

Love Me in the Dark - Chapter 12. Bark

RIVER

Something had shifted in the air. Krew seemed kinder, cool, calm, and collected—not that I was complaining. Just maybe, he was apologizing in his own way. I could also sense it, and it was all in

his
eyes as he pinned his gaze at me.

I felt a sudden self-consciousness. The fact that my nipples were reacting to the way he looked at

me, I
wanted to squirm and dance a Kumbaya at the same time that he finally saw me—noticed me.

He hadn't done anything to me, yet I was burning inside out. Those reactions I bottled up for years

were
just started uncorking. If I wouldn't do anything to suppress it, I might burst into a flame.

My face was probably crimson when I came to realize that opportunities like these didn't always drop

z..
my doorstep. I was here for a reason—for his help, and not to satisfy whatever unsated needs I had.

But let us be honest, I missed Krew even though he fired me. Now that I was jobless, homeless,

dimeless,
I badly needed him the most. So I had to agree to his own terms whatever it took. But then he left

the
room without a word before I could present my proposition. Or more likely, he bolted out. Did I just

scare
the big bad wolf? Interesting.

After I freshened up, I knocked on his door, hoping I could talk out of him. Or my true intention was

to see

him shirtless. Jeez, since when did I become so desperate? But I knew the fact that Krew had a

body of a

god, and he always smelled good as if there was a mind-alter component in his cologne.

Unfortunately, he

was still in his clothes, now wearing a big bad wolf look. I swallowed down my self-dissatisfaction.

“Yeah,” he answered with disinterest. Wow. He was definitely back to his old self. Now I regretted

knocking, and all I wanted was to dash out and disappear out of his sight.

“Um.” Think, River. “I was thinking to make us breakfast.”

“Sure.”

“Are you sure you don’t wanna get some rest?” No matter how hot he was, he also looked tired.

“Sure you

could use a long nap.” I wanted to hit myself. I sounded so stupid.

‘I have work to do.’ Of course, he always had.

“Okay.” I left before I could blurt out something inappropriate.

I made us smoky red pepper crispy egg toasts. Just the moment I putting them on the plate, Krew

emerged to this massive classic kitchen with all his glory and chiseled features. I poured coffee into

two

cups while he sat on the stool, wearing a serious expression, still speechless.

“So you have no plan on hiring me again?” Feigning innocent, I sat across him and took a huge bite

of my

breakfast.

“No. I have something else I want you to do.” He didn’t even look at me, and I felt like losing my
game.

I was surprised by the disappointment I felt. I did my best to ignore it and focused back on my
breakfast.

“Anything.”

He groaned his disagreement. “Don’t just agree if you don’t even know what I would be asking from
you.”

“After what I did, look where I am right now. I think we were bound to meet again. It’s like our fates
loomed

together, but I’m still hoping I met you in different circumstances. At least you don’t hate me, or
there’s no

awkward reunion between us.” Gah, what did I just say? Desperate much, River? “I mean, as long
as

there’s no involvement in murdering someone, I’m okay with that.”

‘Its all in the past now. None of us could have foreseen it. And I don’t hate you, River.” Well, that was
a

relief. But I was more surprised that he seemed okay with this arrangement after he came back to
see his

brother. What did they talk about anyway?

“What is it you’re asking me to do?” I sipped my coffee. My face was on fire when he caught me
staring at

him.

“A lot.”

I did my best to hide my shock. "I said anything. So long as you can help me get a restraining order against Briar." I breathed through my nose. "Funny how I could still trust you and your family after

what

happened. But it doesn't matter now, right? As you said earlier, it's all in the past, and the last time I checked, I am the one who's in need."

He rose from his seat. "Follow me."

"Okay." I was more confused, but I followed him to the hallway. He unlocked another door next to his office.

"What's in there?" I asked before he could flick the light.

Wow. I was mesmerized to see what was before me. I didn't have any idea Krew could paint. The

right

question was, was there anything he could not do?

I guessed he was right again. I didn't know anything about him at all. There were tools, paints,

palettes,

empty canvasses, smock, but they looked untouched.

'I want you to paint.' I was sure I heard him right. And it was an order. He was looking at me with

those

dark and burning eyes.

"What? Me? Why?" I blinked when he did not look like he was joking. "I-I can't. I don't—"

"Yes, you can. At least you did this before." Of course, he knew. He mentioned a conducted

background

check. "Why did you stop?"

'I have to pay my bills. I'm not a professional, and I couldn't make it a living,' I told him half of the truth.

"You don't have to be a professional to paint, River. If it's your passion, it's still deep inside you, running in your veins. You can't just forget the things that you loved. Once you hold the brush, your heart, your mind will take you there." Easier said than done.

"Sounds like from your experience."

'I don't paint.' His voice laced with sadness. Krew was like a huge puzzle to me that I didn't even know where to begin solving. Something terrible must have happened to him. I could see it deep in those dark eyes. I just didn't how to crack him open.

'I will if you will tell me one thing about you. Per painting,' I traded.

'This is not up for negotiation, River.' Of course.

My mouth dropped open before I spoke. "Then I won't. You can't just order me around to paint when I stopped years ago."

"You will, River." He pressed his lips together. I suspected it was to stop blurting out something.

I glared at him. "Or what? You won't help me? Then don't! I know helping me doesn't really come in handy. Since I can't pay you, you're making me do something in return—something difficult that I

have to
open old wounds.”

“And here I thought you would do anything!”

We stared at each other for a few moments, then a long unnerving silence followed. “Screw you and overbearing self, asshole. I’m getting out of here.” I walked out of the room. Before I could go far, he

had
me in his grip. All air had left my lungs as I gasped. He loosened his touch to a featherlight, but
every inch
of my skin felt him.

My pulse roared. My heart was in my throat as I saw the blazing desire through his dark eyes. Oh,

my
god.

“You’re not going anywhere.” His voice was thick and urgent. “You still don’t get it, do you?”

“Get what exactly? Because the last time I checked, I am not working for you anymore, so you don’t

have
anymore the right to boss me around.”

“Why did you stop?” His question was dead serious while my brain couldn’t think straight in shock of

what
I just found out.

My bottom lip started to tremble as I tried to formulate my reasons without breaking down, crying. I

was a
complete mess. My eyes stung as I fought hard not to show him my weakness. “Do you really wanna

hear

it? Oh, yeah. Why don't you ask your freaking self?"

Through my blurry vision, Krew stared at me for a moment. I didn't know exactly what he was up to—

why

he had to remind me of my failure.

He swallowed. "I'm sorry."

'Don't be. You should be celebrating. Your family did a pretty bang-up job in ruining my life, my

career, my

future, and my passion."