

## Chapter 46 What Had She Gotten Herself Into

Seeing her nephew was a huge relief and source of joy for Madeline. For two minutes, she was able to take her mind off the abomination sitting across her, and focus her eyes and her mind on her late elder sister's son; Reuben. Roxanne was one of the people to look up at the man. He stood tall, nothing less than six feet and six inches of height. His hair was crimson red, just like Arthur's and Madeline's and there was a calmness in the green color of his eyes. Even when he smiled, his smile seemed to cause everyone else to smile; including her.

Lancelot's eyes rose up to look over his cousin. It had been almost three years since he last saw Reuben, he could only wonder what the man was here for. Not that Lancelot disliked him, but Reuben reminded him of someone he desperately needed to forget; Bran. And he did not need a constant reminder of his brother around him everyday. Especially not in this period.

"I take offense to that statement," Bailey called out loud, referring to the younger man. Reuben's green eyes glittered with glee as he caught sight of another uncle of his. Lord Bailey rose up to give the young man a pat on his back, and Reuben was more than glad to embrace his uncle.

"I have not seen you in ages uncle," he commented.

"And neither have I! It's glad to have you finally come out of hiding."

Reuben's laugh was equally contagious. It had everyone in the room laughing as well.

"What can I say? Paris has a way of stealing a man's soul." When he spoke, his eyes fell on Lancelot.

"Ahah!" he called out, with a smile.

"My favorite cousin of all time." As he approached Lancelot, Lancelot looked up at him with a bleak expression. However, he was polite enough to take his handshake.

Reuben greeted James, Arthur, and the rest of the family before he settled into a seat beside Lady Marion. He took the dowager's right hand and planted a gentleman's kiss on her knuckles.

Marion's eyes sparkled at the younger male's charm. Roxanne continued to watch him carefully. Despite his excitement and ability to light up the whole room with his charm, there was something calm about him. The way his eyes rested on people, as though he could tell what was in their hearts and sympathize with them. She was lucky to have something... or rather, someone in the room to distract the family.

Some minutes ago, she had thought she would melt into the hot seat they had prepared for her. Roxanne thought she would fall to her savior's feet and kiss his toes. This family was overly dramatic, and Roxanne felt uneasy in their presence. Madeline's eyes fell on her nephew again.

"It is so nice of you to join us Reuben. I would ask you all about your trip, but I'm sure you have lots of stories to tell us later."

The room shook with laughter from different angles.

"You bet I do, aunty. Plus! I had to make it just in time for Lancelot's coronation. I know I missed the hunt already, I had to...."

The sound of Lancelot's fork crashing hard on the ceramic plate caused Reuben to stop talking. When he turned to him, his cousin had a confused

look on his face. Lancelot paid him no mind and focused his gaze on his father. Edward, understood the look Lancelot was giving him and quickly changed the subject.

"We were just getting to know Lancelot's new employee before you came in. She is a very interesting lady," Edward spoke up. Reuben's eyes glanced around the room until they rested on Roxanne. He smiled curtly. "Very interesting indeed," James cut in, and Reuben cut his eyes away from Roxanne to his younger cousin.

James had a malicious smile on his face.

"I mean, Lancelot has never brought any female home before. So, she must be really interesting for him to bring her here, and introduce her to all of us. Don't you think so Ben?"

While Reuben was surprise to hear James call him by his pet name after so long, he was more thrilled to know the young lady his ever brooding and never smiling cousin, Lancelot, had decided to bring home. "Hmmm," Reuben replied, nodding with keen interest.

Lancelot's grip on his fork tightened as he glared at James. Madeline scowled at her younger son. As James looked at both his mother and older brother, he rolled his eyes and scoffed.

Albert, who noticed this exchange, pressed his glass of white wine to his lips.

"I guess the truth is truly bitter after all," he muttered, but it was loud enough for everyone to hear.

Elizabeth, who sat beside her brother, frowned deeply. And Ava feigned a cough.

