

## Love Slave 332

### 332 The Start

"I guess we're almost there," I murmured.

"You're right," Ace replied without turning to look at me.

Now that the time was fast approaching and the event was about to start, I couldn't quite contain the mix of troubling emotions that bubbled up inside of me. I wished that I could feel calm inside or at least appear outwardly calm just like Ace could; however, I couldn't hide all the worries that started taking root deep inside of me.

"Don't worry. Just stick with the team. Julianna and most of the team members have been to this event before last year and the ones before that as well. They know how things are supposed to go down, so you don't need to panic," Ace said as he tried to reassure me.

That just told me that it was plain obvious to him that I was on the verge of losing it. I felt slightly disappointed in myself and all that I could do was nod my head a little to tell him that I understood and that I would follow his instructions. Ace flashed me a smile before he reached for my hand and guided the back of it to his lips. The feeling of his warm and soft lips kissing my hand tenderly brought so much courage to me than I could have ever imagined possible.

Although I didn't want to think about it, whenever I looked at Ace my mind would start thinking that this might be his last event as the CEO of our company. That thought gave me very mixed feelings but none of them were anywhere near joyous. I wondered what it was that he was giving up his position for and what made him think that it was worth it. Ace didn't seem hesitant about this decision at all and that just proves how much thought he had probably put behind it. Regardless of what the future holds for us, it pained me in an indescribable way when I thought that someday soon, Ace would no longer be our CEO.

"Thank you, Ace. Don't worry about me and just do your best out there," I told him before braving a smile.

"You're right. I guess I really have to do my best to end my career at this company on a high note. I hate to think that I'm doing it for my father, but I guess I do owe everyone at the company that much. Don't worry, I'll make sure that everything goes well for everyone right until the end," Ace replied confidently.

It was as if he could read my mind but that didn't seem to surprise me. I nodded my head slowly as I kept on smiling. I was scared to talk to him because countless questions about the future might end up pouring out from between my lips and we didn't have the time for that right now. The car slowed down as we neared the entrance of the venue where the driver was supposed to drop us off.

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The auditorium hall used for the ceremony was a very large and elegantly decorated one. Ace's arrival garnered a lot of attention from the press, which came as no surprise to me. Everything was progressing pretty much as we had expected. Ace was interviewed by the press immediately about his predictions of the results of the competition. I watched as I stood at a respectable distance to the side as Ace smiled politely at the camera and addressed the reporters' questions.

“Of course, I would like to say that I’m confident that we’re going to win but this is a competition so anything can happen. No one can be certain of the outcome until it is formally announced,” Ace replied.

After he addressed a couple more questions, he excused himself and we were able to make our way into the main venue without incident. Just like before, everyone had predesignated seats that ensured that we got to sit with the other team members of Project Alpha that were able to attend the event. My mind was fixated on the schedule of the evening as I waited along with everyone else for the much-anticipated announcement of the winner of the competition.

Unfortunately, there were many agendas that we had to go through before arriving at the announcement of the results. To honor all companies and teams that participated in the competition, all commercials that passed the pre-screening were played in turn on the large screen for all to see and admire. I have to say that although I had been tracking our key competitors and their commercials, this was the first time that I watched all the commercials that passed pre-screening and were shown to the public audience.

After that, the representative from the committee gave a speech that I found too formal to be entertaining. To be honest, it probably wasn’t the speaker’s fault but I was just too impatient to get to the main part of the event. I was certain that everyone felt the same way. The way Jeremy fidgeted in his seat told me that he was also on edge along with everyone else on the team. I looked over to Julianna who had her wide eyes glued ahead as if she couldn’t really see or care less about the speaker’s speech or his presence on stage.

“The suspense is really killing me...” I muttered underneath my breath.

“Yeah, it’s driving me crazy too,” Jeremy whispered back.

The lights in the auditorium dimmed and a lone figure walked up on stage guided by a bright spotlight that shone down from above. It was finally the moment that we had all been waiting for. The announcement of the competition’s results was about to begin. I found myself leaning forward in my seat as I started gnawing at my lower lip.

My hands were shaking from the excitement, and I had to clasp them together on my lap to keep them still. The host for the evening cleared his throat before moving closer to the podium. I wished that he could just spit the result out without going through all the preamble and the mini speech that he had prepared.