hands to herself. Driver could probably give out a good hug if she was in need of one, but would never initiate contact. Perhaps Max liked hugs, but his high-effort hairstyle signaled a no-touch zone. Åke, in stark contrast to everyone else, seemed to actually actively seek out physical interaction. In a funny way, he reminded her of Farello's excitement towards touch. He gave out hugs with his entire heart and soul, and she felt like she could read his mind through his skin. *The mind speaks its truth through the body*, was a saying of her ancestors. Åke kissed the top of her head.

"Oh my God, you smell *good*. Sea, salt, sweat. My favourites."

Dust snorted into his shoulder and tightened up her hug one more time before letting go. She knew he genuinely wanted, and needed, to be here today.

"Two new people have joined. Remember that red-haired kid we met at Manzoni's last week? He's here. And a sporty-looking chick. Looks like you two have a bunch of hobbies in common."

Åke's deer-like, bright yellow eyes beamed down at her with boyish excitement.

"Sweet! That makes seven of us, no? Typical of him to settle for such a biblical number," he rolled his eyes, referring to Ekster, of course. "Where is he, anyway?" He peeked over her head up the stairs.

"In his office," Dust replied, before deciding to unburden her heart. "Honestly Åke, I was pretty anxious all throughout Monday and Tuesday. Ekster called me on Wednesday to tell me you two decided to make amends."

Åke scoffed. "Make amends, yeah. As long as it's in his best interests, he'll meet you in the middle. Everything is transactional for him. Better watch out with that guy, you never know what he's thinking."

Dust couldn't agree wholeheartedly. She was of the opinion that Ekster was rather predictable in nature.

"Prisma and I were just about to set the table," she decided to change the subject and stepped aside to let him in. "You hungry?"

“I thought I smelt fresh bread!” Åke grabbed her hand and dragged her along inside. “I’m literally starving. Everyone’s here already? Oh man, can’t wait to catch up. Prisma? Prismaaaaa!” He yelled up the stairs.

Dust grinned. He really was like a dog.

“—Whoaa!” Åke exclaimed upon entering the room. “Who transformed this squat into a home? Dust, you’ve got magic hands.”

Farello clearly remembered Åke from last week, barking and jumping up to his waist to get his attention.

“Farello!!” Åke cheered, giving the poodle his undivided attention. “Yeah, I missed you too! Sooo much!” He extensively scratched Farello behind his ears, after which he enthusiastically greeted Driver and stole a slice of dried sausage from the cutting board.

“Yo, thanks again for driving me around last Monday, when Ekster was too sour to give me a ride,” said Åke.

“No trouble, Åke. None at all. Glad to see you,” Driver replied with a nod.

“Same here man.”

Åke crept up behind Prisma and jump-scared her with a tight hug.

“Whatcha doin’, workin’ this late on a Friday~?” He sing-songed with his arms around her neck.

Prisma put up a little fit to be let loose, after which she explained in all seriousness the updated features of the tracker rerouting tool. Åke alternated between staring at the screen in awe and showering her with thankful compliments, while Driver and Dust finished dressing the table. Driver offered Åke more sausages, which he declined with a laugh.

“Man, I’m going to seriously cry. You two outdid yourselves,” he said with a theatrical wobble in his voice, referring to the food on the table and the newly furnished living room. He then proceeded to closely inspect and admire every single piece of decoration in the room.

Dust beheld his antics with great amusement, reminded of Ekster’s warning that Åke was, as he had so nicely put it, a professional ass-kisser.

“This couch is am-a-zing! Ugh, so comfortable! Can’t wait to take a nap right here. And what’s this little thing?”

“A table lighter,” Dust explained.

“Ohhh it’s nice! Whoa, heavy,” he said, weighing the lighter in his hand. “Ekster’s?”

“Of course.”

“Motherfucker’s got nice things,” Åke hummed. “Man, you transformed this place, it looks awesome.”

Farello barked happily and joined Åke on the couch.

Dust couldn't help but grin ear to ear, his enthusiasm was genuinely flattering nonetheless.

“I reckoned you’d need a proper couch to sleep on in case you had to crash again,” she laughed.

“I could sleep right here and now,” he said, lying down with Farello on his chest.

