

30 30-The Lost Stepsister

Norman: 1

"Where are Maximus and Kaye? They were supposed to arrive and discuss the candidate list with us," I paced back and forth in the office, frustrated at how careless my brothers had become.

"I don't know. I called them, but they didn't pick up," Emmet replied, lounging back with his legs propped up on the table, looking entirely too comfortable. Sometimes I wondered why he was like this. Why couldn't he act more responsibly?

He had so much potential, yet he was wasting it all.

"Emmet, this is important. The tests start next week, and we haven't prepared anything yet. The students will be back at the academy soon, and those two haven't even submitted the syllabus for training and subjects," I was the only one feeling this much pressure.

Emmet sighed lazily and muttered, "I've submitted mine. As for them, I'm not sure what

they're up to, but I sent my guy to check. He told me they're at Maximus's garage." He casually showed me his phone screen, where the message from his so-called 'trusted guy' was displayed--someone he always talked about but never revealed.

"If they're not picking up the phone, I'll go fetch them myself." That was it. I couldn't sit around in my office any longer, waiting for them to show up.

"Adios!" Emmet waved dismissively, already engrossed in a book he had grabbed from the library.

I shot him a quick, judgmental glance before grabbing my coat and rushing out of the office. The monitors were gathered in the cafeteria, making plans for enforcing regulations once the academy reopened next week.

I hurried toward my car, dialing Maximus and Kaye repeatedly as I walked.

I didn't want to scold them--my brothers meant the world to me. But sometimes, they left me no choice. If Dad found out they were slacking, he would be furious with them.



And then Dad would yell at Kaye, while barely saying a word to Maximus. That would make Kaye feel isolated all over again.

Driving as fast as I could, I arrived at the garage in no time. Kaye's bike, parked outside, confirmed they were indeed together.

I hurried out of the car, not bothering with my coat despite the cold. Rolling up my sleeves, I entered the wide-open garage, noticing food left untouched on the table, already going cold. But the two of them were nowhere in sight, which only heightened my worry.

As I made my way to the far end of the garage, the door to Maximus's private room opened, and out came my brothers.

Maximus looked incredibly tense, while Kaye was busy buttoning up his shirt. But what really unsettled me wasn't their behavior--it was the fact that the door to Maximus's room had been left open, and from where I stood, I could see someone lying in his bed.

I froze, horror creeping up my spine.

"I'm telling you, you need to do it. Just--"



Maximus cut off mid-sentence when he nearly bumped into me.

Their eyes widened in surprise, clearly not expecting to be caught.

"What the hell do you two think you're doing? You know sharing is forbidden in our community!" I kept my voice low, not wanting anyone outside these walls to hear. 3

They exchanged a brief glance before following my gaze to the bed, then back to me.

"Ew, no!" Kaye exclaimed, wrinkling his nose in disgust.

Even Maximus shook his head aggressively, waving his hands to dismiss the accusation. But as they stepped aside, I realized the situation was far worse than I had imagined.

The girl lying on the bed wasn't moving. Something about her stillness sent a chill through me. Instead of asking why she wasn't waking up, I shoved them aside and rushed into the room, only to find our stepsister lying unconscious in Maximus's bed.



A sickening feeling surged through me.

"You absolute idiots--" I couldn't even finish my sentence. They had followed me inside, but now they couldn't hide the truth any longer.

"You two--" I covered my eyes with one hand, my other hand flying to my head as I rocked back and forth, trying to suppress the rising panic.

"What?" Maximus asked casually, but when he met my eyes and saw the disgust written on my face, his expression changed. "Oh no! It's not what it looks like," he said, backing away, clearly desperate to put distance between us.

"Of all the people in the world, you two chose her? And did you drug her?" My voice trembled with rage as the horrifying thought crossed my mind. Were they actually capable of something so twisted?

The sight of our unconscious stepsister lying there made me question if they had committed a crime.

"Brother--no! Do you think I'm so desperate that I would even touch a creature like her?" Kaye responded, his voice steady as he expressed his



disdain for her. But the sight of her in Maximus's bed, unconscious, didn't make any sense.

"Then tell me what the heck is going on and why she's sleeping in your bed," I said, slapping Maximus on the chest, causing him to step back and rub the spot where I hit him.

"Ask him. It's because of his rose that she's probably lost in a coma or something," Maximus said, the uncertainty in his voice weighing heavily on me.

I turned to Kaye, who understood it was time for him to explain before I jumped to further conclusions.

The next few minutes felt unbearably heavy as they recounted how Maximus had hired her for a job and how she had stumbled upon the deadly rose.

It was bad, but at least it wasn't a crime.

However, having her passed out in our home could lead to questions about their negligence. Since she was our stepsister, we could be scrutinized for how much of this was an accident and how much was intentional. We could be accused of trying to eliminate her from the

picture. 1

"Okay, calm down," I said, reaching out to Maximus and placing a hand on his shoulder. He was only trying to do a good thing by hiring her. While I would have advised against it since she wasn't our problem, I knew my brother had good intentions. She had a way of evoking sympathy from others.

She was skilled at appearing innocent and helpless. 1

"Kaye! What do you know about this rose, and have you ever tried to break anyone out of this trance?" I asked, looking directly at him.

"I've heard about cases like this. There's a facility where the victims sleep because they can't be brought back to reality. Some of them have been in that state for over fifty years, and some even grew old and died while stuck in their dreams," Kaye said, his voice tinged with fear as he delivered the grim information. I could tell he was worried about getting into trouble for leaving such a dangerous rose out in the open.

"Is there nothing we can do?" I inquired, hoping Maximus wouldn't lose his mind as he sat down,



burying his face in his hands.

"There's one thing that hasn't happened in the other cases: the roses that took the victims to their perfect dreams were lost. But Helanie had hers in her hand, so we know which rose she's stuck with," Kaye stated, his expression shifting to one of determination, as if he believed he could help her escape from her dream world.

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