

## Chapter 50 His Family

I stand before the mirror, my reflection simply a painting of nerves and uncertainty. Tonight is in my mind, and the weight of Alaric's gathering feels heavy on my shoulders. There's so much unknown.

What will his family think of me? The age gap is only one concern; my history with Jake adds another layer of complexity. Will they recognise me as Jake's ex? The thought scratches at me, refusing to be ignored. I met his brother, and at that moment, I was dating Jake.

As I descend the stairs, the sounds of conversation and laughter drift towards me. Alaric's hand grasps my hip, grounding me with its reassuring grip.

"Stop looking so scared, baby girl," Alaric whispers, his breath warm against my ear.

I force a smile, but it falls. "Easier said than done, Sir," I admit, my voice hushed.

"It makes no difference. Nothing they will change, and their refusal to accept us won't stop me from loving you or wanting you." His hand moves to the base of my back, offering support and a silent reassurance as he guides me into the crowded room.

My eyes settle on Bex, and Alaric nods. He steps back, and I walk towards them, knowing that I need to tell them about me moving out.

Approaching Bex and Ivy, I'm met with warm smiles.

"Congratulations on the pregnancy," Ivy whispers to me.

I smile at them and prepare for their complaints and anger. "I'm also moving out," I say, waiting for them to argue with me.

"We knew you would," Bex remarks. "So what is the purpose of tonight?" She asks as she looks towards where Alaric is.

"Apparently, he's telling everyone we know that we're together," I reveal, glancing at Alaric.

"Then go to him." Ivy laughs, and I nod at her words. I walk to where he is standing. He's with the people I had met before; I believe one was called Jasmine.

As I get closer to him, his arm reaches out. His hand grasps my hip and pulls me against him.

"Ruby! What a pleasant surprise." Jasmine says as she hugs me.

"Not exactly a surprise, Jasmine." The guy laughs.

"I was being polite, Austin!" Jasmine laughs slightly. "He's right, though. Your whole, she was giving insight into the business failed." Jasmine explains.

"I don't understand?" Alaric looks at them with confusion etched on his face.

"Alaric, it was clearly you two were together. Why you wouldn't just say is what confuses us." Austin looks at him.

"Yes. I agree, it was clear from the start, so why not say?" A guy looks towards Alaric. I think I remember him, Robert.

"We weren't together at that point," Alaric speaks.

"Really? Because you couldn't keep your eyes off her all night, Alaric, and I can't see you just ignoring the fact that you like someone." Austin says. Was he really that fixated on me at the start?

"Look, things were complicated at the start, which is why no one was told," Alaric explains.

"Because of the age difference? We wouldn't have cared, Alaric; you should know that." Jasmine offers some support.

"No, because she is Jake's ex. She was here with Jake at the time," Alaric says quietly, and they stare at him.

"But it was clear you two had done far more than admire each other with just eyes." Robert stands confused.

"Yeah, even I knew more had happened." Jasmine laughs.

"Alaric isn't lying, but he's not explained everything. Me and Jake broke up months before. I came back for my things, and something happened. Then Jake dragged me back, trying to make it look like we were together. Alaric knew we weren't, and Jake knew we weren't together, so no, he didn't touch me while I was dating Jake," I explain, not wanting them to think bad of Alaric.

"Oh, well, that's fine then." Jasmine laughs, and I relax.

"Ruby, even had it happened before you and Jake broke up, we wouldn't have said anything bad. It was clear he was obsessed with you." Austin jokes.

"Enough, stop picking on Alaric." Jasmine laughs, and Alaric is quiet. His eyes are focused on someone else. "Or do as he isn't listening. Are you? Alaric!" Jasmine shouts his name, and he glances at us.

"What were we talking about?" He looks at us, and I laugh.

"Never mind, Ruby explained." Jasmine rolls her eyes.

"Sorry, my brother just arrived. I need to speak to him," Alaric says, keeping his hand settled on my hip as he guides me over.

"Desmond." Alaric looks at him. I watch as they quickly embrace. "Where are the boys and Emily?" Alaric asks.

"Here, she's setting rules for them," Desmond laughs. "Where's mum and dad? I need to tell you guys something," he asks, and I step away. I don't want to be there right now if his brother needs to tell them something.

Walking to the glasses, I grab an orange juice. I see Alaric, his brother, and his parents talking. Whatever the news is, it isn't bad, as they are smiling. Ivy is with Oliver, and Bex is now with Lucas.

Sitting, I watch people talking, and Alaric stays with his brother and parents.

"Hey." I turn hearing someone. "You realise it's custom to socialise at these things?" He smiles and pours a drink.

Laughing, I nod. "I don't feel like socialising." Not with people I don't know, anyway. He's about my age? I think.

"Want a tour of the place?" He asks, and I look at him, confused.

"No thanks, I am already pretty accustomed to the house." Who is this guy?

