


### Raven Works Magic

I should've known tonight wouldn't be normal the second Liam grabbed my hand.

Now, fifteen minutes later, I'm still giggling, scrolling through the most ridiculous wedding cakes I've ever seen—one is an exact replica of *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, complete with tiny Jack and Sally figurines.

"This one is hideous," I say, turning my phone toward Liam as we walk into our next stop.

He barely looks at it before grinning. "Perfect. Let's get two."

I snort, slipping my phone into my pocket. It's weird seeing this side of him. I always pictured Liam as the arrogant playboy who could get anything and anyone he wanted. 

But the reality? It's so different.

I didn't expect him to be this easy to talk to—or the type of guy who'd actually go all-in on crashing weddings. And the fact that he's making me order two atrocious cakes for complete strangers? Weirdly adorable.

Warmth spreads through my chest, light and unexpected. I haven't had this much fun in forever, and we haven't even done anything that crazy yet.

But no matter how much I try to stay in the moment, Zane's name keeps slipping into my thoughts. It would've been so easy if it were him instead of Liam.

Stop thinking about him, Em.

I shake the thought away and open my mouth to fire back at Liam, but the

second I take in our surroundings, the words die on my lips.


The salon is alive.

Neon lights shimmer against the walls, rows of wigs in every colour imaginable stretch across the room, and the air is thick with the scent of hairspray and something sweet-vanilla? Caramel? It's the kind of place that feels like it's permanently 3 AM in Vegas.

"Liam Calloway," a deep voice croons.

I turn as a towering figure steps forward, hands on their hips, a cigarette dangling between two fingers. The sequined purple jumpsuit catches the light, sparkling with every movement.

Liam grins like he's just reunited with an old friend. "Raven, I need you to make us look like we walked straight out of a Tim Burton film."

Raven's eyes sweep over me, slow and appraising, before their lips curl into a knowing smile. 

"Oh, honey," they purr, clapping their hands together. "This is going to be fun."

Raven practically vibrates with excitement, their eyes sweeping over me like I'm a couture gown they can't wait to tailor. Neon lights reflect off their sequined jumpsuit, throwing glimmers of purple and silver across their dark skin.

I shift under their gaze, suddenly hyper-aware of how ordinary I must look compared to the dazzling explosion of colour around me. But Raven doesn't seem to mind. They take a step closer, eyes glinting.

"Has anyone ever told you how absolutely stunning you are?" They reach out, like they might lift my chin for a better look, then think better of it. "

And tell me - have you ever considered drag? Because it's -"

"Raven," Liam cuts in, his voice carrying that effortless charm that I'm sure he uses to defuse situations he finds amusing. "Leave Emilia alone."

He turns to me, smirking like he's enjoying this way too much. "Emilia, meet Raven. He and I go way back." And then - without a single warning - he slings an arm around my waist, tugging me into his side like it's the most natural thing in the world. His body is warm, solid, and ridiculously easy to lean into.

Raven's perfectly arched brow lifts a fraction. "Oh?"

"This is Emilia - my girlfriend," Liam says smoothly.

Raven's lips part, and for the first time since we walked in, they actually look shocked. But it lasts barely a second before their expression morphs into something far more scary - pure, unfiltered delight.

"Oh, I like her," they say, practically purring. "She's cute. And she looks like she might pass out any second now."

Liam laughs, the sound rumbling through me, but I can't get a single word out. My brain is still short-circuiting over the fact that he just called me his girlfriend. I mean, obviously I became his girlfriend the moment I signed that contract a few hours ago, but it feels surreal.

Raven leans in conspiratorially. "Sweetheart, you should see your face right now." They glance at Liam, amused. "And you - Calloway, you're such a menace."

Liam just grins. "You love me."

"Unfortunately, I do." Raven sighs dramatically, then flicks their wrist. "But we'll deal with your relationship shenanigans later. Right now, I have

a Tim Burton fantasy to create."

They turn on their heel and disappear into the backroom, leaving me standing there, still reeling.

Liam gives me a squeeze, his breath warm against my temple. "You okay there, Em?"

I blink up at him, trying to form an actual response, but all that comes out is-

"Do you always go through all of this just to crash weddings?"

Liam laughs just as Raven walks in, arms full of palettes, brushes, and an assortment of products I can't even begin to name. They drop everything onto a sleek black counter with a flourish, then gesture for me to sit in a velvet-lined chair in front of a mirror ringed with bright, golden bulbs.

"Let's make you iconic."

I glance at Liam through the mirror, but he just grins. "Don't fight it, Em. Just let the magic happen."

Raven tilts my chin up with a manicured finger. "Tim Burton, yes? Pale but not corpse-like. Ethereal. Haunted."

They dust cool powder over my skin, then sweep on a deep plum blush. "Drama. You have fantastic bone structure."

I snort. "I don't know if I trust you."

"You shouldn't," Raven says cheerfully.

Liam leans in. "I'd be worried if they start gluing rhinestones to your forehead."

"Don't tempt me." Raven smudges blacks and purples across my eyelids, finishing with an inky black lip. Then they step back, eyes shining.

"Oh, darling. Look at her."

I turn to the mirror - and barely recognise myself. The girl staring back is bold, untouchable, wickedly beautiful.

Liam lets out a low whistle. "Now that is a wedding crasher."

Raven spins to him, already grabbing another brush. "Alright, pretty boy. You're next."

After Raven works their magic on Liam, I nearly lose it. The makeup should look ridiculous - dramatic eyeliner, a sharp contour, lips just dark enough to be dangerous - but somehow, it only makes him more swoon-worthy.

Raven shoves us into separate dressing rooms in the back, where we pull on our costumes. When we step out, we take a picture together, showing off Raven's handiwork.

"This is excellent marketing for the shop," Raven says, scrolling through the photos. "Now, I just need time to craft the perfect caption."

"Take all the time you need, Rave. Emilia and I have a wedding to crash."

Liam pulls them into a hug, and before I can react, Raven turns and nearly crushes me in theirs. When they finally loosen their grip, they lower their voice.

"I don't know how he managed to pull you," they murmur, "but it's obvious you mean a lot to him. He hasn't had the best experience with love, so... keep his heart safe, okay?"

I almost laugh - Raven really bought our act - but something in their expression makes me pause. There's an earnestness there, something raw.

"I will," I say, unsure why I mean it.

"Quit gossiping about me," Liam calls. "I'll try to visit more often, alright?"

With one last round of goodbyes, Liam grabs my hand, leading me out of the shop.

We slide into the car at 8:38. Liam pulls up the GPS, setting our next destination. "Alright, wedding gifts first. Then - your first official crash. How do you feel?"

A hundred thoughts race through my head, but only one feels real. I lean back in my seat, a slow smile forming.

"Really good, actually."