

Love Me in the Dark - Chapter 7. Charity Case

RIVER

Our dinner would have surprised me if he asked me a bunch of questions, but I was deeply grateful

that

he did not push the issue. We ate in peace. I couldn't live another day with another humiliation than I

already had, so I limited my words to thank you and good night. I was not fishing for a compliment,

but he

did not even comment on my pot roast, considering he knew his way in the kitchen.

I learn something about Krew that probably only a few people knew about it. He disliked pitch black.

His

house was a showroom. I didn't have to wonder if he preferred lights on over lights off. Whoa! Where

did

that come from? Why did I have to think of something obscene? Utterly inappropriate for an

employee. He

also clearly detested mashed potatoes. He didn't drink anymore, and it was a real winner.

He called it a night early, but for sure, he would go back to his boring office and work his ass off. I,

on the

other hand, went to my room after I helped to tidy up his spotless kitchen.

Suddenly, nostalgia hit me in the butt—my life had drastically changed in a matter of a day when I

decided

to run away than facing my own nightmare as Krew would put it.

I doubled check the windows and bathroom, drew the curtain close, and took a deep breath before I
got
into my new bed.

I knew for a fact that I would not win against Briar. When I talked to the cops, they looked at me as if
I was.
insane. Who would believe me anyway? I was a nobody. Considering what I had done to the Selik in
the
past, they must have heard about it, and they never took my complaint as a serious matter.

Krew tightened his security systems, added cameras, and chose a room closer to his. I felt a lot
safer
around him than for the past few weeks of my life. I was grateful, despite what I had done to him, he
gave
me safety and security that anyone could never do.

I checked the time on my new phone before I closed my eyes. It was only past ten.

I ran and ran into the woods like a mortally wounded animal. It was dark. The icy breeze bristled
against
my skin, prickling me.

The pine trees were thick, shadowing the light as I blindly ran through the path. The light seemed out
of
reach. I was running out of air, my lungs constricting.

Under the new moon, a shadow kept following me. I could sense him—he was closer, so close that I
could
feel him behind me. I didn't know why I knew he was a man. It seemed that I knew him, but if there

was

one thing I was sure of, he was dangerous.

I kept going. Something in my head told me to keep going, and that was what I did. Until I missed my

step

against the root protruded on the ground. I tripped, and he caught me.

“No!”

‘Let go of me!’ I was catching my breath, kicking, and hitting the muscular body that was holding me

tight.

Shockingly, he was warm against my cold skin, considering he was just chasing me, and he was

real. The

man was absolutely real, and the smell assaulting my nostrils was quite familiar.

“Hey, hey, hey. River, it’s me.” The man pulled me closer to him, tighter that I could feel his own

heartbeat.

I could smell him. It was his smell—pine, woody, and comforting. “It’s okay. It was just a bad dream.

Calm

now. I would never let anything bad happen to you.”

I was still shaking, crying, and terrified. I was also sweating, yet he was holding me tight, running his

fingers through my hair. It was too late to realize that I was gripping him, hugging him back as if I

found my

haven in him—with Krew.

Crap.

I pulled away before I got too carried away. I was still grateful that he was here when I needed
someone to
hold on to. I wiped away the beads of sweat around my forehead and blinked away the
embarrassment,
but I didn't feel like it anymore as I saw the deep worry in his eyes.

The light was already on. I woke Krew up, probably from screaming. I could feel my parch and
aching
throat as I swallowed.

God, I can't do this. I couldn't keep doing this.

'T'll leave in the morning.' Those were the first words that came out of my mouth as I rubbed my
eyes.

"What are you talking about? Why?" His brows knitted together, confused.

'I can't do this to you.' I pulled the blanket up to my chest as things became more clearer now.

"Do what exactly? How long has it been, River? Have you seen a doctor? Have you talked to
someone
about this?"

'I can't discuss this with you.' I shook my head and pulled my knees, tucked my chin on. I felt
ashamed.

What was I thinking coming over to a stranger's home and asked for help? Clearly, I wasn't thinking
straight.

“Why not? You’re here with me now, in my home, and I can protect you if for once, you’d be honest
with
me.”

‘I can’t’

“You can’t be honest or you won’t talk to me about it? Then how am I fucking going to help you?” His
voice
was firm. He rose from the bed, and I could feel he was vibrating with anger. “Let me get you some
water.”

‘I can’t involve you in my mess.’ I rushed out my words.

He paused and scoffed. “Too late, don’t you think? I already am the moment you stepped into my
house.

You have to trust me, River. If you want this stalking to be over, you need my help. Whether you’d
like to
admit it or not, you need someone like me who has deep pockets and influence to help you against
your
stalker.”

‘I know that. Why do you think I chose to go to Krystyn?’ I spat out, though, I felt a surge of hope.

‘Then let me help you. Talk to me. This isn’t healthy anymore. You can’t live like this, hiding from
your
predator while he is out there. You have to live a life free from distress, not always looking over your
shoulder to make sure that no one is following you. Trust me, I’ve seen my sister struggled. As long
as

you will allow me to help, I will. Now when did it start? Don’t you ever think of lying to me again?’

I met his flaming eyes, then I remembered he did a background check on me. "I dated him for over a month." There was no use in lying anymore. "Then he just appeared at my job without any calls. I did

not

remember telling him where I worked. One time, he was already in my apartment, cooking in the kitchen.

Journey was really mad at me, telling me that I should have asked her first if I gave a key to someone.

Which I never did, by the way."

'I could tell that he knew a lot about you."

"Exactly." Astounded, I stared at him. I realized Krew was right. Why didn't it come to my senses before?

'Then what happened next? Did he go physical? Did he force you?" His voice was raw, it stabbed me right into my gut. He was getting angrier. I could see how hard he tried not to, but blood was already rushing in his cheeks.

I swallowed hard as I stared at him while he was impatiently waiting with tense and silence for my answer.

"No."

"River." He did not believe me. He glared at me with distrustful eyes, his nose flaring before he murmured

something I wished I had a heightened hearing.

'I was attending an event with my boss, and he suddenly appeared uninvited. I almost got fired.

Good

thing my boss knew me better, that I would never lie when my job is at stake. She believed me.

That's how

I broke up with him. That's also how it started. I talked to him to stop seeing me, and he didn't take it

pretty

lightly. I changed my number, changed the lock in my apartment, but he still managed to get inside. I

informed my landlord, but he did nothing. Then I talked to the police, but they couldn't move further

for a

temporary restraining order without any concrete evidence."

"Why is that?"

'Because he did not usually text or call me. I crashed at my co-workers for a few days, but I had to

go

back to my apartment one way or another. Then last week, he found me, threatened to hurt Journey

if I

would inform the cops again."

'That's pretty dire. I promise I would protect you as long as you stay with me. And obviously, you're

not

going anywhere."

I looked down. I didn't know how to thank him.

"Let me handle him."

Here we go again. "What does that mean?" I couldn't let him do something drastic for me. I just

wanted

this stalking to end legally, not involving threats and blood.

“You just have to trust me, River.” I do. Far-fetched, but I did, even though he didn’t believe me. I fell silent, staring wide-eyed up at Krew. “Why? After what I did to you, why are you doing this?”

“You’re not the first person I offered help.” Of course. Now, I was one of his charity cases. His answer was a punch to my gut. He did this out of kindness to help a helpless person. What else was there? He was a good samaritan—the good neighbor.

‘I donated a huge amount of money to the advocates of abused victims in the country anonymously, so what a small money I could spend to help you lock up this psychopath before he makes another innocent life miserable.” He stormed out of the room and slammed the door. Great.