

Chapter 14

The whole meeting was a bit nerve-wracking for me. Aaron was acting like he didn't know me, and his demeanor seemed different as well. The thin-framed glasses he was wearing gave the impression that he was a simple gentleman.

What surprised me more than his professional aesthetic was how quickly he grasped our team's experimental model as Julian explained it. Aaron's slender fingers traced the cellular diagram on the monitor while he matched our director's vocabulary as they discussed.

To me, the thoughtful motions of his hands on the screen were sexier than when they were palming my chest. The clarity of his academic tone was more alluring than how he sounded in bed with me.

I'd never seen this side of him before-never imagined he had it in him. Sunlight spilled in through the window and landed gently on his face. The warm light made his sapphire eyes sparkle. This wasn't the same lust-addled gaze I'd seen in the bedroom, and I found myself drawn to his focused intellect.

"So far, your project has been nothing but constructive. Everything is built on top of strong hypotheses." Not only was he affirming our results up to this point, but he fully understood Julian's line of reasoning. He truly had faith in our work.

"Yes! I know exactly which one of our experiments you're referring to," Julian nodded eagerly. "That division of our research was highlighted in a journal not too long ago. In fact, it was conducted primarily by Olive here, our only female researcher." He pointed at me.

Aaron's eyes swept up to my face and he gave a polite smile.

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"Then you're working with an incredible woman."

My face flushed. This was the first time I'd ever had a serious conversation with Aaron. The only other times he'd paid me compliments were when I was in bed with him.

"I actually made my decision before coming in today," Aaron continued. "My secretary is already preparing the relevant materials, legalities and whatnot-for me to provide funds to your department on a regular basis. Of course, I'm not doing this just to be charitable. My sponsorship is entirely dependent on your results. If I see in one of your reports that I'm not seeing the progress I want, we'll have to meet again to... renegotiate." He said all of this with a smile and casual shrug of his shoulders.

Nick nudged my shoulder with his arm as Aaron and Julian shook hands in front of us. "Don't start drooling now."

I glared and moved to elbow him. He needed to watch it with the b*lls*it coming out of his mouth. Both Aaron and Julian were here, and I didn't want to ruin their image of me with Nick's unprofessionalism.

Nick immediately stepped forward, out of the way of my elbow, and respectfully raised his hand. "If the two of you don't mind, I think it'd be a wonderful idea to celebrate this partnership. Over lunch maybe? There's this amazing Mexican restaurant nearby."

"I'm sorry, but I have an alumni lecture to give in about half an hour. I'm afraid I can't make it." Aaron declined politely.

"I'm also busy today," I said quickly. "Sorry, Nick."

That was a lie.

I was actually free for the rest of the day after this meeting

Back in the hallway, I pulled up the campus activity feed on my phone and scrolled until I found Aaron's name. It looked like the lecture was about the up-and-coming technological revolution. That was something related to my major, right? Close enough, at least.

And so I decided to check it out.

By the time I got to the auditorium, there was already a long line of people waiting at the entrance. It took me around twenty minutes to get inside, and during that time, I was stuck listening to two girls behind me gossip about Aaron: his looks, his family, his company, and his

past relationships. Hell, they even dedicated a few minutes to imagine how big his d*ck must be. It made me wonder how many people attending his lecture were actually there to learn something.

Still, part of me was happy for him. All in all, this was a successful turnout.

Just when I thought I was finally about to escape those two lovely young ladies, the auditorium's management informed me that the event was by appointment only.

"Scuse me, sis," one of the girls behind me piped up. "If you didn't reserve your seat, could you like, get out of the way? We're trying to

meet that stud inside."

Christ, how entitled could these girls be?

I turned my head and gave them a blank look. "What's got you so excited? I promise he's not as s*xy on the podium as he is on the bed."

I must've been insane to say that to them.

I must've been insane to stand outside the lecture hall for two whole hours.

In truth, I would've loved to know what Aaron was talking about inside, but from where I was, I could only make out the audience's applause and occasional laughter.

So while I waited, I opened up Google and searched for 'Aaron Morris.'

From what I could find, he studied at Columbia University and majored in both computer science and biotechnology. However, he never finished with a degree due to his interest in entrepreneurship.

At least I still had my PhD.

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A few more taps informed me that Aaron was 23 years old when he started his company, and he'd become a stable billionaire by the age of 30. That was pretty much all that Cinder told me. In fact, she told me even more: Aaron had lived in the lap of luxury since he was born.

His mother was from a long line of well-established European

aristocracy. As a child, he lived as if he were a prince.

At that age, I was s*ipping class at my local elementary school and running off to the cemetery to read in peace. Wasn't that just cheery for a little kid?

Before I knew it, my Google search had me clicking on a link to a celebrity news site. P*paraz'i had published photos of him coming in and out of a ritzy hotel with three different women, all on the same night.

That was when I decided I'd seen enough, and I closed the webpage. It wasn't because I was jealous, but... I just didn't like the idea that I'd become another one of those women to him.

I thought back to what Daisy had told me: Aaron never went for longer than one round with the women he casually slept with.

Wait.

Didn't she also say he was sponsoring a project?

Because of me?

No, that couldn't be right. That couldn't even be possible. Funding our research was no small matter, even for someone as ridiculously wealthy as Aaron. He was more logical than this, right? He had to be. He didn't seem like the kind of guy to let his emotions get the better of him. Moreover, his attitude with Julian earlier indicated that he'd been following our work for a long time. He didn't even mention knowing

me while they talked.

He didn't even say a word to me!

While I brooded outside of the auditorium, I watched the lobby doors open. The crowd gradually made their way outside of the building to loiter in the courtyard. With a furrowed brow, I pulled out my phone and tapped on Aaron's profile picture, but there were no updates from him.

I shuddered

I was really checking on what Aaron was up to.

As if my shattered moral compass wasn't enough, I've been infected with this stubborn curiosity toward Aaron. I couldn't believe it. Curiosity meant interest, and interest would lead to love, and love was the last thing I wanted in my life right now.

I locked my phone and slipped it back into my pocket. I made a naive mistake by standing outside his lecture.

Just as I was about to leave, my phone chirped.

I frowned and pulled it out. Again.

* It was Vincent.

Vxnent: Babe??

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Vxncnt: You done yet???

Oops.

Today was our third anniversary. I'd promised him days ago that I'd make sure to finish work in the lab early, but I completely forgot.

I've never forgotten about our anniversary before.

VXncnt: I have something special planned

Vxnent: Wait for me on campus

As soon as I lifted my finger to text my reply, the rich scent of amber washed over me.

"Were you waiting for me, darling?"