

Nothing Matters, except YOU & Me Chapter

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Heather felt her heart twist with an inexplicable sense of guilt and she turned to look at Matthias in frustration. She hadn't been mocking him earlier, but he was making it sound as though she had deemed him unworthy, and perhaps his over-the-top reaction had something to do with his fragile pride.

"Look, I don't know why you fell for me in the first place, but I hope you can understand that

we are incompatible. You know as well as I do that nothing good could ever come from such incompatibility." She needed to cajole him by breaking things down logically, but she had a feeling that her words were falling on deaf ears.

"Does compatibility truly matter when it comes to falling in love?" Matthias retorted defiantly. Love would not be quite so infuriating if one could make a rational choice on whom to fall in love with.

"Maybe it doesn't for others, but it does to me. It's pointless to be in a relationship if I can't see a future with the person. I need to know that the person is someone whom I could spend the rest of my life with," she explained, giving him a contemplative look as she did so.

Heather was more concerned about equality than she was about love—the relationship would be futile if there was a lack of compatibility between the couple, or if one of them was

better than the other.

"How would you know that I'm not that person you could spend forever with? You've come to that conclusion before you even gave us a shot. I'm not a fickle person, Heather, and if I've made up my mind to be together with you, then I'm in it for the long haul." Matthias disagreed with the reason behind her rejection of him, and he couldn't help but feel indignant. She is convinced that forever would never work out for us and she refuses to give

us a chance.

"You and I are two peas in a pod—we have far too much pride for our own good. I'd cross your line and you'd hurt my pride. Besides, we're both too headstrong and competitive to ever make things work out between us." Once upon a time, Heather had thought about looking for someone who shared her qualities as well but that notion was sanded down to nothing over the years, and she realized that she would much rather be with somebody who

could complement her.

"If you and I are the same, then why shouldn't we be together?" He was baffled by her argument, much like how she was by his.

"I don't want to talk about this anymore. I'm going home now," she declared. She didn't want

to dawdle in the car either. It didn't seem fair that she had to become collateral damage to his insanity.

Matthias, on the other hand, was adamantly clinging onto his rhetoric. He was sure that Heather had feelings for him, however little they might be, which meant that he still stood a

a

chance with her. "I hope you'd consider what I've said today. Chemistry and affection are the tenets of a relationship, and you shouldn't have to think about anything else when you make your decision,"

She merely hummed in response, impassive as she made to barrel out of the car. She could not spend another moment with him in this car, not while it was idling right outside the Langston Residence.

Matthias, too, did not stop Heather as she opened the door and stepped out of the car. She cast him a sideways glance. She had thought she knew him well enough but as it turned out,

they were as good as strangers. After a series of calamitous events, she learned that there was a depth to him that she had yet to explore.

Presently, Heather straightened as she walked through the front door of her family home. Knowing that Matthias was staring at her from where he sat in the car, she refused to turn around. Out of all the possible scenarios that she had imagined might happen between them, his affection for her was not one of them.

After all, who could ever love an enemy? Her head was close to bursting and Robert appeared to have played a central part in her current predicament. At the thought of this, Heather recalled something important—she must demand an explanation from Robert for the incident today.

With that in mind, she quickened her pace and made a beeline for his study, knowing that he

would be there brushing up his fine arts at this hour.

The door to the study slammed open with violent force, and a somber Heather marched into

the room with the purpose of confronting her grandfather.

However, Robert was not angry at her intrusion and instead, he beamed at her as he greeted

cheerily, "Heather!" Upon hearing that, she cringed, finding his disposition a suspicious one.

"You owe me an explanation, Grandpa," she said stonily. Judging from the way he had acted

earlier today, it was clear that he had plans to set her up with Matthias.

She hoped that she was reading too much into the situation but if Robert were to start putting his foot into this, things would only get messier. He had basically cleared a path for Matthias and if the latter was free to pursue her, she would only have a much harder time avoiding him.

"An explanation for what?" he asked, and she was angered that the older man was feigning innocence even now.

Irritated, she demanded, "Why did you suddenly agree to partner up with the Locke Group? And why did you invite him over in the first place?" She wanted nothing more than to leave the Langston Group at that moment.

If her family were to start working together with the Locke Group, then it would only give Matthias the chance to pester her by visiting her daily at the Langston Group under the guise of a blooming partnership.

Unable to imagine such a happenstance, Heather silently vowed to leave the company should Robert really have plans on pushing her and Matthias together.

“There’s been a change of circumstances that warrants the proposal of a partnership,” the old man answered straightforwardly, having thought of a response beforehand.

