

"Hey..."

The sound was rough in my throat. Coughing seemed an inadequate displacement for this sudden, stark awareness. With Su Ah's gaze landing on us, every ounce of playful inertia was annihilated.

I could feel the pressure of Mia underneath me, could smell the fading vanilla perfume on her skin mixed with my own exerted warmth, and in that instant, it felt less like sibling wrestling and more like an arrest in progress, with Mia as my unwilling—and terribly willing—co-conspirator.

Heat crawled up my spine. Not quite shame, certainly not guilt, but something closer to being caught with your hand in a metaphorical cookie jar that everyone in the house knew was actually a Pandora's Box.

Any proper brother would've sprung away like someone had lit him on fire. But then again, any proper brother wouldn't have spent the last twenty minutes on this same couch with the same sister's teeth on his shoulder or their hands all over each other.

It was all relative, wasn't it?

Mia stiffened beneath me, her muscles going taut where they'd been languid just seconds before. Her entire body went rigid, not with shock, but with a steely, almost defiant refusal to be flustered. Her heels, which had been resting innocently against the back of my thighs, now dug in.

Every detail of our proximity sharpened into crystal clarity. The way the strap of her tank top had slipped askew, leaving a smooth expanse of shoulder exposed. My mind stuttered, trying to frame an action.

Shoving back would look too violent, too guilty. Practically the kind of rushed denial that only confirmed. Linger? Linger would be an outright declaration. Freeze. Freeze and pretend to be confused by the sudden attention.

This was the logic of a bomb-disposal expert.

The best course of action in this situation was to be absolutely calm and move with the kind of confidence that suggested that, sure, your pants were falling down and your tie was loose, and yes, your boxers had definitely migrated south of the equator, but there wasn't anything in the slightest that indicated the family photograph on the wall was slightly crooked.

As long as your feet kept moving and your chin didn't waver and your smile didn't twitch, people tended not to notice things that were right in front of their faces.

Unfortunately, this damn Noona's decision made mine irrelevant.

Mia pushed up onto her elbows, a languid arch in her back, the movement entirely too challenging. She closed the remaining inch and sealed it with a press of her lips right behind my ear. It was wet and soft and private and horribly, irrevocably for an audience of more than two.

A poignant silence settled in.

Then Su Ah's sharp intake of breath from the doorway tore it to shreds.

"....."

"Su Ah Noona?" My voice was weirdly resigned, with Mia still licking at the rim of my ear like a particularly seductive kitten. Her soft tongue dragged over the sensitive flesh, the pressure purposely teasing, her intentions painfully obvious.

Su Ah's whole countenance twitched. And then—she smirked. *Uh oh*. I could smell the tang of gunpowder from a thousand meters. I could practically see it igniting.

"Ah. Is this a new fetish?" Su Ah tilted her head, and her stare seemed to dig a hole straight through Mia. "Unnie, maybe you should avoid playing house with our brother next time while mom is home, unless, that is, you guys want us to move out."

Mia blinked all too innocently, arms dragging up to curl around my neck, not missing a beat. "Jealous, little sister?" Her fingers began an idle, maddening pattern at the nape of my neck, her nails lightly tracing circles on my skin. "Did your lackluster writing leave you too pent up? I suggest you buy a toy if it'll keep your nose out of my business."

Su Ah uncrossed her arms, pushing away from the frame with the kind of intentional, terrifying casualness I usually saw in panthers to stand in front of us, looking down at us. "Your business? Unnie, you're straddling him on the family couch. 'Business' spreads its legs a bit wider in our household than I remembered." A sharp smile. "Aw. What's the matter, Unnie? Running out of things to keep our dearest brother interested before he finds out you're only exciting enough for two minutes?"

Mia just giggled.

Her arms curled around my shoulders, clinging on, a provocative gleam in her eyes when she met Su Ah's impassive gaze. "Afraid not. He might be fifteen, but he's quite mature, and that *head* of his is capable of pumping out a lot of love, you know~♥"

For fuck's sake...

I cringed visibly.

I had become Switzerland during a fire sale. No, Switzerland is *neutral* by choice. I was Switzerland by *default*. I couldn't and wouldn't take sides here. I had dust off all of my diplomatic skills here before this skirmish turned into a full blown war.

Worse still, Eun Ha was upstairs and could've come down anytime, turning this war into a family feud.

Okay. Plan? The 'Freeze' option was already failing because Mia was openly taking shots. Not my shots, mind you.

I looked at Su Ah. Saw how her smile had widened a fraction, showing just a sliver of teeth. Then she tugged at the collar of her sweater, revealing a brief expanse of smooth, pale skin. Flawless, all but for a fading bruise on her neck. "Oh, I know that very well, Unnie, don't you worry."

The air tightened. Mia laughed—real laughter this time, loud and sharp without humor. "Is that the only one you've got? Wear it with pride then, because it'll be the *l~a~s~t~*"

"Noona—" I started, only to be stopped mid-sentence as Mia shifted under me.

