

STEPBROTHER'S PUNISHES ME EVERYNIGHT -

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The instant we got home, Alpha Diego's penetrating eyes met me. His brow wrinkled when he saw the marks on my arms and face.

"Mia," he continued, his voice low yet authoritative. "Why are you returning so early? And what's with the bruises? "Were you bullied again?"

Before I could react, I felt Rolex tighten beside me. His eyes widened with surprise as he looked at me, apparently taken off guard. "Wait... Was she also bullied earlier? By them? If they had done this before, why was she put back there in the first place? His words flowed swiftly, and I could see bewilderment and remorse in his eyes.

Diego sighed, his frustration obvious. "I asked you to take care of her. Rolex, you were meant to protect her. But you failed. She returned to school because of me, and now look at her." His tone was stern and disappointed.

Rolex squirmed uneasily, clearly feeling the impact of Diego's comments. "I didn't realize things were this bad." He murmured, "I have to go," and excused himself. "I'm late for work."

Without waiting for a response, he turned and walked away, leaving the conversation unfinished. My gaze lingered on his leaving figure, evoking an uneasy feeling.

Diego returned his focus to me, his countenance softening. "You should rest, Mia. I'll be going out for work as well, but if you need anything, let me know.

I nodded, happy for the brief respite, and proceeded upstairs to my bed. As I approached my door, I heard whispered whispers coming from the kitchen. Curious, I tiptoed toward the sound and looked around the corner.

There I saw Xavier. He stood in the kitchen with a female wearing a provocative, tiny clothing. She leaned on the counter, evidently attempting to get his attention. "Pose for me," I heard Xavier say, his voice forceful, but the girl did not appear to take his order seriously. Instead of obeying his commands, she made an attempt to entice him, slipping her hand up his arm, her intentions obvious.

Just then, Xavier's gaze met mine. Panic washed over me as he pulled the model girl away, his expression altering from surprise to frustration. I turned and dashed back to my room, my pulse thumping. I had no understanding why witnessing that conversation made me so anxious.

The door flung wide, and Xavier stood there, his eyes immediately drawn to mine. He went inside, closing the door with a gentle click. The room felt smaller with him in it, and the air was thick with tension.

"Were you spying on me, Mia?" His voice was low and silky, yet with a tinge of threat.

I shook my head rapidly, hoping to evade his piercing look. "No... I was not. I did not mean to..."

He stepped closer, his gaze never leaving mine. I could feel heat radiating from his body as he neared. "Really? Were you not curious about what was going on in the kitchen? Just a casual walk-by?"

I bit my lip, feeling besieged. "I just happened to pass by... I was not trying to spy."

Xavier smirked, plainly delighted by my frantic state. "Right, just 'happened' to pass by while I was with that girl," he remarked, his tone mocking. "But you ran off so fast... almost like you were jealous."

My heart skipped a beat, and I felt my cheeks get even heated. "I wasn't jealous!" I blurted out, but his sneer indicated that he didn't believe a word of it.

He took another step forward, narrowing the gap between us until he stood directly in front of me. His hand reached out and tenderly cupped my injured cheek. His thumb softly stroked against the mark, sending shivers down my spine. "What happened here?" he said softly, his voice falling to a whisper.

I didn't respond because I was too caught up in the warmth of his touch. His thumb circled my cheek, and I found myself leaning toward it unconsciously.

"Why are you breathing like this, kitten?" His words took on a teasing tone again, and I could see enjoyment in his eyes. "Are you nervous?"

"I'm not..." I tried to say something, but my voice failed me, coming out unsteady and uncertain.

Xavier came in closer, his lips almost touching my ear as he muttered, "It's inappropriate to act like this around your stepbrother, you know. You're making things far tougher than they should be."

I felt my breath catch in my throat. The lighthearted tone in his speech made it tough to know whether he was joking or serious. My heart was pounding, and I couldn't bring myself to meet his stare.

His gaze quickly passed over my lips before returning to mine. "You're blushing," he murmured, his tone playful and gentle. "What's going on in that pretty little head of yours, huh?"

I quickly raised my palm to my cheek, recognizing that my face was burning. "I... I'm not—"

"You are," he interrupted me, his voice becoming huskier as he leaned in closer, his breath warm against my skin. "Do you feel like this around everyone, or am I special?"

His statements rendered me dumbfounded. My head was filled with bewilderment and shame. Why was he behaving like this? Why did he have such an impact on me?

He tilted his head slightly, his lips perilously close to mine, but he did not make contact. "Tell me, kitten," he whispered. "Does this always happen when I'm around?"

I swallowed hard, attempting to recover control of my rapidly beating heart. "Xavier..." I whispered, my voice quivering, but I had nothing else to say. I couldn't think clearly with him so close; his presence was overwhelming.

He drew back just slightly, allowing me to recover my breath, but his mocking smile never faded. "You really are too innocent for your own good," he muttered. "It's cute."

I blinked, wondering how to answer. His statements elicited a curious mix of emotions in me, including embarrassment, confusion, and something else I couldn't quite identify.

Xavier's hand traveled from my cheek to my chin, tipping my head up and forcing me to look at him. "Where's the ointment?" he inquired quietly, his fun teasing replaced by something more serious.

My hands trembled slightly as I pointed to the tiny table beside the bed. "Over there..."

He glanced over at the table, but instead of getting it himself, he stepped back and handed me the tube. "Take care of yourself," he added, his voice kind but with an edge that I couldn't place.

I expected him to assist, but he simply placed the ointment in my hand and turned to leave. As he approached the door, he hesitated for a moment and, with a cold face, back at me. "Don't spy on me again. It may not end the same way next time."

My heart raced as the door clicked shut behind him, leaving me alone in the room, perplexed and breathless.

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