

## Chapter 15 Going Back

A knocking wakes me, my mind trying to ignore it.

"Ruby! I need my fucking clothes." My body moves, and I see Alaric sitting up.

"Shit, I fell asleep." He moves and grabs his clothes.

"Alaric, he's right outside the room!" My words are whisper-shouted.

"Ruby! Open the fucking door." The bang makes me jump. As I rush to get dressed, Alaric looks around the room.

"Get behind the door." Alaric pushes me over, and I stand confused.

"Alaric." What is he doing?

"I can't hide, you're smaller."

"And where am I then?" He can't open the door and be in here.

"You're in my room. You were reluctant to go to bed because Jake would join you, so I gave you my room, and I slept in here."

Oh, that could actually work.

I watch him move the door and unlock the door. Opening it, he stands, blocking me.

"Dad?" Jake's voice shakes.

"Ruby is in my room. She wasn't willing to sleep in here in case you climbed into bed with her again," Alaric says, and I hear Jake laugh.

"She's overdramatic." I hear his bathroom door close and lock. Alaric pulls me out from behind the door and takes me to his room.

"Just, I don't know. Get in bed and pretend to be asleep so he comes and wakes you." He walks out and down. Going into his room, I climb into his bed. I'll be leaving soon. Likely never to see Alaric again.

Although I feel that is maybe for the best. Half an hour later, I heard a car leave. Getting out of bed, I walk downstairs, stopping in the kitchen to look at Alaric.

"Ruby?" He looks at me, confused.

"Where is Jake?" I expected him to get me.

"He went home, I thought that was you in the car?" He sits staring at me.

"Wait, he left? Like, went home and left me here?" Staring at him, I stand shocked.

"He went out and then came back in. He said you two were getting back, and he said you said to say goodbye. I saw him leave, and someone was in the car with him."

I laugh, he fucking left me here. "I'm getting my phone." Walking out, I grab it and go back to the kitchen. He stands, holding out a cup as I wait for Bex to answer.

"I will drive you home. I'm going in that direction today anyway." Alaric looks at me.

"Thanks, I need to ring anyway. I've fifteen missed calls." I forgot about her after everything with Alaric.

"Ruby, about time." Bex's voice comes through the phone.

"Sorry, I got distracted."

I hear her laugh. "Mmm, under someone's daddy?"

"No, yes, kind of. You rang a lot, why?" It's not like her to ring so often.

"After you called, I spoke to Ivy; the ball is tomorrow night; you forgot."

Shit. "I planned to cancel. The masquerade ball isn't something I'm looking forward to." I didn't want to go without a date.

"Well, you're too late with cancelling. You need to get a dress and a mask. You should have received a confirmation email. There's a meal and then the ball."

"I'll figure out getting a dress."

"You haven't set off home yet? Jake told Oliver he was on his way home."

"He is, but without me. I'm sorting it out. Thanks for the reminder about the ball." I Hang up, and my head falls forward.

"Ruby, calm down. I said I would drive you home, and I will. Let me grab what I need from the office. Then we will leave." He smiles and walks out.

I sit and drink the coffee. I am still confused by what Jake is playing at. Why would he lie to Alaric? I was here, and he must have known I would see Alaric. Nothing makes sense.

"Let's go." I turn and look at Alaric. Walking out, I get in his car and sit quietly as he drives. "This is my fault." I turn and look at him.

"Alaric, it isn't your fault."

"It is because last night I put the call through. I must have been half asleep. I wanted them to block his account in the morning. Tomorrow morning. Only, I must have said it wrong. They blocked it this morning."

"You took his money?" That was quick.

"I called him, asked why he lied and left you here. He was saying he had given up acting, and you weren't together anymore. He knows I've cut him off."

He continued driving, and now I understand why he said it was his fault. Jake left this morning because he no longer needed to play the perfect boyfriend. We didn't speak, and an hour later, he stopped, and I looked around us confused.

"You said you needed a dress; considering my son left you in this situation, I figured I would make a detour, and then you can get one."

Dress, I almost forgot about that. I glance towards the shops.

"Alaric..."

"Don't, yes, I'm paying. See it as an apology for his fucked up behaviour."

"No." I can't let him buy me a dress.

"Ruby, no arguing, just let's buy a dress." He gets out. Sighing, I follow. Walking into the store, he smiles and sits. "Find the perfect dress, Ruby." I nod and walk through the store.

I pick up a few dresses and walk to the changing room. After trying on the first dress, I stand looking in the mirror. I'm not sure. It's not often I wear long gowns.

Smiling, I take a picture, hitting messages I find Alaric's name.

Can't decide, help me.

Hitting send on the message and attaching the picture, I get changed. As I fasten the dress, my phone vibrates.

Well if that was a genuine choice, you have no hope alone.

I laugh, okay maybe that was a bad choice. I take a picture of myself in the next dress and send it.

Is this for real?

Surely it isn't that bad? Getting changed, I send another picture.

