

Keira narrowed her eyes.

The air was tight with tension, both sides' bodyguards wound up like springs, as if a single spark would set off a war.

Lena lifted her chin proudly, looking down at Keira and Lewis with smug disdain. "Cross me and there's only one way out for you—dead."

Scarlet outranked her as part of the direct line, so Lena couldn't touch her easily. But two outsiders? That was another story.

Besides, with her father standing here today, even Thomas wouldn't be able to shield them. After all, her aunt was the current head of the family.

The direct line had lost its edge.

Keira kept her gaze steady on Lena, then shifted it to the man at her side. That had to be Mason South, younger brother of the current head.

Fox had once warned her about him—ruthless, the kind of man who rarely moved but, when he did, it was always a killing blow.

Would someone like him really show up just because she and Lewis ticked off Lena?

Something didn't add up. And just as that unease settled in, a voice rang out.

"Lena! I knew you couldn't let this go!"

Scarlet's voice carried across the tension. She came running to Keira's side, glaring furiously at Lena. "If you've got a problem, come at me. Bullying others doesn't make you tough."

After Keira had been dragged off, Scarlet had fought tooth and nail to shake her guards, finally breaking free just in time.

She'd made it—Keira hadn't been shipped out.

Scarlet shot a look at Lena, lips curling. Typical. Couldn't handle a little argument without running to her father.

Lena rolled her eyes. "Since when do I need your permission to deal with two vagrants?"

"You—" Scarlet planted her fists on her hips, bristling like a fighting rooster. "If you want to kill them, tell me what law they broke. Our family's territory doesn't allow cold-blooded murder."

"Murder? So what if I do? What can you do about it? Run to the head of the family and tattle? And by the way, every law in this country falls under my father's authority."

Her tone dripped with arrogance, her expression one of someone long accustomed to privilege.

Keira pressed her lips together, silent, her focus locked on Mason.

Thomas's eyes never left him either.

The two men stood apart, letting the young women squabble like schoolkids, making no move to interfere.

"Enough," Thomas finally broke in.

But speaking first was a mistake.

Scarlet clamped her mouth shut at once, then leaned toward Keira. "See that speedboat? If they make a move, I'll keep the guards busy. You two head straight for it."

Keira touched her hand lightly, but didn't answer.

Lena caught them whispering and flared with anger. "I'm arguing with you, and you've got the nerve to talk to someone else? You're both whispering about me, aren't you?"

She grabbed Mason's arm, tugging hard. "Dad, just kill them already!"

Mason shot her a flat look, his voice low and edged. "Quiet."

The warning in his tone sent her shrinking back, silenced.

Then Mason flicked his hand. At once, the guards tightened the circle, weapons raised.

Scarlet stiffened, eyes on him, as Mason stepped forward, slow and deliberate, until he stopped in front of Thomas.

"Thomas," he said evenly, "you're coming with me."

Keira's pupils contracted. Her head snapped toward Thomas.

Just as she suspected.

Mason hadn't come here over a squabble with Lena. His target all along was Thomas South.

Scarlet froze, staring at him in disbelief. "Uncle Mason... where are you taking my dad?"