

Chapter 4

Ollie’s POV

Sylvia’s glare turns a bit wild, like she can’t believe what’s happening.

It is the first time she has failed to manipulate me by using my feelings for the quadruplets.

Then the bell sounds, signaling homeroom is about to start. Sylvia and her minions are forced to return to their seats.

Later, in calculus, as everyone else produces their homework, the teacher walks by Sylvia’s desk and sees that her notebook is empty.

“Where is your homework, Sylvia?” the teacher asks.

Sylvia pales. “I... uh...”

“Did you do your homework?” the teacher prompts, frowning.

Sylvia has no choice but to say, “No. I didn’t.”

The teacher snaps her textbook closed. “I find this very disappointing. Usually you are prepared.” Shaking her head, she says, “I cannot allow this. Go stand in the hallway for the rest of class. You may return tomorrow, with both last night and tonight’s homework completed. Am I understood?”

“Yes, teacher,” Sylvia says, slumping slightly. As she packs up her things, she shoots me a glare.

Behind me, I hear some of my classmates whisper to one another.

“That was brutal,” one whispers to the other.

“Ollie is cold-blooded,” says another. “Do you think she’s going back to how she was before Sylvia came around?”

I focus on my own textbook and pretend not to hear.

At lunch, I sit in one of the round tables in the corner of the room. As I can’t afford the school lunch, I’ve brought a bagged lunch from home. I only start pulling out my sandwich when Ella spots me and hurries toward me.

She takes the open seat beside mine. The rest of our table is empty.

“I heard what happened with Sylvia,” she says, grinning. “I’m so proud of you.”

“I didn’t do anything,” I say.

“That’s just it. Everyone knows you usually do Sylvia, Christie, Vikki, and Kimber’s homework. There’s no way the four of them would get the grades they do otherwise.” Ella laughs. “They got what they deserved. I’m just so happy you finally stood up and told them no.”

As my hands are still sore, I gingerly unwrap my sandwich. It was satisfying to watch Sylvia be punished, but I don’t want to admit that out loud. “I just want to leave the pack.”

“Whatever it takes to keep you from trying to win back those four dog brothers.”

No sooner do the words leave Ella’s mouth, then the door to the cafeteria is shoved open with such force that it clanks against the wall, silencing the entire room.

Conrad enters first, with Declan close behind him. Then, Hugh, and finally Wes.

Their sharp gazes search the room and then zero in on me.

I hold my breath as they approach. Three of them stop on the other side of the table, but Declan doesn’t. Coming near me, he grabs me by the back of the collar and yanks me out of my chair.

“I can walk!” I say, but he doesn’t listen. None of them do, as I’m dragged out of the cafeteria.

As I’m dragged out of the cafeteria and into the courtyard, I can see Ella try to approach. Hugh immediately steps in and blocks her. I can’t hear what they are saying, but soon, Ella turns and leaves. I wish I knew where she is going. She wouldn’t just leave me...

Hugh shrugs as he faces us. “That was surprisingly easy.”

I’m led further into the courtyard to where Sylvia and her minions are standing. Declan pushes me to the ground at Sylvia’s feet. Fortunately, I fall on the grass and not the sidewalk so only my pride is injured.

“Apologize,” Conrad demands. The brothers move around me, standing in a circle with Sylvia at the head. There’s no way for me to escape.

“I didn’t do anything,” I say. Looking around, I try not to let my body react to the thought of me on my knees with the quadruplets towering over me.

“It’s your fault I was punished by the teacher in Calc,” Sylvia says, drawing me back to the moment.

This is no time to be thinking about sex!

“It wasn’t,” I say. “If you did your own homework —”

“Why are you lying?” she asks, her bottom lip trembling. “Why do you hate me so much, Ollie?”

Hugh starts to growl. Declan’s eyes ice over.

“Apologize,” Conrad says again, more forcefully.

No. I refuse, so I press my lips hard together.

Anger flaring in his eyes, Conrad rushes toward me. Grabbing the front of my shirt, he start to roughly pull me upright, when a new voice calls out.

“Stop this, right this moment.”

We all look over and see Ella approaching with the same teacher who had punished Sylvia during calculus class.

Conrad chuffs in annoyance but still releases me. I collapse back onto the ground. I try to catch myself with my hands, but they are still covered in cuts and it stings, making me wince and my arms buckle.

