

Chapter 6: The Rift Widens

Chapter 6: The Rift Widens

(Olivia's POV)

I looked up from my packing, meeting Ethan's blue eyes with confusion. His tall frame lled the doorway as he leaned against it, watching me with an expectant expression I couldn't quite decipher.

"What?" I asked, genuinely puzzled by his question.

A icker of impatience crossed his face before he softened his tone. His lips curved into that familiar half-smile that once made my heart race.

"I was harsh at Lunar Jewelers just now. Don't be mad anymore."

The statement hung in the air between us. He clearly expected me to melt at this barely-there apology, to rush into his arms with gratitude for his magnanimous forgiveness. Three months ago, I might have done exactly that.

"I'm not angry," I replied quietly, turning back to fold another sweater.

Ethan scoffed, pushing himself off the doorframe and taking a step into my room. "Come on, Liv. Don't be like that. Mouth says no, heart says yes."

I continued organizing my suitcase, not bothering to look up. "Think whatever you like."

A ash of annoyance crossed his face. The patience in his voice was wearing thin now, the facade of contrition rapidly fading.

"I already apologized. What more do you want?" he demanded, his tone hardening.

I smoothed the wrinkles from a blouse before placing it carefully in my suitcase. "I don't need your apology."

Ethan's jaw tightened as his gaze xed on me. He seemed to realize his approach wasn't working, so he abruptly changed tactics.

"Where's the gift?" he asked stiy.

I glanced up, genuinely confused again. "What gift?"

His eyes narrowed. "Jason said he saw you buy me a watch. Didn't you buy that to make up with me? I'm back now. Shouldn't you bring it out already?"

The sheer presumption in his voice almost made me laugh out loud. Before I could clarify, he continued, his tone growing increasingly arrogant.

"Enough is enough, stop making a fuss."

A mocking smile nally found its way to my lips. "You're funny."

Ethan scowled, his brows drawing together. "What's so funny?"

I met his eyes directly, speaking with perfect clarity. "Yes, I bought a watch. But it's not for you. And I don't think I've done anything wrong that requires me to coax you or apologize."

His anger ared instantly, blue eyes darkening like storm clouds. "Not for me? Then who is it for?"

"You have no right to know," I answered lightly, turning back to my packing.

Ethan's fury spiraled visibly, his face ushing with indignation. "I have no right? I'm your boyfriend! You buy a gift for another man and I can't even ask?"

My voice remained calm, though I couldn't keep the derision from seeping into it. "Aren't you Cassandra's boyfriend?"

The question caught him off guard. His mouth opened and closed before he rushed to explain, his tone shrinking with guilt.

"Me and Cassandra... it's not like that."

He sounded less sure now, his voice betraying his unease. I could see the truth written all over his face. He and Cassandra were no longer merely former potential partners—they'd crossed the line countless times, yet he still clung to me as his ocial girlfriend.

I understood his game perfectly. He liked Cassandra's boldness and passion, but also enjoyed my gentleness and quiet obedience. He was greedy and unwilling to give up either.

Trying to salvage his lie, he continued, "Today, I went shopping for rings with Cassandra because my mother asked me to. It wasn't for her."

He ran a hand through his dark hair, a gesture I'd once found endearing. "My mother bought a new dress and needed matching jewelry. She said Cassandra has good taste so she took her along. They were picking necklaces, earrings, bracelets, everything."

His eyes softened, attempting to look sincere. "I knew you misunderstood, but I was angry then and didn't explain—wanted to make you jealous on purpose."

My eyes turned frosty at his admission. "You actually knew I would be jealous?"

"I'm sorry..." he murmured, reaching for my hand.

I pulled away before he could touch me. My rejection was immediate and cold. "I heard your apology, but I don't accept it. And that gift is not for you."

His temper exploded again, voice rising sharply. "Then who is it for?"

I replied calmly, continuing to fold my clothes. "My mate-to-be."

Ethan sneered with disbelief, his handsome features twisting with contempt. "Ha, Olivia, you're really shameless enough to threaten me with marriage to force me into committing to you?"

He took a step closer, looming over me. "You mean if I agree to commit to you, you'll give me the gift and forgive me? Is that it?"

I frowned, stunned by his narcissism. How could he be so full of himself? Did he truly think I couldn't live without him?

Ethan looked at me with utter disappointment, shaking his head again and again. His voice dropped to a condescending whisper.

"I thought you understood the gulf between us. I thought you were sensible. But you keep trying to pressure me into a commitment. I'm really disappointed."

With that, he stormed out and slammed the door shut, the sound echoing through the room like a nal punctuation mark.

Left alone, I could only shake my head helplessly. I had planned to use this quarrel to break our relationship cleanly, to tell him that I was the daughter of Alpha Richard Winters of the Riverdale pack, soon to return home to marry Connor Rivers.

But he never gave me a chance to speak.

I realized now—perhaps the condence he had that I would never leave him was something I had inadvertently given him. I had always been the obedient, undemanding girlfriend, never prying or jealous, always gentle and compliant, only sharing intimacy yet never my secrets.

No wonder he mistook my tolerance for dependence.

A year ago, I had overheard him telling his mother, Margaret Grey, "Mother, don't worry. I know you won't approve of her joining our family. I'm just dating her for now. Marriage is another matter."

He had even added smugly, "Your son's not stupid. I know the difference between dating and marrying."

Since then, I had buried my true identity and any hopes for a future. Our relationship became a mutual need for warmth and companionship, little else.

I had kept my heart guarded, my affections measured, but when I discovered I was merely Cassandra's stand-in, even that fragile tolerance shattered. I was Olivia Winters, daughter of an Alpha, no one's substitute.

The sound of voices downstairs pulled me from my thoughts. Martha's respectful tones were answered by a woman's commanding voice that sent a chill down my spine.

Footsteps approached my door, followed by a sharp knock. Before I could answer, the door swung open.

Margaret Grey stood in the doorway, her imperious gaze sweeping over me and my half-packed suitcase. Wearing a deep blue silk dress, sparkling with matching sapphire earrings, necklace, and a massive diamond ring, she looked every inch the wealthy matron who would indeed buy an entire jewelry set for a single outt.

"You're Olivia Winters?" Her scrutinizing gaze was sharp, dripping with disdain, as if appraising an unworthy object.

I straightened my posture, meeting her eyes directly. "Hello, Mrs. Grey."

"Hmm." Margaret's eyes swept the room before settling back on me. "I've heard all about you and Ethan."

She moved into the room uninvited, her expensive perfume lling the air. With practiced elegance, she lowered herself into the armchair by the window, crossing her legs at the ankle.

A cold smile curved her lips as she declared, "A girl like you, dreaming of marrying into the Grey family?"