

Chapter 15: Rough Lips

ARDEN

I didn't know what I had been expecting from that moment. It wasn't the exhilarating 'fireworks' I felt during my first kiss with Jaxon. My heart didn't race faster, nor did fear consume my body. Instead, it felt... safe.

He didn't pull away, but he also didn't kiss me back. I closed my eyes tightly, anxiety swirling within me as I braced for his reaction. My palms rested on the sides of his face, drawing him impossibly closer. The thought that Kieran might recognize who I was loomed ominously in my mind.

"Oh," I heard my brother say, a chuckle escaping his lips. "I see that you're... busy. Anyway, I just came by to let you know that our mansion is throwing a party this weekend. All Alphas are invited. We hope to see you there."

With that, he turned and walked away, leaving me in a state of internal relief. I felt the urge to pull away, but before I could, Cade's arms wrapped around my waist.

My eyes widened as he pulled me even closer. Without any warning, he began moving his lips against mine.

At first, I didn't know how to respond. His lips were the opposite of soft. They had a rough, full quality that, to my surprise, bore an unexpected pain. Yet, it felt like I was under a spell, and I instinctively began to kiss him back.

He didn't use any tongue or teeth, but the intensity of the kiss made it feel like he had. My mind slowed to a crawl, struggling to process what I



was doing. All I was aware of was that this kiss made me forget the chaotic situation I found myself in.

But just as abruptly as it had begun, he pulled away, leaving me a bewildered mess. I looked up at him, my eyes wide with unspoken questions, yet his expression remained unreadable. I noticed a slight pulse in his jaw as he stepped back, shaking his head. Then, a small, teasing smirk appeared across his lips.

"Your words really do contradict your actions," he murmured.

I didn't want to kiss him! It was because he left me with no choice!

"I just—"

"Save it," he interrupted, cutting me off. "I assume you already got what you wanted. Nice try, but even then, I won't budge. You're not getting my points."

"Desperation is not a good look," he added, and with that, he turned and walked away, leaving me frowning deeply. What on earth was he talking about? Did he really think I was taking advantage of him?

"As if," I muttered under my breath, shaking my head in frustration. With a heavy sigh of relief, I leaned back against the wall, grateful that my brother hadn't seen me. That spared me yet another awkward encounter.

"There you are!"

I turned to see Tessa making her way toward me, relief washing over her features. "I was looking for you."

"Sorry," I said sheepishly, casting a glance at the fountain. "I was just



thirsty.”

She let out an exasperated sigh and took my arm. “Let’s go. I’m drained. Did you know that girl we spoke to before class approached me again?”

“Sienna?” I asked, frowning in response.

She nodded, her expression one of frustration. “Yeah. She warned me about you.”

I froze under her touch, nervousness coursing through me. Sensing my unease, Tessa quickly shook her head.

“Don’t worry,” she said, offering me a small, reassuring smile. “I don’t believe her at all. She told me you weren’t what you seemed and to steer clear before it was too late. She’s foolish if she thinks I’m going to take her side.”

Guilt washed over me, and I pursed my lips. “Sorry. I dragged you into this mess.”

“Hey,” she nudged my shoulder playfully, her smile brightening my mood. “We all have our own stories. We’re here for a new beginning. I have my past too, some parts I’m not proud of. But I won’t judge you based on what you’ve done before; I’ll judge you by how you treat me now.”

I smiled back at her, a warm sense of gratitude swelling within me.

Tessa and I finally arrived at our dorm, the familiarity of the journey to our room lingering in the air. The atmosphere was charged with energy, particularly because of the wolves in Hades’ dorm—each one possessing an insane libido that they were not shy about displaying in the hallways.



"I don't think I'll ever get used to witnessing scenes like this," I muttered under my breath, shaking my head in disbelief.

But then, the image of making out with Cade invaded my mind, causing my cheeks to redden. I buried my face with a pillow to get rid of such thoughts. There was no use thinking about a man like him!

Tessa glanced over at me from her bed, amusement in her eyes as she chuckled softly. "You'd better get accustomed to it."

I clicked my tongue in annoyance, propping myself up on the edge of my bed. "I still don't grasp it completely."

"It's more complicated than it seems," Tessa sighed, now sitting up and leaning against the thin wall that separated our rooms.

"The point system has been in place since the inception of Elite. Originally, it centered around academic merit. As you know, graduating from Elite is no easy feat."

I nodded in agreement, recalling my father's struggles to graduate—stories I'd heard, well eavesdropped, from my oldest brother, Lucian.

"Yeah," I said thoughtfully. "I heard that the standards have only gotten tougher over the years."

"That's primarily due to a quota," Tessa explained, a serious look crossing her face. This revelation piqued my interest. "The ultimate goal of graduating from Elite is to secure a position among the high-ranking officials in our respective packs. Being recruited into the United Factions—the governing body of our country, Fenra—represents an even higher aspiration."

"But even then, the available seats are exceedingly limited. Elite aims to



recruit only the best and brightest, and so they've established a cap on how many students can graduate."

"Initially, it was challenging to measure students' merits solely based on academic grades. That's when Mr. Winters became the headmaster and implemented the point system, because in his words, it was more tangible and it didn't cage students within their academic capabilities."

"This is absolutely insane," I said, feeling overwhelmed by the barrage of information.

"They never covered this in the general assembly, did they?"

"Of course not," Tessa replied with a knowing smirk. "They don't openly acknowledge it, but you can find all the details in the 'Echo', the school page I mentioned earlier. There, you'll see the corresponding points laid out. Just check your phone."

I bit my lip nervously, turning slightly to the side. "I don't actually own a phone."

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