

Chapter 30

Quarrel

David followed me out as well.

"You?" Aaron shook his head. He glanced at me in disbelief for a few seconds, then sneered. "Really?"

His voice was harsh and frigid, and his single-worded question hung in the air before David spoke up again.

"Aaron... Listen..."

"Really?" Aaron asked again. His wide eyes continued staring into me. "I want you to say it, Olive."

"Just leave her alone-"

"I told you to shut the f*ck up." Aaron growled without so much as glancing at David.

It was then that I fully realized just how badly I'd messed up. Earlier, I thought that as long as I explained that I'd made an honest mistake, Aaron would laugh it off like he always does. This whole party was just a charity event at the end of the night, so did it really matter who bid on who? No one really had the power to force Aaron to do something he didn't want

to.

But I'd overlooked one thing.

Aaron's feelings.

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He was more serious than I thought he'd be, and it terrified me. I didn't know how to respond. I didn't want to respond. I wanted to run away and finally end this relationship that

never should've begun, but I couldn't. My guilt would never let me.

"Aaron," I whispered. "I'm sorry-"

"Enough."

He raised his head to look at me, and my hand grew cold as he pulled away. My fingers moved to take hold of his once more, but I never raised my hand the rest of the way. I

couldn't.

"Darling," he mocked. "If you liked your professor so much, you should've just told me. I would've bought him for you. Why bother with all this?"

His words carved a hollow deep in my chest.

"What? No, this is about us. It has nothing to do with David," I frowned.

"Sure. Nothing. I bet you think your dear professor is priceless, but you have no idea what he really is."

"Aaron, that's enough! Just stop for a second-"

"What? Because I'm right? You've always liked him, haven't you? More than your boyfriend, at least."

This was too hostile, especially for him. I refused to talk to him

in this state.

With a scowl, I pushed him away and turned to leave. He'd been out of control this entire night.

By the time I returned to the main hall, the auction had ended

and some of the furniture had been moved aside to make way for the next event: a ball. That was the real social gathering for the more youthful elites.

Everyone was given a single rose. The men received red roses while the women received white.

After stealing the show during the auction, Aaron and David were both showered with invitations as soon as the dance began.

I held my white rose tightly in my hand and found a place to sit on the sidelines. My feet were aching from standing all night in these high heels. Occasionally, a few men would walk up to me and invite me to dance, but I refused.

Aaron, on the other hand, changed partners one after the other, though he kept his red rose tucked safely into his breast pocket. Eventually the woman in blue-who bid against me for David earlier-made her way to Aaron. I watched the two of them lean in to speak intimately, and she held up her white rose while pointing to the red one on his chest suggestively.

With a tilt of his head, Aaron made eye contact with me from across the dance floor and smirked.

I bit my lip and wondered if Aaron would really give his rose to her. For a moment, I watched her hand snake up his chest toward his rose, but I averted my gaze before she took it from him.

That was it. I was going to find someone to give my rose to. Did I really think he would save his rose for me? Was I really going to save mine for him? The ugly thought twisted in my

mind and put me on edge.

I'll show him, I thought to myself. I'm not jealous.

With a pout, I scoured the room for a partner, frustrated that

all of the good-looking men were already taken.

That was when I heard a husky voice in my ear:

"You still have your rose after all this time?"

David.

Did he come to me as soon as he was finished dancing?

"Yeah," I sighed. "But it's alright. I've had enough excitement for tonight." Truth be told, I was exhausted. I was supposed to have my third-anniversary dinner with Vincent, but he abandoned me. I was supposed to bid on Aaron, but I chose David. I was supposed to have the last dance with Aaron, but...

David cleared his throat. "... know that I'm not who you were hoping I was." He gingerly took my white rose from me and gave a gentlemanly bow. "But may I have this dance?"

Even though I wasn't at all enthusiastic about dancing, I was still flattered. With a somber smile, I took his hand and let him take the lead.

I followed his steps in time, but the motions felt empty. David was a nice man, but I was only interested in him for the sake of discussing my research. Tonight had already gone wrong in every possible way, so I figured I might as well salvage it by putting myself first, starting with my career.

When I accidentally stepped on his foot for the fourth time, I

grimaced. "I'm sorry- I just have so many questions..."

I

"I like questions," he said. "And this seems like a great night for unpaid overtime."

I laughed. Despite the sarcasm, David had been fully invested in answering my questions and catching me up on current studies.

But this still wasn't the lecture hall. Talking about academia was too serious, and it was impossible to ignore the elephant in the room. Even while we were talking, David seemed absent-minded, and he didn't speak of much else outside of our field.

Suddenly, he blurted, "Is Aaron your fiance?"

I thought for a moment. David and I might have to work together in the future, so there was no use lying to him now: "No. Of course not."

"Oh? But Jane said the two of you were engaged. And the way Aaron reacted-"

"Jane misunderstood, is all. Aaron is just..." I paused for a moment. "We're friends."

David nodded. "I might've graduated long before you did, but I remember what it was like at your age."

After a few seconds, he added, "It's obvious that he does like you. Why isn't he the one with you right now?"

My heart s*ipped a beat.

Aaron likes me?

If someone had told me that days ago, I would've vehemently denied it, but now? I wasn't so sure. Whatever his feelings were toward me, they didn't seem loving.

I shrugged off my initial shock, "Don't worry about him."

David shook his head and gave me a knowing smile. "It's our job to worry about things we don't know much about."

Then the hostess' voice sounded over the speakers, gentle and soothing. "Ladies and gentlemen, this year we've added a little twist to the ballroom dance. Once this song ends, the lights will be turned off for ten seconds. I encourage you all to follow your heart as you change partners one final time.

As soon as she finished speaking, the crowd rippled with excitement.

"This is interesting..." David said. "Do you need me to help you?"