

Brother's Best Friends Are My Mates

chapter 11-20

Brother's Best Friends Are My Mates

Matt

My phone started going off way too early. Growling I grabbed it and opened the group chat.

Group Chat: "Team Mission Lia"

6:03 AM

Jesse: You, everyone up? We need to talk.

Matt: ... Why is this happening before the sun is fully awake?

Colby: Because it's important, Matt. Now get over it and focus.

Rain: zzzz...

Jesse: Rain, wake up. This isn't optional.

Rain: Half-conscious. Proceed.

Matt: This better not be about Lia. It's too early for emotional trauma.

Jesse: It is about Lia. We can't ignore this anymore.

Colby: We've been a mess around her, and it's time we get our act together. No more lurking awkwardly or being avoidant.

Rain: Do you mean no more "accidentally" bumping into her to check if she's still mad?

Jesse: EXACTLY. We've been idiots. Years of bullying her didn't help.

Matt: Didn't it help? It made her hate us. Deservedly.

Colby: Which is why we need a plan. She's smart. If we just rush her with apologies, she'll think we're trying to manipulate her.

Rain: We kind of were bullies, though. Why wouldn't she assume that?

Matt: Rain's right. Trust doesn't happen overnight.

Jesse: Then we earn it. The step one is acknowledging we've hurt her. No excuses, no "we were just kids" garbage.

Colby: We also need to make it clear we're serious about this. It's not just about us liking her-it's about showing her we're safe now.

Rain: "Safe" is a stretch. We're still chaotic.

Matt: Speak for yourself. I'm perfectly stable.

Rain: Says the guy who yelled at a squirrel for stealing his sandwich.

Matt: Irrelevant. Stay on topic.

Jesse: Focus, people. We're meeting early this morning to hash out the specifics.

Matt: I want to sleep.

Colby: Your sleep is canceled. This takes priority. 1

Rain: What even is the plan? Just grovel? THIS CHAPTER IS UPDATE BY

Jesse: We apologize first. Then we start showing her through actions-not just words-that she can rely on us. We've got to be consistent.

Colby: Small gestures. Respect her space. Prove we're different.

Matt: So, no grand romantic declarations? No cornering her with "we're your fated mates" speeches?

Rain: Not. She'd run for the hills.

Jesse: Exactly. We move slowly. Let her take the lead when she's ready.

Matt: Fine. But if this goes wrong, I'm blaming Jesse.

Colby: Blame yourself for being a pain all these years.

Rain: Group consensus: Jesse's fault if it fails.

Jesse: Whatever. Just be up in about an hour. No excuses.

Rain: Cool. Going back to sleep now.

Matt: Same. Don't wake me up again unless it's life or death. I need that extra hour.

Colby: Or Lia.

Matt: ...Fine.

Jesse: Good. Let's fix this mess.

Even though I got an extra hour, it didn't do much. I dragged myself downstairs, grateful that Lia was still fast asleep in her

room.

"Why are we up this early?" Rain asked, barely stifling a yawn.

He scratched his neck where some stubble was already starting to form. Rain shaved when he remembered. It could happen every day or the guy could go a full two weeks before starting to complain that the new beard he was sporting was itchy beyond all reason.

"Because Jesse and Colby thought it was best we get up at the ass crack of dawn to discuss what we are going to do from here on our own," I snapped.

I'd rather be in our room, catching a few more hours of sleep before starting the day. On weekends I liked to get some Rugby practice in. Not like my skills were going to get soft in a day or two without practice, but I liked running across the field, feeling the wind through my braids.

It helped center me and keep my mind at ease. With all the stress I'd been under since finding out my future mate was Lia Brown of all people, I started to throw myself into practice. This was the only time I was able to feel at ease. Other times I just became stressed out, letting my mind wander and wonder about what all of this was going to mean for me.

I didn't care about sharing someone with three of my best friends. If anything, it helped me feel more at ease.

Why did it have to be her of all people? It could've been anyone else. Hell, I would've been able to deal with it being her loud and a little bit crazy best friend Simone. But Lia?

The guilt I'd always shoved aside bubbling to the surface in full force now. Whenever I looked at Lia all I thought about was everything I had done to her. A simple apology wasn't going to help. She would continue to feel this bitterness whenever she looked at us, not that I blamed her.

How were the other guys able to push past this so easily whereas I was the one who kept dwelling on it, unable to move on?

Rain was using his humor to deal while Jesse came off as someone who was never bothered with anything. Colby was thinking critically about it while I was in denial.

Well, I wasn't in denial anymore. I was in denial for a long time but now I accepted that the two of us were mates. The part I was having trouble with was accepting a way to move forward and make it all work for us.

"So, Colby and I were talking before the two of you came out here," Jesse started to say. "Both of us seem to think that a wonderful way to go about it is for us to spend some quality time together with Lia. We'll do a group thing after because she might be intimidated by all of us spending time together with her at once."

Colby nodded. "Yeah, one-on-one outings will be the best way to go first."

"Who's going first?" I asked cautiously.

Colby and Jesse turned right towards me, a rare smile breaking onto Jesse's face.

"You're going first, Matt. Since you're determined to keep avoiding Lia we think it will be best that you face the situation and spend some quality time with her first."

My face fell. "No."

"What do you mean no?" Rain gasped. "Dude, you can't just say no."

"Yes I can and I just did. I'm not going to be the first one to go ahead and spend time with her," I muttered. "I have no problem spending time with her at all. But I won't be the first. Let me be the second."

Colby sighed. "Then you'll probably back out or make some excuse. Why can't you just accept that you have the most awkward relationship with her out of everyone?"

"I do accept it, Colby but it still doesn't mean that I am going to be the one who is willing to take the first plunge. Rain can do it."

"I mean, okay if that's what you want--"

"Rain," Jesse warned, narrowing his eyes. "No."

Rain sighed, giving me a sympathetic look. "Sorry about that Matt, but Jesse scares me more than a little bit so I'm going to just back off. I'll gladly be the second person or something."

"Jesse, Rain might be afraid of you but I'm not," I muttered.

He smiled. "True, but we can always talk about this with Lia and say that you are waffling on spending one-on-one time with her. Can you imagine how hurt she would be if that happened?"

“This is blackmail.”

Colby stifled a laugh. “Matt, I think that’s the point.”

They were putting me in a tricky situation. If I refused to go then they were going to talk to Lia, which would make things even more awkward for the two of us. But if I went on this outing with her it was going to cause me extreme distress and massive levels of awkwardness.

“I hate all of you.”

Rain sniffed. “Matt, my man, I know you’re just saying that because you’re hurt. Trust that all of us, even Jesse, love you. We only want what is best for you.”

“Still hate all of you.”

“Matt, you’re going to make Rain cry,” Colby hissed, gesturing to their friend who was tearing up.”

I sighed. “Rain I don’t hate any of you. I’m just angry.”

“So, you’ll do it?” Rain asked.

If I said no then I was going to disappoint one of my best friends and Lia. Or rather not disappoint her but make things more awkward.

“Fine, I’ll do it but know that I am going to hate all of you for the next few hours.”

Jesse smiled, the smile even reaching his eyes. “Good. Colby made reservations for dinner and then the two of you can see a movie.”

These assholes. They were planning the whole thing and knew I was going to back down in the end!

I never stood a chance.

Brother’s Best Friends Are My Mates

Matt

I kept pacing in front of Lia’s room. She had to smell and hear me. The pacing was just going to make her nervous, but if anyone was extremely nervous in this situation then it was me. It felt like my heart was going to leap right out of my chest.

“Why are you pacing outside the room?” Rain hissed from down the hall. “Matt just knocks on the door and asks Lia if you can speak with her.”

“And if she says no?”

“Then tell her everything through the door. Problem solved!”

I sighed, deciding it was better to take Rain’s advice than just pacing back and forth, doing nothing but wearing a path on the carpet.

So, I took a breath, knocking rapidly at the door.

“Hello...?”

“Hey, Lia... it’s Matt.”

“I know, I can smell you.”

I cursed under my breath. God, why was she such an awkward idiot when it came to her now?

“Anyway, can I come in?”

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.... Yes.”

With my nerves on edge, I walked inside and stayed in the doorway. Standing in the room where she spent her time was difficult. Her scent was overpowering.

“I... was wondering if you wanted to hang out,” I muttered.

“You want to hang out?” Lia asked, confused.

I sighed. “Okay, let me just get straight to the point. The guys were talking and we want to spend some one-on-one time with you. Colby made reservations and bought movie tickets for us, figuring I would chicken out.”

