

Chapter 5

Maya

I made it two steps before he was there, fast and unrelenting as his fingers closed around my wrist and yanked me back so hard, I thought my shoulder popped.

I screamed, but he didn't let go as he swerved me around to face him.

His grip was strong and hard, speaking a message of his anger for itself. I felt the blood flow slowing, not quite pain yet, except it was already more than I could bear on a night like this.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" He growled, and his voice was low but not quiet, the kind of control that vibrates.

"I... bathroom." I couldn't seem to form a full sentence as my brain went blank. "I locked myself out. I wasn't spying, I swear."

Down the hall, the woman had paused at Tylon's door with one brow lifted, and her mouth tilted in a way that seemed amused. Like she had just won something I didn't know about.

Embarrassment was eating me whole, but fear and guilt was at number one.

The point and truth of it all was, I really had no idea who these men were, and I had no idea what they were capable of. And the way he was looking at me right now brought back way too many childhood memories that I tried to bury.

My breathing grew ragged and hard, and I knew what was happening.

"You were told not to wander after midnight," he growled. It wasn't a question, and it landed like an accusation anyway.

"I wasn't," I pleaded, and I heard the tremor in my voice as my heartbeat grew. "Please... let go." My voice broke on the last word without my permission, small and ugly.

Something changed in his face as if a wire inside had just come loose. His hand didn't soften. But his eyes did... just a little.

"Tylon!"

A new voice joined us in the hallway, and I glanced passed him to see

Leo charging towards us. Sleep was still in his eyes, but also anger.

"Let her go, Tylon!" he shouted. "Don't you see you're hurting her?"

Tylon released me so fast I stumbled.

But Leo reached me before the wall did and steadied me with arms. I leaned into that steadiness for a second because my body wanted to, whether from fear or warmth or plain relief... I couldn't tell.

The woman now wore a scowl as she glowered at me, specifically about Leo's arms around me.

"What the hell, man?" Leo didn't raise his voice. He looked at my hand, and I looked too. A bruise would bloom there by morning in the shape of Tylon's hand, no doubt. "Look at her wrist."

Tylon's eyes flickered to my wrist, and I saw the guilt for barely a second before he masked it with indifference and annoyance. His throat worked before he answered Leo.

"She was in my doorway," Tylon said, and the anger was back. "She saw ... Heard... I don't even know how much she saw or heard."

Leo's eyes trailed toward Tylon's doorway, as if he was just seeing the woman. He didn't even spare her that much of a glance as she smiled and wiggled her fingers at him in a suggestive wave.

"How much does that matter?" Leo asked. "We live in a house with doors and locks. Close it."

"She shouldn't have been wandering around in the first place. This is my house. If I want to keep my door open, I have all fucking right to do so."

I wiped my cheeks because crying on my first night here was humiliating enough.

"I came down to find a bathroom," I repeated. "I locked myself out of mine, so I tried a few doors. I didn't mean to..."

I hung my head because I was, indeed, wrong for staying and I was embarrassed.

"The bathrooms connect to the bedrooms," Leo said to me in a gentle tone. "Except the powder room on the ground floor." He tipped his head toward the end of the hall. "Use mine. It's closer."

Tylon's throat worked. He didn't apologize. He didn't explain. He looked

at me like he was checking for injuries he couldn't see and then looked away as if the act of looking had cost him too much.

The woman, now fully composed, watched all three of us with that small, confident smile.

"So," she said to Tylon, "call me if you change your mind."

"I won't," he said, and it was final in a way that made her blink once. She slid past us with a rustle of fabric and the silent certainty of someone who knows she'll get what she wants.

Tylon didn't look back as he went into his room and slammed the door. I flinched, but Leo was still holding me. I allowed it, and he guided me two doors down.

It was tidy without being obsessive, unlike Tylon's, but gave nothing away that hinted at his personality. No pictures, no posters. You would have thought he just moved in today too.

He flipped on the light in the bathroom and stepped back so I could pass. "There."

"Thank you," I managed, voice low and raw at the edges. I hesitated in the doorway because it felt wrong not to say something. "I didn't mean to cause trouble."

I felt like I was five again, apologizing to those people.... after already enduring their 'punishment'.

"You didn't," he said, and I almost believed him. "Don't let him intimidate you. Ty is... Ty. He thinks protecting people and controlling them are the same thing. It's his way, or no way. The situation isn't ideal, but we all just have to work with it."

I nodded because anything more would have made me cry again. I closed the door with a ragged breath, and realized I didn't even want to pee anymore.