

The silence that descended was not peaceful. It was the heavy, gun-loaded silence of a ceasefire where everyone still had their fingers on the triggers. Of course, being in the middle meant that a stray bullet would undoubtedly come my way.

I cleared my throat.

The small sound fractured the taut silence like the tap of a chisel. "Alright. Now that the ceasefire seems *relatively* permanent, let's pretend we're normal humans with functional boundaries. A conversation seems in order."

"....."

I blinked as Mia and Su Ah's gazes locked into stalemate, broken only by the flicker of unease in their gazes.

"....."

I sat stiffly, silently praying for a non-violent solution to the problem at hand.

Su Ah nodded, a satisfied hum, and nestled a bit closer to me, which prompted a low growl from Mia on the other side—but a quick look from me made any protests die before she could even muster the breath for them.

"....."

My hands were placed firmly, *meaningfully*, over my lap. I sighed. "Girls...?"

Their attention immediately snapped to my face. My sisters' attention felt like heat seeking missiles with a missile lock.

"What do you even want to talk about, Jae-il?" Su Ah asked, her voice dipping into that cool, detached register she pulled out when she wanted to sound unaffected. She adjusted her position, one leg folding neatly over the other, her shoulder brushing mine.

On my left, Mia shifted too, mirroring the move like it was some kind of territorial chess game.

Oh Lord.

I resisted the urge to rub my temples. Again. "Oh, I don't know. Maybe the fact that you two are one wrong word away from turning this living room into a crime scene? Or how about the elephant in the room—Mia and I aren't exactly playing patty-cake, and you, Su Ah Noona, seem to have opinions on that."

Since it was pretty obvious what was going on, I decided not to beat around the bush either.

Mia threw her head back, a sound halfway between a scoff and a laugh tumbling out. Her arm found its way over my shoulders, and if there was any hope of either of them being subtle about it all, that hope was completely beat down to a pulp and pissed on.

Mia plopped my head down right between the swells of her chest, the softness cushioning against my cheeks.

That felt... rather nice. I'd always wanted to try it at least once, though I preferred resting my head between Mia's inner thighs or having my head situated between those thighs for completely non-verbal reasons.

But this was neither the right time or place for that, for either case.

If anything, Mia was being outright provocative. I didn't know why she was the one pushing the boundaries while knowing Su Ah was going to push back, but I guessed some twisted part of her enjoyed this.

Still, I wrenched myself free from Mia's booby-trap, knowing that her blatant disregard for Su Ah's reactions could escalate things even faster.

Su Ah shot her an ice-cold look. "Satisfied?" She asked, her voice low and hard-edged. "You have no shame whatsoever, Unnie."

I was tempted to echo that. Just not in quite the same way. I had learned to stop blaming Mia for her nature. Not in the sense that I forgave it, just that I accepted that it was something that wouldn't change, no matter the cost.

Mia leaned over my shoulder, an amused smirk pulling at her lips. "Relax, little sister. What I do to our brother is none of your business, no matter what the fucked-up delusions going on in that virgin head of yours are imagining. And what our brother does to me is purely by mutual choice."

'Sister, not everything in life needs to have your damn teethmarks in it.'

"....."

Su Ah sucked her bottom lip into her mouth, worrying it between her teeth.

"Okay, woah, this is too far." I stood up abruptly, because damn, Mia was going all out. Her arm fell away with an irritated grunt, and as it was not in a compromising position, I got up and moved away for my own good.

Both my sisters looked at me, a pitiful vacuum of space between those two heavenly bodies. The universe definitely had a cruel sense of humor.

"Jae-il..." Mia spoke first, her voice carefully blank. "Please sit."

Su Ah echoed her older sister's words, patting the spot to her side in invitation.
"Jae-il, sit."

And all of a sudden that vacuum of space between those pale, soft, unreasonably sexy bodies seemed to shrink.

They were like binary stars. Or black-hole siblings. Each one capable of sucking me in and swallowing me whole and reducing my existence into dust and fragments of time.

Well, wasn't that creepy? Why were their eyes so damn dark?

Oh Lord...

"Yeah, no... not until I manage to find some sanity, which is obviously not in this damn household." I replied, throwing a glare at them as I continued. "Since apparently it died or skipped the second I stepped inside this house. Seriously, is this something you should kill each other over?"

They had the nerve to look a little bit cowed, Mia chewing her lip as she sank down, looking all innocent as if I would believe such an act.

Su Ah sighed, the hand that had been patting the couch a moment ago running through her hair, the movement strangely cute. Her face softened. "Okay, okay. I suppose I was being a tad unbearable." She crossed her arms, looking away. "But seeing the two of you like that... made me upset."

Well, at the very least, her words had a certain truth in them that stopped Mia's snide commentary.

I turned towards Mia. "Noona? Any more insightful comments on the matter?"

Mia sunk back further into the couch. "Okay, I guess I may have gone overboard." She met her sister's eyes, a grudging concession on her face, albeit unwillingly.

Well, wasn't this a fucking first? A fucking truce on its first stage of formation! "How very big of you."

Mia rolled her eyes. Su Ah huffed.

I leaned against the wall. The whole day seemed to catch up to my muscles all of a sudden. Shit, I had just gotten back home as well.

Su Ah shifted slowly before she stood up.

Mia's eyes were immediately on her, but she didn't make a move to do anything stupid.

This was a breakthrough, wasn't it? A peace treaty.

Su Ah closed the distance between us and enveloped me in a hug.

"Welcome home, you idiot." She said, her voice muffled as her lips rested against my shirt, where I could feel the outline of them even through the layer of fabric. She inhaled. "I missed you."

