

BONUS
SCENE



KING OF SLOTH



NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

ANA HUANG

KING OF SLOTH

BONUS SCENE

ANA HUANG

readvault.in

Copyright © 2024 by Ana Huang

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

readvault.in

CONTENTS

BONUS SCENE

Keep in touch with Ana

readvault.in

BONUS SCENE

XAVIER

“Far be it from me to question your decisions, but is there a reason we’ve circled the block four times in the past...” I checked my watch. “Twenty minutes with no discernible destination in sight?”

“No particular reason.” Sloane turned the corner, her expression suspiciously neutral. “It’s so beautiful out, I figured we could go for a nice walk.”

I narrowed my eyes.

Sloane had been acting weird since we left brunch with our friends earlier. It was Saturday afternoon, which we usually reserved for wandering the city and browsing the piles of old DVDs and VHS tapes at the dusty video shop in St. Mark’s Place. That was where we’d discovered a veritable treasure trove of foreign rom-coms.

However, she’d insisted on coming straight home today, which already raised warning flags. Then, when we were only minutes away, she’d changed tunes and said we should take a walk (or four) around the block.

Something smelled fishy, and it wasn’t the smoked salmon from brunch.

“You hate walks,” I said.

“Incorrect. I love walks.”

I resisted pointing out that mowing down tourists in Midtown while berating some poor, incompetent soul over the phone for their mistakes didn’t quite count as a “walk.” I’ve learned to pick my battles over the years.

“You hate *slow* walks,” I amended.

“This isn’t slow.” She stepped to the side to allow a mother pushing a stroller to pass.

“Luna, if we moved any slower, we might as well call the mayor and declare ourselves the city’s newest statues.”

Sloane’s neutral expression cracked, and a small smile flickered over her face. “You are so dramatic. It’s endearing.”

An answering smile tugged on my mouth before I flattened it. She wasn’t going to distract me with her compliments this time, nor was she going to distract me with the laughing sparkle in her eyes or the scent of her perfume or the way her hair shone beneath the sun. Even after years of dating, she never failed to take my breath away.

That being said, I still wanted to know why the fuck she wouldn’t let us go home.

Answers first, admiration later.

“You’re up to something,” I said. “Spill it, or we’re not watching *The Baker’s Royal Christmas* this weekend.”

That put a halt to her step. “You’d deprive me of a holiday rom-com in *December*?” She gasped, sounding genuinely offended. “When Christmas is only two weeks away?”

I could never deprive her of anything and we both knew it, but I had to pretend for dignity’s sake.

“I’m not depriving you. I’m giving you options,” I drawled. “What’s it gonna be, Luna? Another walk around the block or a nice, cozy night in with popcorn, hot chocolate, and ninety minutes of watching another baker and prince fall in love?”

Sloane’s glare could’ve melted the entire Arctic Circle. “This is why I never do nice things for people,” she grumbled. “They turn around and—”

The chime of an incoming call interrupted what I was sure would’ve been a scathing rant about my audacity to threaten our annual holiday traditions.

I suppressed another grin as she answered her phone. I would never tire of riling her up, but I’d also picked up on her *nice things* slip-up, which was why I didn’t bother hiding my interest as she walked away and lowered her voice.

I tried to edge closer and eavesdrop, but I could only pick up faint snippets.

“It’s done? Perfect...because they’re idiots...no...Monday off. Thanks, Jillian.” After another minute or two, she hung up and turned toward me, her earlier glare melting into an innocent smile. “You know what? I’m tired and could use a nap. Let’s go home.”

My eyes narrowed again.

Sloane didn’t nap. She thought naps were reserved for cats and the laziest portion of society, but again, I held my tongue until we arrived at our house five minutes later.

The entire time, my mind whirred trying to figure out what *nice things* she could’ve been referring to and what they had to do with Jillian.

Sloane had finally given her assistant an emergency key to our house a few months ago. It made things easier for work since she worked from her office only half the time these days; the rest was spent with her clients or working from home.