The look on Lia’s face shifted from one of uncertainty and confusion to one of amusement.

“You and I are both in agreement about this then.”

I sighed again. “Is that a yes or a no, Lia?”

“I’ll go since you asked so bluntly.”

She made a point of not saying that I asked nicely, but she was right. I hadn't exactly been that nice with my questions. Instead, I was rather blunt and curt, wanting to get straight to the point. However, that's what I wanted to do!

It was easier to just tell her everything that was going on in my mind because beating around the bush was never a clever idea. "Okay so let's leave around 5:00 pm tonight," I told her. "We'll take my car... if that's all right."

"It is."

I left, closing the door behind me. My heart was beating loudly in my chest, making me want to go back there and tell her that this was a bad idea.

But my friends were never going to let me live it down. Rain would start to cry. Then Rain was going to cry while Colby was there just trying to figure out the best way to rectify this situation between us. I didn't even want to think about what Jesse would do. He would just stare at me in his usually creepy manner.

*** This update is available on [find\(N\)ovel.net](http://find(N)ovel.net)

Lia

When I smelt Matt out there my blood ran cold. He kept pacing back and forth, getting closer but then his scent would start to get weaker.

What was his game? Why was he pacing in front of my door, repeatedly? I had no idea what I was going to do.

Then he knocked on my door. Begrudgingly, I let him in, and the Matt that was standing before me wasn't the Matt I remembered. He used to be so confident, ready to tease me until I was close to tears. But besides that, he was also a confident person in general.

I wasn't used to this side of him. It was beyond confusing.

But his offer to take me out was something I didn't expect. It was expected that Colby would go ahead and plan it based on how he had acted since finding out the two of us were mated or rather going to be mates in the future.

That was why I said yes. Best to get it over with, anyway. I couldn't deny the fact that I was stuck with four people who I didn't want as my mates. There was no getting away from that.

The first person I had to talk to was Simone. She was the only person I could talk to given I didn't have many friends.

Hey, what are you up to tonight? – S

Ugh, I have a date with Matt. – L

Wait, Matt was the one to suggest it first. – S

Yes. I don't even know why I said yes. I feel like it's going to be so awkward. – L

Come on, it might not be that bad! – S

Simone is going to be bad – L.

You don't know what, Lia. Besides, the five of you must bond eventually. – S

Yes, but what if it makes things worse? – L

Or it could make things even better. You won't know unless you give it a shot. – S

I guess. – L

Exactly. And worst case, you have an awkward dinner and laugh about it with me after. – S

Fine. I'll try not to overthink it. – L

That's the spirit. You're gonna look amazing anyway. – S

Thanks, I'll keep you posted. – L

Can't wait. Good luck! – S

I sighed softly, trying to figure out what I was going to wear. In the end, I decided to wear a pair of skinny jeans and a sleeveless blue blouse paired with a white sweater in case it got too chilly. My choice of shoes was even more casual. Tennis shoes were something you could never go wrong with.

After glancing at myself in the mirror, I realized this was the best effort I could make in this situation.

I headed outside where Matt was waiting. He had his braids tied back, exposing his muscular jaw and neck. My cheeks started to flush but thankfully Matt wasn't looking in my direction.

“Ready to go?” he asked.

“As ready as I'll ever be.”

He snorted. “Yeah, my sentiments exactly.”

The car was quiet, too quiet for my liking. I felt the need to ask something that had been bothering me. Better to get it out before we go to dinner.

“Why are you acting so weird with me lately?”

He nearly slammed on the breaks. “What?” Matt croaked out.

“You’ve been avoiding me and acting like I have the plague. It’s strange... almost as if you’re struggling with being my future mate. Shouldn’t I be the one struggling after all the bullying I’ve endured?”

Everything came out all at once. Word vomit wasn’t something I could hold back but even if I wanted to... it was too late. “Because I was an asshole to treat you like that. Yeah, I did find some humor in it but that’s what makes me an asshole! Now you’re stuck being mated to us and... it’s just hard for me to wrap my mind around it.”

I blinked. “It sounds like you’re doing some self-reflecting.”

“I am... and the other guys want to make things right with you. They don’t want things to be difficult going forward because there is no changing the fact that we are mates or will be in the future.”

“Thank you for sharing that with me,” I whispered.

Matt stiffened. “Yeah, it’s no problem.”

The awkwardness was back but throughout the night it started to fade. He started to become more at ease with me and by the time we went to the movie, I was starting to feel comfortable with Matt.

This threw me for a loop. It wasn’t something I expected to happen and I think neither did Matt. He didn’t make any moves, obviously still having some level of denial with this whole mating thing. But so was I.

“Night,” he said after we headed back home.

I smiled nervously. “Night.”

It was good to be back in my room, but during the entire time I was with Matt this evening, I was fine. At no point did I feel uneasy or unsafe. He was good to me, something I hadn’t expected. Matt had always been one who would be a bit more aggressive with his teasing. Nothing physical, but out of all of them he would get up in my face.

It was difficult to see Matt in this light because it was not Matt I knew. But, he had talked to me, opened, and shared something I never thought he would share with me.

Simone and I texted a bit. She was thrilled that the date went well, but I don't know if I would call it a date, no matter what Simone said.

It was... okay, no it was a date. With one of my future mates.

I needed to get used to that and wondered what the rest of the weekend held for me. A part of me was dreading it but there was also a part of me that was almost looking forward to it. It was something I wasn't expected to feel.

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Rain

The pot I pulled out from the cabinet slipped out of my hands and clattered loudly onto the floor. I let out a nervous shout, trying to grab it before it made any more noise but I ended up dropping it again!

Footsteps from above caused me to freeze. Shit, did I wake some of them up? I wasn't trying to wake anyone up!

"Rain, what the hell are you doing?" asked Colby who popped his head into the room.

I paled. "Shit, did I wake you up?"

"No, I came down to get some coffee so I was already awake. The more important question is why are you down here? You hate getting up early."

"I'm making breakfast in bed for Lia," I said proudly.

Colby paled. "You're going to cook?"

"Yes."

"Rain you, the man who has a toaster on fire trying to make toast, is going to make breakfast?"

I frowned. "Hey, I'm just making eggs!"

"I remember the one time you made eggs when we were on that Rugby retreat. Somehow they turned out to be runny and burnt at the same time. No one could figure out how you did something like that."

"I was trying two things at once."

“Rain, it still makes no sense.”

I shrugged. “Oh well, I’ve watched a lot of YouTube videos since then so I have the utmost confidence that I can make some great eggs.”

Colby started rummaging around through the kitchen, making me frown. He disappeared but reappeared with a fire extinguisher.

“Do you know how to use this?”

“Uh, of course I do. They taught us to use it during camp each year we went back. You know, just in case.”

Colby sighed. “Good then if there is a fire go ahead and use it. I’m going to pour myself some coffee and head back upstairs.” “Hey, I’m not going to need it!” I argued, but Colby just shook his head.

My friends and family always underestimated me. Yes, I could be a bit of an airhead and a goofball, but the truth was I had my serious moments! Rugby was the thing I excelled best at. School was something that didn’t come as easily to me. Most of my grades were good. It just took me longer than most.

Cooking, however, was not one of those things I excelled at. I had the cooking skills of a newborn baby but had done my best to learn as much as I could over the past few hours.

It was romantic to break someone’s breakfast in bed so I was going to cook her some eggs, bring them upstairs, and hope that the two of us could talk for a while.

Wait, maybe I should have found out if she was even awake or liked eggs in the first place.

Crap.

What was I thinking?

I think that was the problem. There was no thinking being done but I suppose that it was too late now. Everything was all ready and set to be cooked.

Taking a deep breath, I grabbed the apron and prepared to cook. It started all right, but then I smelled something burning. Shouting in surprise, I grabbed the pan and moved it off the burner.

Shit.

The eggs were burnt. They were very black. I don’t think eggs were supposed to be so crispy.

That’s okay, I could do this! I just needed to try a new batch. Then I would be on my way to making breakfast for Lia.

Lia

The sound of the smoke alarm going off caused me to jerk out of bed. With the kitchen right below me, I heard it almost like it was right in my room! I threw a robe over my pajamas, rushed downstairs, and found a sight that shocked me to my very core. Rain stood there, trying to run away the heavy black smoke coming from the stove. The food... or whatever it was, was pitch black and stuck to the pan. Oh, the pan.

It was ruined.

I started to laugh, not bothering to contain my laughter. The pan was nothing important. It was an old pan that my parents had.

