

Chapter 18

"Be honest. You must be happy with yourself right now, huh?" I covered my face with my hands and stared at Aaron through my fingers. Everything seemed to be going according to plan for the cunning man in front of me.

"Well... If you say yes to being my date tonight, I'd be so happy that my head would explode." Aaron smiled, and he didn't seem to doubt that I would agree with him. Sure, his bright-eyed arrogance was maybe distasteful, but it didn't irritate me as much this time. I was moved by his proposal. Besides, if I was left alone tonight, all I would be thinking about is what Vincent and Emily might be up to and how much of a failure I was as a girlfriend.

Cinder was gone on a trip and wouldn't be back in New York until tomorrow, so I had no one else to share my pain with

Alcohol was one way I could try to numb myself, but I didn't want to do that. It'd be silly to get drunk over the man who ran to his mistress on our third anniversary. He wasn't worth it.

I was just too exhausted. I didn't want to be tortured like this on tonight, of all nights-I didn't want to be alone for even a second.

I could only find solace with Aaron.

I sniffed, but at this point, my nose was too congested for that to make a difference. Aaron laughed even louder, and he moved over to the side table and grabbed a tissue. I thought he was going to hand it to me, but instead, he reached past my outstretched hand and held the sheet against my nose.

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"There you go, darling." He really wanted me to blow my nose. Into his hand. As if that were normal.

What is with him? Doesn't he think that's dirty?

Even if Vincent had asked me to help him blow his nose, I'd still take a few minutes to think about it. The thought made me cringe.

I grabbed the tissue and stopped him. "I can do it myself."

He let go without any resistance, and I turned away from him. I didn't dare blow my nose loudly. It was too quiet here! The idea of my s*ot echoing through the empty hall was mortifying, and so I settled for only wiping my nose a bit.

"Aren't you gonna... turn around?" I asked.

"You don't need to feel dirty or embarrassed. Not in front of me." He

chuckled behind me.

In the next second, he leaned over and whispered in my ear, "I've seen your whole body, darling. And I love every inch of it. Don't be shy."

Honestly, could he not say three sentences without mentioning sex? I didn't have the heart to put up with his antics right now.

"If you keep being nasty like that, I won't go to that dinner with you," I threatened

"So you will go with me!" He said excitedly. He grabbed me by the

shoulders and spun me around to face him.

His expression was almost cartoonishly ecstatic as if I'd just told him he'd won the lottery

Actually, I don't even think a hotshot CEO like him would be this happy about winning the lottery

"Yes. As a 'thank you' for giving me a shoulder to cry on. I don't like owing people favors." I shrugged nonchalantly and looked away

"I promise: Tonight will be unforgettable." Aaron gave me a smug look.

I eyed him suspiciously. I was getting the feeling that tonight's charity event might not be as simple as he'd made it out to be. His eyes sparkled as if he had a special surprise planned for me.

I rolled my eyes. "What time is this party?"

"Nine o'clock. We have two hours. Plenty of time." He gave me a grin as he looked up from his watch.

"Your clothes. Are you going to go like that?" I raised my chin toward him so he'd look down at himself. After hugging me, there were tearstains and mascara streaks on the front of his shirt.

It was wet enough so that his pecs were on display, and there was something wildly erotic about seeing his nipples peak against the wet fabric

"Oh, that's fine. I can change here. You should touch up your makeup,

too."

Aaron gave me a wink and slowly started unbuttoning his chest as if I wasn't even there. This wasn't a big deal. Like he'd said, we'd seen all of each other's bodies before. We were like a weathered couple with no shame between the two of us; undressing felt as normal as ever.

"Are you trying to seduce me or something?"

"Is it working?"

"Sometimes it does..." I slowed my tone and watched his eyes spark with aroused enthusiasm, then I added, "But no, not now."

"Oh, you're killing me, Olive..." He swooned theatrically

I didn't want to waste any more time in the fitting room than I already had, so I raised my voice and called for the attendant. Soon, someone arrived and I was taken for further styling while Aaron was ushered into a different fitting room.

The stylist's name was Lily. She had the demeanor of a warm and lovely soul, but I could already sense that she was a bit of a perfectionist

"Honey, your skin is flawless, but you really shouldn't stay up too late. You look like a panda with dark circles like those! Late nights are a woman's worst enemy, you know." She waved for the makeup artist to apply more concealer,

"Really? I thought it was men." I smiled. Her exaggeration was endearing

"Men," she sighed. "If you use them right, they make good stepping stones." Then she raised an eyebrow at me "I can tell your heart is hurting. Your eyes look puffy"

She took the brush from the makeup artist and came over to work on me herself. She said gently. "Enjoy life Love yourself more and you'll find people who will treat you right You're so beautiful, dear Don't spoil it with unnecessary stress"

I spent the next half hour listening to Lily ramble on about cosmetology. Not once did she ask about my relationship with Aaron, and I appreciated that

By the time the hairdresser was finished with me, Lily gushed. "Oh my g*d! You are such a natural beauty! Oh, and this dress suits you so well... Another masterpiece!"

I looked at myself in the mirror. My red hair was pulled into an elegant updo, and my eyes glistened like emeralds behind long lashes. The makeup was completed by a matte burgundy lipstick the same shade as my gown. My figure was smooth and my breasts were emphasized. The neckline of the dress guided my eyes naturally from my slender neck down to my cleavage. I'd never looked more effortlessly seductive.

Lily danced beside me and fed me so many compliments that I felt embarrassed.

It wasn't until I stood up and turned around that I saw Aaron at the door. He'd been just out of sight through the mirror while he waited just outside. He was staring at me, but his eyes seemed distant as if he wasn't really seeing me.

A few of the attendants winked at him as they all left the room. I walked up to him, took a deep breath, and asked, "How do I look?"

His Adam's apple bobbed as he swallowed, and after a few seconds of silence, he whispered.

"I want to kiss you. Like there's no tomorrow. Then I could die happy."