But what could she possibly need Jillian’s help with on the weekend that wasn’t work related? Maybe it *was* work related and had nothing to do with Sloane’s odd behavior, but I doubted it since she immediately abandoned our “nice walk” after the call.

Sloane Kensington, what are you up to?

Jillian was already gone by the time we got home, so I couldn’t pick up any clues from her. Luckily, I didn’t need to.

Sloane and I had accumulated various tchotchkes and souvenirs from our travels over the years. They were taking over the house, but when we entered the living room, my eye immediately latched onto the medium-sized box sitting on the floor. It hadn’t been there when we’d left for brunch that morning, and just like that, the pieces clicked into place.

“So *that’s* why you were being so sneaky. You were waiting for Jillian to drop that off.” I clucked my tongue. “Sneaky.”

Sloane didn’t bother denying it. “You should join the FBI with your deduction skills,” she said dryly.

“Don’t deflect. That’s my Christmas gift, isn’t it?” I joked. “Luna, you shouldn’t have.”

I was teasing. We never exchanged gifts until actual Christmas morning, so when her cheeks tinted pink, my eyebrows skyrocketed.

“Actually, it is,” she admitted. “I couldn’t wait until the twenty-fifth for...logistical reasons.”

“What do you—”

A thump inside the box interrupted me.

I froze. Was that...?

No. It can't be.

“Open it.” Now that we were home, Sloane’s earlier neutrality slipped away, revealing an uncharacteristic touch of nerves.

She tucked a strand of hair behind her ear as I walked toward the middle of the living room floor. My heart slammed against my ribcage; she wasn’t the only nervous one in the room, though I had no reason for it other than an increasing suspicion of what waited inside the box.

When I got closer, I saw little air holes poked into the sides, and my suspicions swung from *pretty sure* to *sure sure*.

Still, I didn’t allow myself to breathe until I opened the box and...

Fuck. There she was.

My throat closed at the sight of big brown eyes gazing up at me with pure trust and adoration. She looked so small in that big box, and it brought me right back to my childhood, when I’d opened a similar box and seen a similar face greeting me.

I’d been here before. Not this exact place and time, but the emotions, the instant bond, the weight on my chest, they hadn’t changed.

“It’s a chocolate Lab,” Sloane said when I simply stared at the puppy in silence. She drew her bottom lip between her teeth. “You always say how much you miss Hershey, and every time we pass the dog park, you get this look on your face...We have Feisty, but he’s not the same as a dog, and I thought...Anyway, we can take her back if you don’t—”

“Luna.”

“Yes?” Nerves played across her face, and if I didn’t already know I loved her beyond imagining, I would’ve fallen right then and there.

“You’re fucking incredible.”

The rose on her cheeks deepened. “So you like her.” Relief softened the question into a statement.

Sloane would never admit it, but there was still a part of her that worried she wasn’t warm enough or empathetic enough to be “normal,” and it killed me. She was dealing with that part better than before, but I supposed our insecurities would always have a hold on us, no matter how small. They were what made us human.

Besides, while Sloane may not verbalize her feelings as openly or frequently as others, the thought behind her actions ran deep.

It wasn't about the number of times someone said *I love you*; it was about how they expressed it—like buying a puppy because they picked up on how much their partner wanted one, even when they themselves were not fans of anything that shed indoors.

“Like her? Are you kidding?” I gently scooped the puppy out of the box and held her close to my chest. “This is my daughter.”

Said puppy's tongue lolled out in a doggy grin, and my heart constricted. I hadn't gotten another dog after Hershey because I didn't want to suffer the pain of losing another pet, and my lifestyle hadn't exactly been conducive to dog ownership. But now that Sloane and I lived together and I'd come to terms with the past, the desire for a canine companion had reared its head again in recent months.

I hadn't realized Sloane would notice, but of course she had. She always did.

Sloane rolled her eyes even as her mouth curled into a smile. “Daughter? Now you're *really* being dramatic.”

“It's part of my charm.” I kissed the top of the puppy's head. “Where did you get her?”

