

Ugly Crushes

Chapter 10

Bella

Ace joined his team, he exchanged low ves with everyone, signaling the start of practice. In court, Ariella, Nancy, and Meera shot me death glares before commencing their routines. Fiona, rising from her seat, took the spot next to me.

"You should have taken their warning more seriously, Arabella," Fiona remarked, her gaze xed on the players in action.

I watched as Ace effortlessly dominated the court, his agility outshining even Marcus, our school's former star player. It was watching Marcus excel that had initially stirred feelings within me, but now, compared to Ace, he seemed merely average. The tension between Ace and Marcus had been palpable over the past few days, with Ace noticeably less friendly towards Marcus. This friction between them was one reason I was ne with engaging with Ace. Another was to provoke Ariella. In both regards, Ace proved to be a supportive ally.

"You don't understand—"

"No, you need to understand. Your friend is in the wrong, and instead of addressing it, you and her other minions are enabling her," I interjected sharply, my attention momentarily diverted as Ace ashed me a bright smile and waved.

Ariella and her team witnessed the interaction, and Nancy, in shock, tumbled from her position. I waved back and attempted a smile in Ace's direction, but Marcus misinterpreted the gesture as intended for him. He waved back, his smile sending a surge of frustration through me, tempting me to hurl a rock at him.

Disregarding Marcus, I turned my attention to Fiona. Despite my past admiration for Ariella, I never condoned her wrongdoing. In my eyes, she was always kind and awless, until reality revealed her as the most deceitful person I'd ever known.

"I'm sorry on their behalf," Fiona offered, ngers curling around her cross necklace. Sympathy tugged at my heartstrings as I regarded her. She was deeply ensnared in Ariella's manipulation.

"You don't need to apologize," I assured her, just as Marcus scored. Another smile from him was met with my silent disdain.

Ace conversed with his teammates, wiping sweat from his brow. I couldn't help but notice how attractive he looked. Quickly averting my gaze, I pushed aside any unnecessary thoughts.

Marcus, on the other hand, ran his hand through his hair, his eyes lingering in our direction. I rolled my eyes in response, only to catch Fiona's dreamy stare xed on him.

Oh no!

Don't tell me...

Fiona's eyes were xed on him as he drank water, wiped his sweat, and returned to the court. She was looking at him with the same intensity I once looked at Marcus.

She liked Marcus, the asshole!

"Do you like him?" I asked her bluntly, and she stared at me like a deer caught in headlights.

"What?" Her tone grew pitchy.

"You like Marcus," I stated plainly.

She scoffed, "I don't! I don't!"

"It's written all over your face," I countered, observing her face turning red, making her crush on him even more obvious.

She grabbed my hand, "You can't tell anyone. Only Ari knows about this, and she's been helping me."

Oh God! What a cruel joke!

"She's been helping you? How?" I inquired, intrigued by the revelation.

Fiona beamed. "I told you she's not all bad. She orchestrates our interactions. I've been able to talk to him because of her—they've known each other for a while. Ari guides me and supports me. She even thinks Marcus might like me too, so I'm hopeful."

Fiona's confession conrmed my worst fears: she was Ariella's next victim.

My attention ickered back to the cheerleading practice. True to Ace's word, Sally led the team. Clad in blue and yellow uniforms with "Westwood" emblazoned on their bags and a lion logo, they moved with precision and grace.

Ariella and her squad cheered, chanted, and danced in perfect synchronization. Nancy appeared to be the yer, while Meera served as one of the bases. They exuded condence and experience.

Finally, practice came to a close. Fiona headed off to join her so-called friends, leaving me to observe Ace and Sally deep in conversation—likely discussing my request.

Then, Marcus's voice shattered my thoughts. "How did you like the game?" he asked, wiping his neck with a towel as he settled beside me, his proximity making me uneasy.

He began to drink from his water bottle. "It was ne," I said, about to leave, when he grabbed my hand and rooted me to my place.

My brows furrowed, and I pulled my hand away from his grip, causing him to release it. "You look like you were enjoying the view. Were you, Arabella?" he asked, leaning closer to me.

"Any problem here?" Ace interjected, and I breathed a sigh of relief, though I noticed Marcus bried clenching his jaw.

"No, Arabella and I were just having a little chat," Marcus said with a smile, directing his gaze at me. "You should come by more to watch the game. All support is appreciated." With a wink, he rose and left.

"Dumb piece of s**t!" I muttered under my breath.

"Was he bothering you?" Ace asked.

I shook my head. "No," I replied.

Marcus was my problem, not his.

"I talked to Sally," Ace began, changing the subject. "They need a new member for the team. Are you still interested in cheerleading?"

As Ariella shot us a glare, I rose, subtly provoking her by patting Ace's bicep. "Yeah, I'll go talk to Sally. Why don't you freshen up?" I suggested, feeling a pang of awkwardness as I withdrew my hand.

"I'll be back in 15 minutes. Don't go anywhere this time, wait for me here," Ace instructed, handing me his water bottle before departing.

Turning, I spotted Sally conversing with Ariella. Sally noticed me and waved.

Sally and I discussed my potential involvement. She scheduled an interview for the following day to assess my balance, exibility, and skills. Thanks to my gym workouts and morning Pilates routine, I felt condent about my chances.

However, I anticipated trouble from Ariella once she learned of my interest in joining the cheerleading team.

After Sally departed, Meera approached me aggressively. "You don't f****g understand, do you?!" she spat.

"What the f**k is going on here?" Ace's voice cut through the tension as he approached, his damp hair indicating he had just bathed, back in casual attire.

"Ace, hi," Ariella greeted, appearing out of nowhere.

Ace stood by my side and addressed Meera, "What did you say to her?" He inquired, causing Meera to stumble.

"Don't misunderstand. Meera was just offering Arabella some guidance about cheerleading. Just a few tips. She got a little carried away, that's all. Everything's cool," Ariella lied, and I sensed Meera's embarrassment as she averted her eyes.

Ace looked at me for conrmation, and I returned their gaze. "Thanks for the tips, guys. I'll keep them in mind. Let's go, Ace," I said, prompting Ariella and Nancy to shoot me death glares.

As we left, I noticed Marcus walking, with Fiona trailing behind him like a lost puppy.

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