“Uh, Lia... hi.”

“Hi Rain,” I greeted, giggling softly. “What were you trying to do here?”

“I was cooking.”

“That doesn’t look like food.”

His shoulders slumped. “I did try to make some eggs but I underestimated how tricky eggs can be to cook. Or it’s just me.”

“Well, from what I can tell you haven’t been great when it comes to cooking. Michael has told me a few about your cooking exploits in the past. All of them ended badly.”

Somehow, Rain’s shoulders slumped even further.

“Okay, yeah maybe I should’ve just made some cereal,” he muttered. “I was trying to make you breakfast in bed. At least I was attempting to. Now I’ve woken you up.”

“The bigger issue is that the food is inedible.”

Rain looked devastated. He was staring at the pan like he wanted to grab it and throw it out the window or something. As much anger as I held towards him in the past, I couldn’t help but feel sorry for him.

“Why don’t you throw that away? I’ll order out and we can have some breakfast together.”

His eyes widened, a grin splitting across his face. “Really?”

“Yes, really,” I said laughing.

“Okay, I’ll get to that then!”

While he cleaned up the kitchen, I went to my room to grab my phone. I ordered some simple breakfast for us before returning downstairs.

“So, this was your attempt to spend time with me?”

Rain blinked. “Yeah. Matt and you went on the date so I offered to do something for this morning. I didn’t know it was going to turn out so... smokey.”

“That happens when you burn things.”

I was trying hard not to break out into a fit of giggles again, but it was difficult when he was looking at me like this, almost like a puppy dog.

But to make no mistake there was a wolf inside there.

When I made my way downstairs, the mess was half cleaned up. Rain looked like a mess but the kitchen looked much better.

“The food is on its way,” I told Rain who grinned at me sheepishly.

“Thanks, Lia. I’m... sorry I ruined the breakfast. I thought I could handle making some eggs but I couldn’t.”

“Next time I’ll help you,” I assured him.

“Wait, for real?”

“Yes because I don’t want you to burn the house down.”

Rain huffed. “Hey, there’s a fire extinguisher right there on the counter! I was prepared.”

“You put that out?”

“Colby did, but I know how to use it.”

I tried to offer to help Rain clean up but he refused, telling me he just wanted me to relax. Sighing, I sat down on the counter and watched as he tried his best to clean up before the food arrived. The result was Rain cleaning up the kitchen entirely by the time it came.

“Rain I’ll get it. Go upstairs and clean up a bit. You still smell like smoke and burnt eggs.”

“Shit!”

He ran upstairs, making me laugh.

Out of all my brother's friends, Rain's teasing was the one I was usually able to deal with the best. The teasing did bother me but his teasing was usually more on the silly and slightly immature side because that was simply his personality.

Rain came down and sat at the table with me. The two of us ate, Rain talking enough for the two of us. He would ask me questions, breaking me out of my thoughts. I'd try my best to answer, but it was difficult because this was new to me.

"Thanks for trying to cook breakfast."

He grinned. "It's no problem. I mean, it was almost a problem but I'm glad that it didn't turn into one." Read full story at NovelFind.net

"The house is grateful for that as well."

"Just so you know I've only set a few things on fire in my life."

"Rain, I've never set anything on fire."

Rain shrugged. "Hey never say never. There is a first time or something."

"I don't want to set anything on fire."

"Spend enough time around me, Lia and you'll be setting things on fire once a month."

I laughed. "Rain you're ridiculous."

"Most people tell me that but I'll tell you a secret," he whispered, leaning closer towards me.

"Sometimes I put on an act because I want to make people laugh. It usually works."

"Well, you did succeed in making me laugh," I whispered, cheeks heating up.

He grinned, pulling back away. "Let's dig into the food. It doesn't smell burnt which is always a plus for me."

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Colby

The smell of burnt food filled the house for at least an hour after Rain's cooking attempt. I plugged in one of those air fresheners and it seemed to do the job.

No one was even shocked to smell the burning or hear Rain swearing from down in the kitchen. All of us, including Michael, were used to him setting random things on fire. I honestly don't know how the hell he managed to set so many things on fire. It was a skill that no one should have.

But then I heard laughter and hushed voices. Lia and Rain were having a suitable time. Matt hadn't spoken much about his date with Lia but he had a small smile on his face when he came in the other day.

I tried to ask him about it. Matt just huffed, going back inside his room. We all thought it would help him open and be more willing to accept that this was our life now. But Matt was even closed off than before!

Jesse was his roommate. Let Jesse deal with Matt and try to make some sense to him. Hell, if he had to do it then go ahead. The guy was the most stubborn out of all of us. People liked to say I was stubborn, but that was not the case. He was much worse than I was.

"So, what are you and Lia up to today?" Rain asked later that morning after returning to our room.

I blinked. "Gonna just go for a walk and have a picnic in the park. Don't worry, I don't need any help from you Rain to prepare the food."

"Haha, so funny! Pick on the guy who has a cooking deficit."

"A cooking deficiency is a funny way to put it."

Rain sighed. "It's hard to live with this deficiency, Colby. Can you understand how that feels?"

Leave it to Rain to try to make me laugh. It helped lighten how I was feeling knowing that Lia and I were going to need to have a serious talk.

"How did your morning with Lia go?"

"It was pretty good. We didn't discuss anything serious, which in retrospect I believe we should have done."

"The two of you will have a chance to talk sooner rather than later."

He shrugged. "Yeah, here's hoping. But you two should talk and see where you stand."

"I'm looking forward to that."

The sarcasm was obvious in my voice. But that wasn't going to help with anything about the situation. I needed to keep looking forward and not fall into the trap my friends did. Matt

preferred to keep things out of his mind while Rain used his humor to deal with the situation. Neither was confronting it head-on!

“I need to start getting ready. Lia’s set to meet me out front a little past noon and I need to make sure the food is ready.” “I can help-“

“No!” I shouted, not meaning to yell at him so loudly but letting Rain anywhere near the kitchen again was a bad idea. “I mean, no I got it.” The rightful source is find♦novel.net

Rain poured. “Dude, are you serious right now? I can’t screw up packing for a picnic. All you’re having is sandwiches and finger foods, right?”

“Yeah, but that’s not the point-“

“Don’t worry I got this!”

Sighing, I sent a quick text to Michael. He hadn’t yet left to hang out with his girlfriend who he had been spending time with more lately. The two of them were probably going to move in together soon, which Lia wasn’t going to like. At least this wouldn’t be for a few more months.

Lia

Colby and I always had a strained relationship with one another. He was the one who was always usually front and center when it came to bullying me. Going out with him, one-on-one was making me feel uneasy, but I wanted to do it.

The two of us needed to talk, to figure out where we stood with one another. I hated the fact that I was mated to my four brothers’ friends. It didn’t feel like this would change, but I was trying my best to make the most of it.

I was already in the car waiting for Colby when he slid into the driver’s seat. He put a bag in the back, making me lift a brow. “Oh, so you did plan a picnic.”

“Why are you surprised?” Colby asked, offended. “I said I was going to plan a picnic for you. Did you think I was lying or something?”

I gave a weak shrug. “Colby, sometimes you would lie to tease me in the past. I don’t know when it comes to you.”

“Fair enough.”

I stared out the window, trying to distract myself from the cars and houses we were passing by. Colby kept glancing over at me. A few times I caught his gaze so I was able to catch him in the act.

The park, the arrived, wasn't that busy. Sunday afternoon wouldn't be busy I realized. We found an empty picnic table, the sun shining over us just enough that it provided some warmth.

"The food smells good," I finally said.

"Rain had nothing to do with it," Colby teased. "He did attempt to pack it up for me today, but I was able to get Michael to intercept him."

I laughed. "How could he screw up packing for a picnic?"

"Oh, I don't know... he could drop the food on the floor then attempt to remake it and use the wrong ingredients, rendering it invisible." I

"Colby, do you realize how oddly specific that is?"

"Yes, of course, I do, but it's specific for a reason because it's happened."

I giggled but then I realized I was falling into the same trap I had with Rain. When it came to him, it was easy because of how funny he was.

"Colby, we have to talk."

He kept laying out lunch but did glance in my direction.

"Yeah, that's why I wanted us to come out here to eat. It's nice and quiet, a perfect place for us to have a serious

conversation," he responded softly. "So, what did you want to talk about first?"

"Why did you even bully me in the first place?"

He winced. "Yeah, I was expecting that.

"Can't you answer?"

"No, I can," Colby said firmly. "You deserve answers."

