

The Wedding Invitation

I hum softly, a small smile tugging at my lips. "Hello to you too. You can sit down while I make the coffee. A flat white with cinnamon on top, right?"

She grins. "I love you, you know me so well." She groans and slumps into a chair, resting her arm on the table and propping her head up with her hand.

I start making our coffees but glance at the clock with a frown. "It's just 10 AM, Tess. What are you doing here? Shouldn't you be at work?"

She sighs loudly. "Yes, I should. But I'm burnt out. Had to get off early."

I raise an eyebrow as I begin kneading dough. Rush hour hits by noon, and I need to work quickly. "Work emergency?"

"When is it ever anything else? It's not even counted as an emergency today. Usually, the whole team gives me problems, but this time, it's just one person!"

Here we go again.

"His name's... Leon, right?" I ask, trying to remember.

She raises an eyebrow at me. "Good try, but you should know better. I've complained about him so much, he should be a household name by now. It's Liam Calloway. We went to college together. Remember?"

That was new. "We did?"

"Of course, we did. He was a year ahead of us. Played on the hockey team with Zane. Good Lord, Zane was sooo obsessed with him. He even wanted

to get drafted by the NYC Titans just because Liam did. Remember?"

Was that why Zane wanted to be chosen by NYC so badly? I rummage through my memories. I remember Zane driving me to his hockey game one day, when he didn't want Tess to drive me, so Tess was forced to tag along with us. I think he mentioned a Liam then.

He did seem a bit obsessed.

I shake my head, and she lets out a huge sigh. "Don't worry about it, that asshole's obsession wasn't the issue anyway." She frowns, thinking. "What was the issue again?"

"Work emergency."

"Right! That!" She huffs and starts getting worked up again. I wash my hands, grab our coffees, and put the cookies on a large plate. I walk over and hand her coffee before sitting down across from her. "He's an insufferable playboy!"

I tilt my head, confused. "And... is that a problem?"

"Ordinarily, no. It's not the team's concern. But he's been way over the top lately. He's the biggest name in hockey right now, and with the regular season coming up, he should be polishing his image, not ruining it!"

I shrug, not really getting it. I blow at my steaming coffee and take a sip. "But you guys should get along, right? You knew each other in college."

She looks at me like I'm clueless. "This isn't about his personality. If it was, it wouldn't be a problem because he's charming and nice. But his endorsement contracts have a morality clause. He has to stay in good standing, or he loses them. Even the club contract has the same

condition. If he keeps this up, he'll lose his job."

"It can't be that bad."

"It is! Even his management's on his ass. I know he might be going through something, but this isn't it. You know Jessica Monroe? From Confidential Family?"

At the mention of my and Tess's favorite show, I perk up. "Who doesn't?"

"Exactly!" She looks furious when she adds, "They're supposed to be dating and in a happy relationship, but last night, pictures came out of him on a date with her co-star."

My jaw drops. "He cheated on THE Jessica Monroe?"

Tess grabs a cookie and chews it angrily. "I don't know. I was too busy being pissed off that he was dumb enough to get photographed at such a crucial time. I didn't even think to ask. Everyone knows Jessica Monroe! Confidential Family is the most-watched show right now. Her fans are going crazy, flaming him on social media."

"Well, he deserves it. She's way too hot for him anyway." I've never seen the guy, but Jessica's basically a goddess. "What a scumbag."

"I mean, they did look really good together. Two ridiculously hot people deserve each other, I guess. And he's not really a scumbag. He's probably the best guy I know," she says, grinning sheepishly. "After you, of course. Liam's just going through something, not sure what, but I just hope he handles it more quietly."

I nod. "So, what's the plan?"

"Emergency PR, for now. I'm pretty sure he and her co-star weren't

actually on a date. Hell, I'm not even sure he and Jessica were really dating. It's just what everyone assumed. He has commitment issues. We'll let it blow over, Jess will probably get asked about it during her press tour and clear it up. After that, we'll go with the serious relationship angle. Have him fake date someone less famous, and when they break up, he'll be the heartbroken playboy and a media darling again."

I can't help but smile. Of course, she's already thought everything through. Whenever Zane ranted, it was for advice he was never going to take. But when Tessa rants, it's because she already knows exactly what to do, she just needs someone to listen.

I cringe slightly. I should stop thinking about him. It's been months. He probably hasn't thought about me once.

I'd already spent six months mourning him. It was time to let go. It wouldn't be easy, nothing ever was, but I had to try.

"Earth to Emmy!" Tessa sing-songs. She's smiling, but I see the concern in her eyes. "I lost you for a second there. You okay?"

I'd been so distracted I didn't even notice she'd finished eating.

I smile and reach for her hand. For a split second, I'm terrified she'll pull away and wipe it on her suit pants just like Zane did.

Like I was something dirty. Something disgusting.

But she doesn't. Instead, she squeezes my hand, erasing the bitter memory he left behind. "A penny for your thoughts?"

I shake my head, hating the way my eyes sting. "Just thinking... it's time. I need to move on. Once and for all."

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 +15 Bonus


The tears

come anyway. Tessa's eyes are suspiciously wet when she pulls me into a hug. "Oh my God, Em. I'm so proud of you."

I'm moving on. I'm finally leaving my asshole ex behind.

Or at least, that was the plan.

A month later, I get a message from Zane.

It's an invitation to his wedding. 

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