

From Ashes of Scandal to His Embrace (Laurinda)

Chapter 421

[618 words]

"No," Laurinda said, a little smile tugging at her lips. There was no way she was going to admit she had a thing for his looks.

Adolphus kept his eyes on her, catching the mischievous sparkle in hers. He let out a low laugh, leaned down, and kissed her—soft and deep, a gentle punishment for her pretending. He wrapped her up in his arms, holding her close.

Adolphus didn't need to drive Laurinda to Cabinda. He was quick about it—packed his bags, finished dinner, and Laurinda drove him to the airport.

There were no dramatic goodbyes. Laurinda just kept telling him to be careful and come back soon.

After the plane took off, Laurinda stood outside the terminal and watched the sky until Arrow brought over the scarf she'd left in the car, wrapping it around her neck. "Laurinda, it's late. Adolphus's flight is gone. Let's head home."

Laurinda nodded. She tore her eyes from the sky and walked with Arrow toward the parking lot. They drove back to the estate.

Time slipped by and soon a month had passed. One afternoon, Laurinda stepped out of her study and saw Josh, the house manager, sorting through a stack of flower catalogs. She walked over to him.

"Laurinda, come see. The nursery sent over these catalogs. Didn't you want to plant some flowers around the estate? See if anything catches your eye."

She took the catalog and flipped through the pages, eyes settling on a few different lilies. "Let's put some lilies in that empty space out back. The rest, I'll leave up to you."

Laurinda kept skimming the catalog. There were other flowers she liked, but they just didn't feel right for the estate.

Josh seemed to get it. Aside from the lilies, nothing else stood out to her. He made a mental note to reach out to a few more nurseries.

"Alright, lilies in the backyard. For the front flowerbeds, how about jasmine? I know you love the smell."

"That's perfect. I'll leave it all to you, Josh. Oh, and we're having a guest tonight. Can you go to the market and pick up some fresh seafood?"

A phone call from that morning popped into Laurinda's mind, her eyes darkening a little. She hadn't expected Adolphus's casual comment to actually happen.

"Sure thing. I'll head to the seafood market myself. Does your friend have any food allergies or things they don't eat?"

Laurinda thought for a moment, then laughed. "Nope, he eats everything. Actually, he's got a huge appetite, so you might want to buy extra."

Josh nodded and hurried off.

Laurinda wandered into the kitchen, made herself a cup of floral tea, and sat comfortably by the bay window watching the staff moving busily around the yard.

She found herself missing Adolphus. It had already been a week since she last heard from him, and she had no clue what he was up to.

Lost in thought, she was jolted back

when her phone buzzed. Setting her teacup aside, she pulled out her phone. It was a message from Henry He'd just boarded his flight and would land in Apex in about three hours.

Laurinda put her phone away, stood up, and carried her tea back to the study. She sat down at her desk, scanning the news story that was already making waves online.

Arrow knocked three times on the study door. Hearing Laurinda's answer, she stepped inside.

"Laurinda, Adolphus sent these chocolates for you."

Laurinda looked up, saw the gift box in Arrow's hands, and took it. She opened the box, unwrapped a piece, and popped it into her mouth. The sweetness melted away some of the stress she'd been carrying.

"Laurinda, if there's nothing else, I'll just..."

Arrow was about to leave, but her eyes landed on the computer screen. She

paused, staring at the photo on the monitor.

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Chapter 422

[590 words]

Laurinda noticed the shift in Arrow's expression and turned the screen so she could see more clearly. She asked, a little cautious, "Do you know her?"

Arrow hesitated. "Not exactly, but I've seen her before. She used to be classmates with Seraphina when they were studying abroad. They got along well, but something happened. They just stopped talking out of nowhere."

That caught Laurinda off guard. She hadn't expected any connection between this woman and Seraphina. After asking Arrow to step outside, Laurinda quickly called Seraphina.

Seraphina sounded surprised when she picked up. Her voice was as warm as ever. "Laurinda? I was just about to call you! When are you coming to Cabinda? My dad's birthday is at the end of the month. You'll be here, right?"

"Of course, I wouldn't miss it. Actually, I wanted to ask you about someone. Do you know a woman named Magnolia?"

