

Chapter 41 Unwilling

I don't move. I'm still trying to process what happened. How did it go from Max wanting to cause issues to Beatrix helping him and going to my parents?

Even I know my parents aren't ones to stay quiet. Alaric's arms wrap around my body as he hugs me and I relax into his hold, wanting nothing more than to hide away until they finish destroying my life.

"Don't you fucking run, Ruby!" His words are fierce, and I peer up at him, I had thought it, but not said it, how would he know? "I can see it all over your face. Do not run." He pleads, pulling me closer to him.

"She's using me to get to you, Alaric. She's using me to win." Even I know she is, and the reality that ultimately it will be because of me that he gives her money is worry. She shouldn't get a thing from him, even if she is tormenting me.

"And you think that you walking away isn't her winning? Don't do it, baby girl, promise me." He pleads. Nodding slowly, I agree not to.

"I'm sorry." I don't even know why the hell I'm apologising; I just feel like I should.

"It's fine. You messaged, and I left to come home, but my car stopped working. I logged on to the system and could see you were uncomfortable. What was she saying?" As he finished talking, he pulled me to sit down next to him.

"She spoke about my course and mentioned Max. She worked with him to get me kicked, and she also went to my parents." My words are quiet, and his eyes widen as I speak.

"I'll fix it, baby girl." Leaning forward, he kisses me.

"Nothing can fix it, Alaric." She is going to win, and I would rather she destroy me than Alaric give her the money.

"Watch me fix it, baby girl. Give me a chance to. Did she say anything else?" he asks.

"Just that Max's dad helped." My shoulders shrug slightly, I don't really remember much of it. "I need to call Bex and Ivy." I can't let them find out from other people. They deserve the whole story.

"Call them. I will sort food for you to eat and call to speak to Jake." Kissing my cheek, he walks out, and I peer at my phone. How do I do this?

Hitting the number, I call Bex and wait.

"You didn't check in." Bex's words are loud, and I laugh.

"I only left last night. It's not been twenty-four hours yet." I joke, and she laughs.

"Fine. What did you ring for? Do you have some gossip?" Bex asks, and I laugh.

"Is Ivy there?" I need to know.

"Yeah, she and Oliver are cuddled together watching a shit film." Her words are mocking, and I hear Oliver telling her it's not. "It's simple, Oliver, it's shit." Bex continues to laugh.

"Put me on speaker. I need to tell you something." Oliver may as well hear.

"Oh my god! You're pregnant!" Bex squeals.

"No! Fucking hell, Bex, no, I'm not. Just put it on speakerphone and tell them I'm not!"

"Fine," Bex complains, and I wait for her confirmation. "Right, go ahead."

Sucking in a breath, I open my mouth to talk and close it again. Shit.

"Ruby, are you okay?" Bex's worried voice comes through the phone.

"Yeah. There's something you don't know. I need to tell you myself, as Beatrix is set to torture me, and she will use it. I want you to hear it from me, the whole story." They need to know.

"Ruby, you're worrying us now," Ivy speaks, and I nod even though she can't see me.

"You know what, we're coming to see you," Bex states.

My head shakes. "No, I can tell you over the phone."

"No, we're coming." The call ends, and I groan in annoyance. Walking through the house and into the kitchen, I see Alaric has cooked, despite me already cooking. The food I made is likely cold by now.

"Sit, please, baby girl." He looks at me. Nodding, I move and sit opposite him. I need to tell him; I need to find out how Jake knew, all this time, had known and didn't even mention it to me.

"I know, baby girl, Jake told me."

"How does he know?" I ask, not understanding how Jake could know.

"He didn't want to hurt you. Your parents told him at the start, likely as a way to try and make him run. He didn't want to tell you because it meant hurting you and telling you that your parents told him." His hand grips mine, and I nod.

"It was my fault." My words are whispered. I know it was. Alaric moves and pulls me up, his arms wrapping around my body.

"No, it wasn't. You were a child." His words are soft, and he lifts my head to look at him. "Don't blame yourself, Ruby. It was an accident, and you're not fucking guilty." He announces.

His lips press against my jaw. "Bex and Ivy are on the way. I tried telling them on the phone, and Bex decided she was coming so I could tell her in person." My eyes roll at the thought of it.

"No, she's coming to check on you. I don't blame her either. You sound detached, baby girl. Come back to me." He whispers his words into my ear before kissing me down the jaw to my neck.