I sighed softly. "Yes, I do."

"Guess it was my way of showing I cared in a twisted way. I would see Michael teasing you and me and the other guys wanted to be a part of that fun. It just... got to levels that it never should've," he explained. "And I know that you thinking I only changed because we're mates. The thing is that is partly true. It helped me get my head out of my ass and see you."

This was not what I was expecting from Colby. He was being so honest and straightforward, catching me off guard. "Thank you for being honest."

“Well, the least I can be right now is honest. The other guys want to be too.”

Suddenly, I paled. “That means Jesse is going to want to spend time with me tonight.”

“Yes, he is, but he’s not as scary as you think he is, Lia.”

“You’ve said you were scared of him in the past!”

Colby shrugged. “Yes, but that was when I pissed him off. Have you pissed him off?”

“No, I don’t think so but he always has the same, blank expression on his face. How am I supposed to discern anything but anger from that?”

“Fair enough, but Jesse is just a quiet and controlled guy. Rumor has it that he didn’t cry when he was a child. He just screamed.”

I wasn’t sure if I was supposed to laugh or be afraid of what he just said to me. Instead, I chose to look down at my food and take a bite.

Other than the talk of Jesse, Colby and I had a fine time. He opened on me a bit more and I did a bit, but there was still a large part of me I was keeping hidden from my future mates. They were slowly changing their tune. It was something I could recognize. 1

My mind just kept producing what-ifs. What if they decided to change their tune unexpectedly and go back to bullying?

It kept me from wanting to trust them completely. I know that was a problem and something I had to try to get past at some point. Or I hoped I could.

“Do you want to go for a short walk?” Colby suggested after we finished eating.

I nodded. “Yes, let’s go for a quick walk. It will help me walk off all that dessert.”

“Hey, I’m a professional college athlete. If anyone must worry about it then it’s me.

Brother’s Best Friends Are My Mates

Jesse

“So... Jesse what are you and Lia planning to do today?” Rain asked me, leaning in the doorway with a curious grin on his face.

“Coffee,” I said simply.

Rain blinked. “Wait, that’s it? Just... coffee.”

“Yes, Coffee.”

Matt scoffed. “Rain you do know that coffee dates are a thing, right?”

“Well, yes but that sounds super boring.

“Maybe Jesse doesn’t find them boring.”

I nodded. “I don’t find them boring. They are very simple and to the point. We can either sit there or have our coffee and go. What more could you want?”

Rain paled. “I don’t know why you would want to go on such a date. It’s so boring but hey Jesse that’s up to you. Do what you feel like you need to do.”

“I always do, Rain.”

Everyone seemed so nervous. Matt was still in a state of denial and Rain had screwed up breakfast because of how nervous he was. But to be fair, Rain just didn’t have any cooking skills. He had the exact opposite of a cooking skill.

My thoughts drifted to Colby who was on his way back from his outing with Lia. While he tried to appear at ease I knew he wasn’t. Maybe that had changed now that they had gone out together.

I was a man of simple tastes. There was nothing wrong with going on a simple coffee date. Afterward, I might suggest taking a walk on the beach. Walks on the beach were something I had done often. It helped clear my mind. What better way to clear your mind than walking on the sandy beaches under the moonlight?

Matt and Rain broke out into a conversation while I just listened. I was never the type of person to talk to much. If someone were to describe me they would say I was a man of few words, but this was how it was with me.

Some people say I came off as intimidating. It hit me that Lia might think I am intimidating when we go on our date.

Rain must’ve seen the flash of panic in my eyes because he sat down next to me and started patting my hand.

“Try to smile. That usually puts people at ease.”

Matt gasped. “No!”

“What?” Rain asked, bewildered.

“Rain, you’ve never seen Jesse smile and there is a reason for this. When he smiles, it’s like you’re sitting in the room with a serial killer.” 1

I tilted my head to the side. “You’re right. That is how I look when I smile.”

“Okay... so scratch the smile. Try talking a little more about yourself,” Rain suggested.

“But I don’t talk a lot.”

Rain sighed. “Jesse, my man, which is why I’m encouraging you to talk some more! It doesn’t have to be about anything life changing. If you were me I’d say crack a joke but I don’t know if you even know any jokes.”

“I know jokes.”

His face lit up. “Oh yes? Tell me one then.”

“Can you guess what the therapist said when I told my therapist I’m scared of dying alone?”

“Uh, no what?”

“He said, “Most people don’t die with the company,” I said, chuckling. “Get it?”

Rain looked at Matt. “Matt, am I supposed to laugh at that?”

“Ideally someone is supposed to laugh when they tell a joke,” Matt said with a sigh. “Jesse, what have I told you about your morbid jokes?”

“Not everyone likes them.”

This caused Rain to wince. “Okay, no jokes. Just make some casual conversation.”

“I’ll try.”

Hard to say if I was going to be able to do that. I was certainly going to try to do it because I wanted to make this work with Lia and make a connection with her. She was my future mate now. All of us needed to push forward and try to form our relationship with her.

We also needed to work as a unit but we couldn’t do that until all of us worked on our relationship with her. Then perhaps the two of us could work together to figure this out with Lia.

“Good luck, buddy. You’ll know what to do,” Matt assured me.

I did hope he was right.

Lia

This was the date I had been dreading. Well both dreading and curious about it because I wondered how Jesse was when the two of us were together. Maybe he would be less intimidating than he normally was. Or he would just be worse.

I was waiting outside for him that evening. Jesse walked out, that cold demeanor still there, but his face softened when he found me.

“Hey, Lia.”

“Hi Jesse,” I squeaked out, resisting the urge to take a step away from him. “What’s the plan tonight?” “Coffee.”

“Coffee?” I asked. “Oh, I love coffee.”

“I’m not surprised. Michael is also a huge coffee drinker so it makes sense that it would run in the family.”

I smiled a little. “Yeah, Michael and I love our coffee.” Fresh chapters posted on [FindN\(ovel.net](http://FindN(ovel.net)

“And if you feel up to it we can take a walk on the beach afterward.”

“Jesse, you never struck me as someone who likes to take long walks on the beach.”

Their eyes met and he smirked softly.

“I never said I like to take long walks on the beach. It’s just nice to talk about medium-length walks on the beach during nights like this.”

The coffee shop we went to was quiet when we arrived but I smelled the delicious scent of coffee. It tasted even better! Jesse kept glancing at me, watching me with that intense expression.

“Jesse, why are you always so intense?”

He blinked. “I just am. I’ve always taken things seriously and been someone of few words. Rain suggested I try to make casual conversation tonight to break the ice, but I don’t know if I can do that.”

“Well, you do come off as intimidating but there is nothing wrong with silence. I am sure that I’ll be fine waking up on the beach with us not engaging in casual conversation. Nothing wrong with that.”

“Then let’s go.”

It wasn't a long ride to the beach. The first thing I noticed was how beautiful the ocean looked at this time of night, the stars and moon reflecting off the perfectly still water.

The beach was cool at that time of night. He took off his jacket at one point and put it over my shoulders. I blushed a little, holding onto it with my free hand.

"Thank you."

He shrugged. "Well, you look like you were cold so I thought it was the nice thing to do."

"Jesse, do you have siblings?"

"No, only child and parents spent most of their working. I don't think they ever wanted children to be honest. My parents once told me that I was a mistake."

I gasped. "Jesse that's terrible."

"Well, yes. At the time I thought it was ruder than anything. They should've kept it to themselves. I could already tell that they didn't care for me. It's obvious in their actions," he explained matter-of-factly. "It's not as if they don't care for me. Over the years my parents have paid for my schooling, though I don't go home during holidays. Easier that way."

This was the most I had ever learned about Jesse. He was very open and honest, making me wonder if I should perhaps ask the question I had been waiting to ask.

"And the bullying?"

"I cannot say. It was something we all did for one reason or another. But I am sorry for what we did. A shame it took such an event for us to realize it, but that's unimportant."

I nodded. "I don't know if I can forgive any of you but I can try to move forward. Hopefully."

He smirked. "That's all we ask."

It was a relief he didn't smile. The one time I saw Jesse smile I thought the world was going to end because that was how creepy it was.

When it started to get a lot chillier, Jesse suggested we go back to the house. We drove with me dozing in the passenger seat. It had been a long twenty-four to thirty-six hours. First I was with Matt on a date then hours later, I had breakfast with Rain. A lunch with Colby followed and finally this late-night coffee date and walk with Jesse.

