

Her Secret 33

CHAPTER 33 NO.33

Once the two of them left the station, they were quickly briefed by Ray on their expected duties. They separated to go to their designated spots, with River helping Hannah out at the registration counter and Lana heading to her usual spot to serve as a guide and hand out the clues for the participants.

She sat in the jeep with Ray as he drove her to the spot. Her eyes were fixed on the skies, where the once cloudy blue skies were now slowly being replaced by approaching grey clouds yet the sun was still hanging high and bright.

“Hey, what’s wrong? You look worried.” Ray suddenly asked, bringing Lana’s attention back to him.

“I’m just curious, what would happen if it starts to rain during the event?” she asked.

“We’ll postpone it of course. The safety of the participants are our top priority.”

“Hmm. I see.”

“Don’t worry too much, the weather forecast predicted sunny skies until evening and besides, the hunt isn’t that far out so you don’t have to worry about people getting lost. Of course, hopefully we don’t get trouble makers around today.” Ray explained, sensing Lana’s concern.

Lana nodded as she turned her attention to the red tap tied around some trees to prevent the participants from going deeper into the forest. Soon, they reached her spot and Lana jumped out of the jeep.

“By the way Lana.” Ray called out.

Lana turned to him. “Yes?”

“Are you and River getting along now?” he asked. Lana made a face and Ray laughed. “I’m guessing that’s a no?”

She shrugged. “I sometimes feel like I’m dealing with two different Rivers. One more bearable than the other, of course.” She complained.

“I’m glad that you are at least putting in the effort instead of just arguing with him the entire time. I was pretty surprised to see you helping him with his armband and the two of you talking normally just now. I must say, it was rather refreshing.”

Lana felt her heart drop. She wasn’t sure if she should feel embarrassed or not that Ray saw everything that happened just now between her and River. “Wait...you saw?”

“Was I not supposed to?” he asked innocently with his eyes widened slightly.

“Ray...” Lana muttered, knowing for sure he was pretending to be oblivious.

“Hey, stop with that judgemental look of yours. I simply looked through the window and saw you two. I wasn’t stalking you or anything. Do I look like such a snoopy person to you?” he asked with his brows furrowed as he feigned being offended.

Lana sighed as she leaned forward against the door and peered at Ray. “I always knew you were the doting father type but please don’t tell me you’re also one of those fathers who get all anxious when I’m around boys...” she cringed playfully.

Ray burst out laughing at her unexpected remark, although he felt a bit content hearing Lana refer to him as a father. Lana stayed silent, looking away from him to hide her smile. Soon, Ray’s laughter died down.

“Relax Lana, I’m not here to baby you in that department. But, I don’t remember never giving you a talk about the bees and the birds.” Ray teased.

Lana jolted and stood up straight. “Ahh!! Stop! I don’t wanna hear it!” Lana exclaimed as she quickly walked away from the jeep, wanting to get away from Ray and the sudden emergence of such an embarrassing topic.

“We’ll talk about it when we get home!” Ray called out.

“Okay, I’ll just not go back home ever again then! Bye!” she called back, half-joking. She did not even want to think about what she would do if Ray actually sat her down one day just to talk to her about that. She was already particularly an adult, after all.

Ray softly laughed at her extreme reaction and watched her walk away. He is suddenly struck by an overwhelming wave of sentimentality—knowing that his Lana is all grown up now. How he missed the days when she was younger where she would always greet Ray in the morning with a tight embrace and playful kisses on his face. How she would always wait up for him to come home from work, even if she would often fall asleep on the couch while she waited.

He was never the type to cling onto the past, even when the people he loved left him one after another, he learnt to move on because he had to be strong for her, for his Lana. Ray pondered in silence what he was going to do if one day Lana decided that she wanted to leave him. To Leave Rosecliff. She was slipping through his fingers no matter how hard he tightened his grasp. When the time came, he wondered if he would finally be able to let her go or desperately cling on to her.

He knew what choice he would make when the time would come, but that did not make his heart less heavier. Could he really let her go just like that after 10 years of devoting his entire life to make sure she grew up safe and healthy? 10 years of loving and caring for her as though she was his own child? If he

truly loved her, he knew that he had to set her free. And just like that, Ray came to the conclusion that no matter how much he argued with himself, he was confident that in the end—Lana’s happiness would always come first to him.

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The day continued on completely uneventful as daylight faded quickly. Lana carried on with her duties at handing the participants their next clue. When no one was around, she loafed around the forest occasionally walking around her designated zone and stretching her restless body.

