

Eddie

To think Lawliss said yes to my proposal is beyond what I ever expected. I couldn't wish for more. I know keeping the secret of our marriage from her may cost me, but I'm in too deep to back out now. Josh keeps insisting I tell her, but dare I admit it. I'm more scared than I care to show. Lawliss is nothing if not headstrong, so to prevent disaster I devised a plan to never let it be known. Hence, the proposal.

"Penny for your thoughts?" Lawliss asks, and I turn to her. Her smile is one of the brightest I've ever seen, and I'm beyond thrilled to be the one who puts it there.

"Just wondering how my grandparents will react," I say instead. We're detouring to London to visit them before heading home. Grandpa has tried countless times to come to Louisville, but every attempt has failed because of Grandma's guilt about Mum. Strange as it sounds, I've come to love that guilt. Call me crazy, but it has saved me more than once.

"Am I supposed to dress up or pretend to be someone I'm not? Because I doubt I can." I chuckle.

“After what happened with Mum, they won’t have much left to say. I promise they’ll love you.” I try to reassure her, but it doesn’t quite land. She’ll have to meet them herself to see how childlike my grandparents can really be.

“I doubt your grandfather will, after the way I spoke to him,” Lawliss mumbles, and I can’t help but smile. Every time I think back to how fiercely she defended me, I’m filled with a warmth I can’t put into words. I still remember the way she hung up on him without a second thought.

“You don’t know Grandpa well. Just wait and see. And besides, you’re the one who suggested we visit while we’re on the continent.”

“Don’t I regret it already,” she sighs, starting to turn away, but I gently lift her chin to face me.

“Too late for that now. I know Gramps and Grandma will love you. And if they don’t—then fuck them.”

“Eddie!” she whisper-shouts in reprimand, and I grin.

“Mr. and Mrs. Montgomery, we’ll be touching down in just a few minutes. Could I ask you both to fasten your seatbelts for landing?” the

attendant announces, saving me from her lecture. We buckle in, and I catch Lawliss trying not to react to the title the attendant just used. I smirk and shake my head.

The jet lands smoothly on our family's estate. Stepping down side by side, I place my hand on the small of her back, guiding her toward the house. The butler greets us at the entrance.

"Welcome home, Master Edmund."

I scowl as he takes the bag from my hand. "How many times have I told you to stop calling me that?"

Lawliss giggles, finally relaxing.

"You see what you just caused," I mutter, pointing at her amusement. Philip, the butler, only chuckles as we continue into the foyer, where we are met by Grandpa, who looks stunned to see me, since I never told him we were coming.

"Look who we have here, Adora!" he calls out.

"What is it, Henry? It's late in the evening and you're shout—" My grandmother's voice carries from the hall as she appears, moving carefully with the aid of her silver walking stick, its polished handle

catching the light like jewelry. She stops mid-step when her eyes land on me.

Then she squeals, like a child handed candy, and drops the stick without a second thought.

A laugh bursts out of me, raw and unrecognizable. I don't even realize it's mine until I catch the stares from everyone around me.

"What?" I quip, trying to compose myself, but she isn't having it.

Lawliss, who has been quietly observing the whole exchange, simply smiles. Out of the corner of my eye, I notice Grandpa drawing her close, introducing himself with a gentleness that is reserved for his family and I instantly know she has been accepted.

Lawliss

This might be one of the best decisions I've ever made. Seeing Eddie in his element, in his own space, has been worth everything. Of course Louisville is also his home, but around his grandparents he becomes more of the boy I once knew. Not that I hate the man he's

become—I love both versions of him. But seeing this side again? It awes me.

“Thank you for bringing him back,” Adora says suddenly.

“Pardon?” I blink, snapping out of my thoughts to pay attention. Eddie’s grandparents have been so kind since we arrived. They even asked the chef to prepare dinner just for us, and their warmth makes me miss my own grandparents all the more.

“He’s laughing, smiling and being everything we always hoped he could be. And it’s all thanks to you,” she says.

I shake my head. “I can’t take credit for that. Everything he is now, every smile... those are his own efforts.”

She pats my hand gently before continuing. “You bring more of it out of him. I know what I’m seeing. You and I are both trained to recognize lies and mistrust anything without proof, but dare I say—even without proof—I can tell. You’ve brought my boy back from the brink, and I can’t thank you enough for what you’ve done.”

A lump forms in my throat. *Have I really done something?* Eddie has always been like this with me. Or... maybe I just never noticed how

different he was with everyone else. The wheels in my head start turning. Adora is a retired judge I've always respected, yet I never once connected her to Eddie. Hearing her say these things makes me wonder—what if Eddie is only pretending with me? No. No, he's always been real. If there's one thing I shouldn't doubt, it's his love for me. Or...

"You don't see it, do you?" Grandpa says, joining the conversation. He settles opposite us, the low table between us.

Eddie is still upstairs showering after I convinced him I'd be fine alone with his grandparents, even sealed it with kisses until he gave in.

"That boy has been a shell of himself since his parents died," Grandpa continues. "The way he is now..." He shakes his head, searching for words. "The way he is with you, it's the same as when his parents were alive. I tried everything to bring him out of that darkness. Nothing worked. Not one plan."

Of course, I seem to have witnessed at least one of those miserable plans.

"Please take care of my boy," he says softly. "I know it's a big ask."

“No, it’s not.” My voice steadies. “I’m just glad Eddie had you both to rely on. He speaks so highly of you, and he loves you very much.”

They share a look, then chuckle quietly. Adora lifts her teacup, sips at the now-cold liquid, and sets it back down with a sigh.

Just then, Eddie descends the stairs in his pajamas, and my body instantly wants to leap toward him. He must have read my mind, because without hesitation he crosses the room and presses his lips to mine in front of his grandparents. I kiss him back, brief but full, before nudging him down onto the couch beside me.

“You good?” he asks.

“Never been better.”