

Chapter 2 Brother's Best Friends

Lia

When I came home I was looking forward to being in a quiet house where I could clear my thoughts. But the moment I walked through the door I heard multiple, loud voices coming from the kitchen, the spot my brother and his friends liked to haunt with their imposing presence.

Taking a shaky breath, I closed the door as quietly as I could behind me, but not quite enough. Michael, my brother, popped his head into the room, a smirk playing on his lips.

“Trying to sneak away without saying hello, little sister?”

“I live with you. Why do I have to say hello?” I countered.

A deeper voice chuckled, and Colby came to stand on the left side of Michael. He was a little taller than Michael who was already six feet so that was saying something. Colby’s piercing jade green eyes locked onto my tense form, pearly white tease exposed as he smirked.

“Lia are you going to go all the way upstairs without saying hello?” he asked.

Rain popped up on the other side of Michael. He was the same height as my brother with wild brown locks tied back in a messy bun.

“Lia, you weren’t going to snub us were you?” he pouted.

I sighed. “No, but it’s tempting.”

“Matt, Jesse! Get out here and say hello to Lia before she decides to go hide in her room.”

Shaking my head, I hurried around the corner.

“Lia!” my brother shouted.

“I’m using the restroom!”

Once in the safety of the bathroom, I leaned against the door and cursed under my breath. Why did I have to deal with this right now? Those four friends of my brother were the bane of my existence. They lived to torment me and Michael only did something about it half the time.

Michael thought it built character. How screwed up was that?

If I didn’t have to use the restroom I would have run straight up the stairs and to the safety of my room! There was a sturdy lock on it, but I don’t know if it could withstand the kick of a seasonal rugby player.

After finishing up, I didn’t leave the room right away. I hated what might await me out there. It would be more teasing and bullying from guys I had known my entire life.

For a moment I pressed my ear against the door and tried to see if I could hear anything. It was very quiet out there, which was concerning given how loud I knew they could be. What were they planning?

Chastising myself for hiding in the bathroom, I took a deep breath and opened the door, only to walk right into it and bounce off a solid wall of muscle. A cry escaped me as I stumbled back but strong hands reached out to grab my shoulders and steady me.

“Nice to see you again, Lia.”

My eyes flickered upwards, a blush spreading across my face when I realized how close Matt’s face was. He had a decent amount of stubble across his face, and chocolate brown eyes filled with mirth.

When he leaned down, one of his long braids fell forward, tickling my cheek. I could feel the warmth from his body, making me nervous.

“Yes, very nice. Will you let me go please?”

“I was just making sure you didn’t fall flat on your ass,” he teased. “Next time I won’t play the perfect gentleman and let you fall.”

With a roll of my eyes, I squeezed past him since Matt was refusing to move. The only one I hadn’t seen yet was Jesse and out of all my brother’s friends, he was the quietest. Sometimes when he looked at me it felt like he was taking me apart with one look. If looks could kill then Jesse could kill with one.

My backpack was still at the bottom of the stairs where I left it. I looked around, trying to see if anyone was around or coming up behind me but I heard laughter coming from the kitchen, meaning I might be safe.

There were times they would forget about me and go back to whatever they were doing. I hoped this was one of those times.

Quickly, I dashed upstairs. What I wasn’t expecting was to run into another solid wall of muscle, this one positioned right in front of my door. I nearly stumbled back again but my hands did reach out to steady me.

“Watch where you're going.”

I looked up to see Jesse glowering down at me, his icy blue eyes narrowed into slits. His shaggy blonde hair had fallen forward, obscuring some of his gaze. He flicked it out of the way with a quick flip of his head, never once looking away from me.

“You’re the one in front of my door!” I cried.

He blinked. “I wanted to say hello. Would you have said hello to me otherwise, Lia?”

I hated the way he said my name. It was like he was drawing out each syllable purposely.

“I’d like to get into my room.”

“Either say hello or try to move me. I’d love to see you try though.”

Annoyance ran through me, but what could I do? I was barely 5’4 and there was no match for someone on an active rugby team.

“Hello Jesse,” I hissed.

He smiled. “See was that so hard?”

Jesse pushed past me, flashing one last smirk. “Have a good day, Lia. Maybe you’ll be gracious enough to come down and say goodbye to us all too.”

“Fat chance!” I shouted back.

I hurried into my room, slamming the door shut behind me. Why did all of them have to tease and bother me so much? When I was younger I would follow them around like a lost puppy dog, wanting nothing more than to be a part of their fan.

Now I wanted nothing more than to put as much distance as possible between all of us.

It had been two hours, and the noise was finally dying out. I had been venting to Simone for the past hour. She had listened to every word like the good friend she was.

What would someone do without a friend as good as Simone?

How’s it going? Are you surviving the chaos over there? - S Barely. Colby just “accidentally” spilled chips on my head. - L LOL. Sounds like Colby. What are the others doing? - S Rain’s pretending he’s an expert chef with a box of microwave popcorn. Matt’s laughing at all of it, and Jesse keeps telling terrible jokes. - L Like what? - S He said “Lia, why couldn’t the bicycle stand up by itself?” - L Oh no... - S.

“Because it was two-tired!” - L I’d be so done. - S Right?! And then Matt goes, “Wow, Jesse, that joke was almost as bad as Lia’s taste in movies.” - L.

Ouch! Did you say something back? - S Of course. I told him his playlist was so bad even Spotify would disown him. - L Nice! What did he say? - S Nothing—he just smirked and said, “Good one, Lia,” like I was a little kid trying to be clever. - L Classic Matt. - S And now they’re all plotting something. They get quiet like this when they’re about to pull some dumb prank. - L Oh no. What do you think they’re up to? - S IDK, but if I suddenly stop responding, avenge me. - L Always. - S Gotta goes. Michael just came in and he looks guilty. - L Good luck. You’ll need it!

“Hey, Lia sorry about all that. You know how rowdy the guys get.”

I scoffed, giving him a look. It was a statement I didn’t even want to give any attention to! Did my brother expect me to just forgive him at the drop of a hat? He could be so clueless sometimes, whether it was accidental or purposeful.

Michael always waffled on the way they bullied me. Either he would say it was all wholesome fun, or he would apologize afterward.

“Yes, well, I should expect that from a bunch of rugby players.”

He rolled his eyes. “There’s leftover pizza downstairs. Come down if you want some or stay here and sulk for all I care. It’s up to you if you want to sulk in here.”

For a moment, I wondered what would happen if I ended up mated to Colby, Rain, Matt, or Jesse. A shiver of fear ran through me. I wouldn’t be able to handle the one I was destined to be with being one of those guys.

The teasing would increase, making me stuck with them until one of us passed on to join our ancestors.

But that wouldn’t happen. It was silly to think I would end up mated to one of them.

Yet, the fear remained, filling my stomach and every part of me with dread.