

Chapter 62

[Vivienne]

Elijah stands up before I can come out of my speechless moment.

He faces Caden, blocking my view of him.

"You need to leave, Mr Lawrence. My client—"

Caden scoffs, cutting him off. "She's not your client anymore, Mr Walter. We are already divorced."

"Which, of course, makes me even more determined to look out for her," he grits out, trying to stay calm, but even I can feel how close he is to losing his temper.

Caden takes one step closer. "Why? Because she's single? Because she's back to being a free game?"

Elijah doesn't back down, not an inch. He leans in to get right into his face. "Why? Does it bother you? Does it bother you to think about a world in which Vivienne is happy, without you? Does it hurt to think that she'll soon forget about you? Because she will."

A growl of pure anger rises out of Caden's throat and his hands tighten into fists by his side. But before the situation gets any worse, I decide to stop it right there.

"Stop it!" I snap at them, and the two men immediately turn to look at me, the intensity of their glares enough to melt ice. I turn to face Elijah, the most reasonable out of the two. "Can you give us a minute? I'm sure whatever he wants this time won't take long."

Elijah doesn't take his eyes off Caden's as he bends down to plant a kiss on the top of my head. "Fine. But call me when you need me."

Caden doesn't move an inch. He just stands there, his expression tight, eyes narrowed into thin slits as Elijah walks out of the room, closing the door behind him.

For a long minute, neither of us says anything. Which, kind of feels familiar in its own right.

I break the silence before more painful memories flash through my mind. "What are you doing here, Caden?"

He moves around the bed—taking his fucking time—and sits down where Elijah was seated just a few minutes ago. Back straight. Posture impeccable. Even in this bland room full of sterile-white things, he somehow still looks like he belongs on a fucking throne.

He takes in the IV hooked up to my hand, the machines beeping beside me, and then finally the bandages wrapped around my neck.

"Is that... is it bad? Your burns, I mean."

I want to throw my pillow at his face.

I ground my jaw instead. "Yeah. They're bad, but nothing that can't heal. I should be out of here by tomorrow."

He looks down at my bandaged hand, nodding.

Silence. Again.

"If you're here just to look at me in silence, you can leave now."

He cuts his dark eyes to me, a deep frown forming between his eyebrows.
“I’ll leave when I say I’m done, not a second sooner.”

Is he for real? “What the hell are you? Do you even hear yourself?”

He says nothing and I just throw my hands in the air.

“For fuck’s sake. Say something. Or leave. Or better yet, leave and say nothing at all, and let me never have to deal with this bullshit ever again.”

A look of uncertainty flashes over his face, and for one moment I think he might actually leave, but instead, he asks: “Are you in pain?”

Oh God, give me strength.

I struggle to keep my composure. “No, Caden, I’m not in pain at all. I mean, just take a good look at me. You really think these bandages and ointments are real? Seriously? Come on, get real. It’s all an elaborate charade, can’t you see? I’m faking every bit of it—because, you know, attention-seeking is my main hobby. It’s what I live for. It’s all I’ve ever wanted—to be the center of attention, to be doted on, to make sure everyone’s constantly thinking about poor, wounded me. This, right here, is my masterpiece. I’ve been planning it for ages—what a grand success, don’t you think?”

I grit my teeth when my snark doesn’t even make him crack a muscle on his face.

“Are you going to report this?”

And there it is—the reason he bothered showing his face at all.

“Yes. Anything else.”

“Don’t.”

My eyebrows rise. “And I should listen to you because...?”

“Because it’s pointless.”

“Pointless because she’s your sister, and you’ll do everything in your power to protect her? Is that why you’re here?” I snap, not able to keep it in. “You think you can just waltz in here and tell me what to do, and I’ll just fall in line? Because, what—she’s family, and that gives you some kind of moral high ground?”

God, I hate him so much. He can never change. Never.

I shake my head. “What if I don’t listen to you, huh? What if I do report it? What if I go straight to the police and tell them everything? What if I want to see her behind bars because, clearly, that’s where she belongs.”

The corner of his mouth tips up in a dangerous smirk, and he leans forward until he’s right in my face, his warm, minty breath enveloping me like a cocoon.

But then, he speaks, and the cocoon cracks away.

“Then I’ll destroy whatever peaceful life you’re trying to create for yourself. You wanted to get rid of me, remember? If you go through with this, be prepared to deal with me every day, every hour, every second. You can have me in your life, or you can have peace. What do you choose, Vivienne?”