

Chapter 14

Ellie was safe.

A doctor was attending her. She was safe. That was all that mattered.

I paced back and forth in the sterile hallway, phone in hand and staring blankly at Lucia's number.

Should I call?

If I didn't, she would know sooner or later, and that would make things much worse.

Fuck it.

I tapped my finger on the screen and pressed the cold metal against my ear, feeling the persistent pounding in between my ears.

Lucia picked up on the second ring.

"Dylan?" Her silky voice entered my ears, giving me a warmth I shouldn't feel. "Why are you calling me at this time? Where's Ellie?"

"She's fine." I exhaled. "She's fine."

Silence on the line.

With the way I said it, anyone could tell things were definitely not fine. My stepmother might be beautiful, but she wasn't dumb. Not at all.

"Dylan," her voice hardened. "Tell me what happened."

So I told her. But when I got to the part of the chase, she wanted more details than just 'I ran after her'.

There was no escaping it. I told her about us running across the road and before I reached the conclusion, she cut me off and demanded to speak to her daughter.

"She's in the—"

“Dylan.” I never heard her this angry. Ever. Her voice was barely controlled, the smooth silkiness of her voice gone. “I want to speak to my daughter. Now.”

Putting my head down, I store towards the door, knock twice, then push through. I immediately apologized to the doctor and the nurse who was attending Ellie, wrapping bandages around her bruised ankle. I told them about the situation, and the doctor allowed it with a nod.

Then my gaze went to my sister in her tattered dress. My heart dropped when I realized the necklace I gave her wasn't around her neck anymore. Ellie wasn't looking at me. Her head was down, lips sealed.

But as soon as I handed the phone to Ellie and she heard her mother's voice, my sister broke down crying again, and I had to excuse myself. I wish I could embrace her, hug her tight, but I knew she didn't want me close.

Fuck, I felt like shit. And I deserved to feel like shit.

Why? Why did I do that with Heidi? Why did I have to be such a shitty human being?

Ellie would never trust me again. If I ever thought I had broken her before, well... mission accomplished.

Ten minutes passed until the door opened and the nurse handed me back my phone, gesturing that the call was still live.

I placed the phone close to my ear. “Hello?”

“Dylan.”

Fuck.

I had to struggle a few breaths before my tongue was functioning again. “Mother, I'm—”

“We're on our way.”

“On your way? To—to Singapore?”

“Yes.” I could hear her sigh over the line. She didn’t sound as angry as Lucia. Honestly, I couldn’t tell how angry she was. “We’re flying private, but we’ll still only arrive...” A pause. “Tomorrow. Tomorrow before noon. Make sure Ellie is attended to until we reach there. Is that understood?”

“Yes, Mother.”

“Keep this phone charged. Have internet access at all times.”

“Yes, Mother.” I sighed too. “Mother—”

Click.

We were back in the hotel room.

Luckily, Ellie’s injuries weren’t severe. No head injuries. Just bruises, scratches, and a broken heart. The doctor assured us she would make a full recovery within weeks, though he gave us some painkillers—just in case.

As soon as Ellie sat down on the bed, she spoke out, voice cold.

“I want you to leave.”

“I understand.” I said, looking at her, but her blues were down and still. “But I can’t. I need to make sure you don’t run away or do anything. At least until our mothers are here.”

“I won’t leave. I want to see Mommy.”

“I—” I scratched my head. “I really can’t. I’m sorry.”

She said nothing, so I stood there until my legs were tired.

“Ellie—”

“Shut up.”

I nodded and sighed, respecting her wishes. Aside from my phone ringing every hour—Lucia or my mother called for constant updates—we stayed completely silent.

Ellie, motionless on the bed. Me, sitting on a chair on the other side of the room, feeling like I was a million miles away from her.

It was hours and hours of torture. I had to look at the person I love the most, but not be able to hold, speak, or even touch her.

Finally, I ordered some room service, but Ellie didn't want any food, even when I pleaded with her to eat.

