

Ex Convict 49

Chapter 49

Grace shook her head to clear it.

This was her 'brother' and he likely didn't mean what he'd said the way she was taking it.

It was an innocent question. She shouldn't read too much into it.

This attraction she felt...was one-sided and couldn't go anywhere. If she crossed that line, she'd only stand to lose him. He deserved better than that.

They both did.

She swallowed hard and averted her gaze.

"Of course, I would be sad over you. I care for you deeply."

"As you did for Sean before you learned the truth about him?"

Actually, she felt more for Jay. But she couldn't tell him that. If he misinterpreted her meaning, there would be no putting the genie back in the bottle.

And the last thing she wanted was any awkwardness or distance between them.

She valued his friendship too fiercely.

Grace cleared her throat and said, "I can love my younger brother but that isn't the same kind of love."

"Oh?"

Jason wasn't letting her off the hook, and the whole conversation was making her want to cringe. "It's two different feelings. I thought loving someone was forever and irreplaceable. I even... thought that lovers could live and die together."

What a romantic notion, Jason thought.

Surely, this was the stuff of fairytales, 3D projector billboards, and living happily ever after. He had no experience with such things. His parents certainly were no example. Nor any of his colleagues or associates.

That kind of love... to live or die together. It seemed all-encompassing. All empowering.

Why did he suddenly want to experience such a thing? And with Grace.

What did this mean for him?? Had he fallen in love with her?

No. Of course not.

He didn't believe in that kind of love, and he challenged anyone

who did to prove that it was honest and true, and lasting.

But he did admit, that he had feelings for her. There was a ... sentimental attachment, yes. That was it. And physical attraction.

He studied her and realized that he also had become reliant-

obsessed?- with the feeling of being next to her. He wanted to

know her whereabouts, to be there when she came home, and

to ensure her safety. He acknowledged that he liked being near her, and he was okay with it. Why else would he have played this game for so long?

There was nothing wrong with enjoying someone else's company.

If he was really honest with himself, he was falling into deeper emotional territory.

But to fall in love... he couldn't have done that.

He'd made a promise to himself long ago to never fall in love with any woman!

"And Jay would never make me sad, right?" The gentle tone of her voice resounded in his ear.

He chuckled lowly as he studied her blushing cheeks and a faint smile. He'd give her the out, for now, and fall back into their comfortable position of brother/sister and this little insular world they'd created.

"Your brother will never make you sad," he said. Because that was the answer she wanted to hear. And he meant it. Protecting her for life was as easy as lifting a finger for him. Hell, his accountants could probably find some tax write-off for it.

When she stared at him, her eyes so earnest and hopeful, he felt a pang of unease.

He'd promised not to make her sad, yet... when she one day discovered that he was not Jay Smith, some vagrant worker, and

was actually Jason Reed, President of Reed Corporation, how would she react to the lie he'd been living?

Sad was likely an understatement.

This woman had built up walls all around her and he'd been let in.

It wasn't really a question of if he would hurt her, but when.

Grace went to work the next day. After she finished sweeping the streets with Claire, they returned to the Sanitation Center for their lunch break. However, she noticed that her colleagues were giving her sidelong glances one at a time. Some glances were looks of curiosity, while others were filled with disdain, mockery, and pity.

And many of them were pointing at her as they whispered amongst themselves.

Grace found it weird and noticed Claire walking toward her from the supply closet, who then pulled her aside and quietly asked, "Grace, were you in jail?"

Grace was shaken and her face instantly paled. It was as if all of her previous doubts had suddenly been clarified.

She'd never lied on her application and she was forthright with her incarceration and her commitment to being a productive member of society again. But that information should have been private.

Although... she'd already mentally prepared herself for this, knowing that every secret had its way of surfacing.

This one, about her past, was inevitable. She supposed she was lucky to have made it this.

And yet, when surrounded by people who were gazing at her with varying degrees of shock and disgust and disdain as they casually discussed her past as if they had any right to judge her, she still felt like she was standing naked in a frozen tundra.

Her coworkers stared and pointed. The secret was officially out. They all knew about her imprisonment.

"Hmm," she hummed in agreement.

"Oh, you're such a good kid, why were you in jail? What did you do?" Claire asked. She had rushed over for confirmation after

someone else had told her about it. So apparently the gossip mill hadn't filled her in yet on the specifics.

"Manslaughter caused by drunk driving," Grace said.

"In most cases of drunk driving, even if it causes death, the punishment is usually imprisonment with a suspension of

sentence as well as having to provide compensation, but the Atkinson family was adamant about not taking a single penny from me. They just wanted me to be in jail." She swallowed hard and waited for Claire to rebuff her. "I spent three years in prison before being released."

"Oh... you..." Claire sighed. "I heard you were a lawyer back then but now you've fallen so low that you sweep the streets with me, which is very sad indeed. You should never drink and drive."

Claire chattered on but did not use a critical gaze to study Grace, which filled her heart with relief.