From a distance she could hear the rumbling of thunder and she was sure that rain was approaching them. Thankfully, the day one of the treasure hunt ended before the rain came. She waited for Ray to come pick her up even though she could easily walk back to the station. But the gloomy weather was impacting her mood and it made her extremely lazy. When she heard the familiar sound of the jeep approaching her, she gathered her stuff and headed to the opening of the pathway.

From afar, she could tell that the person driving the jeep was not Ray. When it approached closer, she groaned openly when she noticed that the driver was none other than River. He was not wearing his cap anymore and his hair was wildly fluttering through the breeze. She changed her expression quickly and greeted him with a smile when he stopped the jeep next to her.

She silently grew more agitated when he ran his fingers through his hair to comb it back. It looked ridiculously perfect and she was not thinking about just his hair. She noted that he did not look tired at all even though he spent the entire day out and about just like her. How much stamina did this man have, Lana wondered.

“Why are you here?” she asked, still smiling as she swallowed down all the negative feelings that were piling up inside her. The last thing she needed now, when she was already tired and craved for slumber was another verbal altercation with him.

“Ray got backed up with some stuff, he asked if anybody was free to pick you up and I offered. You can thank me later.” he said smugly as he rested both arms against the steering wheel and leaned forward. “But looking at you expression—would you rather I not come?”

“Yes, actually. I would’ve preferred anyone but you.” Lana replied truthfully, clearly annoyed at his earlier statement of wanting her to thank him even though he volunteered to pick her up.

Her bluntness caught River off guard and he furrowed his brows. When Lana showed no signs of getting in the jeep, he scoffed. “Are you serious? Well then, I’ll just drive back and tell Ray you wanted to walk back to the station.”

“Okay, do just that. Thanks.” She said casually as she walked ahead and passed the jeep.

River was truly dumbfounded by Lana’s behaviour. He turned around, expecting her to be joking and

would walk back and get into the jeep but she did not falter as she confidently marched ahead. The sun was already hidden by the growing dark clouds. He knew that she could effortlessly navigate her way back to the station at night since she as used to this forest after all but if River went back without her, Ray would probably talk his ear off. And what's worst, Ray might tell Griffin and Griffin would talk his ear off.

"Seriously...?" River muttered at himself as he turned the jeep around and drove slowly to follow Lana's pace. He would rather convince her to follow him back rather than face Ray's wrath or even Griffin's disappointment. Lana stared ahead, not sparing him a glance as though he did not even exist. "So, why are you doing this? What are you trying to prove here?" he asked.

"I don't know what you mean." She said indifferently.

"Did I do something to piss you off? Is that why you groaned in disgust when you saw me earlier?" he pressed.

Lana inwardly sighed. She tried her best to hide that fact from him but obviously he noticed. He noticed everything apparently. "No, you didn't do anything. I just think I have reached my maximum fill of River Attwood for the day. I'm not in the mood to deal with you and your snarky remarks right now."

River somehow felt offended by her words although he did his best not to show it in his expression. He wrecked his mind for a moment, trying to figure out what he can say or do to change her mind. He knew how unpredictable she could be and he did not want to risk saying the wrong things. Usually he couldn't care less what she did or said but things were different now. He felt somewhat responsible for her safety.

"...and if I promise not to say anything? Will you get in then?" River asked quietly, not really sure if this plan was going to work, but he did not have anything to lose. Worse comes to worst, he would just drive next to her in a painfully slow pace until they both reached the station. But obviously, he would rather avoid that option.

Lana stopped walking immediately, causing River to press on the brakes, his body jolted forwards slightly from the sudden halt. She turned to him, catching his eyes. "Promise?" she asked with an eyebrow raised.

The edge of River's lips twitched. "What? You don't believe me? You want to pinkie promise again?"

Lana's eyes narrowed as she glared at him. "Very funny."

River held up his hands in defeat. "Get in already. We'll have a quiet ride back. But, can you handle that? The entire day you were trying to make small talk after all." He said, annoyed with himself that he couldn't just stay silent for once. He was expecting Lana to continue walking ahead but she did the opposite.

“Argh! Shut up already.” She huffed as she walked around the jeep and hopped into the passenger seat. She fastened the seatbelt and crossed her arms. When she noticed that River did not start driving, she glanced at him. “What are you waiting—mmpf!” her words were cut off when River shoved his finger on her lips. Her eyes widened as she stared at him in disbelief. How she wanted to just bite his finger off at that moment.

“Shh. Silence, remember?” he whispered before pulling his finger away slowly. After a beat, they drove back to the station in complete silence. Just the way the both of them wanted.’