

## Her Secret 23

### CHAPTER 23

The high schoolers of Rosecliff slowly made their way into the assembly hall in an orderly manner. The hall was filled with the hustle bustle of chattering students and the squeaking of shoes against the polished floor. Lana and her friends walked close together as a group as they maneuvered their way through the crowd and headed towards a row of empty seats so they could sit together throughout the assembly. As Carmen and Lana took their seats, they watched Suzie look around desperately for her beloved Steven.

Once she spotted him, her pout turned into a toothy smile as she excitedly waved at him. Steven smiled at his enthusiastic girlfriend and made his way towards him. Lana watched as he stopped in his tracks, turned around and patted someone to follow him. Lana tensed when she noticed the familiar figure of Zane.

He wore a fitting black t-shirt that hugged his muscular chest tightly, a pair of dark sweatpants and a grey baseball cap. He looked like any other high school boy and yet Lana was in a daze by how good he looked at the moment. She watched as the two made their way towards the girls.

Lana knew that Steven and Zane were friends since they were in the football team together, but they never really spend time together outside of the field as Steven was always with Suzie and her friends and Zane was always with his own group. Seeing them together now was somewhat random, which only led Lana to overthink.

“Are you okay?” Carmen whispered into Lana’s ear. Fully aware of Lana’s feelings towards the golden haired boy.

Lana managed to give her a weak smile before turning to look ahead at the stage to distract herself from overthinking about meaningless things.

Lana recalled the events from yesterday when Lana was greeted by the dumbfounded expressions Carmen and Suzie wore when Lana reappeared at the restaurant with Zane by her side. After a short exchange of hellos and goodbyes, Carmen and Suzie were immediately interrogating Lana on why she was with him in the first place. The truth where she bumped into him and he decided to walk her back was completely ignored.

Lana could feel her heart beating insanely fast the moment she heard Zane’s voice greeting Carmen and Suzie.

“Hey Lana,” he called out with his signature smile. “Mind if I sit next to you?”

Lana turned to look at him as he was making his way down the row towards her. She nodded and stood up suddenly to allow him to walk past her. Their fronts were pressed together for a quick moment. His hand lightly brushed against Lana’s thigh and she could feel his touch even through her jeggings. She

swallowed hard as she stared directly at his chest to avoid meeting his eyes. She inhaled shakily as his cologne lingered around her, filling her senses with an earthy yet sweet fragrant.

Once she noticed Zane sitting down, she took her seat as well. Carmen who was sitting on the other side squeezed her hand slightly and gave her a reassuring smile. This only made Lana feel more tense at the fact that Zane was sitting so close to her that their knees were touching ever so slightly.

Zane leaned closer to Lana, making her freeze in her seat. "How are you feeling today?" Zane asked in a low whisper. Lana could feel her ear getting hot from where his warm breath brushed against her.

"G-Good..." she muttered, leaning away from him as she bumped into Carmen's shoulder.

Zane noticed Lana's discomfort and pulled back. "I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable. Sorry about that." He said as he removed his cap.

"N-No, I was just...startled." She said. It wasn't necessarily a lie. She wasn't uncomfortable at how close Zane was but she was just nervous. Her heart was not showing signs of calming down and her mind was clearly a jumbled up mess. Being this close to Zane only made Lana realize how smitten she was for him. At this point, having a crush on him was starting to become a complete hassle.

Zane smiled as he leaned back against his seat. "I'm glad you are feeling better though," he said.

"T-Thanks again for yesterday. I owe you one..." She said.

Zane was silent for a moment. Lana then glanced at him only to find him already looking at her with a tender smile on his lips. "You can thank me with a dance." Zane suddenly blurted.

Lana's eyes widened. "...what?"

He chuckled at her baffled expression. "During founder's day, I hope that you'd save me a dance."

"Oh...okay..." she muttered, clearly stunned by his sudden request as she was not really comprehending his words.

Zane let out a soft laugh. "I look forward to it then."

Rosecliff Founder's Day is one of the biggest events that happens in Rosecliff aside from hunting season and camping season during the holidays. It's an annual festival that happens at the town square to celebrate the anniversary of Rosecliff being founded and named. The festival will have food stalls, carnival games and even a dance floor. The main purpose of the celebration is to allow the townspeople to have fun and honour those before them but simultaneously it also acts as a tourist attraction. The festival usually starts on Friday and lasts over the weekend.

This festival was also the reason all the high schoolers were gathered at the assembly hall. As per

tradition, the high schoolers had to work with the other adults due to the lack of manpower the small town has. It was considered as an extra curriculum for them and Lana personally enjoyed Founder's Day since she gets to escape the daily routine school had to offer.

During the assembly, the headmaster usually gives a speech about the importance of teamwork and the joys of belonging in a community as welcoming as Rosecliff's. Then, raffle tickets with student's names will be drawn to designate the tasks among everyone randomly. For two years in a row, Lana was assigned to be a part of the team that had to help out Ray and the rest of the rangers for the treasure hunt event that they hosted in the forest. But somehow this year she had a feeling that the repetitive cycle was about to crumble.

As the students settled into their seats, the teachers started to take their seats on the stage as well. After a moment, their headmaster, Mr. O'Brien, who was also Suzie's father came up to the platform. He tapped the microphone twice, sending low feedback that echoed throughout the now quiet hall and started his speech.

Lana tried to focus on Mr. O'Brien's speech but her attention went towards Zane who she noticed shifted in his seat. He leaned in closer to her ear once again.

"Is there a task that you hope you'll get?" he whispered, causing Lana to squirm slightly from the overwhelming jitters that washed over her body.

"Um...I guess the treasure hunt?" she whispered back the first thing that popped into her mind. Her eyes were glued at the headmaster, not wanting to be called out by the teachers for not paying attention.

"Makes sense, you do work part time as a ranger after all."

Lana nodded slightly. "But, I wouldn't be upset if I don't get that. I don't mind trying something new, like working with the haunted house team or the catering team..." she babbled. She started to feel self-conscious for talking so much that she allowed her words to trail off. "...What about you, Zane?"

"Me? I don't mind anything as well, but I guess it would be fun if we got into the same team since we never got to work together for anything. Don't you think so?" Zane asked with his signature smile that made Lana's heart melt.

She felt her throat dry up. "Y-Yeah..." she bashfully replied.

Applause from the crowd made Lana jolt as she proceeded to clap her hands as well. She watched as Mr. O'Brien playfully bowed at the applause he received, some students laughed while Suzie groaned in embarrassment at her father's antics. A large brightly coloured box was brought up to the stage alongside a table. Mrs. Hathaway came up to the microphone and after a quick explanation on all the different teams and which teachers would be designated to which team, the raffle began.