

Her Secret 35

CHAPTER 35 NO.35

Zane opened the passenger seat for Lana and held out his hand for her, mimicking the gentlemen in those old black and white films. Lana laughed as she played along with his silliness. Their fingers touched and Lana was certain that she felt a mild static shock. Zane's fingers were firm to touch and in a swift movement, she felt his thumb brush over her fingers tenderly.

The moment she got into his car, she could feel his touch lingering over her hand. But soon she was overwhelmed by the distinct smell of his cologne. There was a strange tranquillity that came over Lana every time she smelt it and she often wondered why it had such an effect over her. But those thoughts were quickly replaced by why Zane was even her in the first place.

She quickly scanned the messages he sent her earlier, asking if she had a ride to the square and if now he would like to drive her. He even stated that he had a question to ask her. Her brows were knitted together, wondering why Zane could not just text her the question. She managed to only glimpse at the messages Carmen and Suzie texted her before her attention was back to Zane who entered the car.

"All good?" he asked when he caught her gaze.

Lana nodded as she pushed her phone back into her bag. After the two wore their seat belts, Zane lowered the volume of the radio and started to drive.

"So...you said you had a question to ask me?" Lana asked, unable to deal with her own curiosity bugging her constantly at the back of her mind.

"Ah, yes. But first, let me just apologize for showing up like this..."

"No! You texted me! It's my fault for oversleeping so you don't have to apologize for anything." Lana panicked, hating the fact that Zane even saw the need to apologize to her.

Zane chuckled. "You must've had a really tough day yesterday. Was River really hard to deal with?" he asked teasingly.

"You have no idea." She sighed, ready to complain to Zane about everything River did yesterday but quickly caught herself. She did not want to give out any negative impression of herself to Zane, after all. "But, I'll manage..." she muttered unsure what else to say.

Zane nodded in understanding. He then slightly shifted in his seat.

"So the question I wanted to ask you, well, I know it's a bit last minute to ask this of you and if you don't have plans with anyone else for today...I was wondering if you wanted to participate in the treasure hunt with me?" Zane asked.

The ticking of the signal light seemed to echo around Lana as she tried to process his words over and over again in repeat like a broken record player. A million imaginary situations crossed her mind of her spending time with Zane as they tried to solve puzzles together in the forest. It sounded like an ideal date to Lana but she was certain that Zane was only asking her as a friend.

But then she started to overthink. Why did he not ask his other friends? Why did he ask her all of a sudden? She wanted to question him about that but she was afraid he might think she did not want to spend time with him. The worst outcome to occur if she asked him, would be him retracting his invitation claiming that Lana was not comfortable to even be with him. She wanted to stop herself from overthinking but she was too deep in it now. she let out a sigh, which Zane clearly heard.

"I'm sorry if I'm bothering you in any way...you don't have to say yes if you have other plans! I totally get it—" he started.

"Yes!" Lana suddenly exclaimed. Her sudden response caused Zane to flinch from shock slightly. "Yes, I would love to join you..." she repeated.

"Are you sure...?" he asked again, confused that her words and reaction did not match at all. He wondered if she was forcing herself to agree.

"Of course! I don't have any plans after my shift and I would love to do the treasure hunt with you!" she beamed. "I'm guessing you have a half day today too?"

Zane smiled at her enthusiasm. "Yup! I've never really participated in the treasure hunt after all my years of living here so I thought why not try it out at least once and who better to ask than an actual forest ranger."

Lana's smile dropped. Of course he only wanted her to join him only because she was a ranger and she knew her way through the forest. She felt somewhat dejected as she stared out the window to avoid showing Zane her expression.

"I see..." she muttered softly.

"Please don't misunderstand, I'm not only asking you to join me just because of your experience. I just thought that we could use this time to get to know each other." Zane said quickly. Lana wondered if he could read her mind.

"What do you mean...?"

"There's no hidden meaning behind that. I just want to spend time with you, Lana. We know each other ever since middle school but I feel like I barely know you. I mean, I wanna believe that we were pretty close during middle school but we sort of drifted and...I hope that doesn't weird you out...I'm sorry if it does, I'm just speaking my mind here." he babbled on.

“No! Of course not! I feel the same way, Zane!” she confessed. “I mean...I agree with you completely about everything.” she mumbled, dialling her excitement down so Zane would not find her weird. She then noticed that he was pulling over into the car park. She knew that the town square was not far from her house but she couldn’t help herself but to get disappointed over the fact that her car ride with him was over in a blink of an eye.

“I’m glad we feel the same way then. This feels almost like we are rekindling our friendship.” Zane smiled as he pulled over. “But, we’ll need a third team member.” He reminded her.

“Oh...right...” Lana completely forgot that major fact. The treasure hunt had a rule where only teams of three could participate. Lana’s made up fantasies of being alone with Zane were immediately shattered. “Do you have anyone in mind?” she asked him.

Zane shook his head. “I was hoping you would know someone who could join us?”

“I could ask one of the girls...” she muttered, thinking who would most likely say yes between Carmen and Suzie. She even started thinking of her other friends and even considering anyone who were mutual friends with her and Zane.

“Then, I’ll leave it up to you to find us a third member.” He said as he placed his hand on her shoulder. “I trust you whole-heartedly.” He smiled.

Lana could have sworn that time stood still as she stared at his charming smile up close. It had to be illegal how handsome Zane was.

“Okay.” Lana squeaked.

The two then walked towards the entrance of the square together. Zane waved at her goodbye as he jogged towards the haunted house. Lana watched him leave, silently scolding herself for oversleeping. If she only woke up earlier, she could have spent more time with Zane. She pushed aside these feelings as she made her way towards the booth, quickly reaching for her phone to reply to the messages she missed. She wanted to text the group about the treasure hunt but she glanced at the time and felt her heart stop.

She was 5 minutes late. She then bolted towards the booth, speeding past people as she manoeuvred her way around them. She felt her heart sink when she noticed that the booth was already set up nice and neatly and River was seated at his usual spot. Lana quickly tried to think of many different excuses if River questioned her on her tardiness but then she thought that maybe he wouldn’t care and they would just spend their 4 hours in silence again.

But she knew that was not going to happen when their gazes met. River immediately frowned at her, his ocean blue eyes darkened as he shot furious glares at her direction.

“Oi, you’re late.” He said, completely infuriated.