

Love Slave 334

334 Public Retirement

"This is crazy..." I muttered underneath my breath just to hear Ace chuckling softly from next to me.

He must be used to how the host did something like this every year, but I was so far from being used to it. I chewed on my lower lip hard in my anxiousness as my hand squeezed Ace's tightly. Time passed by so slowly that I started praying silently in my hearts of hearts that we would win the competition. What must have lasted a mere few seconds in reality felt like a year to me as I leaned forward in my seat with my eyes glued on the figure of the host who was standing on the stage as well as the large screen behind him.

"...Jessen's and Hill's. Congratulations!" the host announced so loudly into the microphone that his voice seemed to echo endlessly in the hall.

I didn't know how to react, but my body and instincts took over immediately. Without thinking, I jumped up from my seat and cheered so loudly as I clapped my hands. Everyone on the team basically did the same thing. I turned and gave Ace a congratulatory hug before turning to hug my other colleagues.

We did it! We finally did it!

Those words of cheer rang out over and over again in my head. It was hard for me to believe it, but it was really happening. We just won the competition and secured the future of our company at least for the year to come. Our hard work and all the sacrifices that we made have finally paid off. I turned to smile at Ace to see him smiling before he nodded his head slightly at me.

The spotlight found Ace almost immediately and its seemingly merciless light shown down on us. The host dutifully announced his invitation for Ace to join him on stage to say a few words and accept the award as the CEO of the company. I looked at Ace longingly as I wished that I could throw myself into his arms once more. I wanted nothing more than to celebrate this victory with him in private; however, I also knew that had to wait along with the other things that could now be put in motion.

Ace stood up from his seat with a professional smile on his face. I could tell that he was instantly in his CEO mode. I was glad that he did bother to dress up for the event. Ace made his way to the stage while lifting his hand up here and there to greet the people that he knew that congratulated him. It took a little while before Ace made it up onto the stage. I found out without much surprise that I was right that Ace would look stunning standing up on the stage.

"Thank you..." Ace thanked the host as he came to stand next to the host.

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The camera zoomed in on Ace's face and his face appeared so large and clear on the screens all around the auditorium. The award felt like it truly belonged in Ace's hands. I could feel the team's excitement as they continued to cheer and clap their hands. Of course, I was one of them. Our cheering probably went on too long and that ended up giving Ace a slightly hard time to start his award acceptance speech.

"Thank you for this. This award is very important to me as well as everyone on my team who made this possible and everyone working at Jessen's and Hill's. Needless to say, this wouldn't have been at all

possible without the hard work and the many sacrifices that everyone on the team put in all throughout this competition. My sincerest thanks go out to all of you and the talent that you possess. As always, I would like to promise that Jessen's and Hill's will continue to do our very best to surpass your expectations and deliver only the best of the best..." Ace said with a practiced calm.

I had no idea how other people felt about Ace's speech, but I was merrily soaking it all in. His words of praise and his passionate commitment really got to me. I was sure that he didn't prepare his speech word for word because of how natural and sincere it all seemed. His words felt even more touching because they felt so real and so truthful. Ace paused and smiled before glancing at the award that he held in his hand. His eyes then moved to focus on where he knew I was seated along with the other team members.

"Normally, I would be able to make that promise confidently. However, this year, I realized that I have to work even harder to keep that promise honest and true. As all of you are probably aware already, I have decided to step down from my position as the CEO of Jessen's and Hill's. It is an honor to win this prestigious competition which will allow me to end my career at Jessen's and Hill's on such a high note," Ace announced unwaveringly.

I could hear the various gasps of shock all around me from my team members and also from people from other companies that were also in the audience. Although Ace had announced his retirement, things were becoming more real now that the effective date was just around the corner. Since we won the competition, there was nothing holding Ace back from quitting his job as the CEO and moving on to whatever venture that he had planned for himself.

"Even without me leading, I am certain that Jessen's and Hill's will continue to deliver more than we promised. Our repeated victory at this competition is just the start. Our success working with our clients and our spotless track record will continue. Thank you in advance for all the trust that you continue to place in us," Ace said as he was clearly addressing our existing and new potential clients.

For many reasons that were all jumbled up in a mess in my mind, I felt tears stinging the back of my eyes.