

Her Secret 37

CHAPTER 37 NO.37

"I take it back. I take back everything I said earlier!" Lana said firmly as she stared hard at River's back. He walked ahead at a swift pace and Lana had to particularly jog to keep up with him.

"It's a bit too late for that now." He called back to her nonchalantly.

Lana was wrecking her brain to come up with a solution to this mess of a situation. After finding out that River only agreed to join her and Zane on the treasure hunt just to be a nuisance to her, she decided to take back her invitation no matter how rude that might be. But she never had the chance when the two of them were bombarded by people buying tickets. Now, it was lunch time and she was trying her best to stop River as he made his way to the haunted house to meet up with Zane.

"River! I'll do anything," Lana called out desperately, wanting to do anything and everything to make him reconsider. River suddenly stopped in front of her and turned to look at her.

"Anything?" he asked, feeling the sense of déjà vu hitting him as he recalled that he was once in her position. How the tables have turned indeed.

Lana gulped as her imagination ran wild at all the things River could make her do but she decided to brush those thoughts away and meekly nodded at him. "Y-yeah. Anything. I'll buy you food or do your homework—"

"Then, let me join you and Railey on the treasure hunt." He interrupted before she could finish her sentence. He was not even trying to hide the fake enthusiasm in his voice.

Lana's face dropped at the fact that he gave her false hope. "Ugh. You will be the death of me, River Attwood!" she declared.

River smirked at her before continuing to walk ahead. Her getting all upset over this small matter was making River ecstatic. "Well, take this moment as a learning opportunity. You shouldn't have asked me in the first place."

"Fine! I wasn't thinking clearly! I just really wanted a third member so I didn't have to cancel with Zane. Was that selfish of me? Totally!" she admitted as she jogged up to walk beside him. She looked up at him who was staring straight ahead. "So you don't have to do this right? Didn't you say you hated me? Is this like your big chance to ruin my life?" she dramatically asked.

"Yes, I did say that. And no, I'm not a horrible person, you know. I'm a bit offended that you think I have nothing better to do with my life than I would waste my time ruining yours." He scoffed. "Earlier, you clearly needed my help and I agreed. It's as simple as that, so stop overthinking everything."

"You only agreed after I told you Zane was joining! Besides, it's not overthinking when you literally said

you wanted to be a 'bother'." she countered, feeling a headache approaching from all these different excuses and reasons River was giving her.

"That's true. Maybe I do have an ulterior motive after all." He teased.

Lana groaned at how this conversation was seemingly going around in circles. She felt as though she was arguing with a child who was too stubborn to back down. She then took a deep breath. "Which is...?" she asked.

"To watch you and Zane fail horribly at the puzzles and riddles, of course. Seeing that would make my day better even though I have to spend it with the two of you. It's a fair exchange in my mind" He said with a small smile on his lips.

"...are you calling us stupid?"

River shrugged. "We'll find out soon enough." He said as he stopped walking. They were standing in front of the haunted house.

Lana sighed at her failure of an attempt to change River's mind. She could not help but think about what Zane would say when he found out that Lana asked River of all people to be their third member. Would he be mad? Would he suddenly cancel their plans? These questions were swirling in an endless loop in Lana's mind. She was so deep in thought that she did not notice a figure creeping up to her.

River glanced to his side, watching as a man dressed as a zombie slowly approaching Lana from the side. He opened his mouth to say something but he noticed how Lana was completely unaware of her surroundings. He decided to just stay quiet and watch what would happen.

"Argh Lana!" the figure shouted as he suddenly grabbed onto her arm.

Lana shrieked in horror by the sudden scare, pulling her arm free in one swift motion. Without fully comprehending the situation, she quickly and blindly turned to River and wrapped her arms around him tightly. River stumbled backwards slightly from her sudden action and froze in place, unable to process what just happened as he could feel Lana clinging onto him desperately. Her face was pressed against his chest and somehow watching her rely on him like this was making him feel all sorts of things.

"Shit...! I'm so sorry Lana..." Zane apologetically said in his normal voice.

Realization hit Lana like a ton of bricks as she jumped back away from River, holding her hands up as though she just did something horribly wrong. She quickly turned to look at Zane.

"Z-Zane...?" she called out, peering at the man in front of her with heavy sickly green makeup. His clothes were tattered and bloodied with what Lana assumed to be fake blood. She would have never recognized that this person standing in front of her was Zane if he did not speak.

“Yeah, it’s me. I’m really sorry, I did not think you would be that scared...” he muttered, clearly still apologetic.

“N-No! Please don’t apologize...” she said as she looked down to her feet, hiding her shame from him.

Zane then slowly nodded and turned his attention over to River who was just standing there like a statue. Zane then wondered if he accidentally scared River as well but he quickly pushed that thought aside when he remembered how tightly Lana was clinging onto him earlier. He let out a soft sigh before turning back to Lana.

“...right. I’ll just quickly go change, get this makeup off me and meet you back here. Give me a few minutes!” he called out to her as he rushed away to a nearby canopy.

Lana let out a heavy sigh. She could not believe she just embarrassed herself in front of Zane like that. She then gasped and looked at River who was just standing there, unmoving.