No response. Nothing.

Hours felt like days, and when the sun rose over the horizon, then high up into the sky, my heart was still pounding, my headache spiking up as my mother finally called for the last time, demanding me to go downstairs to let them up.

Hesitantly, I left Ellie and hoped to God she wouldn't leave. The past twenty-four hours had been disastrous, but if Ellie were to disappear again, my headache would be the least of my worries.

I took the lift down, my mind a complete whirl. I didn't know what would happen or what my punishment would be. I just hoped Ellie would eventually find a way to not hate me so I could at least have some semblance of my little sister back.

God, I really, really, really fucked up. A kiss and a handjob in exchange for all of this?

What the fuck was I thinking?

The elevator door peeled open, and I saw both my mothers standing in the lobby. They immediately noticed me and I held the door open as they came over, entering the lift. Nobody said anything, but from both their faces, they were *pissed*.

And just as the elevator door sealed shut, I saw a blur and then I stumbled back as pain radiated all around my left cheek.

My mother never slapped me. Heidi was the only one who had ever hit me, but this pain felt completely different. Worlds apart.

"How could you endanger your sister like that?" my mother demanded, voice breaking. I looked up, shocked to see her tearing up. "How could you?"

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to—”

“No.” My mother shook her head. “Sorry isn’t enough. She could be—”

My mother didn’t finish her sentence. Lucia was still silent, not looking at me.

The doors peeled open and my mothers exited. With heavy legs, I followed after them.

Please be there, Ellie. Please be in the room.

She was. Still in the same spot, motionless on the bed.

But when she saw her mother, the dam broke once again. Ellie raced towards Lucia with tears springing down her cheeks. They embraced, hugging tightly.

“Leave us,” my mother told me.

I went back down to the lobby with my left cheek still stinging, the pain still fresh. My stomach growled, and even though I knew I didn’t deserve to eat, I still went to the hotel restaurant. It was tea time by then, so they only served cakes and biscuits.

An hour felt like a day.

My phone rang.

“Where are you?” my mother demanded.

“Next to the lobby. Inside the restaurant.”

“Upstairs.” The line went dead.

It was time. The dreaded talk with my mother. Would I go upstairs and be disowned on the spot? Would I be told to grab my bags and leave the family, never to see them again?

Those thoughts ran through my head nonstop as I took the lift up.

Yeah, I deserved to be disowned. After everything I had done, there was no way I could face my family again.

When I finally reached the door of room number 525, I couldn't open it. My hands were shaking, and I was burning up inside.

It took me a whole minute to finally muster up the courage to beep the keycard and push through.

I expected to see all three of them waiting for me, but only my mother was present. Where were Ellie and Lucia?

My mother answered that for me.

"They're in another room. Ellie will sleep, and when she's feeling better, we can have her injury checked again. Then they will return home."

I knew it was fruitless to apologize, but I still tried.

"Mother..." I started.

"No." She was sitting on a couch and she pointed to the one opposite her. "Sit."

What could I do but obey?

I sat and braced for an immediate scolding, but when my mother stayed silent, it felt worse.

I couldn't look her in the eyes. I couldn't.

A full minute passed before she finally ended my torture, speaking in that sharp tone, making every word feel like tiny daggers to my heart.

"How could you endanger your sister like that?"

"It's... it's my fault. I should—" I looked to the side. "It's my fault."

"Look at me, Dylan."

Slowly, very slowly, I met her icy blues that were identical to Heidi's. My older sister inherited so much from our mother—everything from her striking beauty to that dominating attitude.

"Do you know anything about being a brother?" my mother asked me. "Do you even know your role in this family?"

Here it was. I'll be disowned.

I needed to choose each word carefully. So I recalled the memories of everything my mother had taught me, and a repetitive statement popped towards the forefront of my mind.

"To protect my sisters?"

"To protect your sisters," my mother affirmed. "Why can't you even do that? The most basic responsibility of a man? Of a brother, and some day, a father? How are you going to protect my grandchildren?"