Everything had been very surprising. I had learned a lot of things that I never thought I would learn; for one I wasn't scared of them as much as I was before.

"Lia," Jesse called out as the car came to a stop.

I blinked, yawning loudly. “Oh, are we back at the house now?”

“Yes, we’re here.”

He walked me upstairs, the two of us going our separate ways. I entered my bedroom, trying to calm my beating heart.

This whole weekend had been way too much for me. So, it was going to be nice to crawl into bed and sleep, which was exactly what I needed.

Brother’s Best Friends Are My Mates

Lia

In the morning, I groaned, tempted to pull the covers over my eyes, but I realized that I needed to get to school. We were getting to the point where graduation was just around the corner. Hard to believe that I would be a high school graduate who would be going on to college. I was excited to study teaching in college because teaching was always something I had wanted to do.

Instructing students and trying to get them to where they needed to be something I always wanted. This was just the next step in the plan I had worked out in my head. The one part of my plan that wasn’t something I expected was to be mated to the four guys who I used to call my torments.

Even now I was still shocked, but the events of the weekend sent me reeling. What was I going to do now that I had to see them after sharing moments with every single one? We all had an enjoyable time during our separate events, talking and just forging a new bond.

My phone buzzed while I was in the middle of getting dressed. Sighing, I grabbed my phone and saw it was Simone.

She was my ride this morning but she wasn’t contacting me to ask me if I was ready. Simone was trying to find out what was happening to me and the guys I was now calling my mates.

Hey, how was your weekend? -s

Honestly? Interesting. I spent it with Jesse, Colby, Rain, and Matt. -L

Oh? That sounds like a lot. How did it go? -S The source of this content is find•novel.net

It surprised me. I saw sides of them I wasn’t expecting. -L

Really? Like what? -S

Jesse has this way of making everyone feel like they belong. It's effortless for him. -L

That doesn't surprise me. He's always been good at reading people. -S

True, but it hit differently seeing him in action. Then there's Colby-he's such an outgoing and free person most of the time, but when things got serious, he stepped up. -L

Colby stepped up. That is surprising. -S

I know, right? And Rain... was great too. -L

I can see that. Rain always struck me as silly but great type. -S

Exactly. And Matt... I always thought he was all structured and control, but he has this softer side. He's so thoughtful when it matters. -L

Whoa. Sounds like you're seeing them in a whole new light. -S

I am. It's making me think about them differently. Like, I get why they are the way they are now. -L

That's a good thing, though, right? -S

Yeah, I think so. It's just a lot to process. -L

Sounds like you're making real connections with them. -S

I guess I am. And it's... nice. -L

So, does this mean you have accepted the four of them as your mates? - S

I don't know if I would go that far. - L

Well, the sooner you accept it the better it will be for you. - S

I know, Simone. - L

Well, I'll pick you up in a bit for school. Thank god we're almost graduating, right? - S

I know, right? - L

I got off the phone with Simone, trying to hurry up and finish getting ready. Honestly, it was a relief to get back to school. It was the only place I didn't have to be around my new four future mates. Not that I wasn't adjusting to living with them but I needed to be on my right now.

A person could only spend so much time in the bedroom!

When Michael first invited them to leave us I was against it right away because I couldn't imagine sharing the one space that was sometimes free of them with these four! But the truth was I was starting to adjust to having them around.

It was a relief that my brother was still with me. Yes, he had spent the weekend with his mate but knowing that he was always there for me was a relief. I was using my brother as a bit of a buffer. The guys probably were, too. This just made it easier for us to make these adjustments to a tricky situation.

When Simone texted me to say she was here, I grabbed my bag and headed outside. The guys were already gone, having headed to college. At least they were finally stopping with their hovering over me and being clingy.

The first few days they were doing this, which was exhausting. It was nice to be able to get to school and get something of a break.

"Hey girl," Simone greeted, giving me a grin. "How are you doing?"

"I'm doing."

She laughed. "I'm glad that you five haven't killed each other."

"Hey, my brother lives there too!"

"Yeah, but he's going to move out one day to go live with his mate. You know this is going to happen one day soon."

"What?" I whispered. "Did he say something to you?"

"What? No! Michael and I barely talk anyway. If he did say something like that to me then I would tell you that, you know that right?"

I sighed softly. "Yes I do but don't do that again. You scared the crap out of me when you said that."

"Trust me, I don't know anything about your brother leaving. My bet is he isn't going to leave anytime soon. He wants to stay there with you and his friends to make sure that you all get along. At least that's how I see it."

"I hope so," I murmured, leaning back in the seat. "Not having Michael there would be very strange for me."

"Well, you don't have to worry about it. Let's just focus on the fact that we'll be graduating soon!"

I smiled. "I know, right? It's terrifying but exciting at the same time."

“It’s supposed to be,” Simone said, laughing.

I didn’t know about that.

School had finally moved on past the gossip about me and my new mates. I was grateful for that because I was sick of

everyone staring and looking at me. Someone else had a coming-of-age ceremony and they were matched with three people! There weren’t as many people as I was matched to, but still.

“There has to be something in the water,” Simone whispered as the latest gossip spread around school.

I sighed softly. “I’m just glad they aren’t talking about me anymore so let me be happy about that.”

“Hey, I never said you couldn’t be happy about it so calm down,” Simone teased.

“Simone, how are you adjusting to your mates? I realized I haven’t asked and I feel bad about that.”

“You have a lot to think about, Lia so I’m not mad at you or anything.”

Simone was seriously the best friend anyone could ever have. How did I get so lucky with her? I smiled weakly, linking my arm to hers.

“Thanks for saying that, Simone. I just wish I could snap my fingers and everything would be all right.”

“You need to just take your time with this. There are going to be five people in this mating group. Five personalities butting heads so it’s going to be a lot.”

I paled. “But they are friends and haven’t fought with each other.”

“So? They just haven’t fought with each other yet. They are territorial werewolves and are going to fight with each other eventually. I think you should prepare yourself for that.”

This was something I hadn’t thought about at all. What Simone was saying was true, but I didn’t want to think about it because this was going to add more stress to my life.

“What am I going to do?”

“Well, you said it hasn’t happened yet so just focus on that fact. Once it happens then you need to try to deal with it. I’ll help you when that happens.”

I paled further. “How are you going to help?”

“We’ll figure it out.”

It was difficult to pay attention in class and allow myself to focus on school because my mind kept drifting to issues I might have with my mates. What if they did start fighting with each other? The four of them have been great friends for years.

To think that I could ruin over a decade-long friendship. It would not be something I could deal with without extreme amounts of guilt.

Sighing to myself, I chose to eat lunch outside. Simone joined me after a while, but the two of us didn’t speak. Instead, we just sat there and ate our lunch quietly.

There was a lot on my mind so Simone understood why I didn’t want to talk right now.

It should’ve been expected. Why did I not think it was going to happen sooner or later? I think for the past few weeks I’ve been in survival mode since the coming-of-age ceremony. All that mattered was trying to get through one day after the next.

Yet I had to move past that mindset. My future mating group depended on it.

Brother’s Best Friends Are My Mates

Michael

I logged into the group chat, ready to say my peace. It was time to get it out there. The guys had a right to know what I was doing. There were going to be some pushbacks but so be it.

This wasn’t even unexpected! I had been wanting to live with my mate for a while now. She was finally done with school so it made sense for the two of us to take the next step. Then we could make our bond official and become actual mates, registered with the state and everything.

Michael: Hey everyone, just wanted to let you know I’m officially moving out next week.

Rain: Wait, what? Moving out?

Colby: Is this like a short trip, or are we talking permanently moving out?

Michael: Permanent. I’m going to live with my mate full-time now. It’s time.

Matt: ...You’re serious?

Jesse: Man, are you sure about this?

Michael: Yes, 100%. You are all here for Lia now, so she's set. You'll handle things fine.

Rain: I mean, we are here for Lia, but this was kind of sudden.

Matt: You've been the buffer, man. Lia's family. Your part of what makes this whole thing work.

Colby: Yes, no offense, but do you think everything's going to be fine?

Michael: What are you talking about? You're all her mates. You've got it covered. Follow current novels on

Jesse: Bro. We're still figuring out how to live together. There's... dynamics.

Colby: And clashes. Rain and I argued about whose turn it was to do the dishes yesterday.

Rain: You started that!

Colby: Because you didn't do them the day before!

Matt: Case in point.

Michael: You guys will figure it out. This is how packs work, right?

Jesse: Sure. Eventually. But, like... you've been the glue, Mike. You're family to Lia and sort of the stabilizer for us.

