

57 A Breath Of Fresh Air

"What?" Amelie thought she heard her wrong.

"How do you know Johnathan Radcliffe?" 1

Elizabeth didn't think it was the right time to play innocent. She looked at her friend with a somewhat disappointed look in her eyes and said in a kind tone, "Come on, Amelie. I am sure you have already figured it all out. The rumors... He is the man from the rumors."

Amelie couldn't deny that she had been already suspecting it but now that Lizzy confirmed it, it all fell into place.

"I refused to believe any of it," she started carefully. "Especially since the source of the rumors was shady. Is it all true? Everything?"

Elizabeth clutched the cold glass between her hands and shook her head.

"Not all of it... God, who would have thought that I would still end up talking about it in the end? I guess it's true what they: you can't hide the truth forever." 1

Amelie didn't say anything back; she figured Lizzy needed time to collect her thoughts and she was convinced she would confine in her sooner or later. At last, after several moments of hesitation, Elizabeth took a deep breath, and started, 1

"I met him several years ago when he was looking for a publishing house that would accept his work. You know, my family owns a couple of publishing houses so we work not only with magazines or newspapers but with books as well.

I found his manuscript by accident, one of the editors left it unattended in the hallway and the name got me curious. "Invisible Cracks"... Who would have thought that novel would be about a broken love? It was really good, Lily. That book... I really liked it.

So I contacted the editor-in-chief and urged him to accept his work for publishing. And while the wheels were in motion, I met the guy several times to discuss his book in person.

He fascinated me. He was free, inspiring, and so full of life... He was the complete opposite of the

dull and overworked Daniel who could only talk about the stock market or golf. John talked to me about things I liked the most -- books, movies, paintings... He was that breath of fresh air I needed after being suffocated by the confines of my arranged marriage. 2

And before I knew it... I was having an affair."

Elizabeth paused and offered Amelie a guilty look as if she was confessing to committing a murder. Perhaps it pained her to talk about it because adultery was the very thing that was torturing her friend right now. 1

"My daughter... Emma... It's his daughter, Lily. John's daughter." 4

Amelie had no idea what to say at first. She felt conflicted and lost because even though the two of them were best friends, this was the first time she had ever heard about this. She felt a little betrayed.

"You have been keeping this a secret all this time? Why didn't you ever tell me, Lizzy?"

Elizabeth shook her head as if letting her friend know that she still had no idea why she had no



courage to tell about this to anyone.

"I felt so guilty, Lily. I felt guilty because I betrayed my husband, but the worst thing is... I betrayed my daughter. The shame has been eating at me all this time and yet... I couldn't stop seeing him. He is kind, he understands everything but I know he is hurt too. And I... I am just so scared, Lily. I'm scared of being judged. I'm scared of a scandal." 1

Amelie clenched her fists in frustration. It annoyed her -- no, it angered her how it was always women who were entitled to feel this kind of guilt and almost never -- men. 2

But she understood the burden weighing on Lizzy's shoulders. It was one thing that Richard was sleeping with someone else; but if he came to her with a child in his arms and asked her to act as the kid's mother and raise them as her own... That would be the lowest thing a man could do to a woman. That was the line she would never cross. 2

Amelie understood her friend's guilt. But she also understood her pain.

"Yes, you are right. You are at fault for deceiving

your husband. He has been taking care of a daughter he believed was his... And now it's the same as if he lost her."

Elizabeth nodded and wiped her tears with trembling hands.

"I know. God, Lily, I know! And I will do it! I will face the consequences and accept the punishment I have to accept, but please... John was only trying to protect me. He doesn't deserve to shoulder all the blame. Please, Lily, you have to help him get out of this."

Mrs. Ashford released a long sigh. Richard was head over heels for Samantha and since she hit her head while she was falling into the pool, he would never leave it alone, and might even drag Johnathan to court.

She shook her head and tried to explain.

"There is no proof that Samantha was the one who started the rumors, especially since so many people have been talking about it for weeks. Even if your family sues her for trying to slander your reputation, without concrete evidence and with Richard backing her using his own connections, it will be a lengthy tug of war,

and I am afraid the chances of it ending in your favor are very slim."

Then, Amelie took a few more moments to think before she continued again, "Johnathan is a writer which means Richard will find a way to make sure he could never be published again. Not in this country, at least."

Lizzy covered her face with both hands and let out a pained groan as if she were a trapped animal. She then rubbed her palms against her already red eyes and finally whispered.

"My lawyers advised that I remain quiet for the time being, but... But I do have something you can use to make your husband withdraw his complaints and dismiss the case."

"You do?" Amelie raised her eyebrows and Lizzy nodded, placing a small business card between her friend's hands. "Jason Sanson. You need to meet him." 1