

Her Secret 36

CHAPTER 36 NO.36

Lana gulped as she felt her throat go dry at the sheer intensity of River's fury. She quickly thought of all the different ways she could attempt to calm him down but the longer it took her to reply to him, the more agitated he seemed to become.

"I'm only five minutes late..." Lana finally replied in a mumble as she made her way to the other side of the booth and placed her belongings under the table.

"You do know that we have to be here at 7:30am, right? It's 8:05am right now. Or are you telling me that you completely forgot how to tell time?" he pressed.

At that moment, she honestly felt like a child being lectured by a strict and disrespectful teacher. In Lana's mind, she thought of a million ways to rebuttal against River's statement such as setting up the booth only takes 5 minutes or the fact that no one was even around this early to buy tickets. But she felt as though she should not ruin the start of a good day by arguing with him.

Given that everything happened due to her own carelessness by oversleeping but the sole fact that she met, talked and even rode in the car together with Zane today felt like something out of a dream. If anything was a sign that today was going to be a good day, it was that.

"I'm sorry for troubling you and making you do the booth set up all by yourself. It won't happen again." Lana said to River.

River opened his mouth, ready to protest whatever she just said but he froze when her words slowly registered in his mind. "...What?" he asked, wondering if he heard her wrong.

"I said I'm sorry." She repeated, fluttering her eyelashes up at him innocently.

River knew that she was not being genuine at all, but what else could he do but to stay silent. He then sighed and pulled his attention away from her.

Lana waited for a long minute, wondering if River was going to say anything after that but he kept quiet. She then pulled out her phone and texted the group chat to ask about their plans after lunch. She thought that her friends would be busy prepping for the haunted house but they replied to her almost instantly.

Lana: You two have a half day today as well right?

Suzie: yep!

Carmen: double yep

Lana: what are your plans after lunch?

Lana: do any of you wanna join me on the treasure hunt?

Carmen: omg didn't you say you didn't want to participate?

Lana: Yea, but it's a last minute thing

Lana: Zane asked me if I wanted to join him and I said yes. But we need a third member.

Suzie: NO WAY!!

Suzie: SHUT UP!!

Carmen: Wait Zane as in Zane Railey?

Suzie: omg duh!! We don't know any other Zane's in Rosecliff!

Lana: lol. Yes the one and only Zane Railey

Suzie: That's literally a date right? He asked you on a date!!

Carmen: It's not a date if there's a third person Suzie...

Lana: It's not a date :(

Lana: But guys, please focus and let me know if either of you have time to join me and Zane

Suzie: well...we can't...

Lana: Why? Do you two already have plans?

Carmen: Suzie and Steven are participating and I'm their third member

Carmen: they bribed me with desserts...sorry Lana

Suzie: an all you can eat dessert buffet at that!

Lana: lol no wonder you agreed, Carmen

Lana: but doesn't Steven have ticket booth shift later?

Suzie: apparently they are closing the booth earlier today? You didn't hear anything?

Lana: shit...I came in late today. Mrs. Hathaway probably told them earlier

Suzie: Yup, since Steven doesn't need to help out the rangers this morning, he is helping out the technical team set up the lights around the dance floor

Lana: I see...

Lana: Well, I'll ask someone else then! I have to go before River yells at me for texting during the job

Carmen: Sorry again!

Suzie: Sorry too and buhbye! <>

Lana glanced at River's direction, a part of her was expecting him to be glaring at her but he was just staring ahead in silence. She then tossed her phone back into her bag and started to think about who else she could ask to join them. She had other friends but they either did not share the same shift timings as her or she wasn't as close to them as she was to Carmen and Suzie. She thought about it hard and long until a stupid idea popped into her brain.

She knew she had to be desperate to even consider this person but if she did not ask then her dream-like goal of wanting to spend time with Zane, solving puzzles and looking for the treasure together would vanish into thin air. She would do anything to make that into reality. She took a deep breath and turned her entire body to face River. He noticed her staring at him and looked at her direction.

"What is it?" he asked hesitantly. He had a feeling that whatever Lana had to say, he would not like it one bit.

"Do you have plans later? After lunch?" she asked, acting completely casual. Yet her fingers were fidgeting on her thighs.

River pondered for a moment and then shook his head. He was planning on helping out anyone who needed help. If there wasn't anything for him to do, he would have just gone home. "Nope. Why do you ask?" he asked cautiously as he tried to silently guess what she was going to ask him next.

