

Chapter 11

Maya

The SUV didn't park so much as claim the curb.

Caden's hand closed around my elbow and steered me backward without looking at me. "Inside," he said again, calm like a locked door.

I moved because arguing with that tone felt like misbehaving.

From the livingroom window I watched him cross the lawn.

Tylon was already at the front steps, posture straight enough to measure a shelf with. Leo came through the side gate a beat later, hair still damp with what seemed like sweat.

Two people climbed out of the SUV. The man wore dark everything and a smile that didn't touch his eyes.

The woman didn't bother with a smile. She scanned the house the way you scan a something when looking for errors. Me? Was she looking for me?

At that thought, our eyes met, and my heart skipped a beat as I ducked behind the curtain. When I peeped again, she was still looking with something akin to curiosity.

Who were they? One of their parents? The air around them had that crisp, expensive confidence that screamed power.

I should have left. But I didn't.

I tried my best to hear.

"...a breach on the western border," the man was saying. "How could you have allowed this to happen?"

My skin prickled. The edge of his words rang wrong.

Tylon's shoulders were rigid, and I could tell he was trying his best to stay composed.

Still, his answer was polite yet cold. "We tightened rotations last night. Additional coverage goes in by noon. The intruders were handled."

There's that word again. Handled. Why did it sound so final? And why were these people interrogating three students, regardless of how strong and powerful they seemed? Why would they have to 'handle'

anything?

"You'll file your report?" the woman asked. "We'd prefer language that doesn't alarm the Board."

"Language," Caden murmured, boredom evident in his tone.

"And the girl?" the man asked, a fraction too casual. Leo didn't shift, but the air around him did.

"She's fine," Caden said before Tylon could. "Which is more than I can say for your defenses."

The man smiled his fake smile. "So spirited."

"There's concern in the council regarding her," the woman added, her eyes shifting to where I was briefly. "There are things you men might not know—"

"I know everything that happens under my roof," Tylon growled. "I know where this is going and the answer is no. The girl is off limits to everyone, and that includes the council."

I gasped, and a few heads turned. Luckily, I was fast enough to duck before I could be seen.

But what the hell did they mean? And did Tylon just... defend me?

No. It must've been because of what happened last night.

"This isn't coincidental, Blackridge," the man added sternly. "The rogues were—"

"Let it be," the woman interrupted in a tone that made me realize who was really in charge. "But for reasons, we may need her relocated."

There was a hum that rose so sharp in my chest at her words, and something felt... off.

'May' didn't mean maybe. It meant plan. They weren't here to check. They were here to move me.

Tylon's voice trimmed to steel. "She stays."

A beat passed, then the man's pleasantly fake tone again. "Then you'll abide by Council advisories."

"We'll abide by our own," Caden said. And there it was... the distrust he didn't bother hiding.

The woman's eyes slid to him like she was deciding whether to swat a

fly. "We'll be in touch, Blackridge heirs," she said, and that was interesting.

Only Tylon was a Blackridge, yet she refereed to them all as Blackridge heirs.

Tylon didn't nod. Leo did, polite because that's how he's built. The doors shut on soft hinges, and the SUV rolled away just as it came.

I didn't bother waiting when they entered the house.

"They're hiding something," I said before I could talk myself out of it.

Caden's mouth tipped into a smirk. "They're always hiding something," he said, bored.

"Don't you know it's rude to eavesdrop?" Tylon folded his arms. The stare he leveled at me could have cut the room into pieces.

I lifted my chin. "Then don't have council meetings on the lawn."

Leo's eyes softened, sliding over my face.

"You okay?" he asked in a low voice.

"Yes," I said, and meant it.

His gaze caught on the scrape that shouldn't have been as closed as it was. The tiniest crease formed between his brows, but he didn't ask. He gave me the grace of leaving it, and then nodded once before he stepped past us into the kitchen.

I refocused on Tylon. "They were lying," I said. "Not about everything. Just... the parts that matter."

"How do you know?" he asked.

"I don't know how," I said, frustrated with the truth. "I just know. Most of the conversation was selective truths. And when they said may relocate me, that wasn't maybe."

Silence passed between us. Tylon's gaze moved in slow measure from my eyes to my cheek to my bandaged wrist and down as if he was assessing the damage. It was the first he was seeing me since last night.

"Yes," Caden said, bringing us back. "It was about you."

A low sound came from Tylon's chest.

"It's connected to last night," he told me, as if the growl hadn't

happened. "Those men weren't random."

"Then who were they?" I asked. "What did that man mean by rogue? Like wild student? Is that a name or something? And what kind of council needs students to take care of campus business?"

Caden's jaw worked like he was picking words and rejecting most of them.

Tylon didn't pick any. He simply turned, dismissing me without a second thought.

"Tylon." My voice stopped him. I wasn't sure what I'd say after, just that I didn't want the answer to walk away. "Please."

He didn't face me. "They were intruders," he said. "And the Council doesn't like that." He left it there.

"That's not an answer," I said to his back.

"It's the one you get," he said, and disappeared down the corridor.

I let out a breath I didn't remember holding. Something in my chest wanted to go with him and shake him until more fell out.

Caden leaned a hip into the doorway looking concerned.

"They'll push to move you," he said. "We'll push back."

"Why?" I asked, too tired. "What's so special about me that I was attacked and now drawing the attention of whoever the council is? I'm just an orphan transfer student."

"I don't know," he responded, his eyes distant. "But we'll figure it out before the council does."

"And if you don't?"

His eyes met mine with a deadness I've never seen in Caden before, and prayed I never see ever again.

"Then the council takes you. And we never see you again."