“Sylvia was punished today because she did not complete her homework,” the teacher says. “And for no other reason.”

At once, tears fill Sylvia’s eyes. “She’s right! Oh, gods... I’m such a disgrace.”

“No!” Hugh says. He and the other brothers move closer to Sylvia, stepping around me. They form a close circle around her, as if protecting her from the rest of the world, the teacher included.

The teacher closes her eyes and shakes her head.

With the brothers distracted, Ella hurries to me and helps me up to my feet. Together we back up a few steps.

“I’ve been having trouble keeping up with classes,” Sylvia says through her sobs. “So I went to Ollie for help. I had to depend on her. She was supposed to help with my homework last night, but she was so angry with me about the necklace and the roses...”

That’s not true, but I don’t say so, knowing nothing I could say would make a difference. My heart feels like it’s cracking down the middle. I didn’t think it was possible that I could continue to be disappointed by the quadruplets. Yet, here I am.

Conrad leaves Sylvia in the care of the other brothers, then breaks away to approach me.

“Do not embarrass my sister ever again, Ollie,” Conrad says. “Or you will receive ten times her punishment.”

My sister, he said. The title that used to be mine.

I’m too stunned to speak. Conrad wouldn’t listen anyway. He too quickly returns to Sylvia’s side.

Ella, her arm still wrapped under one of mine leads me away.

“None of this matters,” Ella says. “At the Mating Gala, you’ll find your fated mate, I’m sure of it. And he’ll protect you.”

“Get back to lunch now,” the teacher says to Ella and me, and escorts us there.

Just as we return to the estate that evening, Sylvia’s dress and jewelry arrives. They were custom-made specifically for her first Mating Gala.

Diana, the matriarch of the family and the woman I once considered my mother, calls for everyone to file into one of the sitting rooms so we can all marvel at Sylvia trying on her new dress and jewels.

“I traveled overnight to speak with a designer,” Diana says to Sylvia, as everyone, including the brothers, the staff, Ella and I, as well as Ella’s parents stand in the sitting room. “Every square inch of this dress has been specially designed to suit you and only you, my darling daughter.”

The gown is beautiful, a glittery silver with diamonds stitched into nearly every inch. Teal ribbons laced over the bodice, giving Sylvia the appearance of curves she doesn’t otherwise have.

Nearly everyone coos over her as Sylvia, smiling, twists and turns, showing off the dress.

While I stand in the corner of the room, totally forgotten by Diana.

Beside me, Ella crosses her arms and taps her feet with impatience. “Your birthday is the same day as the Mating Gala. Has Diana forgotten that?”

“It’s fine. I’ve already had the best dress,” I blinked to her.

The dress Ella purchased for me might not be covered in diamonds, but it is more thoughtful and special than anything I could have asked for.

“During my travels,” Diana’s gaze falls onto her sons. “I’ve heard of a set of quadruplets that found their mate, a sole woman. As you have no found yours yet, I wonder if the same fate awaits you. I’m hoping such a union will be harmonious.”

Hugh smirks, while Wes, blushing slightly, looks down. Conrad and Declan seem entirely unaffected.

“The Moon Goddess has a plan for us all,” Diana says. “Her plans for you four remain to be seen.”

Deep within me, a sharp jolt of feeling strikes through, like a shock of lightning. I press my hand to my chest, as my breath is stolen from me.

No one else is acting differently. Only I must have felt this.

What in the world?

My fingers tingle and my heartbeat quickens.

I never felt anything like this before, yet something within me reacted so strongly...

Because Diana is talking about the quadruplets’ mate?

What can that mean?

Before I have time to reflect and consider what these feelings could possibly mean, Sylvia sighs dramatically, reclaiming the attention of the rest of the room.

“What’s the matter, Sylvia?” Wes asks kindly. “You should be feeling nothing but joy right now.”

She pouts her bottom lip. “I’m happy for my brothers. Truly. And I like your current girlfriends. I just fear... No, forget it. It’s silly.”

“Tell us,” Conrad prompts.

She worries her bottom lip with her teeth. “I’m scared that when you find your fate, you will no longer have time to spend with your sister...”

“Never,” Hugh says quickly.

The others agree. Even Declan nods.

Conrad, approaching her, places his hands on her shoulders. “You will always be the most important person to us.”