

## Chapter 174

Violet

I tried not to look anyone in the eyes.

Whatever torturous exercises Rochwall had them doing, they did not look happy. Just a few days ago, some of them had been smiling at me, making it appear as if I was finally earning their respect. But now?

I felt the nerves get the better of me. This was how it usually turned out for me. The same way people admired me quickly, they would turn against me just as fast, and I couldn't even blame them.

Allowing the Captain to show up late? That was crazy.

Maybe this was what Aelius meant when he said I was selfish. What if they all hated me again, and I would have to start from scratch?

"You know what," Rochwall's voice broke through my thoughts. He gestured to the group, inviting them all into the conversation. "We would all like to know where you were."

Well...this was awkward.

I swallowed hard.

Beside me, Kylan let out a small snort. He rubbed the back of his neck, an innocent smirk tugging at his lips. It was the kind that made me want to smack him and kiss him at the same time.

"We had to look for something," he spoke after a while.

Look for something, really?



What the hell was he saying?

Rochwall's face tightened like he was about to blow steam from his nose.

"Please tell us, how far in was it hidden?" one of the guys called out.

Just like that, the group burst out laughing, and the tense, suffocating air, as well as my nerves, disappeared like it never existed. Maybe they were pissed at the situation, but not at us. Maybe this thing we had going on, our understanding within the team, was sincere.

Everyone but Dylan cracked a laugh. He looked mortified, like he was slowly putting together that maybe this bond between Kylan and me wasn't that fake after all.

Of course Trinity knew what we were doing, but she was loyal through and through, so I doubted she would discuss my sex life with him.

My lips curled, until I met Rochwall's eyes. His expression hadn't changed a bit. Seeing him again terrified me. And now it wasn't because of the betrayal thing or because he screwed my mom, but because something about him seemed off today.

Yes, of course he wouldn't give us a pat on the back for showing up late, after all, he was still a commander, but his vibe was different. He was a bit too much like Jorn for my liking.

"You're the Captain, Kylan," Rochwall said, his voice cold. "This is unacceptable."

Kylan sighed like he wasn't even slightly bothered. "Yes. You're right."

He then turned to the group with a fabricated pitiful expression. "I'm really sorry it took me that long to find what I was looking for," he raised



his voice just enough.

"But did you find it?" someone asked.

"I did," Kylan confirmed, a smirk plastered on his lips.

Laughter broke out again, and my face was on fire. When I had wished for him to acknowledge me in public, this wasn't quite what I meant. Kylan glanced down at me, his smirk softening just a little as his finger brushed my burning cheek.

"You're okay," he whispered before turning to the group again. "It's all on me," Kylan said. "She intended to be here on time. You all know what she's like."

His tone was sincere. "So if you want to blame someone, blame me."

A few of them mumbled it was okay, others were still grinning, while some just shrugged in response.

My heart melted. He didn't have to do that. He didn't force me to stay, and it had been my choice just as much as his. Still, he took the blame like it was nothing.

He knew how much belonging in the team meant to me, and he was taking the blame like it wasn't a burden at all.

I looked up at him with a soft expression that probably said enough. "Thank you."

Kylan opened his mouth to say something, but then Rochwall raised the flute to his lips, almost making me jump. "Everyone, on the ground!" he shouted. "Five rounds of sit-ups, followed by sprints, team drills. I want speed, form, and focus!"



I covered my ears with my hands, hearing the vibration of his loud voice near my ears. "I want speed and focus, no excuses, and no more delays!"

Kylan instantly made his way over to the other guys while I still stood frozen in place. Where was I supposed to go?

My eyes already searched for Nate, but then Kylan, who was beside him, raised his hand to grab my attention. He smiled faintly, giving me a small nod as he motioned with his head for me to come over.

Right. Things were like this now.

I blinked in surprise, still unable to get over it.

The same guy who didn't even want to be seen with me, barely even looked at me, had now invited me to sit with him and his friends. I exhaled, trying to prevent myself from smiling, but then someone else called out to me.

"Babes!"

I turned to see Mandy, the third-year combat major, waving me over. "Come here!" she called, patting the empty grass beside her. She was seated with the other girls, leading them like always.

