

## Chapter 840 Independence

Manley's loud laughter caught everyone off guard, and only then did Cole realize what had happened. He had dropped the second version of his application by mistake. That draft represented the lowest point of his dignity. The idea of anyone reading it felt worse than death, but now it was out in the open for all to see.

Frantically trying to salvage the situation, Cole lunged forward and reached for the paper. "Give that back!"

Unfortunately, Merlin reacted faster and seized the draft before Cole could get to it.

Allan, growing curious, leaned over to catch a glimpse as Merlin held up the page. As soon as both of them saw the original, hand-written, painfully cheesy lines, laughter burst out. "Ha-ha!"

The sound of their laughter echoed through the entire room. Nobody in the group had ever laughed so hard before; all sense of self-control vanished in a wave of pure hilarity.

Realizing there was no way to recover his dignity, Cole sighed and abandoned the idea of retrieving his draft. Since they were going to read it anyway, he might as well let them have their moment.

With a sense of total defeat, Cole dropped onto the sofa, accepting his embarrassment in silence.

The three friends barely noticed Cole's embarrassment. Instead, they huddled together, reading through every corny line, taking turns to read them out loud and debate which one was the most ridiculous. The verdict was unanimous. Cole was the undisputed King of Corny.

They continued to tease Cole relentlessly, laughing until their stomachs hurt and they were nearly out of breath.

Cole sat quietly and waited for the laughter to run its course. Once the chaos died down, he finally spoke. "You've all had a good laugh and

witnessed my most embarrassing moment. Now, it's your turn to help me out. If you can't come up with a good idea, don't blame me if I decide to shut you up for good."

Empty threats like that only revealed how embarrassed and annoyed he truly felt.

Merlin laughed softly as he handed the draft back to Cole. "As I said earlier, I can't read Elliana's thoughts. I really don't have any brilliant advice."

Manley followed suit, raising his hands in surrender. "Sorry, Cole. Elliana is called the 'Death Thorn' for a reason. She's a queen in her own league, far more remarkable than anyone I've ever come across. Whatever tricks I have for ordinary women won't stand a chance against someone like her."

Cole's frustration grew the longer he listened. Out of nowhere, he kicked Manley. Not one of them had a useful suggestion to give, but that didn't stop them from snatching his draft, reading through it, and bursting into laughter. What kind of friends did that?

Manley took the kick in stride, still laughing at the whole thing.

Seeing how easily his first kick landed, Cole aimed another at Merlin, but Merlin dodged nimbly, twisting away before Cole could connect.

Rather than chase after Merlin, Cole turned his icy stare toward Allan.

As Cole braced to attack, Allan broke the tension. "Elliana mentioned your application was missing something. I know exactly what she meant."

Instantly, Cole froze mid-motion, and his foot dropped to the floor. "What do you mean?"

Allan didn't give an immediate answer. He leaned back in his seat, clearly about to negotiate. "Let's make a trade."

Cole's brow furrowed. "What kind of trade?"

"I know you're aware of Ava's whereabouts. You've been keeping that from me for a certain reason, haven't you?" Allan began, picking up the original application again. "Here's my proposition. I'll tell you what's missing from this application, and you'll share where Ava is. Deal?"

A wave of uncertainty washed over Cole's face. Allan's instincts had always been keen and out-of-the-box. If Allan had really pinpointed the flaw in his application, his insight could have made all the difference. He felt an urge to accept the deal. But the thought of Elliana's potential anger stopped him cold. Elliana had explicitly informed him that Adah didn't have the slightest interest in Allan, not wanting Allan to find out Ava was actually Adah, his ex-fiancée, or start pestering Adah.

Sensing Cole's inner struggle, Allan pressed on. "Relax. I won't breathe a word about where I got the tip. And I promise, my advice will help you make things right with Elliana."

Cole's hesitation melted away. "Deal."

"To prove I'm serious, I'll start first," Allan said, tapping his finger on the application. "This is already sincere and touching enough. When Elliana read those words, she must have been deeply moved. You two have been through so much, and her feelings for you are strong. Those memories must have meant a great deal to her."


Merlin and Manley agreed, nodding as one. Even though they had made fun of Cole earlier, they couldn't deny that the draft had been written with genuine feeling, and they were moved by reading it. It was hard to imagine Elliana not feeling the same. So the problem had to be that Cole had forgotten to include one particular thing Elliana was hoping for.

When it came to figuring out that missing piece, Merlin and Manley were lost. Both looked at Allan, waiting for his explanation.

Cole, too, stared at Allan intently, hanging on every word.

Allan continued, "I haven't spent a lot of time around Elliana, so I can't claim to know her well. But I have noticed she and Ava share something important. Both women take pride in their independence. They want to stand on their own and don't want to depend on anyone else."



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