Seraphina paused for a second, glancing over at Magnolia, who was sitting at the dining table, sipping coffee with her usual elegance.

"How do you know Magnolia?" Seraphina asked. She didn't answer Laurinda's question, and her tone was suddenly a little tense. She couldn't help but wonder how Laurinda had even heard of Magnolia.

Laurinda picked up on the tension but didn't think too much of it. She went on, "Since you're working with Queen, you've probably seen the news online, right? Magnolia is right in the middle of it all. She's accusing one of Queen's designers of copying her work. Do you know her?"

As soon as she understood what this was about, Seraphina felt a wave of relief. As long as this had nothing to do with Adolphus, anything else was easy to handle.

She let out a little laugh, sounding

lighter. "Yeah, I know her. She's one of my closest friends. I've heard about the whole Queen plagiarism thing too. Honestly, it's weird.

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Magnolia has always been a fashion so thave no idea why she

Signer suddenly switched to jewelry. And her very first jewelry collection ends up looking like something from Queen? If it hadn't blown up online because Queen's fans went after her, I wouldn't have even known she was doing jewelry now."

Listening to Seraphina, Laurinda's brows pulled together. She was starting to think this wasn't as simple as plagiarism. Maybe Magnolia was just trying to get

attention by stirring up drama with

Queen's new line. Why else would a fashion designer suddenly jump into jewelry design?

Seraphina seemed to catch on. "Laurinda, why are you so interested in Queen? You're not worried this will mess up my partnership with them, are you? Don't worry about me. My deal with Queen is solid. This kind of online drama isn't going to touch me."

"I'm glad to hear that. Are you still in touch with Magnolia?" Laurinda asked.

She was hoping to meet Magnolia face-to-face. By this point, she was pretty sure Magnolia was using the controversy to boost her own profile online.

Seraphina nodded, even though Laurinda couldn't see her. "Yeah, we still talk. Why do you ask?" Now she was starting to sense that Laurinda's interest in Magnolia wasn't just casual curiosity.

"Since you're close, do you think you could help me set up a meeting with her? I'd like to talk to her, maybe in three days, in Cabinda."

Seraphina hesitated. "Wait, Laurinda, can you tell me why you want to meet her?"

Even if she wasn't always the most

perceptive, Seraphina could tell

something was off. Before she

met

agreed to anything, she needed to know what Laurinda was really after.

The last thing she

wanted was for

Magnolia and Laurinda to run into

each other with some

misunderstanding hanging over

them.

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[598 words]

Laurinda didn't bother hiding the truth from Seraphina. She kept it short and to the point.

"It's about Queen's new product. The higher-ups want to meet Magnolia in person to sort things out. Can you help arrange it?"

This wasn't something that could be fixed over the phone or with emails. They needed Magnolia herself at the table, or things would just get messier for everyone. Laurinda had proof the design belonged to Queen, but the rumors online were out of control. They had to settle this at the source.

Seraphina hesitated. "I can ask her, but I don't know if she'll agree to talk to Queen. She's the one who got hurt in all this."

As soon as Seraphina said "the one who got hurt," Laurinda realized she believed Magnolia was the victim. Laurinda bit back her frustration and decided not to argue. "Just try, please. If she's willing, let's meet in Cabinda in three days."

"Alright. I'll talk to her."

Seraphina hung up and made her way back into the café. She slid into the seat across from Magnolia and nudged a plate of pastries toward her.

"I remember how much you loved these Cabinda treats. Try one, see if they still taste the same."

Magnolia didn't turn her down. She set her coffee aside, picked up an almond cookie, took a bite, and smiled a little. "Not as good as the ones your family used to make."

After swallowing, Magnolia's gaze drifted, her voice tinged with nostalgia. "I still remember when we were studying abroad. The best part was always those care packages from your family, filled with snacks and pastries from Cabinda."

She paused, lost in the memory. "That year..."

Magnolia stopped, her eyes growing red. She looked at Seraphina, her voice barely above a whisper. "Seraphina do you think I rushed things? If I hadn't, would he hate me so much now? Would I have had another chance?"

Seraphina was about to bring up Laurinda's request, but Magnolia's question caught her off guard. Something in her chest tightened, and her words came out clipped. "I've told you so many times Adolphus doesn't have feelings for you. I know him. If he cared about you, he wouldn't have walked away that day."

