
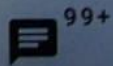


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Leo...Present...


Asher's words echoed in my mind long after we spoke, making it hard to hear anything my teacher said for the entire class I had to sit through. I was an idiot! I needed to see Emma and make things right with her. I couldn't let her feel like I didn't want her when that couldn't be further from the truth. Keeping my distance from her the last few weeks only made me want her more, but the uncertainty of where I stood with her was holding me back. 


As soon as the bell rang I shot up from my seat and rushed into the hall straight for Emma's class. I was almost there, my mind set on one thing so much so that I didn't notice Andrea until she stepped into my path. I stopped just in time to not run right into her.




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“Hey Leo! Long time no see.” She said with what I was assuming was her version of a salutary voice. 

I looked at her like a fly buzzing around my head and tried to step around her. She didn't care and pushed further into my personal space and had the nerve to place her hand on my chest. My attention fell on her but not in the way she hoped it would. The blood under her touch was boiling from anger and I wished it was hot enough to burn her. 

“So I was thinking maybe you and I could go to lunch at that new cafe! What do you think? Hm?” She ran her hand up my chest and around the side of my neck. 


Was she out of her mind? I glared at her but she seemed oblivious to my hatred for her. I grabbed her wrist from traveling any further across my skin. She gasped at my hard touch and smiled up at me. 


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
"No thanks," I said flatly and tried again to move away from her.


She laughed and stepped back just enough to openly check me out. "You look good by the way. Better than before I left. Absolutely tempting!"

This girl was crazy. She had barely noticed me when she was with Asher, and now she was all over me.

"Andrea, what the hell do you want?" I asked with a frustrated sigh. 

"Well, I've noticed things are pretty frosty between you and the little rat. So I'm guessing things are not going well there. Maybe you and I could have some fun together instead." I scoffed at her in disbelief. 

was she for real? Had she forgotten that I was there when Tabetha beat the crap out of her? This chick was crazy. 


She still didn't take the hint that I wanted nothing to do with her and instead leaned further into me. "I know just how to make a guy like you forget all about that little whore." 

My anger was boiling deep in my stomach now and if she didn't get off me I would forget all about our code of not harming women.

"Leo?" Emma's voice was like ice-cold water being dumped on me.

My eyes shot up to meet Emma's confused expression. Her eyes glanced between me and Andrea before focusing on me again. Andrea stepped aside slightly but kept her hands on me and smirked at Emma. I immediately saw the heartbreak in her eyes but she didn't let it show on her face.



"Rat! I missed when I was away!" Andrea said with fake enthusiasm. 

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Emma glanced at her and offered a strained smile. "I am glad you are doing better Andrea,"

Andrea scowled at my girl. "Yes, I'm doing a lot better! Better than you it seems."

My body was frozen and my lack of movement seemed to be making things worse. I could only assume that Emma saw our position as me accepting Andrea's attention. I couldn't seem to make myself move though, and my voice was caught in my throat.

"Leo and I were about to head to that new cafe!" Andrea quips, threading her arm through mine with a giggle.

"Oh, I hope you two have a good time. I'll see you at home Leo." Emma turned away and I took a step forward to stop her but Andrea tightened her grip. ³

"Well, that was pathetic. I was sure she

was going to make a huge scene.” Andrea said with a huff of disappointment. ²

I blocked her out and watched Logan swagger up to Emma with his usual smirk until he noticed the look on her face. His smile faltered and he leaned down to whisper to her. Emma shook her head and he wrapped his arm around her. He glanced back and when his eyes landed on me his face shifted into an angry scowl.

¹

He turned his attention back to Emma and ran a gentle hand down her arm as they walked through the entrance double doors.

When the door slammed shut the sound jolted me from the trance I was stuck in and I turned to Andrea. I forcibly removed her hands from me, not caring if I hurt her.

⁴

“DONT ever touch me again,” I growled out through clenched teeth.

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"What? You don't want her, I was just doing you a favor." She said with a smug smile.


