

51 An Invitation

Amelie fidgeted with a shiny rectangular invitation in her left hand and moved her eyes over the party host's name -- Kyle Marshall. The invitation looked more like a golden ticket than anything official but considering Kyle's known appreciation of everything extravagant, there was really nothing to be surprised about. 1

'According to Anna, Richard got it too, which means that Samantha was invited as well.' Amelie set the shiny piece of plastic aside and looked at the calendar opened on her computer screen. *'Richard can't attend because he has an evening conference call with an overseas partner but according to Anna, that woman has already RSVPed and confirmed that she is coming.'*

At first, the fact that Samantha was close enough to Kyle Marshall surprised Amelie. Coming out of nowhere and being literally a no-one, there were not many opportunities for their social circles to intervene; however, since Samantha had already shown to latch onto everyone whom she deemed useful, their unconventional connection made

sense. 1

The silence in Amelie's office was cut by the sudden knocking on the door. Anna excused herself and came right in, marching resolutely toward her boss' desk. She looked a little flushed as if she were running and took a few seconds to catch her breath before she finally spoke,

"I have just met with Mrs. Gilmore's personal assistant, Mrs. Ashford. It's all just as you suspected -- all she said was that Mrs. Gilmore is sick and doesn't accept guests because she wants some quiet to rest."

Amelie sighed. Yes, that sounded like a plausible excuse to stay secluded in one's house but Lizzy was never like that. Especially, not with the baby next to her.

'Every time she'd get even the tiniest sniffles, she would already be in the hospital, pestering doctors to stick as many needles as needed just to make sure she gets better as soon as possible. It's very unusual for her to stay at home where she can infect her daughter which means it's just an excuse.'

Anna fixed her messy hair back into a sleek low

ponytail and continued, "It took some arm twisting but Carmen said that Mr. Gilmore left their house almost a week ago and never came back even once. He is currently staying at the Sunrise Hotel downtown."

Now, Amelie was sure that her friend was having marital problems. Even when Elizabeth's husband would come home incredibly drunk, they would never get into fights because Mr. Gilmore was a "peaceful drunk" and even enjoyed his wife's scolding. If he left the house, then it meant their fight was huge.

'I can't help Lizzy if she refuses to talk to anyone... And Daniel keeps ignoring every question related to his family... The rumor that Kyle mentioned to me before... Now I am certain that it caused all of this.'

Thinking of Kyle made her look back at the shiny invitation she had no previous intentions to accept. However, now that things turned in such an unsettling direction, Mrs. Ashford decided that Kyle must have sent it to her with a certain agenda in mind.

She had to find out whether he was indeed

scheming something awful or simply playing around.

Kyle's party was one of those events one would find themselves attending when their Friday night turned out to be absolutely boring; at her age at least.

Mr. Marshall rented a large downtown villa with a huge round pool in the front yard and dozens of tiny lightbulbs hanging from the trees to create a somewhat intimate atmosphere whereas there was absolutely nothing intimate about it.

Amelie arrived an hour late because she had to deal with an emergency issue at her hotel and once she found herself surrounded by all the people whom she didn't recognize, she felt overwhelmingly out of place.

'I guess our social circles are indeed vastly different; I don't recognize ninety-nine percent of these people. Some of them look like they've barely reached their twenties only recently... Perhaps coming here tonight was a mistake.'

She took a moment to look over the crowd once again -- she wondered if Liam was there too; after all, he was Kyle's friend. While she tried to discern familiar features in the parade of new faces, a cheerful male voice addressed her from behind.

"Looking for someone, Mrs. Ashford?"

"Mr. Marshall, good evening!" Amelie felt caught off-guard as if Kyle knew exactly whom she was looking for but the young man seemed to be completely oblivious and his question was only a form of a greeting.

"Thank you for coming, Mrs. Ashford. I hope you will enjoy my little gathering."

"Little?" Amelie arched her brow but decided to dismiss discussing his definition of little. She moved on to a more important topic. "Is Mr. Bennett here too?"

Kyle shook his head as he sipped his cocktail through a long glass straw. "No, Liam had some urgent family issues to take care of so he couldn't make it tonight." 1

"Urgent family matters? Is everything alright?"

Something serious?"

"I'm not really sure; he doesn't talk much about his family, even with me."

The woman recalled the sad history of Liam's family and immediately thought about his older brother. *'People say he is too sick to even leave the hospital these days... I hope nothing bad happened. Perhaps I should give him a call or ask him to walk the dog together again just to make sure he is feeling okay?'*

Mr. Marshall watched as Amelie got lost in her worried contemplations, then smiled, and tried to reassure her, "Don't worry, I'm sure everything is fine. If his old man didn't ask him to go back, it means that the situation is not that grave."

Amelie nodded somewhat reluctantly. "Well, yes... I guess it's true."

"Now, please get yourself a nice drink at the bar and try to enjoy your evening. If you excuse me, I have some people I need to have a word with."

He winked at Amelie and disappeared into the dancing crowd, leaving Mrs. Ashford alone. She




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sighed, and moved closer to the pool in search of the bar that the man mentioned but instead, much to her surprise, saw Einar Ingvarsson walking in her direction with two glasses of wine in his hands.

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