



26 26-Knowing My Stepbrother

Helanie: 1

Now, we stood in front of his car, wearing rubber gloves. He handed me a cloth and began pouring soap into the bucket.

I watched him do that for a few seconds before he straightened up and glanced down at his damp shirt and jacket.

"What are you doing?" I nearly choked as he shamelessly pulled his shirt over his head and tossed it aside, his abs now fully on display.

"What? Am I supposed to keep my body trapped in there?" He shook his head slightly, a silent way of calling me 'silly,' before reaching for the sponge in the bucket.

"Okay, but stay away from me," I muttered under my breath, hoping he wouldn't hear. 2

He started scrubbing the car with an intense focus, making his muscles flex even more. I hated how often my eyes drifted in his direction. But soon enough, we were both too busy with



the task at hand to pay attention to ourselves.

I dipped my sponge into the soapy water again, feeling the cool liquid seep through my fingers. I glanced at him, just for a second. He was busy hosing down the tires, his back turned to me, muscles shifting under his wet t-shirt. His shoulders seemed broader than I remembered, and I quickly looked away before he could notice me staring. 1

Why was I even paying attention to that? A quick flash of last night came rushing back to me. My gaze drifted to his hand now—he was gripping the hose tightly, which made me swallow hard. The memory of his hand on my chest stirred something in me, and I bit my lip, shaking my head and silently cursing myself for letting my mind wander there. He really loves grasping things hard, not realizing how firm and big his hands are. 1

"We're barely getting anywhere," he said, turning to me with a grin that made my heart stutter—just a little. His eyes, always a little too keen for my comfort, flickered over me before he nodded toward the bucket. "You're hogging all the soap."



"Sorry, I'm just trying to be careful. I don't want to mess up your car." It was the only excuse I could come up with.

His head tilted, his wet hair making me wonder why he was drenched in water. 2

"The only fragile one here is you, Helanie. Don't be ridiculous," he said, his casual tone snapping me back to reality.

I didn't want to be the kind of person who ogled her stepbrother. He had literally just told me he saw me as his stepsister, as family. It felt strange. I had never been that way before. That thought made me instinctively reach for my pendant, and sure enough, I was wearing it. Of course, it wasn't me creating any pheromones, and he wasn't releasing any either. He didn't have that curse, so why was I so focused on him? 1

Before I could respond, he turned the hose on me, sending a quick blast of cold water that hit me square in the chest. I gasped, my hands flying up instinctively as the droplets soaked through my dress, making the fabric cling to my shirt underneath.

"Earth to Helanie," he teased.



"What was that for?" I asked shyly, trying to peel my dress away from my body. My cheeks burned as I noticed his eyes flicker toward my chest for a split second before he quickly looked away and resumed hosing down the car.

"That was to wake you up," he remarked, but this time, he didn't turn back to look at me. I was sure I was showing more than I intended, and he was being careful not to stare.

"Do you have a girlfriend?" The question slipped out before I could stop myself. He turned to me, his striking blue eyes meeting mine, looking more intense than ever.

"You think I have a girlfriend, yet I'm sleeping around, visiting hostess bars and all that?" He raised a perfectly thick brow, making me shrink inward.

"You must have a mate. You're so strong," I said, genuinely curious as to why I hadn't heard anything about the brothers' mates. I thought maybe I didn't have a mate because I was a weak wolf. 1

He tilted his head, pretending to scrutinize me.

"You're looking a little... soaked there."



I quickly turned away, biting my bottom lip as I heard him laugh at how easily he could make me uncomfortable.

"Ahhh!" he sighed deeply, stepping closer from behind. I wasn't sure what was happening, but whatever it was, it needed to stop.

"I don't have a mate," he said, his voice suddenly close to my ear, almost as if he was leaning over my shoulder.

"Oh! That's odd," I blurted, taking a big step forward and turning around, just to be sure we didn't accidentally come into contact.

His abs were so defined, it was as if they had been sculpted by hand. And his shoulders... broad and powerful, like a god from an anime.

"It's not that strange," he said, shrugging, his full lips delivering the information casually. "When we left the pack, it was made pretty clear that we might not receive any blessings from the Moon Goddess so easily."

Full lips? Seriously? Was that how I was going to talk about my stepbrother? I felt disgusted with myself.



"And yet you guys pray to her all the time?" I asked, my curiosity piqued. I could never forgive the Moon Goddess for what she had done to me, cursing me with these pheromones and subjecting me to that night of torture. Yet, they still prayed to her?

His smile softened, and his voice dropped just enough to make my stomach twist. "We don't give up. Like how I'm not going to rest until I've finished washing this car." His gaze lingered on me a moment longer than it should have, as if he wasn't just talking about the car.

I swallowed hard, suddenly aware of the silence stretching between us. My fingers fumbled with the sponge, dipping it back into the soapy water as I struggled to catch my breath. "Then let's finish quickly. I'm getting paid by the hour." 1

He lifted the hose again, holding the nozzle casually, as if unaware of the tension hanging between us.

"Yeah, sure," he murmured, his tone almost teasing, but now deeper, more serious. With a quick flick of the hose, he drenched the hood of the car, refocusing on the task as if the moment



between us had never happened.

I let out a quiet sigh and forced myself to relax, to act normal. This was ridiculous. I needed to concentrate—on the car, on anything but him.

We worked in silence for a few minutes, the sound of water and soap filling the air. Slowly, my heart began to calm. At least this was helping me get to know him better. Before, I was afraid he'd kick me out of the academy program out of some personal grudge. I mean, he couldn't stand the sight of me back when I was staying at his mansion. So, this felt like a good start.

"Anyway, I'll finish this. Why don't you go take a shower and get ready for lunch? If you have any special requests, let me know." This time, he didn't even look at me.

He stretched his arm over the roof of the car, a wet cloth in hand.

"I don't like mushrooms," was all I said before sprinting away toward the bathroom.

It had been one awkward conversation.