

## His Kickass 121

### Chapter 121

Abby

The lunchtime rush is finally easing up. Much unlike yesterday, it's been a smooth day so far, and I feel relieved; but that's exactly when it happens.

I'm scanning the restaurant floor, making sure everything is running smoothly, when I hear the crash. It's a shocking mix of the sound of ceramic shattering, gasps, and the thud of a body hitting the floor, followed by a loud "Ow!"

My heart lurches into my throat as I rush over to see one of my waitresses, Sarah, sprawled on the ground amid a mess of broken dishes and spilled food.

"What happened?" I ask, my eyes darting around the room, locking onto a group of snickering teenagers at a nearby table.

"I saw it," Karl says, striding past me. "Those little shits tripped her. Deliberately."

In seconds, he's at their table, his face dark with anger. "You think that was funny? Get

"It was an accident!" one of the kids says, feigning innocence. But it's clear that he's full of shit. They all

I kneel beside Sarah, who's clutching her wrist, her face pale. "Are you okay?" I

"I think so," she mumbles, grimacing as she attempts to move. I call over two other employees to clean the mess and guide Sarah to

Karl reappears, dragging the shame-faced teenagers behind him. "Apologize," he commands, his voice icy. They mumble scattered apologies, looking anywhere but at Sarah

“Sorry isn’t enough,” Karl continues. “You’re washing dishes for the rest of the night. And if I see any of you around here again causing trouble, you’re going to wish you never set foot in

“Karl, you can’t—” I begin, but my voice trails off with a look from Karl. A look I know all too well, one that embodies his spirit of an Alpha.

I watch the teenagers slink off to the kitchen, led by Karl. The room is quiet now; even the low hum of conversations has died down. But my focus is on Sarah, who is sitting by the bar and wiping tears from her eyes, her hands shaking.

“I’m sorry, Abby,” she says as I approach. “All that food...”

“It’s not your fault.” I give her shoulder a squeeze. “Little jerks.”

For a little while, I help pick up the slack in the dining area to relieve some of the anxiety from the accident. But it’s not long before the front door swings open, and a couple strides in.

One glance at them tells me all that I need to know: they have that classic “I’d like to speak to the manager” air about them, and my heart sinks. They must be

“Are you the owner of this establishment?” the woman asks, her eyes scanning me up and down as if assessing whether I’m worthy of

“Yes, I am,” I reply, bracing myself for a potential scolding—or worse, pressing

“Our children informed us they’re here, washing dishes? Something about a prank?” the man adds, crossing his arms over his

“Um... Yes,” I say, swallowing the lump in my throat. “They tripped one of my waitresses. She’s been hurt, and there was damage to

I wait for the outburst, the accusations, perhaps even threats of a lawsuit. But instead, the woman sighs, exchanging a tired look with her

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“Are you sure?” I ask, stunned. “I wouldn’t want to impose.”

“It’s not an imposition,” the woman assures me. “It’s about time they learn a good lesson. You can’t go around causing trouble and not expect to deal with the consequences.”

Just then, Karl emerges from the kitchen, wiping his hands on a towel. His eyes meet mine, questioning. I nod subtly, a smile breaking through my fatigue.

“Karl, these are the parents,” I explain. “They agree with your punishment. Actually, they want to extend it for an entire week.”

Karl grins, extending a hand to each parent. “I appreciate your understanding. Trust me, there’s a lot to be learned in a kitchen. I would know.” He glances at me, winking subtly. My face flushes red, and I avert my gaze to my apron.

“Then it’s settled,” the man says, shaking Karl’s hand firmly.

