

Thievery

Elliott wasn't supposed to be home for another several hours, so when I shut the door behind me I pretended not to notice him. I hoped he wouldn't notice me either. I set my keys quietly on the entry table before walking to the brown-tiled kitchen, almost making a show of not noticing my brother sitting the armchair by the television.

"Hello, Victor," he said. The room was dead quiet save for the sound of the kids living in the apartment above us chasing each other around in erratic patterns. There was a tense pause before I responded.

"What are you doing home?" I asked, opening the fridge. I closed it soon after, unsatisfied.

"I got another new job."

Another uncomfortable pause. I avoided his eyes. "You don't say?"

"It sounds like fun, if you're up for it..." he prompted. I finally brought myself to look at him, lounging nonchalantly in the armchair. My eyebrows drew together.

"Elliott... I wondered if we could take a break from all that. With the money we have now, maybe we could even get ourselves a little place. How does that sound?"

"Are you saying you wouldn't want to be by my side? To experience another thrilling adventure with me?"

"No, that's not—"

"I need to protect you besides. You're my brother. This is my job." His voice had gone colorless and dark. I sighed, walking from behind the kitchen counter to stand beside his armchair.

“Don’t you think I’m too old to need your protection? We’re not kids anymore...” I trailed with a small laugh. I knelt down beside him, touching his arm.

“Maybe it’s not about protecting you. Maybe I just thought my own kid brother would want to keep our momentum going. Don’t you want to stay by my side and keep doing jobs with me? I thought you’d be excited, but clearly I was wrong. I just need to understand that our time together as brothers has come to a close.”

Elliott’s face was turned away from me now, his hand brought up to his face in a show of disappointment.

“I still love you, Elliott. I just...”

“Just what?”

He didn’t turn his head back to face me. I sighed softly and stood upright again.

“Maybe I want to protect you now. Maybe all this crime could catch up to us. Maybe I want us to live long and healthy lives.”

The guilt settled in the pit of my stomach as I stared at his profile against the sunlight. The angle of the light made the edges of his skin glow, like he was a ghost that would disappear from the armchair as soon as he’d told me what he’d needed to.

“I thought you loved what we stood for together. Wasn’t this for both of our sakes? Mine too?”

“Don’t you think we’d be safer if we layed low for a while?” I asked, frustration tinging the edges of my voice.

“Safe won’t last forever, Victor,” he started, his academic monotone rising in volume. “Safe only lasts until we run out of money. What could we possibly do without each other once the money runs out, huh?”

“Anything, Elliott! I’m sick of hiding! I’m sick of pretending everything is okay! Even as kids you forced me to help you with your sinister errands! With your thievery!”

Elliott stood up then, towering several inches above me. I matched his eyes, tears welling.

“You dare call what I did for our greater good ‘thievery’?” he asked, the quiet tone of his voice chilling me.

“I love you, but sometimes you’re a real psychopa—”

Suddenly, Elliott’s hand had slapped me hard in the face. From the floor I looked back up to see him staring down at me, casually moving his ringed hand back to his hip. A silent moment passed between us as a ringing in my ear began. The kids had stopped running around above us, perhaps too interested in our rising voices.

His face was unreadable save for the tension I could see in his shoulders. He reached out a hand to me. I was worrying at the cut on my face from one of his rings beneath my fingertips.

His hand was chapped and hot in mine as I took it.

“Just one more job, Victor. I promise it’ll be fun.”