Puzzled, she pressed further, “What happened to taking advantage of the strife?” It was strange that Robert would abandon his initial plans without notice after all the time he had spent curating them, and it looked like he had made up his mind on it too.

“I’m afraid that’s no longer a viable option, seeing as we can no longer stand on the sidelines. It would be ideal for us to form an allegiance with another in the industry before the Moriartys intervene, and you know that our family could never work together with the Hart Family, which leaves the Locke Group as our next best choice,” he explained slowly. However, as well-structured and sensible as his argument was, Heather still found herself completely dumbfounded by it.

She could tell that her grandfather was hiding something beneath his elaborate reasoning, and she wanted him to be forthright with her. “Grandpa, there’s no need to beat around the

bush here. I have the right to know the truth,” she urged as she marched up to him with a look of grim determination.

“The Moriartys are not easily dealt with and neither is the Locke Group. It makes sense for us to curry favor with the latter at the moment,” he replied somberly, then placed his stationery down and settled into his chair.

“The Moriartys’ stronghold is all the way in Leisfeld! I hardly think they have much say in Bradford City,” Heather countered exasperatedly. She was beginning to think that her grandfather was being melodramatic. As things stood, even if the Moriartys had taken over the whole of Leisfeld, they still wouldn’t wield much authority over Bradford City.

“Don’t underestimate them, Heather. They have their own enterprise in Atrigall City as well, and they’ve slowly infiltrated the Bradford City market,” he warned, believing that Heather had little to no knowledge of the Moriartys and their formidability, which he thought accounted for her lack of fear of them.

“I’d be a fool to underestimate them, but why is it that we’ve never heard of the business empire they’ve built in Atrigall City? Surely that means they’re not as powerful as you say they are,” she protested. The subtext of her argument was clear, in that she did not believe the Moriartys were strong enough in the business world to trifle with the Langstons’ enterprise.

“That’s because there hasn’t been any word of their activities thus far and their business expansion has been kept off the grid. Nonetheless, the reality is that they’ve dominated most, if not all, of Atrigall City’s market and they’re working towards monopolizing the commercial scene there.” Robert, too, had been taken aback when he first caught wind of the Moriartys’ ruthless climb to success. While Atrigall City was comparatively smaller than Bradford City, it was no hamlet.

“Where did you even get the intel?” Heather doubted the accuracy of this information.

Which

of the Moriartys have been disrupting the business circle in Atrigall City if the rest of them were thousands of miles away in Leisfeld?

“The news came from a reliable source. Don’t you trust me at all, Heather?” This was not the first time Robert had been exasperated with his granddaughter’s line of questioning. She was so inherently suspicious of everything and she would not relent until she had gotten the whole truth.

“Grandpa, even if the Moriartys are as rich and powerful as you say, could we not stand on our own against them? Must we form an allegiance with another?” Heather couldn’t help but

feel as if Robert had an ulterior motive for wanting to work together with the Locke Group, and she wanted him to explain what it was rather than hear him talk about the Moriartys.

“Of course we must. We might even have to collaborate with the Hart Family as a desperate

measure,” he said solemnly. He couldn’t let his guard down when it came to the Moriartys. He didn’t want to have to work together with the Hart Family either, and he wasn’t even sure

if he had the courage or the humility to partner up with them.

Upon hearing this, Heather felt as though her mind had imploded. The situation was dire indeed if it could make Robert contemplate a partnership with the Hart Family. She thought about how stubborn the old man was and how he would never willingly choose to be acquainted with them. Looks like the Moriartys are a terrifying entity indeed.

“Could the Moriartys dominate Bradfort City if they wanted to?” She felt oddly frustrated and

her skin prickled at the thought of Caleb’s menacing face.

“It’s hard to say, seeing as no one knows about the strength of their forces here in the city. They’re not to be trifled with, and desperate times call for desperate measures.” A dark look

passed over his face as he thought about the heavy blow the Moriartys had dealt against the Langstons all those years ago. He wasn’t sure if his family could take another hit should the former choose to strike again.

Just then, Heather asked, “Why are they coming after us?” She had gone to the root of the mystery, making Robert falter. It seemed as if he had said something he shouldn’t have earlier.

He stammered, “W-Well...” He had wanted to talk to her about this the day before, but she had left so abruptly that he couldn’t get a word in with her. Now that she had asked about it,

he was suddenly having a hard time composing an answer.

Finally, after a moment of hesitation, he declared, “It’s a long story, so let’s just leave this conversation for another day. Besides, it’s almost time for dinner.” It was going to be difficult

for him to explain the Langstons’ feud with the Moriartys and if he were to be precise in his narrative, it would be even harder to bypass the Hart Family’s role in the whole thing.