"Did you get to see the collection of cars?" He smiles, and I go to answer a woman stepping towards us.

"What did I say, Callum?" She looks from him to me. "I'm sorry." She smiles at me and pulls him away, but I can still hear them.

"I was only talking." Callum laughs and finishes his drink.

"What did I just say to you and Alex before we walked through those very doors?" She points towards them.

"Mum." His words are quiet, and I laugh slightly.

"Don't mum me. I told you this wasn't a party for you to find a woman, you don't even know who she is!" the woman sighs looking at him. Wait, he was trying to get my attention for that? I laugh slightly and turn away.

"Uncle Alaric wouldn't care." His words have my eyes widen. Shit, he's Alaric's nephew.

"We're set to move back here, enough." She speaks, and I turn, planning to tell her that he's done nothing wrong. But I see someone stop beside her. They are identical.

"You and Alex need to stop."

"Mum." She turns to the guy.

"Callum?" She glances back. "Why did you two swap coats? God dammit Alex, your dad can sort you two out, I've had enough." She walks away, and they stand laughing. I feel for her, she was there calling him Callum and it wasn't even him.

Alex nods towards me, and Callum smiles, stepping forward.

"You left me." I turn hearing Alaric, and he smiles at me.

"It sounded important and a family matter, so yes." I wasn't about to get involved.

"You're family." He smiles and kisses my cheeks. "Boys." Alaric looks at them, and they stand shocked. "Your mum's not happy, and she didn't even get a drink yet." Alaric laughs.

"It wasn't my fault. She just assumed I was Callum." Alex shrugs and laughs.

"I suggest you pour her a drink and apologise for real. Or you don't get your cars next month for your birthday." Alaric's words have them nodding and rushing off.

"Just so you're aware before we go to your brother and family. Their mum dragged Alex away from me as he was trying to chat me up." I explain, and Alaric stares at me. "Granted, for a while, she called him Callum. You had never mentioned they were twins?"

He laughs and nods. "I didn't even think about it. We got off track, we're meant to letting people know about us. So, before we do that. I think we need to speak to someone else who already knows."

I look at him, confused. "Do you mean Bex and Ivy? I already explained I'm moving out to them."

"No," he moves and pulls me to stand, "I mean your parents." He turns me, and I see them. Shit, they came. I look at Alaric. "All I did was talk, don't ask me."

Why do I feel he's done more than talk? Why have they suddenly shown up and taken an interest in me? He guides me over, and I watch my dad shake his hand.

"It's good to see you again, Alaric." My dad smiles at him and glances at me. "Ruby." So I'm still hated, but they like Alaric? I want to laugh, but I don't.

"Thank you for inviting us," my mum smiles. "You have other guests to attend to, so don't worry about us. We can talk later." She smiles at Alaric, and he nods.

We walk away, and I look at him. "Something isn't right, Alaric." I don't know what, but something.

"Maybe they just realised that this relationship isn't going to end in disaster?" He smiles at me and briefly captures my lips.

"Alaric?" He steps away from me, and Desmond looks at us. Their parents, his wife, and twins are standing here. His wife's eyes widen when she notices me.

"I apologise." She turns and looks at one of the twins. "See what I mean? This is what I was talking about, Alex."

"I'm Callum, mum." He laughs, and she sighs.

"It's fine, Emily. They did nothing wrong." Alaric smiles. "I was just going to come find you anyway. This is Ruby, my partner, and she's pregnant." Alaric says it all, and they stand shocked.

"You were single last time we talked?" Desmond stands shocked.

"It shows how little you called home." Their dad looks at Desmond.

"Welcome to the family, Ruby." Emily hugs me.

"Wait." Desmond steps forward and looks at me. "I thought, Ruby?" He looks confused from me to where Jake is.

"Yes, she used to date Jake. They broke up months before I dated her," Alaric explains, and Desmond simply nods, not looking bothered. His dad, however, is glaring at Alaric.

"Welcome to the family, Ruby. I'm Sally. This is William." His mum points to their dad.

Now, there's tension between Alaric and his dad.

"I'm going to see Bex. It's nice to meet you all." I feel like his dad is holding his tongue while I'm there. When I get to Bex and Ivy, I see Lucas and Oliver talking. So, have they become friends?

"Are you okay? You ran quickly." Bex laughs.

"I'm fine, but I don't think his dad is happy," I say.

"Grandad is never fucking happy." I turn and see the twins. They smile at Ivy.

"Don't. They are both in relationships." My words are quick, and they laugh.

"You're like our mother and just assume we're about to chat up women." One of them says, and I don't even try to work out who is who.

"Bex, Ivy." I point to them. "These are Callum and Alex, Alaric's nephews, and no, I don't know which is which." There is no difference.

"I'm Alex." One of them raises his hand. They have switched coats again? I don't blame their mum for her confusion. Especially if they switch coats so much to make it even more confusing and harder to work out who is who.