

Party Pooper

"f**k 'em," Lark shrugged trying to sell a nonchalance she hoped Ollie bought. "I want to keep dancing."

"He's waving at us."

"Good for him."

"You really hate him."

"Nope. Don't hate him. I gave up on him, Ollie and I simply have no desire to ever return to being his joke sidekick." The one thing she'd never kept from Ollie was how much she loved Max when they were kids. Ollie always knew and kept her secret for her.

She'd told Ollie back then she realized on prom night she was never going to get out of the friendzone. Moreover, she was never going to get over him if she didn't get away from him. Ollie was the one, when she came home to pack her belongings for university away from them, who helped her tearfully burn all the keepsakes Lark saved.

The ticket from their first school dance where she danced her first dance ever with Max, was torn. The photo taken of the four of them in the treehouse with her Instamax camera when she'd kissed Max was the first to burn. A first-place ribbon for when they'd been paired together in science fair in eighth grade joined in the ashes. Her diaries where she wrote his name hundreds of times was put through her father's paper shredder and then lit ablaze. All of it burned. They'd started a bonfire, and she'd burned it all. Later, when Max came home from a date and wandered into the backyard, she walked away without another word to him. She didn't exchange more than a few syllables in twelve years.

Even though their families were close, she'd been able to avoid a single conversation with him. Moving back to Dallas and being here permanently, she knew it might be tougher to avoid him, but it didn't mean she wasn't going to try. Seeing him, even for the very brief glance she took just now, proved to her she still kept a lot of hurt in her heart. She needed to keep her distance. Max Villeneuve always was, and would always be, a weakness for her silly soul.

She grabbed Ollie after chugging her drink and yanked her back to the dance floor. With the new influx of alcohol running through her veins she was able to forget again the memories which seemed to be haunting her tonight and focused on the lyrics and beat of the music.

She and Ollie were both huge country music fans but the blaring pop music with the techno beats being remixed by the DJ were enough to keep her focused on the dancing.

Lark felt hands on her hips again and opened her eyes, noting Ollie was in front of her this time, and she looked over her shoulder and saw Johan behind her. He joined their trio, making them a quartet when they were in middle school. She hadn't seen him much over the years and she threw her arms around his neck hugging him tight.

"Hello gorgeous!"

"Hey Johan!" she yelled over the music as he hugged her back. "You look good."

"Not as good as you! Where's the dud boyfriend? Please tell me this black dress is a revenge dress and you dumped his ass."

"He f****d his secretary on their anniversary!" Ollie screamed over her shoulder at Johan.

"Awesome, now I can make my move!" Johan teased her and then dipped her deep over his arm before kissing her cheek loudly.

She slapped his chest and giggled as he took her hand and twirled her under his arm. Ollie's parents loved to dance and when they were all in middle school and even high school, they would push back the sofas in their living room and Olivier and Bobbie would teach them all kinds of dancing. She was laughing joyfully that Johan hadn't forgotten his lessons as he danced with her.

She was breathless when he spun her backwards and she crashed into waiting arms who immediately crushed her tight and lifted her off her feet.

She pushed furiously, "put me down, Max."

"No way, chère. Dance with me. You used to love dancing with me."

Max's voice was far deeper than she remembered and as he growled in her ear, she realized he was no longer the teenage boy she once adored but he was all man in front of her. Even more reason for her and her foolish heart to avoid him at all costs. Max Villeneuve ate little girls like her for breakfast and picked his teeth with their bones when he was done.

"I grew up," she shoved him away and squeezed her way through the packed dance floor, ignoring Ollie's screams as she bellowed at Max for ruining their fun. She reached the outer side of the dance floor when her arm was gripped, and she was yanked backwards.

"What the f**k!"

"Why are you running off from me?" Max folded his arms over his chest.

She almost rolled his eyes as she noted the n****s poking under his folded arms. The man wore the tightest shirt to show off his perfectly sculpted pecs. Arrogant swine. She yanked her arm away from him. "I don't want to talk to you."

