

## Chapter 53

Violet

For the past week, it felt like my entire body had been on fire. Elite training didn't get any easier, and while the two new commanders, Alexis and Marco weren't quite as relentless as Commander Jorn, they had it out for me too.

It seemed like no matter what I did, I was always falling short, and somehow always the target.

Those two were also kind enough to gift me laps as punishment—and each time, Kylan had the choice to stop it, yet he didn't.

No, he would make me take the punishment, even if it meant him staying by my side to supervise until the late hours.

I was sick and tired of running every single day, and I had lost track of how many laps I had done. Nate was right when he said they would try to make the weaker ones quit because I was close to dropping out of the team.

It would not only make my life easier but also everyone else's.

The rest of my classes were nothing compared to this, but between the hard training, daily punishment laps, and keeping up with the pile of assignments—I barely had time to catch my breath, let alone, some alone time.

I couldn't even remember the last time I had a real conversation with Trinity or anyone for that matter.

The commanders seemed to expect us to eat, breathe, and sleep the Elite team, while somehow keeping our lives together. It felt impossible.

It was already close to eleven when I finally reached the end of my 40th, and last, lap. Tonight was the second time I had completed the entire punishment in one go, without stopping even once.

The punishments dropped from sixty to forty because now there was one thing I could finally manage, and those were flutter kicks.

Everything was definitely getting easier, but my legs still shook as I slowed to a stop. Exhausted, I dropped my hands to my knees as I bent over, trying to catch my breath.

I was already looking forward to next week, where, with Rochwall back in charge, I would have at least a few days to breathe.

While catching my breath, I was surprised to see a bottle of water held in front of me.

Shocked, I lifted my head to look at Kylan who had somehow moved to my side, sticking out the bottle.

I could see the worry in his eyes, and knew he probably didn't want me dying under his watch.

Feeling thirsty, I grabbed the bottle from his hand, and twisted the cap before gulping down the water so fast that it spilled down my lips, and dripped onto my shirt.

When the plastic bottle was empty, Kylan took it back and placed it on the ground. Right after, he leaned forward and unexpectedly covered my cheeks with his large hands, forcing me to look directly into his brown eyes as he was only inches away.

My breath hitched as I stared, wide-eyed, at his face so close to mine.

"Breathe," he said softly, pressing gentle circles against my cheek. His gaze was becoming too much to handle, and I glanced away—trying to focus on anything else.

Kylan wasn't having it. "Look at me, Violet—look at me," he commanded, his voice low. It was the first time he had used my real name, and I hated myself for loving the sound of it.

I wasn't supposed to.

Neither was he...

I wasn't Violet, I was Puppy.

Slowly, I managed to catch my breath as he succeeded in calming me down. Then he released me at the speed of light and stepped back, almost looking apologetic.

Why? I couldn't understand.

He was the reason I had been running myself to exhaustion all week. The commanders gave him the choice to spare me, but he had chosen the punishment out of spite.

I knew he did it to prove a point—that he held control over me.

Why else would he have done it?

"Are you off tomorrow?" he asked out of nowhere.

I nodded, trying to understand where this was going. He possibly wouldn't tell me I had failed my laps, and had to do them all over again—right?

Nerves spread through my veins, just thinking about it.

"Good," he spoke. "I expect to see you at the gates at 5 a.m. We're going outside."

"Outside the gates?" I stammered, almost wanting to cry at sacrificing one of my few days off. "To do what?"

"To get you into shape."

I paused for a bit before letting out a laugh of disbelief. After letting me get punished all week, he now suddenly cared about getting me into shape? Was he serious?

I wasn't stupid, and neither was he.

We both knew why he had done it.

Kylan's jaw tightened in offense. "What's so funny?"

"What's funny?" I raised a brow. "It's funny that you've magically decided to help me."

He grunted, looking visibly annoyed. "Well, I am the captain, so..."

"Bullshit," I cut him off, shaking my head. I was too pissed to hold back. "You made me run like an idiot for an entire week, and it's all because you can't live with the idea of me supposedly going after Nate—"

"Hey, Pup!" Kylan interrupted.

"You did this to prove a point, and you know what? Point proven!" I ignored him, still ranting. "You're right, you are the captain—but you don't want to help me. You've turned this into something personal, and you've hated me from the day you met me, when you knocked those glasses off my face, a-and I know you don't give a fuck about me—"

"Puppy!" he called again, only this time it wasn't Kylan speaking, but my captain.

I stopped, glaring at him. "What?"

His eyes were intense and he released a small breath as he stepped closer. I felt my stomach twist—annoyed as I was, his closeness always did something to me.

"Look, I don't care about what you do in your spare time," he said, calmly. "I won't punish you for that, I'm not like that. But when it involves the team—especially a member of my squad—that's when I start to care. I want to see you at your best."

I narrowed my eyes, trying to comprehend his words. Was he being serious?

"Did you make me do all those laps to see me at my best?" I asked, close to exploding.

I pointed to myself, sweat-soaked, drained, and hair so wet I could possibly fill an entire pool. "Does it look like I'm at my best?"

Kylan sighed, glancing around as if he was trying to find the right words. "You really don't know why I chose to make you do those laps, do you?"

For fucks sake, we had been over this already.

I crossed my arms. "I do know. It's because—"

"No, that isn't it," he cut me off, looking frustrated. He took an irritated breath, shifting uncomfortably. "It's because I don't want anyone on the team to hate you."

His words forced me into silence. I stared at him, my anger turning into confusion.

"That's my job—and my job only," he stated. "Only I get to hate you."

His eyes met mine, and I could tell he was sincere. He looked slightly embarrassed, like he had finally let me in on some secret he had been holding back for a while now.

It finally hit me that perhaps he had been trying to protect me in his own twisted way—and he was, in fact, telling the truth.

I didn't know what to say or how to react—but neither did he. If my ranting at him wasn't already uncomfortable enough, this only made it ten times more awkward.

He cleared his throat, breaking the silence. "Five a.m. at the gates. Pack a bag, and don't be late."

With that, he turned and walked off quickly, leaving me standing there.

Wait—only he got to hate me?

What the hell did he mean by that?