In the same moment that Åke happily closed his eyes, the door to Ekster's office flew open. Max and Mina walked out, loudly chatting about some video game. They matched each other's energy perfectly. Ekster followed, with a face that screamed, ‘I need a cigarette or else—.’ Indeed, he turned an immediate right to the roof terrace, completely ignoring that Åke had arrived. The other man obviously didn't appreciate being ignored and opened his mouth to say something, but was cut off by Max.

“Yo, bro! Sick seeing you again.”

As expected, Åke’s reflexes were quick and he flawlessly diverted his attention from the door that Ekster had just slammed shut, to reciprocate Max’s dap mid-air without missing a single beat.

“No way. You made it,” Åke said with a suitably jovial grin. “Survived Ekster's intake?”

“Zero stress.” Max dropped back into the couch as well, kicking his feet up as if he was at his own home. “Have you met Mina?”

Åke turned to the blonde girl who was grinning brightly.

“*Hallo!* Nice to meet you! This is gonna sound crazy, but you're Aake, right? My friends go mad every time we walk past your ad for Gym Base in Central Mall.”

Åke laughed. “Thanks! My name's pronounced oh-ke, by the way, as in o-kay.”

“Oh!” Mina’s ears grew red.

“Yeah, like that,” Åke joked. “Don't sweat it. Your name’s Mina?”

“Mina Leonhart,” the girl introduced herself with her full name, probably from the nerves.

“Coolest surname I’ve ever heard,” Åke smoothly said. “You play football?”

The three immediately started a conversation about sports, which Dust kind of checked out from. She sat next to Prisma at the table and put her head in her hands.

“Ahh... everyone's here. Reckon that everything will come together at last?”

Prisma raised her head and looked at the three chatting away on the couch. Through the landscape windows behind them, dusk had fallen, and the sky coloured the same shades as Prisma's hair.

"We'll see..." was the only thing she said.

Dust grinned and nudged the other girl with her shoulder. "You're allowed a little bit of optimism, after all that hard work we've already put in."

She looked at Prisma's computer screen, where an icon of Åke's face pretended to be doing groceries at the supermarket.

"Have patience, have everything," Driver said in a proverbial tone of voice, suddenly sitting next to them at the table with a beer in his hand.

Prisma jumped and Dust nodded at the drink. "I could have one."

"Young lady, I see two healthy legs. The fridge's stocked."

"My legs are occupied!" Åke yelled from the couch, pointing at Farello who was taking a nap on his lap.

"Weren't you dying from hunger just now?" Dust reminded him. "Eat before you drink."

"Shouldn't we wait for—" The door flung open mid-sentence and Ekster marched in, laptop and briefcase in hand. "Speak of the Devil," Åke added under his breath.

"Ah, *salut*, you're here," Ekster finally took notice of him. "*Ça va?*"

"Fine, great, thanks," Åke mumbled.

Dust had no idea whether the two had seen each other since last Sunday, but Ekster acted quite airily, while Åke looked like he still had a thing or two on his mind.

Ekster dropped his stuff at the head of the table and reached for the bottle of red wine as he sat down next to Dust. He filled his water glass to the brim.

"I'm really sorry," he said, excusing himself for his lack of etiquettes. "But the past week took twelve decades off my life."

"Didn't know you intended to live for that long," Dust joked.

"Not anymore." He bottomed-up the glass, which would've been quite impressive, if Dust hadn't already seen him do that a handful of times before. "They are stealing my youth." referring to the three on the couch, who were now laughing at Max's seated reenactment of Mina celebrating scoring a goal.

It was obvious Ekster lived on a completely different wavelength from them.

"You pulled it off, though. Everyone who you had your eye on is here."

Ekster nodded his head in semi-agreement. “That's an optimistic way to look at it.” He ripped off a piece of baguette and put a generous amount of blue cheese on it. He gestured for the others at the table to eat something as well.

“In reality, we're only getting started. The client for the Marble Mary suddenly decided he wants the in-person trade off to take place on Paros, which is quite the pain.” He looked at Driver. “Unless you don't mind going on a little road trip all the way to South Aegean.” Driver gave him a thumbs-up. “Sorted. Moreover, I'm working ahead and keeping an eye on the situation at The North-South State Museum, which is developing quicker than I had anticipated. I don't have a mole and it's getting harder to keep track of their inventory. On top of that, I didn't expect to need six different payout strategies, so I'm pretty behind on paperwork.” He glanced at the three new friends again. “And don't get me started on Mister Åkerman, he's a downright legal nightmare.”