As the parents walk toward the kitchen, presumably to have a serious chat with their demented offspring, I lean against the bar, suddenly drained but also immeasurably

Karl leans next to me, his shoulder barely touching mine. “Not what you expected,

“Not at all,” I say softly, a slight laugh escaping my lips. “But these past couple of days have been chock full

He glances at me, his eyes warm and comforting. “Some surprises are good, don’t you

“Yeah,” I murmur, realizing the truth in his words. Maybe it’s the parents owning up to their kids’ behavior, or maybe it’s the simple fact that for once, something has gone right amidst all of this chaos. Whatever it is, I’m grateful. It could have been a lot

The rest of the day is a blur. I feel as though I’m on autopilot, mechanically checking off tasks, my mind drifting. Even when the dinner rush starts and the restaurant fills with the sound of chatter and clattering dishes, I feel detached, like I’m observing it all from a distance.

Finally, the clock nears closing time, and I let out a breath I didn’t know I was holding.

The lights are dimmer now, casting a warm glow over the worn wooden tables and chairs. The last few patrons file out, murmuring their goodbyes, leaving behind the scent of lingering coffee and dessert.

I spot Karl at the far end of the restaurant, flipping chairs onto tables, readying the place for the night. Our eyes meet, and he starts walking over.

“Long day,” he says, as he reaches me.

“You could say that again,” I reply, a weary smile tugging at

“Look, Abby,” he begins, his voice tentative. I know where this is going. “About

“I already told you,” I interrupt, “I can’t go. I need to be

Karl puts a hand up. “Just... hear

I’m a bit surprised, and almost consider reiterating my statement. But for some reason, I let

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Karl

The sun is barely hovering above the horizon as I pull up in front of Abby's apartment building on Friday morning.

I can't help but smile as I think about the day ahead of us. My black car idles, the hum of its engine drowned out by the pop song playing on the radio—a song I can easily imagine Abby singing along to, although I don't personally care for that kind of music myself.

With a deep breath, I turn off the engine and grab the to-go cup of her favorite coffee from the cup holder.

She opens the door almost as soon as I knock, as though she was standing there, waiting. There's a look in her eyes that makes it seem as though she's still on the fence about going. But the second her eyes meet mine, the tension in her shoulders eases. Just a bit.

"Good morning," I greet, handing her the coffee. "Figured you could use this."

She grins, taking a sip immediately. "You read my mind."

There's a slight silence for a few moments. My eyes scan the inside of her apartment, where a bag sits on the floor behind her; it's packed haphazardly, no doubt. She's never been the

"Oh, one more thing," she says before I can say anything. She slips her phone out of her pocket and begins tapping furiously on the screen while her coffee cup balances precariously in the crook of her elbow. "I have to tell

"Ethan will be fine without you," I say, snatching both the phone and the coffee cup away. "And so will the restaurant. Just enjoy your time off,

She glares at me for a moment, that signature stare of hers, but finally relaxes and lets out a deep sigh. "You're

We hit the road within a few minutes. The morning sun streams through the windows, casting her face in a warm amber glow. I plug in my phone and shuffle through a playlist I know she'll

“So, long drive ahead.

“Surprise me,” she says, her fingers nervously tapping on the

I hit play, and the first chords of a nostalgic song—one that played at our wedding—fill the car. She laughs, shaking her head. “Seriously?”

“Come on, it’s a classic,” I defend, bobbing my head to the beat.

Abby’s lips twitch upwards into a smile, but it quickly fades. I watch from my peripherals as she averts her gaze to the window, occasionally sipping out of her coffee cup. She thinks I don’t notice, but she’s swaying back and forth to the song, ever so slightly. And that’s enough for me.

We’ve been riding in comfortable silence for about half an hour when Abby suddenly points to a barely visible building off the main road.

“Remember that place?” she asks.

I glance in the direction she’s pointing, spotting the outline of an old, worn-down motel that has seen better days. “Ah, the Woodpecker Inn,” I say, a smile forming on my own face. “We stayed there more than once.”

“Yeah.” She pauses, her voice taking on a more nostalgic tone. “You proposed to me there, didn’t you?”

