

Chapter 2

Ollie’s POV

I lift my shaky hands to the straps of my sundress and ever so slowly push one off my shoulder. I’m wearing a strapless lacy bra beneath, so now my clavicle and the bare curve of my shoulder is revealed for them.

Then, with a small tug, the top of the dress slinks down to my waist, catching on my hips.

My lacy bra hides very little. The brothers’ eyes zero in on the swell of my breasts, the hard peaks of my nipples poking through...

Wesley swallows hard. Voice rough, he says, “Enough.”

I scramble to pull the top part of my dress back, yanking the straps up over my shoulders. With the heat of the moment cooling, and the brothers all looking away now, humiliation begins to stir within me over this situation and what I allowed myself to do. To feel.

From the hallway, I hear Sylvia gasp. She rushes into the room, going straight for Wes. She clutches at his arms and dips down so that her face is in his line of sight.

“Wes, are you angry?” she asks, her voice shaky. Tears well in her eyes. “Did I go too far? You must be so furious with me.”

“No, Sylvia,” Wes says quickly and gently. “None of this is your fault. I’m not angry with you at all.”

“Are you sure?”

All of the brothers look at Sylvia with concern, even Declan. Though his expression is the most reserved, even showing a hint of it through his cold exterior is a rare sight reserved only for Sylvia.

Declan steps closer to the pair and places his hand on Sylvia’s shoulder. “Pay no mind to Ollie.” As he says my name, he shoots me an ice cold glare. The contrast makes me ache – his thumb tracing soft circles on Sylvia’s shoulder while he looks at me so icily. “If Ollie hadn’t stolen your present and then denied it, none of this would have happened.”

As Declan scolds me, the brothers’ girlfriends sheepishly creep into the room.

All of my underclothes are scattered on the floor, including a thong that I bought in secret when I’d felt daring, and when my wet dreams about the brothers started. I hadn’t the gall to wear it, the tag was still intact, stuck on the waistband.

A blush rises in my cheeks as the girls see it and laugh. One of them even starts to reach for it.

“Don’t --!” I say, stepping forward.

“What’s this?” Conrad’s girlfriend says.

“What doesn’t she want us to see?” says Declan’s girlfriend, scowling at me. To the first girl, she says, “Show us, Christie.”

“You won’t believe it, Vikki.” As Christie stands, holding her hand out and forward, a diamond necklace dangles from her fingers.

The third girl, Hugh’s girlfriend of the moment, gasps. “Isn’t that Sylvia’s present?”

The brothers all look at the necklace, and then four very cold, very angry pairs of eyes turn onto me.

“I didn’t put it there,” I say at once. “I swear, I’m being set up. You have to believe me...”

Conrad strides closer to me and grips me roughly by the arm. Despite the trouble and the ache in my heart, my body reacts to his touch. I sway towards him without even meaning to.

If he notices, he doesn’t comment on it. Instead, his lips curl down as he says, “You will be punished for this.”

“Wait,” Sylvia says.

She moves to my side as if coming to my defense, but I know better than to trust her. Whatever she has in mind for me will not be kind, no matter how she frames it to the brothers.

“Perhaps instead, Ollie could arrange my flowers for me. The ones that decorate the living room? They are so beautiful, I hate to dispose of them. If Ollie could arrange them into bouquets, then I could keep them for longer...”

All of the brothers’ hard outer edges soften at Sylvia’s suggestion, even Conrad – though he continues to dig his fingers into my arm.

“Come back to the living room. You’ll see.”

The brothers and their girlfriends follow Sylvia out of my room and back down the hallway to the living room, where bunches of roses seem to line every wall. Conrad drags me along with his vice-like grip.

There, Sylvia plucks one of the roses from the wall but immediately winces and drops the rose to the ground. A drop of blood beads on her fingertip. “Ouch.”

“Sylvia!” Hugh says, rushing forward. “What happened?” The other brothers move as well. Conrad drops his hold on me to assist her.

“The thorns...” she says.

Christie, Vikki, and Hugh’s girlfriend all share a look, which has dread pooling in my stomach.

“Wouldn’t a better punishment be for Ollie to remove all the thorns from the roses?” Vikki suggests. “Then Sylvia won’t risk getting hurt as she handles them.”

“Won’t I get hurt instead?” I look at my brothers, hoping they will understand. “If Sylvia would just be more careful --”

“Remove the thorns, Ollie,” Conrad says firmly. “And do not expect any pay for this. Remember this is punishment.”

Pay? What pay? For three years, I’ve hardly received any money from the family. I’ve had to take on menial work within the pack to earn any savings at all.

“I want to take Sylvia to the doctor, just to be safe,” Hugh says.

Everyone agrees.

“All of thorns better be removed by the time we return,” Conrad says to me.

“But there are thousands of...” I start, but they all lead Sylvia out of the room, not listening to me.

Two hours later, I’ve only made a small dent in the vast number of roses that need their thorns removed. I look at the rest of the room and sigh, as my one friend Ella enters the room.

Ella is the Beta’s daughter and the only one to have stuck beside me after Sylvia’s return. She stays at the estate with us, but was sent away to buy supplies earlier. I’m relieved to see her return.

“What are you doing?” she asks.

“Removing the thorns from the roses so Sylvia will not prick herself again.”

Ella sets aside the bags she brought and comes over to me. With one look at my scratched and bleeding hands, her fury shows.

“The brothers allowed this...?”