“Oh yes, because legality is what you're worried about here,” Dust teased.

That actually made him laugh. “I draw the line at bad paperwork,” he said, pretending to be stern about it.

“What did your lawyer say about Åke?” Dust asked off-handedly while she walked to the fridge. From the corner she could see Åke's ears perking up.

Ekster sighed and poured himself more wine. The bottle was already half-empty at this point. He then chuckled to himself and shook his head. “I shouldn't laugh. But sometimes I forget that my lawyer is the biggest crook of all.”

Dust opened two bottles of beer and brought one over to Åke. “Must've been an interesting meeting.”

Åke clinked his bottle with Dust's and raised his eyebrows with a knowing look. Mina and Max were quiet for the first time since entering the room. “He was absolutely thrilled to work my case.”

Ekster elaborated, “Viscuso, my lawyer, called me afterwards. First thing he said: congratulations Curator, your most valuable asset as of yet. He had the whole white washing strategy laid out. The man's an absolute shark.”

“Huh?” Dust said, looking between Ekster and Åke. “I don't get it. I thought this was about a way for Åke to get paid?”

Ekster huffed. “It is. I won't bore you with the details, but to put it simply, Åke's a tax haven, legally speaking. A holding for investment and trust funds. At least it's finally clear to

me why the ultra-rich like to keep human assets. They make, hold and launder money all at the same time. Win-win, triple win type of deal. For the account holder, at least. Now, I can make use of some legal loopholes and the power of Åke's written consent," he raised his glass to the other man, "to not only get Åke, but all of us paid, while protecting our identity. Checking accounts are a different story entirely, but this alone will save my guy at the bank a whole bunch of time and work."

"Glad to be of service," Åke sighed. "It just pisses me off that I don't know these things about myself."

"Yeah..." Dust slowly said. She wasn't sure if she really grasped the entirety of the situation, but at least it sounded like Ekster and Åke had found a way to work together on the same side again. "So the Frog won't find out about this?"

"Not if I keep my mouth shut," Åke said with a funny expression. "Right?"

"If that's not too much to ask," Ekster said sarcastically. "On that note."

He opened up the black briefcase. He took out seven Nokia phones in seven different colours and waited for everyone to take a seat at the table.

"We'll continue communication through this device only. Everyone's number is already added."

Dust received the green phone, Driver the white one, Prisma's was pink, Mina got yellow, Max red, Åke was handed purple and Ekster kept the black one for himself.

He then proceeded to give everyone a set of keys. "For the front doors," he explained.

"You're giving everyone a copy?" Mina asked suspiciously. "Isn't this where you live as well?"

"You're planning to murder me in my sleep?" Ekster deadpanned. "That's what I thought," was the answer to her silence. "This time around, I'm not working with professional criminals for a reason. I really do..." He glanced at Åke. "For some unfathomable reason, trust everyone here. To a certain degree. Except for you of course," he jokingly added to Driver.

Driver threw Ekster a heart-shape with his hands. The unexpectedly cute gesture made Prisma giggle.

"First things first," Ekster continued with a little smirk. He'd been looking forward to this day, Dust knew. Hence the uncharacteristically good mood. "Thank you for coming tonight. Everyone knows what they're here for, so I appreciate the show-up. It's my first time building my own team, so bear with me. I'd like to reemphasize that whatever is said between the

seven of us, stays between the seven of us. No exceptions. Anonymity is everything in this field of work, and separation between professional and private life is crucial. I strongly advise everyone to consider that division sacred. I was given the nickname Curator over a decade ago, and have been hiding behind that pseudonym ever since. Besides the six of you and my mother, there is no one who even knows my first name. I am sure, the longer we work together, the more gossip you'll hear about the Curator. Take all you hear with a grain of salt. What I do is in reality nothing more than some smart bookkeeping. I need the money and hate elitists. That's it. My real name is Ekster Vandroogenbroeck. I never, ever use that name professionally."

Ekster briefly side-eyed Dust, who offered him a proud smile. He'd been on the fence about how he'd introduce himself to the team, but Dust was glad to hear he'd decided to take her advice and allow a certain level of mutual confidence.

