

Chapter 3

Ollie’s POV

I nod. I can’t keep my own face from falling. This isn’t the first time I’ve been punished in the last three years, but this time still feels different.

I think... I’m tired of trying. I tell Ella, “I’ve let the brothers disappoint me for the last time.”

“What are you planning?” Ella asks.

“We graduate high school in a month, right? After that, I won’t attend the pack university. I’ll apply to other universities in other packs.”

The only reason I can’t leave right now is I’m not given adult privileges in the pack until my 19(th) birthday.

“I hate to see you go, but maybe it is for the best.” She looks down at my hands. After a moment, she startles. “Oh! I just remembered.”

Standing she goes to one of the bags she set aside and returns with a dress and some new makeup.

“What’s this?” I ask.

“The Mating Gala is a week away,” Ella says. “And it’s your birthday too. Since you’ll be able to shift then, you should attend.” She smiles. “I got these for you as birthday gifts.”

She is talking about my real birthday.

My heart feels suddenly lighter with the kindness of my dear friend. As long as I have a friend, I can survive everything else that comes my way.

In the morning, Ella and I walk to the high school. Along the way, we are passed by Sylvia riding in Hugh’s convertible with the top down.

I push down on my jealousy, though I remember the days the brothers would drive me around in their luxury cars.

“Ignore her,” Ella says. “Sylvia would love to know she’s getting under your skin.”

“I’m trying,” I reply.

The pack’s high school sits in the shadow of the university. The two facilities share five cafeterias and all sports fields, courts, and training grounds.

For the pack, this makes sense, as almost every pack member will transition straight from the high school to the university. Only those whose mate is of a different pack or those who wish to pursue a very specific major will venture outside their own pack for university.

Sylvia, Ella, and I are seniors, almost finished with our high school days. The quadruplets are soon to finish their sophomore year at university. Because of the closeness of the campuses, I still see them more than I want.

Ella and I are in separate homerooms, so I say goodbye to her just inside the high school lobby.

As I walk into my homeroom, I find Sylvia, sitting on her desk, talking to the quadruplet’s girlfriends, who fan around her like she is their idol. They hang on every word she says.

“You really need to do your best to hang onto my brothers while you can,” Sylvia tells them. “I know how difficult it can be. I’ve seen so many other girls come and go before you. But if you follow my advice, maybe you can mean as much to them as... well, not me. But someone, surely.”

She smiles brightly as she continues, “My brothers chase away my suitors. They are adamant that I should wait to find my fated mate before I even think about dating. It’s cute how much they care about me.”

She says that like she has the whole world chasing after her, wanting to date. In truth, I’ve only ever seen one or two people pursuing Sylvia with any romantic intent.

Without meaning to, hearing her words, I laugh.

At once, Sylvia and her minions all turn their sharp gazes to me. Whatever good humor Sylvia had been faking vanishes at once.

“You have something to say?” Sylvia snaps.

I shrug. “I’m just wondering who all these suitors are. I’ve never seen them.”

Sylvia glowers at me.

“What do you know?” Christie mocks. “Someone with an unknown lineage will never be worth much in the pack. No one will ever care about you, or even like you, no matter how many years you stay here.”

“You’ll be an old maid,” Vikki adds.

“Sad and alone,” adds the third, Hugh’s girlfriend. I still don’t know her name.

Before Sylvia came into our lives, I had many suitors, all of whom were actually driven away by the quadruplets. They told me too to wait until I found my fated mate to begin dating.

Now, with how far I’ve fallen in status, no one wants to acknowledge me, let alone pursue me.

Suddenly, nothing feels quite as funny anymore. Hitching my backpack further up onto my shoulder, I try to move around the group toward my desk.

Sylvia and her minions follow me.

“Where’s our homework?” Hugh’s girlfriend asks.

“Kimber, don’t be crass,” Sylvia says with a haughty tone. “I’m sure she’s just getting ready to give it to us.”

Because of my excellent grades and my lowly position, Sylvia started asking me to do her homework some time ago. Knowing she could make my life more miserable, I agreed. Slowly, that request included also doing the homework of her friends.

With my hands still sore and covered in bloody cuts, I haven’t managed to do anyone’s homework but my own.

“I didn’t finish yours,” I say as I sit down. I pull my backpack into my lap and gingerly open the zipper. My hands are so sore, I’m not sure how I’m even going to hold a pencil today.

“What do you mean, didn’t finish?” Sylvia says, frowning. The demure, sweet, innocent act entirely disappears when the brothers aren’t around. With me alone, she has only ever been cruel and impatient.

I hold up my hands, showing her my cuts, though she sneers, unsympathetic.

“I only finished my own,” I say.

“Well, show us, and quickly,” Sylvia snaps. “We can copy it before class.”

On any other day, I would have complied. Then, I’d still been trying to make the most out of my situation. But now, any hope I had of things going back to normal has dissipated. With my plans to leave the pack as soon as possible, I really don’t see the point in playing pretend anymore.

My hands hurt. I’m physically and emotionally exhausted. I just can’t be asked to care anymore, not about Sylvia, and not about the quadruplets who have come to hate me through no fault of my own.

So, I do something I wouldn’t have even thought of doing the past three years...

“No,” I tell her.

She leans back as if I’ve physically struck her. “You can’t say no to me.”

“I just did,” I say.

Christie, Vikki, and Kimber all look at each other with wide eyes. Sylvia notices and it makes her grimace worse.

To me, she says, “Aren’t you afraid that the brothers will hate you even more when they find out about this?”

The words hurt like a knife between my ribs. I remember how much I wanted to make them change their minds about me throughout the past three years.

But no more. Now, I have decided to leave.

“I don’t care,” I say, trying to make my voice sounds steadily.