

Chapter 22

There were various instruments harmonizing in the auditorium violins, violas, clarinets, pianos... They all wove together to make an elegant symphony. But that was three seconds ago, before Aaron said those words. The world around me was quiet. I couldn't hear anything over the sound of my brain exploding while my heart pounded in my chest.

"Excuse me?!" I turned to Aaron with wide eyes and tilted my head to look at him. I don't think I'd ever looked so bewildered in my life.

He really had the nerve to say such complete and utter b*llsh*t! Wasn't he worried about what his aunt would think? What if his parents found out? I could already imagine his mother inviting me over one day just to offer me five million dollars to leave her son.

If word got out to Vincent, my plans for revenge will be absolutely ruined-permanently!

Aaron seemed completely oblivious as to how reckless his plan was, if he even had one. He gave me an innocent wink that told me he had no intention of correcting himself. If anything, he pretended to be even more intimate with me.

"Darling, this is my aunt. Jane Green."

"Are you crazy?" I hissed in a hushed tone. I knew Aunt Jane would – still hear me, but I couldn't control my reaction.

Maybe I shouldn't have protested right away. After all, I still hadn't greeted his aunt properly yet.

"It seems like the two of you haven't reached a consensus on your relationship..." She mused with a good-natured expression. Her eyes wandered back and forth between me and Aaron.

Then her gentle smile became more mischievous. "Don't get all worked up now, Aaron."

Her demeanor wasn't quite naughty-I wouldn't disrespect her like that – but I'd describe it as impishly playful. Cute, even.

She leaned in closer and put her index finger to her lips. Then she gave Aaron a wink of her own and whispered, "When it comes to marriage, it's the woman who decides if you two are ready or not. Don't force it. It only takes away from your charm."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Green," I waved my hands about in denial. "We're not engaged. He's just joking."

"Oh? Aaron's never joked about something like that before. And please, Jane is perfectly fine." She nodded and held her hand out to me.

I took it gratefully, and our palms had just touched when I felt her pinch my hand like we were two old friends sharing a secret.

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I smiled awkwardly and shook my head. Did she think I was the one who was joking?

"We're really not in that kind of relationship..." I kept trying.

It didn't help that Aaron was still keeping up the act.

"Come on, babe! That's enough now..." He wrapped his arms around my waist and kissed my temple with a smirk.

I shivered and pulled away, embarrassed. I looked around to see if anyone noticed. The people nearby were chatting amongst themselves, but my guilty conscience convinced me that every single one of them was gossiping about me and Aaron. Jane stood in front of us and smiled at our "flirting."

Aaron must've gone insane. This whole night, he hadn't said a word about our affiliation with each other. I was sure everyone we met would only remember Aaron's chatty wit and relaxed attitude, not the taciturn woman next to him. I was nothing more than a decoration! An accessory! And I was perfectly content with that. I had been confident no one would remember me being here tonight.

Maybe Jane noticed my embarrassment, because she decidedly changed the topic.

"So what does Olive do?"

I freed myself from Aaron's grasp and answered for myself.

"Bioinformatics research for cancer," I replied. "PhD."

Her eyes widened for a moment, but she quickly regained her composure. "Then I'm sure you'll get a lot out of tonight. My good friend David Ford will be at the auction this evening. He's an expert in the field, I'm sure you know. I'd be happy to introduce you!"

David Ford?!

Was he actually here? I remembered attending his lectures when I was an undergraduate. It was actually because of him that I decided on my career path today

I even wanted to apply for my PhD under his research team, but there were no open positions in his department at the time...

"Really? I would love it if you did! I low did you meet?" I asked excitedly. Originally, I thought I'd be Aaron's puppet all night. I didn't expect such a lucky turn of events.

"He's my husband's cousin, actually. A real Frankenstein," Jane shrugged and then sighed, helpless. "To tell you the truth, I'm here to help find a woman for him. The man is 37 years old and still a bachelor!"

"How?! Women should be flocking to a man like him!"

I never imagined that David would still be single. I remembered him being very popular with the other girls in my undergrad classes. He was tall and well built, a stud even in a loose black t-shirt. His bright eyes were always gently narrowed in a light smile, and he treated everyone with the same friendly warmth.

After lectures, a group of students used to gather around him to ask questions. Guys and girls alike gazed at him with such fervent

admiration. I was one of them, of course.

For a man like him to still be single? Incredible.

"Not necessarily... Aaron was always popular too, but he'd been single for the longest time." Jane gave Aaron a meaningful look, "And now he tells me that he has a fiancée."

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"I just don't want to wait any longer," Aaron said.

"So... After so many years, you still..." She stopped suddenly and covered her mouth with one hand, as if she'd just realized something.

"I changed my mind." Aaron gave her a smile full of conviction.

I didn't understand them in the slightest. What was going on? Maybe they were talking about Aaron's crush a few years ago-the one he'd mentioned in the car earlier. Jane would know all about that. I would've loved to gossip with her about Aaron, but I couldn't.

"Then let me give you my blessing in advance, Aaron." Jane turned to me. "He'll make a good husband. I promise."

Too bad that had nothing to do with me.

This whole misunderstanding was getting too serious...

I scratched my head and confessed, "Actually, Mr. Morris hired me for the night. I'or \$1,000 an hour."