Heather did not try to force an answer out of her grandfather as she was in no rush to learn about what had happened in the past. It must have been a dark time, one which revolved around a feud between their families, and it was likely a feud that could not be resolved

even in her time.

"If the Moriartys are more foe than friend, then why were you so courteous with Caleb yesterday?" She was puzzled by how civil Robert had been the day before, particularly when

it came to dealing with a supposed enemy. Unless...

"Surely you would have figured out the stakes in this whole situation," he remarked with a meaningful smile. Putting on an act was part of the business world survival guide, and it was a common strategy for one to be civil with the enemy before striking.

Alas, Heather was not one to be humored. "Grandpa, I've never seen you treat anyone the way you treated Caleb, not even when you were dealing with business elites," she pointed out, standing her ground as she tried to force him to tell the truth.

"It's dinner time now. I'm sure the others are waiting for us to join them in the dining room,"

he said, glancing at his watch. She had been the one to ignore him when he tried to tell her about the feud with the Moriartys, so he didn't see why he shouldn't hold out on her now that

she was so desperate for the story.

However, Heather's hand shot out and grabbed Robert's arm before he could leave the study. "They won't mind waiting just a bit longer, Grandpa. Just tell me what in the world is going on here."

She tugged at his arm like a little girl asking for candy, all the while coquettish and relentless. Robert, on the other hand, gave her a look of mute despair as the both of them stood in silence. At last, with a sigh of resignation, he promised, "We're going to need more time if you want to hear the whole story. We'll talk about this again tomorrow, alright?"

Having thought that he would spill the details, Heather grew disappointed that he remained adamant on humoring her. Disgruntled, she pouted and eyed him with childish resentment.

"Stop pouting. You look like a duckling," he said affectionately as he gently brushed his finger over the tip of her nose, much like how he did when she had been younger.

It was as if they had both returned to the good old days, when a single pout and puppy eyes from Heather were all it took for Robert to compromise. She had been a proud and determined child back then, foreshadowing the adult she would grow to become.

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The years flew by and Heather grew up to be a rose with thorns, prouder and more headstrong than she had been as a child, and with a will that was forged in steel.

"Please just tell me the story, Grandpa. I'm really, really curious about it," she pleaded, her eyes bright with the same eager spirit she had as a child whenever she came upon something new.

"I'll tell you all about it tomorrow, so just be patient until then," he cajoled affectionately, patting her hand to soothe her. "Now, shall we head downstairs for dinner? It's getting late and they won't start dinner without me."

Upon hearing this, Heather let out a sigh of resignation. It looked like he had made up his mind to leave this conversation for the next day, so she was left with no choice but to wait. Now that she thought about it, it wasn't as if she was desperate to learn the truth before the

day ended. I'll just have to be patient, even if it means learning the truth much later than planned, she convinced herself.

With that in mind, she linked arms with her grandfather and they made their way downstairs.

She liked knowing that she was there to help him down the stairs, though the butler did it most of the time. Robert was no longer young, after all, and he had to be extra careful when

it came to descending the staircase. She hated to think of the grim consequences if he were to slip and fall down the steps.

Meanwhile, the rest of the family were already seated and waiting for dinner when they turned to glance at the two figures wending down the staircase. Blake clenched his fists at the sight of Heather holding onto Robert and he cursed deep down, Of course dinner is delayed because of her. Why does everything circle back to her?

When he saw how she was joking with the older man, he grew even more displeased.

Heather had been working in the Langston Group for a while now, but he still couldn't find a

way to crack her sickening perfect façade.

It wasn't as if he could make a big deal of the little mistakes she had made by confronting her. Besides, Robert would always side with her, and Blake doubted if the mistakes she had made were significant enough for him to accuse her of being incompetent.

He had been waiting for the chance to humiliate her, and he wanted to deal a blow so harsh

against her that retaliation would be impossible on her part. However, being patient was a futile effort when he realized he had missed all the opportunities to bring her down. Much to

his dismay, Heather was thriving now and had worthwhile suitors courting her—one of whom was Matthias, the director for the Locke Group and the other was Caleb, the general of Leisfeld.

That being said, Blake was the first to be incensed to see how well Heather was doing, and he vowed to find some way to make her fall from her pedestal.

Presently, Heather and Robert entered the dining room together, and he made her take the vacant seat next to his. The seating arrangement at the Langstons' dining table went according to age, with the oldest in the family naturally seated at the head of the table.

Under normal circumstances, the grandchildren would never be seated next to Robert, but he had clearly made an exception for Heather today.

