

61 Shallow Pride

"Mr. Clark, Mrs. Ashford is here to see you." 1

Kate, this week's secretary working for Richard's office announced his visitor and stood in the doorway waiting for his reply. Richard nodded. "Let her in."

Amelie walked into her husband's office and greeted him with a dry but friendly "Hello" to which he replied with another nod, his eyes slowly going over a document in his left hand. He was busy but since he still let his wife in, it meant he didn't mind having a conversation with her.

"I don't need anything, Kate, thank you." Amelie dismissed the secretary and once she left the room, Mrs. Ashford walked up to the couch in the middle of the office and took a seat.

"What brings you here today?" Richard asked in a nonchalant voice. Amelie shrugged. "Multiple things, actually, so I don't even know where to start."

With his eyes still glued to the document, he said

dryly. "Start from the beginning."

A light smile briefly appeared on Amelie's lips.
"Very well."

She got to her feet and walked up to her husband's desk, placing a smartphone in front of him.

"I heard you were planning to sue Johnathan Radcliffe for assault because of what happened to Samantha--"

Richard finally set the document aside and interrupted her sternly, "You were involved in this too. I'm simply doing what's right to protect the ones I care about." 2

Amelie looked away, briefly fixing her eyes on the blue sky behind the office's window. A tiny sarcastic grin was desperate to touch her lips but she fought back her real feelings. What was the point? Between them, there was nothing real anymore; only pretense.

"In any case," she finally turned back to Richard, "I would like you to stop it and withdraw your complaints at the police station too."



The man finally showed a distinct emotion of surprise, his eyes widening in clear shock.

"What the hell are you talking about, Amelie? Why on earth would I do that?"

Amelie unlocked her phone's screen and pushed it toward Richard. "Because if you don't, the Gilmores will sue Samantha for slandering their daughter's reputation by spreading false rumors about Elizabeth."

Richard looked down at her phone and realized there was a recording opened and waiting for him to press the play button. He moved his dark brown eyes back at his wife and she nodded, encouraging him to play it.

He pressed the button and arched his eyebrows as he heard a male voice confessing that it was indeed Samantha Blackwood who spread the rumors about Mrs. Gilmore; the one he, too, was aware of.

"The man in the recording is Jason Sanson; your friend's ex-employer. He said he was ready to testify in court against her. I assume you understand what it means if Gilmores involve their lawyers to sue her, right? And you, of

course, realize what will happen when all of our friends who only show kindness to her because she is close to you, find out that she is capable of spreading such horrible rumors? She will become a social pariah and will drag you down with her."

For a moment, Richard was surprised at his wife's straightforwardness. He had noticed it shortly after he introduced her to Sam. In the past, she was reserved, closed-up, almost emotionless, and yet, that was precisely what he liked about her. She was quiet and obedient. She would never go against him because she was connected to him on every level of her existence. 2

Now, she was evolving into something new. She was showing her true colors. Thread by thread, she was detaching herself from him; slowly, their lives were beginning to get separated. 3

The Amelie Ashford his parents raised for him was no longer in his grasp. 2

Displeased, Richard sighed and pushed the phone away, almost causing it to fall from the desk. "Why are you doing this? The damage to

my reputation equals the same damage to yours."

"Someone tried to harm my friend for whatever reason and I cannot simply let it slide. If you are not afraid of marring your reputation, then I am not afraid too." 1

With a confident smile lighting up her face, she picked up her phone from the desk and added, "So what is it going to be, Richard? Your pride or our reputation?"

The man offered his wife a frown but Amelie knew she won. Even for people like them, reputation was more important than shallow pride.

"Fine," the harsh notes of his voice betrayed his internal struggle. "I'll take care of it. He will be released by the end of the day."

Amelie smiled and hid her phone back in her purse. "Thank you."

She headed for the exit but decided to pause and say something she had been meaning to say ever since she talked to Jason Sanson. "No matter how infatuated you are with this woman, Richard, there has to be a limit to your

blindness. But I will stay out of your personal life. I really hope that this is the last time I have to deal with that woman's behavior."

Richard didn't get a chance to say anything as the two of them were interrupted by Mr. Clark's assistant who knocked and entered the room.

"Oh, Mrs. Ashford, I didn't know you were here," he then offered his boss a guilty look and added. "Kate is having a call with the secretary's office--"

"It's alright, I was leaving anyway." Amelie nodded at Ron and left the room.

Richard let out a long and somewhat irritated exhale and almost growled at the man. "What is it?"

Ron quickly approached Richard's desk and placed his tablet before him; he then pointed at the charts and said in a timid tone, "The stock market got updated, sir. The company was sold out this morning. You have lost everything." 3

Richard widened his eyes and grabbed the tablet, scanning the charts on its screen with a confused expression. "What do you mean it was



sold out? What happened?"

Ron shook his head. "I contacted our lead but he said since it was a start-up, there was no way of knowing. He said he lost his money too. These things happen, you know that, Mr. Clark."

Richard sighed. "I know it happens, but... What did he say about the rest of my money? Is he moving it around?"

His assistant nodded. "Yes, he found a more reliable stock so he will be shifting there. He said the selling point is in two weeks."

"Good. Fine. Just keep an eye on it. And make sure the money is coming from my closed accounts. Amelie can't know about this." 1

"Yes, Mr. Clark."