

Chapter 29

She picked me

It took every bit of courage in me to meet Aaron's eyes. His gaze was so intense that I felt disoriented-it felt like he was about to burn a hole in me! I knew as soon as he found out who I'd mistaken for him, he'd be a hell of a lot more than p*ssed.

But he never took things too seriously, did he? I'll apologize to him later, I'll ask him to apologize to me for all the trouble he put me through tonight, and then we'll write it off. Simple as that.

There were a few people who turned their heads and gave me strange looks, but I couldn't help it. My lips curled into an involuntary smile. Despite the reflex, I still didn't dare show my teeth. I did everything I could to tell him with my eyes, I'm sorry! I swear! I even mouthed an apology as clearly as I could, and I bit my lower lip to show him my regret from across the room. The rest of my body stayed still.

I saw him wink at me and mouth what looked like "I know."

He did!?

No. He couldn't have.

He followed the hostess' direction and made his way down the stairs. His head was slightly raised as he reached for his bow tie with one hand. The most warm and affectionate smile graced his handsome face. The corners of his eyes wrinkled with joy. At that moment, he was unlike any man I'd ever seen.

His expression was infectious, and again the corners of my mouth quirked upward. I felt my cheeks tighten as I greeted him with an equally bright and tender smile.

Then, his serene smile broke out into a stunning grin. His head tilted back as his shoulders shook with laughter. His pure

elation was on display in front of so many people-in front of me-as if he didn't care about anyone and everyone watching him.

And neither did I. He was the only thing I could focus on or even think about. His sudden, hearty laugh was all I cared for, and my fingers itched to pull out my phone and save this moment forever. I wanted to be able to come back to this Aaron. Not the romantic CEO or master in the bedroom, but the boy excited to just see me.

Laughter and applause erupted from the crowd. With a smile, he lit up the room, and my heart ached for him.

His gorgeous smile didn't last much longer.

The hostess added, "Yes, that woman there-your winner is the man in the gray suit beside her!"

Aaron stopped dead in his tracks a little more than three yards away from me.

I took a deep breath, blinked firmly, and silently awaited his wrath as the surrounding people burst into laughter.

I shrank back and watched Aaron fall apart in front of me.

The bright smile on his face cracked and crumbled into a grimace, and his body was stiff with tension. With a sharp tilt of his head, he looked at David like he'd just noticed him standing next to me.

His focus was back on me in an instant as he stared into me

with a harshness I'd never seen in him. The sweet sunshine in his eyes curdled into doubt, disgust, and anger as he looked to me for confirmation.

"Cheater's Best Friend, if you would continue making your way toward the gentleman who paid for you. I hope the two of you don't collide too harshly!" The hostess' sly quip made the three of us flush with embarrassment.

All I could do was smile awkwardly, as if I didn't understand a word of what was going on, and nodded for Aaron to keep walking.

I could practically see the smoke rising above his head as his fury grew more volcanic. He pursed his lips tightly and refused to take another step.

"I'll explain," I said quietly, though I wasn't sure if he heard me.

"Please continue toward your bidder, Number Nine!" The hostess urged.

Still, Aaron stood motionless, and so did I.

Suddenly, I felt David step past me. He sighed as he walked to Aaron, who took a slight step back when he saw David

coming toward him. Aaron's entire body was silently screaming its resistance.

Some people whistled, eager to see how the two of them would get on.

David was the first to speak.

"You're making a scene, Aaron."

"Shut the f*ck up."

I knew by then I couldn't avoid being involved-I was already as deep as I could get in this fiasco-so I quickly walked over and grabbed Aaron's hand. His eyes were full of pain and accusation and betrayal when he turned to me.

"I'm sorry, Aaron," I whispered. "Just let me explain."

The chasing spotlight landed on the three of us and fused our shadows together on the floor. Aaron's hands were still clenched at his sides. He wasn't going to move.

"I'm sorry," I repeated as I bit my lip. "Please just come with me."

With a deep breath, Aaron's body language softened somewhat, but I knew his anger was still thrumming just beneath the surface. Little by little, his resistance gave way and he let me hold his hand properly as he unclenched his fist.

His fingers were laced with mine very tightly. I glanced down, but before I could react, he pulled me away from the middle of the room. The lights dimmed behind us, and I heard him muttering "Excuse me" as he cut a path through the crowd for us. For a moment, I was in a trance, caught up in a fleeting daydream. In my mind, we weren't looking for a private place to talk about what happened, we were making our grand escape so that we could elope.

Then reality came crashing back down.

"Explain," Aaron demanded. He hadn't bothered finding a lounge or even another restroom, instead backing me into a

dim, empty corner. He was still holding my hand tightly with his own while the other was pressed against the wall; I was trapped. Although we'd slept together, I still wasn't comfortable being so close to him like this.

"Calm down first," I pleaded.

"This is calm. You need to give me an explanation I can live with before I really get out of hand," he spat through gritted teeth.

"I-Well... I bid. In the auction. And obviously I didn't mean to but I messed up... So I lost my chance-"

"So who did you choose? Who did you mistake for me?" His eyes were bloodshot, irritated by grief and pain. He seemed so vulnerable that I couldn't bring myself to say a single thing out of fear that one wrong word would leave him in pieces in front of me.

"She picked me."