It didn't take long for me to rush to her side. Although we weren't close, it was nice to see she was still trying, especially after I had rejected her offer for lunch. As much as I loved Kylan, I didn't want to be glued to him all the time. We would have plenty of time together in Lyperia, and the last thing I wanted was for him to start getting annoyed with me before we even got there.

"Hey, Mandy," I greeted, dropping down beside her.



She grinned. "Hey, how are you—"

Right at that moment, Rochwall blew the flute again. Horrified by the sound, the whole group dropped to the ground for sit-ups.

Although I was a bit out of breath, and my legs were weaker than usual for obvious reasons, I managed to follow the rhythm without too much trouble.

"So," Mandy said between breaths, "you at least gotta tell me it was worth it."

I furrowed my brows. "What?"

She let out a laugh. "The reason for this horrific workout, instead of the picnic we could've had. Was it worth it?"

Was it worth it?

I immediately felt pressure between my legs, my body suddenly remembering where Kylan had just been. My mind went to that golden tongue of his doing things that still made my toes curl just thinking about it.

Then it went to the shower, and how the water ran down our bodies as he took me, hard and rough, like he owned every inch of me.

A soft smile crept onto my lips.

"So it was worth it?" Mandy gasped, laughing mid sit-up. "Look at you!"

I giggled, feeling my cheeks flush again. Right at that second, all fun was over as Rochwall's face hung above us. His eyes narrowed, and he raised the flute again, the sound loud enough to make both of us flinch.



"No talking!"

Then he turned away.

I waited until he was completely out of sight before sharing my thoughts.

"He's a bit strange today, isn't he?"

Mandy let out a grunt. "Yes, he's been like this all week!"

"Really?" I said between breaths, still keeping up with the exercise.

Mandy nodded. "Yes. I have him for combat, and he gave us a really hard time," she shared. "That's not like him. He's strict sometimes, but not like this. This is different."

I looked over at Rochwall, watching him pace back and forth with a tight expression. His jaw had been clenched about half the time since I'd seen him, his eyes angry, and his shoulders too stiff.

What was his problem?

"Maybe he's having issues with Jane?" Mandy guessed.

No, that couldn't be it.

Rochwall was all about Jane. I had seen how their relationship formed through Adelaide's eyes, and how long the path had been to make their mate bond work.

There was just no way either one of them would risk that.

"Maybe," I said anyway.

But deep down, I knew it had to be more.



I focused on the training, and after a long and exhausting workout, I dropped onto the grass, just wanting to disappear. It had been a disaster, and the worst thing was knowing we could've had some food instead if it weren't for me and Kylan.

Now my legs barely worked because I had done double the work today. First, Kylan wrecked me, then this training...

"Everyone, sit in a circle!" Rochwall requested, like he hadn't tortured us enough already. I had never been so happy to leave for Lyperia tomorrow, if that meant not having to deal with...whatever this was, for the entire week.

A few groans filled the area as some, with no strength left, literally crawled into the circle. I was definitely part of that.

I dragged myself beside Mandy in the circle. Kylan sat on the opposite side, right between Dylan and Nate.

The second I turned my gaze in that direction, all three of them were staring at me.

One stared at me with the 'I'm your brother and you were late so now I have questions' stare.

One with the 'What happened to my sweet, innocent Vivi' stare.

And then Kylan...

He looked at me like he was already imagining a dozen new ways to bend me over. Or maybe he just liked my smile. It could be either one at this point.

Rochwall joined us. He cleared his throat once everyone had settled.



Although his eyes were a bit less sharp, he still didn't appear to be fully in the mood. "I know I pushed you today," he began. "But I just want all of you to get more disciplined. Stronger."

He looked around the circle. But when his gaze reached me, it didn't move. Instead, his expression softened. "I need every single one of you to be stronger."

My stomach twisted with unease. Why did it feel like he was singling me out?

Frustrated, I dropped my eyes to the grass. Could he not see the improvement after all? Had all my work been for nothing?

I knew I wasn't perfect, but I was trying. Hard.

"With that being said, training stops early today...so you can all get ready ...and we can still have the picnic," he said, hesitant, like he thought we actually didn't deserve it.