“An acquaintance of an acquaintance's brother's dog just had puppies, so it was perfect timing.” She heaved a sigh. “They were *supposed* to be home earlier so Jillian could pick up one of the puppies and bring her here, but there was some miscommunication regarding the timing because apparently, they don't know how to use a calendar. Hence, the reason for our aimless walk in the cold earlier.”

“Aimless, huh? I thought it was a *nice* walk.” I laughed when Sloane leveled me with another glare. “I'm kidding. Thank you, Luna.” I walked over and gave her a soft kiss on the lips. “This is...fuck, this is the best gift I've ever gotten. Truly.”

“You're welcome.” Her face softened. “I'm glad you're happy.”

The ache behind my ribs deepened. No matter how long we've been together, there were still days where I couldn't believe she was mine.

“What are you going to name her?” Sloane asked.

I inspected the tiny puppy curled in my arms. Glossy brown fur, floppy ears, sweet eyes. I was tempted to name her Hershey too. I liked the moniker, and she looked like my old friend in so many ways, but it would be a disservice to compare them.

It was time for something new.

“Coco,” I decided. “She looks like a Coco.” I couldn’t explain why, but it felt right.

“First Hershey, now Coco.” Sloane shook her head in mock disappointment. “At least you didn’t name her Snickers.”

“Hey, someone who named her fish *Feisty* has no business judging others’ pet names.” I held Coco up so we were at eye level. “Isn’t that right, Coco?”

Her doggy grin widened, and she let out a small bark of agreement.

“A Daddy’s girl already,” Sloane grumbled. “Don’t forget I was the one who brought you here, *Coco*.”

However, her ire visibly melted when Coco turned her head and nuzzled her hand, and after a few seconds, Sloane caved and reluctantly scratched her behind her ears.

“Don’t make me regret this,” she warned the delighted puppy. “Or I’m taking you back to the Upper East Side where they’ll dress you in ugly frou-frou sweaters and pom pom booties. Got it?”

Coco barked again, this time with audible concern.

“Don’t listen to your mom,” I told her. “She’s all bark and no bite in this household.” I paused. “Well, sometimes she bites, but in a good way.”

“Xavier!”

I laughed again when Sloane’s face flushed the color of the red velvet stockings lining our mantel. We’d been deep in Christmas decoration mode, and the house was coming together nicely, if I did say so myself (though she’d nixed my idea to install an electronic Santa that dispensed mugs of hot chocolate to visitors in the foyer).

“I’m kidding. Coco doesn’t understand human innuendo anyway.” I wrapped my free arm around Sloane’s waist and brought her close. “Have I ever told you how much I love you?”

The corners of her mouth twitched up. “Occasionally.”

“Only occasionally? Then I’m not doing a good enough job.” I brushed my lips over hers. “I love you, Sloane Kensington. Always and forever.”

“Forever is a long time.”

“Not long enough.”

“You are so freaking cheesy,” she said, but that didn’t stop her from returning my kiss or from sighing when I tangled my hand in her hair.

“I love you too, Xavier Castillo,” she murmured. “Always and forever.”

The ache expanded past my chest and into every fucking molecule of my body.

Maybe the sentiment *was* cheesy, but I meant it and I knew she did too. There was life before Sloane, and life after her. The before part had lasted too long, and like I said, the after part wasn't long enough.

But there was no point dwelling on the past or future when the present had everything I could ask for, and later that night, when Sloane, Coco, and I settled in for an early viewing of *The Baker's Royal Christmas* with the promised hot chocolate and popcorn, I knew that this, right here?

This was all I'd ever need.

***He had everything he could've wanted...
except her.***

[Order King of Envy](#) for Vuk & Ayana's story.

[readvault.in](#)

Keep in touch with Ana Huang

[Reader group](#)

[Website](#)

[Bookbub](#)

[Amazon](#)

[Instagram](#)

[TikTok](#)

[Goodreads](#)

[Facebook](#)

[*readvault.in*](#)