

Chapter 886 Love Is A battlefield

Rita and Sophie considered Adah's birthday unmissable and arrived with extravagant presents in hand.

Arthur and Milton accompanied Rita, while Sophie was joined by Jarrett.

Ruben determined to see Adah become an Evans granddaughter-in-law, arrived uninvited but bursting with enthusiasm. With him leading the way, the rest of the Evans family's younger generation soon followed.

Raymond, who had always pictured Adah as his future granddaughter-in-law, made sure not to miss the occasion. He didn't come alone; he brought the entire Shaw family along for the celebration.

Meanwhile, Allan's closest friends, Merlin and Manley, were well aware of just how hard Allan was chasing after Adah. Supporting their friend was non-negotiable, so they made sure to attend, ready to cheer him on.

Though the event itself wasn't huge, it still drew the most powerful families in town, as well as the Campbell family from overseas. It was, by all accounts, a gathering of remarkable status.

Allan, however, was nowhere to be found. No one seemed to have the slightest clue where he'd gone.

Merlin arrived with Hailee, but Elliana quickly swept Hailee away for a private chat, leaving Merlin and Manley to join Cole and press him for information.

"So, Cole, what's going on with Allan?" Manley asked. "Wasn't he supposed to make some big gesture for Adah tonight? After vanishing for six weeks, he skips her birthday altogether?"

Cole just raised an eyebrow, his face unreadable. "Why ask so many questions? Just get used to calling Adah Mrs. Shaw."

Manley's eyes widened in surprise. A grin tugged at his lips. "Wait, are you saying Allan will definitely win Adah over? That can't be! I've heard Adah barely pays him any attention. What makes you so sure she'll choose him over Lance? If you ask me, she seems way more interested in Lance."

Cole glanced toward the door, where Lance was still hanging around, hoping to be the first to see Adah arrive. He shot Manley a pointed look. "Love is a battlefield, and everything can change in a heartbeat. And aren't you an expert with women? How do you not get that?"

Manley fumbled for a retort. His reputation as a heartbreaker was well known, but he'd never put his own feelings on the line. Women always came to him; he'd never actually tried to win someone over.

Merlin quickly picked up on Cole's point. "Cole... are you suggesting Allan vanished for a month and a half just to plan the perfect way to win Adah's heart?"

Cole gave a nod. "Just wait and see. There's a twist coming tonight: Adah will be with Allan. Poor Lance won't even know what hit him."

Cole's words faded as he glanced back at Lance, who was standing by, oblivious to the heartbreak heading his way. Cole knew there was nothing he could do to help Lance.

While the men whispered about Allan's plans, Elliana turned her attention to Hailee, grilling her about Merlin instead. "Hailee, are you happy working for Merlin?"

A radiant, confident smile appeared on Hailee's face. "Absolutely! Working with Mr. Blakely over the last few months has taught me a great deal. For the first time, I have felt capable and independent. It's true what they say—you learn much faster when you're mentored by someone at the top of their game."

Elliana took a moment to look Hailee over, and the transformation was obvious. Gone was the shy, cautious Hailee who once tiptoed around everyone. Now, she stood tall, polished, and self-assured. Clearly, Merlin had given her space to prove herself and shine.

"Has Merlin ever given you trouble?" Elliana asked.

Hailee's eyes widened before she realized what Elliana meant. "Not at

all! He might have spoken sharply once or twice, but since I became his secretary, he's been nothing but professional and respectful. He's never made me uncomfortable, not even a hint of anything improper."

Elliana frowned, confused. She had noticed Merlin's interest in Hailee from the start. It was odd for him to go to such lengths to hire Hailee, only to keep his distance. A man as direct as Merlin seemed far more likely to sweep a woman off her feet with tricks than to play the polite gentleman.

Puzzled, Elliana glanced at Merlin across the room and then dropped her voice. "He's always been polite? Hailee, are you sure you're not missing something?"

"I'm sure!" Hailee replied firmly. "Mr. Blakely has never once overstepped. I'm on call all the time, but he's never said or done anything inappropriate—he hasn't even so much as flirted. I guess when he said he wanted me to be his woman, he was just joking"

Elliana stole another look at Merlin. Everything about him radiated strength and certainty; he didn't seem the type for games. If he said he wanted Hailee, he meant every word. So why hadn't he acted on it? Was he worried he'd frighten Hailee away? Maybe he'd been dialing down his usual intensity, holding himself back just to make sure she felt secure beside him.