

Alex and Millie

It was a lovely evening. Millie had to admit that enjoyed the decorative touches at the soiree her parents had brought her to for the Electrical Allocation Committee. A clear and warm night had moved the party outdoors, where the guests lingered around with drinks in one hand and some hors d'oeuvres in another. Millie had found a spot on a large couch, underneath a few strings of lights that impersonated the swirling sky above.

She was wearing her new, orange dress, though she decided it was unfortunate how well she blended into the couch. A bandage stuck out on her legs, a reminder of her unbalanced lankiness when she had managed to trip up a staircase earlier that week. Her hair was cut short in an asymmetrical bob, almost like it had been tilted mid cut. A deep mumble caught her attention,

Millie turned her head, but didn't look up at the man standing behind her. She brought her hand up, cupping her hand over her eardrum to hear him better. Millie smiled and brushed her hair behind her ear to try and conceal the motion. "What was that?"

"I'm wondering if you're alone." The deep voice repeated.

"I might be." Millie didn't need to look at him to guess his expression.

"Mind if I join you?"

"I suppose I could stand the company." Millie said. The man moved slowly around the couch and sat next to her. He was a couple years older than her, but Millie could see he was still in his early twenties. He was wearing an olive-green vest with dark brown pants. His dark green shirtsleeves were rolled up to his elbows, displaying an expensive looking watch. He'd slicked his blond hair back with gel, forming a smooth crest on top of his head.

"What's your name?"

"Millicent Beatrice Harlsbon, but everyone calls me Millie."

"Seems like less of a mouthful." The man grinned, folding his arms. "Who do you know at this party?"

"I'm here with my parents." Millie turned and pointed at the couple standing by the punchbowl. "They're vice presidents at the Electrical Allocation Committee. Who do you know here?"

"Almost everyone here. My father is the president of the same committee."

“You’re James Michael Shammish’s son?”

“I prefer to go by Alex. I also tend not to tell people who I am. Ruins the mystery too early for my taste.”

“So this is...your party?”

“You keep touching your ear.” Alex said, more of a question than an observation. “Is something wrong?”

Millie looked down and sighed, playing with the folds of her dress. “When I was a little girl, I got an infection in my ear. I never could hear quite right out of that side.”

“Would anything change if I were to switch sides on the couch so you can hear better?”

“It would.” Millie said, touching Alex’s wrist before he could stand. “But my other ear is completely deaf, so it wouldn’t help much.”

“I’m so sorry.” Alex said, looking away. “I didn’t know.”

“Of course not, I’ve gotten good at hiding it.” Millie smiled a little. “I have a hearing aid, so I can hold a decent conversation. I just can’t hear that well otherwise, so I don’t really bring it up unless people ask.”

“I’ll say. If I hadn’t opened my big mouth, I might never have known.”

“Don’t worry about it.” Millie said. “So you know everyone here?”

“Not by choice.” Alex said, looking over his shoulder at the crowd behind them. “Most of them are only interested in the fact that I’ll be signing their paychecks if I inherit the company from my father.”

“If?”

“I’m not a huge fan of taking my father’s company.” Alex said. “There are other things I’d rather do.”

“Like what?”

“I’d love to travel the world,” Alex said. “See the other countries out there while I’m still young.”

“Like what?”

“All sorts of places,” Alex smirked, rubbing his hands together. “Go visit the jungles of Brazil...hidden monasteries and temples of China. Go see the castles of Great Britain or the plateaus of Australia.”

“Such a romantic.” Millie giggled, rolling her eyes with an exaggerated sigh.

“Hey, it’s a big wide world out there.” Alex said. “I’d rather get out and explore it while I still can instead of being stuck in some office for the rest of my life. What about you?”

“I don’t know.” Millie said, rubbing her chin. “Is marry rich an option?”

“Let’s pretend it’s not. For argument’s sake, of course...”

“Well, then I think I’d like to be a painter.”

“You paint?”

“Nothing spectacular.” Millie shrugged. “But I like painting, so if I can do anything, that’s what I’d pick.”

“Would you want to do gallery work?”

“Well, I don’t want to paint murals, that’s for sure.” Millie said. “I’d like to paint things I could sell one day.”

“You could always do commission pieces for waiting rooms.” Alex suggested, brightening. Millie laughed and nudged Alex with her elbow.

“I’m serious.” Alex smirked. “That’s a whole market that no one thinks to take. You could corner the waiting room scene. Abstracts, landscapes...the sky’s the literal limit! I was once in a waiting room that had a wonderful painting of a sheep on the wall, but I couldn’t find the artist’s signature.”

Millie laughed and let the silence hang for minute. There were a few ambient sounds coming from behind her, but she could barely hear any other part of the party.

“You know,” Alex said, leaning forward, “people might get suspicious if we’re sitting here together...away from everyone else.”

“Eh, let ‘em talk.” Millie said. “People are going to talk by virtue of you talking to me. Besides our parents would probably push us together if they got the chance.”

“No boyfriend then?”

“Sort of. I have a corgi at home. Roscoe doesn’t really like the idea of other men in my life.”

“You should get him together with my mother.” Alex said. “She feels the same way about other women in my life.”

“Is she here?” Millie looked around.

“She’s over there.” Alex motioned behind him. “She’s standing by my father’s side.”

Millie turned toward the rear of the room and looked where Alex had directed. The woman to Mr. Shammish’s left looked away quickly, realizing she’d been caught snooping on her son. Millie looked over at her own mother. Her mother smiled, winked and looked back to her father.

“Right on time.” Millie shook her head. “My mother is probably planning our wedding already.”

“If you’d like, I could leave you alone.” Alex said. “Or we could cause a big scene, put a stop to any rumors. That’s always fun.”

“If you get me a drink, I’d be happy to throw some of it in your face.”

“And ruin my good shirt?” Alex put a hand on his vest, shocked by the suggestion. “Perish the thought. I guess we’ll just have to handle the rumors as they come. But since there are going to be rumors no matter what, perhaps I could get your phone number?”

“Wouldn’t I show up in the staff directory?” Millie asked, smiling. “Or do you prefer the challenge of the hunt?”

“I prefer having interesting conversations with fascinating people.” Alex said. “And if I’m going to spend 10 hours a day in the office, I might as well spend most of it on the phone with you.”

Millie smiled and brought her hand to her ear. “We could certainly try.”

“Sorry, I forgot.” Alex said. “Big mouth, remember?”

“You make it hard to forget.” Millie said. “But I do enjoy nice conversation from time to time. Got a pen?”