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Seraphina rubbed her forehead, feeling a headache coming on. She couldn't figure out why Magnolia still believed Adolphus ever liked her. She just didn't get it.

"Magnolia, you have to move on. Adolphus already has someone he loves. I really hope you can do the same. I've got to go, so take care of yourself, okay?"

She grabbed her bag, stood up, called the waiter to settle the bill, and left the café.

Seraphina had made up her mind. She wasn't going to let Laurinda meet Magnolia. Magnolia was too unpredictable and might say something that would only make things worse.

Magnolia stayed in her seat, dabbing at the tears in her eyes. Of course she knew what Adolphus looked like when he loved someone.

She'd followed him for three days at the resort, watching from a distance. She saw with her own eyes how he treated that girl. The jealousy nearly drove her crazy.

But luck was finally on her side. She had her chance now, and she was determined to make that girl pay.

Seraphina sat in her car for a long

time,

she fig to calm herself before

she finally called Laurinda. She tried

to sound casual. "Sorry red

couldn't get Magnolia to meet."

Laurinda set down her book, a little surprised but not really. If that was how it had to be, she'd just handle things the official way.

"No worries, Seraphina. I'll be in Cabinda in three days. Let's have dinner then."

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Chapter 424

[558 words]

When Seraphina found out Laurinda was coming to Cabinda, all her irritation melted away. Suddenly, she was already planning where to take Laurinda out for dinner.

"Perfect. Just send me your flight details and I'll come pick you up."

Laurinda almost said no, but hearing how excited Seraphina sounded made it impossible to refuse. She let out a little laugh. "I'll let you know once I have my ticket. I need to run, Seraphina. Talk soon."

After they hung up, Laurinda saw a new notification on her phone. It was a video call from Adolphus. She called him back right away.

As soon as the call connected, his handsome face filled the screen. He looked pale, and there was rough stubble along his jaw, but it didn't make him any less attractive.

"Laurinda..." Adolphus's voice was soft and warm, the kind that made her want to sink into it and never come up for air.

"What have you been up to lately? I haven't heard a word from you."

Laurinda's eyes stayed glued to the screen, worry clear in her gaze as she took in how tired he looked.

"I had something big to take care of. It wasn't easy to keep in touch, but I'll be home soon. Just wait for me, okay?"

The moment she heard he'd be coming back, Laurinda's whole expression changed. The worry was gone, replaced with pure excitement.

"Do you want me to come to the airport?"

"No need. I'm not sure exactly when I'll get in. Just wait for me at home. I'm about to head for the airport now, so I need to go."

"Alright. I'll be here when you get back."

After Laurinda hung up, Foley hurried over to steady Adolphus and check on his injuries.

"Adolphus, maybe we should wait a few more days before heading back. You just had surgery. It's not the best idea..."

He stopped talking when Adolphus looked at him. Foley knew there was no point arguing.

Egan stepped out of the elevator but before he could say anything, his phone started vibrating. He checked the caller ID and saw Laurinda's name. His whole body tensed. Without thinking, he turned around and stepped back into the elevator.

By the time he stepped out again, the call had ended. Egan stared at his phone, unsure of what to do. Adolphus had made it

clear Laurinda wasn't supposed to know he'd been hurt.

While he hesitated, the phone rang again. Laurinda was calling back. This time, Egan answered right away.

The moment the call connected, Laurinda's voice came through, cold and direct.
"Where are you?"

"We're at Mistfall Atoll."

He blurted it out before he could stop himself. He was already walking on eggshells with Adolphus, but he definitely couldn't afford to upset Laurinda.

The moment she heard the name, Laurinda knew she'd been right. She'd been so happy to hear from Adolphus that she hadn't caught anything wrong at first. But after she hung up, she realized she

recognized the background behind him. She'd stayed there for a month.

She knew that place.

Laurinda pressed her fingers to her aching temples and took a steady breath. "What's his condition?"

Egan could tell from her tone that she already suspected the truth. There was no point in hiding it anymore, so he told her everything.

"Adolphus was hurt in an explosion. The shrapnel's been removed, but he has a broken rib. He was in a coma for six days. He just woke up today."

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