

Chapter 16: Playing with Fire

ELLIE

I forced myself to take a step, and he noticed my presence, making my simple task of descending the stairs more difficult. Forgetting how to walk was not a good sign. Relax, Ellie.

"Good evening, Miss Brown," he said as I approached the car, straightening up.

His hair was slicked back, making me suspect that those rebellious strands would fall onto his face at any moment. I tried to stop staring at how the sweater highlighted his chest and muscular arms.

"Good evening, Morgan."

Up close, it was even harder to ignore his handsome face, with that sculpted jawline and the damn beard that looked freshly shaved. It was enough to mess with my mood.

"Are you cold?" he asked, eyeing my closed trench coat.

"I'm fine. Shall we go?"

"Of course." He nodded and turned to open the door for me.

"You don't need to do that. I mean, we don't need to pretend I'm a woman who doesn't know your intentions for the end of the night," I teased, making him smile slightly.

"I guess when my parents told me to be nice to women, it was because

they hadn't met you."

"Henry and Mary must be disappointed," I said, shaking my head as I walked past him to get into the black Audi sports car.

I fastened my seatbelt while I waited for him to walk around to the driver's side.

"You know my parents?" he asked as he fastened his seatbelt.

"You probably don't remember me, since I don't remember you either, but I went to your brother's wedding."

I met Bennett's parents that day, and I had seen them a few other times since. When I first saw them, I remember thinking how easy it was to see where Bennett got his good looks and elegance.

But the lack of charisma didn't make sense. His parents were lovely, and Bennett was so much more ill-tempered and more of a bastard than he is now—or at least that's what Zoe said.

"I didn't go to Ben's wedding."

"What? What kind of person doesn't go to their brother's wedding?"

"The kind who works. I was also living in London and probably had something important for work."

"That's why they say you're a workaholic."

I looked at his face and caught him staring at my legs. He shrugged and cleared his throat.

"It's strange to think I'm going out with someone who already knows my parents. But on the bright side, I won't have to introduce them to you in the future."

"There's no future where we'll be together. And actually, the weird thing about all of this is that you're the son of such wonderful people."

"Have you ever thought that maybe it's because you've chosen to only judge me?"

"Are you saying I was wrong to judge you for trying to get me into bed when you only knew my name?"

"We always circle back to this. Let's leave it in the past, okay? I'm giving you a chance to see my wonderful side tonight." He gave me a light, sensual smile, making me look away and roll my eyes.

"You're giving me a chance?" I asked, finding it funny. "And why, when you say 'my wonderful side,' does it sound like you're talking about what's in your pants?"

He smiled. A damn beautiful smile.

"Did you realize we're still parked in front of your building? Are you going to let me drive, or are we spending the night here? I won't be able to concentrate on the road if you keep trying to get on my nerves."

"Sorry, I forgot men can only focus on one thing at a time. Must be because they're always thinking with the wrong head."

"Don't worry, Brown, you'll see that I can do many things at once," he

retorted as he started the car, making it move.

"I won't see anything. Now, tell me where we're going."

"A restaurant."

"Predictable," I murmured.

"You could have said if you preferred to go straight to my apartment."

I looked at his profile, spotting the stupid smile on the corner of his lips.

"You know that's not what I meant."

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At some point during the drive, I started to worry that the silence between us hadn't become uncomfortable, and I tried to ignore it when he stared at my legs for too long. And also when I found myself staring at his hands, imagining things I shouldn't.

I tried to avoid arguing until we reached the restaurant, so I wouldn't cause an accident. It seemed like we were always in a battle where the weapons were pure sarcasm, irony, and the occasional sexual innuendo on his part.

We only exchanged a few barbs before he parked in front of the restaurant. At least there was no accident.

A blonde woman with big blue eyes, who I assumed was the hostess, came to greet us as soon as we entered the restaurant. The place was elegant, and I had heard about it before.

Was he trying to impress me, or was this just the kind of place he frequented? I'd bet on the latter.

"Good evening! Did you reserve a table, sir?" the blonde asked with a smile on her face.

I looked around the place while Ethan spoke to her. There were enormous chandeliers hanging from the ceiling and tables with white linens, along with dramatic mirrors, paintings, and a few plants decorating the walls.

The luxurious décor harmonized with the gold and gray tones of the palace-style walls. Ethan touched my arm, drawing my attention.

"May I escort the couple to their table?" the blonde asked, still smiling.

"We're not a couple," I corrected her, causing her to blink in confusion and embarrassment, while Ethan sighed beside me.