Åke straightened his back at the unceremonial mention of Ekster's family name. "What—? Van—? What? How do you spell that?"

"The same way you pronounce it," Ekster joked. "And I swear, if you try to dig for information behind my back one more time, I'm sending Frog your balls in a jewelry box." That last part didn't sound like a joke.

Åke threw his hands up. "Not betting my dignity away twice."

"A couple of other house rules," Ekster placidly continued. "We all speak a couple of languages, but let's stick to English between us. It's the only one we all understand. I don't enjoy excluding people through language."

Everyone hummed in agreement.

"Now." Ekster threw his briefcase shut and rose up from his seat, glancing over everyone at the table. "This is how this is going to work. For every job, I will hire each of you on a contract basis. Before signing, you're allowed to opt out at any point. After signing, you finish the job. The NDA everyone signed is enforced at any time, at all times, always, for the rest of your life. *Capisce*? The only way to get out of a signed contract is jail or death. And I will make sure to keep you out of jail."

Dust looked around the table. Everyone seemed to have already grown used to Ekster's strong choice of words and she swore she saw Mina hold back a grin.

"Everyone's active involvement will differ from gig to gig," Ekster continued, unfazed. "Equity will be split based on time, risk and skill. Technically you're not allowed to debate

your equity stake upfront, but, if needed, they will be recalculated *in your favour* after the fact, based on performance and the results actually achieved. So don't fuck up, and your labour will bear its fruits. After every job, we'll enter a cool-down period in which we don't see or speak to each other." He half-glanced at Åke and Dust. "I will need an undetermined amount of time to process payments, after which you will wait for my call and wash the cash according to my reinvestment instructions. Exact payment details are determined by the volume of profit and will naturally differ from job to job. With every contract I will try to provide an estimated payout plan to the best of my abilities, as a way to manage expectations. Any questions thus far?"

Everyone was dead-silent.

"Fantastic." Ekster adjusted his glasses and crossed his arms. "Now let's get on to the fun stuff. Professional robbing is like riding a bike. You really just have to get a hang of it, before it becomes second nature. First few times you'll eat concrete and look like a fool. But when I say that I see long-term potential in this team, I'm being absolutely serious." He paused for a second, as if to check everyone's reaction. No one said anything. "I have big plans," he continued. "But I'm not unrealistic nor over-confident. This first job should be profitable without too much risk. Let's get into it. Prisma? Can you—?" He opened his laptop and Prisma scooted over.

"Just go here, and click on the projector icon to connect," she mumbled. "It's a bit embarrassing that you don't know these things," she added in a low tone. "It's very basic stuff."

"Told you, I'm a paper pusher, not a technician," Ekster grinned.

"Technician where," Prisma scoffed. "It's just a Bluetooth connection."

Dust patted Prisma on her back. She knew how much the girl hated solving dumb problems. But she also knew that Ekster was surprisingly stupid when it came down to technology, the only applications on his laptop he understood were email and excel.

While the projector above their head whirled into action, Prisma sat behind Ekster's laptop and located some files. A deep frown appeared on her cute face while she mummered, "what a mess, what a mess," most probably referring to Ekster's file structure. If his computer was organised in any way similar to how he had organised his own house, it must be quite the hellscape.

Across the table, Max and Åke had started a conversation about hair dye, while Mina confiscated a bowl of grapes being eyed-up by Farello. Looking at the teenage girl eagerly chomping down on the fruits, Dust couldn't help but wonder what her goals were for joining this group. Ekster had reassured her that everyone had their reasons, and it wasn't her job to overthink them all. Considering how Ekster's motivations differed wildly from her own, she agreed it was probably impossible to guess what anyone's deal was anyway. *"As long as they're intrinsically motivated, I'm convinced,"* Ekster had said... Fair enough.

"Okay," Ekster announced when Prisma gave him a thumbs up. "The current heist at hand—"

"Okay," Ekster announced when Prisma gave him a thumbs up. "The current heist at hand—"

He was promptly interrupted by Åke clearing his throat and raising his hand.

"We're not in class." Ekster rolled his eyes.

"I heard some stuff this past week."

Ekster crossed his arms. "Well?"

