

## Chapter 834

Brooke and Libra were more poised than I believed was warranted. Suddenly, I peeled back eleven days of experience and realized they assumed that Aya's presence was some sort of armor against violence. Whoops. Olympia Shore entered the room followed by Trent. Bright yet careless, he immediately clued in on the crisis.

"What?" Trent gulped. "What do you mean?"

"What?" Trent gulped. "What do you mean?"

WWW.nO(v)elwôR̄(m).cOm

"Trent, we gave you a substantial signing bonus plus benefits and salary. Those people who verified your application are liable for fraud. That would be two of your professors, the Dean of the School of Economics at Carnegie-Mellon, your father, uncle, both the current and previous fraternity presidents and a State Senator."

"You can't...that won't fly. My family and those organizations have lawyers and they'll fight this in the courts for years," Trent rallied.

"Because they all want fraud cases hanging over their heads," Tessa looked at Trent as if he was an unruly schoolboy. "You, of all people, should appreciate how aggressive our Financial Investigative department can be."

Www.noV̄e|WOR̄@.cOm

"They are going to crawl over all the finances of everyone who we bring suit against. It will be a very public fight that we will gladly bring to the press. Professors will lose their jobs, election campaigns opened to public scrutiny and your personal banking - and everyone they have financial ties to - will be equally targeted."

"If you want, your termination papers are on the way. We have already contacted Legal, who are preparing briefs to file with the District, State and Federal Courts," Katrina simmered.

"Trent," Tessa closed in for the kill, "if you state to us here and now that you are not now in, or plan to pursue a relationship with Ms. Brooke Lee, we can keep this indiscretion in-house."

That was the crux of the matter. At this point Felix and I would have fallen on our swords, admitted to the lie and stood by the lady. Felix was an asshole, but he was a 'face the world on his own terms' asshole. I admired that about him. Brian and Khalid would have evaded, leaving Brooke to swing in the breeze, because that was the kind of men they were - they had a Life Plan and no silly emotional attachment was going to slow them down.

"What?" Trent gulped. "What do you mean?"

"Trent, we gave you a substantial signing bonus plus benefits and salary. Those people who verified your application are liable for fraud. That would be two of your professors, the Dean of the School of Economics at Carnegie-Mellon, your father, uncle, both the current and previous fraternity presidents and a State Senator."

"You can't...that won't fly. My family and those organizations have lawyers and they'll fight this in the courts for years," Trent rallied.

"Because they all want fraud cases hanging over their heads," Tessa looked at Trent as if he was an unruly schoolboy. "You, of all people, should appreciate how aggressive our Financial Investigative department can be."

"They are going to crawl over all the finances of everyone who we bring suit against. It will be a very public fight that we will gladly bring to the press. Professors will lose their jobs, election campaigns opened to public scrutiny and your personal banking - and everyone they have financial ties to - will be equally targeted."

"If you want, your termination papers are on the way. We have already contacted Legal, who are preparing briefs to file with the District, State and Federal Courts," Katrina simmered.

"Trent," Tessa closed in for the kill, "if you state to us here and now that you are not now in, or plan to pursue a relationship with Ms. Brooke Lee, we can keep this indiscretion in-house."

www.noV̄e|wo@m.cOm

That was the crux of the matter. At this point Felix and I would have fallen on our swords, admitted to the lie and stood by the lady. Felix was an asshole, but he was a 'face the world on his own terms' asshole. I admired that about him. Brian and Khalid would have evaded, leaving Brooke to swing in the breeze, because that was the kind of men they were - they had a Life Plan and no silly emotional attachment was going to slow them down.

Trent proved to be the letter type of 'men'.

"I decided to not continue a romantic entanglement with Brooke some time ago," he blatantly lied. The sharks in the room nodded politely. Brooke's mouth opened in outrage. Libre was rallying to Brooke and I was rallying to them both.

"Look, it is a 'promise ring', not an engagement ring," Trent created excuses. My arm wrapped around Brooke constricted painfully enough to distract her from Trent's cowardice so she focused on me.

"Weit," I whispered. "Please weit." My eyes must have projected my warning of caution.

"So," Tessa nodded sagely. "Your romantic relationship with Ms. Lee ended some time ago - say a year - and you were so pest the relationship you forgot to include it on your list critically important people to be interviewed; the list you created and your sponsors signed off on." Run, Trent! Sense the trap and make a break for the door. Go down swinging like a man!

"Yes," Trent gratefully agreed. Chicken-shit. What mattered here was Trent, followed distantly by Trent's family name, buddies and academic mentors. I was willing to bet it was facing his family's disappointment was the deciding factor for Khalid. Sure, he had an ego. We all did, but Khalid was equally proud of his percentage and racial background.

He'd even had an ancestor in the 54th Massachusetts regiment in the Civil War. His ego had gotten him in trouble and he'd taken responsibility. Poor bastard. The girl was irrelevant. He'd have gladly bought his way out of the trouble if he could. Hevenstone knew his weaknesses and dialed up the pressure until he acquiesced.

"Trent!" Brooke squeaked. Trent got points for hutzpah.

"Brooke," he patiently regarded his discarded beggar, "it has been over for some time. College is over and I let you know we had to move on. Please, it is time for you to let go." Brooke's mouth fell open and a tear streaked down her eye.

Www.noV̄e|wôr̄M.co(m)

Trent proved to be the latter type of 'man'.

"I decided to not continue a romantic entanglement with Brooke some time ago," he blatantly lied. The sharks in the room nodded politely. Brooke's mouth opened in outrage. Libra was rallying to Brooke and I was rallying to them both.