Michael: I'm not your babysitter.

Rain: No, but you are the guy who helps Lia breathe when things get overwhelming.

Colby: Not to mention you're the one who knows how to de-escalate when Matt gets into his hyper-focus mode and starts bossing us all around.

Matt: Excuse me?

Colby: Tell me I'm wrong.

Matt: ... Okay, fine.

Jesse: Look, we're not saying don't move in with your mate. We get it. But maybe give us a little more time to get steady?

Michael: I get where you're coming from, but no. This is what Lia wanted, too. She needs to build this life with you, and you need to step up for her.

Rain: ...So, you're going?

Michael: Yes. You've got this. Trust me. And if anything, serious comes up, you know where to find me.

Colby: No pressure or anything.

Jesse: Well, guess it's time to level up.

Matt: I don't like this, but we'll make it work. For Lia.

Michael: That's the spirit. You're a pack. You'll figure it out.

Rain: You had better visit.

Michael: Obviously. Just don't burn the place down in the meantime.

Colby: No promises. Rain loves to set things on fire.

Rain: Hey, I don't like to set things on fire. What I do is accidentally set things on fire because I have bad luck.

Michael: Guys I'm not going to stay so have you accepted it?

Matt: I guess so. But what about Lia?

Michael: I haven't told her yet.

Rain: Michael, my man, you haven't told your sister yet. God, you are screwed.

Michael: Thanks, Rain.

But he was right. I had to tell my sister and I needed to tell her in person.

Later that day when she got home, I waited by the door. Lia looked surprised to see me standing there but I tried to play it cool. "Hey, sis."

"Hey, Michael... what is going on?"

"What do you mean? Nothing is going on."

Great now I was lying to my sister. This was great, just great. I didn't want to lie to her but it just came out naturally because I was worried about telling her the truth.

She wasn't going to be happy. I was the one who invited my four friends to live here and she thought I would be there for her. It wasn't like I planned to leave so soon, but the problem was my future mate had graduated earlier than we thought she would.

"Michael let's sit so you can explain everything to me. I know something is going on so please don't play stupid."

The two of us sat in the dining room. I gazed across the table at her, wishing I didn't have to hurt her like this, but it had to happen. It was always going to happen, but the timing ended up being sooner rather than later.

"I'm moving out."

Lia stiffened. "What do you mean you're moving out?"

"I was always going to move out to live with my mate, Lia."

"Yes, but it wasn't supposed to be for another like six months or more!"

I sighed. "The timeline shifted. She's graduating early and after we had a talk, the two of us decided together to move in. Her folks have already gotten us a place."

"You're not even done with school yet."

"

"Yes, but I will be in just a few weeks," I reminded her. "Lia I know you are angry but I must do this. I want to do this."

Lia blinked back tears. "You want to leave me alone here with them."

"Them? Lia, come on they are your mates."

"Future mates," she corrected flatly. "They aren't my mates yet."

"And? It's good for the five of you to live together. The five of you are going to be a pack and I'm going to have my pack. That's not to say I'm still not going to be there for you. You're my sister and those guys are my best friends."

Lia stood up and glared at him. "This is the worst thing you have ever done to me."

"Lia... come on," I pleaded, trying to get her to sit back down but she shook her head.

"No, leave me alone!"

I listened to her storm up the stairs, her door slamming shut loud enough to rattle the things on the walls.

Shit. That went a lot worse than I wanted it to go.

Lia

My body was shaking, the rage overtaking me. I grabbed my phone to text Simone because I had to tell her what happened.

I can't believe this, Simone. Michael's moving out! How could you let this happen?! -L

What am I supposed to do, Lia? Chain him to the house. He's got his own life to live. -S

His own life?! Do you even realize what this means for me? I'll be stuck here ALONE with FOUR FUTURE MATES breathing down my neck! -L

Oh, come on. You're acting like it's the end of the world. You'll survive. -S

Survive? SURVIVE?! Michael was the only one keeping them in check! And now you're just letting him leave like it's no big deal? -L

You're being overdramatic. This isn't about Michael leaving. You're upset because he's not around to act as your buffer anymore. -S

Excuse me?! I am NOT using my brother as a buffer! -L

Really? Because it sure seems like you've been hiding behind him instead of dealing with your "future mates" yourself. -S That's not fair, Simone! He's my BROTHER. He's supposed to protect me! You wouldn't understand. -L

No, Lia. What I understand is that you've been relying on him to avoid responsibility. Maybe it's time you stepped up and handled your problems. -S

You're unbelievable. This isn't about responsibility! It's about losing the only person I could trust in this insane situation! -L

If you trusted him so much, maybe you should trust his decision to leave. He wouldn't do it if he thought you couldn't handle it. -S

I hate this. And I hate you for being so cold about it. -L

I'm sorry... but you know I'm just going to tell you like it is. It doesn't mean I won't listen to your rant. - S

Yeah, I know. – L

I had enough people. With a tired sigh, I threw my phone onto the nightstand next to my bed and lay on my bed. This sucked. No, this more than sucked. How was I going to deal with this?

My brother was abandoning me. That much I was sure of. It killed me to say that but that was what he was doing. I couldn't imagine living here with my four future mates. Yes, I was using him as a buffer, something I readily admitted to but it was the only way I knew how to get through this.

Brother's Best Friends Are My Mates

Lia

I was mad at my brother. He knew it, I knew it, and the entire world knew it. Since he left a few days ago, I have been ignoring his text messages but finally, the guilt started to get me. One morning, about a week after he left, I decided to respond to one of his text messages. My brother just wanted to know how I was doing so I should do that for him.

But god I was tempted to leave him on read or something. It was easier to ignore him than have any type of serious conversation. My brother was just doing what he thought he needed to do. However, I missed him. Why couldn't he just stay here?

My phone vibrated again, reminding me that I had to answer the text or at least swipe it off my screen sooner rather than later. Hey, how's it going? Settling in with the guys okay? -M

Do you mean the four people you invited to move in with me? -L

Oh, come on, Lia. They're your mates. -M

Future mates. Not mates yet. Significant difference. -L

Semantics. -M

It's not semantics when they're all trying to figure out how to live together without killing each other—and now I'm the one caught in the middle. -L

You'll handle it. You're great at managing people. -M

Because I had you here as a buffer! -L

Wait, what? -M

You heard me. I relied on you to keep the peace. -L

You're saying I was your buffer? -M

Yes, Michael. That's exactly what I'm saying. You made it easier for me to handle all of them. And now you're gone, and I'm drowning. -L

Lia, that's not fair. You're stronger than this. You don't need me to hold your hand. -M

It's not about needing you to hold my hand. It's about you dropping this whole situation on me and bailing. -L

Bailing? Are you serious right now? I stayed as long as I could. You knew this was coming. -M

Did I? You never actually asked how I felt about you are leaving. -L

You didn't say you wanted me to stay, Lia. -M

Because I shouldn't have to! -L

I had to move on, Lia. You know that. -M

I know. -L

Then why are you so mad? -M

Because you're my brother, and I feel abandoned. But also? I get it. You deserve to live your life. -L

Lia... -M

No, it's fine. Really. I'll figure this out. -L

I'm sorry if I made this harder for you. -M

You did. But I forgive you. Just... don't disappear completely, okay? -L

I won't. I'm always a call away. -M

You better mean that, Michael. -L

I do. -M

Good. Now, do you have any advice for getting Matt to not take over every group decision? -L

Good luck with that one. -M

Wow. So helpful. -L

What can I say? You've got this, Lia. -M

The two of us were going to be okay, but it was difficult without my brother here. I would be lying that if I didn't admit having him here made things easier. How was I going to handle having these four guys here with me alone?

It wasn't like I thought they would hurt me, but I was still nervous.

What was I going to do?

I sighed and forced myself out of bed. Right now, I was going to take it day by day, choosing to fight my battles depending on the day. This was the easiest way to survive living here with these four men who were my mates.

Today was Saturday morning. I didn't have to go to school so the only thing I could do was leave my bedroom and head downstairs.

It smelled like something was burning when I first got down the stairs. I panicked, rushing into the kitchen to find Rain pouting and Matt glaring at him.

"What happened?"

"Rain decided here that he wanted to try to cook for all of us this time but thankfully I came downstairs in time to stop him from setting the place on fire."

I sighed. "Rain, were you trying to make eggs again?"

"No Eggo waffles in the toaster." Discover more novels at FindN0vel.net

My eyes widened. "Matt, do you need any help?"