Su Ah narrowed her eyes, an iceberg chill bleeding into her smile. And with that, my dearest, most beloved older sister crossed a line in the sand. "Well. Good thing our brother can leave more than one."

I could feel the grinding of teeth right into my ear, and for a moment I really feared for my poor cartilage. "Sister, why don't you scurry back to your room and continue writing trashy poetry lines about his purple eyes?"

Su Ah's face colored for the briefest of moments as she glanced once at me and then back towards Mia. "Perhaps I'll do so after I borrow our brother for his own welcome home present; he *promised* me he'd help me with my writing after all. Let's go, Jae-il. Get away from that infuriating, braindead sex pot."

And then she proceeded to grab my right arm.

"What the fuck are you doing?" Mia shifted, sitting up and latching onto my left arm. "He's going nowhere!"

Now I was watching my two limbs tugging in different directions and square off to duel using words that could sharpen metal if you said them enough times over a forge.

And the worst part? A part of me wasn't thinking about my poor future as a football super-icon turned public scandal; I was noticing how good the tension in their shoulders made their neck lines look.

'Note to self: In your personal autobiography after the fall of civilization, mention that even on the precipice of absolute destruction, the male sexual imperative is unkillable. Also that you have very attractive insane siblings.'

Su Ah pulled on my arm with such strength that the joint of my shoulder creaked. She smirked, her voice dropping in the telltale octave that signaled a real argument was about to start.

"Unnie, you better fucking release him now." The glare coming from Su Ah's beautiful and elegant features turned threatening and lethal, and the next words that left her mouth carried all the threat needed for a fight. "I won't fucking repeat myself."

But my eldest, my Mia, never lost in an argument. Or anything, really.

"And why would I? He's perfectly fine where he is, between my arms. In fact, we were just about to relocate to my room, and guess what we'd do there, Su Ah? Take~a~guess~♥"

"Seriously, Unnie?" Su Ah's voice was cold enough to kill crops in three different continents. "You're not even hiding it anymore? Is that how it is?"

"Well, you already fucking saw the cat out of the bag, why the fuck should I hide it anymore?"

Su Ah gritted her teeth. "I can't believe you... disgusting."

Mia barked a laugh. "As if you're not fantasizing about him taking a piece out of your ass at night. Don't act like some kind of prude saint, you sick fuck."

"That's fucking sick and disturbing, Unnie!"

I really felt I should get involved soon or they might end up really destroying something—namely me—in the process. Besides, I was getting kind of upset over all of this whisper-yelling and yanking. I applied a bit of strength, and, naturally, both women instantly found themselves unable to gain an inch of my limbs' mobility.

Su Ah gasped, shooting me a stare that clearly held some accusation. "Are you helping her, Jae-il?"

Mia stared at me.

"Enough." I peeled each sister's hand from my biceps as if removing stubborn thorns. "Mom is upstairs, and it takes one fucking bad timing and she'll hear everything you're spitting at each other like mangy hyenas, so cut this shit, okay? There's no need for it."

My gaze flickered between the sisters.

Both girls' eyes widened at me. Su Ah looked miffed—in her own weird, quiet way. But Mia had gone straight for the daggers.

"Seriously, what's wrong with the two of you? At each other's throat all of a sudden. Seriously... what the fuck. I'm not your toy, or the subject of this pissing match between the two of you."

"She started it!" Mia whined.

"I did not!"

Su Ah defended herself.

"Did too~"

"Did *not*."

"Stop it!" I hissed, this time with some actual fucking ice into my tone.

Both of them widened their eyes at my outburst.

I calmed down my rising temper. "Are you kidding me? What will it take for you two to get a grip? I came back to be with my family, not to be torn apart by it. The situation here is already volatile enough without you two throwing more shit into it. Please, sit the fuck down and chill out."

I looked at each sister, letting my words sink in. For a second, I thought I saw a flash of shame on Mia's face, a flicker of something unreadable on Su Ah's. But it was gone as quickly as it came.

Su Ah shot her a very pointed stare before she slowly eased herself on the sofa. I watched, mostly speechless as she attempted to squeeze herself between the both of us. "Thank you, brother. At least I know the brain cells of the family aren't gone for good."

Mia let out the most strangled, irritated noise possible.

"....."

"Scoot over and make room for me." Su Ah whispered, elbowing my ribs while glaring at Mia.

Mia narrowed her eyes and her expression turned murderous, but just like Su Ah, she refrained from exploding.

I slightly pushed Mia aside, who clicked her tongue in annoyance, but 'complied' and made more space.

So now I had Mia on my left, and Su Ah on my right. Their combined scents fought for supremacy on the tip of my nose.

And both of them were wordlessly staring at me, eyes unblinking and with the kind of intense, unnerving intensity of hawks watching an especially tasty prey. Or a stalker on the precipice of stabbing someone.

"....."

'I feel like the meat of this situation, which is rather... unsettling. Quite hot, I admit, but unsettling.' A deep inhale through the mouth. *'Fuck.'*