"What the hell, Lark? You haven't talked to me in ages. What did I do?"

"Exist. You exist." She poked his chest. "You live only for yourself, your wants and your needs and you are a selfish bastard and I hate you." She screamed the last part and watched the stunned disbelief on his face. "Now stay the f**k away from me."

"You hate me?"

She stormed away, heading to the bartender, and forced herself to ignore the giant coming behind her. Max was grown, even more than when they were in school. He was broad across the shoulders and was taller than most of the men in the club. She wasn't dainty herself, five foot eight barefoot, which was why Douglas always insisted she wear flats because he was only five foot ten and it made him feel emasculated to have her towering over him. d**k.

She lied to Ollie. She did hate him. What made all those other girls worth his time and yet she wasn't worth ten minutes to come to the rooftop to talk? Her self-esteem took a horrible tumble at the realization, in his eyes, she was not good enough for him. With the steady increase in her self-respect over the years, her animosity towards the arrogant jerk also grew.

She waved at the bartender and motioned for two shots and another boilermaker. Both shots were down her gullet by the time Max caught up to her at the bar.

"Hey, Lark, come on. Talk to me. We were best friends."

"You're no friend of mine."

"Can I at least know what I did?"

His voice was hot in her ear and despite the loud thumping music she felt it slide down her spine like a shiver. The boy who was as English-speaking as she and Ollie, the minute he'd found out his father had Cajun roots suddenly developed a fascination for the French language. He'd even spent time in France, and he'd adopted an accent he was able to put on or off with ease and right now, he played it thick in her ear. She turned and punched his arm.

"Stop with the fake bullshit, Max. You're no more French than I am."

"Would you like to have some French in you?" he boldly retorted.

Her mouth opened and closed in disbelief.

"Oh, come on, you used to joke back with me! Please come talk to me."

"Those jokes were why everyone in high school thought I was one of the girls in your f****g harem. f**k you! No. If you don't leave me alone, I'm calling Riggs."

"Riggs? What do you have him on speed dial?"

"Well yeah. Who do you think keeps you away from me?"

"Wait, are you saying my Dad's head of security and best friend keeps me away from you?" he appeared completely perplexed by her words.

"Yup. I told him the summer we graduated I never wanted you near me again. He makes sure it happens."

"Why?"

"Because I hate you. Which part did you not understand over there?" she swung her arm in the direction of the dance floor.

"The part where you hate me. I don't understand why. We were best friends. Lark, I've known you since we were born. You cut me off. I think I deserve to know why."

"I don't owe you anything, Max. See, friends put each other first. They take care of each other. They don't ditch their friends who are hurting. They don't leave them emotionally vulnerable, and they don't leave them hanging. You stopped being my friend when you started putting your d**k and your need to conquer every woman in a hundred-mile radius ahead of me and constantly humiliating me in front of the world. We're not friends. Not now. Not ever again." She pulled her phone from her back pocket and sent Ollie a text unsure of where she'd gone. She considered Johan was keeping her distracted so Max could keep her cornered.

"Lark," he reached out and tucked a strand of hair behind her hair and then jumped when she smacked his hand off her. He rocked backwards incredulously. "Holy s**t, you really do hate me."

"Yes. I do. Leave me alone, Max. Go find some girl to f**k and pretend I'm not here. It's what you excelled at in the past."

Ollie appeared at her shoulder and shot Max a glare, "not cool, Max. You should know by now your games won't work."

"What games? I'm trying to find out why the person who was my best friend for almost eighteen years hates my guts."

"It's because you're you, you man-w***e," Ollie growled and pulled Lark away. "Come on. Riggs is going to drive us to another location and he," she gave her brother an annoyed glare, "isn't invited."

Lark downed the drink in front of her and then with a single dignified salute at Max, she followed her best friend out of the club. Why after all this time did the burn of alcohol still not take the sting of Max Villeneuve out of her heart?