"Gossip has spread like a wildfire that a large number of objects presented by Baron Marcus de Lyon have been rejected by the Salon Commission. I know it's the truth, because Frog is in that commission. It's an absolute disgrace for the estate of De Lyon, and Marcus is grilling his subordinates to have it fixed by yesterday. For those who don't know," Åke looked around the table, "the first day of the fourteen-day Salon begins in exactly one week, next Friday night. So, he's cracking the whip and making his asset managers run around like headless chickens. The situation is the talk of the town and the Baron refuses to show his face at any of the pre-parties. *Especially,*" he added with a pointed expression, "because word in the wind is that over twenty pieces of jewelry have been stolen from one of the Baron's properties, namely, a little white church in the south-west of the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Department." He paused for dramatic effect and stared up at Ekster. "Now I wonder who could've done that," he added sarcastically.

Ekster looked at Dust, and Dust hid her grin behind the palm of her hand.

"Oops," she giggled.

"I told her to take 'em with," Ekster covered for her. "We spent the night at the church and I couldn't help but notice a couple of shiny things. You said twenty? Hmmm. Funny. I definitely have more than that."

Åke shook his head in confusion. “You two spend the night at the church? Okay. Romantic.”

“I performed an exorcism on the Mary,” Dust explained.

“Just to be safe,” Ekster elaborated.

“I’m sure it was very necessary,” Åke mocked. “In any case, they suspect the movers. The property manager himself is under fire as well. He was already considered useless, but now his head is on the chopping block for real, for real. To save the Salon, and his career, he’s going to have to comb through all his portfolio assets again, and propose a new collection, on top of having to justify the loss of the jewelry. A whole army of inventory checkers has been deployed, like the one we ran into at the church, to get the job done in time. People are also whispering that the police haven’t been notified, because all the jewelry was fake.”

Ekster tapped his chin. “They were replicas. Made from genuine metals nevertheless. Let’s just go through the plan. I think we can make this work in our favour.”

Åke shrugged and sat back in his seat. “Let’s hear it.”

From his laptop, Ekster popped up a couple of images on the projector. the Marble Mary appeared.

“She’s our target. Dated thirty BC, made from Paros marble, in near perfect condition. The only damage is salt water from what I suspect is a relatively recent flood, after which the statue was moved uphill to her current location. She has a bunch of forged paperwork with some bull-shit story attached to her, which makes her relatively valuable to an amateur collector. I suspect she’d been passed around from collector to collector to inflate her value, even going as far as staging a heist on her. It’s absurd. She’s perfectly valuable as she is, but for some reason people have felt the need to rewrite her story to better fit their own aesthetic preferences. We’re calling her the Marble Mary, but she’s most definitely not portraying the Holy Mary. Paros has an interesting history, it might be where the purposeful misinterpretation about her religious origin comes from. My buyer believes she needs to return to her original soil in Paros, in order to lift some curse of sorts, as described per instruction on the statue itself. He’ll buy her refreshed paperwork for one point five million euros.”

Max whistled softly. Mina shuffled in her seat and even Åke sat up a little straighter. Ekster pulled up a couple images of the small white church.

“The Marble Mary currently resides in this sorry piece of property. No security, no proper upkeep, we know the drill. Piece of cake. However...” He rolled his last r and turned to face the group. “This brings us to our current situation. Åke, who do you think discovered that jewelry was missing from the church?”

Åke shrugged. “I assume it was the property manager himself. He must’ve panicked and confided in someone. Gossip literally spreads within a matter of minutes.”

Dust was thinking along. “And they couldn’t notify the police, because the jewelry is essentially worth nothing. Wouldn’t be worth the reputational damage?”

“Having your shit stolen is already embarrassing,” Åke agreed. “But having fake shit in your portfolio is absolutely humiliating. Police involvement means publicity. There is no way in hell the Baron would let that slide. We rarely ever involve the police. The less eyes, the better.”

“That’s a good idea,” Ekster sat back in his chair. “How utterly embarrassing would it be, if the jewelry magically returned?”

Everyone stared at him.

“Huh?” Max said dumbly.

“Return the jewelry, steal Mary, tip the police, confuse the living daylight out of everyone?” Dust thought out loud. Exactly the type of weird plan Ekster would come up with.

“That’s good.” Driver said. “It’ll divert attention.”