"Sure," he forced a smile at her as she began walking ahead of us.

Gripping my elbow, he whispered as we followed her, "I don't think anyone here cares whether we're a couple or not."

"But I do. I don't want anyone thinking I'd date someone like you," I forced a smile at him.

Why couldn't I spend a second by his side without wanting to provoke him?

"You mean someone sexy and virile?" he asked with a smile, making me suppress a laugh.

"I don't think anyone uses the word 'virile' anymore, Mr. Morgan."

"Here's your table, Mr. Morgan. Enjoy your dinner," the hostess said, stopping next to our table.

I noticed the way she looked at Ethan, from head to toe, as he pulled out a chair.

"Thank you," he said as she walked away, while I was still watching her. "Miss Brown?" he called my attention, with his hands on the back of the chair, waiting for me to sit.

"I told you, there's no need to pretend you're a gentleman," I said, sitting down.

"I don't want to give my parents more reasons to be disappointed, do I?" he whispered behind me.

I picked up the menu and waited for him to sit across from me.

"That blonde would certainly like to be in my place," I observed while skimming through the options on the menu.

"What did you say?"

I lowered the menu enough to look at his face. "Didn't you notice how she looked at you like you were a prime steak?"

"No. I don't usually pay attention to other women when I'm on a date with one that interests me."

"Do you go on dates with women who don't interest you?"

"Plenty, for work." I nodded.

"The way you always manage to twist my words is completely annoying, Miss Brown."

I placed the menu on the table and crossed my arms over my chest.

"I'm sorry, but remember it was you who insisted on this date. If you wanted a night with a nice, gentle woman, you could have chosen someone else. Someone who's interested. Try that next time."

"God!" He closed his eyes with a nervous smile, taking a deep breath.

"What are you thinking? Say it, whatever it is, I can take it," I teased, imagining he must be mentally calling me all sorts of names.

Then he opened his eyes again, but they weren't filled with hatred, as I'd thought. It was something more primitive and lustful, which almost made me stop breathing and sent a shiver down my spine.

"I was thinking I can't wait to shut that annoying mouth of yours by putting something in it."

His words made my jaw drop. I blinked, trying to process what he had just said, trying in vain not to imagine the scene.

A satisfied smile spread across his face.

"If I'd known that to shut you up, all I had to do was say what I'm thinking all the time, I would've done it sooner, Miss Brown."

I cleared my throat.

"I just... thought it would be some insults. But what should I expect from a bastard like you?"

"Excuse me," the blonde's voice sounded behind me before she stopped beside the table. "Sorry to interrupt. I forgot to ask if the lady would like me to take her coat."

"Sure," Ethan replied before I could, with an amused expression. "Miss Brown just told me she's getting warm."

I forced a smile at him, resisting the urge to kick him in the balls. I knew exactly what he wanted: to see what I was wearing underneath the coat.

Remembering what I had on beneath my dress, I stood up. Feeling confident, I unbuttoned the coat that had kept the dress hidden and slid it off my arms.

All while watching Mr. Morgan's reaction. He initially seemed eager, and now his eyes traveled over my body, from where the dress ended at my thighs, to my neckline, and then to my neck. His gaze made my whole body heat up.

Taking a deep breath, I turned to the hostess and handed her my coat before sitting back down.

"Satisfied?" I asked when she left us alone.

"Satisfied isn't quite the word I'd use, Miss Brown," he said, picking up the menu and opening it on the table.

"I imagine. It would surely be something less decent, fitting for you."

"I'm glad you granted my request."

"What are you talking about?" His eyes moved up to meet mine.

"You also thought of me when you chose the dress?"

"Don't be ridiculous."

"I like to imagine you thinking about me, especially when you're alone in bed at night."

"In your dreams." I grabbed the menu from the table again.

"Yes. Even against my will, you're there."

"Stop it."

"Why? Don't like hearing the truth?"

"I know what you're doing, and it's not going to work."

"So, why are your cheeks red? I expected everything from you, except that you'd be shy."

Damn! I couldn't stop my cheeks from betraying me.

"Don't kid yourself; this is just anger," I lied.

"Sure," he said, looking back at the menu.

Arrogant idiot. I couldn't let him think he was getting the better of me. Even though it was true, he shouldn't know that.

"Mr. Morgan, remember that lingerie Zoe gave me as a gift?"



I waited for him to raise his face in curiosity, all his attention turning to me before he nodded.

"I gave it some use tonight, so thank you," I said, lifting the menu to hide my smile and leaving him with a priceless expression.



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