

Chapter 4 Taking What's Hers

Even Bradley couldn't help but frown when he heard the amount—three million dollars.

Denise spoke up in a soft voice. "I just thought Sierra might be struggling financially, so I..."

Bradley's heart softened. His little sister was just too kind.

Three million? So what? If it would make Denise happy, he'd pay.

He went upstairs, grabbed his checkbook, wrote out a check, and tossed it in front of Sierra.

"Here."

His gaze was full of disdain, as if he were tossing spare change at a beggar.

Sierra lowered her eyes, staring at the check on the floor. Then, she looked up at Bradley, her expression devoid of warmth.

"Mr. Xander, don't act like you're doing me a favor. This is what I'm owed. You pay employees for their work, don't you? When you need something done, you pay for it. I sat in prison for your precious little sister for three years. Taking three million from you—isn't that fair?"

"You—" Bradley was furious.

He grabbed Sierra by the arm, his grip tight.

Her long-sleeved shirt was yanked askew, slipping down her shoulder.

Bradley had been about to lash out again, but the moment his eyes landed on her exposed shoulder, he froze.

A large, jagged scar covered her pale skin.

"What happened to you?"

Sierra followed his gaze, glancing at the scar before calmly pulling her sleeve back up.

"You saw it yourself," she said coolly. "I got hurt."

"How?" Bradley's frown deepened. How had he not known about this?

Sierra let out a mocking laugh.

"Mr. Xander, what do you think prison is like?"

The way she addressed him as "Mr. Xander" made Bradley's temper flare again.

But when he met her cold, mocking gaze, his anger died in his throat.

Feeling strangely guilty, he averted his eyes and muttered, "I made sure everything was taken care of. I was told you were doing fine in there."

Sierra chuckled, the sound devoid of warmth.

Without another word, she shoved both him and Denise out of her room and slammed the door in their faces.

Bradley wanted to be angry, but the sight of her injuries made him hesitate.

He had spent a fortune to "take care of things" in prison. How could she have still been hurt?

And now that he thought about it, her voice had changed too.

It wasn't as clear and bright as before—it was rougher, hoarser.

What exactly had happened to her in there?

The next morning, Sierra was already waiting in the living room.

She had slept well for the first time in a long while.

At least here, she didn't have to constantly keep her guard up.

Evan was the first to come downstairs.

He barely spared her a glance.

It had always been like this.

Among the three Xander brothers, Bradley would at least talk to her occasionally. Sean would acknowledge her when he was in a good mood, treating her attention like a reward.

But Evan?

Evan had always been distant, cold, reserved—except when it came to Denise.

Ironically, Sierra had only discovered her talent for biochemistry because of Evan.

Back then, she had wanted to get closer to him.

So she studied relentlessly, hoping to find common ground.

But once she discovered biochemistry, she realized she truly loved it. She had an undeniable gift for it.

Too bad she never got the chance to tell him.

She had been thrown in prison before she could.

Now? She didn't care anymore.

They sat in silence, each minding their own business.

Evan stole a few glances at her.

She was staring at her phone, completely ignoring him.

She used to follow him around, hanging on his every word, watching him intently even when he was indifferent.

Now, she was acting like he didn't exist.

It felt... odd.

But this was fine.

He had never been fond of talking to idiots anyway.

Soon, Eleanor and Denise came downstairs.

Eleanor sighed when she saw her two children sitting on opposite ends of the couch, completely disconnected.

Denise, on the other hand, subtly smirked.

"Evan!" she chirped, hurrying over to loop her arm through his. "Have you been waiting long?"

"Not really. Let's eat. After breakfast, I'll drive you to school," Evan said, patting her head.

"Okay!" Denise beamed, then turned to Sierra as if just noticing her.

"Sierra, are you ready? Let's eat."

"I already ate," Sierra said without looking up.

She had woken up early and made herself a bowl of noodles—specifically to avoid having breakfast with them.

Once she was back at school, she wouldn't have to see them every day anymore.

Seeing her still wearing the same clothes from yesterday, Eleanor quickly spoke up.

"I had some clothes bought for you last night—your size this time. Try them on and see if they fit."

Simple designs. T-shirts, pants.

Probably something a servant had grabbed at random.

But for once, it was actually her style.

"Thank you, Madam Eleanor." Sierra accepted them, went upstairs to change, and came back down.

She had always been tall and slender, but now, in simple, clean-cut clothes, she looked sharper, more striking.

Her long hair was gone, replaced by a short, neat cut.

Eleanor had been about to compliment her, but then she saw the long scar running down her right arm.

She gasped. "Your arm..."

Sierra glanced at it, then chuckled lightly.

"It's nothing. Just a small accident."

If she had complained, Eleanor might not have felt much.

But this casual dismissal...

It unsettled her.

Made her feel strangely guilty.

Eleanor wasn't stupid.

She knew that wasn't just some small cut.

And thinking back to the scars on Sierra's wrist...

No matter how much she tried to convince herself otherwise, she could no longer ignore the truth.

Sierra's three years in prison had not been easy.

Eleanor hesitated. She wanted to say something.

But when she met Sierra's cold, indifferent gaze, she realized—nothing she said would matter.

After they left, Bradley finally came downstairs.

Eleanor turned to him, frowning.

"She didn't have an easy time in there, did she? You said you took care of everything—so what happened?"

Bradley's expression darkened.

"I'll have someone look into it."

"Good. You should. She's still your sister. We don't want people thinking we mistreated her."

In the car, Sierra sat in the backseat, silent, playing the perfect, obedient doll.

Evan talked with Denise while occasionally glancing at Sierra.

But she just stared out the window, never once looking their way.

Finally, he spoke.

"I'll take you to the registrar's office to get your paperwork sorted."

"Mr. Evan, that won't be necessary. I can find my own way."

Evan's face darkened.

"Suit yourself."

He had been offering her a way out, but she just had to act all high and mighty.

If he weren't cutting her some slack for the rough few years she had been through, he wouldn't have bothered with her at all.

At school, Sierra quickly found the registrar's office and got her enrollment paperwork done.

Then, she asked about something even more important.

She wanted to change her major.

She had expected it to be a hassle.

But strangely enough, it was processed almost instantly.

Maybe the Xander family had put in a word for her.

Or maybe it was because she had already been a biochemistry minor before.

Either way, she was back where she belonged.

For the first time in years, Sierra smiled—a real, genuine smile.

She had money.

She had her major back.

Things were finally looking up.

But her happiness barely lasted an hour.

Because when she stepped into her department office, she saw two familiar faces waiting for her.

Evan and Denise.

Evan frowned. "Weren't you in the literature department? What are you doing here?"

So, *what was it?*

Was she here for him?

Was this all some scheme to get his attention?