

Not Your Choice To Make

A few hours pass, but Tess is still not back.

I wonder what she wants to tell me that's so important.

Once I sober up, I take a shower, brush my teeth, and keep myself busy by cleaning her apartment.

I try not to think about Zane, but I can't help it. I open the email again, staring at the invitation to his wedding and the couple-only cruise.

Then I see my name in the wrong spot.

My stomach turns, and I barely make it to the bathroom before throwing up.

Later, I do something even worse.

I G****e her. 2

His fiancée is a model. Perfect. Beautiful. Everything I'm not.

Of course, he left me for someone like her.

I'm chugging water, actually following Tess's advice for once, when she finally walks in.

Her nose scrunches as she looks around, but when her eyes land on me, she just sighs and gives a small, sad smile.

"I thought you'd be in worse shape," she says, settling onto the couch beside me.

I lean my head on her shoulder and hold up the water bottle. "If I didn't

pull myself together, you would've done it for me. I've learned to pick my battles."

"Damn straight." She tugs at my hair lightly. "Wanna go out for dinner? There's a new Thai place near my office. It's supposed to have really good food."

I squint at her. "You hate Thai food. What's going on?"

She laughs, and for a second, I forget how miserable I feel. She's beautiful and effortlessly so. If I looked more like her, or like his new fiancée, maybe Zane would still be mine.

Tess sobers up quickly. "Okay, you got me. I just... I didn't know how to say this." She hesitates, then looks me in the eye. "Zane's an asshole, Em. He never deserved you."

I let out a bitter laugh. "You've said that before."

"And I meant it. Do you remember when he got drafted and basically bullied you into moving to Chicago with him?"

I shake my head. "That's not what happened."

"But it is," she insists. "He only got you that bakery because he thought he'd be drafted to New York. Remember our plan? If he didn't, we were gonna split an apartment here. And when you told him you were staying with me, he threw a fit."

I roll my eyes. "He wasn't throwing a fit. He was hurt."

Tess scoffs. "Yeah? So he had to hurt you too? Em, you didn't even want to move. He kept you locked up in his apartment so he could keep an eye on you. I saw you twice a year, and that's only when Chicago played New

York."

"That's not his fault. I didn't want to leave. I didn't want a job. I was okay relying on him."

"And never seeing me? You were okay with that too?" Her voice cracks, but she masks it quickly.

I open my mouth to say something, anything at all, but she cuts me off.

"That's not the point. The point is that I went from barely seeing you to having you around every day. When I said you could stay as long as you want, I meant it, Em. I like having you here."

Her words hit me harder than I expect. When was the last time someone actually said they wanted me around?

Zane never did. He tolerated me, sure. But he never wanted me.

Tess takes my hands, squeezing them gently. "I'm kinda warming you up for something that's gonna piss you off."

"Wha—"

"I knew Zane was getting married." She blurts it out fast, like ripping off a bandage. "I found out a month ago. It's literally my job to know this stuff. But you were already spiraling, and I knew if you found out, you'd do something so fucking stupid like beg for him back."

I go stiff. She knew.

She's right, of course. But if she had told me, I could've stopped it. I could've made him come back to me.

This is her fault.

"That wasn't your choice to make." My voice shakes with anger.

She nods. "You're right. It wasn't. And I'm sorry, Em. But you have to understand that if he left and moved on that fast, he was never coming back."

"You don't know that!" I yank at my hands, but she doesn't let go. "Let go, Tessa."

She shakes her head. "No. Because that's not even the thing that's gonna make you mad."


I stop struggling.

There's more?

"What the hell, Tessa?"

She ignores my glare and keeps going. "He's not coming back, Emilia. You haven't seen their pictures together or heard how he talks about her in interviews."

I thought the worst pain I'd ever feel was when Zane left me. I was so wrong.

Because this? This feels like my heart is caving in. 

But I don't cry. I can't.


"Why are you telling me this, Tess?" My voice is barely a whisper. My head drops. I can't even look at her. I'm too ashamed.

She squeezes my hands. "Because you are worth so much more than that"

asshole you've been shackled to for ten years. And if you don't believe it, then believe this: I will never, ever lie to you, Emilia. Even if I hide the truth sometimes for your sake."

She exhales sharply. "Remember when I told you about my PR strategy for that idiot player at my club?"

I nod slowly. I remember. I just don't know why she's bringing it up now.

"It's been going great. His image is on the rise, but we need to keep it going. You know how I said he should date a pretty girl, make him look like a future family man?" 

I don't nod this time. I hate where this is going.

Tessa hesitates, then grins way too cheerfully. "On a scale of one to Hades's asshole, how mad would you be if I said I recommended you for the job?"



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