

CH 10 - Amber

AMBER POV

Vic scoffed, loudly blurting, "Chicken!" at his retreating back.

I let out a weak laugh, but inside, I felt like a storm was brewing. This was what happened when people were friendly with me. They got dragged into my mess. Only Vic was never pulled into this kind of crap, and for that, I was endlessly grateful. At least I had her.

As if on cue, my brothers strolled into the cafeteria, their faces lit up with easy smiles like they lived in a world of sunshine and rainbows. Sometimes I swore they existed in another dimension.

"Why the long faces?" Rett asked as he slid into the seat beside me, his usual teasing grin in place.

"Nothing," I replied quickly. "Just Rose being Rose."

Robert raised an eyebrow but didn't press further. They were smart enough to know when to leave things alone.

I picked at my lunch, the appetite I'd had earlier completely gone. When the bell rang, I practically bolted from the cafeteria, desperate to escape the suffocating tension.

Biology was my last class of the day and, mercifully, the only one I had without them. It was my favorite subject, maybe because it was the one place I didn't have to deal with the triplets' suffocating presence.

Sliding into my seat, I nally let out a sigh of relief. For the next fty minutes, I could pretend the rest of the world didn't exist. Just me, the textbook, and whatever fascinating topic we were diving into today.

But even as I tried to focus, their burning green eyes haunted me. Why had they looked at me like that? And why couldn't I shake the feeling that whatever storm was coming, I was at the center of it?

When the last bell rang, I practically sprinted out of the school building, leaving Vic behind as she shouted after me. I needed air. I needed to breathe. Biology had done nothing to settle the storm inside me, and the weight of the triplets' piercing stares lingered like a phantom on my chest.

The cold wind slapped my face as I reached the football eld, and for a moment, I welcomed it. The faint crunch of snow under my boots was oddly soothing. I walked over to the benches by the sidelines, brushing off a light dusting of snow before sitting down.

The sky was dull gray, heavy with the promise of more snow. As if on cue, delicate white akes began to fall, swirling around me in a gentle urry. I leaned back, exhaling a misty breath, and tried to center myself.

One by one, the players began to trickle onto the eld, their laughter and shouts cutting through the winter air. I spotted the beta, Hunter Gallagher , and the gamma, Killian Bloom, chatting in the distance. They were both bundled up, their breath forming clouds as they walked.

And then I saw him.

Christian was on the far side of the eld, his back to me at rst, wearing the navy-blue team jacket I'd seen him in a hundred times. Relief ooded me—he was here, alive, uninjured. The ache of worry I hadn't even realized I'd been carrying started to ease.

But then he turned, and my breath caught in my throat.

He wasn't alone.

A redhead clung to him, her arms wrapped around his neck as though she couldn't bear to let go. Their faces were so close, their lips moving against each other in a heated kiss that made my stomach twist violently.

I froze, the world around me blurring into the soft white haze of falling snow. All I could see was them. His hands rested on her waist, ngers brushing her hips as he pulled her closer.

I wanted to look away, but I couldn't. My heart pounded in my chest, each beat a sharp, painful echo. The ache of worry was gone, replaced by something far worse—something raw and jagged, clawing at my insides.

So that's where he'd been.

Before I could fully process the nauseating scene unfolding before me, a pair of strong, muscled arms wrapped tightly around my waist.

"What the—!" I yelped, but the words caught in my throat as I was lifted off the bench with startling ease.

Panic surged through me. My legs kicked instinctively, boots brushing against thick thighs as I twisted, trying to see who dared to grab me. But the grip was unyielding, rm yet oddly careful, as though I might shatter if handled too roughly.

"Put me down!" I shouted, my voice sharp and trembling.

"Not a chance, nerd," a familiar, gravelly voice drawled in my ear.

Alek.

Of course it was Alek.

"Are you out of your damn mind?" I hissed, thrashing against him, but it was pointless. He carried me like I weighed nothing, his movements uid and deliberate.

"You're sitting out here in the cold, looking like you're about to cry over something stupid," he said bluntly, his voice low but still laced with irritation. "Not happening on my watch."

I froze, my protests dying on my lips. *Cry?* I wasn't crying. Sure, my chest was tight, and my eyes stung, but—no. No way.

"None of your business!" I snapped, furious at his audacity and at how easily he'd read me.

"Yeah, well, I just made it my business," he shot back.

He walked with infuriating calm, completely unfazed by my struggling. My sts pounded weakly against his chest, but it felt like hitting stone. His scent—woody, fresh, and irritatingly intoxicating—lled my senses, and I hated how warm it was against the icy air.

"Where are you taking me?" I demanded, my voice trembling now more from anger than cold.

"Somewhere you won't make a fool of yourself," he muttered, glancing over his shoulder toward the eld. "You're welcome, by the way."

I craned my neck, looking back just in time to see Christian glance in our direction. For a split second, his gaze met mine before icking to Alek. His expression shifted—surprise, confusion, and something darker—but he didn't move.

Good. Let him stay with his redhead.

"Unbelievable," I muttered under my breath, my cheeks burning as I stopped ghting, resigning myself to whatever Alek had in mind.