This was getting old and fast. My anger snapped and I grabbed her by the throat and slammed her into the nearest locker.

7

"Don't touch me again. Don't go near Emma either. If you do you will get more than a beating. Got it?" I released her and she slid down to the floor coughing and cursing me. 1

I turned and didn't look back. I weaved my way through the people littering the hallway to get to Emma and the others before they leave. When I finally got outside I saw my friends and Emma standing huddled near our cars. Before I could reach them or say anything, Logan marched up to me and threw a punch right at my eye.

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“What the hell are you doing you prick?”
He yelled at me before swinging his fist
again and hitting me in the mouth. 


I didn't fight back. I deserved every hit he
could shell out.

“Logan enough!” Asher called out.

Logan hesitated with his fist pulled back
ready to hit me again, but he dropped it
and took a step back.


“You're an idiot.” He said before turning
and walking up to Emma and wrapping his
arms around her.

Asher stepped up and held a hand out to
me. I moved back and sat on a small ledge
that served as a raised flower bed.


“Explain Leo,” Asher said crossing his arms
across his chest. 

“Andrea cornered me and put her hands all

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over me. She wanted me to go out with her, but before I could tell her off Emma saw us. It was just a misunderstanding! Please, Emma, I swear it was nothing!" I said whipping some blood away from my busted lip. 

Asher sighed and shook his head. He was ready to tell me off but Emma stepped up beside him and rested a hand on his arm.

"I'll take it from here." She said softly to him and he took a step back to let her move closer to me. 

She watched me carefully but didn't say anything right away.

I hesitated for a moment before looking up and meeting her eyes. She seemed to be studying me as if she could see my thoughts. To my surprise, she reached out and took my face in her hands.

"Leo it's okay to want to be with someone

else, you know that right? Even Andrea if you want. Just because I live with you guys now doesn't mean that you belong to me. We didn't agree to any specific relationship, so just tell me what you want." She said softly. 5

I lifted my hands to cover her's. "That's not it."

"I mean it, Leo, we are friends. I will support whatever you choose." She says and I knew she meant every word.

She was too nice for her own good. Most girls would demand that I am loyal to them, but not Emma. She didn't want to push me into anything and that just made me love her even more. Because I loved her, I think from the moment we met. I never admitted it to her, and that was one of my biggest regrets. I needed to be honest with her now while I had the chance. 1

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I held on to her wrists and stood. She looked up at me and I smiled down at her, moving my hands to grasp hers.

"I don't want anyone else. I want you. I love you, always have." I admit to her, watching her eyes widen in surprise. ¹

"Wha-" I don't let her finish her thought before I lean down and brush my lips against hers. ⁹

It was a gentle kiss, and she shuddered slightly. I smiled and met her eyes again. She was beautiful and I would be an idiot to ever let her go. ²

"I want you too." She says softly and her cheeks quickly flush a soft pink. ⁴

I loved it when she would get shy like that. It was one of her many adorable qualities.


"Good because you can't get rid of me now." She laughed and rested her head

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against my chest.

I dropped her hands and wrapped her in my arms and held her tight.

"Let's go home," I tell her and she nods her head against me.

I let her go and we walk down the sidewalk to meet the others. 

"Well I'm glad that got worked out but Leo brother if you pull anything like that again I'm gonna serve up more than a few punches," Logan says playfully while squeezing my shoulder painfully.

"No beating each other up!" Emma called out from behind him as Jayden helped her climb into the car.

I tossed my keys to Logan and rushed past him to take the seat next to Emma. I slammed the door shut as he let out a slew of curses at me before turning and heading

12:55
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for my car. ²

Emma laughs and shakes her head at me.
"Stop provoking him, he already made a
mess of your face." ⁴

I give her a innocent smile. "Worth it if I
get to sit next to my girl!"

Jayden groans in disgust at my corny line
as he pulls out of the parking lot. Yeah, I
planned on being just as corny as Logan. I
couldn't let him become her favorite
without putting in a good fight.