



Trade and Affairs

Excerpt

"Where have you been, Ro?" Rochelle allowed her father to pull her up to the front of the crowd. He'd been excited to make the announcement to the hundred corporate associates waiting eagerly. Rochelle already heard the written statement but her show of support was more important than the cheers soon to come. "I feel like my most important people are the ones harder to keep close."

"What do you mean? I'm checking everything out behind the scenes. You know Patrick likes to get heavy on the champagne. Someone

had to tell the single ladies to swing wide to avoid him."

Her father flashed his brilliant smile and shook his bald head. "What would I do without you? I'm on round up duty. After the announcement, it's cake time, and it seems like people are straying. You'd think they'd hang close to taste that chocolate monstrosity." Her father was done bitching by the time he shuffled them both to the front of the gathering crowd. Rochelle sighed in relief when no curious gazes landed her way. Everyone had their eyes on her father or the mammoth-sized chocolate cake that took up a quarter of the serving table. People did want the cake, and judging by their lingering gazes, they were impatient to dive into it.

Porter had been the one to purchase the extravagant cake. Today was his first day back from out of town and he felt compelled to contribute to the celebration in some way. Before the party, Rochelle had made herself scarce. At the time she hadn't been ready to face him: he might ask why she hadn't showed up at his going away party last year. That night they were going to publically been seen as a couple and her father would know they'd been intimate. The press would be there, snapping photos of everyone as Mercury became one of Texas's top awarded logistics company.

She'd chickened out, like a cowardly little schoolgirl. She couldn't face her father as a grown woman or stand by the man she'd come to love. Plus, it didn't matter, the fling she and Porter had before were nothing to be taken seriously. Her father wouldn't approve, plus Porter had left to spend a year in Chicago. He never asked her to go with him, but the nagging thought that he was okay with being seen publically together confused her. Was he ready from them to step out of the darkness? Was she?

Why would Porter be okay with announcing their rough-and-tumble sessions to the world? He hadn't proclaimed love or the desire to make them exclusive. She often wondered if that was his way of doing so without words. It didn't matter, he should've said something or told her that God and everybody was going to be at the good-bye party.

At the time she wasn't ready, so she'd only given him a four word voicemail that said, "I can't do this."

Her lackluster explanation rang pretty clear in her mind every time she thought about him. She wished she could take those words back, even though it probably didn't mean much to him when she walked away. She pushed thoughts of her past choices away, since they wouldn't do any good now.

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