"I'm sorry I'm causing you so much trouble." What would Beatrix have against him if I weren't around?

"Really?" His finger settles under my chin, forcing me to look at him. "You're not causing trouble. Think about it, baby girl. I would have seen her true colours and paid her to stay away from Jake. You stopped me and made me realise that paying her is letting her win. You saved me." His words are warming and reassure me.

"I love you, baby girl." He pulls me closer.

"I love you, Sir." He peers down at me and smiles. Well, I said it. He kisses me, and I get lost in the pleasure of it, pulling him closer to me. My fingers begin to unfasten his shirt.

Alaric's hands capture them, and I hear the door. I step away from him and see Jake walk through the room towards us.

"Eat baby girl." Alaric points at the plate, and I sit, doing as I'm told. "How did it go?" He turns and looks at Jake.

"I lost the job." He shrugs and walks further in.

"I'm sorry." It's my fucking fault.

"No, don't apologise. It's probably for the best." Jake explains as he makes a drink.

"You can also do what I suggested, Jake." Alaric looks at him.

"No, because then it's still taking your money. It's not making me face reality." Jake sits down with his drink.

"You will be working, and you will be paid as you would any job. You refused the inheritance until you settled down and met someone. This isn't me giving it to you, Jake; it's me giving you a place in the business, one that you will eventually be given anyway." Alaric speaks, and I agree with what he is saying.

"I'll consider it. I didn't want to rely on you anymore," Jake replies. I can see he has changed. He changed quickly, and somehow, his finding out about me and Alaric made him realise how bad he had gotten. "I'll see you later. I'm going to my room." He turns and leaves.

"You're not eating." Alaric looks at me.

"Sorry, I don't feel great." Too much is happening. I've eaten a bit.

"Okay, well continue eating. I wanted to speak to you." He sits now and looks at me.

"Why do I feel you have bad news?" I ask, his face is so different, and I can't read him.

"No bad news. Regardless of whether you finish your course or not, you want to open a business, right?" He asks and taps my plate, instructing me to eat without words.

"I guess," I reply, shrugging slightly and beginning to eat.

"Then let me help," he says confidently, and I look towards him, confused. "You're going to need money to get it started, baby girl," he says calmly, and I drop my fork in shock.

"No!" I refuse. I'm not letting him pay for things. He's looking at me, shocked. "Look, I don't want your money, Alaric. I don't want you giving me anything." That just confirms everyone's thoughts about me being with him for cash.

"Baby girl, I'm not giving you the money. I'm investing it in your business," Alaric explains.

He's wrong, though. "You're still giving it to me, Alaric. Even if it's used for the business, it's still going to me, which I don't want. I didn't want anything from you," I explain, still confused by his inability to understand.

"Okay. Forget that baby girl. Answer me this. Where do you see us in two years?" He asks me, and I panic. I hadn't considered it. "Bex said you mentioned moving out; where did you plan to go?" He asks, waiting for my answer.

"I had decided to move closer to here so I wouldn't be so far away," I explained.

"Baby girl, what is your plan if you ever move in here? To keep both our lives separated so much to ensure I don't give you any money?" He looks at me, waiting.

"I don't know." I've not considered it, not really.

"Okay, let's say you were pregnant. What would you plan to be, baby girl? Where would you have lived? What would you have done for money?" He's pushing, and I don't know what to reply.

"I don't know, I told myself I would work," I explain, and watch him sigh.

"At some point baby girl, we will move forward, you will move in and you can't avoid my money." He smiles at me, but I can. I feel like I can avoid it.

"Okay, look at it this way. You're going to go to a bank and ask them for money to invest in your business. How is that any different from me investing in it? Same terms, everything." He's looking at me, waiting.

"If I agree, can we stop this?" I ask, wanting to crawl into bed.

"Yes, baby girl." He grins at me like he's won.

"Then I agree," I say, giving in and letting him help.

"Good. I will let you off with not eating, baby girl, but you are tonight. Go get some work done, and I will work from home for the rest of today." Kissing my cheek, he walks out, and I go back to my laptop.

While trying to focus, I fail. Beatrix went to my parents. I can only imagine what she has said to them. Staring at the phone I consider the way forward.

Max is the way forward. I feel like I need to speak to him and find out exactly why he's doing this. Sure, I know, but there has to be a reason. I hadn't reported what happened, so why?

Picking up the phone, I message Adam; I know that he will have Max's number; he's always with him. Something tells me that Max will know Beatrix's plan.