I smirk, shaking my head. “Your memory is betraying you. I actually proposed at that fancy restaurant in the city. What was it called—La

Abby gives me a sideways look. “Karl, you’ve got it all wrong. You proposed at the Woodpecker Inn, right near the fireplace where we used

Her voice trails off momentarily, leaving space where our memories belong. The fireplace at the Woodpecker Inn... I try not to think about it, because if I do, I'll get too distracted and possibly run the car off the

"I know what we used to do near that fireplace, but no, Abby, I proposed at La Bella Vita. I remember because the hostess almost kicked us out for disturbing the peace after you

We go back and forth like this, both of us stubbornly clinging to our own versions of the story. The tension is playful, almost electric, a reminder of simpler times. I'm about to pull out my phone and call one of our mutual friends to settle the argument when Abby's eyes widen, and she bursts

"We're both idiots," she

"What?" I ask,

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I miss those days, miss what we were. The regret hits me like a ton of bricks, settling heavy in my chest. It's a regret that's been there for too long, lurking in the shadows even when I was too stubborn to acknowledge it.

Finally, after another hour and a half of driving, the towering trees give way to the familiar entrance of my estate. I haven't been here in a few months now, but it feels just as familiar as ever; especially with Abby beside me.

I throw her a quick glance, hoping that I don't see any glimmer of doubt in her eyes. "Ready?"

"As I'll ever be," she says, though I catch a note of uncertainty in her voice.

I pull into the driveway, the old mansion coming into view. Before I can even cut the engine, the front door swings open. Gerald, our family butler for as long as I can remember, steps onto the porch. His face lights up when he sees me. "Mr. Karl!" he exclaims, shuffling out. "How nice to—" But then, his face falls the moment his gaze lands on Abby.

"Miss... Abby? What are you doing here?" he asks, a thinly veiled note of disapproval coloring his words.

“Hello, Gerald,” Abby replies, her tone neutral. “I’m

“Hmm,” he mutters, and though he says nothing more, his eyes say it all. Maybe I should have mentioned it beforehand. But hell, if he has a problem with Abby being here, that’s his issue to deal with, not

I reach for her bag, but she’s already grabbed it. “I got it,” she says, our fingers brushing for a moment. Electricity shoots up my arm, and I have to resist the urge to pull

“Shall we?” I gesture toward

She nods, stepping onto the cobblestone path that leads to the door. I catch up to her and we walk side by side, the tension palpable but not entirely uncomfortable. She glances around, taking in the towering oaks, the sprawling garden she once adored, the manor itself. There’s a wistfulness in her eyes that tugs at

Once inside, she continues to look around, this time at the grand staircase, the antique chandeliers, the aged paintings of our ancestors adorning the walls. All the things that make this place more than just a house. It’s a home. It was her home, too, once upon a time. Maybe it will be her home again.

“You okay?” I ask as we ascend the stairs. Her room—the master bedroom, and I’ve decided to take the guest room—is right at the top of the stairs.

“Yeah,” she murmurs, but her voice quivers, betraying her true emotions.

I unlock the door and swing it open, revealing the room she spent so many years in. It’s been a few years since she’s been gone, but I kept the furnishings the same. In fact, I couldn’t sleep in here for the first two years; not since I thought she cheated on me.

“Wow,” she breathes, stepping inside.

Her eyes move from the familiar furnishings to the photos still sitting on top of her old dresser. One in particular catches her eye, a candid shot of us, laughing like there's no tomorrow. Truthfully, I never took it down, although I couldn't bear to look at it for the longest

For a moment, I see the Abby I fell in love with all those years ago. Vulnerable, yet strong. Closed off, yet incredibly

She wipes a tear away before it can fall, then turns to me with a shaky smile. "It's just...a lot, you

"I do," I reply softly, not trusting myself to say

She clears her throat, setting her bag down on the bed. "So, what's the plan for the rest of the

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Abby

The scent of mahogany and bergamot fills the air as I step into the room that was once mine—our room, really.

I feel so drawn to the familiarity of it all; the embroidered curtains, the chestnut armoire that I remember picking out myself, and the plush rug that used to cushion my bare feet in the mornings. Every little detail is still the same, just as I remember it. It's uncanny, really.