I hesitated for a split second before hugging her back, my hand settling lightly on her lower back. "Missed you too, Noona." I murmured, pulling back just enough to look at her.

We were close enough to brush noses. It should have been weird or off-putting, but it wasn't. She wasn't, her lips pulling into a tiny smile, her cheeks blushing just slightly.

I wanted to wipe away a strand of stray hair sticking onto her face, wanted to pull her back towards me and hide my nose into the soft, cool skin of her neck.

A quick glance confirmed that Mia was glaring, arms crossed, typical curtain of hair covering one eye—though no doubt that one glaring as well behind that mane.

And that the temperature was rising again, that dangerous vibe practically pulsating through the atmosphere like some pre-nuclear fallout. Was this the shit I had to deal with? Juggling between two sisters like I was some kind of diplomatic genius, holding together the tattered remnants of this precarious tentative peace?

This couldn't last.

It couldn't *possibly* last.

At least for now, I needed to calm my sisters, so I shifted Su Ah slightly, opening a path just a sliver, and offered it to my oldest sister. A peace offer.

An invitation.

Mia hesitated. She scowled, and she fidgeted, and she acted for all the world like that single gap between her and Su Ah was the worst breach of any imaginable law since the Inquisition.

But like her younger counterpart, eventually she did uncross her arms. She heaved herself up with the dramatic groans usually reserved for men three times her weight. She slinked forward, still shooting dirty looks towards Su Ah, who gladly returned every single glare with her own.

However, this was progress. Baby steps. They would either kill each other, or eventually the insanity would bleed out and leave their system and return the semblance of a normal, functional human family, or I'd die first. One way or another.

It was not an easy life, being a sacrificial brother.

But Mia, at least, did come into my arms, shoving Su Ah out of the way just the tiniest bit, and wound her arms tightly around me.

It was always comforting, somehow, having this woman in my arms. Of course, whenever she hadn't that downright murderous look in her eyes, which I'd never admit was actually fucking hot, but that's beside the point.

Mia nuzzled my shoulder, opened her mouth, and—

"Don't you fucking dare bite me again... that shit hurts."

"....."

Mia closed her mouth, rolling her eyes with an amused smile.

"Okay, you two. Time's up. Jae-il, with me." Su Ah impatiently yanked at my left arm. "We have a lot to talk about, and I need your help, in, well... you know!"

"The audacity!" Mia yipped and her grip tightened. "He's my little brother, he has important sibling duties to perform to fill his daily quota."

Su Ah retorted in that usual snarky manner of hers that had clearly a sharpened blade behind it. "And you just had an overdose for the past decade of this family, Unnie!"

Ah, fuck this, really...

So we basically did another staring contest while both sisters were glaring and tugging and generally trying to kill each other with just the force of their glares alone.

My patience frayed to a breaking point, each tug on my arms pulling harder at threads already worn thin.

"If you don't stop right this instant, I swear I'm going back to the training camp and y'all see me only for Christmas."

".....!!"

They stiffened as if electrified.

Mia blinked, pouting before she mumbled, almost silently. "Okay..."

Su Ah quietly whispered a begrudging affirmative.

"Both of you listen..." My voice registered somewhere north of calm, south of anger. What a rollercoaster of a day, and it wasn't even lunch yet. "The tug-of-war ends. Now. One yank. Just one." I was fucking dead serious. "There'll be consequences."

Consequences, whatever they were, would surely have them simmer down.

Of course, I couldn't simply give them the stick without the carrot. I reached a hand up for Mia's cheek, cupping it, my thumb gliding over her cheekbone. Mia flinched—surprised or just hyper-focused on the contact. I looked up into the intense amber gaze before I craned my neck to kiss her, my sister.

She blinked, clearly stunned, frozen in place, and I could hear the shaky exhale against my cheek. As well as Su Ah's surprised one.

Mia's lips softened beneath mine, moving just the slightest bit, ready to deepen and establish a trade route between our tongues.

I pulled back immediately, leaving Mia with fluttering eyes and a gentle blush.

"Noona, it's true that I *did* promise Su Ah Noona I would help her out." I sighed, knowing fully well what that kind of help entailed. "Can't you wait until I'm done? I have more free time these days compared to before. I won't simply disappear for a week anymore, you know. After all, we live under the same roof, in the same household. I'll be just a door or three away from you."

"....."

"....."

Surprisingly, neither of the sisters had a rebuttal.

Mia's arms dropped first, slithering from me like something defeated by gravity. I watched them dangle, listless. Her amber eyes flickered—not quite wounded, but definitely flickering—betraying a sudden and unfamiliar quiet, one that even I couldn't immediately categorize.

I wasn't quite used to this immediate compliance from her. Maybe I sounded serious enough about leaving that she chose to... well. Not push.

"Fine." She grumbled. The sharp-edged petulance was blunted, softening almost impossibly around the edges, which I decided was enough of a victory. "Fine. Just. Whatever. Make it quick~"

I sighed in relief.

Su Ah's hand found my bicep again as she attempted to coax me along.

We trudged past a cross-armed Mia, whose eyes were on Su Ah and her attempt at getting me into the privacy of her room.

"Su Ah."

"Hm?" Su Ah turned towards her sister. I did too.

Mia didn't say anything, she just wordlessly stared at Su Ah, who stared back in equal quiet.

I imagined a lot was passing between them in this intense gaze. A silent conversation of sorts; it wasn't the first time I witnessed this type of sorcery. And then, surprisingly, it was Mia who averted her gaze first, and walked back to the couch, where she grabbed the remote and turned on potato mode.

"Jae-il... come."

Su Ah cooed, tugging my arm.

"....."