

24 - Break

Trigger Warning: Self-harm (hair pulling)

Sitting on a bar stool beside Alex, we watched the guys struggle (excluding Dean) making food for the rest of the girls. Yesterday, we decided to make a bet against them on who cooks better, and with the only one who regularly cooks their own meal being Dean, we were sure we'd win.

"I said pass the fucking onion so why the fuck did you hand me an apple."

"Maybe you should be more clear with your instructions."

"Zayn..." Brandon took an exaggerated deep breath in, bracing his hands on the countertop with closed eyes. "Get out."

"What? Why! I'm a nice boy."

"Get out."

"But—"

Brandon didn't give him a chance to respond, shoving him out of the kitchen door. Dean and Alyan watched with amused expressions, Dean mixing something in a pot while Alyan was chopping vegetables o to the side. I still didn't have a clue on what they were making, though I did see chicken out so hopefully it wouldn't turn out too bad.

"So, a er lunch what do you guys want to do?" I looked at the group, tucking some hair behind my ear.

"I was thinking we could hang around today. Maybe walk around and see what's le to do before we have to go home." Alyan responded, not looking up from his task. He seemed really concentrated on cutting and mincing, what should take a few minutes now expanding into 5.

"I really wanna go for a swim again. There's another beach a couple of miles away from here that I go to every time I come. It's secluded and nice, barely anyone goes because they prefer the beach here." Vanessa looks to us for approval and we nod.

"Okay, beach today and whatever the fuck we want tomorrow." Alex scrolls through her phone, not looking up as she speaks. "I can't believe we're here for only three more days."

"Right? These two weeks have gone by so fast."

I let Ayesha, Alex and Vanessa fall into a conversation about the remaining programs o ered at the resort while I walked over to Dean, slipping my arms around his body as I peered at what he was doing from the side. He switches the mixing spoon from one hand to the other, his hand now free coming down to rest at the top of my head, nails scraping against my hair soothingly.

"When's the food gonna be done, pretty boy?"

"In ten to fi een minutes. It depends how fast Alyan can cut all those vegetables."

"I'm trying my best, man. Sorry we all can't be professional chefs like you." Alyan sighed, struggling with chopping the onion Brandon had finally received. I glanced behind me to see Zayn smiling while he watched Ayesha talk animatedly, his arm splayed over the top of the couch.

"Here, let me." I gestured for him to hand me the knife and began showing him a technique that I learned.

"You hold it with the tips of your fingers, like this." I showed him my hand placement on the onion. "And then you chop making sure the knife stays on the board the whole time. Li ing it o completely is what's throwing you o."

I repeated it a couple of more times before handing the knife back to Alyan. His eyebrows furrowed, mirroring what I did and looking up to me for approval. Once I confirmed back, he nodded in a thanks and began to chop again.

I walked over to the sink to wash my hands once more, going back over to Dean a er I was done.

"I'm bored, I wanna help."

"Here, Soph." He handed me a spatula. "Cook the vegetables Alyan gives you and then put them in here."

I nodded at the task, pouring the bowl of finely chopped produce and placing it in the pan.

Using my spatula to mix until they so en, I gave a glance back to the girls seeing they were in another discussion.

"I need to set you up with my coworker," Vanessa said with glee, practically bouncing in her seat at the idea.

"Your coworker?" Alex sounded hesitant, and I immediately understood what she was talking about. "Are you sure they'll like me?"

"They'll love you. You guys are perfect for each other."

"No, Vanessa...I meant..."

"Oh... ohyes. Yes, of course. I would never surround myself with those types of people, Alex. I promise."

Alex gave me a quick glance and I nodded at her, vouching for Vanessa.

"Oh...okay yeah, I'd love that. Thank you."

"Anytime. You know, Ayesha. The o er still stands for you too. Damon is still single."

Ayesha rolled her eyes. "My mother will kill me before I date a white man. But thanks, V. I appreciate it."

I turn back to the task at hand, distractedly reaching over to grab the bowl filled with more produce when it slips and falls. The chopped vegetables fly all over the floor and my heart stops, setting me back two years.

I stare at it wide eyed for a few moments, chest constricting as panic starts setting in. Falling to my knees, my hands shake as I try and clean up my mess.

"I'm so sorry," I rushed out, body unsteady. "Oh my god, I'm so sorry."

My hands tremor terribly and combining that with my poor attempts to scoop up the vegetables, I felt like throwing up. Suddenly I couldn't think, couldn't breathe, tears clouding my eyes terrified.

I flinch when a voice calls out to me, my mind ready for the assault that would never come.

"Sophia,"

I try to move back when I feel their hands on my shoulders, scrambling to get as far from them as I can while simultaneously trying to swallow the lump in my throat. I still couldn't see who it was, my mind fuzzy and eyes unfocused.

My hands continue their struggle with the produce, trying to pick up handfuls of it.

"I'm so sorry, it just slipped out. I didn't mean to make it fall. I'm sorry." I shake my head. "Please don't...hurt me." I whisper.

"Sophia, baby." Familiar hands hold onto mine, stopping the tremors. I hold my breath, waiting for what they say next, not comprehending what was going on. Their hands come around to pull me into them, and I struggle slightly, terrified. They run a tender hand over my cheek and my eyes close as my head falls against their chest. My body is still shaking as I try to focus on the smell of citrus and the familiar tapping on my thigh. "Sweetheart, it's just me. It's Dean, baby. You're alright...you're okay."