Heather, on the other hand, wasn't sure why she was given such a privilege. Growing slightly

uneasy at this, she hesitated to take the seat that was otherwise meant for her uncle; even she knew better than to take away an elder's seat at the dining table.

"Well, aren't you going to sit down? The kitchen won't bring out the food until we're all seated, you know," Robert said, beckoning her to take her seat. Heather frowned and did as she was told, albeit unwillingly.

While this was happening, Blake was staring daggers at her, looking as though he wanted to cut her to shreds. She, on the other hand, had never cared for the murderous looks he gave her and she flashed him a triumphant smirk, knowing it would enrage him.

As expected, bitterness rose through Blake when he caught that defiant look on her face, and the anger curbed his appetite. She used to compromise with him just so she wouldn't get into trouble, but now it seemed as if she thrived in trouble and she had no qualms with offending someone as petty as him. It wasn't as if she could win his favor by staying in line anyway.

While dinner was in progress, Robert made sure to ladle Heather's plate with food. It had been a while since he had done this for her, and she recalled how she would grumble about the food he gave her back in her childhood days. It's been so long, she mused at the memory.

Nonetheless, she couldn't ignore the fact that her grandfather was behaving rather oddly, and the alarm bells began to chime incessantly in her head. She had an inkling that something bad was about to happen to her. Meanwhile, Blake was close to breaking his utensils as he watched Robert's interaction with Heather. Seized by wild jealousy, he gritted his teeth as he thought, She's an adult, for God's sake! Why is he still spoiling her like she's a child?

However, Heather and Blake were both so engrossed with their own thoughts that they did not notice the jealous and envious gaze that had fallen upon the former. There had been a shift in Everly's demeanor from the very moment she laid eyes on Caleb, and she only became more twisted after all the nonsense Blake had fed her.

Truth was, Everly was nothing more than a pretty face in the Langston Family, and she had neither extraordinary talent nor outstanding achievements. With her quiet disposition, she was often overlooked in the family and she would have been as good as invisible if it weren't for her beauty.

Unfortunately, the Langstons were all handsome creatures, and Everly's beauty formed part of the general aesthetic of the family. That being said, she had never felt like she belonged in the Langston Family, seeing as everyone else paid more attention to Blake and Heather than they did her. She was painfully aware that most in the family were envious and jealous of Heather, and she so happened to be one of them.

While the Langstons did not interact with Heather much, they still kept an eye on her, though her haughty and icy demeanor kept them from approaching her.

Everly longed to be just like her—accomplished enough to be worthy of Robert's attention. However, she lacked the talent and ruthlessness to emulate Heather's traits. On the contrary, she was timid by nature, and was so demure that she was better off blending into the background.

She wondered how long it would take for her to be as bold and sharp-witted as Heather. Perhaps these were innate qualities that she could never hope to attain.

Before this, she had always looked upon Heather with admiration and envy; the jealousy only came after Caleb entered into the scene. Everly had never believed in love at first sight until she saw him, and having fallen head-over-heels for him, she found that there was little she could do about such sentiments.

She remembered the subtle smile that had played on Caleb's lips when his eyes first fell upon her, and it was that very smile that made her head spin.

Alas, she was nothing more than an interlude to him and when he looked at her, he had regarded her with the same interest as one might have when looking at a pretty bird. Anyone could tell that he only had eyes for Heather, who seemed to have captured his attention without having to lift a finger, while Everly struggled to even get a word in with him.

Given the latter's demure nature, she had a damsel-in-distress quality that could make men fawn over her if she tried. Sadly, Caleb had barely spared her a second glance.

The resentment that had pent up in her afterward snowballed into what she came to know was jealousy. She had never been jealous of Heather before that, regardless of how brightly the latter shone in the family.

Following that, Everly found herself growing ambitious. She wanted to outshine Heather so that Caleb might finally take notice of her, and she wanted his gaze to linger on her and nobody else.

She had seen Heather getting down from Matthias' car earlier that day, which prompted her

to recall the articles that had once been written about them. Indeed, there was even a time when she had believed that the two were meant for each other.

Regardless of how things had turned out, it seemed as if Heather was impassive toward Caleb. A man who was so sorely out of Everly's league was as good as a small fry to Heather, and the thought of this made the former's heart twist with spite. When wild jealousy seized her like that, it was hard for her not to think about what Blake had told her. "Don't you think Heather has outshone us for long enough, Everly? She's always been the brightest in the room and everyone gravitates toward her. How could you possibly be satisfied with remaining in her shadow? For as long as she is around, the rest of us are irrelevant."

