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Mr. Palshaw

English IV

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Password

“Hey man, how’s it going?”

“Uh...hello, Max.” Jeremy rubbed his forefinger against his right temple.

“What’s up, man? You won’t believe the day I had today--I had to drop off some mail, you know jus’ letters and stuff, and I was almost rear ended by some idiot behind me goin’--”

“Sounds rough, I hate when that happens.”

“Yeah but you won’t believe--”

“I’m sorry...I’m...not really in the mood to chat right now.”

“You okay, bro?” Max’s lip quivered.

“Not...really.”

“Well, what’s up?”

“It’s kind of complicated, Max.” Jeremy blinked with distaste.

“I mean, you don’ have to talk about it if you don’ want to. I’m jus’ making sure you’re good, man.”

“I’ll put it this way,” Jeremy began as he picked up a pencil from the coffee table beside him and snapped it with his right hand. He looked up at Max.

“What the hell is that suppos’ to mean?”

“It means...well, it means that *someone*, I’m not sure who, has been lying to me.”

“Huh?” Max’s brows furrowed.

“I was working the other day, watching the graphs, buying, selling--you know--when I noticed my computer screen flicker for a second and saw that green light on my webcam turn on and then off.”

“Ok....”

“I figured it was just a glitch, you know, it’s not the first time that has happened--it’s been doing that for a couple weeks now. But then I glanced at my desktop and saw that it looked a little different. At first I couldn’t figure out what it was, but then I saw that one of my icons, one of the applications, was in the wrong place.”

“Maybe you jus’ ...uh..moved it on accident or something.” Max licked his lips and bit down on the bottom one.

“No,” Jeremy replied. “I never move those icons unless I install a new app and need to change things around, and that wasn’t the case. I *know* that it was in the wrong place because I had just used that application, and the thing was in the right spot when I went to open it.”

Max feigned concern.

“Anyway, I kept working but kept an eye on the webcam and the screen. A few minutes later, there it goes again! The camera turned on again and flickered, *again*. But this time when it flicked, I noticed that icon jump to the place it was originally and then jump back.”

“I don’ really see what’s wrong, dude. Seems like jus’ a glitch to me. You’re probably jus’ --”

“No, Max. You don’t get it, *someone was watching my screen*, and watching *me*. And it’s someone from inside, from our office. There’s no way anyone, or *anything* for that matter, could get past our security from outside. *Someone* is lying to me, and--”

“I don’ know man, I don’ know. I don’ think you should read into it--it’s probably jus’ some problem with the system. And who would have done it anyway? It’s obviously not me, it can’t be Robert, and I doubt it’d be the security guys. Who else?”

“Well you’re forgetting Lauren, but she’s on maternity leave and hasn’t been in the office for weeks. So it isn’t her. And I know it isn’t the security because their location in the building is always monitored and I checked out the feed. They haven’t been in the office for weeks, so I would seriously question it being them. So it--”

“It mus’ be Robert then!”

Jeremy nodded his head and then looked up. “Or...it could be you....”

“*Me?* Dude, what the hell? I’ve known you for years, why would I do something like that. Don’ you trust me at all? I thought we were--”

“Listen, listen, listen. I’ve known Rob just as long as I’ve known you, and I want to figure out who did it asap without dismissing anyone just because we’re friends. You’re both more than just coworkers to me, but *one of you*,” Jeremy raised his eyebrows, “isn’t telling me the truth.”

“So you’ve talked with Robert? How d’ you know he’s not the one tha’s lying--*why do you assume I did it?*”

Jeremy put his hands up. “I’m not assuming anything, but as a technician you would certainly have the ability to do something like this. Again, I’m not saying that you did, but Rob’s

just a stock trader like me, and I know *I* wouldn't have the technical skills to pull something like this off."

Max shook his head and tightened his lips together.

"And besides, Rob *assured* me he didn't do anything like that and he has no idea who did."

*"Well tha's exactly what I'm saying! Why the hell do you believe him and not me?"*

"I didn't say that. I'm just telling you what Rob told me. I had a serious conversation with him and pressed him for a while, and he didn't budge. I'll tell you, he had me convinced. Now I don't know if he's just a good liar or if he was telling me the truth, but--"

*"He's lying! Don' belie--"*

"I'm not saying I do. Just relax. But I'm gonna ask you straight up: *are* you the one that cloned my screen?"

*"No! I didn't do anything! HOW AM I EVEN SUPPOSED TO KNOW YOUR PASSWORD? You keep that DAMN slip of paper locked up like it's the combination to friggin' Fort Knox!"*

"Wait, wait...wait," Jeremy tilted his head. *"What?"*

Max paused his flailing arms.

"How in the *world* do you know where I keep my password?"

Max's eyes searched for an answer. "Uh...I don' know...I jus' figured--"

"You...*you*? I can't believe it...it's *you*!"

*"No! No, look...sorry for yelling. But I don' know anything, honest mistake man, please...I...I didn't touch your computer, I didn't do anything with your password...this ain't me."*

Jeremy's face was stoic, firmly etched in stone. "I don't believe you," he said shaking his head. "I *know* it was you, I don't know what to even do right now--who told you to do this? How much did they pay you, huh? *How much?*"

"How does a hundred thousand sound? How about two hundred? How about five? How about a million? It doesn't even matter because *I* can pay *myself* whatever the *hell* I want to, and there ain't nobody who can tell me otherwise."

"*You* did this? Of your own volition?! *Why?! WHAT DID I DO TO YOU?*" Jeremy's voice squeaked.

"Fuck you." Max reached behind his back to pull something out from behind his jacket.

Jeremy's eyes widened. "*MAX! N--*"