

Dangerous Secret Vows

Bonus chapter

Frankie

The shelter was loud as usual. Dogs barked in the yard while someone at the front desk tried to explain house-training to a nervous adopter.

I stood in the middle of it all with a clipboard tucked under my arm, watching two volunteers argue gently over whether the brindle mutt in kennel three looked more like a zebra or a zucchini.

The front door swung open.

“Frankie?”

Silas stood in the doorway in a charcoal suit, holding a moving cardboard box.

Something inside it yipped.

I stared at him. “Uh. Hi?”

Gio, who had been leaning against the half wall with a coffee in his hand, straightened immediately. He spent more time here than in his office, and he hadn't visited any of his clubs in months, despite Griffin's begging.

A slow grin spread across my husband's face. "Never thought I'd see you here."

Silas's jaw tightened. "I found these near my office building in an alley, next to a dumpster. I was on my way to a meeting."

There was another yip, followed by a tiny bark that sounded more like a hiccup.

I was already moving. "Bring them here."

Silas followed, carefully, as if the box might explode. When he set it down, I peeled back the flaps.

Two black and brown puppies blinked at me.

"Oh, babies!" I breathed.

One of them immediately attempted to climb out, slipped, and face-planted into my wrist.

Behind me, Gio made a low sound.
“Jesus, they’re young.”

Silas stepped back a fraction. “I didn’t see a mother around. They’re unharmed. I checked. No obvious injuries.”

“You checked?” I glanced up at him.

His mouth twitched. “I’m not an idiot.”

I scooped one puppy up, then the other, settling them against my chest. They smelled like dust and city grime.

Gio leaned closer, peering down. “You know,” he said casually, “this is how it starts.”

Silas shot him a look. “With what?”

“One adoption,” Gio nodded at the puppies. “You bring them in, you fall in love, suddenly you’re buying dog beds and arguing with Frankie about grain-free kibble.”

“I am not adopting any puppies,” Silas said flatly.

One of the puppies leaned towards Silas, trying to lick his chin.

I laughed. “They like you.”

“That’s unfortunate.”

Shaking my head, I placed them on the exam table and confirmed what Silas had said; they seemed in fine condition, maybe a little skinny.

“I’ll get them some puppy formula. Hopefully, they will drink from the bottle easily, although if I can get them in with one of the nursing mothers we have here, that will be ideal,” I said, already switching gears.

Silas glanced at his watch. “Do whatever you need to do. I’m late already.”

Gio raised an eyebrow. “Are you going to that gala tonight?”

“Yes.” Silas’s shoulders squared. “Black tie. Endless speeches. Very dull.”

“What charity is it this year?” Gio asked.

Silas hesitated. “Foster kids,” he said finally. “And children up for adoption.”

I made an effort not to look at Gio; he’d told me about Silas’s past.

Silas cleared his throat. “It’s a good cause. And the Sullivans pull in the right people. Lots of business connections to be made.”

I didn't doubt that he meant it; Silas's whole life was dedicated to making money and growing his venture capitalist empire.

I adjusted my grip on the puppies, feeling one of them sigh against my collarbone. "That's...good," I said carefully.

Silas met my gaze. His expression became watchful, even more guarded.

"Gio's told you about my parents," he said.

I nodded. "I just—" I stopped myself before I could say something clumsy. Instead, I shifted closer and lowered the puppies into a waiting crate lined with towels. "If tonight's...hard, you can call us."

Silas looked away.

"I'll be fine," he said. "I didn't come here for therapy."

Gio snorted. "Could've fooled me."

Silas ignored him, straightening his cuffs. "I have a meeting."

"And puppies to save apparently," Gio added.

Silas snorted. "Don't tell anyone, I have a reputation to uphold."

"Nobody would believe me anyway," Gio laughed.

"Before you go," I said. "Did you want to name them?"

A flash of surprise passed over his face.

I warned, "Not something stupid like Income Tax or Venture Capital."

He made a face. "What are they?"

"Boy and girl."

He thought for a second. "Leopold and Phoebe."

"Those are great names," I smiled.

He nodded and turned to leave without so much as a goodbye, but he paused at the door. "You should find them good homes," he said, not looking back. "They deserve better than dumpsters."

"We will," I promised.

He left without another word.

I exhaled.

“Something’s going on with him,” I said quietly.

Gio came up behind me, slipping his hands around my waist, his chin resting on my shoulder. “Yeah. I noticed.”

“He’s...different.”

Gio hummed. “Griffin’ll get it out of him.”

I smiled faintly. “Griffin gets everything out of everyone.”

“Yeah, he either wears them down or shocks it out of them.”

I leaned back into Gio, feeling the solid warmth of him. His thumb brushed the inside of my wrist, right where one of the puppies had licked me.

“You’re happy,” he murmured.

I turned in his arms, looking at him. A few months ago, I wouldn’t have believed this version of us.

“I am,” I said.

“Is there anything that would make you happier?” he asked.

My immediate answer was to say no, I couldn't possibly be happier, but then I looked down at the two puppies Silas has rescued.

"Well...there are one or two things that would do it," I said.

Gio frowned, "What? Name it, and it's yours."

"I don't have to name them, Silas just did," I laughed. It took Gio a moment to catch on. He let out a groan.

"Are you serious?" he asked.

"Don't you think they're cute?" I said, giving him my own puppy dog eyes. I knew he wouldn't be able to resist for long.

"Of course they are, they're puppies," he agreed with a sigh. "What about Asher?"

Our dog was as much the love of Gio's life as I was, and I didn't mind it one bit.

"I think he'd love a couple of siblings," I said. Asher was a sociable dog and often hung out around the shelter, showing the other dogs how to be a Good Boy.

“Okay, but if they chew my Italian leather shoes—”

“You can buy new ones,” I laughed, pecking him on the lips. “Don’t act like you’d be angry for a second, you know you’re a softie.”

“I’m not a softie!”

“You share your steak with Asher!”

“It’s not my fault he has good taste! He gets his love of sirloin from me,” he said with a laugh.

“So, is that a yes?” I asked, knowing the answer already.

He kissed me.

Behind us, one of the puppies yipped.

I laughed into Gio’s mouth, and he smiled against my lips.

“Yes.”

I kissed him again.