His words had resonated with her. Every woman would wish to shine as brightly as the sun, the golden center around which people orbited. Surely no one would want to be plain and unimportant for the rest of their lives.

Unaware of the jealousy and resentment that threatened to consume Everly, Heather continued to see her as a quiet and withdrawn young woman. She couldn't stand most of the Langstons but she had never felt any animosity toward Everly.

Instead, she had always seen Everly as a child, but little girls wouldn't stay little forever.

They

grew up in the blink of an eye and while there were a myriad of reasons that could account for such growth, falling in love remained a prominent one.

Maybe Heather had played a role in Everly's abrupt shift in behavior, and after what felt like a

long time, she found herself torn between thanking her and hating her for it.

Everly would seize onto even the slightest glimmer of hope that Caleb might one day see her, and she clenched her fists as her gaze flickered over from Heather to Blake.

She was outright staring at him. When he finally noticed this and turned to meet her gaze, it was clear to see that they had reached a consensus.

Ah—the crazy things one could do in the name of love, Blake thought when he saw the

determined look in Everly's eyes. He would be sure to use this pawn wisely. Her parents did not have much standing in the Langston Family; they might be good and honest folk, but a family business such as theirs had no room for those who stuck by the rulebook.

As such, Everly's parents did not hold significant roles in the running of the Langston Group. This translated into the girl's low self-esteem, which in turn led to jealousy, and the terrifying

and destructive power of jealousy was such that it drove one to hurt others.

At that moment, it seemed as if everyone at the dinner table was scheming. Heather had no

intention of becoming the center of attention in the family, but Robert's gestures had obviously turned everyone against her.

No one knew of his ulterior motives and when dinner was over, he sauntered over to the backyard with Heather. Upon seeing this, the rest of the Langstons exchanged bewildered looks. Dinner had been dismissed much earlier than usual, and this came after Robert had spent a better part of today behaving erratically.

The backyard featured elements that were at odds with the outlook of the entire villa and with the newly-installed pavilion, the entire landscape mirrored that of an ancient, imperial garden.

Presently, the evening breeze was caressing Heather's face as she sat gracefully in the pavilion with Robert next to her. He was recounting her childhood days, his voice drifting in and out of her ears like how waves lapped on a shore. She nodded as he spoke and occasionally interjected with an anecdote or two.

Then, he heaved a sigh as he said, "I'm getting old, Heather. I won't be able to take care of you like how I did when you were a kid." There was sorrow in his voice when he said that. These days, he found it harder to carry out even the most mundane of tasks, and he grew worried that his time might come abruptly. He hated to think that Heather would be all alone

without him.

Heather never should have been dragged into the feud between their family and the Moriartys, and Robert wanted to make sure that he could protect her, so he needed to tell her the truth behind the strife while he was still around.

"You don't have to worry about me in your old age, Grandpa. I'm all grown up now. I can take

care of myself and I'll make sure to take good care of you too." She was slightly surprised by the turn their idle conversation had taken, and she wondered why her grandfather had become so sentimental all of a sudden. He looked so careworn from these past few years of worrying over the Langston Family.

Her eyes fell on the white streaks that ran through his grey hair and she felt her heart clench.

It was only then that she realized how far along he had advanced in his old age. When she was a child, she had always heard him grumble about how useless his sons were, which was why he had placed all his hopes on his grandchildren.

Unfortunately, Blake was only focused on staying in power, and he wasn't bold enough to partake of the warfare that was rife within this industry. Conversely, if Heather were to be in

charge of the Langston Group, they could very well thrive among their competitors and reach new heights of success.

Heather had never been in the running to succeed Robert, who had spent these years training the heir to the Langston Group. With all the sons in the family, it was impossible for the torch to ever be passed down to a woman.

Having given careful thought to his choice of successor, Robert came to the conclusion that Blake made for the best male candidate. However, there had been many occasions in which the former wanted to be stubborn and leave the company to Heather, but every time he wanted to make such a decision, the courage seemed to drain out of him.

“Blake isn’t a bad person. Should there ever be a day when the company has a crisis, he’s going to need your help to turn things around.” He was no fool. He knew all the tricks Blake had pulled over the years under the belief that Robert did not love him more than he did Heather, when in reality, the older man had always seen Blake as his successor and had trained him so that he might one day take over the company.

Despite the favor that Robert had shown him, Blake still thought of his affection as inadequate. Heather was so much more accomplished than he was and he felt inferior to her. He had always resented her for being better than him in every way but he had never asked himself why he remained second-best to her, and that lack of self-awareness eventually became his fatal flaw.