I feel gentle strokes moving up and down my back, small words of reassurance in whispers. My mind starts to clear and I panic for a completely di erent reason.

I pull away from Dean, my hands on his shoulders as I look to see the mess of people staring at me. Alyan and Brandon have moved to one side of the kitchen, giving us space. The girls have stopped talking, and everyone looks at me with deep concern.

I hated it.

Dean gingerly moves my face so I'm looking solely at him, most likely sensing my discomfort. "Sophia," He murmurs so tenderly and sweet. "Are you alright?"

I nod, not being able to talk at the moment. My eyes fill with tears again, now for a completely di erent reason.

"Let's get out of here, is that okay with you?"

Another nod and Dean is helping me to my feet. I look to the floor, feeling their stares as he leads me back to our room. Silence follows and the urge to vomit grows exponentially.

As soon as I enter, I immediately reach up to clutch my hair, tugging at it harshly.

"Stupid, stupid, stupid." I mumble to myself, walking around in circles.

My hands were gently removed from my head and I was being led to the bed.

My hands were gently removed from my head and I was being led to the bed as Dean sat down in front of me, collecting my hands in his so I wouldn't pull at my hair again.

"Sophia," Dean called out so I would focus on him. "We really need to talk."

"I know, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to react like that. I just—"

"You don't need to explain yourself to me, Soph. I never want you to apologise for reacting a certain way. You can't control that. It's not your fault."

I was confused now, not understanding what this was about. "What did you want to talk about then?"

"Do you...pull your hair a lot?"

I grew perplexed. "Not a lot...just when I'm feeling stressed or..."

"When you want to feel something?"

I looked down, embarrassed. "Yes."

"Sophia..." Dean trailed o , looking like he waa bracing himself for what he wanted to say next. He took in a breath, still silent.

"What, Dean?" I didn't understand why it was taking him so long. "What is it?"

"I know you got upset when I mentioned this weeks ago...but I really, really think you should think about the aspect of therapy."

I froze, that word sounding o alarms in my mind and immediately shook my head, waving o that idea.

"Dean, I already told you—"

"I understand that, Soph. I really do." He cut me o . "But I just can't..." He stops, voice breaking. "I don't know how to help you. I'm not a professional, and with what you've gone through? The shit you've had to face? Sophia...fuck, you're breaking apart everyday."

"That's not true." I whisper but we both know it's an enormous life.

He shi s closer, trying to bring me comfort while confronting me about things I'm too scared to face. "You can barely sleep, barely eat. You had a meltdown the other week out of the blue—" oh, yeah. I forgot I hadn't told him about the hospital results yet. "...—you had no idea what it felt like to be cared for...Sophia, you need help. Real, professional help if you ever want to be able to move on. Help if you ever want to be in a healthy relationship..."

My heart froze at that last part, my body tensing up as I stared at him through my foggy eyes.

"What are you trying to say?"

He swallowed, eyes misty as he squeezed my hands. "I'm saying...if you can't help yourself, Sophia. If you can't try and acknowledge that you need help...I don't think we should be together."

I let a few tears escape, pouring down my cheeks as I tried to hold it in. But it hurt, God, it fucking hurt so terribly bad as I straightened my back and tried to composed myself. "You think or you know?"

He looked down, mouth closed like he didn't want to say it. But I needed him to, I needed to hear the words straight from his mouth.

I stood up, moving out of his hold as I stepped aside and looked down at him.

"Tell me, Dean. You think or you know?"

He rose gently, a few tears escaping his eyes as well. "Sophia—"

"I need you to say it."

"God," He rubbed his hands over his face, shaking his head. "I never wanted to do this here."

"But you have and we're here, Dean. I already told you my stance on therapy so why are you trying so hard to push it?"

"You need to talk this out with someone—"

"Talk?" I laugh, humorlessly. "Oh? Like how you do with me? You never tell me what you're thinking. You never tell me about your childhood or your parents. The only thing I know about either of them is that you don't want to talk about it. Are you sensing a pattern here or is it just me?"

He shook his head, his brows furrowed. "That isn't fair or the same."

"Fair? You wanna talk about fair?" I was purposely starting an argument to deflect from my situation and I know it was a shitty thing to do but I was petrified at the thought of therapy. "We've both had shitty fucking childhoods, Dean. Are both living with shit from the past. Tell me how we aren't the same."

"I'm not the one who was stuck in a fucking abusive relationship, Sophia!"

I freeze, staring at him with my cheeks wet as he lets out a sigh and rubs at his face, cursing under his breath.

"Fuck, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to raise my voice at you."

I don't say anything, letting the reality of his words sink in. I had never said it outloud to myself, never thrusted the truth right in front of my face. He was right, I had been stuck in an abusive relationship. One that had warped my sense of reality, my sense of living.

At my state Dean's eyes so ened, stepping forward. "Sophia, I fucking care about you. Far more than I have ever cared about anyone else in my entire life. And I will always be there as a friend supporting you and being someone you can lean on." He brushed some hair away from my face, cupping my cheek with one hand. "But I can't be the one to fix you. You can only fix yourself."

"I don't want to lose you."

"You won't, Soph. I'm right here, I'll always be right here with you."

I wiped my eyes, avoiding his gaze. "Then why does it feel like you're a million miles away?"

He said nothing, collecting me in his arms for a hug. My arms stayed limp by my sides, still processing the entirety of our argument.

"You're the strongest person I know. And I understand that therapy will be hard and scary but denying what you've gone through won't help you move on and heal, Sophia. Forgetting the past won't ever change the present."

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