A few in the circle cheered, praising the man to be a legend like he hadn't just made our lives a living hell. I slowly raised my head and glanced at the three guys in front of me who were still shamelessly staring.

Kylan, who had caught my gaze for a split second, gave me a wink. Though all I wanted was to jump on top of him, I acknowledged him with a slight eye roll and a smile.

"So what's the occasion?" Nate asked.

"The occasion?" Rochwall repeated, getting up and brushing off his hands.

He looked at Kylan. "I have known this guy right here since he was a





small, annoying...fill it in," a smile grew on his lips. Then he looked at me. "And now he has found his mate who..."

Who what?

Who was the daughter of your ex, your best friend you betrayed?

The look in Rochwall's eyes changed. He seemed sad all of a sudden. Almost guilty.

"Anyway, I'm proud of these two. This is a big deal, and an honor that should be celebrated."

Well, there was that. Way to go, making me feel even worse for showing up late than I already did.

No wonder he had lost his shit. He had planned all of this, for us, and we had disrespected him by not showing up.

Was this the selfishness Aelius was talking about?

No, Violet.

Not everything revolved around Aelius and his cryptic words.

My eyes met Kylan's, and he gave me a look. A serious one that clearly said, 'Yeah, I feel bad too.'

"I want everyone to get ready, and we'll meet back here at eight," Rochwall clapped his hands once. "And Violet, I would like to talk to you for a moment."

Before panic could hit my chest, I had already processed his softened eyes and figured it was just a normal talk. Nothing more.



Karla's expression softened, but a trace of hurt lingered in her eyes. "Was something that severe the only lie you could come up with?" she inquired, her voice laced with a mix of curiosity and disappointment.

Duncan nodded, a sense of vulnerability evident in his demeanor. "Yeah," he confessed, his voice tinged with a hint of regret. "At that moment, I was caught off guard, and I knew your cousin is a tough investigator. I panicked, and it was the first thing that came to mind."

Karla considered his words, her gaze locked on Duncan's face as she tried to gauge his sincerity. After a moment of contemplation, she nodded slowly, accepting his explanation. "Really?" she asked, seeking confirmation.

Duncan met her gaze, his eyes filled with genuine honesty. "Yeah," he replied, a hint of reassurance in his voice.

"If you had called her and told her I wouldn't be coming last night, then I wouldn't have said that."

Karla shrugged, a hint of resignation in her voice. "Don't blame me. Julie would have interrogated me just as much if I had called her," she explained. "Anyway, thanks for coming up with something to save me a bit at that moment."

Duncan's gaze met Karla's, gratitude evident in his eyes. "No, thank you," he said sincerely. "Thank you for understanding and for not revealing the truth."

Karla smiled faintly, a sense of loyalty and determination in her expression. "It's okay," she assured him. "Your identity needs to be kept a secret so you can navigate the complexities of the Lennart family effectively. I won't sabotage your plan. Your secret is safe with me. Okay?"

"

Duncan's tension eased as he realized he had someone he could trust in this delicate situation. His eyes met hers, and he smiled warmly. "Thank you," he replied, his voice filled with genuine appreciation.

"And you're welcome." Karla's smile widened, her eyes reflecting the deep bond between them. "Thanks for staying with me all night," she added, her voice filled with warmth and sincerity.

Duncan nodded, his gratitude evident in his gaze. "It was the least I could do," he replied, his voice tinged with a touch of sadness. "But now, I need to go. Take care of yourself, Karla."

As he began to rise from the couch, ready to leave, something held him back. He paused, his gaze fixed on Karla, a mix of emotions swirling within him.

Karla noticed his hesitation and met his gaze curiously. "Is there anything else you want to say?" she asked gently, her voice filled with understanding.

Duncan remained silent, his eyes locked with hers, his mind flooded with memories of the previous day, the moment when Karla had been shot. The weight of the situation lingered in the air.

"Duncan, if you want to scold me more, I..." Karla started, her voice trailing off, sensing the unspoken thoughts in his eyes.

But before she could finish, Duncan rushed towards her, closing the distance between them in an instant. He leaned down and enveloped her in a tight, protective embrace, his arms encircling her with a mixture of relief, affection, and concern.

