

Chapter 5: Unexpected Encounters and Hidden Truths

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(Olivia's POV)

"Liv, what are you doing here..."

I turned around to nd Jason Mitchell, Ethan's longtime friend, standing behind me with a surprised expression. His dark hair was slightly tousled, and his eyes held that same sympathetic look I'd noticed at Sophie's birthday party.

"Jason, hello," I greeted him with a polite smile.

His gaze dropped to the shopping bag in my hand, the Timber Wolf Timepieces logo clearly visible. "Buying a gift for Ethan?"

The question caught me off guard. I hadn't expected to run into anyone who knew me, especially not one of Ethan's friends. To avoid a complicated explanation about Connor and my impending departure, I simply nodded.

Jason's expression shifted subtly. "This brand's watches are very expensive, even the basic models cost thousands of dollars." He hesitated, then added gently, "Honestly, you don't have to buy such an expensive gift for him. Ethan, he..."

The unspoken words hung in the air between us. He doesn't deserve it.

I clutched the bag a little tighter, feeling a strange mix of amusement and sadness. If only Jason knew the watch wasn't for Ethan at all.

"You work hard for your money," Jason continued, his voice lowered. "I know lawyers at your level don't make that much yet. This must be several months' salary for you."

I was touched by his concern. In the three years I'd known him, Jason had always been kind to me, even when the others in Ethan's circle kept their distance.

"Ethan doesn't need those things," he said, frustration evident in his tone. "You don't have to spend several months' salary on a gift for him."

I smiled politely. "Alright, I won't next time."

We said our goodbyes, and as I turned to leave, I thought I heard him sigh quietly behind me. My wolf, Cora, stirred within me, sensing the genuine concern in Jason's manner.

(Jason's POV)

I watched Olivia walk away, her honey-brown hair catching the afternoon light. She'd always been too good for Ethan—kind, intelligent, and unfailingly loyal despite how poorly he treated her.

Pulling out my phone, I typed a message to Ethan, who I suspected was with Cassandra at that very moment.

"Brother, your girlfriend is really good. I just saw her buying a watch for you, worth thousands, probably a few months' salary for her. Treasure her."

My thumb hovered over the send button for a moment before pressing it. Would it make any difference? Probably not. But I had to try.

The conict inside me had been growing for months. Ethan was my oldest friend, but his treatment of Olivia was inexcusable. He had confessed to me, during a drunken night out, that he still couldn't forget Cassandra and merely treated Olivia as a substitute.

"She looks a bit like Cassandra, you know?" he had slurred. "Same build, similar features. But she's... easier. Doesn't demand as much."

I had been disgusted but said nothing. What kind of friend was I?

And after the birthday party, I knew Ethan and Cassandra had spent the night together at a hotel. Earlier today, in our private friends' group chat—a circle Olivia had never been invited into despite three years of dating—Cassandra had brazenly posted a photo of herself with Ethan, suggesting he keep it as a souvenir, then deleted it a minute later claiming it was an accident.

Everyone knew it wasn't an accident. It was a power play, a way to mark her territory.

I pocketed my phone and headed for my car, wondering if I should have said more to Olivia. Warned her, perhaps. But what right did I have to interfere?

(Ethan's POV)

The exclusive restaurant was dimly lit, creating an intimate atmosphere as I sat across from Cassandra. Her green-gold eyes sparkled as she talked about her plans to open a healing practice in Harbor City.

My phone vibrated with an incoming message. Jason's name ashed on the screen, and I read his text about Olivia buying me an expensive watch.

My initial irritation instantly dissipated, my expression softening. So Olivia was trying to make amends with an expensive gift. Perhaps she felt guilty about our confrontation at the jewelry store, or she was seeking to reconcile after last night's events.

Inwardly, I devised a plan: accept the gift, give her an apology to smooth things over, offer some sweet words, and she would surely yield. Olivia was always so forgiving, so eager to please. It was one of the things that made her... convenient.

"Ethan, who messaged you?" Cassandra asked, her tone casual but her eyes sharp.

"No one," I replied coolly, putting my phone face-down on the table.

"You're smiling," she observed. "Must be good news."

I shrugged. "Just business."

Standing up, I excused myself to the restroom, needing a moment to think. Olivia's gift was unexpected but not unwelcome. It meant she was still invested in our relationship, still trying to please me despite everything.

As I walked away, I didn't notice Cassandra's eyes following me, calculating and cold.

