

Chapter Eleven

Aubrey moved closer as Sarah stepped off the stage and right into the mystery man's arms. He kissed her temple and her shy smile spoke a million words for everyone Sarah was likely to say but Aubrey still planned to interrogate her. Just what was going on?

One thing that didn't need explanation was the way Sarah shut down the two women Aubrey saw earlier bragging they knew Rosemary. Aubrey was beaming a smile as wide as Sarah's and couldn't contain herself any longer.

"Sarah! That was awesome!"

Sarah turned. Her face was a mask of utter shock. Apparently she didn't know Ruth sent the invitation. Aubrey took off her mask just to make sure there was no confusion.

"Oh my god! Aubrey! What are you doing here?"

They immediately embraced practically giddy with everything they wanted to talk about. Aubrey was bursting with questions...so many questions.

"Jamie!" Zoe excitedly hugged the little boy as soon as her father put her down. "Come and meet all my cousins!"

She dragged him to the table to introduce him to the other kids. Aubrey couldn't help but notice Jamie's reluctance and maybe even a little jealousy over how close she was with other kids. In the past it had always been just the two of them. They had other friends but never ones they treated like family.

The other little boys seemed just as reluctant to greet Jamie. It couldn't be that they were actually jealous, could it? Aubrey was certain it was her imagination until she overheard one of the men saying, "Luke, don't take this the wrong way, but I think you're going to have to keep an eye on that little charmer of yours."

Maybe it wasn't her imagination....and now she knew the mystery man really was Lucas. If she had any lingering doubts Sarah cleared it up with social introductions also allowing Aubrey to identify the older woman in the wheelchair as Sarah's former mother-in-law, Alice Stanton.

"So you're Lucas," Aubrey couldn't help herself. "You and I are going to have a very long talk...so prepare yourself."

He blinked and looked suitably intimidated. Maybe Sarah had told him about her. Fair warnings aside he had no idea what was waiting for him once she got him alone for their chat.

"Mommy, is Auntie Aubrey and Jamie staying with us?" Zoe asked. "I want to show him my new play set."

"Of course, baby."

"Oh, we couldn't impose," Aubrey shook her head.

"Don't be ridiculous. We have plenty of room, don't we?" Sarah looked at Lucas expectantly.

"Sure. Of course," Lucas nodded earning chuckles from the group.

"Well, at least you have your lines down," Aubrey eyed him with a smirk.

"I like her," Alice declared and Aubrey knew immediately she and the old woman would get along just ne.

"It's you!"

Aubrey gave a start at the sudden voice. She turned to see a man with impressive shoulders and a trim beard. There was no doubting her immediate physical attraction but why did he look at her as if he knew her?

"You don't remember? Four years ago. Swift Hibernian Lounge. St. Patrick's Day."

Aubrey's mouth dropped. It couldn't be...There was no way it could be. It just wasn't possible...not after four years.

He approached cautiously as if afraid she would disappear if he moved too quickly, "Your name. Please, it's been driving me crazy."

"Aubrey."

"Aubrey," he breathed her name as if it was the answer to the universe. "I'm Nicolas."

His arms circled around her and his lips sought hers as if he had been starved for the past four years. Aubrey clung to him afraid her knees would give out from under her. Her ears were ringing as the blood seemed to rush to her head but she didn't miss the jab Julius gave to Lucas, "So maybe she won't be staying with you."

"Mommy? Who's that?"

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Nicolas's emotions were all over the place. Coming to the masquerade had been a whim to take his mind off his troubles. Since his father made the announcement three years ago all of his brothers had hurriedly married.

It was no surprise that Cole married his girlfriend Delilah. As for Ethan and Liam the pair had settled on their most frequent respective booty-calls: Josie and Paige. As far as Nicolas was concerned they were heartless bitches and he didn't envy either of his brothers. But they were fertile which made their father happy as both got pregnant almost immediately which made Nicolas wonder if it were more than just calls going on prior to their marriages.

Unfortunately his nephew and niece: Trevor and Amber, were taking after their parents so he couldn't even enjoy spending time with them. Meanwhile his brother's teasing only got worse. At least his sisters were sympathetic and just as unhappy with their sisters-in-law as he was. Charlotte was a huge Rosemary Thomas fan and had managed to secure herself an invitation only to find out it was the same day as her fashion show. She had been devastated but offered it to him saying he could use it as an opportunity to network. Nicolas hadn't been all that excited but now he was glad he came.

The woman of his dreams was nally in his arms. This day couldn't get better until he heard the curious voice, "Mommy? Who's that?"

Nicolas felt her backing away and he let her. He was too shocked to stop her as she crouched down pulling the little boy into her arms. He had the same smooth, dark skin as his mother and a mop of black hair yet...something about his eyes and features reminded Nicolas of himself. The boy couldn't be more than four which meant...could it be?

"Baby, this is your daddy. Nick...this is Jamie."

He had a son...with the woman of his dreams. They had a son.

The boy looked at him. It was difficult to describe his expression: surprise, doubt, wonder, fear? Did the boy think he would abandon them? Never!

Nicolas knelt not taking his eyes off his son hoping his expression conveyed all his assurance, hope and desire as he said, "It's nice to meet you Jamie. When you're ready...I hope you'll call me daddy."

The boy's eyes widened and he seemed unsure of what he was supposed to do, what the adults expected of him. Maybe he thought this day would never come? He suddenly came to his decision and left his mother's side to approach Nicolas on his own. Without a word his little arms reached out to hug him.

Nicolas found himself shaking as his arms embraced the tiny boy. He was holding his son. His son! He looked up to see Aubrey's eyes glassy with tears. Cradling the boy close he stood and pulled her into his embrace. He was never letting them go. Never...

The sound of clapping reminded him that they were not alone. Nicolas looked to see the little girl dressed as a princess happily clapping and jumping up and down in excitement. His gaze drifted from her to Lucas to see the other smiling broadly. Beside him Sarah watched with a joyous expression clearly happy for her friend. Had she been the blonde in the bar after all?

Nicolas could kick himself. His gaze swept the group seeing their smiles and raised glasses. Julius and Silas in particular gave him knowing looks. Though his family ridiculed him for searching for a single woman these men knew and understood his determination. This was the moment he had lived for.

Aubrey stirred stepping back to look at him. She was trying to ght her tears as she said, "I guess we have a lot to talk about."

"Yeah. We do."