

Apocalypse 41

Chapter 41 The Protective Duke

"Sister! I want to come with you," Keith exclaimed, chasing after Kisha as she headed towards the vehicle, waiting for Duke and the others to finish packing up. Duke needed to organize tasks for his subordinates who would remain behind.

Eric came over, his determination was evident. "I want to come too."

Before Kisha could respond, Ethan interjected, "It would be beneficial for me to accompany you. I have combat experience and survival skills." He said worriedly.

Kisha regarded Ethan with an indifferent expression. "Your combat proficiency is precisely why you should stay here. Your assignment is to train civilians and assist in organizing perimeter guard rotations, correct?"

Ethan grasped Kisha's implication, yet he couldn't bear the thought of his younger sister confronting the horde of rabid zombies out there. Despite recognizing that she somehow has combat prowess, he couldn't shake the belief that, as a woman, her strength might not suffice, and there could be situations where she would require assistance.

This is only natural because he did not know Kisha's level of skills and had not seen her engage in a fight but based on Duke's trust in her, she would definitely have some skills of her own. Or she might be just a guide, just like her role in their escape through the city. Ethan was worried to death that he could not stop himself from thinking of many things while facing his sister.

However, Ethan momentarily overlooked the fact that Kisha wouldn't be alone. Duke and the other two, Sparrow and Vulture, would accompany her. While Sparrow and Vulture were on par with Ethan in skill, Duke stood at an even higher level.

Ethan's concern was evident, etched on his face, mirroring the sentiments of other Evans members nearby who harbored a desire to accompany Kisha, alongside her grandparents. Yet, they all understand that their presence might only burden Kisha rather than aid her in times of need, so they remain silent.

Eric, being the eldest, understands that Ethan cannot leave his post. However, he realizes that he can step in, especially since he and their father work at the same place. Eric plans to delegate his responsibilities to their father and take on the role of protecting his sister outside. "Then allow me to come with you," he proposed.

Kisha's eyebrow arched slightly as she responded with a stoic expression. "No."

She remained uncertain and indifferent as to why the Evans always seemed so attentive and enthusiastic around her. Whether they sought her favor to speak up on their behalf or to lighten their burdens, she saw no room for negotiation.

Yet, she found herself strangely at ease in their presence, almost amused, as she had never witnessed such a strong familial bond in the apocalypse, of course aside from her family—a stark contrast to what she previously experienced with other families who survived together but ended up killing each other to continue surviving or for other reasons.

The apocalypse often revealed the darkest aspects of humanity, leaving little room for genuine connections.

Eric was taken aback. "Why?"

She answered. "No time to babysit." She then faced Keith, her stoic face softening. "Baby brother, I can't bring you with us now because it's going to be dangerous. But I need you to stay here to train with our grandparents and to practice what I taught you previously." Kisha reiterated patiently.

The stark contrast in treatment pained Eric and Ethan but they can't do anything about it. They can only keep it to themselves because they have yet to reveal their connection with Kisha so it is understandable for her not to have the same patience with them the way she has for the Aldens.

The silent Melody seized an opportunity to voice her thoughts upon witnessing her family's discomfort with the perceived disparity in treatment. Eager to stoke discontent, she aimed to gradually sway them to her side. "Ms. Aldens," she began, her tone calculated, "considering the perilous nature of the journey with Duke and the others, wouldn't you be the one potentially hindering their progress?

Perhaps being babysat instead of contributing?"

"Suppose you gained Duke's trust through questionable means," Melody insinuated, her words dripping with accusation, "but is it not excessive to cling to him in such dire circumstances as now? In the chaotic world outside, caring for a woman's safety becomes a daunting task.

Wouldn't going out to save his family require focus and resolve, rather than treating it as a casual outing?" Her meaning was unmistakable.

Following the rescue of the Squad 1 captain, the gravity of the Winter's family predicament became apparent to all. They understood the dangerous situation and the urgency with which Duke needed to act to save his parents.

Melody's insinuation weighed heavily on the Aldens and Keith, their expressions incense with the implications. Meanwhile, the Evans wore furrowed brows, their emotions difficult to discern—whether disappointment in Kisha's perceived actions or genuine concern for her safety if she were to accompany Duke.