My fingers trace the intricate patterns on the upholstery of the armchair near the window. It's a bit surreal, being back in this space. I mean, this was my sanctuary once. Our sanctuary. But now, it's filled with... bittersweet memories. Maybe more bitter than sweet.

I move to the dresser next. That's when I see it: a photo of us, still sitting exactly where it used to be on top of the dresser—Karl and I laughing at something, looking so young, so naive. My eyes widen slightly as I gently pick it up. Did he have this picture up all this time?

As I hold the picture, something stirs in me. Tears begin to prick the backs of my eyes, and I have to set the frame back down with a ragged breath, laying the photo flat so I don't need to look at it. Suddenly, it feels all too stuffy in here, and I need to get out for

I make my way down the winding staircase and out through the large foyer, bypassing the glances of a few household staff. When I reach the back patio, I take a deep breath, as if I can finally breathe again. Then, pushing open the door, I step into the garden, a sanctuary that I used to escape to when the weight of the world felt

The colors and smells envelop me instantly, filling my senses with a mix of nostalgia and tranquility. Rows of roses, lavender, and daisies stretch out in front of me like an artist's vivid canvas. I walk past a bunch of lilies, their heads tilted towards the sun, and reach the jasmine vine that was always my favorite. Leaning in, I take a deep sniff. Its scent is as intoxicating as

For a moment, I feel free from the memories and the speculation that my return is no doubt

But then, feeling as though someone is watching me, I look up instinctively toward the mansion. Overhead in a window, that's where I see Gerald, the butler, staring at me through one of the back

His face is inscrutable, but his eyes, they hold a certain...bewilderment? Or is it something else?

Then, the moment our gazes meet, he abruptly steps away from the window and disappears from view.

A flush creeps over my skin, a mix of embarrassment and curiosity. It must be odd for him to see me wandering around the garden, the ex-Luna now an unexpected visitor in her former home. How many people here still believe that I cheated on Karl with the gardener?

I shake my head, trying to dispel the uneasy feeling that settles in my gut. Surely he was just surprised to see me. After all, I doubt Karl made a big announcement about my return. I just hope that he at least dispelled the theory about my nonexistent infidelity.

Deciding it's time to go back inside, I take one last look around the garden, breathing in deeply to steady myself. Then, I make my way back towards the house. Just as I reach the patio door, it swings open, and there stands Elsie, one of the maids I had always been

"Abby!" Her eyes light up, and before I know it, I'm wrapped in a warm, affectionate

“Elsie, it’s so good to see you,” I murmur, returning the hug with just as

“You look amazing,” she exclaims, pulling back to look at me. “Is life outside treating

I laugh. “As well as it can,

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“Thanks, Elsie,” I say softly. “It’s good to be back.”

With that, I make my way back into the house, each step carrying a different weight, a different emotion. As I reach the top of the staircase, I hear Karl’s voice drifting from the living room, and my heart does a strange little leap. Maybe Elsie’s smirk held more truth than I’d like to admit.

Just then, I hear the familiar ping of my phone and my thoughts snap back to the present. Reluctantly, I pull it from my pocket and see a message from Ethan. He’s asking a question about inventory, and I know that I should let it wait until I get home. But before I know it, I’m typing out a reply, unable to resist the urge to be a boss for five minutes.

I’m halfway through responding when the sound of footsteps approaches behind me. “Ahem.”

Startled, I whip around to see Karl standing on the step below me. He has a knowing look on his face, and a sparkle in his eye.

He moves closer, and for a split second, I’m transported back to a time when this was an everyday occurrence.

“You’re not working, are you?” he asks, gesturing to the phone in my hand. “You’re supposed to be enjoying the weekend

With an embarrassed shrug, I avert my gaze. “Maybe

Karl reaches for my phone, gently taking it from me. “Abby, Ethan and the restaurant will survive just fine without you for a couple of days. Just try to

I look at him, partly exasperated but mostly grateful. He always had a knack for cutting through my excuses. “Okay, okay. No more work. I get

A smile brightens his face, and it’s a smile I’ve missed more than I care to admit. “Well, look,” he says, “I just finished up a couple of things here, and now I’m free until my meeting. How about some coffee at that cafe you used

...

