

Love Slave 335

335 His Disappearance

When Ace walked up on that stage, I never dreamt that he would give a speech that would mark his retirement from his role. Even though I knew that it was coming, I never imagined that he would end things so abruptly and publicly like this. I wondered if the Chairman knew in advance about Ace's announcement and then I highly doubted it.

This long-awaited victory undoubtedly brought me great joy; however, it would be inaccurate to say that we didn't see this coming. Even though I wasn't as confident as Ace and the other members on the team were, there were many things that led us to believe that we were most likely to win the competition. Ace was probably quite certain of it and Julianna clearly felt the same way. Jeremy, being captivated by numbers and statistics, was also very well convinced.

The amount of donations that we received to back the cause was a very impressive amount. The donation amount alone put us in first place, leading the competitor in second place by miles. That coupled with the positive comments and praise we've received on social media from the audience and some industry experts, made a very firm case that we would win. In that sense, our victory didn't come as much of a surprise but that doesn't mean that it was a cause for any less celebration.

Ace's abrupt announcement truly stole the spotlight even if it wasn't his intention to do so. I wasn't sure how other people felt about it, but to me, the joy that came along with our victory faded in the blink of an eye. The disappointment of reality hit me hard and falling back to the ground from such a high point truly hurt emotionally.

The shocked murmurs and whispers in the hall and all around me suddenly got louder. It didn't take long for soft whispers to gather motion and grow into people yelling out questions at Ace. Almost all at once, chaos seemed to have broken out in the auditorium. Some people stood up from their seats, the reporters started using their microphones and speakers to amplify their questions. I was immediately worried for Ace and his safety even though I knew that there were many security guards and bodyguards around.

"Everyone, please calm down and remain in your seats! You can ask questions later after the end of the ceremony," the host almost had to scream into his microphone as he attempted to control the crowd.

His words and efforts didn't seem to have much effect at all. Within a short while, the security team was called in to escort out reporters and other people who were causing trouble and disturbances. Throughout it all, I kept my eyes on Ace who didn't seem bothered at all by what was going on around him.

"I apologize for that, Mr. Hills," the host apologized to Ace.

"Oh, it's fine. I did expect something like that but perhaps to a lesser degree. On that note, I don't think that the news that I've shared is necessarily news. There's no need for anyone to feel so panicked. I'm just stepping down from my role as CEO but that doesn't mean that I'll be disappearing from the face of the earth," Ace said before he laughed jokingly.

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What does he mean when he says that he's not going to disappear?

The host laughed along but I could feel that Ace's words and sudden announcement left the host in a very awkward position as well. I had no idea why Ace had to announce his retirement here or why he had to remind everyone that his time with the company was pretty much up. Whether it was beneficial to the company or not, I wasn't sure. However, it was undeniable that the company would get a lot of attention from what Ace had done.

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Just like I had witnessed and participated in the years before when the company won this competition, almost everyone in the company stayed behind after work to watch the live awards ceremony. I knew without a doubt that everyone must have cheered when the results came out. In my mind, I could see my colleagues, both the ones that I knew and those that I didn't know personally, holding their drinks in their hands and getting a little tipsy while watching the live broadcast of the ceremony. After the announcement, the full-fledged party would start and go on well into the night.

With that in mind, it became the default option for all of us to return to the company together in order to celebrate with the others. It felt like we were heroes returning from a long-waging war when we finally arrived back at our company. At least, that was the way that I felt with so many people waiting in front of the company to greet us when we got out of the team bus. I could hear the cheers of the people even before the bus door opened.

Everyone else on the team lifted their hands and waved proudly as they made their way out of the bus. I did the same although I felt slightly embarrassed inside. My mind wasn't fully on what was going on around me although it was a moment that I should have been taking in and living to my fullest. The truth was that I was too worried about Ace to focus fully on celebrating. Unlike that time at his birthday party, Ace somehow disappeared from the venue after leaving the stage. I tried calling him a few times, but his phone was switched off. Although I kept telling myself that he may have switched off his phone to avoid calls from the reporters or from his father, I couldn't completely shake off the feeling that something was wrong.

"Karina..."

I heard someone calling my name and turned around to see my ex-boss waving eagerly to me. Since moving from my old department to work with Ace and his team, I haven't had much time to visit my old department or my old boss.