They stood in front of the triage tents while a beautiful reporter with silky blonde hair and delicate Eurasian features interviewed his mom and friends about their escape from the fire. She questioned the girls, her face reflecting each of their responses, and when she reached Harry, he didn't know what to say and just nodded.

"I think we can all appreciate a man who has little to say. I'm Connie Nguyen for Channel Four News. Back to the studio!"

Her bright smile faded as the camera switched off, and she grinned, thanking the girls.

"You three were fantastic, and you," she pointed at Harry with a cheeky grin, "know how to charm a host!" The phone lines are already ringing with questions about the handsome young hero. I'd love to do a follow-up interview... Maybe over dinner?"

"Harry's had a rough three days," said his mom with a stiff smile, smoothly stepping between him and the beautiful reporter. "I think some rest would be best for my son."

"Oh... of course," Connie brightened. "Maybe tomorrow?"

"We'll call you," Tracey said, throwing the woman a smile that ended the conversation. She then wrapped an arm around each of her friends and walked towards the motel, tossing her golden hair.

Connie's gaze followed Harry's sister with a sour expression, and she fidgeted with her blouse, frowning as the trio passed by. His mom gave the woman a warmer smile but still had a tight-lipped look and huffed when the reporter slipped Harry a business card.

"Call me," the woman winked, prompting another huff from his mom that made her laugh.

"Some women have no shame," she muttered as they walked towards the motel.

"If you're waiting for me to complain, don't hold your breath," Harry said, which earned him a wide-eyed look from his mom before a chuckle escaped her throat, and she leaned into his side, patting his chest.

"Men never change."

"With nothing else to do... can you blame me?"

The girls entered the office and spoke with a white-haired old lady, arranging rooms for the night, while his mom circled around to position herself in his line of sight, raising an eyebrow.

"Expecting something?" There was a dangerous note in her voice, but Harry pressed on, meeting her eyes with his own challenging stare.

"I want to know where I stand with you... My guts are already tied in knots... I need to figure out what's going on with Daphne and Fleur... But I won't lose our relationship over a weak moment or embarrassment."

Her eyes moistened, and the hard line of his mom’s mouth softened as she approached him, grabbing him by the elbows.

"Nothing will ever come between us," the fierceness in her eyes returned, but the challenge disappeared, leaving only love. "As for what happened before... you are a man now and can decide your future. Just know, whatever you choose, I will always love you."

Her elbows pressed together at the end of this statement, causing the torn neckline of her dress to reveal a deep line of cleavage. There was hope and worry in her eyes, but she stepped back, crossing her arms, as if she had never been on the verge of kissing him, when the office door burst open.

"We have two rooms," Tracey said with a mock frown. "But each one only has one bed, so we'll have to share... Who wants the second room?"

"We'll take it," Harry said, grabbing the key and ignoring the amusement dancing in sister’s eyes as he led his stepmom away.

A ferry was coming in, but it wouldn't leave until the next morning. The food was sparse, and they received a small stack of MREs, mundane rations. Daphne and Harry divided them while the girls and his mom started taking showers. The sighs of pleasure from both rooms made the blonde beauty and him roll their eyes.

"You'd think they'd never had a hot shower before," Harry chuckled, and Daphne nodded.

"I can't wait for a mattress. I'm going to sleep for twelve hours."

"Me too," he grunted. "Want a vegetable omelet or... beef stroganoff?"

"Definitely the omelet," Daphne grabbed three and tossed them into the room. "Are you ready for how everything will change when we get back home?"

Her tone shifted, and Harry froze in his squat, feeling Daphne's gaze watching his expression. He had dreaded this moment all morning, but now that it was before him, he saw the path he had to walk and knew all he had to do was be honest. He looked up and took in the girl's beautiful features, allowing himself to drink in the moment.

"No," he admitted, butterflies returning to his stomach as a smile spread across her lips.

"Good, maybe we'll have an advantage if you're off-balance," she winked at him.

"I'll always be at a disadvantage dealing with you," he slipped a hand around her back, enjoying the flush of pleasure that spread across her face as he leaned in to kiss her lips.

Daphne breathed heavily as Harry pulled away, tasting her lips on his tongue. His eyes fell as she pressed against his waist, feeling a pulse when he looked at the deep shadow

between her large, firm breasts. Teen was like putty in his arms, and he felt the gaze of someone watching him at night as he bent her in his arms and drank in her body once more.

