

## Chapter 209 A Good Star

Rylan did not bring the car to a halt until he had sent Janessa to the entrance of her apartment building.

Rylan was very attentive where Janessa was concerned. He could tell from Janessa's rounded posture that she was probably exhausted. "The exhaustion is written all over your face. You deserve a good night's rest," he exclaimed, evidently concerned.

It meant a lot to Janessa that Rylan was forever willing to extend a helping hand in her times of need. "I appreciate what you did for me today. Your help always means a lot to me," said Janessa in an appreciative tone. Janessa had her bag in hand, ready to head out of the car and into her apartment. "If it were not for you, Rylan, I would not have been able to get back. I would have, at most probabilities, been stranded," continued Janessa.

Even though Rylan appreciated that Janessa was so thankful, her thankfulness, in that moment, did not seem like compensation enough for how long Rylan had to wait for her. "It is quite fitting and expected that you say thank you, for I had to wait for you outside for 3 hours!" Rylan pretended to feel aggrieved. Rylan did this to try winning some sympathy from Janessa. His handsome face was already dashing. After he put on this performance, nobody seemed to be able to let him down.

His performance did get Rylan the sympathy he sought. Janessa was ready to negotiate his reward. "How would you like for me to thank you?" asked Janessa unreservedly. Performance or not, Rylan deserved the reward from Janessa. Janessa was cognizant of the fact that she would have been stranded had it not been for Rylan. She would not be able to take a bath or to sleep, let alone be safe. Janessa would still, after suffering such an ordeal, have been expected at work.

Rylan viewed this question by Janessa as an invite to express his inherent desire to marry, or at least have Janessa. He took the gamble. "Make me the happiest man then and marry me," he requested hesitantly. With his eyebrows arched, Rylan waited for what seemed like an eternity to hear Janessa's response to what he also knew to be a crazy request.

Logically Rylan knew what Janessa's response would be. Emotionally though, it made sense for him to hold on to this fantasy he had. In this fantasy of his, Janessa's response would be a resounding yes. She would excitedly say "I will marry you, Rylan."

Alas! Janessa did not extend a response to Rylan's heartfelt, yet abrupt request. Janessa was evidently and expectedly bewildered by what had ensued.

"You had better make your way back. I do not intend to keep you any longer. It is getting really late," said Janessa. The awkwardness of what had ensued was unbearable for Janessa. Janessa opened the car door and let herself out, without a second more to spare.

Rylan managed to contain his dismay. He did not want to make the situation any more awkward than it already was. All he managed to say was, "Well, you should go and rest now, Janessa. I am certain you have an early morning tomorrow."

Probably sensing Rylan's dismay and disappointment, Janessa looked back at Rylan and said, "Let me treat you to dinner another day. That should be compensation enough for your efforts tonight." Surprise and excitement brushed over Rylan's face. "Good night," he said. Janessa's dinner suggestion made Rylan beam with joy. His marriage proposal may have been rejected, tacitly, but he still had a chance to woo Janessa.

"Good night," Janessa said softly. It had been a long and overwhelming day for Janessa. All she had in mind was her bed. Rylan was a hopeless romantic. For him, a man could never drive off without first making sure that his lady was safely inside the house. He sat there with a smirk that stretched from ear to ear. Once he realized that Janessa was in her apartment, he drove off into the dewy night.

Rylan thought to himself, "Tonight could have played out differently. Janessa could have cursed me and never wanted to see me again. She could have accused me of being forward. At least I won a meal and her gratitude for my efforts."

Not every love is a case of love at first sight. Rylan realized this and this gave him hope. He realized that even though Janessa was not in love with him then, it was not to be deduced as a complete rejection. Her invite portrayed an interest that Janessa may not have been aware of. Rylan was willing to work hard to bring Janessa's interest to the fore and make her aware of it. Rylan was convinced he could show Janessa that he was the man worthy of her love.

Janessa shared her condominium with her two friends, Alana and Leona. They were expected to have been asleep at that time, so Janessa opened the door slightly. She was surprised by a beam of light that shone directly on her face. 'Are they still awake?' she wondered.

The squeakiness of the door as Janessa closed it shut startled her as well. She walked inside on tip-toe, intending to get to her bedroom without her friends hearing or seeing her. As she raised her head to turn the corner into the passage way, there they were. They were waiting for her. Their hands placed firmly on their waists. One look at them and you would swear they had transformed into Janessa's mom, waiting to reprimand her for coming home late.

The most daunting thing for Janessa was that Alana was wearing a black facial mask.

Janessa breathed a sigh of relief upon the realization that these were her black-facial-mask-wearing friends who thrived on meddling in her affairs. She had, in that moment, believed that these were men wearing balaclavas, waiting to rob her. "Guys, I have warned you that you might cause me to have a heart attack one of these days. Do not walk around in the dark while wearing your black facial masks," she warned, agitated. With one hand on her chest, almost pleading with her heart not to give way, Janessa thought it best to head into her bedroom and slumber. As she was about to take her first step, her friends shoved her into the living room. For a minute, it felt like she was under the custody of two policemen. It felt like she had entered the interrogation room. Janessa knew that there was only one way to get out of this situation and be able to get to bed. She had to tell her meddling friends the truth, and nothing but the truth!

