

Her Secret 31

CHAPTER 31 NO.31

Lana stretched her arms over her head and allowed herself to let out a pleased groan. Being seated for 4 hours was starting to make her body restless. She glanced at the time and realized she had 5 minutes left to her shift. River left a while ago to use the restroom and Lana wondered if he was okay or if he just wanted to ditch work. She then started to think of what she wanted to have for lunch to distract herself, but that was not a good idea as soon she could feel her stomach grumbling. It was demanding for all kinds of food to satisfy its hunger.

“Lana!” someone called out. Steven waved over at her excitedly as he made his way towards her. Maddison lagged behind him, clearly not wanting to be anywhere near Lana. “How was the first shift?” he asked.

“It was okay. Pretty slow in the morning but we sold a lot of tickets.” She told him.

She then noticed Maddison looking around. “Where’s River?” she asked.

“He went to the restroom.” Lana told her. Maddison looked at Lana with a sour expression before looking away with a huff.

“Well then Lana, you can go ahead and grab lunch! Maddison and I will take over.” He beamed. The mentions of lunch made Lana’s stomach growl. Maddison and Steven looked over at her in surprise.

Lana coughed out an awkward laugh. “I’ll be going then...” she said as she grabbed her bag.

Maddison and Steven exchanged glances. Steven then turned back to Lana and smiled widely. “Eat well, Lana!” Steven called out.

“T-Thanks...” Lana mumbled. She wanted to run away from there immediately as the overwhelming feeling of embarrassment engulfed her. She lowered her head in shame and rushed away.

As always, the first day of founder’s day did not have that many people since it always fell on a Friday. She spotted many familiar faces of the townspeople walking around and even some tourists but the crowd was still manageable. Lana took this opportunity to walk around the square and see what the different stalls had to offer. Her phone then buzzed and she took it out. It was messages from her group chat with Carmen and Suzie.

Carmen: where are you Suzie? Did you ditch actually ditch work again?

Carmen: I’m already out for my lunch break. Where are you!?

Lana: She probably went to the restroom

Carmen: Hey Lana

Carmen: Are you done with work?

Lana: Yea, I'm on my lunch break too

Carmen: Yay! Let's eat together

Suzie: don't leave me alone!

Suzie: I'm joining too!

Carmen: oh finally

Lana: Where did you go?

Suzie: Went to see Steven

Carmen: ofc

Suzie: he told me that you just left Lana

Lana: Yea, I went to check out what food they had here

Suzie: Where you at right now?

Lana: Near the dance floor

Carmen: ok see you two by the dance floor then

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After a moment, Lana is reunited with her two friends in the middle of the town square where they were still setting up the dance floor and the lights for the dance event later at night. Lana was surprised to see Carmen, who was still in heavy make-up since she had to go back to work after lunch anyway. She had to play the role of a crazy doctor and her face was full of drawn wounds and scars. To complete her look, she donned a bloodied lab coat and a fake stethoscope.

"You look insane." Lana remarked.

"Thanks! That's the whole point." Carmen laughed as she shoved the prop into her coat pocket so she wouldn't lose it in the crowd.

"Do you guys know what you want to eat?" Suzie asked as she looked around. "I'm feeling something

scandalous.”

“How can food be scandalous?” Carmen questioned Suzie with her signature puzzled look.

Suzie thought about it for a while before answering. “Like...you know, something we aren’t supposed to eat but we’re going to eat anyway?”

“Like fried cheesecake?” Lana asked as she pointed to a stall nearby.

“Exactly that!” Suzie exclaimed as she rushed towards it.

“Watch her complain tomorrow and suddenly announce that she’s going to start a new diet or something.” Carmen muttered to Lana. Lana sighed and shrugged, knowing for certain that it will happen as it happened many times before.

The girls then decided to split up to grab their food and meet back at the eating area where a bunch of benches and long tables were arranged for people to sit, eat or even rest from a long day of walking around. Lana decided to head over to a stall that was serving typical snack foods like chili fries, corndogs and even mini sliders. She then spotted a familiar back and all she could do was put on an awkward smile when she realized it was the stall where Mrs. Hathaway was a part of.

“Hello dear, what would you like?” she asked when it was Lana’s turn in the queue. She greeted Lana with a bright smile as she playfully posed with the tongs she waved around like a magic wand.

