Near the end of *An Academic Affair,* Lyons University – the university Sadie and Jonah work for – tries to push forward an agenda called "Renewniversity", which will see many people (including Jonah) lose their jobs.

Sadie turns to Chess to help them fight a legal battle (the first step in the two sisters repairing their relationships). But her friend and union rep Julia also helps make Sadie and Jonah the stars of a media campaign designed to draw attention to the poor treatment of staff in universities – and she draws on the help of her ex-husband and his partner to do it, who might be very familiar to you if you've read *Not Here To Make Friends*…

An Academic Affair **Bonus Scene**

Sadie

I didn't get starstruck easily. I had met most of the biggest scholars in my field at various conferences over the years, and while I hero-worshipped plenty of them, I'd always managed to keep it together. All that time staring down Professor Fisher and his hatred of my work had made it easier being cool and calm and collected around people with friendlier attitudes towards it.

The day we did our media shoot with Murray O'Connell and his partner Lily Ong, though, I just about lost my mind.

"That's Lily Fireball," I said, elbowing Jonah repeatedly when I spotted them, Julia, and a small camera crew approaching us across the campus lawn. "Oh my god, that's *Lily Fireball*!"

I'd tried to explain to him who Lily Fireball was ("literally the most iconic reality TV villain of all time," I'd said, practically sending him toppling glasses-first into the couch in my haste to shove him onto it and bring up the first episode of the most recent season of *Marry Me, Juliet*, "but she ended up revealing in the reunion that she was actually in love with the producer – Julia's ex – the whole time, and you don't even understand, darling, it was one of the most incredible moments of reality TV *ever*"), but he hadn't really got it. He might be in most ways an ideal husband, but some part of Jonah would always be a tweedy little snob.

I was glad to have him beside me, though. His hand on the small of the back kept me steady as Murray and Lily (Lily Fireball! *Lily Fireball!*) asked us questions, so they could best work out how to approach our story in the two-minute media package they were putting together for us as a favour to Julia. "We need to work out which elements to emphasise and de-emphasise, so we can tug at the right heartstrings," Murray – a compact dark-haired man with a cool-eyed assessing stare – explained. "There's a big difference between a real-life romance and a love story you can tell on TV."

Mostly I was busy being starstruck, but the part of me that was a scholar wanted to sit him down and ask him approximately infinity questions about that.

Some of the elements they discarded made Jonah bristle. “That’s important nuance, though,” he protested, when they decided to gloss over the partner hire aspect. “I wouldn’t have got this job without Sadie.”

“Julia, you’re relatively impartial,” Lily said. “Lay it out for us. Just say you and old mate –” she nudged Murray with her elbow, “– had stayed married when you got your job. If you’d wanted to bring him over on partner hire, could you have?”

“No,” Julia said. “Partner hire only happens when the partner is appropriately qualified. And brilliant as you are, Murray –”

“– I’m not an academic,” he finished. “Great. Okay. That’s definitely not relevant, then. So –”

“Yes, it is!” Jonah insisted.

“Mate, no it isn’t,” Murray said. “I get that the reality is complicated, but this is a broad-strokes medium. Subtext –”

“– is for cowards,” Julia and Lily said in unison.

His analytic gaze turned amused for a moment as his eyes flickered between them. “Exactly.”

I twined my fingers through Jonah’s and pressed my lips to his shoulder. “You can tell me all the footnotes you would have added later,” I promised him.

“This, though, we definitely can use,” Lily said, waving her hand up and down as she gestured at us. “All this cosy body language? Half domestic, half desperate? ‘I’ll die if I’m not touching you in at least four places’? TV gold.”

Oh my god. Lily Fireball approved of me.

“Absolutely,” Murray agreed. “We need to go for a sort of two-people-against-the-cold-cruel-world thing here. You’re the academic Romeo and Juliet, and the university is this big unjust unfair heartless force trying to tear your perfect love apart.”

“Fisher,” I said, as Jonah’s fingers tightened in mine, “don’t you dare say anything about Shakespeare right now.”

I’d said it under my breath, but Murray heard me. “Fisher?” he said sharply, looking at Julia.

She sighed. “Brother.”

Murray raised his eyebrows.

“Hey,” Lily said, snapping her fingers in front of his face. She was wearing an engagement ring, I noticed, with the most enormous ruby I had ever seen. “Head in the game, handsome. We’ve got a lot of work to do here, and only about six hours until we’re supposed to catch our flight back.”

Then she turned to us. “Can either of you cry? We can use menthol if we need to, but it always looks better if you can do it organically.”