"Would you like to be in a team with me for the treasure hunt later?" she blurted aloud.

River furrowed his brows. That was the last thing he would have guessed that she would ask him. "No. That sounds tedious." He replied instantly.

Lana frowned. "That was a fast reply...it seemed to me that you were going to say no, no matter what I asked you."

River shrugged. He was annoyed at how true that statement of hers was. If he had the chance to avoid her for the rest of the day then he would take that opportunity in a blink of an eye. Joining her in the

treasure hunt only sounded like more time spent arguing with her.

“If you joined, wouldn’t that be considered cheating?” he asked.

“How so? I don’t know the answers to the puzzle or whatever.” she frowned at what he was insinuating.

“But you know your way through the forest, don’t you? More than any normal person.”

Lana decided to ignore his last statement about her being not normal. “That doesn’t matter, the puzzles and riddles are the main thing you need to do to even win the hunt in the first place. You are guided through the forest by the guides after all.” She argued.

River held his hands up in defeat, not knowing how else to rebuttal her when she knew more about the event than he did. “Okay fine, I take back what I said.”

Lana beamed in a childish manner. “So does that mean you’ll join?” she asked excitedly as she involuntarily moved in closer to him.

River pressed himself further into his chair. He had never seen Lana like this before. He silently wondered why she even wants to participate in the treasure hunt event when she was often passive about it before. “No. I take back what I said about you cheating.” he said firmly.

Lana’s happy expression was immediately dropped as she let out an exasperated sigh at the false hope that he gave her. “River, I’m going to murder—”

“Why are you asking me anyway?” he cut her off. “Isn’t it mandatory to be in groups of three? Why not ask Carmen and Suzie?”

“They are already doing it with Steven.”

River laughed and then cooed at her. “Aw, did they exclude you? Aw, don’t be sad.” He teased her in an irritable tone.

Lana clenched her fists. “I told them I did not want to join but things changed okay.” she said, trying her hardest to calm herself down before she did something rash.

“Oh? Pray tell,”

“Why should I when you already said no to joining?” she huffed.

“I thought I would reconsider if you told me the entire story, but heh, suit yourself.” He shrugged again as he turned his attention away from her.

“...it’s...” she mumbled.

River sighed. "Speak up."

Lana clicked her tongue. "Fine!" she said. River then watched in silence as she took in a deep breath and opened her mouth.

"I overslept today, that's why I'm late in the first place but when I was rushing to get ready Zane appeared at my front door and he asked if he could drive me here since we are going to the same place, I said yes but I was still confused as to why he was even there at my house and then in the car he asked if I wanted to team up with him for the treasure hunt and I said yes yet again, obviously. But now I have to find a third member and since my friends aren't free I thought hey why not ask River 'cause you said you didn't have any plans and now here we are talking about this. So that's the entire story!"

She gasped once she finished her story, trying to replenish the air that escaped her lungs. River stared at her, completely dumbfounded. The fact that she could speak so fast and in one single breath was pretty impressive but he pushed aside his amazement for her immediately when he remembered a certain name that popped up in her story. Somehow he had a feeling that person would be involved.

"Alright." Was all he replied after her lengthy explanation.

"Alright?" Lana repeated, confused. She wondered if she even heard him properly or if she imagined his reply.

"I'll join you and Railey on the treasure hunt." He clarified. Deep down River knew this was a big mistake but for some reason, the thought of her and Railey spending time together was infuriating.

"Really?!" she asked, her eyes glistening with joy.

River gave her a half-hearted smirk. "Don't make me take back what I said." He warned.

Lana nodded and stayed quiet. She felt relief that she could spend the day with Zane after all but then an overwhelming sense of dread washed over her. What the hell did she just sign up for? Why in the world did she even ask River, the one person who openly admitted that he hated her and treated Zane just as badly as he did her? She slowly turned to face River once again.

"Um...River..." she called out hesitantly, afraid to even ask him as she did not even want to know his true intentions.

"What?"

"You did not agree just so you could bother Zane right...?"

River made a face. "What is that supposed to mean?"

“Well...you are always mean to him so I was wondering if you only agreed to—?” she stopped talking when she noticed River shaking his head.

“I only agreed to bother you.” He smiled and that smile alone was enough to send shivers down Lana’s spine. “If you think I was just going to follow you two around like a third wheel, then you are mistaken.” He added and Lana was certain that she just made the biggest mistake of her life.