

Chapter 42

Alyssa

I sit in the backseat beside Zuri, who's babbling happily and calling for her "Nee-koo" between bites of her teether. The familiar streets towards my childhood home are quiet, almost too peaceful for the boulder forming in my gut. King's driving, and Niko's riding shotgun, unusually quiet. The tension in the car is suffocating, a silent promise that nothing good is about to happen.

King hasn't said a word since before we left the house, his grip on the steering wheel tight enough to make his knuckles white. I don't like it. It's like he's shutting me out, going through the motions of delivering me to Gray without a fight.

"Guys, I'm not staying there, right? Like, Gray isn't going to order you to lock me in a room and fetch all our stuff?" I joke, but there's a tremble in my voice that I'm sure they can hear.

It sounds exactly like something this new Gray would do.

King tenses, his eyes meeting mine in the rearview mirror. "Do you think I would let him take you away from me?" he asks, a malicious edge to his voice.

"I don't know," I admit, chewing on my lip. I glance at Niko, who stays frustratingly silent. "It seems like you didn't have a choice in bringing me here, so what's stopping him from keeping me?"

King's jaw flexes, the muscle twitching as he stares at me through the mirror, not saying a word. Niko's silence speaks louder than any reassurance they could offer, and that's when it hits me—I'm fucked.

We're about to walk into Gray's house, and my daughter and I are about to become prisoners.

King parks in front of the house that holds too many memories. The place where I grew up, where I got married, where I last saw my mom. Before I can gather my thoughts, King's out of the car, yanking my door open with a speed that makes me flinch. "Nee-koo, get the baby," he orders, mocking Zuri's new nickname for him.

My heart slams against my chest as he reaches across me, unbuckling my seatbelt with a rough yank. He grabs my arm, pulling me out of the car and pressing me against it, caging me between his body and the warm metal. His breath fans against my ear as his voice drops to a low growl.

"You underestimate me, kitten. I'm not afraid of your goddamn brother. I could tell him all about how I fuck you every night, and I wouldn't lose a wink of sleep. But I also know that would unleash hell, and you and Zuri have seen enough violence." His lips brush against my ear, sending a shiver through me. "If Gray's goal is to trap you here today, I'll fight for you. Niko and I—we both will."

I sink my lip between my teeth, still unconvinced. "And if it doesn't work?"

His eyes bore into mine. "It will."

I want to believe him, want to let his confidence erase the dread sitting like lead in my stomach. But what if it's not enough?

King's eyes flicker down to my lips. I want to kiss him so badly, in case it's the last time, but he must read my mind because he says, "I promise, kitten. You'll come back home with us, and we'll take turns wrecking you for anyone else tonight, just like I promised we would if you behave like a

good girl."

Niko walks around the car, Zuri clinging to him as she gums her teether, blissfully oblivious of the tension swirling around us. She's teething—I can tell by the way she's gnawing that thing like her life depends on it.

"C'mon, let's go," Niko says quietly as we head towards the house. "Gray's already suspicious. We don't need to give him any more reasons to keep you here. Not unless you want him to kill us first."

"I'd like to see him try," King mutters, his hand hovering near the small of my back, grounding me.

We enter the house, and I can feel the memories pressing down on me from every direction. Memories I wanted to keep suppressed, but Gray had the only men I trusted drag me back here.

Gray greets us, his suit crisp and black, with the collar popped up. I furrow my brows, wondering why he's wearing that in the middle of the fucking day.

"Little sis," Gray says smoothly, pressing a kiss to the top of my head like we're still kids, like he hasn't dragged me back here against my will.

I snort. "What are you wearing? You look like you're about to monologue about world domination."

Niko lets out a snicker behind me, but Gray's icy glare shuts him up quickly.

Gray leads us into the living room. Niko sits down beside me with Zuri in his lap, while Gray takes the armchair across from us, putting his foot up on the coffee table. King leans against the wall, arms crossed, looking disinterested.



Fuck. This is going to be a long day.

I glance at King and Niko, hoping they can somehow convince Gray that I'm better off with them. It's not just because I kinda dislike my own brother right now, or that I want to stay further away from my asshole of a husband. I need them—I want them. Waking up between them felt right, even though it's the furthest thing from it. I want to explore more with them, even if it's just a purely physical connection.

Plus, Zuri is already attached. She's already never going to see her father again, I want her to have her "uncles" in her life. Does my brother even care that being here would destroy my mental health and every ounce of happiness I've managed to gain since escaping Isaac?

"Your henchmen brought me here, like you asked. So, what do you want, big brother?" I ask, my tone sickly-sweet.

Gray doesn't look amused as he takes a slow sip of dark liquor. "Not really loving the tone you've been using with me, Alyssa. Maybe you should correct that."

I hold his gaze, my expression defiant. "Maybe you should stop speaking to me like I'm not a grown-ass woman."

Niko shifts beside me, tension rolling off him, but he keeps his mouth shut. Gray's eyes flicker to him and then to King, who's standing like a damn bodyguard.

"Niko, King...leave us. I need to speak to my sister alone," Gray orders, his tone final.

"No," I insist, my voice firm, even though my heart is racing for some reason. "They stay. Zuri and I feel safer with them around."

Gray raises a brow. "You don't trust being alone with your own brother?"

I shrug, crossing my legs. "I just don't see a point in dismissing them. We're all family, aren't we?"

I have to fight the urge to vomit at my own words.

He doesn't respond, but anger flares in his eyes. His jaw is so tight, I half-expect to hear his teeth crack under the pressure. After a long, tense moment, he says, "Look, you've had enough time to calm down from your tantrum. It's time to stop being a stubborn brat and come home."



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