The cafe hasn’t changed much since I was last here three years ago.

The aroma of freshly brewed coffee fills the air, mingled with the comforting scents of baked goods. Even the barista seems to remember us, shooting a discreet, knowing look our way.

Karl orders our drinks—black coffee for him and a hazelnut latte for me, just like old times—and we decide to take them to go. Stepping out, we make our way to the nearby park where I used to lose myself in books and Karl occasionally joined me, pretending to read but really just watching the birds.

That was before he started spending too much time as an Alpha, and leaving little time for me. For us.

“It’s... Just as I remember it,” I say, taking a sip of my latte as we walk along the stone pathway.

He smiles. “Some things never change.”

But some things do. Like us. Like me. And yet, the more we walk, the more the lines blur. The trees are still tall and majestic, the air is fresh, and the world around us feels like it’s stuck in a time capsule—a snapshot of our happier

Suddenly, Karl nudges me. “Don’t look now, but I think we’ve got

I glance sideways to see a couple pointing discreetly at us. A young woman approaches, cautiously but curiously. “Alpha Karl!” she greets, her gaze sliding over to me. “And... Luna

Luna. The word catches me off guard. It’s been ages since I’ve been addressed that

Karl offers the woman a polite smile. Much to my surprise, he doesn’t correct her on the title she’s given me. “Is there something I can do

“Oh, no, just wondering if... are you two back together?” she blurts out, her eyes bright with hope—or maybe

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Abby

The warm afternoon sunlight casts dappled patterns on the ground as we walk through the park, holding cardboard coffee cups in our hands. The warmth seeps through the cup, mingling with the crisp air. It’s a nice moment, bordering on something that feels almost normal.

And then we stop in front of it—the old oak tree.

Its massive trunk and sprawling branches are as iconic as they come. It’s always been a sort of landmark in this small town, here long before the town was ever built. But to me, it’s more than just a tree. It’s a bitter reminder of another life, of another version of us.

We took our wedding photos under this tree.

“Do you remember?” Karl asks, his eyes meeting mine as if he’s searching for something—recognition, perhaps.

“Of course I remember,” I snap, maybe a little too quickly. “How could I forget?”

He looks taken aback, his eyebrows knitting together in confusion. Then, as though sensing he's wandered into a minefield, he falls

We stand there for another minute, neither of us able to speak. Then I can't hold back any

"Did you ever tell the staff the truth?" I ask, my voice edged with more tension than I'd intended. "That I never actually cheated on you with the gardener? That it was a

Karl goes silent, the creases on his forehead deepening. I wait for what feels like an eternity, my patience waning with each

"Karl?"

He sighs. "No, Abby, I didn't make an

Anger and hurt surge within me, mingling with a heavy dose of disbelief. And yet, somehow, I expected this. It's just like Karl, isn't it? "That must be why Gerald was giving me dirty looks from the window earlier."

"Gerald did what?" Karl's eyes flash, a ripple of anger surfacing before he reins it in.

I blanch, regretting that I let that slip. "It's nothing, really. I just caught him giving me an odd look. And he seemed... perturbed when I arrived."

Karl's jaw clenches, and for a moment, it looks like he might explode. Then he exhales deeply, as though forcing himself to calm. "I'll speak with him."

"And what about setting the record straight?" I press, my voice filled with frustration. "About me?"

He falls silent again, and my annoyance flares up once more.

“Karl? Why didn’t you clear my name?”

“I... I thought it would make me look incompetent,” he finally admits, avoiding my eyes. “That I couldn’t even handle my personal matters

“Incompetent?” I retort, incredulous. “So my reputation gets tarnished because you’re worried about your image? That’s not fair, Karl. You need to man up and do something about

He looks at me, his eyes meeting mine without evasion this time. “You’re right. I’ll handle it. I’m sorry,

Admittedly, I’m a bit shocked. Karl is so willingly offering to make things right. I was so angry with him, and yet somehow, he’s exceeding

But before I can say anything else, he changes the subject. “Where do you want to go for

For a moment, I consider naming one of the countless restaurants we used to frequent, each carrying its own set of memories. But then a different idea pops into

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“Smells amazing in here,” Karl says as he walks in, his eyes meeting mine for a moment before landing on the pot. “Whatcha cooking?”