Breaking free from his arms, she brushed dark strands from her flushed cheeks with one hand and grabbed the doorframe of her room with the other. She turned to look at him, tossed her head back, and let out a throaty laugh, shaking her head.

"If you only knew what... advantages you have," Daphne bit her full lower lip and approached Harry, cupping his package with her hand. "Give her what she needs... And if she doesn't finish the job, call me." With one last wink, she turned to her room and stepped inside. Her rounded hips swayed hypnotically, pulling Harry along like a magnet. When the door slammed shut, inches from his nose, he staggered and heard laughter from inside. At the same moment, he heard a snort from his right. He turned to see one of the hotel staff standing in the covered walkway, one hand holding a stack of linens against her belly, the other covering her mouth. The laughter died with a held breath as the woman's eyes took in the too-large bulge in his pants, and she swallowed hard.

"Harry, the shower's free," his stepmom peeked her head out of the room, her wet blonde hair hanging in a thick curtain around her shoulders, and a thick white towel wrapped around her torso. "Come get cleaned up."

"Need more towels?" The maid held up the stack of linens and then frowned.

Harry's mom gave the woman an icy smile, placing her hand on his shoulder to guide him into the small room. "Harry has all the... towels he needs," she replied, her voice a queen's icy tone, smiling at the woman only with her lips, her expression never touching her eyes. "Thank you."

"Yes, ma'am," the woman curtsied, then realized what she was doing and backed away, mumbling to herself.

The bathroom was small, but the water was hot. The last of Harry's tension melted away as the soap washed the dirt away. He had managed to bathe at the cabin, but it felt good to scrub under a hot stream. The murmur of conversation outside the bathroom piqued his interest, and he turned the water down just enough to catch a few snippets.

"What is expedited approval?" And a moment later: "What does it mean the owners can't appeal? But that's all my son left from his father! Would you use the fire to steal our land for your parks?! You fucking whore, I'll cut your heart out, you bitch!"

Harry had heard these curses before and winced when the archaic motel receiver slammed down into the cradle. A moment later, the whirr of the hair dryer replaced the angry curses, followed by a mournful song he often heard when she was getting ready. The foreign words always evoked a sense of heartbreak, and he was lost in thought when he dried off and stepped out of the small bathroom to find her sitting on the bed before the small mirror, a brush moving through her silky blonde hair.

"Such a sad song," Harry said, the bed creaking as he sat on it, the old mattress sagging beneath his weight.

"Do you think so?" She smiled at him through the reflection in the mirror. "My stepmother taught me this song. It's for a woman to prepare her heart before..." Her eyes fell, and small red spots appeared on her cheeks.

"I have something to tell you, Harry. I'm so sorry, but the insurance company..." Her face twisted, but Harry shifted on the bed and placed a hand on her bare shoulder, the contact sending a spark of electricity that made them both jump.

"I heard," he shrugged, letting his hand slide from her skin before he burned his fingers.

"They would steal your birthright and pay for it in pennies," she turned her head as if to spit, angrier than Harry had ever seen her, but seeing only the rough carpet, she restrained herself and cursed with a sharp nod.

“Let them try,” Harry said. “We’ll find a lawyer and fight them in court. God knows there’s no shortage of firms willing to take on the government.” He stood up and walked into the small bathroom, turning on the warm water. “We had great memories in the cabin… but after it went up in flames, I’m not sure we’d ever be comfortable there again.”

His stepmom smiled at him, wiping a tear from her cheek. Putting down the hairdryer, she shook her long blonde hair back, then took a deep breath and let it out.

“You’re right,” she said. “I don’t know why I let myself get so upset.”

“It’s not the cabin you’re upset about,” Harry said, leaving the rest hanging in the air. She looked at him, her fists tightening around the towel at her thighs.

She was as tense as a guitar string, her spine rigid, knees trembling, and her pale blue eyes staring into his. If Harry didn’t know her, he’d say it was the trauma of escaping the fire combined with old pains making her nerves fray. But he knew her. He knew this woman better than anyone else. He’d seen her rise from the depths of despair and find a glimmer of joy. She’d held onto that flame tightly, and their relationship had blossomed in those tough years. Now, on the cusp of getting everything she wanted, she was also at risk of losing it all, and she felt powerless about the outcome.