

Chapter 31

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Nikolai

"Between you and me...what is King's endgame with Alyssa?"

Mason's question catches me off guard as we pull into King's driveway.

I glance at him, narrowing my eyes. "Why are you asking?"

He stares ahead, avoiding eye contact, his tone uncharacteristically soft. "I can't stop thinking about what she said earlier. I just want her to be...happy."

Seriously, what's been going on with him? He's usually so laid back, but lately, there's almost something almost possessive about the way he talks about Alyssa. I'm starting to entertain the ridiculously insane idea that he wants her again.

"I don't know what his intentions are," I admit, uncertainty creeping into my voice. "But he won't hurt her."

King may be emotionally fucked up, but I have faith that he'll do right by her.

If not, I'll have to step in.

We step into the house to find King on the couch, Zuri nestled comfortably in his massive arms, suckling on her bottle. The sight tugs at something deep in my chest—a mix of envy and something else I can't name.

"Hey, pretty girl," I greet her. Zuri's head snaps in the direction of my voice, and she immediately spits out her bottle, reaching up for me. I swear, I'll never get used to it. I've always fantasized about coming home to kids screaming "Daddy," running to jump into my arms.

This is the closest thing to it.

My feet move before my brain catches up, and I find myself crossing the room to scoop her up. Her small body curls into mine, and my chest burns with emotion—like it does every single time.

"Did you miss Uncle Niko?" I ask softly as her hand curls around my finger. For a moment, everything fades away—it's just me and Zuri. This fragile life that, in a span of a week, somehow means more to me than I ever expected.

But then King's voice slices through the moment, bringing me back to reality. "Where the hell have you guys been? I expected you back an hour ago."

His voice is low but sharp, his eyes swirling with barely-contained irritation.

"Gray insisted we go out to dinner with them," Mason answers before I do, rolling his eyes. "I guess it was their way of showing appreciation for being their taxi all day. As you can imagine, it was torture."

I hated every second of it. Not just because I despise Christine with every fiber of my fucking being, but I missed Alyssa and Zuri. I wanted to hurry back to them, but Gray insisted we stay.



He didn't once mention what Alyssa said at the table. Instead, he kept prying about why King is so interested in his sister staying here. He said King's behavior was off, even for him, and he wanted both Mason and me to keep an eye on him and report any troubling behavior.

I didn't have the balls to tell him that King has been fucking her since the night she arrived. I couldn't betray my brother like that. That would be a death sentence, and I'd probably be the one forced to kill King for him.

Besides, I'm just as guilty. I want her too.

It's like high school all over again. Back then, King and I both wanted her—that's where the pact came in. But we're not boys anymore. We're grown-ass men, and this time, we're both going to have her.

As Mason disappears down the hall to King's library, my eyes sweep the room just to make sure I didn't miss Alyssa. "Uh, where's Alyssa?" I ask hesitantly.

King's expression gives nothing away. "Taking a nap."

"And she knows you're watching Zuri?" I can't help but ask the question, even though I know it might piss him off.

A flicker of annoyance crosses his features, as if I've offended him. "What's that supposed to mean? You think I can't handle her on my own?" His voice is low, measured, careful not to startle Zuri, but there's a razor edge to it.



"No," I answer quickly, trying to backpedal. "I...just didn't think you wanted to."

Instead of being angry, a glint of amusement sparks in his eyes. "Like I said before, me and Zuri have an agreement."

He's mentioned this agreement before, but I still don't know what the fuck he's talking about. What agreement can you have with a seven-month-old that she'll understand?

Before I can tell him how insane he sounds, King pushes himself from the couch with a heavy sigh. "I guess I'll get going now. I'm sure it will take a while to find Albert Bruno, especially if he knows I'm coming."

"What's wrong? You don't seem as excited as you usually are when it's time to collect payment," I tease, trying to lighten the mood as I take his place on the couch.

King smirks, but there's something lazy in the way it spreads across his face. "Guess my kitten milked all the energy out of me."

Of course, he fucked her.

My chest tightens with jealousy. I told him before we left that she was fragile. That didn't mean go upstairs and take advantage of her.

King chuckles softly, catching the look on my face. "Relax, Niko. I didn't take advantage of her. She begged me for it, and I didn't want to turn her down."

His words do little to calm the jealousy gnawing at my insides. It only

makes it worse. He keeps that part of her to himself, that private connection, and it's driving me insane.

How could she ever want me in that way if he keeps stealing it away for himself?

King disappears into his office and comes back with a black case—his "torture tools," as he likes to call them. There's a dark gleam in his eyes, the predator awakened. "This shouldn't take long, but in case it does, I'll call in a few hours to check on them."

He takes a moment to glance down at Zuri. It seems like he wants to say something, but he just pats her head and walks out the door, shutting it quietly behind him.

After King is gone, Mason returns to the room with a small stack of books, plopping down into King's chair. "Still convinced he won't hurt her?" he mutters as he flips open the first one, not bothering to look up.

I lean back on the couch, cradling Zuri as my thoughts spin. The realization crashes over me like a cold wave—he's right. Alyssa is more vulnerable than any of us realized. She's going to use King to numb herself, to escape the pain she's running from. She doesn't know she's diving headfirst into something far darker.

King's not only going to break her; he's twisting her, reshaping her until she's so dependent on him, she'll never be able to leave, and she'll think it's her choice. It's exactly what he did to me. Right now, he's obsessed with her, and she's only fueling that obsession, making it spiral out of control. But what scares me the most is that she might mistake it for love, for something real. 1

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But I know King. He's not capable of that. He's a predator, and she's become his prey.

I can't let that happen. Not to her. Not ever.

Whatever it takes, I have to step in.

Even if it means crossing a line I can't uncross.

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