

Cupid's Beau ~ Alicia Dean ~ Excerpt

Aphrodite's exquisiteness made the woman in Grant's restaurant look like a rusted trumpet. She had a blonde, ethereal beauty, eyes the color of the sky, flawless ivory skin, and a body that would cause a saint to stray. She wore a silky white toga trimmed in gold that flowed around her body like mist.

Ivy sat nervously on a fluffy, bejeweled chair, tapping her foot on the cottony floor.

Aphrodite paced in front of her crystal desk, her lovely face drawn in a scowl. "Ivy, is what Meg said true? Did you really ruin Mr. Crawford's last chance to find love?"

Ivy swallowed a knot of tears. The only thing worse than being a lousy, sneaky Cupid was disappointing Aphrodite. "Yes, ma'am. I did."

"Why? Why would you do something so...so terrible?"

Ivy shrugged. Misery weighted her shoulders, made her want to sink into a puddle and disappear. "I wasn't thinking. I just—acted."

"Your impulsiveness has ruined a man's life. Do you have any idea how serious this is? How horrible it is for a human to go through life without love?"

Ivy blinked back tears. "I know."

"He's a special case, too. Raised his sister on his own after his mother left. Because his father was so busy searching for a love to replace the one he lost, he ignored his children. The two of them grew up lonely, feeling abandoned, with only each other to turn to. That's why Mr. Crawford is so dead set against love, why he so desperately needs our help. He saw what the search for love did to his father, and he wants no part of it."

"Yes." Ivy's heart ached for the little boy Grant Crawford had been. For the lonely man he'd become. For her role in making him lonely for the rest of his life.

"Love is a powerful emotion. The most powerful of them all. It causes people to do the most outrageous things. But it also brings the most joy, the most satisfaction. More than you can ever imagine."

"And I've stolen that from him. I wish there was something I could do."

"There is."

Ivy lifted her head and stared at Aphrodite. "There is? But he only gets three chances, right? That was his third?" In spite of her genuine guilt over what she'd done, the thought he might still find love, might be with some lucky woman, triggered that same unpleasant feeling in the pit of her stomach.

"This is a special circumstance and calls for special measures. The three chance rule is in place for those who continue to throw away the opportunities we give them. If they are too closed off, too jaded, or just too foolish to grab onto love when we give them the chance, then that's on them. But, you are the one who sabotaged his final chance. As a matter of fact, you are the reason he needed a third chance."

"I know. I'm sorry. So, we give him more chances? I promise, I won't interfere again." She had to keep her promise. No matter how much it hurt.

"Not exactly. We can't apply the usual method, you've seen to that."

"Then what method?"

Something in Aphrodite's expression told Ivy she didn't want to hear about the other method.

"You shall travel to Earth and make sure Mr. Crawford finds love."

"What? Travel to Earth?" Ivy's knees weakened. She'd never been beyond the clouds. This was her home. Her sanctuary. Earth was crowded and dirty and dangerous...

"That's right. You have until Valentine's Day to help him find his soul mate."