"Tell us, who gave you a lift back home. Who is he?" Alana began the questioning very straightforwardly. "What is he to you? What is the status of your relationship?" Alana continued almost breathlessly. At this point, Alana was pacing. She looked like an animal stuck in a cage, pacing back and forth. As soon as one question left her mouth, it seemed like the next one was already waiting in line, ready on the tip of her tongue to escape her mouth. "How far has the relationship progressed? What have you done together, as a couple?" she continued. Not at all fazed that Janessa was not even responding to her questions. "Have you kissed each other? This has clearly progressed into a serious relationship. He is prioritizing you now and giving you lifts home. You should arrange for us, as your friends, to meet with him," Alana pleaded.

Janessa felt faint at the thought of answering these questions being posed by Alana.

"Please. Stop! You have asked me a string of questions. I do not know which one you would want me to answer first. I feel so overwhelmed that I do not even feel like I should attempt to respond to any your questions," Janessa snapped. Janessa was certainly feeling attacked by the questions that were being aimed at her like darts. She felt perplexed. Though she felt this way initially, she soon realized that her friends were only bombarding her because they cared for her. She realized that her friends were the only ones who truly understood the pain of her past relationship. Therefore, they genuinely were excited about the prospect of Janessa being in a relationship again, any relationship.

Leona was the only one of the two who seemed to be cognizant of the fact that it was futile to ask someone questions and not give them time to respond. "Give her a chance to speak, Alana. We have all night. There is no rush. Just let Janessa speak as slowly as necessary so that we can get all the answers we need out of her," Leona said to Alana, rolling her eyes. Leona sat beside Janessa on the couch. Leona rested her hand on Janessa's thigh, almost signaling to Janessa that she could trust them. That she should go ahead and share with them all that had happened.

Alana sat on the coffee table with her legs apart, with a slouching posture. At first glance, you would have thought she was a man. She stared intently at Janessa, waiting for Janessa's response.

It was like an unspoken agreement between the three of them that no one would be going to bed until Janessa spilled the beans on what was happening between her and the mysterious man who had dropped her off.

Alana was an owner of a dessert establishment. Leona was heavily pregnant. She was about to commence a new chapter in her life. Janessa could not fathom how these women had so much time to stay up this late, wait for her in dark corners and interrogate her. Janessa turned and looked at them. "How do you guys manage, busy as you both are, to stay up so late and question me to no end?" she said hastily.

Leona knew how much Janessa loved her unborn child. She knew that was her trump card in this situation and that the mere mention of the unborn child was the sure thing that would get Janessa to talk. "Think of my baby, my unborn child. How the stress of not knowing what is going on in your life may harm my unborn child, Aunty Janessa," proclaimed Leona. While Leona uttered these seemingly manipulative but impactful words, the gravid Leona looked down at her baby bump and rubbed it gently.

Alana and Leona's tricks had assured them a victory. Janessa could take no more. She succumbed and told her friends everything that had occurred between herself and Rylan these past few days.

"Rylan waited outside the restaurant for me. He offered me a lift back home. I am home now, thanks to his lift. That is all there is to it," Janessa said. As little details as these were, Janessa was no way near feeling comfortable enough to tell her friends about the marriage proposal that Rylan had sprung on her. In any event, she was sure that Rylan was just pulling her leg. Janessa continued, "Go to bed now. I have done what you asked of me. My response has surely answered all of your questions." Janessa reveled at the idea of taking a hot shower and then getting into bed. The finality of this interrogation meant that she could now do as she pleased. As she got up to head into the bathroom, Alana stood in front of her. She pushed Janessa down on to the couch. Janessa was flabbergasted. She could have never anticipated that entering her condo would be like entering a wrestling ring with a fight that would last throughout the night.

With one arm resting on the couch and the other lifting Janessa's chin, Alana superciliously said, "It seems that you have a new boyfriend now but you do not want to confirm this with us. It seems that the information you relayed lacked some details. Like I said, I want to know every single detail." "How do you really feel about him? Why are you being so secretive about your feelings for this man?" Alana continued.

According to Janessa, her focus had to be placed entirely on her studies at Lu Group. Her focus had to be on eventually running the family business. "Why do you assume that Rylan being nice to me has something to do with him being my boyfriend? He is not and will not be my boyfriend. He is a friend who was being nice in my time of need. I have no time for boyfriends!" Janessa finally snapped. In this time of her life, Janessa was definitely not contemplating marriage. She appreciated Rylan's proposal but really hoped that he would comprehend that she wanted nothing, at all, to do with marriage.

Alana was convinced that Janessa was downplaying all that had occurred. After Alana had heard a car pull up into the driveway, she had rushed over to the window to take a quick glance. She then witnessed Janessa and Rylan saying their goodbyes to each other. "I saw the way Rylan looked at you. He looked at you with loving eyes," said Alana animatedly. Alana finally let go of Janessa. She was not pleased with the minor detail that they had managed to get out of Janessa. She then went into the bathroom to remove the facial mask plastered on her face first.