Eric and Ethan bowed their heads in apology to Kisha on behalf of Melody. "Ms. Aldens, please forgive our sister," Eric began, "she's still young and sometimes lacks the discretion to know when and what to speak and when to remain silent."

Kisha, however, wasn't swayed. "Ms. Evans," she addressed Melody sternly, "as a member of an esteemed family, why do you view others through such a tainted lens? Or perhaps that's simply your nature?"

Turning to Eric and Ethan, Kisha continued her tone firm. "Gentlemen, your sister is a grown-ass woman. Referring to her as young and attributing her behavior to immaturity and insensibility will only embolden her. While you may tolerate her actions as a family, do not expect everyone else to do the same. I will not tolerate it."

Despite feeling a surge of anger for being called out, Melody managed to conceal her emotions behind a practiced smile. "I apologize, Ms. Aldens if my words came across as insulting," she responded smoothly. "My intention was genuine concern for your well-being."

We've all witnessed what happened to our acquaintance and knew the dangers that await beyond the vast forest, and the thought of you facing such horrors is indeed unsettling."

Melody's words carried a veiled undertone of frustration, masked by her diplomatic demeanor. She refrained from revealing the true depth of her feelings, choosing instead to maintain an air of composure in front of the others.

Melody adeptly downplayed her previous insulting remarks about Kisha's relationship with Duke, as if she had never uttered them in the first place.

Taking note of the softened tension among the group, Melody seized the moment to make her suggestion. "Considering the gravity of this task, wouldn't it be wiser to entrust it to someone like my brother Ethan?" she proposed. "His skills and expertise could undoubtedly assist Duke in the mission to rescue his family."

Melody's primary objective is to prevent Kisha from spending additional time with Duke, as she harbors concerns about their growing rapport. Additionally, she views this situation as an opportunity to elevate her brother's status and gain Duke's trust. By positioning Ethan as a valuable ally in Duke's eyes, Melody hopes to increase her own proximity to Duke.

Ultimately, she envisions this strategic maneuver as a stepping stone toward reviving her family's efforts to arrange a marriage between herself and Duke.

Melody also sees an opportunity to counter Kisha's accusation of her being insensible by flipping the narrative in her favor. She aims to portray Kisha as overly harsh and unfit to lead, highlighting Kisha's apparent bias and inability to accept criticism. Through this strategic maneuver, Melody intends to sway others to question Kisha's leadership abilities and rally support for her own side.

Suddenly, Duke's cold, stern voice reverberated from behind them. "Who are you to make suggestions and decisions on my behalf?" He approached and stood beside Kisha. "While Ethan is undoubtedly skilled, and a good candidate to fight through a wall of zombies out there.."

Upon hearing Duke's words, Melody's selective hearing honed in solely on his compliment toward her second brother, leading her to believe that he had affirmed her earlier suggestion.

Before Melody's imagination could run wild, Duke continued with a firm tone. "However, it seems you've conveniently overlooked whose efforts and discerning decisions saved your entire family. It was Kisha's."

Without waiting for a response, he strode off, pulling Kisha along by the hand. She gestured to Keith and her grandparents to follow them briefly.

Keith and their grandparents complied, standing by the window with visible concern etched on their faces as they watched Kisha.

Seeing their worried expressions, Kisha couldn't help but smile. "Don't worry, little brother, Grandpa, and Grandma. I'm well-prepared for what lies ahead. When we return, I hope to find you all ready. Next time I venture out, you'll join me."

It was only then that Keith took a step back, promising his sister that he wouldn't slack off. He vowed to diligently train his newly awakened ability. Their grandparents, equally determined, pledged to intensify their training efforts so they wouldn't hold back or worry Kisha.

After bidding her farewell, Duke signaled to Sparrow to drive.

Kisha spoke up. "Should I take the wheel instead?"

Duke replied, leaning back in his seat with his eyes closed. "No need."

Sparrow continued Duke's words to explain. "Haven't I returned unscathed from the city filled with zombies? I've grown accustomed to maneuvering through the streets, even when they're overrun with zombies. Navigating through such conditions won't be an issue for me anymore—I've picked up a few tricks along the way." Sparrow boasted.

And so, they embark on their mission with a clear goal in mind.