(Cassandra's POV)

The moment Ethan disappeared around the corner, I reached for his phone. The password was pathetically simple—his birthday. He'd never bothered to change it in all the years I'd known him.

I quickly navigated to his messages, starting with Olivia's chat window. The last exchange was from a week ago, where she had suggested a vacation during the upcoming holiday, sharing scenic itineraries and activities they could enjoy together.

Ethan had replied ve hours later with a dismissive: "It's too crowded during holidays, nothing fun about it."

Since then, Olivia had sent no more messages. I couldn't help but smirk at the lopsided affection. After three years, Ethan couldn't even be bothered to travel with her.

Flicking through other chats, I spotted Jason's recent message praising Olivia's costly gift. My lips curled in disdain.

So she's still trying to curry favor and mend things by buying gifts. I thought she was ready to give up, but no, she's still groveling.

I locked the phone again and placed it exactly as Ethan had left it. Then I pulled out my own phone and dialed Margaret Grey, Ethan's mother.

"Madame Grey," I greeted warmly when she answered. "I hope I'm not disturbing you."

"Not at all, dear," she replied. "How are you and Ethan getting along?"

"Wonderfully," I said, injecting just the right amount of concern into my voice. "But I wanted to let you know... I just went with Ethan to look at rings and saw that girl trying on engagement rings, clearly pushing him to marry her..."

(Olivia's POV)

Back at Moonlight Manor, I continued packing my suitcase methodically. Martha had brought me fresh linens, her eyes curious but respectful enough not to ask questions.

I carefully placed the watch—my gift not for Ethan, but for Connor Rivers—in its box, wrapping it securely in a soft cloth before tucking it into my luggage. The thought of Connor brought a small smile to my face.

Connor Rivers. My childhood friend and current ancé-to-be in the planned alliance between the Winters Pack and Rivers Pack.

Memories of Connor's cold yet elegant face came unbidden as I folded my clothes. We had known each other since childhood, living mere miles apart in the same territory of Riverdale.

When I was ten, still a little girl with pigtails and scraped knees, my parents brought me to the Rivers residence. The mansion had seemed enormous then, with its sprawling gardens and imposing stone facade.

There, I rst glimpsed Connor, already a breathtakingly handsome fourteen-year-old with frosty ice-blue eyes like winter snow. He stood tall and proud beside his father, the Alpha of the Rivers pack.

"Go on," my mother had whispered, giving me a gentle nudge forward. "Say hello."

Obediently, I had called out, "Alpha Connor."

He had only responded with a cool, "Hello," his expression unchanged. I remember thinking he must be dicult and unapproachable—a misconception that lasted for years.

I sighed, folding another sweater and placing it in my suitcase. How different things might have been if I'd understood him better back then.

After my mother's death from wolfsbane poisoning when I was fteen, I transformed from a carefree child into a quiet, rebellious teen. The loss had hollowed me out, leaving me angry at the world and everyone in it.

During my high school years, I struggled with history—dates and events blurring together as I tried to focus through my grief. Connor's mother suggested he tutor me, boasting of his near-perfect knowledge of the subject.

When twenty-one-year-old Connor arrived at our home to help, I had deantly told him, "I don't need you to teach me."

He had only smiled, tapping my forehead gently with his pen. "But I insist."

Contrary to my fears, he was endlessly patient, explaining every concept thoroughly, even offering multiple interpretation methods when I struggled. He never rushed me, never showed frustration when I failed to grasp something immediately.

Gradually, my resistance faded to admiration. One day, after I'd nally mastered a particularly dicult concept, I marveled, "Wow, Connor, you still remember all this after so many years?"

He admitted with a soft laugh, "Not everything. I reviewed the histories beforehand."

That small confession—that he had prepared specically to help me—had touched me deeply. Thanks to his devoted coaching over that summer, my knowledge soared, enabling me to attend Riverdale University—his alma mater.

To me, Connor had always been a respected gure, never a romantic prospect. So when my father proposed I marry Connor to strengthen the alliance between our packs, I instinctively rejected it.

How could I marry someone I've always looked up to?

Instead, I had ed to Harbor City, determined to make my own way, to nd love on my own terms. And I thought I had found it with Ethan Grey.

How wrong I had been.

Lost in these memories, I was startled when my bedroom door opened. Ethan stood leaning by the frame, gazing down at me with unreadable eyes.

"Are you almost done packing?" he asked quietly.

I answered softly, "Mm, almost."

He remained lounging against the door, then said, "Liv, don't you have something you want to say to me?"