

Chapter 843 The Joke Seemed To Be On Him

After Allan confirmed it, Manley gave a firm nod. "Yeah, this woman looks exactly like Ava to me—especially that bold, fiery aura. Doomsday Rose and Ava might actually be the same person."

Merlin let out a low laugh. "Looks like my theory held up. Allan, if you want Ava back, it's going to be even tougher than you imagined."

A woman as remarkable as Doomsday Rose was sure to carry immense pride. Winning her heart wouldn't be easy, especially since Allan had already walked away from her once. Could she even consider the idea of letting him back into her life?

Manley laughed, shaking his head. "You've really outdone yourself this time, Allan!"

All color drained from Allan's face. He had spent all that time searching and yearning, never realizing the woman he had missed for so long was the same one he'd dismissed without a second thought. Now, the question loomed large. How could he possibly win Adah back?

Allan mulled it over until his head hurt, but he couldn't come up with any answers. Left with no choice, he decided to ask for help. "Either of you have any advice?"

Merlin shook his head immediately. "Sorry, I'm not much use to you on this."

Manley shrugged in defeat. "Same here."

Without saying another word, Allan stood and made his way out. This was a challenge he would have to face on his own. No one else could do it for him.

As soon as Allan left, Merlin and Manley exchanged a look, sharing a quiet laugh at the absurdity of it all.

At that moment, Hailee stepped into the room and spoke in a calm, soothing tone. "Mr. Blakely, you've got an important meeting scheduled in an hour. It's time to start getting ready."

Merlin took a moment to study her. Hailee truly was a breath of fresh air, kind, soft-spoken, and never demanding. She was nothing like Elliana or Adah. His gaze drifted to the shopping bag in her hand, and he smiled. "So, what did you get?"

Hailee reached in and pulled out a tie. "You mentioned you needed a new one, so I went out and picked this up for you. Do you like it?"

Merlin's lips curled in a resigned smile. He had handed Hailee his card and encouraged her to go shopping, not to handle any tasks for him but to treat herself and enjoy spending his money. Instead, she had treated it like a serious assignment and came back with a tie she picked out for him.

Looking at the tie she held, he felt conflicted. It was an exact match to the one he already had on. There was a time when he had never strayed from his habits. He always wore the same designer, the same style, the same black shoes, and the same ties.

But since Hailee entered his life, he had wanted things to change. He had hoped his style might shift into something that would please her, so he had let her take over his wardrobe choices. But Hailee had stuck closely to his old routine, never daring to choose something different.

As a secretary, Hailee was diligent and precise, but her attentiveness was all business. Not once did she show a personal touch or any hint of warmth beyond her duties.

A quiet sigh escaped Merlin. He had spent the evening making fun of Cole and Allan for their difficult journeys ahead of winning their women, but seeing his own reflection in the situation, he realized his own path was no less challenging.

Despite the touch of disappointment he felt, Merlin refused to let it show or risk dampening Hailee's mood. He mustered a smile and nodded. "It's perfect. I really like it."

With a practiced motion, he took off his old tie and replaced it with the new one Hailee had picked out. Even though she considered this nothing more than a task on her to-do list, there was still a gentle warmth in

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wearing something she'd chosen, however impersonal it might be.

Hailee folded the old tie with great care, tucking it away without any awareness of the storm of emotions swirling in Merlin's heart.

"Let's head out," Merlin said, leading the way toward the exit.

Hailee offered Manley a courteous nod before hurrying after Merlin.

As soon as the door closed behind them, Manley's grin faded. He was now alone in the empty room. He had spent the evening laughing at the struggles of his friends, but with everyone gone, the joke seemed to be on him. The other three had someone worth fighting for, someone holding on for them no matter the challenges. Meanwhile, he had no idea where to even start. There was no one waiting for him, and that truth settled over him with a deep, isolating weight.

After departing from the Royal Club, Cole chose not to return home. He drove by himself to the mountain's peak, where he stood at the highest overlook, taking in the sprawling view of the city below. The entire stretch of the Evans family manor unfolded in the distance, clearly visible from where he stood.

He focused on the villa he had once shared with Elliana, imagining her inside, keeping watch over their two children as they played, while waiting patiently for his next application. The answer to what she wanted was now clear, but the words she longed to hear were the very ones he struggled to promise.

The truth was, he inherited his resilience from his mother, Sophie. Letting go of it wasn't something that could happen instantly.

Years back, Sophie had faced her own battles in silence. She had kept everything to herself, vanished without warning, and left her family behind just to shoulder the pain alone.

Cole had once blamed his mother for leaving. Now, with someone he cared for so fiercely, he finally understood. When you loved someone so much that their pain felt worse than your own, you'd rather carry the burden alone. He still believed he wasn't in the wrong, but he knew Elliana wouldn't accept that reasoning. Now, he was left standing at a crossroads, uncertain which path to take.