

## Chapter 14

Violet

“I don’t know about you, but the only thing that will satisfy me is you accepting my rejection.”

It was hard to decline his offer, but somehow I had managed to use every bit of dignity I had left to stand my ground.

All that crap about taking me in these woods?

It wasn’t Kylan speaking, it was the beast playing mind games—just like Lumia was doing with me.

Kylan was disgusted by me, just as much as I was by him. This moment, this tension, wasn’t real—it was forced.

A dark chuckle escaped Kylan’s lips as he let go of my body, and I finally released the breath I had been holding back.

“We need to get moving,” he said, his tone serious again. He walked away, leaving me standing there against the tree, completely confused and frustrated.

My body felt hot, heart almost beat out of my chest, yet here he was—pretending like nothing had happened.

Huffing, I kicked a nearby twig and made my way back to the others. How would I survive the rest of the mission if this was what he was going to be like?

When I arrived, Dylan and Nate were already back. The golden box was now in Nate’s hand, meaning my turn was slowly approaching. My stomach tightened at the thought of that box having the same effect on me as it did on Kylan and Dylan.

“Oh no, I can carry my bag,” I stepped in as soon as Nate wanted to pick it back up from the ground.

He moved faster, grabbed it, then took a step back. “Beautiful, I’m not weak.”

“And neither is she—” Kylan growled, ripping the backpack out of Nate’s hand. “I understand you have the White Knight Syndrome, Nate—but this isn’t the ‘Four-eyes’ show. She has to put in some actual work if she wants a spot on the Elite Team.”

A spot on the Elite Team, my ass.

He knew damn well he would pull every string to keep me off that team because he couldn’t handle our mate bond.

Kylan threw the bag at me, and I barely managed to catch it in time. I scrunched my nose at him as he placed a hand on Nate’s back, guiding him to the front.

I didn’t mind carrying my own bag, but what I did mind was him thinking he had the right to boss others around because he was a prince. Team leader or not.

Throwing the backpack over my shoulders, I had expected it to be heavy, but surprisingly it didn’t feel as bad this time. I wasn’t actually feeling any weight at all.

As I walked, I glanced back in confusion and finally noticed what was going on as my eyes locked with Dylan. He supported the backpack for me, carrying all the weight so I didn’t have to.

A small, rare smile tugged at his lips. I smiled back awkwardly, not knowing how to respond because we never smiled at each other.

He kept supporting the bag for our entire walk, and I felt grateful for his help. Because of him, we were able to continue without me holding anyone back.

I wanted to say something—anything, to break the awkward silence between us, but didn’t know how to start. The two of us hadn’t had a real conversation in years.

“So…” I tried grabbing his attention. “You found your mate?”

“I did.”

It was short, but at least he answered. A sharp feeling went through my heart—maybe jealousy, perhaps sadness. It wasn’t that I didn’t want him to be happy. I was just slightly irritated because everything seemed to be working out for others, while I was stuck with Kylan.

“Is she from our pack?”

“No,” Dylan replied, his voice sounding kind and soft. “She’s from a pack in the south. Her dad’s an Alpha.”

I gasped, invested in his story. “And you’ll be an Alpha, which means she’ll make the perfect Luna. You’re lucky.”

See?

It all worked out for him.

A genuine laugh escaped from Dylan’s lips, one I hadn’t heard in ages.

We used to get along well, it was only that I could barely remember. It was before Mom and Dad died. The memories were vague, but back then when he was not forced to be my brother but just my cousin—he’d often hold me after my nightmare, telling me everything would be fine.

Somewhere in time it went wrong, he began resenting me—and our bond shattered.

“She’s amazing,” Dylan continued. “Beautiful, strong, smart…she doesn’t take crap from anyone. But she’s also kind, caring. I’m lucky to have found her,” I could sense his smile as he spoke. “I think the two if you would get along. She’s just as stubborn as you are.”

I smiled, listening to him. If he thought the two of us would get along, then maybe he didn’t hate me completely after all.

“This is the most we’ve spoken in years. It’s kind of embarrassing, isn’t it?”

Dylan sighed. “Violet—”

Before he could finish, Nate suddenly groaned, dropping the box to the ground. He hunched over and clutched his head, taking deep breaths.

Up until now, his reaction had been the worse.

Dylan let go of my backpack and joined Kylan, rushing to Nate’s side to check up on him, but my eyes were fixed on the box.

It was my turn.

I felt my palms grow sweaty as I stared at it. The box...

The same box that had already affected Kylan, Dylan, and now Nate.

I took small, hesitant steps forward, knowing there was no escaping this. Everyone had done their part, and now it was my turn.

In all honesty, I was shaking—and couldn’t even begin to imagine what would happen when I held that box.

Would it really talk to me?

Would it break me just as it had broken Nate?

My hands trembled as I got closer, the golden box was in my reach, and just as I bent down to pick it up—I felt a firm hand on my shoulder.

I looked up and saw Dylan’s face, his eyes worried.

“You don’t have to do this,” he decided. “I’ll take it.”

Kylan, who had also appeared, pushed his hand off my shoulder. “It’s—”

“With all due respect,” Dylan interrupted, slightly raising his voice, “I know you’re the team leader, but that’s my sister, and I won’t let her suffer.”

Kylan exhaled, his expression irritated. “I was only going to say I should take it. It’s not your turn yet.”

I glanced between the two of them, utterly confused. Were they really going at it over who was going to take my turn? The two people who hated me the most?

Part of me wanted to let them fight over it, to let someone else deal with the burden. But another part of me, perhaps the stubborn part—knew I couldn’t let that happen.

“No!” I snarled, picking up the box. “I don’t want any special treatment because I’m a woman. I will carry my backpack, and I will carry this box. Now let’s go.”