“Spaghetti Bolognese,” I reply, stirring the pot once more. “I remember it was one of your favorites.”

“Still is,” he grins, moving closer. “Need any help?”

I look at him, momentarily caught off guard. It would be so easy to say yes, to let him slide back into that role he once played so perfectly. But I hesitate, unsure. I’m still upset about earlier, about finding out that he never cleared my name. But at the same time, I can’t bring myself to be too mad at him—not when he so willingly agreed to set the record straight. And not when we’re in our old home together, and the nostalgia is taking over me.

Finally, I nod. “Could you chop those mushrooms for me?”

He grabs a knife and starts slicing, his movements as fluid as they always were. For a brief moment, the kitchen feels like it used to—full of life, laughter, and the smell of delicious food.

As we work side by side, I can't help but marvel at how well we function together. The synergy is still there, as if time hasn't changed anything. I find myself imagining what it would be like to have him by my side at

He'd be the perfect sous chef—steady, reliable,

My lips part, prepared to ask him if he would join me for the competition. But at the last moment, I close them, shaking my head

What am I thinking? This is just dinner, nothing

“Abby?” Karl asks, snapping me back to reality. “You good? You looked like you were about to

I shake my head, glancing away.

Finally, the meal is ready. We sit down at the dining table, a space that once hosted countless meals, countless memories. The spaghetti is tender, the sauce rich and savory.

“This is incredible, Abby,” Karl says after the first bite, looking up at me with sincerity in his eyes.

“Thank you,” I reply, my heart swelling at the compliment. There's a lot unsaid between us, but for the moment, the food says it all.

We drink red wine, each sip easing away the day's worries. Conversation flows easily after the first few sips, filling the room with an ambiance that's oddly intoxicating.

“I miss this,” he says softly as he refills my glass. “I miss us.”

His words hit me like a tidal wave, drowning all the caution and restraint I've been holding onto. I look at him, really look, and see the man who once was my everything. For a heartbeat, I want to let go, to bridge the distance between us in a way words

But I can't.

"It's getting late," I murmur, pushing back my chair abruptly. "I should head to

He looks at me, eyes searching, but doesn't push. "Alright. I'll clean up. Goodnight,

"Goodnight, Karl."

With a terse smile, I stand and turn, heading for the door. But at the last moment, Karl's voice reaches

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Karl

The mahogany door clicks shut behind me as I step into the conference room.

Members of the council, influential businessmen and entrepreneurs who hold significant power in the community, are already seated around the long table. I can feel the weight of their expectations hanging in the air, but right now, my thoughts are preoccupied with something—or rather, someone—else.

Before I can approach the table, my secretary, Gianna, is waiting by the door for me. "Good morning, Alpha Karl," she says, her voice low and even as usual. "Nice to see you after all this time."

I nod as I slip my jacket off and hang it on the hook. "I'm glad to be back."

"And you're staying, I presume?" she asks, her eyes glinting with something unreadable.

For a moment, I feel almost like I'm being put on the spot. The others are preoccupied with their preparations, but Gianna's gaze is unwavering. I always knew that she disapproved of my... adventure out to the city to win Abby back, but there's something else in her gaze. Something I can't quite put my

"We'll see," I say, trying to

Gianna blinks slowly before handing me the meeting's agenda in a leather bound folder. As she does, our fingers brush, and she

"Sir, I know this might not be my place, but I heard that your... ex-wife is staying with you. Is that

Her sudden choice of words gives me pause, especially in this setting. Slowly turning to face her, I can't help but notice a subtle furrow of her brows, a tightening around her eyes. "And if she is, would that be that a problem?" I ask, keeping my

"No, not a problem," she says, but her hesitation tells me otherwise. "Just... be careful around her, Karl. You know how things were."

