

Chapter One

“I need help.”

Oliver stood with his arms folded behind her as she waved two dresses on hangers in front of a floor-length mirror. Positioning each dress in front of her body, she sighed. Oliver opened his mouth to respond, but before he could respond, she interrupted.

“Nevermind. I think I'm going to go with this one,” she said holding the black and green dress up to the light. “Yeah,” he responded as he continued to type.

Anne Marchand was the Program Director at the prestigious World Institute of Language. As Program Director she was responsible for planning, designing, and implementing language studies, teaching, preservation, translation, and internationalization efforts.

The Institute, which it was normally called, also afforded Anne the opportunity to attend many swanky affairs. Tonight, was one of those occasions, an awards ceremony honoring the global language community and those who had contributed to this community.

As usual, she fretted for what felt like an eternity over what she would wear. Yet, Oliver understood the real reasons for her anxiety. Anne was scared about her nomination for the prestigious Vanguard in Leadership Initiatives award. Tonight's award ceremony was her first time being nominated despite the many years she had dedicated to global language development programs and initiatives.

He was accustomed to decoding her behavior. Tonight was no different. He smiled to himself then made his way back to his desk. Taking a seat in his gray adjustable desk chair, he slid the chair up to his minimalist rectangular light oak wooden desk with metal legs.

He had a few more work fires to put out before he could it a day. Oliver's workday rarely ended without being passed out on his laptop. It was five thirty and he had already worked twelve hours without taking a lunch break.

As the Program Manager under Anne's leadership, Oliver spent most of his days acting as a liaison for meetings, assisting in the development of language programs, and developing training programs. He also spent a significant portion of his workday assisting in development and implementation of international engagement, outreach strategies, and scholarship programs for language students, PhDs, instructors, and advocates of language programs.

While Anne remained vexed over her dress selection, Oliver worked on the agenda for an upcoming conference. Though Oliver empathized with Anne's anxiety over the event, he often grew impatient with her lack of consideration towards his own worries. The amount of work he performed during a week was sometimes overwhelming. Yet, she seemed to share none of his concern.

“Stop daydreaming. I need your full attention.” Despite years of working with Anne, she refused to treat him as a colleague. Instead, she preferred barking out commands.

“Daydreaming is not one of the many tasks I perform,” he started, “but you have my full-”

“Which dress do you think is best for this international indigenous language preservation ceremony tonight,” she interrupted.

Oliver looked at her incredulously. "I thought you made your decision a few minutes ago." The woman was incredibly competent and strong, yet Oliver despised her entitled attitude. "I have, in fact, not done so or I wouldn't be asking." He removed his glasses and rubbed his eyes. "Okay, the green one," he offered, eyebrows furrowing.

"Are you paying attention? There is no green one." Anne often disregarded his opinion, full array of his skills, and wasted much of day with secretarial tasks. He was a linguist, social scientist, and expert who had managed several language programs throughout his career.

His boss' incredulous responses to the relatively trivial matter left him rubbing his temples.

"Well, gosh. Maybe, I'm colorblind," he pursed his lips and widened his eyes. She waved a dismissive hand, starting to walk away. She stopped dead in her tracks. "Be at my house at nine o'clock." His mouth fell. She turned to face him.

"What? Are you serious?" His eyebrows rose so quickly, they nearly flew off his face. "As always. Do you have a tuxedo," she asked as he placed his hands on his forehead.

"I have attended several of these events with you in the past. Of course, I have a tuxedo."

"Okay, well, be there at nine o'clock on the dot," she repeated. There was no hint of a smile on her lips.

She turned once more and walked away.