"Yeah, why not? Rain goes somewhere upstairs and cleans yourself up. Lia, you can set the table if you'd like. It's not like I can't handle working a toaster. I'm not Rain."

He started to sulk and went upstairs, leaving a smell of burnt toast in his wake.

"Are Colby and Jesse still asleep?"

Matt shook his head. "They had one of their rare Saturday classes. Rain and I are the only ones here today."

I saw that Matt was still a little tense. He tensed the moment I stepped into the room. This made me frown because I couldn't understand why he was still so tense around me.

“Still awkward around me I see.”

He coughed. “Yeah, well I’m trying here. I’ve been thinking a lot about our conversation when we were out the other day.” “And?”

“I was a shitty person and I think the reason I’ve been having such difficulty accepting this is because I feel guilty.”

My eyes widened slightly. “You feel guilty?”

“I’m not even going to criticize you for being surprised that I feel guilty because you’re right. Why would you think I could feel guilty over what I did to you had given how I’ve treated you?”

“The point is you do feel guilty and I want to thank you for that.”

Matt flashed me a half smile. “It’s the least I could do.”

The rest of the breakfast was made in silence, but I felt like Matt and I had a moment. There was more I wanted to say. I needed to gather my thoughts to make sure I didn’t blurt out something that I would regret or make things worse.

Matt

I can’t believe I blurted that out, but it was a long time coming. For days now after our date, I was trying to figure out why the hell I was still trying to keep Lia at a distance. Then Michael said he was going to move out and I saw Lia’s reaction.

She was devastated, angry, and a little bit scared. I didn’t blame her for that. Lia was going to be left alone with us, four guys who had treated her like shit for over a decade and a half. It was at that moment I realized that I was upset over how I treated her.

This guilt was making it impossible for me to handle the fact that we were now mates. I had to get past that because letting myself overcome this guilt wasn’t going to help anything. It was going to do nothing but make things more awkward for us.

“I don’t know if I can forgive and forget, but I can try to move forward,” Lia said after a while.

The table was set and the food was almost done. I turned towards her, a hesitant smile playing on my lips.

“I can work with that.”

I reached for one of the plates, our hands brushing against each other. This warmth followed through my body as I took in the first touch I had taken of my future wife. Neither of us had so

much as laid a hand on one another. The other guys probably had touched her in some capacity, but I was trying to avoid it.

It was easier to avoid touching a future mate even though my body had ached for it. Lia froze, looking at me with a mixed expression on her face. But I made myself smile, trying to make myself non-threatening as possible. She relaxed a bit.

“We should finish setting the table and then call Rain down. He’s probably starving to death.”

I snorted. “Yeah, he’s probably starving. The guy hasn’t eaten in what four hours?”

“He eats in the middle of the night?”

“I’ve shared a room with him before, Lia. Trust me when I say that it’s entirely possible that he grabbed something to eat in the middle of the night. The guy gets hungry at random moments so don’t be surprised by that.”

She sighed softly. “Well, why don’t you go tell him? I’ll finish setting everything out.”

When I got upstairs, Rain was already waiting at his door. He opened it up, grinning at me. I didn’t even have to knock!

“Rain, you scared the crap out of me!” I muttered, glaring at him.

“Is the food ready? I think I heard the toaster ding, which is good. It means I didn’t ruin it.”

I sighed. “I’m sure the household could afford a toaster. If you haven’t noticed Lia and Michael are well off.”

Not that I was bragging about this. It was true, but none of that mattered to me. She could have no money and I wouldn’t care.

“Okay so is it ready...?”

“Rain, yes it’s ready.”

I rolled my eyes as he rushed past me, shaking my head in amusement. The guy could sometimes act like a kid, but that wasn’t a dreadful thing. It kept all of us amused.

Brother’s Best Friends Are My Mates

Matt

Lia went off to spend time with Simone. She drove off, leaving me with Rain. But the two of us were supposed to head to the college to practice.

I kept thinking about my conversation and moment with Lia. My hand still tingled, something I was embarrassed to admit. Rain waved his hand in front of my face suddenly, making me jerk back.

“Rain, what the hell?”

“You dazed out,” Rain said, grinning sheepishly. “And we’re just sitting here in the driveway with the car running so I figured you’d want to hurry up and be on our way.”

I sighed. “Yeah, I’m going.”

The rain kept snickering in the seat beside me. I was tempted to slam hard on the breaks but that would make me pout and no one wanted a pouting Rain.

“So how are you and Lia doing?”

“I think you already know how the two of us are doing.”

Rain blinked. “Well, I have an idea but I want to hear about it from you.”

“We talked,” I told him, but then I realized this wasn’t going to have any effect other than making him want to keep pestering me with questions. “I realized that I was acting this way because I felt guilty about bullying her. Becoming her mate made me realize that I had no right to be her mate, but that’s what I am. What we all are.”

He sniffed. “Yeah, I had the same conversation with Lia the other day. I almost cried. She almost cried. We both almost cried together. It was a little strange. But it did help clear up a few things.”

“Don’t you think you could’ve told me this before?”

“I don’t know if you would’ve listened, Matt. You are stubborn. Guess Jesse could’ve said something because you listen to him more.” Official source is [FindN\(\)vel.net](http://FindN()vel.net)

I sighed. “Only if he’s in one of his scary moods.”

The college was quiet at this time of night. Rain and I exited the car, heading to the field. Colby and Jesse were already there. My eyes locked with Jesse. He smirked.

“I guess you and Lia patched things up.”

“How does everyone know this?”

Colby laughed. "Rain sent us a text saying that you and Lia had reached a new, comfortable point in your relationship."

"I hate all of you," I grumbled but they all knew I didn't mean it. "Let's just get some practice in. We have a big game this weekend, followed by our finals. Hard to believe we'll be graduating soon."

From there we were all hoping to get an official offer with the state's rugby team. All five of us were hoping to become professional rugby players, but in case it didn't happen we all had backup plans. My backup plan was to become a coach. Still, let me stay in rugby but instead, I could teach the younger generation.

"Wait, Michael isn't here," Rain reminded us.

Colby sighed. "Yeah, Michael is busy with his mate. They did just officially mate so the coach understands."

"Then I guess we'll just have to practice without him."

I tried not to sound disappointed. The four of us hadn't seen much of him over the past two weeks he had been living with his mate. It was something I had to get used to.

They were forming their pack just like the four of us were forming our pack with Lia. I was almost still waiting for the last pin to drop, afraid that we might not get along as well as we used to do.

The fact of the matter was these guys were the best friends anyone could ever have. I didn't want anything to happen or get in the way of their friendships. But I heard fights breaking out when more than one person shared the same mate.

We all got into our gear, ready to get straight to practice. I kept glancing over my shoulder, almost as if I hoped that Michael was going to show up at the last minute.

Rain

This practice was one of our most successful yet! I earned a few new bruises and marks, but this was rugby. It wasn't a sport that was meant for the faint-hearted. But when we walked off the field and into the locker room, I had a grin on my face. "Hey isn't a recruiter coming to the next game?" one of the guys on the team said.

I was half-listening, not wanting to worry about recruiters coming to the game. Unlike some guys on the team, I did have a backup plan. Computers were my other interest and something I excelled in. Jesse was interested in tech as well, Matt coaching, and Colby and Michael's business.

We all knew the importance of having a backup plan. Even me, the resident goofball. I had enough sense when our counselor talked to us at the beginning of college!

Colby nudged me. "If anyone is going to impress the recruiter it's going to be us."

"Yeah, we are pretty good but I don't want to get cocky, Colby. What if one of us doesn't get in?"

"Well, then we support the other. That's all we must do," I told him, grinning.

"Rain you can be so cheesy."

"Hey Colby, I am the one who always lifts everyone's spirits around here and I take my job seriously."

Sometimes I could get down, but I had a genuinely helpful attitude. You know, except for the bullying I engaged in. Lia had said something like what she said to Matt. She doesn't forgive or forget but she wants us to try to move forward.

Crazy how we all ended up here. If someone had told me I would end up as a future mate to Lia, along with the rest of my friends, I would've laughed in their faces. There was just no chance of that happening!

"Let's head home. I'm exhausted," I muttered, throwing my bag over my shoulder.

Matt and I piled into the same car while Colby and Jesse piled into the other. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed Matt kept wincing.

"You okay?"

"Yeah, I think I hurt my shoulder back out on the field."

My eyes widened. "Matt, my dude, you should ice it as soon as we get back to the house otherwise it could get worse."

"Rain, I got this injury back in high school remember?"