“Whatever you’d recommend, Mrs. Hathaway. Everything looks good and I’m famished.” Lana watched as Mrs. Hathaway nodded and started to load her paper plate up with food. Halfway through, she noticed she was making two plates instead. “Um...I’m hungry, but I don’t think I can finish that much food, ma’am.” Lana said nervously.

“One plate for you, one plate for River.” She said with a twinkle in her eye.

Lana admired Mrs. Hathaway’s enthusiasm but something was clearly wrong here. “But...I’m not with River right now?” Lana said, sounding more unsure by the minute. She had the strong urge to look behind her, wondering if River was lurking around.

“Oh? Then just pass him a plate would you, dear? He’s right there,” she said as she pointed behind Lana with the plastic tongs in her hand. Lana twirled around and noticed River walking around and looking at the different stalls by himself.

Lana sighed and ultimately agreed to pass him the food. Mrs. Hathaway was nice enough to buy the two lunches as well so Lana really could not say no to her request. She carried the two plates and made her way slowly to where River was. For some odd reason, she felt nervous to call out to him. Thankfully for her, River turned around to look at her. He grimaced at the sight of her, or more like the smell of her and in response Lana sighed.

“Mrs. Hathaway told me to give this to you.” She said as she held out a plate towards him.

“Oh? And here I thought you were just over-indulging, of course I’m not saying there’s anything wrong with that.” he teased.

“Shut up...” she muttered, pushing the plate against him.

River took the plate from her and eyed the contents. “How much was it?” he asked. “I’ll pay you back.”

“It’s Mrs. Hathaway’s treat.” She said, her gaze went to the sitting area where she spotted Carmen and Suzie sitting together with a group of their other friends. She wanted to leave but somehow she did not want to leave River alone.

“That’s nice of her.” He muttered.

“Do you...” Lana started. River raised an eyebrow at her but stayed silent so she would continue. After a short pause, Lana took a deep breath and spoke.

“Do you want to join us for lunch? I mean, if you have other plans then that’s fine I’m not going to force you. But since we have to go to the forest together to help out the rangers then I was thinking it would be easier to just have lunch together...” she babbled on and on, pretty sure that the words that were coming out of her mouth were incoherent at some point. She was unsure why she suddenly had to justify even inviting River to join her and her friends. But what was weirder was the fact that she even did so in the first place.

River was silent which made Lana sheepishly glance over at him. He looked at her with his usual straight face. Obviously, in his mind River just wanted to be alone and especially away from Lana at all cost. He then glanced over at the table where Lana’s friends were and nodded. “Sure.” He said. He was almost as surprised as Lana was when he agreed. He frowned, clearly unable to think properly after whatever that happened with Avery in the restroom.

“...okay...let’s go.” Lana muttered as she led the way. Her friends were loud and chaotic but the entire table fell silent when Lana approached them with River behind her. They gawked at him. “Hey, River will be joining us.” She boldly said as she sat at an open seat. She scooted over to allow River to sit beside her.

She then tensed, realizing that maybe River sitting next to her was not the greatest idea since her alpha scent would bother him but to Lana’s surprise, he plopped next to her without much hesitation.

The awkward atmosphere quickly changed once River and the other started talking and eating. Lana silently ate her food and occasionally would scoot further in to put some distance between her and River but that plan of hers failed when some of River’s friends joined the table and Lana was particularly squeezed between River and his friend. Her legs were pushed against his and their elbows would brush

every time one of them moved. Lana was not comfortable at all as she started to overthink if River was okay.

She glanced up at him as he happily ate his food and joked around with the others. If her scent was bothering him, he did not show it at all in his controlled expression.

“Aren’t you going to eat?” River’s friend who sat on Lana's other side asked. If she was not mistaken, his name was Alex.

“R-Right!” she let out a nervous laugh. “I was just daydreaming.” She smiled. She shifted her body uncomfortably so she could eat without her hand brushing against River’s. But unfortunately for her, the plastic fork in her hand slipped and fell on River’s lap. As a reflex, Lana reached down to pick it up but she was brought back to reality when the back of River’s hand slightly nudged her hand away.

She tensed and pulled her hand away immediately. Lana wanted to scream at how she was about to casually touch River at that area without a second thought. She lowered her face to hide her shame and her red cheeks from the rest of the people at the table who were clearly not paying attention to Lana and her mishaps. River then passed her fork back to her, his fingers brushing against hers.

“S-Sorry about that...” Lana whispered to him. Her voice was soft enough so that only River could hear her.

“...It’s fine.” He whispered back and yet, he looked anything but fine.