“That’s really good,” Åke added with a laugh. “I can’t really imagine a more pathetic public downfall as having the police show up at your doorstep for counterfeit jewelry that the thief already returned. That’s hilarious”

“Okay,” Ekster folded his fingers together. “This is how we’ll prep. Dust and I curate the jewelry we’ll return. Not all of it, since they’re obviously oblivious to what was exactly stolen. We’ll return the most useless shit. I’ll even clean it and make sure it catches everyone’s attention. Driver modifies the van for the Marble Mary. We need to be able to transport her easily and securely. I want Max and Åke to be armed.” Max lit up and Åke opened his mouth to say something, but Ekster raised his hand to shut him up. “I’m not expecting any heat from this job. But, if we continue to pull off heists successfully, they won’t go by unnoticed for long. You two should get ready to be able to eliminate law enforcement vehicles in the future event of a chase. You’ll be using rubber bullets. I’ve got more than

enough on my mind, homicide is the last thing I want to deal with. That being said..." Ekster turned to Max. "The gun loadout you requested... You sure do like heavy artillery."

Max was quick to speak up. "Man, the Remington MSR has been like my tried and trusted for years. You've seen it, I hit 'em high-scores with this weapon, both online and in the field. Yo, Driver said it would be cool. Sure, there are a couple of tiny differences between an airsoft gun and the real thing, but he said he'd get me up to speed within no time." Max didn't stumble over his words once, despite his obvious excitement. "You know what you should be more worried about? A marksman needs a spotter. Who's gonna spot for me?"

"That would be me," Dust spoke up. Ekster had been very clear about what skills of hers he was interested in. Besides her knowledge of the area and sharp eye, her steady-fast personality and communication skills would be complimentary to this kid's fiery spirit.

"That's right," Ekster confirmed. "Dust spots, Max provides long range support, Driver saves the heavy hitters for the last resorts and Åke provides the tactical ground support."

"... And I am able to do that based on what?" Åke hesitantly protested. "Little known fact, I have never held a gun."

Ekster had it all figured out, apparently. "Driver's a fantastic drill sergeant. Don't worry about the short-term, you'll be fine. Even with our current skillsets, I have full confidence that the Marble Mary hit-and-run will be a walk in the park. At the night of the heist, Dust and Max will take their position on a vantage point to keep an eye on the roads. Like I said, I'm not expecting heat, but we'll need to be on the lookout nevertheless. Better save than sorry. Mina and I will cover all footwork. Driver and Åke focus on the statue, Prisma stays in the van because I believe she needs to take care of Åke's tracker?" He glanced over to Prisma, who had a particularly deep frown between her brows.

"Uh— yeah," she stated. "Like I told you, it's not foolproof. The code that triggers a GPS scramble is not yet stable on the receiving end and can display the output data at random, causing jitters and jumps in the tracking data. When the GPS data needs to be rerouted for long periods at a time, it needs manual supervision."

Ekster didn't blink. "You got it, though?"

Prisma nodded stiffly.

Ekster proceeded to pull up another image on the projector behind him. "This is the floorplan of the church. The Mary is marked in red. Mina, the two of us will work together to return the jewelry. We'll need to know the floorplan like the back of our hands and move as

fast and effectively as possible. On the way out we can have some fun and grab a couple of other valuables.”

“Other... valuables?” Mina repeated, sounding a bit overawed by the whole thing.

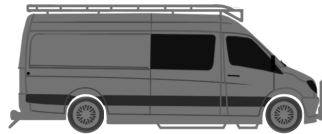
“Kill two birds with one stone. The more we bag, the better. Let’s mess up their inventory control system real good.” Ekster tapped through a couple of dozen images of various small objects; pictures he had taken in the church during their overnight trip.

“I thought it’d be a good idea to run a couple of small test thefts to see if anyone would bat an eyelash. Turns out that was the right thing to do. We have the upper hand now. I actually hoped this would shake things up a bit, because the silence surrounding that church was way too suspicious. Now, it’ll be best to strike while the iron is still hot. As we’ve just discussed, a bit of prep needs to happen before we can make this a flawless plan. Meaning we’re going to have to lock in for a bit. So. Cancel your weekend plans, everyone. We’ve got shit to steal!”

First Move Wins

Chapter 9 - Unparalleled Potential

END



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