Reuben could tell from that instant, that he had just stepped into the lion's den. And from the look of things, the young lady who looked like nothing but a lost puppy, shared in his sentiments as well. In attempt to lighten up the dark mood, Reuben spoke again. He turned to Edward and smiled.

"So, Uncle, how did the hunt go?"

On hearing his question, a series of weird sounds broke out from different corners of the room. Some people appeared to choke, some cleared their throats, while others like Madeline, hit her fork against her plate.

Eloise figured it was time to come to everyone's rescue. Roxanne and Reuben were equally confused. Roxanne was confused because she did not understand anything that was being said. While Reuben was confused because he had not expected such a response from any of them. He made a mental note to ask about it later, none of them seemed to want to talk about it now.

With a genuine smile spread across her cheeks, Eloise looked up at Roxanne.

"Tell me now child, what are your hobbies?"

The question alerted Roxanne, and she looked away from Lancelot. She forced a smile and adjusted her sitting posture. She tried to make deliberate efforts not to allow her eyes wander off to Lancelot again, since it was clear that he was avoiding her.

"I particularly enjoy reading and music, Your Highness."

Eloise's smile broadened at Roxanne's simple and honest reply. She was beginning to like her, and she was not bothered about it one bit. The girl's heart was pure, and it impressed Eloise.

"Why, why? I enjoy reading myself. Books are like windows to the soul. They open your mind and heart to endless possibilities. Wouldn't you agree with me, Madeline?"

Madeline partially jolted when she heard her name. She had not expected to be dragged into Eloise's conversation with the American lowlife.

However, she forced a smile and nodded.

"Of course, Aunty."

Eloise smiled and looked away from her.

"Tell me now dear, what books do you enjoy reading?"

Roxanne was surprised that the woman was being so calm and nice to her. The questions were asked out of genuine curiosity, not the dire need to humiliate her. All eyes were still on Roxanne as she answered, but she suddenly didn't feel so self-aware anymore. There was a warm feeling that the woman's smile gave her, and Roxanne appreciated it.

"Mostly classical literature and crime thrillers."

Eloise applauded her, a satisfied look glittered in her grey eyes.

"Wonderful! Wonderful! Just what I enjoy! Tell me dear, I am dying to know if you have any talents."

Roxanne coughed to clear her throat and sat up again.

"Well, I do know how to..."

"Miss Roxanne plays the piano forte excellently well!" Peter cut in from behind them.

Eyes turned to him, and he lowered his head in apology.

"Forgive me, your majesties. But I really couldn't help myself."

In that moment, a wave of nausea washed over Roxanne. Beads of sweat formed and trickled down her forehead and her palms became twice as sweaty. She found it hard to take in air, resulting to her breathing heavily. Eloise's eyes narrowed at her.

"You don't say?"

Roxanne's thoughts continued to hover around. Why? Just why did Peter have to blurt out to them like that?

Beside her, the beautiful Elizabeth scoffed.

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"As if a scrawny American would ever know a thing about classical music."

Roxanne's eyes met with hers, but she rolled her eyes and looked away.

Roxanne fought back the urge to stand up and run.

What was wrong with these people? Why were they all so filled with... malice?

With them, even the most harmless of statements had an underlying mockery to it. She was tired of being amongst them, very tired.

"It's nothing very serious Your Highness, I just..."

"Nonsense!" Eloise said out loud, giggling happily.

"I think you should play for us! Entertain us after dinner! Don't you think so, sister?"

Lady Marion's eyes ran over Roxanne again after she heard Eloise's question, before she nodded. Eloise exclaimed with joy and turned to Madeline. "What do you say? Won't you like to hear the lady play? I am curious."

Madeline looked away from Roxanne and sipped her wine.

"What do you even play?" she asked, her eyes sending a very visible challenge to Roxanne.

Roxanne didn't know why, but she accepted the challenge with a smile on her face.

"Beethoven, Mozart, modern day Kris Bowers..."

"How delightful!" Eloise exclaimed, Roxanne blushed slightly.

"It is settled then! You would play the piano forte for us after dinner! I am so excited."

As she grinned, the knot in Roxanne's stomach tightened.

What had she just gotten herself into?