

Chapter 4 Bullies

Lia

The school was buzzing with excitement from the moment the email was sent out. Come Friday, it was all anyone could talk about. It was like they forgot that the championship Rugby team members once went to this very school.

I don't know how they could forget such a thing. This was something I remembered every single day, unable to forget no matter how much I tried.

But I believed what my brother said. They weren't going to be there. It was just going to be him.

Until I ran right into Colby of all people. He looked surprised so I don't think he was trying to seek me out. I jerked away as if I had been burned, flattening myself against the wall and trying to become as small as possible.

"Hey Lia," he purred, grinning from ear to ear.

He ran a hand through his damp dirty blonde locks, clearly having just gotten out of the shower not long ago.

"Colby," I spat, trying to make a run for it.

Before I could, Colby crowded me against the wall. He had me pinned with both hands on either side of me.

"Aw, come on why are you leaving so soon? I don't have to be on stage for another twenty minutes. Why don't we catch up?"

I felt a blush creeping up my cheeks. He was too close to me, so close I could feel his breath on my neck.

"This is my school," I ground out through clenched teeth. "Why can't you leave me here?"

"Hey, I used to go here too!" Colby pointed out with a hearty laugh.

She struggled to contain her anxiety, wishing she could be anywhere but here.

"Hey!" Simone shouted.

This distracted Colby enough for me to duck underneath his right arm and put as much distance between us as possible.

"Well, now you've gone and ruined our fun," Colby said, giving Simone a look. "I guess we'll have to continue this another time, Lia."

He walked off, making Simone frown.

"Are you okay?"

"He was just doing his usual tormenting of me."

Simone looked me up and down, causing me to sigh.

"Don't sigh at me. I'm checking to make sure you're okay!"

"You know they tease me. I've told you this for years now."

She bit down on her bottom lip. "Yeah, but I've never seen it up close. I kind of want to punch them."

"They're on the rugby team. That's not going to go well for anyone involved—mostly you."

"Hey... have you ever thought about why they tease you so?"

I blinked. "What?"

"Well, maybe they have crushes—"

"We aren't in middle school!"

"So?" she argued back. "Some guys are still expressing their feelings in such a way—especially jocks."

"I don't want to think about it."

"Excuse me students please everyone start heading to the auditorium."

The two of us shared a look.

"Let's hope this goes quickly," Simone whispered to me. "You know, for your sake."

The rest of the morning was a blur. I kept my head down, trying to make sure none of them noticed me. But even though Simone and I had positioned ourselves in the back, it was like each of their eyes kept finding me.

When the speeches were over, they said we were more than welcome to leave and head back to our classes. Simone and I were among a handful of students to leave. The others stayed behind, wanting to talk with the beloved rugby team that was constantly on my mind—and not by choice.

I was grateful to get out of there without much fanfare.

Now that this was over I had to worry about the fact that my coming-of-age ceremony was coming up in just a few days, something I had been dreading for a long time now.

"I think you need to clear your head," Simone whispered to me. "Do you want to go get some coffee after school?"

My eyes lit up. "Are you paying?"

"Wow, Lia don't even offer to pay? I can't believe you're using me for my money."

I laughed. It felt good to be able to laugh so freely.

"Well, to be fair, I only get so much money from my trust fund a month and there's a limit of how much I can take out. You, on the other hand, have a proper part-time job through the school."

I thought about getting a part-time job but decided against it. My goal was to get good grades and get into college. With my brother and I not having to pay tuition, I didn't want to do anything to jinx my situation.

"Fine, just meet me in front of the school later today."

I counted down the minutes, which wasn't something I recommended. When it was time for school to officially get out, I left with my bag slung over my shoulder. My mind was focused on the thought of getting coffee with my best friend that I failed to notice a certain someone lurking.

"Lia, where you off to in such a hurry?"

I stiffened and saw Rain leaning against the brick, a smirk playing on his full lips.

"Shouldn't you be back at Ironside?" I whispered, taking a step away from him.

This time his long dark brown locks were pulled back in a messy braid, almost resembling my own. His equally dark brown eyes were filled with mirth, which grew with how uncomfortable I looked.

"Nah, a few of us stayed behind to give some pointers to the rugby team here. If some of them play their cards right they could be playing for Ironside next year."

"Lucky them."

In a matter of seconds, Rain was in front of me. He leaned down, mouth wide and nostrils flared.

I cried out, shoving him away. He didn't budge an inch much to my frustration.

Our eyes locked and Rain doubled over laughing.

"Oh my god, you should see the look on your face! Did you think I was going to bite you?"

I angrily blinked back tears, not wanting to give Rain the satisfaction of seeing me cry.

"You're such a jerk! Why do all of you have to bother me like this?"

He shrugged. "It's fun."

There it was. A simple answer that almost sent me raging, but I heard Simone shouting my name.

Rain gave a little wave, pulling away from me.

"Hey, Simone. Did I get your name right?"

She frowned. "Yes. Lia, let's go."

I shot Rain a look, trying to push my anxiety so far down that it wouldn't bother me.

"You okay, Lia?"

"Yes, I'm fine. Just my brother's friends being jerks."

The spot on my neck where he pretended to bite started to tingle. I rubbed at it absentmindedly, even though nothing had happened. Why when any of those guys got close to me did I feel this shiver of fear mixed with anticipation? It was hard for me to deny, but I spent a lot of time trying to ignore it.

Shivering, I started rubbing at the spot a little harder. Simone grabbed my hand, giving me a worried look.

"Are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm fine, why?"

"You're rubbing at your neck so hard I'm afraid you're going to bruise it!"

I smiled faintly. "It's fine. I'm fine."

"Lia... did he bite you?"

"What? No!"

Simone breathed out a sigh of relief. "Not that I think any of your brother's friends would do that but it's always a worry with some of these alphas."

"They would never do that."

And not just because my brother would have their heads. He might tolerate their teasing, but he would never accept them forcing a bite on me. That wasn't appropriate for someone who hadn't even had their coming-of-age ceremony.

"Then stop rubbing at your neck!"

I wrenched my hand away from my now reddened neck, ignoring the strange tingling sensation that was left in its wake. Biting down on my bottom lip, I settled for shoving my hands into the deep pockets of my school-issued sweater, hoping it would be enough to keep my hands busy.

"See, I'm fine."

Simone gave me a dubious look. "I don't know about that but I guess it's fine if you've stopped rubbing at it."

I wondered if I would ever have any of these happy moments again. Simone and I were always able to go out and have such fun, but with my coming-of-age ceremony and then graduation I didn't know if it was possible.

It didn't seem like it was to me.

"In a couple of days everything is going to change," I said out loud to Simone who frowned.

"Yes, but it's going to change amazingly! You're going to find out who your chosen mates are going to be and that's so exciting!"

Exciting for Simone but for me it marked a change in my life I wasn't ready for,

"Let's just go to the café and get some coffee. I need something else to focus on right now."

She slung an arm around my shoulders, putting some of her weight onto me.

"Sounds good to me."