"I..." I looked away, but my mother clicked her tongue, forcing our gaze back together. "I'm sorry."

"No sorrys." When I tried to look away, she clicked her tongue, forcing me back into her.

"We're all very fortunate nothing happened to her," she continued. Her voice was back to even and controlled, unlike the burst of emotion in the elevator. I honestly couldn't tell how angry she was. "Very fortunate."

I hung my head. "I know."

"Your sister is safe. That's the most important thing." My mother's eyes narrowed. "And she will never ever be in a situation like that ever again."

I just nodded, but then immediately remembered my mother *hated* unspoken words, so I quickly followed it up with a 'Yes, Mother.'

"The... event with Heidi." She paused. "When was this?"

Kill me.

“Umm...” I rubbed my neck. “During her party.”

My Mother sighed, finally breaking eye contact. “I won’t ask for details. But do you not think of the consequences before you do anything? Do you not think about how Ellie would feel? How...” She clicked her tongue, stopping herself from saying more, visibly showing a frustration I rarely see from her.

How could I answer that?

“I’ll reprimand Heidi when we return home. For now, give Ellie space. Do you understand me?”

She was talking as if I would be staying in the family. A good thing, I guess?

“Yes, Mother.”

“Why are men like this? No decency. No...” She shook her head. “Your father... you’re just like him.”

“Like... him?”

Was my mother actually talking about Father? To me?

My mother sighed and grabbed the cup of coffee from the glass table in between us.

Sipping, she set the cup back down and looked into the distance—through the window that had a gorgeous view of the city.

I shuffled my feet. Was she going to drop the conversation or continue it?

She decided a few seconds later.

“I was his first,” my mother whispered. “He was happy. We were happy. Everything was perfect and then he *had* to set his sights on Lucy.”

I already knew that, but still, I stayed entranced. My mother never spoke about things like this. About my father. About her past.

“Of course I was furious. Just like Ellie is right now. I refused to let it happen, but...” She blew out a long exhale. “I guess it worked out in the end. We were happy, and then I had the greatest joy of my life. I had Heidi.”

She looked at me.

“I had you.”

“And all through your fuck ups...” my mother continued. “All...” She stopped herself, then inhaled sharply, trying to compose her emotions.

I almost apologized again. But I allowed her to do what she needed to do and say what she needed to say.

“You remind me so much of him, you know that?” When her blues returned, there were tears in them, but she made no effort to wipe them away. “Your father always made mistakes too... he always...”

She choked on the last word, and the tears slipped free.

I have only seen my mother cry after my father’s passing, and I hated seeing her like that. Even though she had caused me so much pain, I still loved her more than I could imagine.

There was a box of tissues on the table, so I handed her them.

“I’m just thankful your sister is okay,” my mother whispered, wiping her tears. “I don’t know when you’ll grow up, Dylan. You have responsibilities to this family, and one day you’ll have to step up and shoulder them all.” She sniffed. “Do you understand?”

I nodded. “Yes, Mother. I understand.”

“Do you not think I love you? Have I failed so much as a mother you can’t see that?”

Had I misheard that?

She didn’t repeat it. Just stared at me with those blue eyes that had been reddened with tears.

“I—” I rubbed my neck, so uncomfortable with this. “I...”

"I do love you," my mother spoke, and the world crumbled.

She... there was no way. The three words. She actually said the three words.

No way. No fucking way.

Was the past 24-hour a fever-filled nightmare? Was I going to wake up at any moment? Honestly, that seemed like the most logical explanation than hearing an 'I love you' from her.

This all felt surreal.

"And I still love you after everything you did," my mother continued. "That's my job as a mother. You're my son. You're your father's son."

"I..." I could feel the waterworks behind my eyes. "I—I love you too, Mother. And I'm sorry. Truly, I am. I... I don't deserve you. I don't deserve Ellie."

