



Validation

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Brittany Gates | support@brittany-gates.com

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The award ceremony saved the best recipient for last: Myself.

I sit in the middle of the front row, crossed legged, my freshly-pressed black tuxedo shining from the theater's light. My date looks just as beautiful as me as she sits to my right, her cream sequin dress sparkling also from the theater's lights.

The speaker on stage talks about me and all of my accomplishments. I listen closely to make sure he hits all the notes my assistant gave him. Even though the speaker is an intelligent man who knows of me and my accomplishments, I wanted to be certain he spoke correctly about me to the audience. Thankfully, he was open to the help and even worked with my speech-writer. I should use him in the future if I need another introduction.

My date rubs my hand, stealing my attention from the speech. I shoot her a stern look and slightly loosen my grip from hers. She's a smart gal and learns quickly not to seek my attention at this moment. I'm able to reconnect to the speech without an issue. And since I already know the contents I know it's almost over. So I ready myself to walk on stage and uncross my legs.

"Enough of me talking about our esteemed guest. It's time to hear from the man of the hour: Oslo Tang!"

I stand up, smooth out my tuxedo jacket, and walk toward the stairs to the stage. As I near the stairs I hear some boos. Then the boos get louder as I walk across the stage toward the podium where the speaker stands, clapping. When I reach him he shake hands and the speaker leans in close to me to speak.

"Oslo, I have no idea why the audience is booing."

"Don't worry. I'll get them to stop."

The speaker nods and releases my hand. I take my position behind the podium as a sizable part of the audience continues to boo me. Through the bright lights I can see some in the crowd boo and flash obscene hand gestures. My mood darkens but I keep smiling so these cretins don't see their actions have an effect on me.

"Thank you for that glowing introduction, Malcolm. However, it appears some in the audience disagrees with your characterization about me."

The audience replies with more boos but others in the crowd try to drown them out by clapping and cheering.

"I would also like to thank the organization for bestowing me this award."

The boos increase in volume, causing me to pause and to lookout into the audience again. My smile weakens but I force myself to continue.

"I worked tirelessly to...to help those needing help. And, and I never expected my actions...um, my actions to be rewarded this way. I never sought out to try to win this award."

"LIAR!"

"Who said that?!"

The audience goes silent finally. I wait for an answer.

"I did."

My eyes lock onto a tall, skinny man wearing a generic button-down shirt tucked into basic black pants. His black tie lays limp against his chest.

"Explain your charge. How am I a liar?"

"You only help others whenever it benefits you. And whenever that help can be televised or recorded for the public to see."

"So you take offense with how I help others because I would like my actions recorded for the world to see? That's a short-sighted and moronic viewpoint. I help the less-fortunate and make my actions known so I influence others to help their fellow neighbor."

The tall, skinny man smiles at me in response. This confuses me and makes me feel slightly uncomfortable.

"You are a great speaker, Mr. Tang. You always win over audiences, until now."

I move to answer but then I see security guards rush through the crowd toward the tall, skinny man.

"No, wait, stop!"

The security guards freeze in place and look over at me.

"Mr. Tang, we are only doing our job to remove the heckler."

"Wait a moment: I still have questions for him."

"All right, sir."

"What is your name?"

"You don't care about my name at all, Mr. Tang. You only care that I don't like you. That the people who booed you tonight don't like you."

"Fine. Be a coward. People like you mean nothing to me."

"Yet, you stopped this entire award show to talk directly to me."

"If you hate me so much, why attend this event? I would not waste my money purchasing a ticket to boo a man I hate."

"I don't hate you, Mr. Tang. I bought my ticket to support the other individuals accepting awards tonight. Once you were added to the event's lineup at the last minute did I come up with the idea to boo you. I expected to be the only one to boo you but I see I was wrong."

"Take him away now."

"My command elicits another round of loud boos from the audience. I slam both my fists on the podium and scream: "STOP IT! STOP BOOING ME!"

The audience goes silent again except for the tall, skinny man. He laughs as the security guards grab him.

"Why are you laughing? What's so funny?"

"The great Oslo Tang, a genius who will save the world. A billionaire from his inventions. And a generous philanthropist who uses his wealth and connections to help the needy. You, Oslo Tang, have much more than us regular people yet you're no different than us. To think you

were above the need of validation because you achieved so much. You're not. And that's why I laugh."

I look at the tall, skinny man as the security guards lead him out of the theater until I remember I'm on stage to accept my award. I look over to Malcolm, who now stands several feet away from me. Although his head looks at me, his eyes won't meet mine.

As I open my mouth to speak again some people in the audience restart booing. I literally bite my tongue to keep from screaming at them. As hot blood fills my mouth I look around for help. I know I'll get none from Malcolm. I look out into the theater for more security guards and see none. The only thing I can do is leave and that is what I do, leaving my award behind.