

Chapter 16

Violet

I fumbled with my hands, thinking about my biggest secret.

What was my biggest secret?

For a second, my mind went to Kylan—but then I realized that he wasn't it. He was definitely a fear, and a secret, but not my biggest.

The voices were talking about my glasses—the thing I had been forced to hide my entire life. They had been my biggest insecurity.

A loud laugh broke the tension.

It was Kylan.

"No, no," he said, the laughter only growing louder. He buried his head between his hands, sighing. "No, I'm not doing this."

He held an uneasy look in his eyes, and so did Nate who shifted beside him. Although Nate had been kind, also he hadn't opened up about anything. The only thing I knew about him were the basics. Beta dad, noble blood, bitch sister.

"If you want to become captain," Dylan spoke up. "I'm afraid you'll have to."

Kylan chuckled. "No."

"We can be back before sunrise—but not if that box keeps talking to us," Dylan didn't back down.

Dylan had always been a serious person. He didn't always like doing things, but he'd do them if they needed to be done. He wasn't one to take no for an answer, and everything had to go his way—which was why most people thought he was difficult to hang out with.

However, this time he was right. "Dylan has a point," I spoke.

Kylan didn't respond, didn't growl, talk back, belittle me—and it was because he was wise enough to know that was the truth.

"Thank you, Violet," Dylan spoke. "Your biggest secret. Unfiltered, nothing but the truth—and it stays between the four of us. We'll never tell anyone about it, and we'll never bring it up again."

We all looked at each other, nodding in agreement—even Kylan, who suddenly didn't seem all that tough anymore.

Dylan turned the box in his hand, showing no emotion. "I'll go first."

I braced myself, waiting to hear his biggest secret. He wasn't just sharing it because he wanted to—no, we were all going to share something deep, something personal, because we had to.

Dylan's eyes met mine. "I resent you, Violet," he said without a single stutter. "I resent you, and sometimes I just wish you were dead."

My heart sank at his cold confession, but I hadn't expected anything less. "I know," I chuckled, hiding behind my pain. "Everyone knows. That's not really a secret."

"But you don't know why."

Did I want to know why?

"Growing up, I always felt overlooked by Dad," Dylan spoke. "You might not notice but he has always kept an eye on you, neglected me to do so even though I'm his son. It made me...jealous, angry."

I blinked, his words hitting me like a punch to the gut. Jealous? Of me?

"That's not true. Dad doesn't care about me."

That man didn't even have the decency to check up on me.

Dylan shook his head, lowering his gaze. "You were always different. Better. You have healing abilities that outshine anyone in our pack, the elders love you—Dad loves you," he stated. "It's not fair to blame you, I know that, but I do."

"Dylan—"

"And when I was younger..." he exhaled. "When I was twelve, I told Dad he had to put me first or else I would kill myself, and take you with me. I held a knife to your throat while you slept, and he had to stop me. That's how much I hated you, Violet."

No one spoke, no one breathed. I could only hear the sound of the fire. That's the impact his words had left.

For the first time, it all made sense—why Uncle Fergus was so cold toward me. He had no choice. One was his son—the other his niece, and he chose his heir.

My chest tightened in sadness. I knew he hated me, but I could've never imagined him hating me that much.

I always thought Dylan was the one who had it all. Our future Alpha. He was strong, confident, everything our pack respected. And here he was, telling me that I made him feel small.

A nobody.

"I..." I tried speaking, but my lips just wouldn't move. What could I even say in this situation?

I forgive you?

I don't forgive you?

Nate glanced between us with sympathy, while Kylan shifted uncomfortably, likely already worrying about his own turn.

Dylan sighed, running a hand through his hair. "I put so many in the pack against you, told them you were a freak, took away the opportunity for you to have friends and I'm not proud of it, Violet," he ranted. "I'm your brother, I was supposed to protect you—but I had somehow turned into your biggest bully. I felt embarrassed, I knew it was wrong—but I just kept going."

I felt a tear forming at the corner of my eye, but I quickly blinked it away. My childhood after Mom and Dad died wasn't something I liked thinking about, and then to learn that Dylan was the perpetrator.

"I hope you can find it in your heart to forgive me, and if you don't—I understand."

"I forgive you," I whispered, deciding to be the bigger person—even though he had supposedly held a knife to my throat. "I never knew."

Dylan gave a weak, apologetic smile. "How could you have known? I never told anyone. Not even myself until now."

We stared at each other, neither of us blinking as we came to a mutual understanding. For the first time in years, I felt like I understood him.

Suddenly, the gold color of the box dulled slightly as Dylan finished his confession. A small, satisfied smile appeared on his face. "It's working."

He handed the box to Nate who sat beside him, and had somehow lost every little spark that made him Nate. He had always been present, but right now, he looked like he would rather be anywhere but here.

"No rush," Dylan tried, but Nate shook his head.

"It's not like I can run from it."

"Okay. So, uh...I guess the thing I've been hiding..." Nate stumbled over his words, pausing for a moment before drawing in a long, deep breath.

"Everyone sees me as Nate, the future Beta, always happy, always positive, the guy who's supposed to follow in his dad's footsteps and be perfect. But the truth is, I'm far from it—actually, I'm none of those things."

I could feel the tension as I looked into his paled eyes. Nate always carried a warm smile on his face, he was friendly, approachable—and hearing that there was more to him came as a shock.

"When I was younger," Nate began, "I felt this pressure to be someone. To live up to my dad's name, to be the next Beta." He shifted his gaze, avoiding eye contact with anyone. "It was suffocating, you know? I just wanted to feel normal, I wanted it to stop—so, I started sneaking into the medical wing and taking Lunaris."

Kylan's head snapped up, and his brows furrowed.

Lunaris.

It was an illegal drug we had studied back home. It was mostly used for anesthesia as it numbed the mind and body—but it was addictive. Overdosing on Lunaris was not something uncommon.

It was only prescribed to healers for painful surgeries, it was hard to come by—and was definitely not for personal use.

"One pill here, one pill there," Nate explained, and I could hear the shame in his voice. "At first, it was just once a month, something to take the edge off. But then one pill a month became one pill a week. And before I knew it, I was taking several pills a day. I still am."

"Nate..." my heart ached for him. Behind those smiles was a person who was hurting, a person who couldn't function without those pills.

I wanted to tell him to stop at once because I knew what Lunaris could do to a person—but that wasn't my job.

We had all agreed never to bring it up again after tonight.

He released a sad laugh. "So, yeah. The perfect Nate? Not so perfect after all. I'm an addict. There you have it."

I stared at him, still trying to figure him out. It was probably an ignorant thing to say, but he didn't look like an addict. If he hadn't told us, I would've never guessed.

As the color of the box faded for a second time, Nate's eyes flickered to mine, but his usual warm smile was now replaced with shame. He couldn't look at me for too long, and I didn't want to bother him either—so I looked at Kylan.

After all, it was his turn.