

68 An Important Keepsake

"Mr. Bennett?" Amelie was happy to finally hear from him; strangely it felt like she could breathe freely again. 1

"Hi, Miss Ashford. How have you been?"

Liam's voice sounded quiet and exhausted. It sounded as if he had a hard time uttering the words and Amelie got incredibly concerned. "I have been busy, just the usual things. What about you, Mr. Bennett? I have sent you many messages but you never replied..."

Her words were met with a long silence from the other end of the line and Amelie instantly knew what they meant. One long minute later, her assumptions were confirmed.

"My brother has passed away this evening." 3

The woman felt a sharp rock forming in the middle of her throat. It was expected and perhaps Liam was prepared but it was still a huge tragedy.

Amelie recalled everything Lizzy told her about

the Bennett family. Tragedy after tragedy, they were forced to watch their loved ones leave them and there was nothing they could do but remember their presence and mourn their absence.

"I am really sorry, Mr. Bennett. I am sorry you and Mr. Oscar Bennett have to go through such a tragedy. I can only... I can only say how sorry I am. I am truly sorry."

Liam held his breath the whole time Amelie was talking and once she was done, he let out a long, trembling exhale and closed his teary eyes, rubbing them vigorously as if that would help the tears dry faster or stop altogether.

"Miss Ashford..." he finally started, his voice shaking no matter how hard he tried to compose his emotions. "If I was standing next to you right now and asked you for a hug, would you have hugged me?"

Amelie almost choked on her own words. "Mhm. Yes, it goes without saying."

Liam smiled and took a deep breath, feeling the streams of tears running down his face. "Thank you, Miss Ashford. I am really... I am really glad I

left this phone with you. Knowing that you are the only one who can use it, makes me feel like there are only the two of us in this world." 1

The woman smiled at such a rapid change of subject; it was good for both of them.

"Speaking of which," she tried to lighten the mood even more. "You said this phone was an important keepsake. May I ask why?"

Liam took a few moments to ponder, humming quietly under his nose before finally replying, "It belonged to my late father."

"Oh..." Now Amelie felt bad because it seemed like she inadvertently evoked yet another unpleasant memory. Liam, however, seemed to have a different opinion. He continued.

"You probably remember the snake game these phones used to have. My brother liked it a lot when he was a kid and kept stealing this phone from our dad's pockets to secretly play that game instead of doing his preschool studies."

Amelie stretched her lips into a bitter smile. She used to do that too with the late Mr. Clark's phone and every time she got caught, Richard

would cover for her, pretending that it was he who stole the phone instead. 1

"When our parents were leaving for the trip..." Liam spoke again, "The trip they never returned from... Our father left his phone to my brother and told him to keep it safe until he came back. He never did and Noah never touched that phone ever again. 2

I didn't want to lose it so I have been keeping it with me all this time. I think the night I accidentally left it under your door was the very first time I have ever lost it. I was very happy that it was you who found it. And I was very happy that it is you who gets to keep it."

"This is such an important item," Amelie felt a little uncomfortable after hearing the story behind the old mobile phone. "I don't think I deserve to keep it, Mr. Bennett. It means so much to both you and... your late brother. Would you like me to ship it to you?"

Liam let out a soft, somewhat sad chuckle. "No, Miss Ashford, you are the one I want to have it. But... If you are so eager to give it back to me, then you will have to wait a little longer. I will be

back in the country soon. And then, I will make sure to hold onto the things that matter so much to me." 3

"It looks like your friend needs a lot of money, huh? The hostess bars do not pay enough? I thought that was the only reason the girls even go to work there -- the money."

Kyle slid a thin white envelope across the coffee table in his hotel room and Samantha shoved it right into her purse without even looking inside. This was the second time she had to ask him for money because, after all that had happened, she didn't want to have Richard suspect her even more.

She still needed time before she could freely use his money.

"That girl has a family she is supporting so the money she earns is not enough. I appreciate your help, Mr. Marshall, I will make sure to repay you as soon as I can."

"Sure, sure, no rush." Kyle took a generous sip of gin and tonic from his glass, then set it back on



the table, and leaned forward, closing the distance between him and the woman. "You look a bit different today. Hmm... Are you wearing less makeup than usual?"

Samantha moved her face away and turned away, feeling embarrassed by such a sudden interrogation. "Well... Richard said he likes it more when I don't wear makeup so I am only putting some refreshing touches."

Kyle grinned and leaned back in his seat. "Is that so? Mrs. Ashford also barely wears any makeup, perhaps he is just used to that." 2

Samantha rolled her eyes; it annoyed her that even Kyle harbored subtle feelings of admiration for that woman. Sliding her purse over her forearm, she stood up and offered the man a friendly smile.

"Thanks again, Mr. Marshall. I should be going now, you probably have a lot to do today."

"Wait a moment, Miss Blackwood," Kyle, too, rose to his feet and walked up to the big wooden desk in the opposite corner of the room. When he came back, he handed Sam a small glossy card with an address written in silver letters on it.



"Mr. Edward Harris and his new wife are having a baby shower party in two days. I was invited and my old man is forcing me to go but I don't want to go alone. Come with me as my friend."

"A baby shower party?" Samantha looked over the card and Kyle added. "I see Mr. Clark didn't mention it to you. Oh well, I guess I am your lucky charm. If you come with me to such an event, more people in Mr. Clark's surroundings will see you in a better light. After all, the only thing that matters to them is that you, too, can attend parties like this one."

Falling back onto the couch, he picked up his drink again and grinned. "Come, Miss Blackwood. I will consider it you're paying me back for the money that is now resting in your purse."