Having witnessed Alana's behavior, Leona felt bad for Janessa. "Janessa. Take anything that Alana says with a pinch of salt. You know she means you no harm. She just cares about you and is afraid of having to see you get hurt like the last time. Just follow your heart, and nothing that we say. You will never get lost following your heart," said Leona. "Just please do not do anything you might regret," Leona continued, concern clouding her face. A pat on Janessa's shoulder was the only fitting way for Leona to say good night and to let Janessa know that she had her friend's support. It had been a long night, filled with tons of emotions. No more words were necessary. Leona was evidently very exhausted, as she soon thereafter rushed into bed.

Janessa looked back at Leona. She sighed. Not really a sigh of relief but a sigh that carried with it a lot of thankfulness. She knew she was blessed to have friends that cared for her that deeply. She knew that they questioned her for her own good. Janessa did not want to disappoint her friends; however, Rylan was really not the one she loved.

The morning usually brought with it a fresh start. It usually carried no traces or evidence of yesterday. But today, looking in the mirror and seeing the bags under her eyes, Janessa was quickly reminded of all that had ensued last night. She applied three layers of foundation, hoping to get rid of the evidence of last night's horror on her face. Then she headed out with coffee in hand. When Janessa arrived at the Lu Group headquarters, she quickly realized that Rayan had not arrived yet. Her attention was quickly grabbed by the bouquet of roses in the corner of her tiny desk.

They were eleven beetroot red roses, evenly spaced in a delicate vase. Janessa smiled helplessly.

Janessa sat at her desk wondering how Rylan had managed to pull this off. 'Rylan definitely is a man of his word. How did he manage to get into the CEO's office and leave the roses on my desk?' Janessa thought intently.

'What will Rayan think of it if he knows that Rylan sends me roses again?'

Janessa was beside herself. She could not come to grips with why she was suddenly flooded with thoughts of Rayan.

The last time Rylan bought Janessa a beautiful bunch of roses, Rayan completely lost it. In a jealous rage, Rayan ordered Corbin to remove all the plants in the office and prohibited any plants in the office going forward.

As Janessa was deep in thought about Rayan, she felt a cold hand on her shoulder. As she turned around, her eyes locked into that person's. It was Rylan. "Did you like the roses? I can get you different ones if you did not like these ones," he said nervously.

Janessa was startled when she turned around and saw Rylan. She did not expect to see Rylan at the Lu Group headquarters, let alone Rayan's office on the top floor. She was even more nervous about how Rayan would react if he came into the office and saw her with Rylan. Janessa was deep in thought about Rayan when Rylan approached her. Even when Rylan offered to buy her new roses, she was still stuck thinking about Rayan and how he would react. Janessa felt guilty that all she could think about, even in the presence of Rylan, was Rayan.

Like a child caught with her hand in the cookie jar, Janessa felt like Rylan had caught her in the act, doing something completely despicable.

Inhaling and exhaling quietly, Janessa attempted to calm herself down.

"Why are you here?" Janessa finally managed to ask Rylan. She hoped that her enquiry did not come off as rude but she was truly interested.

It was a known fact that Rylan was not an employee of the Lu Group. Janessa could not fathom what he would possibly be doing at her office.

"You can say I am a magician, or rather a spy. I can go in and out anywhere I please. Now you see me, now you do not. I have special abilities," Rylan said jokingly.

"I believe you. Now, please tell me how you got here," Janessa asked sarcastically and then later sternly. Janessa could not find it within her to believe that Corbin let her in? Janessa found herself asking, agitated. Janessa could not place her finger on it, but she had this unshakeable feeling that Rylan was up to something. "There must be something wrong," Janessa said under her breath. Not even a child would entertain this talk of special abilities that Rylan supposedly possessed. Janessa certainly did not believe it and was not going to believe it any further. Once being gullible and taking everyone's word for the truth, Janessa had worked hard not to be that person anymore. She was, after all, no longer a child.

Janessa's desire to hear the reason for Rylan being at the Lu Group headquarters was like a hungry monster which could no longer be kept at bay. She wanted to know and intended to ask until the monster was fed.

Sensing Janessa's uneasiness and restlessness, Rylan decided to answer Janessa's pressing question. "I have recently started working with the Lu Group. So I will often show up here. Think of us as colleagues. But I will never be in your way. I promise," said Rylan, reassuringly. Rylan knew how much of a professional Janessa was. He knew that she could draw a clear line between what was private and public. This was why Rylan was in such admiration of Janessa. As per his promise, to stay out of Janessa's way, Rylan made his way into Corbin's office, not before turning back and winking at Janessa.

Rylan anticipated any opportunity to see Janessa. Even though he did not really need to be in the Lu Group headquarters all that much, since that day, his attendance became more frequent. Every time he saw Janessa, it was as if he was seeing her for the first time. His appreciation for her and her beauty grew with each glance he saw.

Seeing Janessa every day was like the fuel to Rylan's fire. She was like the wind beneath his wings. Seeing her added a spring to his step.

While sitting on the couch in Corbin's office, Rylan had the perfect view of Janessa while she sat at her tiny desk. He smiled happily.