

## Chapter 27

Bought him?!

"Angel Three, sold for \$4,200 to the madam in the black dress! Congratulations!" The hostess cheered.

After three rounds, I'd finally figured out the auction process. Every man was numbered and given the base price of \$1,000. He wouldn't come on stage at all during the bidding process. All the audience had to go off of was the man's code name and a set of three photographs. Only those present in the room could bid. The photos were revealed one at a time, and if you bid based on the first photo, you're given a \$500 "discount" at the end of the round. Once the bidding was over, the man would come out from backstage.

Then, in front of the entire audience, he would walk up to the winner, whether they were a man or a woman.

That was the funniest part. Everyone waited with bated breaths like gamblers waiting for the river to be dealt.

The audience's reaction to the Bulgarian Rose's reveal was unforgettable: a chorus of Wow! over and over again. The Rose looked about seventy years old. He was dressed in a suit with leather shoes to match, and his silver hair was tied up. He was fashionable, definitely, but he looked like Santa Claus in a fancy tux. It was almost funny.

The photos showed his physical features, but not his age. Maybe they were taken when he was younger.

A petite lady had paid a fortune for the old geezer, and from where I was in the crowd, I saw the corner of her mouth twitch as he walked over to her.

"Oh my g\*d!" She shouted. She laughed while she shook her head and waved her hands in front of her. "No!"

I'd probably feel the same way. If I paid \$4,200 for someone's grandpa, I'd be devastated too. What would he do with me? Read me a bedtime story?! What a tragic waste of my single auction opportunity.

Everyone only had one chance to bid for the sake of fairness.

The lady took a few breaths to regain her composure, put on a smile, and held her hand out to him. It was as graceful as it was reluctant, but she was still a good sport about it. Amid the applause and shouted blessings of the crowd, the two of them took a photo together.

Yes. The event had set up a booth and hired a professional photographer just for that. These d\*mn people really pull out all the stops...

But I had to be cautious.

I had only one chance to pick Aaron and I literally couldn't afford to choose someone else. I paid extra close attention to the next sets of pictures, examining each one to find some connection to Aaron.

The next set showed a pair of blue eyes. Aaron had blue eyes, but something about the pupils seemed... off. Besides, I knew his lashes were much thicker. I remembered being jealous of his eyelashes the first time I woke up next to him. They were long and thick, and they shaded his eyes as if he was the heroic elf in a fantasy movie. Ethereal. Regal.

I shook my head. Those weren't Aaron's eyes.

Next, the hostess showed a photo of a collarbone, but it was too thin and pale to be Aaron's. I figured he was the type to

be involved in some kind of outdoor sport, so I expected some kind of tan line around his neck and collar. Maybe less of a tan line and more of a tan gradient. I remembered Vincent saying Aaron was tanned from golfing, but I also knew he injured his wrist about six months ago. He probably didn't go as often after that, so that might've been why I never noticed a tan on him before.

Anyway. This wasn't Aaron either.

"Are you confident you'll find him?" Jane nudged me with a playful wink.

I shook my head and answered truthfully. "I'm not sure. I don't actually know him all that well."

"What you don't know if yourself," she smiled. "You'll recognize him, I'm sure. Aaron certainly is."

Next up were pictures of eyebrows, bangs, hands, and one after another, I knew they weren't his. Every rinse-and-repeat moment of the "Angel" meeting his bidder left me dazed.

By now, seven people had already been auctioned and none of them were Aaron. I was a bit satisfied to see that I knew him better than I thought I did.

Every new photo on the screen made me carefully recall his looks, our messages to each other, and the moments I spent with him. I even started imagining what would happen if I did end up winning him. What would he look like when he walks up to me from behind the curtain?

The hostess' voice cut my fantasy short.

"Moving on to Angel Eight: The Cemetery Reader."

Cemetery?

I suddenly remembered what I'd read about Aaron online. As a child, he liked to s\*ip classes and go to the cemetery to read alone. This had to be him.

The photos that followed made all the ladies in the room scream. It was of his chest. On the left side was a small burn scar, about the size of a cigarette butt.

The moment I saw the photo, I understood why Aaron was so confident. Only someone who's slept with him could

recognize his chest at a glance.

I raised my hand to bid before the rest of the photos were even revealed.

My speed must've surprised everyone. Immediately after my hand went up, more than a dozen people raised theirs to bid. The \$500 discount for first-photo bids was a trap. It drove everyone to rush in and raise the price even higher so early in

the round.

Even more people raised their hands once the photos of his abs and toes were presented. I don't think I've spent enough time with Aaron to recognize him by his feet, but the scar was enough for me to be sure of my decision.

In the end, the final two bidders were me and a lady across the room wearing a blue dress.

"Going three times? Number Eight is sold to the woman in red for eighteen thousand dollars!" The hostess gleefully knocked

her gavel on the podium.

That was insane... Eighteen grand was the highest price of the night! My face was flushed and my throat was dry. Never in my life would I have imagined that I'd buy a man one day.

The spotlight flickered and moved in small circles until it spiraled over to the side of the stage and he stepped out from behind the curtain.

He breathed a sigh of relief and wore a graceful smile on his face. His eyes swam with too many emotions to identify, but his gaze landed directly on me.

The people around me murmured to each other, and I heard the woman I won against slam her wine glass harshly on her table. I watched him walk toward me amid the applause, whistles, and cheers of the audience, and the spotlight followed him until he reached me.

With the light coming down on us, our shadows vanished underneath our feet, and it was just the two of us in our white

halo.

He bowed his head ever so slightly, grateful, and held his hand out to me.

"Thank you, Olive,"

And I stood still, speechless. My blood cooled in my veins and

my heart felt as though it'd been frozen over.

He was wearing a silver-gray suit.

He wasn't Aaron.