I look at her squarely. "Abby never cheated on me. The gardener manipulated the situation. Let's not forget that."

Gianna's expression shifts, a hint of guilt flashing across her eyes, but before I can question it further, the room settles into a hushed silence, signaling the meeting's commencement. Gianna takes her seat, and I push my concerns aside, focusing on the task at hand.

"Let's get started," I say, scanning the room. "First on the agenda—"

The meeting progresses smoothly enough. Various issues are discussed: business acquisitions, investment opportunities, community initiatives. But it's the last item on the agenda that makes my stomach tighten.

My brother's condition.

“As you all may know,” the local renowned physician and member of the council, Dr. Thompson, begins, “your brother may be waking up from his coma soon. How does that affect your position as

All eyes are on me, probing, scrutinizing. I maintain my composure. “I welcome it. If he wakes up, maybe a little friendly competition for the role of Alpha wouldn’t be a bad thing.” Of course, my words are couched in a hint of humor. But at the same time, I can’t entirely deny the fact that there’s a bit of truth behind

I’ve been the Alpha here for years. No matter how much I love my brother, I won’t give up my position so easily. And besides, who’s to say that he’ll even be physically able to lead our

A low murmur courses through the room at my words. Then Mark, a council member who’s always been vocal about his opinions, speaks

“But you’ve been working at a restaurant in the city, haven’t you, Karl?”

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“Karl,” Gianna says once they’re gone, snapping me out of my reverie. “I think you should come to dinner tonight. We need to discuss a few more things.”

I look up at her. There’s something off about her tone, something I can’t quite place. Maybe because of that, I wind up making a snap decision. “You know what?” I say, standing. “That’s an excellent idea. We’ll hold a dinner at my house tonight.”

For a moment, a peculiar expression crosses her face. It’s fleeting, but it’s there—a mix of surprise and something else I can’t identify. She quickly masks it with a professional smile.

“Very well, sir. I’ll see you tonight.”

...

As I settle into the leather seat of my car, the engine purrs to life, but I don’t immediately pull out of the parking lot. My fingers drum on the steering wheel, my mind racing through the events of

Abby's return home for the weekend, the council's thinly veiled criticism, Gianna's strange behavior— each thought competes for attention, but it's Abby who ultimately wins

My wolf stirs, breaking his prolonged silence. “You know, this dinner tonight could be a good opportunity. A date with Abby, gaining her approval

I chuckle softly, already ahead of him. “That was the goal, my friend. I'm even thinking of taking her out shopping for a new dress before dinner. Let her choose whatever she wants, no price tag

Memories flood back: me buying Abby the latest designer handbags, high-end jewelry, whisking her off on surprise getaways. I loved spoiling her, loved the shine it would bring to her eyes, or so I

“But did Abby ever really enjoy being spoiled?” My wolf's question catches me off guard.

I sigh, taking a moment to shift through years of memories and moments. Then it hits me. A flashback steals over my thoughts.

We were younger then, still grappling with the early years of our relationship and my role as Alpha. I had missed our anniversary dinner due to an urgent Alpha matter. When I returned home late that night, I found her in our bedroom, crying softly into her pillow.

In an effort to make it up to her, I went out the next day and bought an expensive diamond necklace. I was certain it would cheer her up, that the sheer extravagance would wipe away her tears and disappointment.

But when she opened the box, her face fell.

“Karl, return it,” she said, her voice filled with a sadness I

“Why?” I asked, confused, maybe even a

“Because you can’t buy my love,” she replied. “You always think that you can just... shower me with all the necklaces, bags, or gifts you want. But the truth is, I’d never appreciate them as much as spending quality time with

At the time, I thought she was being petty, maybe even bordering on ridiculous. Couldn’t she see these gifts were expressions of my love, my

The memory fades, leaving a bittersweet ache in its wake. That’s when the realization hits me: my wolf