

The Billionaire's Baby Bargain Chapter 12

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Chapter 12 Paint...Or Else

Arthur introduced me to so many people that I knew I would never be able to remember who was who. Luckily, I didn't think that I would ever see these people again once the contract was over and done with.

I stayed glued to Arthur's side. Wherever he went, I went too. It would have been fine, but being so close to him meant I was breathing in his scent constantly. It was driving Lily insane.

Just one little taste, Lily pleaded and I hated to admit that after that kiss, it was extremely tempting to go for another one. But I had to be careful. Lust was only a few steps away from love and I could not fall in love with Arthur.

It wasn't helping that Arthur kept bending down to whisper in my ear. I was afraid I was going to have permanent goosebumps. "We have to tread very carefully with this next person. He would love nothing more than to steal my title."

My grip tightened on his arm as I nodded my head. We approached a middle aged man with his back to us, his salt and pepper hair cropped short.

"Uncle Jack, I'd like to formally introduce you to my fiance, Almara," Arthur said by way of greeting and the man turned around. I felt the color drain from my face as I took in the man before me. I knew him.

"Hello, Almara. It's lovely to meet you," Jack said, taking my hand and placing a gentle kiss on the back of it. I gave a small curtsy, praying that he didn't recognize me. I'd only served him a couple of times at the restaurant. Surely someone of his status wouldn't notice a lowly waitress.

"It's nice to meet you too," I replied and was thankful that my voice sounded steady.

"I'm sorry, my dear, but have we ever met? You look awfully familiar. Perhaps you've dined at Ricardo's?" Jack asked smoothly and I swear my heart stopped. He knew. He absolutely recognized me and was just asking in a roundabout way.

My tongue felt swollen as I forced out a lie. "No, I've never heard of it. I'm sure this is the first time we're meeting."

"Hmmm. I must be mistaken then. So, I hear you're an art student. Would you mind giving us a live demonstration of your work?" Jack quirked an eyebrow in challenge. He was definitely trying to out us.

"I'm sure Almara would love to, but unfortunately we don't have any art supplies on hand. Perhaps next time," Arthur cut in, saving me from having to

answer. I glanced up at him. He seemed perfectly calm on the outside, but orange floated above his head. He was agitated.

“Luckily for us all, I brought some. Once I read your email this morning, I knew that I wanted to see her in action. You know how much I love art,” Jack said and waved someone over. A woman walked over, holding a paper bag full of art supplies.

“Lucky us,” Arthur muttered, but for once I wasn’t worried. I had been painting for as long as I could remember. I could do this.

Jack led us to one of the dining tables and I started setting up the supplies. Once I was satisfied with everything, I sat down and got to work.

On some level, I was aware of the crowd that was gathering around us, but they didn’t matter. I was getting lost in the painting. Every brushstroke was another weight off my chest. By the end of it all, I felt as light as a feather.

I lifted a hand to push back a wayward strand of hair and I felt the smear of paint as I did so. I glanced down at the dress I was wearing and could immediately see flecks of paint all over it. It was completely ruined. Oops.

“Are you finished?” Arthur asked, leaning over me. I breathed in his scent and leaned back into him. Painting had brought in some much needed clarity. If we were going to fool everyone, they were going to have to believe we were together and I couldn’t do that if I was holding myself back.

Arthur stiffened for a split second at my touch, but he recovered quickly. His lips once again grazed my ear, but no threats accompanied it this time. It was just pure affection.

“Yes, I’m finished,” I answered, getting up and stepping away from the table.

Arthur carefully picked up the canvas and held it up so that everyone could see the mountain landscape I had created.

Claps erupted around us and my face heated. But this time it wasn’t from embarrassment. I had never gotten such a public response. Most of the time only my parents saw my paintings and of course they had always complimented me. This was my first confirmation that my paintings were worth anything.

“My, my, my. You are quite the artist,” Jack said, but there was venom in his voice. That hadn’t been a compliment.

“Thank you,” I said anyway.

Before Jack could say anything further, people pushed their way to me to give me praise. I would be lying if I said I didn’t enjoy it a little bit.

A little bit? You’re practically glowing, Lily snickered and I couldn’t help but smile. This was one instance that I didn’t mind her calling me out.

A man that looked similar to Arthur appeared in front of me. He looked closer to my age, with shaggy black hair that somehow managed to still look neat. His emerald eyes shone with genuine warmth as he grinned at me.

“Hey! I’m William, Arthur’s nephew. It’s a pleasure to meet you,” he said and kissed the back of my hand in greeting. A shock of tingles shot up my arm. You definitely have a type, Lily chimed in and I shushed her. I definitely did not like where that line of thinking was going. I had enough on my plate as is. “I have to say that I was surprised by Arthur’s news. I never would have thought he would go for someone as pure and as beautiful as you. Not to mention insanely talented. I would like to buy your painting, if I may,” William said and I stared at him in shock. He actually wanted to buy my painting? “I’m nowhere near a professional painter. I couldn’t ask you to buy it, but I don’t mind -” I was cut off by Arthur taking my hand out of William’s. I hadn’t even noticed he was still holding it.

“She’ll take ten-thousand for it.”

I whipped my head around so fast that it almost gave me whiplash. Ten thousand was an insane price, especially for such a small painting.

“Done. Just give your bank info to my people and I’ll be sure to transfer it as soon as possible,” William said, still grinning and completely unphased by the price that Arthur had set.

“Almara, would you mind signing the painting for me?” he asked and I nodded, extremely flattered. I bent over the table, grabbing a paintbrush and dipping it into the black ink. I had never signed my name before so it was a bit messy, but it was mine.

As I handed the canvas to William, Arthur came up behind me and wrapped an arm around my waist. It felt possessive...and hot. I knew Lily was enjoying it immensely.

“Get used to this, Almara. If you want to become a great painter, you need to treat yourself as a great painter. This is all just in a day’s work,” he whispered in my ear and I couldn’t suppress the shudder that went through my body. Arthur’s grip tightened and he gave an almost imperceptible growl.

“If you’re not too busy, would you mind talking to me about your art or just art in general? I would love to pick your brain,” William said and I gave him a genuine smile. I had never expected to meet someone I connected with at this party.

“I’m sorry, nephew, but Almara is getting a little tired. I’m sure you understand. It’s been an eventful night after all.” Arthur shot me a warning glance as I opened my mouth to protest.

Did you see that? Lily asked, sounding positively giddy.

See what?

Of course you missed it. Our alpha is very displeased with what just happened.

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