

Claimed by my Brother's Best Friends

Chapter 28

Alyssa

"Big brother, can you pass the salt?" My voice is laced with artificial sweetness, dripping with sarcasm. We're all seated around the table, a thick, toxic cloud of tension hanging in the room. Even Sebastian hauled ass after serving our plates.

Gray's shock, anger, and betrayal are written all over his face as he slams the salt shaker down in front of me.

"Thanks," I mutter, forcing a smile that feels more like a grimace.

"Hey Zuri, let's go upstairs and play with some toys," Niko suggests, standing up after practically inhaling his food. He glances at me for permission, and I give a slight nod.

"Where are you going?" Gray demands.

"Anywhere but here," Niko shoots back, darting out of the room with my baby in his arms. Mason stares after him, possibly considering joining, but remains seated.

I'm surprised King hasn't left yet either. There's no reason for him to sit in here. It's not like I'm going to decide to go with Gray, especially after this. Honestly, right now? Fuck my brother.

It's crazy when I trust my former bullies more than my own flesh and blood.

Gray scowls at me from across the table. "I can't believe you hid a baby from us. I missed seven months of my niece's life and for fucking what?" he growls.

Christine places a hand over his, her voice a soft murmur. "Calm down, babe. Give her a chance to explain."

I'm sorry, who asked for her input?

I snort bitterly. "That's rich coming from you, Gray. I just learned you got married, and you made sure your gang didn't tell me."

Gray snarls, his voice low and seething with barely-restrained fury. "You know, when mom was dying, she kept asking for you. I didn't even know what to tell her, but now I know you let her die without telling me or her that you were pregnant."

"Shut the fuck up!" I snap, my voice trembling as tears sting my eyes, the pain of his words sinking in deep.

It wasn't my fault.

I yank my shirt over my head, revealing the fading yellow bruises scattered across my chest and stomach. The room falls into a suffocating silence, but I start talking before I lose my nerve.

"I planned to go to mom's funeral," I say, taking a steadying breath. "But the night before, Isaac beat me so badly that I had a miscarriage. My eyes and lips were swollen, and the cramps and bleeding went on for what felt like forever. He...he didn't know that I was pregnant. Zuri was only a few months at the time, and maybe he would've gone easy on me if he knew...but he didn't."

Revisiting that memory is like tearing open an old wound, more like a scab that has barely fucking healed, but if Gray's going to throw Mom's passing in my face like that, I might as well share my truth.

It feels like the only sound in the room is my breathing as I continue. "Now, I know you're probably wondering, 'How did she get pregnant again so soon?'. A strangled laugh bubbles up my throat as I throw my hands up theatrically. "Well, I was forced to have sex a week after having a baby. The one time he was too drunk to be disgusted by my body, he wanted to fuck me in the ass, but when he couldn't get past the hemorrhoids, I guess he settled for my bloody, barely-healed vagina."

Okay, I'm oversharing a bit now, but fuck it.

Gray's features are clouded with shock and disgust. I'm sure King's and Mason's are no better, but I refuse to look at them, to see the pity in their eyes.

"Why the fuck...Why did you stay with him?" Gray asks, his voice hard.

"I had my daughter's life to think about, among other things," I reply, forcing the words from my constricted throat. "I thought he loved me, and that if I did what he wanted, he would stop hurting me."

He clenches his jaw. "And when did the abuse start happening, Alyssa? When did he first hit you?"

"Our wedding night," I admit, gnawing on my bottom lip. "He saw me alone with King, Niko, and Mason, and he got angry." I feel King tense beside me, his teeth grinding together. "It was just a slap, and I thought it would end there, but then he started getting angry at any little thing."

"And you were stupid enough to not leave then?" Gray asks callously.

Stupid. If he calls me that again, I might just fucking lose it. I tried so many times to get away, but Isaac was always one step ahead, ready to beat me back into compliance.

King rises from the table, his shadow looming over us like a dangerous storm cloud. His fists clench, a muscle in his jaw jumping rhythmically as he fights to say in control. "Gray, I swear to God—"

Without thinking, I reach out and place a hand on King's chest, my eyes pleading with him to stop.

Yeah, what Gray just said stung, but I can defend myself. And I don't need them getting into a fight or some shit over me. I don't know what my brother could do against someone like him—I mean, he's literally fucking terrifying when he's angry, but I'm not taking any chances.

King's eyes soften slightly when they meet mine, and he slowly sits back down, lifting his drink to his lips while still glaring daggers at my brother.

Gray sighs in frustration. "I just don't understand, Alyssa. We used to talk on the phone a lot. Why didn't you say anything?"

"For one, he monitored those calls. And two, he succeeded in his goal to isolate me from my family and friends. Everyone thought I no longer cared about them, and in turn, everyone forgot about me." I pause, swallowing hard as hot, silent tears finally spill over and run down my cheeks. "He could've killed me, and my own brother wouldn't have noticed for years."

Guilt flickers in Gray's eyes but vanishes just as quickly. "These excuses aren't good enough," he retorts, slamming his fist on the table. "He was hitting you. He wanted to kill you and your child. Do you not have any motherly instincts?"

"Babe, for some women, that isn't a natural thing," Christine murmurs to him. Her eyes flicker to me with a mix of pity and something else—maybe doubt. It's subtle, but I can feel it, and it makes me want to scream. Who the hell is she to judge me?

I hate her already.

I can't even find the energy to respond. I realize there's no point in trying to explain anything else to him. He's not listening, and it feels like I'm talking to a fucking brick wall.

My heart throbs painfully as frustration and anger course through me like venom. "Y-You know what...I'm staying here," I announce, my voice breaking as I glower at my brother. He might try to drag me out, but I know King would stop him. "And until you're ready to apologize, I won't speak to you. In fact, I don't want to see you here again."

I know this is King's house, but I'm kinda on a roll here, and the words spill out before I can stop them.

Without waiting for his response, I stand up from the table and storm upstairs, fresh tears streaking down my cheeks. Each step feels heavier than the last as the emotions I've fought to suppress crash over me in waves, threatening to pull me under.