Matt wasn't the only one of us who had gotten injured during rugby but he was the only one whose injury was outlasting. It sucked that he had to go through it. The guy was stronger than me, never letting it bother him and if it did bother him, he tried to show that it wasn't a big deal.

"Well, yeah... but still!"

"I appreciate you worrying about me but I can handle a sore shoulder. Some ice and over-the-counter pain medicine will have to be back to normal in no time."

I sighed. "If you say so."

It was hard for me to remember how Matt even got that injury because of how long ago it was. I think it was during our junior year. Someone from the other team had come out of nowhere and rushed at him in a move that was legal but not fair.

The result was Matt had to get some physical therapy. It wasn't going to derail his career but he had to take care of it. When there was pain he had to take a minute and nurse it otherwise it could cause permanent damage.

Waiting outside with us was Lia. I grinned and waved at her. She paused and smiled. What struck me as amazing was that this time the smile even reached her eyes. There were times she was around us when the smile didn't reach her eyes. (1

I hated to see that but it was understandable given everything she had been through with us over the past few years. Matt was right about that guilt. It was hard to move past and push to the back of your mind but I wasn't going to let it bother me when we were working hard on making this mating group work! 1

Guess I got excited because when I got out of the car and Lia approached, this sudden urge approached me. I leaned down and kissed her fully on the lips. She froze, but for a moment started to respond, her lips parting ever so slightly in response to my kiss.

But then I heard growls from everyone around me. I jerked away, a growl escaping my own throat.

Shit. I didn't mean to do this. Everyone was angry, but any rationality I had in my mind was gone. All I could think about was fighting those four guys who were supposed to be my best friends: my pack!

"Guys, why are you acting so strange?" Lia asked, sounding scared and desperate, but again my mind was so far gone that I didn't pay much attention to what she was saying.

Brother's Best Friends Are My Mates

Lia

Simone had warned me and she was right. I wished that I had heeded her warnings that day because now I was finding myself between a rock and a hard place. What was I going to do now that these guys, who were best friends all their lives, were fighting with one another?

This was so stressful. The first person I reached out to was Simone. A part of me was tempted to reach out to my brother Michael. I knew he would set those guys straight but I also didn't want to intrude on his happiness right now. He and his mate were trying to adjust to living together as well as being mates for good now.

I couldn't imagine when the four became my official mates. Flushing, it was going to be quite the experience but I had to put that out of my mind because it wasn't going to be happening anytime soon.

With a tired sigh, I grabbed my phone and sent a text to Simone. She didn't take very long to respond much to my relief. Leave it to Simone to respond to me within seconds. I never had to wait long to hear from her!

You were right about the guys being jealous and possessive. – L

Of course, I was. What happened? – S

Simone, I need your advice. Things are getting... complicated. – L

Uh-oh. What's going on? Spill. – S

Do you know how Colby, Matt, Rain, and Jesse are all best friends? – L

Yes, your future mates. What about them? – S

They've finally started acting territorial. Like, full-on wolves. – L

Yikes. What are they doing? – S

It's the unimportant thing, but they're constantly trying to one-up each other now. It's like a competition for my attention. –

L

Oof. That sounds exhausting. – S

It is. I feel like I'm stuck in the middle, and I don't want to ruin their friendship. – L

Have you tried talking to them about it? – S

I don't even know how to start that conversation without making it worse. Any ideas? – L

You need to remind them you're not a prize to fight over, and they're on the same team here. Maybe get them all together and lay it out. – S

I just hope they listen... Wolves can be stubborn. – L

True, but if anyone can handle it, it's you. And if you need backup, just say the word. I've got you, and I won't let anyone hurt my best friend. – S

Thanks, Simone. That means a lot. – L

She was right. I had to remind them that I was not a prize to be fought over! What I was their future mate. Yes, this was a situation that none of us thought we would end up in but it didn't mean that we couldn't make the best of it.

I did attempt to talk to them that morning. The first person I spotted was Jesse but then Matt caught wind of it and started growling. Colby took the chance to say something to me, leaning closely and whispering.

“Hey!” Rain snarled. “What the hell do you think you're doing? Trying to make a move when we're distracted?”

“I'll do as I want,” Colby hissed back. “She's my future mate too.”

This time Rain snarled even louder than before, causing my eyes to widen almost as large as saucers.

The snarl from Rain caught me off guard. He never sounded that angry, almost always having a positive attitude and a smile on his face. I had to take a step back. While I wasn't scared of him, the tension in the air did make me uncomfortable.

“What?” Colby snapped. “You have a problem with me all of a sudden Rain?”

“Yeah, I do! You're trying to weasel your way into Lia's good graces.”

He huffed. “I don't need to weasel my way into her graces. She loves having me near her.”

I started to say but then Matt and Jesse jumped into the fray.

I sighed, trying to get their attention but no matter what I said they wouldn't listen. It was beyond frustration.

So, I did what anyone would do in my situation. I turned around and went back upstairs, slamming the door behind me. They didn't even realize I was gone until about an hour later when they started texting as well as knocking at the door, to see if I was all right.

How I wished my brother were here! Maybe he could talk some sense into them but I had to handle this on my own. As a fully-fledged adult and their future mate, I had to deal with it.

That evening I decided that if they weren't going to be mature enough and sit with me to talk this out then I was going to have to take desperate measures.

Lia: Okay, you four. Welcome to the group chat A Bonding Experiment. The mission: Bond without tearing each other apart. You're all amazing in your way, so get to know each other. Play nice. ♦♦

Colby: This feels unnecessary. I'm perfectly capable of getting along... if certain people cough Matt cough stop being so smug. Matt: Smug? Just because I win when we spar. Sure, Colby. Latest content published on Find1Novel.net

Rain: This is already going well. Lia, are we allowed to vote for someone off the island?

Rain: Guys let's chill. If we're all supposed to be her future mates, doesn't it make sense to, like, work together instead of tearing each other down? Does teamwork make the dream work?

Colby: Of course, you'd say that Rain. You're a golden retriever.

Rain: And proud of it, thanks.

Colby: Golden retriever energy is better than insecure alpha-wannabe vibes, though. Just saying.

Matt: Shots fired.

Lia: This is exactly why I made this chat. Try harder, please.

Rain: Fine. Here's an icebreaker: What's everyone's favorite way to de-stress?

Jesse: Rugby and walking on the beach.

Matt: Rugby too but I'm not cheating.

Colby: Reading. Helps me tune out unnecessary noise, like Matt's constant boasting.

Rain: Music. Preferably loud enough to drown all of you out.

Lia: See? Progress. Keep going. I'm muting the chat for my sanity. Play nice, boys. And I do mean play nice. If I hear that the four of you are fighting I will reach out to Michael and kick your asses.

I sighed and made sure to turn off notifications to the chat. Let them sit on that, trying to figure out what they must do. I've done enough in this situation.

The guys ended up talking for a while that night when I checked back in the morning. I came downstairs to see that breakfast was almost done and everyone was sitting around the table. There were forced, awkward smiles on their faces but their eyes lit up when they saw me.

"Hey Lia!" Rain greeted.

Jesse nodded towards me. "Lia."

Colby and Matt just waved at me. I smiled at all of them, trying not to show attention to one over the other. What if they started arguing or fighting again?

“So have you guys made peace?”

This made Colby sigh.

“I mean, we’re not killing each other so I suppose yes.”

“Then if you haven’t realized your friendship is important we’ll have to start spending time as a group-no we’re a pack,” I told them firmly. “And this is something I want as your future mate so if you care about me you’ll agree to it.”

The looks on their faces were priceless. I once sported that deer in a headlight look but now it wasn’t me. It was their turn to deal with this.

“Yes, that is fair,” Jesse said after a while.

Leave it to Jesse to turn around and be the voice of reason. I almost wished that Rain would say something to lessen the tension but he hadn’t been in a good mood as of late. It was one of the things I liked about him.

Rain hung his head. “Yeah, we should do something like that today after practice.”

“Why don’t I go with you guys to watch you practice?” I suggested unexpectedly.

Sports still weren’t something I was interested in, but these guys were very interested in it. As their future mate, the least I could do was try to go to some of their practice. Sure I went to their games, but going to practice was difference.

“Really?” Colby asked hopefully. “You don’t mind coming? It’s not exactly exciting.”

I smiled faintly. “It’s all right. I’ll take Simone with me if she has time and if not then I’ll find a way to occupy myself.” 2

Let’s just hope the guys would be able to resist fighting on the field. This wouldn’t be good since they were on the same team!