“River...hey sorry about that...” she muttered, feeling her face heat up at the fact that she acted like a scared little child in front of both of them. But the difference was that Zane would never tease her over that. But River would 100% tease her over that. She braced herself and waited silently for his sarcastic remarks. “River?” she called out to him again when he did not respond.

River blinked once and then twice and finally looked down at Lana. He then cleared his throat. “Can’t believe that actually scared you...”

“...hey, I already said I was jumpy when it came to things like this.” She frowned.

“Hm. Maybe we should experience the haunted house at least once. I’m suddenly in the mood to see you scream until you pass out.”

“You do know you sound pretty psychotic right now, right?”

He brushed her off. “Is that a no? Are you really that scared?” he continued to provoke her, knowing fully that she would eventually succumb to her overwhelming stubbornness.

“I’m not!” she fumed. She was starting to feel her rage building up inside her from River’s holier-than-thou attitude even though she clearly knew he was doing it intentionally.

River nodded once and then headed to the ticket counter for the haunted house. He then glanced behind to look at Lana. “Railey’s gonna take a while to get rid of all that makeup on him right? So, let’s not waste any time.”

Lana watched in horror as River purchased two tickets to the haunted house. He then gestured to her to come to him with his index finger as the entrance to the haunted house was pulled open by the attendant. White smoke escaped from the open door and from a distance they could hear gut

wrenching screams and manic laughter.

“Welcome... Step right into your nightmares.” The attendant greeted the two in a chilling voice.

Lana gulped as her body refused to step forward. River, who was about to walk through the door turned around and approached Lana when she did not attempt to even move forward. She took a step back when she saw him walking up to her but he quickly grabbed her by the wrist.

“Didn’t you say that you aren’t afraid? Come in and prove it.” He whispered at her with a sinister smile creeping on his face.

Before Lana could protest, she felt herself getting pulled by River. As soon as they entered through the door, the attendant slammed it shut behind them and they were surrounded by darkness. Lana felt River’s grip around her wrist loosen.

“D-Don’t let go!” she pleaded. “I mean...I’m not afraid but I just don’t want to be separated from you. Obviously that would be a hassle since we have to go to the forest together later and I don’t want to be late at registering...” She babbled on as she tried to justify herself.

River let out a low laugh. “Right.” He muttered as he tightened his grip once more. “Let’s go then, the longer we spend inside here the longer your beloved Railey has to wait for us.” He said, even though Lana could not properly see his face due to the lack of light, she was positive that he had his signature smirk plastered on his face.

“I really hate you...” she muttered. She then took a deep breath, knowing that River would not be walking ahead and that she had to lead them through this, which only meant that she was going to experience all the jump scares first. But strangely enough, she thought that as long as River did not let go of her wrist, everything would be alright. She was not as afraid, as long as he was there beside her.

River on the other hand was baffled by how many bad decisions he made today. When he woke up, he had a clear cut plan of just finishing his shift at the ticket booth and continuing his day away from Lana. Although he was confident that he was getting used to her scent, he could still notice the little things such as his heart beating faster whenever she was close. He could easily just blame his instincts and his attraction to her alpha traits for even wanting to be near her but this was taking it to the next level.

Agreeing to join her on the treasure hunt was one thing, but now he was alone with her in a dark space and he was getting frustratingly aware of how soft her skin was under his touch. A part of him never wants to let her hand go, but the other part of him, the rational side just wanted to run away and leave her here all alone. The further away he was from her, the better. His life would be easy if he could just put the blame on her but he knew that it was not that simple. And the fact that he was happy that he could spend this short moment alone with her was rather alarming.

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Lana plopped down on the bench as her legs felt like jelly and her heart was at the urge of exploding. She always knew that she was weak to jump scares but her haunted house experience only solidified that fact.

Her throat was burning and felt incredibly dry from all the screaming she did earlier, but what she was most embarrassed about was the amount of times she turned to cling onto River whenever another ghost or creature popped out from the shadows. By the end of the experience, she was confident that River spent most of the time laughing at her misery like some psychopath.

“Are you alright, Lana? You look really pale...” Zane’s gentle voice asked her as he passed her a bottle of water.

She offered him a weak smile as she took the bottle from his hands. “I’ll survive.” She muttered. She then looked past Zane and glared at River who was looking at her with a smug look on his face.

“What?” he called out when he saw her looking at him.

“Nothing...” she said through clenched teeth.

“I actually did not expect you to enter the haunted house, Lana. What made you change your mind?” Zane asked.

She then straightened her posture and let out a soft laugh. “Just wanted to experience the team’s hard work, that’s all.” She lied. She could hear River stifle a laugh.

“What did you think about it?” he asked her eagerly, looking down at her with those puppy dog eyes.

“Hah...of course, I loved it!” she lied again, feeling the crushing weight of guilt against her chest. She truly did not have the heart to admit to Zane that she had her eyes closed most of the time when she was in the haunted house.

Zane laughed. “I’m glad, but I wished you would’ve entered the haunted house when I was still on duty.” He said with a saddened expression.

Lana did not know what to say. If she told him that she would go tomorrow just to experience it when he was on duty, she had to go through everything all over again and she was not confident that her heart would survive a second trip. She then let out a nervous laugh. But before she could say anything, River walked up to them.

“We should head to the forest soon or we’ll be late for registration.” He said. He did not wait for their reply as he walked away, heading towards the parking lot. Lana and Zane watched him walk away from them in silence.