"You're on semester break now." She took another ply of tissue. "I've decided to send you to Europe. To your grandparents."

So this was my punishment? Banishment? I'd gladly accept it. Honestly, I got off lightly.

"Your grandparents, especially your grandfather, will work you hard. You'll start from the bottom and learn everything there. And when school commences, you'll return to us."

So she wanted me to return. Not banishment then. I didn't know whether to feel disappointed I wasn't canned heavier, or happy that my mother actually loved me.

"Yes, Mother."

She actually loved me. I couldn't believe it.

"Hopefully, you learnt something there and returned as a changed man." She stood up. "Stay. I'll bring Lucy. I want you to look her in the eyes and swear you will never allow any harm to come to your sister ever again."

Facing Lucia might even be worse than my mother.

I exhaled. "Okay."

My mother rounded the coffee table and gestured for me to stand. When I got to my feet, she took my chin with her two fingers.

"I don't want to deal with this type of stress again." She propped my chin up. "I deal with a lot of pressure every day, Dylan, but I can handle them all. The only thing I cannot tolerate is the safety and wellbeing of my family. Do you know how Lucia was when she heard the news? I never want to see her like that again."

For the first time in the conversation, I looked my mother square in the eye.

"It will never happen again. I'll keep her safe. Both of them."

"Good."

Lucia was understandably more upset than my mother. She had been crying too because when I saw her, tears were still on her cheeks. My mother had to do the courtesy of wiping them off.

My mother hugged Lucia, whispered an "I love you," then pecked her on the lips before taking her leave to check on Ellie.

Growing up, I was used to that intimacy between my mothers, so I always assumed it was normal. It was not until way later in life I realized family members weren't actually supposed to kiss each other on the lips.

I had my suspicions about their odd intimacy, but I couldn't be sure. I knew my mother loved her sister almost as much as she loved Heidi, so maybe that was just her way of displaying her love.

Or maybe...

No, that would just be too weird. But then again, I wanted to fuck my whole family, so I shouldn't judge.

“I’m sorry,” I croaked out, looking my stepmother in the eye. Growing up, Lucia showed me much more love than my mother ever did. There were countless times where I considered her more of a mother than my own ever was.

Hurting Lucia felt as bad as hurting Ellie.

“Your sister is okay,” Lucia said. Her voice had lost its usual silkiness. She sounded a little hoarse—probably from all the crying. “That’s the most important thing.”

“How...” I swallowed. “How is she?”

“Heartbroken,” Lucia said. “Why would you...”

“I know. I’m sorry. I fucked up bad.”

“You need to give her time and space,” Lucia advised, then closed her eyes. “Honestly, I’m not even sure if she will ever be the same after this.”

“I’ll try and make amends. I—”

“Dylan.” Lucia looked at me in a way that crushed my heart. Like my mother, she didn’t accept my apology. How could she? I ruined her daughter. “Ellie was deeply in love with you. I think she loved you more than she loved herself. You broke something sacred. That can’t be fixed.”

“She’ll never forgive me?”

A long sigh.

“I don’t know. For her sake, I hope she does. She’s your sister and she... she still loves you very much, Dylan. Maybe with time...”

I looked down.

“Listen,” Lucia continued. Her voice had gotten softer, more compassionate. “I don’t fully understand why you would ever break something so special. Your father... he had similar ideas. But that doesn’t mean you should follow in his footsteps. I was a different person back then, and I certainly wouldn’t tolerate it now. Ellie would never tolerate this, and that’s why she reacted that way.”

My throat was so dry.

“She gave me a necklace,” I croaked out.

“She told me.”

“I... I really fucked up, didn't I?”

“You should sleep.” Lucia stood up. “If you want to talk to Ellie, give me a message, and I'll relay it to her.”

“Tell her...” I swallowed, my voice wavering. “Tell her I'm sorry. Tell her... tell her I love her very much.”

Lucia gave me a small smile, and then she was gone, leaving me to mull alone with my thoughts.