Neither of us were sure if we could, but I managed it, no menthol required. “Jonah’s one of the only people I have in the world,” I watched myself say in the finished clip when Julia sent it to me a few days later, voice breaking. “My mother died. My father left. Apart from my sister, he’s – he’s…”

“Shhh,” screen Jonah said, kissing my temple. “It’s okay, darling.”

“You’re all I have,” screen Sadie whispered back to him. “I can’t lose you too.”

We’re going to start distributing this on union social media channels tomorrow, Julia texted me, *but M&L are already circulating it to some of their news media contacts, so be prepared for a wave of interview requests.*

We’ll brace ourselves, I texted back. *Thank you so much for doing this. I know it must be weird, hanging out with your ex and his new partner.*

Not weird at all 😊, she replied. *We split up years ago, and we’re still good friends. It was nice to see him.*

It had clearly been at least a little weird, judging by the expression on Murray’s face when he’d realised Jonah was related to Elias, but I wasn’t about to say that.

*And M&L are *very* good at their jobs,* Julia texted, *so the chances of this going viral will be high.*

Fingers crossed we can use it to save Jonah’s job, I replied, *and a bunch of other people’s too.*

The first interview request came about ten minutes later. Within an hour, they were in the double digits. As an avid watcher of *Marry Me, Juliet*, I’d already known Murray and Lily were extremely good at what they did, but my goodness, they clearly didn’t fuck around.

“What we’re negotiating here is called the two-body problem,” I explained the following night, as Jonah and I did an interview for a popular night-time news panel show. “This is something that a lot of academics in relationships with each other face. There are so few permanent jobs in universities that the odds of two people getting a job in the same location – if they can get a job at all – are astronomically slim.”

I glanced at Jonah, leaning my forehead briefly against his cheekbone before looking at the camera again (*your body language is one of the best assets in your arsenal,* Lily had told me when I’d got up the courage to ask her for interview tips, *make sure you use it*). “We thought we’d beaten the odds and managed it,” I said, “but now the university is trying to pit us against each other. To make us go head-to-head for a job in a kind of Hunger Games situation. To effectively force us to make a choice between our marriage and one of our careers.”

“You’ve indicated that’ll be your career if it comes to it, right, Jonah?” the interviewer asked. “That if the university pushes through with its Renewniversity – my goodness, that’s a terrible name – proposal, then you won’t re-apply for your job?”

“That’s correct,” Jonah said.

He put his arm around me. I laced my fingers through his.

“While I’m a career academic, and I’m deeply dedicated to and passionate about the work I do,” he said, “I have no appetite at all to compete with my own wife.”

“How incredibly romantic,” the interviewer said.

“But we should make it clear that we’re far from the only people affected by the Renewniversity agenda,” Jonah said. “This isn’t a problem limited to our institution either. The reason there are so few permanent jobs is because of the rampant casualisation of higher education. Only one in four university workers have secure jobs, and it’s those insecurely employed people that are always the first targeted when it comes to eliminating positions. Casual academics are always the first casualties.”

It was so, so hot that my husband – for all the ivory tower privilege with which he had been raised – had always been such a staunch union man.

I wasn’t the only one who thought he was hot, either. “Look at this,” I told him the next morning over breakfast, showing him my phone screen. *Is this the country’s most romantic man?* was the headline.

Jonah blushed bright red. I laughed.

“That shouldn’t be the story, though,” he protested. “‘Look, this man loves his wife’ isn’t the point. It’s –”

“I know, I know, darling, I know how you feel about nuance. But I promise, all the good stuff we said made it into the article itself. And this kind of thing is the reason why we’re the face of the anti-Renewniversity campaign. We’re the hook. People love a love story.”

My phone buzzed. It was Julia. *Great coverage today! M said well done – strong balance between story and talking points.*

“See?” I showed Jonah my phone.

It buzzed again. “Well, that I disagree with,” he said.

I looked at the second message. *L agreed but said not to wear that black jumpsuit in TV spots again,* Julia had written. *In her words: “as a professional at being one, it’s too bitch-coded”.*

“I love that jumpsuit on you,” Jonah grumbled.

“I’m yet to find an outfit you don’t claim to love on me, Fisher.” I patted his hand. “If Lily Fireball gives me fashion advice, I’m going to take it. Maybe I should look into getting some tweed.”

Jonah blinked.

Blinked again.

“Oh, you *really* like that idea, don’t you?” I said, grinning.

“When’s our first interview?” he asked. “Do we have time to go back to bed?”