Okay, you need help.

I laugh. They aren't that bad. I hear the knock and freeze.

"Miss, we have a dress for you to try on."

Opening the door, I look at the woman.

"He suggested that the dresses might not be appropriate." She holds up one, and I take it. I stare at it, it's red, and sparkly. Putting on the dress, I stare.

Wow. It's a strapless dress with a love heart neckline, and the slit goes so high. Taking a picture, I decide this is the dress.

No

No? I laugh at his message.

You picked it. How can you say no?

I'm picking this dress.

Because I saw you in it.

Then I imagined it on the floor

Not my floor

So, the perfect dress, then. Getting dressed, I walk back out. He is staring at me, which only makes me smile more.

"I'm not sure it's appropriate." His words are whispered into my ear as he pays.

"I think it's highly appropriate." It's highly perfect. He guides me back to the car. Sitting, I smile at him. It won't end up on any floor except for my own. I'm not going home with a random guy.

We sit in silence, and I can't help but wonder what I should do now. It will be strange to go back to life and not see Alaric again.

He stops outside my place; turning, he looks at me.

"For you." He holds out a box. I open it, my eyes widening. The mask is beautiful. It's all gold.

"Thank you, Alaric." He nods and smiles.

"Enjoy your life, Ruby."

Enjoy your life...Wow. Opening the door, I go to get out, but his hand stops me. "Ruby." Turning, I look at him. He sits quietly, then shakes his head. "Just take care and be careful."

"Thank you, Alaric, you too." Getting out of the car I walk in.

"Well, you're looking refreshed." Bex grins. "With gifts."

"Don't!" Holding up my hand, I go upstairs and place the items on my bed.

"You realise he's still parked outside, right?" Turning, I look at her. "How did you leave it?"

"He told me to enjoy my life, then stopped me from getting out of the car to tell me to take care and be careful." She stays by the window and grins at me.

"And he's out of the car, walking to the door." Her eyes widen.

"Okay." Moving, I walk down and reach the door just in time for him to knock. Opening it, I look at him.

"Erm, I realised you left quickly, or we left quickly. I forgot about your stuff, so I will pack it up for you. Then, if that's okay, I will ship it here."

"Yes, thank you, Alaric, whatever is easiest for you."

"Take care." Turning, he leaves, and I close the door.

"He wants you." I groan, hearing Bex. "What? He does, he was fighting with himself for a reason not to never see you again. You were meant to say no, it's fine, I will come to collect them."

Was I? God, I didn't notice. As I walked upstairs, she followed me and looked at the items.

"So, he bought you gifts."

"He bought my dress and mask for tomorrow night." She opens the box and stares.

"He has taste. I know you didn't choose either of these."

I laugh and nod. Taking out my phone, I look at it. Is it really over? Clicking his name, I upload the videos from the last few days and hit send.

Thank you for the last few days. I trust you. You kept your businesses hidden from Jake, so I know you will keep these safe.

Maybe I'm hoping that him having the videos of us will make him want to reach out to me more. Maybe it won't.

"So, what is happening, and what happened?" Ivy walks in with glasses and a bottle.

"Honestly, nothing is happening, that's it now."

"You don't sound happy about it." Bex looks at me.

"He's different, I felt completely safe with him, like I never had with anyone. I'm Jake's ex, though, and despite how bad Jake is, he's still his son."

"Screw Jake! He didn't just use you to get money, but he betrayed his own father! His dad should punish him."

"He has, he's cut him off." Their eyes widen.

"You fucked him that much he stopped giving his son money?" Bex laughs.

"It's not caused by me." I hope anyway, as then Jake will want me dead.

"I'm joking. Still, you haven't told us everything, you rang to be picked up yesterday then went silent." Bex looks at me.

"Alaric introduced me to his guests. I spoke to them about his business and what I thought. After, we had fun, and then we spent the whole night in Jake's bed." Jake's bed... of all places.

"You fucked his dad in his own bed?" Ivy laughs.

"What business?" Bex turns to me.

"Boudoir Bunny is Alaric's business or one of them, but Jake has no idea. He doesn't want him to know."

"I don't blame him! Jake's knowing is a disaster. Are you two really not seeing each other again?"

"Nope, it won't work. I'm Jake's ex, and he's Jake's dad. It would be complicated and messy, but it's for the best."

"Hmm." Turning, I look at Ivy. "Sorry, but that's bullshit. He likes you. I was watching from the window. I'm not saying right now to message him to speak, but give it a bit of time and reach out."

My head shakes. "No, Jake will be on the warpath when he finally realises he really has been cut off, and he will come at me because, let's be honest, it's my fault." I should never have gone with him.

Sitting ages pass as I tell them about everything, about how it got close to us getting caught by Jake, but in the moment, I didn't care.

Part of me thinks I should try and see him again, but I know things will be a mess, so I won't. It's a clean break, which is why I even deleted his number and decided to pretend he no longer exists.