

Chapter 35

Violet

“W-Wha...” I widened my eyes, his words startling me right before I lost my balance. My body dropped sideways, but before I could hit the ground, my hands found his shoulders.

Making the situation ten times more embarrassing than it already was, I somehow ended up straddling him, my legs on either side of his torso as I hovered over him.

Our faces were close, too close, and I froze, feeling the heat of his body beneath mine.

Nate showed his dimple, moving one hand to my waist while the other gently brushed a loose strand from my ponytail.

“The text,” he said, casually. “Are we still on, beautiful?”

There was no shame, nothing.

I gulped, still on top of him. “Yes,” I whispered.

“Okay, okay,” he nodded, smirking. My body tensed as his hand rubbing slow circles on my waist. “Do you want to do it here?” he glanced down at the space between us.

Shocked, I looked down, realizing I was still on top of him. “I’m so sorry!” I gasped, my face heating up as I quickly scrambled off him and stood up.

“No worries,” Nate chuckled, standing up as well. “I don’t mind.”

He squinted his eyes as if he was trying to figure me out. Nervously, I brushed my hand through my ponytail and took a step back, my eyes darting everywhere, anywhere but his.

“When would be a good time for you?” I asked, trying to sound casual, only to get exposed by my voice suddenly turning a pitch higher. Nate grinned as I cleared my throat.

“Probably after family day? Or whenever you want to—”

“After family day works for me,” I blurted out quickly, eager to end the conversation. I was in a rush to get ‘it’ over with, but I didn’t want to talk about it much longer.

I still had a few days before family day to fully process whatever was going to happen.

An uncomfortable silence settled between us as we stared at each other again in complete silence.

“So,” Nate began. “Do you want me to grab you a bottle of water?”

I nodded. “Yes, please.”

“Cute,” he chuckled under his breath as he walked off.

As soon as he was gone, I let out a breath I hadn’t realized I was holding. My thoughts were spinning, trying to make sense of everything—but just as quickly, something pulled me from my thoughts—I felt a pair of eyes on me.

Slowly, I turned and saw him glaring at me from across the room.

Kylan...

Even though I really didn’t want to give him that satisfaction, I caught myself staring back at him. My stomach twisted, watching his hateful eyes. He hadn’t looked at me once, so why now? The intense look in his eyes made me feel like I had done something wrong.

Probably my existence because he hated everything about me.

Even from across the room, I could hear the soft grunt as he turned his head to focus elsewhere.

I felt a chill run down my spine. There was no way that glare was meant for me, right? Not after everything he had said. Or maybe, just as I had expected, Kylan couldn’t stand seeing me with someone else, especially his best friend—and was actually going insane.

Because whether he liked it or not, the bond was still there.

Or was it meant for Nate?

Thinking about it, the tension between the two was thick and they had not exchanged a single word. Although I doubted something was going on because those two were as good as married.

I flinched, feeling a tap on my shoulder and turned around to see Nate. “Here you go,” he handed me a bottle.

“Thanks,” I murmured, taking a sip but keeping my eyes on him the whole time. His usual smile had now been replaced with a look of pity, and I could not quite understand why.

“Try to get in some more strength training in your spare time,” Nate spoke, his tone serious.

I nodded slowly, still sipping my drink. I knew I wasn’t as athletic as the others on the team. Sure, I had my healing abilities to rely on, but that didn’t help much in combat when no one was hurt. The other healers were guys who, unlike me, looked like they actually spent time at the gym.

They were muscular, fit, and didn’t seem out of place when it came to training.

The girls, all majoring in some sort of combat, could easily keep up, and from what I’d seen, they were just as strong—if not stronger—than the guys.

“Are you a strong shifter?” Nate asked, breaking the silence once again.

I shook my head, wiping my mouth with the back of my hand.

“Explains your bad condition,” he said bluntly, but his tone lacked any hint of teasing that usually went on between the two of us. It was honest, straightforward.

“Wow, okay,” I couldn’t help but laugh at his honesty.

He gave me a nod. “We should get into the woods sometime. Work on that too.”

I raised an eyebrow. “I thought we weren’t allowed to shift without permission.”

“We’re not,” he whispered. “But the training’s not going to get easier from here, especially with shifting class. I’m just trying to help you get ready.”

“Thanks,” I frowned, shifting uncomfortably. “For the pep talk.”

He shook his head, his expression softening a bit. “It’s not a jab, Vivi. For the commanders, there’s no distinction between shifters, strategists or whatever,” he stated. “They expect everyone to be equally strong, no matter your role—it doesn’t matter here.”

I sighed, the weight of his words sinking in. “Great. So I’m just supposed to be a combat expert and a shifter, and a healer all at once?”

“You’re supposed to keep up with everyone,” Nate spoke clearly. “If you think Kylan is bad or even Rochwall...”

I tilted my head, wondering just how bad it could get. “Are you saying the commanders are worse than Rochwall and Kylan?”

Nate nearly cackled. “I’d put Rochwall at like a 4, Kylan at a 6, and the others at a 10. They’re rough,” he spoke. “You can’t kick anyone off the team without a reason, so they push the weaker ones until they drop out themselves. It’s what they always do.”

A shiver ran down my spine. Nate, the kindest person I knew, wasn’t sugar-coating anything, and his words hit harder than I expected.

The idea of being bullied out, forced to quit because I couldn’t keep up, wasn’t something I’d even considered.

“So...you think I’m weak?”

“No. I think you have a strong mentality—and if you put your heart into it, really start taking this seriously, you’ll get there.”

I took in his words. They were heavy, but necessary, and made me realize I had a lot to think about. Esther seemed confident in her decision to get me on the team, but I wasn’t that sure anymore.

I plastered a forced smile on my face, desperate to shift the topic. “Hey, is everything alright between you and Kylan?”

Nate frowned. “Yes, why wouldn’t it be?”

I shrugged. “I don’t know, because the two of you seem on the verge of divorce.”

He cracked his signature smile. “Well, I haven’t received any papers yet.”

Even though he denied it, something about his response seemed off. It really got me thinking that something was wrong.

“We should get back to training. You’ve got a lot of work to do,” Nate brushed it off, patting my back. I could tell something was still bothering him, but I decided to let it go.

Maybe he was just fed up with Kylan’s bullshit like everyone else. After all, after spending years with someone like that—there had to be a breaking point.

I hadn’t known that fucker for too long, and he had already broken me.